

# Children and Conflict

SERIES: Beyond Commemoration: Community,  
Collaboration and Legacies of the First World War





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**Series:** *Beyond Commemoration: Community, Collaboration and Legacies of the First World War*

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*Children and Conflict*

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*with support from Sarah Lloyd and Anna Hammerin.*

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**Cover image:** Refugee children at Grand Val, near Paris, France, where a home has been established for them by the American Red Cross, ca 1918-ca 1919. *Image courtesy of National Archives at College Park, photo no. 165-WWW-179C-2. Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons.*

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*Front cover image:* Refugee children at Grand Val, near Paris, France, where a home has been established for them by the American Red Cross, ca 1918-ca 1919. *Image courtesy of National Archives at College Park, photo no. 165-WWW-179C-2. Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons.*

*Inside front cover image:* WW1 Children with Gas Mask, 27 February 1918, © *Mirrorpix via Getty Images.*



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Ian Grosvenor and Sarah Lloyd

SERIES:

# Beyond Commemoration: Community, Collaboration and Legacies of the First World War

## Conflict, Commemoration and Context

In 2014, five First World War Engagement Centres were established by the UK's Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC). At the core of the objectives set by the AHRC was a desire to benefit communities across the UK by enhancing public understanding of the First World War and its role in shaping the world we live in today, and to challenge traditional narratives of the conflict.

This was to be achieved through: supporting community research and promoting research skills among a wide range of people, making them more confident in accessing and interpreting different types of sources and information; working collaboratively to reach new communities and make the commemoration relevant to, and inclusive of, a culturally diverse population; and furthering universities' commitment to public engagement with research.

The Engagement Centres can best be understood as a unique experiment. Unique in that they involved multi-institutional partnerships and a commitment to funding in excess of the normal research project funding period. These factors enabled academics, citizen historians, community volunteers, heritage practitioners and community enterprises to come together in meaningful and productive relationships. There is extensive evidence that the work of the Engagement Centres has enriched public understanding of the First World War (FWW) and its legacies, and has enhanced the research capacity of diverse communities across the UK. In turn, this has generated confidence in engaging with the complexities associated with the critical study of the past and, in particular, building understanding of the contemporary resonances and issues relating to the conflict in personal, local and global contexts. Over six years, the Centres supported the establishment of new research relationships across higher education institutions and new models of working with civic society mediators. They delivered and enhanced opportunities for early career researchers to experience participatory research and public engagement, and effected institutional change through the promotion of public engagement and the sharing of good practice.<sup>1</sup>

In 2019, the *Voices of War and Peace* and *Everyday Lives in War* Engagement Centres organised the *Four Nations Festival of Research and Ideas* to mark the end of the commemoration period. This initiative, involving all five Centres, presented research produced during the centenary. It reflected a wide range of the arts and humanities and celebrated the expertise,

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<sup>1</sup> For an account of the activities of the *Voices of War and Peace* Engagement Centre, see Nicola Gauld and Ian Grosvenor, 'The Role of Commemoration in History and Heritage: The Legacy of the World War 1 Engagement Centres' in Matilda Keynes, Henrik Åström Elmersjö, Daniel Lindmark and Björn Norlin (eds.), *Historical Justice and History Education* (Cham, 2021), pp. 153-176 and <https://www.voicesofwarandpeace.org/> accessed 8 October 2021.



experience and insights located within communities. The *Festival* engaged diverse publics in exploring the legacy of the FWW and its relevance for today. It provided opportunities to critically reflect on FWW research collaborations between the academy, community groups, creative practitioners, and the heritage sector; and to explore how existing and new research collaborations between the academy and the cultural, creative and third sectors could be sustained and evolve. In addition, the *Festival* included a series of Policy Breakfasts which focused on areas relating to effective community engagement: *Diversity*; *Shared Heritage*; *Heritage, Community and Opportunity*; and *Gender*. These events were attended by major funders, heritage organisations, community enterprises, academics, and politicians. The data generated from these events were translated into a policy statement by the two Centres, in consultation with the other Centre PIs, AHRC officers, and the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF): *Communities, Commemoration, Collaboration: Shaping Our Futures Through Sharing Our Pasts*.

However, the question still remained as to how research legacy can be identified and made accessible and durable beyond the span of a national anniversary or major public investment in community engagement. It was a question that was not foreseen when the FWW Engagement Centres were established in 2014, nor one that was identified by the Centenary Partnership. It only became a pressing question in the aftermath of the FWW centenary as Parliament and other national bodies assessed what has been achieved.

As the House of Commons DCMS Select Committee enquiry into the centenary concluded in 2019:

The centenary commemorations reached new audiences, and enabled the public to be more exposed to hidden or less well-known histories. But this approach could have been more systematic and better embedded in all strands of activity... We are concerned that little attention seems to have been given at the outset to what the legacy of the commemorations would be.<sup>2</sup>

*Beyond Commemoration: Community, Collaboration and Legacies of the First World War* emerges from a follow-on funding AHRC project which addressed this concern and aimed to make visible the work of citizen historians involved in commemorative activity between 2014 and 2019.<sup>3</sup>

Rather than memorialise community research, this project has aimed to keep it in circulation by working with communities to produce a series of four downloadable legacy-themed e-books: *Remaking Histories of the Nation*; *Children and Conflict*; *Women and War*; and *War and its Aftermath*. The themes represent gaps in historical understanding or poorly represented topics. They were identified through the Centres' close working relationship with the NLHF across the centenary period, and through the 2019 Festival where they became visible. Each of the books has been delivered by a project team consisting of community activists, academics and independent scholars. The books are uniform in design but different in terms of approach, as each one reflects different experiences within the project team. In producing the books we have drawn on an earlier cross-Centre initiative, the book *Beyond the Battlefields: Käthe Buchler's Photographs of Germany in the Great War* (2018). In combining research, new material and community responses, it offered a template for the current publications. This project also drew on the insights and approach offered by the AHRC-funded *Connected Communities Foundations Series* (2018), edited by Keri Facer and Kathleen Dunleavy, and by *Making Histories, Sharing Histories* (2020) in which members of this project team translated a commitment to collaboration into practical guidance.<sup>4</sup>

Working through community networks built up over the period of the centenary, the project aimed to reach out to new user communities and audiences. It began and ended during the Covid-19 pandemic. Every conversation and meeting happened online; every image was negotiated in the context of reduced archive services. As a collaborative project addressing some 'difficult' histories, it depended wholly on dialogue, conscious participation and transparency, on sustained relationships of trust and on an ethics of care and empathetic listening.

### Reflections, Learning and Challenges

This project has documented what was so evident throughout the centenary; that communities have a deep commitment to history and that their own concerns are a powerful tool for shaping research. New questions emerge when different communities engage with the past. Contemporary contexts can give an added urgency to calls for stories to be told, heard, and absorbed into the national narrative. However, emphasis on the military, the dead and memorialisation through anniversary events during the centenary period had the effect of reinforcing traditional narratives to the detriment of public engagement with what were sometimes perceived as uncomfortable histories. Nevertheless, if one looks, there are other stories, hidden within bigger themes, which enrich understandings of the conflict.

<sup>2</sup> House of Commons, Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee, 'Lessons from the First World War Centenary', 2019: Recommendation 6 <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmcmds/2001/200102.htm> accessed 8 October 2021.

<sup>3</sup> The First World War and its Legacy, 2020 and Beyond: Community, Collaboration and Conflict, Arts & Humanities Research Council Follow-on Funding for Impact and Engagement, Reference: AH/V001329/1

<sup>4</sup> See <https://connected-communities.org/index.php/connected-communities-foundation-series/> accessed 8 October 2021; *Making Histories, Sharing Histories: putting university-community collaboration into practice* (2020), <https://www.voicesofwarandpeace.org/2020/11/23/resource-making-histories-sharing-histories/> accessed 8 October 2021.

While the team pooled its knowledge of community research during the centenary, trawling the internet for its traces, even three years on, it proved difficult to discover what many projects had done once they were launched. The fragility of community outputs, and particularly of digital materials, makes it difficult to document legacies. Lost projects constitute enduring gaps in knowledge. Identifying those voices and themes that surfaced during the centenary, but which have subsequently disappeared from widely accessible historical narratives, challenges everyone to consider how to create an inclusive, diverse and tangible historical legacy, which can be acknowledged by a broad public.

The unfinished business of the past creates generational burdens, which are historical, such as the violence of Empire and the inequalities of historical neglect. Nevertheless, the process of researching the past can be as important as what is found. It can be an agent of collective redress; it can aid in the repair of personal trauma. The impact of projects – for example, those that explored the enduring legacies of the conflict – can be profound for individuals and organisations. Centenaries and anniversaries create opportunities to understand the complexity of the past and the exclusionary nature of received notions, but then close the window when attention moves on to other events.

Finally, what has emerged in the conversations surrounding the production of the project books is, first, the extent to which place-based narratives and photographic evidence can complicate familiar narratives of the First World War. Visualisation of experience is a powerful trigger of historical imagination, but also requires strategies to recognise and deal with gaps in knowledge: who is named in images, who is not; absent information about context and provenance. Second, where communities and collaborative partners experience successful projects, these energise organisations and stimulate distinctive new research. Of course, there still remain unanswered questions which the project does not address explicitly; for example of the moment, who, in today's world of 'wokeness' and 'cancel culture', are the custodians of historical legacies?



**Remaking Histories of the Nation** A significant achievement of the UK centenary has been the inclusion of men of colour within established narratives of the First World War, alongside the role of Europe's global empires. Much of this work has been driven by a desire to reflect ethnic diversity in the UK in the 21st century, yet the centenary has itself often reinforced narratives about the nation state, which have in turn prioritised certain forms of knowledge over others. *Remaking Histories of the Nation* builds on community project work to reveal the limits of this approach, the distortions it entails and what an honest history requires in its place.



**Children and Conflict** Considerable emphasis was placed on young people as a key audience during the centenary – the desire to inspire a new generation in order that the conflict's legacies could be carried forward was central to the commemorative vision. Numerous projects engaged with young people, yet the stories told were in the main those of adults, in projects defined and managed by other adults. Research led by young people about young people was rare, and the community projects captured here give a voice to not only the unheard of the past, but also to those of the present whose power to shape history has traditionally been limited.



**Women and War** During the centenary of the First World War, community historians expanded knowledge of women's lives, at times departing from familiar, streamlined narratives about women who nursed, worked in munitions, or volunteered for the Land Army. *Women and War* describes some of that research, with the aim of creating a richer and more nuanced account of women's experiences during the conflict. In the process of compiling the booklet, the reasons why women's history matters became increasingly prominent: it connects people with their ancestors; it provides a testing ground for present-day experience; it makes visible what is often hidden, unspoken or unnamed.



**War and Its Aftermath** Now that the official UK First World War centenary has concluded, the aftermath of the war, and its international dimensions, are receding from public view. This book draws together community research that addressed the impact of the FWW on survivors and on the generations that followed. It considers how the legacy of the war affected communities, families, and individuals, both in the years immediately after and up to the present day. It also reflects on how the seemingly straightforward act of engaging in community research offers its own legacy for those involved, going beyond just the accumulation of information but setting in motion new questions and debates, inspiring new areas of interest, while also challenging old assumptions.



## Key Policy Statement for Makers

Heritage is a major resource for empowering communities. In a rapidly changing, globalised world, heritage can foster a sense of identity, security and belonging. Innovative research and community partnerships can address contested heritage and strengthen human connections across time and place. A collaborative model of heritage has potential to shape new policies and practice, creating more resilient communities for the future.

Universities have a key role to play in bringing people together to commemorate events of national significance. They are uniquely placed to connect academic and public knowledge of the past, enabling diverse communities to tell their own stories of belonging and contribution. Universities can facilitate processes that develop and share new understandings, that sustain an inclusive, rigorous, rich heritage, and that respond to the challenge of divisive and uncomfortable histories.



## First World War Engagement Centres: Broader Lessons Learnt

- ▶ Collaborative work around history and heritage encourages people to explore new stories relevant to their own lives and experiences.  
*It opens spaces for alternative voices to be heard, creating multi-layered stories.*
- ▶ Operating across the UK can bring different stories into focus and enable discussion of contested and uncomfortable pasts.  
*In aiming at a more inclusive heritage, including new shared histories, collaborative research has the potential to challenge received narratives. It can incorporate broader global perspectives.*
- ▶ A sense of place and the local are critical to many community participatory projects.  
*Place-based institutions can contribute significant expertise. If universities are to fulfil their civic responsibilities and meet the needs of local communities, relationships must be sustained.*



- ▶ Partnerships between universities, cultural organisations and community groups initiate challenging conversations and dialogue.  
*Productive research collaboration requires clear agreed agendas, open exchange and a sense of everyone being an equal stakeholder.*
- ▶ By devolving research funding to a series of multi-institution hubs, it has proved possible to create a structure which facilitates innovation and responsive community engagement.  
*This model promotes wider understanding and appreciation of what can best be characterised as 'hidden histories'.*

Images on page 7 courtesy of the CAER Heritage project: <https://caerheritageproject.com>.







# About the authors

## Rachel Duffett

Rachel Duffett is a First World War historian with a particular interest in the wartime experiences of children and young people. She was a member of the *Everyday Lives in War* First World War Engagement Centre (2014-2020) where she worked to support those interested in finding more of the war stories of their communities, and bringing them to a wider audience.

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## Ian Grosvenor

Ian Grosvenor is emeritus professor of urban educational history at the University of Birmingham. He has published extensively on the history of education and childhood, racism and education, and the visual in historical research. He was Director of the *Voices of War and Peace* First World War Engagement Centre, 2014-2021.

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## Robert Johnson

Robert Johnson is a project manager with the Durham-based organisation Investing in Children (IiC). For over 20 years, IiC has been working to create a range of effective ways in which children and young people can have a say on the issues, processes and services that affect them - it supports them in getting their voices heard by those who have the power to take action.

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## Introduction: 'Who Cared for Kids?'

The centenary commemorations of the First World War provided many opportunities for postgraduate students, early career researchers and established academics to engage with the public.

As the WW1 centenary commemorations approached, the British government initiated plans to allocate significant funding to encourage and support community history projects. The aim was to move the narrative of the war and its legacies away from the politicians and universities out into the wider population. It was an initiative to capture stories and experiences that had slipped below the cultural radar. The small grants were to be an investment in the development of historical research processes across a wide range of groups and individuals, but also a way in which diversity and richness would be added to the nation's heritage through the collection of new narratives.

Much of the thinking that underpinned the National Lottery Heritage Fund's 'WW1 Then & Now' small grant programme – with its £10,000 ceiling – was founded on the belief that groups new to doing history would become involved and with them would come the yet to be heard stories of the war. The reality proved rather different. In the main, applications came from existing history groups and established organisations, and the majority of the stories that they wanted to explore were familiar in terms of their common experience, if not their specific local detail. Engaging with young people had been a particular ambition of the funding. The desire to inspire a new generation in seeking out the conflict's details and carrying them forward into the next century was central to the commemorative vision. While there were numerous projects that were designed to work with children and young people, they were almost exclusively the products of adult imagination. The list of grants awarded demonstrated the supremacy of the soldiers' lives when it came to remembering the war, and, of course, that's unsurprising given the millions

of veterans, the c.725,000 dead and the over 90,000 war memorials registered by the Imperial War Museum (IWM). This concentration on the military highlights the continuing gaps in our knowledge; the way in which, even when there's a determined effort to widen the gaze of the nation, it is still the men in uniform and their legacies that becomes the central focus.



Investing in Children was founded upon the belief that young people's voices should be heard and that they should take a lead in determining the activities and policies of the world around them.





## Who Cared For Kids during World War One in County Durham?

2 Dear Reader

1 Life for girls in World War One was good if you were rich. They could go to school and  
6 learn skills for the future like sewing and cooking. You would leave school at 12.

5 However, if you were poorer you often didn't go to school. You would do jobs to help  
3 your family. You might even end up in a workhouse, which was hard as girls would do  
6 lots of cleaning work and in return would get cared for and fed. There was one in Durham  
2 City which girls went to. It is now where St Margret's Hospital is.

1 In the war women also did many jobs men used to do and young girls helped out too.  
t Many girls would have been scared of losing their Dads. If this happened then sometimes  
s they went into children homes like Stockton Childrens Home. We found that many of  
r them left there to become servants during the War.

Picture: Emily Smith Aged 12 from Co. Durham. Written and researched by Emily. A project facilitated by Investing in Children CIC, supported by Croft Community School and funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund



Included in the non-military remainder were a small number of projects (85) that related to children and young people, but only a handful of these were initiated, shaped and executed by the young people themselves. In most instances, their activities were prescribed by adults and the processes were – in the nicest possible way – imposed upon, rather than originating from, the young people themselves. A project that sprung directly from the interests of youth was 'Who Cared for Kids?', funded through the Durham-based community interest company, Investing in Children (IiC). IiC was founded upon the belief that young people's voices should be heard and that they should take a lead in determining the activities and policies of the world around them. When the possibility of applying for a WW1 grant arose, the question that the group wanted answered was 'who looked after young people during the war?'. Some of the group had experience of the care system, while others had worked with social services and other family-

based organisations across the county; the desire to discover who had supported young people like them a century earlier sprang from their personal experience.

IiC looks to participants to set its agenda: it's about young people having the freedom to decide which issues and opportunities to address. Here, IiC is very different from, for example, the many schools that received project grants - however interesting and valuable the topics, they spoke more to the interests of the adult bid writers than those of the pupils for whom they were devised. 'Who Cared for Kids' originated in the specific interests of young people. It was an expression of historic curiosity that reached back into the past to try and uncover the uncharted lives of those who had relied on the limited social provisions of the early twentieth century for support. The group undertook research training from Durham County Council's team and used those skills to explore the archives looking for information on what were known in the terminology of the time as 'cared for children'. Records were limited as young people tend to leave less of a trace than adults, and such information is often regarded as sensitive which can make access difficult. They investigated the ways in which young peoples' experiences of WW1 were presented by museums, both local (including the Durham Light Infantry Museum), and national (such as the IWMs of Manchester and London). Their main finding from their visits was that such lives received little acknowledgement amongst the multitude of stories about adults on home and battle fronts. Their questions about the ways in which children were cared for in the period weren't answered, and even when enquiries expanded to include the general impact of the conflict on young people's lives, they found little information. While women, through roles in war service, production and sustaining family life, have managed to find some space on the mainly male military stage, children's lives have not.

The group wanted to share the information – and the absences – they'd found with others and created a 'Who Cared for Kids' activity box for visits to local schools. It included dressing-up activities, details on industrial schools, a writing competition and information postcards that they had designed. Delivering



'Who Cared for Kids' was that rare thing: a history project about young people that was devised, executed and delivered by that same age group.

the workshops was hugely valuable: in addition to the research skills that they had gained, they now developed both confidence and public speaking abilities in order to engage their audiences. The visits were very successful, and the presenters made a strong connection with the pupils, conveying their research, but also embodying the power of young people exploring their own histories for themselves. In addition to the school visits, an intergenerational event at the Eden House Care Home in Bishop Auckland was organised with the support of Age UK. Sharing the stories of war – the WW1 research that the group brought and the WW2 memories of the elders – formed a communication bridge across the age gap, creating a space where experiences could be both recounted and reflected upon.

'Who Cared for Kids' was that rare thing: a history project about young people that was devised, executed and delivered by that same age group. Reviews of the funding process indicated that there was, in the main, a familiarity with both

the tellers and the tales. The ambition to involve groups new to historical research and uncover untold stories hadn't quite materialised – and this was noted particularly in terms of youth, past and present. Why was it that relatively few youth groups engaged with the commemorative process? Perhaps the answer lies in the liC's responses to the museum culture of WW1: where are the stories of children and youth? It is an absence that speaks to the connections that have not been made. When social groups cannot locate their own experience in what have been constructed as the definitive repositories of the nation's wartime lives, there is little to generate interest and promote engagement. A key aim of this book is to showcase the wonderful research that was undertaken into the WW1 stories of children and young people, but also to show how much more there is yet to do. It is a world that remains largely undiscovered and one that will reward its explorers with access to a rich vein of as yet unrecorded stories – something of a novelty in the crowded historiography of the conflict.



### *Who Cared For Kids during World War One in County Durham?*

Dear Reader

This comes with great sadness that I have to inform you that my Father has died, down in the pit, in Felling. Our family are struggling to cope with the war. My mother is dealing with eleven children on her own with no help from the family. The decision was made that some of my brothers and sisters needed to go into a Doctor Barnardo's Care Home in Washington. I was left with the role of taking two of my sisters and two of my brothers during the war from Felling to Washington. Within four months of my siblings being put in care it came as a shock to find all four of them were taken to London, put on a Doctor Barnardo's ship to be sent to Canada! I have returned to Felling and have taken the job of my Father, working down in the pit during the war years.

Yours sincerely, James, 15, Felling.

Picture: Jack Smith, Age 12 from Co. Durham. Written and researched by Caitlin Dobbie, Age 16 from Co. Durham. Letter based on an interview we had with a family member of James. A project facilitated by Investing in Children CIC, funded by The Heritage Lottery Fund.



### *Who Cared For Kids during World War One in County Durham?*

Dear Reader

I discovered that industrial schools 'cared for kids' during World War One. They were like 'bad' boarding schools for the very poor, where young children were put to work and learned a trade. Children were ripped from their family homes for simple things such as larceny, truancy and begging. The most local one I found out about was Earl's House, now Lanchester Road Hospital, taking boys as young as 9. Once there, learning a trade seemed to be important for the boys and accounts from the school show that many boys successfully left the school with a trade, including working on many County Durham farms during the war. Some boys even left the school to join the Northumberland Fusiliers and H.M.S. Queen Elizabeth.



Yours sincerely, Jade, 18, Chester-Le-Street

Picture: Jade Hay, Age 18 from Co. Durham. Written and researched by Jade Hay, Age 18 from Co. Durham. Letter based on information from County Durham Council Archives about Earl's House Industrial School. A project facilitated by Investing in Children CIC, funded by The Heritage Lottery Fund.



Jade Hay, Emily Smith and Jack Smith (Investing in Children), Edie Furness, Violet Furness, CJ Odaranile, Abbie Spry and Katelyn Spry (UTASS: Upper Teesdale Agricultural Support Services), Freya Dhiman and Sam Treweeke (Durham Youth Council)

with support from

Rachel Duffett, Robert Johnson (Investing in Children Project Manager), Ian Grosvenor, Natasha Macnab, Gina Richardson (UTASS Youth Work Lead and Community Support Worker).

# ‘Children just don’t sit centre stage in life’:

## images as objects to think through

### Background

Maggie Andrews, N. C. Fleming and Marcus Morris in *Histories, Memories and Representations of being Young in the First World War* (2020) make the case that in the context of the national story the experiences of British children and young people are ‘primarily discussed in relation to other histories’ or as ‘bit parts in the narratives of others or through an adult’s lens’.

In part, this reflects methodological issues in the study of childhood: how, as historians, we understand the perspectives of children in the past and whether we can separate them from the influence of adults; issues of agency in the past and the present; the complex relationships between younger and older children; and the hidden nature of ‘the voices of children, their experiences and emotions’.<sup>1</sup> Andrews et al are not alone in raising such issues. Sarah Maza similarly has a problem with agency. It is a ‘more problematic concept for the young than any other category of human actors’. She accepts ‘that children have the ability to act on the world around them, that they can be effective beings’, but argues that children do not have ‘historical agency’ because that involves ‘a group or its members acting on behalf of an imagined ... collective future’ and children could not exert such agency ‘since childhood is the one identity fated to disappear over time’.

Further, instead of writing ‘history of children’ she argues for a shift to writing ‘history through children’, of writing history that uses children ‘as a way of finding fresh approaches to classic issues in the historical repertoire – questions about the nature of status, rights and consent’. Her argument has received a level of resistance from some historians, and in response she posits that this may be ‘yet another instance of the ways in which we personalise our relationship to our sources’, and that ‘just as we recoil at the exploitation of children in real life, it might seem somehow unethical or hard-hearted to “use” children in historical analysis for ends other than themselves’. While an interesting proposition that historians might have ‘moral responsibilities towards their most vulnerable and elusive subjects’, she concludes that it is one ‘most often implied rather than articulated and examined’.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Maggie Andrews, N. C. Fleming, and Marcus Morris, ‘Introduction’, in Maggie Andrews, N. C. Fleming, and Marcus Morris (eds), *Histories, Memories and Representations of being Young in the First World War* (Cham, 2020), 2-5.

<sup>2</sup> Sarah Maza, ‘Getting Personal with Our Sources: A Response’, *American Historical Review*, 125, 4, (2020), 1317-1320. For the full exposition of her position see ‘The Kids Aren’t All Right: Historians and the Problem of Childhood’, *American Historical Review* 125, 4, (2020), 1261-1285.



What does all this have to do with working with Investors in Children as our lead community partner in producing *Children and Conflict*? Central to the success of 'Who Cared for Kids?' was giving voice and agency to the young researchers. The pursuit of this objective was not limited to the Heritage Lottery project. In 2017 the *Everyday Lives in War* and *Voices of War and Peace* Engagement Centres in partnership with the Museum Für Photographie, Braunschweig (Germany), collaborated to produce a touring exhibition in England, 'Beyond the Battlefields', which presented the face of Germany during

the First World War seen through the eyes of the German photographer Käthe Buchler (1876-1930). Different picture cycles which examined the care of orphaned children and the role of children in collecting salvage to support the German war effort were used in the exhibition. In the accompanying publication researchers were asked to respond to the images, and Caitlin Dobbie, a 16-year-old researcher on the 'Who Cared for Kids?' project, chose an undated photograph of children and their carers in a war nursery in Braunschweig (see fig 1).



*Children and their Carers – War Nursery (undated)*

To me this photo looks like a war nursery. The building itself doesn't look very child-friendly but by the way that the children are dressed in clean clothes and looking quite healthy, I'd say that the staff were good Samaritans, and cared for the kids. If I was to talk to the children in the photo, I'd ask 'How do you think this nursery has helped make you who you are?' This photo makes me feel quite happy knowing that there was at least something out there for kids during the war. It has almost given me a sense of closure knowing that not every kid was left alone and that someone was out there caring for them.

**Caitlin Dobbie** is a 16-year-old researcher working with *Investing In Children World War One*. Investing in Children is a children's human rights project based in the North East of England. Their Heritage Lottery Funded project, 'Who Cared for Kids?', explored what happened to children who lost parents or who needed to be cared for because they were unsafe or unwell.

**Fig 1. Caitlin Dobbie, 'Children and their Carers – War Nursery (undated), Matthew Shaul, *Beyond the Battlefields: Käthe Buchler's Photographs of Germany in the Great War* (University of Hertfordshire Press, 2018).**

The visual was important in the 'Who Cared for Kids?' project, and it made sense to use photographs of children and young people from the conflict a hundred years ago to develop and shape the book's content and approach through discussion with a new cohort of young people. Parallel to organising this discussion, Robert Johnson, the Investors in Children

Project Manager, organised an online meeting with some of the participants in the original 'Who Cared for Kids?' project where they shared with us their reflections on the project, their experiences of doing research and outreach work with local communities, and their thoughts on how we might develop the new project.

### Images as objects to think through<sup>3</sup>

What follows are extracts from a ninety-minute workshop held online with young researchers from the North-East of England. They were presented with 25 images which specifically related to children's lives during the First World War. The images were presented without any contextual background other than their capturing different experiences of the conflict. The event was recorded, and a full transcript produced. The young researchers questioned the images, commented on their content, reflected on the significance of what was presented to them and drew analogies with their own experiences in the present.

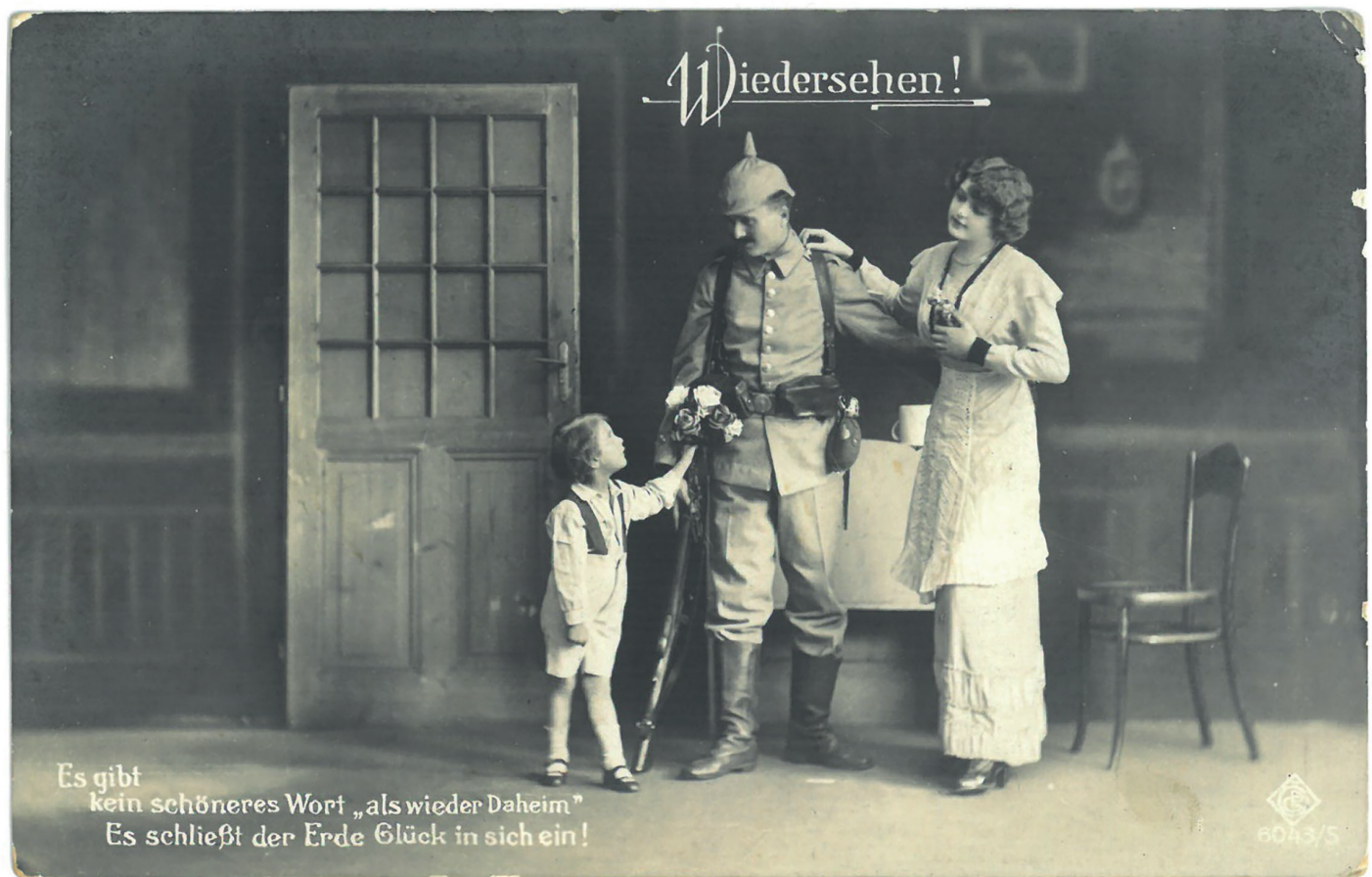


Fig 2. A German postcard 'Wiedersehen!', Private Collection.

Fig 2.

“ It's like saying goodbye to your dad because it might be forever. ”

“ You'd have a lot of people in the same area that would've been left to fend for themselves after someone had died at war. You'd see every morning letters brought about people not coming back. And there'd be that massive amount of apprehension and whether that would happen to you as well. ”

“ It would be a bit like sending your dad off with a death wish, I guess. Knowing that you're probably giving him the permission to go to war and probably leave you. ”

“ They do it [go to war] for their family or their country or the leader or anyone. ”

“ The propaganda that would definitely make them think all that. When they had the propaganda thrown at them and they'd probably be proud of their father for doing that I imagine. ”

<sup>3</sup> This phrase is borrowed from Inés Dussel and Karin Priem, 'The visual in histories of education: a reappraisal', *Paedagogica Historica* 53, 6, (2017), 646.





Fig 3. A French postcard 'Comme Papa!', Private Collection.

Fig 3.

“ I feel it's almost like a propaganda ... they look quite happy about it as well. ”

“ I think it might be more like a joke for adults because you get those cards these days that you send to your dad. Adults have a sense of their kind of humour and stuff that they send cards to each other so it might be like that. ”

“ ... it's a bit gory as well because they're stepping on a person. ”





**Fig 4. Local children at the unveiling of the Upper North Street School Memorial on 23 June 1919, Poplar Recreation Ground, to London school children killed by a German bomb, © William Whiffin (photographer); administered by Tower Hamlets Local History Library and Archives, London Borough of Tower Hamlets (Ref: P08370/082.2).**

Fig 4.

“ I think it would make people feel guilty for not joining the war as well. I know there’s a name for them that I learnt in history, and I can’t remember the name of the people that didn’t want to fight but it would make them guilty and make people want to enroll because this is what happens, so we need to prevent that from happening, so you need to join up. ”

Fig 5.

“ Maybe ... the homes of the children have been destroyed and they don’t have any food. ”

“ There is likely to have been a lot of food shortages ... it’s humanitarian aid. ”

“ There’s no one to feed them so they’re just feeding them because they’re really hungry. ”

“ It might be their children so just as well doing it for those kids as if they were their own because they probably had no one else to turn to. ”

“ They’ve got family links to children maybe even a brother or a sister so they know what it’s like to be the child. ”

“ This is what the Germans are doing: children starving; soldiers forced to share food. Fight, so this doesn’t happen anywhere else. ”



**Men of the 10th Battalion, Black Watch providing food for children in a Macedonian village, 1916. © IWM Q 31806.**



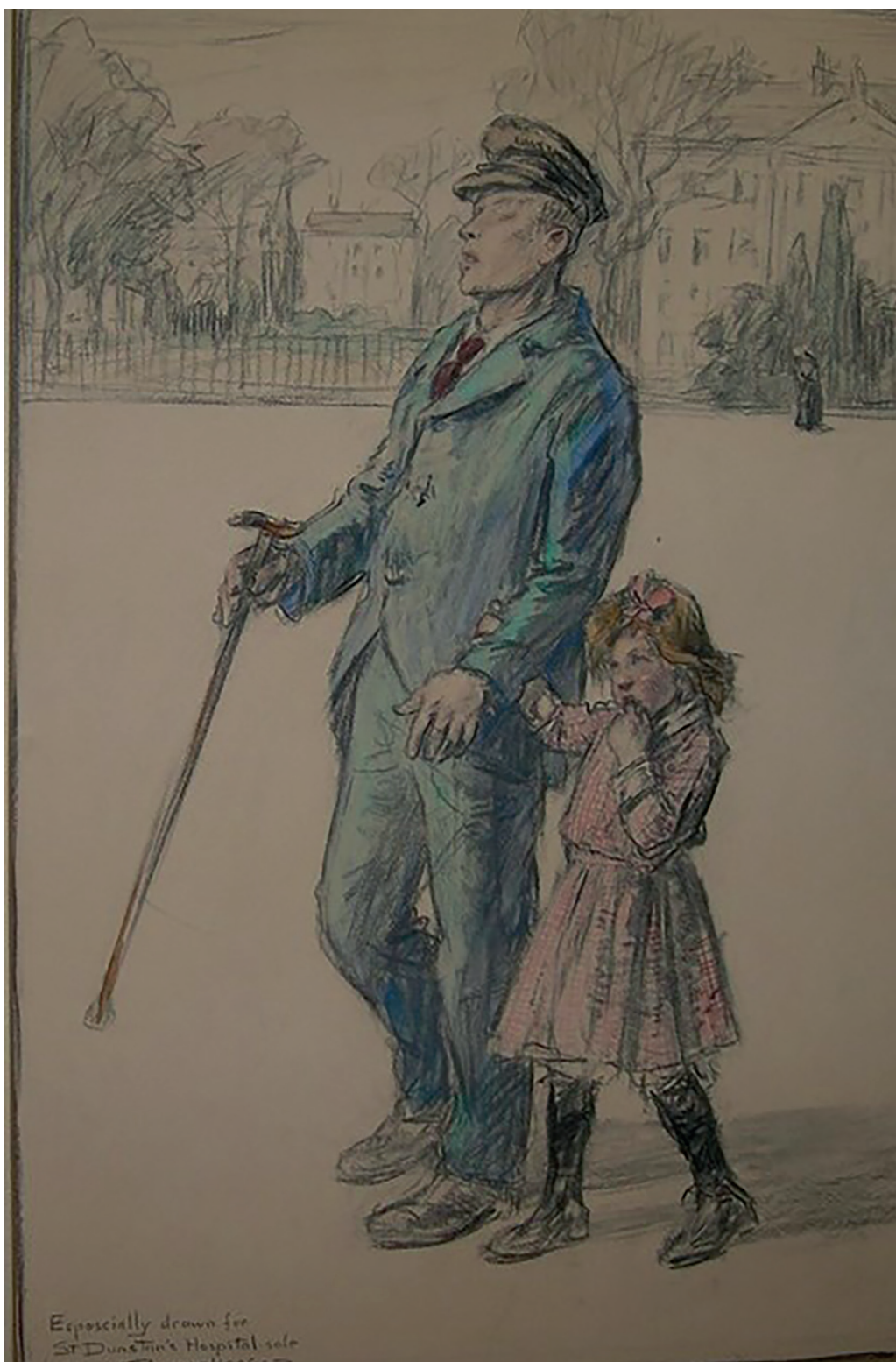


Fig 6. 'Little Ruby' guiding a blind veteran at St Dunstan's, 'Especially drawn for St Dunstan's Hospital sale' by the Dutch cartoonist Louis Raemaekers, 1916<sup>4</sup> © Blind Veterans UK.

Fig 6.

“ ...she really cares about him and she needs to make sure that he doesn't need a sign, she's making sure he's okay. ”

“ ...don't get scared off by wounds or disabilities. ”

<sup>4</sup> See <https://100objects.blindveterans.org.uk/little-ruby-drawing/>





Fig 7. WWI Children with Gas Mask, 27 February 1918, © Mirrorpix via Getty Images.

Fig 7.

- “ I suppose it's a bit like the masks that we have to wear now [with Covid-19]. It's nothing like them but to start with it would've been scary but then you get used to it. So, like I remember wearing a mask for first time last year and feeling really self-conscious but then now they're normal so I wonder whether people would've got used to it? ”
- “ Wouldn't it have been sort of normal? Like every morning at school, they would have to go through drills, getting your mask on to try and get prepared for a bombing raid. ”
- “ It's a bit weird ... because all the people in the picture wearing gas mask are boys. The two girls in the pictures aren't wearing the gas masks. I was wondering why that was? ”



Fig 8.

- “ It looks like they’re sort of all squeezed into one room like there’s four children sitting on desks that looks as though it was only meant to hold two people. ”
- “ These children don’t look particularly happy about being in like a barn doing schoolwork but also, they’d be scared as well as they’d been separated from their parents, so they’d probably be worried and not really know what’s going on. ”
- “ I just wanted to say [...] being a school photo but like none of the children are smiling and not even the adult is smiling. If it were these days and you were doing a school photo everybody in it would be forced to smile [...] I suppose it might be the etiquette back then - you don’t smile in photos but also, they’re not very happy as they’re all squished. ”
- “ They used to say not to show your teeth in photos because they’d say if god wanted you to show your teeth he wouldn’t have given you lips. They said that you weren’t allowed to smile in photos you just had to keep a straight face. ”
- “ Photos weren’t as readily available to take back then. They wouldn’t be used to being photographed back then, it would be an unusual thing for them. ”

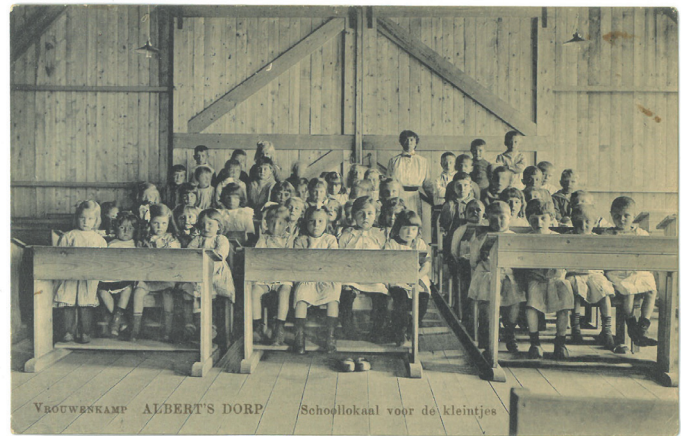


Fig 8. School children of interned Belgian soldiers at the Women’s Camp, Albert’s Dorp, Soesterberg, the Netherlands, 1914-18. Dutch postcard, Private Collection.



Fig 9. Refugee children at Grand Val, near Paris, France, where a home has been established for them by the American Red Cross, ca 1918-ca 1919. Image courtesy of National Archives at College Park, photo no. 165-WW-179C-2. Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons.

Fig 9.

- “ You’d be like what happened to them and everything and why they’re there and what’s next. You must be very sad or angry to the people who did this to them. ”
- “ They’ve sort of been hardened to what they’ve seen and quite gruff almost. They’ve also got a bit more individuality compared to the other sort of photos where they’re organised in the camp. Much different. ”
- “ They look quite grubby but their hair still seems to be quite well presented. ”





Fig 10. Jennie Jackson (1909-1997), 'Young Kitchener' At Her Usual Corner, English postcard c. 1915-18  
© Towneley Hall Museum.



◀ Fig 10.

“ It feels like it's fine to do it but it also feels like you know she was forced to grow up too fast as if the adults should have been doing it. She's like only a child and she's having to fundraise thousands of pounds for the war ... ”

“ I just think if it was something that she wanted to do then it's fine because as a young person I've always wanted to get involved in things and fundraise and organise things myself. So yeah, it does get her involved but also I feel like if it's something that her mum is like 'you need to do this' then it's not as good. But then having a child fundraise it's more guilt. It makes adults feel bad if they don't donate. Guilt them into like have you got a penny to spare or something and then they feel like bad if they don't.' 'It was probably quite progressive for the time; I imagine it would be a bit different. ”

“ Maybe there was something about her doing it for a family connection as well. ”

Listening to the discussions and reading through the transcript, the questions the young researchers wanted answered were evident: Who were these children? Why did this happen to them and what happened afterwards? The researchers reaffirmed the importance of placing children at the centre of the conflict and giving them a voice in history. As one young person observed at the end of the workshop: '... children just don't sit centre stage in life'. We had our steerage on the approach to adopt in *Children and Conflict*.



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Ian Grosvenor and Sîan Roberts

# ‘Every war, just or unjust, is a war against the child’:

exploring children’s experiences of conflict through visual evidence



‘Walther Buchler and a friend playing cowboys and indians’, ca 1911 © Estate of Käthe Buchler, Museum für Photographie Braunschweig/Deposit Stadtarchiv Braunschweig.

## Introduction

Children and armed conflict as an area of study has attracted its own historians. Children’s engagement with conflict has varied according to space and time and the nature of political, social, cultural, economic, and technological conditions.



The first half of the twentieth century has been dominated by global conflicts and the history of modern childhood, and war has seen the lives of children and youth increasingly meshed 'with the study of war in all of its military, political, and cultural context'.<sup>5</sup> It is also the case, as James Marten observed, that wars have generated unusual amounts of child related and child produced evidence.<sup>6</sup> Historians have found children recording their experiences in letters, diaries, school essays, art projects and drawings and have connected these with government reports, newspaper articles, novels, and memoirs to document how children experienced war as an abnormal time and to gain insights into how adults shaped some of these experiences.<sup>7</sup> This has led historians to conclude that the responses of children to war are far more complicated than imagined and to see 'children as more than simply victims of war. They do not simply remain bystanders ... they make the experience their own'.<sup>8</sup> In this process of documenting past childhood experiences of conflict, photographic evidence has generally been underused. Where it has been used, research has largely focused on documenting children as innocent 'sufferers' of conflict and analyses of how humanitarian agencies have deployed images of the traumatised and the displaced to attract concern, empathy, and action.<sup>9</sup> In the present essay our purpose is twofold. First, to make the photographic the starting point of inquiry and, second, to surface different strands of inquiry, which are reflective of both the day-to-day experiences of conflict and the extraordinary. In pursuit of these two objectives, we will focus on the photographic archives of one city, Birmingham, and children's experiences of the First World War.

At the outset it is important to acknowledge the contested nature of the photographic image. The assumption that photography is both truthful and objective is problematic.<sup>10</sup> As Susan Moeller argued in *Shooting War: Photography and the American Experience of Combat* (1990), there is 'a morass of contradiction, confusion and ambiguity'<sup>11</sup> around the documentary status of photographs. Nevertheless, historic photographs are 'literally records of a history otherwise unavailable to us' and in that sense they,

'privilege us as they foreground events which we look at as if through a glass darkly. As documents, such images are windows into a world otherwise lost and, to that extent, are significantly and appropriately documentary photographs'.<sup>12</sup>

In other words, photographs do have evidentiary power.

## Photographs and children's experience of conflict

All photographs generate questions, and because photographs are 'randomly inclusive' carrying an excess of information, any individual photograph has more than one story to tell. This plurality of narratives can be expanded by juxtaposing one image with others which potentially open new lines of enquiry in the archive. Here we take four separate images. The first is of the Parsons family of 1915, showing Abednego Parsons, his wife Fanny, and their daughters Sarah and Norah (fig 1).



**Fig 1. Abednego Parsons and family, 1915, MS 4616/1.**  
Reproduced with the permission of the Library of Birmingham.

<sup>5</sup> Mischa Honeck and James Marten, 'More than Victims: Framing the History of Modern Childhood and War', in *War and Childhood in the Era of the Two World Wars* ed. Mischa Honeck and James Marten (Cambridge, 2019), 11.

<sup>6</sup> James Marten, 'Childhood Studies and History: Catching a Culture in High Relief' in *The Children's Table: Childhood Studies and the Humanities* ed. Anna Mac Duane (Athens, Ga., 2013), 49-60.

<sup>7</sup> See Manon Pignot, *Allons enfants de la patrie: Génération Grande Guerre* (Paris, 2012) and Rosie Kennedy, *The Children's War* (Basingstoke, 2014).

<sup>8</sup> Marten, 'Childhood Studies and History', 55.

<sup>9</sup> See Karin Priem and Frederik Herman, 'Humanitarian Photography Beyond the Picture: David "Chim" Seymour's Children of Europe' in *Appearances Matter. The Visual in Educational History* ed. Tim Allender, Inés Dussel, Ian Grosvenor and Karin Priem (Oldenbourg, 2021), 156-81.

<sup>10</sup> See Pippa Oldfield, *Photography and War* (London, 2019) Chapter 4.

<sup>11</sup> Susan Moeller quoted in Graham Clarke, *The Photograph*. (Oxford, 1997), 163.

<sup>12</sup> Clarke, *The Photograph* 146. Emphasis in the original.



The second image is of a food queue in 1917 (fig 2). The third is from an article in the *Birmingham Illustrated Weekly Mercury* in 1918 about photographs 'found' on the battlefields (fig 3).



Fig 2. A food queue in Birmingham 1917, MS 4616/1. Reproduced with the permission of the Library of Birmingham.



Fig 3. 'From the Battlefield,' *The Birmingham Illustrated Weekly Mercury*, 7 October 1916, back page. Reproduced with the permission of the Library of Birmingham.





**Fig 4. Children on a Birmingham Co-operative Society float at the May Day parade, 1920, MS 4616/1. Reproduced with the permission of the Library of Birmingham.**

The last image is from 1920 and is of children on a Birmingham Co-operative Society float at the May Day parade under the banner of 'War Made us Fatherless' (fig 4).

The family is shown in a conventional studio pose with the father standing behind the mother. Elizabeth Edwards has described such photographs as 'little theatres of self' as in the anonymity of the studio they project an ideal, both personal and collective, capturing a moment when the 'mythic and the idealised self, in "Sunday best" was performed' and made visible 'the abstract norms, values and feelings that surround social life'.<sup>13</sup> It was also through such moments, she argues, that children learned the conventions and traditions of photography, 'what it meant to have one's photograph taken'.<sup>14</sup> In many working class households such photographs represented in the first half of the 20th century the only surviving document of family history.<sup>15</sup> It was 'exhaustive proof' of lives lived.<sup>16</sup> The image captures a likeness of a father

and a husband that could be kept on the mantelpiece to be treasured by those who are faced with an impending moment of departure and with no knowledge of the moment of return. Abednego went with the Royal Army Medical Corps to France. What did Sarah and Norah feel at being separated from their father and not knowing if or when he would return? What difficulties did Fanny face with her husband's absence? Keeping in touch through letters and parcels connected families with absent fathers and sustained emotional connections. Holding a letter,<sup>17</sup> as Santanu Das has argued, physically and emotionally connected the writer with the recipient of a letter, but gaps in correspondence and the uncertainty and anxiety associated with waiting to hear from loved ones inevitably, as Michael Roper has documented, also had an emotional impact on family life and relationships.<sup>18</sup> When soldiers returned, relationships needed to be 'rebuilt, roles defined and feelings reaffirmed'.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Elizabeth Edwards, "'Little Theatres of Self' Thinking about the Social' in *We are the People. Postcards of the Collection of Tom Phillips* (London, 2004), 29-31.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>15</sup> Audrey Linkman and Caroline Warhurst, *Family Albums* (Manchester, 1982), 2.

<sup>16</sup> Maria Stepanova, *In Memory of Memory* (London, 2021), 75.

<sup>17</sup> Santanu Das, *Touch and Intimacy in First World War Literature* (Cambridge, 2005), 13.

<sup>18</sup> Michael Roper, *The Secret Battle. Emotional Survival in the Great War* (Manchester, 2009), 86-93. See also Kennedy, *The Children's War*, 137-41.

<sup>19</sup> Kennedy, *The Children's War*, 156.

Throughout the conflict securing an adequate supply of food was a problem, but from 1917 it became a serious issue. Queues outside food shops, as shown in fig.2, became a regular sight, and Birmingham Schools' Medical Officer complained that children were being kept off school to wait in food queues.<sup>20</sup> In this image, the continuing 'novelty' of the camera on the street is readily apparent with two children and two adults looking directly at the photographer. The adults, predominantly women, are pressed together waiting for the rationing centre to open; they are not the poorest of Birmingham's population and generally appear relaxed. The one boy is dressed in a military style overcoat and a cap with insignia. However, in the poorest parts of the city food shortages hit hard, as the Head Teacher of Dartmouth Street Boys School noted in February 1917: 'Attendance lowest for some time...The weather [and] food and fuel are scarce and there are many scholars ill.'<sup>21</sup>

Towards the end of the war, the *Birmingham Illustrated Weekly Mercury* newspaper ran a series of appeals asking for information about family photographs found abandoned on the battlefield (fig 3). These are images which for those left behind visually represented the possibility of loss, and if not proof of loss, they certainly spoke of uncertainty. Over 350,000 children lost their fathers during the conflict and many thousands more would have lost relations.<sup>22</sup> The contingency of death was particularly difficult for those who remained at home. As Mary MacLeod Moore wrote in *The Sunday Times* newspaper,

"'Killed' is final; 'Wounded' means hope and possibilities; 'Prisoner of war' implies a reunion in the glad time when peace comes again to a stricken world; but 'Missing' is terrible. In that one word the soldier's friends see him swallowed up behind a cloud through which pierces no ray of light.'<sup>23</sup>

For a child to turn a page in a newspaper and suddenly to find themselves and that of a missing father or sibling returning their gaze would have been deeply distressing, and if the photograph in the newspaper and that on the mantelpiece was all that remained, the missing body made it difficult to grieve properly.

Younger children would have had only the briefest of memories of fathers and siblings, but they were expected to engage in the cult of remembrance. As Catherine Rollet has so perceptively written:

Death in wartime formed a conclusive reference point for their developing identity ... With time, direct memory of the father came to be merged with or submerged beneath the memory constructed by the family and by the nation. A significant obligation imposed itself on everyone: the living had a debt they owed the dead and the children had to play an active part in this duty of remembrance.<sup>24</sup>

The 'fatherless' children in the 1920 May Day photograph (fig. 4) perfectly project this active role in the 'duty of remembrance'. The act of loss publicly defined these thirty or more children. Their fathers died for the flag and the medals worn by the boys materially declare their acts of sacrifice. At the same time, the banner 'WAR MADE US FATHERLESS' might also be read as implicitly carrying another message that war 'just or unjust, is a war against the child'. The children were part of the May Day procession, a political event organised by the local labour movement and attended by trade unions and a campaigning group for former soldiers, the National Union of Ex-Servicemen, among others, and which concluded with a political rally.<sup>25</sup>



**Fig 5. Children making munitions, *The Birmingham Illustrated Weekly Mercury*, 14 August 1915, p.6. Reproduced with the permission of the Library of Birmingham.**

A newspaper photograph of boys working for the war effort prompted a different line of inquiry: the role of delinquent children in the war (fig 5). The boys were from Norton, formerly known as Saltley Reformatory, which was essentially a prison for young offenders. Boys were admitted between the ages of about nine and 17 and their lives were strictly regulated. Activities were timetabled for each day between waking up at 6am and going to bed at 10pm. They were educated and trained in various trades, including shoemaking and tailoring. The contribution to the war effort was substantial as the School Superintendent detailed in the 1916 Birmingham Reformatory Annual Report. The boys had produced in the workshops:

<sup>20</sup> Library of Birmingham, Annual Report of the School Medical Officer, 1917, 4.

<sup>21</sup> Library of Birmingham, S 56/2/2 Dartmouth Street Boys School Log Book, 9 February 1917.

<sup>22</sup> Kennedy, *The Children's War*, 18.

<sup>23</sup> Mary MacLeod Moore, 'Missing', *The Sunday Times*, 8 July 1917.

<sup>24</sup> Catherine Rollet, 'The home and family life' in *Capital Cities at War. Paris, London, Berlin 1914-1919. Volume 2: A Cultural History* ed. J. Winter and Jean Louis Robert (Cambridge, 2007), 347.

<sup>25</sup> *Birmingham Post*, 3 May 1920.



thousands of articles of equipment ...either wholly or partly made up – namely, 5,000 dispatch riders' kit covers, 2,500 bandoliers, 2,500 buckle straps, 1,000 military mail bags, 3,400 ammunition pouches, 1,579 water bottle carriers, 925 flag-signaller cases.<sup>26</sup>

Apart from the workshops boys were also deployed on the reformatory farm and some worked in the local munitions' factories. There is an allusion in the 1917 annual report to the increase in delinquency being experienced in cities<sup>27</sup> and consequently pressure being put on the reformatory schools 'to provide accommodation for cases committed to their charge'. At Norton nearly twice as many boys were admitted in 1916-1917 compared to the previous year, and boys were passing through the school too quickly, the training was too short, and this was 'adverse to the boy's welfare'.<sup>28</sup>

The next two photographs are associated with the field of battle. Both come from a commemorative album for the city's Tank Bank Week which was held from 31 December 1917- to

January 1918. The last year of the war opened in Birmingham with efforts to raise additional funds for the war effort and to boost public morale as the city celebrated Tank Bank Week.<sup>29</sup> A tank was placed outside the Town Hall to draw in the crowds, playing to the public's desire to see this new technology of the war. A civic competitive spirit came into play and Birmingham was keen to outdo other cities that had already held similar events, and in particular to collect more money than Manchester and Liverpool which had raised £4,450,020 and £2,060,512 respectively. A huge board was erected at the side of the Town Hall on which the daily totals were displayed with the message 'Birmingham Must Win', and a variety of events and speeches were held in the square every day. The grand total in Birmingham, once postal deposits had been included in the count, was £6,703,439.

The first image, clearly posed for maximum impact, is of a small boy dressed in a sailor's outfit returning the salute of an army officer while handing his contribution to another soldier half hidden inside a tank (fig 6).



**Fig 6. Children saluting, Birmingham Tank Bank Album, 1918, LF 75.7/531718.** Reproduced with the permission of the Library of Birmingham.

<sup>26</sup> Library of Birmingham, L43.94 Birmingham Reformatory 63rd Annual Report, 1916, 10.

<sup>27</sup> See Victor Bailey, *Delinquency and citizenship: Reclaiming the young offender, 1914-1948* (Oxford, 1987).

<sup>28</sup> Library of Birmingham, L43.94 Birmingham Reformatory 64th Annual Report 1917, 7.

<sup>29</sup> From 31st December 1917 to 5th January 1918.







An assembled crowd of adults surround the Boy Scout while a second boy positioned at the front of the frame stares directly out of the image challenging a future reader to act. Later scouts worked as bell-boys on trams, built huts for soldiers, worked for the Public Works Committee whitening kerb stones and lamp-posts in parks and helped with air raid precautions. As Kennedy has argued, it was through children's involvement with organised youth groups that was perhaps the 'most visible way British children were mobilised for the war effort'. Further, Baden-Powell, founder of the Boy Scout movement, saw the organisation as an ideal way to instil in youngsters a strong sense of patriotism and a willingness to defend and maintain the British Empire. The Scouts were the 'best' of British youth.<sup>31</sup>

All three images point to the critical role children played both the war effort and in enabling the nation to actually wage war. Consciously or unconsciously, 'uniformed' children were proxies used to deliver state propaganda. The reproduction and circulation of their images enabled the message to reach far beyond the children captured in the individual photographs. 'Children', for Liisa Malkki, 'occupy a key place in dominant imaginations of the human and the "world community"', and she identified five interrelated dimensions that define modern notions of childhood. Children are perceived,

as embodiments of a basic human goodness and innocence; (2) as sufferers; (3) as seers of truth; (4) as ambassadors of peace (and symbols of world harmony); and (5) as embodiments of the future.<sup>32</sup>

Malkki's analysis is useful for framing the next Birmingham photographs (figs 9 and 10) of children displaced by war. The caption for the first photograph tells us that the boys are from Serbia, that they are being cared for by J. Douglas Maynard and his wife at Serbia House, Selly Oak, and that the home was controlled by 'a committee of local ladies and gentlemen.' The two adults in the photograph are identified as J. Douglas Maynard and 'Mr Geale, who is acting as scoutmaster'. The image was reproduced both in the *Weekly Mercury* and the *Bournville Works Magazine*.<sup>33</sup> The boys, aged between 10 and 14, arrived in Birmingham in early 1916 suffering from the effects of exposure and semi-starvation following retreat across the Albanian mountains.<sup>34</sup> We know from documentary evidence that they arrived with their Serbian schoolmaster and were met by a band of Birmingham Boy Scouts and 'marched up to the house with flags flying'.<sup>35</sup> The boys returned home in 1919. The second photograph is from 1921. The previous year 18 girls from Vienna arrived in Bournville where they lived with local families for a year. Here we can see the girls with George and Elizabeth Cadbury who financially contributed for the maintenance of each child.<sup>36</sup> The Quaker paper *The Friend* reported their arrival describing them as 'sweet-looking children of from 8 to 12 years

of age [who] all appeared to be very happy as they trooped into the Infants' School, many of them carrying all their possessions in a small bundle on their backs'.<sup>37</sup> The article goes on to describe their efforts to learn English and closed with a reminder to its readers that 'tens of thousands of little children' in Austria 'will probably suffer for life through the lack of food'. The girls' return to Vienna in September 1921 was similarly reported in *The Friend*; the article describes how the children and their foster parents clung to each other weeping, and contrasted the appearance of the 'healthy, plump looking' children, 'well clothed and well cared for', with the 'thin emaciated and badly clothed' children who had arrived a year earlier.<sup>38</sup>



<sup>31</sup> Kennedy, *The Children's War*, 83, 158. For the use of Scouts in propaganda see also Honeck and Marten, 'More than Victims', 1-3.

<sup>32</sup> Liisa Malkki, 'Children, Humanity, and the Infantilization of Peace', in *In the Name of Humanity: The Government of Threat and Care*, ed. Ilana Feldman and Miriam Ticktin (Durham, NC, 2010), 59.

<sup>33</sup> *Birmingham Illustrated Weekly Mercury*, 1 July 1916; Library of Birmingham, L66.53 *Bournville Works Magazine*, 1916. The works in the magazine title refers to the Cadbury chocolate factory which was located in Bournville

<sup>34</sup> Reginald H. Brazier and Ernest Sanford, *Birmingham and the Great War 1914-1919* (Birmingham, 1921), 317-18.

<sup>35</sup> Library of Birmingham, MS 466/1/1/15/3/13.

<sup>36</sup> *Bournville Works Magazine*, November 1921, 283.

<sup>37</sup> *The Friend*, 19 November 1920, 743.

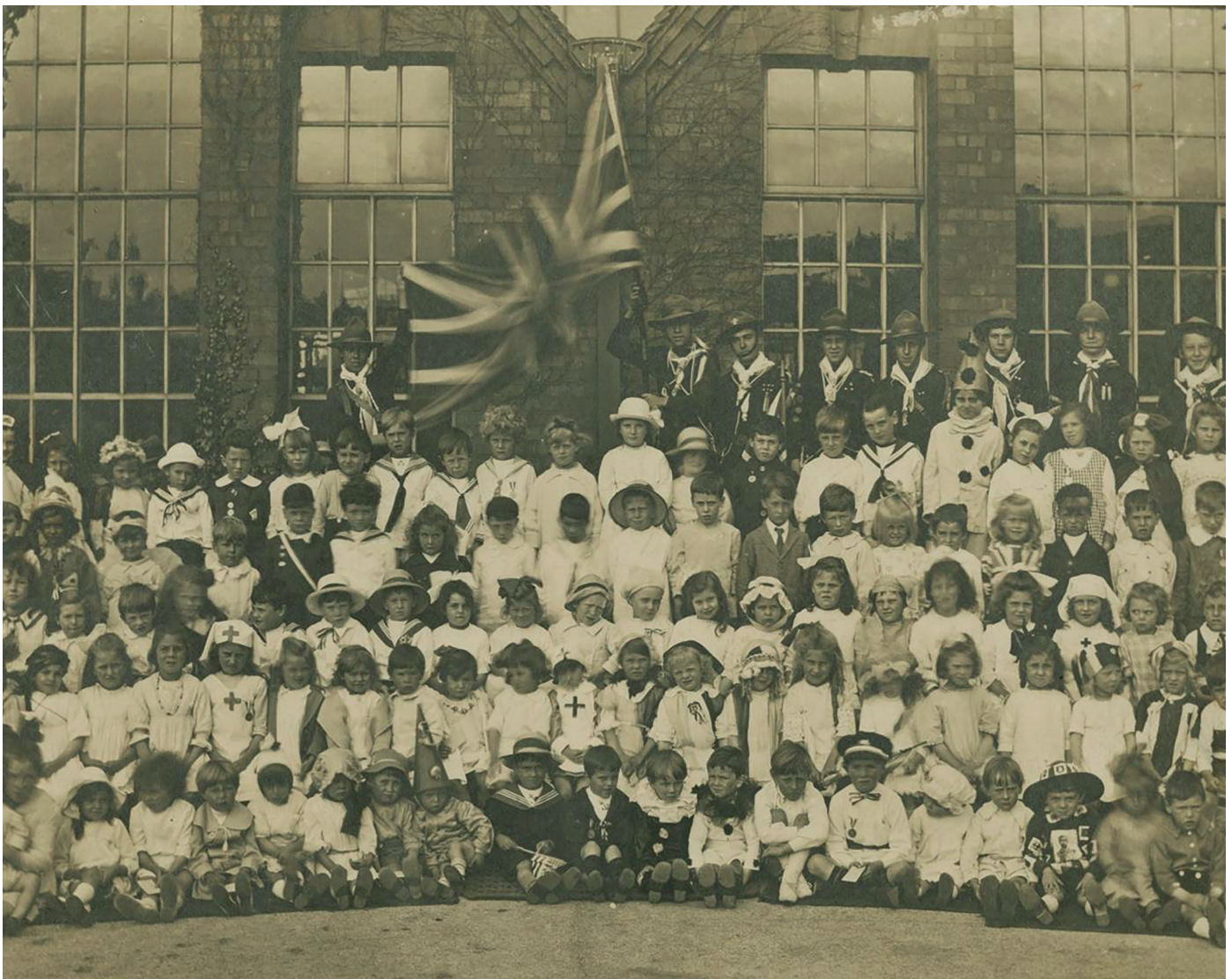
<sup>38</sup> *The Friend*, 16 September 1921, 613.



None of the children in either photograph look distressed, and yet both groups of children were refugees who had been uprooted from all they knew and displaced in history. Both photographs were taken for fundraising and promotional purposes. What is different between these two groups of children is that the girls were the 'children of enemies'. They had escaped from a city of suffering following the Allied blockade. There is a further link between the two images. They are both a product of the international humanitarian relief movement. Their stories physically and emotionally give real meaning to Eglantyne Jebb's observation that 'Every war, just or unjust, is a war against the child'. Jebb saw no distinction between the children of allies and enemies; 'all children were innocent and deserved assistance'.<sup>39</sup> We do not know the names of the children or what happened to them on their return, but the photographs, once again, offer exhaustive proof of lives lived, and of innocence, suffering and the future. It should also be remembered that refugee stories are powerful

reminders that the 'local', as Doreen Massey has emphasised 'is always a product in part of "global" forces'.<sup>40</sup>

Our final image is from the end of the war (fig 11). It is an example of the genre of the school photograph that became increasingly commonplace at the end of the nineteenth century: the whole school/class group portrait. Children, mainly of infant and junior age, have been organised in rows with the youngest sitting at the front. Two rows of older children are standing on benches that are hidden from view, and behind them are much older boys who are in their scout uniforms. The other children are wearing some form of costume rather than their ordinary clothes, including eleven boys wearing sailor suits, five girls dressed as nurses, three boys wearing 'Pierrot' outfits - a popular costume associated with the Edwardian music hall and seaside entertainment - and one boy dressed as a wizard. At first sight, there appears to be an absence of adults, but closer scrutiny reveals the head of a man almost in hiding behind



**Fig 11. Victory celebrations at Bordesley Green School, Birmingham, 1918, MS 1645/14.** *Reproduced with the permission of the Library of Birmingham.*

<sup>39</sup> Siân Roberts, 'Exhibiting children at Risk: Child Art, International Exhibitions and Save the Children Fund, 1919-1923'.

<sup>40</sup> Doreen Massey, 'Places and their Pasts', *History Workshop Journal*, 39, 1995, 183.



the back row, and the leg, shoulder, and part of the hat of a figure outside of the frame who is attached to the scouts. Looking at the photograph, the eye is immediately drawn (again) to the centrality of the Union Jack flag in the photograph's composition which, despite being held by two boy scouts, is caught moving. A boy wearing a Union Jack is also waving a second flag. Behind him, another boy is wearing a sort of Union Jack cravat, and a girl in the row behind him has a shawl or Union Jack dress. Several children are wearing medals, including one of the nurses, while others wear rosettes. At the front, a small boy wears a dark hat and outfit with different symbols attached, and on his front is an image of King George V. Along from him, and placed directly in line with the billowing Union Jack flag, is a small boy in a sailor suit who is holding another flag, but not the Union Jack – it is the Stars and Stripes of America.

Only a few of the children can be described as looking happy, and indeed many look totally bemused or even bored with what is going on. Given the length of time it would have taken to organise them [and their costumes?], this apparent lack of enthusiasm for the experience is not surprising. All these children were born before the outbreak of war and therefore they would have all experienced in some way its impact on their lives. Their understanding of this experience would naturally be filtered by age and circumstance. But what would they have taken and remembered from this 'celebratory' moment of which they are a part; a moment saturated with the symbols of patriotism and nation? What would they have drawn upon to make sense of it?

### **The visual and children's experience of conflict: seven reflections.**

The photographic historian Darren Newbury has argued that '... [photographs] are the starting point for inquiry rather than its end', so what conclusions can we draw from this photographic led account of the First World War and children's experiences of conflict?<sup>41</sup>

First, it is self-evident that the logic of total war disrupted the routines, formalities, and procedures associated with children's lives. Birmingham families endured economic and emotional hardships. However, Catherine Rollet has pointed to the difficulties associated particularly with trying to uncover the emotional experiences of children with fathers at the front and cautioned that 'in the case of children, historians need to be even more diffident'. There is, she argues 'very little direct material, some drawings and school essays, letters, personal diaries written by the older children and then autobiographies – but these recreate experience of war after the event'.<sup>42</sup> This warning could also be employed when talking of the experiences of refugee children.

Second, children were used, whether knowingly or not, as instruments of adult persuasion. Patriotic events employed children as key social actors, and photographs were circulated which captured these moments. In these photographs, we see the past, but in most cases the faces of the children remain unknown. Nevertheless, the photographs reveal the social world of which they are a part, and we can witness their connections to the wider social narratives of both community and nation.

Third, the photographic evidence of children at war has taken our gaze beyond the institutional sites of school and home that are so often the focus of historians of childhood. As Kim Rasmussen observed, 'places for children' are only seldom the same as 'children's places'.<sup>43</sup> The photographs used in this paper, and many of the others found in the archive, point to the significance in children's lives of public spaces. These were spaces of performance and spectacle, where children gathered to witness the mobilisation and departure of men going to war. They were also spaces where the sounds and sights of childhood changed. They were spaces where children experienced both a 'complex of representations' and the 'circulation of representations', the effects of the one 'always articulating into and re-working the other'.<sup>44</sup> Men in uniform, some wounded or mutilated, were ever present on the street. The street was a place of flag days and other campaigns to raise funds. Street advertising covered the walls and temporary hoardings of the city, but the content and language was different. Patriotic symbolism and legal notices visually testified that the city was at war. Maroons became a feature of the city soundscape, and children were able to see and touch the new mechanical weapons of destruction. Cinemas showed images of war and patriotism, music halls interspersed comic turns with one act plays about the war. If children could not see them, they would know of them through overheard adult conversations. The night, which before the war was turned into day through illumination, returned to semi-darkness because of fear of aerial attacks; attacks which brought the noise of war into public and private spaces. All these sensory experiences became strands in the fabric of children's identity in wartime Birmingham. These public spaces also constituted affective borders or 'emotional frontiers' where different norms and prescriptions had to be navigated.<sup>45</sup>

Fourth, what was the legacy of experiences such as these? Certainly, the social and psychological results of the 'war to end all wars' was profound. It not only affected how people thought about the future, but also their view of the child as part of that future. John Thorne has pointed to the period after the 'Grande Guerre' as being one of 'cultural demobilisation', a turning away from the culture of war.<sup>46</sup> The Declaration of the Rights of the Child drafted by Jebb and approved by the League of Nations in September 1923 was one element in this process.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>41</sup> Darren Newbury, *Defiant Images: Photography and Apartheid South Africa*. (Pretoria, 2009), 4.

<sup>42</sup> Rollet, 'The home and family life', op. cit., 345.

<sup>43</sup> Kim Rasmussen, 'Places For Children - Children's Places', *Childhood*, 11 February 2004, 156-66.

<sup>44</sup> John Tagg, 'The Discontinuous City: Picturing and the Discursive Field', in *Visual Culture: Images and interpretations* ed. Norman Bryson, Michael Ann Holly and Keith Moset (London, 1994) 85.

<sup>45</sup> Stephanie Olsen, 'Children's Emotional Formations in Britain, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, around the First World War,' *Cultural and Social History*, 17, 5, (2020) 643-657.

<sup>46</sup> John Horne, 'Demobilisations culturelles après la Grande Guerre,' 14-18 *Aujourd'hui* (Paris, 2002) 45-53.

<sup>47</sup> See Edward Fuller, *The Right of the Child. A Chapter in Social History* (Boston, 1951).

It was universal, without any distinction on the basis of nationality, 'race', or religion. Children assumed 'unprecedented importance' with the 1920s being hailed as the Children's Decade.<sup>48</sup> The wellbeing of the body and the mind of the child became the focus of professional study.<sup>49</sup> The extent to which these concerns were linked to the emotional impact of the culture of war on children, rather than the product of idealism and humanitarianism in the face unprecedented loss of life and suffering, remains unproven. Cabanes has cautioned about 'overestimating the extent to which children's psychological wounds were actually taken into consideration in the wake of the Great War' and instead points to the Second World War as marking the emergence of such concerns. However, he also pointed out that the history of the 1920s was 'significantly underdeveloped in contrast to the large amount of scholarly work devoted to the First World War and the 1930s' and this remains the case.<sup>50</sup>

Fifth, the photographs used in this essay animated our gaze, but as with all evidence there are problems regarding use. Photography as Hans Belting has noted 'is a medium between two gazes'. What is captured in a photograph is a product of the gaze of the photographer which is then transferred 'onto our gaze when we stand before the finished picture'.<sup>51</sup> Meaning therefore cannot be understood without acknowledging the context and issues which come into play at the time the photograph was taken. Similarly, if the context in which we view these images changes, so too can the meaning we take from them and their emotional impact. The meaning of a photograph like that of any other entity is 'inevitably subject to cultural definition'.<sup>52</sup> Therefore, it is necessary in the case of these images to consider the effect of viewing them through the lens of both commemoration and academic engagement.

Sixth, the First World War was a conflict fought in front of the camera lens, it was also the first conflict where the experiences of civilians, including children, were extensively visually documented. The centenary commemoration saw photographic exhibitions open across the UK and Europe. Amongst these was an exhibition of photographs, *Paris 14-18, la guerre au quotidien* at the Galerie des bibliothèques de la Ville de Paris. The photographs were all taken by Charles Lansiaux and record daily life in the city from the recruitment and departure of French soldiers, to victory celebrations in 1918.<sup>53</sup> The exhibition and associated publication allow comparison with the Birmingham photographs. In the Lansiaux exhibition, children can be seen watching military parades and adopting military poses, Boy Scouts march alongside soldiers, and children are photographed in family groups alongside their fathers in military uniform. Domestic images of children playing in parks, shopping and being entertained by street vendors are displayed next to photographs of child refugees and their families arriving from Belgium and children

queuing in soup kitchens. Child newspaper sellers distribute news reports of events on the Western Front, while others sell patriotic medals or are photographed collecting donations for war orphans and refugees. Children are photographed looking at artillery, sitting astride large canons and parading on Armistice Day. In other words, it is clear the children's experiences captured in the Birmingham photographs are not unique to either the city or the nation.

Finally, to what extent did taking the photographic as the starting point for our inquiry into children and conflict surface different strands of experience that were reflective of the ordinary and the extraordinary? Birmingham as a major industrial centre was fully mobilised for war, and the city's population grew exponentially as male and female workers, soldiers and medical personnel, the wounded, and refugees poured in from other parts of Britain and beyond. Consequently, the lives of children and youth in Birmingham 'meshed' not only with the military, political and cultural contexts of conflict, but also with the economic and social. A meshing that was captured in the lens of the camera. Further, Elizabeth Edwards has argued that photography and the practice of history belong to the same epistemic project – to capture the past as it was.<sup>54</sup> The Birmingham photographs are 'windows into a world otherwise lost'. We see the faces of children and their lives as lived, with all the multiple contingencies which informed and controlled their experiences of war time conditions. They are images waiting to be used.



All photographs generate questions, and because photographs are 'randomly inclusive' carrying an excess of information, any individual photograph has more than one story to tell.

<sup>48</sup> Alice Boardman Smuts, *Science in the Service of Children 1893-1935* (New Haven, 2006), 139.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., see also John Stewart, *Child Guidance in Britain, 1918-1955: The Dangerous Age of Childhood* (London, 2013).

<sup>50</sup> Bruno Cabanes, *The Great War and the Origins of Humanitarianism 1918-1924* (Cambridge, 2014) 8.

<sup>51</sup> Hans Belting, *An Anthropology of Images* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 154.

<sup>52</sup> Allan Sekula, *Photography against the Grain. Essays and Photo Works, 1973-1983* (Halifax, Nova Scotia, 1984), 3.

<sup>53</sup> The exhibition was open 15 January 2014 -15 June 2014. All of the images are reproduced in Marie-Brigitte Metteau (ed.) *Paris 14-18, la guerre au quotidien. Photographies de Charles Lansiaux* (Paris, 2014).

<sup>54</sup> Elizabeth Edwards, 'Thoughts on Photography and the Practice of History,' in *The Ethics of Seeing: Photography and Twentieth Century German History*, ed. Jennifer Evans, Paul Bett and Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann (New York, 2018), 23-36.



# Children and Conflict:

## Project Case Studies

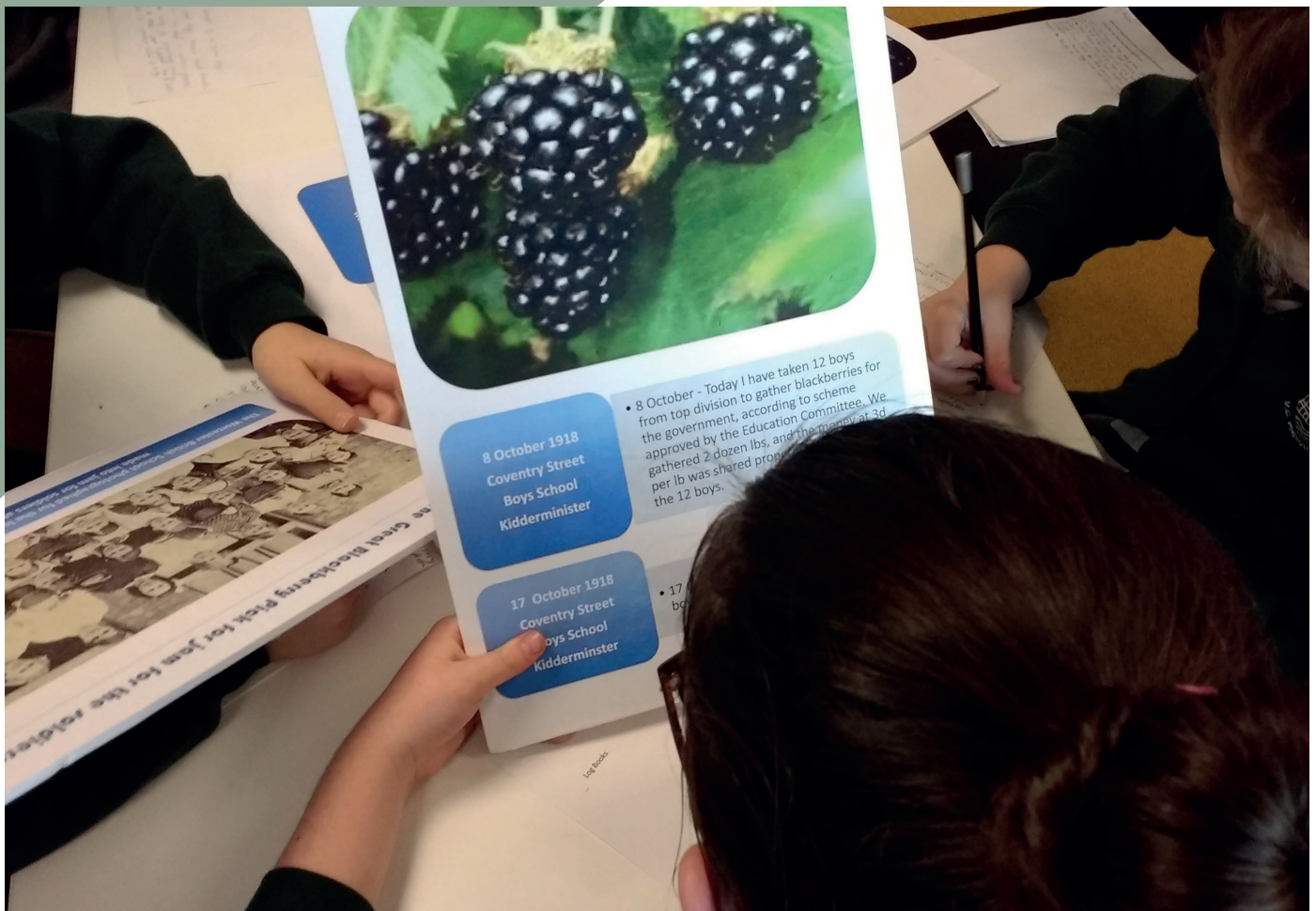


Children in uniform, ca 1915 © Estate of Käthe Buchler, Museum für Photographie Braunschweig/Deposit Stadtarchiv Braunschweig.



# Patriotism or Pragmatism:

Children and Young People  
on the Rural Home Front  
in Worcestershire.



The centenary commemorations of the First World War provided many opportunities for postgraduate students, early career researchers and established academics to engage with the public.

Collaborations with heritage organisations and community groups allowed for an exciting and ever-developing historical community to explore the hidden histories of the past together. This was the aim of the 2017 project Patriotism or Pragmatism, which placed children at its centre – both as its main research focus and as the key participation group. The project encouraged young people to explore how the conflict had affected the lives of children who had supported the home front effort in a variety of ways, from fundraising for war charities to picking blackberries to make jam for the soldiers. It sought to understand whether the lives and labours of children had been shaped by patriotic sentiments or more pragmatic concerns.



Local groups of children and young people, including Guides and Scouts, Young Carers, and a group of home-educated children, participated in a series of workshops. They undertook a number of activities in which they recreated and explored life on the home front in the county during the war. For example, a group of Cub Scouts painted eggs as children had done for soldiers a century before. Through such fun, hands-on activities, children were able to engage with the complicated question of whether young people in wartime were likely to have undertaken similar tasks for patriotic, or more pragmatic reasons. Did they, for example, paint eggs for soldiers in a fit of patriotic fervour, or because it was a more exciting way to spend an afternoon at school than learning lessons?

The groups also looked at archival film footage from the home front, and a selection of primary source material in order to create an exhibition on childhood in wartime Worcestershire. This was displayed during November 2017 in The Hive Library, the only combined university and public access library in Britain, which also serves as an information point in the city of Worcester and reaches a wide variety of audiences. Elements of the exhibition now inform the outreach work done by the education team, and local schools also visited the display and were fascinated by its contents. Their fascination may well be attributed to the fact that the exhibition was curated by their peers, the groups of young people who had worked with us on the project. Stories of gory accidents, or naughty children caught misbehaving at work, went down well, and enabled us to engage young people on the complex, and at times contrasting, motivations contemporary children had for undertaking war work.

A key factor behind the project's success was the pre-selection of sources offered to the children as a result of extensive research undertaken by postgraduate students. School logbooks and local newspapers were scoured for accessible and interesting material. For every logbook containing rich detail of school life, there were those which contained basic statistics with no exciting 'hooks' for the young people. Similarly, most local newspapers were undigitised and the students had the skills and time to skim pages and pages of microfilm to find the few relevant articles to present to the children. This approach meant that no workshop time was wasted on irrelevant material, while multiple copies of a given source could be made, which several groups could annotate as they saw fit. It does raise the question, however, of how the researchers' own interests might have impacted—positively or negatively—on the sources selected. Sources that were dismissed as dull or irrelevant, may in fact have been interesting and engaging to the young people. Although groups were given tours of Worcestershire's archives at The Hive, our approach meant that children did not have direct experiences of working in an archive itself. Possible future projects may seek to adapt our approach, for example, by giving young researchers time to explore archives by themselves; the material they find could be used alongside the pre-selected range of relevant resources. This might allow for groups to feel an even greater sense of authorship over outcomes, and inspire a passion for working in and with archives.



A key factor behind the project's success was the pre-selection of sources offered to the children as a result of extensive research undertaken by postgraduate students









Laura Davison  
Project manager

# Making history real:

‘We will remember them’



‘We Will Remember Them’ was a partnership project initiated with North Primary School in Colchester, Essex, between 2014 and 2018, commemorating the centenary of the First World War.

It was inspired by Headmaster John Harper’s entry in the School Log Book on 11 November 1919, stating that “... a Roll of Honour was to be hung permanently in the school hall, recording the 50 men from the school who lost their lives in the war.”

This historical record led us on an extraordinary journey - researching the former pupils who served and lost their lives in the First World War, commissioning a roll of honour to commemorate them, hosting community events and exhibitions, and developing an archive. A poppy plaque was commissioned for each of the former pupils’ homes, and digital walks were created to share their stories. This was followed by ‘Discovering Their Footsteps’ where 12 children travelled to the historic battlefields - literally walking in the footsteps of the 12 former pupils who lost their lives on the Somme. In the final year, ‘Homecoming’ explored the social impact upon the local community at the end of the war.

A team of creative professionals were recruited for each project, including an historian, artists, creative writer, designer, photographer and film maker. Our approach was not predefined; it was a process of collaboration and co-creation between the teachers, pupils and project team.

The Year 5 and 6 pupils were project advocates, learning how to research and write unique case studies about each soldier, by gathering evidence from primary and secondary sources. They learnt about the soldiers’ lives and where they lived by using census records and maps. By visiting and photographing their homes, the children could relate evidence from census records to the actual house where their pupil lived. The children were incredibly proud of their achievements, which promoted understanding of their soldier’s lives and the impact the war had on the school and its locality.



The pupils responded to the research through creative writing and interaction, which empowered them to make personal and inspirational responses through written word, poetry and performance, working out for themselves what they thought was good and why, in order to make sense of the war. The children produced powerful monologues that were performed at the final commemorative event, and exemplified both their knowledge and their engagement with the whole project. The children's skills and confidence demonstrated their sense of ownership and pride, as well as deep compassion towards the devastating effect the First World War had on this community.

Inspiration during the projects also came from learning outside the classroom, with visits to memorials, museums and archives, as well as an exceptionally affecting field trip to the Somme battlefields. The children's responses were real, unique and inspirational, creating moving poetry and a hauntingly beautiful film.

Involving the local community was also integral to the success of these projects. History was made real by the families who shared their stories with the children, showing them photographs, medals and death pennies.

For 'Homecoming', the children interviewed and selected the artist; ownership, confidence and knowledge of the project were clearly evident. The pupils' maturity in understanding what was required was impressive. A beautiful oak relief incorporating their designs was the final outcome. It is the sister-piece to the roll of honour, both of which are on permanent display in the school hall.

The investment of the Heritage Lottery Fund's 'First World War: Then and Now' programme demonstrates how history can be made meaningful and real. Most importantly, the children have learnt to work as real historians. The 76 former pupils are no longer just names, they are individuals, with their own stories, which can now be told and shared.

The impact of this work is a lasting legacy for the school, summed up in headteacher Alan Garnett's comment: "Through these projects the children have gained a deep respect and reverence for the people on the roll of honour. They will remember them. The children will remember this project as one of the highlights of their school careers." This was exemplified when the children progressed to secondary school - the skills, knowledge and inspiration had been embedded, and the pupils continued to use these skills within their writing and school work, always remembering.

Through co-creation, pupils were empowered to actively and confidently take ownership of the arts and heritage in their school, leading to a deeper understanding of the First World War that became meaningful to them through locally relevant stories. This approach meant that everyone had the opportunity to experience and be inspired by heritage, actively participating in the project, making it, shaping it, and uncovering real history.



Through these projects the children have gained a deep respect and reverence for the people on the roll of honour

*Alan Garnett, Headteacher*





Stephen Dixon  
Manchester School of Art

# 'The lost boys': remembering the boy soldiers of the First World War through ceramics



'The lost boys' project was developed as a partnership between Manchester School of Art at Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU) and the Clay Foundation/British Ceramics Biennial.

It examined the issue of the many boy soldiers (aged 14 to 18) who served in the British Army during the First World War. At the outbreak of the conflict, the legal age limit for armed service overseas in the British Army was 19 years, yet by the end of the war, it is thought that an estimated 250,000 underage soldiers had signed up for and/or seen active service - the youngest was aged 12 at the time of enlistment. While the war's impact on men and their families has been widely researched, the effects on the very young - many of whom were, by any standard, children - have been under-explored.



The project raised public awareness of the under-acknowledged contribution of the boy soldiers, the sacrifices made by those who were often little more than children



120 young volunteers from schools and colleges in Stoke-on-Trent and Newcastle-under-Lyme were recruited as active co-researchers and co-creators. These young men and women were also aged 14 to 18, and the confluence of their ages allowed the volunteers to directly empathise with the underage soldiers of a century before. They used British Army records and local newspapers to uncover the stories of the boy soldiers, research work supported by MMU historians and local archivists. They received introductory training in the use of archives, from cataloguing principles to the possibilities of the wide range of materials available. The volunteers were encouraged to focus on finding and collecting material on the memories and experiences of underage Staffordshire soldiers, in particular imagery in the form of official documents, photographs and correspondence. The death notices found in the Staffordshire Sentinel microfiche library in the Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire County Archives gave them a unique insight into the experiences of First World War soldiers of their own age.

The historic local connections of the Potteries were central to the project, and the stories of the boy soldiers became the narrative for a series of commemorative ceramic pieces made by the volunteers. In addition to the research training, creative ceramic workshops using the resources of the Manchester School of Art and The Clay Foundation were held. The young people brought the images and research material that they had found in the archives to the process of producing new objects – objects that would evoke a sense of remembrance and loss. The work produced included squares of paper porcelain inscribed with extracts from the boy soldiers' letters, fragments that movingly conveyed a sense of their experiences – the frightening challenges of war and the haunting memories of home. Plates were created using laser printed decals and digital transfer prints made from the papers and images collected in the archive; the archival traces of the (very) young men were glazed onto plain white dishes, capturing the past in the present through ceramics, a traditional product of the region.

An installation of 32 plates was exhibited at the Wedgwood Museum and at MMU Special Collections. The exhibition attracted over 400 visitors, many of whom commented on how important it was to hear young people's reflections on their involvement in such an emotional topic and what they had gained from their engagement with it. The project raised public awareness of the under-acknowledged contribution of the boy soldiers, the sacrifices made by those who were often little more than children. Through the creativity demonstrated by the young people of Staffordshire, the exhibition was able to facilitate a far greater understanding of the commemorative potential of ceramic artefacts. The stories of the underage soldiers were given a special emotional valency through their retelling by young people of similar ages, one hundred years on from the sacrifices of the First World War.





FRED'S SPURGIN

DAD SAID "BE A MAN!"

# Being young on the home front



In the recent centenary commemorations, many projects have sought to challenge our understanding of the war and its effects, examining the war from different perspectives.

Today's younger population has been a key audience for such projects. Nevertheless, familiar tropes have dominated the story of young people and the war. In focusing on young people as recipients of this new understanding, the majority of such projects have neglected young people's experiences one hundred years ago. There has also been a lack of thought about how young people today receive, process and react to such commemorations, and thus how they should be engaged with. There has been a tendency to direct young people, rather than allowing them to drive such projects in genuine co-production. The project, 'Being Young on the Home Front: Young People in North West England during World War One', was therefore devised to examine the war with young people, from their perspectives and in ways that would be more meaningful to them.

Young people have remained largely absent from Britain's First World War home front story. Britain's 'boy soldiers' may be familiar, but what about those who did not want to fight or the girls who wanted to fight? What was the emotional impact on the nation's young people? How did the loss of hundreds of thousands of fathers, brothers, uncles, affect Britain's children? What about those who contributed through their labour? Did young people feel underappreciated or disempowered? Indeed, young people were often criticised as delinquents, much like the young people today who we were working with on the project. We tried to answer, or at least examine, some of the questions on the project, thereby avoiding the standard tropes.



Key to our project was the placing of young people at the heart of those investigations. To give more ownership to the young people who would be participating, we worked initially through local youth group leaders and teachers, so that they could lead rather than the project team.

At the outset, we had devised the project to employ a cascade model, whereby direction was given by the project lead to group leaders (and young people directly) and then worked through participants' authorship of their work. Ultimately, we wanted all outcomes to be co-produced with both group leaders and the young people involved.

To give our stories of young people's wartime experiences more relevance, we centred our project on the local area and on themes – the emotional impact, disempowerment and delinquency, and work – that still matter today.

We hoped that this would shorten the distance between the past and the present, thereby encouraging engagement with the key questions. More importantly, from the outset we sought to engage with the past in non-traditional ways in the hope that this would stimulate greater interest and further develop understanding.

Our non-traditional method of engaging with the past was through cultural production. Those participating in the project were tasked with researching, devising, choreographing, rehearsing and performing their own productions. We thus gave the participants authorship of their productions, further encouraging their interest in the topic and associated themes.

Our groups chose to understand the war and its effects on young people through dance and drama. We hoped to improve their knowledge and understanding of the war, encouraged them to apply that knowledge, and also hoped to develop their research, analytical and creative skills.

There were undoubted challenges. Working with young people of different ages, from different backgrounds and with different interests all presented issues. However, by developing a non-traditional model we found that we were able to make the past more accessible, memorable and even enjoyable.

At least, that is what the participants said in their feedback and it certainly comes across in their performances. Such enjoyment was crucial to the success of the project.

The participants (and audiences for the live performances and videos) also noted that they not only knew more about the conflict, but also thought about it in a different way and from a perspective they had not considered before: their own.



The project was devised to examine the war with young people, from their perspectives and in ways that would be more meaningful to them



Gertie Whitfield

# Whitworks Adventures in Theatre:

bringing history to life



Gertie and Paul Whitfield have spent the last 8 years finding ways to bring history to life using drama, creative writing, active learning and research training with communities of children and young people (C&YP).

WAT has been involved in 7 First World War 'Then and Now' projects across Derbyshire and Yorkshire. 5 were working with schools and communities that did not readily engage with heritage, and were unlikely to have done so without the curriculum work led by WAT. Experience has resulted in the development of powerful strategies for engaging C&YP in First World War history projects.

**Never under-estimate** the ability of children from KS1 to KS4's ability to engage with the past. This puts no limitation on where their imaginations might take them. Using freeze frame techniques and putting C&YP in the situation of people from history is very powerful and develops a real understanding of past lives.

**Follow the enthusiasms** of the children.

Bakewell Y1s loved the story of soldiers like Richard Allcock, who developed strong emotional relationships with their horses. They chose to help Paul, WAT's writer, create a story about horses on a farm, who are then separated when one goes to war. Interestingly, the story also reflects the human experience of wartime separations. The book was made using their illustrations with every child providing at least one.





**Active learning** is central to engagement, and one technique that encourages critical thinking was used extensively in the classroom and in the First World War resources produced by WAT. Having explored some recruitment propaganda, C&YP are given the opportunity to place themselves on a continuum of Agree or Disagree regarding certain statements, for example: *"The government was right to use various techniques to encourage men to fight in the War."* They are told there is no right answer, but they must justify where they choose to stand; C&YP love this exercise and the respect given to their opinions.

**The power of performance** was demonstrated many times. Performances were part of 6 of the projects, drawing in the local community, allowing parents and adult contributors to share the learning and experience. Children felt great ownership and pride, having often selected the stories themselves. Their own creative writing - diaries, scripts, silent movies and letters - was frequently incorporated and often performed by the creators. The 'Sheffield Stories' project led to the writing and performance of 4 short plays. Over 250 people watched these performances.

Wherever possible, WAT ensures that the **children's voices** are heard. Sheffield Archive has a transcript of the children of disabled men who lived and worked at "Painted Fabrics" in Sheffield. This was used to help create a play set in the 1920s that demonstrated the true cost of the war. The C&YP were fascinated – and shocked – by hearing those voices from the past describe a world where men with all their limbs intact were alien to children more used to living with limbless veterans.

After Norbriggs' performance, the head, Paul Scragg, commented on how the work had drawn the school and its community together:

*"An unexpected bonus of the project, and for me the real strength, was the engagement of the Turkish community and how the project became a vehicle to break down some of the barriers that exist between our non-Turkish and Turkish families... The parents, both Turkish and non-Turkish, all spoke positively about how they felt respected, valued and included in the school and community - as a direct result of this project.... Our children have raised confidence and self-esteem. Our parents feel engaged, included, respected and valued."*

There is no doubting the power and impact of WAT's work with C&YP, reflected in this comment from a Y5 teacher: *"Drama and History work... gives all children a more level playing field from which to be able to write. They have all felt and experienced the same events. It gives them something to refer to internally."* Working on the First World War provided a historical context for sharing powerful and moving experiences in order to create new and original stories shaped by the responses of the C&YP themselves.



Really interesting. I have learned how it felt and the emotions they would have. Before I didn't know anything about World War 1

*Year 5 student*





30 Days—March 10.

60 Days—April 10.

90 Days—May 9.

FEBRUARY, 1917.

Fine but very cold (bright) 5 MONDAY [36—329] up 7.40  
12° of frost in the night.

Worked at the Co-op from  
attended Evening Class (Wright) Arith. & English.  
Felt queer tonight, rotten headache.  
Lethbridge Rd School was flooded out (pipe)  
Children could not attend school.

Break:—Fried Br & Tea.

Dinner:—Beef, cabbage, Mince M. Robby P.

Tea:—Br. Dripping & Tea Supper:—Hot Lemon Dr.

Bed 9.1

6 TUESDAY [37—328] up 6.40 A.M.

Fine & very cold. Sunshine in the afternoon.

Worked at the Co-op from 7 A.M. till

Took a note to Escott's Hall for Mr Drew, who joined up

Took the collars to the Laundry. Mr Button went to Dev.

Have not use trams for two days!!

Started to read "Tale of Two Cities". Did not go to Evening

Break:—Br. B, egg & cocoa

Dinner:—Mutton Ch. potatoes & Sago Pudd.

Tea:—Br. B & Tea. Supper:—Cocoa.

Bed 10.4

7 WEDNESDAY [38—327] up 7.0 P.M.  
O Full Moon, 3.28 a.m.

Fine & very cold.

Hard frost.

Worked at the

from 7 A.M. till 6 P.M.

Went out to Coate Res. in the evening with  
lovely slides in moonlight on ice. Came home  
Mr Monk at 10 P.M.

Uncle Will unwell and home from  
The weather for the past week or so, is the most severe since

Break:—Beef Sand. & Cocoa.

Dinner:—Boiled M., Broth

Tea:—Br. B & Tea.

Supper. Br. B & Cocoa.

Bed 10.4



# Lost voices of the past

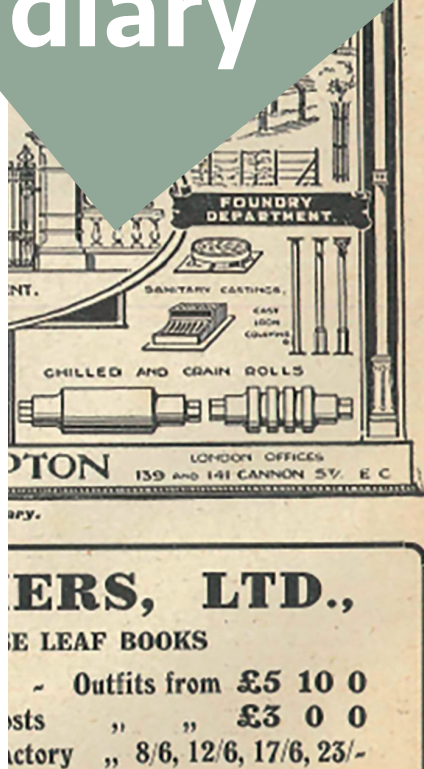


The centenary's commemorative projects brought forth a multitude of stories that emphasised the war's profound impact on individuals, communities and the nation.

In terms of understanding the conflict, we're probably more familiar with the suffering and loss that was the experience of so many, yet there were lives that remained relatively unaffected by the war and stories that speak to the ordinary and everyday. The diaries of two young people – Edward Taylor and Marjorie Western – provide glimpses into such a world where, despite the earthshattering events on the national stage, life at home continued much as it had before. The war's presence can be detected, but it's interwoven with all the other threads that constituted day-to-day existence and what it meant – and means – to be young.

Sarah Lloyd

# Edward Taylor's diary



## MEMORANDA.

1916

### Christmas Presents.

her  
ank & Ethel (Wedding present). Biscuit Barrel  
Charlie  
Dolly.  
Maple  
Aunt  
Uncle  
Stanley  
Granny  
Mr Blough  
Mr Button.

Salt Cellars  
Books (E.M.L.)  
Pencil Case  
Hair Combs.  
Book.  
Biscuit Barrel  
Handkerchief.  
Book.  
Handkerchief.  
L  
Cigars (4).

### Presents Received.

Dad, Ma, Frank, Ethel.  
Dolly.  
Aunt & Uncle  
Mr Button.

Pocket Wallet  
Diary  
Big Album.  
Tie.

In 2012, I paid a dealer £20 for a bag of assorted letters and other documents dating from the late 19th century and early 20th century. This was history by lucky dip: one of the items was a handwritten diary from 1917. All but one week in August had been filled in neatly, as had the pages for notes and accounts.

I read it quickly and my first impression was that it never mentioned war. Compared with the letters and diaries kept at the Imperial War Museum, for example, it seemed a very poor source and of little historical value. I'd put it back in the bag and leave it until I got around to tidying odds and ends. But something about the diary's apparent silence intrigued me. The First or 'Great' War was supposed to be a 'total' war in which the whole of society and all its resources were mobilised. As a result, it was virtually impossible for anyone in the United Kingdom to be untouched by its effects. If that was the case, where did the diary fit and who was the diarist?

So instead of putting the diary back into the bag, I started to read it again, more carefully this time. The second time around I did pick up some references to the war: a man joined up (6th February), another received his papers (22nd March), a third was rejected (27th September); Alf Rickman died of wounds (28th February); the public clocks, which had been silenced for fear of Zeppelins, struck again on 14th March. In April, 3 soldiers from the Worcester Regiment were billeted on the diarist's family. A battle plane flew over in August. In November, the Co-op was fined for selling split peas above the control price. Together these didn't add up to much; more significant was the following entry from March when 'Charlie was transferred from Wakefield to Dartmoor'. These sounded like prisons, so with the introduction of compulsory military service in 1916, was Charlie a conscientious objector? By now I was hooked. It was time to turn to other historical tools to help.



The diarist had written what was presumably his name – E F Taylor – on a page of advertisements at the front of the diary, and on 8th May noted his 16th birthday. Most recreation took place in 'town' but he cycled out to Coate, which is near Swindon. So with a partial name, date of birth and approximate place, first stop was the 1911 census. And there he was, Edward Fred Taylor, aged 9, at 19 St Margaret's Road, Swindon. In the household were the 2 brothers and 2 sisters mentioned in the diary, confirming the match. In 1911 his father and elder brothers were employed at the 2 places where Edward, as we now can call him, worked in 1917: the Cooperative and the Railway Company's carriage works.

With a full name, I moved on to school logbooks and registers, again online. I traced Edward to Lethbridge Road school and then on to Higher Elementary school in 1913: I now knew that when the diary began in 1917, he had been less than a year out of school. And what about the tantalising hints about Edward's brother Charlie? A standard search through the military sections of the genealogical databases turned up a 'Record of Service Paper' from Woolwich in 1916, but more significantly, he appears in a database of conscientious objectors (COs). And now the diary revealed something the other sources hadn't: that Charlie was a member of the Independent Labour Party, since he was at a meeting when the constables came around to arrest him in November 1917. A further connection emerged from the apparent trivia of Edward's notes: a Christmas present from Jim Innes linked the family to another CO.

So what do we have now? A glimpse of 1917 through the eyes of a 16-year old boy who is already working 11 hours a day but thoroughly absorbed by teenage pursuits: his stamp collection, buying a camera, football and going around town with his mate, Norman G. If the reading list is anything to go by, Edward's imagination was caught up with stirring tales of global adventure, a tone set by his first novel of the year, *The Prisoner of Zenda*. His family's political loyalties come through in a reference from May to a 'Labour demonstration', but the rhythm of the diary is set by personal and domestic details: toothache, night school, cycle rides and meals.

Diaries record patterns of life and thought; in our zeal for evidence of war we can overlook the material that does not fit our preconceptions. Centenaries are about remembering, but they are also about forgetting the pulse of everyday life: gadding about with Norman G or picking bluebells. In Taylor's diary, war is on the periphery, coming home literally in the form of Charlie Taylor and the billeted soldier who occupied Edward's bed leaving him to sleep downstairs, but most of the time pushed out to the edge. Reconstructing the life of Edward Taylor reminds us of this, inviting us to see official histories of war as only partial stories of human experience. In thinking about the legacies of war, what first appeared to be the inadequacies of Edward Taylor's diary became their most remarkable characteristic.

## Books read during 1917

- | Title   |
|---|
| "Prisoner of Zenda."                                    |
| "Rupert of Hentzau" (sequel of 1)                       |
| "Head of Mary's."                                       |
| "Cruise of the Gyro Car."                               |
| "The Pools of Silence" (a story of the Belgian Congo)   |
| "Boy Crusoe's" (Story of Siberian Forest)               |
| "The Telling Star"                                      |
| "The Fifth Form at St. Dominic"                         |
| "Grey Ghost" (Norman invasion of England).              |
| "Willis the Pilot" (Sequel to "Swiss Family Robinson"). |
| "The Tiger of Mysore" (Indian Story)                    |
| "The Flying Scout" (Chinese story).                     |
| "Adrift in the Pacific" (Cruise yarn)                   |
| "The Three Scouts" (Boer War).                          |
| "The Last Square of Ingleswood" (In the lanes of Kent)  |
| "The Red Heggerv" (Story of U.S.A.)                     |
| "Exploits of Elaine" (Welsh story)                      |
| "The Smugglers"   |
| "Tommy" (Lanc. Boy)                                     |
| "Michael O'Halloran"                                    |
| "Masterman Ready" (Shipwreck yarn).                     |
| "Lost Face" (about a                                    |
| "The Jacket"  |
| "Robina Crusoe" (Girl Crusoe)                           |
| "Willoughby Captains" (No 160668)                       |
| "The Black Box" (Detective Yarn)                        |
| "St. Wenefred's" (School Tale).                         |
| "The Green Ray"   |
| "The Scarlet Plague"                                    |
| "Children of the Frost"                                 |
| "Short Cruises" (W.W.J.)                                |
| "The Sign of the Spider."                               |



Sue Laidler

# Marjorie Western's diary

[30—336]  
Epiphany.

... time had very good  
read Portia by Miss  
great good, should like to  
d young man from the County  
leading at Christmas.

31 MONDAY [31—335]

*The insurance herein contained is not valid until  
your name has been registered.*

Eat gingerbread as a cure for insomnia.

Washing day so very busy. This even heard sounds  
as if guns, say the Zepps have been so close  
the guns sounded between Newmarket & Bury  
what a pity they have started that again.  
Do not like my book the Bellmate by May Lindau

FEB. 1 TUESDAY [32—334]

*A pail of water put under the bed will prevent cramp at night.*

I heard the Zepps went to Bury & Newmarket  
but no official news yet, they seem to keep it  
quiet. went up to see the W. mrs. Annie  
had a cold, poor dear. Mary has not finished  
reading her books yet, should think she  
dowell is very good Mrs. Cresswell is now  
having words with a man in her house  
thank goodness the fates have gone back

Marjorie Western was born in August 1897 in the village of Bildeston, Suffolk, the youngest of three daughters of a farmer father, George, and his wife Mary.

Her world was small by modern standards - a mainly rural existence with visits to Ipswich and the Felixstowe seaside - but she lived through events that while they reconfigured the world, seemed to have had relatively little impact on Marjorie's life. Her 1915-1916 diaries paint a picture of a busy life that revolved around home and family; as well as housework, she helped on the farm, bottle fed lambs, collected eggs and, in 1916, worked in the fields. She walked her dog Peter, read books, made cakes, visited family, went to the cinema and to the shops. She rode her bike, took photos with her Kodak camera, went to Church and out for afternoon tea. In many ways, the war was distant, but its impact was felt and Marjorie's diaries evidence both the continuities and the changes of a young girl's life during the Great War.

The aspect of war that caused Marjorie the greatest anxiety was the Zeppelin. Their raids are mentioned frequently; for example, on 2nd February 1916 "the Zepps went to 6 counties on 31st January and dropped 220 bombs 54 killed 67 hurt the biggest air raid of all they think they will frighten us". Most worrying of all, on 31st March: "at 9 tonight we heard about 5 explosions then Pa came in



## 3 THURSDAY [34—332]

● New Moon, 4.6 p.m.

Lay a patient flat on the back when in a faint, and give plenty of air.

Very windy tonight started doing new exercise out of Beaky's Health they are very nice we keep on with them. I & I went to the del. think they liked it, made some Pear & Apple Jam today, did not do much crochet things like that make my back ache rather I don't know if I shall take any food of my own, I should like to work in the field

## 4 FRIDAY [35—331]

In convulsions give one or two drachms of ipecacuanha in warm water, and make the child sick. Sit it in hot water, with flannel round the shoulders, and apply a poultice of three-quarters linseed to one-quarter mustard to the throat and upper part of chest.

Look Mrs Emerson up. some eggs for the Hospital said Freddie was leaving England in 2 weeks she is going to the West I don't know whatfield I should think it will be rather nice should like to go. A Zepp fell in the sea, it went about 9 men on a trawler to save them, but they could not as there were men so on the Zepp I & I did the kitchen this morn, so had plenty of work. like my new exercise very much. They are very nice & muscular

## 5 SATURDAY [36—330]

A man may not marry a sister of his wife if he has divorced her or been divorced from her, as long as his wife lives.

to say he had heard the Zepps. Then at quarter to 11 we heard about 9 more quite close, heard the engines was not frightened then at 12 we heard about 9 more Zepps coming back how awful. I hope they won't come again I pray God not". That night, the bombs dropped on the Suffolk towns of Sudbury and Bury killed twelve people. Marjorie was interested in other war news too; she noted Kitchener's drowning in June 1916 and on 20th September "the English have something new out called a tank a kind of motor with guns it can jump ditches and anything so I should think this will be great help to us". Fifteen men from Bildeston died during the war and Marjorie mentions some of them. On 12th March 1916 she noted after Church: "very solemn and nice service, young Chinnery is dead" - Harry Chinnery had died on 11th of March aged 20. On 9th September 1916, "Welham had a telegram to say come at once expect his poor son is dying so he went off at once". His son Alfred Welham died of wounds just 10 days before his 21st birthday.



The centenary's commemorative projects brought forth a multitude of stories that emphasised the war's profound impact on individuals, communities and the nation.



25 TUESDAY [25-341]

### Conversion of S. Paul.

To remove a stopper that has got stuck in a bottle, hold the bottle while someone rubs a piece of string backwards and forwards, up the neck of the bottle, until it becomes quite hot.

Went to Albany with Pa this morning then down to Cold Pier. They have lots of sleds there, saw a sealplane come down, & an air gun firing. In the afternoon I went for a walk. Grandma lent me sable fur. I felt great swanks & very amused. Went to the Victoria Hall where they put some very good pictures, another air raid & some but no lives lost.

Although Marjorie writes about Zeppelins, nursing training - all three of the Western sisters worked as VADs - and the deaths of local men, life seems to pass as before: the war hovers in the background, but never really takes centre stage. Marjorie liked clothes and with an allowance from her father was able to buy a navy costume price 12s 6d in April 1915 and a muff made of moleskin that October. Excitingly, on 25th January 1916 "Grandmother lent me her sable fur and Dolly her hat - felt great swanks and very amused". Anxieties about her appearance are regularly referenced; indeed, her preoccupations resonate with contemporary concerns about body image and its impact on teenagers. Marjorie wanted to be taller and in 1915 embarked on height-increasing exercises (it's not clear what exactly they involved) in an effort to grow from 5ft to 5ft 3in. Later that year, she also bought a bust developer, but the outcomes of her efforts aren't detailed. Marjorie is often critical of other women, describing them as 'big and fat' or even 'very fat indeed'. She worries about how to wear her hair and uses beauty products like Golden Lux shampoo and Carline to help her curls. Indeed, in July 1915 Marjorie states that her "dearest wish is to have a beautiful body, but it cannot be".

If there was one thing Marjorie lacked because of the war it was boys. Many young men had joined up and the resulting absence is a recurring theme in her diaries. In January 1915 Marjorie laments: "I wish I had a boyfriend it seems strange we know no boys, but they are all soldiering at present". Three weeks later: "I wish I knew some nice boys. My ideal man is tall and big..." and in July 1915 "Wish I knew a nice soldier". In May 1916, she wrote: "in Felixstowe went to the spa to hear the band lovely sat next to nice airman with laughing eyes" and a week later: "here we are home again wonder how the twinkly eyed airman is getting on."

It's fascinating to read Marjorie's diaries from such a momentous time and see that war didn't revolutionise her life nor appear to generate great anxieties - Zeppelins and the lack of men aside. I suspect she worked more in the fields than previously, but her day-to-day life continued as if the world weren't destroying itself just over the English Channel. However, there's no mention in the diaries of any romances and I know that, unlike her sisters, she never married, so perhaps after all the war did have a major impact on Marjorie's life.



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**Im. Seal Tie and Muff**  
 (as shown)  
 In Black, with knotted fringe, lovely appearance.  
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**YOUNG LADIES' Im. Seal**  
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 In white jars, 1/1 & 2/3 Ask for

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GET IT AT YOUR CHEMIST.

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In the winter, when vitality is at its lowest, baby's food becomes a subject for serious consideration.  
 Your baby must have the maximum of nourishment with the least possible tax on the delicate stomach.  
 Give your baby Dr. Ridge's Patent Cooked Food. No other food is so nourishing, so easily assimilable, and so completely satisfying.  
 Thousands of mothers, doctors, and nurses who have experienced the wonderful feeding and health-giving properties of Dr. Ridge's Food during the past 50 years are unanimous in its praise. It is a wholesome food for body and brain. Dr. Ridge's Food, being in a concentrated form, goes further, and is therefore the cheapest food you can give baby.  
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**RANKIN'S**



**Don't Look Old!**  
 Keep Your Employment.  
**LOCKYER'S SULPHUR HAIR RESTORER**  
 DARKENS IN A FEW DAYS.



Rachel Duffett

# Uncharted worlds:

## children in the First World War



H.M. QUEEN ALEXANDRA & BURNLEY'S "YOUNG KITCHENER."

© Towner Hall Museum.

We don't know what went through Jennie Jackson's mind each time she donned her uniform, an exact replica of Lord Kitchener's, and prepared for one of her regular marches through the Burnley streets of a century ago in order to raise funds for the armed forces.

Nor indeed her mother's motivations for the painstaking work that must have gone into creating such a beautifully crafted costume. We do know, however, that Jennie, or 'Little Kitchener' as she was known, managed to raise around £4,000 – about £200,000 today – and that she was awarded the war medal of the British Red Cross Society for her efforts. Additionally, we know that she wasn't the only Burnley schoolgirl who fundraised in military dress. Amy Foster also paraded around the town every Saturday in the uniform of the Black Watch and became known as the 'Hieland Lassie', a tribute to her kilt and sporran. Young Amy and Jennie were exceptional in their financial achievements, but they were far from alone in their support of the war effort.





'Hieland Lassie' (Amy Foster), © Towneley Hall Museum.

Peter Grant writes that 'virtually every schoolchild was involved in at least one of the national [charity] campaigns' and cites the 7 million children who contributed £35,000 to the Jack Cornwell VC Memorial Fund as a powerful example of their engagement.<sup>55</sup> Rosie Kennedy's *The Children's War: Britain 1914-1918* paints a wholly convincing picture of the way in which the conflict permeated the lives of the young – from the books read at home to the lessons learned at school.<sup>56</sup>

Despite these contributions, the war's impact on children has been relatively under-explored, it's the narratives of the soldiers in the trenches and the women in the munitions' factories that dominate. It's hard to insert children's lives into history, given that their experiences leave fewer traces on the archives than those of adults, but there is a wealth of fascinating material out there waiting to be explored. We might never know for sure what motivated Jennie and Amy, how they felt about their pseudo-military activities, but we can search for evidence of the lives of other children in order that

their stories might sit alongside those of the adults with whom they shared the world of the war.

Uniforms for children were not the sole prerogative of the hardworking fundraiser, they could be bought for the dressing-up box from department stores like Gamages – 10/6 for a private's and 22/6 for an officer's, extra for the caps and belts. Not all uniforms were for play, however, and members of the recently founded Boy Scouts fulfilled a range of roles on the home front. Their efforts as orderlies in recruitment offices, organising waste paper collections, distributing recruitment posters, packing comforts for the troops and running messages freed up men for military service. While there are numerous images and fascinating research on the Scouts at work, the contributions of their female peers have attracted less attention. The Girl Guides Association's manual lists various awards for which the girls might qualify including the War Service Badge which required 'not fewer than 100 hours of unpaid service' in hospitals or on the land helping to produce food. The most prestigious award, however, was the Nurse Cavell Badge which had been instituted as both a memorial and a means of encouraging her particular brand of 'special pluck' amongst the Guides.<sup>57</sup> The manual shows that girls too were caught up in the nation's struggle, not only in sustaining the memory of Edith Cavell's sacrifice in Belgium, but in working towards achieving their Air Mechanic or Fire Brigade badges.

Many of the sources relating to children, like the associational manuals, are mediated through the adults that governed their lives, the parents, teachers, doctors and social workers. The detailed records kept in individual school logbooks are a rich seam of information on the day-to-day lives of children and the diverse ways in which the war coloured their existence. The regular half-day holidays given in rural areas for harvesting the woods and hedgerows – blackberries (jam) and horse chestnuts (explosives) – are recorded, but what about other entries that are less easily interpreted a century on? What precisely were "The three ways in which we may help win the war" in the lesson given in January 1917 in the village of Swilland, Suffolk?<sup>58</sup> Or the content of the 'loyalty lesson' held at Monewden School after a spy had been shot at nearby Woodbridge in 1916?<sup>59</sup> Exactly how frightening was it for the pupils of Rushmere St Andrew when they arrived on Monday 13 September 1915 to find that a zeppelin had passed over in the night and dropped several bombs in front of their school?<sup>60</sup>

Perhaps they were conscious of the risks to young people of such raids given that Percy Goate, aged 14, had been killed by a similar bomb in the East Anglian town of Kings Lynn earlier that year? Or what about the impact on the pupils of being taught by people whose lives were profoundly caught up in the worry and grief of war? The logbooks contain repeated references to teachers' absences in order to marry servicemen, spend their precious leave with them, visit them in hospital and, ultimately for some, mourn their deaths.

<sup>55</sup> Peter Grant, *Philanthropy and Voluntary Action in the First World War: Mobilizing Charity* (Abingdon, 2014), p. 113.

<sup>56</sup> Rosie Kennedy, *The Children's War: Britain 1914-1918* (Basingstoke, 2014).

<sup>57</sup> *Girl Guide Badges and How to Win Them* (Girl Guides Association, 1920), pp. 2-5.

<sup>58</sup> Swilland School Logbook, Ipswich Record Office (IRO), A376/4, 13.1.1917.

<sup>59</sup> Monewden School Logbook, IRO, A1059/2, 26.1.1916.

<sup>60</sup> Rushmere St Andrew School Logbook, IRO, A1747/5, 12.9.1915





Pupils pay their weekly contributions into the War Savings Association in 1916 at Gibbons Road School, Willesden, London.  
© IWM Q 30245.

The absence of fathers had harsh consequences for some children as men compelled to serve abroad could leave behind families unable to cope in challenging circumstances. The army's separations allowances were not generous and mothers with poor health and many children to feed sometimes found the challenges insurmountable. The Waifs and Strays Society was especially busy and built an additional 'Kitchener Home' in London for the children of servicemen. Their Bermondsey archive contains the case files from the period which indicate the limited choices that unskilled women in poor health faced when husbands – and the bulk of their pay packets – were absent. Many of the 'orphans' cared for by the society did have a living parent, sometimes, two, but they were unable to provide for the family. Although the Society's care could be an improvement on that of a parent, 13-year-old Edith Howes

was 'outraged' and drowned by her veteran father, William Howes, in June 1920.<sup>61</sup> She and her siblings had been placed with the organisation during the war, but he had returned to reclaim his daughters in 1919. Howes was convicted of murder, but his sentence was commuted to confinement in Broadmoor on the grounds of insanity. The details of his plea aren't clear, but the shellshock from which he had suffered as a soldier was accepted as a defence in a number of post-war murder trials.<sup>62</sup> The conflict could have long-lasting as well as immediate effects on family life. Clearly, Howes was an exception, but the presence of the war in the home, whether in the physical scars, unexplained rages, dislocation from family life or militarily rigid parenting, is evident in many of the memories of the children of the veterans.

<sup>61</sup> *The Times*, June 2 1920 and November 16 1920.

<sup>62</sup> For example, Clive Emsley's *Soldier, Sailor, Beggar Man, Thief: Crime and the British Armed Services since 1914* (Oxford, 2013).



There were places where adult influence might be less intrusive, the children's world of games, toys, books and comics, for example, but these too referenced the national struggle. Maybe it was especially important that such things did reflect the war, given that part of their role was to allow the young to practise being older, to imitate the behaviours and beliefs of the world that they would one day enter.

Military toys have a long history and, in a similar vein to their lead soldier predecessors, the miniature howitzers, replica soldiers' caps (half a crown each) and Meccano tanks brought the battlefield into the nursery. Occasionally, a product overstepped the line and an exploding trench toy had to be withdrawn shortly after its introduction in 1915. It was deemed too violent by adults, though it's not clear what the children for whom it was designed thought of it, they may have revelled in the mechanism that expelled 'Boche' troops rapidly upwards. Popular comics like *Chums* reflect the war's dominant role and there are countless stories of military men's derring-do and of boys saving the day at home through their detection of wicked (German) spies. Some of the stories speak to very specific concerns; the 13 October 1917 edition ran one titled 'The Kybosh on the Profiteer' where an evil merchant made excess profits on the sale of potatoes. It's hard to imagine what the child readers made of the relatively complex discussion on the role of the middleman and the morality governing the differences between wholesale and retail pricing. Some of the advertising found in the magazine makes strenuous use of the war in its sales pitches. For example, children were exhorted to 'keep to the ration' as restraining their appetite was their 'supreme patriotic duty' and this could be achieved 'if you munch Mackintosh's Toffee and drop a meal a day.' Sweet-eating for the nation has an appeal and was likely an activity in which children would have been delighted to participate.

The war wasn't all about sacrifice and service; in some areas children's needs were, for the first time, given special

consideration and Christmas 1915 saw the beginnings of what would eventually become Bethnal Green's Museum of Childhood. The Victoria & Albert Museum decided to set apart a room in its South Kensington home for a special holiday exhibit of 'various objects which are likely to appeal to children'. For girls there were costumes and dolls, but for the boys it was mainly items relating to battle. As *The Times* commented, there were 'martial things enough to stir the spirits of the least warlike boy' from casts of Cromwellian soldiers to paintings of Waterloo. The same article noted that it was excellent that the museum had taken such steps given that, as a general rule, 'a museum is but a depressing place for children', but the emphasis was not so much upon entertainment as on explaining war, to boys in particular, given the likelihood of their playing an active role in the future.

Despite the wealth of commemorative projects carried out over the centenary, the diversity of the roles and experiences of children during the war remains relatively under-explored. As ever, such lives have been lived mainly hidden from the gaze of those who came after. It is the adults who, in the manner of victors, have written history in their own image, determined by their interests and perspectives. Many of the stories of the conflict's impact on children's lives remain untold yet tantalisingly close, sometimes they prefigure narratives that are familiar from our engagement with a later conflict. For example, the Second World War highlighted the civilian trauma associated with mass bombing and evacuation, but who remembers Dr C.W. Kimmins' earlier research into the dreams of children and the impact of the bombing raids of 1914-1918? Or what about the St Nicholas Home for Raid Shock Children set up in Sussex in 1917 to provide a recuperative space for those that had suffered in such attacks? It is the narrative of military service that dominates our understanding of that first war, unsurprisingly given the numbers of men who served and died. Amongst those untold stories sit the shadowy lives of children, always present yet often barely visible and only faintly traced in the dominant narratives of the nation's history.





Sarah Younan, coordinator on the National Heritage Lottery funded 'Hands on Heritage' project at Amgueddfa Cymru – National Museum Wales, where she works with children and young people aged 11-25

# Whose history is it anyway?

## Thoughts on children and youth engagement with heritage



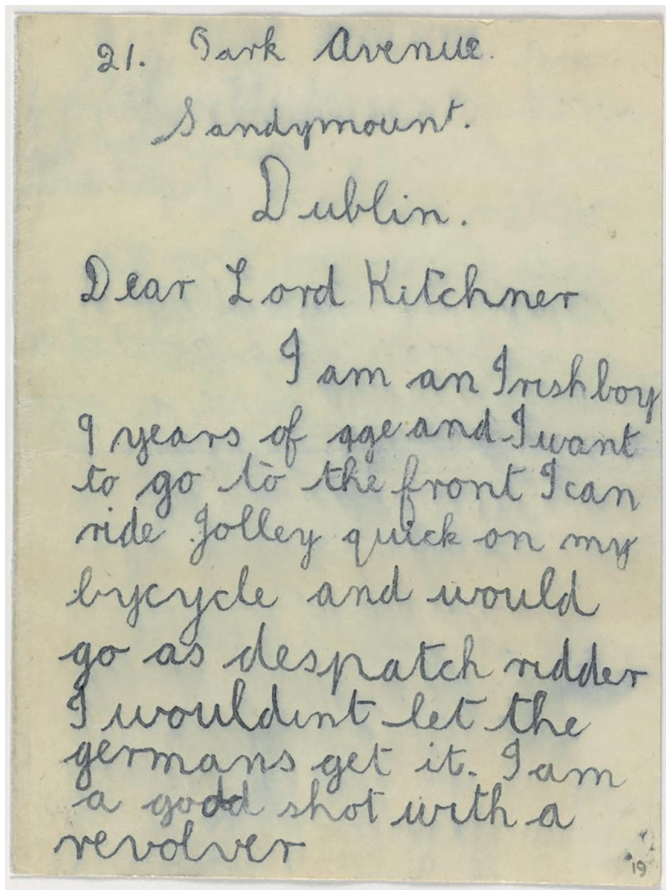
History is not a finished project. If it were, there would be no need for historians.

Every historical event, character, source and object reveals new layers of meaning the more we investigate it and depending on who investigates it. History is not neutral or objective, and it certainly is not set in stone. History is an ongoing process of investigation, discovery and interpretation.









And yet, when it comes to the presentation of heritage and history, its framing and interpretation, we return to authoritative methods. Heritage spaces such as museums demand reverential silence, as we gaze up at figures and objects framed by glass cases, plinths and gilded frames. And historical narratives are the premise of 'experts' too – people with degrees and publications to their names. Even community interest groups often want to see history as a fixed story, a solid link to the past that connects them to land, nation and people.

If there's one thing that does not excite children and young people, it is a closed story. And why should they care about narratives from which they are excluded, that happened before their time?

"But young people should learn from history" is a common argument – that there are moral lessons to be learned from history which can be conveyed to children and young people. But that isn't quite true is it? History is not a children's story; it contains as much evidence of injustice, exploitation, and violence as it contains stories of nationhood, pride and advancements. Often, these stories are one and the same.

Even the idea of engaging children and young people with history demands inspection. Are we operating on the presumption that there is 'history' which young people should be engaged with? And is this about the benefit to young people or our desire to raise the next generation of torch bearers – to see our interpretations carried forward, to make sure that our take on history is preserved?

But history is not a finished project.

To engage children and young people with history we have to relinquish control. Irrespective of our own political and ideological frames of thought, we need to take a big step back and listen, truly listen to what is of interest to them. It does not matter whether this is video games, music, or the exploration of societal and gender norms. Over the past years, I've been involved in projects that moved from RuPaul's drag race to a British history of cross dressing, to the Rebecca Riots in Wales. Even the most mundane subject can open up the field of history. History is a rich catalogue, there is something for everyone in there if we know how to look.

It's a journey we can help to navigate, but shouldn't lead. Expertise is important, but often it's the expertise of how to look, research and find relevant sources that is more in demand than a regurgitation of facts and dates. The knowledge I try and share with young people is that their interests and questions are relevant, that there are stories relevant to them, which they can take an active role in interpreting. From their points of view.

I try to reinforce that history is a project in which they can get involved, which they can shape.

This stance allows my knowledge to grow and horizons to widen. Did you know that the first and last shots of WW1 fell in East Africa? Did you know that superglue was invented during WW1 to glue together the horrible wounds of soldiers? Did you know that WW1 revolutionised medicine? Do you know how WW1 changed women's roles in society? Do you know stories of the colonial troops and carriers who fell in WW1? Have you heard of the gay war poet Wilfred Owen? There are a host of intersectional stories and figures who have long been excluded from the myths we build around WW1. They too deserve to be memorialised.



Crowd of children through an exhibition of official war photographs in 1919, titled "See the War", at the City Art Gallery in Leeds. 5,000 school children visited the exhibition.  
© IWM Q 28577.



When working with young people, relationships are important – we have to create an open culture of engagement that gives them the confidence to share and ask questions, that values their input, and that allows topics to flow freely and meaning to emerge from open conversation. There's no easy recipe to make this happen, but here are some pointers:

**Access:** if you are working with collections or heritage spaces, enable children and young people to go 'behind the scenes'.

**Power:** who sets the tone, the objectives and makes decisions? Hand over decision-making and equip young people with the tools to make meaningful and informed decisions. Don't expect them to come in 'cold' and immediately be able to do this, follow their cues and input.

**Bias:** check your own biases and remain mindful of how your own world view and interests shape your work. No, you are not neutral and neither is the knowledge you hold. Try and become a conduit for the interests of others, not your own.

**Value:** what do children and young people gain from engaging with your project? This can go beyond history. Are you helping to create a safe space where they can find likeminded people? Are you offering fun and creative opportunities? Are you valuing what they bring into the space?

**Relationships:** think about the relationships you build in the long term. What happens when the project has ended? How are you going to maintain what you started?



Three girls from the rescue home with swing, ca 1913 © Estate of Käthe Buchler, Museum für Photographie Braunschweig/Deposit Stadtarchiv Braunschweig.



# Further Resources

## ARCHIVES

The Army Children Archive:

<http://www.archhistory.co.uk/taca/1914-18.html>

The British Library:

[https://www.bl.uk/world-war-one/articles/childrens-experiences-of-world-war-one?gclid=Cj0KCQjw7MGJBhD-ARIsAMZ0eeuSEbXZyf\\_gOFvr-t4GV3V1RgyYZvGdVIV-Mknx4NyNLkPBbYFX3EwaAm7oEALw\\_wcB](https://www.bl.uk/world-war-one/articles/childrens-experiences-of-world-war-one?gclid=Cj0KCQjw7MGJBhD-ARIsAMZ0eeuSEbXZyf_gOFvr-t4GV3V1RgyYZvGdVIV-Mknx4NyNLkPBbYFX3EwaAm7oEALw_wcB)

The Children's Society: Hidden Lives Revealed:

<https://www.hiddenlives.org.uk/>

Europeana 1914-1918:

<https://www.europeana.eu/en/collections/topic/83-1914-1918>

Imperial War Museum:

<https://www.iwm.org.uk/history/10-ways-children-took-part-in-the-first-world-war>

National Childhood Collection (V&A):

<https://collections.vam.ac.uk/search/?limit=15&narrow=1&q=museum+of+childhood&commit=Search&collection%5B%5D=THES48593&offset=0&slug=0>

## GUIDES

Being Young on the Home Front Resource Pack:

<https://mcphh.files.wordpress.com/2018/05/final20resource20and20project20pack.pdf>

Birmingham Children of War: A learning guide for researching children's lives in the First World War:

[http://www.voicesofwarandpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/childrenofwar-guide\\_web.pdf](http://www.voicesofwarandpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/childrenofwar-guide_web.pdf)

The Great War 1914-1918:

<http://www.greatwar.co.uk/research/education/teacher-ww1-resources.htm>

## GUIDES (continued)

Urban Childhoods: Contexts, Cultures and Images (Birmingham Stories):

[http://www.connectinghistories.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/bs\\_rg\\_urban-childhoods.pdf](http://www.connectinghistories.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/bs_rg_urban-childhoods.pdf)

Voices of War and Peace: Resources List:

<https://www.voicesofwarandpeace.org/portfolio/resources/>

## OTHER PROJECTS

British Jews in the First World War: We Were There Too:

<https://www.jewsfww.uk/the-first-world-war-through-the-eyes-of-londons-jewish-children-852.php>

Quakers and the First World War: Quakers on the Home Front:

<http://www.voicesofwarandpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/livesandlegacies-homefront.pdf>

Youth Message of Peace and Goodwill:

[http://venuewithaheart.wales/wfp/theme\\_peaceandgoodwill.html](http://venuewithaheart.wales/wfp/theme_peaceandgoodwill.html)

## READING

Briggs, Julia, Dennis Butts and M.O. Grenby (eds.). *Popular Children's Literature in Britain* (Aldershot, 2008)

Bristow, Joseph. *Empire Boys: Adventures in a Man's World* (London, 1991).

Brown, Kenneth D. *The British Toy Business. A history since 1700* (London, 1996)

Cooter, Roger (ed.). *In the Name of the Child* (London, 1991)

Cunningham, Hugh. *The Invention of Childhood* (London, 2006)

Fass, Paula F. (ed.). *The Routledge History of Childhood in the Western World* (Abingdon, 2013)

Hendrick, Harry. *Children, Childhood and English Society 1880-1990* (Cambridge, 1997)

Kennedy, Rosie. *The Children's War: Britain 1914-18* (Basingstoke, 2014)

Paris, Michael. *Over the Top. The Great War and Juvenile Literature in Britain* (Westport, 2004)

Paul, Lissa, R. Ross Johnston and Emma Short (eds). *Children's Literature and Culture of the First World War* (Abingdon, 2016)

Stearns, Peter M. *Childhood in World History* (Abingdon, 2008)

# Acknowledgements

## ► 'Who cared for kids?'

Investing in Children (IiC) is a children's human rights organisation working in partnership with children and young people to exercise their rights and participate in decisions that affect them.

Images © IiC.

<https://www.investinginchildren.net/>

## ► 'Children just don't sit centre stage in life'

Upper Teesdale Agricultural Support Service (UTASS) works across the rural communities of County Durham to help prevent problems from getting to the desperate stage and assist in maintaining a safer, happier self-sustaining community.

<https://www.utass.org/>

Durham Youth Council gives children and young people a 'collective voice' that is listened to and acted upon by the important decision makers.

<https://www.durham.gov.uk/article/22687/Youth-Council>

Natasha Macnab is an academic researcher and the Legacy project administrator.

## ► 'Every war, just or unjust, is a war against the child'

Siân Roberts is a lecturer in Education and Social Justice at the School of Education, University of Birmingham.

## ► 'Patriotism or pragmatism'

Hayley Carter and Anna Muggeridge are postgraduate students at the University of Worcester.

Images © the 'Patriotism or Pragmatism' project.

<https://www.voicesofwarandpeace.org/voices-projects/>

## ► 'Making history real'

Laura Davison is a project manager who has worked extensively with schools on developing historical research in the classroom and beyond.

Grateful thanks to Essex Record Office for permission to use the material from the North Primary School Log Book (E/ML 86/2).

Images © North School Archive:

Hajar performing a monologue.

Roll of honour, by sculptor Ian Etheridge and signwriter Geoff Kent.

Pupils researching for their case studies at the Essex Record Office.

Children respond to historic events in the Sunken Lane at Beaumont Hamel through creative writing and poetry.

<http://www.lauradavison.co.uk/wewillrememberthem/>  
[admin@lauradavison.co.uk](mailto:admin@lauradavison.co.uk)

## ► 'The lost boys'

Stephen Dixon is Professor of Contemporary Crafts at Manchester School of Art, investigating contemporary narratives in ceramics.

Images © Stephen Dixon, Tony Richards and 'The Lost Boys' project.

<https://www.art.mmu.ac.uk/profile/sdixon/projectdetails/793>

## ► 'Being young on the home front'

Dr Marcus Morris is a Senior Lecturer at Manchester Metropolitan University and is heavily involved in the History Department's Widening Participation and School's Outreach initiatives.

Images © Marcus Morris and the 'Being Young on the Home Front' project.

<https://mcphh.org/being-young-on-the-home-front/>

## ► Whitworks Adventures in Theatre

Gertie Whitfield is a creative historian, resource writer and drama specialist.

Contemporary images © Gertie and Paul Whitfield:

Re-enactment of Bakewell's memorial service by Bakewell's Infant School

Dick Allcock on his horse ©Bakewell Old House Museum

Isla's illustration of horses in the desert

Kieran as a Keystone style cop, Norbriggs Primary's silent movie

Arthur Fisher (right) working at Painted Fabrics ©Sheffield Archives and Local Studies

<https://whitworks.co.uk/about-whitworks-adventures-in-theatre.html>

## ► Lost voices of the past

Sarah Lloyd is a historian and was director of the *Everyday Lives in War* First World War engagement centre.

<https://everydaylivesinwar.herts.ac.uk/>

Sue Laidler is a First World War collector and historian.

Every effort has been made to trace the copyright holders of the diaries, but if any have been inadvertently overlooked, the Publishers will be pleased to make the necessary arrangements at the first opportunity.

## ► Uncharted worlds: children in the First World War

Grateful thanks to The Hold, Suffolk Archives for use of the school logbooks.

## ► Whose history is it anyway?

Sara Younan is co-ordinator on the National Heritage Lottery funded 'Hands on Heritage' project at Amgueddfa Cymru – National Museum Wales, where she works with children and young people aged 11-25.

Contemporary images and text © Amgueddfa Cymru – National Museum Wales

<https://museum.wales/>





**'Caregivers with their children',** © Estate of Käthe Buchler, Museum für Photographie Braunschweig/Deposit Stadtarchiv Braunschweig.





You'd be like what happened to them and everything and why they're there and what's next. You must be very sad or angry to the people who did this to them.

