


2003

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Recommended Citation

Pearce, Cyril (2003) "Rethinking the British Anti-War Movement 1914-1918: Notes from a Local Study," *Quaker Studies*: Vol. 7: Iss. 1, Article 3.

Available at: <http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/quakerstudies/vol7/iss1/3>

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RETHINKING THE BRITISH ANTI-WAR MOVEMENT 1914–1918: NOTES FROM A LOCAL STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Based on extensive research into the 1914–1918 anti-war movement in Huddersfield, West Yorkshire, this study sets out to examine the proposition that Huddersfield was a 'special place' in the strength of its anti-war community and in the tolerance shown to it. In the process, it raises fundamental questions about historians' understanding of the way in which British society dealt with the war. It criticises what it sees to be an essentially metropolitan view of the war which it regards as inaccurate and misleading. It also raises questions about popular attitudes towards the war, the nature of anti-war groupings, accepted calculations of Conscientious Objector (CO) numbers and the notion of the CO as an individual 'suffering for conscience sake'. In doing so it makes a plea for more local studies and, in particular for closer attention to the idea of the CO as representative of a coherent and self-sustaining broad-based radical sub-culture.

KEYWORDS

Huddersfield, Pacifism, war, Quakers, socialists, Conscientious Objector, anti-war

Starting with Huddersfield...

The question of the anti-war movement in Huddersfield during the 1914–18 war was first raised publicly by one of its major figures, Wilfrid Whiteley. He maintained, as have others, that opposition to the war was stronger there than in other towns and that it was more readily and more genuinely tolerated there than anywhere else he knew.¹ That was where this study began, and the

1. C. Pearce, 'An interview with Wilfrid Whiteley', *Bulletin of the Society for the Study of Labour History* 18 (Spring 1969), p. 18. Other unpublished interviews with Arthur Gardiner,

evidence has more than confirmed Wilfrid Whiteley's judgement. If anything, he probably understated the true position. Equally important, however, the research process has thrown up other more general questions about the nature of public opinion, about the reliability of the historical record and about the accuracy and quality of existing published work. These are far bigger and much more difficult issues but addressing them has been a necessary part of coming to terms with the significance of Huddersfield's anti-war movement.

Revisionism?

Huddersfield apart, there seems to be general agreement among historians that, for the British people, the 1914–18 war was not unpopular. Towards the end, enthusiasm may have flagged and been replaced by a weary determination to see it through but, on the whole, it is argued, Britain's commitment was never seriously questioned, let alone actually challenged. Within this consensus, therefore, those who did oppose the war, especially those who became Conscientious Objectors (COs), are necessarily depicted as a very small and marginal minority. There is even a view that they were only really important in so far as their existence demonstrated Britain's ability to conduct a modern war, '...without abandoning liberal precepts and the parliamentary system', and that, 'Despite many lapses into beastliness, the fundamentals of a liberal community had been preserved...'²

Only as the centenary of the outbreak of war approaches has that old consensus begun to shift. Trevor Wilson's massive and authoritative work, *The Myriad Faces of War*, first published in 1986 marked, perhaps, its high water mark. Niall Ferguson's *The Pity of War*, published to general acclaim some twelve years later, has come to represent a summary statement of a process of revision. The 'ten questions about the Great War', which he took as the starting point for his work, have produced answers—many of them prompting further questions—which have challenged the old consensus. In particular, his fourth question, 'Was the war as is often asserted, really greeted with popular enthusiasm?' produced the challenging and unequivocal response,

Nor was Britain swept into the war on a wave of popular enthusiasm for 'little Belgium'; one reason so many men volunteered in the first weeks of the war was that unemployment soared because of the economic crisis the war had unleashed.

George Hargreave and Florence Shaw suggest a similar view, that Huddersfield's attitude to the anti-war movement was tolerant.

2. T. Wilson, *The Myriad Faces of War: Britain and the Great War* (London: Basil Blackwell, 1986), p. 851.

The financial crisis of 1914 is indeed the best evidence of war pessimism. For many people in Europe, the war was not a cause for jubilation but trepidation: apocalyptic imagery was as frequently employed as patriotic rhetoric. People recognised Armageddon.³

Elsewhere that process of revision has advanced in a number of ways, some of them unthinkable only twenty years earlier. Others are reflections of advances across an increasingly broad and diverse scholarly front. Julian Putkowski's work on Army Act executions, for example, has exposed the barbarism, racism and naked class bias of the British Army's disciplinary codes when applied to colonial troops and to other ranks accused of cowardice or desertion.⁴ Jill Liddington's work on the particular coincidence of feminism and anti-militarism in British history has added much to an understanding of the breadth of opposition to the war.⁵ It is probably also true to say that even military historians such as John Keegan are beginning to revise their views. In contrast to the view which held that, for whatever reasons, the First World War was inevitable, he states quite clearly, 'The First World War was a tragic and unnecessary conflict'.⁶

The process of revision has not yet been advanced much by the relatively new discipline of Cultural History. One or two valuable insights apart, its contributions have been disappointing. Perhaps this is as much a shortcoming of the discipline itself as it is of the individual studies. Setting aside the self-serving nonsense of postmodernism, the process of selecting the culturally significant is fraught with difficulty. Nevertheless, Paul Fussell's *The Great War and Modern Memory* and Jay Winter's *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning*, by the novelty and intrinsic value of their approaches, open up new responses and suggest new approaches. Sadly, however, neither Fussell nor Winter has anything new to say about popular attitudes towards the war.⁷

What follows here might be seen in the same revisionist spirit as some of the work cited above. It contains a series of skirmishes with some of the detail of the old consensus where issues to do with public feelings about the war are

3. N. Ferguson, *The Pity of War* (London: Penguin Books, 1998), pp. 442–44.

4. J. Putkowski and J. Sykes, *Shot at Dawn: Executions in World War One by Authority of the British Army Act* (Barnsley: Wharncliffe Publishing, 1989).

5. J. Liddington, *The Long Road to Greenham: Feminism and Anti-Militarism in Britain since 1820* (London: Virago, 1989).

6. J. Keegan, *The First World War* (London: Hutchinson, 1998), p. 3.

7. P. Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975); J. Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

concerned. In particular, and in line with Ferguson's answer to his fourth question, it will be argued that, in the light of the Huddersfield evidence, some elements of the received view should be re-examined and, perhaps, modified—especially those concerning opposition to the war and the strength of the anti-war movement.

Underpinning much of this is a plea for the importance of the local experience and for perspectives anchored firmly outside London. With few exceptions the standard works on Britain in the 1914–18 war attempt a national picture based on national sources. In so doing they perpetuate the nonsense that England, or even worse, Britain, can be viewed as the homogeneous whole which it very clearly was not. American academics, perhaps understandably, seem particularly prone to this affliction although it is not just a question of where you are or what platform you are standing on.⁸ It is an almost inevitable consequence of the difficulty of resisting the overwhelming inertia of the apparently necessary source material generated at the centre: government records, national press, soldiers' and politicians' diaries, institutional records and the like.

If this is true for the more general accounts, those dealing more particularly with opposition to the war are no better. They also deal at the national level and from a metropolitan perspective.⁹ James Hinton's work on the shop

8. The American scholars in mind here are particularly, A.J.Q. Adams and P.P. Poirier, *The Conscription Controversy in Great Britain, 1900–1918* (London: Macmillan, 1987). Not only is their view entirely metropolitan, they contrive to write about conscription with only one reference to each of the NCF (p. 267) and the UDC (p. 226) and no reference at all to either the No-Conscription Councils, Fenner Brockway, Bertrand Russell or Clifford Allen. Similarly guilty is the more prolific T.C. Kennedy, *The Hound of Conscience: A History of the No-Conscription Fellowship, 1914–1919* (Fayetteville, Arkansas: USA, 1981); 'The Quaker Renaissance and the Origins of the Modern British Peace Movements, 1895–1920', *Albion* 16, 3 (Fall, 1984), pp. 243–72; 'Fighting about Peace: The No-Conscription Fellowship and the British Friends Service Committee, 1915–1919', *Quaker History* 69 (Spring 1980), pp. 3–22; 'Public Opinion and the Conscientious Objector, 1915–1919', *Journal of British Studies* 12 (May 1973), pp. 105–19.

9. The standard works, in order of publication, remain: J.W. Graham, *Conscription and Conscience* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1921); a Quaker and pacifist account. D. Hayes, *Conscription Conflict: The Conflict of Ideas in the Struggle for and against Military Conscription in Britain between 1901 and 1939* (London: Sheppard Press, 1949); D.A. Martin, *Pacifism: An Historical and Sociological Study* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1965); D. Boulton, *Objection Overruled* (London: MacGibbon and Kee, 1967); a partisan and pro-socialist view. J. Rae, *Conscience and Politics: The British Government and the Conscientious Objector to Military Service, 1916–1919* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970); a thorough attempt to diminish the importance of the COs, socialist COs in particular, and the anti-war movement, to

stewards' movement and Sheila Rowbotham's study of the Alice Wheeldon affair are notable exceptions.¹⁰ Added to this, however, they have two other debilitating tendencies: the first is to diminish specific local anti-war opinion by incorporating it as part of a much grander narrative. This might be understandable and even excusable in work charting the 'rise of Labour' or the development of British revolutionary politics. It is less understandable and therefore less excusable in work looking to explain such central anti-war issues as the Quaker peace testimony or the British Peace Movement.¹¹ Two recent publications will serve to illustrate the point. Both of them are works of intimidating authority and enviable scholarship—Thomas C. Kennedy's *British Quakerism 1860–1920* and Martin Ceadel's *Semi-detached Idealists*. Both contain, as they must, significant sections dealing with the Great War. Nevertheless, neither gives more than a cursory glance at what opposition to that war looked or felt like where the war resisters lived. Neither work tells us whether the war's opponents were more numerous or more vocal, more Quaker or more Socialist, in one place or another. Indeed, that is not their purpose and therein lies the problem.¹²

justify conscription and to explain away its brutalities. M. Swartz, *The Union of Democratic Control in British Politics During the First World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971); an elite study of an essentially elite organisation. K. Robbins, *The Abolition of War: The 'Peace Movement' in Britain, 1914–1919* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1976); a hypercritical and unsympathetic study which manufactures its own sitting ducks and frequently misses. M. Ceadel, *Pacifism in Britain, 1914–1945: The Defining of a Faith* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980); a thought-provoking sympathetic study whose suggestion of the terms 'pacifism' and 'pacifism' to differentiate anti-war positions has been significant. F.L. Carsten, *War against War: British and German Radical Movements in the First World War* (London: Batsford, 1982); a reminder that the British anti-war movement had its German equivalent which had to function under much harsher conditions.

10. J. Hinton, *The First Shop Stewards' Movement* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1973); S. Rowbotham, *Friends of Alice Wheeldon* (London: Pluto Press, 1986).

11. Into this offenders category fit Ceadel, *Pacifism in Britain*; Hayes, *Conscription Conflict*; and Fenner Brockway, *Inside the Left: Thirty Years of Platform, Press, Prison and Parliament* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1942); W. Kendall, *The Revolutionary Movement in Britain, 1900–1921: The Origins of British Communism* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1969); P. Ward, *Red Flag and Union Jack: Englishness, Patriotism and the British Left, 1881–1924* (London: The Royal Historical Society, 1998), and practically all the standard works on the history of the labour movement e.g. K. Burgess, *The Challenge of Labour: Shaping British Society, 1850–1930* (London: Croom Helm, 1980).

12. Thomas C. Kennedy, *British Quakerism 1860–1920: The Transformation of a Religious Community* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Martin Ceadel, *Semi-detached Idealists: The British Peace Movement and International Relations, 1854–1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

The second, to which historians sympathetic to COs often fall victim, is to become pre-occupied with the COs individual heroism to the point where that struggle is seen only in those terms. One exponent of this approach, Caroline Moorehead, explains very clearly how she wanted to show that, 'pacifism is basically the most lonely of beliefs, held for the most part in private and sustained in isolation often in the face of powerful opposition'.¹³ Unfortunately, Felicity Goodall's more recent contribution, *A Question of Conscience: Conscientious Objection in the Two World Wars*, is from the same school.¹⁴ We have yet to see a study of COs which sets them properly in their social contexts and attempts to understand them not just as heroic/misguided individuals but also as groups and individuals expressing a broader community consciousness. This is only possible through more careful attention to the detail on the ground and in local communities.

In a different way, Trevor Wilson's work has acknowledged this problem of local and national experiences, but more as a token than a reality. One twenty-one page chapter in a book of almost nine hundred pages is devoted to the experience of an Essex village.¹⁵ Elsewhere he relies heavily on standard works on Leeds and Leicester which are both flawed by their concern to champion local patriotic efforts rather than to take a more circumspect view.¹⁶ In his defence, however, there are few other sources to which he could turn.

New local studies are beginning to appear but they are still too few and too diverse in their concerns.¹⁷ The consequence is, therefore, that, despite

13. C. Moorhead, *Troublesome People: Enemies of War, 1916–1986* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1987) p. xiii; similarly afflicted are Graham, Boulton, and Fenner Brockway.

14. F. Goodall, *A Question of Conscience: Conscientious Objection in Two World Wars* (Stroud, Sutton, 1997).

15. Wilson, *Myriad Faces*, Chapter 16.

16. P. Armitage, *Leicester 1914–1918: The Wartime Story of a Midland Town* (Leicester, 1933); W.H. Scott, *Leeds in the Great War, 1914–1918: A Book of Remembrance* (Leeds, 1923).

17. The number of studies drawing significantly on local material is growing steadily but is still bedevilled by varying methodologies and authors' different concerns. Nevertheless, the picture is now much richer and more varied. For example, G. Barnsby, *Socialism in Birmingham and the Black Country, 1850–1939* (Wolverhampton: Integrated Publishing Services, 1998); J.A. Jowitt and K. Laybourn, 'War and Socialism: The Experience of the Bradford Independent Labour Party, 1914–1918', *Journal of Regional and Local Studies* 4.2 (Autumn, 1984) pp. 57–72; A.R. Mack, *Conscription and Conscientious Objection in Leeds and York during the Great War* (M. Phil., York, 1983); A.J. Peacock, *York in the Great War, 1914–1918* (York: York Settlement Trust, 1993); G.R. Rubin, 'The Composition of Munitions Tribunals in Glasgow during the First World War', *Scottish Economic and Social History* 6 (1986), pp. 47–64; K. Weller, 'Don't Be a Soldier!' *The Radical Anti-War Movement in North London, 1914–1918*

massive outpourings of scholarly work on Britain and the Great War, and notwithstanding the process of revision currently, if haltingly, in train, we are still largely ignorant of what was really going on at home where the people were. The force of the old consensus on popular attitudes to the war is weakened but continues to act as a barrier which both delays and distorts a more thorough understanding. In one way this study is aimed at dispelling a small part of that ignorance and at raising that barrier. In another, and more presumptuous way, it is trying to suggest that although the view from Huddersfield public library is different, it is nevertheless just as valid as that from Kew, Colindale or the Imperial War Museum.

The Case for Huddersfield

It will be argued here that, in Huddersfield at least, the anti-war movement was stronger and more resilient, and that its support in and tolerance by the wider community was more substantial than the accepted national model might allow. As a consequence, therefore, doubts must be raised about the claims and assumptions for the war's enduring popularity. Three general points may serve to convey an initial impression of what this means.

First, Huddersfield's opposition to the war derived much of its energy, personnel and organisation from a local labour and socialist movement which was consistently and substantially opposed to the war. In almost every area of the rich working-class social, political and industrial sub-culture the anti-war elements were in charge: the Trades and Labour Council, the Independent Labour Party (ILP), the British Socialist Party (BSP), the Socialist Sunday Schools (SSS), Labour and Socialist Clubs and even most major local trade union branches.

Secondly, the anti-war left had effective connections with individual anti-war radicals within the town's dominant Nonconformist Liberal elite. In matters of war and conscription the important ILP element in the labour and socialist movement shared common ethical roots with local Liberalism. They also shared *ad hoc* but long-standing organisational ties. They had come together to oppose the Boer War and again to confront the pre-war militarism of the National Service League (NSL); when war broke out those links were renewed, further strengthened by the struggle to resist conscription, through the common membership of local branches of the Union of Democratic

(London: Journeyman Press, 1985); S. White, 'Soviets in Britain: the Leeds Convention of 1917', *International Review of Social History* XLIX, Part 2 (1974), pp. 165–93.

Control (UDC), the No-Conscription Fellowship (NCF) and the No-Conscription Council (NCC).

Members and Attenders at Huddersfield Friends' Meeting House at Paddock were important agents in this process. That is particularly true of the Robson family. Birthright Quakers with extensive connections to the wider Quaker community of the North of England, head of the family and head of the family textile dyeing firm was Joshua Wheeler Robson. With his son John and two daughters, he was prominent in the politics of the Huddersfield Liberal Association. Julia Robson Glaisyer and her sister Alice were also active in the women's movement. They all held firm to the peace testimony and were active in all the local campaigns against war and militarism before and during the 1914–18 war.¹⁸

Thirdly, the tenor of the town, in a number of ways, ran contrary to the received view. That is not to say that it posed a threat to the state as Glasgow and Sheffield were thought to have done. It is more that rather than being positively, even enthusiastically patriotic, Huddersfield's public mood was decidedly sceptical, wary and little moved by the wilder demands of wartime jingoism. When war broke out there was little wild rejoicing; there was no anti-German rioting, nor were the war's opponents ever prevented from holding their meetings, whether indoors or in the open air. Recruiting, while good enough in 1914, tailed off in 1915 and can be linked as much to financial inducements, unemployment and social and workplace pressures as to patriotic altruism. Inflation and the munitions workers' increased bargaining power, coupled with increased trade union membership, made local industrial relations, despite or even because of wartime regulations, sharper and more combative than before. The pressures of war gave added force to campaigns for better housing, food supplies and child welfare. But, presiding over all of this was the benign influence of a Liberal establishment reluctantly committed to the war and reluctant to use its control of the press, the police and the local authority in any ways other than those it thought proper in a liberal democracy—war or not.

Lest the argument become too beguiling, it must still be remembered that for all its breadth and apparent homogeneity, Huddersfield's anti-war movement was nevertheless only a minority movement. However, tolerance by the majority gave it a wider currency and makes it possible to argue first, that the movement might usefully be seen as a perfectly proper and natural extension of the town's Liberal as well as socialist radicalism. Secondly, that Huddersfield's COs must not be seen simply as lonely and isolated individual prisoners

18. Pearce, *Comrades in Conscience*, Appendix VIII.

of conscience, but as an expression of a collective as much as an individual commitment to oppose the war, nourished emotionally, physically and ideologically by an extensive and supportive movement.

Huddersfield—a Special Place?

The question of anti-war sentiment in Huddersfield during the First World War was first raised publicly in 1915 by John Hunter Watts, a patriotic socialist and War Office recruiting agent. He warned his first public meeting in Huddersfield that, 'the War Office informed him that the most serious opposition to recruiting came from this district'. Will Thorne spoke of Huddersfield as 'a hot-bed of pacifism', and Cunningham Graham, another pro-war veteran of the Labour movement attacked Huddersfield's anti-war campaigners as, 'skunks, scoundrels, cowards, pacifists, neuters, neither men nor women'.¹⁹

Huddersfield in 1914 was typical of the generality of English industrial towns. It had a population of more than 100,000 but it served an area of more than twice as many. It was almost entirely a product of the nineteenth century processes of industrial revolution and urbanization, having had a population of only 7,268 in 1801. The economic engine for its growth was the wool textile trade which, by 1911 had over 40 per cent of the town's employed population.²⁰

From the beginning, it had been a radical town, or, at least, a player in most of the major political upheavals of the nineteenth century. The Luddites, Owenite socialists and co-operators, the Chartists, factory reformers and poor law resisters had all made their early marks there. Secularism had been strong as had republicanism but it was, by the turn of the century, primarily a non-conformist town with the institutions and attitudes to match. Temperance, 'self-help' and the Protestant work ethic were still very much in evidence.

Politically, Huddersfield's traditions in 1914, although crumbling to both left and right, were overwhelmingly Liberal. It was a Liberalism which continued to proclaim the traditional virtues of liberal democracy and individual

19. *The Worker*, 18 September 1915 and 27 November 1915.

20. Much of the evidence on which this brief account of Huddersfield on the eve the 1914–1918 war is drawn from the following: D.F.E. Sykes, *The History of Huddersfield and its Vicinity* (Huddersfield: The Advertiser Press, 1898); R. Brooke, *The Story of Huddersfield*, (Huddersfield County Borough, 1968); Robert Perks, *The New Liberalism and the Challenge of Labour in the West Riding of Yorkshire with Special Reference to Huddersfield* (PhD, Huddersfield Polytechnic, 1985); E.A.H. Haigh (ed.), *Huddersfield a Most Handsome Town: Aspects of the History and Culture of a West Yorkshire Town* (Huddersfield: Kirklees Cultural Services, 1992).

liberty and yet was itself dominated by a tight wealthy industrial and commercial elite joined by family ties, sectarian affinities and an extensive network of social and charitable organisations. Mouthpiece for that elite was the Woodhead family's *Huddersfield Examiner*. Since 1868 the Liberal party had dominated the Town Council and had pursued a vigorous policy of civic progress through municipal enterprise. By 1914, however, this always incomplete radicalism had almost run out of steam. Two years earlier, for the first time, the Liberals had lost overall control of the Council. At the Parliamentary level, however, the Liberal tradition held fast. In 1914 Huddersfield was represented by Arthur Sherwell, a radical Liberal of the older kind, a temperance campaigner and associate of Seebohm Rowntree.

In local politics, the principal beneficiaries of Liberalism's relative decline were the Conservatives. Labour, by comparison had failed to achieve any lasting electoral success. Nevertheless, despite being handicapped by a persistent local weakness in trade union membership, it had established an active presence in Huddersfield's political life. A small and vigorous Trades and Labour Council dated from 1885, and socialist politics of the Independent Labour Party variety, had taken root there as early as 1891. By 1914 it had spawned an extensive sub-culture of clubs, Socialist Sunday Schools, socialist societies and a militant branch of the British Socialist Party, but the movement was fractious and divided.

In this setting the outbreak of war was met with enormous anxiety and little enthusiasm. There was no mass hysteria of the sort reported elsewhere. There was no great public show when war was declared and few occasions during the war when Huddersfield demonstrated any real pro-war fervour. Indeed, the *Huddersfield Examiner*, mouthpiece of local Liberalism, made a virtue of it by suggesting that,

in place of the flag-waving militarism which sometimes manifests itself in such periods, there is a restraint which speaks of a quiet determination to 'see the business through' and, on the part of those who cannot give their services in the field, a desire to realise the spirit which MILTON observed when he wrote; 'THEY ALSO SERVE WHO ONLY STAND AND WAIT'.²¹

There were no anti-German riots and no sustained attempts to disrupt anti-war meetings. Open-air meetings were occasionally attended by 'lively scenes', but there was only one recorded attempt to break up an anti-war meeting. In January 1917, half a dozen young men 'in the uniform of the Royal Flying Corps' trying to disrupt a meeting at which the principal speaker was Philip

21. *Huddersfield Daily Examiner*, 10 August 1914.

Snowden, were routed by the 'pacifists' and ejected from the hall.²²

This reluctance to be carried away by the passions of wartime can also be seen in the town's response to the call for recruits. In the early months of the war young men from Huddersfield, like young men everywhere else, joined up in droves. But, when the promise of peace by Christmas was not fulfilled that enthusiasm quickly disappeared. Huddersfield's recruiting performance in 1915 was poor and the cause of some alarm within the town's elite.²³

Unfortunately the debate around the recruitment issue has persisted as a debate about the presence or absence of the proper patriotic impulse. The truth for Huddersfield, as elsewhere, is much more complex. The simplicities of 'patriotism', 'honour' and 'duty' are tender blooms when faced with practical considerations of work, family, food and comfort. The expanded job opportunities of the wartime economy offered secure work and income levels of the sort that many local workers had never before enjoyed.

Added to this, there were other aspects of the recruiting process which provoked hostility and helped foment cynicism. For example, from the early weeks of the war the appeal to patriotic altruism, which was the local recruiting committee's principal tactic, was supplemented by a growing number of more equivocal inducements. At first these were fairly benign. There were supplements to pay, jobs held open, and free rent for soldiers' families living on local landed estates. By 1915, however, some of these inducements took forms which challenged both the spirit and the letter of the voluntary principle. Employers were 'releasing' men of military service age to 'encourage' them to enlist and the local Recruiting Committee approached other employers to ask them to replace shop assistants and office workers with women so that men might be 'released' to 'volunteer'. A circular from the Local Government Board in March 1915 even invited local authorities to explore the feasibility of 'releasing' eligible men. By mid-April Leeds Corporation had 'released' five hundred, but Huddersfield had refused. The Council set its face against such 'compulsory voluntarism'.²⁴

An Anxious but Tolerant Elite

For Huddersfield's largely Liberal elite the war was unwelcome. As the crisis gathered during the summer of 1914 it argued for non-intervention. Once war

22. *Examiner*, 29 January 1917 and 3 February 1917.

23. Pearce, *Anti-War Huddersfield*, pp. 161-74.

24. West Yorkshire Record Office: *General Union of Textile Workers (Huddersfield) Minute Book*, 10 and 13 November 1915; *Worker*, 17 and 24 April 1915.

had been declared the emphasis was switched to loyalty to Asquith and the Liberal government. Nevertheless, the switch could hardly be described as wholehearted and enthusiastic.²⁵ In common with much of the rest of the Liberal establishment, the *Examiner's* stance throughout the war was loyal but critical. At times it was vigorous in its defence of long-held Liberal principles when these were seen to be threatened by military conscription and the Munitions Acts.²⁶ It was also remarkably tolerant of the war's opponents. The Liberal establishment was not alone in this. The Conservative *Huddersfield Chronicle* noticeably refused to join the 'shrieking brotherhood of armchair patriots'.²⁷

If we take the Town Council as the formal expression of the elite view then the picture is confirmed. While other local authorities moved to prevent the anti-war campaigners from holding meetings in Council premises or on Council land Huddersfield maintained its commitment to free speech throughout the war.

That is not to say that the Council was unanimously or even consistently free from the taint of pro-war excess. There was a lobby of mainly Conservative councillors led by Alderman Ernest Beaumont who persistently argued the ultra-patriotic line. In 1916 it was the Council's policy towards its schoolteachers who were Conscientious Objectors which became the point at issue. Leeds City Council refused to employ known COs as teachers and by December 1916 had dismissed three of them and a school caretaker too for good measure. When faced with similar proposals from Beaumont's group, the Council would have none of it. A majority of Liberal, Labour and Conservative members preferred to defer a decision until after the war.

This tolerance extended to the work of the local police. In Huddersfield even opponents of the war maintained,

...the local police...have shown no sign of infection by the Prussian spirit, and, at all times carry out their difficult duties with tact and impartiality...²⁸

Probably the defining moment for the Council and for the Liberal establishment came in June 1915. A resolution from the local recruiting committee called upon the Council to support a form of 'National Service'. The response was a debate which re-affirmed the Council's commitment to the voluntary principle. Elsewhere, the Huddersfield Women's Liberal Association weighed in on the side of Liberal principle and agreed unanimously that,

25. *Examiner*, July and August 1914 *passim*.

26. *Examiner*, 12 August 1914.

27. *Worker*, 3 February 1917.

28. Carsten, *War against War*, pp. 171-72; *Worker*, 3 February 1917.

all forms of compulsory military service...are contrary to the principles of individual liberty for which the Empire stands... [and that] ...the voluntary system had more than justified itself, and (they) would deplore the introduction of Prussianism and the doctrine of slavery of the citizens of this country.²⁹

Shaken by the declaration of war, by the time this debate took place, the cracks in the edifice of Liberal unity were widening. Arthur Sherwell, sharply critical of the formation of the coalition government had, from the summer of 1915 sat in opposition as an Independent Liberal. Thereafter he campaigned persistently against the government's every departure from the paths of traditional Liberal orthodoxy. In particular he campaigned against military conscription and in doing so showed scant respect for Asquith or his cabinet colleagues. For many Liberals Sherwell was articulating their deepest concerns but for others, probably a sizeable number of the Huddersfield Liberal Association, such public disloyalty was unforgivable. In February 1916 Huddersfield's Central Liberal Cub struck his name off its list of Honorary Vice-Presidents.³⁰

Labour and Socialist Anti-War Unity

If the pressure of wartime was beginning to fragment the Liberal elite, then, for the labour and socialist movement in Huddersfield it had the opposite effect.

For a number of years before 1914 the movement had been seriously divided. A vigorous, if small, Marxist group in the shape of the Huddersfield branch of the BSP had conducted a running battle with the local movement's ILP-dominated leadership. This struggle was acted out on street corners, in the meetings of the Trades and Labour Council and in the columns of the movement's own newspaper, *The Worker*. It contributed to the left's persistent failure in local council elections just at the time when Labour was making significant advances elsewhere.³¹

Nationally, the labour and socialist movement's united opposition to the war melted away when war was declared. The majority of the Parliamentary Labour Party and the TUC fell in with the government. The ILP, on the whole, but with local variations, continued to oppose the war while the BSP was chronically divided. A vigorously pro-war BSP Executive, led by Blatchford and Hyndman, found itself at odds with a majority of local branches

29. *Huddersfield Weekly Chronicle*, 19 June 1915; *Worker*, 19 June 1915; *Examiner*, 19 June 1915.

30. *Examiner*, 16 February 1916.

31. This theme is dealt with comprehensively by Perks, *New Liberalism*.

which took an unequivocal anti-war class position.³² In Huddersfield however, the outbreak of war set many of the pre-war differences to one side and the 'Socialist Unity' for which *The Worker* and others had been campaigning was practically, if not formally, achieved. It was opposition to the war which now made it possible

However, while the ILP line was consistent, the arguments which sustained it were not. Influences on ILP policy ranged from an ethical opposition to war and militarism in general to a neo-Marxist rejection of the war as a 'quarrel... between the ruling classes of Europe'. The ILP in Huddersfield mirrored all of that. Significantly, as the dominant force in the local labour and socialist movement, it took both the Trades Council and the Labour and Socialist Election Committee (LSEC) along with it.³³

For the members of Huddersfield's BSP branch there was no equivocation. Arthur Gardiner, one of its leading figures later explained,

I took up the position as did most of the young fellows of the Huddersfield Socialist Party, of anti-war. It wasn't an anti-war movement from the viewpoint of a religion or even of pacifism—we were based definitely and soundly on the theory of the class struggle and that the 1914–18 war was merely a fight for foreign markets which we were not prepared to give our lives for.³⁴

Untroubled by any concern for the niceties of party considerations in either the ILP or the BSP, *The Worker's* editor, George Thomas, and his staff argued and campaigned for a determined resistance to the war. Their lively and largely Marxist analysis and persistent campaigning gave Huddersfield's labour and socialist movement a real intellectual force and cutting edge.

The only significant challenge to the apparent hegemony of these anti-war views appeared in the summer of 1915. It coincided with the appearance in West Yorkshire of John Hunter Watts, one of the British socialist movement's 'old guard'. A Londoner, he had been a prominent member of the Social Democratic Federation and BSP since the 1880s and was closely associated with its veteran leader H.M. Hyndman. He took Hyndman's patriotic socialist line at the outbreak of war and, when the anti-war elements took over the BSP in 1916, joined him in the formation of the National Socialist Party. In 1915 he was employed by the War Office as a recruiting agent. His task would seem

32. The ILP's position is explained in Fenner Brockway, *Inside the Left* and Boulton, *Objection Overruled*; the BSP crisis in C. Tsuzuki, *H.M. Hyndman and British Socialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961).

33. Pearce, *Anti-War Huddersfield*, pp. 128–35.

34. C. Pearce, *An Interview with Arthur Gardiner*, (Unpublished, 31 October 1968).

to have been to do what he could to undermine the anti-war elements' domination of Huddersfield's labour and socialist movement.³⁵

He quickly set about bringing together some of the scattered representatives of pro-war or patriotic socialist opinion to create the Huddersfield Workers' Own Recruiting Committee (HWORC). His recruits were largely disaffected oddities and outsiders and notwithstanding two or three months of hectic activity made little headway. The purpose of the HWORC was overtaken by the advent of conscription. By November 1915 Hunter Watts had moved on and without him and his War Office backing, the challenge to the anti-war consensus faded.³⁶

An Anti-War Community

In Huddersfield there was a substantial pre-war history of opposition to war and militarism which had united a number of the sections of the centre-left from radical Liberals to Marxist socialists.

Huddersfield's radical Liberalism and the local ILP's ethical brand of socialism arguably shared a common source. Those common threads had first combined to oppose the Boer War. The Huddersfield branch of the South African Conciliation Committee brought together members of the Trades Council and the ILP with members of the radical wing of the Liberal Association. This successful mobilization of local anti-war feeling had helped to define and mobilize a local constituency. Some of its key players were still active when war broke out in 1914.³⁷

As the years before 1914 gave rise to questions of war and peace, empire, armaments and conscription, elements of the previous groupings re-appeared. They were less closely organised and fraught with new political problems, nevertheless, it was a group of radical Liberal and Labour town councillors who responded to a broad-based campaign and persuaded the Education Committee to re-name its schools' 1914 Empire Day holiday, 'Peace and Empire Day'.³⁸

What had stirred the local anti-militarist alliance into action was the National Service League's 1913 campaign for a system of compulsory national service. In late December 1913 representatives of the Society of Friends, Huddersfield ILP, the Huddersfield Adult School Union, the Huddersfield Junior Liberal Association, the Free Church Council and the BSP branch formed the Hudders-

35. Tsuzuki, *Hyndman*, pp. 227, 235; Kendall, *The Revolutionary Movement*, p. 89.

36. Pearce, *Anti-War Huddersfield*, pp. 136-54.

37. Perks, *New Liberalism*, pp. 348-52.

38. *Worker*, 18 April 1914.

field Committee against Compulsory Military Service. It was later joined by representatives of the Trades Council and the Labour and Socialist Election Committee. Three of the prime movers in the Committee were veterans of the Boer War campaign, Ben Riley of the ILP, Joshua Robson and his son John, both Quakers and Liberals. They were joined by Robert Hopkinson, heir to a prosperous engineering business and unattached left-of-centre radical. All four were to become deeply involved in the wartime anti-war movement.³⁹

Once war had been declared, the centre of resistance shifted to the labour and socialist movement. It was not until 1915 that the pre-war anti-militarist alliance re-appeared and it was the formation, in February, of the Huddersfield branch of the Union of Democratic Control (UDC) which marked its return. As a national organisation the UDC had been formed shortly after the outbreak of war. Its objectives were a negotiated peace and the replacement of Foreign Office secret diplomacy by the democratic control of foreign policy. Initially a metropolitan grouping, the UDC expanded rapidly into a national organisation. By October 1915 it had sixty-one branches. The branches were spread throughout Britain but with a concentration in the industrial areas and particularly in those where support for both radical Liberalism and the ILP was traditionally strong.⁴⁰

At the beginning the UDC was irredeemably middle-class, Liberal and well-meaning. Fenner Brockway described its members as 'bourgeois to their finger tips. They were suave, gracious, cultured. They might have been lifted out of any gathering of the gentlemen of England.'⁴¹

Branch membership, however, was generally more varied. In Huddersfield it represented a genuine coming together of radical Liberals, trade unionists and members of the ILP. The eleven members of its first provisional committee came from different sections of the town's radical community. Five of them were from some branch of the labour and socialist movement: Ben Riley, ILP; Wilfrid Whiteley, ILP and Socialist Sunday Schools; Fred Wood, Postmen's Federation, Trades Council and LSEC, R.H. Yates, Shop Assistants' Union, Trades Council, LSEC, and Law Taylor, Postmen's Federation, Trades Council and Labour Alderman. The two women members were both active suffragists and members of the Huddersfield branch of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS). Of the two, Julia Robson Glaisyer was a Quaker and prominent member of the Women's Liberal Association. Her father's and

39. Pearce, *Anti-War Huddersfield*, pp. 100-108.

40. UDC Archive (Hull University), DDC/1 Minute Books, General Council, October 1915; Swartz, *Union of Democratic Control*, pp. 60-61.

41. Fenner Brockway, *Inside the Left*, p. 54.

brother's work in the local anti-militarist cause has already been mentioned.⁴²

The remaining four original members are not easily categorised. Robert A. Hopkinson who, with Ben Riley, had called the meeting, had been associated with the pre-war Huddersfield Committee against Compulsory Military Service. He was a rich industrialist with a radical left-of-centre background.⁴³ Edgar Woodhead was also a wealthy man, divisional clerk to the West Riding Education Committee, a Liberal and active member of the congregation of Milton Independent Chapel, but a Quaker sympathiser and close friend of the Robson family. Of Messrs. H. Oxley and Stokes, the other members of the provisional committee, little is known.

Membership of the Huddersfield UDC was not extensive. It was also undermined for a time by the BSP's suspicions that it was a 'side-tracking organisation'. Nevertheless, it was important because it established continuity with the pre-war movement and announced the existence of an ethical community with a common critical position on the war which cut across party, class and gender divisions.

Two things galvanized and further unified the anti-war movement; the failed campaign to prevent the introduction of conscription and the working of the conscription process itself. Indeed, the advent of conscription in the spring of 1916 became a major benefit to the war's opponents. Confronting the machinery of compulsion reinforced the bonds between the anti-war movement's diverse elements. Military Service Tribunals (MST) were monitored, case notes recorded, COs identified, traced, advised and supported, leaflets distributed and meetings organised. Above all, conscription gave the anti-war movement its own flesh and blood conflict. The enemy was militarism and the coercive state, the troops were the COs and the battlegrounds were the Tribunals, the magistrates courts, the courts martial, prisons and work camps. It even gave the anti-war movement its own local heroes.

At the centre of this unfolding drama were the No-Conscription Fellowship (NCF) and the No-Conscription Councils (NCC). Formed in November 1914, the NCF was initially a small propagandist group aiming to bring together young men of military age who opposed the war. Although much was claimed for its rate of expansion during 1915, there is little evidence of its impact in Huddersfield until the early months of 1916. A factor in this might have been that, like the UDC, it seems to have preferred to meet in the ethically sound but politically neutral premises of the Society of Friends. However, by the end of January 1916 it had moved its premises, and probably its

42. Pearce, *Anti-War Huddersfield*, pp. 188-92.

43. Perks, *New Liberalism*, p. 284, 332; *Examiner* (Obituary), 22 November 1947.

membership, sharply to the left, by meeting in the BSP rooms in the centre of Huddersfield. Indeed, once the battle for the rights of the COs was thoroughly joined, the left, with a mixture of ILP and BSP militants seems to have taken it over entirely.⁴⁴ So much so that Adams' and Poirier's view of the NCF as a 'doughty group of religious and philosophical pacifists' bears little relation to the Huddersfield reality.⁴⁵ It is probably an unreal view of the NCF branches in other places too.

NCF branches, almost of necessity, remained small and representative primarily of intending COs. Broad-based opposition to the war and to conscription found more tangible expression elsewhere. A National Council against Conscription had been formed in London 'to mount an eleventh hour campaign against conscription'. Local branches of the Council against Conscription, Huddersfield among them, began to appear during January 1916.⁴⁶

The initiative in calling Huddersfield's inaugural meeting had been taken by the Trades Council. Attending were also representatives of all the local labour and socialist organisations, the Society of Friends, the NCF, the Fellowship of Reconciliation and the Brotherhood and Adult Schools. Although complete records of the Huddersfield NCC have not survived, we do know that during its first year its management committee at one time or another had members from across the whole range of the anti-war community. This broad-based membership persisted to the end of the war. It became the hub of anti-conscription work in the town.⁴⁷

Conscientious Objectors

When the Military Service Act came into operation in February 1916, the anti-war movement was faced with new and immediate challenges. Its central commitments to repeal the act and end the war had to give way to the urgent need to respond to the practical and ethical imperatives of a new situation. Robbins is not wide of the mark when he suggests:

Until this point, if one led a quiet life, being an 'opponent of the war' was largely a matter of private conviction without public significance. Now it became a matter of general concern to the state. For eligible men, a choice between fighting on the one hand and accepting or refusing the alternatives offered on the other, could not now be avoided.⁴⁸

44. *Worker*, 22 January 1916.

45. Adams and Poirier, *Conscription Controversy*, p. 247.

46. Boulton, *Objection Overruled*, p. 119.

47. *Worker*, 22 January 1916.

48. Robbins, *Abolition of War*, p. 79.

Assessing the numbers of potential war resisters now faced with this choice is crucial to a proper understanding of the strength or weakness of the anti-war constituency. Unfortunately there is no reliable data on which such calculations can be made. The indicators are all flawed, partial and subject to varying interpretations.

An impression of the extent of the problem can be obtained by considering those occasions when a potential CO had to decide what to do. His first decisive occasion was when he received his call-up papers. He then had at least five options:

- set aside his CO and report to barracks as required;
- appeal to the MST for exemption on grounds of essential war work—usually requiring employer support—but without revealing their anti-war views;
- appeal to the MST for exemption on grounds of conscience;
- refuse to collaborate with the system at all and wait to be arrested;
- run away.

No figures can exist of the numbers of those who set aside their CO and chose to accept conscription. As Ken Weller has suggested, family reasons, the fact that even army pay would help wives and dependants, often weighed more heavily in the balance than conscience or political convictions.⁴⁹ One such from Huddersfield was Tom Whitehead. A trade unionist, he was a member of Paddock Socialist Club. Killed in France in December 1917, *The Worker* obituary stated that, 'although a soldier through the Military Service Acts he still held his views'.⁵⁰

In the same way accurate figures of those who went on the run and avoided capture are simply not possible. There is evidence of three Huddersfield men who became fugitives and avoided capture.⁵¹

For COs who did not apply for exemption on grounds of conscience but who were exempted from military service for other reasons there are no figures. On the other hand, for those who applied to the MSTs for exemption on grounds of conscience or for those who refused to use the MSTs but did not run away there are manageable if debatable figures. Both of these groups came within the official orbit of either MSTs or magistrates courts and therefore stood some chance of making a mark on the record.

Accepting that the number of 'potential' COs cannot be quantified with any

49. Weller, *Don't Be a Soldier*, p. 50.

50. *Worker*, 22 December 1917.

51. Pearce, *An Interview with Arthur Gardiner*.

accuracy, two questions persist: first, how many actual COs were there, and, second, who were they?

John Rae's figures of the number of people nationally appearing before tribunals on grounds of conscience are probably suspect. He suggests that the total number of CO appeals to tribunals was about 13,700; David Bolton quoting NCF sources, argues for 16,100, while calculations based on the Huddersfield evidence indicate a national figure of between 18,000 and 19,000.⁵²

However, the figures for Huddersfield can be managed to tell slightly different stories. Two sets of statistics are fairly central to the general debate and they derive from the question suggested by Rae's work: were the majority of COs religious or political?

A factor in making that judgment is an assessment of the contribution of the Christadelphians. They took no part in the anti-war movement. Indeed, their beliefs distance them from involvement in worldly things other than those absolutely necessary to 'render unto Caesar'. Unlike many other COs they appear to have had no objections to serving in exempt occupations or doing war-related work.⁵³ They do not sit easily with our established understanding of either religious or political COs. Yet in Huddersfield they constituted the largest single group of those who appealed to the MST for exemption on grounds of conscience.

Bearing this in mind, the two tables which follow are open to interpretation. Table 1 has been compiled primarily from the local Huddersfield press accounts of the MST hearings. In the reports not all the COs were named but motives were mentioned in sufficient detail to permit the kind of analysis shown here.

This is not an accurate tool. The press accounts recorded specific motivation and affiliation in only 68 of the 121 cases analysed above. How we are to understand 'Socialist', 'Religious' and especially those who simply stated that they had 'Moral' or 'Ethical' reasons for their CO appeal is not altogether clear. For the sake of argument, the 'Socialists' might be included with the other more clearly identified political COs and the 'Religious' with the other religious COs. That still leaves a large group of those with ethical or moral objections to war service. On this basis, therefore, however we deal with the detail, it appears clear that of the 121 COs identified, 80 were motivated by their religious, moral or ethical convictions rather than a more 'political' philosophy.

52. Rae, *Conscience and Politics*, p. 131; Boulton, *Objection Overruled*, p. 139.

53. F.G. Jannaway, *Without the Camp: Being the Story of Why and How the Christadelphians were Exempted from Military Service* (London: Christadelphians, 1917).

Table 1. *Huddersfield Conscientious Objectors 1916–1918: Appeals to the Military Service Tribunal for Exemption on Grounds of Conscience*

| Description | Totals | Percentage |
|-------------------------|--------|------------|
| SOCIALISTS | (39) | (32.23%) |
| BSP | 9 | |
| ILP | 8 | |
| Socialist Sunday School | 11 | |
| 'Socialist' | 11 | |
| RELIGIOUS | (49) | (40.5%) |
| Baptist | 1 | |
| Christadelphian | 22 | |
| Church of England | 2 | |
| Methodist | 5 | |
| Quaker | 3 | |
| Roman Catholic | 2 | |
| Salvation Army | 1 | |
| Spiritualist | 2 | |
| 'Religious' | 11 | |
| MORAL/ETHICAL | (31) | (25.62%) |
| OTHERS | (2) | (1.65%) |
| Republican | 1 | |
| Vegetarian | 1 | |
| | 121 | |

Table 2 produces rather different findings. Table 1 describes only those who appeared before the MST. It does not include the fugitives nor those who refused to use the MST and went straight to the magistrates court having been arrested as absentees. The only way to count up those cases is by tracking named individuals as they appear in the press and elsewhere. Table 2 is based on that sort of research. It provides a smaller number—109 as opposed to 121—but each case is documented and the judgment on motivation is, therefore, less equivocal.

Table 2. *Huddersfield Conscientious Objectors 1916–1918: Named and Tracked COs*

| Description | Totals | Percentage |
|-------------------------|--------|------------|
| SOCIALISTS | (48) | (44.04%) |
| BSP | 13 | |
| ILP | 10 | |
| Socialist Sunday School | 9 | |
| 'Socialist' | 16 | |
| RELIGIOUS | (35) | (32.11%) |
| Christadelphians | 22 | |
| Church of England | 1 | |
| Methodists | 3 | |
| Quakers | 4 | |
| Spiritualists | 1 | |
| 'Religious' | 4 | |
| MORAL/ETHICAL | (2) | (1.83%) |
| NCF/UDC/NCC | (4) | (3.67%) |
| NOT KNOWN | (20) | (18.35%) |
| | 109 | |

While acknowledging that this process has 'lost' twelve COs, and that there are still 20 whose motivation remains unknown, the impact on our sense of the nature of Huddersfield's COs is quite dramatic. The Moral/Ethical category has declined from 31 to 2 and the 'Religious' from 11 to 4. If we set aside the Christadelphians as a special case then it becomes very clear that the balance between the religious and political COs has shifted significantly towards the latter. The conclusions are simple. First, the political COs were overwhelmingly socialists of one form or another; and second, that if considered as reflections of the components of the active anti-war community (i.e. with the exclusion of the Christadelphians) then that community is represented, in the main, by men with socialist beliefs.

One final comment is necessary with respect to the local Quaker contribution to the ranks of the COs. It was, on the evidence of both forms of calculation, very small. In one case, Table 1, 3 out of 121 and in the other, Table 2, 4 out of 109. None of them were radicals. Not one of them took their opposition to the war beyond a refusal to fight. They preferred work of national importance or non-combatant service in either the FAU or the RAMC. One of them, Edward O'Brien, was killed in 1917 while serving with the RAMC.⁵⁴

54. *Huddersfield Preparatory Meeting Minute Books 1911–1919* (Records of the Society of Friends; Brotherton Library; University of Leeds), PA 5 and F63/1-4 inclusive.

Notwithstanding this ultimate sacrifice, the Quaker community's contribution to the list of Huddersfield's COs was modest. It may have been a reflection of the Paddock Meeting's relatively small numbers or its ageing membership. In 1916 the Meeting had 70 male Members and Attenders; a number which had been consistent since 1910.⁵⁵ Allowing for a likely age spread, the figure of three or four COs is probably a fair reflection. On the other hand, it is more likely to have been an expression of the equivocation over the peace testimony which appears to have been widespread throughout Quakerism and which has been so thoroughly exposed by Kennedy's work.⁵⁶

What this all might mean in terms of Huddersfield's standing as a 'hotbed of pacifism' is difficult to say without comparative studies. The impression is that the number of COs—however calculated—is a significant indicator of the existence of resilient local anti-war community—and herein lies a further issue.

A Community of Resistance

The received view is that, ultimately, whatever the ideological source of their motivation, COs were individuals making a stand for freedom of conscience. What has been ignored is the extent to which the COs represented and spoke for a collective or group consciousness. The Huddersfield evidence suggests that local COs, especially those from within the labour and socialist movement, can be better understood when seen in this light. They were representatives of both ethical and Marxist components within the local anti-war movement and they were supported by an extensive and vigorous local organisation.

In sustaining the anti-war community the parts played by clubs and societies and by labour and socialist families were important but, equally, if not more important were the roles assumed by women.

Historically Huddersfield's labour and socialist movement had been augmented by clubs and societies which expressed its broader and less formal sub-culture. As wartime dramatized the issues facing it, the movement's need for the warmth and support of that sub-culture was greater than ever. Paddock Socialist Club, for example, emerged as something of a centre for radical resistance to conscription. Six of its members were COs and two of them rejected all concessions to the conscription system. Huddersfield Central ILP club extended its premises and increased its services to members and non-members alike by adding games and catering facilities. The 'billiards and mash'

55. *Huddersfield Preparatory Meeting Members and Attenders 1888–1911* PA3/29–45; PA3/45, 46, 47.

56. Kennedy, *British Quakerism 1860–1920*, pp. 312–56.

strategy seems to have been successful. By September 1916 the Central ILP was claiming a big increase in membership. Bazaars, whistdrives and socials to raise money for the COs and their families became part of wartime club life.⁵⁷

Family and friendship networks extended that work further. In the BSP, for example, there were at least four interconnected families which contributed at least twelve active members between them, of which three became COs. The ILP and the Socialist Sunday Schools were also part of an extended network of political families. Family networks linked closely with neighbourhood and friendship networks. They also meant that some family members, relatively inactive in the normal course of events, were motivated to step up their level of political work especially when their young men went as COs. This led to the greater involvement of women. The BSP was particularly affected. It lost most of its principal figures as COs and, as a consequence, for the first time, in 1917 two women were elected to the branch committee. Within the ILP too, and the left generally, women activists had a higher profile during 1916–1918 than they had enjoyed before.⁵⁸

This was also true of the Quaker wartime effort. Julia Robson Glaisyer and her sister Alice seem to have come to dominate the Paddock Meeting's work. Some of that work was within the Quaker anti-war community itself. Funds were raised for the Friends' Peace Service and for the Northern Friends' Peace Board. At the same time, however, local Quakers were involved in the wider network of support for local COs and their families. The Paddock Meeting House was used for meetings organised by the UDC, the NCF, the NCC and the Fellowship of Reconciliation.⁵⁹ While not in the vanguard of the anti-war movement in any numerical or organisational sense, the work of the dominant figures of Huddersfield Quakerism helped expand the community of war resisters in ways which conferred on it a measure of respectability which otherwise it might not have enjoyed.

Conclusions

In Huddersfield the opposition to war had numerous roots. For some it was a simple matter of international class loyalty; for others, the source was a deeper and less easily identified mix of ethical antipathies to violence and to the denial of individual freedoms which were seen to be inherent in war and militarism. These ethical positions grew from roots in radical and Nonconformist

57. *Worker*, 23 September 1916.

58. *Worker*, 3 February 1917.

59. *Huddersfield Preparatory Meeting Minute Books 1911–1919*.

Christianity which were shared with local Liberalism. That shared antipathy to war and militarism had been manifest in the combined local opposition to the Boer War and in the immediate pre-war anti-militarist agitation. It was revived in wartime by some radical Liberals through their collaboration in the Huddersfield branches of the UDC, the NCF and the NCC.

Official Liberal opinion, the historically dominant element in Huddersfield politics, was divided, anxious and ambiguous. It had struggled to oppose Britain's entry into the war, and then accepted the need to fight; it agonised at the social consequences of conscription and then accepted. It worried about its MP, Arthur Sherwell, because his loyalty to principle was greater than his loyalty to the Liberal government. And yet it still clung tenaciously to some of the tattered remnants of its Liberal values through tolerance of opposition and a principled resistance to the worst excesses of wartime patriotism.

Rather than dividing the town's radical community the war had united it. The struggle to resist conscription and the support for local COs after 1916 strengthened the bonds. At the same time a strong local labour and socialist sub-culture supplemented by ties of family and friendship, and informed by the campaigning vigour of *The Worker*, reinforced and sustained the anti-war value system against pro-war propaganda. In such a context those who refused to be conscripted into military service, rather than lonely prisoners of conscience, became the vanguard and representatives of a particular community of resistance.

Signposts Towards a Revised Account

Where does all this put the Huddersfield experience and what might it have to say about the bigger picture? Should we regard it as eccentric or symptomatic of something more widespread?

If we assume that the process of revising history's view of the 1914–1918 war is well under way, then what should we expect when it revisits the anti-war movement? This work on Huddersfield suggests, if nothing else, that we need more local studies. There is already adequate evidence even from the most cursory of evaluations based on the lists published in *The Tribunal*, that there were other CO 'hotbeds'. We do need the comprehensive register of COs which an extended study of those listings would produce if we are to make that clear.

Such a register might help answer a number of other hitherto unexplored issues. The most obvious one being 'Who were the COs?' We know many of their names. Certainly we know the names of the prominent national figures.

On the other hand, we don't know much about the personal backgrounds of the vast majority. Were they as middle-class as the national figures or were they, as the Huddersfield evidence seems to suggest, drawn largely from the ranks of the skilled and unskilled industrial working-class?

The Huddersfield experience also suggests tremendous solidarity among local COs and their supporters. It also suggests the existence of a broad anti-war community which could encompass a spectrum of opinion from Marxist to Methodists and back again by way of Quakers, radical Liberals and Feminists. It is even tempting to suggest that there, in embryo and at the local level, was the centre-left constituency which was to become so influential later in the twentieth century. That sense of community is supported by various CO publications and by the practice of taking photographs of COs in work centres and of reproducing them as postcards. At the individual level, NCF members and supporters had their lapel badges and numerous individual COs compiled autograph books filled with entries from COs they met in their movement around prisons and work centres between 1916 and 1919. This world of CO ephemera has yet to be mapped, but probably contains the evidence to sustain the notion of the anti-war movement as a distinctive and resilient social and political sub-culture drawing much of its vitality from its local communities.

The story of the British COs and the anti-war community which produced and supported them, as with every other aspect of the 1914–18 war, has been part of the painful and much protracted process of coming to terms with the shocking reality of that slaughter. Perhaps the centenary's accounts will be more truthful. If we are to believe the Huddersfield evidence, there is certainly a more complex tale to tell.

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