

UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM

COMMUNITY, PATRIOTISM AND THE WORKING CLASS IN THE FIRST WORLD WAR: THE HOME FRONT IN WEDNESBURY, 1914-1918

by

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A thesis submitted to
The University of Birmingham
for the degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

School of History and Cultures
College of Arts and Law
The University of Birmingham
October 2015

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STATEMENT

Elements of Chapters 2, 4 and 5 have been published as 'Industry, Labour and Patriotism in the Black Country: Wednesbury at War, 1914-1918' in *The Great War: Localities and Regional Identities* eds. N. Mansfield and C. Horner (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014), pp. 53-76.

A version of Chapter 6 has been published as 'Zeppelins over the Black Country: The Midlands' First Blitz' in *Midland History*, 39 (2) (2014), pp. 236-254.

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the impact of the First World War on the town of Wednesbury. Although receiving limited scholarly consideration to date, it is contended that this Black Country town played an important wartime role and this study, based upon extensive archival research, has investigated the key economic, political and social consequences and changes occurring during this period. Embedded within the broader contexts of time and place, it draws extensively on the experiences of the town's working-class community to demonstrate how a local history can enrich our appreciation of the lives of working people and inform our understanding of the national picture. Following the establishment of the rationale, methodology and the principal historiographical debates, life and society in Wednesbury on the eve of war are described. Reaction to the outbreak of hostilities, economic and manpower mobilization, and wartime industrial relations are assessed. Also charted are the main social and political developments. There is a chapter devoted to the locality's first air raid, when the German Navy's airships bombed Wednesbury, Bradley, Tipton and Walsall. In evaluating this community's patriotism, it is concluded that whilst the adjustment of attitudes was unavoidable, many aspects of Wednesbury's contribution should be viewed as truly unique.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This researching and writing up of this thesis has been undertaken on a part-time basis and this has added considerably to the challenges of balancing study, employment and life in general, whilst endeavouring not to neglect family and friends. Therefore, I would like to express my appreciation to the many people and organizations that have provided me with assistance, guidance, inspiration and support throughout this time. Without them, the completion of this thesis could not have been accomplished.

First and foremost, I must begin by thanking my PhD Supervisor at the University of Birmingham, Professor Carl Chinn. Carl has been a steadfast champion of my work and an unstinting source of sound advice, encouragement, friendship and wisdom. Also at the University of Birmingham, I have been grateful to Dr John Bourne for asking me to contribute an article to the Special Issue of *Midland History* dedicated to 'The Midlands and the Great War' and to Dr Malcolm Dick, Dr Michael Snape and Dr Jonathan Boff for their support of my endeavours. The late Dr Bob Bushaway was instrumental in shaping some of my early thoughts during one of the legendary Ludlow summer schools that he ran, and which, like the man himself, are much missed.

Attendance at a number of academic conferences and day schools has given me the chance to engage with fellow enthusiasts in the most convivial and stimulating of circumstances. The opportunity to discuss, reflect further upon and re-evaluate some of the aspects of this research and, on occasion, to communicate my own findings to such audiences, has been tremendously beneficial because it has led to the consequential revision and strengthening of several of the key aspects of this thesis. I am indebted to Dr Nicholas Mansfield of the University of Central Lancashire and Dr Craig Horner of Manchester Metropolitan University for inviting me to make a presentation to the 2012 conference, *The Great War: Localities and Regional Identities*, and for the inclusion of that paper as a chapter in the volume of the same name that they have edited.

It would be remiss of me not to acknowledge the professional staffs of the National Archives, the People's History Museum, the Staffordshire Record Office and the Centre for Modern Records at the University of Warwick. All were unfailingly courteous, knowledgeable and helpful in tracking down obscure documents and other materials just when they were needed most. Several local archives have been visited on a frequent basis, especially those in Sandwell, Walsall and Wolverhampton, and I am very much obliged to Richard Slaughter of the Sandwell Community History and Archive Service and Paul Ford of the Walsall Local History Centre for their help.

In the six years that it has taken me to produce, I have discussed this work with numerous people and have benefited enormously from the copious ideas and suggestions that this has generated, and for the motivation and stimulation they have provided, for which I am most grateful. I would like to express my appreciation to Emeritus Professor Owen Ashton of Staffordshire University, Peter and Mandy Griffin, Brendan and Lynn Hawthorne, Dr Spencer Jones of the University of Wolverhampton, Mark Kendrick, Peter Knowles, Dr Michael LoCicero, Mick Pearson, Stephen Roberts, Professor Gary Sheffield of the University of Wolverhampton, Mark Terrett, Dr Alun Thomas, Andrew Thornton, and Geoff Webb. The resultant thesis, however, together with any errors and shortcomings in the text, remains my own.

Last but certainly not least, my parents, Edith and Derek Fantom, have been unwavering in their love, patience, support and understanding. This has combined with their resolute belief in what I have attempted to achieve by carrying out this research and it has helped me to persevere during those difficult moments that all postgraduate research students inevitably face. My debt of gratitude to them is incalculable.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to the memory of two of the author's Great-Grandfathers, both of whom served with the South Staffordshire Regiment during the First World War.



10331 Private Samuel Boyd (1871-1947)
3rd Battalion, South Staffordshire Regiment



30692 Private John Millington (1895-1963)
2/5th Battalion, South Staffordshire Regiment

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

1/5 th	First line Battalion of the Fifth Battalion
2/5 th	Second line Battalion of the Fifth Battalion
Ald	Alderman
AIR	Air Ministry papers, TNA
ASE	Amalgamated Society of Engineers
BEF	British Expeditionary Force
CAB	Cabinet papers, TNA
CMR	Centre for Modern Records, University of Warwick
Cllr	Councillor
DCM	Distinguished Conduct Medal
DORA	Defence of the Realm Act
DSO	Distinguished Service Order
eds	Editors
EEF	Engineering Employers' Federation
FO	Foreign Office papers, TNA
HMSO	His Majesty's Stationery Office
ILP	Independent Labour Party
IWM	Imperial War Museum
LAB	Ministry of Labour papers, TNA
MC	Military Cross
MCTF	Midland Counties Trade Federation
MEF	Midland Employers' Federation
MM	Military Medal
MP	Member of Parliament
MUN	Ministry of Munitions papers, TNA
PHM	People's History Museum, Manchester
NADSS	National Association of Discharged Soldiers and Sailors
NFDDSS	National Federation of Discharged and Demobilized Sailors and Soldiers
NWAC	National War Aims Committee
SCHAS	Sandwell Community History and Archive Service
SRO	Staffordshire Record Office
SSFA	Soldiers' and Sailors' Families Association
PLP	Parliamentary Labour Party
RECO	Reconstruction papers, TNA
RFC	Royal Flying Corps
RNAS	Royal Naval Air Service
TF	Territorial Force
TNA	The National Archives (formerly the Public Record Office), Kew
TNT	Tri-nitro-toluene
TUC	Trades Union Congress
UDC	Union of Democratic Control
UK	United Kingdom
VC	Victoria Cross
VTC	Volunteer Training Corps
WALS	Wolverhampton Archives and Local Studies
WEWNC	War Emergency Workers National Committee
WLHC	Walsall Local History Centre
WO	War Office
WU	Workers' Union

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND HISTORIOGRAPHY

1.1 Background to the thesis

This thesis seeks to assess the manner in which the people of the Black Country town of Wednesbury experienced the First World War. It is an investigation of the home front and is made in accordance with the assertion of John Bourne that this was ‘not only as important as the war front but also inseparable from it’.¹ During such a period of immense and traumatic change, the lives of the town’s inhabitants were affected in a multitude of ways. Hence, it will consider the economic, political and social impact of the conflict and, in view of the demography of this locality, and its socio-economic composition, will pay particular attention to the patriotism of Wednesbury’s large working-class community and the significance of the role it played throughout the war.²

The central question that this thesis endeavours to answer is expressed as follows: what forms did working-class patriotism take during the First World War and how did this impact upon the working-class people of Wednesbury? Accordingly, consideration will be given to various notions of patriotism, especially those described as community patriotism, Labour patriotism, popular patriotism and working-class patriotism. Several supplementary questions may also be discerned. Did working-class patriotism change between 1914 and 1918? Were pre-war attitudes and behaviours modified? Did war change the town’s cultural, economic, political and social structures? Are the causes of these developments located during wartime or in the pre-war years? How did patriotic behaviour affect military recruitment and munitions production, and did this change over time? Were there any examples of dissent from the patriotic viewpoint discernible within Wednesbury’s working-class community?

¹ J.M. Bourne, *Britain and the Great War, 1914-1918* (London: Edward Arnold, 1989), p. 199.

² N. Kirk, *Change, Continuity and Class: Labour in British Society, 1850-1920* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), p.143. Kirk has confirmed that in 1901 approximately 85 per cent of the country’s total working population were employed by other people, whether in agriculture, industry or domestic service. Furthermore, approximately 75 per cent of the working population were employed in manual occupations and the greater majority of these people were concentrated in urban rather than rural areas.

It will be argued that a range of shared identities and values existed in Wednesbury that bolstered the sense of belonging to the town and shaped this community's contribution to the war effort. The assessment of changes and developments occurring during the period, some of which were national, whereas others were local, serve to demonstrate this. Examples include the increased solidarity and strength of the labour movement, extension of the franchise, greater participation of women in the workplace and society generally, and the close connection between the town and local military units.³ The thesis explores whether these changes are attributable to the war or whether their roots should be associated with earlier events.

It is appropriate to provide some background information at the outset in respect of Wednesbury.⁴ It is situated eight miles to the north-west of the City of Birmingham, in the area that has been known since the nineteenth century as the Black Country, and during the period concerned the town resided within the County of Staffordshire. Yet the precise boundaries of the Black Country have long generated controversy, with competing views existing on which of the outlying towns should be included.⁵ The most compelling definition, however, relies on the extent of the South Staffordshire coalfield and the associated manufacturing districts. John Fletcher has stated that 'since it is the mineral producing region that should rightly be known as the Black Country', it is certain that Wednesbury occupies a position that is well within the Black Country.⁶

³ The military formation that enjoyed the closest attachment to the town of Wednesbury was the Fifth (Territorial Force) Battalion of the South Staffordshire Regiment. See J.P. Jones, *History of the South Staffordshire Regiment 1705-1923* (Wolverhampton: Whitehead Brothers, 1923); A. Thornton, 'The Territorial Force in Staffordshire, 1905-1915' (Unpublished MPhil thesis, University of Birmingham, 2004); W.L. Vale, *History of the South Staffordshire Regiment* (Aldershot: Gale & Polden, 1969).

⁴ The principal work on the history of the town has been J.F. Ede, *History of Wednesbury* (Wednesbury: Wednesbury Corporation, 1962; reprinted Wednesbury: Simmons Publishing, 1991) but this concentrates mainly on Wednesbury's emergence as a key centre for manufacturing during the Industrial Revolution. Two Master's degree dissertations have also covered aspects of the town's history, namely: S. Langley, 'History of the Iron and Steel Tube Trade in Wednesbury' (Unpublished MCom thesis, University of Birmingham, 1948); P.A. Fantom, 'Radicalism, Reaction and Reform: Popular Protest, Public Order and the Working Class in Wednesbury, 1838-1848' (Unpublished MA thesis, Open University, 2008).

⁵ A map of the Black Country is provided in Appendix 1. This is taken from D. Vodden, *Our Black Country* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 2003). This confirms Wednesbury's location within the Black Country and its proximity to the other towns in the area, together with Wolverhampton and the suburbs of Birmingham.

⁶ J.M. Fletcher, 'What is the Black Country?', *The Blackcountryman*, 1 (1967), p. 12.

Economically distinct and geographically separate from their neighbours, each of the Black Country's towns used the abundant resources of coal, ironstone and limestone to specialize in a variety of manufacturing and mining activities.⁷ Developments in the early years of the nineteenth century facilitated large-scale production, which expanded considerably during the subsequent years to provide for not only the needs of Britain and her empire but also many other international trading partners.⁸ This was the period of the area's greatest industrial and population expansion, with census records for Wednesbury indicating that the town's population rose from 4,160 in 1801 to 14,281 in 1851 and from 26,554 in 1901 to 30,407 in 1921.⁹

However, this level of intense industrialization carried with it considerable consequences for Wednesbury's physical environment and the health of a population that was characteristically working class. There was the network of canals and railways that had been created in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries respectively to transport the output of the area's manufacturers so that it could be sold on national and international markets. In between this, the people of the town resided in housing that was densely interspersed with a multitude of factories, foundries, coal pits and mine workings. These crowded a landscape that was already congested with slag heaps and toxic industrial spoil. The coal was also burnt to supply the energy required by the steam engines utilized to mechanize many of the working processes formerly done by manual labour. As the thick plumes of black smoke emerged from chimneys, not only did this darken the sky; it also blackened buildings by coating them in a tar-like residue, caused environmental pollution by contaminating the land and the supply of water, and contributed to the various respiratory diseases that afflicted so many of the people.

⁷ G.C. Allen, *The Industrial Development of Birmingham and the Black Country, 1860-1927* (London: Frank Cass, 1929), p. 78. Darlaston produced nuts, bolts and screws, Dudley and its surrounding district supplied nails and chains, in West Bromwich they made springs, and in Willenhall locks and keys. Wednesbury was renowned for manufacturing steel tubes, edge tools, axles and wheels for railway rolling stock, and bridges and many other items of railway infrastructure that were exported across the world.

⁸ J.F. Ede, pp. 236-239.

⁹ Ibid., p. 413; G.J. Barnsby, *Social Conditions in the Black Country, 1800-1900* (Wolverhampton: Integrated Publishing, 1999), pp. 3-4.

1.2 The rationale and structure of the thesis

A number of factors contributed to the selection of Wednesbury as the focus of this study, shaping the overall rationale and the aims and objectives of this thesis. As stated, Wednesbury occupies a key position in the Black Country's industrial heartland, both geographically and in terms of the particular trades associated with the town. During the period concerned, it was host to an impressive array of manufacturing companies.¹⁰ These ranged from the small firms employing a handful of workers to large complexes such as James Russell & Sons Crown tube works and the multi-sited Metropolitan Railway Carriage, Wagon and Finance Company, which enjoyed a high international reputation and provided substantial local employment.¹¹ With the outbreak of hostilities, many of Wednesbury's firms began to adapt their expertise and processes, with the resultant output making a vital contribution to supplying the nation with essential war materials. This included participation in the production of such items of ordnance as the Mills hand grenade and Stokes mortar bomb, and from 1916, the assembling of the British Army's first tanks.¹² The extent of this manufacturing activity generated substantial employment, reviving the local iron and steel industries, with the Metropolitan subsequently posting record profits during the wartime period.¹³

Considerable social and political tensions pervaded the years immediately prior to the outbreak of the war. Although Britain was the greatest imperial power the world had ever seen, deriving enormous benefits from world trade, diminishing returns had now settled in. It also became embroiled in an escalating rivalry with Germany, which

¹⁰ Examples of the pre-war advertising for the firms of James Russell & Sons and John Russell & Co. Ltd., and which indicate the ranges and types of products manufactured by these companies were featured in the 1907 *Ryder's Annual*. They are reproduced in Appendix 6, Illustrations 5 and 7, pp. 283-284.

¹¹ G.C. Allen, pp. 193 and 358. The Metropolitan Railway Carriage, Wagon & Finance Company was formed in 1902. Its creation was the result of the amalgamation of the Patent Shaft & Axletree Company with two other carriage and wagon-building firms. The Patent Shaft & Axletree Company had been established in 1834 and it had undergone a merger involving another large Wednesbury firm, Lloyd Fosters, in 1867.

¹² The National Archives Munitions Papers (hereafter TNA MUN) 4/4175: Negotiations with the Metropolitan Carriage, Wagon & Finance Co. Ltd. for a contract for tanks. Of the first 100 tanks to be ordered by the British Army, twenty-five were manufactured in Lincoln by William Foster & Co. Ltd. and seventy-five were built by the Metropolitan in Wednesbury at the Patent Shaft's Old Park works. Forty-nine of these vehicles saw action at Flers-Courcelette in September 1916. See Chapter 4, pp. 116-117.

¹³ J.F. Ede, pp. 283-284.

prompted a costly naval arms race. Domestically, by 1914, the Liberal Government's avowed intention of introducing Home Rule for Ireland had almost brought the rival Protestant and Republican factions to the point of civil war. Furthermore, the Suffragettes were pursuing an increasingly violent campaign as they strove to win the vote for all women. Numerous industrial disputes and strikes punctuated the years 1911-1914, as the trade unions exerted their growing influence and strength in order to advance their demands for improved conditions and wages for their members.¹⁴

One example of this was the Black Country strike, with the local press remarking that 'when the industrial history of the Black Country comes to be reviewed in the distant future it will be seen that much space will have to be devoted to the happenings of May 1913'.¹⁵ This dispute began in Wednesbury at the Old Patent tube works of John Russell & Co. Ltd. and the strike spread rapidly across the Black Country, so that more than 40,000 skilled, semi- and unskilled workers participated in demonstrations and meetings. Furthermore, it also gained national attention, with marches to London and South Wales, and such prominent figures in the labour movement as Tom Mann visiting the Midlands to offer both publicity and support.¹⁶

There had also been considerable growth in and wider recognition for trade unions in the area as a direct consequence of this action, described as 'one of the most remarkable labour movements of recent years'.¹⁷ This was particularly evident in the Workers' Union.¹⁸ This trade union had taken the lead in organizing many of the workers participating in the strike. The intervention of Sir George Askwith, the Chief

¹⁴ H.A. Clegg, *A History of British Trade Unions since 1889, Volume Two: 1911-1933* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), p. 24.

¹⁵ *Tipton Herald*, 31 May 1913; S. Langley, pp. 74-75. See Chapter 2, pp. 51-69. Demands were made for a weekly minimum wage of 23s. for unskilled men and 12s. per week for women (to achieve parity with the pay levels for comparable work being offered to workers employed in similar jobs in nearby Birmingham).

¹⁶ *Who's Who and Who Was Who* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012). Tom Mann (1856-1941) was a national trade union leader and noted advocate of syndicalism. As a trained engineer, he had joined the Amalgamated Society of Engineers (ASE) before becoming involved in the foundation of the Workers' Union in 1898. He later returned to the ASE as General Secretary from 1918-21. He visited Wednesbury twice in 1913 to offer his support during the Black Country strike. See Appendix 6, Photograph 15, p. 288.

¹⁷ *Tipton Herald*, 31 May 1913.

¹⁸ H.A. Clegg, pp. 57-59. The Workers' Union was one of the fourteen trade unions that amalgamated in January 1922 to form the Transport & General Workers' Union.

Industrial Commissioner of the Board of Trade, facilitated the strike's conclusion, reaching an accommodation with most of the demands of the workers concerned being satisfied.¹⁹ Yet, it is salient that upon the declaration of war in August 1914, many of those who had been on strike during 1913 demonstrated their patriotism, either by volunteering to serve with the various branches of the armed forces or by harnessing their efforts to increase the supply of munitions for those serving at the front line.

The parliamentary constituency of Wednesbury was established by the Representation of the People Act 1867, and in the eight general elections held between 1868 and 1910, the seat was won by the Conservative Party on five occasions; with the other three being victories for the Liberal Party.²⁰ In the two general elections of 1910, the Conservative candidate was the enigmatic John Norton Griffiths, known as 'Empire Jack', who fought a populist campaign taking the seat from the Liberals and retaining it.²¹ The 1910 election was a highpoint for local Conservatism, both in Wednesbury and across the Black Country, with a change to the complexion of local politics increasingly evident thereafter.²² Manifestation of this occurred with the creation of an Independent Labour Party (ILP) branch in Wednesbury in 1913, followed by a Divisional Labour Party in 1918. Labour candidates stood in Wednesbury for the first time at the 1913 municipal elections, albeit unsuccessfully. The *Wednesbury Herald* proclaimed:

A party has been brought into being in the Borough of Wednesbury which will have to be reckoned with in the future. Whether it be dubbed Labour or Socialist or whatever else, it is clear it will have some following.²³

¹⁹ J.F. Ede, p. 293.

²⁰ Ibid., pp. 360-361. This legislation had also extended the franchise to urban working-class males.

²¹ *The Times*, 29 September 1930; *Who's Who and Who Was Who* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012). An engineer and soldier before his political career, John Norton Griffiths (1871-1930) served in the Matabele and South African wars before becoming Wednesbury's MP in 1910. During the First World War, and at his own expense, he raised the 2nd King Edward's Horse, a detachment of the King's Overseas Dominions Regiment. Following his commissioning as a Major in this unit, he attained the rank of Lieutenant Colonel and was involved in establishing the first of the Royal Engineer tunnelling units, being then awarded with the Distinguished Service Order (DSO). Having relinquished the Wednesbury constituency, from 1918, he held Central Wandsworth for the Conservative Party until his suicide in 1930.

²² *The Times*, 17 January 1910; *The Times*, 5 December 1910. The principal issues for the Conservatives at this election were tariff reform, national defence and the extension of freehold ownership; the Liberal issues included national defence, free trade and social reform. See Appendix 6, Photograph 10, p. 285.

²³ *Wednesbury Herald*, 8 November 1913. Labour candidates stood in the Kings Hill and Town Hall wards.

These local elections occurred during the same year as the Black Country strike, when support for the labour movement was growing, with the establishment of four branches of the Workers' Union in the town. During the war years, there was an augmentation of Labour and trade union involvement in local politics, and by organizations that now represented former servicemen. Taking an increasingly prominent role in the affairs of the town, the Trades and Labour Council gained representation on various patriotic committees that were concerned with the welfare of the people of Wednesbury. The general election of December 1918 has become known to historians as the 'Coupon' election.²⁴ Notably, this was the first contest to be fought with an increased electorate.²⁵ It was also the occasion for Wednesbury to return its first Labour Member of Parliament, Alfred Short.²⁶ In this respect, the town was one of four Black Country constituencies to disregard the overtures of the Coalition's candidate. In Wednesbury, this was Archibald White Maconochie.²⁷ The *Express and Star* newspaper verified that during the campaign Alfred Short was carried shoulder high from election meetings, 'not by pacifists nor by pro-Germans but by discharged soldiers'.²⁸

Wednesbury was one of the first localities in the British mainland to receive a direct attack by the air from enemy forces during the First World War. On the night of 31 January 1916, the Black Country was an early victim of aerial warfare when two of

²⁴ This is attributable to the remarks of the former Prime Minister H.H. Asquith with reference to the joint letter of support penned by the leader of the Coalition Liberals, David Lloyd George, and the leader of the Conservative Party, Andrew Bonar Law. This document was sent to all prospective parliamentary candidates in the general election who were standing for the continuation of the Coalition Government.

²⁵ The Representation of the People Act 1918 expanded the British electorate from 7.7 million to 21.4 million. This was achieved by abolishing most of the property qualifications for adult males over the age of 21 years and the enfranchisement of females over 30 years of age if they met the minimum property qualifications. Full electoral equality required the passing of the Representation of the People (Equal Franchise) Act 1928.

²⁶ *The Times*, 25 August 1938; *Who's Who and Who Was Who*, 2012. According to his obituary, Alfred Short (1882-1938) was a boilermaker by occupation, had been a City Councillor in Sheffield and from 1911 had been the Secretary of the Sheffield Branch of the Boiler Makers' Society. He was the Member of Parliament for Wednesbury from 1918-1931. In his later career, he worked for the Transport & General Workers' Union. Elected as the Labour MP for Doncaster in 1935, he held that seat until his death.

²⁷ *The Times*, 4 February 1926; *Who's Who and Who Was Who*, 2012. Archibald Maconochie's (1855-1926) had been the Liberal Unionist MP for Aberdeenshire East from 1900-1906 and was managing director of the firm 'Maconochie Brothers', which was responsible for the manufacture of a range of tinned foods that were issued as rations to the front line troops in the First World War. The best known of these products was Maconochie's Stew, which the contemporary accounts indicate consisted of a thin gravy containing carrot and turnip but very little meat. It did not enjoy an enviable reputation amongst British soldiers.

²⁸ *Express and Star*, 4 December 1918. See Chapter 8, pp. 243-253.

the Imperial German Navy's Zeppelin airships, the L19 and L21, entered its air space. Having deviated from their planned route during a mission intended to bomb the port of Liverpool, the outcome of this incursion was that thirteen Wednesbury people died because of the bombs dropped during the raid.²⁹ The consequence of this and other actions against unarmed civilians had a profound impact on the attitudes of those on the home front and its investigation will be an important element of this research.

The first aim of this thesis therefore will be to examine this complex set of dynamics in greater depth. Accordingly, it will describe and challenge the prevailing notions of patriotism and voluntarism by exploring the range of motivations that caused exactly those members of the industrial working class that had participated in the 1913 Black Country strike to rally to the colours from 1914 onwards. The second aim is assess change over the period concerned by considering the home front from a number of different perspectives, including coverage of the economic and industrial, political and social viewpoints. A third aim is to investigate these experiences, to evaluate the changes in attitudes, morale and wartime performance of industry and its workforce. Hence, the intention is to evaluate critically the home front, thereby allowing the formulation of some fresh conclusions in respect of this area of investigation.

These aims are attainable through the completion of a local study that reviews the prevailing issues at the outbreak of the war and charts those that were to emerge during the course of the conflict. This approach should also satisfy the objectives of providing insights into the mechanisms and operation of contemporary social attitudes, class structures, and economic and political factors. The significance of this research will allow it to contribute to a number of areas of scholarship, principally First World War studies, labour history, and the social history of the Black Country. Studies of this

²⁹ T. Fegan, *The Baby Killers: German Air Raids on Britain in the First World War* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword Books, 2002); J. Morris, *German Air Raids on Great Britain, 1914-1918* (London: Sampson Low, 1925; reprinted London: Naval & Military Press, 2001), p.67; T. Morgan, 'The Great Zeppelin Raid Night of Jan 31st – Feb 1st 1916' <<http://www.hellfire-corner.demon.co.uk/zeppelin.htm>> [Accessed 1 September 2009]; TNA AIR 1/2123/207/73/5: Air raids on Britain, 1 January 1916 – 28 February 1916.

type advance our understanding at a local level and throw light on the national picture, too; opening up debates about the importance of and correct historiographical context for a piece of research such as this. Whilst no other exposition has investigated the town of Wednesbury at this time and in such depth, it is suggested that this thesis does complement the work of a number of historians with similar research interests.³⁰

Turning attention to the structure of the thesis, a thematic rather than a chronological approach has been adopted. This ensures that each of the core chapters provides a discrete, self-contained analysis of a particular issue or topic. Furthermore, in view of the volume of primary and secondary material available, duplication of effort or repetition of material is minimized to produce a thesis of manageable proportions.

Following on from this first chapter, which has sought to define the rationale and structure, set out the methodology employed and review existing scholarship, Chapter 2 provides an overview of Wednesbury's working class in 1914, together with a survey of its composition and structure based on a sample of six streets. In examining the industrial, political and social structures, this chapter identifies some of the formative influences and issues that pre-dated and yet endured the war. Chapter 3 is concerned with the mobilization of the town's population and the transition from voluntarism to eventual conscription for military service. Chapter 4 explores economic mobilization, the industrial requirements for waging the war and the impact on local industry of munitions production and the growing role of the state. Chapter 5 focuses attention on industrial relations and trade unionism, and the instances of dislocation, disputes and their resolution during the war. Chapter 6 addresses the 1916 Zeppelin raid on the Black Country, the first incursion into the area by hostile aircraft, and its impact on the community and the wider repercussions for national defence. Chapter 7

³⁰ S.J.L Gower, 'The Civilian Experience of World War One: Aspects of Wolverhampton, 1914-1918' (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Birmingham, 2000); S. Langley, 'History of the Iron and Steel Tube Trade in Wednesbury' (Unpublished MCom thesis, University of Birmingham, 1948); E. Taylor, 'The Working Class Movement in the Black Country, 1863-1914' (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Keele, 1974).

devotes attention to the impact of war on Wednesbury's society and evaluates the role of the local press on the home front. Chapter 8 endeavours to explain political change, community activism, the growing influence of the labour movement and the importance of 'patriotic Labour' in local politics, and provides an analysis and assessment of the 1918 general election. Chapter 9 is the final chapter that summarizes the evidence regarding the community's role, sense of identity and sacrifices made. It will present some pertinent conclusions in terms cohesion, motivation and patriotism on the home front, demonstrating the extent of the shared commitment to winning the war.

1.3 The methodology of the thesis

To determine the scope of the research required for a thesis such as this, a number of decisions were necessary as to the most appropriate methodology. Several overarching themes emerged, the first of which being the crucial importance of the class structure in British society, both before and during the conflict, and more specifically the composition and location of Wednesbury's working class in relation to that structure.

It was in the first half of the nineteenth century that the terms 'working class' and 'working classes' came into common usage, becoming largely synonymous with 'the people'. As E.P. Thompson stated, 'most English working people came to feel an identity of interests as between themselves and as against their rulers and employers' and he noted that 'the ruling class was itself divided' but gained cohesion over the same period as the emergent working class.³¹ However, within the working class itself, several overlapping strata were also discernible with 'a vertical division based on the adherence or otherwise of its members to the general values of the group which were accepted as pertaining to it'.³² This was a separation imposed by such considerations as employment and income, housing provision and living conditions, culture and lifestyle,

³¹ E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, 3rd edn (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991), p. 11.

³² C.S.A. Chinn, 'The Anatomy of a Working Class Neighbourhood: West Sparkbrook, 1871-1914' (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Birmingham, 1986), p. 110.

attitudes and prospects. Amongst these, the primary factor was undoubtedly income. As Carl Chinn has pointed out so succinctly, 'The poor had no options. Their lives were circumscribed by a lack of money'.³³ The more prosperous upper or 'respectable' working class tended to have regular and stable employment, typically in the skilled occupations as members of the so-called 'aristocracy of labour'; they had greater aspirations for self-improvement through education and social mobility, and often adhered to religious non-conformity and teetotalism. Many of these values were shared by the 'middling' section of the working class, who were elevated above the lowest levels by possessing a sense of pride in their community and family. A reliance on semi-skilled employment reduced the opportunities available for them to enjoy the relatively greater prosperity afforded to their 'respectable' counterparts, however.

At the base of this class structure were society's poorest members, often denigrated as the 'residuum', the 'rough' element or the 'submerged tenth' and who endured the harshest conditions of all. Mostly employed as casual or unskilled labour, they had little opportunity for advancement in work or life generally. Bernard Waites asserted that the 'skilled and unskilled wage-earners were almost two different races, set apart from one another by wide disparities in income, dress and personal bearing'.³⁴ They were also subjected to judgemental views from those of the higher social ranks who viewed their predilection for alcohol, gambling and tobacco as fecklessness. Of course, the changeable economic circumstances of Victorian and Edwardian Britain meant that the 'respectable' and 'rough' elements constituted two ends of a scale, with most working-class families occupying a position somewhere between the extremes.³⁵

³³ C.S.A. Chinn, *Poverty Amidst Prosperity: Urban Poor in England, 1834-1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), p. 5.

³⁴ B.A. Waites, 'The Effect of the First World War on Class and Status in England, 1910-1920', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 11 (1) (1976), p. 32. As well as being the group that were most vulnerable to rising living costs and unemployment, these were also the people least likely to benefit from the Liberal Government's pre-war social and welfare reforms. In turn, they were very hostile to these measures.

³⁵ C.S.A. Chinn, 'The Anatomy of a Working Class Neighbourhood', pp. 110-113. Periodic unemployment or short-time working meant that few working class families had the opportunity for any real social mobility and, in order to evade poverty, there was of necessity, a reliance on the pawnshop, for instance.

The second theme to have emerged is that of the cohesiveness and identity of the community, which Donald Macraill and David Martin suggest is a concept that ‘can be used to examine a number of characteristics of working-class life’.³⁶ A family’s place of residence during this period being determined by the cost in relation to household income, the size and quality of the dwelling, and the proximity to the place of employment (since, in the absence of public transport, working-class people had little alternative than to walk to work). This was important because unless unavoidable due to adverse economic conditions inducing relocation from rural areas or migration from Wales and Ireland, few working people possessed the means to travel great distances for their employment. Accordingly, most of Wednesbury’s large working-class community sought their livelihood in the town’s numerous engineering and manufacturing companies, the details of which were evidenced from trade directories of the period.³⁷

The community also acted as an intangible but nonetheless real barrier that gave the working class some defence against intrusion from officialdom. Moreover, it also segregated the different strata that existed within the working class itself, as the more ‘respectable’ families would be found in one enclave, while the ‘rough’ elements might often be located in another cluster of streets. In turn, it was the street, or the concentration of a clutch of streets that coalesced to become a neighbourhood, which really informed and fashioned the character of a community and ‘despite poverty, despite migration, despite isolation, working-class neighbourhoods were an established fact of urban life by 1900’.³⁸ A further layer derived from the ties of family and friendships, the accepted common codes of behaviour and value systems, and the levels of orderliness and stability, especially since the ‘rougher’ areas generally experienced

³⁶ D.M. MacRaid and D.E. Martin, *Labour in British Society, 1839-1914* (London: Macmillan, 2000), p. 86.

³⁷ *Kelly’s Directory of Staffordshire, 1912* (London: Kelly & Co., 1912). This trade directory (together with the 1916 volume) provided clear evidence of the extent of the heavy metal-based industries in the area and the large number of engineering and manufacturing firms that were situated in Wednesbury at this time. Of the twenty Wednesbury-based companies that were listed for the year 1912, ten of them were manufacturers of iron or steel tubes, while many of the others were providing ancillary services.

³⁸ S. Meacham, *A Life Apart: The English Working Class, 1890-1914* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1977), p. 52.

higher levels of crime. This translated into a community spirit giving the essence of belonging, a unifying force of class loyalty and support through the difficult times but also a suspicion of outsiders; just as these qualities were important to life on the home front, they were equally applicable to those men who would serve at the front line.

Gender also had a vital role in fashioning the community's values and the debate about how the position of women in society changed during the course of the war, and whether there was a real improvement, has been extensive.³⁹ Economic necessity dictated that many working-class women in the Black Country were already part of the nation's workforce before the outbreak of the war. Yet it should be noted that they earned considerably less when compared with the men, as witnessed in the 1913 Black Country strike. They performed a variety of jobs, often in factories and workshops or as homeworkers, to supplement the generally meagre family incomes.⁴⁰ However, as women attained greater responsibilities and participated through the war-related work there 'opened up a wider range of occupations to female workers and hastened the collapse of traditional women's employment, particularly domestic service'.⁴¹

The third theme regards the various notions of patriotism in terms of the working class and with reference to the concepts of citizenship and nationalism. The declaration of war on 4 August 1914 sparked an unprecedented response, becoming 'one of the most extraordinary mass movements in history, the voluntary enlistment of two and a half million men in the British Army in the first sixteen months of the war'.⁴²

Numerous motivations are identifiable with respect to those who volunteered to join the

³⁹ C.A. Culleton, *Working Class Culture, Women and Britain, 1914-18* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000); G. Braybon, *Women Workers in the First World War: The British Experience* (London: Croon Helm, 1981); A. Woollacott, *On Her Their Lives Depend: Munitions Workers in the Great War* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

⁴⁰ Even the most physically demanding jobs were undertaken by many women in the Black Country, often in the most arduous and primitive working environments. For example, there were those working in the chain and nail making industries and the so-called 'Pit Bank Wenches' who were employed in the local coal mining industry. The latter had the task of sorting and bagging up the coal that came up to the surface from the pithead. See Appendix 6, Photograph 3, p. 282 of the 'Pit Bank Wenches' of Wednesbury.

⁴¹ J. Bourke, *Working Class Cultures in Britain, 1890-1960: Gender, Class and Ethnicity* (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 104-105.

⁴² W.J. Reader, *At Duty's Call: A Study in Obsolete Patriotism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), p. vii.

ranks.⁴³ These included patriotic sentiment, the loyalty to one's own community, friends and peers, a desire for adventure, or to leave behind a mundane job and, at its most fundamental level, the prospect of escaping from the grinding poverty and unemployment that so often beset the working class. Many of the industrial workers from Wednesbury's factories volunteered to join the armed forces, some of whom according to the records of the Workers' Union were also active locally in their trade union. For example, the 1915 volume of the Union's Annual Report and Statement of Accounts featured a Roll of Honour of its members who had been killed in action in 1915.⁴⁴ These impulses and motives were frequently complex and often interconnected, since the poorest members of British society were frequently amongst the most patriotic. By the end of the war, almost six million British men had served with one of the armed forces during a conflict entailing horror, misery and a good chance of injury or death, with over 40 per cent receiving wounds and over 720,000 being killed.⁴⁵

The mobilization of British industry is the fourth theme. A pre-war growth in foreign competition had resulted in manufacturing decline during the years between 1870 and 1914. This was attributable to protectionist policies and tariffs that prevented British companies from competing in American and German markets, thereby shielding these markets and enabling American and German companies to become strong enough to challenge and penetrate unprotected British home markets. Consequently, British exports had to be re-directed from their traditional American and European markets and alternative trading opportunities sought within the constituency of the British Empire.

⁴³ K. Grieves, *The Politics of Manpower, 1914-1918* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988); C. Messenger, *Call to Arms: The British Army, 1914-18* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2005); J.M. Osborne, *The Voluntary Recruiting Movement in Britain 1914-16* (New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 1982); D. Silbey, *The British Working Class and Enthusiasm for War, 1914-1916* (London: Frank Cass, 2005); P. Simkins, *Kitchener's Army: The Raising of the New Armies, 1914-1916* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1980).

⁴⁴ University of Warwick Centre for Modern Records (hereafter CMR) MSS.126/WU/4/1/10: Workers' Union Annual Report and Statement of Accounts, 1913-1918. The 1915 volume contained photographs of three Wednesbury trade unionists who were also soldiers, and who were killed whilst on active service during that year. The information provided by this document indicated that all three were volunteers in the 1/5th and 1/6th Territorial Force Battalions of the South Staffordshire Regiment. This would mean that they were pre-war part-time soldiers as well as active trade unionists. See Appendix 6, Photograph 38, p. 299.

⁴⁵ A. August, *The British Working Classes, 1832-1940* (Harlow: Longman, 2007), p. 167.

Whilst masked by an economic boom which began in around 1908, the ‘pomp and glitter of the prosperous Edwardian period therefore rested on insecure foundations’.⁴⁶

When the war came, its effects on British industry were numerous. By February 1916, over a quarter of the men employed in industry had enlisted and, in some sectors of the economy such as commerce and financial services, over 40 per cent had joined the armed forces. A quarter of a million coal miners had volunteered during the first year of the war and ‘so serious did the loss of manpower become that in 1916 the Government prohibited the enlistment of any more workers from the coal industry’.⁴⁷ The tremendous demand for men and materials placed terrific strain on the British economy and required that the remaining workers be used more efficiently, with greater flexibility being encouraged by measures ‘including *dilution* – the employment of unskilled men and women on jobs that had been the preserve of skilled men’.⁴⁸ As well as restricting practices that had been crucial to the influence of skilled men in the workplace, the 1915 Munitions Act introduced the Leaving Certificate system, which effectively tied workers to specific jobs by stipulating that they could not accept new employment without documentation from their current employer verifying that they were no longer needed.⁴⁹ One feature of this arrangement was that because employers still feared losing workers to competitors, they began to use the system draconically with the threat of dismissal without a certificate as a means to discipline the workforce.⁵⁰

Leading on from the third and fourth themes, the fifth theme deals with what can be viewed as the beginning of a major realignment of British politics, with the emergence of the Labour Party and the notion of ‘patriotic Labour’, together with the eventual decline in support for Asquithian Liberalism. In his work on the pre-war

⁴⁶ E. Hopkins, *A Social History of the English Working Classes, 1815-1945* (London: Edward Arnold, 1979), p. 170.

⁴⁷ J. Benson, *The Working Class in Britain, 1850-1939* (London: Longman, 1989), p. 151.

⁴⁸ J.M. Bourne, *Britain and the Great War, 1914-1918*, p. 183.

⁴⁹ H. Pelling, *A History of British Trade Unionism*, 4th edn (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987), pp. 143-146.

⁵⁰ A. August, p. 168.

Liberal Party, George Dangerfield made the case that the unrest resulting in the decline in working-class support for the Liberals began during the years 1910-1914. He attributed this to an inability to respond to the problems in Ulster concerning Home Rule, the increasingly militant campaign by the suffragettes, and strike action by a strengthened labour movement with grievance emanating from the continual erosion of real wages.⁵¹ However, Labour's advancement was not straightforward and, particularly during the pre-war years, many within Wednesbury's working-class electorate continued to support Conservative Party candidates. This could be viewed as an act of consolation and self-interest, to support the party that favoured protectionism and tariff reform, rather than Liberal free trade policies that might jeopardize working-class jobs.

By also embodying the virtues of hard work, patriotism and self-help, Conservatism appealed to a 'respectable' working class and especially the 'aristocrats of Labour' who were more susceptible to feeling some measure of deference. This Conservatism, which was particularly strong amongst the Anglican working class of the Victorian and Edwardian eras, also tended to be far more tolerant of the popular culture and pastimes enjoyed by the working class. This was in contrast to its frequently Non-Conformist Liberal counterpart, which routinely argued forcibly against the fondness for alcohol and gambling and in favour of teetotalism, for instance. The social role played by the Conservative and Unionist Associations, clubs and friendly societies was also notable. This should be seen as working in a complementary manner to the practice adopted by many employers in the Black Country of using the workplace as a means to instil some political loyalty amongst their employees towards Conservatism.⁵²

Yet the pre-war years had heralded changes in the local economy that had wider implications. With the transition from small workshops to larger factories, the bonds

⁵¹ G. Dangerfield, *The Strange Death of Liberal England, 1910-1914* (New York: First Perigee, 1980), p. 217.

⁵² J. Lawrence, 'Class and Gender in the making of Urban Toryism, 1880-1914', *English Historical Review*, 108 (428) (1993), pp. 629-652; M. Pugh, *The Tories and the People, 1880-1935* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985), p.38.

between employer and employee were weakening. On the one hand, there was less paternalism (although some Black Country family-run companies, such as Rubery Owen and F.H. Lloyd & Co. Ltd., continued to provide social and welfare facilities for their workforces); although, on the other hand, there was reduced pressure for working men to vote for the same political parties as their social superiors, the employers. The trade unions' improved bargaining position in many industries was augmented by a membership that rose from about 800,000 in 1880 to over three million in 1914.⁵³ This lifted the movement's profile considerably. Growing pre-war trade unionism had also seen the rise of industrial militancy, most notably during the years 1911 to 1914 and, in some quarters, the contention was that this derived from the ideas of syndicalism.⁵⁴

Whilst a small minority of trade unionists and Labour politicians had spoken out against the war, including James Keir Hardie and James Ramsay MacDonald (the latter resigning the Party's leadership in August 1914), the majority of the labour movement endorsed Britain's approach to winning the war. Arthur Henderson succeeded MacDonald as Labour's General Secretary, and when appointed as President of the Board of Education in the Coalition administration in 1915, he became the first Labour Party politician to hold a Cabinet post. With a political system that had for so long given power to the privileged and wealthy, this was remarkable. Henderson's experience in government, along with that of George Barnes, as Minister of Pensions, and John Hodge, as Minister of Labour, would add considerable weight to Labour's electoral credibility at the general election called in 1918.⁵⁵ At local level, the wartime activities of the trades councils were supportive of the community, helping to establish a

⁵³ J. Hinton, *Labour and Socialism: A History of the British Labour Movement, 1867-1974* (Brighton: Harvester, 1983), p.24.

⁵⁴ R. Holton, *British Syndicalism, 1900-1914: Myths and Realities* (London: Pluto Press, 1976), pp. 209-210. In the preface to this book, Bob Holton describes British syndicalism as 'a movement dedicated to destroying capitalism through revolutionary industrial class struggle and to build a new social order based not on parliamentary democracy or state bureaucracy but rather on workers' control.' As will be shown in Chapter 2, the support of one of the key proponents of syndicalism, Tom Mann, led to accusations that the 1913 Black Country strike was being orchestrated by trade unionists that held syndicalist sympathies.

⁵⁵ H. Pelling and A.J. Reid, *A Short History of the Labour Party*, 11th edn (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996), p. 37.

moderate and patriotic stance.⁵⁶ This was in marked contrast to the Bolshevism that Labour's political opponents prophesized would follow electoral success for the Party.

Furthermore, within the labour movement itself, the outlook of the alliance of the trade unions and socialists achieved greater accord with a broader working-class audience.⁵⁷ An example of this occurred in the document *Labour and the New Social Order*, which became Labour's 1918 electoral programme.⁵⁸ This incorporated policies that proposed greater state involvement and the public management of key sectors of the economy. With an increased electorate arising from the introduction of the Representation of the People Act 1918, the December 1918 general election gave the Labour Party a fresh opportunity to assert itself. Having won 42 out of the 56 seats contested in 1910, the Party gained 57 of the 361 seats it fought in 1918 and fine-tuned its position from being the Liberal Party's junior partner to the nation's second political party and the foremost parliamentary opposition to the Coalition Government.⁵⁹

Turning to the sources used to carry out this research, the primary source material has been both diverse and extensive, covering national and local perspectives to support all dimensions of the work.⁶⁰ A careful reading of the bibliographies of other studies suggested that quite limited use had been made of many of the primary sources used in this research, with some of them being apparently completely unexplored. This thesis sought to make better use of this neglected evidence so that through its analysis, further insight into this area of work would be achievable. For ease of reference, the description of the primary sources utilized the following four broad headings.

Firstly, there were the manuscript sources in the holdings of various archives.

Particularly relevant are the National Archives of the United Kingdom (formerly the

⁵⁶ A. Clinton, 'Trades Councils during the First World War', *International Review of Social History*, 15 (2) (1970), pp. 202-234.

⁵⁷ D. Tanner, *Political Change and the Labour Party, 1900-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 3.

⁵⁸ *Labour and the New Social Order: A Report on Reconstruction* (London: W. Speaight & Sons, 1918).

⁵⁹ H. Cunningham, *The Challenge of Democracy: Britain, 1832-1918* (London: Longman, 2001), p. 239.

⁶⁰ However, the availability and quality of some sources can be variable, especially the local ones, being reliant upon individuals and organizations being motivated to ensure their survival and preservation.

Public Record Office), the People's History Museum at Manchester, the University of Warwick's Centre Modern Records Centre, Sandwell Community History and Archive Services, the Staffordshire County Record Office, and the Walsall Local History Centre. Additionally, access has been acquired to a number of miscellaneous artefacts and documents through the generous permission of the owners of several private collections, and the names of the collections' owners are listed in the bibliography at the end of the thesis. Amongst the documents of the National Archives, there is particular reference to the papers of the Cabinet and the War Cabinet (CAB) and to the documents concerning the Zeppelin raid (AIR) and to industry, munitions production and industrial relations in the West Midlands region (LAB and MUN).⁶¹ The National Archives Labour and Munitions records furnished a tremendous amount of valuable information about the local situation during the war. For example, they provided extensive documentation of the steps taken by the government and both sides of industry to avert industrial relations problems and the strikes that would otherwise have adversely affected munitions production.⁶² Amongst the records available at the various local and national archives visited throughout this study, there was the correspondence for the Wednesbury Trades and Labour Council, and files of the various employers, trade unions and their local branches, and of the Wednesbury Borough Council and a number of its committees.

Secondly, there were the contemporary printed sources relating to the home front, including the political and social dimension, and the emergence of thinking about the post-war world.⁶³ Thirdly, there were the official records, including parliamentary papers, dealing with a wide range of contemporary issues including military recruitment and the reports of the various bodies addressing economic matters and the problems of industrial unrest, and the comprehensive volumes recording the activities of the

⁶¹ <<http://www.a2a.org.uk>> and <<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk>> [Accessed 01/09/2009].

⁶² I.F.W. Beckett, *The First World War: The Essential Guide to the Sources in the UK National Archives* (Kew: Public Record Office, 2002), pp. 5-6, 113-114, 192-194 and 199-202.

⁶³ G.D.H. Cole, *Labour in War Time* (London: G. Bell & Sons, 1915); *Labour and the New Social Order: A Report on Reconstruction* (London: W. Speaight & Sons, 1918).

Ministry of Munitions. Also of relevance were the memoirs of key figures of the period, particularly those of Sir George Askwith of the Board of Trade, for example.⁶⁴

Fourthly, there were the contemporary local and national newspapers and periodicals. Although accepting that all the newspapers had the agendas of their editors and owners, together with any overt political allegiances, it was evident that from 1915 they were prevented from making full reports from the front line; subsequent reports being noticeably reduced when compared with those of the early months of the war.⁶⁵ However, much useful information was still harvestable from the available spread of local and national newspapers. It was imperative to note the role of local newspapers in reinforcing the link between the home front and the front line by carrying news not just of local patriotic meetings, fundraising events and military service tribunals but by reporting on such matters as the distinctions and medals awarded to sons of the town.⁶⁶

Having regard to secondary sources, a vast quantity of articles, books, essays, theses and web content on the First World War was already in existence. This wealth of material was constantly augmented, especially with the centenary commemoration in 2014. Similarly, there was much scholarship about the Black Country's industrial and social history. Yet there were still gaps and Bourne identified that 'there remains scope for sophisticated modern treatment of how the war was experienced and perceived in local communities'.⁶⁷ The abundance of this secondary material made it possible to locate the work within the correct context; nevertheless, there was also a problem. In order to produce a thesis of manageable proportions, it was inevitable that there would be items that ideally could or should have been consulted and included but considerable selectivity as to their relevance and hence inclusion or exclusion could not be avoided.

⁶⁴ Ministry of Munitions, *The Official History of the Ministry of Munitions*, (London: HMSO, 1922; republished by Navy & Military Press, 2008); G. Askwith, *Industrial Problems and Disputes* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1920); <<http://www.parlipapers.chadwyck.co.uk>>[Accessed 05/03/2010].

⁶⁵ A. Faber, 'The Provincial Press during the First World War: A case study of the Wolverhampton *Express and Star* between January and March 1918' (Unpublished MA thesis, University of Birmingham, 2006).

⁶⁶ An example of this type of journalism was supplied in a series of articles entitled 'With the Wednesbury Territorials', which were published in the *Wednesbury Herald* each week during the early months of 1915.

⁶⁷ J.M. Bourne, 'The Midlands and the Great War', *Midland History*, 39 (2) (2014), p. 162.

1.4 A review of historiographical debates and literature

In seeking to efficiently engage with and achieve an appreciation and understanding of this area of scholarship, this section offers a review of the literature together with a broad overview of the key historiographical debates in order to facilitate this process.

In his examination of the civilian experience of Wolverhampton, Stephen Gower identified what he believed to be two leading approaches to historical writing on the First World War.⁶⁸ The first was that adopted by some military historians. It concentrated on battles, campaigns and operational minutiae, and was reliant on the biographies and diaries of the principal people involved; divisional and regimental histories can typically be of this type. The second approach was that utilized by social historians to apply a ‘history-from-below’ methodology to ordinary soldiers or citizens to determine how events were to shape or change their lives. However, criticism of the over simplicity of this ‘binary’ division prompted an alternative approach, as demonstrated by Trevor Wilson in *The Myriad Faces of War: Britain and the Great War*. Drawing on social, political and military history, Wilson gave comparable attention to the front line and the home front and integrated decisive insights into how the war was fought by ordinary soldiers and its hardships endured by ordinary people.⁶⁹

The pioneer in stimulating the interest of many into the impact of war on society was Arthur Marwick, through his groundbreaking work *The Deluge: British Society and the First World War*. In his further volume, *Total War and Social Change*, Marwick advanced the concept that he termed the four dimensions of war, and which served as a framework for discussion of the socio-economic experiences and consequences of war. Firstly, was the ‘destructive and disruptive dimension’ (war’s destructiveness created an impulse to any post-war reconstruction). Secondly, there was the ‘test dimension’ (by placing society under pressure, war tested how society changed to avoid defeat).

⁶⁸ S.J.L Gower, pp. 1-10.

⁶⁹ T. Wilson, *The Myriad Faces of War: Britain and the Great War* (Cambridge: Polity, 1986).

Thirdly, there was the ‘participation dimension’ (war required the involvement of marginal groups whose involvement heralded the possibility of post-war social change). Fourthly, there was the ‘psychological dimension’ (by generating such emotional responses as hatred of an enemy, again war could bring post-war social change).⁷⁰

Following on from Marwick’s analysis and emphasizing the importance of social class was the work of Bernard Waites. His contention being that class was ‘a fundamentally contested concept’ with there being disagreement ‘not only on how we should define class position and formation but also on the import of class division and conflict for modern history’.⁷¹ This has focused on the home front and perceived little variation in society’s social structures because of the war. Gerard de Groot asserted that there was a continuous process at work, beginning in the last years of the nineteenth century; whilst the war did lead to social change, it was probable that the change would have happened in any case at some point, and that the impact of the war served to accelerate this process.⁷² Recent additions to the history of the British home front that have delivered a convincing challenge to the 1914 ‘rush to the colours’ thesis are Adrian Gregory’s *The Last Great War: British Society and the First World War* and Catriona Pennell’s *A Kingdom United: Popular Responses to the Outbreak of the First World War in Britain and Ireland*.⁷³ In throwing new light onto propaganda and patriotism, volunteerism and the equality of sacrifice, Gregory described how the tensions that threatened to spill over were averted through the process of commemoration.

Other, thematic, studies have been carried out as the result of the enduring fascination with all aspects of the First World War. However, a criticism has been levelled by Nicholas Mansfield that the literature has predominantly ‘concentrated on

⁷⁰ A. Marwick, *The Deluge: British Society and the First World War* (London: Macmillan, 1973); A. Marwick, ed., *Total War and Social Change* (London: Macmillan, 1988).

⁷¹ B. Waites, *A Class Society at War: England, 1914-1918* (Leamington Spa: Berg, 1987), p. 1.

⁷² G.J. De Groot, *Blighy - British Society in the Era of the Great War* (London: Longman, 1996).

⁷³ A. Gregory, *The Last Great War: British Society and the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); C. Pennell, *A Kingdom United: Popular Responses to the Outbreak of the First World War in Britain and Ireland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

the larger strategic, domestic or military issues and especially the minutiae of the war, without connecting them to the reactions of localities'.⁷⁴ Subsequently, there has been an increased interest in local history and the war, and this has generated some detailed and valuable studies of several communities.⁷⁵ When considering the importance of social class to this area of scholarship, it has been important to note the point made by Patrick Joyce about the complexities of class, in that it has a relationship to the concepts of nation, region and community that makes it relevant to the study of the community at war.⁷⁶ Furthermore, that 'class in Britain seems indeed to have grown in the cumulative, aggregate way; neighbourhood, town, region and nation being gradually pieced together in the outlook of working people'.⁷⁷ In attempting to locate this thesis in relation to these main theoretical approaches and the contemporary debates concerning class, it was noteworthy that similar studies have employed an essentially revisionist, 'history-from-below' approach to elicit insights into the motivations of the working-class. As David Silbey pointed out, 'The soldiers and factory workers are as important to understanding modern war as are the strategy, tactics and technology, and leadership'.⁷⁸

Marxist historiography has sought to divide modern British social history into three interconnected and simultaneously distinct periods that fit into a three-stage model.⁷⁹ Firstly, the classical age of the industrial revolution (1780s–1840s), when the concept of social class was 'made' and there was growing class-consciousness and popular protest movements. Secondly, the mid-Victorian years (1840s–1870s), during which there was a retreat from class-consciousness, an eventual disintegration of the

⁷⁴ N. Mansfield, *English Farmworkers and Local Patriotism, 1900-1930* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), p. 11.

⁷⁵ R.J. Batten, 'Devon and the First World War' (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Exeter, 2013); J.G.M. Cranstoun, 'The Impact of the Great War on a Local Community: The Case of East Lothian' (Unpublished PhD thesis, Open University, 1992); A.S. Gregson, 'The 1/7th Battalion King's Liverpool Regiment and the Great War: The experience of a territorial battalion and its home towns' (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Coventry, 2005); L.K. Riddell, 'Shetland and the Great War' (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Edinburgh, 2012).

⁷⁶ P. Joyce, *Visions of the People: Industrial England and the Question of Class, 1848-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 8.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 336.

⁷⁸ D. Silbey, *The British Working Class and Enthusiasm for War, 1914-1916* (London: Frank Cass, 2005), p. 3.

⁷⁹ N. Kirk, pp. 6-8.

protest movements and fragmentation by reference to occupational, skills and purchasing power. Accompanying this were some gains, including the negotiated benefits arising from an 'aristocratic' outlook on the part of the labour movement. Thirdly, the period to the end of the First World War, when the modern working class became characterized by the emergence of a mass labour movement, and this acted in response to intensified economic competition and employer pressure. Eric Hobsbawm attributed the class-consciousness of British workers to a morality based on 'solidarity, fairness, mutual aid and co-operation and the readiness to fight for just treatment'.⁸⁰

A different approach to viewing social class featured in Gareth Stedman Jones' collection of powerful essays, which assessed the conception of class relative to its manifestation in the history of culture and politics since the 1830s. He asserted that 'the word class has acted as a congested point of intersection between many competing, overlapping forms of discourse – political, economic, religious and cultural – right across the political spectrum'. Furthermore, the distinctions between two conceptions of class are emphasized, that is the everyday and commonplace perception, and the revolutionary-significant Marxist view. These are challenged vis-à-vis the essential meaning of such concepts as class-consciousness and with regard to the employment of language.⁸¹ Since Stedman Jones maintained that the embodiment of class is in the language used, analysis should be in terms of its linguistic content. Stedman Jones also discussed what he termed the 'culture of consolation' whereby the defeat of Chartism resulted in the working class being imbued with a feeling that they could not defeat capitalism.⁸² Accordingly, the 'respectable' working class accepted the prevailing socio-economic circumstances and entered into an accommodation with the Liberals and Conservatives that persisted from the 1860s until the early twentieth century.

⁸⁰ E.J. Hobsbawm, *Workers: Worlds of Labor* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), p. 191.

⁸¹ G. Stedman Jones, *Languages of Class: Studies in English Working-Class History, 1832-1982* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 2.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 237.

However, this approach has been subjected to considerable criticism because its narrowness took insufficient account of the wider socio-economic context. It assumed the working class had no 'agency', by which is meant 'purposive human action' or, in other words, the capacity to act independently and make their own choices, and so they acted according to the social structures set out for them by the ruling classes.⁸³ In fact, the working class 'prided themselves upon the power of their own agency – upon the proven ability to create their own ways of life and institutions' and the gains achieved.⁸⁴

Alternative models have been presented that have endeavoured to rectify this oversight, and John Belchem has been prominent in employing Michael Mann's methodology which, in turn has been derived from the social sciences, to identify what are deemed to be the four aspects of social class.⁸⁵ The first element of this model was class identity, i.e. the definition of oneself as being working class. Secondly, there was class opposition, namely, the perception of employers and other agents as enduring class opponents. Thirdly, there was class totality, which has meant the making of both class identity and opposition the central defining feature of one's situation. Fourthly, class alternative, which was the conceptualization of an alternative form of social organization. This model possessed some considerable merit in terms of this topic of research because of the view advanced by John Benson that 'the growth of individualities and patriotic ideals combined with one another to impede the development of a coherent sense of working-class consciousness'.⁸⁶ Each of these approaches can contribute to the analysis of class, in terms of community and patriotism, and should advance understanding of the interactions and motivations concerned, particularly as they were at the outbreak of the First World War.

⁸³ M. Fairburn, *Social History - Problems, Strategies and Methods* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999), pp. 103-104.

⁸⁴ N. Kirk, p. 154.

⁸⁵ J. Belchem, *Industrialization and the Working-Class: The English Experience, 1750-1900* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1991), p. 3; M. Mann, *Consciousness and Action Among the Urban Working Class* (London: Macmillan, 1973), p. 13.

⁸⁶ J. Benson, *The Working Class in Britain, 1850-1939*, p. 142.

A number of other secondary sources interact with particular facets of social class generally, and the working class in particular. For example, Miles Savage and Andrew Miles investigated aspects concerning trade union militancy, the development of capitalism, and the social mobility of the working class. They also investigated the pre-war impact of New Liberalism and concluded that whilst it was attractive to some elements within the working class, namely the 'respectable' working class, it 'simply did not address the sort of issues which they knew to be important to them'.⁸⁷ Macraill and Martin argued that when contemplating the lives of working people and their lives, historians should 'demonstrate a willingness and an ability to wrestle with the complexities of the term class, and to apply it, and the alternative models offered by its critics'.⁸⁸ Hence, there was the derivation of a large amount of useful insight into working-class culture, communities and the means of self-help available to them.

Both Jon Lawrence and Ross McKibbin have provided an extensive assessment of political ideology in relation to the British working class. Lawrence researched the rise of class politics during the period from 1867 to 1914, paying particular attention to the phenomenon of working-class Conservatism as experienced in nearby Wolverhampton.⁸⁹ This can be connected to Benson's assessment of those factors held to be responsible for the lack of a strong trade union movement in the Black Country during the later Victorian and early Edwardian years. He attributed this to the survival of small-scale production and sub-contracting in local manufacturing, which, whilst not unique to the Black Country, arguably accounted for a working class that exhibited notable industrial weakness and political conservatism.⁹⁰ Ross McKibbin has also charted the advance and consolidation of the Edwardian Labour Party, maintaining that

⁸⁷ M. Savage and A. Miles, *The Remaking of the British Working Class, 1840-1940* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 78.

⁸⁸ D.M. MacRaild and D.E. Martin, *Labour in British Society, 1839-1914*, p. 13.

⁸⁹ J. Lawrence, *Speaking for the People: Party, Language and Popular Politics in England, 1867-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); J. Lawrence, 'Class and Gender in the making of Urban Toryism, 1880-1914', *English Historical Review*, 108 (428) (1993), pp. 629-652.

⁹⁰ J. Benson, 'Black Country History and Labour History', *Midland History*, 15 (1990), pp. 100-110.

by 1914 it was already a class-based political party, although the attempts to introduce Marxist ideologies were unsuccessful.⁹¹ In contrast, James Young has been highly critical of much of the labour historiography. This is because he considered it to have ‘focused almost exclusively on socialist intellectuals and working-class movements at the expense of portraying the lives and culture of the unimagined majority, the anti-capitalism of the latter has been largely ignored by labour historians’.⁹²

Several historians, including most notably Patrick Joyce, Gareth Stedman Jones and Bernard Waites, have argued persuasively for the deep embedment of patriotism within British working-class culture. In his investigation of Birmingham’s working class during the years 1899-1914, Michael Blanch has further articulated that there was a deeply ingrained nationalism, although this was not merely a class-motivated chauvinism, and his contention was that it was more defensive than aggressive.⁹³ Further endorsement of this perspective arose from Hugh Cunningham’s observation that ‘there can be few more obviously patriotic acts than to volunteer to defend one’s country’.⁹⁴ Patriotism was a very real sensation for many British men and women, with a decisive point being made by Bourne being that ‘it is easily confused with jingoism, though the two are not the same: patriotism is about love, jingoism is about hate’.⁹⁵

There have been numerous efforts to trace and explore the basis of patriotism in relation to the working class. Attention has been given to changes in the perception of patriotism, with a transition from it being associated with radicalism to it becoming synonymous with conservatism, which commenced in the mid-to-late Victorian period. August recounts that ‘working-class patriotism was well-established before the war,

⁹¹ R. McKibbin, *The Ideologies of Class: Social Relations in Britain, 1880-1950* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994). This was especially the case following the affiliation to the Labour Party in 1909 of the Miners’ Federation of Great Britain. Prior to this, and as with a significant number of other trade unions and similar organizations, this union had previously given its considerable financial support to the Liberal Party.

⁹² J.D. Young, *Socialism and the English Working Class: A History of English Labour, 1883-1939* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989), p. 9.

⁹³ M.D. Blanch, ‘Nation, Empire and the Birmingham Working Class, 1899-1914’ (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Birmingham, 1975), pp. 385-386.

⁹⁴ H. Cunningham, ‘The Language of Patriotism, 1750-1914’, *History Workshop*, 12 (1981), p. 26.

⁹⁵ J.M. Bourne, *Britain and the Great War, 1914-1918*, p. 218.

persisted beyond it alongside scepticism of authority reinforced by the day-to-day experience of working-class men and women in Britain'.⁹⁶ Both Hugh Cunningham and Miles Taylor have studied the alternative, democratic/pluralist or democratic/radical concepts of patriotism, which emphasized citizenship, democracy and political rights. They asserted that these were displaced by an essentially conservative patriotism that associated the national character with national interest and defence against both internal and external threats, originating with the Russo-Turkish disputes of 1876-1878 (and the associated *Jingoism*) and the new imperialism in South Africa (including the repercussions of the disastrous 1895 Jameson raid).⁹⁷ J.H. Grainger has provided a stimulating discussion of the development of the concept of *Englishness* with respect to patriotism.⁹⁸ Paul Ward has offered a most effective analysis of patriotism and the political left, including both the anti- and pro-war groupings within the labour movement during the First World War.⁹⁹ Covering similar ground is J.O. Stubbs' article, in which he described how Lord Milner successfully cultivated those prominent social democrats who favoured the prosecution of the war to a victorious outcome.¹⁰⁰

In an examination of Edwardian militarism, Anne Summers created a further connection between social class and patriotism. She noted that in the Volunteer Force (a forerunner of the Territorial Force that came into existence in 1908), 'at least 70 per cent of the Force came from the working class. On the whole, they represented that section of the working class which was in more or less regular employment'.¹⁰¹ This was associated with the military's increasing popularity; previously, it was seen as only being fit for the unskilled working class or the unemployed. A typical reaction was that received by William Robertson when he told his mother he had joined the Army and she

⁹⁶ A. August, p. 170.

⁹⁷ H. Cunningham, 'The Language of Patriotism, 1750-1914', p. 23; M. Taylor, 'Patriotism, History and the Left in Twentieth Century Britain', *Historical Journal*, 33 (4) (1990), pp. 972-974.

⁹⁸ J.H. Grainger, *Patriotisms: Britain, 1900-1939* (London: Routledge, 1986).

⁹⁹ P. Ward, *Red Flag and Union Jack: Englishness, Patriotism and the British Left, 1881-1924* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press for the Royal Historical Society, 1998).

¹⁰⁰ J.O. Stubbs, 'Lord Milner and Patriotic Labour, 1914-1918', *English Historical Review*, 87 (1972), p. 718.

¹⁰¹ A. Summers, 'Militarism in Britain before the Great War', *History Workshop*, 2 (1976), p. 106.

declared that ‘she would rather bury him than see him in a red coat’. Nevertheless, his career was truly phenomenal and Sir William Robertson has remained unique in being the only professional head of an army to have risen from its lowest rank to its highest.¹⁰²

John Osborne has conducted an investigation into volunteering during the early period of the war.¹⁰³ In a subsequent article he proceeded to explore the Volunteer Training Corps (VTC), observing that ‘without the spur of the complex and comprehensive national military service systems common on the continent, hundreds of thousands of Britons considered it their duty to enlist’.¹⁰⁴ John Hartigan has carried out an evaluation of Birmingham’s experience during the first year of the war. In this, he weighed up the local impact of various motivational factors that he believed affected voluntarism, including economic necessity, psychological pressure and popular conviction about the war. His findings were that the men came predominantly from the working class, and were often older than previously thought to be the case.¹⁰⁵

Nicoletta Gullace furnished an alternative perspective in her body of work concerning female patriotism and the memory of the war. In her other studies, she examined examples of the utilization of language in propaganda, citing examples of the recruitment posters and linking overt masculinity and male pride with appeals to enlist on patriotic grounds.¹⁰⁶ This research has delved deep into the origins, implications and consequences of the distribution of white feathers by women to those men believed to be shirking their duty. It has also charted the emotiveness of propaganda, and how this

¹⁰² R. Holmes, *Tommy: The British Soldier on the Western Front, 1914-1918* (London: Harper Perennial, 2004); pp. 121-122. Having enlisted in the ranks as a private soldier in the 16th (The Queen’s) Lancers in 1877, Sir William Robertson (1860-1933) was commissioned into the 3rd Dragoon Guards in 1885. He continued his meteoric rise and held the position of Chief of the Imperial General Staff (CIGS) for much of the First World War, when differing views often brought him into conflict with Prime Minister, David Lloyd George. The pinnacle of his career was to be promoted to Field Marshal and to be created a baronet.

¹⁰³ J.M. Osborne, *The Voluntary Recruiting Movement in Britain 1914-16* (New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 1982).

¹⁰⁴ J.M. Osborne, ‘Defining their own Patriotism: British Volunteer Training Corps in the First World War’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 23 (1) (1988), pp. 59.

¹⁰⁵ J. Hartigan, ‘Volunteering in the First World War: The Birmingham Experience, August 1914 – May 1915’, *Midland History*, 24 (1999), pp. 171.

¹⁰⁶ N.F. Gullace, *The Blood of Our Sons: Men, Women and the Renegotiation of British Citizenship during the Great War* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002); N.F. Gullace, ‘White Feathers and Wounded Men: Female Patriotism and the Memory of the Great War’, *The Journal of British Studies*, 36 (2) (1997), p. 179.

progressed from Alfred Leete's iconic poster of Lord Kitchener with the message, *Britons - Your Country Needs YOU*, to those featuring vulnerable female figures espousing the slogan, *Women of Britain say GO!* Even children were depicted, the foremost example being the poster of the guilty-looking man seated with his son and daughter, who has just been asked by them, *Daddy what did You do in the Great War?*

1.5 Conclusion

Therefore, having established the background to and motivation for this research, the methodological approach employed, and the key scholarly debates, it should be added that this local study – or micro history – will be firmly embedded within a national framework. Hence, it will examine the significance to Wednesbury of local and national evidence identifiable as relevant to the location and time period in question.

It is important to note that the home front experience of the working class was markedly different from that of the other social classes in several crucial respects. All families suffered anxieties and concerns for the safety and welfare of sons, husbands and brothers serving with the armed forces, especially at the front line. The arrival of a War Office telegram, announcing that a loved one had died or was missing in action was felt equally as grievously in the most affluent as well as in the poorest of households. All were also vulnerable to indiscriminate enemy attack, such as from the enemy air raids that began in 1915 with the bombing of cities and towns by German airships. However, for the privileged the access to luxuries was not problematic until the war had been waged for almost three years, when the unrestricted submarine warfare began to take its toll. For those with business interests, the conflict became very profitable, particularly for the producers of munitions, and the suppliers of the domestic goods that now replaced those which were previously imported from abroad. For many of the working class, and especially the unskilled labourers, their deprivation, together with hunger and sub-standard housing, had always been constant companions. In

wartime, such families faced the prospect of reliance on the inadequate Separation Allowances or, when a breadwinner was lost, the meagre pensions offered by the state. By undertaking paid employment, even when this was for the war effort by the female munitions workers, such state allowances would be reduced or even removed entirely, reversing any minor improvement gained. Battles with authority over such matters had a profound impact on the wider perceptions of the equality of sacrifice being made by those in the respective classes of British society. These factors would eventually come to influence the political allegiances of many within the working-class community.

Over the course of the following chapters, this thesis will aim to demonstrate that by the end of the conflict the working-class people of Wednesbury had been actively and extensively involved in all aspects of the nation's war effort. Whether by the military service of their men at the front line or by their work on the home front, the people of this community had an intense commitment to winning the war. Yet their patriotism was motivated as much by the values, sense of identity and a desire to look after their own communities, homes, and families and friends as it was their country. The actions and the sacrifices that were being made on the home front were in their own way essential to provide support to their loved ones in the armed forces at the front line.

Pre-war events serve as an essential contextual reference point from which to measure the impact of the First World War. The class antagonisms that reached crisis point in the latter years of the war had their origins in the industrial unrest that occurred in the years from 1911 to 1914. For that reason, the economic, social and political facets of everyday life for the working class in Wednesbury on the eve of the war are considered in depth in Chapter 2, together with a detailed examination of the causes and consequences of the 1913 Black Country strike. This has been provided because it yielded many insights into this community and its motivations of benefit in achieving a greater understanding of what occurred on the home front during 1914 to 1918.

CHAPTER 2: WEDNESBURY ON THE EVE OF THE WAR

2.1 Introduction

This Chapter will provide an overview of life in the town of Wednesbury prior to the outbreak of the First World War to ascertain whether it was, in the words of the narrator of the landmark BBC television series *The Great War*, ‘a world of firm beliefs; the established order was not widely questioned’.¹ To achieve this, the key factors deemed to have contributed to Wednesbury’s growth during the latter years of the nineteenth century and early years of the twentieth century will be examined. Firstly, an increasing population, combined with a resultant expansion in geographic area, and the progressive urbanization of the town. Secondly, the establishment of a local government structure with electoral accountability, together with the formulation of a unique civic identity. Thirdly, the changing patterns of economic development, as local industries contended with the demands of an increasingly competitive global marketplace. In focusing on the town’s pre-war economy and society, there will be consideration of social class and structure, economic and industrial organization and performance, and political activity and class allegiance. This analysis will provide insights into the local community, enabling comparison to be made of the economic, political and social activities and networks, so that the extent and nature of any change can be evaluated effectively.

A significant portion of this Chapter is devoted to the 1913 Black Country strike. Although occurring in the year preceding the outbreak of hostilities, it was an event of great significance and importance to Wednesbury. The strike’s implications and far-reaching consequences continued to resonate with the town’s working people during wartime, as will be shown in the following Chapters. Therefore, it is appropriate for there to be a comprehensive account of the background to and causes of the dispute, its outcome and legacy, and the involvement of Wednesbury’s men and women.

¹ *The Great War* (BBC TV, 1964, re-issued as DVD collection, 2002), Episode 1, *On the Hill of Summer*.

2.2 The Growth of Wednesbury to 1914

The report of Wednesbury's Medical Officer of Health for the year 1914 is replete with information and statistics.² It confirmed that the town had a population of 29,100 inhabitants, an increase from the 28,103 that were recorded in the 1911 census.³ This demonstrated continued growth from the beginning of the nineteenth century, with the population in 1801 being a mere 4,160.⁴ In 1914, there were 929 births (rising from 808 in 1913), 497 deaths (a decrease from 521 in 1913), giving a net increase to the population of 432. Wednesbury Borough Council's municipal boundaries described an area of 2,287 acres within which there were 5,900 houses, each occupied by an average household of 4.9 persons. The number of new houses built in 1914 was 26, falling from the 53 that were built in the previous year. The rateable value of the entire area was £102,991, the district rate was 3s. 10d. in the £, and the poor rate was 4s. 8d. in the £.⁵

The Borough of Wednesbury was one of the new parliamentary constituencies inaugurated by the Second Reform Act of 1867.⁶ The geographic area covered originally included Wednesbury, West Bromwich, Darlaston and Tipton, and it was then the largest single constituency in England. However, consequent to the 1884 Reform Act, West Bromwich became a separate constituency in 1885 so that Wednesbury's total electorate in 1914 was 13,857.⁷ Nevertheless, with the conferring of Borough status by Parliament in 1886, it was at least fifty years ahead of other comparable Black Country towns.⁸ The Borough Council was comprised of four unelected Aldermen (former senior Councillors) and twelve Councillors, the latter serving four-year terms when returned by municipal elections in the four wards of Kings Hill, Market, Town

² Sandwell Community History and Archives Service (hereafter SCHAS) Report of Wednesbury's Medical Officer of Health, 1914, pp. 2-42. The reports for 1913-1918 are summarized in Appendix 4, p. 278.

³ Cd. 62591912-13 *Census of England 1911 – Area, families or separate occupiers and population, Vol. II, Registration Areas, Command Papers* (London: HMSO, 1914), p. 200.

⁴ G.J. Barnsby, *Social Conditions in the Black Country, 1800-1900*, p. 70.

⁵ SCHAS Report of Wednesbury's Medical Officer of Health, 1914, pp. 2-42.

⁶ The Representation of the People Act 1867 (30 & 31 Vict. c. 102). <<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/>> [Accessed 30 April 2015].

⁷ 1912-13 [53] Parliamentary Constituencies (electors, & c.). (London: HMSO, 1913), p. 10.

⁸ The Municipal Corporations Act 1882 (45 & 46 Vict. c.50). <<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/>>

Hall and Wood Green. The Mayor and Deputy Mayor could be either Aldermen or Councillors and enjoyed a two-year period of office.⁹ By 1914, civic activities were conducted from Wednesbury's Town Hall on Holyhead Road (erected in 1871), administered by a small professional staff including the Town Clerk, Thomas Jones, the Treasurer, Edward Wilson, and the Medical Officer of Health, Dr Walter Garman.¹⁰

Wednesbury's economic development and industrialization was rooted in its long history of mineral extraction dating back to the fourteenth century. Further expertise developed over successive centuries, including the pottery known as Wedgbury-ware and, from the early eighteenth century until the end of the Napoleonic Wars, it had been a notable centre for firearms production. The emergence of modern, metal-based manufacturing in the town was the direct consequence of a series of technological advances during the Industrial Revolution. These included the development in the early nineteenth century of new processes for tube making pioneered by Cornelius Whitehouse and for axle manufacture conceived by a local Baptist Minister, the Reverend James Hardy.¹¹ Ultimately, these changed the nature of production and relationships in the workplace, as semi-skilled and unskilled labour in factories and foundries replaced the apprentices and skilled artisans in smaller workshops.¹² Even with unprecedented growth in the size of companies and greater mechanization and capital intensification, there was still the irregularity of employment that was an accepted feature of life for the working-class population of the area.¹³

Founded in 1834, the Patent Shaft & Axletree Co. Ltd. would become Wednesbury's largest firm, and by 1842, it had negotiated an exclusive contract to

⁹ *Kelly's Directory for Staffordshire, 1912*, p. 448; SCHAS B/W/3/8-13 Borough of Wednesbury Year Books; SCHAS *Ryder's Annual*, 1885-1918. See Appendix 3, p. 277 for a table showing Wednesbury Borough Council's political composition during the interval from 1913/14 to 1918/19.

¹⁰ SCHAS B/W/3/8-13 Borough of Wednesbury Year Books.

¹¹ G.C. Allen, p. 91; J.F. Ede, p. 236.

¹² G.J. Barnsby, *Socialism in Birmingham and the Black Country, 1880-1939* (Wolverhampton: Integrated Press, 1998), p. 137. See Appendix 6, Photograph 2, p. 281, which depicts some steel tube workers employed at the South Staffordshire Patent tube works during the early years of the twentieth century.

¹³ E. Hopkins, 'Small Town Aristocrats of Labour and their Standard of Living, 1840-1914', *Economic History Review*, 28 (1975), p. 233.

produce rolling stock for the country's principal railway company, the London and North Western Railway.¹⁴ In 1867, Messrs Lloyds-Foster & Co., a Wednesbury company founded in 1818 by Samuel 'Quaker' Lloyd, acquired the Patent Shaft. This venture combined the Patent Shaft's Brunswick iron and steel works with Lloyds-Foster's Monway steel works and Old Park bridge yard, giving the new organization access to blast furnaces, rolling mills, a Bessemer steel plant, an axle and wheel works, a bridge and girder shop, and extensive collieries. In a further amalgamation occurring in 1902, the three plants of the predecessor companies (although still collectively known as the Patent Shaft) became a part of the Metropolitan Railway Carriage, Wagon and Finance Company, which also had works at Smethwick and Saltley in Birmingham.¹⁵

Considerable economic change occurred in the area between 1860 and 1914 as mining lost its pre-eminence, with the coal seams being exhausted or neglected through carelessness leading to flooding.¹⁶ Consequently, from 1865 to 1913, the total tonnage of coal extracted fell from nine million to three million tons.¹⁷ In the metal-based industries, many local firms faced growing competition. Barker has pointed out that this was 'not only abroad but also at home because of Britain's unprotected market and the large fall in international transport costs'.¹⁸ With the declining demand for wrought iron tubes and popularity of seamless and weldless tubes, Langley noted the diminishing of 'Wednesbury's importance as the principal tube producing area in the country'.¹⁹ Nevertheless, Wednesbury and the wider Black Country retained its separate identity from Birmingham, 'the home of the assembly industries and the lighter trades'.²⁰

¹⁴ K. Beddoes and C & S Wheeler, *Metro-Cammell: 150 Years of Craftsmanship* (Huddersfield: Runpast Publishing, 1999), p. 95; J.F. Ede, pp. 243-245.

¹⁵ F.W. Hackwood, *Wednesbury Faces, Places and Industries* (Wednesbury: Robert Ryder, 1897), p. 66; G.C. Allen, p. 358.

¹⁶ M. Le Guillou, 'Developments in the South Staffordshire Iron and Steel Industry, 1850-1913' (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Keele, 1972), p. 1.

¹⁷ E. Hopkins, 'Small Town Aristocrats of Labour and their Standard of Living, 1840-1914', p. 235.

¹⁸ T. Barker, 'Workshop of the World, 1870-1914', *History Today*, 44 (6) (1994), p. 30.

¹⁹ S. Langley, p. 74.

²⁰ E. Taylor, 'The Working Class Movement in the Black Country, 1863-1914' (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Keele, 1974), p. 25.

2.3 The pre-war economic, political and social context

Eric Taylor asserted that ‘the population and ethos of the Black Country remained overwhelmingly working class in the early years of the twentieth century’.²¹ Verification should be sought therefore on whether this statement is justifiable for Wednesbury. This is because, as Jose Harris observed, it is not only the distribution of property and the differentiation of types of employment that describe a town, ‘the organization of work, schools, housing, welfare, culture and recreation all conspired to compartmentalize British society on class lines’.²² Occupation and family provide a starting point for revealing ‘the patterns of income, values, advantages, and social behaviour which go to make up class’.²³ To examine this, data extracted from the 1911 Census Returns has been utilized and an assessment of Wednesbury conducted with regard to employment and the occupancy levels of property via a sampling exercise.²⁴

The geographic area of Wednesbury has been divided into six segments of approximately equal size. With each of these six areas being representative of a distinct community and having its own identity, one street was selected that typified that area. The six streets are Church Hill, Foley Street, Meeting Street, Piercy Street, Ridding Lane and Russell Street, all of which have been highlighted in the map shown in Appendix 2. With reference to the 1911 Census Enumeration Books, data was obtained from a sample of the properties situated on each of the streets. Information was gathered from these households concerning the number of occupants per property in terms of gender, the type of employment undertaken by the residents, and whether they were classified for the purpose of the Census as being employed, self-employed or as

²¹ Ibid., p. 35.

²² J. Harris, *Private Lives, Public Spirit: Britain, 1870-1914* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1994), p. 7.

²³ A. Adonis and S. Pollard, *A Class Act: The Myth of Britain's Classless Society* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1997), p. 6.

²⁴ Cd. 6259 *1912-13 Census of England 1911: Area, families or separate occupiers and population, Vol. II Registration Areas*, Command Papers (London: HMSO, 1914); Cd. 6343 *1912-13 Census of England 1911: Area, families or separate occupiers and population, Vol. III Parliamentary Areas*, Command Papers (London: HMSO, 1914). See Appendix 2, pp. 270-276 for the map and tables of data that have been extracted from the 1911 Census Enumeration Books <<http://www.Ancestry.co.uk>> [Accessed 12-16 December 2011].

the employers of others. From these samples a number of patterns emerged that enhance understanding of Wednesbury's social class composition and structure.

Firstly, the majority of occupants of Meeting Street, Piercy Street, Ridding Lane and Russell Street were engaged in manual employment, ranging from unskilled labouring to the skilled tasks that were undertaken by artisans; with Ridding Lane and Russell Street enjoying greater heterogeneity in terms of occupations. Secondly, while Church Hill and Foley Street contained residents performing manual work, they lived alongside those who were self-employed and the employers of others. Thirdly, the extent of property occupation was higher in Meeting Street, with residences typically accommodating at least six occupants, than it was in Church Hill, for example.

This analysis of these six main communities provides a picture from which it is evident that the majority of Wednesbury's working people earned their livelihoods mainly in the iron and steel industries. Although a very small number were self-employed or were the employers of others, most were manual workers, whether in unskilled labouring, semi-skilled or skilled occupations. This supported David Cannadine's view that 'in terms of skills, status and income, there were still complex graduations, which carried over from the mid-Victorian era'.²⁵ Notwithstanding the middle class, many of whom had migrated away from Wednesbury by 1914, most workers could not afford to reside far from their place of employment and this afforded some explanation for the expansion of the town's population, consistent with the growth of the area's manufacturing industry. Invariably, rather than being owner-occupied, accommodation was mostly rented (often directly from an employer), and it would be either a small house or rooms within a larger property. Typically, these would contain at least five occupants, with houses in multiple occupation, i.e. more than one family and/or lodgers sharing the property being a common arrangement. Conditions in such

²⁵ D. Cannadine, *Class in Britain* (London: Penguin, 2000), p. 115.

housing was frequently cramped and cold, if not squalid, with outside toilet facilities and water supplies that often became contaminated, leading to outbreaks of cholera and typhoid. On the other hand, a positive aspect of such living conditions was that it could create an interdependence and reliance that strengthened bonds in the wider community.

Benson asserted that a neighbourhood ‘usually comprised the street in which a family lived, together with those immediately surrounding it’, whereas a community was ‘an area and a group of people to which its members feel they belong’.²⁶ Hence, a community was more than just the people who lived there; it was an outward expression of their attitudes, beliefs, employment, interests, social interactions and their pride in belonging. As Bourke remarked, such ‘close knit communities enforced standards of behaviour and respectability and marked off hierarchies of status and authority’.²⁷ This is what gave working-class communities their cohesion, structure and as Joyce noted the ‘sense of shared perspective and reciprocal dependency’.²⁸ Similarly, August argued that social class had grown ‘in a cumulative, aggregate way; neighbourhood, town, region and nation being gradually pieced together in the outlook of working people’.²⁹ Allowing for the complexities and contentions associated with attempts to define a working-class consciousness, and the various forms that it could take, these communities were held together by their ties of friendship, kinship and neighbourliness.

It is noted by Stevenson that economic uncertainty meant that ‘life for the thirty per cent of the population which lived near or below the poverty line was a constant struggle to make ends meet’.³⁰ This is important in terms of social class and the reports of Wednesbury’s Medical Officer of Health for the years 1913 and 1914 contain data, the interpretation of which allows for further insights into life in the town.³¹

²⁶ J. Benson, *The Working Class in Britain, 1850-1939*, p. 118.

²⁷ J. Bourke, p. 137.

²⁸ P. Joyce, p. 336.

²⁹ A. August, p. 95.

³⁰ J. Stevenson, *British Society, 1914-45* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990), p. 42.

³¹ SCHAS Reports of Wednesbury’s Medical Officer of Health, 1913 and 1914. See Appendix 4, p. 278.

Specifically, while Wednesbury's overall population continued to rise, there was only a modest increase in the number of new houses constructed. Deaths often resulted from respiratory or other conditions arising from a lifetime of hard manual work. Infant mortality, and the noticeably high number of deaths recorded for children under five years of age (182 from the total of 497 in 1914, reflected the heavy toll of infectious diseases on those at risk as the result of living in overcrowded and insanitary conditions.

The period 1870 to 1914 was notable for the emergence of a distinctive working-class culture, which according to Stedman Jones emphasized 'the distance of the working class from the classes above it and to articulate its position within an apparently permanent social hierarchy'.³² This was important because rather than assigning class position based on economic criteria alone, there was allowance for the activities of everyday life, including those institutions that supported it, such as the co-operative, friendly and various types of self-help societies. These were often active on a group basis, so that they could deal with the economic uncertainties with which the state was either unable or unwilling to assist. August noted that these 'cultural approaches have enriched the efforts made to understand the lives of working people' and in this the popular press played an important role.³³ In addition to local publications with a wider readership, such as the *Express and Star*, there were two newspapers printed in Wednesbury itself, namely the *Midland Advertiser* and the *Wednesbury Herald*.³⁴

Jonathon Rose supplied a pertinent reminder that the overwhelming majority of the working class 'never wrote memoirs, never engaged in any serious political agitation, never became a government or trade union official?'³⁵ For Wednesbury's working-class women, leisure time was very limited and often an extension of their domestic responsibilities; whilst for men, it tended to be devoted to the public house,

³² G. Stedman Jones, p. 237.

³³ A. August, p. 2.

³⁴ *Kelly's Directory for Staffordshire, 1912*, p. 448.

³⁵ J. Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (Yale: Nota Bene, 2002), p. 190.

working-men's club and sporting activities.³⁶ The cinema was still a novelty with, as Stedman Jones observed, the music hall remaining popular and serving as an effective yardstick of working-class opinion. From the 1870s onwards, it was increasingly jingoistic, appealing to the working class's Conservative-supporting elements.³⁷ The manner in which the working class utilized its, albeit limited, leisure time was a matter of considerable unease for some middle-class social observers. This was especially so, given the implications of this for the amount of time that could be available to be spent in the workplace, and working-class resistance to the reorganization of employment conventions to mechanize and undermine the independence of the labour force.

Religion also shaped working-class life and in 1914 Wednesbury could claim six Anglican Churches, one Roman Catholic Church, and numerous Chapels representing the Baptist, Christian Brethren, Congregational, Primitive Methodist, United Methodist and Wesleyan Methodist varieties of non-conformity.³⁸ Notwithstanding the tendency of the Anglican clergy to have Conservative sympathies and for non-conformists to favour Liberalism, the political and social dimensions of religion were more complicated.³⁹ Efforts to engage with working-class communities took a number of forms, including patronage of cultural and social events and support for youth organizations, such as the Boy Scouts and the Boys Brigade, to inculcate the values believed necessary to make good citizens and reliable workers. Moreover, by deflecting the attribution of guilt for the social conditions away from the bad employers and landlords and on to the improvidence of the habits of working-class life, as Eric Taylor argued, organized religion played its part in 'blunting the edge of class conflict'.⁴⁰

³⁶ See Chapter 7, pp. 209-214. By this time, football had become the principal sporting interest of the area's working class men, with many local clubs emerging in the 1870s. Wednesbury Old Athletic Football Club (nicknamed the 'Old Uns') was founded in 1874 but a lack of success led to it being disbanded in 1924.

³⁷ G. Stedman Jones, p. 231.

³⁸ *Kelly's Directory for Staffordshire, 1912*, p. 498.

³⁹ H. McLeod, *Religion and Society in Britain, 1850-1914* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996), p. 113.

⁴⁰ E. Taylor, 'The Working Class Movement in the Black Country, 1863-1914', p. 36. See also section 2.4 of this Chapter for an account concerning the controversial intervention of the Reverend L.A. Pritchard, the Vicar of St. Bartholomew's and its consequences and impact during the 1913 Black Country strike.

Duncan Tanner remarked that local and national politics in the years preceding the First World War were ‘determined by a complex range of religious, material and ideological factors’.⁴¹ Economic considerations included growing competition from foreign companies and relative industrial decline thereby resulting in rising prices and falling real wages that purchased less in 1910 than had been the case in 1900.⁴² Exposure of the pronounced inequalities and the growing gap between the rich and poor within Edwardian society coincided with a mounting belief in increased state intervention, and this prompted the more radical New Liberal inclined-element in the Asquith Government to curtail its former, minimalist, free-trade stance.⁴³ However, its social and welfare reforms were not always popular with a working class expected to contribute more now in order to reap the benefits later on.⁴⁴ As Michael Bentley observed, this was ‘so obviously aimed at improving the security of working-class people against sickness’ and yet it ‘provoked animosity from the very people it purported to protect’.⁴⁵ Such steps also failed to ameliorate industrial unrest, as the workers struggled both to secure an income that could keep pace with rising prices and to win recognition for the trade unions that had assisted them in their efforts.⁴⁶

A multitude of non-economic factors, including past political traditions and religious denomination, influenced political allegiance and behaviour. The latter years of the nineteenth century were the high watermark of British imperialism and, as Blanch argued, ‘patriotism and ideas of Britishness came to be used to justify the territorial expansion of England’.⁴⁷ In 1914, the turmoil generated by militant suffragettes and those Ulstermen following Sir Edward Carson in defying Home Rule meant that all of

⁴¹ D. Tanner, *Political Change and the Labour Party, 1900-1918*, p. 81.

⁴² J. Ward, ‘Emergence of the Labour Party in the Black Country, 1910-1922’ (Unpublished MA thesis, University of Wolverhampton, 1993), p. 9; K. Burgess, *The Challenge of Labour: Shaping British Society, 1850-1920* (London: Croom Helm, 1980), p. 118.

⁴³ K. W. Aikin, *The Last Years of Liberal England, 1900-1914* (London: Collins, 1975), p. 119.

⁴⁴ K. Burgess, p. 141. By creating additional bureaucracy, such reforms could also be punitive and repressive.

⁴⁵ M. Bentley, *Politics Without Democracy, 1815-1914*, 2nd edn (London: Fontana, 1996), p.354.

⁴⁶ D. Tanner, *Political Change and the Labour Party, 1900-1918*, p. 62.

⁴⁷ P. Ward, *Red Flag and Union Jack: Englishness, Patriotism and the British Left, 1881-1924* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press for the Royal Historical Society, 1998), p. 19.

the political parties had to grapple with the issues of nationalism and patriotism.⁴⁸ There was a constant barrage of patriotic propaganda, which was filtered into schools, Sunday schools and churches; it was also to be found in newspapers and works of literature, as well as the cinema and music hall. Paul Ward pointed to an increased awareness of ‘the commercial and military threat posed to Britain’s established position by an ascendant Germany’.⁴⁹ This gave the motivation for the formation of a number of patriotic pressure groups, which, by harnessing such popular sentiment, were able to campaign vigorously for an increase in the size of the Royal Navy’s Grand Fleet, for example.

Jon Lawrence suggested that political beliefs are ‘assured to arise automatically from the objective economic and social interests of electors or from their (usually socially determined) character types’.⁵⁰ The class identity that was shaped in the segregated working-class neighbourhoods, by ‘the growth of cultural homogeneity in the urban working class’ and by economic insecurity, was often ‘consciously respectable, law-abiding, even reactionary’.⁵¹ Despite a long-standing tradition of artisan radicalism, the respectable working class rejected revolutionary methods, such as the physical force Chartism of the 1840s, recognizing that its aims were best achieved by parliamentary means.⁵² However, whilst the radical tradition was not extinguished, the divisions and differences that fragmented its character prevented any particular party affiliation from taking hold.⁵³ Howkins pointed out that the ‘working class was forming itself politically as a class at local level, at different rates and in different ways’.⁵⁴

⁴⁸ M.D. Blanch, p. 162.

⁴⁹ P. Ward, p. 102.

⁵⁰ J. Lawrence, ‘Class and Gender in the making of Urban Toryism, 1880-1914’, *English Historical Review*, 108 (428) (1993), p. 630.

⁵¹ J. Lawrence, *Speaking for the People: Party, Language and Popular Politics in England, 1867-1914*, p. 26; A. August, p. 146; G. Dangerfield, p. 215.

⁵² J.F.C. Harrison, *The Common People: A History from the Norman Conquest to the Present* (London: Croom Helm, 1984), p. 383. Aside from the Chartist movement, the roots of artisan radicalism can be traced back to the Levellers and the Corresponding Societies of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

⁵³ P. Clarke, ‘The Social Democratic Theory of the Class Struggle’ in *The Working Class in Modern British History: Essays in Honour of Henry Pelling*, ed. by J.M. Winter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 4; A. August, p. 153; N. Kirk, p. 146.

⁵⁴ A. Howkins, ‘Edwardian Liberalism and Industrial Unrest: a class view of the decline of Liberalism’, *History Workshop*, 4 (1977), p. 151.

The two principal political parties continued to enjoy substantial support from Wednesbury's working class in 1914, with the Conservatives being dominant, as reflected in their control of the Borough Council and the strength of local membership. Of the twelve seats on Wednesbury Borough Council, in 1913/14, the Conservatives held eight and the Liberals three, with an Independent Councillor holding the one other seat. Wednesbury's Conservative Club boasted 650 members and its Liberal Club had 200 members.⁵⁵ Indeed, those who valued the Empire, family, monarchy and the nation, who favoured tariffs over free trade, and were not averse to the existence of elites and social hierarchy, were drawn towards the Conservative cause.⁵⁶ This tended to attract rather more Anglicans when compared with other denominations, although the Church of England did not impose a common line on their clergy.⁵⁷ As Lawrence argued, the Conservative's 'deliberate identification with aspects of urban popular culture, such as the public house, football and racing, was intended to distinguish them from the moral reforming style of Liberal politics'.⁵⁸ There was very significant female support for Conservatism too, principally via the activities of the Primrose League, and there is evidence to corroborate that this organization was active in Wednesbury.⁵⁹

The political realignment in Birmingham from the mid-1880s, when Joseph Chamberlain broke with the Liberal Party to make common cause with middle-class Conservatives resulted in Chamberlainite Liberal Unionists taking all of the seats in Birmingham and several constituencies in the Black Country at the 1892 general election. Furthermore, as Peter Marsh noted, one of Chamberlain's characteristics that left a deep and lasting impression on the electorate was 'his concern for the wellbeing of

⁵⁵ SCHAS *Ryder's Annual*, 1885-1918; *Kelly's Directory for Staffordshire*, 1912, p. 497.

⁵⁶ C.S.A. Chinn, 'The Anatomy of a Working Class Neighbourhood', p. 274; J. Lawrence, 'Class and Gender in the making of Urban Toryism, 1880-1914', p. 638; A. August, p. 154; R. McKibbin, *The Ideologies of Class: Social Relations in Britain, 1880-1950* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), p. 288.

⁵⁷ H. McLeod, p. 201.

⁵⁸ J. Lawrence, 'Class and Gender in the making of Urban Toryism, 1880-1914', p. 638.

⁵⁹ The Primrose League (named after Benjamin Disraeli's favourite flower) was founded in 1883 to disseminate Conservative ideas and values and to help to mobilize political support. To achieve this, it arranged concerts and garden parties, and at the height of its popularity, there were several million members of the League. Activity in Wednesbury is confirmed in the *Ryder's Annuals* for the period.

the working man'.⁶⁰ This legacy continued to exert its powerful influence into the early years of the twentieth century and, as Christopher Green suggested, 'the label Unionist seems to have helped here, allowing floating voters to overcome their reluctance to vote Conservative'.⁶¹ Liberal Unionism eventually merged with Conservatism until the point was reached when any real distinction became increasingly difficult to make.⁶²

Prior to the First World War, in the Black Country, the antipathy to be found between the typically Liberal-supporting employers and their workforces does offer some form of explanation for the declining fortunes of Liberalism and the continued electoral success of Conservatism. Although, across the country, the Conservative Party began to lose some of its working-class support in the aftermath of the 1901 Taff Vale case, in the Black Country, this was not seriously affected until it began to be challenged by the emergence of the Labour Party.⁶³ On many of the main social issues of the day, whilst the Liberals tended to be more socially progressive in their views than were the Conservatives, implementation of such policies was not always welcomed by a working class resentful of attempts to undermine its independence, especially when it affected the manner in which they derived their livelihood. In overcoming the vagaries of fluctuating trade conditions and irregular employment, many earned livings as street traders, for example.⁶⁴ Moreover, the Liberal Party's attractiveness to the working-class was constrained by it being widely seen as 'supported by business, professionals and

⁶⁰ P.T. Marsh, *Joseph Chamberlain – Entrepreneur in British Politics* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1994), p. 670.

⁶¹ C. Green, 'Birmingham's Politics, 1873-1891: The Local Basis of Change', *Midland History*, 2 (1973), p. 98.

⁶² Given that from the time of the aforementioned merger in 1912 Unionism began to lose its separate identity, for the purpose of this thesis the term Conservative will be used in preference to Unionist.

⁶³ E. Hopkins, *A Social History of the English Working Classes, 1815-1945*, p. 171. Following the settlement by collective bargaining of the dispute between the Taff Vale Railway Company and the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants in 1900, the Railway Company decided to sue this trade union for damages and won the ensuing legal action. It having previously been believed that as unincorporated entities, trade unions could not be sued under the law of trusts, the judgement was reversed when the union took the case to the Court of Appeal. However, the Railway Company appealed to the House of Lords, which in 1901 ruled that as the trade union was capable of owning property and of inflicting harm on others then it was liable for any damages caused, such as economic loss during strike action. A precedent was created for unions being held liable for damages resulting from the action of their members and officials.

⁶⁴ C.S.A Chinn, *Poverty Amidst Prosperity: Urban Poor in England, 1834-1914*, p. 64; J.D. Young, p. 93. Resentment of officialdom and the imposition of middle-class social values, such as temperance, epitomized the gulf between 'them' and 'us' that was shared by the majority of working-class people.

millionaires'.⁶⁵ Furthermore, its stance in the field of industrial relations, including the 1909 Osborne Judgement, and in several disputes during 1911-1913 where armed troops were called out, effectively began to erode the base of its working-class support.⁶⁶

Even at the level of municipal politics, few of the Conservative or Liberal associations were prepared to sponsor any aspiring working-class candidates, despite pressures from below for reform and the concerns being voiced of the repercussions of 'seeing the Labour Party win seats at their expense if they did not pass such measures'.⁶⁷ Consequently, such ambitious individuals now looked to fulfil their ambitions through membership of the trade unions and the recently formed Labour Party. In the years after 1910, Labour refined its policy stance and sought to broaden its electoral appeal yet further.⁶⁸ Changing attitudes within the trade union movement made finance and an established network of potential supporters available, constituency organization was strengthened, and electoral support rose, although with substantial regional variation.⁶⁹ There was also a change in generational loyalties, with Michael Childs remarking that as 'Labour grew...not only as the unions grew but as Labourites grew up'.⁷⁰ The Osborne Judgement was tempered by legislation enacted as the Trade Union Act 1913, and 'the structure of the workforce evidently did not obstruct the growth of a working-class party or of unions which enrolled a significant fraction of the workforce'.⁷¹

⁶⁵ D. Cannadine, p. 114.

⁶⁶ K. Laybourn, 'The Rise of Labour and the Decline of Liberalism: The State of the Debate', *History*, 80 (1995), p. 213. Walter Osborne, a Liberal Party supporter and member of the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants, campaigned against individual trade unionists being asked to contribute to Labour Party political funds. His case passed through the courts and to the House of Lords, with a ruling being made in 1909 that trade unionists would have to contract-in if they wanted a portion of their salary to be used in this way. By replacing the previous system of contracting-out in which trade unionists had to state explicitly that they did not wish to contribute, this judgement was particularly detrimental to one of the Labour Party's main sources of funding. Between 1909 and 1914, the loss of funds to the Labour Party resulting from the Osborne judgement was estimated to be circa £30,000 (which equates to £3,019,263 in 2015).

⁶⁷ E. Halévy, *The Rule of Democracy, 1905-1914: History of English People in the Nineteenth Century, Volume 6* (London: Ernest Benn, 1961), p. 445.

⁶⁸ H. Cunningham, *The Challenge of Democracy: Britain, 1832-1918*, p. 219; M. Pugh, *Speak for Britain: A New History of the Labour Party* (London: Vintage, 2010), pp. 77-78.

⁶⁹ D. Tanner, *Political Change and the Labour Party, 1900-1918*, p. 3.

⁷⁰ M.J. Childs, *Labour's Apprentices: Working Class Lads in late Victorian and Edwardian England* (London: Hambledon, 1992), p. 161.

⁷¹ The National Archives Home Office Papers (hereafter TNA HO) 45/10685/224596: Trade Unions and the Trade Dispute Bill 1912; R. McKibbin, *The Ideologies of Class: Social Relations in Britain*, p. 38.

Nevertheless, Labour remained the third party, sustaining the Liberals in office nationally in order to deny power to the Conservatives but, with the establishment of an ILP branch in Wednesbury during 1913, it had started to exert a presence locally.⁷²

In the case of a town such as Wednesbury, with its large working-class population, the issue of agency was of relevance, namely ‘to what extent, in what form and for what reasons, do workers become politically active and so affect historical developments?’⁷³ It was the changing structure of local industry and movement from small workshops to larger productive units, combined with the increasing trade union membership of the respectable skilled workers of the Labour aristocracy, that the Labour Party began, as Pugh observed, to ‘deprive the Conservatives of their traditional hold over a section of the working class’.⁷⁴ When Labour entered the local political contest for the first time, with two candidates standing for election to Wednesbury Borough Council in November 1913, the *Wednesbury Herald* alluded to trade union influence in the aftermath of the 1913 Black Country strike. It reported that although they were narrowly defeated, the Labour candidates were carried shoulder-high through the streets as their supporters sang what had been the strike song, ‘*Here we are again!*’

No doubt the leaders of the great strike have got round them a body of men whom they have detached from Liberalism, and to a lesser degree from Unionism, men of the class who benefited from the settlement of the strike.⁷⁵

Locally, the Labour Party’s electoral breakthrough took a few more years to materialize fully since, as Tanner stated, ‘Conservative strength in the West Midlands stretched beyond Birmingham to include Black Country seats such as Wednesbury’.⁷⁶

Arguably, this was compounded by the electoral restrictions that required one year’s

⁷² D. Tanner, *Political Change and the Labour Party, 1900-1918*, p. 187; *Midland Advertiser*, 14 February, 4 and 25 April, and 25 July 1914. By 1914, there were 38 Labour MPs (reduced from 42 in 1912, the Party having lost four seats at by-elections) and 1,858,000 Labour Party members in 130 trade unions.

⁷³ M. Savage and A. Miles, *The Remaking of the British Working Class, 1840-1940*, p. 1.

⁷⁴ M. Pugh, *The Tories and the People, 1880-1935*, p.160.

⁷⁵ *Wednesbury Herald*, 8 November 1913.

⁷⁶ D. Tanner, *Political Change and the Labour Party, 1900-1918*, pp. 180-181. Labour’s first electoral victory in Wednesbury came in the December 1918 general election. This was the first election contested in the town following the abandonment of the political truce held since 1914 and with a larger electorate.

residence at a property before eligibility was conferred, effectively excluding younger voters, lodgers and those who relocated regularly (although it excluded all such voters, regardless of their political allegiance).⁷⁷ This was shown by the composition of Wednesbury Borough Council in 1914, with each of the Council's four wards typically being held by two Conservative members and one Liberal or Independent.⁷⁸

Having regard to the town's economic structure, according to the 1912 edition of *Kelly's Directory*, ten of Wednesbury's twenty principal employers were tube manufacturers; the other factories and foundries being engaged in the producing various castings, nuts and bolts, and valves.⁷⁹ In that year, the town's largest employer remained the Patent Shaft (now part of the Metropolitan Railway Carriage, Wagon and Finance Company). Occupying 475 acres spread over three sites (Brunswick, Monway and Old Park), it had recently fulfilled the largest order then placed with a single firm by supplying the Great Central Railway with 6,500 freight wagons.⁸⁰ Other commercial activity in the town was concentrated in the service industries, including 56 public houses, 66 beer shops, 64 grocers, 33 butchers and 98 other miscellaneous shops. In addition to the small number of professionals, such as accountants, architects and solicitors, as required by a town of Wednesbury's size, there were 15 hairdressers and 17 pawnbrokers.⁸¹ The area's two principal railway companies met the town's transportation needs.⁸² The Great Western Railway offered travel to Birmingham and Wolverhampton; the London and North Western Railway ran services to Dudley and Walsall. To facilitate the efficient handling of freight, there was an extensive network of exchange sidings with connections to the lines of both railway companies.

⁷⁷ K. Laybourn, *The Rise of Labour: The British Labour Party, 1890-1979* (London: Edward Arnold, 1988), p. 11; J. Ward, 'Emergence of the Labour Party in the Black Country, 1910-1922', p. 9.

⁷⁸ SCHAS B/W/3/8-13 Borough of Wednesbury Year Books; *Ryder's Annual*, 1885-1918. See Appendix 3, p. 277 - composition of Wednesbury Borough Council from 1913/14 to 1918/19.

⁷⁹ *Kelly's Directory for Staffordshire, 1912*, pp. 500-506. See Appendix 5, table 1 for summary information, and Appendix 6, 4-9, p. 282-285 for illustrations and photographs of some of these companies.

⁸⁰ K. Beddoes and C & S Wheeler, p. 13.

⁸¹ *Kelly's Directory for Staffordshire, 1912*, pp. 500-506. See Table 4 in Appendix 5, p. 279 for a summary.

⁸² *Wednesbury as a Manufacturing and Commercial Centre and a Base for the Establishment of New Industries* (London: J. Burrow & Co. Ltd, 1918).

Black Country employers had traditionally used the sub-contracting system of middlemen known as ‘butties’ to recruit labour. This practice was widely detested by workers who were vulnerable to exploitation, owing to the irregularity of employment and low wages, and in 1913, the wages of Wednesbury’s iron founders were typically between 33 and 38 shillings per week.⁸³ This, and the often poor relations between employers and their workforce began to change, however, with the introduction of new machinery and working methods into factories and foundries requiring greater numbers of semi-skilled and unskilled workers, who were necessary for making the efficiency gains essential when competing against both domestic and foreign competitors.⁸⁴

Initially limited locally, the increased assertiveness of trade unionism added to what Keith Laybourn described as ‘an atmosphere of change and which altered the balance of relationships within the trade union movement and between unions, employers and government’.⁸⁵ Nationally, total union membership rose from 2,513,000 in 1907 to 4,415,000 by 1914, with 719,000 members being enrolled in 1913 alone.⁸⁶ Whilst not reversing the 1909 Osborne Judgement, the Trade Union Act 1913 had permitted the unions to raise political funds provided these remained separated from member contributions for general and industrial purposes; members thereby being able to contract-out of making political contributions.⁸⁷ In both ideological and sociological terms, this bottom-up organizational expansion began to challenge forces that had constrained the working class since the demise of Chartism in the 1850s. Henry Pelling observed that this included ‘the traditions of laissez-faire Liberalism combined with the union leaders’ rooted hostility to any erosion of their voluntary and extra-legal status’.⁸⁸

⁸³ Cd. 6054 *Wages (Standard Time Rates)*, Command Papers (London: HMSO, 1914), p. 64.

⁸⁴ E. Taylor, ‘The Midland Counties Trades Federation, 1886-1914’, *Midland History*, 1 (1972), p. 39.

⁸⁵ K. Laybourn, *A History of British Trade Unionism, c. 1770-1990* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 1997), p. 106.

⁸⁶ H. Pelling, *Popular Politics and Society in Late Victorian Britain* (London: Macmillan, 1979), p. 149; E. Hopkins, *A Social History of the English Working Classes, 1815-1945*, p. 180. Exceptionally low unemployment during 1911-1914 made it difficult for employers to dismiss and replace unionized workers.

⁸⁷ H. Pelling and A.J. Reid, p. 26; K. Laybourn, *The Rise of Labour: The British Labour Party, 1890-1979*, p. 23.

⁸⁸ H. Pelling, *A History of British Trade Unionism*, p. 132; J. Hinton, p. 93.

The employers disliked the ensuing competition for day-to-day control and power in the workplace that was now being advanced by union representatives and, when met by this growing confidence in their formerly compliant workers, ‘quickened and intensified their attempts aggressively and unilaterally to exert control over workplace matters’.⁸⁹ Yet even when making an allowance for the emergence during the latter years of the nineteenth century of the ‘New Unionism’ intended to broaden the movement’s appeal by recruiting from the ranks of the unskilled and semi-skilled workers, British trade unionism had enjoyed a growth in the number of its members and its popular standing that was less than smooth. This was to change, especially during the period from 1911 to 1914, when unprecedented industrial militancy contributed acutely to a changing climate in industrial relations, and these years have subsequently become known as the ‘Great Unrest’. Prior to this, the maximum number of strikes had been no more than five hundred per year but in 1911, there were 872. This rose to a maximum of 1,459 in 1913 and, by August 1914, it looked highly probable that even this figure might be surpassed as 972 disputes had already been staged.⁹⁰ Furthermore, according to the official statistics, as provided by the Board of Trade’s Labour Department, the number of days of production that were lost during industrial action, and which had stood at 2,150,000 in 1907, had spiralled to 40,890,000 by 1912.⁹¹

A number of factors were to make their contribution to what Eric Hobsbawm has described as ‘flaring bushfires of labour unrest’.⁹² These included the falling growth of productivity and adverse trading conditions, inequality and the failure of wages to keep pace with climbing inflation, and numerous accumulated grievances over working conditions, all of which gained significance during a period when unemployment was historically low. Increasing consciousness resulted in not only ‘the respectable’ skilled

⁸⁹ N. Kirk, p. 170.

⁹⁰ H. Perkin, *The Rise of Professional Society: England since 1880* (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 174.

⁹¹ H. Pelling, *Popular Politics and Society in Late Victorian Britain*, p. 149; M. Pugh, *Speak for Britain: A New History of the Labour Party*, p. 87.

⁹² E.J. Hobsbawm, *Industry and Empire*, 2nd edn (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1999), p. 171.

workers joining the new general unions; the semi-skilled and unskilled workers in the previously unorganized trades and industries were also being recruited. These unions developed at a much faster rate than the rest of the labour movement and foremost amongst them was the Workers' Union, which was founded on 1 May 1898 for these traditionally neglected groups. During its earliest years, advancement was modest though progress occurred, as it assumed an increasingly prominent role in industrial relations. Membership in 1911 had comprised 18,000 in 111 branches, although by 1914 this grew to 143,000 in 567 branches, with many women joining its ranks.⁹³

As trade unionism's frontiers extended, syndicalism (derived from *syndic*, the French word for a trade union) achieved some prominence. This doctrine advocated the abandonment of the quest for political power by parliamentary means; instead, control should stem from the workers taking control of production. This would be achieved by direct action in each industry, culminating in a general strike, and described as scientific trade unionism, as envisaged in the 1912 pamphlet, *The Miners' Next Step*.⁹⁴ Syndicalism carried an appeal to workers who were dissatisfied with the Labour Party's performance and progress or, as Meacham suggested, to those members of the working class 'who had no sympathy for the bureaucratic socialism of the Fabian stripe'.⁹⁵

As Pugh argued, 'the culmination of this trend came with the Triple Alliance of miners, railwaymen and transport workers' that came into existence in early 1914.⁹⁶ Potentially, this could have been a step closer to the adoption of syndicalism by a major portion of the British labour movement but, as Henry Pelling related, most of the trade unionists 'simply looked upon it as a means of strengthening their respective bargaining

⁹³ R. Hyman, *The Workers' Union* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 35.

⁹⁴ R.C.K. Ensor, *England, 1870-1914* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1936), p. 438; E. Hopkins, *A Social History of the English Working Classes, 1815-1945*, p. 177. Written by the so-called Unofficial Reform Committee of the Cambrian Combine strike of 1910-11, this Syndicalist treatise is attributed principally to the trade unionist and political theorist, Noah Ablett, who was also part of the movement that subsequently created the Plebs' League, an educational and political organization that was based on Marxist principles.

⁹⁵ S. Meacham, "'The Sense of an Impending Clash': English Working Class Unrest before the First World War", *The American Historical Review*, 77 (5) (1972), pp. 1345-1346.

⁹⁶ M. Pugh, *State and Society: British Political and Social History, 1870-1992* (London: Edward Arnold, 1994), p. 133.

positions'.⁹⁷ The three trade unions to be involved in this arrangement were the Miners Federation of Great Britain, the National Union of Railwaymen and the National Transport Workers' Federation (an association of dockers, seamen, tramwaymen and road vehicle workers). If, as was believed at the time, joint action was planned for the autumn of 1914, which could have made it the most serious industrial relations episode since the 1842 Chartist general strike, then it was averted by the outbreak of war. Syndicalism remained a minority creed, and the trade unions taking action during these years did so for essentially pragmatic motives, not as the agents of 'a movement dedicated to destroy capitalism through revolutionary industrial class struggle'.⁹⁸ Yet, the class-consciousness and political motivation of the working class would undoubtedly have been influenced when seeking redress from stubborn employers.

2.4 Wednesbury and the 1913 Black Country strike

Between May and July 1913, the Black Country experienced what C.L. Staples and W. Staples described as 'a series of strikes, meetings, marches, and demonstrations initiated by largely young, unskilled male and female labourers and their supporters'.⁹⁹ At the lowest level of the area's industrial hierarchy, these were the so-called *Bottom Dogs* (similar to Under Dogs), the local slang term for the unskilled workers employed to perform the dirtiest and hardest jobs, such as tending the furnaces and carrying out the maintenance work in the Black Country's manufacturing factories and foundries. It is contended that from the available evidence, the epicentre of this industrial action is identifiable as Wednesbury, with the origin of the dispute being traceable to the second week of May in that year. This was when 200 employees of the Old Patent tube works of John Russell & Co. Ltd. commenced what began as an unofficial strike in support of a claim to raise the minimum wage of the unskilled workers to 23s. per week.

⁹⁷ H. Pelling, *Popular Politics and Society in Late Victorian Britain*, p. 160.

⁹⁸ R. Holton, *British Syndicalism, 1900-1914: Myths and Realities*, Preface.

⁹⁹ C.L. Staples and W. Staples, "'A Strike of Girls': Gender and Class in the British Metals Strike, 1913", *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 12 (2) (1999), p. 158.

It is important to point out that the explanation given by John Ede has caused some confusion in relation to this strike's origins, which, he stated 'beginning in Wednesbury at the Old Crown tube works of John Russell & Co. Ltd., spread to all the iron trades and throughout the Black Country'. This is erroneous, as the Crown tube works was controlled by the Wednesbury firm of James Russell & Sons Ltd., whereas the company responsible for the Old Patent tube works were John Russell & Co. Ltd.¹⁰⁰

An earlier dispute, the 1910 strike for a minimum wage by the women chain-makers of Cradley Heath, organized by Mary Macarthur, Julia Varley, Thomas Sitch and Charles Sitch, has often been seen as one of the most prominent actions by the working class of the Black Country during the pre-war period and it has deservedly merited attention.¹⁰¹ Yet, by its conclusion in the summer of 1913, thousands of both male and female workers had participated enthusiastically in the Black Country strike, with many more across the wider community offering their support. According to the official appointed by the Liberal Government to settle the dispute, the Board of Trade's Chief Industrial Commissioner, Sir George (later Lord) Askwith, large sections of the industry throughout the area were affected and eventually this came to involve:

50,000 operatives in boiler and bridge works, metal-rolling mills, tube works, railway carriage and wagon works, nut and bolt works, and other allied trades, and thousands of people indirectly in various industries.¹⁰²

The specific root of the trouble was attributable to discontent arising from the processes of technological change and the factory system that required numerous low-paid, semi-skilled and unskilled workers. Traditionally employed in workshops

¹⁰⁰ J.F. Ede, p. 293; R. Hyman, p. 54; E. Taylor, 'The Working Class Movement in the Black Country, 1863-1914', p. 346. The strike's origins at the Old Patent works are confirmed by all of the primary sources examined. See Appendix 6, Photographs 5-9, pp. 283-285 for illustrations relating to both of these Wednesbury companies. Founded in 1850, the Old Patent tube works of John Russell & Co. Ltd. was located at Smith Road, Wednesbury, and through mergers and acquisitions it eventually became a part of the General Electric Company (GEC) Group. The building's original frontage, with the trademark Anchor symbol, as shown in Appendix 6, Photograph 6, p. 283, has now been incorporated into the reception facilities of the Black Country Living Museum, which is located in Tipton, near to its border with Dudley.

¹⁰¹ T. Barnsley, *Breaking Their Chains: Mary Macarthur and the Chainmakers' Strike of 1910* (London: Bookmarks Publications, 2010), pp. 35-51; S. Blackburn, 'Employers and Social Policy: Black Country Chain-Masters, the Minimum Wage Campaign and the Cradley Heath Strike of 1910', *Midland History*, 12 (1), 1987, pp. 85-102. This strike was principally led by the National Federation of Women Workers.

¹⁰² G. Askwith, *Industrial Problems and Disputes* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1920), p. 252.

overseen by paternalistic owners, few of these men and women were unionized at the outbreak of the strike. Moreover, there was the issue of their suitability for membership of organizations that hitherto were for skilled male workers alone, such as the Amalgamated Society of Engineers (ASE) or the Midland Counties Trade Federation (MCTF).¹⁰³ These trade unions were elements of the powerful local labour aristocracy and, as Trevor Lummis has indicated, they had ‘members of a very particular kind, concerned with ensuring their own security’.¹⁰⁴ Consequently, the majority of the workforce was unprotected from the intensification due to mechanization and the sizeable differential in pay and conditions relative to their skilled colleagues.

When compared with the wages available elsewhere, the Black Country’s workers were undoubtedly the victims of exploitation. The most contentious comparison was with Birmingham’s unskilled male labourers, paid a minimum of 23s. and the women 12s., whilst their Black Country counterparts typically received 18s. for men and 10s. for women, for a 54-hour working week at a time when the weekly rent for a four-roomed house was 4s.¹⁰⁵ Putting this into context, Benjamin Seebohm Rowntree’s 1901 study of living conditions in York, *Poverty: A Study of Town Life* calculated that for a family consisting of a man, woman and three children, the minimum weekly earnings required to prevent absolute poverty was 21s. 8d.¹⁰⁶

The dispute commenced in Wednesbury at midday on Friday, 9 May 1913 when, without giving notice to their firm, 200 employees of John Russell & Co. Ltd. launched a strike for increased pay. To register their demands with the firm, they marched to its headquarters, which was based at the Alma tube works in Pleck Road, Walsall.¹⁰⁷ Upon receipt of the workers’ demands for a ten per cent increase in piecework rates and a ten

¹⁰³ J. Ward, ‘Emergence of the Labour Party in the Black Country, 1910-1922’, p. 29.

¹⁰⁴ T. Lummis, *The Labour Aristocracy, 1851-1914* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1994), p. 35. The term aristocrats of labour had first been used during the 1830s, in order to describe those skilled workers who were relatively more highly paid than the other members of the industrial working class were.

¹⁰⁵ *Manchester Guardian*, 4 June 1913; S. Langley, p. 75.

¹⁰⁶ C.S.A Chinn, *Poverty Amidst Prosperity: Urban Poor in England, 1834-1914*, p. 25.

¹⁰⁷ *Midland Counties Express*, 10 May 1913; *Wednesbury Herald*, 10 May 1913; *Midland Advertiser*, 17 May 1913.

per cent increase for day workers earning up to 25s. the company offered to raise wages to 20s. It refused to make any further concessions.¹⁰⁸ On 13 May, William Adamson (the South Staffordshire Organizer of the Workers' Union) addressed a mass meeting in Wednesbury's Market Place and encouraged these labourers to join the union. He quickly got to the heart-of-the-matter, stating 'what the men in Birmingham had got, they in Wednesbury could get'.¹⁰⁹ A further gathering occurred at Wednesbury's High Bullen, near to the town centre, on 16 May. Following this, a procession to Walsall progressed through the streets with participants singing a 1910 music hall favourite that became the song of the strike, *Fall in and Follow me*.¹¹⁰ They also sang *Land of Hope and Glory* and *Rule Britannia*, emphasizing the line 'Britons never will be slaves', demonstrating to everyone their inherent patriotism even during a strike action.

The next day, the employees of one of the foremost manufacturers in the vicinity, Wednesbury's James Russell & Sons Crown tube works, added their backing so that there were more than 1,400 Wednesbury men and women on strike. On 22 May, a visit to Globe tube works of John Spencer Ltd., Wednesbury, took place and a resolution of this firm's employees was passed giving unanimous agreement to joining the strike. Following directly from this, over 2,000 strikers including those from the three John Russell factories now affected by the dispute (the Alma, Cyclops and the Old Patent works), marched to Tipton, where employees from the firm of Foster Bros. and the Junction works of Job Edwards were persuaded to make common cause.¹¹¹

The Wednesbury strike committee attended a meeting with the town's Mayor, Alderman A.E. Pritchard, held on 17 May 1913. A prominent and well-connected local Conservative and a member of the Wednesbury Borough Council from 1886, Pritchard was also a familiar figure on the magistrate's bench, the proprietor of the South

¹⁰⁸ G.J. Barnsby, *Socialism in Birmingham and the Black Country, 1880-1939*, p. 157.

¹⁰⁹ *Express and Star*, 13 May 1913; *Wednesbury Herald*, 17 May 1913.

¹¹⁰ This piece was written and composed in 1910 by A.J. Mills and Bennett Scott.

¹¹¹ *Express and Star*, 16 and 22 May 1913. See Appendix 6, Photographs 11-14, pp. 286-287. As seen in Photograph 12, a band of local musicians accompanied the strikers on their journey.

Staffordshire Patent tube works, and the brother of the Reverend Lorenzo Alfred Pritchard, the vicar of St. Bartholomew's, Wednesbury's parish church. In an attempt to quash rumours of syndicalist sympathies, a public reassurance that revolutionary methods were not being advocated was offered by the strike committee's Chairman, Edward 'Teddy' Williams, who was one of Wednesbury's foremost trade union leaders of the period.¹¹² Williams added a further comment to give some emphasis that 'the strike was not being fought on personalities but on the principle of a living wage'.¹¹³

The harsh economic reality of their predicament could literally have meant the humiliation and stigma of the workhouse for many of the strikers and their families should their incomes decrease any further.¹¹⁴ This was underlined by Teddy Williams' statement that 'the employers would have them believe that if they did not return, the only thing that would happen to them was the parish or starvation'.¹¹⁵ Possibly mindful of the value of working-class endorsement at a general election likely to be held in 1914/15, and in a constituency with a composition such as Wednesbury's, this was a critical consideration, the Conservative MP, John Norton Griffiths, sent a donation of £5 to the relief fund established for the welfare of the strikers' families.¹¹⁶ The *Midland Counties Express* published on 24 May imparted the concessionary observation:

There is not the slightest doubt...that the men have taken up the matter in a spirited manner. They have the support of trade unions, while many people in the town are of the opinion that the men are justified in asking for an increase in their present wages.¹¹⁷

On 27 May, deputations left Wednesbury with the intention of bringing workers from the other towns out on strike. They were successful at Halesowen (Coombs Wood

¹¹² Edward 'Teddy' Williams was one of Wednesbury's foremost trade union leaders. Having voluntarily enlisted with the South Staffordshire Regiment, and reported missing and believed killed in action, he was a prisoner of war in Germany, as reported in the *Midland Advertiser and Wednesbury Herald* of 2 June 1917.

¹¹³ *Midland Advertiser*, 17 May 1913. Having previously had little presence in Wednesbury, by 17 May 1913 it was reported that membership of the Workers' Union had already risen to over one thousand.

¹¹⁴ Wednesbury had a workhouse from 1766 but this closed in 1858; thereafter, West Bromwich was the site of the nearest such institution. M.W. Greenslade, ed., *A History of the County of Staffordshire: The Victoria History of the Counties of England, Vol. XVII* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), p. 45.

¹¹⁵ *Wednesbury Herald*, 24 May 1913.

¹¹⁶ *Express and Star*, 23 May 1913, *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 24 May 1913, *Wednesbury Herald*, 24 May 1913.

¹¹⁷ *Midland Counties Express*, 24 May 1913.

works of Stewarts & Lloyds Ltd.), West Bromwich (Victoria and Excelsior works and at J. Brockhouse & Co. Ltd.), Wednesfield (Weldless Tube) and Wolverhampton (John Brothertons, the New Brothertons Tube, Stella Conduit of Bradley, and two of the Lewis works). Having participated at the behest of their colleagues elsewhere in the Metropolitan Railway Carriage, Wagon & Finance Company, the workers at the three Wednesbury plants were advised that management had agreed to the rate of 23s.¹¹⁸

In excess of 400 women workers and the wives of strikers met at Kings Hill, Wednesbury on 30 May to receive a talk from Julia Varley, the Workers' Union Women's Organizer.¹¹⁹ She told her audience that the fight was not confined to the men, adding 'it was always the women that had to suffer through low wages'.¹²⁰ It was intended that women workers aged 21 years and above should have not less than 12s. per week, which was the rate paid to the women in Birmingham. Over 200 female employees from the Darlaston firm of the Steel Nut and Joseph Hampton Co. Ltd. subsequently left their place of work to parade through the streets of Wednesbury, signalling their approval of the wider action. At a time when many working-class women were oppressed and subject to social control, this was a remarkable act of defiance. This procession also included a conveyance containing children, some of whom were carrying placards that had the slogan, 'We can't help it, please help us'.¹²¹

The *Express and Star* of 31 May reported that 'a sensation was caused in Wednesbury today by the closure of the Old Park works and the other departments of the Patent Shaft & Axletree Co. Ltd. This arose from the revelation that the stated concession by the parent Metropolitan Company to pay the 23s. was happening in an

¹¹⁸ *Express and Star*, 27 and 29 May 1913; *Midland Counties Express*, 31 May 1913.

¹¹⁹ J.M. Bellamy and J. Saville, eds., *Dictionary of Labour Biography, Vol. V* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1979). Julia Varley (1871-1952) was a suffragette and trade union organizer whose great-grandfather, a veteran of Peterloo, was imprisoned for being a Chartist agitator. By 1909, she had risen from weaver in a Bradford mill to become Secretary of the Birmingham Women Worker's Organization Committee, assisting Mary Macarthur to unionize the women chain makers of Cradley Heath as a branch of the National Federation of Women Workers. In 1913, she joined the Workers' Union, eventually becoming Chief Women's Organizer and serving on the TUC's General Council. See Appendix 6, Photograph 25, p. 292 of Julia Varley.

¹²⁰ *Express and Star*, 30 May 1913; *Midland Counties Express*, 30 May 1913.

¹²¹ *Midland Counties Express*, 31 May 1913. See Appendix 6, Photograph 22, p. 291.

arbitrary fashion, with particular groups, namely older workers, being discriminated against through exclusion from the pay increase. On the same day, the *Wednesbury Herald* referred to the way in which the strike was now affecting other industries in the area. It carried the comments of Mr Bayley of the Moulders' Union that with reference to the 23s. claimed, the amount being sought 'was about as much as some employers would spend upon a pair of dancing slippers for their wives to go to a ball'.¹²²

A mass meeting was convened in Wednesbury's Market Place on 1 June to receive speeches from Julia Varley and Charles Duncan, the Labour Member of Parliament for Barrow-in-Furness. Before entering national politics, Duncan had been an active trade unionist, initially with the ASE and then with the Workers' Union, serving as President at its formation and subsequently as its Secretary, a position that he occupied until it was absorbed into the Transport & General Workers' Union in 1922.¹²³ Julia Varley delivered an inspiring speech, with her heartfelt contribution being to point out that 'she realized perhaps more than the men did that the present strike was a woman's matter and would not be complete unless the women were taken into it'.¹²⁴

Ten of Wednesbury's largest firms were now affected by the rapidly spreading action and the *Wednesbury Herald* estimated that 25,530 of the Black Country's workforce were now out on strike. This included men and women from Blackheath, Darlaston, Ettingshall, Great Bridge, Handsworth, Netherton, Oldbury, Smethwick, Walsall, Wednesbury, Wednesfield, West Bromwich, Willenhall and Wolverhampton.¹²⁵ The *Manchester Guardian* of 2 June confirmed that the Workers' Union had sought to raise the profile further still by issuing a manifesto with the title, *The Fight for the Bottom Dog*.¹²⁶ This document described the dispute in graphic terms as 'the greatest battle the sweated, starvation-suffering, underpaid, underfed workers have ever engaged

¹²² *Wednesbury Herald*, 31 May 1913.

¹²³ SCHAS Ryder's *Annual*, 1914, p. 173; *The Times*, 7 July 1933.

¹²⁴ *Wednesbury Herald*, 7 June 1913.

¹²⁵ *Express and Star*, 31 May 1913; *Wednesbury Herald*, 31 May 1913.

¹²⁶ *Manchester Guardian*, 2 June 1913.

in'. On 6 June, John Norton Griffiths MP made a further generous donation of £20 for the relief of those local working-class families now suffering the consequences of severe financial hardship. Wednesbury's Mayor had also established an appeal fund with the same intention.¹²⁷ However, a contrary viewpoint was to be taken at the annual meeting of the Board of the Metropolitan Railway Carriage, Wagon & Finance Company, which would take place on 4 June 1913, with the Directors expressing unrestrained criticism of the new diplomacy now being practiced by the trade unions. This was articulated publicly by Frank Dudley Docker who, in addition to being the founding Chairman of the Metropolitan, also held a Directorship of the Birmingham Small Arms (BSA) Company. In his opinion, this was a most unwelcome innovation that had resulted in a strike 'instituted without rhyme or reason, in defiance of agreements, forced on them by gross intimidation, the beginning of a reign of terror'.¹²⁸

Having had a limited involvement to this point, the skilled workers began to demonstrate some tangible solidarity with their semi- and unskilled colleagues so that, by 9 June in excess of 30,000 workers had joined the strike as it continued to spread throughout the Black Country.¹²⁹ One of the leading trade unionist of the period, the Vice-President of the Workers' Union, Tom Mann, made his first visit to Wednesbury on 10 June. Earlier that year, in March 1913, in a pamphlet entitled *The Labourer's Minimum Wage*, Mann had made an almost prophetic and direct reference to the Black Country, commenting that the rates of pay in the area 'are awful to think of, and in some districts near West Bromwich, the pay of the women is a hideous crime'.¹³⁰ He addressed a large open-air meeting held in Wednesbury's Market Place, stating that for

¹²⁷ *Express and Star*, 2, 6 and 7 June 1913; *Manchester Guardian*, 3 June 1913; *Midland Counties Express*, 7 June 1913; *Wednesbury Herald*, 7 June 1913. The £20 donation made by the Wednesbury MP, John Norton Griffiths, in June 1913 would be the equivalent in value to £2,061 in 2015.

¹²⁸ *Midland Counties Express*, 7 June 1913; SCHAS *Ryder's Annual*, 1918; *Who's Who and Who was Who Was Who*, 2012. Frank Dudley Docker (1862-1944) was the Chairman of the Metropolitan Railway Carriage, Wagon & Finance Company, which he was instrumental in establishing in 1902 via the amalgamation of several companies that manufactured railway rolling stock, including the Patent Shaft & Axletree Co. Ltd., and from 1906 he also became a Director of the Birmingham Small Arms Company.

¹²⁹ *The Times*, 9 June 1913.

¹³⁰ CMR MSS.574/C/2 Correspondence from Tom Mann (including *The Labourer's Minimum Wage*).

some 35 years he had been trying to show working people the advantages of organization and nothing had previously taken place in the Black Country that had been so encouraging to him. Asserting that there could be no faith in the ability of Parliament to settle the differences between capital and labour, the remedy lay with the workers themselves. He urged the people to stand firm and be loyal, and warned that those still working were betraying their class and that the stamp of dishonour would be upon them. Calling upon all present to continue their struggle, he received a unanimous affirmative response. Another speaker, a Mr Parker, publicly disputed the reporting of the strike that had been given in the *Wednesbury Herald*, which was that the workers were being unwittingly exploited by socialists and syndicalists. He told the gathering that ‘the workers had come out on their own accord. They had not been exploited by anyone. It was on their own initiative that the Workers’ Union had come to their aid’.¹³¹

The first conference between the representatives of the employers and the trade unions occurred on 20-21 June 1913. Despite discussion of many proposals, agreement proved unachievable. The workers were determined to stand firm, so that a newspaper as ardently pro-employer and critical of organized labour as the *Wednesbury Herald* conceded that ‘the martial spirit of the metal workers has been roused’.¹³² The proposal advanced by the employers for a minimum weekly wage of 21s. was to be put to a ballot on 27 June, before which more meetings were held with speakers roundly denouncing the offer as idiotic and insulting.¹³³ Throughout the week more Black Country towns and firms, including Darlaston (Messrs Keay Ltd., Rubery Owen’s Victoria works and J. Garrington & Sons), Great Bridge (Messrs Norton and Hardy) and Tipton (Horsley Iron Company) received visits from parades of striking men and women with the aim of encouraging more workers to join the movement. *The Times* reported that at Darlaston,

¹³¹ *Express and Star*, 11 June 1913; *Wednesbury Herald*, 14 June 1913; SCHAS *Ryder’s Annual*, 1914.

¹³² *Express and Star*, 21 June 1913; *Midland Counties Express*, 21 June 1913; *Wednesbury Herald*, 21 June 1913.

¹³³ *Express and Star*, 25 June 1913; SCHAS *Ryder’s Annual*, 1914, p. 175.

the nut and bolt industry had been brought to a standstill with 4,000 workers from that town now being involved in the strike.¹³⁴ When held on 27 June, the outcome of the secret ballot was that the employers' terms were rejected by an overwhelming majority of nearly five to one.¹³⁵ As the strike moved into its sixth week, William Adamson of the Workers' Union was quoted in the *Express and Star* on 1 July as saying that:

He was beginning to wonder if the employers of labour had any conscience, or else they would have been impressed by men and women standing out for so long for the betterment of their conditions.¹³⁶

Tom Mann returned to Wednesbury on 3 July and, speaking in the town's Market Place, congratulated the strikers on the demonstration of their solidarity. He reflected on previous disputes where the working class had accepted the low pay and conditions they were offered, asserting that for the workers their poverty was the direct outcome of robbery by the rich.¹³⁷ Many companies affected by the dispute were non-federated, rendering them ineligible for membership of the Engineering Employers' Federation (EEF).¹³⁸ To strengthen collective resistance to the strike, on 14 June 1913 several of these firms established a new organization, the Midland Employers' Federation (MEF), with Harris Spencer of Wednesbury's Globe tube works as President and Arthur Warne Browne of the Metropolitan Railway Carriage, Wagon & Finance Company as Secretary.¹³⁹ In accordance with its pronounced anti-trade union stance, the MEF maintained that negotiations should not occur while the dispute was being continued by the strikers.¹⁴⁰ When responding on this point to Warne Browne, however, the local trade unionists took a similar view to that of Tom Mann, saying that 'it only shows how little the employers know of the conditions of life and the cost of living'.¹⁴¹

¹³⁴ *Express and Star*, 26 June 1913; *Manchester Guardian*, 26 June 1913; *The Times*, 28 June 1913.

¹³⁵ *Express and Star*, 28 June 1913; *Manchester Guardian*, 30 June 1913.

¹³⁶ *Express and Star*, 1 July 1913.

¹³⁷ *Express and Star*, 3 July 1913; *Midland Counties Express*, 5 July 1913.

¹³⁸ The EEF was an organization created to support the engineering manufacturers and it was founded in 1896.

¹³⁹ R. Hyman, p. 56.

¹⁴⁰ R.T.P Davenport-Hines, *Dudley Docker – The Life and Times of a Trade Warrior* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 38.

¹⁴¹ *Express and Star*, 3 July 1913; *Midland Counties Express*, 5 July 1913; R. Hyman, p. 56.

The dispute's settlement was hastened by the arrival on 2 July 1913 of the Board of Trade's Chief Industrial Commissioner, Sir George Askwith.¹⁴² In his memoirs published in 1921, Askwith alluded to the circumstances that prompted his intervention, because 'in spite of the activities of relief agencies, distress among the families of the strikers became increasingly acute'.¹⁴³ Furthermore, several major contracts had gone to other districts and even to foreign competitors (including some from Germany), which had vied for orders that would otherwise have been fulfilled in the Black Country. For the purposes of conducting negotiations, the representatives of the parties assembled in separate Birmingham hotels, with the employers directed by Arthur Warne Browne and the trade unions by the Workers' Union Birmingham Organizer, John Beard.¹⁴⁴

Askwith recorded his initial impressions of a lack of receptivity, which was soon confirmed to him by the attitude of the employers' representatives. Finding their terms ambiguous, and that they themselves were unclear over the interpretation, he informed them that 'you are not agreed on the meaning of your own clauses. I can convey no unanimous explanation'.¹⁴⁵ However, by this stage, reports were also being received that the leaders of organized labour had declared their intention to disrupt all works that were connected with the MEF, and which were still not prepared to pay their workers the 23s. As the 7 July issue of *The Times* conveyed to its national readership, some Black Country firms had already accepted the workers' demands ahead of a settlement being attained, and this included several of the Wednesbury firms involved, such as the Hope Patent tube works of James McDougall Ltd. and Samuel Platt Ltd.

¹⁴² *The Times*, 25 June 2013.

¹⁴³ G. Askwith, p. 255; *Who's Who and Who Was Who*, 2012. Sir George Askwith (later 1st Baron Askwith of St Ives) (1861-1942) was a barrister who had been called to the Bar of the Middle Temple in 1886 before joining the Board of Trade in 1907. He rose to become the Board's Chief Industrial Commissioner from 1911-1919. From 1915-1917, he served as the Chairman of the Government Arbitration Committee under the Munitions of War Acts. See Appendix 6, Photograph 25, p. 292 for an image of Sir George Askwith.

¹⁴⁴ *Who's Who and Who Was Who*, 2012. John Beard (1871-1950) had a varied career as a Shropshire agricultural worker, coalminer and engineering shop labourer before joining the Workers' Union, rising to become President of the TUC. A Birmingham City Councillor from 1904, he was involved in the creation of the Birmingham Municipal Bank in 1915 and during the First World War was an active advocate for patriotic Labour. He received the CBE (Civil Division) in 1938. See Appendix 6, Photograph 25, p. 292.

¹⁴⁵ G. Askwith, p. 254.

Understandably, this development placed even greater pressure on those companies that were still attempting to hold out against the wage demands of their workforces.¹⁴⁶

Finally, on 7 July 1913, a draft agreement was reached by the parties. This provided for the payment of 23s. and 12s. respectively to those men and women in the Birmingham district, as this included Oldbury and Smethwick. In the Black Country, the men would be paid a minimum of 22s. which would increase within six months to achieve parity with the Birmingham rate, and similarly for the women workers. There was to be full trade union recognition and, in order for there to be no victimization, all of those who had been embroiled in the dispute were to be reinstated and to experience no recriminations for their actions. There was still some dissatisfaction, however, particularly amongst the skilled and semi-skilled workers, so that the agreement's ratification had to be deferred pending the organization of a further ballot.¹⁴⁷

Prior to this, another meeting was staged in Wednesbury Market Place on 9 July, when the benefit accruing to all from the increase in the piece rate was communicated to those that were assembled there. John Beard underlined that the 'unions were democratic in their character and the members themselves must make or refuse to make an agreement'.¹⁴⁸ The vote took place on 11 July and the outcome favoured acceptance of the settlement and a resumption of work by a majority of over three to one. The agreement was concluded by the representatives of the employers and of the trade unions, and this included John Beard and Julia Varley. Within this document, there was also a provision made for the avoidance of future disputes. In the Workers' Union Annual Report and Accounts for 1913, Beard even paid them the compliment that 'as far as the Midland Employers' Federation is concerned, we have hardly had a complaint, and when a case has cropped up it has been dealt with satisfactorily'.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁶ *The Times*, 7 July 1913; R. Hyman, p. 58.

¹⁴⁷ *Express and Star*, 7, 8 and 9 July 1913.

¹⁴⁸ *Wednesbury Herald*, 12 July 1913.

¹⁴⁹ CMR MSS.126/WU/4/1/9-14: Workers' Union Fifteenth Annual Report and Accounts, 1913, p. 189.

After the declaration of the result of the ballot, the Minimum Wage Council disseminated their manifesto. This document was published in its entirety in the *Wednesbury Herald* on 19 July 1913 and the key extract is reproduced as follows:

Fellow Workers –

You have decided to accept the terms agreed upon between the Midland Employers' Federation and your representatives after prolonged conference.

You are alive to the fact that the terms won do not concede the whole of the demands made, nevertheless the 23s. for the Bottom Dog is conceded, and we hope and believe that an understanding has been arrived at whereby the other demands can be consolidated and dealt with in a way never before possible.

We congratulate you on the splendid spirit of solidarity and self-denial shown throughout this trying time and desire to emphasise the fact that this has been possible by reason of the improved organization of the men in all departments.

We earnestly believe that such conditions can be avoided in future by perfect organization. Let those who have taken up trade unionism be staunch and earnest members and let every non-unionist worker affected by these disputes join his union without delay.

It is our duty to request all men to return to their employment as soon as the various works can be got ready.¹⁵⁰

When assessing the attitudes of the Black Country's working class to trade unionism during the late nineteenth and early twentieth-centuries, Eric Taylor asserted that it was 'distinguished chiefly by characteristics of insularity and intellectual submissiveness'.¹⁵¹ Furthermore, a local engineering union official had commented that 'the Black Country temperament does not incline towards organization; several people have broken their hearts over fruitless labour for the bringing together of the workers into the various unions'.¹⁵² Hence, at the outbreak of the 1913 dispute, few of the area's workers were trade union members. Politically, as indicated by the election of the

¹⁵⁰ Cd. 7658 *Report and comparative statistics for 1913 (Trade – Boards, Disputes, Unions: Strikes and Lock-outs)*, Command Papers (London: HMSO, 1916), pp. 186-187; *Express and Star*, 11 July 1913; *The Times*, 12 July 1913; *Wednesbury Herald*, 19 July 1913.

¹⁵¹ E. Taylor, 'The Working Class Movement in the Black Country, 1863-1914', p. 114.

¹⁵² R. Hyman, p. 49.

Conservative candidate, John Norton Griffiths, in both of the general elections of 1910, if not overtly Conservative, many of the working class were so by instinct.

This began to change with the assistance of union officials, such as John Beard and Julia Varley, who were working to establish a foothold in the industrial Midlands by developing a campaign for a minimum wage.¹⁵³ Building on the foundations of Tom Mann's publications and *The Miners' Next Step*, this groundwork had the effect of revitalizing the more receptive members of the working class. In the longer term, it began to minimize those constraints retarding the growth of a labour movement whose national leaders were perceived to have become increasingly isolated from its local union membership and hesitant in pressing for improvements for the working class.

Even though union officials offered strikers their energetic support, some local leaders had discovered a sense of independence. Moreover, they became increasingly motivated to take matters beyond controlled militancy, with physical violence erupting when firms employed blackleg labour. In managing the challenges posed by workers influenced by syndicalist ideas, 'the official union leaders had to run very fast to keep up with their members'.¹⁵⁴ Any gap between the union leadership and the rank-and-file was off set against the workers' sense of grievance and, as Bob Holton has argued, this 'helped the organized movement to influence strike policy and make new recruits'.¹⁵⁵

The 1913 strike was an opportunity for the trade unions, and especially those representing the unskilled workers, to make progress locally. The initial step was taken by the Workers' Union, whose local officials were the ones that in the first instance had persuaded the striking labourers of John Russell's Old Patent tube works to modify their claim, bringing it into line with the unions' own demands.¹⁵⁶ John Beard created and chaired a Minimum Wage Council with its headquarters based at the *Old Park Hotel* in

¹⁵³ H.A. Clegg, p. 58.

¹⁵⁴ H. Perkin, p. 180. One role of the trade unions that is often forgotten is that they were often responsible for ameliorating the tendency towards more extreme forms of social behaviour exhibited by the working class.

¹⁵⁵ R. Holton, p.136.

¹⁵⁶ CMR MSS.126/WU/4/1/9-14: Workers' Union Fifteenth Annual Report and Accounts, 1913, p. 193.

Darlaston Road, Wednesbury, to co-ordinate liaison with trades councils, strike committees and other unions participating in the strike, including the Birmingham Gas Workers, the National Union of Gas Workers and the National Federation of Women Workers. This body published the leaflet *The Bottom Dog's Struggle for Betterment*, which articulated the striker's demands and sought support from all workers.¹⁵⁷

As the strike movement gathered momentum, various events seeking support from the wider community were held, including a rally in West Bromwich. This was attended by Ben Tillett, a founder member of the Independent Labour Party and from 1917 the Labour MP for Salford North.¹⁵⁸ Efforts were made to spread the strike to other towns by secondary action and the impact of the strike on the local communities was immense.¹⁵⁹ As so few of the workers taking industrial action had been paid-up trade union members prior to the commencement of the strike, most were ineligible for financial benefits such as strike pay. Without any source of income, many soon found the situation of themselves and their families to be acute, and 'money had to be raised to feed them and their families since the cupboards would be bare within a week'.¹⁶⁰ In a parliamentary question to the Prime Minister, John Norton Griffiths MP referred to thousands of children being on the verge of starvation and pressed the Government to take urgent steps to ensure that parents should receive insurance benefit. Asquith's response was that he would make enquiries to see what could be done. In the same debate, the Labour Party Member for Merthyr Tydfil, James Keir Hardie, suggested that the schoolchildren ought to receive free meals.¹⁶¹ Norton Griffiths raised similar points with the Chancellor of the Exchequer on 9 June 1913. The response of the

¹⁵⁷ *Express and Star*, 26 May 1913; J. Ward, 'Emergence of the Labour Party in the Black Country, 1910-1922', p. 29.

¹⁵⁸ *Who's Who and Who Was Who*, 2012. Ben Tillett (1860-1943) had been a founder member of the Independent Labour Party and, in 1917, he was elected as the Labour MP for the Salford North constituency. He had risen to prominence as a trade union leader during the 1889 London Dock Strike and he was involved in the organization of a number of further trade disputes during the years 1911-1914.

¹⁵⁹ R. Hyman, p. 55. See Appendix 6, Photographs 11-14, pp. 286-287 of marches and demonstrations.

¹⁶⁰ *Express and Star*, 9 June 1913; C.L. Staples and W. Staples, p. 166.

¹⁶¹ *Tipton Herald*, 7 June 1913.

Parliamentary Secretary to the Board of Trade, John Mackinnon Robertson MP, a former journalist and staunch advocate of free trade, was that workers who were parties to the dispute were disqualified from receiving aid as long as the stoppage continued.¹⁶²

Public contributions to relief funds allowed for the payment of a shilling per week to the unmarried, two shillings to married couples, and a further shilling for their children.¹⁶³ Soup kitchens became operational and gifts of food made by shopkeepers and trades people not normally expected to have been sympathetic to such a cause.¹⁶⁴ The *Tipton Herald* reported on 31 May 1913 that the proceeds from performances at two of Wednesbury's theatres, the *Palace Theatre* and the *Hippodrome*, had been donated to the relief funds¹⁶⁵. On 14 June, the same newspaper reported that Mr White, a butcher of Union Street, Wednesbury, had provided at his own expense a dinner for the strikers at Wednesbury's Town Hall, with over 450 people attending.¹⁶⁶ Collections began, with the *Manchester Guardian* recording that 'hundreds of men and women were out with collecting boxes' and barrel organs touring the streets and benefit concerts were held to show solidarity, such was the sympathy of the public towards the strikers.¹⁶⁷ The records of the strike committee in Walsall indicate that £764 5s. 6d. was raised in this way, with concerts at Her Majesty's Theatre contributing £33 1s. 3d.¹⁶⁸

Large groups of striking workers set out to take their message beyond the Black Country and to gain publicity and enlist sympathy for their cause, with deputations walking towards London, Glasgow and South Wales, where it is recorded that they were greeted enthusiastically. They carried banners with such slogans as *Blessed are the piece workers, In the midst of life we are in debt* and *Get everything cheap, especially labour*. Those walking to London converged on Trafalgar Square on 10 July, and local

¹⁶² Hansard, Vol. 53, ccl. 1254-1256. <<http://www.hansard.millbanksystems.com>> [Accessed 30 April 2015].

¹⁶³ R. Hyman, p. 56.

¹⁶⁴ *Express and Star*, 30 May and 3 June 1913; *Manchester Guardian*, 4 June 1913; H.A. Clegg, p. 59. See Appendix 6, Photographs 16-21, pp. 288-290.

¹⁶⁵ *Tipton Herald*, 31 May 1913.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 14 June 1913.

¹⁶⁷ *The Times*, 7 June 1913; *Manchester Guardian*, 9 June 1913. See Appendix 6, Photograph 22, p. 291.

¹⁶⁸ Walsall Local History Centre WLHC 50/13 and 208/2-3: Labour Party records relating to the 1913 strike.

and national newspapers describe the demonstration that took place at Marble Arch attended by Tom Mann, and the Labour MPs, George Lansbury and Will Thorne.¹⁶⁹

However, there were also those who fundamentally disagreed with the dispute and the tactics employed by the strikers.¹⁷⁰ Although the majority of the marches were peaceful, a small number ended in disturbance and violence. This happened at Walsall's Talbot-Stead works on 11 and 16 June when police and strikers came into conflict as crowds exceeding 3,000 surrounded the premises calling on the men inside to come out. The *Manchester Guardian* reported that the managing director attempted to speak to the strikers, 'but had to retreat before a shower of missiles' and that mounted police then arrived and charged the crowd.¹⁷¹ Similar scenes occurred in Darlaston on 24 June, when the Atlas works of F.W. Cotterill Ltd. and Messrs R.C. & J. Keay Ltd. received visits from strikers believed to have come from Wednesbury. The owners of both firms alleged that their workers were intimidated and that the protection afforded by the Staffordshire Constabulary being inadequate, rioting was likely to follow. This point was made in telegrams and letters sent to the Prime Minister, H.H. Asquith, by Cotterills and others.¹⁷² On 30 June, a serious disturbance occurred at the Etruria works in Bilston resulting in the arrest of the Wednesbury strike leader Teddy Williams, who was subsequently charged with incitement to riot. Williams appeared at the Bilston Police Court on 4 July wearing a red and white rosette and accompanied by his supporters. He was bound over for six months with a personal surety of £50.¹⁷³

¹⁶⁹ *Manchester Guardian*, 12 July 1913; *Express and Star*, 17 June 1913; *Black County Bugle*, 12 March 2009. The later article concerns George Stokes, who led a march of 30 men from Wednesbury to South Wales. The 1913 Strike marked the beginning of his lifelong political career. He organized soup kitchens in the town during the First World War, became the Chairman of Wednesbury's Trade and Labour Council, and then a Labour member of Wednesbury Borough Council in 1920 and Mayor of Wednesbury in 1959. See Appendix 6, Photograph 24, p. 292, featuring Coventry workers who were supporting the strike.

¹⁷⁰ *Midland Advertiser*, 12 July 1913. This newspaper was extremely critical of the strikers, their leaders and supporters. It was especially scathing of Tom Mann, whom it described as a 'wild socialistic agitator'.

¹⁷¹ *Manchester Guardian*, 12 June 1913.

¹⁷² *Express and Star*, 11, 12 and 25 June 1913; TNA HO 45/10706/239811: Strikes – Labour Unrest at Darlaston and Wednesbury, 1913.

¹⁷³ *Midland Counties Express*, 5 July 1913; SCHAS *Ryder's Annual*, 1914, p. 175. Further to the reference to the rosette worn at the trial by Teddy Williams, there was a high demand for red ribbon in Wednesbury during the dispute, with every striker and supporter wearing a piece of the material affixed to their clothing.

The Bishop of Birmingham, Henry Wakefield, took an interest in the dispute, expressing his hope that a serious effort would be made to arrive at a settlement.¹⁷⁴ Locally, another churchman became the source of considerable antagonism, however. The Reverend Lorenzo Alfred Pritchard was the Vicar of St. Bartholomew's, the parish church Wednesbury, and brother of the Mayor, Alderman A.E. Pritchard. He publicly told the wives of some of the men involved in the strike that 18s. a week was enough for any labourer, before giving further offence by instructing the women that they should put on trousers and go to work in place of their men. It then became known that the theme of his next sermon was to be taken from the Gospel of St. Luke, *The labourer is worthy of his hire*. Consequently, the Police had to intervene on 29 June when a crowd of 250 angry protesters 'went to the church on Sunday morning and said to him that they would fetch him out and tell him to feed the body never mind the soul'.¹⁷⁵

The strike had a number of important consequences and implications. Its immediate outcome was to raise the wages of unskilled men from 18s. to 23s. per week, thereby lifting a considerable number of the area's families out of a life of unrelenting penury. Whilst this settlement could not be described as overly generous, it established a floor below which the workers could expect that their wages would not fall.¹⁷⁶ The area's working-class were able to purchase life's necessities and, as Barnsby commented, the 'social effects of having control over their lives and the lives of their families brought new attitudes of confidence and self-respect'.¹⁷⁷ Although it did not have the levels of outright confrontation with the authorities and employers seen in other disputes, such as those in Liverpool and Llanelli, South Wales, in 1911, the impact and importance of the Black Country strike should not be discounted; nor should the influence of the national figures who visited the area. Its outcome must be attributed to

¹⁷⁴ *Manchester Guardian*, 9 June 1913.

¹⁷⁵ *Express and Star*, 30 June 1913; *Wednesbury Herald*, 5 July 1913; E. Woolley, *Wednesbury in Old Picture Postcards* (Nottingham: Adlard, 1991), p. 21.

¹⁷⁶ C.L. Staples and W. Staples, p. 123.

¹⁷⁷ G.J. Barnsby, *Socialism in Birmingham and the Black Country, 1880-1939*, p. 159.

the genuine solidarity of the participants, whether skilled, semi-skilled or unskilled, coupled with the tenacity of the trade union officials John Beard and Julia Varley, who persuaded these men and women, that their cause was just and worthwhile. This was reinforced by the visits of national personalities in the labour movement, which did much to bolster the spirits of those workers then on strike. By the autumn of 1913, such was the legacy of the Black Country strike that Birmingham and the Black Country accounted for one quarter of the total national membership of the Workers' Union.¹⁷⁸

John Breuilly has argued that the emergence of the Labour Party during the first decade of the twentieth century should be connected with the rise to prominence of what he termed as the 'new, non-aristocratic working-class groups' and described as the 'more general trades unions compared with those of the 1850-90 period'.¹⁷⁹ Although the relationship between industrial agitation, trade union membership and working-class politics is far from being axiomatic, the evidence that the people of Wednesbury's working-class community and of the wider Black Country had drawn their own lessons from the events of the summer of 1913 is certainly compelling. Through the experience of the Black Country strike, and the outcomes that were achieved, they had gained at first hand an appreciation of just how effective the local labour movement could be in endowing them with real influence, power and effective strategies that they could use to gain improvements in their living conditions and in the workplace.¹⁸⁰ Henceforth, it could be seen that 'by a combination of organization in the country and the application of steady pressure in Parliament by Members of both the Liberal and Labour MPs, it was now possible to use the power of the state to the advantage of the working men'.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁸ R. Hyman, p. 60; CMR MSS.126/WU/4/1/9-14: Workers' Union Fifteenth Annual Report and Accounts, 1913, p. 147. By December 1913, as with the other Black Country towns, recruitment to the Workers' Union in Wednesbury had resulted in a membership that was in excess of a thousand. Four active branches of the union had also been established in the town. However, it should also be noted that because the Workers' Union tended to organize itself around strikes, its membership could also go down as well as up.

¹⁷⁹ J. Breuilly, 'The Labour Aristocracy in Britain and Germany: A Comparison', *Bulletin of the Society for the Study of Labour History*, 48 (1) (1984), p. 65.

¹⁸⁰ See Chapter 5, pp. 152-158, for a description of the 1917 Crown tube works strike.

¹⁸¹ M. Pugh, *State and Society: British Political and Social History, 1870-1992*, p. 134.

2.5 Conclusion

This Chapter's intention has been to provide an overview of Wednesbury as it was in 1914 because, as Jay Winter has argued, 'to evaluate the effects of the First World War, we must look at British society on the eve of the conflict'.¹⁸² Assessment of the primary sources, and particularly of the 1911 Census returns, has demonstrated that Wednesbury was a town with a sizeable and vibrant working-class community, the majority of whom were employed as skilled, semi-skilled or unskilled workers in the metal-based manufacturing industries that was firmly established in the area during the nineteenth century. This provided an economic environment that was conducive to the development of a political and social infrastructure, which, in turn, was receptive to the emergence of strong localities and close-knit neighbourhoods, each having their own distinct culture and a set of shared community values, providing strength in adversity.

Yet working people did not necessarily think about themselves and their lives exclusively in terms of their social class. Identification was multi-faceted and occurred because of employment, gender, locality, political opinions, religious beliefs and notions about respectability, together with numerous other influences. Social conditions were shaped by these experiences and outlooks, and frequently required negotiation and self-help strategies to deal with the complexities of authority and to combat inequality. Indeed, it was the prevailing social structure and a person's location within it that would determine the conditions of their life, and whether this would be a matter of sheer endurance or enjoyment. Even within the working class, a hierarchy existed. At the top of this structure were those members of the respectable working class, typically the skilled workers, known as the aristocrats of labour. They were followed by the semi-skilled and unskilled workers, with the latter (known in the Black Country as the 'Bottom dogs') carrying out the harshly exhausting manual labour. Finally, at the base

¹⁸² J.M. Winter, *Socialism and the Challenge of War: Ideas and Politics in Britain, 1912-1918* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974), p. 2.

of this construct were those people who belonged to what were known as the rough elements or the residuum, only able to get work intermittently and then only of the lowest kind of labouring. They were frequently unemployed and in the worst cases dependent upon the Poor Law. The consequence of this was that life was very forcefully constrained for the working people of the Black Country in Edwardian Britain, with the fall from working-class respectability to the workhouse being all too common during changing economic circumstances, whether due to a trade downturn or the replacement or eradication by new technology of a particular type of employment.

Although tending to be somewhat conservative in outlook, if not indifferent to formal politics and the leading political parties, many of Wednesbury's working class had taken a vigorous position or supported those involved in the large-scale trade dispute occurring in the Black Country during 1913. Commencing in Wednesbury, this action quickly spread to concern a considerable part of the manufacturing industries across the area, thereby demonstrating the substantial benefits of collective action and solidarity. When reflecting on this, John Beard of the Workers' Union, and one of the strike's principal leaders, wrote of the Black Country in January 1914 that 'there was no other district in the country where a minimum wage had been fixed by trade unionism'. He said of the people of Wednesbury that they 'had fought, they had led the way, and in years to come they would be proud of the part they played in this struggle'.¹⁸³ For his involvement in the settling of this matter, Sir George Askwith viewed this strike and its ultimate resolution as 'a blessing in disguise, because it provided methods of dealing with difficulties which proved of service during the war'.¹⁸⁴ The implications of this for industrial relations during the First World War and the further associated themes will be assessed and discussed in detail in the following chapters of this thesis.

¹⁸³ *Wednesbury Herald*, 31 January 1914.

¹⁸⁴ G. Askwith, p. 256.

CHAPTER 3: WAR AND THE MOBILIZATION OF MANPOWER

3.1 Introduction

On 4 August 1914, Great Britain entered into a general European war for the first time in ninety-nine years. The Cabinet, which had been preoccupied with preventing a civil war in Ireland, viewed the assassination on 28 June 1914 of the Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria and his wife Sophie, Duchess of Hohenberg, as having consequences that were best resolved by reliance on international diplomacy. It was altogether unprepared for the rapid transformation of the *July crisis* into a conflict that would soon become a worldwide struggle of an unparalleled magnitude. Any desire by the British public for war being largely absent at this point, as Bourne has suggested, a fundamental consideration was ‘the disastrous German decision to violate Belgian neutrality, in the wake of which anti-war agitation disappeared overnight’.¹ The essential concern became the organization of the war effort and the allocation, distribution and utilization of the nation’s scarce resources. This was articulated by Keith Grieves in the question, ‘to what extent, and for how long, could manpower be provided in order to maintain the armies in the field, vital war production and the export trade in the prolonged war of military and economic attrition against Germany?’²

Industrialized warfare would eventually necessitate the effective mobilization of much of British society. In 1914, this was quite unimaginable, as were the grave implications for the millions of British men and their families, together with those in the wider British Empire that would become involved. Yet during the next four years, they would experience such developments and innovations as national registration, military conscription, and the establishment of a Ministry of National Service.³ As Peter

¹ J.M. Bourne, ‘The Midlands and the Great War’, p. 157.

² K. Grieves, *The Politics of Manpower, 1914-1918*, p. 3.

³ T. Wilson, *The Myriad Faces of War: Britain and the Great War* (Cambridge: Polity, 1986), p. 13; H.B. McCartney, *Citizen Soldiers: The Liverpool Territorials in the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 1.

Simkins has conveyed, ‘the army of 1914-18 was the largest and most complex single organization created by the British nation up to that time’.⁴ The rate at which these men volunteered, in what W.J. Reader described as ‘one of the most extraordinary mass movements in history,’ was remarkable, with 2,466,719 joining up before conscription was introduced.⁵ The British people traditionally inclined towards maintaining an anti-militarist outlook, so that before the war comparatively few of these men would have even contemplated the thought of long-term enlistment with the armed forces.

The images of the large crowds of people seemingly welcoming the news of the outbreak of war and of men enlisting in such vast numbers have long shaped popular perceptions of the First World War. They have also influenced earlier generations of commentators, with military historians focusing on the logistical and tactical issues for the armed forces and social historians assessing social class and the extent of cultural change. David Silbey remarked that ‘both have treated the *Rush to the Colours* as a single occurrence, consisting of a mob of men driven to volunteer by either overwhelming passion or social control, a ‘herd’ whose ‘instinct’ it was to enlist’.⁶ This has been increasingly challenged by deeper and more insightful evaluations, moving away from the singular motivation of an emotional or irrational patriotism that has allowed inconvenient aspects to be minimized or ignored. For instance, and as related in Chapter 2, the working class had experienced the consequences of economic recession and, as in the case of the 1913 Black Country strike, they had sought redress. Nicholas Mansfield has pointed to those men who ‘saw no incongruity in being active trade unionists with volunteering for the armed forces. Yet this contradictory behaviour continues to puzzle researchers into working-class life in the twentieth-century’.⁷

⁴ P. Simkins, *Kitchener's Army: The Raising of the New Armies, 1914-1916* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1980), p. xiv. The number of men serving during 1914-1918 was 5,704,000 (of whom 722,000 were killed and 1.7 million wounded), compared with 3,788,000 between 1939 and 1945.

⁵ W.J. Reader, p. vii.

⁶ D. Silbey, p. 2.

⁷ N. Mansfield, p. xii.

A crucial contribution to the debate has been volunteered by Adrian Gregory and his three propositions.⁸ Firstly, that reaction to the outbreak of the hostilities was not one of universal, unthinking enthusiasm. Secondly, that the war was not necessarily seen as being inevitable or universally welcomed. Thirdly, that volunteering was a more layered experience than a straightforward rush to the colours. Catriona Pennell has sought to ‘set aside the mythology and establish the genuine nature of responses to the outbreak of war in 1914 across the United Kingdom’.⁹ This has been achieved through examination of public opinion and how this was transformed over three distinct phases, namely the initial war crisis and aftermath, a second phase of confusion and disorder and a third phase by September 1914 in which a ‘war culture was in place’.¹⁰

This Chapter is comprised of sections that aim to deal with three main themes that are grounded in the very nature of such a comprehensive local study. It is contended that these are of importance because, as Helen McCartney pointed out, Britain ‘was a decentralized nation in 1914 and the horizons of her citizens were profoundly local, it is also important to view war experience from a local perspective’.¹¹ There will be an examination of the reaction to the outbreak of the war with a focus on Wednesbury, investigating how this event affected in particular the town’s working-class community. The necessity of mobilizing manpower and the transition from voluntary recruitment to conscription, via the Derby Scheme, will be reviewed, as will evidence of Wednesbury’s receptivity to the call to arms. A decisive aspect is the recruitment to the military formation that had the closest connection to the town, namely the Fifth Battalion of the South Staffordshire Regiment, that being a part-time Territorial Force unit. Therefore, the final component will explore the relationship

⁸ A. Gregory, *The Last Great War: British Society and the First World War*, pp. 9, 19, 31, 39; N. Beeching, ‘The Provincial Press & the Outbreak of War: A Unionist View in Worcestershire’, *Midland History*, 39 (2) (2014), pp. 163-164.

⁹ C. Pennell, *A Kingdom United: Popular Responses to the Outbreak of the First World War in Britain and Ireland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 5.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

¹¹ H.B. McCartney, p. 3.

between this battalion and the community from which it tended to be recruited, in a dynamic that was essential to the war effort both on the front line and at home.

3.2 Wednesbury and the outbreak of the war

On 28 June 1914, the heir-apparent of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and his wife were assassinated at Sarajevo by Gavrilo Princip, a member of the Young Bosnia revolutionary movement.¹² Princip's actions that day set in motion the chain of events that eventually brought Europe and the world to war.¹³ British interest in the diplomatic overtures grew as the crisis unfolded and the first reference to be found in the local press occurred in the *Wednesbury Herald* article 'Austrian Heir Assassinated: A Student's Crime' on 4 July 1914. This piece alluded to disturbances in Sarajevo with the military being called in to re-establish order although it did not consider the wider implications.¹⁴ Indeed, the possibility of civil war breaking out between Ireland's sectarian factions was judged a much greater danger, particularly by those sitting in the Asquith Cabinet. As Beckett noted, not only did the public have 'little time to react to events' it was the case that 'the public had little influence on the decisions taken, and war, when it came, was the result of diplomatic steps (or failures)'.¹⁵ The point when Britain's entry into a conflict began to appear likely arrived with Germany's invasion of Belgium. Pennell stated that 'the obligation to France under the Triple Entente divided government and country but Belgium was another matter'.¹⁶ Pragmatic consideration of Belgium's strategic location, and how the loss of its coastline to a hostile power could

¹² The Young Bosnia movement had connections to the Serbian Black Hand terrorist organization with both wishing to see Bosnia integrated into a greater Serbia. Links to the Serbian military included Colonel Dragutin Dimitrijević, the Chief of Serbian Military Intelligence, thereby facilitating weapons training and access to the grenades and pistols used by Gavrilo Princip and his associates. These were Nedeljko Čabrinović, Trifko Grabež, Vaso Čubrilović, Cvjetko Popović, Danilo Ilić, and Muhamed Mehmedbašić.

¹³ C. Pennell, p. 24.

¹⁴ *Wednesbury Herald*, 4 July 1914.

¹⁵ I.F.W. Beckett, *The Home Front, 1914-1918: How Britain Survived Total War* (Kew: National Archives, 2006), p. 8.

¹⁶ C. Pennell, p. 33. In order to attack France according to the plan originally formulated in 1905 by the Chief of its Imperial General Staff, Field Marshal Count Alfred von Schlieffen, Germany demanded free passage through Belgium. This was rejected by the Belgian government, so that Germany's incursion represented a violation of the 1839 Treaty of London, signed by the Great Powers to guarantee Belgian neutrality. This action prompted the British ultimatum for the withdrawal of German troops from Belgian territory.

compromise Royal Navy dominance of the North Sea, was fundamental. At 12 noon on 4 August, the momentous intelligence concerning Belgium's predicament reached the Cabinet and a time-limited ultimatum issued to expire at 11 pm, British time (Midnight in Berlin), was then forwarded to the German Government. On 8 August 1914, the official statement from the Foreign Office was reproduced in the *Wednesbury Herald*.

Owing to the summary rejection by the German Government of the request made by His Majesty's Government for the assurance that the neutrality of Belgium would be respected, His Majesty's Ambassador in Berlin has received his passport. His Majesty's Government have declared to the German Government that a state of war exists between Great Britain and Germany as from 11 pm on August 4.¹⁷

Together with the depiction of an idyllic Edwardian era abruptly terminated, the perception that the British, French and German peoples greeted the outbreak of war enthusiastically, jubilantly and universally has entrenched itself in popular imagery and been taken as evidence of national willingness to fight. Reader described war as an accepted part of life, with it being 'difficult to maintain that the national mood was altogether peaceful'.¹⁸ Marwick stated 'British society in 1914 was strongly jingoistic and showed marked enthusiasm for the outbreak of war'.¹⁹ However, recent scholarship has attempted to dispel any myths of universal war enthusiasm and several historians point to enthusiastic scenes occurring in large cities where men flocked to enlist, adding that reaction in the other urban and rural areas was rather restrained.²⁰ Gregory argued that the existence of any ambivalence or dissent 'might back the narrative drama of the idea of enthusiasm but has the benefit of reflecting the typical reaction of the British'.²¹ Pennell has quoted Alfred Woodcock's recollection of the crowds blocking Walsall's streets on 4 August 'but does not describe them as loud, enthusiastic or celebratory'.²²

¹⁷ *Wednesbury Herald*, 8 August 1914.

¹⁸ W.J. Reader, p. 55.

¹⁹ A. Marwick, *The Deluge: British Society and the First World War*, p. 349.

²⁰ R.J. Batten, 'Devon and the First World War' (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Exeter, 2013), pp. 51-52; L.K. Riddell, 'Shetland and the Great War' (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Edinburgh, 2012), p. 104.

²¹ A. Gregory, *The Last Great War: British Society and the First World War*, p. 24.

²² C. Pennell, p. 39.

The emphasis being placed on events by the local press was variable. The *Express and Star* of 6 August 1914 included an article ‘Practical Patriotism: How to be helpful in wartime’ setting out things to do and to be avoided.²³ It counselled people to ‘Keep your heads. Be calm. Go about your business quietly and soberly’. The hoarding of goods, thereby inducing artificial scarcity, was a matter of concern highlighted by the *Wednesbury Herald* on 8 August, and a Home Office statement on the matter was cited.²⁴ Similarly, the *Midland Counties Express* issued a dramatic warning that the enemy was at the gate and ‘immense demands will be made upon the patriotism of every Britisher’. To this was added, ‘the crisis calls for the exercise of all the best British qualities and I do not think there is any fear of disappointment on that score’.²⁵

These sentiments were typical of the countless calls during the duration of the war made in the name of duty and honour, love of one’s country, loyalty to King and Country, and of patriotism. Cunningham related the sense that ‘there can be few more obviously patriotic acts than to volunteer to defend one’s country against invasion’.²⁶ Yet to comprehend what was meant by those making such entreaties and, equally, what was understood by the different social classes and sections of the population when responding to them has been a matter of interpretation and complexity. It is shaped by the questions of what and for whom the actual fighting was being done, by notions of citizenship, identity, liberty and other beliefs and values held, and the desired outcomes to be achieved. For most people, this exceeded the simplistic acceptance of my country, right or wrong. It remains problematic, however, because what people said publicly and what they genuinely felt may have differed given the pressures from peers and society in general. Nevertheless, it must be tackled if a better appreciation of the motivations of the men and women affected by the First World War are to be better understood.

²³ *Express and Star*, 6 August 1914.

²⁴ *Wednesbury Herald*, 8 August 1914.

²⁵ *Midland Counties Express*, 8 August 1914.

²⁶ H. Cunningham, ‘The Language of Patriotism, 1750-1914’, p. 26.

The prestige of the Empire was important to people's thinking because it boosted their sense of self-worth and confidence in a nation to which they felt they belonged. Reinforcing this was imperialistic and nationalist literature and propaganda that was allied to militarism, although this had at its foundation the voluntary principle that eschewed the conscription practised on the continent of Europe. In interpreting this in the context of the First World War, Summers has argued that there had been insufficient understanding of 'the social, political and cultural basis of British patriotism as it was manifest at this particular moment in history'.²⁷ Mansfield echoed this assessment, relating it to agricultural workers, with an interpretation of local patriotism fusing wartime militarism, parochialism and a sense of loyalty to the nation.²⁸ As suggested in Chapter 2, the years preceding 1914 were noteworthy for some of the most uncompromising industrial and social unrest since the 1840s and, as Silbey commented, 'radical groups, including working-class groups, throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, created their own patriotism, counter to the government's definition. That this continued even into the First World War seems indubitable'.²⁹

It has been argued by historians including Patrick Joyce, Gareth Stedman Jones and Bernard Waites that patriotism had become deeply embedded in working-class culture by the end of the nineteenth century. This is also prominent in John Hartigan's study of volunteering in Birmingham during the First World War, with the suggestion that working-class patriotism was defensive rather than aggressive, rarely being outright jingoism, tempered by belief in values of fair play and independence.³⁰ Patriotic feelings, and especially those of the working class, were culturally, historically and politically formed during the nineteenth century, and Paul Ward noted the movement away from what may be termed *radical patriotism*, namely the 'political uses to which

²⁷ A. Summers, p. 105.

²⁸ N. Mansfield, pp. xii and 79.

²⁹ D. Silbey, p. 8.

³⁰ J. Hartigan, p. 81.

love of country can be put by those who do not accept the government or state as synonymous with nation'. He also advanced the notion of *social patriotism*, or an inwardly focused patriotism, as one that was orientated towards domestic social reform and implied a kind of new and improved Britain. Social patriots' acceptance of the state as legitimate meant that the working class were not excluded and, pragmatically, could increasingly accept and identify with the cause of the nation as a whole.³¹ R.L. Nelson's research has also taken account of the fragmentation and weakening of the anti-state radical patriotism and its succession by a 'cross-class allegiance to the state and its elite rulers' that he considered to be closer to a conservative definition of patriotism.³²

In 1914, Germany's aggressive actions in violating the rights of neutral countries and attacking Britain's allies meant that unless defeated by military means, Britain's independence and standing in the world would be threatened. This was a war to defend honour, liberty and democratic rights during which, as Pennell indicated, 'the commitment of ordinary people to the British cause was reflected in this behaviour. A new social order was established in 1914 based on voluntarism, self-sacrifice and equality of sacrifice'. Hence, 'hundreds of thousands of Britons considered it their duty to enlist..., while hosts of others took it upon themselves to train as nurses, collect funds for war relief'.³³ This was consistent with the sentiments expressed by Wednesbury's Mayor, Councillor Nat Bishop, in a speech that he made on 8 August 1914.

It is scarcely necessary in this hour of national peril to appeal to the loyalty of the inhabitants of the Borough of Wednesbury. Sufficient evidence is already to hand to convince the most peace-loving subjects that the war being waged against Germany is a righteous war.³⁴

Later during that month, the Mayor pronounced 'I feel I can rely on Wednesbury's sons to wake up to this great emergency and see that they are not lacking

³¹ P. Ward, p. 4.

³² R.L. Nelson, 'When the War is Over/We'll Damn Well March No More: Working Class Patriotism in the Great War' (Unpublished MA thesis, Simon Fraser University, 1997), p. 4.

³³ C. Pennell, p. 9; J.M. Osborne, 'Defining their own Patriotism: British Volunteer Training Corps in the First World War', p. 59.

³⁴ *Wednesbury Herald*, 8 August 1914.

in their duty'. This sentiment was matched by the local Member of Parliament, John Norton Griffiths, who was 'quite sure of one thing, that the men of the Black Country would make good their proud history...and come forward to do their duty'.³⁵

This statement typified those made in the earliest days to convince the British people of the war's necessity. Often these were articulated by leading members of the local community, typically politicians, industrialists, clergymen and officers from the County Regiment, at meetings and rallies. Indeed, few religious leaders 'voiced any opposition to the Great War once it had broken out. The invasion of Belgium had particularly shocked and united Christian opinion in Britain'.³⁶ One Wednesbury clergyman who was more vocal was Father J.F. Piris of St. Mary's Catholic Church. At a public meeting on 12 September 1914, he stated, 'we are engaged in a fight of right against might, defence against defiance, protection against barbarism, honour against treachery, justice against gross injustice'.³⁷ Subsequently published in the *Wednesbury Herald*, he wrote to the Mayor of Wednesbury commending the appeal on behalf of Belgian refugees, stating that this 'was the admiration of the town, and speaking for the Catholics of Wednesbury, I feel you all merit the expression of most sincere gratitude'.³⁸

An interesting perspective was provided in an article, *Municipal Patriotism: A Timely Suggestion* by another noted Wednesbury figure, F.W. Hackwood.³⁹ He urged Wednesbury's Council, as a matter of patriotic duty, to undertake the long deferred housing scheme to provide continued employment. Hackwood argued that 'the municipality which keeps the wheels of industry within its own area running most briskly and regularly will have rendered the highest duty to that state in this time of

³⁵ *Midland Advertiser*, 22 August 1914.

³⁶ C. Pennell, p. 63.

³⁷ *Wednesbury Herald*, 12 September 1914.

³⁸ *Wednesbury Herald*, 24 October 1914.

³⁹ Frederick William Hackwood (1851-1926) trained as a schoolteacher, eventually becoming the headmaster of St. Bartholomew's School, Wednesbury, and he also sat as an independent radical member of Wednesbury Borough Council during the late 1880s, but it was for his endeavours as an author, historian, antiquarian and philanthropist that he is principally remembered. His most notable literary works included *Wednesbury Faces, Places and Industries* (1897) and *Wednesbury – Ancient and Modern* (1902).

stress'.⁴⁰ Hackwood's recommendation might appear curious, excepting that one of the paramount fears at the outset of the hostilities was that there would be a financial crisis. On 5 September 1914, the *Wednesbury Herald* enquired, 'What service can I render in the present crisis?' before opining, 'we shall all sooner or later have to put our shoulder to the wheel... to cope with the distress that always follows in the wake of war.'⁴¹

In terms of working-class attitudes during August and September 1914, elsewhere in British society questions were asked over their patriotic feelings and willingness to enlist and serve with the armed forces. Reader noted an uneasiness amongst middle-class recruiters when approaching men of the working class that was 'hardly surprising in view of the sour state of labour relations before the war in several of the country's important industries'.⁴² The availability of information from a range of newspapers and periodicals allowed working people to formulate their own view of the world as they saw it.⁴³ Hence, 'the vision of British glory and power existed for many in the middle of the squalor and poverty of their everyday lives'.⁴⁴ Moreover, for many the military was still the last refuge of the unemployed or the criminal and few families approved of their sons joining its ranks. As Nelson conveyed it, 'being a soldier had long been frowned upon by the working classes as the lowest of occupations, and nothing could be worse for the reputation of lower-class parents than to have their daughter run off with a Tommy'.⁴⁵ The First World War largely removed this prejudice, so that disapproval became reserved for young men not in uniform. Frequently, families in which more than one son had enlisted were used as patriotic examples in order to shame those whose sons had not volunteered. This was a war during which the

⁴⁰ *Wednesbury Herald*, 15 August 1914.

⁴¹ *Wednesbury Herald*, 5 September 1914.

⁴² W.J. Reader, p. 122. See Chapter 2, pp. 51-69 for a discussion of the Black Country strike of 1913.

⁴³ In addition to the national daily newspapers, with the most popular amongst the working-class readership being the *Daily Mail* and *Daily Mirror*, in the Black Country there was a daily evening paper, the *Express and Star*, and also the weekly titles (with these usually being published on a Saturday). For Wednesbury, the latter included the *Midland Advertiser*, the *Midland Counties Express*, the *Staffordshire Advertiser* and the *Wednesbury Herald*. In 1916, a merger created the *Wednesbury Herald and Midland Advertiser*.

⁴⁴ D. Silbey, p. 58.

⁴⁵ R.L. Nelson, p. 6.

status of women in society would change; for some this would be temporary and others permanently. A social phenomenon that had its first occurrence at Deal in Kent was young women giving out white feathers to young men, mostly complete strangers, whom were out in public and who were not wearing military uniform. It was originally reported in *The Times* that the first to receive this implied token of cowardice were the ‘young men found lolling on the beach and promenades.’⁴⁶ Originating from a suggestion by Penrose Fitzgerald, an elderly retired Admiral, this practice spread across the country, continuing even after the introduction of conscription. As Gullace noted, it created ‘one of the most persistent memories of the home front during the war’.⁴⁷

Popular reaction to events was given via newspapers, which offered commentary on public behaviour and opinion.⁴⁸ Until late July 1914, as noted by Beckett, ‘there was no noticeable sense of the impending crisis’.⁴⁹ Few newspapers offered explicit opinions but Liberal newspapers such as the *Daily News* and *Manchester Guardian* were against war (remaining so until 4 August 1914), as was the *Labour Leader*; the Conservative press followed an anti-German line, however. Nick Beeching’s assessment was ‘that the provincial press took a sober and critical view of the imminent outbreak of hostilities’.⁵⁰ Reactions to the outbreak of war differed from later responses, with opinion changing daily if not hourly, and ‘the public were not as naive about the consequences of the war as is often imagined’ has been identified by Gregory.⁵¹ The critical juncture may be identified in the days following the retreat from Mons, albeit

⁴⁶ *The Times*, 2 September 1914.

⁴⁷ N. F. Gullace, ‘White Feathers and Wounded Men: Female Patriotism and the Memory of the Great War’, p. 179. Later in the war, any men who had been discharged from the armed forces due to their age or wounds or sickness would be issued with the Silver War Badge. As the *Midland Advertiser and Wednesday Herald* of 5 August 1916 stated this was for ‘the purpose of distinguishing those men who had done their bit from the men who had yet to do theirs’. See Appendix 6, photograph 42, p. 301.

⁴⁸ Government control and censorship of the press was minimal at this time. Nevertheless, newspapers and their editors did not wish to aid the enemy or to undermine morale at home. Whilst newspapers represent an excellent and prolific primary source, a note of caution in their use has been provided by Pennell, highlighting ‘problems, such as inherent bias, lack of authority, and inaccuracies’ so that ‘any one newspaper in isolation is of limited value’ so that they should ‘be taken together and treated with care’.

⁴⁹ I.F.W. Beckett, *The Home Front, 1914-1918: How Britain Survived Total War*, p. 8.

⁵⁰ N. Beeching, p. 163.

⁵¹ A. Gregory, ‘British ‘War Enthusiasm’ in 1914: A Reassessment’ in *Evidence, History and the Great War: Historians and the Impact of 1914-1918*, ed. by G. Braybon (Oxford: Berghahn, 2003), p. 75.

through articles that were days and sometimes a week after the event. The coverage of this in the *Express and Star* is cited by Gower, noting the printing of a special Sunday edition that referred to ‘masterly generalship’.⁵² At this time, news of the German atrocities committed in Belgium began to filter through, firstly in the national press and then in provincial and local publications. The destruction of the city and libraries of Louvain was recorded by *The Times* on 29 August 1914. In the days that followed, the calls for men intensified and references to rolls of honour appeared in the local press, detailing the names of those who had volunteered.⁵³ As described in the following pages, there were frequent meetings and rallies in Wednesbury, usually at the Town Hall, with reports emphasizing that these were enthusiastic and well-attended events.

3.3 Manpower – from voluntarism to conscription

It has been asserted by Wilson that ‘nothing revealed the British people’s commitment to the war better than the way in which so many of the country’s young men volunteered for military service. There was no inevitability about this’.⁵⁴ In contrast to the other European nations and their conscript armies, and encouraged by its naval strength, Britain depended upon a small, well-trained and professional army that was recruited on a voluntary basis. On 4 August 1914, this comprised 247,432 officers and men (not including reservists), with a substantial number engaged in policing the British Empire.⁵⁵ The mobilization of the British Expeditionary Force (BEF), comprising four infantry divisions and a cavalry division, began on 5 August 1914 and the first troops arriving in France two days later.⁵⁶ Despite gallantry in its first encounters, the BEF could not match a much larger German army that was augmented by abundant reserves.

⁵² S.J.L. Gower, p. 25.

⁵³ See Appendix 6, illustrations 26 to 29, pp. 293-295

⁵⁴ T. Wilson, p. 243.

⁵⁵ C. Pennell, p. 142; P.G. Cooksley, *The Home Front: Civilian Life in World War One* (London: NPI Media, 2006), pp. 123-124. At any one time, one-third of the strength of the British Army was stationed in India.

⁵⁶ British pre-war military planning had anticipated that in the event of such a crisis, six infantry divisions would be despatched to the Continent. However, Kitchener now feared that there could be a surprise German invasion and this led to two of these divisions being held back for home defence, if required.

The newly appointed Secretary of State for War, Lord Kitchener of Khartoum, realized that the war would not be over quickly, that it would be difficult to expand the BEF under existing arrangements, and that this carried profound consequences for Britain's prosecution of the war. As Reader remarked, this was 'clean against the accepted opinion of the day, even at the highest levels'.⁵⁷ Kitchener prevailed upon the Cabinet for an increase in the size of the army to a million men, the first time this had ever been contemplated. Authorization for an increase in recruitment to the regular army to 500,000 by 31 March 1915 was granted by Parliament on 5 August 1914 and two days later Kitchener appealed for his first 100,000 volunteers, with his *Call to Arms* appearing in the *Wednesbury Herald* on 8 August 1914.⁵⁸ On 22 August 1914, in a meeting at Wednesbury Town Hall, Colonel T.F. Hickman, MP, confirmed that he had been entrusted with establishing a new battalion of the South Staffordshire Regiment. Over 200 men now volunteered to join this unit and it recorded that 'the next day the Mayor of Wednesbury personally conducted them to Wolverhampton en route to Whittington Barracks, Lichfield'.⁵⁹ Hundreds of similar meetings and rallies were held across the country and a call for a further 100,000 men was made on 28 August 1914.⁶⁰

This had been preceded by the publication on 25 August of the Belgian Official Report on Germany's actions and atrocities. On the same day, *The Times* published its Mons Despatch, 'presenting the battle as a heroic defeat, it ended with an appeal for more men to join up'.⁶¹ This coincided with the creation a civilian patriotic initiative, the Parliamentary Recruiting Committee, with representatives from all the political parties utilizing constituency organization and local knowledge because Britain did not

⁵⁷ W.J. Reader, p. 105.

⁵⁸ *Estimate of the Additional Number of Men required in the year ending 31 March 1915 in consequence of the war in Europe*, House of Commons Papers (London: HMSO, 1915); *Wednesbury Herald*, 8 August 1914. The terms that were offered to these volunteers were the same as those of the pre-war regulars, namely for men aged between 19 and 30 years to serve for three years or for the duration of the war.

⁵⁹ *Wednesbury Herald*, 22 August 1914.

⁶⁰ See Appendix 6, Photographs 33-35, pp. 297-298. Photographs of groups of Wednesbury's soldiers.

⁶¹ *The Times*, 25 August 1914; A. Gregory, *The Last Great War: British Society and the First World War*, p. 32.

have a national system of recruitment and the existing machinery was now overwhelmed. Osborne made the case that it was the voluntary recruiting movement that 'saved the military authorities from a manpower disaster in the autumn of 1914' by bringing 'to recruitment a pervasive civilian flavour of freshness, expedience, innovation, and pride of participation'.⁶² In a parliamentary reply to the Wednesbury MP, John Norton Griffiths, Prime Minister Asquith indicated on 26 August 1914 that he hoped the 'most excellent service...rendered by MPs and local political organizations in arousing attention to the need for recruits...may be carried on in a much more extended scale in future'.⁶³ Such a meeting occurred in Wednesbury in early September 1914 when speeches were made by Captain J. Lees, Father J.F. Piris and Mr S.M. Slater. Alderman J.A. Kilvert, 'a living echo of the Crimean War' was also present. Mr Slater made a commitment on behalf of his firm, stating 'every man who was equal to the task and had no kind of claim at home should be given the facilities to join' and he 'intended to make it clear that their places would be kept for them when they returned home'.⁶⁴

It is undeniable that the emotions underpinning volunteering were complex and varied, and 'early in the war, there would have been little awareness of what volunteers might experience'.⁶⁵ Recent work has focused on the end of August 1914, since 'following the publication of the news from Mons, 174,901 men enlisted.' Moreover, 'far from signing up in a burst of enthusiasm at the outbreak of war, the largest single component of volunteers enlisted at exactly the moment when the war turned serious'.⁶⁶ Pennell distinguished between what she categorizes as being 'pull' factors, namely

⁶² J.M. Osborne, *The Voluntary Recruiting Movement in Britain 1914-16* (New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 1982), p. 31.

⁶³ R. Douglas, 'Voluntary Enlistment in the First World War and the Work of the Parliamentary Recruiting Committee', *The Journal of Modern History*, 42 (4) (1970), p. 566.

⁶⁴ *Midland Advertiser*, 12 September 1914. Captain Lees was the commanding officer of H Company, Fifth Battalion, South Staffordshire Regiment and Mr Slater was representing James Russell & Sons Crown tube works. See Chapter 5, pp. 152-158 for the importance of this statement during the 1917 Crown tube strike.

⁶⁵ N.F. Gullace, *The Blood of Our Sons: Men, Women and the Renegotiation of British Citizenship during the Great War*, p. 116.

⁶⁶ N. Beeching, p. 177; A. Gregory, *The Last Great War: British Society and the First World War*, p. 80. This was for the period 30 August to 5 September 1914. It has been borne out by the monthly enlistment rates, which have demonstrated that during 1914 the highest level of recruitment occurred in September.

excitement, feelings of adventure, the desire to be with friends, pride in one's country, and the 'push' factors, for example, guilt, pressure from employers and from women. That there was manifest reaction that surpassed naive patriotism has been contemplated by Simkins, recognizing a more considered, pragmatic approach, particularly from married men who 'needed time to settle their affairs and make sure their families would be cared for before joining the army, no matter how patriotic they may have been'.⁶⁷

Throughout September 1914, onwards into 1915, the local newspapers featured further recruiting meetings and rallies in their coverage of events.⁶⁸ There was reference in the *Wednesbury Herald* of 5 September 1914 to the town's Roll of Honour. In addition to the regular army, reservists and territorial recruits, mention is made of the 'goodly company of time-expired soldiers and civilians who have volunteered their help' and a record of these Boer War veterans is supplied.⁶⁹ On the anniversary of the outbreak of the war, the *Wednesbury Herald* confirmed that some 3,000 townsmen had responded to the call of King and Country, declaring that 'Wednesbury men were willing to step forward and take their share in the dangers and perils of the time'.⁷⁰

Nationally, a diminishing number of volunteers became noticeable during early 1915, however, reinforcing an increasingly supposed conviction that young, single men were not making themselves available in the numbers anticipated. Sven Müller cited a *Daily Mail* editorial from 6 July 1915 that voluntarism took the 'pick of the nation, places them in the firing line, and sacrifices them there that the coward and shirker may live at ease'.⁷¹ The first stage in what would become the path to conscription was compilation of a National Register to assist the computation of the nation's available manpower. Prepared by the President of the Local Government Board, Walter Long,

⁶⁷ C. Pennell, p. 159; P. Simkins, p. 57.

⁶⁸ See Appendix 6, illustrations 26-29, pp. 293-295 for examples of the types of advertising regularly used.

⁶⁹ *Wednesbury Herald*, 5 September 1914.

⁷⁰ *Wednesbury Herald*, 7 August 1915.

⁷¹ S.O. Müller, 'Who is the Enemy? The Nationalist Dilemma of Inclusion and Exclusion in Britain during the First World War', *European Review of History*, 9 (1) (2002), p. 70.

the National Register Act received the Royal Assent on 15 July 1915 and the gathering of information occurred on 15 August when all persons aged between 15 and 65 years were obliged to register the particulars of their birth, family, occupation and the skills they possessed. The first personal identity cards were introduced, together with the concept of 'starred' jobs held by those deemed indispensable to the war effort.

As soon as the registration had been completed, ways in which the information gathered could be utilized to increase voluntary enlistment were sought, not least to relieve the pressure at the front line. The next step was the appointment on 5 October 1915 of Edward Stanley, 17th Earl of Derby, as Director-General of Recruiting.⁷² As Roy Douglas has observed, at Derby's 'own request he was unpaid; he held no military rank and was responsible to Earl Kitchener, Secretary of State for War'.⁷³ The announcement of what became known as the Derby Scheme occurred on 21 October 1915. It has subsequently been viewed either as a last attempt to preserve the voluntary system or as prelude to conscription. Particularly damning were Marwick's comments that it was 'one of those shotgun weddings between the fair maid of Liberalism and the ogre of Tory militarism' and that it 'was a gigantic engine of fraud and moral blackmail'.⁷⁴ In considering the political objections to conscription from many in the Labour and Liberal Parties, Silbey has argued that the scheme 'served as a public spectacle to assure the supposedly restive working class that the volunteer system was given every chance'.⁷⁵ Labour was enthusiastic in its support of the scheme in the hope that it would forestall conscription because, as Reader, added 'there was a feeling that conscription would be the rich man's dodge to make the poor man's son serve'.⁷⁶

⁷² *Who's Who and Who Was Who*, 2012. Edward Stanley (1865-1948) was a former soldier, diplomat and politician. Elected as MP for Westthorpe in 1892, he held posts in the Conservative administrations of Lord Salisbury and Arthur Balfour before succeeding his father to the Earldom in 1908. In 1914, prior to his appointment as the Director-General, he had successfully recruited in Liverpool for Kitchener's New Armies. He was Ambassador to France and held further posts in the Governments of the 1920s.

⁷³ R. Douglas, p. 578.

⁷⁴ A. Marwick, *The Deluge: British Society and the First World War*, p. 77.

⁷⁵ D. Silbey, p. 36.

⁷⁶ W.J. Reader, p. 124.

The Derby Scheme entailed using the National Register to personally canvass every man aged between 18 and 41 years, to ask them to attest to pledge themselves to join up when called for, thereby avoiding the disgrace of conscription.⁷⁷ They could also volunteer for immediate service should they wish to do so. Those involved in essential war work would be granted an exemption and, from 19 November 1915, tribunals were established to consider such cases. On this basis, men were categorized into 46 groups. Groups 1 – 23 being single men, with group 1 being 18 year-olds and group 23 being 40 year-olds; groups 24 to 46 were married men, with group 24 being 18 year-olds and group 46 being 40 year-olds. Each group would in turn become available for military service, though married men would not be called until no single men remained to do so; a pledge being made by Asquith on 11 November 1915.⁷⁸ Although men were not compelled to attest, considerable pressure was applied for them to do so through door-to-door canvassing and giving those who had attested an armband to wear to offer them protection from accusations of shirking. Waites related accounts from the West Midlands of workers being compelled to attest under duress by workmates, with non-attested men ‘being deprived of their shoes and stockings, placed in wheelbarrows and driven in mock military procession to the Recruiting Officer’s table’.⁷⁹

On 30 October 1915, the *Wednesbury Herald* outlined the scheme’s arrangement locally via a recruiting committee and the establishment of tribunals. This reiterated the King’s appeal to ‘men of all classes to volunteer under Lord Derby’s scheme’ and by doing so ‘avoid a defeat that ‘would mean the degradation of every Briton to a position of vassalage’.⁸⁰ The scheme’s deadline was originally set for 30 November 1915 then extended several times before finally concluding on 15 December. As this date approached, there were frequent comparisons in the local press to the opening weeks of

⁷⁷ See Appendix 6, Photographs 30-32, pp. 295-296. Derby Scheme Attestation and Registration Forms.

⁷⁸ R. Douglas, p. 579.

⁷⁹ B.A. Waites, *A Class Society at War: England, 1914-1918*, p. 189.

⁸⁰ *Wednesbury Herald*, 30 October 1915.

the war, with recruiting offices being inundated with men.⁸¹ There are accounts of this happening in Wednesbury, with recruiting sergeants and voluntary assistants working into the early hours to meet the demands of the men queuing to attest. A great rush was reported of young men showing ‘that their hearts were in the right place after all’.⁸² In the New Year, the *Midland Advertiser* confirmed that the first recruits under the group system had now departed from Wednesbury and proceeded to their training camps.⁸³ Lord Derby published his report on recruitment on 20 December 1915.⁸⁴ With 2,182,178 men not attesting (nearly 50 per cent of single men and 40 per cent of married men), any optimism for the scheme rectifying faltering voluntary recruitment was misplaced. However, Grieves has asserted that the demand for 35,000 men per week ‘was a grossly inflated target which any system in an industrial society after sixteen months of war was unable to meet’.⁸⁵ Simkins contended that Lord Derby’s report ‘effectively removed the last major obstacle to compulsory military service’.⁸⁶

By the end of 1915, it was increasingly apparent that the existing arrangements were incapable of accommodating the ever-increasing manpower requirements of the armed forces. As recruitment faltered, there was concerted debate on the advantages of conscription. The sense of frustration that shirkers were nevertheless avoiding their duty was captured in a statement by Wednesbury’s MP, John Norton Griffiths.

On the question of conscription, as a soldier I prefer not to express an opinion, but as a Member of the House of Commons we simply want a plain declaration from the Army and Navy setting forth what numbers they want and will require, and for the Government to state if they can supply these needs on our present system.⁸⁷

⁸¹ *Midland Counties Express*, 11 December 1915.

⁸² *Wednesbury Herald*, 18 December 1915.

⁸³ *Midland Advertiser*, 22 January 1916.

⁸⁴ Cd. 8149 *Report on Recruiting, Earl of Derby*, Command Papers (London: HMSO, 1916). Lord Derby identified 5,012,146 men of military age, 2,179,231 of whom were single and 2,832,210 that were married. There were 690,138 single men and 915,491 married men that had been designated as ‘starred’. The total number to have attested was 2,829,263 comprising 1,029,231 single men and 1,152,947 married men. Hence, there were some 2,182,178 men who had not undergone attestation, so that nearly 50 per cent of single men and 40 per cent of married men had not done so, the higher response of the latter group being attributable to a widely-held belief that if they attested they would not be called up for some time.

⁸⁵ K. Grieves, p. 22.

⁸⁶ P. Simkins, p. 156.

⁸⁷ *Midland Counties Express*, 2 October 1915.

This was supported by most Conservatives and some Liberals. Resistance to conscription came principally from three groups, namely the majority of the Liberal Party, organized labour, and religious and pacifist associations. Liberals believed that ‘the state was merely entitled to request its citizens to do their military service, but not to compel them, since coercion was incompatible with the principles of freedom and democracy’.⁸⁸ Feeling in the Labour Party and the trade unions was that whilst conscription might address concerns about equality of sacrifice, it could lead to industrial conscription, with labour being directed to work under army pay and discipline, losing all concessions and agreements fought for during years of negotiation.

The Military Service Bill proposed to treat all single men as if they had attested and it was introduced to the House of Commons by Asquith on 5 January 1916. At its first reading, there were 403 votes for the Bill, 105 against and 160 abstentions. Reports on the debates appeared in the local press, with John Norton Griffiths telling the House that ‘if they did not pass this Bill they would have no opportunity of winning the war’. The *Midland Counties Express* praised ‘a stimulating speech, typical of *Empire Jack*, and reflecting the spirit of the men in the trenches’.⁸⁹ At the third and final reading, there was opposition from only 38 MPs (31 Liberals, six Labour and one Irish Member) and the Military Service Act received the Royal Assent on 27 January 1916.⁹⁰

Henceforth, conscription applied to men aged between 18 and 41 years, who were unmarried or were widowers without children or dependants. Those who had attested or volunteered through the Derby Scheme were called up in parallel with these conscripts. The results were disappointing and did not reveal the multitude of men believed to be shirking their duty. The number of men enlisted between February and

⁸⁸ S.O. Müller, p. 71.

⁸⁹ *Midland Counties Express*, 15 January 1916; *Wednesbury Herald*, 15 January 1916.

⁹⁰ C. Messenger, *Call to Arms: The British Army, 1914-18* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2005), p. 132. The Act came into effect in England, Scotland and Wales on 10 February 1916 but voluntary recruitment remained in operation in Ireland throughout the war. In view of the 1916 Easter Rising, and the possible repercussions that any attempt to introduce conscription might have, it was resisted by the authorities.

April 1916 was 203,230, which was less than the equivalent period under the Derby Scheme.⁹¹ Conscription immediately halted voluntary recruitment yet, as A.J.P. Taylor asserted, ‘the compulsory system, far from bringing more men into the army, kept them out of it’.⁹² On 7 March 1916, the Army Estimates for 1916/17 were published, indicating a net estimate of 4 million men.⁹³ Furthermore, the planning for the 1916 Somme offensive added to the pressures of filling the places of men already killed, wounded or incapacitated. A Bill for a second Military Service Act was presented to the House of Commons on 25 April to extend conscription to married men on the same terms as those compelled to serve under the first Act. On the same day, Andrew Bonar Law and Lord Kitchener met with principal trade unionists and Labour leaders to discuss the need to rescind Asquith’s pledge that conscription would not be extended.⁹⁴

Notable though the ‘willing acceptance of the majority of opinion that conscription was the appropriate means to fill the ranks of the armed forces’, the actual results were still disappointing. Consequently, in September, action began to be taken to conscript the supposedly large number of men who had hitherto evaded military service. The *Midland Advertiser and Wednesbury Herald* explained that visits to public houses in the area were being organized ‘and a search made for possible shirkers, but without avail’. It expressed with pride, ‘it is perhaps due to Wednesbury’s honour today that in this respect it is remarkably clean’.⁹⁵ The Army Estimates for 1917/18 and 1918/19 both featured net estimates of 5 million men.⁹⁶ A third Military Service Act was introduced during April 1917 that facilitated the comb-out from manufacturing and

⁹¹ D. Silbey, p. 37.

⁹² A.J.P. Taylor, *Politics in Wartime* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1964), p. 23. Certain categories were exempted, namely the population of Ireland, Ministers of religion, the medically unfit, those employed on essential war work, and the men who had expressed a conscientious objection to combatant service.

⁹³ *Army Estimates of Effective and Non-Effective Services for the Year 1916-17*, House of Commons Papers (London: HMSO, 1916).

⁹⁴ H.A. Clegg, p. 154. The Bill was enacted on 3 May 1916, opposed by 27 Liberal and 10 Labour MPs.

⁹⁵ *Midland Advertiser and Wednesbury Herald*, 16 September 1916.

⁹⁶ *Army Estimates of Effective and Non-Effective Services for the Year 1916-17*, House of Commons Papers (London: HMSO, 1916); *Army Estimates of Effective and Non-Effective Services for the Year 1917-18*, House of Commons Papers (London: HMSO, 1917).

a re-examination of those men formerly rejected on health-related grounds. As Bourne has asserted, 'it is difficult to imagine that conscription would have been introduced with such little public dissent unless voluntary methods had been tried first'.⁹⁷

Even in the first months of the war, it was noticeable that there were local and regional variations since recruitment 'was not necessarily a uniform phenomenon across the nation'.⁹⁸ There was a discernible pattern with certain industries, such as engineering and mining, supplying more men than agriculture, and urban men were more inclined to enlist than their rural counterparts were.⁹⁹ Men were left behind and there was an expectation that conscription would reveal the shirkers but an important distinction must be made between recruitment and enlistment. This is because having been targeted by recruiting campaigns and subjected to bullying and cajoling, many were unable to fulfil the physical requirements owing to poverty and ill health. Silbey stated that 'the rate of medical rejection among working-class men seems to have been about three times the rate for middle and upper-class men'.¹⁰⁰ Factors causing some (and especially married) men to be hesitant were financial uncertainty and the inefficient system for paying separation allowances to dependants. This indicated 'that they were not swept along by emotion, but were more calculating in their decision'.¹⁰¹

On 10 November 1915, the Local Government Board established a system of local tribunals to hear appeals made for exemption from attestation under the Derby Scheme. This could be granted on a number of grounds, including a man's employment in important war work; the prospect of serious financial hardship to dependants; ill health or infirmity; and conscientious objection.¹⁰² Three categories of exemption could be granted, namely absolute exemption, exempt combative duties, and condition

⁹⁷ J.M. Bourne, *Britain and the Great War, 1914-1918*, p. 182.

⁹⁸ N. Beeching, p. 165.

⁹⁹ J.M. Bourne, 'Burslem and its Role of Honour, 1914-1918', *Midland History*, 39 (2) (2014), p. 203; C. Pennell, p. 44.

¹⁰⁰ D. Silbey, p. 45.

¹⁰¹ A. Gregory, *The Last Great War: British Society and the First World War*, p. 91.

¹⁰² R.J.Q. Adams and P.P. Poirier, *The Conscription Controversy in Great Britain, 1900-1918* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1987), p. 120.

exemption for a specified period. Absolute exemption was discouraged and eventually removed.¹⁰³ Tribunal members tended to be prominent members of local society, typically local councillors, clergymen and professionals who had volunteered for the role. The purpose of these bodies was modified by the Military Service Act 1916 and, thereafter, they determined whether appellants should be conscripted. Although some records have survived, including reports published in the local press, Adrian Faber noted that in many cases, ‘unfortunately, they are not comprehensive or complete’.¹⁰⁴

The official notice publicizing the creation of the local tribunal for Wednesbury under the Military Service Act 1916 appeared in the *Midland Advertiser* on 26 February 1916.¹⁰⁵ Reviewing local newspapers has uncovered only one report of this tribunal’s proceedings, in the *Midland Advertiser and Wednesbury Herald* on 16 September 1917. Chaired by Dr W.C. Garman, Wednesbury’s Medical Officer of Health, and attended by the Mayor, Councillor W. Warner, this considered the case of Leonard Geoffrey Johnson BA, aged 22 years of 2 Gospel Oak Villas, Gospel Oak Road, Tipton. Charged with being an absentee under the Military Service Act, in his defence Johnson stated his willingness to do agricultural work. Given that many tribunals were wholly unsympathetic, he thanked the tribunal for their fair consideration, remarking ‘in some parts the magistrates had been very severe on conscientious objectors but they could not say that about Wednesbury’. The tribunal’s decision was to fine Johnson 40s., following which he was escorted to Lichfield barracks for conscription to the army.¹⁰⁶

By 1916, Asquith’s administration was facing the problem of determining the most effective allocation of resources between the military and industry, for it was essential ‘to strike a balance between military and economic activity which would fend

¹⁰³ The British were unique among the European nations in allowing for a moral objection to military service. In total, there were approximately 16,000 conscientious objectors, of whom 3,300 accepted service in a non-combatant capacity, 3,000 did ambulance work, and over 6,000 served at least one prison sentence.

¹⁰⁴ A. Faber, ‘The Provincial Press during the First World War: A case study of the Wolverhampton *Express and Star* between January and March 1918’ (Unpublished MA thesis, University of Birmingham, 2006), p. 28. The Ministry of Health undertook to destroy many of the individual case files during 1921.

¹⁰⁵ *Midland Advertiser*, 26 February 1916. See Appendix 6, Illustration 41, p. 301.

¹⁰⁶ *Midland Advertiser and Wednesbury Herald*, 16 September 1916.

off bankruptcy until the war could be won'.¹⁰⁷ Men were needed to replace those lost to death, wounding or incapacity at the front line. Silbey highlighted the highest 'wastage' rate occurring in April 1915, when 33,527 men were lost, and that the average for the voluntary enlistment period was 23,227.¹⁰⁸ Furthermore, planning for the offensives of 1916 and thereafter, necessitated immense numbers of men, exceeding this replacement rate. To provide such a large force with the equipment, ordnance and services they required had implications though, and Grieves commented that 'very little thought had been given to the impact of such a large withdrawal of labour on the economy'.¹⁰⁹

It has been asserted by Bourne that manpower planning 'was piecemeal and pragmatic. It was extended step-by-step by the compelling force of circumstances'.¹¹⁰ Indeed, it was in this way that the imposition of a form of national service on all adult males to ensure national control over the economy was instigated. From March 1917, this took the form of a Ministry of National Service, with Neville Chamberlain as its Director-General.¹¹¹ Accompanied by much publicity, at its launch the scheme called for 500,000 volunteers by the end of March 1917. On 27 March, the *Express and Star* described a meeting at Wednesbury Town Hall during which Wirral MP, Gershom Stuart emphasized the importance of industrial organization.¹¹² A similar report appeared in the *Midland Advertiser and Wednesbury Herald*, accompanied by a letter from Chamberlain that was addressed to every patriotic citizen, and which outlined the features of the scheme.¹¹³ The number of volunteers fell far short of expectations and it

¹⁰⁷ J. Turner, *British Politics and the Great War: Coalition and Conflict, 1915-1918* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), p. 94.

¹⁰⁸ D. Silbey, p. 27.

¹⁰⁹ K. Grieves, *The Politics of Manpower, 1914-1918*, p. 16. See Chapter 4 for a description of the efforts made by the Government from 1915 onwards to modify the civilian workforce via dilution and substitution, including the increased employment of women and the replacement of skilled workers by the unskilled.

¹¹⁰ J.M. Bourne, *Britain and the Great War, 1914-1918*, p. 180.

¹¹¹ In December 1916, upon succeeding to the Premiership, David Lloyd George offered the then Lord Mayor of Birmingham, Neville Chamberlain, this new position with the responsibility for conscription and ensuring adequate labour for the essential industries. Chamberlain's working relationship with Lloyd George was difficult, with the latter providing little support, and on 8 August 1917 Chamberlain resigned.

¹¹² *Express and Star*, 27 March 1917.

¹¹³ *Midland Advertiser and Wednesbury Herald*, 31 March 1917. Volunteers aged between 18 and 61 years would be paid a minimum of 25s. per week and an allowance of 17s. 6d. if required to move from home.

had only reached 163,000 by mid April. Trade union opposition to this national service was encountered owing to the suspicion that military discipline would be introduced into the civilian workplace. Following Chamberlain's departure, the Ministry was reorganized and a replacement Director-General, Sir Auckland Geddes, appointed.¹¹⁴

Manpower continued to be a logistical problem and a further Military Service Act was introduced in January 1918, raising the age of conscription to cover men aged between 41 and 50 years. In March of that year, Germany launched its last major offensive on the Western Front, which posed a grave threat to the Allies. It coincided with the decision to provide the Army with only 100,000 Category 'A' men. This was based on the belief that the enemy lacked the resources to attempt such an assault. Additionally, Lloyd George feared that the campaigns planned for that year would be repetitions of the Somme and Third Ypres, expending men on a colossal scale without achieving decisive results.¹¹⁵ In July 1918, Winston Churchill, as Minister of Munitions, authored a report on munitions and the limits of recruiting. In this, he stated that the continued drafting of skilled men was having a detrimental effect on steel production, 'for the sake of getting comparatively small numbers of men of inferior physique who will not be of much use'. He warned that 'we run the risk of endangering production of munitions on which not only our armies, but the rapid importation of American troops, depend'.¹¹⁶ His comments regarding the standard of fitness and general health were long known to have been pertinent to the working class. During the Boer War, the dire physical state of many of Britain's poorest men was revealed for the first time, hence accounting for the rejection on medical grounds of many between 1914 and 1916.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁴ *Who's Who and Who Was Who*, 2012. Sir Auckland Geddes (1879-1954) had been a professional soldier before eventually becoming Professor of Anatomy at the University of Edinburgh, and then entered politics as the Conservative MP for Basingstoke. During 1920-1924, he also served as the British Ambassador to the United States of America. He was the brother of Sir Eric Geddes of the Ministry of Munitions.

¹¹⁵ D.R. Woodward, 'Did Lloyd George Starve the British Army of Men Prior to the German Offensive of 21 March 1918?', *The Historical Journal*, 27 (1) (1984), p. 245-248.

¹¹⁶ TNA CAB 24/58: War Cabinet Memoranda 12 July 1918: Labour position in Munitions Industries.

¹¹⁷ P.E. Dewey, 'Military Recruiting and the British Labour Force during the First World War', *Historical Journal*, 27 (1) (1984), p. 211.

3.4 Civilians in uniform – Wednesbury's servicemen

The strong tradition of military service across the Black Country and in Staffordshire has been commented upon by a number of historians with Bourne affirming that the County 'was one of the most fruitful recruiting grounds for the pre-war regular army'.¹¹⁸ Whereas many cities, towns and other localities responded to Lord Kitchener's call to arms by raising service battalions for the New Armies (the so-called 'Pals' battalions) these formations did not have such prominence in the Black Country. Instead, men tended to enlist with those units of the Territorial Force that had a strong local connection and long-standing support, since many Black Country towns had their own unit. Wednesbury was no exception, with a Company of the South Staffordshire Regiment's Volunteer Battalion having served during the Boer War. Eventually, this became H Company of the Fifth (Territorial Force) Battalion of the South Staffordshire Regiment.¹¹⁹ Owing to the recruitment of the majority of its soldiers from amongst the town's working-class community, especial attention will now be given to this unit.

Andrew Thornton has pointed out that an important factor in the success of the TF in Staffordshire 'was the support elicited by the County's Territorial Association from local employers'.¹²⁰ The TF was not without its critics, however, the foremost of which during the pre-war years was the National Service League, and this had become openly hostile to the TF by 1913.¹²¹ By this time, TF recruitment had begun to decline nationally, with Beckett arguing that it was also weakened by political expediency that

¹¹⁸ J.M. Bourne, 'Burslem and its Role of Honour, 1914-1918', p. 211.

¹¹⁹ Reforms of the Army had been carried out under the tenure of the Secretary of State for War, Richard Burdon Haldane, motivated by the many lessons that had been learnt during the Boer War, and culminating in the Territorial and Reserve Forces Act 1907. This legislation amalgamated the various auxiliary units (Volunteers and Yeomanry) into the new Territorial Force, which came into existence on 1 April 1908. Although designated for home defence, with overseas responsibilities being carried out by the Regular Army, the TF was intended to be modelled on the latter and closely linked to it so that it became an integral element in the regimental hierarchy. The administration and organisation of the TF was undertaken by the respective County Association, which was led invariably by the Lord Lieutenant of the County.

¹²⁰ A. Thornton, 'The Territorial Force in Staffordshire, 1905-1915' (Unpublished MPhil thesis, University of Birmingham, 2004), p. 29.

¹²¹ I.F.W. Beckett, 'The Territorial Force' in *A Nation in Arms*, ed. by I.F.W. Beckett and K. Simpson (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985), p. 129. Created in 1902, and benefiting from having as its President for former Commander-in-Chief of the Army, Field Marshal Lord Roberts VC, the League questioned the wisdom of reliance on voluntary enlistment and it campaigned for conscription.

undermined 'its status as a means of expanding the army'.¹²² A lack of regard from regular soldiers, bordering on contempt, in relation to matters of discipline and confidence had led to the TF being nicknamed the 'Saturday Night Soldiers' due to the perceived emphasis placed on social activities rather than military efficiency.¹²³

In contrast to this were the companies of the South Staffordshire's Territorials, which, through the endeavours of the County Association, were well recruited from the localities and occupations that gave them a sense of shared identity that aided cohesion and combat effectiveness.¹²⁴ This was confirmed by Nelson, whose research reveals that of the eight per cent of British males who had received military training, 70 per cent were of working-class origin.¹²⁵ In assessing why the TF attracted working-class support given that its officers were unlikely to share the same sympathies as most working people, it was the customs, identity and values of the respectable working class that were paramount and supported the instinct to defend community and town. McCartney reiterated that the TF's 'traditions were derived from the social structures and values of its members and the locality from which it was recruited'.¹²⁶ Accordingly, when war did come, the Territorials of Staffordshire were mobilized without difficulty.

One of the most controversial aspects of Lord Kitchener's tenure as the Secretary of State for War was his flagrant disregard for the Territorials and their County Associations; instead, he preferred to raise his New Armies of service battalions from scratch and to do this directly through the War Office. As Beckett related, 'on the morning that he took over the War Office, Kitchener remarked that he could take no

¹²² I.F.W. Beckett, *Britain's Part-Time Soldiers: The Amateur Military Tradition, 1558-1945* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword Paperbacks, 2011), p. 222. On 1 August 1914, the Territorial Force should have had an establishment of 316,000 men whereas its actual strength was actually just below 270,000.

¹²³ J.M. Bourne, 'The Working Man in Arms' in *Facing Armageddon – The First World War Experienced*, ed. by H. Cecil and P.H. Liddle (London: Leo Cooper, 1996), p. 340.

¹²⁴ The officers in the Territorial Force, as in the units of Volunteers that preceded them, were predominantly drawn from the landowning, business or professional classes. In the industrial areas, the non-commissioned officers were typically recruited from the type of skilled working-class men who held positions of some responsibility, such as factory foremen, and the other ranks came from the shop floor. This also suggests that working-class suspicions were felt less keenly for the TF than they were for the Regular Army.

¹²⁵ R.L. Nelson, p. 43.

¹²⁶ H.B. McCartney, p. 9.

account of anything but regular soldiers'.¹²⁷ This was compounded by the TF soldiers only being able to serve abroad following the making by them of the Imperial Service Obligation. Additionally, as Mansfield observed, Kitchener 'was distrustful of the political influence of civilians through the County Territorial Associations, referring to the Territorials disparagingly as a Town Clerk's Army'.¹²⁸ Nevertheless, Adams and Poirier point out that an opportunity for the orderly expansion of the Army was missed because of Kitchener's 'total divergence' from 'established military structures'.¹²⁹

In August and September 1914, this led to competing recruitment campaigns between the New Armies and the TF, with each pressing their case and the advantages to serving with them. The New Army recruits would be treated as regular soldiers, receiving higher rates of pay, and would serve abroad; the TF would accept younger recruits (17 year olds) and men who did not meet, for example, the height stipulations. Even though enlistment with the TF was curtailed until the first 100,000 men came forward for the New Armies, during the early months of the war 235,195 men joined TF units, with an additional 129,224 doing so by 3 February 1915.¹³⁰ Direct recruiting to the TF, apart from to a few specialist units, ceased after 11 December 1915; and thereafter, all recruits were for general service and allocated to units as required.

That there was essentially nothing original in the 'Pals' concept that emerged in the autumn of 1914 has been commented on by Simkins, who has emphasized that the numerous Territorial (and before them, Volunteer) battalions 'contained whole companies of men drawn from the same community or workplace'.¹³¹ The TF units had always offered friends, siblings or work colleagues the opportunity to serve together in the same local unit. Eager to dispel the impression that joining the TF was a soft option,

¹²⁷ I.F.W. Beckett, *Britain's Part-Time Soldiers: The Amateur Military Tradition, 1558-1945*, p. 226. Lord Kitchener's negative view of the Territorials has been attributed to his experience of having served as a volunteer with Chanzy's Army during the Franco-Prussian War, together with the discipline problems that he encountered from some of the irregular troops that came under his command during the Boer War.

¹²⁸ N. Mansfield, p. 87.

¹²⁹ R.J.Q. Adams and P.P. Poirier, p. 57.

¹³⁰ P. Simkins, p. 100.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 82-83.

there was an overwhelming response by the TF men to signing the Imperial Service Obligation in order to be allowed to serve overseas. On 5 September 1914, the *Staffordshire Advertiser* reported that this commitment had already been made by over 75 per cent of Wednesbury's H Company, and that this was higher than the typical national response rate, which was around 70 per cent.¹³² The minority of men who elected not to sign the Obligation were generally married men with wives and children to support, and 'upon whom could devolve a great deal of hardship were their men to be taken for overseas service'. This factor was distinguished during the war years, being pointed out by Edgar Wallace in *Kitchener's Army*, a publication from the time.¹³³

In August 1914, it was the King's Proclamation that signalled the necessity for the South Staffordshire's TF battalions to mobilize, as envisaged since their formation, for home defence duties. This would then permit the regular troops of the BEF to depart for the continent where they could be readied for immediate front line service. Having been at their annual camp at St. Asaph, North Wales, since 1 August, at 7.00 pm on 4 August the Territorials received the telegram authorizing their mobilization and requiring their immediate return to the Midlands. This order was executed successfully by 8 August. In the weeks that followed, the commanding officer of H Company, Captain John Lees spoke at numerous public meetings locally. On 12 September, he called for fifty men to join the reserve battalion then in the process of being instituted.¹³⁴ On 3 October 1914, the *Wednesbury Herald* published the following notice.

The Mayor of Wednesbury makes an urgent appeal to the young men of the town to join immediately the Reserve Territorial Battalion. It is of the utmost importance that there should be no delay. Lord Kitchener asks for this to be done at once as the War Office will not despatch the first line Territorial Battalion until all vacancies in the Reserve Battalion have been completed.¹³⁵

¹³² *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 5 September 1914; A. Thornton, p. 74. When the first of the Military Service Acts was introduced in January 1916, the option for Territorials to refrain from overseas service was immediately removed and many of the time-expired men found themselves being recalled for service.

¹³³ E. Wallace, *Kitchener's Army and the Territorial Forces* (London: Newnes, 1916), p. 176.

¹³⁴ *Wednesbury Herald*, 12 September 1914.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 3 October 1914.

In the autumn of 1914, preparations were being made to prepare the Fifth Battalion for departure to the front line.¹³⁶ Captain Lees featured in the *Wednesbury Herald* of 24 October 1914, stating that ‘we regard it as an honour to have our place in a Battalion in the first Territorial Division to proceed to active service’.¹³⁷ The *Wednesbury Herald* continued to provide reports from *The Wednesbury Lads* informing readers that they were in training in East Anglia, then proceeding to be conveyed to Rouen via Le Havre. They reached the front line trenches on 10 April 1915, with the first fatality being Private William Dudley, a 19 year-old resident of Dudley Street, Wednesbury, killed in action at Wulverghem on 21 April. Private Wilfred Tromans and Sergeant Jack Hayward were both wounded on 24 April. A description of life in the trenches referred to working for up to 20 hours per day, with sleep rare and snatched at intervals. In spite of this, it concluded that ‘the spirit of the men is indomitable’.¹³⁸

South Staffordshire’s 1/5th Battalion was initially posted to Armentières, and then to Ypres for acclimatization.¹³⁹ Its first major engagement took place on the afternoon of 13 October 1915, during the Battle of Loos.¹⁴⁰ With the other battalions of 137th Brigade, the 1/5th was ordered to attack a German strongpoint and observation post that the British had named the Hohenzollern Redoubt, which was linked to a

¹³⁶ The establishment of a Reserve Battalion in September 1914 had created the need to distinguish between the first line and this new second line formation. Accordingly, this was achieved by the means of a prefix, so that the first line became the 1/5th Battalion, the second line the 2/5th Battalion and so forth. The 1/5th Battalion, together with the 1/6th Battalion of the South Staffordshire Regiment, and the 1/5th and 1/6th Battalions of the North Staffordshire Regiment, would serve within the 137th (Staffordshire) Brigade, which was an element of the 46th (North Midland) Division, which also included the 138th (Lincoln and Leicester) and the 139th (Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire) Brigades. A further reorganization occurred in January 1915, reducing the number of companies serving within a battalion from eight to four, so that the Wednesbury men of the former H Company found themselves transferred to an expanded D Company.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 24 October 1914.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 12 and 19 December 1914; 20 March 1915; 10 and 17 April 1915.

¹³⁹ J.P Jones, *History of the South Staffordshire Regiment 1705-1923* (Wolverhampton: Whitehead Brothers, 1923), p. 415.

¹⁴⁰ A. Thornton, ‘We had done all that was expected of us: Staffordshire’s Territorials and the Assault on the Hohenzollern Redoubt, 13 October 1915’ <<http://www.hellfire-corner.demon.co.uk/terriers.htm>> [Accessed 1 September 2009]. Commencing on 25 September and concluding on 19 October 1915, Loos was the largest British battle of 1915. It was an attempt to break through the German defences in the area of Artois and Champagne, and to restrict the movement of the enemy’s reserves, but the British artillery lacked sufficient ordnance and was ineffective against the German positions so that the advancing infantry was extremely vulnerable to enemy machine gun fire. It was notable as the first occasion when Chlorine gas was used by British forces. A final attack on 13 October by 46th Division (including 137th Brigade) to capture the fortified Hohenzollern Redoubt and area behind it was repulsed with further heavy losses.

coalmine with a high slagheap known as the Dump. Martin Middlebrook stated this was to be attempted 'without having had an opportunity for reconnaissance or preparation and with no support from any other units/brigades'.¹⁴¹ The attack would occur along the eastern end of the so-called *Big Willie trench* and it was intended to advance towards the objective, which was a position known as *Fosse 8*.¹⁴² The British artillery bombardment commenced at midday, having a negligible effect on the enemy, so that when the 1/5th and other South Staffordshire Battalions left their trenches at 2.00 pm, 'they came under a deadly crossfire from three sides' making them 'perfect targets for the efficient and deadly machine guns' of the German 6th Army.¹⁴³ Progress was impossible, with the attack along *Big Willie* only being able to be carried out by small parties of men with bombs and grenades. This continued into the night and until the South Staffordshire's men were relieved next morning by the 2nd Guards Brigade.

Correspondence from Private B. Walford to the Reverend G. Percival Jones of St. John's Church, Wednesbury, was published in the *Midland Advertiser* on 30 October 1915. This described the scenes of the battlefield saying, 'it was like Hell with the lid off'.¹⁴⁴ The attack on the Hohenzollern Redoubt, as argued by Bourne, 'was almost certainly pointless. It never stood any realistic chance of success and failed totally with tragic results'.¹⁴⁵ The losses of 137th Brigade were 32 officers and 533 other ranks killed or wounded, and a further 157 other ranks missing presumed killed in action. For the 1/5th Battalion, there were 13 officers and 306 men killed on 13 October 1915. Although reported in the press, with the *Wednesbury Herald* of 30 October confirming the deaths of Captain William Millner, Company Sergeant Major Jack Hayward, Lance

¹⁴¹ M. Middlebrook, *Your Country Needs You: Expansion of the British Infantry Divisions, 1914-1918* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword Paperbacks, 1999), pp. 106-107.

¹⁴² The *Fosses* were pitheads that had been constructed around Loos during development of the area's mining industry. The Hohenzollern Redoubt was 300 yards long, with extensions to two trenches, *Big Willie* to the south and *Little Willie* to the North. Both were well fortified and equipped with machine gun positions.

¹⁴³ J.P. Jones, p. 415; W.L. Vale, *History of the South Staffordshire Regiment* (Aldershot: Gale & Polden, 1969), p. 310. Chlorine gas was also released so that the infantry were required to wear the primitive hooded gas masks known as *Hypo helmets*. This action warned the Germans of an imminent attack.

¹⁴⁴ *Midland Advertiser*, 30 October 1915.

¹⁴⁵ J.M. Bourne, 'Burslem and its Role of Honour, 1914-1918', p. 212.

Corporal John Williams, and Privates Simeon Hall and Archie Taylor, the coverage did not make the extent of the carnage obvious. Presumably, this was to avoid creating the tremendous blow to civilian morale to be expected from such news.¹⁴⁶ However, by actively recruiting to the Territorials men who lived and worked together in the same community, this localized and intensified the scale of the loss. Therefore, the sense of devastation felt in July 1916 by the many other communities that had raised the Pals battalions, in the days following the first day of the Battle of the Somme, had already been experienced by Wednesbury and other Black Country towns in October 1915.¹⁴⁷

On 1 July 1916, 1/5th Battalion participated in the Battle of the Somme when 46th Division and 56th (London) Division were involved in a diversionary action at Gommecourt, eleven miles north of the main attack. The losses for the Staffordshire Brigade that day were 68 officers and 1,478 men, with most of the casualties occurring in the first minutes of the initial attack at 7.30 am. A further assault at 3.30 pm also failed. The intention had been to take Gommecourt Road and village, approximately four miles north of Beaumont Hamel. Although this tied up men and guns that the Germans could have used further south, the four-wave assault by 137th Brigade failed to achieve its objectives.¹⁴⁸ As a consequence of this, and especially the view that there had been a lack of offensive spirit, the General Officer Commanding 46th Division, Major-General the Hon. E.J. Montagu-Stuart-Wortley, was dismissed, 'and the Division seems to have been given the reputation as only being suitable as a line holder'.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁶ *Wednesbury Herald*, 30 October 1915. Captain William Millner was actually a resident of Tettenhall, Wolverhampton, but Simeon Hall lived in Piercy Street and Archie Taylor in Foley Street. These were two of the six streets to have been selected for the assessment of employment and housing in Wednesbury, as based on the 1911 census returns. These have been summarized in the tables in Appendix 2 of this thesis.

¹⁴⁷ Wednesbury lost 32 men during the assaults made on the German positions at the Battle of Loos, with 14 of them being killed in the ferocious action at the Hohenzollern Redoubt on the afternoon of 13 October 1915. They were Company Sergeant Majors Jack Hayward and Aaron Moseley, Sergeants Charles Bloomer and Edward Fenton, Corporal Fred Smith, and Privates John Clifford, William Constable, John Cooper, Thomas Griffiths, John Harrison, Ernest Henderson, Leonard Hunt, Thomas Jones and William Jones. In terms of the scale of this loss, by way of comparison, on the 1 July 1916, eight Wednesbury soldiers were killed in action during the first day of the Battle of the Somme. I am indebted to both Andrew Thornton and Geoff Webb for allowing me access to the research they have undertaken to compile this information.

¹⁴⁸ J.M. Bourne, 'Burslem and its Role of Honour, 1914-1918', p. 212; J.P. Jones, p. 416.

¹⁴⁹ M. Middlebrook, p. 107.

Although it had been engaged in operations along the River Ancre, participating in an attack on Liévin in July 1917 and the action at Hill 70 in August 1918, general opinion on 46th Division did not change until 29 September 1918. This was the day when the Division executed a successful attack on the strongly held Hindenburg Line defences at Bellenglise by crossing the St. Quentin canal. J.P. Jones provided a succinct account of this feat of arms, describing Bellenglise as ‘the key to the German position’ and that ‘once the canal was forced the defences on either side would be turned’.¹⁵⁰ Commencing at 5.30 am with a heavy artillery and machine gun barrage, the advance of the battalions - 1/5th South Staffordshire in the centre, with the 1/6th North Staffordshire to the left, and 1/6th South Staffordshire to the right – was aided by a dense fog. This allowed the Territorials to approach the German trenches before their defenders could repel them.¹⁵¹ Some parts of the canal were impassable, being 50-60 feet wide and up to 10 feet in depth but the men used those footbridges that had survived undamaged, or they made their way across in inflatable rafts. Some men even swam across, using lifebelts that had been taken from cross-Channel ferries. Advancing on the German positions the Staffordshire men captured over 4,200 prisoners and 70 artillery pieces.¹⁵²

The President of Staffordshire County Territorial Association, Lord Dartmouth, was in prompt communication with the commanding officers of 137th Brigade, Brigadier General J.V. Campbell VC, and 46th Division, Major General G.F. Boyd. The latter had declared to the Lord Lieutenant, ‘how can we fail to win through with men like mine to command’.¹⁵³ In a similar spirit was Lord Dartmouth’s further response.

How fully my confidence has been justified and has been shown over and over again, and I should be glad if you would tell our Staffordshire lads that we are thinking of them today in the Old Country and in the Old County.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵⁰ J.P. Jones, p. 417.

¹⁵¹ W.L. Vale, p. 380.

¹⁵² Ibid. See also Appendix 6, Photograph 40, p. 300, in which men wearing the lifebelts are visible.

¹⁵³ Staffordshire Record Office (hereafter SRO) D859/1/4/4: Correspondence between Earl Dartmouth and Major General G.F. Boyd regarding the contribution of Staffordshire Territorials of 46th Division, 1918.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

The 2/5th Battalion of the South Staffordshire Regiment was formed as a second line or reserve battalion in September 1914 in accordance with successive Army Orders of 21 and 31 August and 21 September.¹⁵⁵ Intended to take over home defence duties from the first line and to provide drafts of reinforcements when required, the unit was receiving training at St. Albans when called upon to help suppress the Easter Rising that had broken out in Dublin on 23 April 1916. Rather than troops from Irish formations, English units had been specifically requested to crush this armed insurrection by Irish republicans and there was severe fighting, with heavy casualties being taken by the South Staffordshire's 2/5th and 2/6th Battalions as key buildings were cleared of snipers.¹⁵⁶ Subsequently, 59th Division completed its training in Ireland, at the Curragh, before returning to England and being sent to France in February 1917. It participated in pressing the German retreat of 1917, and at third Ypres and Cambrai. For their gallantry at the Marne in January 1918, the men of 2/5th Battalion received a DSO, three MCs, one DCM and three MMs, although this did not prevent the unit being disbanded later that month. This was due to a Cabinet Committee decision to reduce the number of battalions per division from twelve to nine, and the 2/5th Battalion men were sent to other South Staffordshire units. As McCartney noted of the units disbanded, they were 'often privately raised units such as Pals battalions or second line Territorial units'.¹⁵⁷

On the home front, the Volunteer Training Corp (VTC) was established as a defence force of volunteers who either were above military age or engaged on war work.¹⁵⁸ The creation of Wednesbury's VTC unit was prompted by a call from John Norton Griffiths MP for 'the formation of a Home Defence Corps of those not enrolled

¹⁵⁵ I.F.W. Beckett, 'The Territorial Force' in *A Nation in Arms*, p. 132. In February 1915, the 2/5th Battalion of the South Staffordshire Regiment became part of the 176th (2/1st Staffordshire) Brigade, which in turn was a component of the 59th (2nd North Midland) Division. The third line or 3/5th Battalion was established in November 1914, and in preparation for the 1/5th Battalion being despatched for overseas service.

¹⁵⁶ J.P. Jones, p. 418.

¹⁵⁷ H.B. McCartney, p.72.

¹⁵⁸ J.M. Osborne, *The Voluntary Recruiting Movement in Britain 1914-16* (New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 1982), pp. 39-40.

in the regular forces or the reserve'.¹⁵⁹ This became a unit of the Staffordshire Volunteer Regiment in 1915, led by A.J. Glover, and T.R. Knowles as platoon commander.¹⁶⁰ Although Charles Messenger made a comparison, viewing the VTC as 'the equivalent of the Home Guard of the Second World War', Osborne added that there was a mistrust of the VTCs and the 'feeling in high places...that they were playing at soldiers'.¹⁶¹ VTCs typically concentrated on supporting recruitment activities or providing rudimentary military training, yet as the value of such spontaneous outbursts of patriotism had been overtaken by the Military Service Act and conscription, this made the VTCs appear somewhat irrelevant, and they were finally disbanded in 1916.¹⁶²

3.5 Conclusion

In view of the level of industrial unrest in Britain prior to the outbreak of war, it might have been expected that Britain's working class would be reluctant to come to the aid of the nation at this time. Furthermore, the working class had a long-standing antipathy towards the military, borne principally from the low status to which a career in the army was viewed by society as a whole. Yet, when the call to arms came, men of all political persuasions and from all social classes volunteered their services, not least being the working class, which was and remains patriotic in outlook.¹⁶³ Research by Gregory and Pennell has underlined the importance of the events in August and September 1914, especially in the aftermath of the Battle of Mons, signifying that the rush to the colours

¹⁵⁹ *Wednesbury Herald*, 8 August 1914.

¹⁶⁰ At first, and in lieu of a uniform, VTC members were provided with a red armband with the symbol of a crown and the words GR reproduced in black on it. This led to the epithets *Genuine Relics* or *Grandpa's Regiment* coming into circulation. To distinguish them from the Army, rather than khaki, they were then issued with a green-grey uniform, which was replaced in 1916 by a more appropriate khaki uniform. See Appendix 6, photographs 36 and 37, p.298 for examples. The Wednesbury VTC unit adopted a variation on the Staffordshire knot emblem, and incorporating a fighting cock to represent the town's heritage.

¹⁶¹ C. Messenger, p. 162; J.M. Osborne, 'Defining their own Patriotism: British Volunteer Training Corps in the First World War', p.65.

¹⁶² J.R. Williams, 'The Wednesbury Volunteer Training Corps', *Bulletin of the Military History Society*, (29) (1978), pp. 21-23.

¹⁶³ See Appendix 6, Photograph 38, p. 299, of the three Wednesbury soldiers, who were pre-war trade unionists, and were killed in action during 1915. These men had served with local companies of the Territorial Force and from the date of their deaths, it is certain that they would have been pre-war members of their TF units. Their photographs form a part of the Roll of Honour in the Workers' Union Annual Report 1915, signifying that this trade union was proud that its members had made this commitment.

was a more complex phenomenon than previously supposed. As Silbey suggested, ‘the singular event which shocked the British public out of complacency was the retreat of the BEF in late August 1914 and the consequent realization that the war was unlikely to be over before Christmas’.¹⁶⁴ Therefore, the men who volunteered between August 1914 and December 1915 did so not because they wished particularly to become soldiers but because it had become evident that the nation was in danger. Pennell asserted that ‘a variety of complex and nuanced social, political and economic factors encouraged men to enlist’.¹⁶⁵ As much as any ideological, moral, nationalistic or patriotic feelings, or the sense of adventure and pressure from employers, friends and family, or women brandishing white feathers, it was the pragmatic belief that community, family and home were worth fighting for that drove men to enlist.

Between August 1914 and November 1918, 4,970,902 men enlisted, with almost half of them (2,466,719) doing so of their own free will.¹⁶⁶ This unselfish response produced the largest volunteer army in British history. However, in a total war in which effective use was required of all resources, the efficient co-ordination of manpower proved elusive. Lord Derby’s Scheme having failed to convince men of the case for attestation to produce the numbers of recruits required for the front line, conscription was introduced in 1916. This was followed by a scheme of National Service for industrial workers, although working-class reaction to this was unenthusiastic. The expectation that a vast pool of shirkers evading the call to duty would be revealed also proved misplaced. Many of the men that it was expected would be drawn into the armed forces by these measures were already engaged on essential war work and, until they could be replaced by other (female or unskilled) labour, they could not be spared by industry. Britain was unique in making some allowance for conscientious objection

¹⁶⁴ D. Silbey, p. 121.

¹⁶⁵ C. Pennell, p. 156.

¹⁶⁶ K. Grieves, *The Politics of Manpower, 1914-1918*, p. 217.

by introducing tribunals to consider the cases of men who felt unable or unwilling to undertake combatant service, although evidence of tribunals being held in Wednesbury has verified only one occurrence. There were also the men who had tried to enlist but who had been rejected because of their inability to satisfy the medical requirements for service due to the dire effects of poverty and industrial labour. As the months passed, these standards were reduced and more men found their way into the armed forces.

A substantial contribution to the war effort was made by the Territorial Force, which prior to the ending of voluntary enlistment in December 1915, raised 318 battalions compared to the 404 service battalions formed for Kitchener's New Army.¹⁶⁷ The total number of men enlisting in the TF was 725,842, some 577,016 of whom became war casualties. The notion of men serving in the same unit as their friends, family members or work colleagues that was typically used as an inducement for recruitment into the so-called 'Pals' battalions had long been established in TF companies. These were rooted in their local communities, with service being seen as an extension of civic responsibility and a commitment to maintain the defence of the area, as was the case with Wednesbury's H Company (subsequently renamed D Company upon reorganization in 1915) of the Fifth Battalion of the South Staffordshire Regiment.

Although this enhanced the identity and esprit de corps of individual units, there were other implications that arose from this localism, however. The well-documented experiences of those communities that responded to Lord Kitchener's call by raising the Pals battalions, and which were devastated by the tremendous losses of men incurred on the first day of the Battle of the Somme, were experienced months earlier across the towns of the Black Country and in Staffordshire in the aftermath of the Battle of Loos. The greatest number of fatalities and casualties occurred on 13 October 1915 when the

¹⁶⁷ I.F.W. Beckett, 'The Territorial Force in the Great War' in *Home Fires and Foreign Fields: British Social and Military Experience in the First World War*, ed. by P.H. Liddle (London: Brassey's Defence, 1985), p. 22.

Territorials of the North and South Staffordshire Regiments attempted what was to be a forlorn assault on the defences of the Hohenzollern Redoubt. Almost three years later, it was a Territorial formation, namely, the 46th (North Midland) Division, and which included men from these same Staffordshire Regiments that carried out one of the war's most decisive and successful actions. On 29 September 1918, with audacity, courage and skill, these men crossed the St. Quentin Canal and broke through the fortified positions of the Hindenburg Line. This added to the conviction of Germany's military leaders that victory was unachievable and hastened progress towards the armistice.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁸ SCHAS 940.544941: Wednesbury Book of Remembrance and Wednesbury War Memorial Campaign Group pamphlets. In 2013, and following a campaign that attracted unanimous support from the across the community and the local authority, the names of those men of the town of Wednesbury who had laid down their lives in the First and Second World Wars were inscribed onto four new plinths laid in the town's Memorial Garden. For the first time, and by compiling a definitive list drawn from all available sources, the research undertaken by the Campaign Group revealed the true extent of the town's contribution. Between 1939 and 1945, some 203 men had made the ultimate sacrifice but it was during the conflict from 1914 to 1918 that the greater loss was incurred, with 861 men giving their lives for King and Country.

CHAPTER 4: THE MOBILIZATION OF THE ECONOMY – INDUSTRY AND MUNITIONS PRODUCTION

4.1 Introduction

As Claire Culleton has observed, there has been a tendency for historians of the First World War to differentiate between those who fought and those who waited; a more appropriate division perhaps being between ‘those who fought and those who worked’.¹ This Chapter will examine this latter group’s experience in relation to the mobilization of the economy and munitions production, which was defined in the Munitions Acts of 1915, 1916 and 1918 by reference to the manufacture and repair of arms, ammunition, ships, vessels, vehicles and aircraft intended for the successful prosecution of the war. Furthermore, there was the construction of essential buildings and docks, the supply of heat, light, water and power, together with the provision of transport facilities.²

Marwick conveniently segregated the domestic history of the war into three parts.³ Firstly, there was the initial period in which notions of *business as usual* were dominant, and the first section of this Chapter will consider the requirements for waging the war, including the transition and move towards *total war*, and its translation at local level. Marwick’s second period, from 1915 to 1916, was one in which there is the beginning of state intervention, the status of the labour movement improved and new freedoms for women emerged for the first time, and the second section will assess the manner in which these developments influenced industrial output for the war effort. The third period, representing the years 1917 and 1918, was denoted by even greater regulation at a time of shortages and industrial disharmony. These factors will be considered, therefore, in terms of their impact on industry in Wednesbury, the support that the war effort received on the home front and the significance for social change.

¹ C.A. Culleton, *Working Class Culture, Women and Britain, 1914-18* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), p. 1.

² M. Kozak, ‘Women Munition Workers in the First World War’ (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Hull, 1976), p.33.

³ A. Marwick, *The Deluge: British Society and the First World War*, p.11.

4.2 Meeting the requirements for waging the war

As Gerard de Groot has related, ‘In total war, strategy is affected by home front capabilities. The size of a country’s military force is strictly limited: too many soldiers means not enough workers to equip them’.⁴ Upon the outbreak of hostilities, the British Government rejected the notion of despatching a large contingent to the continent; instead, reliance would be placed on the Regular Army (augmented by reservists and Territorials), the imposition of a Royal Navy blockade on Germany (albeit without inconveniencing any neutral countries), and the supply of money and munitions to Britain’s allies.⁵ At this time, and with the exception of the Royal Arsenal at Woolwich and the small number of other armaments manufacturing establishments on the War Office and Admiralty lists, there were few factories dedicated to munitions production. This would have important implications as attempts were made to meet the increasingly imperative demands to furnish the military with the requisite supplies, whilst also preserving civilian goods and services, and combating domestic inflationary pressures.⁶

On 4 August 1914, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, David Lloyd George, expounded the Liberal Government’s conviction that laissez faire economic principles would continue to enable the traders of this country to carry on with *business as usual*. This standpoint drew on pre-war assumptions regarding the international financial connections between the industrialized societies, which have been described by Patrick O’Brien as leading to the conclusion that ‘from the vantage point of 1900-14 there seemed to be no need to be anything but optimistic’.⁷ This attitude made it difficult for the policy-makers to comprehend and visualize the extent of the mobilization of resources and application of industrial techniques that would be required, and which

⁴ G.J. De Groot, p. 80.

⁵ A.J. Arnold, ‘The State, War and Industry: The Effects of the First World War on the Profitability of British Industry’ (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of London, 1994), p. 51; P.E. Dewey, *War and Progress: Britain, 1914-1945* (London: Longman, 1997), p. 22.

⁶ R.M. Shill, ‘Munitions Workers in the Black Country’, *The Blackcountryman*, 21 (3) (1988), p. 50; P.E. Dewey, *War and Progress: Britain, 1914-1945*, p. 23; G.J. De Groot, p. 54.

⁷ P. O’Brien, ‘The Economic Effects of the Great War’, *History Today*, 44 (12) (1994), p. 25.

would prolong the conflict for four years. The consumption of men, munitions and other scarce resources was to be so vast that market enterprise and voluntarism could not possibly satisfy demand without ultimately jeopardizing military strategy.⁸

One of the Liberal Government's first wartime actions occurred on 8 August 1914 with the passing of the Defence of the Realm Act (DORA). This extremely brief legislation 'to ensure the public safety and defence of the realm' furnished the state with unprecedented powers, including those to requisition buildings and land, deport problematic individuals from key areas, and to try civilians accused of sedition or treason before courts martial. This was swiftly followed by the DORA (No. 2) Act, which came into effect on 28 August 1914, empowering the movement of private firms (or any part thereof) to munitions production, with this work being given priority. Interestingly, no reference was made to the regulation of profit making, however.⁹

The official *History of the Ministry of Munitions* records that from the close of 1914, there were increasing demands from the army for 'a more liberal supply of ammunition' and by March 1915, it was evident that 'so far as the immediate future was concerned, an adequate supply of ammunition could not be assumed'.¹⁰ Early expectations were of a war of movement, requiring mobile artillery and smaller calibre ordnance but, as the belligerents adapted to trench warfare, as Hew Strachan remarked, 'in the winter of 1914-15 this seemed to be a matter of guns and high-explosive shell'.¹¹ The existing stockpiles of high calibre high explosive shell were quickly expended, with replenishment dependent on the few dedicated manufacturers struggling to increase supply given their insufficient capacity, production bottlenecks and labour shortages.

⁸ B.A. Waites, *A Class Society at War: England, 1914-1918*, p. 5; H. Pelling, *A History of British Trade Unionism*, p. 140.

⁹ A.J. Arnold, pp. 56-57; J.M. Bourne, *Britain and the Great War, 1914-1918*, p. 192; A.J. Reid, 'Dilution, Trade Unionism and the State in Britain During the First World War' in *Shop Floor Bargaining and the State: Historical and Comparative Perspectives*, ed. by S. Tolliday and J. Zeitlin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 60. DORA empowered the competent military or naval authorities to search premises, seize documents and/or commodities if deemed necessary for their purposes, and to compel anyone living in a specified area to leave their homes and to report to another address for the duration.

¹⁰ Ministry of Munitions, *The Official History of the Ministry of Munitions, Volume One*, p. 130.

¹¹ H. Strachan, *The First World War: A New History* (London: Free Press, 2006), p. 163.

The British system was ostensibly geared towards waging small colonial wars and this was causing men to die at the front.¹² Despite this, the Ministry reported the difficulty of expanding production elsewhere because the ‘ordinary engineering firms could not take up such work at a moments’ notice when there was little or no organization or headquarters for instructing or supervising them’.¹³ Sir George Askwith’s memoirs recall the other dimension of manpower limitations, in that ‘neither contactors nor subcontractors could fulfil contracts or subcontracts without more skilled labour’.¹⁴

By 1915, the economic climate was such that rising commodity prices and shortages were being experienced on the home front for the first time. There had been warnings of this possibility during the earliest days of the war. For instance, the *Wednesbury Herald* had highlighted the damage to trade leading to rising prices that would follow from a continental war.¹⁵ Combined with evidence that successive military setbacks were attributable to deficiencies in the supply of the appropriate ordnance, this made the case for the reorganization of the munitions industries increasingly compelling.¹⁶ The military situation came to a head on 14 May 1915, when *The Times* published an article by its military correspondent, Charles a’Court Repington, quoting Sir John French’s comments that at the Battle of Festubert, ‘the need for an unlimited supply of high explosive was a fatal bar to our success’.¹⁷ This prompted the House of Commons debate on 21 May 1915 when concerns were aired about both the shortage and the poor quality of munitions that helped to further undermine Asquith’s Liberal administration, leading to ‘the formation of a Coalition

¹² J.M. Bourne, *Britain and the Great War, 1914-1918*, p. 187; K. Burk, ed., *War and the State: The Transformation of British Government, 1914-1919* (London: Allan & Unwin, 1982), p. 8.

¹³ Ministry of Munitions, *The Official History of the Ministry of Munitions, Volume One*, p. 134.

¹⁴ G. Askwith, p. 364.

¹⁵ *Wednesbury Herald*, 13 August 1914.

¹⁶ P.E. Dewey, *War and Progress: Britain, 1914-1945*, p. 23; *The Great War*, Episode 7, *We await the heavenly manna*. In the first half of 1915, the British Expeditionary Force had been provided with a mere ten heavy guns per division, which compared with twenty that were supplied to a German division.

¹⁷ *The Times*, 14 May 1915; G.J. De Groot, p. 77. Repington’s report carried credence because he was a former soldier (who served with the Rifle Brigade during 1878-1902 and attained the rank of Lieutenant Colonel). However, following his report, he was banned from visiting the Western Front until March 1916.

Government committed to a more efficient and purposeful prosecution of the war'.¹⁸ As David French has identified, 'the real significance of the *Shells Scandal* was that it gave Lloyd George the opportunity to implement his vision of a total war economy'.¹⁹ The local perspective was given by the *Wednesbury Herald*, via a letter from Mr J. Foster of Wednesbury, whose son was on active service, which concluded with the observation that in 'curtailing the supply of munitions of war they are keeping indefinitely thousands of men out who are anxious to get back to their homes and families'.²⁰

This was the background for the establishment on 9 June 1915 of the Ministry of Munitions, with its unprecedented powers to institute the changes to employment relations and industrial practices. Not only could skilled labour be compulsorily transferred to armaments production by the Ministry, private manufacturers were to be compelled to undertake work for the war effort. By continuing to appropriate responsibility for such essential areas of the economy, this new branch of the state became an important employer in its own right. By the conclusion of the war, this included a staff of 65,000 working in over 250 factories and it had spent in excess of £2,000m. It also supervised 20,000 controlled establishments.²¹ As Waites has pointed out, with the Ministry's encouragement, 'many firms used the opportunity afforded by wartime profits to develop their works'.²² One consequence of this was the introduction of new machinery and techniques thereby facilitating the replacement of craft production with standardization. Such was the rate of increase that, for example, annual machine gun production rose from a meagre 274 in 1914, to 120,864 by 1918.²³

¹⁸ *The Times*, 21 May 1915; J. Stevenson, p. 68; P.E. Dewey, *War and Progress: Britain, 1914-1945*, p. 27.

¹⁹ D. French, 'The Rise and Fall of Business as Usual' in *War and the State: The Transformation of British Government, 1914-1919* ed. by K. Burk (London: Allan & Unwin, 1982), p. 24.

²⁰ *Wednesbury Herald*, 24 April 1915.

²¹ P.E. Dewey, *War and Progress: Britain, 1914-1945*, p. 27; H. Perkin, p. 180. Controlled establishments were factories regarded as essential to the manufacture of munitions, in which wages and working conditions were directly controlled by the Ministry of Munitions with dilution accepted by the trade unions.

²² B. Waites, *A Class Society at War: England, 1914-1918*, p. 8.

²³ P.E. Dewey, 'The New Warfare and Economic Mobilization' in *Britain and the First World War*, ed. by J. Turner (London: Unwin, 1988), p. 77; R. Hyman, p. 84; J. Ward, 'Emergence of the Labour Party in the Black Country, 1910-1922', p. 43.

Under Lloyd George's direction as Secretary of State, and drawing on the fund of goodwill that he had amassed with business interests before 1914, many prominent industrialists agreed to assume senior positions within the administration and in the relevant Ministries or Departments. As related by Davenport-Hines, it was following the 1915 munitions crisis that 'hundreds if not thousands of business men were seconded to government departments in the belief that the traditional officials, though honourable, laborious and loyal, lacked initiative or wide outlook'.²⁴ The best example is provided by Eric Geddes, the Deputy General Manager of the North Eastern Railway Company, described by Grievess as 'the embodiment of the men of push-and-go' so valuable in such roles. Appointed as the Deputy Director of Munitions Supply in 1915, Geddes made rapid progression to become 'the pre-eminent trouble-shooter of the British war effort'.²⁵ It was men with these qualities, and who were able to thrive in emergency conditions that acquired control of the management of the ten munitions districts for England to be created by the Ministry between June and August 1915.

The Midlands District was comprised of the ten counties of Derbyshire, Leicestershire, Lincolnshire, Northamptonshire, Nottinghamshire, Oxfordshire, Rutland, South Staffordshire, Warwickshire and Worcestershire. It was described in *The Official History of the Ministry of Munitions* as 'was one of the first engineering centres to be organized by the Government for the spread of munitions work, for although important armament works had very large interests...there was ample engineering capacity which these works did not touch'.²⁶ Co-ordination was conducted through the Midlands District Office, which was located centrally within the City of Birmingham and where it was controlled by the local financier and industrialist, Frank Dudley Docker.²⁷

²⁴ R.T.P Davenport-Hines, pp. 5-6.

²⁵ K. Grievess, 'Improvising the British War Effort: Eric Geddes and Lloyd George, 1915-1918', *War and Society*, 7 (2) (1989), p. 40.

²⁶ Ministry of Munitions, *The Official History of the Ministry of Munitions, Volume Two*, pp. 95-96.

²⁷ K. Burgess, p. 161; G. Robb, p. 77; G.R Rubin, *War, Law and Labour: The Munitions Acts, State Regulation and the Unions, 1915-1921* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), p.12.

4.3 Industrial output for the war effort

The concentration of metal-based manufacturing in Wednesbury and elsewhere in the Black Country ensured that when the War Office and Admiralty did begin to place orders with new suppliers, those local firms that had sufficient productive capacity, or were able to expand their operations, could fulfil much of the work. Industrial association records and trade directories for the years 1914 and 1916 detail the extensive network of enterprises in Wednesbury alone that would make their contribution to supplying munitions to the armed forces. The town possessed at least ten manufacturers of steel and brass tube, four iron and brass founders, five producers of nuts and bolts, and two axle makers and carriage wrights.²⁸ At the end of the war, Wednesbury Borough Council produced a guide listing local firms holding military contracts and elaborating on the particular types of production undertaken.²⁹

Wednesbury's largest manufacturer, the Metropolitan Railway Carriage, Wagon & Finance Company already performed an extensive array of manufacturing activity at its three works. The expertise gained in providing items of rolling stock for the railway industry domestically and internationally meant that the firm was ideally placed to supply the army with suitable vehicles onto which large calibre naval guns could be mounted in order to act as mobile siege artillery.³⁰ Arising from the confirmation of government control in August 1915, the Company's Monway works began delivering the various forgings that were then shipped to other establishments across the country where they were transformed into finished artillery shells ready for the front line.³¹ One of the most significant manufacturing contributions to be made from 1916 onwards, however, remains the assembly of the first tanks at the Company's Old Park works.

²⁸ SCHAS BS/L/1-4: Records of the South Staffordshire Iron and Steel Association; *Bennett's Business Directory for Staffordshire, 1914* (Birmingham: Bennett & Co., 1914); *Kelly's Directory for Staffordshire, 1916* (London: Kelly & Co., 1916).

²⁹ *Wednesbury as a Manufacturing and Commercial Centre and a Base for the Establishment of New Industries* (London: J. Burrow & Co. Ltd, 1918).

³⁰ SCHAS BS-PS/10/3/359-367: Patent Shaft – Works Photographs of gun trolleys, etc. See Appendix 6, Photographs 47-48, p. 304 of railway vehicles onto which 12-inch naval guns were then mounted.

³¹ R.M. Shill, p. 50.

By 1915, the combination of proficient rapid-firing artillery, barbed wire and the machine gun, giving a distinct advantage to the defenders of entrenched positions, had resulted in the deadlock on the Western Front. The most viable solution to this problem was produced by the British, and Major W.G. Wilson is attributed with conceiving the idea for the tank, derived from his work on designs for a trench-crossing machine.³² Between September 1915 and January 1916, the early prototypes were designed and assembled at the Lincoln works of William Foster & Co. Ltd. They were the outcome of collaboration between Wilson and William Tritton, a Director of Fosters.³³

At trials held on 29 January 1916, a practical demonstration was given and the military observers were so impressed by the machine's capacity for dealing with the obstacles placed before it that ten days later the Army Council made a recommendation to the War Office that one hundred of these tanks (as they were to become known) should be ordered. As *The Official History of the Ministry of Munitions* stated, the contract for the manufacture of these vehicles was to be awarded to two firms. Twenty-five machines were to be built by William Foster & Co. Ltd. and, owing to the greater capacity of its organization, seventy-five would be constructed by the Metropolitan Railway Carriage, Wagon & Finance Company, at its Old Park works in Wednesbury.³⁴ An additional order to the Metropolitan for a further fifty tanks was authorized by the War Office in April 1916, with all of these 150 vehicles being allocated to the six new tank companies then being raised as a component of the Heavy Section of the Machine Gun Corps and to be commanded by Lieutenant Colonel E.D. Swinton.³⁵

³² *Timewatch: Tanks - Wonder Weapon of World War One?* (BBC Television, 1995); *Timewatch: 1914 - The War Revolution* (BBC Television, 2003).

³³ K. Beddoes and C & S Wheeler, p. 23; D. Fletcher, *British Mark I Tank, 1916* (Oxford: Osprey, 2004), p. 10; *Who's Who and Who Was Who*, 2012. Sir William Ashlee Tritton (1875-1946) had joined Fosters in 1906 and had acquired expertise in agricultural machinery. Prior to his involvement in the development of the prototypes of the tank, he had designed various caterpillar-tracked vehicles for moving naval guns.

³⁴ Ministry of Munitions, *The Official History of the Ministry of Munitions, Volume Twelve*, p. 75.

³⁵ D. Fletcher, p. 12. *Who's Who and Who Was Who*, 2012. Sir Ernest Dunlop Swinton (1868-1951) was, in addition to his involvement with the development of the Tank Corps, the author of some of the first tactical instructions for the use of armoured vehicles in warfare. He retired from the Army in 1919 with the rank of Major General, and then served with the Civilian Aviation Department of the Air Ministry.

Assembly of the Mark I tanks, as these vehicles were subsequently classified once improved models had been developed, required the provision of materials from across the country. The armoured plate was made in Sheffield, the caterpillar track links, locally, at Wednesbury's F.H. Lloyd & Co. Ltd., and the engine and other mechanical components in Coventry. The armoured plates were bolted or riveted to a cast iron superstructure and the 105 hp Daimler engine and other internal fittings then lowered in from above and secured. The two tracks ran along the sides of the machine's rhomboid frame, operating on sets of rollers and toothed idler wheels. There were two variants of the tank, each to fulfil a particular battlefield role; the *Male* being armed with four machine guns and two Hotchkiss six pounder (57mm) artillery guns, and the *Female* carrying five machine guns. In order to minimize the height profile, these armaments were housed in sponsons mounted on either side of the tank's central hull.³⁶

Combining firepower and movement, these new weapons went into action for the first time on 15 September 1916, during the battle of Flers-Courcelette. Accidents and mechanical problems before they reached the front line meant that of the forty-nine machines available, only thirty-six actually participated.³⁷ A lack of reliability and poor performance, with a top speed of no more than four miles per hour, prompted eventual refinements, with replacement models such as the more successful Mark IV and Mark V machines (having a new engine, brakes and gears, giving an improved top speed of 4.6 mph) coming into service in 1917 and 1918 respectively. Further orders were placed, with 1,000 Mk IV tanks being constructed in 1917 at a cost of £3,800 each (equating to £235,460 in 2015), so that a total number of 2,297 tanks had been manufactured by the end of 1918, many of them originating from Wednesbury's Old Park works.³⁸

³⁶ Ibid., pp. 12-13.

³⁷ K. Beddoes and C & S Wheeler, p. 29.

³⁸ TNA MUN 4/4175: Negotiations with the Metropolitan Carriage, Wagon & Finance Co. Ltd. for a contract for tanks; Ministry of Munitions, *The Official History of the Ministry of Munitions, Volume Twelve, Appendix VI*; SCHAS BS-PS/10/3/380-390: See Appendix 6, Photographs 49-54, pp. 305-307. Tank production figures: Mk I (150), Mks II & III (100), Mk IV (1,015), Mk V (400), Mk V* (632).

On the home front, what was heralded in the press as a war-winning weapon gave a tremendous boost to civilian morale; its propaganda value being arguably equally as important as its intrinsic military value, especially in the light of the initial success achieved by tanks at the Battle of Cambrai in 1917.³⁹ Naturally, this bolstered the Metropolitan's finances, although production was dependent upon the cooperation and good will of the workforce in meeting the output targets. On 22 December 1917, the *Midland Advertiser* reported that the Wednesbury workers and their colleagues at the company's other works in Oldbury and Saltley, had demonstrated 'their very practical patriotism' by raising £5,000 for the production of a tank that was to be named *The Metropolitan*. The presentation of this vehicle was made in a formal ceremony that was attended by the commander of the Tank Corps, Major General Sir Hugh Elles.⁴⁰

At least as diverse was the output of another leading Black Country firm, namely that of F.H. Lloyd & Co. Ltd., with its James Bridge plant situated on the border between Wednesbury and Darlaston. This company had been responsible for the fulfilment of a number of pre-war armaments contracts. Notably, this included producing castings that were then used in the construction of the Royal Navy's Dreadnought class of battleships.⁴¹ As with many local organizations, a considerable portion of its manufacturing effort was subsequently turned over to the production of artillery shells and other forms of ordnance. Correspondence with the Ministry of Munitions and the Admiralty from 1917 revealed that F.H. Lloyd created castings that were then sent on to A.B.C. Coupler Ltd. of Wolverhampton. The next part of the process having been executed, the consignments of shells would be despatched to one of

³⁹ *The First World War* (Wark Clements/Hamilton Film Partnership and Channel 4, 2003). At Cambrai, some 400 tanks were deployed on a six-mile front. An initial advance of five miles and the taking of 4,000 German prisoners was celebrated by the ringing of church bells in Britain for the first time during the war.

⁴⁰ *Midland Advertiser*, 22 December 1917; *Who's Who and Who Was Who*, 2012. Sir Hugh Jamieson Elles (1880-1945) was a veteran of the Boer War and he had served with the 4th Division at Le Cateau in 1914. In January 1916, he attended the trials of the prototype vehicle, 'Mother'. Appointed to lead the Heavy Branch of the Machine Gun Corps in September 1916, he personally led the tanks into action at the Battle of Cambrai on 20 November 1917. He commanded the Tank Corps for the remainder of the war.

⁴¹ SCHAS BS-FHL/9/7/1: F.H. Lloyd & Co. Ltd. – Booklet issued to commemorate the First World War.

the National Shell Factories, where they were filled with explosive and finished as either Common Pointed Shell or Semi-Armour Piercing Shell.⁴² In a booklet published in 1919, the management of F.H. Lloyd chronicled the company's other wartime endeavours, including creating the castings used for the construction of submarines and torpedo boats, and the development of transporter gear that enabled the Royal Navy's ships to be re-coaled while at sea.⁴³ The production of the links for the caterpillar tracks of the new tanks having been referred to above, it is notable that the firm were providing the Patent Shaft's Old Park works with 40 tons of links per week, at a cost of £80 per link. Correspondence with the Ministry of Munitions from May 1918 confirmed that an extension of the James Bridge plant was sanctioned because the tonnage output of the firm had risen by 400 per cent during the four years of the war.⁴⁴

The files of the Ministry of Munitions document some of the other contracts undertaken by Wednesbury firms. This included the manufacture of three-inch Stokes' mortar bombs, and the supply of 45,000 cartridge containers, as performed in June 1916 by the Steel Nut & Joseph Hampton Ltd.⁴⁵ The Chief Industrial Commissioner's Department of the Board of Trade provided arbitration for the settlement of a number of disputes, thereby revealing the commodities manufactured by the firms concerned. For example, on 24 November 1915, a hearing considered the conditions of labourers who were manufacturing hand grenades at Messrs Edward Pugh & Co. of Wednesbury.⁴⁶ Further examples are that John Spencer's Globe works were also providing castings for artillery shells and manufacturing the automatic water sprinklers for use in the explosives factories, Edwin Richards & Sons were manufacturing axles for a variety of military vehicles, including gun carriages, and Samuel Platt Ltd. were concentrating on

⁴² SCHAS BS-FHL/4/3: F.H. Lloyd & Co. Ltd. – Contracts with A.B.C. Coupler Ltd., 1916-1918; BS-FHL/6/1/15-16: F.H. Lloyd & Co. Ltd. – Correspondence with Ministry of Munitions.

⁴³ SCHAS BS-FHL/9/7/1: F.H. Lloyd & Co. Ltd. – Booklet issued to commemorate the First World War.

⁴⁴ SCHAS BS-FHL/1/5/7/2: F.H. Lloyd & Co. Ltd. – Possible enforcement of war contracts, 1918.

⁴⁵ TNA MUN 3/59: Supply of Stokes Bombs - Steel Nut & Joseph Hampton Ltd., Wednesbury.

⁴⁶ The National Archives Ministry of Labour Papers (hereafter TNA LAB) 2/40/IC2473/1915: Arbitration Award - Edward Pugh & Co., Wednesbury v Amalgamated Society of Gas, Municipal & General Workers.

machine tools.⁴⁷ Elsewhere in the Black Country, the Birmingham Metals and Munitions Company factory in Rowley Regis produced 12,000,000 rounds of .303 mark VII ammunition per week; the National Projectile Factory in Dudley and the Walsall Munitions Company made 4.5 and 6 inch calibre artillery shells; and Albright & Wilson's Oldbury chemical works supplied phosphorous and Tri-nitro-toluene (TNT).⁴⁸

4.4 The impact of the war on industry in Wednesbury

Notwithstanding the extensive changes to the organization of the region's engineering and metal manufacturing enterprises during the previous decades, as have been discussed in Chapter 2 of this thesis, the impact of the war on local industry and on conditions in its labour market was initially one of some dislocation. This was attributable to economic uncertainty created by the outbreak of hostilities, and the loss of valuable overseas customers and markets, together with the consequences of a sizeable portion of the nation's workforce volunteering for military service in 1914-1915. In the earliest days of the war, on 15 August 1914, the *Wednesbury Herald* explained that a public meeting taken place two days earlier, during which steps were advocated to minimize potential suffering in the town by maintaining levels of trade and work. It was reported that the Mayor of Wednesbury, Councillor Nat Bishop, attended this gathering and he had urged the owners of local companies to assist the families of those men who had volunteered or been called back to the colours as reservists.⁴⁹

The records of F.H. Lloyd & Co. Ltd. show that at the commencement of the war every worker of this firm agreed to make a financial contribution to assist the families who would be deprived of their breadwinner. Consequently, a system of subscriptions was established that was to yield a total sum of £1,920 1s. 6d., and from which allocations were made both to the families of those employees on active service

⁴⁷ *Wednesbury as a Manufacturing and Commercial Centre and a Base for the Establishment of New Industries* (London: J. Burrow & Co. Ltd, 1918).

⁴⁸ R.M. Shill, p. 50.

⁴⁹ *Wednesbury Herald*, 15 August 1914.

and to other war funds. Significantly, these records state that the workers, managers and directors of the company also combined to pay the rents of the families of the married men who were performing military service from the time of their joining up. Furthermore, each year the firm's directors would organize a party for these families, usually at Christmas, at which the children were presented with gifts of new boots.⁵⁰

At the beginning of the war, the problem had been insufficient work and employment, 'but by the early part of 1915 the situation had so far improved that the question of unemployment generally amongst the industrious classes had almost disappeared'.⁵¹ By March 1915, the *Wednesbury Herald* was stressing the need for unity. It argued that 'Employers and employed must address themselves resolutely to the great task of providing the Navy and the Army and our allies with the materials of war'.⁵² This served to highlight that pre-war underemployment had been more widespread than realized, as 'the additional employees had been drawn from many sources, the most important being the continuous employment of persons who were hitherto casuals'.⁵³ Consequently, there was the employment of older workers who had come out of retirement and men who had had been discharged from military service owing to wounds they had received during service. In the engineering industries, shortages of skilled workers continued to be problematic though, as Waites suggested, the movement from craft-based to mass production meant that 'by 1917 the demand for the skills of craftsmen had been overtaken by the general demand for labour'.⁵⁴

Many Black Country firms had been small, family-owned enterprises supplying specialist products via limited production runs. In 1914, they did not possess the plant capable of supplying an army of the size to which the British Expeditionary Force was

⁵⁰ SCHAS BS-FHL/9/7/1: F.H. Lloyd & Co. Ltd. – Booklet issued to commemorate the First World War.

⁵¹ Cd. 8195 *Special War Work. Local Government Board Report*, Command Papers (London: HMSO, 1916), p. 45.

⁵² *Wednesbury Herald*, 6 March 1915.

⁵³ A. Gregory, *The Last Great War*, p. 194; Cd. 7850 *Report of the Board of Trade on the State of Employment in the United Kingdom in February 1915*, Parliamentary Papers (1914-1916), vol. xxi, p. 5.

⁵⁴ P.E. Dewey, *War and Progress: Britain, 1914-1945*, p. 23; B.A Waites, 'The Effect of the First World War on Class and Status in England, 1910-1920', p. 36.

to grow by end of the war. It took time for existing productive capacity to be transferred away from domestic production and across to munitions work, for new factories to be erected and supplies of raw materials to be acquired, and for energy and transportation to be co-ordinated.⁵⁵ Such expansion was transformative of industry and the labour market, particularly where there was a migration of employees. However, this could often be at the expense of other, competing industries that then contracted. Mineral excavation had been one of the principal industries in Wednesbury and across the Black Country, albeit one that was already in decline by 1914, and Dewey related how ‘coal mining was hit early on by the reduction in exports and heavy recruiting’.⁵⁶ In 1915, the coal mining industry received official protection from military recruitment but its labour force was to continue to remain below pre-war levels throughout.

Another dimension was the unprecedented level of control exercised by the government through the granting of financial and technical assistance and support for training. Kozak observed that ‘as a result of the new Government-inspired armaments requirements, substantial changes occurred in local industries’.⁵⁷ The reorganization instituted by the Ministry of Munitions was responsible for the creation of the 200 new National Factories, for example, which were an exemplar for the efficient use of manufacturing methods and the deployment of labour. Facilities hitherto unheard of in the workplace, such as canteens, were now being provided for this first time. Also designated as controlled establishments were all of the important armaments manufacturers in the area, such as the three plants of the Patent Shaft and of F.H. Lloyd. Within these organizations, and in accordance with the Munitions Acts and DORA, priority was given to war work and there was a limitation on the profits to be made.

⁵⁵ G.J. De Groot, p. 81; J.M. Bourne, *Britain and the Great War, 1914-1918*, p. 179; *Kelly's Directory of Staffordshire, 1912 and 1916*; *Bennett's Business Directory for Staffordshire, 1914*. See Appendix 5, Tables 1-3, p. 279. These tables provide an indication of the manner of wartime expansion. The trade directories of 1914 and 1916 have enabled identification of those firms not shown in the 1912 directory.

⁵⁶ P.E. Dewey, *War and Progress: Britain, 1914-1945*, p. 25. As indicated in Chapter 2, coal mining had been an important industry in Wednesbury but had ceased to be a major employer; in 1915, the industry received official protection from military recruitment but its labour force remained below pre-war levels.

⁵⁷ M. Kozak, p.40.

It has been suggested by Waites that, ‘up to the First World War, wage rates were strongly influenced by the customary comparisons which the skilled and unskilled in one trade made with each other, and with men of similar levels of skills in other trades in the district’.⁵⁸ Indeed, such practises had been the cause of the 1913 Black Country Strike and while innovations such as industry-wide bargaining and wider union recognition did emerge, the rapid expansion of munitions production carried with it obstacles to the progress of the labour movement. Hence, the war was the ideal opportunity for employers to attempt to weaken controls over the labour market, including ‘the elaborate structure of trade union rules and restrictions built up over the years of struggle with the employing classes’.⁵⁹ The 1915 Munitions of War Act introduced restrictions on labour mobility, control of wages, and attempted to eliminate industrial indiscipline. For instance, Schedule 4(3) of the Act stipulated that:

Any such practice or custom not having the force of law which tends to restrict production or employment shall be suspended in the establishment, and if any person induces or attempts to induce any other person (whether any particular person or generally) to comply, or continue to comply, with such a rule, practice or custom, that person shall be guilty of an offence under the Act.⁶⁰

With over a million men having enlisted voluntarily by December 1914, the loss to the labour force of such an immense number of valuable workers had grave implications for the war economy. It has been noted by A.J.P. Taylor that the army ‘had more men than they could equip’ and Stevenson asserted that a balance was required for the ‘seemingly insatiable appetite of the military chiefs for fresh divisions with the requirements of securing the basic needs of the home population’.⁶¹ Official reluctance on the part of the Liberal Government to introduce conscription led to the compromise

⁵⁸ B.A. Waites, ‘The Government of the Home Front and the “Moral Economy” of the Working Class’ in *Home Fires and Foreign Fields: British Social and Military Experience in the First World War*, ed. by P.H. Liddle (London: Brassey’s Defence, 1985), p. 179.

⁵⁹ A. Marwick, *The Deluge: British Society and the First World War*, p.57; A.J. Reid, ‘Dilution, Trade Unionism and the State in Britain During the First World War’ in *Shop Floor Bargaining and the State: Historical and Comparative Perspectives*, ed. by S. Tolliday and J. Zeitlin, p. 54.

⁶⁰ G.R. Rubin, *War, Law and Labour: The Munitions Acts, State Regulation and the Unions*, p. 232.

⁶¹ A.J.P. Taylor, *English History, 1914-1945* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), p. 53; J. Stevenson, p. 16.

of the Derby Scheme.⁶² The results of this endeavour enabled two conclusions to be reached. Firstly, given disappointment at the number of men who had attested, it was unavoidable that conscription would be introduced. Secondly, that there was a surplus of skilled workers readily transferrable to munitions production, so that alternatives could be utilized more effectively, namely women workers and unskilled labour.

The labour movement had a long-standing opposition to military conscription, viewing it as comparable to the “Prussianism” against which the war was being fought, and Alan Clinton attributed this to the not unrealistic ‘fear of the power it would place in the hands of the employers, since it might lead to industrial conscription’.⁶³ Nevertheless, by late 1915, this concern was overcome without great difficulty and, whilst Lloyd George and others made occasional reference to the need to extend such compulsion to the civilian population, this was never attempted due to the possibility of a collision with both employers and unions; governmental powers being extended incrementally, instead. The military’s continual calls for more men to fill the ranks, and the affect this had on the structure of the labour force, created a scarcity of even unskilled workers in some areas and industries; a problem that was ‘most pressing in the blast furnaces, in steel works and rolling mills, in tube works and in foundries’.⁶⁴ The consequences of taking skilled men into the army remained contentious and, even as late in the war as July 1918, the Minister of Munitions, Winston Churchill, expressed his grave concerns about the impact this would have on the production of tanks:

To take hundreds of men from the manufacture of tanks, thus dislocating the whole of the Metropolitan works, with the result that for the sake of getting enough men to make a couple of companies of infantry, the equipment of perhaps four or five battalions of tanks will be lost. Considering that one tank is worth hundreds of men, and, properly used, may conceivably be worth a whole battalion, I must avow myself unable to comprehend the processes of thought which are at work.⁶⁵

⁶² See Chapter 3, pp. 83-96

⁶³ A. Clinton, pp. 215-216.

⁶⁴ H.A. Clegg, p. 152.

⁶⁵ TNA CAB 24/58: War Cabinet Memoranda 12 July 1918: Labour position in Munitions Industries.

The depletion of labour had far-reaching consequences, with employers paying higher wages to retain existing skilled workers and to entice those of other firms to join them.⁶⁶ Government sought to curtail this by introducing the Leaving Certificate scheme. Under the 1915 Munitions of War Act, employers were forbidden from hiring any munitions workers not possessing such a certificate from their most recent place of work unless six weeks had elapsed since they had left their last job.⁶⁷ Rubin highlighted that no provision ‘generated more hostility among munitions workers’ who saw it as ‘the embodiment of slavery, it bound reluctant workers to their employer’.⁶⁸ This legislation also introduced Munitions Tribunals for the purposes of ruling on any transgressions, including withholding of Certificates and compelling labour to work for lower pay. The *Midland Counties Express* of 1 January 1916 reported that a Wednesbury man, Jeremiah Bray of Meeting Street, won his claim that the Certificate was being unreasonably withheld, thereby preventing him from taking up a promotion of a skilled job as an engineer.⁶⁹ *The Official History of the Ministry of Munitions* stated, however, that these bodies usually found in favour of the employers and, ‘the total effect was to arm employers, managers and foremen with arbitrary powers that were certain to be abused’.⁷⁰ Despite the Leaving Certificate scheme’s amendment in 1916, continued severe criticism led to its eventual abolition in October 1917.

The *Express and Star* envisaged that with this development, there would be a considerable movement of labour; the expectation being that workers residing in lodgings near to their place of employment would seek work nearer to home. This article described the steps taken by the Ministry of Munitions and the Trade Union Advisory Committee to avert such a dislocation by encouraging workers not to change

⁶⁶ Ministry of Munitions, *The Official History of the Ministry of Munitions, Volume One*, pp. 94-95.

⁶⁷ H.A. Clegg, p. 127.

⁶⁸ G.R. Rubin, *War, Law and Labour: The Munitions Acts, State Regulation and the Unions*, p. 203.

⁶⁹ *Midland Counties Express*, 1 January 1916.

⁷⁰ A.J. Reid, ‘Dilution, Trade Unionism and the State in Britain During the First World War’ in *Shop Floor Bargaining and the State: Historical and Comparative Perspectives*, ed. by S. Tolliday and J. Zeitlin, p. 55; Ministry of Munitions, *The Official History of the Ministry of Munitions, Volume One*, pp. 41-42.

their employer unless for substantial reasons. Inducements included the payment of subsistence allowances and the granting of railway passes allowing workers to make regular visits home whilst staying in their current job, thereby minimizing the impact over as long a period as possible.⁷¹ The October 1917 Ministry of Labour Situation Report remarked upon the abolition of the Leaving Certificate that ‘it seems clear that the commonly expected anticipation of disastrous results was groundless and the stolidity of labour will be little affected’. The reasons for this were a disinclination to sacrifice good wages, the anticipation of conscription should unemployment arise and the actions of the employers themselves. It was observed that some employers were attempting to introduce a Character Note to protect themselves from the employment of potential agitators but this was immediately viewed as merely an unofficial Leaving Certificate ‘and, if it is really persisted in by the employers, trouble will result’.⁷²

The continual pressure on firms to increase munitions production was inextricably linked to the size of their workforce and its skill level, which were to result in both dilution and substitution. A definition provided by Deborah Thom was that, ‘dilution meant the replacement of skilled men by semi-skilled or unskilled workers; substitution meant the replacement of one semi-skilled or unskilled worker by another, usually in both cases thereby increasing the number of women in the workplace’.⁷³ This was assisted by the stipulation for standardized products, and made possible by new engineering techniques, semi-automated machinery and mass production processes. Furthermore, it facilitated the progression of unskilled (often-female) workers to semi-skilled status, thereby narrowing the economic and social demarcation between workers, and raising the wages of the formerly unskilled. Initially, the intention was for a more flexible deployment of existing skilled labour, ‘not to reduce the skills of existing male

⁷¹ *Express and Star*, 1 October 1917.

⁷² TNA CAB 24/29: The Labour Situation: Report from the Ministry of Labour, October 1917, pp. 1-2.

⁷³ D. Thom, *Nice Girls and Rude Girls: Women Workers in World War I* (London: IB Tauris, 2000), p. 31.

workers but rather to release them to jobs where their skills could be used more effectively'.⁷⁴ However, it was not popular with the employers that were losing their skilled workers and, as Marwick pointed out, it became 'overshadowed by the decision to release as many fit men as possible for service'.⁷⁵ Such comb-outs of those men eligible for military service exacerbated the tensions between the skilled and unskilled and their respective unions, with the craft unions viewing the dilutees – and especially male dilutees - 'as a permanent threat to craft status (which women were not)'.⁷⁶

Kozak has asserted that the reorganization of munitions production and the introduction of dilution, 'paved the way for the large scale mobilization of women into all government work and even more significantly into metals and engineering which prior to the war were almost exclusively the preserves of men'.⁷⁷ Adrian Gregson's research into community and identity during the First World War has examined the experience of a Territorial Battalion of the King's Liverpool Regiment and its home towns of Bootle and Southport in Lancashire. He made the case that the 'single most identifiable group of non-combatants in the war were women and it is perhaps their level of commitment which most clearly demonstrates the extent of community identity shared with the troops abroad'. Gregson further described the role of these women in terms of the material, financial and emotional support that they provided for the services; being the dependents of the men who marched away; and their nascent employment in traditional and non-traditional areas, as a direct result of the war.⁷⁸ It has been argued by Braybon that to assess women's work during the war, 'it is essential for one to have some understanding of the kind of approach adopted by government, employers, press and middle-class public towards working-class women before the

⁷⁴ A.J. Reid, 'World War I and the Working Class in Britain' in *Total War and Social Change*, ed. by A. Marwick (London: Macmillan, 1988), p. 20.

⁷⁵ A. Marwick, *The Deluge: British Society and the First World War*, p. 205.

⁷⁶ B.A. Waites, *A Class Society at War: England, 1914-1918*, p. 196.

⁷⁷ M. Kozak, p. 53.

⁷⁸ A.S. Gregson, 'The 1/7th Battalion King's Liverpool Regiment and the Great War: The experience of a territorial battalion and its home towns' (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Coventry, 2005), p. 47.

war'.⁷⁹ In July 1914, women comprised 29 per cent of the total workforce. Employed not only in domestic service; they also worked in manufacturing, with 36 per cent belonging to the industrial workforce.⁸⁰ Throughout the Black Country, substantial numbers of women possessed experience from employment in mechanized industries - albeit for lower wages than paid to men, as discussed in Chapter 2 of this thesis.⁸¹

When labour shortages became obvious in early 1915, the employers turned firstly to the unemployed and the reserves of casual labour, the retired, boys about to leave school and the men who were working in the non-essential industries. The first indications of an increase in employment opportunities for women became noticeable in the latter months of 1914, as clerical and shop work became more widely available. The first systematic attempts to utilize female labour for munitions work arose from the creation of a special war register by the Board of Trade in March 1915.⁸² With the introduction of conscription in January 1916, the replacement on the factory floor of the men now in uniform assumed the highest priority and it seemed to accelerate the entry into industry of large numbers of women. After a faltering start, the number of women workers in key industries rose from a national total of 212,000 in 1914 to 819,000 by 1917, with overall female employment increasing from 5,966,000 in 1914 to 7,311,000 in 1918.⁸³ In 1916, *Ryder's Annual* stated that for Wednesbury, 'the insistent demand for munitions of war, and especially of shells, also led to the employment of large numbers of women and girls in the various factories engaged on war contracts'.⁸⁴

Some firms had already assumed responsibility for training their own female workers, whereas others benefited from the courses offered at technical colleges and other training facilities. On 28 October 1916, the *Midland Advertiser* featured an article

⁷⁹ G. Braybon, *Women Workers in the First World War: The British Experience*, p. 29.

⁸⁰ C.A. Culleton, p. 28.

⁸¹ See Chapter 2, pp. 51-69.

⁸² J.M. Bourne, *Britain and the Great War, 1914-1918*, p. 184.

⁸³ A. Marwick, *The Deluge: British Society and the First World War*, p. 91; Cmd. 135 *Report of the War Cabinet Committee on Women in Industry*, Command Papers (London: HMSO, 1919), p. 80. This is significant because it shows that prior to the war, for many females industrial work had not been a novelty.

⁸⁴ SCHAS *Ryder's Annual*, 1916. See Appendix 6, Photographs 43-46, p. 302-303. - Women war workers.

‘Women Munitions Workers – Wednesbury Education Committee seeking students’ describing the County Metallurgical and Engineering Institute’s scheme to train women aged between 18-45 years to become munitions workers. Lasting six weeks, the scheme’s suitability for soldiers’ wives was stressed and reference made to how the wider community could assist with supporting these women’s childcare arrangements. The *Midland Counties Express* of 11 November 1916 reported in an item, ‘Women Workers – Patriotic Services as Munitions Workers – How they are trained in Walsall and Wednesbury’ on a visit to such training facilities by the Government’s Special Commissioner. It was stated that the absence of pay was an obstacle in the case of some of these women because they had to face the cost of living during the period of instruction. It further noted that the women would receive between 30 and 35s. per week as soon as they were able to gain employment. Drawing attention to the numerous applications for admission to the scheme that had been made, it added that ‘In all cases the training is given free but the student undertakes to enter a munitions factory at the end of the course’.⁸⁵ It is important to note that in most parts of the country, there had been no agreement negotiated on the wage rates to be payable to women workers. The major exception, however, as has been pointed out by Hugh Clegg, was in the Black Country and this was entirely due to ‘the settlement between the Midland Employers’ Federation and the Workers’ Union following the 1913 Black Country strike’.⁸⁶

The day-to-day requirements of war work ensured that it was not a safe option; it was often extremely arduous and dangerous labour, with the performance of shifts in excess of twelve hours being commonplace. In the most part, rather than being dilutees, the women workers were substitutes carrying out simple, repetitive work. Of course, this could also be highly physical, strenuous and exhausting. Employment conditions varying between trades and workplaces, adequate amenities such canteens and separate

⁸⁵ *Midland Advertiser*, 28 October 1916; *Midland Counties Express*, 11 November 1916.

⁸⁶ H.A. Clegg, p. 143.

toilet facilities often had to be introduced by the companies to accommodate the needs of their new and growing workforces. As Braybon noted, some employers ‘often took advantage of women’s patriotism to make them work harder and longer than they would have done in peacetime’.⁸⁷ There was also the high risk of industrial accidents and fatalities due to the nature of the work, the machinery operated or the substances handled, with chemicals such as TNT dyeing the skin and hair of those working with it. In 1916 alone, 52 deaths occurred due to chemical poisoning but censorship under the DORA legislation ensured that this went unreported in the press for fear of damaging civilian morale.⁸⁸ Woollacott acknowledged that, ‘Although the deaths were only a fraction of those of the armed forces, a significant number of men and women munitions workers laid down their lives for their country as surely as did the troops’.⁸⁹

What Braybon has described as the ‘romantic idea, commonly held, that the classes came together through munitions work’ was in general terms a far from accurate depiction, being the home front equivalent of ‘the myth of class harmony in the trenches’.⁹⁰ Kozak has stressed that despite the official publicity, ‘the well-worn image of the Florence Nightingale-type of woman taking up patriotic munitions work had little basis in fact’.⁹¹ The majority of the women munitions workers were from a working-class background, working out of economic necessity rather than choice; frequently, they were either already employed and had transferred occupation, or they had returned to the workplace they had left following marriage and motherhood. Many of the latter were wives and mothers working to supplement the meagre Separation Allowances received when husbands and/or other male family members were on active service.⁹² Where women from the other social classes performed work in the war industries, and

⁸⁷ G. Braybon, *Women Workers in the First World War: The British Experience*, p.114.

⁸⁸ P.E. Dewey, *War and Progress: Britain, 1914-1945*, p. 39; C.A. Culleton, p. 94.

⁸⁹ A. Woollacott, *On Her Their Lives Depend: Munitions Workers in the Great War* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), p. 9.

⁹⁰ G. Braybon, *Women Workers in the First World War: The British Experience*, p. 48; G.J. De Groot, p. 129.

⁹¹ M. Kozak, p. 64.

⁹² See Chapter 7, pp. 194-209, for further information on Separation Allowances.

there were middle-class women who did so, it was generally in supervisory or welfare capacities that this employment was carried out since it was believed that these women possessed the authority needed to maintain acceptable standards of behaviour. The benefits that the working-class women attained during the war were the increased employment opportunities, better health due to higher wage levels and a greater degree of confidence and independence, financially and socially, than hitherto possible. In remarking that 'factory work supplied the women with a sense of achievement and agency outside the confines of the house', Culleton endorsed this interpretation.⁹³

The war has been credited with the attainment of many changes that were already underway. It can be argued that it created a new and modern image for women workers, especially for those in the munitions industries, who were given the popular nicknames of *munitionettes* or *Tommy's Sister*. Contemporary propaganda tended to emphasize the higher motivation of patriotism. As Susan Pyecroft noted, 'the glowing press reports did not always reflect conditions on the shop floor' or comment on the stoicism of those contending daily with dangerous and sweated working conditions.⁹⁴ Hopkins rightly maintained that these women deserved 'recognition for their war service just as much as the men in the trenches'.⁹⁵ However, working-class women also had to tolerate regulation by curfew and prohibition under the DORA legislation, and press and public criticism owing to perceptions of their behaviour outside of work and for the supposedly extravagant manner in which they spent their wages. It was emphasized by Woollacott that they were considered threatening 'when they sought by their own agency to control and shape that experience to their own ends' and the classic view 'that women were recruited eagerly by employers, and that they left willingly, of their own accord, when they were no longer needed' does not stand up to scrutiny.⁹⁶

⁹³ C.A. Culleton, p. 32.

⁹⁴ S. Pyecroft, 'British Working Women and the First World War', *Historian*, 56 (4) (1994), p. 699.

⁹⁵ E. Hopkins, *A Social History of the English Working Classes, 1815-1945*, p. 171; C.A. Culleton, p. 20.

⁹⁶ A. Woollacott, *On Her Their Lives Depend: Munitions Workers in the Great War*, p. 10.

The implications for the nation's workforce of the eventual return to peace were discussed as early as October 1916, with the publication of the first (interim) report of the sub-committee on the demobilization of the army. This document recognized that assistance would have to be provided to those servicemen unable to secure immediate employment upon their return to civilian life. To prevent the labour market being flooded by these men, the sub-committee made recommendations for the payment of unemployment insurance and for Labour Exchanges to take an active role in assisting the men to find suitable work.⁹⁷ This was not forgetting the undertaking made by many employers at the outbreak of the war that for those men who went away, their jobs (or other employment) would be available upon their return.⁹⁸ So that by 1918, the implications for the current workforce of the eventual return to peace were beginning to be contemplated. An example may be elicited from the minutes of the 2 February 1918 meeting of the Wednesbury branch of the ASE. Within this document, there was reference to the impact of the Government's manpower proposals and, in order to discuss this, nominations for delegates to attend a national conference were invited.⁹⁹

On 26 October 1918, the *Midland Advertiser and Wednesbury Herald* questioned what would happen to the women munitions workers with the approach of peace and a realignment of industry away from war work that was expected to follow soon thereafter. This newspaper anticipated that there could be a widespread dislocation in employment, women having to give way to men who had completed their military service.¹⁰⁰ There was the recollection in many minds of the wartime recruitment campaigns that had urged the employers to keep their men's jobs open for their eventual return from the war. For instance, David Englander cited William Beveridge's comment from October 1916 'that unemployment experienced at the end of

⁹⁷ The National Archives Reconstruction Papers TNA RECO 1/832: Board of Trade: Enlistment from the Industrial Classes and the State of Employment on Government and other Work in mid-February 1916.

⁹⁸ See Appendix 6, Illustration 27, p. 294. See Chapter 6 – Section 6.4, regarding the 1917 Crown tube strike.

⁹⁹ SCHAS O/WE/3/2: Minute Books - Wednesbury Branch, Amalgamated Society of Engineers.

¹⁰⁰ *Midland Advertiser and Wednesbury Herald*, 26 October 1918.

the war will be predominantly that of workpeople substituted during the war for men joining the forces, or drawn from the munitions trades rather than that of the soldiers themselves'.¹⁰¹ This would have a major social as well as economic impact locally, therefore. It is important to record the ambivalence of all parties to the plight of these women at this time, who despite their invaluable contribution to the winning of the war, were still seen as a temporary and inferior alternative to male labour, and as such, superfluous to the plans for post war reconstruction. In the majority of cases, women workers were expected to return to the roles that they had previously held in British society. Malcolm Brown pointed out that whilst the transformation had been temporary, the 'movement of women from the private to the public world and the acknowledgement of a new relationship with the state would become permanent'.¹⁰²

4.5 Conclusion

The BBC television series *The Great War* noted the means by which industry had been transformed so that 'Britain was now the war factory of the Allies'.¹⁰³ As this was from the outset a conflict between populous and powerful industrialized nations, it followed that their economies would be capable of using the latest technologies to supply their armies with weaponry of a quality and quantity that would have been unimaginable a generation before. The aim of this Chapter, therefore, was to examine Wednesbury's munitions production and to carry out an in depth exploration of the experience of those who were involved in that work in order to gain some appreciation of and insight into the industrial changes that were necessitated by the war emergency. In addition, this would allow for an assessment of the impact that these developments had on the employment experience of the men and women of the town's working-class community.

¹⁰¹ D. Englander, 'Soldiers and Social Reform in the First and Second World Wars', *Historical Research*, 67 (164) (1994), p. 319.

¹⁰² M. Brown, *The Imperial War Museum Book of the First World War* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1993), p. 183.

¹⁰³ *The Great War* (BBC TV, 1964, re-issued as DVD collection, 2002), Episode 20, *Only war, nothing but war*.

In spite of the continual advancement of engineering and metal-based manufacturing in the latter years of the nineteenth-century and during the first decade of the twentieth century, the outbreak of the First World War had found many sectors of the British economy very much ill prepared for and unable to face the immediate and rapidly accelerating requirements for military hardware. Adherence to an approach of *business as usual* had been manifestly unsuccessful so that ‘the wartime experience offered a fundamental challenge to the doctrines of economic industrialization and laissez-faire which had dominated the nineteenth century’.¹⁰⁴ Accordingly, and within the relatively short period of four years, the introduction of processes that were more efficient and effective, improved technologies and innovative approaches to the mobilization of the workforce (and particularly the employment of women). This enabled local enterprises to be able to deliver the immense quantities of equipment and ordnance that were required to wage the war successfully. Such remodelling of British industry was of revolutionary proportions, albeit of a temporary nature, with the exceptional involvement of the British state. The intervention included extensive participation in the recruitment, deployment and organization of the workforce and, for the first time, widespread consideration of the welfare needs of the nation’s employees.

The working-class people of Wednesbury played a crucial role in supplying an extensive range of war munitions to all of the armed forces including, notably, the first tanks to be deployed by British forces on the Western Front during 1916. The patriotism of this community was well established before the war, and it persevered to endure the day-to-day experiences and hardships in a protracted war of national survival. Consideration of the complex interactions and the strategies required to deal with problems of local industrial relations, and the level of equality of sacrifice required to achieve victory, are themes that will be explored in Chapter 5 of this thesis.

¹⁰⁴ N. Kirk, p. 163.

CHAPTER 5: INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS DURING THE WAR

5.1 Introduction

The burden of producing the armaments while shouldering most of the privations of war fell principally on the country's labour force. Pre-war industrial conflict and social division had created reservations at the highest levels of government about the reliability of a working class that was, as Bourne noted, 'the least militarized in Europe. Its attitude to the army was almost wholly negative even when not openly hostile'.¹

This Chapter examines the munitions industries during the war, giving an overview of the national picture in conjunction with a discussion of local developments in Wednesbury regarding industrial relations and productivity. Consideration is given to attitudes within the trade union movement and the manner in which, following the dilemma of whether to adhere to pacifist inclinations, a patriotic stance largely was adopted, leading to the Treasury Agreement of March 1915. The consequences of the growth of the labour movement, the emergence of new and powerful representation at shop floor level and the tensions between craft unions acting on behalf of the skilled workers and the general unions that campaigned for their semi-skilled and unskilled colleagues, will be assessed. Further consideration of the essential issues of dilution and substitution, as highlighted in the previous Chapter, together with the impact of women workers are therefore integral to this. A section will recount the strike that occurred at the Crown tube works of James Russell & Sons in Wednesbury during the summer of 1917. As with the 1913 Black Country strike, this dispute carried great significance and its implications for the war effort were so serious that the matter was drawn to the attention of the War Cabinet. Accordingly, there will be an account of the causes that motivated the strike, the actions taken by the protagonists, and its outcome and legacy for the men and women of Wednesbury and the wider Black Country.

¹ J.M. Bourne, *Britain and the Great War, 1914-1918*, p. 171.

5.2 The labour movement in wartime

During July and early August 1914, many trade unionists had participated in the anti-war demonstrations that were being held across the country at that time. Yet, following Britain's declaration of war on 4 August, and with the exception of some members of the Independent Labour Party (ILP) including such prominent individuals as James Ramsay MacDonald and Philip Snowden, the labour movement was to drop its opposition to the war.² As G.D.H. Cole related during 1915, this development was to be 'the signal for an industrial truce. The important strikes which were in progress when war broke out were quickly settled, generally without consultation of the rank-and-file'.³

In its simplest terms, the choice that was confronting the labour movement could be articulated in terms of patriotism or pacifism, with the non-partisan views of the Union of Democratic Control (UDC), created to call for a public examination by Parliament of war aims and foreign policy, also being influential. A wartime report produced by Assistant Commissioner Basil Thomson of the Metropolitan Police's Criminal Investigation Department is enlightening in the insights that it provides. For instance, Thomson cited the ILP and UDC as non-revolutionary organizations, which had taken the line that the continental nations should be left to settle their own quarrels on their own ground, and recorded that the pacifist views tended to hold more appeal with the intellectual members of the working class rather than the rank-and-file.⁴

On 29 July 1914, the Labour-supporting *Daily Herald* newspaper alluded to the grave responsibility that was falling on the trade unions: 'At any moment the working classes of Europe may be called upon to defend interests in which they are not concerned, for a cause that tends in no way to uplift them'.⁵ The decision of the

² H.A. Clegg, p. 118; .G. Robb, *British Culture and the First World War* (Basingstoke, Palgrave, 2002), p. 69; T. Corfield, 'War and Wages, 1914-1918', *History Today*, 43 (11) (1993), p. 21.

³ G.D.H. Cole, *Labour in War Time* (London: G. Bell & Sons, 1915), p. 43.

⁴ TNA CAB 24/4: Pacifist Propaganda.

⁵ *Daily Herald*, 29 July 1914. This article is reproduced in C. Hampton, ed., *A Radical Reader: The Struggle for Change in England, 1381-1914* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984), p. 599.

leadership of the Trade Union Congress (TUC), and supported by the majority of the Labour Party, was for a total commitment to sustaining the war effort, stemming from its democratic traditions and an abhorrence of “Prussianism”. Avner Offer’s explanation is suggestive that the labour movement, having arrived at the conclusion that the struggle for peace was now lost, had changed its position and ‘largely adopted an attitude of sane patriotism’, with many of its leaders proceeding to become involved in the ‘relief activities of the War Emergency Workers National Committee’.⁶

However, working-class compliance was generally not so passive and identification of the war with the protection of British society and its institutions against external threat was, as Horne suggested, the means of combining nation and labour and nation and the working class, ‘perceived in the light of the international crisis to be intimately connected’.⁷ Nicholas Mansfield has observed that many local trade unionists were actively involved in persuading their members to join the forces, so that ‘by early December 1914, the *Daily Citizen* reported that 250,000 trade unionists had enlisted’.⁸ In explaining this apparent new consensus, Waites has borrowed the concept of the *moral economy* that had been used by Edward Thompson to explore the legitimizing notions behind the eighteenth century food riots and the popular consensus regarding the rights of the people. Building upon this idea, Waites proposed that the ‘common mentalities of a distinct subculture’ within working-class communities ‘co-existed with people’s patriotism and a nationalist “mass culture” to legitimise the war’.⁹

While recognising that the labour movement’s support for the war effort appeared at times both laudable and understandable, Corfield and others have offered some rather more pragmatic explanations, however. Namely, that it would have been

⁶ A. Offer, ‘The Working Classes, British Naval Plans and the coming of the Great War’, *Past and Present*, 107 (1985), p. 223.

⁷ J. Horne, *Labour at War: France and Britain, 1914-1918* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), p. 43.

⁸ N. Mansfield, *English Farmworkers and Local Patriotism, 1900-1930* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), p. 107.

⁹ B.A. Waites, ‘The Government of the Home Front and the “Moral Economy” of the Working Class’ in *Home Fires and Foreign Fields: British Social and Military Experience in the First World War*, ed. by P.H. Liddle, pp. 177.

extremely difficult to avoid without incurring serious repercussions in the eyes of an overwhelmingly patriotic working-class community. There was also the very real possibility of vilification by the other classes of British society, which were concerned ‘about the malleability and irrationalism of the masses’.¹⁰ In spite of the strikes of 1911-1914, the labour movement was essentially pragmatic and reformist in outlook; characteristics underlining a readiness to cooperate that went beyond simple patriotism. In concurring with Patrick Joyce’s analysis, Geoffrey Field attributed this to ‘the power of other sources of social identity and social imagery than class and to the continuing strength within the labour movement of nineteenth century radical liberalism’.¹¹

A prophetic warning was made by the *Daily Herald* in the war’s earliest days: ‘It is the duty of all now to insist that the poor shall be protected against the machinations of plunderers, who, taking advantage of the necessities of the people, will force up food prices’.¹² For the next two years, industrial relations in the manufacturing industries enjoyed an unparalleled absence of strife until such factors as wages being unable to keep pace with rising prices and the first public revelations of the making of extraordinary profits provided a potent symbol for workplace disharmony. However, this does contrast with the experience in the rural areas of the Midlands, where the patriotism generated by the war was used to blur class divisions and reinforce conservative attitudes. This is highlighted by Mansfield’s research into the experience of Shropshire’s agricultural workers, showing that from 1917 the growing power of the farm workers’ trade unions and attempts to redress rural poverty were diffused by the renewal of a sense of loyalty to country and the nation, fostered by the rural elites.¹³

¹⁰ T. Corfield, p. 21; J. Horne, *Labour at War: France and Britain, 1914-1918*, p. 49; A.J. Adams, ‘Working Class Organisation, Industrial Relations and Labour Unrest, 1914-1921’ (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Leicester, 1988), p. 1.

¹¹ G. Field, ‘Social Patriotism and the British Working Class: Appearance and Disappearance of a Tradition’, *International Labor and Working Class History*, 42 (1992), p. 24.

¹² *Daily Herald*, 5 August 1914. This article is reproduced in C. Hampton, ed., *A Radical Reader: The Struggle for Change in England, 1381-1914*, p. 601.

¹³ N. Mansfield, pp. 123-128.

Locally, on 30 October 1915, the *Midland Advertiser* reported on a meeting held in Wednesbury at which the Wolverhampton MP, Alfred Bird, had addressed the employees of Messrs Edwin Richards & Sons and of Messrs C. Walsh Graham. In this speech, he declared that ‘we now have two kinds of soldiers: there were the soldiers in the trenches and the workers at their benches, and they were absolutely indispensable to each other’. There was also the warning that Germany had prepared for this war by assembling a system of espionage, which could only be thwarted by the workers and soldiers blending their efforts in effective combination. Mr Bird received great applause from this largely working-class audience when he stated that the ‘consistency, regularity, worth and ability of British workers had no equal in the world’.¹⁴

The tendency for levels of trade to fluctuate even on a localized basis had resulted in the implementation of the district bargaining arrangements that had operated before the war. The consequence of this, as demonstrated in disputes such as the 1913 Black Country strike, was that even for workers undertaking similar employment, the wages and differentials could differ between near localities. As Waites observed, rates of pay were ‘strongly influenced by customary comparison which the skilled and unskilled in one trade made with each other, and with other men of similar levels of skill in other trades in the district’.¹⁵ Richard Price described this labour process as, ‘above all else a social process in which the technical characteristics of a particular work environment shape and condition the forms of struggle for authority and control’.¹⁶

The necessity of finding alternative mechanisms and structures to settle industrial disputes during the war and without recourse to strike action became increasingly urgent. Three-way collaboration between the state, employers and organized labour began to evolve. However, it proved to be an unequal relationship

¹⁴ *Midland Advertiser*, 30 October 1915.

¹⁵ B.A. Waites, ‘The Government of the Home Front and the “Moral Economy” of the Working Class’ in *Home Fires and Foreign Fields: British Social and Military Experience in the First World War*, ed. by P.H. Liddle, p. 179.

¹⁶ R. Price, ‘The Labour Process and Labour History’, *Social History*, 8 (1) (1983), p. 62.

with the trade unions having to rely on consultation, delegations, lobbying and moral persuasion when making the case on behalf of their memberships. Real wages fell by thirty per cent during the first two years of the war and, for the Black Country's iron founders, who had been earning from 30 to 33s. per week in 1914, the purchasing power of this income declined to a level below that which had been the cause of the 1913 strike.¹⁷ In January 1916, the *Midland Advertiser* reported that Wednesbury workers had rejected the proposed wage settlement that was being offered by the Midland Employers' Federation. A combined meeting of several trade unions had concluded that the increase of 2s. per week for day workers and 1s. 6d. for men aged 18 – 21 years and 1s. for youths, was unsatisfactory although strike action was not instigated.¹⁸

National wage negotiations eventually allowed the engineering workers to recover some of the ground that had been lost as prices had continued to rise, and those working to piece rates rather than flat rates derived greater benefit from this, although the importance of maintaining earnings led to the greater involvement of the state in the resolution of trade disputes. The records of the Chief Industrial Commissioner's Department at the Board of Trade illustrate the attempts to reach conciliatory agreements by arbitration. Three cases involving Wednesbury firms during the early years of the war are extant and provide good examples of this process. In November 1915, in the case of Messrs Edwin Pugh & Co. and the Amalgamated Society of Gas, Municipal and General Workers, regarding the piece rates paid to youths employed in making hand grenades, when the Commissioner found in favour of the employer.¹⁹ In August 1916, the case between Messrs James Russell & Sons and the Workers' Union, concerning adjustments in the agreement between the Midland Employers' Federation and the Midland Counties Tube Trade Federation, with the Commissioner determining

¹⁷ H.A. Clegg, p. 168; Cd. 6054 *Wages (Standard Time Rates)*, Command Papers (London: HMSO, 1914), p. 64.

¹⁸ *Midland Advertiser*, 1 January 1916.

¹⁹ TNA LAB 2/40/IC2473/1915.

in favour of the union.²⁰ In December 1916, between Messrs Isaiah Oldbury and the National Union of General Workers, for the payment of piece rates to various categories of workers, with the Commissioner again supporting the workers' grievance.²¹

The British Steel Smelters' Mill, Iron, Tinplate and Kindred Trades Association's records demonstrate the nature of the negotiations conducted by Wednesbury's largest employer, the Patent Shaft & Axletree Co. Ltd. On 24 May 1916, correspondence between the local branch of the Association and the organization's General Secretary, John Hodge (who became the first Minister of Labour in Lloyd George's Coalition administration in December 1916) indicated that for employees producing the steel to be cast for shell cases, the pay rates and war bonuses were incorrect.²² Reports of alterations to both wages and conditions between 30 June 1916 and 4 February 1917 respectively confirmed that the firm's crane drivers were to receive increased pay and bonuses due to the scale of work that was being carried out.²³

5.3 Industrial relations in wartime

Important steps towards increasing industrial output occurred on 4 March 1915, when the Engineering Employers' Federation, engineering trade unions and the government concluded the Shells and Fuses Agreement. In return for the acceptance of greater flexibility by the unions, employers agreed to refrain from any erosion of pre-war conditions.²⁴ This attitude was vociferously supported by the *Wednesbury Herald* in an article entitled, 'Everybody's Duty'. This stated that, 'we rely on the patriotic good sense of employers and employed to ensure that the reasonable requirements formulated

²⁰ TNA LAB 2/194/IC3420/1916/IC1871.

²¹ TNA LAB 2/194/IC3420/1916/IC5223.

²² CMR MSS.36/W13: Iron and Steel Trades Confederation and predecessors, Wednesbury branch Documentation regarding Monway works, 1900-1921.

²³ CMR MSS.36/B31: Iron and Steel Trades Confederation and predecessors – Negotiations with employer, the Patent Shaft & Axletree Co. Ltd. Brunswick works, 1897-1926; CMR MSS.36/P47: Iron and Steel Trades Confederation and predecessors – Correspondence regarding the Patent Shaft & Axletree Co. Ltd. Brunswick works, 1914-1928.

²⁴ A. Marwick, *The Deluge: British Society and the First World War*, p.58; P.E. Dewey, *War and Progress: Britain, 1914-1945*, p. 38; G. Braybon, *Women Workers in the First World War: The British Experience* (London: Croon Helm, 1981), pp. 50-57.

by the Government in the vital interests of the nation shall be cheerfully and completely fulfilled'.²⁵ At the Midland Iron and Steel Wages Board meeting on 9 March 1915, a tribute was paid to the patriotism of the workers by the Chairman of that body, George Macpherson. He observed that they had sent recruits to the armed forces, supported benevolent causes and adjusted their working conditions. Negotiations on wages had been accepted by the unions because 'it would be against the national interest to strike at the present juncture'. Furthermore, 'the men had pledged themselves to use the information they had among the workmen to the end that there should be no commotion of work, especially where contracts for the army and the allies are concerned'.²⁶

Successive national negotiations were held between 17-19 March 1915 at a Treasury Conference that was attended by Arthur Henderson and other leading trade unionists; the Chancellor of the Exchequer, David Lloyd George; and the President of the Board of Trade, Walter Runciman. The outcome was that the unions relinquished the right to strike in favour of binding arbitration and relaxed restrictive practices. In return, it was agreed that skilled wage rates would be upheld, that the measures were for the duration of the war, and the excessive profits derived from war work would be subject to taxation.²⁷ In a speech on 10 May 1915, Lloyd George reiterated the need for employers to produce munitions, stating that 'we propose to take steps under the Defence of the Realm Act to compel these gentlemen to use the whole of their resources for the purpose of increasing the supply of shell'. Reference was then made to gaining co-operation when it was necessary, 'to eke out, as it were, the skilled workman with either unskilled or female labour', adding that they were already doing this in France.²⁸

²⁵ *Wednesbury Herald*, 6 March 1915.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 13 March 1915.

²⁷ J. Horne, *Labour at War: France and Britain, 1914-1918*, p. 79.

²⁸ The National Archives Cabinet Papers (hereafter TNA CAB) 37/129/31: Speech delivered by the Minister of Munitions to representatives of the Trades Unions on the supply of munitions, 1915; TNA MUN 5/10/180/17: The minutes of a Conference between the Government and Trade Union Representatives on the Mobilization of War Industries, 1915; TNA MUN 5/10/180/26: Memorandum and Agreement made with Trade Unions on the acceleration of output on Government work, 1915.

The Treasury Agreement was concluded by the nation's leading trade unionists but, as argued by Henry Phelps Brown, it 'could not and did not forthwith commit their members up and down the country' attached to hard-won principles of free collective bargaining. To ensure conformity at all levels of industry, the government 'judged it advisable to give the necessary statutory backing to a Munitions of War Act which made it an offence to take part in a stoppage in any of the industries scheduled in the Act'.²⁹ Introduced on 3 July 1915, this legislation sought to control the labour market and prevent interruptions to production. Reid maintained that, 'although there were clauses in the Act which could be used by hard-line employers as the nearest approximation to industrial compulsion', government's response recognized the importance of and was favourable to the unions from the outset.³⁰ The National Advisory Committee's memorandum on the organization of labour stressed that 'organized labour can and must take an essential and indispensable part, for with enthusiasm and unselfishness it can render invaluable service in a great national crisis'.³¹

By willingly surrendering the right to strike without gaining any important concessions in return, the trade unions had relinquished what was arguably their most effective and potent weapon for dealing with partisan or uncompromising employers. This had been a decision of the union leadership, not the rank-and-file locally, and it had been made on the assumption that when peace returned the nation as a whole would be grateful to the workers for their sacrifice.³² It was also consistent with the generally held opinion that the war would be a brief one although as the months passed, the number of workplace grievances requiring settlement began to increase again. This accentuated the importance of having more formalized bargaining procedures for, as

²⁹ H. Phelps-Brown, *The Origins of Trade Union Power* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 93.

³⁰ A.J. Reid, 'Dilution, Trade Unionism and the State in Britain During the First World War' in *Shop Floor Bargaining and the State: Historical and Comparative Perspectives*, ed. by S. Tolliday and J. Zeitlin, p. 65; A. Clinton, p. 202.

³¹ TNA CAB 37/129/33: Acceleration of the Supply of Munitions: Memorandum of the National Advisory Committee, 1915.

³² G.J. De Groot, pp. 110-111.

Hyman argued, 'the concept of an unofficial dispute became for the first time a clear one; and the union leaders were determined to prevent such outbreaks occurring'.³³

The developments of 1915 constituted the beginning of a major transition in the relationship between the state and its main interest groups, the employers and trade unions. Waites suggested that notable differences remained, however, 'in the ways in which government intruded into production and consumption, and into the everyday life of producers and consumers'.³⁴ Although state regulation and the need for cooperation between capital and labour undermined further *business as usual*, as Rodney Lowe noted, 'many employers were still reluctant to recognize trade unions and consequently the unions were suspicious of the permanent use to which wartime concessions might be put'.³⁵ Within the labour force itself, even though a prominence unobtainable before the war had been achieved, the friction between the skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled categories of workers remained, however.³⁶ Consultation, as Rubin indicated, prompted the 'abandonment of the voluntarist, non-statist and non-legally hidebound system of pre-war industrial relations' to clear the way for 'a new political and economic strategy for industrial relations, which we describe as corporatism'.³⁷ Reid has succinctly portrayed this as the 'new kind of bargaining in which British Government offered large measures of social reform in order to win the co-operation of the working people'.³⁸

One of the consequences of the increasing effectiveness of trade unions and their enhanced bargaining power during the war was the putting aside of employer resistance to workplace organization, at least temporarily for the duration. Membership in the

³³ R. Hyman, p. 114.

³⁴ G.R Rubin, *War, Law and Labour: The Munitions Acts, State Regulation and the Unions, 1915-1921*, p.13; B.A. Waites, 'The Government of the Home Front and the "Moral Economy" of the Working Class' in *Home Fires and Foreign Fields: British Social and Military Experience in the First World War*, ed. by P.H. Liddle, p. 175.

³⁵ R. Lowe, 'The Ministry of Labour, 1916-1919: A Still, Small Voice' in *War and the State: The Transformation of British Government, 1914-1919* ed. by K. Burk (London: Allan & Unwin, 1982), p. 115.

³⁶ N. Whiteside, 'Welfare Legislation and the Unions during the First World War', *The Historical Journal*, 23 (4) (1980), p. 858.

³⁷ G.R Rubin, *War, Law and Labour: The Munitions Acts, State Regulation and the Unions, 1915-1921*, p.7.

³⁸ A.J. Reid, 'World War I and the Working Class in Britain' in *Total War and Social Change*, ed. by A. Marwick (London: Macmillan, 1988), p. 23.

general unions of the semi- and unskilled workers rose dramatically and, for example, the Workers' Union gained over 250,000 new members by 1918.³⁹ This added to the responsibilities undertaken by local officials and, as Waites has suggested, was to lead to 'a toughening of labour organization and a transfer to them of power and prestige'.⁴⁰ In Wednesbury, this union increased its branches from four to six, and there was a consistent year-on-year increase in membership, even allowing for the surge that occurred during and in the months that followed the Black Country strike of 1913.⁴¹ In an article entitled, 'The Patriotism of the Nation's Workers', the *Express and Star* reported on the 30th annual conference of the Midland Counties Trades Federation in July 1916. Parallels were drawn between the plight of small nations in need of protection from aggressors and the principles of trade unionism to 'stand by every man until he had a living wage'. The MCTF pledged itself to 'give every assistance to the government to carry on the war until it has defeated the common enemy of mankind'.⁴²

The continuation of industrialized trench warfare on the scale of the First World War required much more from the nation's labour force than could ever have been imagined by those entering into the industrial truce of 1914. The unprecedented requirement for munitions led to attempts to conserve skilled workers via the granting of exemptions to those working in the 'starred' occupations in engineering (August 1915), and by the issuing of badges (February 1916), trade cards (November 1916) and the Schedule of Protected Occupations (April 1917).⁴³ The engineering and metal manufacturing industries enjoyed a long tradition whereby there had been domination by craft unions that refused admission to women and to newcomers who had not served the long apprenticeship deemed necessary for membership. The general unions such as the Workers' Union had been the beneficiaries during a recent rapid expansion and,

³⁹ CMR MSS.126/WU/4/1/9-14: Workers' Union Annual Report and Accounts, 1913-1918.

⁴⁰ B.A Waites, 'The Effect of the First World War on Class and Status in England, 1910-1920', p. 41.

⁴¹ CMR MSS.126/WU/4/1/9-14: Workers' Union Annual Report and Accounts, 1913-1918.

⁴² *Express and Star*, 27 July 1916.

⁴³ M. Kozak, p.50. See Appendix 6, Photograph 42, p. 301 of the 'On War Service' Badge.

with the coming of the war, their members were now taking on some of the roles in the workplace formerly performed by skilled workers, yet the skilled workers alone enjoyed the immunity from conscription. This represented the latest stage in a strained workplace relationship, the antagonism within the working class arising from the divisions between the various strata of skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled workers.⁴⁴

The craft unions were in a far stronger position to exert pressure on employers and the government than the other agencies of the labour movement. In May 1915, the ASE, having secured an agreement with engineering employers to exempt their members from military service, at the same time rejected overtures from the Workers' Union for closer links and, as Tanner noted, this action by the ASE incurred criticism for being party to 'secret diplomacy on the manpower question'.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, despite the steps taken to preserve skilled men and their jobs, there was an influx of unqualified and untrained diluted labour at the lower levels of the industrial hierarchy. Eventually, even the jealously guarded privileges of the craft unions were to be overtaken by the countervailing pressure of inducing into the army as many men as possible.⁴⁶

The war confronted the leaders and members of trade unions with difficult industrial and political problems, typically on dilution, wage rates and the combing-out and conscription of workers. Yet in discussing their industrial and political attitudes, Waites refers to the workers facing 'acute contradictions between the conflict consciousness that arose at the workplace and their support for the war'.⁴⁷ As Laybourn related, however, 'most of the British workers were patriotic, accepted the industrial demands of the wartime government' and 'there was relatively little dissent against the war effort and revolutionary intent was minimal within the trade union movement'.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ A.J. Reid, 'World War I and the Working Class in Britain' in *Total War and Social Change*, ed. by A. Marwick (London: Macmillan, 1988), p. 17; H. Pelling, *A History of British Trade Unionism*, p. 144.

⁴⁵ D. Tanner, *Political Change and the Labour Party, 1900-1918*, p. 363.

⁴⁶ H. Perkin, p. 188; A. Marwick, *The Deluge: British Society and the First World War*, p. 61.

⁴⁷ B.A. Waites, *A Class Society at War: England, 1914-1918*, p. 194.

⁴⁸ K. Laybourn, *A History of British Trade Unionism, c. 1770-1990*, pp. 109 and 112.

This is evidenced by the report in the *Express and Star* on 28 May 1917, which stated with some satisfaction that the MCTF had provided no strike pay during the whole of the year, and this was due to ‘the conduct of officials and the rank-and-file’.⁴⁹ Upon closer examination, however, war-weariness was becoming discernible before this date. Rising front line casualties, increasing food prices and rents, and shortages on the home front, gave the clear impression that Britain’s working class was bearing a sacrifice that was disproportionate to that elsewhere in society. Thus far, patriotic sentiment had restrained excesses in bargaining and largely averted the necessity for strike action. It had its limits, however, and the growing evidence of profiteering increased the working people’s scepticism. This belief was eloquently stated in Askwith’s memoirs:

While they were being called upon to be patriotic and refrain from using the strong economic position they occupied, employers, merchants and traders were being allowed perfect freedom to exploit to the fullest the nation’s needs.⁵⁰

On 20 July 1917, the *Express and Star* captured the public mood with its assertion that ‘the feeling amongst the people is strong that they are being unfairly treated, nay misled, and much evidence exists in support of this statement’.⁵¹ This affront to the working class community arguably did more to encourage the growth of class-consciousness than any specific dispute, with Waites asserting that it constituted a fundamental shift ‘in the value cluster of the working-class moral economy’.⁵²

Across the nation, the engineering industries were troubled by periods of unrest during the years 1917 and 1918, with a number of strikes being a reaction to profiteering or the product of pacifist agitation.⁵³ This coincided with the negative view within the local trade union branches of the passivity of the labour movement’s national

⁴⁹ *Express and Star*, 28 May 1917.

⁵⁰ G. Askwith, p. 373.

⁵¹ *Express and Star*, 20 July 1917.

⁵² B.A. Waites, ‘The Government of the Home Front and the “Moral Economy” of the Working Class’ in *Home Fires and Foreign Fields: British Social and Military Experience in the First World War*, ed. by P.H. Liddle, p. 183.

⁵³ J. Horne, ‘Remobilizing for ‘Total War’: France and Britain, 1917-1918’ in *State, Society and Mobilization in Europe during the First World War*, ed. by J. Horne (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 198.

leadership. Increasingly perceived as an abdication of responsibility, a vacuum was created and filled by the emergence of a radical shop stewards' movement. Henry Pelling acknowledged that shop stewards had existed before the war to carry out union-related administrative tasks in the workplace but now 'they made their appearance with impunity and often exercised an important role, especially in the large factories of the engineering industries'.⁵⁴ By providing some validation and moral justification for this response to working-class economic grievances, and being easily accessible to union members, these representatives (many of whom still subscribed to the syndicalist notions of worker control) began to exert some influence, albeit for a brief duration since the bulk of trade unionists and the wider working class remained unpoliticized.

The Government's response to the engineering disputes across the country in the spring of 1917 came on 13 June 1917 was the establishment of Commissions of Enquiry into Industrial Unrest for eight munitions districts, including the West Midlands.⁵⁵ The Commission's report acknowledged that the area had been generally free of strikes, which was due to 'the wise and patriotic action taken by the employers' federation and by the trade union leaders, and by the people generally'. The report stressed the 'bitter resentment amongst workers at the thought that someone is making excess profits out of them'.⁵⁶ The main areas of discontent have been extracted from the evidence by George Barnsby: the trade card system's protection of skilled workers from conscription, loss of hard-won union liberties, dilution, leaving certificates, the differentials between skilled and unskilled labour, and rising food prices. Barnsby's assessment was that all the official report achieved was to make 'a series of the most anodyne proposals for most of these ills'.⁵⁷ Subsequent Ministry of Labour Situation reports provide evidence that numerous small-scale disputes in local firms continued into 1918 and through to the end

⁵⁴ H. Pelling, *A History of British Trade Unionism*, p. 141.

⁵⁵ A. Marwick, *The Deluge: British Society and the First World War*, p. 206.

⁵⁶ Cd. 8665 *Report of the Commission of Enquiry into Industrial Unrest: No. 4 Division, West Midlands Area*, Command Papers (London: HMSO, 1917-18), p. 3 and p. 9.

⁵⁷ G.J. Barnsby, *Socialism in Birmingham and the Black Country, 1880-1939*, p. 274.

of the war. At this point, these were mainly concerned with the calling up of skilled men for military service when dilutees were available and had not been conscripted.⁵⁸

Hence, women war workers were often caught up in continuing conflicts between employers and trade unions. There had been reluctance on the part of some employers to take on female labour at all because they did not wish to encourage the principle of equal pay for equal work. Many firms were concerned at the costs of introducing new machinery and techniques, together with the additional supervision and training needed, and the employment of women in roles formerly occupied by men created speculation about their capability and potential. As early as 1916, reservations about the efficiency of women workers were being articulated in the columns of the *Express and Star*, with one correspondent's view being that only a fraction of the work was actually performed and that 'they should be called munitions shirkers!' was greeted with a barrage of criticism from other readers.⁵⁹ As Kozak asserted, 'by and large the Government extolled the virtues of the women workers, employers found dilution in munitions profitable, whilst trade unions were careful not to appear too blatantly discriminatory.'⁶⁰ The fragmented attitude towards dilution and substitution resulted in hostility to women working in the formerly male-dominated occupations, where it was believed that as well as giving up the right to strike, they had opened the way for anyone to do their jobs. There was the widespread expectation that unscrupulous employers would exploit an inexperienced female labour force, reducing wages and eroding conditions. *The Official History of the Ministry of Munitions* commented as follows:

Women were badly organized, prone to manipulation by employers, ignorant of workshop practices, in particular defensive practices; and content to work in lowly positions for low pay. Women did not enjoy the protection of custom, they were not organized in strong trade unions nor could such organizations be built up in an emergency.⁶¹

⁵⁸ TNA CAB 24/42; CAB 24/57; CAB 24/58; CAB 24/65; CAB 24/66 – Labour Situation Reports.

⁵⁹ *Express and Star*, 17 and 21-22 February 1916.

⁶⁰ M. Kozak, p. 125.

⁶¹ Ministry of Munitions, *The Official History of the Ministry of Munitions, Volume Four*, p. 57.

This was compounded because some unions had not accepted female members before the war, or women had been effectively prohibited from joining as their part-time hours and low pay prevented them from paying the subscription fees. In time, with growing expectations and the greater sense of collective entitlement and other benefits of union membership becoming more apparent, female participation in the trade unions rose dramatically, so that total female membership increased from 357,000 in 1914 to 1,086,000 by 1918. The Workers' Union annual reports reveal that its female membership improved from less than 5,000 to over 80,000 during the same period, and that from having just one female official (namely Julia Varley) covering the whole country, by the end of the war there twenty female organizers employed by the union.⁶²

The increase in union membership among female munitions workers noticeably affected the balance of negotiating power, since not only were the general unions strengthened in numerical terms, wage levels in the diluted occupations had held up well during the war to the benefit of both the men and women employed in those roles. Consequently, the general unions were to emerge from the war as amongst the most successful of organizations due to their ability to mobilize the large numbers of semi-skilled and unskilled munitions workers. Seeing the war as a means for making progress in the attainment of equal rights, Julia Varley supported mixed union branches, stating that 'Both sexes should pay in the same book and meet in the same room'.⁶³

Nationally, the views of the popular press with respect to the trade unions and strikes tended to be highly critical, and especially so during wartime. The economic and military impact was such that as indicated by Sven Müller, 'contemporaries regarded strikes or the absence of strikes as an essential indicator of the powers of endurance of both one's country and the country of one's enemies'.⁶⁴ Examples are encapsulated in a

⁶² J. Bourke, p. 106; CMR MSS.126/WU/4/1/9-14: Workers' Union Annual Report and Accounts, 1913-1918.

⁶³ D. Thom, p. 68.

⁶⁴ S.O. Müller, 'Who is the Enemy? The Nationalist Dilemma of Inclusion and Exclusion in Britain during the First World War', *European Review of History*, 9 (1) (2002), p. 76.

series of cartoons that appeared in *Punch* and which were syndicated to other local publications, in this case the *Midland Counties Express*. It is notable how they become increasingly accusatory in tone as the years pass, beginning in March 1915 with appeals to refrain from industrial action, followed by the questioning of workers' patriotism, and culminating in October 1918 with the depiction of the stereotypical trade unionist as a traitor, willing to stab his working-class brother, the front-line Tommy, in the back.⁶⁵ These contrast strikingly with a local press nearer to its working-class readership rather than a middle-class audience with, for example, an article in the *Midland Advertiser and Wednesbury Herald* on 2 June 1917 concerning Teddy Williams, a Wednesbury trade unionist who had voluntarily enlisted in the South Staffordshire Regiment. Believed killed in action on 17 February 1917, official notification had been received that he was now a prisoner of war in Germany. This newspaper was moved to comment:

That in the days after the war, industrial strife will, if it exists at all, be experienced in an atmosphere of conciliation where there will be opportunity for that peculiar brand of sweet reasonableness which under a rough exterior of blunt manner and sometimes crude utterance manifested itself in the gallant Tommy who is now captive in the enemy's country.⁶⁶

In contrast to the demonizing of wartime trade unionism, further evidence of the extent of working-class support for the wider war effort is discernible in some of the surviving local trade union records, such as those of the Wednesbury branch of the ASE. Included in these documents are the frequent financial contributions from the members to the various funds for the welfare of sailors and soldiers and their families. Also of importance is the continued payment of subscriptions to their union made by those men who were now in uniform and who wished to retain their branch membership in expectation of resuming employment in their particular trade in peacetime.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ *Midland Counties Express*, 13 March and 25 September 1915, 26 May 1917, 5 October 1918. See Appendix 6, Cartoons 55-60, pp. 308-310.

⁶⁶ *Express and Star*, 2 June 1917. As the Chairman of the Wednesbury strike committee, Teddy Williams had been one of leading local trade unionists in the town during the 1913 Black Country strike. See Chapter 2.

⁶⁷ SCHAS O/WE/3/2: Minute Books - Wednesbury Branch, Amalgamated Society of Engineers.

5.4 The 1917 Crown tube works strike

Tony Adams has emphasised ‘the ability of trade unions to construct an identification between their own fortunes and those of others within the local community’.⁶⁸ An incident occurred in Wednesbury during the summer of 1917 to illustrate such a connection, with the workers and their trade unions appearing in a very different light to that generally portrayed in the press. Given its implications, it was of such importance that the highest levels of government were made aware of it, with the War Cabinet memoranda of 1 August 1917 concluding: ‘The incident is not without significance’.⁶⁹

Specifically, this concerned a strike that had broken out at the Crown tube works of James Russell & Sons, one of the largest factories in the town.⁷⁰ The dispute’s origins can be traced back to the morning of 26 July 1917, when a former employee of the company, Frank Bowen Smith, arrived at the Crown works site with the intention of regaining his old job. This man had volunteered for the army at the outbreak of the war, served with distinction on the Western Front (including being mentioned in despatches), and had been honourably discharged following wounds received that resulted in the loss of his leg. Notably, the press reports pointed out that Smith wore the Silver War Badge.⁷¹ In returning to his former employer, he said that he was ‘depending upon a promise given in the early stages of the war that every man who offered himself for the fighting forces would be given his job again if he returned’ and that ‘if wounded or invalided he should be found employment suitable to his physical condition’.⁷² Upon his discharge, Smith would have forsaken his army pay and any separation allowance

⁶⁸ T. Adams, ‘Labour and the First World War: Economy, Politics and the Erosion of Local Peculiarity’, *Journal of Regional and Local Studies*, 1 (10) (1990), p. 28.

⁶⁹ TNA CAB 24/21: War Cabinet Memoranda – Strike at the Crown tube works, Wednesbury over refusal to reinstate ex-employee discharged from Army.

⁷⁰ F.W. Hackwood, p. 68. James Russell & Sons had been Wednesbury’s first manufacturer of steel tubes. See Appendix 6, Photographs 7-9, p. 284-285 of the works and an advertisement for its products.

⁷¹ <<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/records/medal-index-cards-ww1.htm>>[Accessed 4 May 2015]. The Silver War Badge (also known as the Discharge Badge, Wound Badge or Services Rendered Badge) was issued to those servicemen honourably discharged due to wounds or sickness contracted during the war. First issued in September 1916, it was accompanied by an official Certificate of Entitlement. At a time when some women were giving white feathers to men not in uniform, the Silver War Badge was worn on civilian clothes to signify that a man had seen military service. See Appendix 6, Photograph 42, p. 301.

⁷² *Express and Star*, 28 July 1917; *Midland Counties Express*, 28 July 1917.

that had been payable to his family by the state. The imbursement of the disability pensions being notoriously slow, this may have necessitated his search for work.⁷³

Having reported to the firm's main office, where he had been told to wait and a job would be found for him, the reward for the former soldier's valour was to endure an abrupt interrogation by the works superintendent, Alexander Marshall, who had not recognized Smith and demanded to know why he was there. Despite the explanation given, Marshall ordered Smith out of the office, stating that it was not the place for him, before physically manhandling him and telling him to go and wait outside, at the factory gate. This incident was witnessed by several other workers, who felt a great sense of outrage at the deplorable treatment meted out to the wounded ex-serviceman by this manager, and they swiftly communicated this to other employees. When news of what had happened became known more widely, over 1,800 of the firm's employees ceased work immediately, proceeding to walk out of the factory to commence a strike.⁷⁴

Meetings of the Crown's workforce were held in Wednesbury during that day and the next, and their demands were made known to the firm. These were that Frank Smith should be reinstated without any delay, and that for his behaviour Alexander Marshall should be dismissed. The Company's senior management were keen to make amends for the offence caused and offered reassurances that the promise to returning soldiers would be honoured in full. They attempted to gloss over Marshall's treatment of Smith, however, by suggesting that 'the men were under a misapprehension in regard to the official concerned'.⁷⁵ This was not well received by the firm's workforce and it was apparent that Marshall ceased to hold the confidence of the Crown work's employees, who passed a resolution that the Ministry of Munitions should be requested to hold a full inquiry into the matter. The branch secretary of the Workers' Union, Fred

⁷³ *Midland Counties Express*, 28 July 1917. See Appendix 6, Illustration 27, p. 294: On 30 January 1915, an advertisement was placed in that day's *Wednesbury Herald* and which urged the local employers in the area to keep open the positions of any of their men who were voluntarily enlisting for military service.

⁷⁴ TNA CAB 24/21.

⁷⁵ *Midland Advertiser and Wednesbury Herald*, 28 July 1917.

Thorpe 'expressed himself pleased that the men of the Crown tube works had stood by one of the men who they believed had been treated in a very shabby fashion'.⁷⁶

Although a return to work had occurred on 30 July 1917, when it became evident that no action was going to be taken against Marshall by the company, the strike action was resumed, beginning with the night shift. The Workers' Union Birmingham Organizer, John Beard (well known locally, and especially for the role he had played in the 1913 Black Country strike) informed the *Express and Star* that Marshall 'could see the silver badge...and even he might have been civil to a silver badged man'.⁷⁷ Support for the Crown work's strikers was offered by the trade unionists from the Patent Shaft & Axletree Co. Ltd., and from several other firms in Wednesbury, together with those in the nearby localities of Darlaston and Tipton. Fred Thorpe had referred to 'the seriousness of the position in regard to output' and he added that 'the men had the support of workers in other districts in the attitude they had taken up'.⁷⁸ The *Express and Star* was certain that what could be detected was the same strength of feeling and spirit in the people in Wednesbury and its neighbouring towns that had endured to win an earlier dispute. The viewpoint of this newspaper was that many 'were prepared to cease work in support of the action of the men at the Crown works, similar to 1913'.⁷⁹

Negotiations now involved the principal trade unions providing representation to the majority of the Crown works' employees. Accordingly, John Beard of the Workers' Union and the other representatives (from the Engineers and Firemen's Union and the Tube maker's Society) held several meetings during the following days with the company's management, which included the chairman (Councillor Stanley Mills Slater) and the managing director (Frederick Guy). This represented an attempt to reach a conciliatory understanding that would minimize the impact of the dispute on the firm's

⁷⁶ *Express and Star*, 28 July 1917.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 28 July 1917.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 3 and 4 August 1917.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 4 August 1917.

production for the war effort.⁸⁰ In a meeting at Wednesbury Town Hall on 9 August 1917 that was chaired by Fred Thorpe, it was made clear that the measures proposed by the firm were deemed most unsatisfactory. Mr J. Wright of the Engineers and Firemen's Union told this gathering that 'in future it would be the duty of every worker to see that when their brothers came back from the war, they shall have justice done'.⁸¹ In a secret ballot subsequently held in Wednesbury on 10 August 1917, over 95 per cent of the workers who voted indicated their intention to remain out and on strike until their demands for Marshall's dismissal and an inquiry were satisfied, thereby necessitating arbitration.⁸² Even such an anti-trade union newspaper as the *Midland Advertiser and Wednesbury Herald* was of the plain opinion that 'the Wednesbury men in the trenches knew the exact position, and were with them as far as sympathy was concerned'.⁸³

From the point of view of the workers, the situation had become greatly inflamed because no public apology to Frank Smith had been offered by Marshall, although a letter giving his version of the events of 26 July was published in the *Express and Star* on 9 August 1917. In this correspondence, he stated that he wished 'to make it clear that I did not know that the stranger with whom I had been speaking was a returned soldier'.⁸⁴ This account being refuted by the evidence that Smith was clearly wearing the Silver War Badge, it did little to endear Marshall to the Crown's workforce. As reported in the *Midland Advertiser and Wednesbury Herald* on 11 August, it was apparent that Marshall already had a poor reputation for his high-handed attitude, which had built up considerable resentment amongst the firm's employees. The workers' representatives were of the conviction that had this been an isolated incident they would have been more willing to come to an accommodation with the firm but this injustice

⁸⁰ *Midland Advertiser and Wednesbury Herald*, 11 August 1917. As well as being the Chairman of the Wednesbury firm of James Russell & Sons, Councillor S.M. Slater was the Mayor of Walsall. His late wife was Mrs Mary Julia Slater, the Mayoress of Walsall, who had died from injuries received during the raid carried out by the German Navy Zeppelins L19 and L21 on 31 January 1916. See Chapter 6, pp. 161-191.

⁸¹ *Midland Advertiser and Wednesbury Herald*, 11 August 1917.

⁸² *Express and Star*, 4, 6 and 10 August 1917.

⁸³ *Midland Advertiser and Wednesbury Herald*, 11 August 1917.

⁸⁴ *Express and Star*, 9 August 1917.

was the latest in a long series of objectionable dealings and Marshall's behaviour towards an ex-serviceman and loyal worker such as Frank Smith was the final straw.⁸⁵

A meeting of the local trade unionists was convened on 15 August 1917 in Wednesbury, and was again chaired by Fred Thorpe, at which there were representatives from the tube workers and other associated trades. Those present confirmed that 'they had notified their employers that they were willing to support the men at the Crown tube works to any extent'.⁸⁶ Assurances of sympathy, together with the prospect of supportive industrial action, if necessary, were also received from the trade unions representing these other engineering occupations and trades. The difficulties of resolving the dispute having been communicated directly to the Ministry of Munitions, the representatives of both sides were informed that they were required to attend a summit to take place at the Ministry's London offices on 16 August 1917.⁸⁷

The dispute finally came to its conclusion when an emergency conference of the National Employers' Federation was convened in Birmingham on 24 August 1917. Testimony was taken from the relevant parties, including Messrs Smith and Marshall, and corroboration supplied by other witnesses to the event. The finding of this body was that although it was an extremely unfortunate situation, it was felt that the demand for the dismissal of Marshall could not be supported. Nevertheless, in the aftermath of these proceedings, Marshall resigned of his own accord and this decision was accepted by the Company. On the following day, the unions met and a resolution to return to work was unanimously supported.⁸⁸ The Ministry of Labour's situation report for the week commencing 7 November 1917 indicated that the prospect of a further dispute at this works had been averted due to the success of the negotiations between the parties.⁸⁹

⁸⁵ *Midland Advertiser and Wednesbury Herald*, 11 August 1917.

⁸⁶ *Express and Star*, 15 August 1917.

⁸⁷ *Midland Advertiser and Wednesbury Herald*, 18 August 1917.

⁸⁸ *Midland Advertiser and Wednesbury Herald*, 25 August 1917.

⁸⁹ TNA CAB 24/31: The Labour Situation: Report from the Ministry of Labour, November 1917. The Crown work's employees were not disaffected and, like many other workers, their patriotism was not in doubt.

It is notable that this strike occurred during a year in which immense pressure was being experienced by the allied cause. In February 1917, Germany had resumed its policy of unrestricted submarine warfare in an attempt to disrupt the supplies of food and other necessities to Britain and its allies; and, in March, Russia had experienced the first of the year's revolutions, upsetting the prospects for concerted action against the central powers on all fronts during 1917. There was already considerable discontent amongst the munitions workers across the country, and especially those in the engineering trades, with disputes arising over pay and conditions, dilution and the combing-out of workers channelled to fill the ranks on the stalemated Western Front.

The dispute in Wednesbury was of a completely different nature, however, and this is evidenced by the positive reporting of the local press. The *Midland Counties Express* of 28 July 1917 highlighted the workers' motivation, as they saw themselves 'acting in the interests of their comrades who were still fighting their battle in the trenches', to which John Beard added in the *Express and Star* that 'no one could charge the employees of the Crown tube works with a lack of patriotism'.⁹⁰ On 11 August 1917, Beard also informed the readers of the *Midland Advertiser and Wednesbury Herald* that 'Nobody could accuse Wednesbury men of doing anything against the success of the war.' Added to this, he stressed that the promise made to the workers by their employers 'was based on the fundamental principles of liberty, and would have to be redeemed'.⁹¹ This sentiment was therefore entirely consistent with the motivation that had underpinned the earlier Black Country strike of 1913, with both of these disputes drawing support from across the community in Wednesbury and its neighbouring towns. The Ministry of Labour's report to the War Cabinet for the week

⁹⁰ *Express and Star*, 28 July 1917; *Midland Counties Express*, 28 July 1917; R. Hyman, p. 82; N. Mansfield, p. 134. John Beard demonstrated his own patriotism by joining his local Volunteer Training Corps, adopting the habit of attending meetings in uniform. At the beginning of 1915, he also resigned from the ILP, in protest at its attitude towards the war and joined the British Workers' National League. This organization (initially called the Socialist National Defence Committee) was formed in April 1915 by the journalist Victor Fisher to counter calls for peace at any price from pacifists in the labour movement.

⁹¹ *Midland Advertiser and Wednesbury Herald*, 11 August 1917.

ending 8 August echoed this point of view by noting that ‘the incident suggests that the workers have a very high regard to the rights and interests of the discharged soldiers’.⁹²

Six months’ after the commencement of the Crown tube works dispute, in an article headed ‘Tribute to Labour – Extracts from Sir Douglas Haig’s Despatches’, the *Midland Advertiser and Wednesbury Herald* reproduced elements of his 25 December 1917 despatch. This had originally been published in the issue of the *London Gazette* dated 8 January 1918, with the relevant extracts supplied by the War Office. Reference was made in the article to ‘the invaluable help and zeal manifested by the workers in the district in enabling the Commander-in-Chief to carry out so successfully his operations on the Western Front’. Furthermore, it emphasized that in such times of anxiety and industrial unrest, the importance of the patriotic purpose of ‘stimulating more than ever the work people in the district, and the country generally, to bring about by their united efforts a speedy termination of the world-wide struggle’. Within the article, there was featured a letter from Colonel S.L. Cozaster, Chief Mechanical Engineer, addressed to Messrs James Russell & Sons, Crown tube works, Wednesbury. Writing on behalf of Major General Sir G. Scott Moncrieff, Colonel Cozaster highlighted the relevant sections of Field Marshal Haig’s despatch to openly acknowledge the efforts that were being undertaken at home to assist in winning the war. Furthermore, the request was made to the firm that the appreciation and thanks of both the Field Marshal and Major General Moncrieff be communicated to ‘your staff, foremen and workmen, who have contributed to the successful supply of engineer stores to our armies in the field’.⁹³

The wider events of 1917 and their impact and consequences stimulated discussion within the local labour movement on the issue of the right to strike, with the

⁹² TNA CAB 24/22: War Cabinet Memoranda – Strike at the Crown tube works, Wednesbury over refusal to reinstate ex-employee discharged from Army. This clear concern for the interests of those discharged soldiers who had been wounded during their active service was referred to in public meetings held by the National Federation of Discharged and Demobilized Sailors and Soldiers. See Chapter 8, pp. 235-243.

⁹³ *Midland Advertiser and Wednesbury Herald*, 16 February 1918. Major General Sir George Kenneth Scott Moncrieff had joined the Royal Engineers in 1873, rising to become Director of Fortifications and Works (a position subsequently re-titled as Chief Royal Engineer in 1936) from 1911 until his retirement in 1918.

Wednesbury Trades and Labour Council's proceedings being published in the local press in early September 1917. Concerns were expressed by this forum's executive committee with regard to the power accumulated by employers and the prospect of the permanent removal of the hard-won rights that the trade unions had surrendered for the duration of the hostilities. The *Express and Star* reported that this Council was mindful of the prospect of there being a high demand for labour in the manufacturing industries after the war, due to the anticipated need for reconstruction.⁹⁴ Hence, it was imperative that living standards should not be allowed to suffer. The conclusion arrived at by the Council was that 'the employers, politically and economically, were never more powerful than today' and the workers 'should not be deprived of their "most priceless treasure," the power to strike and withhold their labour for the adjustment of wrongs'.

5.5 Conclusion

Expanding on the previous Chapter's discussion of wartime munitions production in Wednesbury, the intention of this Chapter has been to give an account of industrial relations and productivity, exploring the way in which this affected both local industry and wider society. Consideration has been given to the further development of the labour movement and the manner in which local trade unionists committed themselves to the aims of winning the war, especially in the light of negotiations such as the 1915 Treasury Agreement. The establishment and maintenance of local power bases by the new generation of general unions fostered an environment whereby wartime demands on issues such as equal pay and the widening of the scope of jobs previously restricted to skilled labour alone could be used to greater advantage. Perhaps one of the ironies of this total war was that many people actually now enjoyed better living and working conditions than had been the case in peacetime, due to a combination of government intervention and trade union activism. Of particular importance locally was the

⁹⁴ *Express and Star*, 6 September 1917.

Workers' Union, which from 1913 onwards was to become increasingly dominant because its membership was open to the semi-skilled and unskilled workers, including the large influx of women munitions workers entering employment with local firms. Under the conditions of war, the wages of many workers rose to a level inconceivable before the war, providing a taste of 'what life might be like with regular earnings and a higher standard of living'.⁹⁵ The size and influence of the labour movement continued to grow and their efforts in achieving this enhanced not only the position of trade unions within their industries; it also added to their prestige in the community generally.

That the 1913 Black Country strike had revealed a real spirit of community and worker solidarity was exhibited in Chapter 2, and this Chapter has provided evidence that the essential spirit of this was continued even during wartime. The 1917 dispute at James Russell & Sons Crown tube works was a clear demonstration of the people's reaction to the unjust treatment of a returned and wounded veteran, Frank Smith. Such community patriotism was indicative of the wider concern for the welfare of the town's men and the treatment they could expect when they returned home from the trenches. Because the existence of this type of 'sectional patriotism of the workers was not antagonistic to a larger patriotism', this meant that the working class emerged from the war as a more cohesive and powerful entity than it had entered it.⁹⁶ These events highlighted in very practical terms the power that the local labour movement had now acquired for itself, both in the workplace and beyond. The logical extension was therefore for organized labour to mobilize and seek political power at local and national levels, and this will be one of the themes to be discussed in Chapter 8. Before proceeding to that, there will be an examination of another aspect of the home front; namely the air raid that was carried out by the Imperial German Navy's Zeppelin airships on 31 January 1916, during which several Black Country towns were bombed.

⁹⁵ J.D. Young, p. 123.

⁹⁶ B.A. Waites, *A Class Society at War: England, 1914-1918*, p. 60.

CHAPTER 6: ZEPPELINS OVER THE BLACK COUNTRY - THE MIDLANDS' FIRST BLITZ

6.1 Introduction

The following extract is taken from a letter sent to his mother by Fregattenkapitän Peter Strasser, the commander of the Imperial German Navy's Airship Division:

We who strike the enemy where his heart beats have been slandered as baby killers and murderers of women. What we do is repugnant to us too, but necessary, very necessary. A soldier cannot function without the factory worker, the farmer and all the other providers behind them. Nowadays there is no such animal as a non-combatant. Modern warfare is total warfare.¹

This statement articulates the rapidly changing nature of war in a conflict that harnessed industry and technology on an unprecedented scale, providing exceptional innovation in the development of armaments. The majority of these were deployed at the front line but one weapon that had a profound impact on the British home front was the German airship. This targeted cities and towns, industries and essential services, the workforce and ordinary civilians. Whilst the damage and disruption were relatively limited, especially when compared with that taking place in later conflicts, fear and panic were widespread during what might be viewed as the first Battle of Britain.

This Chapter is principally concerned with the German air raid that commenced on 31 January 1916; an incursion into the West Midlands by hostile aircraft during part of what was the first sustained strategic bombing campaign in military aviation history.² Commencing with an examination of the revolutionary development of the airship as an offensive weapon, thereby altering forever the relationship between the front line and the home front, the changing nature of warfare will be considered. As a driving force in this process, the creation and aspects of the war service of the Germany Navy's Airship Division, the Marine-Luftschiff-Abteilung, will be charted. The focus will then shift to

¹ E. Lawson and J. Lawson, *The First Air Campaign: August 1914 – November 1918* (Cambridge MA: Da Capo Press, 1996), p. 79; *1914-18* (KCET/BBC Television, 1996). The term 'baby killers' was first seen in *War Illustrated* magazine's article, 'The Coming of the Aerial Baby Killers' on 30 January 1915.

² Earlier air raids, such as the Italian bombing of Turkish forces in Libya in 1911, were individual actions.

the detail of the events of 31 January to 2 February 1916, when an audacious mission intended to make a clear statement about Germany's ability to strike anywhere on the British mainland took place. Following a discussion of the background to this operation, there will be an extensive examination of the participation of the Zeppelins L19 and L21, which were responsible for the bombing of Bradley, Tipton, Walsall and Wednesbury. Coverage will be given to these towns and some of the individuals so tragically affected, of whom the *Midland Advertiser* commented on 5 February 1916:

The people of Staffordshire have had an experience this week which they will never forget for the rest of their lives. For the first time in eighteen months of warfare, the horrors of war were brought to their very doors.³

There will be a discussion of the political, public and press reaction, the human and other costs, and the longer-term consequences for Britain and Germany. A previously neglected area concerns the early history of Britain's air defences and the growth in prominence and sophistication of this will be evaluated in terms of the changes arising from the events of January-February 1916. The Chapter will also make a firm contribution to the debate regarding the intended target of this raid, and whether this was in fact, the port of Liverpool. Finally, there will be reference to the memorialization that the respective towns carried out at the time and subsequently, to honour the civilian victims, supporting the argument that not only was this was a tragic event and one that generates emotion amongst local people, even to the present day.⁴

6.2 The war reaches the home front

The First World War was to be the conflict in which a threat to the security of the nation state came, for the first time, from the air. Through the deployment of aircraft capable of performing long-range strategic bombing missions that caused devastation, outrage and panic, a new and terrifying dimension to warfare was heralded. This was because

³ *Midland Advertiser*, 5 February 1916.

⁴ See Appendix 6, Photograph 65, p. 314.

until the twentieth-century, wars were generally fought by professional armies (notably in the nineteenth century's colonial campaigns) and situated far from the battlefield the civilian population performed the roles of spectator and supporter. The defence of the British Isles had been the traditional preserve of the Royal Navy, with its Grand Fleet constructed at vast expense to control the sea-lanes and deter any possible threat of aggression. However, within the span of a decade, aircraft progressed from travelling but a few yards to being capable of comfortably crossing the English Channel, so that the possibility of aerial combat was contemplated by amongst others, the author H.G. Wells.⁵ Yet complacency in government and military circles was prevalent, the view being that this was science fiction, and as John Morris has recounted, few believed 'air attacks upon citizens would soon become an integral part of modern warfare.'⁶

At the outbreak of the war, the air forces of the combatant nations were so small that they were utilized principally for reconnaissance duties; however, on 8 October and 21 November 1914, the Royal Naval Air Service had bombed the airship storage sheds at Düsseldorf and Friedrichshafen respectively. German forays were undertaken by seaplanes on 21, 24 and 25 December 1914, the first two being flights to Dover (a bomb landing near to the Castle on the second visit) and the third to the London Docks.⁷ No fatalities or casualties occurred in any of these German raids. The implication was clear; it was only a matter of time before the execution of rather more ambitious missions. This was to occur at the beginning of 1915, spearheaded by airships the German propagandists would portray as wonder weapons capable of rendering Britain's defences redundant and raising the cost of resistance to a level too high to bear.

⁵ H.G. Wells, *The War in the Air* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1941; reprinted, 1976). Originally serialized in *The Pall Mall Magazine* during 1907, *The War in the Air* became available as a book for the first time in 1908. Almost prophetically, this work described the employment by an ambitious and nationalistic Imperial Germany of a fleet of airships to launch a surprise attack on the United States. Initially obliterating the US Navy's Atlantic Fleet, this action was following by a devastating assault on New York.

⁶ J. Morris, *German Air Raids on Great Britain, 1914-1918* (London: Sampson Low, 1925; reprinted London: Naval & Military Press, 1993), p. 7.

⁷ National Archives Air Ministry Papers (hereafter TNA AIR) 1/554/16/15/45: Home Defence reports on raids, December 1914 – March 1916; T. Fegan, *The Baby Killers: German Air Raids on Britain in the First World War* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword Books, 2002), p. 10.

Count Ferdinand von Zeppelin's pioneering LZ1 rigid airship flew for the first time at Friedrichshafen, on the German side of Lake Constance, on 2 July 1900. Christopher Chant pointed out that from this modest beginning, the features of subsequent Zeppelin models could be discerned.⁸ These were the streamlined cylindrical shape, structured by a framework of duralumin rings and girders, enclosed in a fabric envelope. This contained separated hydrogen gasbags providing the airship's lift, and stability during flight was via the operation of horizontal and vertical control surfaces. The use of duralumin, an aluminium alloy, gave lightness and a high strength to weight ratio that was essential to the Zeppelin's performance on long endurance flights. Hydrogen gas being prone to escape through most materials, to counter this, the gas bags were fabricated from a material known as Goldbeater's skin, which was derived from the chemically-treated intestines of cattle.⁹ Propulsion was supplied by petrol engines, each of which had an independent fuel supply, and control was located in gondolas suspended beneath the airship's hull to afford the best forward and downward fields of vision. Standard features on later Zeppelins included electric lighting (powered by engine-driven generators), radio and flight equipment. To assist with navigation, and where fitted, a Goerz sub-cloud car could be suspended by a cable extending up to 1,000 metres below the airship. Hence, by using a telephone linked to the airship's commander, a member of the crew located in the cloud car could assist with locating the target while allowing the airship to remain hidden in cloud cover.¹⁰

By the end of the decade, the airship had established itself as a proven means of transporting civilian passengers. Widely associated in Germany with national pride and seen to be indicative of technological achievement, improvements made to the design brought such lighter-than-air ships to the attention of German authorities keen to exploit

⁸ C. Chant, *The Zeppelin: The History of German Airships from 1900 to 1937* (London: David & Charles, 2000), p. 40.

⁹ *Attack of the Zeppelins* (Windfall Films for Channel 4, 2013).

¹⁰ E. Lawson and J. Lawson, p. 65.

the potential of such inventions. Fundamental logistical and technical problems had to be resolved before the application to military use, including the provision of a support infrastructure comprised of hangers, maintenance shops, the facilities for producing the immense quantities of Hydrogen gas required, and a network of wireless stations.

In the way that the brand name of Hoover is virtually synonymous with the vacuum cleaner, that of Zeppelin has become almost a generic name for a German airship. There were other manufacturers, however, including Parseval and the firm of Luftschiffbau Schütte-Lanz. The latter company's airships were constructed using a framework of three-ply wood and although offering the advantage of lightness, they were prone to inferior performance, especially during inclement weather when the wood absorbed moisture, causing splits in the frame and hull.¹¹ Hence, by the outbreak of hostilities, Luftschiffbau Zeppelin had established itself as the dominant contractor supplying airships to Germany's Army and to its Navy. The production of this company expanded to such an extent that by 1918 a workforce numbering in excess of 12,000 was employed, of whom there were some 1,600 scientific and technical staff.

The German Army's Airship Division, the Heers Luftschiffe, had been created in 1909 following the acquisition of Zeppelin Z1. By 1914, it had twelve airships, several of them being civilian vessels impressed for military use at the outbreak of the war, and which were used for training purposes. Consequently, four airships were allocated for service on the Western Front, and three to the Eastern Front.¹² The Marine-Luftschiff-Abteilung was the airship division of the Imperial German Navy, the Kaiserliche Marine. Founded in 1912, Griehl and Dressel relate that its first airship the Zeppelin L1 had crashed in the North Sea on 9 September 1913 when participating in a naval exercise.¹³ Its sister ship, the Zeppelin L2, had exploded during a flight in the

¹¹ TNA AIR 1/543/16/15/4: Reports on air raids, various districts – Zeppelins or aircraft, April 1915 – November 1917.

¹² C. Chant, p. 56.

¹³ M. Griehl, and J. Dressel, *Zeppelin! The German Airship Story* (London: Arms & Armour, 1990), p. 13.

same month; there being no survivors from either of the airships. The first commander of the Marine-Luftschiff-Abteilung had been Korvettenkapitän Friedrich Metzting, who had perished together with all of the crew of the L1. His successor to the post of Führer der Luftschiffe (Leader of Airships), and reporting directly to the commander-in-chief of the German High Seas Fleet, was the recently promoted Korvettenkapitän Peter Strasser, who was to become one of the outstanding pioneers of military aviation.¹⁴

As Wilbour Cross confirmed, when war broke out the sole airship at the German Navy's disposal was the Zeppelin L3, which was considered suitable for reconnaissance missions only. Nevertheless, Strasser's energetic determination and his vision resulted, within a matter of months, in the establishment of large-scale installations on Germany's North Sea and Baltic coasts. These grew to accommodate an airship service that expanded from an initial 120 to 7,000 officers and men, and which completed over 1,000 reconnaissance and 300 bombing missions by the end of the war.¹⁵ Commenting on this force, Thomas Fegan related that they 'were among the most highly motivated personnel to be found in the German services. They were all volunteers and the dangers that were faced instilled in them an abiding sense of comradeship between the officers, the NCOs and the men that was not found elsewhere'.¹⁶ The transcripts of the interrogations of prisoners from surviving airship crews note the dominance of the German Navy in this field of operations. This was attributed to Germany's Army officers being rather 'less competent as navigators than the commanders in the Navy'.¹⁷

¹⁴ TNA AIR 1/543/16/15/4; E. Lawson and J. Lawson, p. 79. Born in Hannover in 1876, Peter Strasser entered the Imperial German Navy at the age of 15, and rose rapidly to become a gunnery specialist in the Naval Office in Berlin. Initially, since he had no experience of airships, he viewed his transfer to this new branch of the service in September 1913, unfavourably. Nevertheless, by securing funding and recruiting capable and efficient crews, he built up the Marine-Luftschiff-Abteilung so that it became a highly effective force. Testament to this was that by 1916, he had been promoted to Fregattenkapitän (the rank equivalent to Rear Admiral) and in 1917, he was awarded the Pour le Mérite, which was Germany's highest military decoration (known informally as the Blue Max). Personally leading the last airship raid against Britain on 9 August 1918, Strasser was killed along with his crew in Zeppelin L70, when it was shot down near to Wells-next-the-Sea by a British DH 4 aircraft flown by Major Egbert Cadbury and Major Robert Leckie.

¹⁵ W. Cross, *Zeppelins of World War I: The Dramatic Story of Germany's Lethal Airships* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1991), p. 165.

¹⁶ T. Fegan, p. 17.

¹⁷ TNA AIR 1/543/16/15/4.

Airships, by virtue of their range and payload, offered major advantages when compared with the conventional fixed-wing aeroplanes available during the period.¹⁸ Nevertheless, in the first year of the war, they tended to be employed predominantly on long-range scouting operations, in the case of the German Army over the front lines and for the Imperial German Navy over the Baltic and the North Sea.¹⁹ As Charles Stephenson has noted, tactical attacks are made with the intention of defeating military forces; strategic attacks aim to defeat an enemy state without fighting its military forces. As such, this was a tactical role being performed to the detriment of the potential strategic importance of this weapon.²⁰ Their size created visibility problems, particularly when flying during daylight and at low altitude, with three Army airships downed during the war's opening weeks. Hence the German General Staff's stipulation that offensive operations were to be carried out only under the cover of dark moonless nights, effectively making Germany's airships the world's first stealth bombers.

The value of such a weapon came to be appreciated more fully with the arrival of trench warfare and the imposition of the British naval blockade, together with the realization that the output of the war industries and morale of the civilian workers would be imperative to the war effort. Fegan pointed out that German public opinion had been enraged by fatalities incurred during a French air raid on Freiburg. This had prompted Admiral Hugo von Pohl's proposal that airships should be employed on bombing missions. However, before this recommendation could be implemented, the Imperial assent was required but 'the Kaiser prevaricated, worried about the effect this unprecedented form of warfare might have on the opinion of neutral countries, such as the United States'.²¹ This hesitation was understandable given the prevailing codes of military honour, which held that non-combatants should be shielded from the dangers of

¹⁸ *Timewatch: Zeppelin - The First Blitz* (BBC Television, 2007).

¹⁹ Essentially, the intention of this type of airship scouting operation was to prevent the German High Seas Fleet from being trapped in the North Sea by its numerically superior adversary, the British Grand Fleet.

²⁰ C. Stephenson, *Zeppelins: German Airships 1900-40* (London: New Vanguard, 2004), pp. 13-14.

²¹ T. Fegan, pp. 15-16.

war. Furthermore, there were the Hague Conventions of 1899 and 1907 to be considered.²² Of course, the consequences for civilian populations of blockades and sieges, as strategies that had been used by armies and navies for centuries, meant that such assurances were far from being guaranteed. When implemented, the reaction, succinctly articulated by Morris, was that this extension of warfare to the home front ‘was enough to create widespread indignation and anger amongst the British public’.²³

On 10 January 1915, the Kaiser gave his qualified support, although he forbade damage to royal palaces and historic buildings; only targets such as coastal defences, docks and military installations were to be attacked.²⁴ Many of these being located near to densely populated areas, the rudimentary aiming techniques rendered it virtually impossible to bomb with precision. The initial raid by airships occurred on the 19-20 January 1915 when German Naval Zeppelins L3 and L4 attacked Great Yarmouth, King’s Lynn and Sheringham; the first victim of these airships was a civilian, Samuel Smith, a resident of Great Yarmouth. On 21 January 1915, when reporting on this event, a German publication, the *Kölnische Zeitung*, exclaimed:

The first Zeppelin has appeared in England and has extended its fiery greetings to our enemy. It has come to pass, that which the English have long feared and repeatedly have contemplated with terror. The most modern war weapon, a triumph of German inventiveness and the sole possession of the German military, has shown itself capable of crossing the sea and carrying the war right to the sod of old England.²⁵

The first air raid on London was carried out on 31 May 1915 by German Army Zeppelin LZ38, commanded by Hauptmann Eric Linnerz. The first bombs falling on Stoke Newington, thirty-five high explosive and ninety incendiary bombs were released, killing seven people (including four children) and injuring a further thirty-five.

²² These were the international declarations and treaties negotiated at the peace conferences held at The Hague in the Netherlands during 1899 and 1907. Specifically in relation to aerial warfare, Declaration XIV of the 1907 Convention sought to prohibit the discharge of projectiles and explosives from balloons. This Declaration was signed and ratified by Great Britain and the United States. Many other nation states – including France, Germany, Italy, Russia and Japan – neither signed nor ratified the document, however.

²³ J. Morris, p. 8.

²⁴ Unrestricted aerial bombing was not permitted by the German military until 20 July 1915, when it was sanctioned by the Kaiser, and this led to an eventual escalation in the number of air raids carried out.

²⁵ Quoted in W. Cross, p. 20.

6.3 The Zeppelin raid of 31 January – 1 February 1916

Vizeadmiral Reinhard Scheer's appointment as the commander-in-chief of the High Seas Fleet on 18 January 1916 was a catalyst for the implementation of a more aggressive naval strategy. Maximizing the role of the Marine-Luftschiff-Abteilung was central to this thinking. The last air raid over the British mainland having taken place on 13 October 1915, that scheduled for 31 January 1916 was planned to be the most ambitious yet attempted, involving the largest number of airships, to demonstrate Germany's military prowess.²⁶ As Tom Morgan stated, this time airships would 'fly across the entire breadth of England en masse and bomb Liverpool which, until then, had been considered well beyond the range of the raiders'.²⁷ Not only would industrial and military targets be assaulted, it was believed that the sheer scale of the attack would shatter British morale and resolve. There were reservations on the German side, however. Although airships of the latest class of Zeppelins would be employed, Cross recorded that Strasser was concerned for the welfare of his crews because in carrying out this mission they would have to make round trips of several hundred miles.²⁸

Unfortunately, no single document survives to confirm that the target of the raid was Liverpool, and there has been inevitable speculation on whether the Zeppelins that reached the Midlands did so intentionally seeking munitions factories. The evidence presented supports the case that this large port, receiving shipments of munitions and supplies from the British Empire and neutral countries, was a logical choice for the German Navy. Firstly, on 4 February 1916, *The Times* reproduced the text of two telegrams that had been intercepted by the Wireless Press. These had been transmitted by the German Admiralty and claimed that the action of its airships had been a success. The telegrams were set out in an article headed 'German Reasons for the Raids'.

²⁶ Five airships (the L11, L13, L14, L15 and L16) had bombed South London and some parts of the Home Counties on 13 October 1915. This was an air raid that resulted in 71 fatalities and 128 casualties.

²⁷ T. Morgan, 'The Great Zeppelin Raid Night of Jan 31st – Feb 1st 1916' <<http://www.hellfire-corner.demon.co.uk/zeppelin.htm>> [Accessed 1 September 2009].

²⁸ W. Cross, p. 52.

To the German Embassy, Washington:-

The newspapers point out that Birkenhead, which is the chief place for the construction of warships, is the principal entrance to the harbour of Liverpool, and is a depot for American ammunition at the mouth of the Mersey.

To the United Press, New York:-

Judging from the Zeppelin observations, it is believed that the attack on Liverpool accomplished its objective, which was to destroy the grain elevators. It is officially stated that England receives most of her grain from foreign countries through Liverpool, and that there are also great mills there, so that practically all English grain supplies must go through Liverpool.²⁹

Secondly, the report of the Intelligence Section, GHQ Home Forces, in considering whether the airships had originally intended to go to the Black Country, concluded that they did not. It pointed out that their courses, 'if persisted in, and opening out fanwise from the coast, would have brought the airships over the Liverpool-Manchester-Sheffield district'. Although none reached there, it noted that 'the fact that the German Admiralty officially reported the airships had visited the Liverpool-Manchester district tends to show that this was the intended objective'. This was reinforced by the report's statement that 'the airship crews themselves believe, or affect to believe that they had reached this district'.³⁰ Thirdly, this argument was further strengthened by the transcript of the interrogations of the surviving crew of Zeppelin L15 that crashed during a later raid, and which are available in the National Archives. Despite their only reaching Caythorpe in Lincolnshire, the transcripts record:

The crew are apparently fairly convinced that they reached Liverpool on 31st January. It is quite possible that the extinction of lights in certain towns upset the calculations of the commanding officers and led to their believing this error.³¹

At 11.00 am GMT on Monday, 31 January 1916, a force of nine airships – Zeppelins L11, L13, L14, L15, L16, L17, L19, L20 and L21 – set out from their bases

²⁹ *The Times*, 4 February 1916.

³⁰ TNA AIR 1/2123/207/73/5: Air raids on Britain, 1 January 1916 – 28 February 1916, p. 3.

³¹ TNA AIR 1/1269/204/9/86: Precautions against Zeppelin raids. This represents the first time that this piece of evidence has been presented, and it considerably strengthens the argument for Liverpool being the target.

on the northern coast of Germany. They made a rendezvous at Borkum Island and in successive groups, crossed the North Sea. As the GHQ Intelligence report confirmed, 'the entire available squadron of the new standardized naval airships was employed'.³²

The operations that they had carried out during the previous year had provided the crews with valuable experience enabling them to hone their tactics. Cooksley stated that essentially this involved 'climbing as soon as possible to an altitude where the prevailing easterly winds were beneficial in good weather or nights when there was little moon'.³³ Approaching the British coastline during the final moments of daylight, altitude would then be reduced briefly so that the airship commanders could identify their location and plot their course. The intention was that their arrival over the target area would be when visibility from below was minimal, giving them the opportunity to drop their bombs and safely return to base before dawn. During these early raids, navigation was aided and abetted by the airships being able to follow the lights along roads, so that they could better identify the cities and towns that they encountered. An anti-cyclimatic system having extended over Western Europe for some days previously, on the evening of 31 January weather conditions over the North Sea were quiet, although there were large patches of mist and fog on the eastern coast of Britain. Whilst crossing the North Sea with relative ease, the difficulties of identifying their place of landfall and in making the necessary course calculations was compounded by rain and snow, taking all of the insurgents away from their intended direction inland.³⁴

A member of the Q class of twelve airships, Zeppelin L21 (LZ 61) was virtually brand new, having been delivered from the company's Löwenthal works on 10 January 1916.³⁵ It was a huge machine, 585 feet in length and 61 feet in diameter, with four Maybach HSLu engines of 240 horsepower giving it a maximum speed of 59.72 mph,

³² TNA AIR 1/2123/207/73/5, p. 3.

³³ P.G. Cooksley, p. 43.

³⁴ TNA AIR 1/2123/207/73/5, p. 3.

³⁵ C. Chant, p. 110; <<http://www.zeppelin-museum.dk>> [Accessed 01/11/2010]. L21 was the navy's tactical number, whereas LZ61 (standing for Luftschiff Zeppelin) was the company's production number.

an operational range of 2,672 miles and a maximum altitude of 9,185 feet. The crew of up to eighteen men were located in two gondolas suspended below the hull, and the L21 could deliver a payload of 3,880 lb (usually a mixture of high explosive and incendiary bombs). Based at Nordholz, near Cuxhaven, the L21's commander was Kapitänleutnant Max Dietrich, with Leutnant der Reserve von Nathusius as the executive officer.³⁶

The following particulars of the flight of the L21 were taken from the GHQ Intelligence report. The L21 entered the British mainland north of Mundesley and passed over Hanworth shortly after 4.50 pm. It was accompanied by the L13, which was commanded by Kapitänleutnant Heinrich Mathy, already a legendary figure being the veteran of several air raids on London. The L21 reached Narborough at 5.20 pm, proceeding towards King's Lynn, then south of Grantham at 6.30 pm, travelling in a direction that took it north of Derby but south of Nottingham. From this point, the L21 veered north-west towards Stafford, where it was observed at 7.25 pm. By this time, after nearly nine hours spent airborne, the L21 was completely lost. Approaching Wolverhampton at 7.45 pm, by 7.55 pm its engines were heard in the neighbourhood of Netherton for several minutes, after which it headed northwards towards Dudley and then onwards to Tipton, arriving over this Black Country town at 8.00 pm.³⁷

The L21 began its offensive manoeuvres by dropping three high explosive bombs that landed in Tipton's Union Street and Waterloo Street. In Union Street, two houses were demolished and others were destroyed, as was the gas main; in Waterloo Street, some outbuildings to the rear of houses were destroyed and damage caused to the nearby canal bank.³⁸ Three incendiary bombs fell into gardens and yards in Bloomfield

³⁶ <<http://www.zeppelin-museum.dk>> [Accessed 01/11/2010]. Max Dietrich, who was the uncle of the actress and singer, Marlene Dietrich, had been a merchant seaman before the war. He would fly 41 missions and prior to commanding the L21 had served on the L7 and the L18 airships. During July 1916, he was given the command of the L34 but was killed when this airship was shot down near to Lowestoft by Flight Lieutenant Egbert Cadbury on 28 November 1916. By coincidence, this was the same day that the L21 (with Oberleutnant zur See Kurt Frankenberg in command) was also shot down over the sea near to Hartlepool by Sub-Lieutenant Edward Pelling of the RNAS. See Appendix 6, Photograph 62, p. 312.

³⁷ TNA AIR 1/2123/207/73/5, p. 5.

³⁸ Ibid.

Road and Barnfield Road, where they failed to ignite. In total, fourteen people were killed (five men, five women and four children) and a further ten were injured. In an article published in December 1918, the *Manchester Guardian* supplied a detailed account of several air raids, including this one. It offered the explanation that ‘these reports were all compiled at the time by our own reporting staff or by our correspondents in the towns concerned but were held up by the censor’. It recorded that with respect to Tipton, five of the people that were killed in one house (now known to be 8 Union Street) were a husband and wife (64 year-old William Greensill and 67 year-old Mary Greensill), their daughter (44 year-old Sarah-Jane Morris) and her two children (eight year-old Millie Morris and eleven year-old Martin Morris).³⁹

Proceeding to the district of Lower Bradley, situated close to the town of Bilston, the L21 dropped five high explosive bombs that landed near to the towpath of the Wolverhampton Union Canal, damaging the canal bank and the wall of the drainage pumping station at the Pothouse Bridge Basin. This action caused the deaths of a young courting couple, 23 year-old Frederick Fellows of Coseley and 24 year-old Maud Fellows of Bradley who, although sharing the same surname, were not in fact married or related to each other in any way. Frederick died instantly as a direct consequence of the bomb blast and Maud was critically injured and, having been brought to Wolverhampton General Hospital, died there on 12 February 1916 from septicaemia.⁴⁰

The L21’s flight then took it in the direction of Wednesbury. At 8.15 pm, twelve high explosive and eight incendiary bombs were unleashed, many landing in King Street, close to the Crown tube works of James Russell & Sons.⁴¹ Three houses were demolished and, as the *Manchester Guardian* later reported, after the first explosion a number of people were killed as they rushed from their houses when further

³⁹ *Manchester Guardian*, 19 December 1918.

⁴⁰ TNA AIR 1/2123/207/73/5, p. 5. A memorial plaque situated at the Pothouse Basin to the memory of Frederick Fellows and Maud Fellows was unveiled by the Bradley-born MP, Dennis Turner, in 1994.

⁴¹ See Appendix 6, Photograph 63, p. 313. These show the nature of the bomb damage, as caused to buildings in the King Street area of Wednesbury, which was inflicted during the air raid on 31 January 1916.

bombs landed in the street.⁴² The fatalities included 37 year-old Joseph Horton Smith, his thirteen-year-old daughter, Nellie, his eleven-year-old son, Thomas, and his seven-year-old daughter, Ina, all resident at 14 King Street. Yet more distressing was that the blast of the explosion was so great that Ina's body was not found until the next morning, when it was discovered on the roof of the Crown tube works by Police Sergeant Frank Robinson. This factory also received a direct hit, killing one person, wrecking the roof and shattering the windows. The Crown and Cushion Inn, the stable and outbuildings at Hickman and Pullen's Brewery, the railway goods yard in the Mesty Croft area, and the Old Park colliery, were also damaged during the raid.⁴³ Having added thirteen Wednesbury people to its growing list of victims, the L21 proceeded towards Walsall.⁴⁴

There being no expectation that any enemy aircraft would be able to reach the Black Country, as with Tipton, Bradley and Wednesbury, Walsall was fully illuminated when the L21 arrived there at 8.25 pm. Dropping seven high explosive and four incendiary bombs, the first building to be hit was the Wednesbury Road Congregational Church, the roof and interior being smashed. A group of local primary school children, working in the church's parlour were miraculously unharmed and their teacher, Winifred Clark, gave a powerful description, stating that 'she saw a small piece of ceiling fall from the roof and then a blinding blue flash more vivid and fearsome than any lightning she had ever seen'.⁴⁵ Walsall's first fatality was 28 year-old Thomas Merryless, who was taking an evening walk and died instantly from a head wound caused by a bomb fragment. Situated on the outskirts of the town, Walsall's General Hospital had an incendiary bomb fall into its grounds. This was swiftly extinguished by Police Constable Joseph Burrell, who also helped to calm the hospital's patients by

⁴² *Manchester Guardian*, 19 December 1918. Due to the lifting of the wartime censorship, more information on the various German air raids became available, as published in this post-war edition of the newspaper.

⁴³ TNA AIR 1/2123/207/73/5, p. 5.

⁴⁴ T. Morgan, 'The Great Zeppelin Raid Night of Jan 31st – Feb 1st 1916' <<http://www.hellfire-corner.demon.co.uk/zeppelin.htm>> [Accessed 1 September 2009]. The names of the thirteen Wednesbury civilians are shown on Wednesbury's main war memorial in Walsall Street and on the memorial erected in the town's main cemetery by an anonymous benefactor in 2012. See Appendix 6, Photograph 65, p. 314.

⁴⁵ *Walsall Chronicle No. 8 - Walsall at War* (Walsall: Walsall Local History Centre, 1998), p. 23.

telling them the noise produced by the airship's engines had been the sound of a new engine at the town's gas works.⁴⁶ A bomb also fell in Mountrath Street having no effect, whilst another blew a hole in the wall of the saddle works of Elijah Jeffries.

The impact of the high explosive bomb that landed in this town's centre, at Bradford place, and near to the Walsall Institute of Science and Arts, remains visible in one of the walls of a nearby building.⁴⁷ Injury was caused to several people. This included the passengers of the number 16 tramcar, one of whom was Walsall's Mayoress, 55 year-old Mrs Mary Julia Slater.⁴⁸ Sustaining severe wounds to her chest and abdomen, and although she was able to alight from the tramcar, Mrs Slater was immediately taken to the nearby hospital, where she remained for several days. She died from septicaemia and shock on 20 February 1916, which by tragic coincidence was the date of her birthday.⁴⁹ This family's heartbreak was compounded because, as reported in the *Walsall Pioneer and District News* on 26 February 1916, their eldest son was Lieutenant Percival Slater, then serving as a subaltern with the 1/6th Battalion of the South Staffordshire Regiment. Lieutenant Slater was himself recovering from wounds received during the assault on the Hohenzollern Redoubt on 13 October 1915, in the final stages of the Battle of Loos.⁵⁰ Mrs Slater's funeral on 24 February 1916 was presided over by the Bishop of Lichfield, Dr John Kempthorne. As the procession made its journey to St Matthew's, the parish church of Walsall, local people and soldiers of the South Staffordshire Regiment lined the streets to demonstrate their respect.⁵¹

⁴⁶ *Express and Star*, 25 August and 1 September 2011 and 29 March 2012. These issues of this local newspaper have featured a number of articles that have been written by Professor Carl Chinn.

⁴⁷ At the time of the raid, this building housed the town's Labour club. It is now a nightclub and the marks where the bomb caused damage to the building remain visible. A Blue plaque has been erected here.

⁴⁸ *Walsall Chronicle* No. 8 - *Walsall at War*, p. 23.

⁴⁹ *Walsall Observer and South Staffordshire Chronicle*, 26 February 1916. Mrs Slater was a noted philanthropist and heavily involved with the work of the local Red Cross. Her husband was the Liberal Mayor of Walsall, Councillor Stanley Mills Slater, who was also the Chairman of Wednesbury's James Russell's Crown tube works, which by coincidence had been bombed by the L21 earlier that evening.

⁵⁰ I am indebted to Andrew Thornton for providing further information on Lieutenant P.J. Slater. Percival James Slater saw war service with the 1/6th South Staffordshire Regiment, in the Royal Flying Corps and the Royal Air Force. He attained the rank of Brigadier in the Second World War, served as a Deputy Lieutenant of the County of Staffordshire, and marched in the Queen's Coronation procession in 1953.

⁵¹ *Walsall Pioneer and District News*, 26 February 1916.

The other victims that evening were Walsall's William Haycock, a 50 year-old bed-ridden former Police Constable, who had been particularly agitated by the explosions caused by the L21's bombs; his death was attributed to shock when the L19's bombs were subsequently dropped. A patient at Walsall's workhouse infirmary, 59 year-old John Thomas Powell, also expired from shock. Two Wednesbury residents, 34 year-old Charles Cope and 36 year-old Thomas Linney, were also among those killed in Walsall by the L21.⁵² Returning to its base via Sutton Coldfield, Nuneaton, Market Harborough, Kettering, Ely and Thetford, it dropped the remainder of its bombs at Thrapston in Northamptonshire although no harm was done by this. When crossing the coastline near to Lowestoft at 11.35 pm, the L21's return journey across the North Sea coincided with its sister ship, the L19, commencing its offensive actions.⁵³

Constructed at Friedrichshafen, the L19 (LZ 54) airship was a member of the twenty-two P class of Zeppelins, making its maiden flight on 19 November 1915 and by January 1916, it had completed fourteen missions. Its specification was similar to that of the L21, in that it was 536 feet long, with a diameter of 61 feet, could achieve a maximum speed of 59.72 mph, operate over a range of 2,672 miles and reach a height of 9,185 feet. It was originally fitted with four Maybach CX 210 horsepower engines, which were replaced by the more powerful HSLu 240 horsepower engines also used by the L21. Based at Tondern in Schleswig-Holstein (later ceded to Denmark by the Versailles Treaty), its crew of up to eighteen men were commanded by Kapitänleutnant Odo Loewe, with Oberleutnant zur See Erwin Braunhof as the executive officer.⁵⁴ As with its sister ships, the L19 carried a mixture of high explosive and incendiary bombs.⁵⁵

⁵² *Walsall Chronicle* No. 8 - *Walsall at War*, p. 23.

⁵³ TNA AIR 1/2123/207/73/5, p. 5.

⁵⁴ C. Chant, p. 109; <<http://www.zeppelin-museum.dk>> [Accessed 01/11/2010]. See Appendix 6, Photograph 61, p. 311 of Zeppelin L19 and its commander, Kapitänleutnant Odo Loewe.

⁵⁵ *Attack of the Zeppelins* (Windfall Films for Channel 4, 2013). See Appendix 6, Photograph 64, p. 314 for examples of both the high explosive and incendiary devices that were dropped during this air raid. Containing the highly inflammable chemicals Benzine and Thermite, the incendiary devices had also been wrapped in tar-coated rope. This meant that once they had been ignited, they became extremely combustible and able to burn at very high temperatures, causing considerable damage to property.

The GHQ Intelligence report confirmed that the L19 had reached the British coast near to Sheringham at approximately 6.30 pm. From there, the airship followed an erratic path, so that it was seen at Swaffham at 7.05 pm, at Stamford at 8.10 pm, and at Loughborough at 9.20 pm, heading in the direction of Burton-on-Trent, where it was the third airship to drop its bombs that evening. Turning south to skirt Birmingham, which was blacked-out, it passed near to Bewdley, Kidderminster and Stourbridge, and then from 11.30 pm, Loewe began to follow a similar route to that taken by the L21. The L19 arrived at Wednesbury at midnight, releasing a single bomb that caused some minor damage to the Monway Works of the Patent Shaft & Axletree Co. Ltd.⁵⁶

Travelling towards Dudley, five high explosive and seventeen incendiary bombs were dropped. Some windows were broken by the blast, with no injury or devastation caused. Indeed, most of the bombs landed harmlessly in fields, some even in the grounds of Dudley Castle. Tipton was another town to receive a second visitation when, at approximately 12.20 am, eleven high explosive bombs fell demolishing dwellings and wrecking the Bush Inn public house on Park Lane West but with no loss of life.⁵⁷ At 12.25 am, L19 came to Walsall, dropped three high explosive bombs killing three pigs and a horse in the Pleck area, and causing damage to St Andrew's church and vicarage in the Birchills district. The *Walsall Pioneer and District News* commented, 'with a fellow feeling for their own kind, the Germans no doubt would have spared the pigs had they known'.⁵⁸ A slow, haphazard journey ensued as the L19 struggled to return to its base. Passing over Sutton Coldfield at 12.30 am and Coventry at 12.50 pm, L19 did not reach the coast until 5.25 am. Several signals requesting a position fix by radio triangulation were sent; the last relayed from the airship at 4.00 am on 1 February when 22 miles from the Dutch island of Ameland, reported the failure of three engines.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ TNA AIR 1/2123/207/73/5, p. 7.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 8.

⁵⁸ *Walsall Pioneer and District News*, 5 February 1916; *Walsall Chronicle No. 8 - Walsall at War*, p. 23.

⁵⁹ Despite being more powerful than those they replaced, the Zeppelin's new engines were far less reliable.

It is reported from Ameland this afternoon that a Zeppelin, which probably owing to fog had lost its way, was seen about 100 yards from the coast flying very low. A coastguard station bombarded the airship.⁶⁰

Drifting at very low altitude, on 2 February 1916 the L19 had crossed the Friesian islands. At 7.30 am that morning, the distress signals of the by now crashed and waterlogged airship, 95 miles east-by-north of Spurn, were seen by a British trawler, the *King Stephen*, which duly investigated. Upon reaching the L19, the trawler's captain, William Martin, refused to give assistance to the stranded airship's crew, despite being offered money and the assurances of Kapitänleutnant Loewe, upon his word of honour. Martin's justification for this was that his own nine-man crew were outnumbered by the Germans, who were most likely armed, and that it was be an easy matter for them to gain control of his ship and take him and his crew back to Germany and an uncertain fate. This was corroborated by First Mate George Denny in the *Wednesbury Herald* on 12 February 1916.⁶¹ With a calm sea and no indication that it would sink, Martin's intention was to find a Royal Navy vessel and alert them to the airship's position. Failing to locate one, he only reported the matter to the authorities upon the return of the *King Stephen* to Grimsby.⁶² The weather worsened and all of the L19's crew were lost. They placed farewell messages into bottles, some of which eventually reached Gothenburg, Sweden. The text of Loewe's message read as follows:

With fifteen men on the top platform and backbone girder of the L19, floating without gondolas in approximately 3 degrees East longitude, I am attempting to send a last report. Engine trouble 3 times repeated, a high headwind on the return journey delayed our return and, in the fog carried us over Holland where I was received with heavy rifle fire; the ship became heavy and simultaneously the engines broke down.
[2 February 1916, towards One o'clock, our last hour is approaching.]⁶³

⁶⁰ *Express and Star*, 2 February 1916. This was also reported by the *Manchester Guardian* on 7 February, which added 'with their usual contempt for neutrality, the airship had passed over Dutch territory'.

⁶¹ TNA AIR 1/2123/207/73/5, p. 8; *Wednesbury Herald*, 12 February 1916.

⁶² The *King Stephen* was later converted to military use as a Q-ship (with concealed weaponry), commanded by Lieutenant Tom Phillips of the Royal Navy Reserve. Having been placed on the German Navy's wanted list, when this vessel was sunk by a German torpedo boat and its crew captured on 26 April 1916, until his identity was verified, Phillips was charged with war crimes and placed under sentence of death.

⁶³ T. Morgan, 'The Great Zeppelin Raid Night of Jan 31st – Feb 1st 1916' <<http://www.hellfire-corner.demon.co.uk/zeppelin.htm>> [Accessed 1 September 2009]; <<http://www.zeppelin-museum.dk>> [Accessed 01/11/2010].

The formal confirmation of the fate of the L19 was made by the Press Bureau on 5 February 1916, stating that the Secretary of the Admiralty announced that ‘a fishing trawler has reported today to the naval authorities that she had seen a German Zeppelin in the North Sea in a sinking condition’.⁶⁴ In conveying this message, the *Midland Advertiser* newspaper also urged its readers to remember that German airships had bombed and sunk a merchant vessel, the *Franz Fischer*, with the loss of most of her crew in the North Sea. Nevertheless, this was a controversial action. An official French communiqué was cited by the *Wednesbury Herald* that ‘on the destruction of the Zeppelin L19 by Dutch guns, we may say there is justice somewhere, after all’. The same issue also carried the conflicting views of the French and German press:

The *Journal des Débats* says:- The wretched murderers aboard the L19 succumbed probably after terrible agony, not by virtue of the harsh law of retribution, but as the consequence of a measure of precaution, which nobody can blame the British sailors for having taken. Everybody else would have done the same in similar circumstances. The Germans can no longer expect as of right the benefit of those usages which civilised nations have gradually adopted to soften the hardships of war.

The *Lokalanzeiger* says:- This final infamous action provides still another of those disclosures which the present war has furnished us of the brutality of the British character.

The *Vossische Zeitung* resonates:- Everyone who has still proffered an impartial judgement will agree that the *King Stephen* affair...is a blot on the character of Britannia.

The *Krenz Zeitung* writes:- The attitude of the crew of the *King Stephen* was more cruel than that of the bombing crew...If the crew of the *King Stephen* feared an attack from the shipwrecked Germans they could have disarmed them, but who believes in such a fear, which would have been simply and solely proof of cowardice.⁶⁵

Praise for the actions of the Captain of the *King Stephen* came from the Bishop of London, Arthur Winnington-Ingram, who commended Captain Martin for placing the safety of his own crew first, which in turn provoked German anger, bitterness and vilification. During a service to dedicate two ambulances that had been provided by

⁶⁴ *Midland Advertiser*, 5 February 1916.

⁶⁵ *Wednesbury Herald*, 12 February 1916.

donations from the residents of Stoke Newington, the Bishop said, ‘any English sailor would have risked his own life to save another human life but the sad thing was that the chivalry of war had been killed by the Germans, and their word could not be trusted’.⁶⁶ In relation to the possibility that members of the L19’s crew might have been rescued by another vessel and incarcerated, an exchange of correspondence occurred between the Foreign Office and the United States Embassy; a neutral state in 1916, the United States had interceded at the request of the German Government. On 3 March 1916, a letter from the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs to the United States’ Ambassador that acknowledged that there were no known survivors nevertheless requested that the names of the airship’s crew be forwarded to facilitate further enquiries into the matter.⁶⁷

6.4 The implications and legacy of the raid

Of the nine airships that set out on 31 January 1916, none succeeded in reaching their intended objective of Liverpool, nor did they inflict any damage of military significance. Nevertheless, the actions of the L19 and the L21 were profoundly shocking to the people of the Midlands. This was the view conveyed by the *Midland Advertiser*, which commented that ‘the raid was so tragically sudden and unexpected that the bulk of the population were staggered more by the novelty of the occurrence than by the danger to life and limb’.⁶⁸ The *Walsall Pioneer and District News* suggested that ‘it seems difficult to believe that the war should have been brought to our own doors, even in such devilish fashion’.⁶⁹ The GHQ Intelligence report argued that had the airships been able to navigate as accurately as the German authorities maintained, and had they wrought the level of destruction claimed, ‘there is little doubt that raiding expeditions of this nature would have continued on an extensive scale’.⁷⁰ Dependent on

⁶⁶ Ibid., 12 February 1916.

⁶⁷ The National Archives Foreign Office Papers TNA FO 383/182: Loss of German airship L19 in North Sea. *Midland Advertiser*, 5 February 1916.

⁶⁹ *Walsall Pioneer and District News*, 5 February 1916.

⁷⁰ TNA AIR 1/2123/207/73/5, p.11.

dead reckoning, observation of the landscape and the reception of radio signals, few airship commanders knew their position with any great certainty; all experienced navigational problems to some extent. Furthermore, whilst equipped with Zeiss optical bombsights, aiming was also problematic for the crews, even though they no longer dropped the bombs by hand from the control gondola as done in the early missions.⁷¹

Germany's action of 31 January 1916 confirmed for many what Trevor Wilson described as 'the popular image of the enemy as an unscrupulous murderer of citizens, to be resisted at all costs'.⁷² Nationally, in total there were 70 deaths (29 men, 26 women and 15 children) and 113 injuries (44 men, 50 women and 19 children).⁷³ Locally, there were 34 fatalities and 19 injuries. In Bradley, the deaths of one man and one woman were directly due to the air raid. Fourteen people died in Tipton (five men, five women and four children), and there were ten people in the town who sustained injuries (one man, five women and four children). In Wednesbury, there were thirteen people killed (four men, four women and five children). Five fatalities occurred in Walsall, both directly and indirectly due to the air raid (three men and two women) and there were nine people with injuries (seven men and two women).⁷⁴ The *Express and Star* and the *Midland Counties Express* newspapers noted that 'a great majority of the victims belonged to the poorer classes, and about half of the total number were women and children'.⁷⁵ Regarding the damage to property, it was indicated that no buildings of military importance were hit and that many of the bombs that were dropped landed harmlessly. A statement issued by the Press Bureau and reproduced in the *Wednesbury Herald* on 12 February 1916 alluded to severe damage to an unnamed tube factory.⁷⁶

⁷¹ TNA AIR 1/543/16/15/4.

⁷² T. Wilson, p. 157.

⁷³ TNA AIR 1/604/16/15/238: Unfortified places attacked by German Zeppelins. This file also contains a list of the total number of casualties and injuries that were incurred during the air raid of 31 January 1916.

⁷⁴ TNA AIR 1/2123/207/73/5, p.14.

⁷⁵ *Express and Star*, 3 February 1916; *Midland Counties Express*, 5 February 1916.

⁷⁶ *Wednesbury Herald*, 12 February 1916. This was subsequently confirmed to be the Crown tube works of James Russell & Sons in Wednesbury, which sustained damage to the roof of one of its buildings.

The Staffordshire Coroners' Inquests provided an immediate outlet for the venting of feelings of public anger, with the proceedings being reported in the local and national press. However, as noted by Mick Powis, owing to wartime censorship, the newspaper reports refer in general terms to the raids occurring in 'areas of Staffordshire'.⁷⁷ Consequently, there has been confusion because these articles did not differentiate between the northern and southern parts of that County, which were bombed by different airships. Therefore, where place names are discernible because of the other details in the articles, they have been provided here in parenthesis.⁷⁸

At the first Inquest to be reported (Tipton), the Coroner notified the jury that 'their duty was to inquire into the cause of this unhappy and appalling occurrence'. The evidence having been received, including that from a man whose two children, wife and her parents had all perished, the Coroner gave a direction to the jury. He recommended that the verdict should be that 'the victims met their deaths by the explosion of bombs discharged by an enemy airship' and it was his hope that 'we should not adopt the barbarous methods of our enemies'. The Coroner recounted that several juries had returned a verdict of wilful murder against the German Emperor. Whatever their feelings, he suggested that it was 'quite useless to return such a verdict, because there was no one in this country who could be brought to answer such a charge'.⁷⁹

In responding, the foreman of the jury stated that such was their feeling that the jury could not accept this recommendation. Accordingly, their opinion was that thirteen persons had been killed by explosive bombs dropped by an enemy aircraft and 'that a verdict of wilful murder be returned against the Kaiser and the Crown Prince of Germany as being accessories before and after the fact'.⁸⁰ Despite the Coroner's attempts to persuade the jury to reconsider, which was met with the response that 'he is

⁷⁷ SCHAS 940.4 M. Powis article 'Zeppelins over the Black Country: The raids of 31 January 1916'.

⁷⁸ See Chapter 7, pp. 215-222, for a more detailed discussion of the local press coverage during wartime, including censorship, together with an examination of the reporting of this air raid by the local newspapers.

⁷⁹ *Express and Star*, 3 February 1916; *Tipton Herald*, 5 February 1916.

⁸⁰ *The Times*, 4 February 1916.

the controller of Germany, and as such orders these things', the verdict was unchanged and accepted. The foreman made a further point on behalf of the jury, namely that their concerns about the extent to which enemy aircraft could travel inland without any resistance and the authorities not being informed should be referred to the War Office.⁸¹

The second Inquest (Walsall) considered the cases of four individuals and the Coroner advised this jury that they had to satisfy themselves that all the deaths were directly due to the air raid. The first fatality, a 28 year-old man had died 'with the back of his head blown off' received the verdict that his death 'was due to injuries caused by the explosion of a bomb dropped from an enemy aircraft'. A similar verdict was achieved in the second case, a 36 year-old man whose severe leg injury had caused death due to loss of blood and shock. The third and fourth cases were two men that were aged 50 and 59 years respectively, and both individuals were known to have had heart-related problems that were aggravated by feelings of agitation experienced during the air raid and the ensuing shock was confirmed as being the cause of their deaths.⁸²

The third Inquest (Wednesbury) was held into the deaths of twelve people, including a father and his three children. In each case, the bodies were identified and the cause of death attributed by the witnesses called upon to give evidence. The *Midland Counties Express* remarked that the body of one child was identified by the mother and that 'during the giving of her evidence she was in a hysterical condition and left the court crying bitterly'. A Police Sergeant described the discovery of several mutilated bodies, including one of a young child found hanging from a beam on the roof of the adjacent tube works.⁸³ At the conclusion of the proceedings, the Coroner expressed his sympathy on his own behalf and that of the jury, describing the German air raid as a 'dastardly and useless outrage perpetrated by an enemy aircraft'.⁸⁴

⁸¹ *Midland Advertiser*, 5 February 1916.

⁸² *The Times*, 4 February 1916.

⁸³ As discussed on p. 174, this was 7 year-old Ina Smith of 14 King Street, Wednesbury.

⁸⁴ *Midland Counties Express*, 5 February 1916.

The political cost of air raids was high, shaking the beliefs of those brought up in the relative calm of the Victorian and Edwardian years, and believing in the inviolateness of the home. This was, as Cooksley has argued, ‘a massive moral shock as people saw that the dead were not just soldiers, fighting in a far-off land but civilians, including women and children, in their own homes’.⁸⁵ Further to the claims of the aforementioned German Admiralty telegrams, a War Office response was published in *The Times* on 3 February 1916 repudiating what was described as the ‘utterly inaccurate report in the Berlin official telegram of 1 February’.⁸⁶ Furthermore, there was the comment that ‘the raiders were quite unable to ascertain their position or shape their course with any degree of certainty’. Nevertheless, the low-key tone of this despatch does suggest that there was some embarrassment in the War Office. The feelings of people in the Midlands were of ‘displeasure with the Government that no official air raid warning had been received’.⁸⁷ For instance, the comments in the *Walsall Pioneer* that ‘it is the greatest indignity that Great Britain has ever suffered during the lifetime of the present generation, against which we have today no redress whatsoever’.⁸⁸

The *Manchester Guardian* reported on 6 February 1916 that the Lord Mayor of Birmingham, Alderman Neville Chamberlain, had organized a conference that had taken place on 4 February, and which had been attended by local civic leaders and the respective chief police officers to discuss the preventative measures to be carried out in future.⁸⁹ Chamberlain had made representation to the Home Secretary, Herbert Samuel, asking for the issuing of an order ensuring uniformity of lighting restrictions throughout the whole area and a system of early warning for the Midlands. This conference was held in private session, although an official report was subsequently made available for publication in the press and the summary statement is reproduced as follows:

⁸⁵ P.G. Cooksley, p. 10.

⁸⁶ *The Times*, 3 February 1916.

⁸⁷ T. Fegan, p. 176.

⁸⁸ *Walsall Pioneer and District News*, 5 February 1916.

⁸⁹ *Manchester Guardian*, 6 February 1916.

The Lord Mayor stated that the meeting, which was unique in character, was the natural outcome of the recent air raid. The meeting had created widespread interest, and general satisfaction had been expressed that the conference of the Midland authorities was to take place. He deprecated anything in the nature of recrimination, and whilst expressing in strong terms his opinion of the inadequacy of the arrangements made to warn local authorities of the approach of aircraft, he considered it would be better to discuss the means to prevent the recurrence of recent events rather than to apportion blame.⁹⁰

A resolution of the Conference was moved, seconded by the Lord Lieutenant of Staffordshire, Lord Dartmouth, and carried unanimously, which expressed the view:

That this meeting, representing the local authorities of the Midlands, while welcoming the new order from the Home Office ensuring uniformity of lighting restrictions throughout the area, records its conviction that no arrangement for the defence of the area will be adequate which does not provide an organized system for giving early warning of the presence of hostile aircraft in the country, and information as to their subsequent movements in land.⁹¹

The minutes of the quarterly meeting of Wednesbury Borough Council refer to this Conference, recording that a letter had been received from ‘the Corporation of Birmingham summoning delegates to a meeting of Midland local authorities to consider the best means of taking concerted action in the event of future air raids’.⁹² Subsequently, local authorities received correspondence from the General Staff – Home Forces, informing them of the arrangements being made with the Post Office to notify police forces by telephone of the movements of hostile aircraft. An example from Major P. Maud of the General Staff to the Mayor of Walsall was reproduced in the *Walsall Observer and South Staffordshire Chronicle* on 12 February 1916.⁹³

Local towns also held their own conferences, such as that occurring in Wednesbury on 11 February 1916, which was reported in the following day’s *Wednesbury Herald*. Convened and chaired by the Mayor of Wednesbury, Councillor W. Warner, this forum considered the issue of uniformity of lighting

⁹⁰ Ibid., 10 February 1916.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² SCHAS B/W1/15: Minutes of Wednesbury Council, 1908-1919. Quarterly meeting held 7 February 1916.

⁹³ *Walsall Observer and South Staffordshire Chronicle*, 12 February 1916.

restrictions. However, as related in a statement by Wednesbury's Town Clerk, Thomas Jones, given the importance of maintaining munitions output, local manufacturers pointed to difficulties posed by the constant operation of blast furnaces and other works. The conference concluded that in order for the necessary precautions to be taken, sufficient warning of the approach of enemy aircraft was essential, with co-ordination between the War Office, Home Office and the Postmaster General being called for.⁹⁴ The GHQ Intelligence report indicates that on the night in question, one aeroplane piloted by Major A.B. Burdett was sent out from the Castle Bromwich aerodrome at 8.30 pm, remaining airborne for an hour yet unable to locate the airships.⁹⁵ In the towns that had been attacked by the airships, there was anger not only that they had been so affected but that there had been no official warning of the imminence of the air raid and that deterrence was so ineffective. The *Tipton Herald* recorded the criticism levelled at the War Office by the Mayor of Dudley, Councillor S.C. Lloyd, which, he said, seemed 'unable to grapple with an emergency of any kind; such dilly-dallying is fatal to the public safety'. Furthermore, he was especially unimpressed by official intransigence with regard to the arrest of aliens deemed to be a danger to the public peace.⁹⁶

Alfred Gollin asserted that 'as early as the year 1908...H.H. Asquith's Liberal Government found it necessary to take up the question of the air defence of Britain'.⁹⁷ Consequently, Lord Esher was charged by the Committee of Imperial Defence with the task of reviewing the dangers that might be posed by hostile aircraft. Relatively little preparation was forthcoming. Responsibility for the air defence of the British Isles was shared by the Royal Flying Corps (RFC) and the Royal Naval Air Service (RNAS).⁹⁸

Rivalry between the War Office and the Admiralty impeded the creation of an efficient

⁹⁴ *Wednesbury Herald*, 12 February 1916.

⁹⁵ TNA AIR 1/2123/207/73/5, p.16.

⁹⁶ *Tipton Herald*, 12 February 1916.

⁹⁷ A. Gollin, 'A Flawed Strategy: Early British Air Defense Arrangements' in *The Great War, 1914-18: Essays on the Military, Political and Social History of the First World War*, ed. by R.J.Q. Adams (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1990), p. 31.

⁹⁸ The RFC had responsibility for the defence of the mainland, while the intention was for the RNAS to patrol the coastline for enemy ships and submarines as well as carrying out fleet reconnaissance duties.

national air defence system, and the government proved unable to make them cooperate to this end. Gollin added that these ‘two departments of state followed policies and strategies that were entirely opposed to each other in this new sphere of national defence’.⁹⁹ Indeed, the War Office had been sending all spare aircraft to France and in the early years there were only thirty-three anti-aircraft guns for available for home defence. Most of these were situated in London and the Home Counties but proved incapable of hitting targets able to fly at the height attainable by the German airships.

The bombing raids of 1915 and early 1916 forced the authorities to take action. Wilson identified this as the shifting of responsibility from the Royal Navy to the Army, introducing an early warning system, and diverting expertise and guns to the home front. He noted that from February 1916 onwards, a number of RFC air bases were established for aircraft equipped for night fighting.¹⁰⁰ Several important implications arose from these developments; especially the allocation of scarce resources, hardware and personnel otherwise destined for the front line. By the end of 1916 there were 17,000 officers and men serving the twelve RFC home defence squadrons and in anti-aircraft and search light battalions.¹⁰¹ These efforts were assisted by new direction-finding techniques, coastal listening stations and a code-breaking department.¹⁰²

The only truly effective counter to the German airships was interception by fighter aircraft. The British machines of early 1916 were too slow and easily outmanoeuvred. For instance, the most proficient model then in service was the Royal Aircraft Factory’s BE2c, which had a 90 horsepower engine that gave it a maximum speed of 72 mph and a ceiling of 10,000 feet. However, even when an airship was located, the standard .303 ammunition did not have any great effect on the airships. One imaginative proposal was to use seaplanes that had been fitted with floats and

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ T. Wilson, p. 390.

¹⁰¹ T. Fegan, p. 40.

¹⁰² N. Faulkner and N. Durrant, *In Search of the Zeppelin War: The Archaeology of the First Blitz* (Chalford: Tempus, 2008).

armed with a 2-pounder artillery gun. However, because the seaplane would have had to track the airship before it reach the coast, land at sea and then fire upwards, this was deemed most impractical and not taken further.¹⁰³ Hence, typically, the aircraft continued to be armed with a single Lewis machine gun and a complement of bombs.¹⁰⁴

A more practical and effective approach came with the introduction of incendiary bullets (filled with phosphorous) and explosive bullets (filled with nitro-glycerine). Both varieties of this Brock-Pomeroy-Buckingham ammunition were loaded into the Lewis Gun's magazine, and when discharged it punctured the airship's gas cells and ignited the escaping Hydrogen with the most devastating consequences.¹⁰⁵ The vulnerability of Germany's airships was immediately apparent and throughout 1916, the RFC achieved considerable success. Despite the creation of a new generation of 'Super Zeppelins' that could climb to even higher altitudes, the pace of technological development for conventional aeroplanes prompted the emergence of long-range bombers; notably from 1917, such as Germany's two-engined Gotha and the six-engined Giant. Airship losses resulted in many vessels being transferred to the Eastern Front, with the last raid of the Zeppelins on Britain occurring on 9 August 1918.¹⁰⁶

Prior to 1914, the impression of war on Britain's civilian population had been slight, exacerbated by slow communications that often diminished the emotional effect of events happening weeks earlier. The German air raids were immediate and, as Fegan asserted, 'the most profound impact of the bombing was psychological, undermining

¹⁰³ TNA AIR 1/1269/204/9/86.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.; T. Fegan, pp. 21-22. Sub-Lieutenant R.A.J. Warneford of the RNAS made the first successful use of incendiary bombs when he flew his Morane-Saulnier Type L above the Zeppelin LZ37, dropping the bombs to destroy the airship at Ghent, Belgium, on 7 June 1915. As the first British pilot to defeat a Zeppelin, Warneford was immediately awarded the Victoria Cross and the French Légion d'honneur. However, he died due to injuries sustained during a non-combat flying mission on 21 June 1915.

¹⁰⁵ *Attack of the Zeppelins* (Windfall Films for Channel 4, 2013); *Timewatch: Zeppelin - The First Blitz* (BBC Television, 2007). Lieutenant William Leefe Robinson of the RFC's 39 Squadron was the first British pilot to use this ammunition successfully, bringing down the German Army's Schütte-Lanz airship SL11 near to Cuffley, Hertfordshire on 2-3 September 1916; an action for which he was awarded the Victoria Cross. At the time, the press reported that he had destroyed Zeppelin L21 (a mistake that persisted for many years) but the L21 was actually brought down over the sea on 28 November 1916. (See footnote 33 above.)

¹⁰⁶ M. Griehl, and J. Dressel, p. 113. This final mission was led by Fregattenkapitän Peter Strasser, who died aboard the Zeppelin L70. Between 1915 and 1918, German airships carried out 51 raids, killing 557 people and injuring 1,358; German aeroplanes carried out 27 raids, killing 85 people and injuring 1,972.

morale and the nation's will to fight'.¹⁰⁷ Compared with the Second World War, the damage done was of a lower magnitude, owing to fewer direct hits to munitions factories. Yet account should be taken of the disruption caused by the raids, the delays to transport, accidents due to extinguished street lighting, and other infringements to everyday life. Morris argued that 'the shock of the air raids did begin to wear off, and that people began to adjust to this new type of war'.¹⁰⁸ Ultimately, the air raids had the opposite effect to that anticipated by their perpetrators because the fighting spirit of the British people strengthened. An example was the statement made by the Mayor of Walsall, and Chairman of Wednesbury's Crown tube works, Stanley Mills Slater.

If we in this district give way to panic or nervousness, if we allow our apprehension to interfere with the output of munitions, we are doing exactly what the Germans want, and exactly what will encourage them to persevere with these raids.¹⁰⁹

To provide financial relief to the victims and their families, some of whom were deprived of a breadwinner, and others of their home and belongings, recourse was made to the Prince of Wales' Fund and to other local charities. Postcards showing one of the incendiary bombs that landed and failed to ignite were sold to raise money.¹¹⁰ A benefit football match also took place at the ground of Wednesbury Old Athletic FC on 4 March 1916. The *Midland Advertiser* appealed to local manufacturers to support this by purchasing the 6d. tickets to distribute to their workers. This would allow them to see an exceptional attraction with the teams 'captained by Jesse Pennington, the West Bromwich Albion skipper, and Harry Hampton, the Aston Villa Centre Forward'.¹¹¹

Jay Winter and Antoine Prost provide the valuable insight that 'from consolation and support it is a short step to commemoration'.¹¹² Drawing together communities

¹⁰⁷ T. Fegan, p. 80.

¹⁰⁸ J. Morris, p. 9.

¹⁰⁹ *Walsall Pioneer and District News*, 19 February 1916.

¹¹⁰ See Appendix 6, Photograph 64, p. 314.

¹¹¹ *Midland Advertiser*, 12 February 1916.

¹¹² J.M. Winter and A. Prost, *The Great War in History: Debates and Controversies, 1914 to the Present – Studies in the Social and Cultural History of Modern Warfare, No.21* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 30.

related by blood or experience, terrible events such as those of 31 January 1916 required an outlet for the inevitable grief and, in turn, this became a part of the collective memory of the localities concerned. Tom Morgan recorded that in Wednesbury, there was a 'simple wooden memorial which used to be fixed to a wall in King Street bearing the names of those killed' but that this disappeared many years ago.¹¹³ With the passage of time, more-enduring monuments have been erected. Walsall's war memorial stands in Bradford Place on the spot where the bomb fell that was to result in the death of the Mayoress, Mary Julia Slater. A commemorative Blue Plaque was also situated on the wall of a building that still bears the scar of a bomb fragment. A plaque to the memory of Maud and Frederick Fellows was placed in the Bradley canal basin yard in 1994. The most recent tribute to the victims is shrouded in mystery, being placed in Wednesbury's cemetery by an anonymous benefactor in December 2012.¹¹⁴ What these monuments demonstrate with the utmost eloquence is that not only was this a tragic event and that it continues to resonate with feeling for the people of the Black Country.

6.5 Conclusion

This Chapter has examined the first attack by enemy aircraft to be experienced by the people of the Midlands. As the conflict in which the strategic bombing from the air would be sustained for the duration, affecting the lives of so many civilians directly and indirectly, the First World War blurred forever the distinction between the front line and home front. The wider significance of the air raid of 31 January 1916 is that, at the time, it was the largest incursion yet attempted in an organized campaign that shocked civilised men and women in all countries. Although not the intended target, which the available evidence suggests was Liverpool, many towns, including those in the Black Country, fell victim to the German airships that penetrated so far in land unchallenged.

¹¹³ T. Morgan, 'The Great Zeppelin Raid Night of Jan 31st – Feb 1st 1916' <<http://www.hellfire-corner.demon.co.uk/zeppelin.htm>> [Accessed 1 September 2009].

¹¹⁴ See Appendix 6, Photograph 65, p. 314.

Even in the pre-war years, airships captured the imagination of the population at large. They became the embodiment of industrialized conflict, acknowledged in the BBC Television Series, *The Great War*, which stated that ‘the scientist and the engineer had created a new dimension in warfare: the air’.¹¹⁵ These machines were sinister, vast and seemingly invulnerable, bringing death and destruction indiscriminately. At its outset, this first aerial Battle of Britain was one-sided, there being no way to predict when and where the airships would arrive. This experience was unparalleled, the aim of the protagonists to raise the price of resistance to a level too high to bear. Indeed, the opinion of the Marine-Luftschiff-Abteilung itself, was that the raids were exerting a deep-seated effect on morale and that the consequences for industry and the military in Britain was much more serious than was being acknowledged in the press at the time.¹¹⁶

From this Chapter’s discussion of the political, public and press reaction, it is evident that after the initial disruption, and with the introduction of counter measures, the air raids began to have the opposite effect on British morale to that intended. The first home defence measures, early warning systems and effective interceptor aircraft were put into place and grew in sophistication. This laid the foundations for the air defence that would be so vital during the Second World War and the experience of the Black Country towns on 31 January 1916, and in the days that followed, played its part. An event that continues to have profound meaning for the people of Bradley, Tipton, Walsall and Wednesbury, it is contended that this is no mere historical footnote.

¹¹⁵ *The Great War*, Episode 20, *Only War, Nothing but War*.

¹¹⁶ TMA AIR 1/543/16/15/4. This conclusion was based on the information obtained from the interrogation of German prisoners of war who had formerly served as members of airship crews and from the items of documentation that had been retrieved from airships, which had been shot down but not destroyed.

CHAPTER 7: THE IMPACT OF THE WAR ON SOCIETY IN WEDNESBURY

7.1 Introduction

The First World War was much more than a conflict involving armed forces and their servicemen; it was a total war affecting all social levels within the participant nations. The citizens of these societies were crucial to sustaining the war effort and any collapse in morale on the home front carried potentially disastrous repercussions. This was noted by Brock Millman when he stated that ‘the maintenance of a nation’s will to fight is as important as its physical ability to continue the struggle’.¹ The intention of this Chapter is to describe and evaluate the impact of war on society in Wednesbury by reference to three elements relating to the town’s social life and structures.

In order to understand the impact of the war on the part of the town’s working-class community, the first of these elements will include an examination of health, housing and welfare in Wednesbury during these years. Included within this discussion will be an assessment of the manner in which wartime hardships were endured, together with local and national responses to remedy this by alleviating poverty and raising living standards. One of the paradoxical improvements found on the home front was to wellbeing and Marwick argued that ‘other, more complicated, and sometimes contradictory, influences must be examined if the deeper changes wrought in the pattern of British life and leisure during the period are to be understood’.² Therefore, the class dimension will also feature, particularly in terms of local reactions to injustice and profiteering at a time when national calls for equality of sacrifice were being made.

The second element will be a discussion of citizenship and wider support for the war effort in Wednesbury. This was of great importance to the nation when millions of men were joining the armed forces, firstly as volunteers and later as conscripts; when

¹ B. Millman, *Managing Domestic Dissent in First World War Britain* (London: Frank Cass, 2000), p. 1.

² A. Marwick, ‘British Life and Leisure and the First World War’, *History Today*, 15 (6) (1965), p. 129.

there were major reorganizations of industry, with consequences for conscription and employment, as well as production; and the state's involvement through the regulation of everyday life reached levels hitherto unimaginable. Success demanded cohesion and the upholding of public order and purpose. The manner in which this was translated to the local level, the changing of any attitudes compared with those of the pre-war years will be undertaken by reference to the main aspects of working-class culture and life.

The final element will be a review of press and propaganda. This will include both the traditional newspaper and other media, such as the cinema, together with consideration of censorship via the Defence of the Realm Act (DORA). The operation of the local press in Wednesbury and the wider Black Country will be integral to this discussion, focusing on the key issues covered in the period. Examples will include fund-raising activity, aspects of military news and the events following the bombing of Wednesbury and other Black Country towns by Zeppelin airships in 1916.³

In following this structure, the Chapter will investigate Wednesbury's experience and the influence of war on civilian life. Hence, it is motivated by Marwick's view that to understand the British social experience during the war, it must 'lead to a detailed study of war and war's impact on society'.⁴ This will be achieved by addressing several questions, including the following: How did Wednesbury's society change during the war? Were some people expected to make a greater sacrifice than were others? How did the community respond when it became apparent that the war would not be won quickly? What were the consequences of greater state regulation? In responding to these questions, the existing evidence has been reinterpreted and challenged, and attention given to those primary sources that have not been fully utilized until now, such the reports of Wednesbury's Medical Officer of Health.⁵

³ See Chapter 6, pp. 161-191.

⁴ A. Marwick, 'The Impact of the First World War on British Society', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 3 (1) (1968), p. 51.

⁵ SCHAS Reports of Wednesbury's Medical Officer of Health, 1913-1918. See Appendix 4, p. 278.

7.2 Maintaining morale - health, housing and welfare

Jay Winter and Blaine Baggett described morale as ‘the determination to go on’ and state that it ‘mattered in this war in a way that it never had before’.⁶ Incomparable to the demands made on those at the front line; nevertheless, the civilian population endured material hardships to finance and equip the armed forces so that they could continue the struggle for national survival. Their morale, and especially that of the working class in towns such as Wednesbury, depended on community identity and sense of belonging, together with other factors that could fluctuate, making it difficult to quantify, so that it could not be taken for granted.⁷ The suggestion that all members of society participated equally and for the common good must necessarily be tempered, since the propensity for animosity and disapproval to materialize was ever-present, and it increased in the war’s latter years. As Waites has argued, whilst class differences may have diminished, ‘class conscientiousness in contrast became sharpened through the scandal of profiteering, and the vision of vultures feeding off the corpses of dead British soldiers’.⁸

The outbreak of war was accompanied by a belief that hostilities would be brief and that Britain would emerge victorious. Typical of the public pronouncements were remarks passed at a public meeting on 14 August 1914 by Wednesbury’s Mayor, Councillor Nat Bishop. He stated that ‘the loyal spirit shown throughout the British Empire was an undoubted proof that all were prepared to make sacrifices and to suffer in a cause which they believed to be righteous’.⁹ Indeed, most of the nation, if not welcoming them, generally accepted the transformations occurring in the autumn of 1914. This was important, especially once it became evident that a successful outcome would not be achieved within a few months and, as Catriona Pennell noted, there were

⁶ J.M. Winter and B. Baggett, *1914-1918: The Great War and the Shaping of the 20th Century* (London: BBC, 1996), p. 107.

⁷ J.M. Bourne, *Britain and the Great War, 1914-1918*, p. 200. There was no equivalent to the systematic research techniques used by Mass-Observation to record everyday life, gauge civilian morale and influence policy-making in the Second World War. Therefore, reliance has to be placed on the period’s available sources, such as local newspapers, which although anecdotal and circumstantial, were generally consistent.

⁸ B.A. Waites, *A Class Society at War: England, 1914-1918*, p. 68.

⁹ *Wednesbury Herald*, 15 August 1914.

‘too many socio-economic changes for anyone to carry on as if the war was not happening’.¹⁰ Moreover, for a town such as Wednesbury, the demographic and economic implications were crucial due to the competing military and industrial burdens that would in due course fall upon its people. Added to this was the national population’s social composition because, as pointed out by Bourne, ‘the working class comprised 80 per cent of the population. Their morale was the national morale’.¹¹

In the first months, there had been the belief that economic hardship would be incurred. However, as Marwick remarked, ‘it was one of the lesser ironies of the war that, after all the preparation for unemployment, it was in the end to furnish an unprecedented demand for labour’.¹² Nevertheless, considerable energy and time on the part of individuals, charitable bodies, municipal authorities and central government was expended to alleviate distress. The pre-war years being notable for the emergence of numerous voluntary organizations, including local branches of political parties, friendly societies and cooperatives, together with various religious denominations, there was crucial fund-raising activity within local communities. This often dovetailed with the National Relief Fund established on 6 August 1914, with the Prince of Wales as President, to assist the dependants of those undertaking military service as well as other people affected by industrial disruption.¹³ On 15 August 1914, the *Wednesbury Herald* reported on local activity instigated at a town meeting by the Mayor, Councillor Nat Bishop.¹⁴ He stated that all current public works would continue and further schemes be initiated via grants from the Local Government Board under the Unemployed Workmen Act 1905. Referring to a telegram issued on behalf of the Prince of Wales, he hoped that the National Relief Fund would be generously supported in the Borough.

¹⁰ C. Pennell, p. 199.

¹¹ J.M. Bourne, *Britain and the Great War, 1914-1918*, p. 200.

¹² A. Marwick, *The Deluge: British Society and the First World War*, p. 74.

¹³ J.G.M. Cranstoun, ‘The Impact of the Great War on a Local Community: The Case of East Lothian’ (Unpublished PhD thesis, Open University, 1992), p. 190. Within one week of its establishment, nationally, donations to the National Relief Fund had exceeded £1m. In 2015, this would be £103,061,224.

¹⁴ *Wednesbury Herald*, 15 August 1914.

The local press also outlined activities by local manufacturers to support the community, including regular charitable donations from their workforces. For example, the Patent Shaft & Axletree Co. Ltd. provided for the families of those employees who had enlisted in the army. A similar commitment to make weekly subscriptions to relief funding was given by the James Russell & Sons Crown tube works. The workers of Edwin Smith's Brunswick tube works had agreed to donate between 1d. and 4d. per week, and the Staffordshire Patent tube works would make a weekly contribution equivalent to 1½ per cent of the firm's wage bill.¹⁵ Total subscriptions to the National Relief Fund were recorded on 29 August 1914 to be £1,196 15s. 11d.¹⁶ By November 1914, this increased to £2,776 5s. 2d. and within a year would achieve £4,933 5s. 2d. From this sum, £400 18s. 2d. was allocated to the Mayor's fund and £451 19s. 5d. to aid Belgian refugees; the remainder being made available to the Prince of Wales' Fund.¹⁷ On 22 August 1914, the *Wednesbury Herald* reported that the town's women had created a committee to provide clothing to servicemen. The deeds of Florence Nightingale and Dorothy Pattison were cited and the Mayor stated that 'it was time for women to emulate such noble examples of self-sacrifice and he had no doubt that the women of Wednesbury would give a good account of themselves'.¹⁸ Fund-raising continued throughout the war and the *Midland Counties Express* reported on 6 July 1918 that £170 had been collected in Wednesbury at a flag day for the Red Cross.¹⁹

The payment of Separation Allowances to the families of servicemen was delegated to the Soldiers' and Sailors' Families Association.²⁰ Founded in 1885 with

¹⁵ *Wednesbury Herald*, 15 and 22 August 1914; *Midland Counties Express*, 22 August 1914; *Express and Star*, 24 August 1914.

¹⁶ *Wednesbury Herald*, 29 August 1914.

¹⁷ *Midland Counties Express*, 14 November 1914 and 30 October 1915.

¹⁸ *Wednesbury Herald*, 22 August 1914. Dorothy Wyndlow Pattison (1832-1878), known as Sister Dora, was an Anglican nun and a nurse, who cared for Walsall's working-class during the 1875 small pox epidemic.

¹⁹ *Midland Counties Express*, 6 July 1918.

²⁰ J. Lomas, 'Delicate Duties': Issues of Class and Respectability in Government Policy towards the Wives and Widows of British Soldiers in the era of the Great War', *Women's History Review*, 9 (1) (2000), p. 125. The Separation Allowance consisted of a portion of a soldier's pay, which was generally matched by the government, to ensure that the soldier's dependants were not going to be left to face destitution.

royal patronage, the SSFA was a philanthropic body. In Wednesbury, it was established that the SSFA funds were £138, which the Association's Treasurer (Mr Joynston) and the President (Wednesbury's Mayor) would allocate upon receipt of deserving applications. The aforementioned local expressions of generosity from the townspeople and local firms elicited a response from the SSFA, with Mr Joynston being 'delighted to find that the working men of Wednesbury were showing themselves alive to the necessities of the case now as in the Boer War'.²¹ Although experienced in managing such payments, most recently during the Boer War, as Susan Pederson noted, its 'class composition and explicit moral agenda' did not engender it favourably to recipients.²²

A factor crucial in Britain's entry into the war was the plight of Belgium and some 200,000 Belgians fled to Britain in 1914. Pugh asserted that their arrival 'helped to reinforce the view and to give a high moral tone to the British cause'.²³ Locally, this was endorsed on 12 September 1914 when Councillor Nat Bishop confirmed that 'His Majesty's Government had offered to the Belgian victims of the war the hospitality of the British nation...and it is necessary to distribute a very considerable number in various parts of the country'.²⁴ In total, 30 Belgians were situated in Wednesbury, 22 of them at Wolsey House (home of the late Mayor, Alderman John Knowles) and the others in cottages owned by Wednesbury resident, Arthur Spittle. The press reported Wednesbury's generosity in providing cash, clothing, food and other necessities marched the warmth of the reception that the Belgians received, with £235 15s. being raised initially, rising to £415 19s. 5d. in 1915.²⁵ On behalf of the refugees, a letter of appreciation from Messrs. C. Caene and J. Vandenberg was published in the *Wednesbury Herald* on 24 October 1914. This stated, 'the public of Wednesbury

²¹ *Wednesbury Herald*, 15 August 1914.

²² S. Pederson, 'Gender, Welfare and Citizenship in Britain during the Great War', *American Historical Review*, 95 (4) (1990), p. 993. The intention was that in especially deserving cases, SSFA would augment the Separation Allowance but apart from making a few small loans to tide over the particularly needy, this did not occur. When applying to SSFA, many were kept waiting for weeks without receiving a penny.

²³ M. Pugh, *State and Society: British Political and Social History, 1870-1992*, p.146.

²⁴ *Wednesbury Herald*, 12 September and 24 October 1914.

²⁵ *Midland Counties Express*, 14 November 1914 and 30 October 1915.

understanding our distress, overwhelmed us with their kindness and we feel their enthusiastic reception has, if not cured, at least healed the soreness of our hearts'.²⁶

The first anniversary of the outbreak of the war was marked by a public meeting attended by Wednesbury's leading citizens and chaired by the Mayor, Councillor Bishop. This was arranged at the request of Lord Dartmouth, the Lord Lieutenant of Staffordshire, to bolster 'resolute determination to carry on the conflict until a peace, honourable, durable, and satisfactory to our allies and ourselves is obtained'. Alderman A.E. Pritchard moved a resolution of abiding loyalty, recalling 'twelve months of unparalleled crimes and atrocities, the blackest the world has ever seen'.²⁷ Similar sentiments were expressed when the Bishop of Lichfield, Dr John Kempthorne, addressing the congregation of St. John's church, Wednesbury, asked whether God was 'writing "Tekel" on the wall of the British Empire', deeming it 'in danger of being weighed in the balance and found light'.²⁸ The second anniversary was marked officially on 12 August 1916, and Alderman E.J. Hunt moved a resolution of loyalty:

That in this, the second anniversary of the Declaration of a righteous war, this meeting of the citizens of Wednesbury records its inflexible determination to continue to a victorious end the struggle in maintenance of those ideals of liberty and justice, which are the common and sacred cause of the Allies.²⁹

It would be in the years 1917-1918 that war-weariness and the seemingly bleak prospects of winning the war decisively began to have an impact on public confidence. Despite the positive representation offered by the local and national press, such as that following the brief breakthrough at Cambrai in 1917, as Adrian Gregory noted, news of the blood baths of the Somme and Passchendaele had also reached the wider public.³⁰

This was at the time when Tsarist Russia's departure from the war following the

²⁶ *Wednesbury Herald*, 24 October 1914.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 7 August 1915.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 30 October 1915.

²⁹ *Midland Advertiser and Wednesbury Herald*, 12 August 1916.

³⁰ A. Gregory, *The Last Great War: British Society and the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 213. As will be illustrated later in this Chapter, the First World War was the first conflict in which the civilian population would receive relatively timely news of what was happening to the men serving on the front line, with information being forthcoming from a number of sources.

Bolshevik Revolution and the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, combined with Italy's defeat at Caporetto, threatened to destabilize Britain's efforts on the Western Front and elsewhere. On the home front, which was being affected by unrest in the munitions industries and the repercussions of inflation and profiteering, steps were required to reverse this bleak picture and restore some confidence and rekindle national optimism.³¹

On 7 January 1918, the *Express and Star* reproduced the New Year proclamation of King George V, which was read out in all places of worship. Warning of the dangers of pessimism, pacifism and peace-mongering, the Reverend T.H.P. Hyatt of St. Bartholomew's Church, Wednesbury, pronounced that 'it was the spirit of the people at home that mattered, for it was upon their determination to go on working and economizing that the efficiency of the men at the front depended'.³² It should be recorded that these comments were made before the German offensive that commenced on 21 March 1918, and which threatened not just the recent progress made but to turn the course of the war. However, as Trevor Wilson pointed out, 'anxiety, and the sense of having been thrust into uncharted territory, never passed over into despair'.³³

The true nature of the fighting and the human costs incurred shattered any illusions of waging a short war; instead, there would be protracted military stalemate and increasing calls on national resources preventing those at home from carrying on their lives as normal. Enthusiasm and innocence were battered as the news of fatalities and casualties became commonplace. As described by Woollacott, British society had to 'accommodate the bandaged, the wounded, those on crutches, the limbless, those with disfigured faces, lost eyes and damaged nerves'.³⁴ Yet this did not encourage outrage or widespread pacifism or subversion; on the contrary, there was an acceptance of the situation, which Peter Liddle has referred to as 'a sort of grim resolve to see

³¹ In 1917, Commissions of Enquiry were established to investigate industrial unrest.

³² *Express and Star*, 7 January 1918.

³³ T. Wilson, p. 644.

³⁴ A. Woollacott, 'Khaki Fever and its Control: Gender, Class, Age and Sexual Morality on the British Home Front in the First World War', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 29 (2) (1994), p. 331.

things through'.³⁵ In addition to assisting the families of those on active service, Wednesbury also provided support to the families of men held as prisoners of war. In a letter in the *Midland Advertiser and Wednesbury Herald* on 19 January 1918, the Mayor, Alderman A.E. Pritchard, indicated that 44 men from the Borough were detained by enemy forces, and that parcels of food and other necessities were sent to every man on a fortnightly basis, at an annual cost of £3,653 per man. Alderman Pritchard observed that 'it is for us who are living in comparative safety to make OUR sacrifice and show ourselves worthy of the highest tradition of the British Empire'.³⁶

When considering such sacrifices, and the efforts to continue to feed the nation and maintain living standards, it should be noted that before the war Britain had imported approximately 60 per cent of its food. Even in the earliest days of the conflict, there were concerns and reports in the local press of outbreaks of panic buying that induced shopkeepers to raise prices immediately.³⁷ Official action was instigated when the Board of Trade issued a list specifying the maximum retail prices for sugar, butter, cheese, margarine and bacon, as recorded in the *Wednesbury Herald* on 15 August 1914.³⁸ This measure proved futile and prices rose regardless, with the working class being hit hardest since, as Pennell noted, they 'were less able to meet rising prices with a shift in diet or to cheaper food'.³⁹ For the poor, meat had always been a luxury commodity, resulting in a dependency upon bread, flour, potatoes and oatmeal. The effect of such substitution as occurred had an impact on the diet of the nation as a whole because of the inflationary consequences that led to food prices 'representing arguably the most significant factor affecting everyday life'.⁴⁰ For families with breadwinners in uniform and reliant on Separation Allowances, everyday existence became a struggle.

³⁵ P.H. Liddle, *Voices of War – Front Line and Home Front 1914-1918* (London: Leo Cooper, 1988), p. 19.

³⁶ *Midland Advertiser and Wednesbury Herald*, 19 January 1918; SCHAS Wednesbury Miscellanea.

³⁷ *Express and Star*, 4 and 5 August 1914.

³⁸ *Wednesbury Herald*, 15 August 1914.

³⁹ C. Pennell, p. 202.

⁴⁰ I.F.W. Beckett, *The Home Front, 1914-1918: How Britain Survived Total War*, p. 112. See Appendix 5, p. 279. Between 1912 and 1916, the number of butchers' shops in Wednesbury decreased from 33 to 20, thereby providing some indication of the impact that the war was having on working-class diets.

For the typical working-class family, in 1914 one-fifth of household income was expended on bread and flour, and in that year alone the price of wheat had risen by 72 per cent, that of barley by 40 per cent, and oats by 34 per cent.⁴¹ If unchecked, this would cause damage to civilian morale and, in turn, to that of the men at the front line.

Attempts were made by the state to ensure the availability of sufficient quantities of basic foodstuffs although the reliance on imports became problematic, especially with the sinking of merchant shipping by German submarines. David Bilton recorded that during the last four months of 1916, '632,000 tons of shipping had been sunk and the President of the Board of Trade reported that a complete breakdown in shipping would come before June 1917'.⁴² A solution was for British farms to produce more food. This would have to be achieved with far fewer workers and fewer horses (since both were needed by the army) so that women, children, the elderly, discharged soldiers and prisoners of war were induced to help. Efforts were also made to encourage economy, such as the replacement of traditional white bread with a more nutritious brown bread, thereby upholding calorific levels. In the autumn of 1917, action was taken to peg prices to their 1916 level, although this was not without controversy since, from 1915 onwards, the term "profiteer" had entered into widespread usage mirroring a belief in the unfairness of the plight of many in British society. Waites contended that 'issues such as excess profits, high food prices and inequalities of distribution were affronts to the *moral economy* of the English working class' given the 'lip service paid to the ideals of self-sacrifice and communal effort in the war'.⁴³

A meeting of the Wednesbury and District Trades and Labour Council, held at the George Public House, Wednesbury, in May 1916, discussed the rising cost of living. The Council's Chairman, Mr R. Micklewright, commented on the erroneous impression

⁴¹ G.J. De Groot, p. 201.

⁴² D. Bilton, *The Home Front in the Great War: Aspects of the Conflict, 1914-1918* (London: Leo Cooper, 2003), p. 87. It is important to note that the figures which have been cited by Bilton relate to 1916 and, therefore, are prior to the resumption of unrestricted submarine warfare by Germany in early 1917.

⁴³ B.A. Waites, *A Class Society at War: England, 1914-1918*, p. 222.

that workers 'were receiving such stupendous wages that they had nothing to do than to put it in the bank'. By contrast, he added, 'nothing was said about the enormous wealth which was being piled up in other directions, whereby the price of food was being raised'.⁴⁴ The working class, and particularly the previously impoverished semi-skilled and unskilled workers, were 'believed to be spending their money on pianos, furniture, good quality boots and shoes for their children, and even gramophones'.⁴⁵ Resentment at high prices and unfair distribution of food became one of the causes of industrial unrest in the factories in 1917 and there was the growing belief that unscrupulous producers and traders were manipulating the situation to the own ends. In his assessment, Sir George Askwith attributed this to 'the fact that some people were making money out of the war without any restraint upon their methods' and in August 1917, the Ministry of Food began to take a harder line with profiteering shopkeepers.⁴⁶

Queues for foodstuffs initially appeared in the spring of 1917. For working-class people this became an acute problem because time spent queuing meant being away from work and a reduced income. Adrian Faber's study of the provincial press related that 'the queues almost took on the form of a shared emblem that showed people were playing their part in helping to win the war'.⁴⁷ Recognizing the potential for civilian morale to be undermined, the first step towards a nationwide distribution of food was the Regulation of Meals Order, which came into effect in December 1916. This restricted hotel and restaurant meals to either three courses for evening meals or two at other times of the day.⁴⁸ A Food Department was established in 1916, based initially within the Board of Trade until Ministry status was conferred in 1917, and empowered by DORA to enter and search premises in order to tackle food hoarding.

⁴⁴ *Wednesbury Herald*, 6 May 1916.

⁴⁵ B.A. Waites, 'The Effect of the First World War on Class and Status in England, 1910-1920', p. 35.

⁴⁶ G. Askwith, p. 372; A. Gregory, *The Last Great War: British Society and the First World War*, p. 139.

⁴⁷ A. Faber, p. 40. The various types of voluntary initiatives, such as the food economy campaign that was organized in Wednesbury, and which was described in the *Midland Advertiser and Wednesbury Herald* on 2 June 1917, were not able to forestall the eventual introduction of rationing nationally in 1918.

⁴⁸ P.G. Cooksley, p. 129.

Local food committees with statutory powers to fix prices and distribute food were established, supervised by local authorities. However, these bodies were a source of class tension because, as Waites suggested, they ‘were unduly representative of local traders and middle-class voluntary workers inimical to working-class interests’.⁴⁹ Consequently, until labour representation was agreed, food vigilance committees were set up by local Labour parties, Trades and Labour Councils and Cooperative Societies. In Wednesbury, such dissatisfaction resulted in deputations visiting local factories and a public meeting was held in the town’s Market Place in January 1918. At this gathering, trade unionist George Stokes spoke out against the unfair distribution of food and urged the implementation of a rationing scheme that would operate on an equitable basis.⁵⁰

On 3 February 1917, an appeal for voluntary rationing and reduced consumption was instigated, which was ‘in effect a Derby Scheme for food’ but with ‘compulsion held in the background as a threat’.⁵¹ The Food Controller offered advice to local councils on plans for rationing. According to the *Midland Advertiser and Wednesbury Herald*, a deputation from the Black Country’s municipal authorities had met in conference and discussed a voluntary scheme and sought the views of the Food Controller.⁵² Following its introduction in London and the Home Counties, food rationing was extended to the rest of the nation in April 1918, firstly for meat and then, from July, for other foodstuffs. Each household was to register with a retailer supplied only according to the needs of their customers. Initially they were provided with a document of entitlement, eventually to be replaced by coupons held in a ration book.⁵³

⁴⁹ B.A. Waites, ‘The Government of the Home Front and the “Moral Economy” of the Working Class’ in *Home Fires and Foreign Fields: British Social and Military Experience in the First World War*, ed. by P.H. Liddle, p. 186.

⁵⁰ *Express and Star*, 31 January 1918; *Midland Advertiser and Wednesbury Herald*, 2 February 1918. Established to operate in parallel with the local food committees, until Labour was co-opted on to these bodies, the food vigilance committees were an outlet for working-class views on food distribution. See Chapter 2, pp. 51-70 and Chapter 8, pp. 235-243, regarding George Stokes’ participation in local politics.

⁵¹ A. Marwick, *The Deluge: British Society and the First World War*, p. 193.

⁵² *Midland Advertiser and Wednesbury Herald*, 29 December 1917.

⁵³ By November 1918, this national rationing scheme had been extended to embrace some 40 million people. For an example of the type of ration book used in Wednesbury, see Appendix 6, Photograph 66, p. 315.

The *Express and Star* reported on 22 November 1917 that the Wednesbury Tradesman's Association had met in response to public meetings organized to protest at the price and inadequate supply of food. A resolution was adopted by this body 'sympathizing with the workers in their difficulty in getting goods, pointing out that it was not in the province of the Association to alter the existing state of supplies'.⁵⁴ In January 1918, large queues were reported in Wednesbury, with reports that the Deputy Mayor, Councillor W. Warner, gave assistance in allocating necessary commodities.⁵⁵

With public concern mounting, a committee was appointed by the Chancellor of the Exchequer and chaired by Lord Summers to investigate price rises and increases in the cost of living to the working class since June 1914, with its report being published in October 1918. In considering factors apart from wage increases arising due to the war, this body highlighted food, rent, clothing, fuel, insurance, fares and household sundries. With food comprising the largest portion of working-class budgets, by 1918 'there was clear reason to suppose that the quantities of different articles of food ordinarily consumed had changed materially since 1914'.⁵⁶ The report categorized the impact of this by reference to the skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled workers, with the percentage increases in prices being felt more keenly by the unskilled than the skilled. In summary, however, the Committee's findings were that the families of unskilled workers were better fed at the end of the war than at its beginning, with the number of undernourished children declining by more than half, as their parents were now receiving better food. Nevertheless, for the average family of 4.75 equivalent people, weekly expenditure on food had almost doubled from 24s. 11d. in June 1914 to 47s. 3d. in June 1918.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ *Express and Star*, 22 November 1917.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 11 January 1918.

⁵⁶ Cd. 8980 *Report of the Working Classes Cost of Living Committee*, Command Papers (London: HMSO, 1918), pp. 5-7. The Committee's approach was based upon the taking of evidence from witnesses and an assessment of the 1,306 budgets that were obtained from working-class families, which had been collected on its behalf by the Board of Trade. The benchmark for 1914, however, was based upon the extrapolation of the Board's 1904 expenditure figures, then adjusted for changes in prices, incomes and family sizes.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.* The general average rise in family expenditure between July 1914 and July 1918 was 74 per cent, and it is notable that the increase in the weekly expenditure on food alone had reached 90 per cent.

As was the case for most families across the country, the majority of Wednesbury's working class were compelled by circumstances to live in private sector rented accommodation. From 1914, they were increasingly the victims of rising rents and a housing shortage, so that dwellings otherwise considered unfit for human habitation remained in use.⁵⁸ Following successful agitation, the Rent Restriction Act 1915 was introduced, holding the rents of working-class dwellings at pre-war levels.⁵⁹ According to Winter, this was 'probably the most important measure in the defence of working-class living standards in wartime; it is arguable that without it, the war economy would have collapsed'.⁶⁰ Despite the Housing (No. 2) Act 1914, empowering the Local Government Board to spend £4 million on housing, the reasons for the shortage were economic, for the construction of working-class homes was considered a matter for the private sector.⁶¹ This was constrained because of the soaring costs of building materials and a labour force depleted by military service or the finding of better-paid work in the munitions industries. The maintenance of the existing housing stock was similarly impaired and dilapidated accommodation was allowed to remain in use. Nationally, for the period between 1911 and 1918, only 238,000 houses were built; a wartime average of 38,000 compared with an annual 84,000 in the pre-war years.⁶²

Discussion of Wednesbury's housing shortage occurred in early 1915. The *Wednesbury Herald* confirmed proposals to purchase a site for 24 dwellings to be constructed by the firm of Messrs. Summerhill and Jellyman, with the total cost of the project being £5,240.⁶³ Yet this did not assuage concerns about overcrowding and, on

⁵⁸ B. White, 'Wigwams and Resort Towns: The Housing Crisis in First World War Devon' in *The Great War: Localities and Regional Identities*, ed. by N. Mansfield and C. Horner, (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014), p. 98. Bonnie White has indicated in this article that due to economic circumstances, there were an estimated 85 per cent of working-class families who had to rent their accommodation.

⁵⁹ This was principally due to the month-long rent strike and resistance to eviction against profiteering landlords in Glasgow, which was led by Mary Barbour and others in the Red Clydeside movement.

⁶⁰ J.M. Winter, *The Great War and the British People* (London: Macmillan, 1986), p. 229. When 18 of the 20,000 participants in the Glasgow rent strike were summonsed, the Clyde shipyards went on strike.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ *Wednesbury Herald*, 2 January 1915.

18 March 1915, the *Express and Star* featured an unsigned letter stating, ‘for years men employed in Wednesbury have had to find houses in neighbouring towns owing to a lack of houses’.⁶⁴ The local authority was subsequently advised that as well as the building of a new school at nearby Moxley, the proposed housing scheme had been halted by the Treasury. That the issue of housing supply remained unresolved is shown in the reports of Wednesbury’s Medical Officer of Health, indicating that whilst the number of occupants per household remained stable at 4.9, between 1914 and 1916 the number of houses decreased from 5,900 to 5,895 and none were built from 1916 to 1918.⁶⁵ Nevertheless, in October 1918, as a first step in rectifying the national housing shortage, a Local Government Board inspection in Wednesbury led to anticipation of a scheme wider in scope than that of 1915. Pragmatically, the *Midland Advertiser and Wednesbury Herald* commented that this would ‘involve very considerable expense but there will be some satisfaction in paying for the happiest necessities of peace’.⁶⁶

The consequences of rising food prices and housing costs became marked in the real distress increasingly felt during the war’s early years, with Waites asserting that conditions ‘threw into sharp relief the chronic insecurity of the urban millions who relied on the low, often irregular, wages of unskilled work.’⁶⁷ Locally, the *Wednesbury Herald* reported on official surveys being conducted into the extent of unemployment and action that local authorities might implement to offset distress.⁶⁸ Whilst the poorest continued to be vulnerable to some extent, there were tangible improvements once Separation Allowances were paid with increased regularity and munitions production created employment to keep pace with the military necessity. This resulted in

⁶⁴ *Express and Star*, 18 March 1915.

⁶⁵ *Express and Star*, 3 May 1915; SCHAS Reports of Wednesbury’s Medical Officer of Health, 1913-1918. See Appendix 4, p. 278.

⁶⁶ *Midland Advertiser and Wednesbury Herald*, 12 October and 16 November 1918. The latter report refers to the public-spirited proposal by the Patent Shaft & Axletree Co. Ltd. to gift to the people of Wednesbury some 26 acres of land to be used for the construction of housing for the town’s working class families.

⁶⁷ B.A. Waites, *A Class Society at War: England, 1914-1918*, p. 200. See Appendix 5, p. 279, in which it was confirmed that the number of pawnbrokers in Wednesbury was still plentiful, although there was a decrease during the war years, thereby reflecting improvements in obtaining regular employment and wages.

⁶⁸ *Wednesbury Herald*, 15 August 1914.

contradictory effects on living standards, however. For families having several adults able to work, increased wages and regular overtime improved matters; whereas, in contrast, for those on fixed incomes or with one adult and several children (typically a female with a husband on active service), rising prices could be devastating.

It was only during the war that there was the beginning of a national commitment by the state towards welfare provision, which Janis Lomas attributed to the Asquith administration's decision to extend Separation Allowances and widows' pensions to the wives of volunteers. Separation Allowances were paid according to an incremental scale linked to military rank, with the spouses of privates receiving 1s. 2d. per day and those of senior non-commissioned officers a daily 2s. 3d. Increments were also made for each additional child in the household.⁶⁹ Initially, this was administered by the SSFA, which interpreted its remit to include assessing whether wives' conduct and morality was sufficiently virtuous to merit a payment. Consequently, invasions of privacy occurred, and with great resentment caused, this resulted for instance in the discovery 'that a large number of working-class soldiers were not married to the women they lived with'.⁷⁰ Eventually it was decided that payment would be made even when a marriage licence was not produced, and the SSFA was relieved of this role, which was taken over by the Ministry of Pensions in 1916. Separation Allowances were beneficial to the health and welfare of working-class families, so that 'by 1917, the pressures of war had led the state to accept the introduction of benefits for soldiers' wives on an unprecedented scale'.⁷¹ This was due to recognition that 'to maintain civilian morale it could not allow the wives and families to be forced on to the Poor Law'.⁷² Nevertheless,

⁶⁹ J. Lomas, p. 127.

⁷⁰ G. Robb, p. 52.

⁷¹ S. Pederson, p. 1000. Prior to the war, only those wives deemed "on the strength" (which meant they were married to the small percentage of men permitted by the Army to marry as a reward for loyalty and long service) were eligible for Separation Allowances; those who were "off the strength had to seek employment or aid from charities or the Poor Law. Pederson estimated that during the war, 1.5 million wives and several million children were receiving these allowances at subsistence rates; smaller amounts, allocated on terms that are rather more stringent, were given to a further 1.5 million dependent relatives of servicemen.

⁷² G.J. De Groot, p. 206.

when resulting from the loss of a husband on active military service, widowhood could still represent an extremely bleak financial future indeed for the man's family.⁷³

That 'the war period must be viewed as one of the most significant improvements in public health' was Winter's assertion, attributed to improvements in nutrition, especially in the case of infants and those whose health was impaired by pre-war casual employment.⁷⁴ In the decade 1910-1920, there were noteworthy increases in civilian life expectancy, rising from 49 to 51 years for men and 53 to 60 years for women. Infant mortality, which Gregory described as 'the most sensitive indicator of general economic wellbeing' owing to the importance of survival at the most vulnerable stage of life, declined considerably from 105 to 80 deaths per thousand.⁷⁵ In Wednesbury during 1915-1918, the total population increased from 29,100 to 30,364 (an average annual increase of between 207 and 309), the death rate for children aged below five years reduced, and the total infantile death rate fell from 136 to 94 per thousand. Having regard to diseases known to be especially prevalent amongst children, for example puerperal fever, the rate remained stable during wartime.⁷⁶

When compared with the other European nations engaged in the war, Britain was the only one in which there were real improvements in the infant mortality rate. However, any examination of the reasons for this, identifying such common denominators as rising wage rates, a more equitable distribution of food, smaller families and a reduced birth rate owing to men being away on military service, suggests that these were also to be found in other countries.⁷⁷ Furthermore, there has been criticism of a perspective that can be viewed as 'rather self-congratulatory and Whiggish' and 'which sees this social progress as a product of the superiority of British

⁷³ Payment of widows' pensions was dependent on the circumstances of the man's death and when this was not because of front line service, it could be refused. This affected not just those whose husbands had contracted a disease or sustained an injury that proved fatal; it was also the case when the man had been tried and shot for cowardice or desertion, thereby adding to the anguish felt by the families concerned.

⁷⁴ J.M. Winter, *The Great War and the British People*, pp. 111-117 and p. 142.

⁷⁵ A. Gregory, *The Last Great War: British Society and the First World War*, p. 285.

⁷⁶ SCHAS Reports of Wednesbury's Medical Officer of Health, 1913-1918. See Appendix 4, p. 278.

⁷⁷ S. Pederson, p. 1002.

representative government'.⁷⁸ Laybourn referred to the poorest as being those that experienced the greatest gains through the introduction of rationing.⁷⁹ Whilst the living standards and poverty to be found in the poorer working-class neighbourhoods had undoubtedly contributed to high mortality rates in the late Victorian and Edwardian periods, as pointed out by Chinn, some improvements to the British mortality rate, for example, occurred in the years that preceded the conflict.⁸⁰ Yet, the pre-war demographic legacy for the working class could not be eliminated and with the occurrence of the Spanish Influenza pandemic in 1918, such privations increased susceptibility to the virus.⁸¹ In Wednesbury, there were expressions of alarm at the number of recorded deaths arising from pulmonary tuberculosis, with the *Express and Star* reporting that this matter had been referred for the attention of the county authorities; later reports indicated that this escalated from 163 in 1915 to 652 by 1917.⁸²

7.3 Citizenship and community support for the war

It has been asserted by Pennell that 'national identity is never more sharply defined than in times of conflict' and the maintenance of morale is vital during any period of warfare.⁸³ One of the corollaries of this involves the vilification of the enemy in general, and their leaders in particular, as part of the justification for a nation's involvement in a conflict. Gower alluded to the pre-war antipathy towards Germany, which to the public was reaffirmed most dramatically by the atrocities committed by German forces on the Western Front in the autumn of 1914.⁸⁴ This sentiment was communicated by the *Express and Star* and the coverage of public meetings where not

⁷⁸ A. Gregory, *The Last Great War: British Society and the First World War*, p. 287.

⁷⁹ K. Laybourn, *The Rise of Labour: The British Labour Party, 1890-1979*, p. 39.

⁸⁰ C.S.A. Chinn, *They Worked All Their Lives: Women of the Urban Poor in England, 1880-1939* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), p.137. His study of the experience in Birmingham highlights success during these years, as gauged by a drop in infant mortality to six per thousand live births.

⁸¹ Wartime censorship minimized the early reporting of the illness and the mortality rates. It has been estimated that there were 200,000 fatalities in Britain as a direct consequence of this pandemic.

⁸² *Express and Star*, 3 May 1915; SCHAS Reports of Wednesbury's Medical Officer of Health, 1913-1918. See Appendix 4, p. 278.

⁸³ C. Pennell, p. 92.

⁸⁴ S.J.L Gower, p. 49.

only the justice and righteousness of Britain's cause and the requirement to preserve national honour were mentioned; there was also the importance of teaching the Kaiser and Germany a lesson for their outrages.⁸⁵ Such acts of barbarism made it 'abundantly clear that the Germans were beyond redemption – except through the lesson of complete and utter defeat. Such a defeat could only be achieved by everyone doing his bit'.⁸⁶

Of all the belligerent nations, only Britain made some allowance for conscientious objectors avoiding military service and following the introduction of conscription in 1916 some 16,500 registrations occurred. Those whose beliefs placed them in this category were frequently abused by others 'and the term conchie became an expression of approbation'.⁸⁷ The process by which objectors were registered entailed appearance before a local panel, which would typically comprise local clergymen, prominent local dignitaries and retired army officers. Invariably hostile, such panels mirrored the widespread distain felt for those seen to be shirking. Although the working class might grumble and on occasion go on strike, it did not see this as dissent despite the lack of military progress, casualties and fatalities, shortages and rising prices. Millman's assessment of working-class patriotism views this as being the majority reaction and 'for most of the working class, in 1918 as in 1914, nation comes before class'.⁸⁸ Evidence of this was drawn from Metropolitan Police Assistant Commissioner Basil Thomson's report, which records the strong public feeling against pacifist meetings and that these were often prohibited to prevent breaches of the peace'.⁸⁹

One consequence was the intrusion of the state into life on a scale unimaginable before the war, and there was the anticipation that as well as maintaining morale, good order should be upheld to ensure national survival. An example cited by Gower was a circular letter of 13 August 1914 from Lieutenant General Sir Herbert Plumer,

⁸⁵ *Express and Star*, 10 August 1914.

⁸⁶ P.H. Liddle, *Voices of War – Front Line and Home Front 1914-1918*, p. 23.

⁸⁷ G. Robb, p. 118.

⁸⁸ B. Millman, p. 36.

⁸⁹ TNA CAB 24/4: Pacifist Propaganda.

Commander-in-Chief of Northern Command, recognizing that disorder could occur in the event of unemployment or food shortages.⁹⁰ Two days later, Staffordshire's Chief Constable convened a meeting of magistrates to appoint special constables to deal with such eventualities. These specials would be private citizens, usually above military age or engaged in essential occupations and able to volunteer for a few hours per week.⁹¹

The extension of police duties took place in numerous ways, such as the identification of groups and organizations suspected of undermining the war effort. Wilson related that a watch was kept on aliens and 'all foreigners had to register with the constabulary and must keep indoors between the hours of 9 pm and 5 am, unless furnished with a police permit'.⁹² On 1 January 1916, the *Midland Advertiser* reported that under the Aliens Restrictions (Amendment) Order 1915, husband and wife Thomas and Jessie Jacques, proprietors of a lodging house in the Market Place, Wednesbury, were charged with failing to register a Russian subject, Ivan Adler, who performed at Wednesbury's Music Hall in November 1915. Both defendants were fined 20s. by Wednesbury's Police Court.⁹³ The fear of spies continued, so that on 6 July 1918 the *Midland Counties Express* reported that the National Party had gathered 3,000 signatures in the area for a petition favouring the immediate internment of aliens.⁹⁴

Public morality received attention during 1914 with an outbreak of so-called *Khaki Fever*, the term acting as a metaphor for relaxed morality. With few women visiting public houses, perceived as a male domain, where military establishments were nearby, the social and sexual behaviour of young women attracted to men in military service created concerns. Moreover, the authorities wished to control the problem of sexually transmitted diseases among the troops. From September 1914, women in such areas came under surveillance via morality patrols instigated by the middle-class

⁹⁰ S.J.L. Gower, p. 86.

⁹¹ *Wednesbury Herald*, 15 August 1914.

⁹² T. Wilson, p. 153.

⁹³ *Midland Advertiser*, 1 January 1916.

⁹⁴ *Midland Counties Express*, 6 July 1918.

Women's Patrol Committee and the Women Police Volunteers (becoming the Women's Police Service in 1915). Predominantly middle- and upper-class women, they responded to 'grave rumours of uncontrolled excitement' and their remit later extended to the workplace following agreement with the Ministry of Munitions in July 1915.⁹⁵ As Waites added, this reinforced resentments that the law, police and judiciary 'were the devil in working-class ethics precisely because they were seen as not being fair to us'.⁹⁶

Mounting apprehension that consumption of alcoholic beverages was damaging to the war effort was famously espoused by Lloyd George in 1915, when he said, 'we are fighting Germans, Austrians and drink, and as far as I am concerned the greatest of these deadly foes is drink'.⁹⁷ The first regulatory measure was the Intoxicating Liquor (Temporary Restriction) Order of 31 August 1914, which empowered the licensing authorities and the police to restrict public house opening hours. As a mainstay of the leisure time of working-class men in the Black Country, the motivation for this was practical; it was to uphold industrial production and public order by reducing drunkenness, rather than as a response to ideas of temperance. Indeed, the Wednesbury and District Licensed Victuallers Association deemed this step unnecessary, which was understandable in view of the number of public houses in the town, and for whom this would have adverse financial consequences.⁹⁸ Selective regulation was undertaken from May 1915 by the Liquor Trade Central Control Board, a body that 'addressed insobriety with radical ideas that transformed virtually every aspect of drinking – from hours, liquor strengths and taxes to retailing and social customs'.⁹⁹ Henceforth, public house

⁹⁵ I.F.W. Beckett, *The Home Front, 1914-1918: How Britain Survived Total War*, p. 66; A. Woollacott, 'Khaki Fever and its Control: Gender, Class, Age and Sexual Morality on the British Home Front in the First World War', pp. 325-327.

⁹⁶ B.A. Waites, 'The Government of the Home Front and the "Moral Economy" of the Working Class' in *Home Fires and Foreign Fields: British Social and Military Experience in the First World War*, ed. by P.H. Liddle, p. 179.

⁹⁷ I.F.W. Beckett, *The Home Front, 1914-1918: How Britain Survived Total War*, p. 130.

⁹⁸ *Wednesbury Herald*, 5 September 1914. See Appendix 5, p. 279. From 1912-1916, the number of public houses in Wednesbury remained at 56, whilst the number of beer retailers decreased from 66 to 55.

⁹⁹ D.W. Gutzke, 'Gender, Class and Public Drinking in Britain during the First World War', *Histoire Sociale*, 54 (27) (1994), p. 371.

opening hours were to be between 8 am and 9 pm on the weekdays and from 12.30 pm to 2.30 pm and 6 pm to 9 pm on Sundays. Notification that a Wednesbury Restriction Order had been promulgated and was going to be imposed by the Home Secretary to confirm these earlier public house closing times, with checks being made to corroborate adherence to these, was reported in the *Express and Star* on 21 May 1915.¹⁰⁰

A further Central Control Board initiative was to reduce the potency of alcoholic drink to a 70 per cent maximum proof for spirits and a commensurate weakening of beer. With its production reduced and prices increased through the imposition of taxes by the Chancellor of the Exchequer in successive budgets, and with less time available for consumption, sales of beers and spirits fell dramatically. According to Cunningham, by 1918 it had more than halved since 1914.¹⁰¹ All these changes contributed to a lowering of the incidence of alcoholism and cases of parental neglect of infants, and were therefore beneficial to the nation's health generally. Evidence of this is supplied by Winter, who quotes the Registrar-General's reports for 1916. These noted the decline of a pre-war pattern whereby the number of infant deaths due to suffocation reported on Sunday mornings outnumbered all other days of the week, attributable to parents being too drunk on Saturday evenings to take proper care of their children.¹⁰²

Social conventions and attitudes towards drinking as a leisure activity were also changing during the war years. For example, there was general adherence to Lord Kitchener's plea for the sake of military discipline that people should refrain from treating servicemen on leave to a drink.¹⁰³ Yet, at the same time, Gutzke asserted that 'respectable working-class and lower middle-class women, who had shunned public drinking for almost a century, began patronizing the pub in unprecedented numbers.'¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁰ *Express and Star*, 21 May 1915.

¹⁰¹ H. Cunningham, *The Challenge of Democracy: Britain, 1832-1918*, p. 246.

¹⁰² J.M. Winter, 'The Impact of the First World War on Civilian Health in Britain', *Economic History Review*, 30 (1977), p. 502.

¹⁰³ Lord Kitchener also followed the personal example set by King George V of abstaining from drink.

¹⁰⁴ D.W. Gutzke, p. 367.

Since the nineteenth century, the great spectator sports had become, in the words of Marwick, 'the very marrow of working-class and lower middle-class activity'.¹⁰⁵ The crowds attending the matches of the professional teams were often exceedingly partisan and, in the case of teams associated with particular religious denominations, this reflected more than geographic rivalry. What is more, as Veitch asserted, football had 'been rapturously embraced by the working classes, and the teams emerging from the industrial heartlands of England...began to gain the ascendancy'.¹⁰⁶ That matches continued in the first months of the war was not well received by the middle and upper classes, the perception being that this was unpatriotic and an impediment to military recruitment and industrial production. On 23 November 1914, *The Times* gave a scathing account of recruitment drives at matches yielding poor results despite the large crowds in attendance.¹⁰⁷ Pressure exerted on the Football Association led to the cessation of football for the war's duration.¹⁰⁸ Other working-class pastimes were also curtailed by the war. The *Wednesbury Herald* of 22 August 1914 confirmed that fearing espionage, the War Office had prohibited pigeon racing since 'Germans in England may use the races as an opportunity of releasing birds to fly to Germany'.¹⁰⁹

The necessities of waging total war resulted in there being reduced time for leisure generally; however, increased incomes from factory employment, channelled people's habits towards escapism and the forms of entertainment that had previously been enjoyed principally by the working class.¹¹⁰ Whilst the theatre had been the preference of the middle and upper classes, the music hall was that of the working class. Both were to be overshadowed by the arrival of the cinema. With an estimated 3,000 cinemas open nationally in 1914, popularity was such that 20 million cinema tickets

¹⁰⁵ A. Marwick, *The Deluge: British Society and the First World War*, p. 196.

¹⁰⁶ C. Veitch, 'Play up! Play up! And win the War! Football, the Nation and the First World War, 1914-15', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 20 (3) (1985), p. 368.

¹⁰⁷ *The Times*, 23 November 1914.

¹⁰⁸ The last football match to be played for the duration of the war was the FA Cup Final that was held at Old Trafford, Manchester, on 24 April 1915, in which Sheffield United beat Chelsea by three goals to nil.

¹⁰⁹ *Wednesbury Herald*, 22 August 1914.

¹¹⁰ A. Marwick, 'British Life and Leisure and the First World War', *History Today*, 15 (6) (1965), p. 413.

were being purchased each week and social customs, such as the playing of the national anthem at the end of performances, may be traced back to this period.¹¹¹ Stephen Badsey described the ‘unprecedented British interest and enthusiasm for what would be the first of the big documentary films’, *The Battle of the Somme*, produced in August 1916.¹¹² Its appearance at Wednesbury’s picture house, with matinee and evening showings, which were being arranged by the manager, Mr S.W. Siddaway, was promoted by the *Midland Advertiser* as ‘the most historic film the cinema world has yet produced’.¹¹³ This performance was viewed by at least 30 million people nationally and was a film that added immeasurably to the rich propaganda value of the allied cause.

7.4 Press and propaganda on the home front

Public opinion, according to Stevenson, was ‘in one sense the ultimate commodity which underpinned the continuation of the war and the ability of the government to demand ever greater sacrifices from the country’.¹¹⁴ The immediate way of upholding national morale, whilst eroding that of the enemy, was with the use of propaganda at home and abroad. This was not only a question of newspaper content, especially at a time of mass literacy, when public appetite for information was seemingly unquenchable but there were also those novel means of visual communication, the cinema and the poster.¹¹⁵ Numerous official and unofficial activities and social groups were influenced because morale could not be taken for granted and had to be rallied continuously. When entering the war, Britain possessed neither a policy for news management nor the bureaucracy to implement it, and this was the first time in Britain’s history that a government consciously mounted a public campaign to win support for its war aims. As Philip Taylor and Michael Sanders contended having regard to the means

¹¹¹ I.F.W. Beckett, *The Home Front, 1914-1918: How Britain Survived Total War*, p. 135.

¹¹² S. Badsey, ‘Press, Propaganda and Public Perceptions’ in *A Part of History: Aspects of the British Experience of the First World War*, ed. by M. Howard (London: Continuum, 2008), p. 31.

¹¹³ *Midland Advertiser*, 18 November 1916.

¹¹⁴ J. Stevenson, p. 75.

¹¹⁵ Alfred Leete’s iconic Kitchener ‘Your Country Needs You’ poster first appeared on 5 September 1914.

by which the British Government 'came to employ the weapon of propaganda during the First World War, it was undeniably an impressive piece of improvisation'.¹¹⁶

An official Press Bureau was first established at the Royal United Services Institute in August 1914 to dispense war news. As Badsey pointed out, this 'normally went no further than to issue editors with guidance on which stories were to be avoided or treated with caution'.¹¹⁷ The opening of this office, which was headed by the noted barrister and Conservative MP, F.E. Smith, was reported in the *Wednesbury Herald*, adding that it 'will be issuing to accredited representatives of the press the news relating to naval and military matters in the war'.¹¹⁸ The growing importance of propaganda, and the recognition that it should be undertaken more consistently and systematically, both at home and abroad, and to minimize confusion, followed the proliferation of unauthorized atrocity stories and other rumours at the start of the war. Nevertheless, stories of German outrages were circulated by the press for the duration of the hostilities.¹¹⁹ Eventually, the need for a more rigorous approach to propaganda prompted the creation in 1917 of a National War Aims Committee (NWAC) and a Ministry of Information in 1918. The view of the NWAC was that it was imperative to remind the nation of the causes of the war, to sustain continuation of the struggle until victory had been achieved, and it worked with patriotic trade unionists to this end.¹²⁰

Until the middle of 1915, the press were frequently able to secure information via letters and reports passed on from troops, and some correspondents even managed to reach and make reports from the front lines, though as the war continued censorship increased. The 1914 Defence of the Realm Act (DORA) was created to prevent the obtaining and relaying of information directly or indirectly useful to the enemy, rather

¹¹⁶ P.M. Taylor and M.L. Sanders, *British Propaganda during the First World War* (London: Macmillan, 1982), p. 1.

¹¹⁷ S. Badsey, pp. 28-29.

¹¹⁸ *Wednesbury Herald*, 15 August 1914.

¹¹⁹ S.O. Müller, p. 64. Following the violation of Belgian neutrality, and for the duration of the war, actions such as the first employment of poison gas, air attacks on civilians and unrestrained submarine warfare provided British propagandists with abundant scope to depict Germany as the embodiment of evil.

¹²⁰ B. Millman, pp. 229-230 and 237-240.

than to control domestic public opinion, although that become one of its consequences. The management of news began to involve the manipulation of information that might otherwise undermine Britain's position, encourage the enemy or jeopardize relationships with neutral countries. As Faber argued, the powers provided by DORA have led to some historians perceiving 'a sophisticated state system being put in place to censor and spin in order to stop the nation knowing what was happening'.¹²¹ A more pragmatic motivation takes account of the war-weariness evident from 1917, namely to bolster the national will to win. The targeting of those opposing the war, such as pacifists and some socialists and trade unionists, together with shirkers, profiteers, heavy drinkers and food hoarders, led to increased censorship or manipulation of news coverage. Individuals were also placed under surveillance because information on the attitudes of 'unreliable citizens was increasingly sought after by the state and its servants in order to manage the social tensions generated by industrial warfare'.¹²²

Eight categories of propaganda methods were developed during the war. These have been summarized by Alice Marquis, and include the use of stereotypes, pejorative names, selection and omission of facts, atrocity stories, slogans, one-sided assertions, pin-pointing the enemy and the 'bandwagon' effect.¹²³ They allowed British propagandists to depict Germany and its people as barbarous enemies of civilisation, embodying the traits of despotism, intolerance and militarism; in contrast, the British were deemed democratic, peaceful and tolerant.¹²⁴ The moral superiority of the Allied cause and of the British soldier when compared with his opponents on the front line was articulated in the *Express and Star* on 25 November 1914, for example.¹²⁵ In Wednesbury, one event that had an overt propaganda value took place in January 1916.

¹²¹ A. Faber, p. 4.

¹²² D. Englander, 'Military Intelligence and the Defence of the Realm: The Surveillance of Soldiers and Civilians during the First World War', *Bulletin of the Society for the Study of Labour History*, 52 (1) (1987), p.24.

¹²³ A.G. Marquis, 'Words as Weapons: Propaganda in Britain and Germany during the First World War', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 13 (1) (1978), p. 486.

¹²⁴ D. Stevenson, *With Our Backs to the Wall: Victory and Defeat in 1918* (London: Penguin, 2011), p.13.

¹²⁵ *Express and Star*, 25 November 1914.

This involved the displaying of a German field gun that had been captured at the Battle of Loos in 1915.¹²⁶ It was noted that a detachment of regular soldiers and the Wednesbury Volunteer Training Corp attended this event. It was reported that it was ‘certainly a compliment to Wednesbury that this gun is being sent here, for Walsall, West Bromwich and Wolverhampton have had no such distinction’ and was a tribute to ‘the unique efforts of Wednesbury in supplying men and munitions for the war’.¹²⁷

One occasion when an essentially local event was of great national significance, and which was reflected in both local and national press coverage, was the air raid by German Zeppelins on 31 January - 1 February 1916.¹²⁸ Despite their accounting for 1,413 of the 1,570 civilian deaths occurring during the war, Ian Beckett recalled the habit of the Press Bureau for euphemistically describing such incursions as ‘visits’ in an effort to reduce panic.¹²⁹ Hence, accounts of these events tended to be limited with reports being made in very general terms and with minimal detail. For instance, most of the reporting of the aforementioned air raid did not mention by name the towns that were bombed. The *Staffordshire Advertiser* of 12 February 1916 when describing the funerals stated that these were ‘of the victims of the air raid on a Staffordshire town, which was twice visited by the Zeppelins’.¹³⁰ The local press dwelt on the deaths of women and children and did report some of the detail of the inquests held during the days that followed, and in which much of the emotion of local people was allowed to be printed. As Robb asserted, ‘the press did not create a patriotic public but rather nurtured existing patriotism and concealed unpleasant facts that might undermine morale’.¹³¹

Local newspapers flourished during the war years and Wednesbury was well served in this regard by the *Midland Advertiser* and the *Wednesbury Herald*, together

¹²⁶ See Appendix 6, Photograph 36, p. 298. The Battle of Loos had particular significance to the people of Wednesbury, as many local men serving as Territorials with the 1/5th Battalion of the South Staffordshire Regiment fought in this battle in October 1915. The losses sustained were some of the largest of the war.

¹²⁷ *Express and Star*, 20 January 1916; *Midland Advertiser*, 22 January 1916.

¹²⁸ See Chapter 6, pp. 161-191.

¹²⁹ I.F.W. Beckett, *The Home Front, 1914-1918: How Britain Survived Total War*, p. 186.

¹³⁰ *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 12 February 1916.

¹³¹ G. Robb, p. 113.

with the *Express and Star* and *Midland Counties Express*, which had a greater circulation area covering the Black Country and Staffordshire.¹³² All had their own editorial and political agendas yet were devoted to serving their community by attempting to connect the front line and home front. Equally, the voracious appetite for news from a public following the progress of fathers, sons and brothers serving with local battalions ensured an attentive readership. First-hand accounts, gleaned from letters and other information from the front were often less sensationalized when depicted by the local press than by their national counterparts, and features such as the 'Letter from the Wednesbury Territorials' reflected local interest and enthusiasm.¹³³

It was asserted by Winter and Baggett that 'waiting for news of loved ones was an agonizing and unavoidable preoccupation for millions of families during the war'.¹³⁴ As the months passed, there were features containing casualty lists and biographical details about local men wounded or killed in action, and occasionally information about the circumstances of the action. This would begin to diminish with increasing censorship and other constraints after 1915, such as wartime shortages of paper that reduced the size and content of editions, and the tendency to regurgitate official reports became noticeable. *The Express and Star* gave the particulars of ten men, mostly officers, who had died during the attempt by the 1/5th and 1/6th Battalions of the South Staffordshire Regiment to seize the Hohenzollern Redoubt, during the Battle of Loos.¹³⁵ With the anniversary of this event imminent, on 9 September 1916 the *Midland Advertiser* confirmed that a memorial had been installed at St James's Church, Wednesbury, in honour of Company Sergeant Major Jack Hayward, who had fallen during that day. It mentioned that in peacetime, he had been the local scoutmaster.¹³⁶

¹³² In 1916, a merger of the former created the *Midland Advertiser and Wednesbury Herald*.

¹³³ *Wednesbury Herald*, 19 December 1914, 20 March and 24 April 1915

¹³⁴ J.M. Winter and B. Baggett, p. 15.

¹³⁵ *Express and Star*, 19 October 1915. The 137th (Staffordshire) Brigade (which included the 1/5th and 1/6th Battalions) had made a gallant but doomed attempt to seize this fortified position near to Auchy-les Mines.

¹³⁶ *Midland Advertiser*, 9 September 1916.

The local press took an especial pride when communicating the achievements of men who had received commendations for gallantry. On 18 October 1916, the *Midland Advertiser* gave coverage to the civic reception for Sergeant Joseph Davies, a resident at 48 Cross Street, Wednesbury, and winner of the Victoria Cross.¹³⁷ Sergeant Davies had been greeted at Wednesbury railway station by the Mayor and Mayoress, Alderman John Kilvert (a veteran of the Battle of Balaclava) and a guard of honour. It added that buildings were festooned with bunting, flags and banners that read, ‘Welcome Home to our VC Hero’. A reception was organized in March 1918 at Wednesbury Town Hall for Corporal Leonard Waldron, who had been mentioned in despatches and awarded the Military Medal following actions in which he had been severely wounded and lost a leg. The *Midland Advertiser and Wednesbury Herald* stated that when he was congratulated by the Mayor, Corporal Waldron modestly said ‘it was the proudest moment in his life’ and ‘like many other Wednesbury boys he just did the best he could for his country’.¹³⁸

In considerable contrast, the *Midland Counties Express* on 23 February 1918, in an article entitled ‘Not a Hero – Wearing Army Decorations without Authority’, reported on a markedly different matter. This concerned the case of Harry Parker, aged 35 years, a native of Birmingham and a man of no fixed abode, who had worn in public the Queen’s South Africa Medal, Distinguished Conduct Medal and Military Medal, and was arrested in Wednesbury for falsely representing himself with the intention to deceive. In accordance with the DORA Regulations, Parker was sentenced to three months’ hard labour, with Wednesbury’s magistrates recording their determination to protect the public against a man who had previously been convicted for deception.¹³⁹

¹³⁷ Ibid., 28 October 1916. See Appendix 6, Photograph 39, p. 299, showing Sergeant Joseph Davies being welcomed at Wednesbury station on his return to the town on 20 October 1916. Joseph John Davies (1889–1976) was born in Tipton and was serving with the 10th (Service) Battalion of the Royal Welch Fusiliers when he won the Victoria Cross for his gallantry at Delville Wood on 20 July 1916. Part of a group of eight men cut off from their Company and surrounded by the enemy, the then Corporal Davies repulsed several German attacks by use of grenades and rapid rifle fire, to get the other men safely to cover.

¹³⁸ *Midland Advertiser and Wednesbury Herald*, 16 March 1918. On 24 May 1962, Councillor Leonard Waldron, as the Mayor of Wednesbury, welcomed Queen Elizabeth II on her official visit to the Borough.

¹³⁹ *Midland Counties Express*, 23 February 1918.

One measure of practical patriotism was the popularity of subscriptions for National War Bonds and War Savings Certificates. Notably, these were also marketed to the public as a prudent investment, albeit one reliant on Britain's success in winning the war. In February 1918, the *Express and Star* revealed that in order to give publicity to these funds, the Tank Bank was to visit the area to facilitate the making of subscriptions.¹⁴⁰ The *Midland Advertiser and Wednesbury Herald* of 23 March 1918 related that the Savings Certificates were available for purchase at 15s. 6d. and the Bonds could be bought at rates between £5 and £5,000.¹⁴¹ In Wednesbury, a War Savings Committee had been constituted with the objective of raising £70,000, a sum estimated to be the equivalent to providing 28 military aircraft. Remarkably, it was revealed in newspaper reports on 30 March 1918 that Wednesbury's contribution had now exceeded £145,000, with £7,000 donated by workers of the Crown tube works and £1,400 from Wednesbury's schoolchildren, thus enabling some 56 aircraft to be acquired.¹⁴² A ceremony hosted by Walsall's Mayor, Councillor S.M. Slater, was held at Walsall Town Hall on 30 March 1918. In a speech delivered from the top of the tank, the Mayor of Wednesbury, Alderman A.E. Pritchard, reaffirmed that 'their main duty as civilians at home was to do everything they could to help the brave fellows who had stemmed the German advance'. This was greeted by cries of 'Good Old Wedgbury!'¹⁴³

¹⁴⁰ *Express and Star*, 2 February 1918. The tank banks were converted Mk IV tanks, which toured towns and cities promoting the sale of National War Bonds and War Savings Certificates, and tank 113 'Julian' was the vehicle that visited Walsall. See Appendix 6, Illustration 67 and Photographs 68-69, p. 315-317.

¹⁴¹ *Midland Advertiser and Wednesbury Herald*, 23 March 1918.

¹⁴² *Midland Advertiser and Wednesbury Herald*, 30 March 1918; *Midland Counties Express*, 30 March 1918. The sum of £145,000 in 1918 would be £7,359,296 in 2015. <<http://www.bankofengland.co.uk/education/Pages/resources/inflationtools/calculator/flash/default.aspx>> [Accessed 25 February 2015].

¹⁴³ The Mayor's comment about the German advance was a reference to the Ludendorff offensive (codenamed 'Michael') and also known as the Kaiserschlacht (Kaiser's Battle). This had commenced on 21 March, was the deepest advance made by German troops since 1914, and threatened to break through the British Fifth Army situated to the west of Cambrai. It was the first of five large offensives launched by Germany on the Western Front in 1918, the others being codename 'Georgette' (9-29 April), 'Blücher-Yorch' (27 May-4 June), 'Gneisenau' (9-14 June) and 'Friedenssurm' (15-17 July). Whilst the advances of the German forces were initially successful, using recently pioneered tactics including the deployment of storm troops, the strain on their supply lines and the cost in terms of the numbers of men lost (10,581 killed and 28,778 wounded on the first day alone) fundamentally weakened Germany's position. In consequence, it was unable to halt the British Army's 'Hundred Days' offensive later in that year, in which a significant role would be played by the men of the 1/5th Battalion, South Staffordshire Regiment, when attacking the fortified Hindenburg Line on 29 September 1918. See D. Stevenson, pp. 30-111 and pp. 112-169.

7.5 Conclusion

In 1914, it would have been impossible to prophesize what the outcomes of the war would be, what changes would follow and how it would be concluded. Fundamental to the continuation of the war and the achievement of victory in 1918 was the upholding of civilian morale. The work that local communities carried out, and which maintained this spirit was performed ‘by individuals known to few but who were sustaining the national endeavour by their undemonstrative personal resilience’.¹⁴⁴ The war’s impact on society was visible in numerous ways, though these were not sufficiently devastating to destroy Britain’s hierarchical social structure. As Hobsbawm indicated, the working class world, containing its pubs, newspapers, music halls, football teams and the labour movement, ‘co-existed with the middle-class world but were not part of it’.¹⁴⁵ This conflict influenced all of these to the extent of, for example, determining which leisure pursuits were deemed acceptable and discouraging or banning those that were not.

Industrialized warfare revealed as never before the nation’s dependence on the working class and many working people would make advances due to the war. Given their pre-war position, arguably, they had the most to gain. Their health and living standards improved, some of the worst features of poverty were removed, at least temporarily, and there was more plentiful employment for the semi- and unskilled labour force, and better working opportunities for women. However, the extent of exploitation by profiteering landlords and shopkeepers was cause for eventual state intervention to prevent discontent from turning into something that would ultimately threaten the winning of the war. In this conflict, as never before, those doing the fighting had families at home, and with an efficient postal service facilitating frequent contact, they wanted to be assured that their loved ones were being looked after.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁴ P.H. Liddle, *The Worst Ordeal – Britons at Home and Abroad 1914-1918* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword Paperbacks, 1997), p. 7.

¹⁴⁵ E.J. Hobsbawm, *Industry and Empire*, 2nd edn, p. 266.

¹⁴⁶ Each week, 12 million letters were delivered to soldiers and their families received replies within days.

Patriotism was deeply instilled in the Black Country's and Wednesbury's working class communities and this was demonstrated by the widespread contempt directed at those who were perceived to be doing well out of the war, with especial hostility being reserved for those producers and traders who were unscrupulously profiteering at the expense of their fellow citizens. The scandal that the sacrifice being readily offered up by the working class was not equitably replicated elsewhere in British society was to some extent minimized by a compliant press and a propaganda effort that helped enforce a new morality. This depicted dissent as being as much an enemy to the nation as the armies of its opponents on the battlefields. Nonetheless, an important lesson learnt was that in view of the heightened level of public interest, with the war ceasing to be a matter for professional armies by the end of 1914, and thereafter becoming instead a struggle between the societies of the belligerent nations, it was no longer possible for government to disregard the views of the people. It was, however, permissible for popular opinion to be channelled, controlled and shaped by censorship and propaganda so that it too became one of the most potent weapons of war.

For the working class in Wednesbury, as elsewhere, the war had brought moral and cultural transformation, with increased state involvement in their daily lives, which might have become rather more tolerable to bear. The attainment of genuine change and social mobility remained as elusive as ever. This is succinctly stated by De Groot, who has observed that 'the cul-de-sac of working-class experience became a little less drab, and a bit more secure but it remained difficult to escape'.¹⁴⁷ Nevertheless, from August 1914 through to November 1918, and despite all the injustices, privations and the personal losses suffered by countless families, as has been illustrated by the various examples supplied throughout this Chapter, Wednesbury's working-class community remained stoic in the face of such adversity and its patriotism was unwavering.

¹⁴⁷ G.J. De Groot, p. 303.

CHAPTER 8: POLITICAL CHANGE DURING THE WAR

8.1 Introduction

In the January 1910 general election, the constituency of Wednesbury returned as its Member of Parliament the Conservative candidate, John Norton Griffiths, popularly known as *Empire Jack*.¹ The second general election held during December of that year witnessed him hold this seat with an increased majority, retaining it until 1918.² The Liberal Party had been his only opposition at either contest, since neither the Labour Party nor the Independent Labour Party (ILP) participated.³ When examining the extent of Labour's advance during the Party's formative years, both Duncan Tanner and Martin Pugh have associated the West Midlands with the existence of a tradition of working-class Conservatism, and Wednesbury was completely consistent with this.⁴

By 1914, the Liberal administration of H.H. Asquith had governed Britain for most of the previous decade, described by Trevor Wilson as 'an astonishing series of constitutional and social reforms' interwoven with 'heightened political passions and by the mismanagement of some important episodes'.⁵ The electoral alliance between the Labour and Liberal Parties dating back to 1903 meant working-class voters' only real alternative was the Conservative Party, led since 1911 by Andrew Bonar Law. With its imperialist, nationalistic and patriotic attitudes, this appealed because, as Hugh Cunningham remarked, 'in the later nineteenth and early twentieth-centuries, patriotism

¹ See Appendix 6, Photograph 10, p. 285. In the 1910 general election campaign, John Norton Griffiths was typically portrayed as 'Wednesbury's Worker' to appeal to a predominantly working-class electorate.

² SCHAS *Ryder's Annual* 1913, p. 3; SCHAS B/W3/1/8 Borough of Wednesbury Municipal Yearbook 1913/14. At this time, the Parliamentary Constituency of Wednesbury was comprised of the three Parishes of Wednesbury, Darlaston and Tipton, with them having 5,211, 3,082 and 5,564 electors respectively. However, by 1914, the total electorate for the Constituency had increased from 13,857 to 14,059.

³ *The Times*, 17 January and 5 December 1910. The seat being held previously by Clarendon Hyde for the Liberal Party, in the January 1910 general election, John Norton Griffiths gained Wednesbury for the Conservative Party. He polled 6,636 votes compared with the 6,040 achieved by the Liberal candidate, C.G. Hyde. Norton Griffiths secured his position at the December 1910 general election, by increasing his majority from 596 to 732, when beating the Liberal candidate H.A. Baker by 6,423 votes to 5,691.

⁴ M. Pugh, 'The Rise of Labour and the Political Culture of Conservatism, 1890-1945', *History*, 87 (2002), p. 528; D. Tanner, *Political Change and the Labour Party, 1900-1918*, p. 83. See Chapter 2, pp. 36-51, for an extensive discussion of political allegiances and working-class Conservatism, and its underlying attractions and motivations to the working-class community of Wednesbury during the pre-war years.

⁵ T. Wilson, p. 192.

was extensively propagated by those in authority, and its political location was on the right'.⁶ However, with a mere eight million adults enjoying the right to vote, political inequality was 'much more widely diffused than social or economic inequality'.⁷

The First World War changed this political landscape in dramatic fashion. It contributed to the Liberal Party's schism and the ousting of Asquith as Prime Minister in 1916; the introduction of Coalition government, increased state intervention and franchise reform; and Labour's emergence as a viable political party in its own right. At the 1918 general election, as John Turner stated, there 'was the culmination of wartime political machinations, and it was the first time for nearly eight years that the political elite had confronted the mass electorate'.⁸ In that year, the Representation of the People Act replaced household suffrage with adult suffrage, to include women over 30 years of age and those men not previously enfranchised.⁹ The outcome was a resounding victory for the Coalition, winning 473 seats compared with the 234 gained by other parties. Yet account must be taken of the speed with which the election was called, incomplete electoral rolls and the many servicemen who were unable to vote. The national turnout was only 57 per cent. With a noticeable shift in political loyalties in the Black Country, of this area's ten constituencies, Wednesbury was one of four electing a Labour Party candidate for the first time, signalling a change in working-class allegiances.

This Chapter examines the key political events affecting Wednesbury when there was a growing sense of an increasingly unified, if not yet class-conscious, working class. As Mike Savage attested, it is important to examine the local dimension 'because it is in this arena that formal politics, based around the national state, meets with and interacts with practical politics'.¹⁰ This discussion will cover the three principal political

⁶ H. Cunningham, 'The Language of Patriotism, 1750-1914', p. 8.

⁷ A. Marwick, *The Deluge: British Society and the First World War*, p. 23.

⁸ J. Turner, *British Politics and the Great War: Coalition and Conflict, 1915-1918*, p. 2.

⁹ H.A. Clegg, p. 230.

¹⁰ M. Savage, 'The Rise of the Labour Party in Local Perspective', *Journal of Regional and Local Studies*, 1 (10) (1990), p. 13.

parties but given the changes to be assessed and the outcome in 1918, the Labour Party will receive particular attention in terms of Tanner's three components of political change.¹¹ Firstly, Labour's shift away from co-operation with the Liberals, thereby testing the assumption that before 1914, Labour was beginning to supersede Liberalism, and that war accelerated this process. This is a view that Pugh criticized as 'the product of hindsight'.¹² Secondly, Labour's cumulative improvement in electoral performance. Thirdly, internal changes enabling Labour's creation of a distinct identity within the centre-left. As Laybourn asserted, this 'broad debate has spawned several sub debates - the most important covering the issues of the franchise, the New Liberal ideology and local developments'.¹³ Hence, the labour movement's role in the 1913 Black Country strike and 1917 Crown tube works strike is stressed. Since the mid-nineteenth century, the working-class channelled its efforts into trade unions, cooperatives and friendly societies; but events demonstrated the reacquisition of a political relevance not enjoyed since Chartism. Consideration of working-class politics is essential to this thesis.

8.2 National politics in wartime

Certain areas of the country that were Conservative in allegiance before 1914 were nationally important. This included the West Midlands, where Joseph Chamberlain's charismatic personality and brand of Liberal Unionism matched with civic service reflected the populist imperial sympathies of the area's working class, extending beyond Birmingham and into the Black Country.¹⁴ Several strands within this political culture are identifiable. There were the deferential working class who accepted governance by their social superiors; the pragmatic working class who were Conservative by instinct and allegiance because it reflected their own self-interests; and non-unionized employees, isolated from and suspicious of the labour movement, and having a greater

¹¹ D. Tanner, *Political Change and the Labour Party, 1900-1918*, p. 1.

¹² M. Pugh, *State and Society: British Political and Social History, 1870-1992*, p. 129.

¹³ K. Laybourn, 'The Rise of Labour and the Decline of Liberalism: The State of the Debate', p. 211.

¹⁴ The 1912 merger between Liberal Unionism and Conservatism minimized any distinction between the two.

sense of class collaboration due to working in smaller workplaces.¹⁵ In describing Conservatism's powerful appeal, John Belchem cited the politics of recreation and entertainment, not least the imperialism found in popular culture such as the music hall. He stated that 'the Tories offered a range of attractions which radicals and socialists, divided over temperance and other ascetic considerations, were unable to match'.¹⁶

From the 1880s, the Conservative Party reinforced its attractiveness to the affluent and aspirational members of society, while the Liberal Party slowly began to lose its appeal to the working class. It has been argued by both Tanner and Pugh that 'Liberalism's historic weaknesses in some parts of these areas suggested that there was an electoral space which Labour might exploit' even though 'Asquith's party seemed entrenched in office, if battered by a succession of controversies'.¹⁷ Those workers disinclined to vote Liberal might be persuaded, therefore, to vote for Labour men of the same social class, so that the interests they supported could be upheld locally and in Parliament. As John Ward asserted, 'a number of constraints held back the emergence of the Labour Party, both nationally and locally, in the years before 1914'.¹⁸ These included exclusion from the franchise of all women and a substantial number of men, inadequate organization and the absence of political agents, together with a weakened financial position arising from the 1909 Osborne judgement. Consequently, reliance on the electoral pact with the Liberals imposed ideological cautiousness, repressed Labour's independent identity and limited its position to that of a supporting role.¹⁹

¹⁵ R. McKibbin, *The Ideologies of Class: Social Relations in Britain, 1880-1950*, p. 95.

¹⁶ J. Belchem, p. 242.

¹⁷ D. Tanner, *Political Change and the Labour Party, 1900-1918*, pp. 162-163; M. Pugh, *State and Society: British Political and Social History, 1870-1992*, p. 131.

¹⁸ J. Ward, 'The Development of the Labour Party in the Black Country, 1918-1939' (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Wolverhampton, 2004), p. 11. Locally, Labour achieved only the one victory, with Frederick Richards holding Wolverhampton West from 1906-1910, after which it was regained for the Conservative Party by Alfred Bird. *The Times*, 6 October 1942 provided the obituary of Thomas Frederick Richards (1863-1942). Born in Wednesbury, he was the Labour Party's first MP in the Black Country, representing the Wolverhampton West constituency from 1906 to 1910. Thereafter, he resumed a career as a trade union leader, eventually becoming President of the National Union of Boot and Shoe Operatives.

¹⁹ M. Pugh, 'The Rise of Labour and the Political Culture of Conservatism, 1890-1945', p. 514. Pugh has argued that it was not only the potential electors from the working class who were disenfranchised since the young and the mobile of all classes and political allegiances were disadvantaged by the arrangements.

During the period 1911-1914, an improvement in Labour's position became discernible. This was connected to economic and social change in the workplace, declining craft production and increasing demand for non-skilled workers. Also contributing to this was intensified industrial unrest and the growing power of several trade unions that had recently become affiliated to the Labour Party. The first local evidence of this emerged during the 1913 Black Country strike, when concerted union participation during this successful trade dispute broadened the labour movement's appeal to the working-class community.²⁰ Nevertheless, had an election been held in 1915, it was unlikely that the Labour Party would have been able to contest more than 150 parliamentary constituencies.²¹ In the Black Country, whether working-class support would have translated into votes for Labour was questionable, with the Party having been accurately described by Eric Taylor as having a very tenuous foothold.²²

In February 1914, there was political upheaval when Wednesbury's MP, John Norton Griffiths, communicated his intention not to stand in the next general election owing to increased business demands. According to *The Times* on 6 February 1914, his decision was accepted with regret by Wednesbury Conservative and Unionist Association, a sub-committee being appointed to select a new candidate.²³ In his biography of Frank Dudley Docker, Davenport-Hines described Norton Griffiths as 'a man with a bad financial record' whose 'business went into liquidation at this time with heavy losses to everyone except himself'.²⁴ Also contributing to local misgivings were his long absences abroad, limited Parliamentary impact and neglect of constituency interests. As business owners and employers themselves, especially in local manufacturing, many Conservatives were undoubtedly dismayed by Norton Griffiths'

²⁰ See Chapter 2, pp. 51-70.

²¹ H. Cunningham, *The Challenge of Democracy: Britain, 1832-1918*, p. 219; M. Pearce and G. Stewart, *British Political History, 1867-1995: Democracy and Decline*, 2nd edn (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 209.

²² E. Taylor, 'The Working Class Movement in the Black Country, 1863-1914', p. 463.

²³ *The Times*, 6 February 1914.

²⁴ R.T.P Davenport-Hines, pp. 65-66. The principal reason for the demise of Norton Griffiths' firm, the civil engineering and mining contractor, Griffiths & Co. Ltd., was the considerable reluctance expressed by his financial backers to support a five-year contract for the construction of a railway line in Australia.

donations to hardship funds during the 1913 Black Country strike.²⁵ In March, the *Midland Advertiser* confirmed that Archibald White Maconochie had been selected as prospective Conservative candidate for the next general election.²⁶ In accordance with the Parliament Act, this should have been arranged by 1915, being delayed by the outbreak of war, and Norton Griffiths remained as Wednesbury's MP until 1918.²⁷

In the summer of 1914, international events had shifted public attention away from the domestic controversies that had recently dogged the Asquith administration. However, when considering what has subsequently been described as 'the choice of 1914', A.J.P. Taylor's contention was that appearances of national unity were deceptive, there being 'deep cleavages in the party outlooks'.²⁸ For instance, with its radical and non-interventionist elements, there was a danger that both the Cabinet and the Liberal Party would be divided on Britain's participation in the conflict. The Conservatives had long regarded Germany as a dangerous rival threatening the global balance of power and felt their views to have been finally vindicated. Publicly, the treaty obligation to defend Belgian neutrality was the principle underpinning British involvement and the Government sought to take the moral high ground; however, the politicians were acutely aware of the necessity of defending national and Empire interests against German expansionism. Failure to stem this carried with it massive implications for prestige, prosperity and national security, and there was considerable apprehension but the industrialized total war that followed was simply unimaginable in August 1914.

Bourne pointed out that even the 'rage of politics' was stilled, so that national unity became evident even in Parliament, due to the 'patriotic opposition' of Conservatives and Labour. The electoral and political truce achieved in the earliest

²⁵ See Chapter 2, pp. 51-70.

²⁶ *Midland Advertiser*, 7 and 14 March 1914; R.T.P Davenport-Hines, p. 66. Archibald White Maconochie was the owner of a company that had supplied tinned food to the British Army since the time of the Boer War. Just as the local press had nicknamed John Norton Griffiths "Empire Jack" due to his popular patriotism, Maconochie was soon dubbed "Fighting Mac". See Appendix 6, Photograph 70, p. 317.

²⁷ J. Turner, *British Politics and the Great War: Coalition and Conflict, 1915-1918*, p. 51. At the 1918 general election, John Norton Griffiths was selected to contest the Central Wandsworth constituency.

²⁸ A.J.P. Taylor, *Politics in Wartime*, p. 12.

days held, although, as optimism faded, disagreements over the conduct of the war exposed divisions in all political parties.²⁹ This prompted the formation of the first Coalition on 25 May 1915, described as an ‘unhappy amalgam’ in which Asquith’s ‘years of playing off one personality against another seemingly enhanced his own indispensability’.³⁰ Making some concessions to other parties did not heal the rifts in the Cabinet; instead, it allowed grievances to be aired, particularly between Asquith and Lloyd George to the detriment of the Liberal Party. The primary reason for the fall of this first Coalition in late 1916 was continued contentiousness on the introduction of conscription. This was combined with insufficient clarity in relation to war objectives and a lack of military success in any of the theatres of operation and especially given the fatalities and casualties incurred during the Somme offensive. Asquith’s control of the House of Commons was slipping and he was thought to be too dilatory. There were calls for a more decisive style of leadership, so that with Bonar Law declining the Royal invitation, Lloyd George felt able to capitalize on his success as Minister of Munitions and seize the Premiership for himself, albeit with Conservative support. Upon forming his Coalition on 6 December 1916, which was in effect a palace revolution to displace Asquith, Lloyd George also met the Labour Party Executive and the Parliamentary Labour Party (PLP) because, as Clegg observed, he required their support.³¹

Carl Brand noted that until ‘the very day of the empire’s entry into the war, the British Labour movement unitedly strove for peace’ with the *Daily Herald* of 5 August 1914 lamenting being ‘plunged into a European war, the extent and the horrors of which no man can foresee’.³² The initial indications were that its internationalist and anti-

²⁹ J.M. Bourne, *Britain and the Great War, 1914-1918*, p. 106. When a constituency fell vacant, the party holding it would put up a candidate when an election was held and the other political parties would voluntarily refrain from doing so, although this did not prevent any independents from standing in opposition to the sitting party. Local party political activity within the constituencies was also suspended.

³⁰ M. Pearce and G. Stewart, p. 213.

³¹ H.A. Clegg, p. 161.

³² C.F. Brand, ‘British Labor and the International during the Great War’, *The Journal of Modern History*, 8 (1) (1936), p. 41; *Daily Herald*, 5 August 1914. This article is reproduced in C. Hampton, ed., *A Radical Reader: The Struggle for Change in England, 1381-1914*, p. 601.

militarist traditions would split Labour into factions that opposed and supported the war. In the former were the pacifists; the latter contained most of the wider movement, mainly rank-and-file trade unionists who, ‘once it was clear that hostilities could not be avoided, came to feel there was little alternative but to support their own country’.³³ It was this transformation of opinion and the decision of the PLP to back the Government’s request for war credits of £100 million that prompted James Ramsay MacDonald to resign the Party’s chairmanship on 7 August. This position would be filled by Arthur Henderson, now commanding broad support in Parliament and nationally, who would steer a path of supporting the war effort, yet criticizing policy failures when they occurred. This was a major achievement because this strategy successfully averted intra-party division during the first three years of the war.³⁴

Studies of social patriotism and the British working class refer to its patriotic loyalties as a counterweight to the class-consciousness that was beginning to emerge in the years before 1914. As Field contended, for instance, August 1914 highlighted the attitudes of leftward-learning intellectuals to ‘the potential malleability and irrationalism of the masses’.³⁵ Cunningham, in examining ‘the linguistic shift on the patriotism of the age leading up to the First World War’ drew comparison with the notions of patriotism employed by earlier generations of radicals, such as the Chartists, as integral to the language of freedom and opposition to tyranny. He argued that although emphasizing duty and loyalty to a higher cause through expression in jingoistic terms from the 1870s onwards, when the initiative passed to the political right, it remained fundamental to ‘the relationship between the state and the working class in the age of imperialism’.³⁶

³³ D. Sassoon, *One Hundred Years of Socialism: The West European Left in the Twentieth Century* (London: Fontana, 1997), p. 28; D. Howell, *British Workers and the Independent Labour Party, 1888-1906* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1983), p. 21. With regard to a tendency in some of the literature to equate it with pacifism, Howell cited patriotic attitudes in ILP branches prior to the First World War. Indeed, it is to be noted that the RFC ace Major Edward Corringham (Mick) Mannoock, VC, DSO and Two Bars, MC and Bar, had been the pre-war secretary of the Wellingborough branch of the ILP.

³⁴ H. Pelling and A.J. Reid, *A Short History of the Labour Party*, 11th edn, pp. 32-33.

³⁵ G. Field, p. 22.

³⁶ H. Cunningham, ‘The Language of Patriotism, 1750-1914’, p. 9.

Considerable caution should be employed in this regard, nevertheless; because, as Hinton has emphasized, patriotism was ‘neither a very stable attitude (moments of patriotic fervour alternated with moments of war-weariness and militant protest among the same groups of workers), nor did it necessarily rule out radical social demands’.³⁷

In compliance with their pre-existing electoral alliance with the Liberals, the Labour Party accepted the *political truce* for the duration of the hostilities in a similar manner to which the labour movement accepted the *industrial truce*. G.D.H. Cole criticized those trade unionists that ‘made their concessions without first obtaining corresponding concessions from the other side’.³⁸ Arthur Henderson became the first representative of the Party to take a seat in the Cabinet, becoming in 1915 the President of the Board of Education in the Asquith Coalition administration. In December 1916, he joined Lloyd George’s five-man War Cabinet as Minister without Portfolio and was influential in shaping the nationalization of the coalmines. Although the impact was not immediately noticeable, Henderson’s involvement in resisting industrial conscription while minimizing industrial unrest on matters including the direction of the labour force and contributed to the development of the corporatist approach to industrial relations that endured after the war. Two other Labour men, John Hodge and George Barnes, were appointed to roles in the Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of Pensions.³⁹

Following his resignation, Ramsay MacDonald became Chairman of the Union of Democratic Control (UDC). This organization included disaffected Liberals and socialists, who believed ‘the war could only be brought to an end by negotiation and a compromise settlement’ and ‘its principal attack was directed at secret diplomacy, which in its opinion was responsible for the war’.⁴⁰ This represented ‘a small proportion of the left, and only a tiny minority when compared to the population as a whole’ who

³⁷ J. Hinton, p. 96.

³⁸ G.D.H. Cole, *Labour in War Time*, p. 48.

³⁹ K. Burgess, p. 177. Importantly, this was supported at the Labour Party conference in January 1917.

⁴⁰ F.L. Carsten, *War Against War: British and German Radical Movements in the First World War* (London: Batsford, 1982), p. 31. Notable UDC members included Norman Angell and Bertrand Russell.

believed that ‘a temporary loss of freedom was a fair price to pay for victory’.⁴¹ A memorandum on pacifist propaganda from the Home Secretary, Sir George Cave, to the War Cabinet listed several organizations including the UDC, ILP, British Socialist Party, and the No-Conscription Fellowship. The revolutionary organizations were identified as the Shops Stewards and Amalgamation Committee (otherwise known as the rank-and-file movement), the Industrial Workers of the World, and Workmen’s and Soldiers’ Council.⁴² By employing DORA, the Government assumed powers to suspend civil liberties by banning public meetings likely to involve a breach of the peace.⁴³ By comparison, John Horne cited local meetings in 1918 showing ‘working-class audiences ranging typically from a hundred to a thousand supporting government war aims and opposing the calls of rival (usually ILP) meetings advocating a negotiated peace’.⁴⁴

By 1916, and with the lack of a decisive victory at Jutland or in the Dardanelles or Somme campaigns, political opinion at home had begun to diverge and polarize, and Brock Millman argued that ‘British society was quite simply beginning to turn against itself’.⁴⁵ With the advent of the March 1917 revolution in Russia, all left-wing political movements had cause to reflect. In August 1917, a special Labour Party conference voted in favour of a negotiated peace, concluding ‘the time had come to use the political weapon to supplement the military in order to secure an honourable and democratic peace’.⁴⁶ Wishing to attend an International Socialist Congress in Stockholm, Henderson felt compelled to resign from the Government when Lloyd George refused to sanction an exit visa; an event which became known as the “Doormat incident” when a humiliated Henderson was made to wait outside the Cabinet room while the matter

⁴¹ P. Ward, p. 126; H. Cunningham, *The Challenge of Democracy: Britain, 1832-1918*, p. 246.

⁴² TNA CAB 24/4: Pacifist Propaganda. This document was prepared by Metropolitan Police Assistant Commissioner, Basil Thomson, who headed the Special Branch of the Criminal Investigation Department. As well as industrial workers and political activists, Thomson’s remit also included keeping a close watch on ex-servicemen’s organizations from early 1918 onwards due to their criticism of government policy.

⁴³ D. Bilton, p. 22.

⁴⁴ J. Horne, ‘Remobilizing for ‘Total War’: France and Britain, 1917-1918’, p. 209.

⁴⁵ B. Millman, p. 130.

⁴⁶ C. Brand, p. 54.

was discussed. This was a turning point, after which Labour increasingly distanced itself from the Coalition whilst beginning to reconcile its pacifist and trade union elements; it also allowed Henderson to reorganize in readiness for a general election.⁴⁷

Turning to the impact of war on political life, Mike Savage highlighted the local dimension's significance because 'everyday politics allows us to conceptualize agency not simply as manifested in spectacular political events (a la E.P. Thompson) but as rooted in and tied up with the hum drum routines of everyday life'.⁴⁸ Take for instance the role played by Wednesbury's MP, which was largely dictated by the extent of his war service and was chronicled by the local press.⁴⁹ For example, at a public meeting held in the Town Hall in connection with a local campaign for thrift and saving, as reported in the *Midland Counties Express* on 22 July 1916, he urged co-ordination of effort was needed in every direction to win the war. Sacrifice being necessary, he deemed buying imported goods to be an unpatriotic action. Stressing that a splendid army had been created, unless the munitions army continued day and night then they were going to ask the army to do the impossible, so the combined efforts of labour and the army were required to achieve victory.⁵⁰ Coincidentally, another article in the same issue carried the message from the commander-in-chief, Sir Douglas Haig, to munitions workers, imploring them to empower the army to complete its task in France, together with Arthur Henderson's response, in which the assurance of the labour movement was given that efforts would not be relaxed until a victorious conclusion was reached.

⁴⁷ H.A. Clegg, p. 225; J. Ward, 'Emergence of the Labour Party in the Black Country, 1910-1922', p. 16.

⁴⁸ M. Savage, 'The Rise of the Labour Party in Local Perspective', p. 10.

⁴⁹ *Midland Counties Express*, 2 October 1915. John Norton Griffiths had previous military experience, having risen through the ranks to become a Captain in the bodyguard of the Commander-in-Chief, Lord Roberts, during the Boer War. In August 1914, he had personally raised the 2nd King Edward's Horse, a cavalry unit comprised of former colonials but it was his engineering experience that was ultimately deemed to be more valuable. Early in 1915, he was made a liaison officer with responsibility for recruiting and organizing those companies of the Royal Engineers engaged in tunnelling and mining duties on the Western Front. During this tenure, 933,300 pounds of explosive were detonated under Messines Ridge on 7 June 1917, an explosion that was loud enough to be heard by Lloyd George in Downing Street. It is estimated that some 10,000 German soldiers died because of this and the other explosions taking place on that day. Awarded the Distinguished Service Order (DSO) and promoted to Lieutenant Colonel, thereafter he was sent to Romania to destroy vital materials to prevent them falling into German hands, which including the burning of 200 square miles of oilfields, that were subsequently valued at £50 million.

⁵⁰ *Midland Counties Express*, 22 July 1916.

8.3 Local politics in Wednesbury during the war

In 1914, Wednesbury Borough Council was comprised of four Aldermen (two Conservatives, one Liberal and one of unknown allegiance) and twelve Councillors (eight Conservatives, three Liberals and one independent), and drawn from these, its Mayor and Deputy Mayor were both Conservatives. By 1918, due to the acceptance of the political truce, apart from there being a Liberal Deputy Mayor, there was no change to party composition, the only alteration being of replacement personnel in 1914/15.⁵¹

However, at the November 1913 local government elections, and for the first time, the Labour Party had contested two seats in Wednesbury's Town Hall and Kings Hill wards, being defeated by a narrow margin. Describing this initial performance in a municipal contest, and Labour's only one in Wednesbury until 1919, the *Wednesbury Herald* of 8 November 1913 recorded that a Labour man was 'carried shoulder high up Russell Street' with supporters singing songs associated with the 1913 strike. This newspaper claimed 'No doubt the leaders of the great strike have got round them a body of men who they have detached from Liberalism and in a lesser degree from Unionism, men who benefited from the settlement of the strike'. It conceded that whether termed Labour or socialist, a 'party has been brought into being in the borough of Wednesbury, which will have to be reckoned with in the future'.⁵² In June 1914, the *Midland Advertiser* recognized that in some Conservative areas, most notably in Wednesbury, West Bromwich, Handsworth and West Birmingham, 'Labour/socialist groups were becoming an anti-Tory force'.⁵³ Hence, with the steady growth of organization at constituency level, a view was beginning to establish itself that rather than the two main political parties, the Labour Party was the party for the working man to belong to.⁵⁴

⁵¹ SCHAS B/W/3/8-13 Borough of Wednesbury Year Books; SCHAS *Ryder's Annual*, 1885-1918. See Appendix 3, p. 277 for a table summarizing the composition of Wednesbury Borough Council from 1913/14 to 1918/19, with footnotes representing the changes that occurred during the war years.

⁵² *Wednesbury Herald*, 8 November 1913.

⁵³ *Midland Advertiser*, 6 June 1914; D. Tanner, *Political Change and the Labour Party, 1900-1918*, p. 189.

⁵⁴ K.W. Aikin, p. 138.

Four days after the outbreak of war, a joint message appealing for loyalty was issued by Wednesbury's MP and its Mayor, Councillor Nat Bishop, both of whom were Conservatives, and reproduced in the *Midland Counties Express* and the *Wednesbury Herald*. Entitled *Wednesbury's Duty*, this highlighted the desirability of all sections of the community working together to make the necessary arrangements to help the unemployed, co-ordinate the supply and distribution of food, and care for the families of reservists called to the colours. It urged that all 'domestic and internal differences must be forgotten, and all our amiable energies must be directed to the one end in view'.⁵⁵ This marked the commencement of a political truce locally, and diminishment of overt political activity. As Lawrence pointed out, however, 'we should not imagine that wartime emergency regulations simply closed the arena of public politics for the duration' and to which it may be added that political and other interest groups continued to influence decision-making, becoming increasingly involved in volunteer work.⁵⁶

On 10 August 1914, Wednesbury Borough Council formed a special committee comprised of councillors, charitable organizations and trade unions to co-ordinate relief activities. This arose from a Local Government Board communication to all county, town and urban district councils regarding steps to alleviate distress via local committees conducting relief distribution. It was anticipated that industry would manage a shortage of men and increase overtime accordingly. The Board stipulated that these committees survey existing employment conditions and assume responsibility for measures, including applications to the National Relief Fund, when conventional methods of assistance were exhausted.⁵⁷ On 5 September 1914, the Mayor stated that 'We had to be thankful that in Wednesbury, there had been as yet no civil distress'.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ *Midland Counties Express*, 8 August 1914; *Wednesbury Herald*, 8 August 1914.

⁵⁶ J. Lawrence, 'The Transformation of British Politics after the First World War', *Past and Present*, 190 (2006), p. 194; J.G.M. Cranstoun, pp 205-206.

⁵⁷ *Wednesbury Herald*, 15 August 1914. See Chapter 7, pp. 215-222, where there is a discussion of the town of Wednesbury's support for various wartime charities, which included the National Relief Fund.

⁵⁸ *Wednesbury Herald*, 5 September 1914.

An intervention was made in November 1914 by R.G.L. Simpson, the prospective Liberal Party candidate, on the issue of recruitment. Writing in the *Midland Advertiser*, he emphasized the politicization of local meetings that were dominated by the Conservatives, especially via the attendance and making of speeches by John Norton Griffiths and A.W. Maconochie, the sitting Member and prospective candidate respectively. Simpson complained that he was ‘still waiting to be invited to address a non-political meeting for recruiting purposes in the constituency’. Furthermore, he supported the Labour Party’s demands that the dependents of soldiers and sailors should be treated well, because this would bolster recruitment without the need to have recourse to conscription since ‘the masses have done and are doing their duty nobly’.⁵⁹

On 5 August 1915, an event held in Wednesbury Town Hall commemorated the anniversary of the outbreak of the war and, as the *Wednesbury Herald* reported, ‘The large building was packed and a representative platform of the town’s leading public men supported the Mayor, Councillor Bishop, who presided’. The Wednesbury Volunteer Training Corps were also present. The Conservative and Liberal prospective Parliamentary Candidates, Messrs A.W. Maconochie and R.G.L. Simpson, also attended the gathering and wholly endorsed the resolution. Maconochie urged supporting ‘the Government of the day, and whatever they demanded’.⁶⁰ A resolution of abiding loyalty was moved by Alderman A.E. Pritchard. In this, he stated that the war was ‘waged on the side of liberty, justice and righteousness. It was a war not on our part of aggression but in defence of the small, feeble nations unjustly attacked’.⁶¹

One aspect of municipal life having understandable prominence was recognition of the heroism of those members of the community serving in the armed forces.⁶² For example, on 2 October 1916, Wednesbury Borough Council’s minutes record that the

⁵⁹ *Midland Advertiser*, 7 November 1914.

⁶⁰ *Express and Star*, 5 August 1915; *Midland Counties Express*, 7 August 1915.

⁶¹ *Wednesbury Herald*, 7 August 1915.

⁶² See Chapter 7, pp. 220, for a discussion of the town of Wednesbury’s response to examples of heroism.

Mayor, Councillor W. Warner, made the gratifying announcement of the award of the Victoria Cross for Valour to Sergeant Joseph Davies, a resident of 48 Cross Street, Wednesbury, for his heroic conduct during the campaign on the Somme. It was unanimously resolved by the Council that a letter of congratulations be forwarded to Sergeant Davies on behalf of the Burgesses, for his valorous services to his country.⁶³

Local authorities continued to carry out their normal peacetime activities and, in its first years, the war had a negligible effect in this regard. The political dimension eventually resumed an importance in Wednesbury because of a vacancy on the town's Enlistment Tribunal. The *Midland Advertiser* of 12 February 1916 maintained that 'it is well known that Labour is not represented on that tribunal and some dissatisfaction has been occasional on this score'. Consequently, the Labour Party was requested to make a nomination that would be satisfactory to the local authority and Mr F.G. Thorpe, the Workers' Union representative for Wednesbury, was accordingly designated as the Labour's preferred candidate.⁶⁴ This particular outcome commended itself 'to all who want to see justice done between a man and the state in these all important matters'.⁶⁵

Trades councils were another dimension of local political life. Formed to co-ordinate trade union activity, they trained future generations of Labour politicians, both locally and nationally. They were associations of trades unions or trade union branches in a geographic area, and 'flung themselves into surveying, discussing and agitating about the economic distress which was widely expected to follow the declaration of war'.⁶⁶ With a turning point in attitudes increasingly evident after 1916 through discontent and war-weariness, they campaigned against profiteering, declining real wages, rising prices and rents, together with erosions of civil liberties by the Munitions Acts and the Defence of the Realm Act. By articulating such grievances, they accessed

⁶³ SCHAS B/W/1/15: Minutes of Wednesbury Council 02/10/1916.

⁶⁴ Frederick Thorpe was the Branch Secretary for the Workers' Union in Wednesbury and he had been involved as a trade union activist in the 1913 Black Country strike and the 1917 Crown tube works strike.

⁶⁵ *Midland Advertiser*, 12 February 1916.

⁶⁶ A. Clinton, p. 205.

local opinion and were instrumental in creating if not class-consciousness then a sense of working-class awareness.⁶⁷ They complemented the War Emergency Workers' National Committee (WEWNC), formed in August 1914 as a peace committee and which actively promoted 'the defence of the rights and interests of the working class from unreasonable encroachment'.⁶⁸ As well as gaining concessions for the working class, both trades councils and the WEWNC aided inter-party cohesion and cooperation.

On 26 May 1917, the *Midland Advertiser* reported on a public meeting of the Wednesbury and District Trades and Labour Council at Wednesbury Town Hall, presided over by Mr R. Micklewright.⁶⁹ The topic was the food supply, which this gathering concluded should have been administered by the state from the start of the war. The guest speaker, Mr R.C. Wallhead, argued that 'the men who had been waxing rich were those put in charge of the people's food and yet were pleading for equality of sacrifice'.⁷⁰ Through such participation, local views fed into the democratic process, as demonstrated by the minutes of the Wednesbury branch of the ASE from May 1917, concerning the nomination of delegates to attend the Labour Party's 1918 conference.⁷¹

As it seemed that hostilities would continue relentlessly, and there appearing to be no obvious solution to the many economic and social problems experienced, the trades councils had to prepare for struggles with local politicians and agencies. For instance, the *Express and Star* of 20 November 1917 noted that Mr B.W. Griffiths, Secretary of Wednesbury's Trades and Labour Council, sought greater involvement for the body in local affairs, alleging that the 'local Council more or less select who they think fit to serve on the Committees'.⁷² Convinced that there was fairer representation

⁶⁷ J. Turner, *British Politics and the Great War: Coalition and Conflict, 1915-1918*, p. 197.

⁶⁸ K. Laybourn, *The Rise of Labour: The British Labour Party, 1890-1979*, p. 41; D. Swift, 'Labour Patriotism in Lancashire and London, 1914-1918' in *The Great War: Localities and Regional Identities*, ed. by N. Mansfield and C. Horner, (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014), p. 138.

⁶⁹ G.J. Barnsby, *Socialism in Birmingham and the Black Country, 1880-1939*, p. 272. It is to be noted that the Wednesbury and District Trades and Labour Council had been first established during 1875.

⁷⁰ *Midland Advertiser*, 26 May 1917. In 1922, Richard Collingham Wallhead became ILP MP for Merthyr.

⁷¹ SCHAS 0/WE/3/2: Minutes of the Wednesbury Branch of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers.

⁷² *Express and Star*, 20 November 1917.

elsewhere, and questioning why Wednesbury should be different, demonstrations were staged with workers leaving their employment to protest against the method of food distribution in the Borough and to demand increased Labour representation. Eventually, a change in official attitude prevailed and four Labour representatives were nominated to serve on Wednesbury's Food Committee.⁷³ On 10 February 1918, Mr Griffiths corresponded with Mr J.S. Middleton, Secretary of the WEWNC, concerning the newly established Vigilance Committee and requesting information to place this on a satisfactory basis. A reply despatched on 16 February, suggested that reference be made to the National Food Journal, issued fortnightly by the Ministry of Food.⁷⁴

On 25 February 1918, the *Express and Star* published a letter from Mr Griffiths, communicating the Ministry of Munitions' announcement that Wednesbury was now officially designated as a Munitions Area and therefore constrained by the Ministry's rules. However, owing to the ejection from their residences of a number of the locality's families, the Trades and Labour Council had become involved in this matter with Mr Griffiths confirming that it had been resolved to the satisfaction of all parties.⁷⁵ The *Midland Counties Express* of 6 July 1918 verified that the shortage of coal amongst local dealers was questioned by Mr Griffiths who recommended that concerns be forwarded for investigation by the local authority, which had responsibility for this.⁷⁶

The working-class community began to shed the deferential attitudes often held before the war. A trade union movement with increased authority and the Labour Party were increasingly viewed as giving the best guarantee of defending their interests from a return to unfavourable working practices. Adams asserted that support 'provided by local Labour Parties and Trades and Labour Councils at a local level could also produce

⁷³ Ibid., 5 February 1918.

⁷⁴ People's History Museum Papers (hereafter PHM) LP/WNC/16/2/151-152: Wednesbury and District Trades and Labour Council.

⁷⁵ *Express and Star*, 25 February 1918. Such munitions areas were placed under the direction of an Authorized Competent Military Authority, which assumed the responsibility for all matters affecting the enforcement of regulations that were made under the emergency legislation. In the case in question, this was for the production of munitions and other items that were deemed to be essential to the war effort.

⁷⁶ *Midland Counties Express*, 6 July 1918.

electoral benefits' and this is echoed by Turner's comments that they were becoming 'active in local politics, supporting candidates for municipal elections'.⁷⁷ In Wednesbury, in January 1918, there was discussion of the advisability of running Labour candidates at the next general election. Attended by over 100 delegates representing 36 trade union branches, the conclusion was that Labour should stand. Reference was made to the receiving of women into political life since the franchise had been extended and the Labour Party's duty was to encourage them to use their vote. The conference was of the opinion that the Parliamentary Division should be fought by Labour at the next general election, and the following motion was unanimously passed:

The Wednesbury, Darlaston and Tipton Trades Councils to call a selection conference, under the constitution of the Labour Party, to select a Labour candidate for the Division and further asks the Trades Councils to take the necessary steps to organize a Divisional Labour Party for the constituency.⁷⁸

Other politically motivated mass organizations became prominent, especially during the latter years of the war, and the materialization and rise to prominence of ex-servicemen's movements commenced with the introduction of conscription in 1916.⁷⁹ These organisations planned to articulate the grievances of their membership with regard to disability pensions and the rehabilitation of ex-servicemen. Believing these matters to be a legitimate ground for activism, demonstrations and propaganda campaigns were instigated. In the light of events in Russia in 1917, and fear of radicalization comparable to that underlying the shop floor unrest in the industrial workplace, as Stephen Ward asserted, 'distrust and fear influenced the Government's decision to monitor ex-servicemen as a potential source of revolutionary activity'.⁸⁰

The National Association of Discharged Sailors and Soldiers (NADSS) was founded in Blackburn in September 1916, drawing together working men who had

⁷⁷ T. Adams, pp. 28-29; J. Turner, *British Politics and the Great War: Coalition and Conflict*, p. 31.

⁷⁸ *Midland Advertiser and Wednesbury Herald*, 19 January 1918.

⁷⁹ D. Englander, 'Soldiers and Social Reform in the First and Second World Wars', p. 321.

⁸⁰ S.R. Ward, 'Intelligence Surveillance of British Ex-Servicemen, 1918-1920', *The Historical Journal*, 16 (1) (1973), p. 182.

served in the armed forces and been honourably discharged, to campaign for better pensions and opportunities for retraining. Led by James Howell, it developed links with the trade unions and the Labour Party. In the 1918 General Election, having severed these links, however, it became more Conservative in outlook, sponsoring several candidates of the so-called *Silver Badge Party*.⁸¹ The National Federation of Discharged and Demobilised Sailors and Soldiers (NFDDSS) was a veterans' group founded in London in April 1917 and led by left-wing Liberal MPs James Hogge and William Pringle, which sought improved pensions and representation on government committees. As Paul Burnham has indicated, 'the Federation excluded commissioned officers from its membership, and it was controlled by the rankers themselves'.⁸² In 1921, many of these comrades' associations merged to form the Royal British Legion.

On 14 August 1917, the *Midland Advertiser* reported that a large crowd had gathered in Wednesbury's Market Place to hear addresses from the NFDDSS, the event being presided over by former Sergeant-Major G.W. Blythe (who had recently served with the Royal Engineers). The aims and objectives of the Federation being outlined, he said that men had been assured they would not be forgotten when returning from the war and he thanked 'the men of Wednesbury for taking up the case of a discharged soldier'.⁸³ Stressing that it would be wrong for workers to be idle during wartime, he argued that no discharged soldiers should be called back to the colours until all other classes of men of similar ages and categories had been called up.⁸⁴ A branch of the Federation was formed in Wednesbury, having taken 60 requests for membership.

⁸¹ The Silver Badge Party took its name from the Silver War Badge, which was also known as the Silver Wound Badge, that was issued from 1916 to those servicemen who had been honourably discharged.

⁸² P. Burnham, 'The Radical Ex-Servicemen of 1918' in *The Great War: Localities and Regional Identities*, ed. by N. Mansfield and C. Horner, p. 31.

⁸³ *Midland Advertiser*, 18 August 1917. See Chapter 5, pp. 152-159, for a detailed description of the both the causes and consequences of the 1917 strike at the Crown tube works of James Russell & Sons.

⁸⁴ See D. Englander and J. Osborne, 'Jack, Tommy and Henry Dubb: The Armed Forces and the Working Class', *Historical Journal*, 21 (3) (1978), p. 619. In July 1917, ex-Sergeant Major Blythe (a former Sheffield trade unionist) had told an audience of 200 ex-servicemen in Cardiff that there were now 843,000 discharged soldiers and sailors, and none were going back until every available man had done his duty. They were going to see to it that all of the malingerers in munitions factories were brought out.

Another organization to be active in Wednesbury was the British Workers' National League, initially formed in April 1915 as the Socialist National Defence Committee by the journalist Victor Fisher to counter calls for peace at any price from pacifists in the labour movement.⁸⁵ By 1916, it was being financed by Lord Milner and locally was supported by John Beard of the Workers' Union. The *Midland Advertiser* of 2 December 1916 described a well-attended gathering at Wednesbury's Picture Palace. It was commented that 'the Social Democrats in Germany had forfeited all respect formerly given to them when they formed part of the vast army of invasion into Belgium'. The Chairman, Reverend. J.A. Shaw of Wolverhampton accused such men as Ramsay MacDonald and Philip Snowden of 'only wanting the things that Germany wanted'.⁸⁶ The Reverend Shaw reappeared at a meeting of the League in Wednesbury in April 1918, at which the sum of £18 gathered from a collection was passed to the Mayor of Wednesbury for his prisoners of war fund.⁸⁷ The significance of this perhaps is that it occurred at a time when politicians in all parties were starting to contemplate how politics would be practised once the war was finally brought to its conclusion.

8.4 Wednesbury and the 1918 general election

Alastair Reid argued that of the changes that occurred in Britain during and immediately after the war, 'the extension of the vote to women and the Labour Party's rise to influence...could be seen as the natural political fruition of an underlying transformation of social relationships'.⁸⁸ The pre-war franchise, which had been determined by the Representation of the People Act 1884, was restrictive, being limited to adult males householders.⁸⁹ This prevented many people from voting, especially the young (such as sons living with parents), domestic servants living with employers,

⁸⁵ H.A. Clegg, p. 276.

⁸⁶ *Midland Advertiser*, 2 December 1916.

⁸⁷ *Midland Advertiser and Wednesbury Herald*, 20 April 1918; SCHAS Wednesbury Miscellanea.

⁸⁸ A.J. Reid, 'World War I and the Working Class in Britain' in *Total War and Social Change*, ed. by A. Marwick (London: Macmillan, 1988), p. 17.

⁸⁹ M.D. Blanch, p. 185.

lodgers paying less than £10 per year in rent and workers who moved frequently. The twelve-month registration period for non-owner-occupiers, followed by a six-month wait for all, effectively created delays for those re-joining the electoral register. These factors ensured that no more than sixty per cent of adult males were eligible for electoral registration in 1911.⁹⁰ The 1918 transformation of the franchise was initiated via a conference chaired by the Speaker of the House of Commons and Laybourn's assessment, alluding to pre-war suffragette agitation, was that the war 'provided the occasion, rather than the cause of the Reform Act; it was unfinished business'.⁹¹

The Representation of the People Act of 1918 realized a 'demand that went back to the Chartists and beyond', by giving the vote to all men aged over 21 years, subject to a six months' residence period, and to women aged over 30 years who were eligible for the municipal vote.⁹² This trebled the electorate, which was now 21 million. There was also a reduction in the number of seats and in plural voting. Consequently, there were far-reaching implications for all the political parties now that the majority of the adult working-class population had the vote, and possibly would be using it for the first time. Also of importance were the 1918 boundary revisions, which Tanner acknowledges had created essentially industrial seats benefiting Labour and rural constituencies favouring the Coalition.⁹³ As observed by Ward, the legislation further 'weakened the bonds between employers and their workforce, which had traditionally characterized the workshop economy of Birmingham and extended into parts of the Black Country'.⁹⁴

Liberalism's inability to cope with the pressures of war and the failure of the Asquithian policy of *Business as Usual* gave rise to increased economic mobilization and state intervention to run several industries and control others by fixing wages and

⁹⁰ J.G.M. Cranstoun, p. 12; D. Tanner, *Political Change and the Labour Party, 1900-1918*, pp. 119-120.

⁹¹ K. Laybourn, *The Rise of Labour: The British Labour Party, 1890-1979*, p. 38.

⁹² D.M. MacRaild and D.E. Martin, p. 171; B. McGill, 'Lloyd George's Timing of the 1918 Election', *Journal of British Studies*, 14 (1) (1974), p. 111. In the spirit of natural justice, men of 19 years of age also received the vote if they had seen active service with the armed forces. However, many of these men were unable to exercise this right because in spite of special arrangements they did not receive ballot papers.

⁹³ D. Tanner, *Political Change and the Labour Party, 1900-1918*, pp. 387-388.

⁹⁴ J. Ward, 'The Development of the Labour Party in the Black Country, 1918-1939', p. 6.

profits.⁹⁵ This did not mean that the Conservatives and Liberals had been converted to the virtues of state control and socialism; these were expedient responses to crises. Nevertheless, there was serious consideration of whether the essentially collectivist methods employed by the state in wartime could be used to improve the security of workers and to tackle the economic and social problems to be expected after the war had ended. The labour movement's new found respectability, for instance, was matched with the Whitley Committee's reports in 1917/18, which advocated corporatism, trade union recognition and joint negotiating machinery in every industry. For the Labour Party, this raised the requirement for a detailed programme of policies, not least on the economy, as attention began to shift from current grievances to post war prospects.

In June 1918, 'the Labour Party took the long-awaited decision to drop its recognition of the political truce; the departure of Labour from the Coalition became a real possibility'.⁹⁶ At its conference, it ratified a Constitution introducing local organization and individual membership. This would benefit finances and appeal to the increased electorate created by the 1918 Act. Also featured in the new Constitution was Clause IV, calling for nationalization of the means of production, which, in anticipation of a general election, was to be linked to the Party's electoral programme.⁹⁷ This document sought the 'securing to every member of the community...all the requisites of healthy life and worthy citizenship' and the 'socialisation of industry in order to secure the elimination of every kind of inefficiency and waste'.⁹⁸ It proposed the common ownership of land, nationalisation of railways, canals, coal and electricity, a capital levy to pay off the National Debt and social reforms in housing, health and education.

The 23 March 1918 *Midland Counties Express* reported on four nominations for the Labour Party candidacy in the Wednesbury parliamentary division, with the

⁹⁵ E.J. Hobsbawm, *Industry and Empire*, 2nd edn, p. 219; G. Robb, p. 78.

⁹⁶ J.O. Stubbs, p. 748.

⁹⁷ Labour and the New Social Order: A Report on Reconstruction (London: W. Speaight & Sons, 1918). This document committed the Labour Party to the principle of the nationalization in accordance with Clause IV.

⁹⁸ R. McKibbin, *The Evolution of the Labour Party* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974), p. 104.

selections process occurring at the town's Holyhead Road schoolrooms. The nominees were Councillor A. Short (Boilermaker's Society), Mr J. Baker (British Iron and Steel and Kindred Trades), Mr H. Whitehouse (Miners' Federation) and Mr J. Brownlie (Amalgamated Society of Engineers).⁹⁹ Confirming his successful nomination, the *Midland Advertiser and Wednesbury Herald* detailed Alfred Short's interests as housing, public health and the pensions paid to servicemen and their dependants.¹⁰⁰ The prospective Labour candidate attended an Ironworkers and Blacksmiths Society social gathering on 26 October 1918, and, when explaining his views, was of the opinion that they 'needed men of their own class in Parliament to look after their own interests'.¹⁰¹

By 1918, even though Prime Minister, Lloyd George commanded allegiance from a fraction of the Liberal Party and he depended upon Conservative support for his parliamentary majority. Magill suggested fear that 'his government might be voted out before he could hold an election continued to haunt him until the summer of 1918'.¹⁰² The timing was vital and in expectation that there would be some positive war news by then, he held out; the allied advances on the Western Front in the summer and autumn 1918 persuaded him to go to the people. Hence, on 22 August 1918, at a conference in Criccieth, Lloyd George tentatively approved the notion of an autumn election. Realizing that their electoral fortunes were tied together, and despite opposition from Austen Chamberlain, Curzon and Lord Robert Cecil, Bonar Law carried the Conservative Party into an electoral alliance with Lloyd George and his supporters.

Prior to the formal announcement of the general election, a resumption of local political activity could be discerned. For instance, the *Midland Advertiser and Wednesbury Herald* ran an article on 12 October 1918 speculating on the prospects of the parties. Supporting the Conservative candidate, Maconochie, this newspaper

⁹⁹ It is indicative of Wednesbury's level of industrialization that all the candidates were trade unionists.

¹⁰⁰ *Midland Advertiser and Wednesbury Herald*, 30 March 1918. See Footnote 26 in Chapter 1, p.7, for a description of Alfred Short's political and trade union career and Appendix 6, Photograph 70, p. 317.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 26 October 1918.

¹⁰² B. McGill, p. 110.

highlighted ‘the patriotic traditions associated with the Borough by the valiant Colonel Sir John Norton Griffiths’.¹⁰³ On 16, 17 and 18 October, Christabel Pankhurst addressed audiences in Tipton, Wednesbury and Darlaston respectively, on the dangers of Bolshevism. For the duration, the Suffragette movement in which she had previously been active had turned its attention to supporting the war effort, including the notorious practice of handing white feathers to young men in civilian attire in order to induce them to enlist.¹⁰⁴ These meetings represented the first steps in Pankhurst’s candidacy at the 1918 general election, when she stood in Smethwick for the Women’s Party.¹⁰⁵

On 11 November 1918, the *Express and Star* described the scenes in Wednesbury when intelligence of the armistice reached the locality. It reported that female workers emerged from their employment ‘in high glee, many of them cake-walking along the streets, and, with the male workers joining in patriotic songs’.¹⁰⁶ Permission to dissolve Parliament had been granted by the King on 5 November and, within twenty-four hours of the end of hostilities, it was announced that a general election would occur on 14 December 1918. This election had been periodically postponed by Parliament, and there being an assumption that it would take place in wartime, or shortly after a victory was gained, in view of Lloyd George’s belief that it should precede the impact of demobilization and pre-empt the threat of socialism. With the objectives of confirming his Coalition in office, excluding Asquithian Liberals from power, and marginalizing political elements still deemed unpatriotic, the timing gifted him the opportunity to exploit his prestige as ‘The man who won the war’.¹⁰⁷ It became recognized as the ‘Coupon’ election because of the letter of support dated 20 November

¹⁰³ *Midland Herald and Wednesbury Advertiser*, 12 October 1918.

¹⁰⁴ G.J. Barnsby, *Socialism in Birmingham and the Black Country, 1880-1939*, p. 302. It is noted that the National Union of Women’s Suffrage Societies (NUWSS) established a branch in Wednesbury in 1912.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 19 October 1918. In November 1918, Miss Pankhurst, a former Labour Party member, emerged as a third candidate in the Smethwick Constituency. With the support of Lloyd George and Bonar Law who feared a Labour gain, she supplanted the Unionist candidate, Major Samuel Thompson. However, despite receiving the Coalition ‘Coupon’ she was beaten by the Labour Party’s candidate, John Davison.

¹⁰⁶ *Express and Star*, 11 November 1918.

¹⁰⁷ J. Turner, *British Politics and the Great War: Coalition and Conflict*, p. 317; M. Pugh, *Speak for Britain: A New History of the Labour Party*, p. 122.

1918, signed by both Lloyd George and Bonar Law, and circulated to Coalition candidates. Being suggestive of candidates' patriotism, those not receiving the letter were negatively portrayed by their opponents as pacifists, with the contest becoming 'a virtual plebiscite for or against Lloyd George, as the architect of the victory'.¹⁰⁸

At a delegate conference on 14 November 1918, the Labour Party recognizing the necessity for reintegrating its pacifist and patriotic elements, formally withdrew from the Coalition and stood on its own programme.¹⁰⁹ By this time, Labour's position had strengthened to such an extent that it was able to endorse 361 candidates, considerably more than at previous general elections. The decision to make this increase was motivated by several factors. Firstly, the split from the Liberals allowed Labour to compete with them as the party of reform appealing to the moderate left; secondly, boundary revisions worked to Labour's advantage in the industrial centres; and thirdly, the recent revolution in Russia gave Labour confidence in what might now be achieved. Labour felt poised to make inroads into the Conservative working-class areas of the North West and West Midlands, as noted by Tanner, because of 'the party's association with the gains made by the predominant local unions' in regard to the negotiation of pay claims and improvements in working and living conditions.¹¹⁰

By 25 November 1918, when Parliament was dissolved, *The Times* reported that the election campaign was in full swing, with Lloyd George making two important speeches when visiting Wolverhampton. In these, he steadfastly rejected the suggestion that he would be hampered by any Conservative reactionaries, and emphasized that 'deadheads and cranks were no party's monopoly' but that he preferred the word 'comradeship to coalition'. Significantly, there was reference to housing and the social conditions to which millions were subjected, when he pledged that the principal

¹⁰⁸ H. Pelling and A.J. Reid, *A Short History of the Labour Party*, 11th edn, p. 41. The term 'Coupon' derived from H.H. Asquith's contemptuous comparison of the letter to the coupons found in wartime ration books.

¹⁰⁹ A. Marwick, *The Deluge: British Society and the First World War*, p. 262; J. Turner, *British Politics and the Great War: Coalition and Conflict*, p. 318.

¹¹⁰ D. Tanner, *Political Change and the Labour Party, 1900-1918*, pp. 413-414.

responsibility of the new government would be ‘to make Britain a fit country for heroes to live in’ because the ‘slums were not fit homes for the men who had won the war’.¹¹¹

The Wednesbury Constituency contained the three districts of Wednesbury, Darlaston and Tipton and descriptions of the three candidates who were standing in the election were published in the *Midland Counties Express* on 7 December 1918 and *Birmingham Gazette* on 10 December 1918. The Conservative Party’s candidate was A.W. Maconochie who, from 1900 to 1906, had represented the parliamentary constituency of East Aberdeenshire, and was described as a manufacturer; the Liberal Party’s candidate, R.L.G. Simpson, was a barrister-at-law; and the Labour Party’s candidate, Alfred Short, was by occupation a boiler smith and a trade union official.¹¹²

Alfred Short’s adoption by Wednesbury’s Labour Party was proposed by George Stokes on 25 November 1918 and carried unanimously.¹¹³ Short’s acceptance speech criticized the timing of an election taking advantage of ‘the position of the moment and the excitement following upon the victory in France’. He questioned the treatment of soldiers and their families, since ‘the wife of a serving soldier without children had to try and exist upon 12s. 6d. per week, and the widow of a man who had made the supreme sacrifice was paid 13s. 9d. in pension’.¹¹⁴ Wednesbury Conservative and Unionist Association confirmed Maconochie’s adoption on 26 November 1918, when he remarked that ‘as a business man it would be a delight for him to represent a business constituency’. The Association’s President, Dudley Docker, said they could leave the questions of the peace terms ‘to the Government which had won the war’.¹¹⁵

In his electoral programme, Short argued for the restoration of pre-war trade union rights and workshop customs, increased pensions, better education and the public

¹¹¹ *The Times*, 25 November 1918.

¹¹² *Midland Counties Express*, 7 December 1918; *Birmingham Gazette*, 10 December 1918. Short was also a member of Sheffield City Council, officer of the Boilermakers Society and secretary of the Sheffield Trades and Labour Council. He was also a member of the Ministry of Labour’s Resettlement Committee.

¹¹³ *Midland Advertiser and Wednesbury Herald*, 30 November 1918. George Stokes was President of Wednesbury’s Labour Party and had been a trade unionist activist during the 1913 Black Country strike.

¹¹⁴ *Express and Star*, 25 November 1918.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 27 November 1918.

ownership of railways, canals and coalmines.¹¹⁶ This was a popular stance to take, as a letter to the *Express and Star* from Mr William Andrews, a member of the Executive Council of the Amalgamated Society of the Tubes Trade, demonstrated. This urged trade unionists to vote Labour because it was ‘the first opportunity trade unionists in Wednesbury have had of supporting a fellow trade unionist’. Noting Short’s credentials, he stressed ‘the efforts he has made for our cause’ and that they should ‘remember your principles and vote for an actual trade unionist on Saturday next’.¹¹⁷ Crucially, this verified the importance of trade union support to Labour in 1918.

What were perceived to be radical attacks on the Coalition alarmed local Conservatives. In a speech at Tipton’s Tivoli picture house, Alfred Short warned that the Coalition offered continuation of ‘the economic and social system which had brought to the workers of the country the depressing social conditions, the foul putrid houses, low subsistence wages and the monopoly of land for the landlords’. He questioned, ‘Why was it that the great landowners like the Earl of Derby and the Duke of Portland were supporting Mr Lloyd George? Was it not because they were using him for the purpose of securing political domination and bolstering up the old policy of class?’ At the same meeting, Hollowware Workers trade unionist Simeon Webb suggested ‘it was time the working classes made up their minds that Labour was the only party any decent citizen could belong to’.¹¹⁸ The *Express and Star* noted that after a meeting, Short was ‘hoisted shoulder high by an enthusiastic body of discharged soldiers and carried from Darlaston to Wednesbury, amid considerable excitement’.¹¹⁹

The local press steadfastly supported the Coalition, with the *Midland Advertiser and Wednesbury Herald* of 23 November 1918 enthusiastically declaring that ‘Lloyd George having saved his country in time of war is best qualified to define the policy on

¹¹⁶ *Midland Advertiser and Wednesbury Herald*, 30 November 1918.

¹¹⁷ *Express and Star*, 12 December 1918.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 4 December 1918.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 5 December 1918.

which the permanence of the peace shall be established.¹²⁰ The *Wednesbury Conservative* Marshall Freeman aggressively attacked the Labour Party in the local press, accusing Short of having links to Ramsay MacDonald and the ILP, and claiming that ‘It looks as if you sympathise with the men whose traitorous language had to be suppressed in the interest of our own national liberty’.¹²¹ Furthermore, the *Tipton Herald* enquired of Short: ‘Do you or do you not believe in making the brutal Huns pay compensation to the uttermost farthing for what they have done to innocent civilians, men, women and children, and to property in this district’. The Labour candidate rebutted these claims, affirming that he supported ‘full and complete reparations for the wrongs Germany had done’.¹²² This failed to convince the *Midland Advertiser and Wednesbury Herald*, however, which emphatically proclaimed, ‘every true lover of his country is plumping for the candidate who is pledged to support Mr Lloyd George’.¹²³

At Darlaston Town Hall on 4 December 1918, the Conservative candidate said that ‘the question for the British working man at this time was to decide who should pay the cost of the war...should it be paid by the innocent or those who had caused the war?’ Echoing Lloyd George’s call for housing reform, Maconochie stated that ‘those people who said they wanted healthy workmen must give them healthy homes; they could not have good workers if they lived in hovels’. Yet he was reluctant for there to be any state involvement, arguing that ‘it was not the duty of the government to interfere with any business’.¹²⁴ Allegations were made that Maconochie had accused 90 per cent of the Labour Party of being either pacifists or pro-Germans. In a letter printed in the *Express and Star*, when considering Labour’s leaders, he cited the plight of thousands of Russian peasants who had they not believed the promises of Lenin and Trotsky, ‘would be alive today...instead of rotting on the land they were promised

¹²⁰ *Midland Advertiser and Wednesbury Herald*, 23 November 1918.

¹²¹ *Express and Star*, 5 December 1918; *Midland Advertiser and Wednesbury Herald*, 7 December 1918.

¹²² *Tipton Herald*, 7 December 1918; *Midland Advertiser and Wednesbury Herald*, 14 December 1918.

¹²³ *Midland Advertiser and Wednesbury Herald*, 7 December 1918.

¹²⁴ *Express and Star*, 5 December 1918; *Midland Advertiser and Wednesbury Herald*, 7 December 1918.

should be their own'. The Coalition candidate sought to clarify this by claiming that he was referring to the Independent Labour Party but this failed to alleviate the gaffe.¹²⁵

Polling took place on Saturday, 14 December 1918, with the local newspapers continuing to report the conclusion of campaigning. In his final address, delivered from the steps of Wednesbury's Conservative Club, Maconochie accused Short of 'trying to stir up blood between employers and workpeople', describing him as 'a full blown Socialist, whose wild ideas would bring the country to absolute ruin'. Alfred Short attended meetings at Mesty Croft and at Wednesbury Town Hall on 13 December, with the latter being especially notable because "Teddy" Williams, a leading trade unionist during the 1913 Black Country strike, was welcomed back after 22 months captivity as a prisoner of war in Germany.¹²⁶ In a gathering at Wednesbury's market place, attended by an estimated 2,000 people, Short described 'very encouraging reports from all centres' suggesting 'plenty of votes to spare to put him at the head of the poll'.¹²⁷

Nationally, the result declared on 28 December 1918 was a triumph for the Coalition, which won 523 seats with 379 being Conservative victories. Labour contested 361 seats, winning 57, and the Asquithian Liberals collected just 36 seats.¹²⁸ Although Labour was now the main party of opposition, and had increased its strength by 15 seats, it is justifiable to question whether the Party could have done better. Contributing factors must include Lloyd George's timing of the election to derive maximum benefit for his cause, and the low national turnout of 57 per cent owing to the limitations of the electoral rolls and the large number of servicemen who were unable to vote. In Wednesbury, the result was given as: A. Short (Labour) 11,341 (49.8 per cent); A.W. Maconochie (Coalition Conservative) 10,364 (45.9 per cent); and R.L.G. Simpson

¹²⁵ *Express and Star*, 10 December 1918.

¹²⁶ *Midland Advertiser and Wednesbury Herald*, 14 December 1918.

¹²⁷ *Express and Star*, 14 December 1918.

¹²⁸ A.J.P. Taylor, *English History, 1914-1945*, p. 127. Prominent national figures who failed to secure re-election in December 1918 were H.H. Asquith and Arthur Henderson, with the latter's rejection in Barnard Castle arising from his refusal to condone retribution against a defeated German. Henderson was returned to Parliament in a 1919 by-election as the Member for Widnes. Ramsay MacDonald, together with all other ILP members also lost their seats, the electorate taking a dim view of their wartime pacifism.

(Liberal) 988 (4.3 per cent). With an electorate of 34,415, the turnout was 66.2 per cent.¹²⁹ The announcement of the vote was made by the Mayor, Alderman A.E. Pritchard. The newly elected Member stated that he was ‘indeed very proud to be declared the representative of so great an industrial borough, and it would be his duty, while having regard for the principles for which he had fought and the principles dear to his party, to adequately represent all sections in the division’.¹³⁰ Maconochie counselled that ‘while the country came first, the constituents were next’ and Simpson added that ‘the time must cease when Wednesbury could be regarded as a Conservative seat’. Labour Party supporters gathered in Wednesbury’s Market Place and Alfred Short was ‘escorted through the streets by a multitude of cheering and enthusiastic supporters’.¹³¹

Labour was not expected to win in Wednesbury, and for a Conservative to lose ‘in this election was quite an achievement, shared by only seven others’.¹³² As Ward stated, ‘Labour’s success in Wednesbury was more predictable than West Bromwich’, which was also a Labour gain.¹³³ The *Midland Advertiser and Wednesbury Herald’s* assessment was that Labour had exploited ‘the emotions aroused in the aftermath of the many petty strikes which have taken place in the Black Country in recent years’ and exclaimed ‘thank heaven Wednesbury is not England’.¹³⁴ President of Wednesbury’s Conservatives since succeeding Lord Dartmouth in 1909, Dudley Docker furiously criticized the apathy and bad organization of the local activists. He resigned and ceased to take much interest in local politics thereafter.¹³⁵ Labour consolidated its position, becoming a growing force and then the majority party on Wednesbury Council. Alfred Short held the parliamentary constituency until 1931, when it was lost to the National Government candidate, Viscount Ednam, then regained at a by-election in 1932.

¹²⁹ *Express and Star*, 28 December 1918.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 28 December 1918.

¹³¹ *Midland Advertiser and Wednesbury Herald*, 4 January 1919.

¹³² A. Marwick, *The Deluge: British Society and the First World War*, p. 264.

¹³³ J. Ward, ‘The Development of the Labour Party in the Black Country, 1918-1939’, p. 57.

¹³⁴ *Midland Advertiser and Wednesbury Herald*, 4 January 1919.

¹³⁵ R.T.P. Davenport-Hines, p. 66.

8.5 Conclusion

Between 1910 and 1918, an important political transition occurred in Wednesbury, resulting in the town ceasing to be a bye-word for working-class Conservatism. The constituency became one within which the Labour Party established an enduring presence and a number of far-reaching consequences would follow from this.

In 1914, although its progressive wing was intact, the Liberal Party's social democratic ideas were vulnerable and it was 'no longer the party of the left'.¹³⁶ Four years of war compromised its commitment to individual liberty and, when combined with failures in the economic and military spheres, it resulted in a loss of appeal to the nation as a whole. With the evolution of Coalition government, Asquithian loyalists became sidelined, whilst Lloyd George's supporters moved away from the tenets of traditional Gladstonian Liberalism. Previously, the Liberal Party had been the focus for non-conformists and radicals; increasingly, they were attracted to either the Labour Party or the ILP. Hence, Pugh's argument that for the Liberals, the war 'derailed their domestic reform agenda and destroyed their successful Edwardian government'.¹³⁷

Traditional allegiances to Conservatism was intrinsic to many working-class communities across the Black Country, demonstrating that not all workers would turn to Labour.¹³⁸ The values underpinning this included deference to social superiors, enthusiasm for tradition, the monarchy and empire, together with hostility to the state and suspicion of improving legislation. McKibbin suggested that 'working-class Tories, by misinterpreting their class, misinterpret social reality and crucially confuse their appropriate influence groups'.¹³⁹ Nevertheless, 'recurrent grievances against their employers and participation in strikes rendered their loyalty to the Conservative Party

¹³⁶ G. Dangerfield, p. 22.

¹³⁷ M. Pugh, *Speak for Britain: A New History of the Labour Party*, p. 106.

¹³⁸ *Kelly's Directory for Staffordshire, 1916*, p. 489. Even in 1916, the membership of the Wednesbury Conservative Club and of the Liberal Club, which was recorded at 600 and 200 members respectively, was entirely consistent with that during the pre-war years. This can be seen as appropriate evidence to indicate that the popular support for both of these political parties was being maintained locally at this time.

¹³⁹ R. McKibbin, *The Ideologies of Class: Social Relations in Britain, 1880-1950*, p. 289.

inherently unstable'.¹⁴⁰ Industrial action during 1913 and 1917 caused many in the working class to re-evaluate their position and the war's emphasis on equality of sacrifice tested assumptions about the fitness to govern of the established political class.

In 1914, Labour resembled a pressure group struggling to carve out an identity separate from a Liberal Party not always receptive to working-class interests. By gathering trade union support, Labour embarked on a journey from junior partner in a progressive alliance to an independent force credible to the electorate. Locally, this happened in an industrial context within which the class collaboration formerly located in small workshops, between employers and their workforces, was superseded by mechanization and factories. Local trade unions had developed in size and influence and sought an outlet for their political ambitions. Wednesbury's experience differed from that described by Savage, as the perception that the rise in the Labour Party and class-based politics was 'bound up with the declining salience of local politics'.¹⁴¹

As Edward Royle stated, the 'conditions for Labour to register considerable gains nationally were created between 1916 and 1918'.¹⁴² During these years, the working class benefited from increased employment, rising wages and living standards, and Labour began to emerge as the political force supportive of the workers. Whether skilled or unskilled, they had a greater homogeneity and awareness of their importance politically, especially when wartime government had consulted the trade unions on policy matters. With the exception of the pacifists and UDC, often deeply unpopular with the labour movement's patriotic rank-and-file, the Labour Party was able to generate, if not class collaboration and class-consciousness, then heightened working-class awareness and class loyalty, where previously there was no uniform experience. Winter noted other wartime changes, suggesting that 'many people also turned to

¹⁴⁰ M. Pugh, 'The Rise of Labour and the Political Culture of Conservatism, 1890-1945', p. 518.

¹⁴¹ M. Savage, 'The Rise of the Labour Party in Local Perspective', p. 1.

¹⁴² E. Royle, *Modern Britain: A Social History, 1750-1985* (London: Edward Arnold, 1987), p. 142.

Labour in 1918 and the years that followed because its political programme had changed'.¹⁴³ Workers were impatient to restore pre-war skilled status whilst protecting wartime gains and locally based trades councils were influential in articulating grass root views. When the general election was called in November 1918, this influence ensured that Labour's candidates tended to be moderate, patriotic and respectable working-class men, as was the case in Wednesbury with the nomination of Alfred Short.

The 1918 Representation of the People Act was important because the pre-war franchise was restrictive and unrepresentative. Yet the limitation to females aged over 30 years was, 'both a large step towards democratization and a clear refusal to carry the step too far'.¹⁴⁴ Although the war demonstrated the extent of political inequality and the inadequacies of the traditional parties, perceptions of a Labour Party dominated by male trade unionists hostile to female employment drew suspicion. As more middle-class women were enfranchised than from the other social classes, this benefited the Coalition more than the other political parties. If the war marked a turning point then the 1918 general election profoundly affected political relationships, with Tony Adams maintaining that 'the growth of electoral support for Labour and the concurrent decline in Liberalism remains the single most important change in British party politics'.¹⁴⁵ Labour's performance appears more positively although it may be argued that the election came too soon for the Party. Nevertheless, in Wednesbury, Labour capitalized on the advances it had made during the strikes of 1913 and 1917, and its role in improving conditions for working people, to win a victory of great significance. The breakthroughs in four formerly Conservative Black Country's constituencies confirmed that a political realignment was under way and 'Labour had put a foot in the door'.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴³ J.M. Winter, *Socialism and the Challenge of War: Ideas and Politics in Britain, 1912-1918*, p. 273. The role that Labour had played during wartime gave it increased credibility with the industrial working class.

¹⁴⁴ T. Wilson, p. 661.

¹⁴⁵ T. Adams, p. 23.

¹⁴⁶ D. Tanner, *Political Change and the Labour Party, 1900-1918*, p. 416.

CHAPTER 9: CONCLUSION

The principal aim of this thesis has been to contribute towards achieving a greater understanding of the forms that working-class patriotism took during the First World War. Extending our appreciation of the relationships within and between communities, and the effects of economic, political and social change during this period, has been realized through this local study of Wednesbury. Secondary aims have been to explore the complex dynamics in greater depth, to shed light on whether their origins should be attributed to changes occurring in the pre-war years, and to determine if attitudes and identities were modified during the war. Accordingly, the home front has been examined from several different perspectives, with each chapter assisting in the assembly of a fuller account of the wartime experiences of working-class communities.

Several themes underpin this work, including the cohesiveness and sense of community identity, the distinctions between citizenship, nationalism and patriotism, the realignments occurring within economics, politics and society, and the enduring importance of social class in British society. Waites pointed to the distinction between class awareness and class-consciousness, adding that ‘many of the attitudes and values common to the working class have frequently been inimical to developed levels of class-consciousness.’¹ This was fashioned by the industrial changes emanating from the later eighteenth century, with Joyce remarking that it was ‘built out of the often ill-fitting bricks of those distinctive local and regional experiences, in which the parochial and the sectional were often finely balanced with the catholic and the solidaristic’.²

Why has it been deemed appropriate to carry out such an assessment of Wednesbury during this period? Certainly, there has been no other substantial study of this town. Furthermore, micro histories of this type can be seen to represent part of a

¹ B.A. Waites, *A Class Society at War: England, 1914-1918*, p. 181.

² P. Joyce, p. 330.

growing trend that complements the wider-ranging accounts of conventional military history. This has been shown by the doctoral theses of R.J. Batten, J.G.M. Cranstoun, S.J.L. Gower and L.K. Riddell, with reference to Devon, East Lothian, Wolverhampton and Shetland respectively. Such holistic approaches, therefore, fill some of the gaps in the historiography by focusing on aspects that have been neglected. This is an approach that supports the notion that this war acted as one of the most prolific agencies of social change; perhaps more so than in any conflict in history, prior to this. With a methodology reliant on primary source material, and acknowledging the existence of gaps in the evidence unlikely to be ever filled, one innovative approach was adopted and may serve as a model for future research. This was to carry out a survey to reflect critically on the demographic, economic and social life of Wednesbury, as based on a sample of six streets selected by dividing the town into six approximately equal parts.

In order to understand better a working-class community such as Wednesbury, and how it was influenced by the war it is important to explore its composition. To achieve this, a review of the immediate pre-war years was necessary. Chapter 2 has revealed that since the mid-nineteenth century, although there had been improvements, prosperity and relative stability, huge disparities in income and living standards caused the life chances of the working class to be extremely limited.³ To counter this, there was reliance on informal networks of mutual aid and support that provided a measure of agency and independence beyond the control or influence of the affluent and powerful. Nevertheless, hierarchy existed even in the working class with demarcations between skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled workers. Previously, this pervaded attitudes and reduced the chances for real solidarity but as Bourne stated, 'Labour unrest ran at unprecedented levels before the war, seeming to some to presage revolution'.⁴ Increased mechanization and technological change generated a level of economic and

³ M. Savage and A. Miles, p. 33.

⁴ J.M. Bourne, 'The Midlands and the Great War', p. 161.

political agitation amongst the organized working class that had not seen since the disturbances associated with the Chartist movement of the mid-nineteenth century.

Despite its overwhelmingly working-class configuration, Wednesbury (as with the Black Country generally) had a long-standing political allegiance to Conservatism, as demonstrated by the local authority composition and election of John Norton Griffiths as its Member of Parliament. This was not mere deference; it resulted from economic pragmatism at a time when the majority of workers were un-unionized and the local labour movement was weak and divided. When a strike by Wednesbury tube workers broke out in May 1913, spreading across the Black Country, attitudes began to change as trade unions organized the unskilled workers. Even the local newspapers, traditionally hostile to such a cause, which initially attempted to ascribe the dispute to syndicalist revolutionaries, had to concede that support from the wider community was steadfast. This was evidenced by the many charitable acts and demonstrations mounted to that end and counting towards the successful settlement of the dispute in July 1913.

The radical patriotism of the nineteenth century had given way to a social patriotism that sought not merely to oppose the state; instead, it aimed to work through it. Patriotism continued to remain a contested value. Indeed, during the first days of August 1914, when Britain's entry into the war became inexorable, there was the question of how a working class that might otherwise have protested over British involvement would react, and this has been considered in Chapter 3. The range of emotions and factors that influenced individual decisions can never be known save for the evidence pointing towards the response of the majority of the British working class being to support the war effort. Locally, this included those who had been on strike in 1913, as confirmed by the Roll of Honour of the Workers' Union, showing those members who had volunteered and been killed in action. One of the dispute's principal leaders, Wednesbury trade unionist Teddy Williams, having volunteered for military

service, had been taken as a prisoner of war, as reported in the local press in 1917.⁵ There is a comparison to be made between the action of the working class during the 1913 strike and its response to the war through voluntary enlistment. Both included elements of sacrifice and the moral conviction about what was right and fair treatment.

Patriotism was demonstrated in many forms, therefore, and this allowed those unable to offer their services to the armed forces to continue to claim citizenship during wartime. In view of David Young's assertion that much of the labour historiography has concentrated on those challenging the state, and that 'less attention is paid to those industrial workers who volunteered for the forces or who, otherwise supported the war effort', this thesis has sought to redress this from a local perspective.⁶ Lord Kitchener's recognition that the army needed millions of men, combined with propaganda such as Alfred Leete's poster of September 1914, undoubtedly helped to elicit the vast numbers of men who volunteered. Recent research by Gregory and Pennell indicated that this was a much more of a layered experience than an ideologically charged, jingoistic and spontaneous rush to join the colours, as suggested by earlier generations of historians. For instance, a key point in the chronology of events was the retreat from Mons, reports of which prompted many to feel that the nation needed their help in its hour of need. Separating out the specific motives that are woven together within the evidence remains problematic and for many, as pointed out by Silbey, 'if they did not understand what they were getting themselves into then neither did the politicians, generals...'.⁷

Although the war that they would encounter and the duration for which they would be in uniform would have been incomprehensible to them in 1914, this did not dissuade whole communities from encouraging their men to enlist. Cunningham argued that 'it was impressive testimony to the identification forged between people and

⁵ *Express and Star*, 2 June 1917.

⁶ D.M. Young, "'All means short of murder'" British Socialists, 'Patriotic Labour' and the Politics of Recruitment during the Great War', *Stand To! The Journal of the Western Front Association*, 89 (August/September) (2010), p. 33.

⁷ D. Silbey, p. 122.

nation'.⁸ To many localities, it was a matter of civic pride and they responded to Lord Kitchener's call to arms by raising service battalions for his New Armies; whereas other areas already had close relationships with existing formations of the Territorial Force. There was an especially strong connection with the Territorials in Staffordshire and the Black Country, and Wednesbury had its own unit, H Company of the Fifth Battalion of the South Staffordshire Regiment. Later redesignated as D Company of the 1/5th Battalion, these Territorials had their first experience of a major battle in the assault on the Hohenzollern Redoubt. As they left their trenches at 2.00 pm on 13 October 1915, the German machine guns opened fire and Wednesbury lost fourteen of its sons. Thus, the town had an early experience of the collective trauma that many other communities felt following the first day of the Battle of the Somme. Wednesbury's men went on to play their role in the decisive action when they crossed the St. Quentin Canal and broke through the Hindenburg Line on 29 September 1918 to hasten the end of the war.

Chapter 4 has been concerned with the demands placed on the war economy and Wednesbury's role in munitions production, most notably by the construction from 1916 onwards of tanks for the British Army. By participating in the Battle of Cambrai in 1917 and the Hundred Days Campaign in 1918, these Wednesbury-made machines made a crucial contribution to the eventual victory. However, the mobilization of manpower and resources on the scale required would be a problem for all of the nations involved in the war. Britain was the only country to achieve this successfully, so that it could equip the mass army it had created from voluntarism and eventual conscription. Following an initial period of trade disruption and an unsuccessful attempt to pursue a regime of *business as usual*, shortages of ordnance that impeded military progress prompted the foundation of a Ministry of Munitions and successive steps towards the rationalization of production to optimize output. Accordingly, it was during this

⁸ H. Cunningham, *The Challenge of Democracy: Britain, 1832-1918*, p. 230.

conflict that the 'wartime experience offered a fundamental challenge to the doctrines of economic industrialism and laissez-faire which had dominated the nineteenth century'.⁹

Increasingly, this entailed the utilization of female labour, with over 1.6 million women eventually being drafted in to replace the men who were combed-out, firstly by the Derby Scheme and then by conscription. The manufacture of munitions was only a step away from using them at the front line. Hence, it was in this manner that the nation's workforce was able to express its patriotism. For many female workers, their industrial career, and enjoyment of increased wages that accompanied it, proved to be a temporary one when the men began to return from their military service. Tribute must be paid to them and the patriotism they demonstrated in performing work of an often highly dangerous nature because without them the war could not have been won.

Other accompanying social changes were in the field of employee relations, as shown in Chapter 5. Producing vast quantities of ordnance under conditions of great urgency required industrial harmony. Initially, an industrial truce had been agreed by the trade unions, thereby demonstrating their patriotic commitment to the war effort, yet this was threatened by discontent over such matters as the Leaving Certificates introduced by the Munitions Act 1915 and the impact of food shortages and rising prices. Such considerations came to provoke searching questions regarding the operation of sectional interests, profiteering and equality of sacrifice, meaning the expectation that wartime burdens ought to be shared equally across the social classes. The working class made considerable gains with regard to their wages and working conditions during the war, owing to collective negotiation with firms and the departments of the Government. With an increased trade union membership, both for male and female workers, there would be political repercussions. An early indication of this was shown by an event that occurred in late July and August 1917, at the Crown

⁹ N. Kirk, p. 163.

tube works of James Russell & Sons. The workforce of this firm went out on strike in order to support a former employee, a recently discharged and wounded soldier, who had been prevented from regaining his job by an officious manager. As mentioned in the press at the time, this strike was an echo of the 1913 dispute because the people were calling upon the networks of support as they had done then.¹⁰ This should be seen as a deeply patriotic action by the workforce because this soldier had done his duty, been wounded in action, and was now depending on a promise that had been made at the start of the war. If this could not be honoured, then what were they fighting for?

The people of Wednesbury, together with those in Tipton and Walsall, became victims of the first air raid on the Midlands on 31 January and 1 February 1916, when two German Zeppelin airships that had deviated from their intended target of Liverpool dropped explosive and incendiary bombs killing and injuring civilians. As stated in Chapter 6, this strategic bombing campaign represented an entirely new form of warfare that targeted industry, infrastructure and people. Its intention was to demolish not just the physical structures but also the morale and will of the communities to resist aggression. Effectively, this ‘had given rise to the total battlefield where no one was safe and everyone was a target’.¹¹ Despite the wartime censorship preventing the publication of the names of the towns bombed or of the victims, it is still possible to gauge the level of anger felt by the community at what they viewed as an atrocity of war. Moreover, the defiance and determination of the local population was evident in the steps taken to introduce the first air defence measures, with the civic leaders of Wednesbury and the other Black Country towns participating in key discussions held.

War had an impact on civilian life in terms of living standards and exposed the deficiencies and inequalities of the pre-war years, many of which were outlined in Chapter 2 of this thesis. This was particularly the case for working-class women whose

¹⁰ *Express and Star*, 4 August 1917.

¹¹ N. Faulkner and N. Durrant, p. 148.

husbands, fathers or brothers had gone off to fight, with some not to return, and who now had to contend with harsh economic realities. Steps were necessary to provide essential relief during the early days of the war, both for those working people vulnerable to the conflict's immediate economic consequences, and to the Belgian refugees who found shelter in Wednesbury. The conflict also frustrated many measures for improvement that had been planned, for example, as shown in Chapter 7, the housing scheme in Wednesbury was curtailed for the duration and did not commence until 1919. The impact of the First World War had changed British society in numerous different ways and a return to the pre-1914 patterns of life was therefore impossible.

Politically, progress for the working class had been inhibited before the war. The franchise was denied to all women and many working-class men and, as Chinn argued, 'the urban poor fought and worked for a country which had denied them the full rights of citizenship and which had degraded them. They did not fail England. England had failed them'.¹² As demonstrated in Chapter 8, the activities of the trade unions and trades councils were instrumental in connecting with local people. This 'brought wider endorsement of the need for independent political action to protect working-class communities'.¹³ One aspect of this was the role of ex-servicemen's organizations, with some forging connections to the labour movement on allowances, pensions and the reintegration of former servicemen back into civilian life. By not following the path taken by the Bolsheviks or the Freikorps, the point has been well put by Young that 'the stolidity and the *broad church* of British labour is, I feel, one principal factor why patriotic labour did not change into proto-fascism'.¹⁴ Historians of the labour movement have argued that the foundations of political change were established before 1914, with the war reshaping the Labour Party to make it attractive to members of the working

¹² C.S.A Chinn, *Poverty Amidst Prosperity: Urban Poor in England, 1834-1914*, p. 97.

¹³ T. Adams, p. 32.

¹⁴ D.M. Young, p. 38.

class who had previously supported the Conservative Party.¹⁵ In the Black Country, Labour's power base had been narrow but the repercussions of the strikes of 1913 and 1917 were to be appreciated in Wednesbury during the general election of 1918.

At the commencement of his electoral campaign, David Lloyd George had pronounced that 'the war had been won by the unity of all classes, by the sacrifice of every rank, in every condition of life. Patriotism is the common inheritance and virtue of all'.¹⁶ Sacrifices were made by all of the social classes and it remains the case that the immense demands of industrialized warfare, whether on the battlefields or in the munitions factories, were such that the war could not have been won without the British working class. Many of the men who died during the war did not have the vote and even with the passing of the Representation of the People Act 1918, it was noted in the local press that there was a 'virtual disenfranchisement of the army' since three out of five servicemen had been unable to vote.¹⁷ Given the Conservative Party's pre-war dominance of the Black Country, the outcome in Wednesbury was a very credible one for the Labour Party, particularly in view of those appeals made by the Prime Minister, the Coalition and its candidates for the working class to respond with patriotism.

The solidarity of the people of Wednesbury, as described in this work, derived from shared experience and the necessity of mutual support, which was reinforced by their innate sense of patriotism. Whilst not seeking in any way to devalue or underplay the sacrifices made by all the other social classes, the immense burdens, challenges and demands of the First World War fell especially on such communities. Extensive and intense, working-class patriotism was varied in the many forms that it took. Commentators of more recent times, jaded perhaps by cynicism, will have seen the working class as being distracted by patriotic, monarchist and imperial sentiment to

¹⁵ K. Laybourn, 'The Rise of Labour and the Decline of Liberalism: The State of the Debate', p. 225; M. Pugh, 'The Rise of Labour and the Political Culture of Conservatism, 1890-1945', pp. 531-532.

¹⁶ *Express and Star*, 23 November 1918.

¹⁷ *Midland Advertiser and Wednesbury Herald*, 21 December 1918.

make them easy prey for manipulation. That point of view does a great disservice to the many men and women who were motivated by a very real sense of duty and obligation to their country. To them this was not contradictory and it applied equally to the front line and the home front. It was shaped by events and experiences in the pre-war years that endowed people with a capacity for endurance in the face of adversity, and continued during wartime to influence the ongoing transformation of British society. By the end of the war, working-class deference had become markedly less evident, replaced by a cohesiveness and greater awareness of both the influence and power now held, so that any return to the pre-1914 patterns of life was simply not possible.

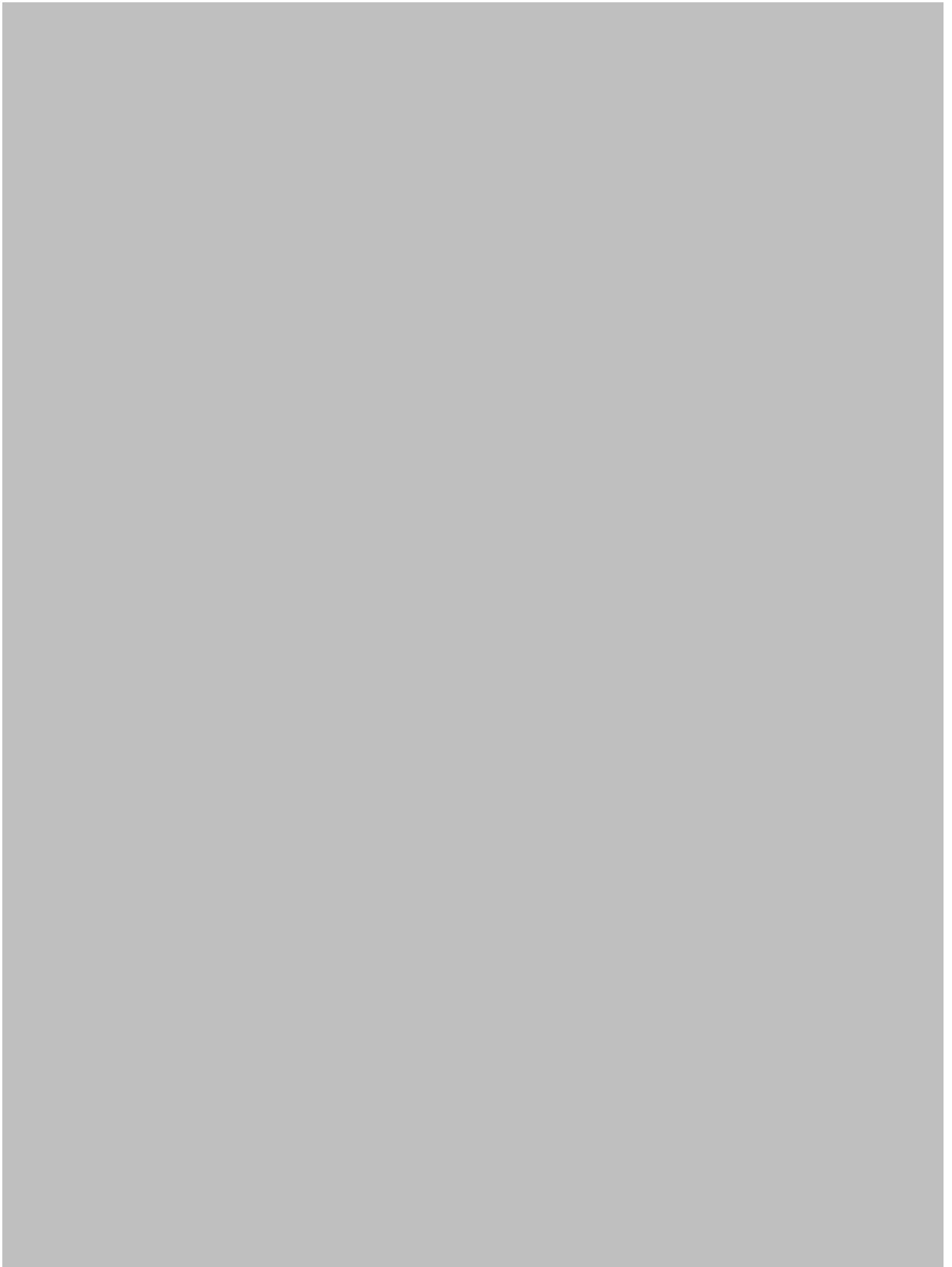
In conclusion, Wednesbury's wartime experiences were in many respects an accurate microcosm of the wider national condition. Furthermore, this thesis has shown that relevant local studies can also have their place in the national context by providing a point of connection to the larger themes that have been addressed recently by, for example, the work of Gregory and Pennell with reference to the outbreak of the war. Each chapter has taken this ideal further and reflected on many examples to demonstrate that it was much more than that and, therefore, the important aims set out in this thesis have been accomplished. Working-class patriotism was exhibited throughout the war and if it did not diminish, it certainly adapted to circumstances and changed over time. This thesis has supported some views to be found in the historiography and it has challenged others, thereby adding to and advancing the sum of knowledge concerning the Black Country during the early years of the twentieth century. Finally, it is hoped that through the chronicling of Wednesbury's striking workers of 1913, its servicemen of 1914-1918 and those munitions workers who supported them throughout, it has gone some way towards rescuing them from what E.P. Thompson described in *The Making of the English Working Class* as 'the enormous condescension of posterity'.¹⁸

¹⁸ E.P. Thompson, p. 12.

APPENDICES

The appendices are organized as follows:

- Appendix 1: Maps of the Black Country and of Wednesbury
- Appendix 2: A map and tables summarizing a survey of employment and housing in a sample of six Wednesbury streets
- Appendix 3: A table showing the political composition of Wednesbury Borough Council, 1913-1918
- Appendix 4: A table summarizing data from the Reports of Wednesbury's Medical Officer of Health, 1913-1918
- Appendix 5: A table summarizing commercial and industrial activity in Wednesbury, 1912-1918
- Appendix 6: Illustrations and Photographs

APPENDIX 1: MAPS OF THE BLACK COUNTRY AND OF WEDNESBURY

1. Map showing Wednesbury in relation to the Black Country.
Source: D. Vodden, *Our Black Country* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 2003), p. 7.



2. Ordnance Survey Map for Wednesbury, 1902

This map is reduced from the original Ordnance Survey 1:2500 map to a scale of approximately 1:4340

Source: (Consett: Alan Godfrey Maps, 1987)

**APPENDIX 2: EMPLOYMENT AND HOUSING
IN A SAMPLE OF SIX WEDNESBURY STREETS**



3. Map of Wednesbury indicating the six streets analysed with reference to the 1911 Census
Source: Ordnance Survey Maps for Wednesbury, 1902
(reprinted Consett: Alan Godfrey Maps, 1987).

1. Church Hill

House No.	Surname of main occupant	No. of males	No. of females	Occupations	Employed/ Employer/ Self-employed
Caldwell House	Knowles	2	4	Iron tube manufacturer; Clerk; Servant (living in)	Employer; Employed; Employed
Church Hill House	Guy		3	Private means	-
Hill Crest	Partridge		3	Private income; Servant (living in)	- Employed
Rose Hill Tavern	Richards	2	2	Licensed victualler; Housekeeper (living in); Servants (x2) (living in)	Employer; Employed; Employed
The Vicarage	Pritchard	3	3	Clergyman; Servants (x2) (living in)	Employed; Employed
43	Perry	4	2	Travelling salesman; Hairdresser	Self-employed; Self-employed
62	Smith	1	3	Tube manufacturer; Servant (living in) Cook (living in)	Employer; Employed Employed
63	Faultless	2	4	General Hotelier; School mistress; Servant (living in)	Self-employed; Employed; Employed
64	Walker	4	3	Borough Surveyor	Employed
74	Bubb	2	2	Coachman	Employed
75	Wilson	1	1	Tube tester	Employed
76	Higgins		2	Elementary school teacher (x2)	Employed
77	Pitcock	6	5	Blacksmith: tube works; Pinafore maker; Nut and bolt worker	Employed; Employed; Employed
78	Davies	4	2	Fitter at Patent Shaft works	Employed
79	Davis	2	2	General engineer (x2) Housekeeper (x2)	Employed; Employed
104	Powell		2	Shopkeeper (x2)	Self-employed
105	Fiffer	2	2	Labourer; Crane Driver	Employed; Employer
106	Rollaston	2	1	Builder's foreman; Coal miner	Employed; Employed
107	Tibbetts	2		Salvation Army Captain; Salvation Army Lieutenant	Employed; Employed
108	Wright	2	1	Chemist's Assistant	Employed
109	Chandler	5	3	House decorator; Leather trade worker	Employed; Employed
110	Roger	2	3	Planner- Bridge works	Employed
111	Woodhall	2	2	Spring Maker	Employed
112	Harrington	1	1	Brick layer	Employed
113	Moseley	4	2	Worker in tube factory	Employed
114	Turner	2	1	Axle smith	Employed

2. Foley Street

House No.	Surname of main occupant	No. of males	No. of females	Occupations	Employed/ Employer/ Self-employed
4	Chandler	1	4	Ironmonger's shop manager	Employed
5	Burns	1	2	Municipal accountant	Employed
6	Gue	1	1	Clerk of Works	Employed
7	Griffiths	2	2	Corporation Clerk; Assistant school mistress	Employed; Employed
8	Taylor	2	3	Worker in gas tube trade	Employed
9	Gilroy	3	2	Accountant	Employed
10	Wassall	1	3	Blacksmith	Employed
11	Bowdler	1	3	Foreman in tube works	Employed
12	Taylor	2	3	Wrought iron fitter	Employed
13	Bayley	5	2	Compositor-printer; Commercial clerk; Errand Boys (x2)	Employed; Employed; Employed
14	Morgan	1	3	House painter	Employed
15	Dawes	3	1	Joiner	Employed
16	Bond	3	3	Wheel turner; Electrician; Tailoress	Employed; Employed; Employed
19	Clift	1	3	Clerk	Employed
20	Addison	1	2	Tailor and cutter	Employed
21	Beardmore	5	3	Electrical engineer	Employed
22	Wedge	3	2	Wagoner	Employed
23	Hale	3	3	Turner in tube works; Post Office Clerk	Employed Employed
24	Owen	1		Carpenter	Employed
25	Yorke	3	2	Estate agent; Bailiff	Employed; Employed
26	Fellows	2	1	Furnace Labourer	Employed
27	Tranter	2	2	Pattern maker	Employed
28	Dodd	1	1	Retired	-
29	Stanley	4	2	Borough Librarian; Clerks (x2)	Employed; Employed
31	Lowe	1	1	Sand merchant	Employer
32	George	1	2	School teacher	Employed
33	Francis	1	2	Commercial clerk	Employed
34	Bates	4	2	Blacksmith's striker	Employed
35	Cherrington	5	3	Coach axle fitter; Dressmaker	Employed; Employed

3. Meeting Street

House No.	Surname of main occupant	No. of males	No. of females	Occupations	Employed/ Employer/ Self-employed
11	Maddox	4	3	Press Driver; Builder	Employed; Employed
12	Harrison	6	3	Blacksmith; Gas fitter; Office boy	Employed; Employed; Employed
13	Banks	2	1	Steel smelter	Employed
14	Jevons	5	5	Brass caster; Rivet maker; Tailoress	Employed; Employed; Employed
16	Kemp	3	4	Time keeper; Storeman	Employed; Employed
17	Bragg	2	2	Core maker; Labourer	Employed; Employed
18	Gulley	2	1	Building labourer	Employed
19	Lloyd	3	8	Labourer, Nut and bolt worker	Employed; Employed
20	Wheatley	3	3	Labourer; Fitting striker	Employed
21	Bray	3	2	Engine driver; Shop Assistant	Employed; Employed
23	Hopkins	1	1	Labourer	Employed
24	Evans	3	3	Labourer	Employed
25	Gaden	3	2	Tube fitter	Employed
26	Gaden	2	1	Labourer	Employed
27	Severn	4	4	Miner; Steel worker	Employed
28	Collins	3	1	Steel worker; Labourer	Employed
29	Morris	1	2	Wooden box maker	Employed
30	Stevens	3	4	Boiler stoker; Grocer's Assistant	Employed; Employed
31a	Jones	5	2	Die maker	Employed
31b	Lee	2	1	Ash Loader; Errand boy	Employed; Employed
32	Pugh	3	2	Labourer, Turner	Employed
33	Woodward	2	5	Cast iron worker	Employed
34	Harris	3	1	Labourer	Employed
35	Mason	3	2	Butcher	Employed
36	Humphries	4	1	Plater	Employed
37	Brooks	3	1	Railway Platelayer; Assistant Butcher	Employed; Employed
38a	Pugh	1	1	Labourer	Employed
38b	Doughty	2		Collier; Carter	Employed
39	Davis	1	1	Pattern Maker	Employed
40	Wall	3	3	Wheel and Axle worker	Employed
41	Barrett	3	2	Furnaceman	Employed
42	Davies	1	3	Waggoner	Employed
42a	Ashton	2	2	Furnaceman	Employed
42b	Garrett	2	1	Iron Puddler	Employed
43	Grew	3	4	Collier; Scrivener	Employed; Employed
45	Ward	3	2	Undertaker's Coachman	Employed
46	Dent	2	2	Carter; Printer	Employed
47	Barrett	8	3	Brickyard labourer	Employed
48	Smith	1	2	Iron worker	Employed
49	Bamford	6	3	Iron works stoker	Employed

4. Piercy Street

House No.	Surname of main occupant	No. of males	No. of females	Occupations	Employed/ Employer/ Self-employed
4	Campion	2	2	Blacksmith's striker; Laundry Maid	Employed; Employed
5	Wyles	1	4	Boot maker	Employed
6	Bradbury		3	Tailor's machinist	Employed
8	Wade	1	1	Iron turner	Employed
9	Fellows	1	1	Boiler tube maker	Employed
10	Farmer	4	3	Insurance agent; Boiler tube worker	Employed; Employed
11	Paxford	3	2	Brewery carter	Employed
12	Thompson	1	1	Life insurance collector	Employed
13	Davies	2	2	Life insurance agent	Employed
14	Bayliss	3	3	Carter	Employed
15	Palmer	3	3	Blacksmith; Tailor's machinist	Employed; Employed
16	Powell	2	2	Fitting maker; Laundress; Milk man	Employed; Employed; Employed
17	Kendrick	8	1	Tube fitter; Groom; Labourers (x2); Butcher	Employed; Employed; Employed; Employed
18	Hartwell	2	3	Boiler stoker; Fitter	Employed; Employed
18	Upton	2	4	Blacksmith's striker	Employed
19	Neale	5	2	Warehouseman; Blacksmith's striker; Labourers (x2)	Employed; Employed; Employed
20	Booth	1	3	Manager of Off Licence; Shop assistant; Boot repairer	Employed; Employed; Employed
21	Elkington	2	1	Coach lock turner	Employed
22	Ingram	1	7	Fitting maker	Employed
23	Woodhall	2	2	Gas tube fitter	Employed
24	Nicholls	3	5	Railwayman	Employed
25	Grove	4	4	Axle Smith	Employed
26	Hughes	3	1	Blacksmith	Employed
27	Manley	3	1	Warehouseman	Employed
28	Timmins	5		Axle forger; Insurance agent; Blacksmith; Carter (x2)	Employed; Employed; Employed; Employed
29	Johnson	3	5	Castings presser; Shop errand boy	Employed; Employed
30	Wynne	3	5	Boiler stoker; Tailoress (2) Laundress	Employed; Employed; Employed
31	Rymill	5	2	Carter; Blacksmith's striker	Employed; Employed
32	Wearing	3	7	Carter; Sewing machinist (x4) Tap and die maker	Employed; Employed; Employed
33	Wilson	1	3	Fitting maker	Employed
34	Leech	3	1	General Labourer (x2)	Employed
35	Rowe	5	3	Tube enameller	Employed
36	Lewson	5	2	News agent; Apprentice fitter	Employed; Employed

5. Ridding Lane

House No.	Surname of main occupant	No. of males	No. of females	Occupations	Employed/ Employer/ Self-employed
26	Bailey	2	1	Baker/Confectioner	Employer
27	Williams	3	1	Hearse driver; Boot maker	Employed; Employed
28	Robinson	5	3	Police sergeant; Electrical fitter	Employed; Employed
30	Chambers	2	2	Locket maker; Dress maker	Employed; Employed
31	Bailey	7	5	Printer; Printer's clerk; Insurance clerk; Tailoress	Employed; Employed; Employed; Employed
32	Richards	3	2	Overseer at Iron tube works	Employed
33	Bishton	4	2	Furnace Labourer	Employed
34	Grew	3	4	Tube Welder; Shop Assistant	Employed; Employed
35	Carrington	3	2	Printer; Postman; Clerk	Employed; Employed; Employed
36	Pinner	2	3	Hairdresser (x2)	Self-employed
37	Lowe	2	2	Moulder	Employed
38	Jones	2	1	Printer/Compositor	Employed
40	Price	3	3	Coach builder	Employed
41	Dilworth	2	6	Coach axle turner; Assistant school mistress	Employed; Employed
42	Robinson	3	3	Bricklayer; Apprentice bricklayer	Employed; Employed
43	Moore	2	2	Mechanical engineer	Employed
44	Clarke	1	1	House agent	Self-employed
44	Dawson	1		Clergyman	Employed
45	Beardmore	1	2	Assistant headmaster	Employed
46	Jones	6	1	Assurance superintendant	Employed
47	Pinson	2	1	Estimating clerk	Employed
49	Wolfe	1	1	Jeweller/shopkeeper	Self-employed
50	Masson	4	3	Store clerk; Assistant clerk	Employed; Employed
51	Brooks	1	2	Grocer	Employed
52	Nutt	3	6	Switch maker; Solicitor's clerk	Employed; Employed
57	Raybould	3	2	Tube fitting maker; Commercial clerk	Employed; Employed
58	Hawkins	4	4	Foreman at Gas tube works	Employed
59	Horton	2	3	Coach axle worker; Insurance clerk	Employed; Employed

6. Russell Street

House No.	Surname of main occupant	No. of males	No. of females	Occupations	Employed/ Employer/ Self-employed
2	MacDuff	1	1	Printer	Employed
4	Williams	2	2	Hairdresser	Self-employed
5	Timmins	1	1	Packer in tube works	Employed
6	Forgham	1	1	General dealer	Self-employed
7	Cole	3	2	Wardrobe dealer; Railway porter	Self-employed; Employed
8	Evans	1	1	Shopkeeper	Self-employed
9	Roberts	5	4	Labourer; Machinist; Junior clerk	Employed; Employed; Employed
10	Halling	2	3	Blacksmith; Fitter at tube works	Employed; Employed
11	Hill	4	5	Wheel turner; Train driver; Labourer	Employed; Employed; Employed
12	Pymm	4	3	Blacksmith's striker; Furnace worker	Employed; Employed
13	Kelly	3	1	Commercial clerk; Apprentice	Employed; Employed
14	Harrington	2	2	Bricklayer	Employed
15	Moore	1	2	Engineer	Employed
16	Astbury	3	4	Turner at iron works	Employed
16	Thomas		1	Charwoman	Employed
17	Oldbury	8	3	Template maker	Employed
18	Styles	4	3	Butcher	Employed
19	Small	6	2	Iron founder	Employed
20	Slove	1	4	House painter	Employed
21	Moseley	4	2	Gas stoker Labourers (x2)	Employed; Employed
22	Davies	2	2	Blast furnace worker; Labourer	Employed; Employed
24	Hall	5	2	Fireman; Labourers (x2)	Employed; Employed
25	Purchase	4	2	File cutter; Warehouseman	Employed; Employed
26	Hawthorn	1	2	Shopkeeper	Self-employed
27	Brocklehurst	4	1	Iron worker; Office boy	Employed; Employed
28	Edwards	2		Postman; Furnaceman	Employed; Employed
29	Hughes	6		Collier; Iron workers (x2)	Employed; Employed
30	Banner	6	4	Tube workers (x2)	Employed
31	Titely	1	2	Warehouseman	Employed
32	Stokes	3	2	Insurance agent	Employed
33	Sullivan	4	1	Labourer	Employed
34	Higgs	5	1	Steam hammer operator	Employed
35	Burns	3	3	Tool maker	Employed
36	Bissell	4	3	Steel smelter	Employed
37	Savage	1	2	Electrician	Employed
38	Oldbury	1	1	Stamper	Employed
39	Fitzgerald	3	1	Blacksmith	Employed
40	Rosewarne	2	1	Engine fitter	Employed

APPENDIX 3: THE POLITICAL COMPOSITION OF WEDNESBURY BOROUGH COUNCIL, 1913-1918

Year	1913/1914	1914/1915	1915/1916
Mayor	Cllr N. Bishop (C)	Cllr N. Bishop (C)	Cllr W. Warner (L)
Deputy Mayor	Ald A.E. Pritchard (C)	Ald A.E. Pritchard (C)	Ald E.J. Hunt (C)
Aldermen	Ald I. Griffiths (L) Ald J. Handley (C) Ald J.A. Kilvert (X) Ald A.E. Pritchard (C)	Ald I. Griffiths (L) Ald J. Handley (C) Ald J.A. Kilvert (X) Ald A.E. Pritchard (C)	Ald N. Bishop (C) Ald E.J. Hunt (C) Ald J.A. Kilvert (X) Ald A.E. Pritchard (C)
King's Hill Ward	Cllr N. Bishop (C) Cllr J. Disturnal (L) Cllr W.P. Edmunds (C)	Cllr N. Bishop (C) Cllr J. Disturnal (L) Cllr W.P. Edmunds (C)	Cllr A. Beebee ³ (C) Cllr W.P. Edmunds (C) Cllr J. Jeffries ¹ (L)
Ward Electorate	1,542	1,553	1,553
Market Ward	Cllr S. Beardmore (L) Cllr T.R. Knowles (C) Cllr T.J. Withers (C)	Cllr S. Beardmore (L) Cllr T.R. Knowles (C) Cllr T.J. Withers (C)	Cllr S. Beardmore (L) Cllr T.R. Knowles (C) Cllr T.J. Withers (C)
Ward Electorate	1,186	1,220	1,220
Town Hall Ward	Cllr J. Lacey (C) Cllr H. Peace (I) Cllr J.H. Sheldon (C)	Cllr J. Lacey (C) Cllr H. Peace (I) Cllr J.H. Sheldon (C)	Cllr J. Lacey (C) Cllr H. Peace (I) Cllr J.H. Sheldon (C)
Ward Electorate	1,339	1,340	1,340
Wood Green Ward	Cllr E.J. Hunt (C) Cllr A. Richards (C) Cllr W. Warner (L)	Cllr E.J. Hunt (C) Cllr A. Richards (C) Cllr W. Warner (L)	Cllr A. Richards (C) Cllr L.A. Shirlaw ² (C) Cllr W. Warner (L)
Ward Electorate	1,135	1,152	1,192
Total Electorate	5,242	5,305	5,305
Year	1916/1917	1917/1918	1918/1919
Mayor	Cllr W. Warner (L)	Ald A.E. Pritchard (C)	Ald A.E. Pritchard (C)
Deputy Mayor	Ald E.J. Hunt (C)	Cllr W. Warner (L)	Cllr W. Warner (L)
Aldermen	Ald N. Bishop (C) Ald E.J. Hunt (C) Ald J.A. Kilvert (X) Ald A.E. Pritchard (C)	Ald N. Bishop (C) Ald E.J. Hunt (C) Ald J.A. Kilvert (X) Ald A.E. Pritchard (C)	Ald N. Bishop (C) Ald E.J. Hunt (C) Ald J.A. Kilvert (X) Ald A.E. Pritchard (C)
King's Hill Ward	Cllr A. Beebee (C) Cllr W.P. Edmunds (C) Cllr J. Jeffries (L)	Cllr A. Beebee (C) Cllr W.P. Edmunds (C) Cllr J. Jeffries (L)	Cllr A. Beebee (C) Cllr W.P. Edmunds (C) Cllr J. Jeffries (L)
Ward Electorate	1,553	1,553	2,523
Market Ward	Cllr S. Beardmore (L) Cllr T.R. Knowles (C) Cllr T.J. Withers (C)	Cllr S. Beardmore (L) Cllr T.R. Knowles (C) Cllr T.J. Withers (C)	Cllr S. Beardmore (L) Cllr T.R. Knowles (C) Cllr T.J. Withers (C)
Ward Electorate	1,220	1,220	2,654
Town Hall Ward	Cllr J. Lacey (C) Cllr H. Peace (I) Cllr J.H. Sheldon (C)	Cllr J. Lacey (C) Cllr H. Peace (I) Cllr J.H. Sheldon (C)	Cllr J. Lacey (C) Cllr H. Peace (I) Cllr J.H. Sheldon (C)
Ward Electorate	1,340	1,340	3,195
Wood Green Ward	Cllr A. Richards (C) Cllr L.A. Shirlaw (C) Cllr W. Warner (L)	Cllr A. Richards (C) Cllr L.A. Shirlaw (C) Cllr W. Warner (L)	Cllr A. Richards (C) Cllr L.A. Shirlaw (C) Cllr W. Warner (L)
Ward Electorate	1,192	1,192	2,331
Total Electorate	5,305	5,305	10,703

1. Elected 1 November 1914
2. Elected 26 February 1915
3. Elected 9 November 1915

Key: C (Conservative) L (Liberal)
I (Independent) X (Unknown)

Sources: Borough of Wednesbury Municipal Year Books, B/W/3/8-13; *Ryder's Annual*, 1885-1918
(Sandwell Community History and Archives Service)

APPENDIX 4: REPORTS OF WEDNESBURY'S MEDICAL OFFICER OF HEALTH, 1913-1918 – A STATISTICAL SUMMARY

	1913	1914	1915	1916	1917	1918
Area in Acres	2,287	2,287	2,287	2,287	2,287	2,287
Estimated population	28,108	29,100	28,414	27,776	29,760	30,364
Population per Acre	12.29	12.72	12.42	12.14	13.0	13.27
Number of houses in the Borough	5,812	5,900	5,919	5,895	6,108	6,108
Number of persons per house	4.9	4.9	4.8	4.7	4.87	4.9
Number of births (Total)	868	929	780	787	707	788
Number of births (Male)	446	474	374	392	364	415
Number of births (Female)	422	455	406	395	343	373
Number of deaths (Total)	521	497	471	480	415	518
Increase/Decrease in total population	+347	+432	+309	+307	+292	+207
Birth rates	30.8	32.1	27.4	26.0	21.3	20.5
Death rates	18.5	17.1	16.5	17.3	14.2	20.3
Infantile death rates	152	136	114	101	94	104
Total deaths from Diarrhoea	31	27	17	7	7	8
Infantile mortality from Diarrhoea per 1,000 births	35.7	29.0	27.45	17.7	4.9	1.0
Total deaths of children aged under 5 years	246	182	150	137	146	176
Death rate of children aged under 5 years			5.28	5.0	4.9	6.1
Respiratory death rate	2.77	6.2	2.7	2.4	2.9	5.0
Death rate from Phthisis	1.17	2.3	1.5	1.8	0.7	1.1
Death rate from other forms of Tuberculosis	0.64	1.23	0.31	0.5	0.15	0.01
Zymotic death rates ¹	4.2	1.6	1.6	1.6	1.6	0.6
Number of cases of infectious diseases notified ²	189	246	163	398	652	291
Rateable value (£)	101,899	102,991	104,120	104,258	106,060	112,786
1d. in the £ yields for general purposes (£)	330	330	380	380	380	360
General district rates (£)	3s. 6d. in £	3s. 10d. in £	4s. 4d. in £	4s. 4d. in £	4s. 8d. in £	5s. in £
Poor rate	4s. 2d. in £	4s. 8d. in £	5s. in £	4s. 4d. in £	4s. 8d. in £	5s. 8d. in £
Number of new houses built	53	26	21	0	0	0

1. Zymotic diseases include Puerperal Fever, Scarlet Fever, Measles, Diphtheria, Diarrhoea and Whooping Cough.
2. Infectious diseases include Small Pox, Cholera, Cerebro-spinal Meningitis, Poliomyelitis, Pulmonary Tuberculosis and other forms of Tuberculosis

Source: Reports of Wednesbury's Medical Officer of Health, 1913-1918
(Sandwell Community History and Archive Service)

APPENDIX 5: WEDNESBURY'S COMMERCIAL AND INDUSTRIAL ACTIVITY 1912-1918 - A STATISTICAL SUMMARY

1. Principal Employers in Wednesbury in 1912

Name of Employer	Type of Business
Alfred Beebee	Nut and bolt manufacturer
Walter P Edwards	Iron founder
Edward Job Ltd.	Tube manufacturer
Edward Elwell Ltd.	Edge tool manufacturer
Richard Garbett	Gas valve manufacturer
Griffiths and Billingsley	Tube manufacturer
Isaac Griffiths & Sons	Tube manufacturer
Samuel Hampton & Sons	Nut and bolt manufacturer
John Knowles	Gas fittings and tube manufacturer
F.H. Lloyd & Co. Ltd.	Steel castings manufacturer
James McDougall Ltd.	Tube manufacturer
Patent Shaft & Axletree Co. Ltd.	Axles, wheels and railway infrastructure
Samuel Platt Ltd.	Iron founder
Thomas Pritchard	Tube manufacturer
James Russell & Sons Ltd.	Tube manufacturer
John Russell & Co. Ltd.	Tube manufacturer
Edward Smith Ltd.	Tube manufacturer
John Spencer Ltd.	Tube manufacturer
Steel Nut & Hampden Ltd.	Nut and bolt manufacturer
William Trow & Sons Ltd.	Brass and iron founder

Source: *Kelly's Directory for Staffordshire, 1912* (London: Kelly & Co., 1912).

2. Additional Principal Employers in Wednesbury in 1914

Name of Employer	Type of Business
Adams & Richards	Iron and steel merchants
J. Bagnall & Sons	Iron founders
Foster Brothers Ltd.	Tube manufacturers
Isaac Oldbury	Axle spring manufacturer

Source: *Bennett's Business Directory for Staffordshire, 1914* (Birmingham: Bennett & Co., 1914).

3. Additional Principal Employers in Wednesbury in 1916

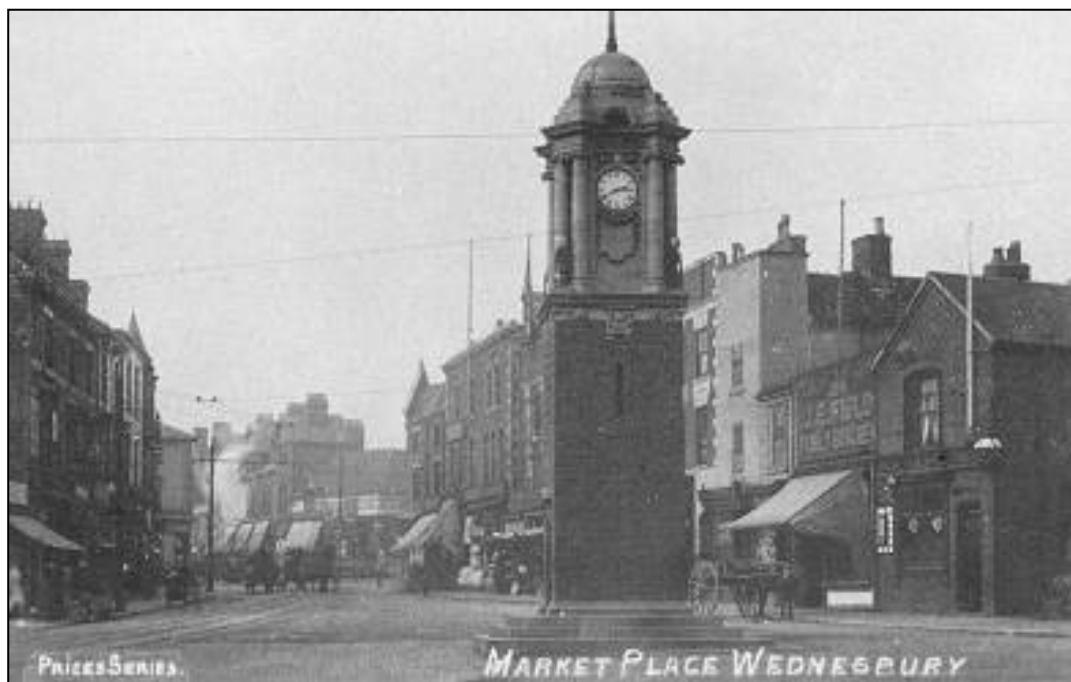
Name of Employer	Type of Business
Hampden & Dean	Nut and bolt manufacturer
Thomas Newton	Nut and bolt manufacturer
Isaiah Oldbury	Coach maker
Henry Peace Ltd.	Brass founder
Richard & Co Ltd.	Axle manufacturers

Source: *Kelly's Directory for Staffordshire, 1916* (London: Kelly & Co., 1916)

4. Type and Number of Commercial and Industrial Organizations in Wednesbury

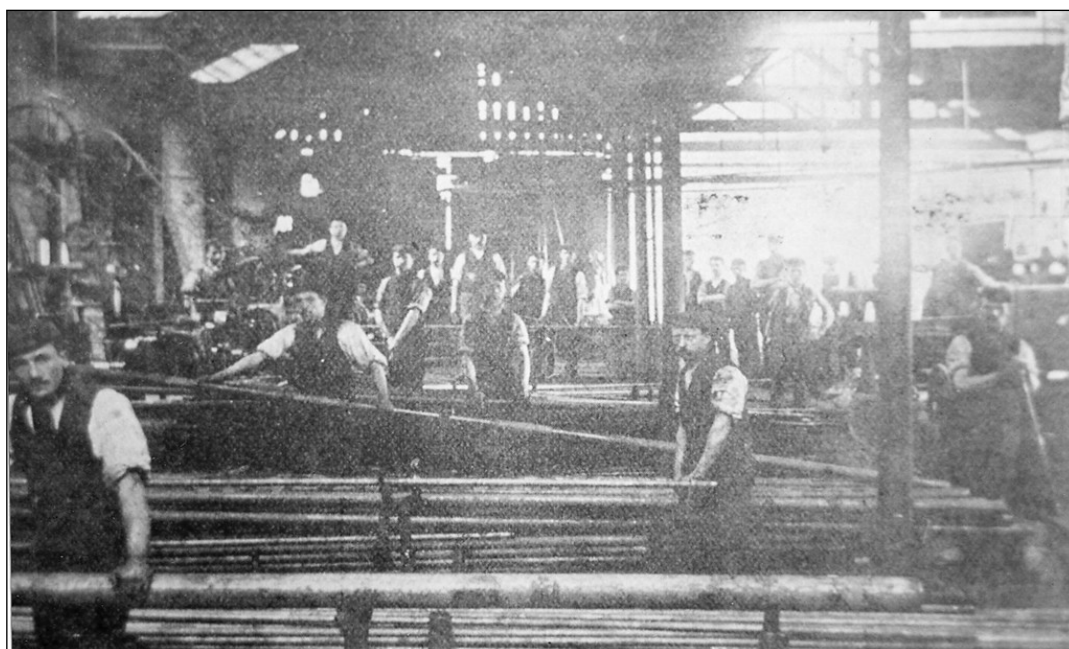
Organization	Number in 1912	Number in 1916
Accountant	1	1
Architect/Surveyor	1	3
Bailiff	1	0
Baker	19	17
Bank	3	3
Beer Retailer/Shop	66	59
Blacksmith	4	4
Builder/Carpenter	15	14
Building Society	1	1
Butcher	33	20
Chemist	5	7
Chimney Sweep	1	1
Clothier	12	6
Coal Merchant	10	17
Confectioner	27	25
Dentist	1	1
Draper	32	34
Dress Maker	9	16
Engineering, etc.	10	10
Fish Monger/Seller	20	23
Furniture Dealer	3	3
Grocer (including Green Grocer)	64	52
Hair Dresser (including Barber)	15	18
Insurance Agent	10	26
Iron Monger	2	2
Jeweller	1	1
Leather Goods	25	29
Motor Garage	0	1
News Agent	5	11
Pawnbroker	17	15
Painter/Decorator	7	11
Photographer	1	6
Physician/Surgeon	4	4
Plumber	7	6
Printer	5	4
Public House	56	56
Shop (Other)	98	161
Solicitor	7	6
Tailor	9	11
Theatre	1	1
Tobacconist	18	17
Toy Seller	3	1
Undertaker	1	1
Vet	1	1
Watch Maker	0	1

Sources: *Kelly's Directory for Staffordshire, 1912* (London: Kelly & Co., 1912);
Kelly's Directory for Staffordshire, 1916 (London: Kelly & Co., 1916)

APPENDIX 6: ILLUSTRATIONS AND PHOTOGRAPHS

1. Wednesbury Market Place, after 1911

Source: <http://www.localhistory.scit.wlv.ac.uk/articles/Wednesbury/Industry.htm>.



2. Workers at the South Staffordshire Patent tube works, Wednesbury

Source: F.W. Hackwood, *Wednesbury Faces, Places and Industries* (Wednesbury: Robert Ryder, 1897), p. 81.



3. The 'Pit Bank Wenches' of Wednesbury

Source: F.W. Hackwood, *Wednesbury Faces, Places and Industries*
(Wednesbury: Robert Ryder, 1897), p. 29.

THE PATENT SHAFT & AXLETREE CO.,
LIMITED
WEDNESBURY.
BRUNSWICK, OLD PARK, & MONWAY IRON & STEEL WORKS.
Coal and Ironmasters, Engineers and Ironfounders ;

MANUFACTURERS OF
RAILWAY WHEELS & AXLES, TURNABLES, WROUGHT, CAST-IRON, & STEEL BRIDGES, ROOFS, TANKS,
BOILERS, SWITCHES & CROSSINGS, CRANES, & OTHER RAILWAY MATERIAL, MALLET'S
BUCKLED PLATES, FORGE & FURNACE CASTINGS, ROLLS, &c.
BESSEMER STEEL, BRUNSWICK CAST STEEL, OPEN-HEARTH STEEL, & IRON RAILWAY TYRES,
AXLES, RAILS, FORGINGS, & USES.
Open Hearth Steel Castings, &c., Rivet Steel, Bar, Boiler-Plate, Chequered-Plate, Angle, Tee, and all kinds of Rolled and
Hammered Iron and Steel.

BESSEMER, SIEMENS & BASIC, BLOOMS, SLABS, BILLETS, &c.
Round Rolled Bars up to 6½in. diameter. Square Rolled Bars up to 5in. square.
Flat Rolled Bars up to 13½in. wide.

Principal Brands { PLATES, ANGLES, TEES, CHANNELS, & BARS, L. F. & CO.,
BRUNSWICK.
BESSEMER STEEL TYRES, AXLES, &c.—"P. S. & A. CO."
BRUNSWICK CAST STEEL, do. do. —"BRUNSWICK CAST STEEL."

Head Office:
BRUNSWICK WORKS.

4. Pre-war advertisement for the Patent Shaft & Axletree Co. Ltd.

Source: <http://www.localhistory.scit.wlv.ac.uk/articles/Wednesbury/Industry.htm>.


ESTABLISHED 1811.

JOHN RUSSELL & CO. LIMITED,
 Manufacturers of all kinds of
WROUGHT IRON TUBES AND FITTINGS,
 FOR
GAS, STEAM, WATER & HYDRAULIC PURPOSES,
 BLACK AND GALVANIZED,
 COLD-DRAWN AND HOT-DRAWN WELDLESS
 STEEL TUBES,
 AND
LAPWELDED IRON AND STEEL TUBES,
 FOR
LOCOMOTIVE, WATER-TUBE AND MARINE BOILERS.
SUPERHEATERS for Locomotive & Marine Boilers.
CONDUIT TUBES & FITTINGS FOR ELECTRIC WIRING,
OIL PIPE LINES, BORING, CASING, AND OTHER
WELL TUBES.
HIGH-PRESSURE STEAM MAINS
 FOR
ELECTRIC POWER INSTALLATIONS,
PUMPING PLANTS, AND BOILER HOUSES,
TUBES WITH LOOSE OR FIXED FLANGE JOINTS.
INSERTED LEAD JOINTS,
FLUSH JOINTS.
BORING RODS, STEEL DRIVING CAPS, SHOES, &c.
CAST IRON PIPES AND VALVES.
COILS ANY LENGTH OR DESCRIPTION,
 FOR HEATING, REFRIGERATING, &c.
 Telegraph and Electric Tramway Poles.
 Railway Point Rods. - Tubes for Heating.
BRASS, STEAM, WATER, AND GAS FITTINGS.
CHANDELIERS, ELECTROLIERS, BRACKETS, ETC., FOR
INVERTED, INCANDESCENT, ACETYLENE & ELECTRIC LIGHTING.

5. Pre-war advertisement for John Russell & Co. Ltd.
 Source: *Ryder's Annual*, 1907.



6. Frontage of the Old Patent tube works of John Russell & Co. Ltd.
 Now part of the entrance to the Black Country Museum.
 Source: Photograph by the author.


JAMES RUSSELL & SONS, Ltd.
 INVENTORS AND FIRST MANUFACTURERS OF
GAS TUBING,
 PATENTEES AND MANUFACTURERS OF
LAP WELDED, LOCOMOTIVE, AND MARINE BOILER TUBES,
Crown Tube Works, Wednesbury.

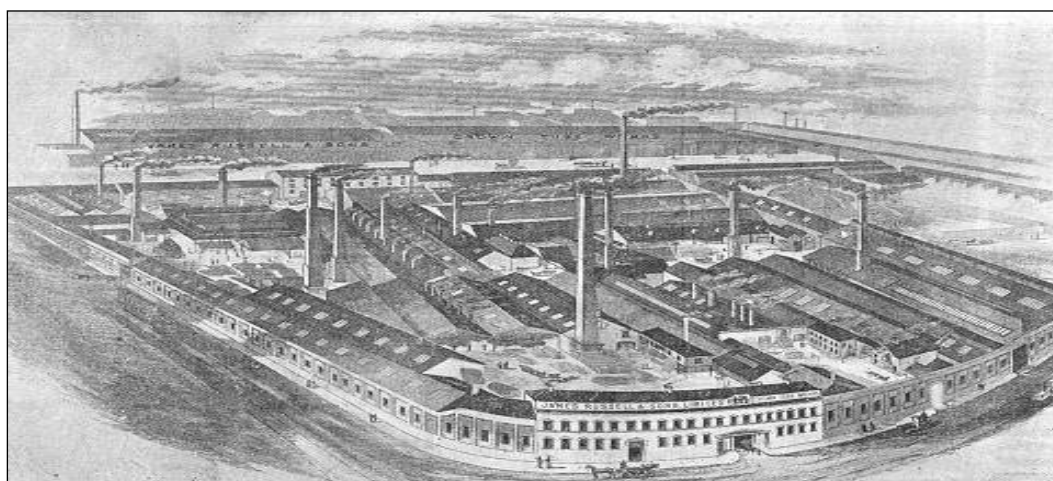
WAREHOUSES—

LONDON—108, Southwark Street. LEED—56, Mark Lane, Briggate.	BIRMINGHAM—114, Colmore Row. MANCHESTER—33, King St. West.
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1853—United States, Honourable Mention. 1855—Paris, Medal. 1862—London, Medal. 1865—Cologne, Gold Medal. 1868—Dudley, Medal.	1867—Paris, Medal. 1867—Turin, Honourable Mention. 1868—Havre, Diploma D'Honneur. 1873—Vienna, Medal—Progress. 1881—Melbourne, Five Silver Medals.
--	--

Boiler Tubes, Iron and Steel, of every description.
Brass and Gun Metal Fittings of all kinds, for Gas, Steam, Water, Hydraulic and other purposes.
Coils, plain and tapered, for Heating and Refrigerating purposes.
Core Bars, plain, drilled, and tapered.
Gas, Steam and Water Tubes, of all sizes, and **Fittings** to correspond.
Hydraulic Tubes and Fittings, of any size, proved from 4,000 to 12,000 lbs. per square inch.
Railway Point and Signal Rods.
Reservoirs for Railway Carriage Gas Lighting, and other purposes.
Roller Tubes, for Looms and Machinery.
Stocks, Dies, and Taps, of Whitworth's Standard Thread for Gas Tubes; ditto ditto for Bolts and Nuts for Engineering work; Whitworth's Patent Guide Stocks and Dies for Tubes and Bolts; also other Tools for Engineers, Gas Fitters and Smiths' use.
Telegraph, Tramway, and Electric Light Tapered Poles, up to 35 feet, Buttwelded, in one length.
 Ditto, ditto, ditto, in 3 sections lapwelded.
Tubes, for Heating and Superheating Apparatus.
Tubes, for Well Boring, suitable for lining and driving purposes.
SPECIALITY.—Large Mains in Iron or Steel, for Steam, Gas or Water, rolled, up to 24 inches diameter.
PRICES FORWARDED ON APPLICATION.

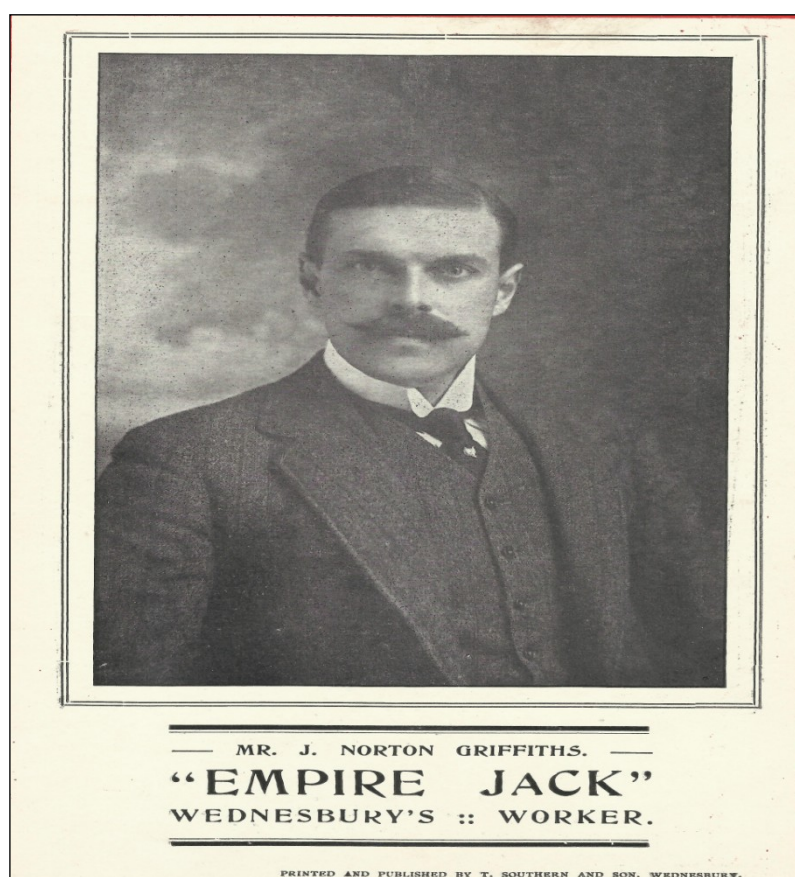
7. Pre-war advertisement for James Russell & Sons Crown tube works
 Source: *Ryder's Annual*, 1907.



8. James Russell & Sons Crown tube works
 Source: F.W. Hackwood,
 (Wednesbury: Robert Ryder, 1897), p. 69.



9. James Russell & Sons Crown tube works
Source: Ian Bott, Private Collection.



10. John Norton Griffiths, MP for Wednesbury, 1910-1918
Source: Peter Knowles, Private Collection.



11. Striking workers leaving Wednesbury to picket in another town –
The 1913 Black Country Strike, Wednesbury
Source: *Ryders Annual*, 1914.



12. Striking workers accompanied by band of musicians –
The 1913 Black Country Strike, Wednesbury
Source: *Ryders Annual*, 1914.



13. Striking workers leaving Wednesbury to picket in another town –
The 1913 Black Country Strike, Wednesbury
Source: Ian Bott, Private Collection.



14. The 1913 Black Country Strike, Wednesbury
Source: Ian Bott, Private Collection.



15. Meeting in the Market Place - Tom Mann (seated with coat over shoulder)
waiting to address crowd – The 1913 Black Country Strike, Wednesbury
Source: *Ryders Annual*, 1914.



16. Workers in Wednesbury Market Place for handouts of free food –
The 1913 Black Country Strike, Wednesbury
Source: <http://www.localhistory.scit.wlv.ac.uk/articles/Wednesbury/Industry.htm>.



17. Children receive a meal at Mesty Croft, Wednesbury –
The 1913 Black Country Strike, Wednesbury
Source: Ian Bott, Private Collection.



18. Children receive a meal at the Old Park Hotel, Wednesbury –
The 1913 Black Country Strike, Wednesbury
Source: Ian Bott, Private Collection.



19. Children receive a meal at the Fountain Inn, Wednesbury –
The 1913 Black Country Strike, Wednesbury
Source: David Worley Private Collection.



20. Wives and Children queuing for bread in Wednesbury –
The 1913 Black Country Strike, Wednesbury
Source: <http://www.localhistory.scit.wlv.ac.uk/articles/Wednesbury/Industry.htm>.



21. Brays Fish Fryers distributing free fish in Wednesbury –
The 1913 Black Country Strike, Wednesbury
Source: Ian Bott, Private Collection.



22. Advertising the benefit concert at the Palace Theatre, Wednesbury –
The 1913 Black Country Strike, Wednesbury
Source: Ian Bott, Private Collection.



23. Demonstration outside of works, Walsall –
The 1913 Black Country Strike, Wednesbury
Source: Ian Bott, Private Collection.



24. Coventry Workers give their support to the strike –
The 1913 Black Country Strike, Wednesbury
Source: Centre for Modern Records, University of Warwick.



25. Personalities of the 1913 Black Country strike –
(1) Workers' Union Organizer, Julia Varley (when imprisoned in 1907 for activities as a suffragette);
(2) Workers' Union Organizer, John Beard;
(3) Board of Trade Chief Industrial Commissioner, Sir George (later Lord) Askwith



**IS
YOUR
NAME
on a
ROLL
of
HONOUR
?**

IF YOUR NAME goes down on your firm's Roll of Honour, it also goes on that mighty Scroll which records the names of all who have rallied round the Flag.

There is room for your name on the Roll of Honour.

Ask your employer to keep your position open for you. Tell him that you are going to the help of the Empire. Every patriotic employer is assisting his men to enlist, and he'll do the right thing by you.

Tell him NOW—

**Your King and Country
Want you—TO-DAY.**

At any Post Office you can obtain the address of the nearest Recruiting Officer.

GOD SAVE THE KING.

5 Questions to men who have not enlisted

1. **I**F you are physically fit and between 19 and 38 years of age, are you really satisfied with what you are doing to-day?
2. Do you feel happy as you walk along the streets and see other men wearing the King's uniform?
3. What will you say in years to come when people ask you—
"Where did you serve in the great War?"
4. What will you answer when your children grow up, and say, "Father, why weren't you a soldier, too?"
5. What would happen to the Empire if every man stayed at home like you?

Your King and Country Need You.

ENLIST TO-DAY.

At any Post Office you can obtain the address of the nearest Recruiting Office.

God Save the King.

26. Recruitment advertisement in the local press

Source: *Wednesbury Herald*, 15 January 1915

Source: *Wednesbury Herald*, 23 January 1915

The WAR

FOUR QUESTIONS TO EMPLOYERS

1. **A**S an employer have you seen that every fit man under your control has been given every opportunity of enlisting?
2. Have you encouraged your men to enlist by offering to keep their positions open?
3. Have you offered to help them in any other way if they will serve their country?
4. Have you any men still in your employ who ought to enlist?

Our present prosperity is largely due to the men already in the field, but to maintain it and to end the War we must have more men. Your country will appreciate the help you give.

More men are wanted——

TO-DAY

What can you do?

GOD SAVE THE KING.

YOUNG MEN!

ATTENTION!!

GREAT

RECRUITING RALLY!

Officers and Men of the 2/5th South
Staffordshire Regiment will march
accompanied by Military Band, through
Wednesbury,

TO-DAY (Saturday), May 15th.

MEN OF WEDNESBURY!

Your King and Country need you **NOW.**

27. Recruitment advertisement in the local press

Source: *Wednesbury Herald*, 30 January 1915

Source: *Wednesbury Herald*, 15 May 1915

TERRITORIAL FORCE.
5th (Reserves) South Staffs. Regt.
WANTED IMMEDIATELY,
100
SMART PATRIOTIC YOUNG MEN,
 Aged between 19 and 35, to join the "H"
 Wednesbury Company of the above Battalion
 for service abroad.
 Height 5ft. 3in. Chest measurement 33in.
 Usual Pay and Allowances.
 Apply at once to THE MAYOR, Mayor's
 Parlour, Wednesbury, from 10 a.m. to 8 p.m.
 This is an exceptional opportunity to join
 the local Company and serve your Country
 with your own townsmen.

28. Recruitment for the Fifth Battalion, South Staffordshire Regiment
 Source: *Wednesbury Herald*, 3 October 1914.

BOROUGH OF WEDNESBURY.
A GREAT
PATRIOTIC MEETING
 will be held in the
TOWN HALL, WEDNESBURY.
On Wednesday, the 4th August, 1915.
At Eight o'clock.
 When the following resolution will be
 submitted :—
 "That on this Anniversary of the Declaration
 of a Eighteen War, this Meeting of the
 Citizens of Wednesbury records its inexti-
 nishable determination to continue to a victorious
 end the struggle in maintenance of those
 ideals of Liberty and Justice which are the
 common and sacred cause of the Allies."
 I earnestly invite all Sections of the Com-
 munity to make a special effort to attend this
 important meeting.
NAT BISHOP.
 Mayor.

29. Notice in the local press for a patriotic meeting in Wednesbury
 Source: *Wednesbury Herald*, 31 Jul 1915.

1,500 M HW V W 13090-4672 Army Form W. 3194.
 Name Joseph J. Bailey No. 1144
 Address Rossdale Wharf date St
Wednesbury
 Group Number 11
 Date of Attestation 15th July 1916
 The above-named man has been attested and transferred to the Army Reserve,
 until required for service, when he will be sent a Notice Paper, informing him as
 to the date, time and place at which he is to report himself. Fourteen days' notice
 will be given.
 N.B.—Any change of address should be immediately notified to the Recruiting
 Officer.
 Officer Edgell Station Wednesbury Signature [Signature]
WEDNESBURY Date 15th July Rank Private

30. Example of an Attestation Form
 Source: Ian Bott, Private Collection.

38

This is to Certify that
 (a) Harold Booth
 (b) Labourer
 (c) of 23 Pritchard Street
Wednesbury Staffs
 has been Registered under the
NATIONAL REGISTRATION
ACT, 1915.
 Signature } H Booth
 Holder.
GOD SAVE THE KING.
 (a) Name (b) Occupation (c) Postal Address

BOROUGH OF WEDNESBURY
 TOWN CLERK

31. Example of a Derby Scheme Registration Form
 Source: Ian Bott, Private Collection.

WEDNESBURY *Group 3*
Army Form B. 2512.

6382 *Walsall*

SHORT SERVICE.

Duration of the War, with the Colours and in the Army Reserve)

Card No. *314/3*

ATTESTATION OF

No 3669 Name *John Millington* Corps *South Staffordshire*

Questions to be put to the Recruit before Enlistment.

1. What is your Name ... *John Millington*
2. What is your full Address? ... *97 Rucara, Wednesbury*
3. Are you a British Subject? ... *Yes*
4. What is your Age? ... *20* Months
5. What is your Trade or Calling? ... *Striker*
6. Are you Married? ... *No*
7. Have you ever served in any branch of His Majesty's Forces, naval or military, if so, which? ... *No*
8. Are you willing to be vaccinated or re-vaccinated? ... *Yes*
9. Are you willing to be enlisted for General Service? ... *Yes*
10. Did you receive a Notice, and do you understand its meaning, and who gave it to you? ... *Yes* Name *S. J. Cooper Sgt* Corps *South Staffordshire*
11. Are you willing to serve up on the following conditions provided His Majesty should so long require your services?
For the duration of the War, at the end of which you will be discharged with all convenient speed. You will be required to serve for one day with the Colours and the remainder of the period in the Army Reserve, in accordance with the provisions of the Royal Warrant dated 20th Oct., 1915, and such time as you may be called up by order of the Army Council. If employed with Hospitals, depots of Mounted Units, or as a Clerk, etc., you may be retained after the termination of hostilities until your services can be spared, but such retention shall in no case exceed six months.

John Millington do solemnly declare that the above answers made by me to the above questions are true, and that I am willing to fulfil the engagements made.

John Millington SIGNATURE OF RECRUIT.
S. J. Cooper Sgt Signature of Witness.

OATH TO BE TAKEN BY RECRUIT ON ATTESTATION.

John Millington swear by Almighty God, that I will be faithful and bear true Allegiance to His Majesty King George the Fifth, His Heirs, and Successors, and that I will, as my duty binds, honestly and faithfully defend His Majesty, His Heirs, and Successors, in Person, Crown, and Dignity against all enemies, and will observe and obey all orders of His Majesty, His Heirs and Successors, and of the Generals and Officers set over me. So help me God.

CERTIFICATE OF MAGISTRATE OR ATTESTING OFFICER.

The Recruit above named was questioned by me that if he made any false answer to any of the above questions he would be liable to be punished as provided in the Army Act.

The above questions were then read to the Recruit in my presence.

I have taken care that he understands each question, and that his answer to each question has been duly entered as verified to, and the said Recruit has made and signed the declaration and taken the oath before me at **WEDNESBURY** on this 14 day of DEC 1915 19.

Signature of the Justice *W. J. R. R/O*

† Certificate of Approving Officer.

I certify that this Attestation of the above-named Recruit is correct, and properly filled up, and that the required forms appear to have been completed with. I accordingly approve, and appoint him to the 1st *Division*.

If enlisted by special authority, Army Form B. 203 (or other authority for the enlistment) will be attached to the original attestation.

Date 17 AUG 1916 19
Place Lichfield

William Captain, *Adj. Insp.*, *South Staffordshire* Approving Officer.

(The signature of the Approving Officer is to be affixed in the presence of the Recruit.)
(Here insert the "Corps" for which the Recruit has been enlisted.)

* If so, the Recruit is to be asked the particulars of his former service, and to produce, if possible, his Certificate of Discharge and Certificate of Character, which should be returned to him immediately enclosed in red ink, as follows, viz:—(Form) _____ on the (Date) _____

32. Attestation Form for the Fifth Battalion, South Staffordshire Regiment.
(The man's occupation is given as 'Striker', which was a blacksmith's assistant,
i.e. the man who wielded the sledgehammer in heavy forging work.)

Source: www.Ancestry.co.uk



33. The South Staffordshire Regiment, Market Place, Wednesbury
Source: Ian Bott, Private Collection.



34. H Company, Fifth Battalion, South Staffordshire Regiment
Source: Ian Bott, Private Collection.



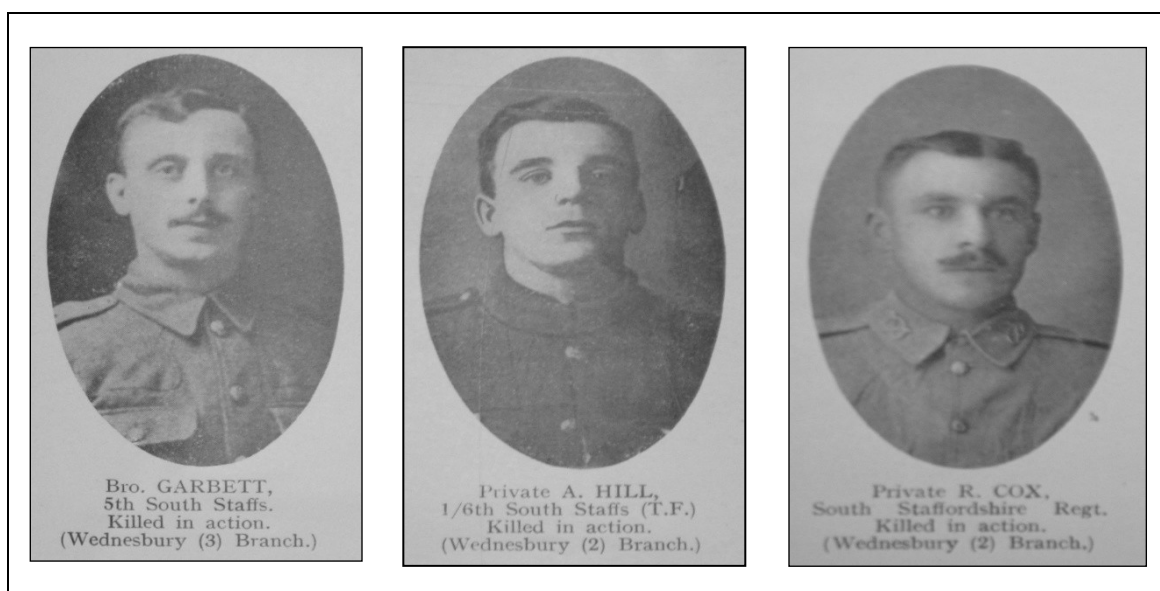
35. Wednesbury soldiers of the South Staffordshire Regiment
Source: Ian Bott, Private Collection.



36. Parade of the Wednesbury Volunteer Training Corps
Source: Ian Bott, Private Collection.



37. Member of the Wednesbury VTC and VTC cap badge (featuring the fighting cock symbol)
Source: Vic Vayro, Private Collection.



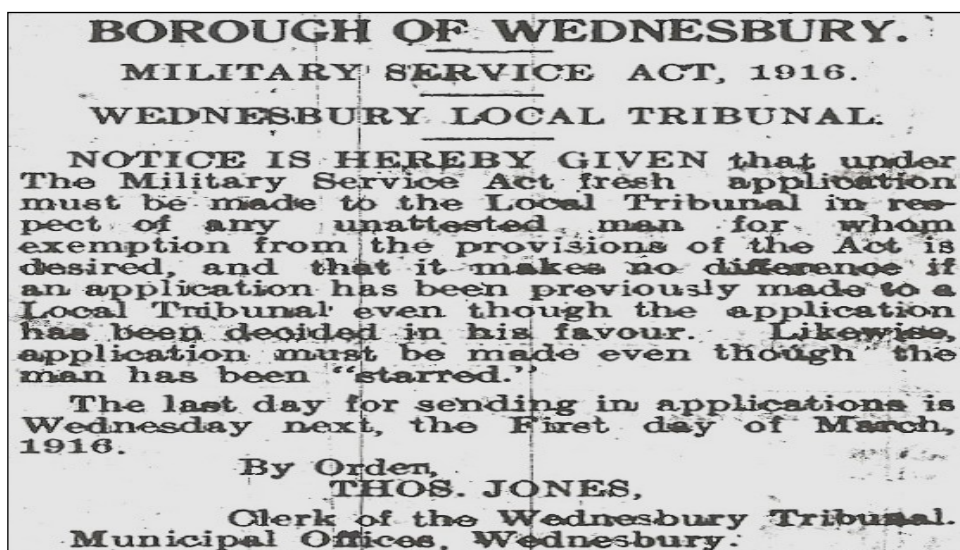
38. Three Wednesbury soldiers, who were pre-war trade unionists, and were killed in action in 1915
 Their photographs form part of the Roll of Honour in the Workers' Union Annual Report, 1915
 Source: Centre for Modern Records, University of Warwick, MSS.126/WU/4/1/10.



39. Victoria Cross recipient Sergeant Joseph Davies was born in Tipton and resided at 48 Cross Street, Wednesbury. He is receiving a public welcome on his arrival at Wednesbury. In the group are the Mayor and Mayoress of Wednesbury (Councillor and Mrs W. Warner), the mother and grandmother of Sergeant Davies, and Alderman John Ashley Kilvert JP, a veteran of the Battle of Balaclava.
 Source: *Birmingham Gazette*, 21 October 1916.



40. Following the breaking of the Hindenburg Line, Brigadier General J V Campbell, VC, addressing the men of the 137th (Staffordshire) Brigade, a part of the 46th Division, and which included the 1/5th Battalion, South Staffordshire Regiment, at the St. Quentin Canal.
Source: *Walsall Chronicle No. 8 - Walsall at War* (Walsall: Walsall Local History Centre, 1998), p. 7.



41. Notice in the local press – Wednesbury Local Tribunal
Source: *Midland Advertiser*, 26 February 1916.



42. On War Service' lapel badge and authentication document for Munitions Worker, Wednesbury
Source: Ian Bott, Private Collection.

Silver War Badge and Certificate of Entitlement
Source: www.iwm.org.uk.



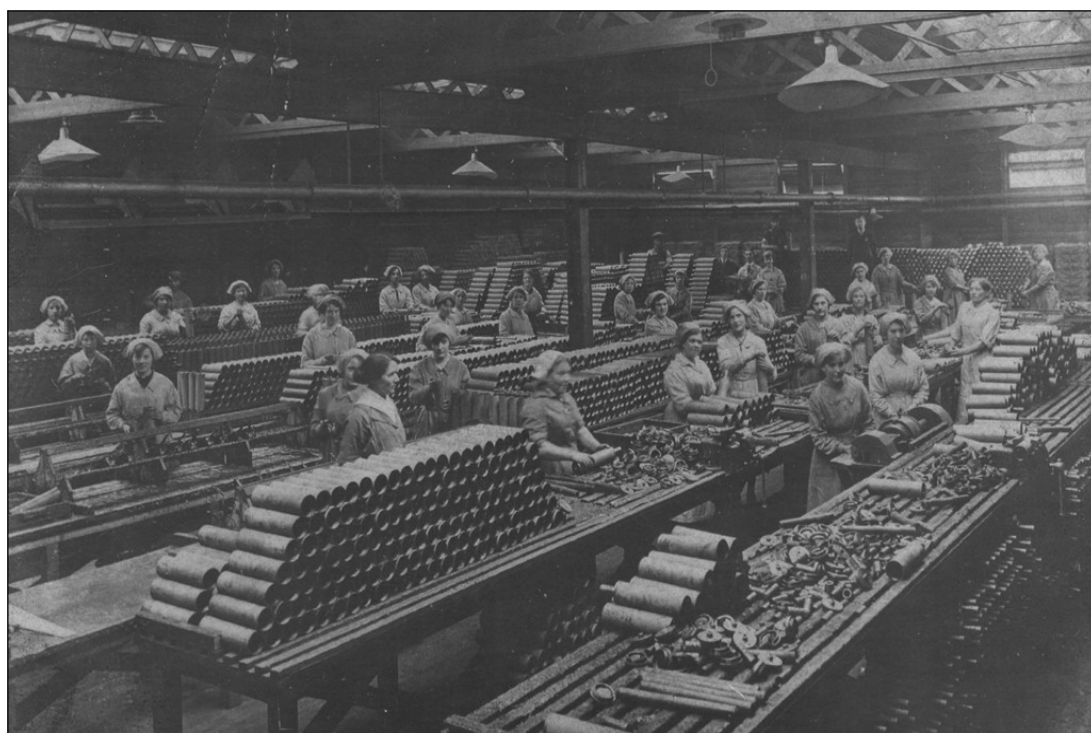
43. The Munitions Department, Samuel Platt's Foundry, Wednesbury, 1915
Source: Ian Bott, Private Collection.



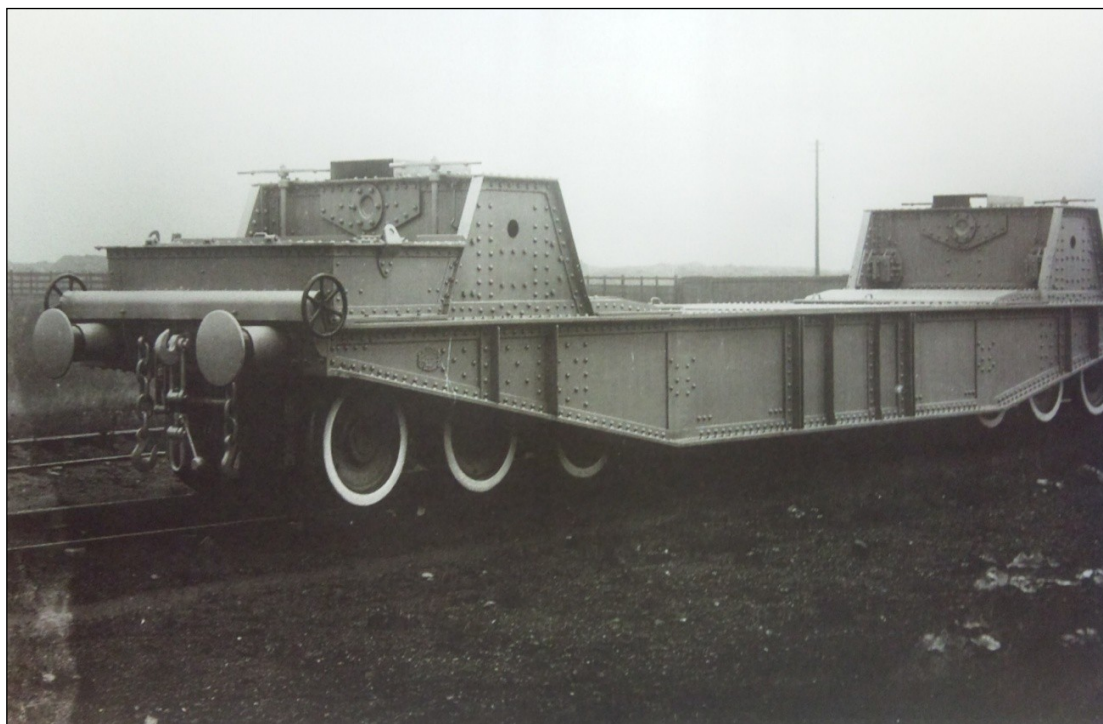
44. Women War Workers at Wednesbury in 1917
Source: Ian Bott, Private Collection.



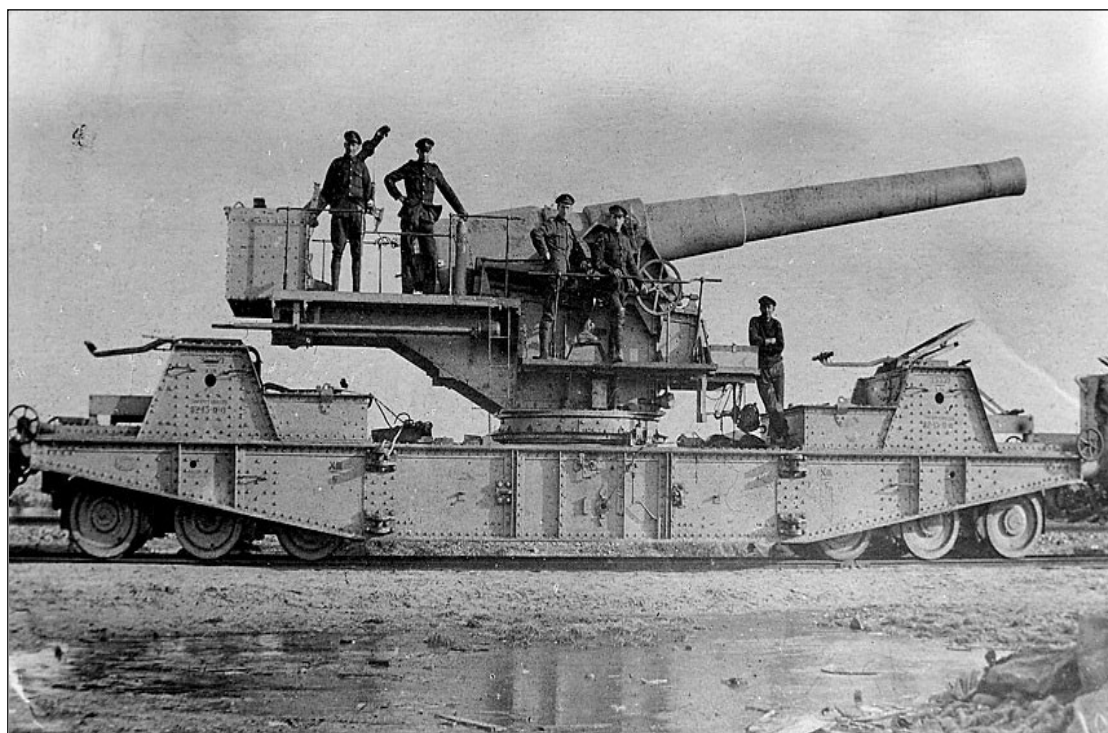
45. Women Munitions Workers, the Globe works of John Spencer Ltd., Wednesbury
Source: David Worley, Private Collection.



46. Artillery shell production, the Globe works of John Spencer Ltd., Wednesbury
Source: David Worley, Private Collection.



47. Railway chassis constructed at the Old Park works, Wednesbury
Source: Sandwell Community History and Archive Service.



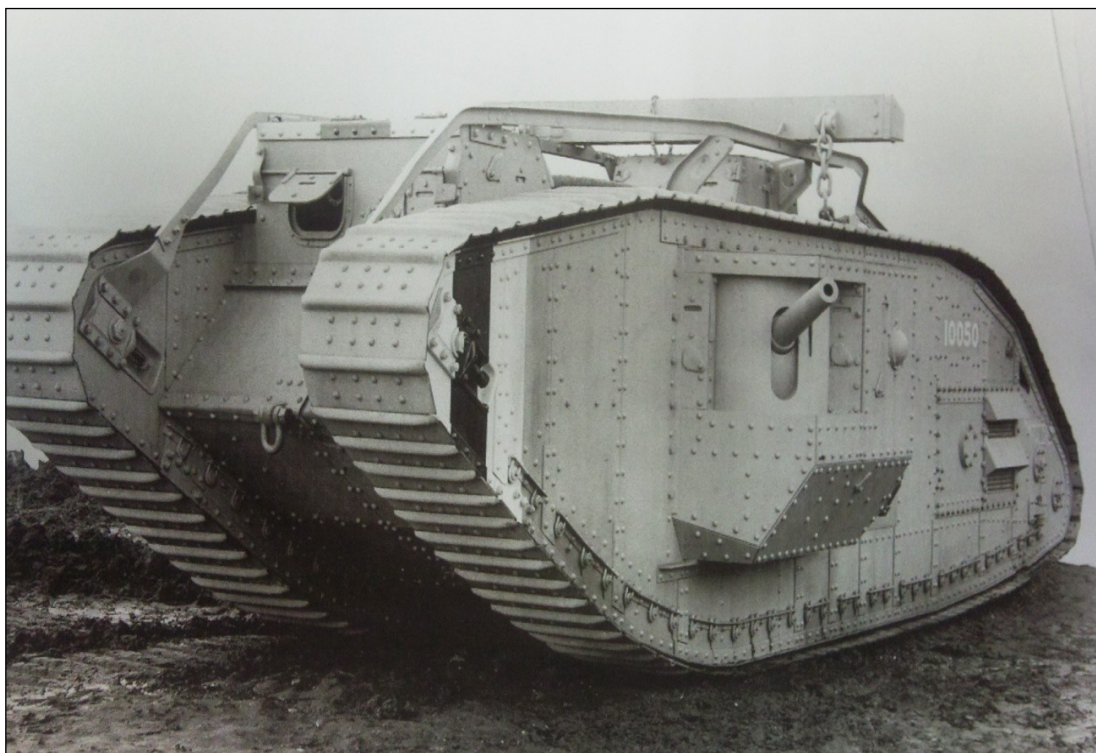
48. Railway chassis constructed at the Old Park works, Wednesbury with 12-inch naval gun mounted
Source: Sandwell Community History and Archive Service.



49. Mark I 'Male' Tank, which saw service in September 1916
 © IWM (Q 2486) <http://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/205194947>



50. Mark II Tank under construction, winter 1916/1917.
 Source: K. Beddoes and C & S Wheeler, *Metro-Cammell: 150 Years of Craftsmanship*
 (Huddersfield: Runpast Publishing, 1999), p. 28.



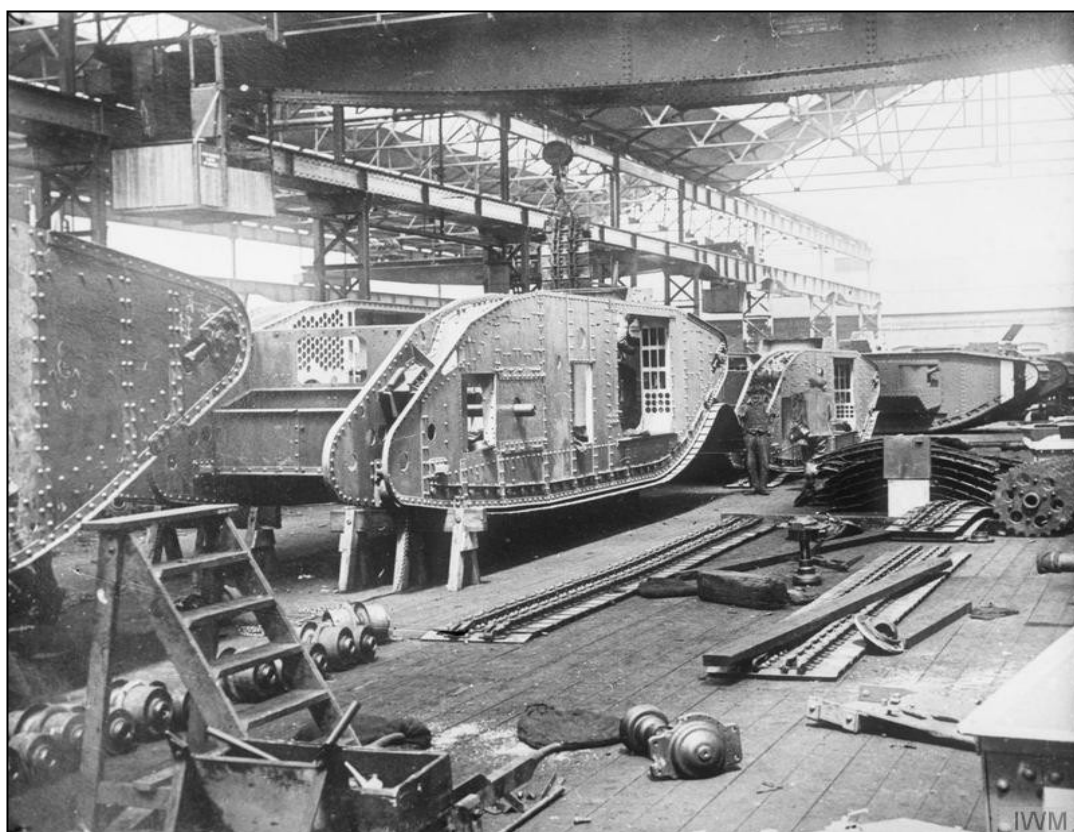
51. Mark IV 'Male' Tank, constructed at the Old Park works, Wednesbury, 1917
Source: Sandwell Community History and Archive Service.



52. Mark IV Tanks, constructed at the Old Park works, Wednesbury
Source: Sandwell Community History and Archive Service.



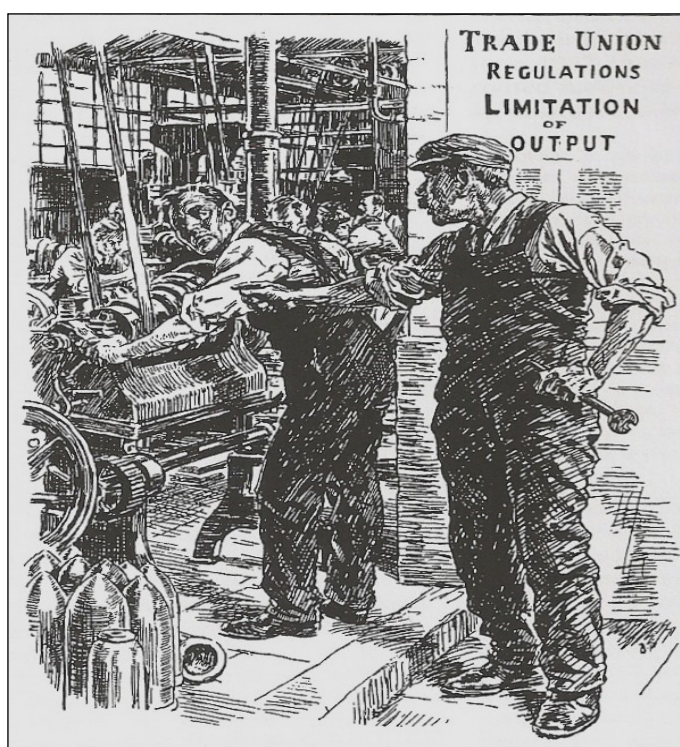
53. Mark V Double Star Tank constructed at the Old Park works, Wednesbury.
Source: Sandwell Community History and Archive Service.



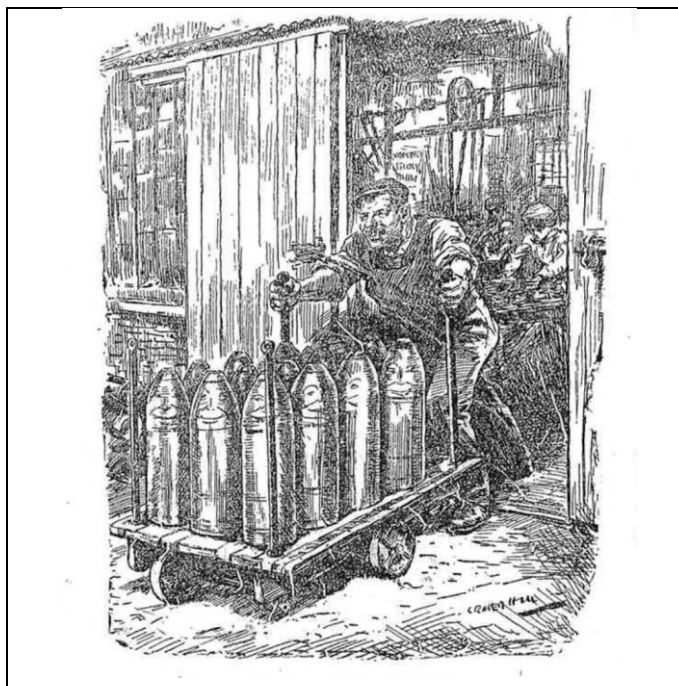
54. Mark V Tanks under construction
© IWM (Q 14520) <http://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/205249622>



55. Caption Reads: SOLDIERS ALL –
Tommy (home from the front, to disaffected workman):
‘What would you think o’ me, mate, if I struck for extra pay in the middle of an action? Well, that’s what you’ve been doing’.
Source: *Midland Counties Express*, 13 March 1915.



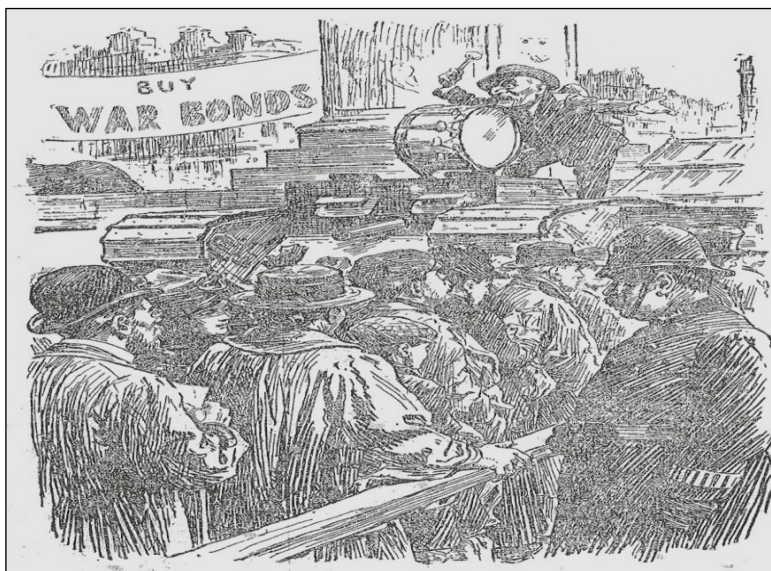
56. Caption Reads: THE LAST WORD –
First Worker: ‘Look here mate, you’re working too hard. You’re a traitor to your union’.
Second Ditto: ‘Well I’d sooner be that than a traitor to my country’.
Source: *Midland Counties Express*, 25 September 1915.



57. Caption Reads: THE BIG PUSH –
Munitions Worker: 'Well I'm not taking a holiday myself just yet,
but I'm sending these kids of mine for a little trip to the Continent'
Source: *Midland Counties Express*, 5 August 1916.



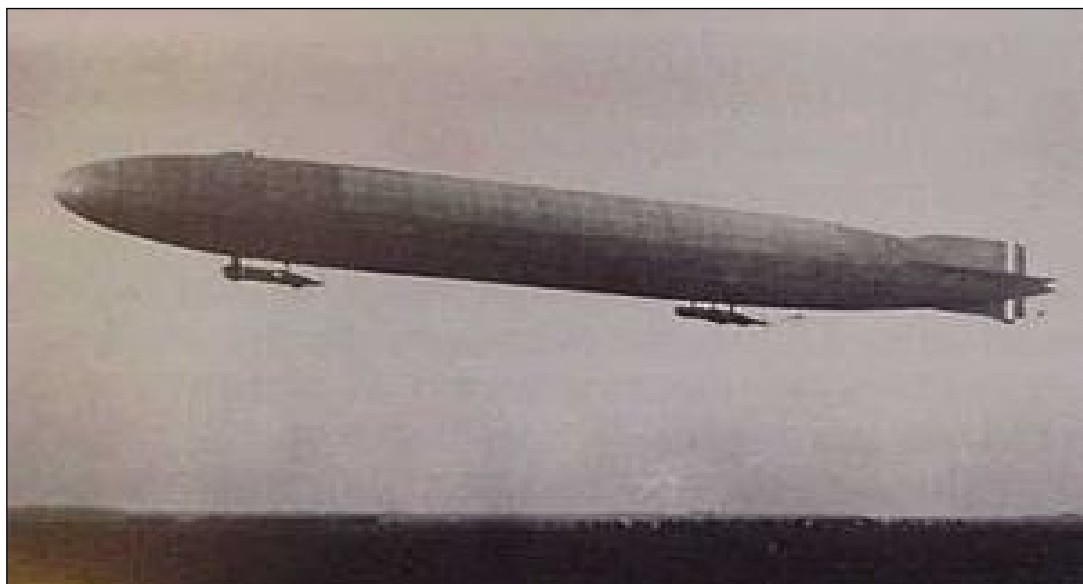
58. Caption Reads: FOR SERVICES RENDERED –
A German decoration for British strikers
Source: *Midland Counties Express*, 26 May 1917.



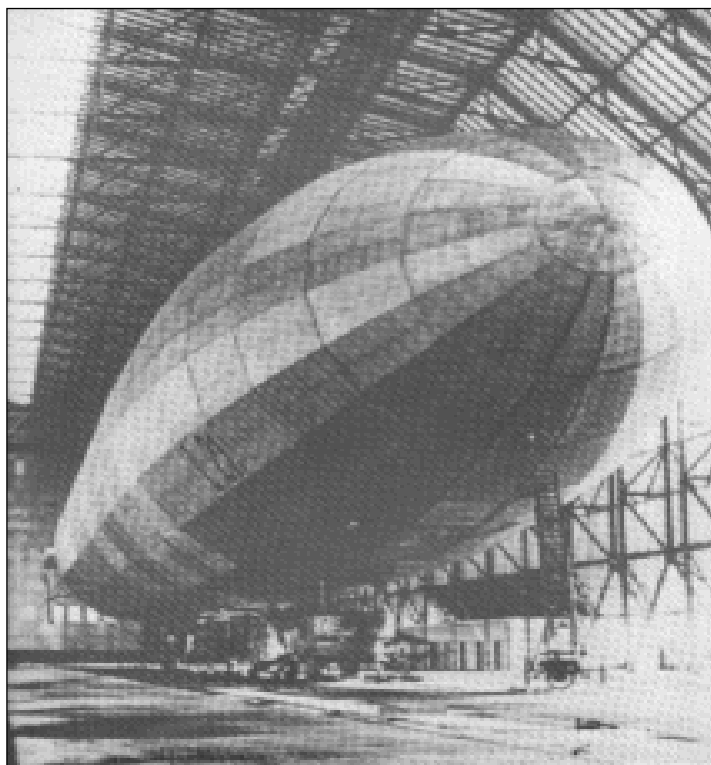
59. Caption Reads: THE RIGHT KIND OF QUEUE
Source: *Midland Counties Express*, 9 March 1918.



60. Caption Reads: THE TRAITOR
Source: *Midland Counties Express*, 5 October 1918.



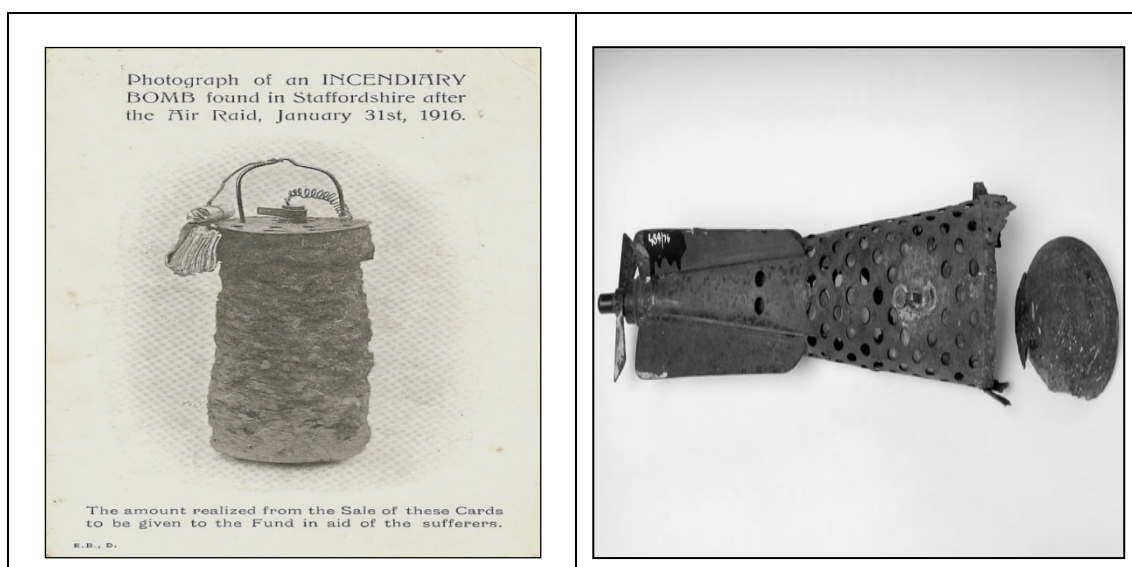
61. Zeppelin L19 and its commander, Kapitänleutnant Odo Loewe
Source: <http://www.zeppelin-museum.dk>



62. Zeppelin L21 and its commander, Kapitänleutnant Max Dietrich
Source: <http://www.zeppelin-museum.dk>



63. Air raid damage to buildings in King Street, Wednesbury, 31 January 1916
Sources: R. Pearson, *Tipton, Wednesbury and Darlaston in Old Photographs* (Gloucester: Alan Sutton Publishing, 1989), p. 114; T. Fegan, T., *The Baby Killers: German Air Raids on Britain in the First World War* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword Books, 2002), p. 26.



64. Incendiary bomb and fragment of high explosive bomb
Sources: Andrew Thornton, Private Collection and *Express and Star*.



65. The 2012 Monument to the 13 air raid victims, Wednesbury Cemetery
(Source: Photograph by the author). The names on the monument are:
Matilda Mary Burt (Aged 10) (40 Dale Street, Wednesbury)
Mary Emma Evans (Aged 5) (High Bullen, Wednesbury)
Rachel Higgs (Aged 36) (13 King Street, Wednesbury)
Susan Howells (Aged 30) (12 King Street, Wednesbury)
Mary Ann Lee (Aged 59) (13 King Street, Wednesbury)
Francis Thomas Linney (Aged 36) (12 Perry Street, Wednesbury)
Albert Gordon Madeley (Aged 21) (48 Great Western Street, Wednesbury)
Betsy Shilton (Aged 39) (13 King Street, Wednesbury)
Edward Shilton (Aged 33) (13 King Street, Wednesbury)
Ina Smith (Aged 7) (14 King Street, Wednesbury)
Joseph Horton Smith (Aged 37) (14 King Street, Wednesbury)
Nellie Smith (Aged 13) (14 King Street, Wednesbury)
Thomas Horton Smith (Aged 11) (14 King Street, Wednesbury)

MINISTRY OF FOOD.
NATIONAL RATION BOOK (B).

INSTRUCTIONS.

Read carefully these instructions and the leaflet which will be sent you with this Book.

1. The person named on the reference leaf as the holder of this ration book must write his name and address in the space below, and must write his name and address, and the serial number (printed upside down on the back cover) in the space provided to the left of each page of coupons.

Food Office of } *WEDNESBURY* Date *Nov 1918*
Issue }

Signature of Holder *Joseph South*

Address *Rusdale & Hardedale St*

2. For convenience of writing at the Food Office the Reference Leaf has been put opposite the back cover, and has purposely been printed upside down. It should be carefully examined. If there is any mistake in the entries on the Reference Leaf, the Food Office should be asked to correct it.


3. The holder must register this book at once by getting his retailers for butcher's meat, bacon, butter and margarine, sugar and tea respectively, to write their names and the addresses of their shops in the proper space on the back of the cover. Persons staying in hotels, boarding houses, hostels, schools, and similar establishments should not register their books until they leave the establishment.

4. The ration book may be used only by or on behalf of the holder, to buy rationed food for him, or members of the same household, or guests sharing common meals. It may not be used to buy rationed food for any other persons.

N. 2 (Nov.) *29/11/18* (Continued on next page.)

IF FOUND, RETURN TO ANY FOOD OFFICE.

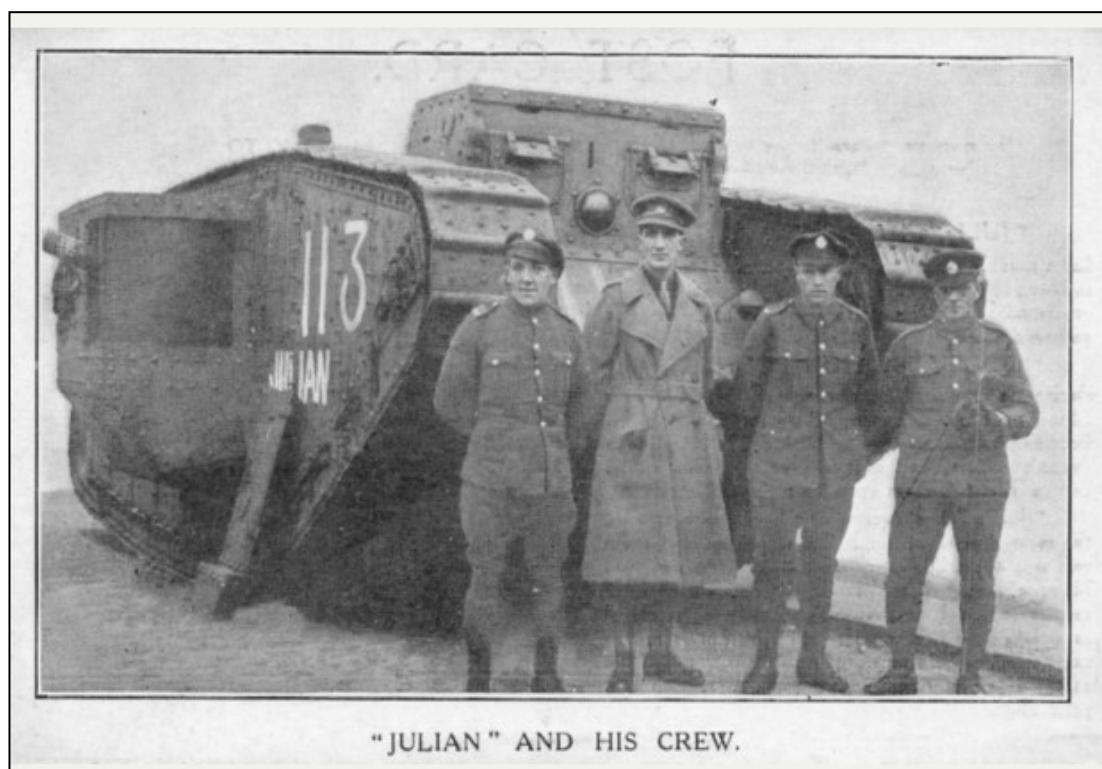
66. Example of a ration book for 1918
Source: Ian Bott, Private Collection.



The TANK
will come to WALSALL
ON
Monday next
Get ready now
to make
WALSALL'S
TOTAL
something to be proud of.

Every inhabitant of WALSALL and district should buy National War Bonds or War Savings Certificates from the Tank next week. You can buy a War Savings Certificate for 15/6 or a National War Bond for £5 or £5,000 or any amount in between.

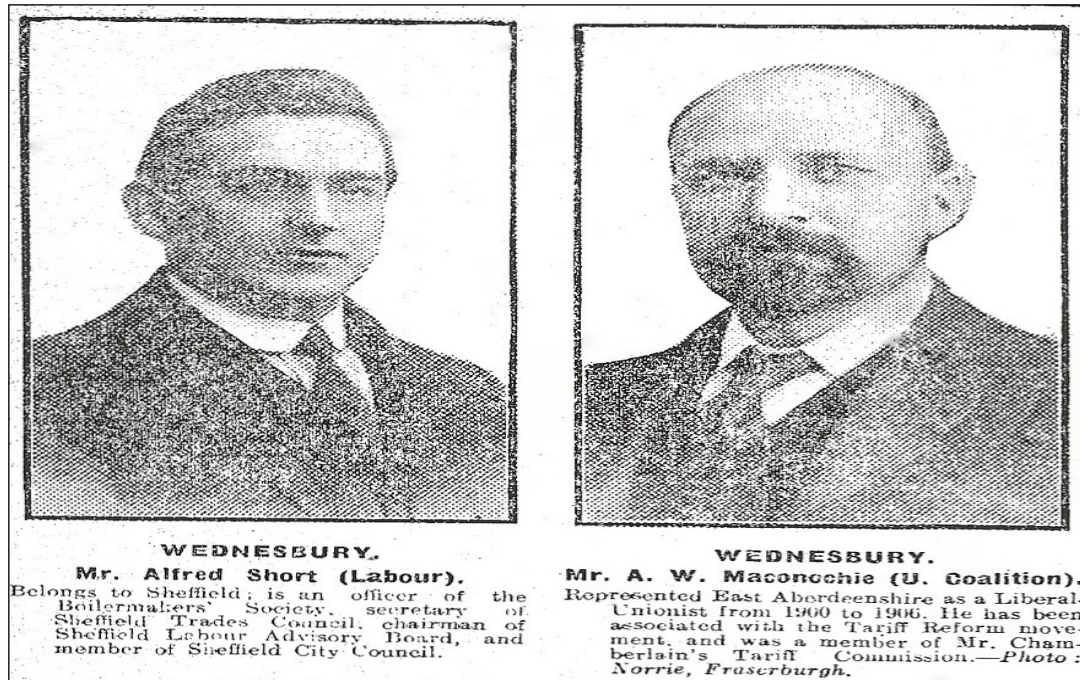
67. Notice in the local press for War Bonds
Source: *Midland Advertiser*, 23 March 1918.



68. The tank 'Julian' and his crew, and outside Walsall Town Hall.
Source: www.blackcountrybugle.co.uk.



69. War Savings Certificates
Source: www.blackcountrybugle.co.uk.



70. Two of the candidates in the 1918 general election
Source: *Midland Counties Express*, 7 December 1918.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

The bibliography is organized as follows:

1 Primary sources: Manuscript sources

- 1.1 The National Archives of the United Kingdom, Kew, Surrey
- 1.2 Labour History Archive and Study Centre, People's History Museum, Manchester
- 1.3 Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick, West Midlands
- 1.4 Sandwell Community History and Archive Service, Smethwick, West Midlands
- 1.5 Staffordshire County Record Office, Stafford, Staffordshire
- 1.6 Walsall Local History Centre, Walsall, West Midlands
- 1.7 Miscellaneous documents from private collections

2 Primary sources: Printed sources

- 2.1 Contemporary printed sources
- 2.2 Official printed records
- 2.3 Contemporary newspapers and periodicals

3 Secondary sources

- 3.1 Published books
- 3.2 Published articles in books
- 3.3 Published articles in journals
- 3.4 Unpublished theses
- 3.5 Miscellaneous reference works
- 3.6 Websites
- 3.7 Audio-visual media

1 Primary sources: Manuscript sources

1.1 The National Archives of the United Kingdom, Kew, Surrey

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AIR 1/604/16/15/238: Unfortified places attacked by German Zeppelins.

AIR 1/1269/204/9/86: Precautions against Zeppelin raids.

AIR 1/2123/207/73/5: Air raids on Britain, 1 January 1916 – 28 February 1916.

CAB 24/4: Pacifist Propaganda.

CAB 24/21: War Cabinet Memoranda: Strike action at Crown tube works, Wednesbury over refusal to reinstate ex-employee discharged from Army.

CAB 24/22: War Cabinet Memoranda: Strike action at Crown tube works, Wednesbury over refusal to reinstate ex-employee discharged from Army.

CAB 24/29: The Labour Situation: Report from the Ministry of Labour, October 1917.

CAB 24/31: The Labour Situation: Report from the Ministry of Labour, November 1917.

CAB 24/42: The Labour Situation: Report from the Ministry of Labour, February 1918.

CAB 24/57: The Labour Situation: Report from the Ministry of Labour, July 1918.

CAB 24/58: War Cabinet Memoranda: Labour position in Munitions Industries, 1918.

CAB 24/65: War Cabinet Memoranda: The Labour situation, 1918.

CAB 24/66: The Labour Situation: Report from the Ministry of Labour, October 1918.

CAB 37/129/31: Speech delivered by the Minister of Munitions to representatives of the Trades Unions on the supply of munitions, 1915.

CAB 37/129/33: Acceleration of the Supply of Munitions: Memorandum of the National Advisory Committee, 1915.

FO 383/182: Loss of German airship L19 in the North Sea.

HO 45/10685/224596: Trade Unions and the Trade Disputes Bill 1912.

HO 45/10706/239811: Strikes - Labour Unrest at Darlaston and Wednesbury, 1913.

LAB 2/40/IC2473/1915: Arbitration Award - Edward Pugh & Co., Wednesbury v Amalgamated Society of Gas, Municipal & General Workers.

LAB 2/194/IC3420/1916: Arbitration Award - James Russell & Sons, Wednesbury v Workers' Union.

LAB 2/194/IC3420/1916: Arbitration Award - Isaiah Oldbury & Co., Wednesbury v National Union of General Workers.

MUN 3/59: Supply of Stokes Bombs - Steel Nut & Joseph Hampton Ltd., Wednesbury.

MUN 4/4175: Negotiations with the Metropolitan Railway Carriage, Wagon & Finance Co. Ltd. for a contract for tanks.

MUN 5/10/180/17: Minutes of a Conference between Government and Trade Union Representatives on the Mobilization of War Industries, 1915.

MUN 5/10/180/26: Memorandum and Agreement made with Trade Unions on the acceleration of output on Government work, 1915.

RECO 1/832: Board of Trade: Enlistment from the Industrial Classes and the State of Employment on Government and other Work in mid-February 1916.

1.2 Labour History Archive and Study Centre, People's History Museum, Manchester

LP/WNC/26/3/16: Position of married Territorials who signed on for home service only.

LP/WNC/31/4/117: Rules on Proficiency Pay for men re-enlisted after service with Volunteers or the Territorial Force.

LP/WNC/16/2/151-152: Wednesbury and District Trades and Labour Council.

1.3 Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick, Coventry

MSS.36/B31: Iron and Steel Trades Confederation and predecessors – Negotiations with employer, the Patent Shaft & Axletree Co. Ltd. Brunswick works, 1897-1926.

MSS.36/P47: Iron and Steel Trades Confederation and predecessors – Correspondence regarding the Patent Shaft & Axletree Co. Ltd. Brunswick works, 1914-1928.

MSS.36/W13: Iron and Steel Trades Confederation and predecessors, Wednesbury branch Documentation regarding Monway works, 1900-1921.

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