

DEVON IN THE FIRST WORLD WAR

WAR AND THE HOME FRONT: DEVON IN THE FIRST WORLD WAR, 1914-1918

By

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Abstract

This investigation contributes to the existing scholarship on Britain and the First World War by examining the war's impact on the county of Devon in southwest England. More specifically, this study pays particular attention to how communities, families, and individuals responded to the pressures of war and to what extent social unity was achieved at the county level. By exploring the relationship between the state and its citizens, this dissertation questions the extent to which Devonians were passive and accepting of the sacrifices and hardships that the government required from them, how their experiences were informed, and to what extent class, gender, and religious differences limited public support for the war? While this dissertation argues that Devonians were generally supportive of British participation in the war, that support was provisional and based on the perception of 'equality of sacrifice' – the expectation that the burdens of war would be shared equally throughout the county and across all segments of society. This study reveals that the inequalities of sacrifice and inconsistencies of government policies burdened some groups more than others and led to social disaffection. Rather than promoting solidarity, the war often exacerbated rural/urban tensions, highlighted the social and economic divisions that characterized relations between the communities of northern and southern Devon, and led to frequent and public criticisms of the government's management of the war.

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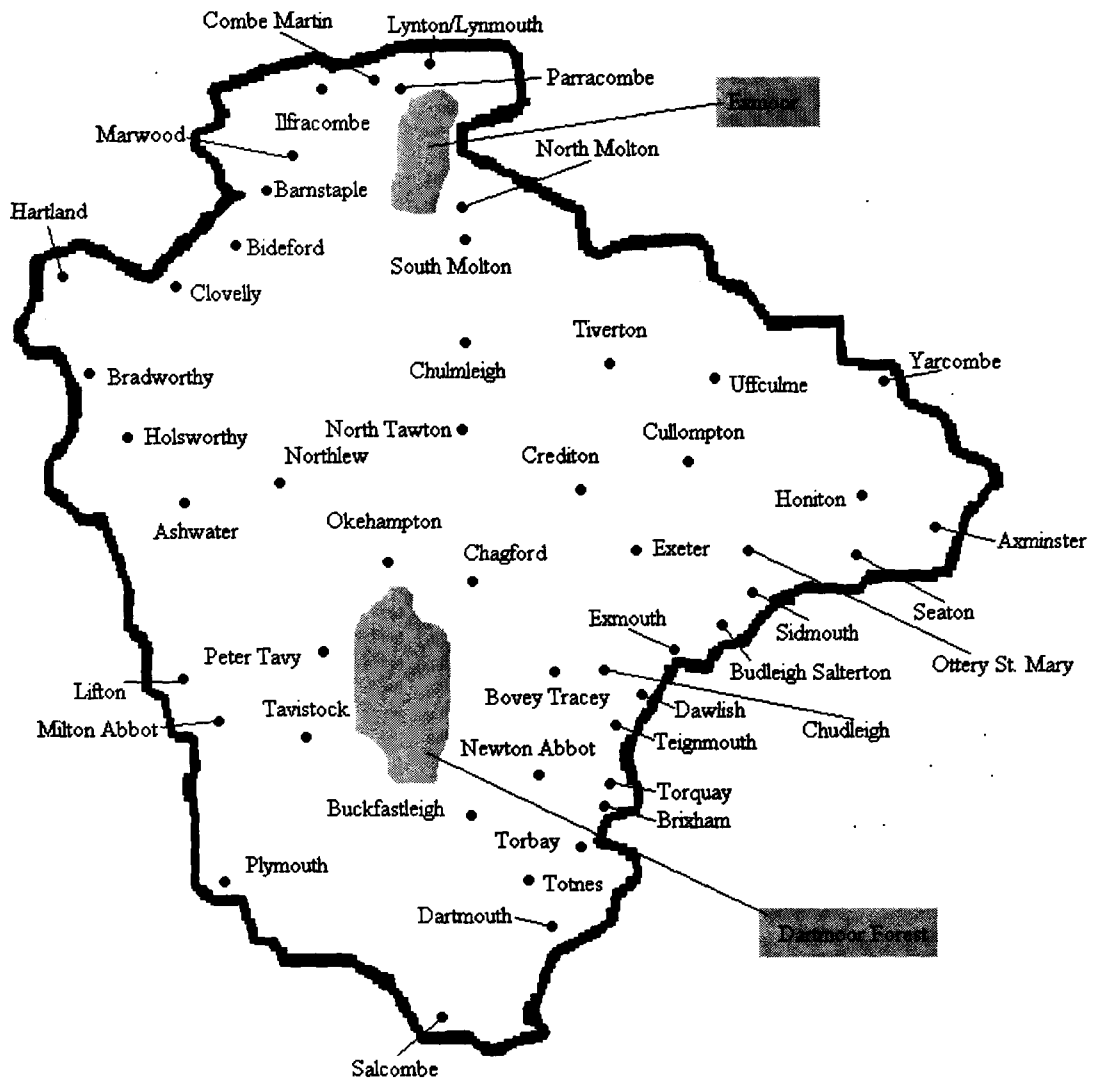
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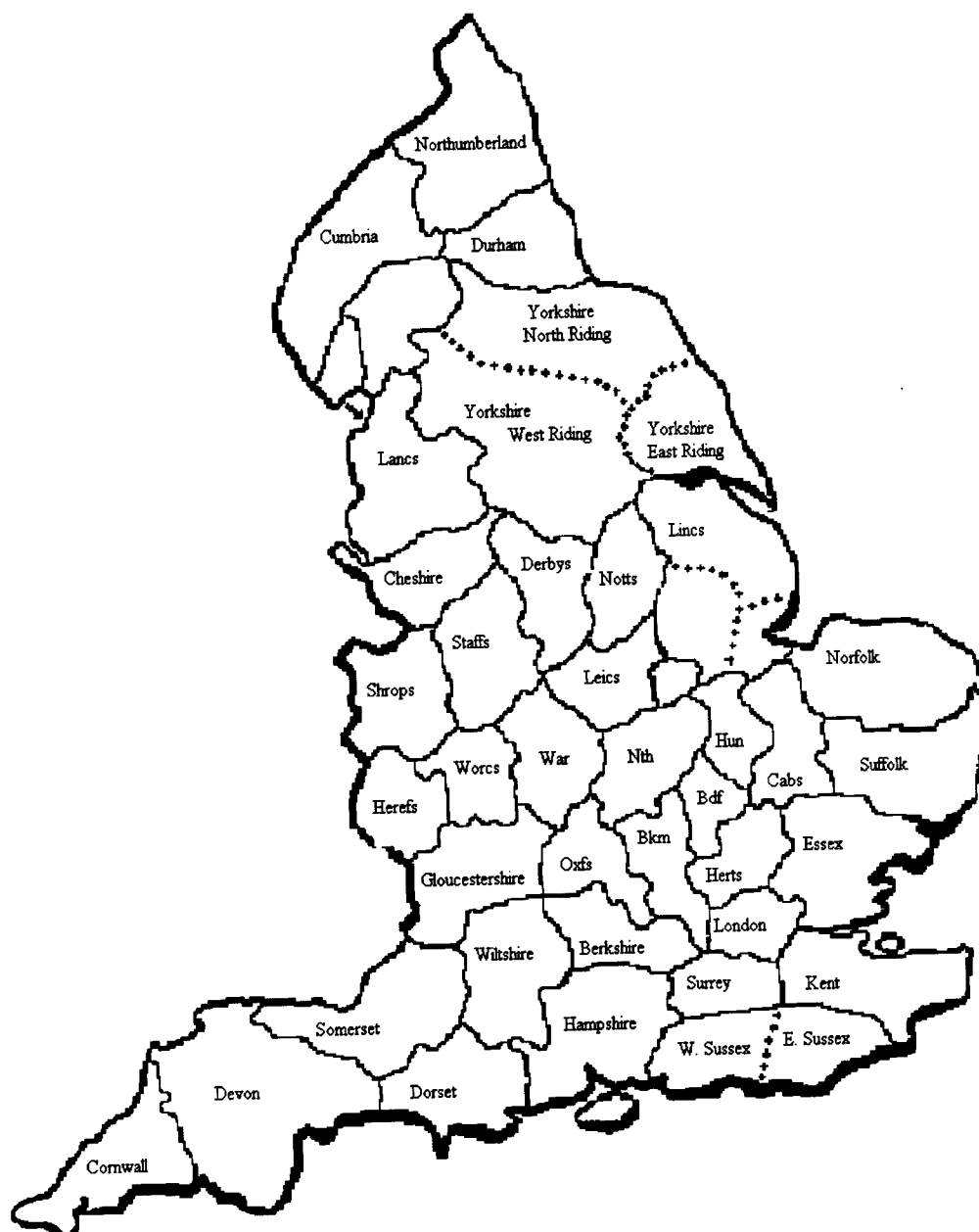
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Map 2: County of Devon



Map 1: Counties of England

Introduction

On 4 August 1914 the people of the county of Devon in south-west England received news that Britain was at war with Germany. Devonians, with few exceptions, acknowledged that Britain's military effort was a just cause, and most accepted that sacrifice would be an essential part of the civilian contribution to the war effort. However, the First World War generated two seemingly contradictory responses: uniting society against a common enemy and, at the same time, revealing existing pressure points around differences of class, gender, or religion. The government and propagandists presented the war as a necessary reaction to German aggression and so the expected response was one of popular support for the British state. Yet, unity was always conditional and old antagonisms were not easily forgotten. This dissertation seeks to understand how Devonians responded to the challenges of the war, to note how attitudes and beliefs changed between 1914 and 1918, and to determine the extent of change or stability in Devon during this period. More specifically, this study aims to understand how wartime experiences were shaped by geographical, occupational, temporal, and religious factors. It asks what a local study can reveal about the relationship between the state and its citizens, and what impact a study of a single county can have on our interpretation and understanding of Britain in the First World War?

This dissertation argues that although Devonians were generally supportive of British participation in the war, their support was based on the expectation of 'equality of sacrifice' – that the burdens of war would be shared equally throughout the county and across all segments of society. However, given the economic, religious, and social divisions already existing in the county, it is not surprising that the perception of this

equality was not uniformly shared. The various social, political, economic, and religious groups that comprised Devon society approached the war with different objectives and expectations. Yet, each group wanted the government and the rest of society to recognize that their sacrifices and hardships made a meaningful contribution to the war effort, which could only be done if their needs, whether in regard to housing, food, or labour, were met. However, as this dissertation will show, because each group viewed the war in terms of their own experiences there could be no objective interpretation of the war or its management. Instead, military and civilian needs were always in competition and both, separately, were always in flux. The end result was that hardships burdened some groups more than others, or were at least perceived to, and the government's handling of the war was often criticized.

The response of Devonians to the First World War fits into to an extensive historiography on the British home front and connects with a number of issues covered in the secondary literature: state intervention, housing, shortages and restrictions, social unrest, pacifism and dissent, volunteerism and conscription, manpower, and religion. But the majority of studies on the war are concerned with the national picture, and the extent to which the war was responsible for cultural, social, political, religious, and economic change. The value of a county focus is that by disaggregating the national picture it throws the national picture into question. County studies can help to reinforce or challenge existing views and conclusions about “how different groups of people lived through the war, and what we really know about their various experiences.”¹ More specifically, the local emphasis allows a shift away from grand generalizations into the

¹ Gail Braybon, *Evidence, History and the Great War: Historians and the Impact of 1914-18* (Oxford: Berghahn, 2003), p. 1.

crucial dimensions of local structures and experiences. Examining a county where social conflicts were exacerbated and drawn to the surface, and where the appeal for voluntary service was met with indifference and even hostility, raises important questions about the mythologies of 1914 and an overly deterministic view of popular patriotism.²

On 4 August 1914 fear, excitement, and uncertainty characterized many Devonians' responses to the declaration of war. Although Adrian Gregory suggests that enthusiasm was clearer on this day than at any other point during the war, he is careful not to confuse enthusiasm with support or patriotism.³ The war came suddenly and Devonians were, in many ways, initially unprepared to meet its challenges. It took some time for people to adjust to the exigencies of a national emergency, a transition that was not complete until early 1915. This delayed response was a reflection of the contradictions and competition between local and national interests. Certainly Devonians were well aware that Britain was involved in a European war, but the level of commitment demanded of the nation was initially obscured by the Asquith government's approach to the war -- that British involvement would be limited and would not disrupt

² For more on the myth of 1914 see, Hew Strachan, *The First World War* (New York: Viking, 2004), pp. 61, 64; Jay Winter, "Nationalism, the Visual Arts and the Myth of War Enthusiasm in 1914" *History of European Ideas* vol. 15 (1992): 357.

³ Adrian Gregory, "British War Enthusiasm in 1914: A Reassessment," in *Evidence, History and the Great War: Historians and the Impact of 1914-18* ed. Gail Braybon (Oxford: Berghahn, 2003), pp. 67-77. There is a vast literature on English patriotism that demonstrates that historically the concept has been widely contested and taken on many meanings. See Hugh Cunningham, "The Language of Patriotism, 1750-1914," *History Workshop Journal*, 15 (1981): 8-9, 25; A. Summers, "The Character of Edwardian Nationalism: Three Patriotic Leagues" in A.J. Nicholls and P. Kennedy (eds.), *Nationalist and Racialist Movements in Britain and Germany before 1914* (London: 1981): 68-86; J.H. Grainger, *Patriotisms: Britain 1900-1939* (London: Kegan Paul, 1986), pp. 267-304; Hugh Cunningham, *The Language of Patriotism* in Raphael Samuel, ed., *Patriotism: The Making and Unmaking of British National Identity*, vol. 1 (London: Routledge, 1989-91), pp. 57-89; Miles Taylor, "John Bull and the Iconography of Public Opinion in England, 1712-1929," *Past and Present* 134 (1992): 95-100, 124. Recent discussions of English patriotism have revolved around the relationship of patriotism to national identity. For an extensive discussion of this literature see, Krishan Kumar, *The Making of English National Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 121-174, 230-231.

home affairs significantly. This laissez-faire response from the national government left some with the impression that the situation was not so dire. Rather than preparing for the long-term impact and demands that the war would require, Devonians focused on the war's immediate effects. The possibility of a cross-channel invasion or an aerial assault were a source of unease, but, of more practical concern, were fears of shortages and starvation, the darkness and silence that coastal communities were forced to endure, and the sudden removal of men and horses from towns and villages. It was these measures, incited by the war but regulated and enforced – often seemingly inconsistently – by government agencies that made Devonians uneasy and led to social disaffection. However, conflict, like support, was never static; instead, both changed in response to the vacillating demands of the war. This dissertation addresses Pierre Renouvin's contention that 'patriotism' persisted from the time the German ultimatum was issued to Belgium until 1917 when military blunders weakened morale.⁴ Instead, I argue that initial hesitation was followed by a peak in support between the spring of 1915 and January 1916. Not surprisingly, the introduction of conscription in 1916 had a dampening effect on public attitudes, but by mid-1917 Devonians had settled in to see the war through and most preferred a military victory to a negotiated peace.

Keeping these points of tension and conflict in mind, this dissertation also refutes Arthur Marwick's contention that the First World War "had a dissolving effect on the class structure of Britain," blurring, especially, the distinction between the middle and

⁴ Pierre Renouvin, "The Role of Public Opinion, 1914-1918," in *Promise of Greatness: The War of 1914-1918* ed. George Panichas (London: Cassell & Company, Ltd., 1968), pp. 440-445. Renouvin argues that although pacifist sympathies did appear in 1915 they were quiet and experienced little public expression.

working classes.⁵ As George Robb rightly points out, class dynamics became more prominent and class consciousness became more acute during the war.⁶ As will be seen in Chapter One, the war exacerbated class tensions in Devon, and class identity was heightened in response to the perceived inequality of wartime sacrifices. In order to evaluate the extent to which the war was an instrument of social change, it is necessary to understand the nature of Devon society prior to the outbreak of war.

On the eve of the First World War Devon was clearly divided along class lines. At the top of the social ladder were the large landowners of the aristocracy and gentry. As a group these families were neither uniformly rich, nor were they equally influential. Since the 1870s their lands had been reduced due to debt, falling rents, and sales to tenant farmers.⁷ Despite signs of decline in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, in 1914 the upper classes still retained significant wealth and power.⁸ The middle classes tended to live in the urban areas of Exeter, Plymouth, Barnstaple, Tiverton, Torquay, and Teignmouth. Some of these families were involved in manufacturing and the developing

⁵ Arthur Marwick, *The Deluge: British Society and the First World War* (London: Norton, 1970), p. 300. Some of the major works that deal with the social and cultural impact of the war as a whole since Marwick are: J.M. Winter, *The Great War and the British People* (London: Macmillan, 1985), pp. 249-279, 261-267; Trevor Wilson, *The Myriad Faces of War: Britain and the Great War, 1914-1918* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1986), 751-759; J.M. Bourne, *Britain and the Great War, 1914-1918* (London: Edward Arnold, 1989), pp. 199-240; Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 29-77; Gerard DeGroot, *Blighty: British Society in the Era of the Great War* (London: Longman, 1996), pp. 257-270; Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), pp. 3-35; Samuel Hynes, *A War Imagined: The First World War and English Culture* (London: Bodley Head, 1990), pp. 57-98.

⁶ George Robb, *British Culture and the First World War* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), pp. 75-79.

⁷ G.E. Mingay, *The Gentry: The Rise and Fall of a Ruling Class* (London: Longman, 1976), pp. 168-178, 188-189.

⁸ J.V. Beckett, *The Aristocracy in England, 1660-1914* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), pp. 468-469. Although many remained connected to the land, in the Victorian period the British aristocracy and gentry began to diversify by acquiring new types of wealth. For example, landed families began to invest in tourist resorts, the railways, banking, and industry. Also, some families began selling their land to businessmen and developers to restore some of their finances that had been depleted earlier in the century. See, M.L. Bush, *The English Aristocracy: A Comparative Synthesis* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), pp. 61-69; David Cannadine, *Lords and Landlords: The Aristocracy and the Towns, 1774-1967* (New Jersey: Leicester University Press, 1980), pp. 420-421.

tourist industries in north and south Devon, while others comprised a slowly expanding class of middle-income farmer owners. The vast majority of the population belonged to the urban and rural working classes and, as Chapter One will show, the marked social divides of the county were not blurred by the war. Due to a slumping housing industry in the late 1850s the working class areas of Exeter⁹ became overcrowded, as were the dockside sections of Plymouth, Dartmouth, and Portsmouth. Although new houses were built at the turn of the century, construction did not keep pace with the growing population, and the agricultural depression of the 1870s and 1880s brought an increasing number of rural workers into the city in search of work, adding to the already dire housing shortage.¹⁰

The war did little to solve the county's housing problems. Jay Winter notes that between 1911 and 1918 Britain's housing industry was depressed due to the increased cost of supplies, rising interest rates, and poor wages and working conditions that encouraged builders to seek other forms of employment.¹¹ In Devon this was certainly the case and, building on Winter's argument, the war not only prevented the construction of new homes, but the influx of thousands of refugees into the county compounded the housing crisis. Working-class families were forced to occupy homes that were previously deemed uninhabitable. Overcrowding and the lack of proper sanitation, combined with rising food prices and charges of hoarding and profiteering against the affluent classes, created animosity and resentment among working-class residents. Class conflict led to frequent public protests about the inequality of wartime demands and, despite public calls

⁹ Exeter was the seat of county government and the site of the largest agricultural market in the south-west. Wasley, *Devon in the Great War*, p. 12.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Winter, *The Great War and the British People*, pp. 242-243.

for improvement, the housing shortage persisted into the post-war period. Although the war was not responsible for the county's housing deficiencies, it did prevent the construction of new homes or, at the very least, discouraged local governments from investing in housing reform. It was not until the late 1920s that new construction finally made an appreciable contribution to relieving the housing shortage.

Whereas the principal urban centres of south Devon suffered from overcrowding, the northern and western districts of the county had few large towns and experienced the war in different ways. Pamela Horn's study of rural England suggests a fair degree of unity within rural communities,¹² but as this study will demonstrate, the industrial and geographic make-up of Devon actually served to weaken notions of solidarity and undermined early recruitment efforts. Barnstaple was the major town of the north and the region's largest market town with its own shopping and entertainment centres. However, despite its increasing commercialization, the town remained connected to and dependent on the surrounding rural countryside. With the exception of Barnstaple the towns of the north had little contact with the towns in the southern half of the county. The expansion of the railway in 1854 connected Barnstaple to Exeter and the south, but branches to the north were not completed until the 1870s or, in some areas, the 1890s. The late arrival of the railway meant that north Devon established a strong sea link with South Wales in the mid-nineteenth century. While rail and road links with south Devon were underdeveloped, transportation across the Bristol Channel was frequent and affordable. Men from north Devon who were looking for employment often found new opportunities in South Wales. Just across the Bristol Channel were the rapidly expanding towns of the

¹² Pamela Horn, *Rural Life in England In the First World War* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1984), pp. 43-46, 73, 138-139, 140-143.

South Wales coalfields, and up the Channel was Bristol where both trade and population doubled in the second half of the nineteenth century.¹³ This invaluable economic relationship with South Wales, as well as the difficulties in travel to the south, further distanced the northern communities from the southern half of the county.

When the railway finally did arrive in Devon's smaller northern communities, it had a devastating effect on local economies. Cattle and sheep markets were rerouted to the south and ancient market towns all over Devon decayed, as the railway weakened the economic rationale that had sustained them since the twelfth century.¹⁴ Beyond the market towns were villages and farmsteads of varying sizes. The villages were generally home to several hundred people and relied on a number of trades and occupations that were tied to the rural countryside. As the railways brought people away from the countryside and into the larger towns and markets, the inns, public-houses, saddlers, harness-makers, blacksmiths, wheel-wrights, and corn merchants felt the impact of Devon's changing economic profile.¹⁵

By 1900 northern and western Devon were in a state of economic deterioration. The woolen industry had long since declined, and the copper and iron mines in north and central Devon had been struggling for decades.¹⁶ Indeed, the collapse of these industries meant that many towns had suffered declining populations from the mid-1800s; several families from Tavistock, for instance, left for the mines of northern England, Australia,

¹³ Wasley, *Devon in the Great War*, p. 131.

¹⁴ W.G. Hoskins, *A New Survey of England: Devon* (London: Collins, 1954), pp. 121-122. The railways had the benefit of transporting farmers' goods faster and cheaper, but they also introduced people to new markets and commodities that were not available in their particular market areas, thereby increasing competition between regions. B.A. Holderness, "Agriculture and Industrialization in the Victorian Economy," in *The Victorian Countryside*, vol. 1, (ed) G.E. Mingay (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), pp. 185-186.

¹⁵ Hoskins, *A New Survey of England: Devon*, pp. 121-122.

¹⁶ Hoskins, *Devon*, pp. 174-175.

and the United States.¹⁷ The northern fishing ports suffered stiff competition from south coast fishermen and the importance of the Atlantic sea-lanes for trade reduced activity at the north coast dockyards, forcing many families to relocate to England's east coast.¹⁸

Conversely, the period was a time of transformative growth in the south. By the 1870s Plymouth had become the leading fishing port in Devon and ranked tenth among such ports in England and Wales.¹⁹ Brixham was also a major fishing port in the south, but the growing importance of deep-sea fishing, for which Devon's fishermen were not equipped, led to stagnation toward the end of the nineteenth century. The naval race with Germany early in the twentieth century, however, made Devon's ports vital for home defense and public concerns about an invasion of the south-west brought the port towns of Plymouth and Devonport to the attention of the British Admiralty. Between 1900 and 1914 both areas experienced the expansion and modernization of their dockyards. Beginning in 1909 a naval war plan was developed for the south-west and defense plans reflected concerns about sabotage and espionage, rather than a full-scale invasion. Yet, as will be seen in Chapter Three, this did not allay public fears. Devon's dockyards were expanded to accommodate warships and Devonport benefited from the escalating demand for naval building. Between the 1889 Naval Defence Act and the First World War new construction accounted for over half of the labour resources employed in Plymouth and

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 487. Due to the urbanization of industry throughout the nineteenth century many rural districts reached their maximum populations between 1831 and 1871. Holderness, "Agriculture and Industrialization in the Victorian Economy," p. 181.

¹⁸ M.G. Dickinson, *A Living From the Sea: Devon's Fishing Industry and its Fishermen* (Tiverton: Devon Books, 1987), p. 8. This was also true of shipping. North Devon shipping activities were increasingly confined to home trade, whereas the south had more vessels for use in deep water. Basil Greenhill and Michael Nix, "North Devon Shipping, Trade and Ports, 1786-1939" in *The New Maritime History of Devon Vol. II* (London: Conway Maritime Press, 1992), p. 56.

¹⁹ Peter Hilditch, "Devon and Naval Strategy since 1815," in *The New Maritime History of Devon Vol. II* (London: Conway Maritime Press, 1992), pp. 157-158.

Devonport. At Devonport Dockyard the civilian labour force increased from 5,206 in 1890 to 12,290 in April 1914. In 1911 the number of naval personnel in Devon rose to 21,581 compared to just 8,289 in 1881.²⁰ Construction of docks, barracks, and training facilities increased, as did the number of new schools for naval education and training. Between 1881 and 1914 enrollment in cadet schools in Plymouth more than doubled²¹ and between 1902 and 1905 the Royal Naval War College was constructed in Dartmouth, replacing the old hulks that had been in place since the 1860s.²²

Industrial growth also brought an increasing number of immigrants to Devon's southern towns. Plymouth served as a major passenger port throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, especially for Irish immigrants traveling to Australia, the Cape Colony, Argentina, the Falkland Islands, Hong Kong, and the West Indies, but opportunities for employment at Devon's booming dockyards also attracted workers to the Three Towns.²³ Between 1855 and 1872 35,614 Irish people departed via Plymouth, and although there are no exact statistics as to how many settled in south Devon rather than abroad, between 1860 and 1900 the southern port towns witnessed a rise in the number in Irish immigrants, most of whom settled in or around Stonehouse.²⁴ The town of Plymouth grew rapidly and in 1906 had a population of 107,636 (the population of Devon was 662,197 in 1911) compared to Exeter's population of 47,185 and Barnstaple's

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Wasley, *Devon in the Great War*, p. 32.

²² Apart from shipbuilding and the fisheries, the southern half of the county was home to a miscellany of industries. Tiverton's large textile factory and Honiton's sawmills and lace industry provided employment for many of the towns' workers. Plymouth, Dartmouth, and Brixham had a number of sailcloth factories, rope-works, large-scale soap and candle works, sugar refineries, salt works, and a paper mill. R. A. J. Walling, *The Story of Plymouth* (London: Westaway Books, 1950), pp. 197-198.

²³ The Three Towns refers to Plymouth, Stonehouse, and Devonport.

²⁴ Mark Brayshay, "The Emigration Trade in Nineteenth-Century Devon," in *The New Maritime History of Devon Vol. II* (London: Conway Maritime Press, 1992), pp. 115-116.

9,698 for the same year.²⁵

During the war the royal dockyards held a monopoly on naval repairs, which required specialized facilities and, more importantly, a highly skilled labour force that was largely protected against conscription when it was introduced in 1916. When workloads exceeded manageable levels in the south, repairs were transferred to the Appledore dockyard in the north, temporarily reviving the industry that otherwise suffered gradual decline throughout the second half of the nineteenth century. This revival is most important within the context of north Devon life where industries and families were dependent of the labour on a small number of men. Peter Dewey's argument that low enlistment numbers within certain occupations could be explained by the nature of the work and the ease with which skilled men could be replaced with women or unskilled workers is valid and convincing.²⁶ However, as Chapter Three will show, the industrial and demographic complexion of the county helps to explain why enlistment numbers were lower in north Devon than they were in the south. The revitalization of the north Devon dockyards and their importance during the war discouraged men from enlisting, and similar patterns were evident in the northern fisheries. While the south Devon fisheries were important during the war, given the size of their fishing loads, they employed a much larger labour force making it possible for more men to be released for military service. Conversely, northern fishing vessels tended to be smaller, employed a small labour force, and were involved in the transportation of

²⁵ Next to Plymouth and Exeter, Tiverton was the largest town in Devon with woollenmills, lace manufacturing, and large cattle and sheep farms. Although declining in population (11,144 in 1851 to 10,386 in 1901), the town was prosperous and home to local notables such as Sir Ian Amory-Heathcoat, owner of Heathcoat's lace manufacturing. See Appendix I-1 for a sample of Devon towns by population.

²⁶ P.E. Dewey, "Military Recruiting and the British Labour Force during the First World War," *Historical Journal*, 27:1 (Mar., 1984): 200.

supplies to northern France, leaving few men available to enlist. However, the revival of the north coast shipbuilding and fishing industries was temporary and thus resumed their decline once the war ended.

The geographic divisions that characterized the fisheries and shipbuilding also were evident in Devon's growing tourist industry. Although many of the immigrants who settled in Plymouth and Devonport were working-class, the developing holiday resorts attracted wealthier visitors to the county. The period from 1844 to 1900 proved to be a time of major change for the coastal resorts, as an increasing number of people were able to afford seaside vacations. As the benefits of Britain's growing prosperity slowly filtered down the social scale over the course of the nineteenth century, white-collar workers, in particular, came to frequent the resorts of south Devon. Dawlish, Teignmouth, Torquay, and Exmouth were the largest and most profitable resorts in Devon. Traditional landowning families owned many of the resorts in the county, but a number of wealthy businessmen also bought land for the purpose of development, and from the mid-nineteenth century more and more land was alienated to accommodate the growing number of visitors to Devon. The resorts in Dawlish and Exmouth did not attract the masses of working-class visitors like Margate or Blackpool, but the smaller number of visitors allowed some resorts to retain an exclusive appeal. South Devon resorts, particularly those in Torquay and Teignmouth, built early reputations around their health spas, but as the popularity of seaside health cures gradually faded, the resorts were replaced with expensive hotels, up-scale restaurants, and more up-to-date recreational facilities that were often not accessible to the working class vacationers.²⁷

²⁷ Wasley, *Devon in the Great War*, pp. 23-24.

Although the middle and working classes were generally excluded from the more luxurious resorts, a more modest tourist industry was emerging in the north as well. In the 1850s north Devon was a “sparsely populated region with small towns incapable of generating any substantial demand for seaside holidays.”²⁸ Although few members of the working-class received paid holidays, the Bank Holiday Act of 1871 freed workers from their labour for a few days of vacation and the natural, undisturbed landscape of Devon’s north coast began to attract day-trippers.²⁹ Although the railway did not extend to the resort towns of Ilfracombe until 1874 and Lynton until 1894, its arrival brought visitors from farther afield, including the Midlands and London. In the 1870s there were new housing developments, usually very small in scale, and although there were a few large hotels, they were nothing like the resorts of the south. At Lynton and Lynmouth, both difficult to access by land or sea, the number of visitors grew slowly until 1885 when George Newnes announced his intention to build a landing pier. Lynton expanded rapidly, but the plans for the pier fell through when Newnes decided to build a house there and wanted to preserve the town’s natural splendor and privacy rather than open it up to lower-middle and working-class pleasure-seekers. Land and property prices collapsed, building projects were abandoned, and workingmen were forced to relocate in search of work³⁰

Despite setbacks, the holiday industry in north Devon grew steadily and in the early 1900s resort towns emerged on the northern coast at Woolacombe, Croyde Bay, and Saunton Sands. Thirty percent of their visitors came from London, while the rest came

²⁸ John F. Travis, *The Rise of the Devon Seaside Resorts, 1759-1900* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1993), p.124.

²⁹ Ibid, p. 95.

³⁰ John Travis, “The Rise of the Devon Seaside Resorts, 1750-1900,” in *The New Maritime History of Devon Vol. II* ed. Michael Duffy (London: Conway Maritime Press, 1992), p. 143.

from Wales and the Midlands (very few visitors came from south Devon). The north Devon resorts were characterized by boarding houses that advertised moderate prices and few amenities, and apart from the scenery of the coast, pay-at-the-door dances provided entertainment for visitors.³¹ While these resorts provided an affordable option for working-class vacationers and attracted an increasing number every year, during the war the north Devon resorts, geographically distanced from the southern half of the county due to poor transportation networks, suffered from a lack of visitors. Exeter was the primary distribution point for refugees arriving in Devon, and one solution to the housing shortage was to relocate refugees to the resort towns. Unlike the resorts in north Devon, the south coast resorts were equipped for long-term stays and, linked to Exeter by rail and road, benefited financially from this new market. However, the war took its toll on a number of Devon's south coast resorts. During the war many resorts were poorly maintained and as their appeal weakened, they opened their doors to working-class visitors. Once the war ended these resorts became increasingly congested and lost their upper-class clientele. The north coast resorts, on the other hand, retained their rural appeal, and in the post-war period the resort towns of Ilfracombe and Lynton were attractive alternatives to the overcrowded attractions of Teignmouth and Torquay.

Although the tourism industry would become the largest industry in Devon later in the twentieth century, in 1914 the majority of the population lived in the countryside, and Devon's major industry remained agriculture. The importance of agriculture in Devon is essential to understanding the response of its rural communities to the war. While this dissertation supports Dewey's conclusion that the agricultural industry was

³¹ Travis, *The Rise of the Devon Seaside Resorts*, pp. 141-142.

slow to respond to the war effort, his explanation that the decline of agriculture in the decades before the war meant that there were simply fewer men available from this industry offers only a partial accounting.³² Also of importance was the nature of landownership and the differences in farming practices that existed between regions. In Devon, enlistment numbers among agriculturalists were low initially, despite the fact that the county had the largest agricultural workforce in south-west England. As Chapter Two will demonstrate, the explanation has little to do with patriotism and much to do with the changing nature of landownership and farming practices in the decades prior to the war, as well as the diversity of experience within the farming community and the relationship between farmers and their labour force. *The Return of the Owners of Land* (1873) provides the first detailed description of the distribution of landed property in Devon (see Appendix I-2). There were 10,162 owners of one acre of land and upwards in Devon, and 21,647 owners who owned less than one acre. However, the holdings of land belonging to the latter group amounted to only three thousand acres in total, indicating that at most these owners had small gardens on their property. In contrast, there were five large estates of more than 20,000 acres each. In sum, sixteen (extended) families owned one-fifth of all the land in Devon, and approximately one-half of the county's land was held in estates of one thousand acres or more and controlled by 150 families.³³

Comprehensive agricultural records for Devon began in 1866 when wheat was the most important crop. However, by the turn of the century wheat was in decline and was being replaced by barley and oats, the latter especially suited to Devon's damp climate. Following the agricultural depression of the 1870s and 1880s, the areas of Dartmoor and

³² Dewey, "Military Recruiting and the British Labour Force during the First World War": 200.

³³ Hoskins, *Devon*, pp. 87-88.

Exmoor were returned to moorland, and in the late nineteenth century more and more arable land was laid down to grass as prices continued to fall.³⁴ In 1889 the area under grass exceeded that under the plough and Devon was quickly becoming one of the country's most important cattle producers, and was not far behind in sheep and ponies (especially on Dartmoor and Exmoor). In fact, the amount of arable land in Devon fell by 100,000 acres between 1870 and 1900 and continued to fall until 1917 (see Appendix I-3). However, the abandonment of the land that was witnessed in other parts of the country was not as marked in Devon. In 1894 the area of improved land, under crops and grass, reached its maximum of seventy-three percent of the total arable land of the county.³⁵

At the same time, the nature of land ownership in Devon was transforming. At the turn of the twentieth century farms in Devon were smaller on average than in 1870 and large land holdings were increasingly uncommon. In Devon, and in England generally, land ownership was largely divorced from the operation and working of farmland. Most of those who lived on the land were tenant farmers, or occupiers—meaning that they farmed the land but did not own it. The landlord-tenant system, although changing, continued to dominate in the years prior to the First World War.³⁶ Landowners generally provided fixed capital for such purposes as mending fences and buildings, as well as the construction and repair of roads, ditches, and drains (but not the installation of subsoil

³⁴ Trade and the railways had a profound impact on English agriculture and in the later years of Victoria's reign, between two and three million acres of arable land were laid down to permanent grass. The result was that rents declined and more land was sold off, but wages for agricultural labourers increased reaching 15s per week by the end of the Victorian period. Hugh Prince, "Victorian Rural Landscapes," in *The Victorian Countryside*, vol. 1, (ed) G.E. Mingay (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), pp. 19-20; G.E. Mingay, "Rural England in the Industrial Age," in *The Victorian Countryside*, vol. 1, (ed) G.E. Mingay (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), pp. 5-6.

³⁵ Hoskins, *Devon*, pp. 101-102.

³⁶ *Ibid*, p. 89; Dewey, *British Agriculture in the First World War*, p. 8.

drainage), and in return, received rent at a rate of approximately three percent of the capital value of the land.³⁷ Although the five large landowning families still possessed a considerable amount of land, in the fifty years prior to the war they began to sell off parcels of land to those farmers whose families had rented the land for several generations.³⁸ The change in land ownership meant that an increasing number of owner-occupiers emerged at the end of the nineteenth-century. Although there were a growing number of owner-occupiers, change was gradual and the tenant system remained largely in place. Further, many of the smaller farms of between fifty and one hundred acres were consolidated into larger farms of two hundred to 250 acres. Although the yeoman farmer, occupying a position between the middle-income owner-occupier and the lesser gentry and generally owning up to one thousand acres of land, survived, tenant farmers and owner-occupiers prospered in the first years of the twentieth century.³⁹ Farms were smaller and, with a surplus of workers and horses, labour costs were kept low.⁴⁰

However, David Cannadine has demonstrated that once the war ended the large

³⁷ Mingay, "Rural England in the Industrial Age," p. 14.

³⁸ Hoskins, *Devon*, 92-93. This was in part due to the agricultural depression. When prices and rents declined some landowners sold off parcels of land to avoid a financial fallout. It was also connected to the introduction of the Third Reform Act (1884-85) that brought an end to the constitutional benefits granted to the aristocracy. David Cannadine, *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy* (Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1990), pp. 25-27, 36.

³⁹ Hoskins, *Devon*, pp. 92-93.

⁴⁰ There was machinery on the land in Devon, but there was considerably less than in other areas of England, particularly in the north. This was due to the fact that Devon farms had increasingly converted to livestock, as well as the continued reliance on horses. Farms in Devon were small and irregular in shape and approximately eighty-five percent of all horses in the county were used for agriculture in one way or another. "Changes to Devon Farming, 1850-1900," Pamphlet outlining the changing needs of farmers in the second half of the nineteenth century, November 1900, Devon Record Office, Fortescue of Castle Hill, 1262M/L126. The first stage of development in terms of the use of machinery on the land in southern England was between 1835-1850 and was primarily confined to simple machines like corn-dressers and oat-crushers. More advanced machinery, particularly the portable steam thresher, was not in use until later, 1850-1880. E. J.T. Collins, "The Age of Machinery" in *The Victorian Countryside*, vol. 1, (ed) G.E. Mingay (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), p. 205.

landowning estates were increasingly broken-up and sold off. In Devon, the twenty years after the war saw the five great estates slowly divested of their lands and on the eve of the Second World War there was only one farm that held more than one thousand acres.⁴¹ At the same time, however, the pre-First World War growth and prosperity experienced by middle-income farmer owners did not survive the war. The resumption of food importation and the repeal of the Corn Production Act in 1921 meant that farmers increasingly returned to livestock. This was a costly undertaking and many, owner-occupiers in particular, had to sell off parcels of their land in order to make the adjustment. The result was that small freeholder farms, approximately fifty acres in size, replaced the middle-income farmer owners and because the land was less lucrative post-1919, these small farms tended to change hands rapidly, particularly in northern Devon where farms were smaller and the land was of poorer quality.

Also of significance was that nature of farming that protected owner-occupiers in the pre-war years led to difficulties during the war as prices rose, and labour and horses became scarce. Owing to the limited size of their farms, owner-occupiers employed a small and specialized labour force, and their farms were largely family run. Many of these farmers had also continued to rely on horses rather than machinery and the change from livestock to crops (as mandated by the Board of Agriculture) during the war required a much larger labour force, as well as the financial capital to cover the cost of such an overhaul. Although the labour shortage was manageable with the use of unskilled male or female workers, farmers considered these workers to be unsatisfactory, not least because once conscription was introduced their employment freed the farmers' sons for

⁴¹ Cannadine, *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy*, pp. 89, 93-94, 97, 111; Hoskins, *Devon*, pp. 302-303; Hoskin, *Devon*, p. 302.

military service.

Prior to the introduction of conscription, low enlistment numbers among agricultural labourers was connected to the centrality of agriculture in the economic life of the county and is representative of rural enlistment patterns in other areas. Recent studies have suggested that there was a discrepancy between the response of rural and urban areas to recruitment and propaganda. For example this appears to have been true in Norfolk and Andrew Clark's diaries suggest a high level of listlessness among agricultural labourers in parts of rural Essex.⁴² In the countryside people were skeptical about the larger issues surrounding the war (such as German military aggression or Belgian neutrality)⁴³ and often could not connect them with their day-to-day existence. In Devon, the decision of many agricultural labourers to stay on their farms rather than enlist was significant. While some were tied to the land by labour contracts or cottage rental agreements, others were offered monetary incentives to remain at home. Others still hoped that the importance of agriculture during the war would bring change to the hierarchical structure of the land that kept wages low, a focus that emphasized the local experience over the national one. In 1862 the average male farm labourer in Devon earned 7s per week compared to 10s per week in Herefordshire and 11s per week in England's northern regions.⁴⁴ The result was that from 1866 to 1872 between 400 and

⁴² James Munson, *Echoes of the Great War: The Diary of Reverend Andrew Clark, 1914-1919* (Oxford, 1985), pp. 10, 24, 92; Nicholas Mansfield, "Volunteers and Recruiting" in Gerald Gliddon, *Norfolk & Suffolk in the Great War* (Norwich: Gliddon Books, 1988), pp. 19-20. See also, Jay Winter, "Nationalism, the Visual Arts and the Myth of War Enthusiasm in 1914" *History of European Ideas* vol. 15 (1992), p. 358; Jean-Jacques Becker, *The Great War and the French People* (New York, 1986), pp. 325-326; Robert G. Moeller, *German Peasants and Agrarian Politics, 1914-1924: the Rhineland and Westphalia* (Chapel Hill, 1986), pp. 16-20.

⁴³ For more on the British presentation of the war see, Strachan, *The First World War*, p. 60.

⁴⁴ Ibid. Mid-century the average wage for an agricultural labourer was 10s. Mingay, "Introduction: Rural England in the Industrial Age," p. 6.

500 families employed in agriculture left Devon for farms in northern England and this exodus continued through 1900. Although in 1914 Devon remained the largest agricultural county in the south-west, its skilled and semi-skilled workforce was in decline, and farmers were forced to make better use of unskilled labourers. Female workers were used on the land in limited numbers, and were most often employed on small farms and for fruit picking. However, by 1914 Devon's apple orchards were in decline and the consolidation of farms and the excess of male labourers meant that the number of women employed in agriculture followed.⁴⁵

According to the 1911 occupational census, approximately five thousand women were employed in agriculture in Devon, including farmers' wives and daughters and other female relatives. During the war this number changed as an increasing number of women found work with the Women's Land Army. Marwick was one of the leading proponents of the view that the war was progressive for women, suggesting that it "brought a sudden and irreversible advance in the economic and social power of a category of women employees." Women's historians have since challenged Marwick's emancipation thesis, suggesting instead that although the war brought short-term gains to women, in the long run the patriarchal system remained firmly in place.⁴⁶ This study

⁴⁵ Hoskins, *Devon*, pp. 92-93. The declining number of agricultural labourers was not specific to Devon. The 1901 census shows that the number of agricultural labourers in Britain declined from 780,777 in 1891 to 732,927. W. Hasbach, *A History of the English Agricultural Labourer* (New York: Economic Classics, 1966), p. 355.

⁴⁶ Marwick, *The Deluge*, p. 92. Marwick expanded his emancipation thesis in his *Women at War* (London: Fontana, 1977), which was a further spur to feminist revisionism. See Gail Braybon, *Women Workers In the First World War* (London: Routledge, 1981), pp. 105-109, 148-149; Sarah Boston, *Women Workers and the Trade Union Movement* (London: Davis-Poynter, 1981), pp. 96-130, 132-134; Jane Lewis, *Women in England* (London: Wheatsheaf, 1984), pp. 145-158; Gail Braybon and Penny Summerfield, *Out of the Cage: Women's Experiences in Two World Wars* (London: 1987), pp. 1-7, 77-78, 111-113, 129; Angela Woollacott, *On Her Their Lives Depend: Munitions Workers in the Great War* (California: University of California Press, 1994), pp. 1-14, 188-192, 214-216; Deborah Thom, *Nice Girls and Rude Girls: Women Workers in World War I* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1998), pp.

demonstrates that there was a degree of male prejudice toward women within Devon's agricultural community and although many farmers, owner-occupiers in particular, eventually employed women on their farms, others remained tentative about the use of female labour. Their hesitations were not because women were incapable of performing manual labour, but because perceptions of women's roles and the dictates of tradition necessitated the maintenance of the status quo. This dissertation argues that the relationship between farmers and the women of the Land Army was complicated and was influenced as much by economic and familial considerations as it was by preconceived notions of gender-appropriate behaviour. Likewise, a complex of motives and experiences characterized women's participation in the agricultural labour force. In partial agreement with the argument put forward by Angela Woollacott, some women found the experience of working on the land to be liberating, despite the grueling intensity of the work.⁴⁷ For these women, their war work afforded them greater independence and granted them more economic power than they possessed in the pre-war years. Conversely, other women viewed their employment in terms of war service⁴⁸ and although they found the experience to be distasteful, they continued to do their jobs out of a sense of obligation to their families, nation, or both. Despite the short-term advances made by women in terms of training, employment, and wages, in the post-war years the number of women employed in agriculture fell below pre-war numbers.⁴⁹

53-74, 203-206; Claire Culleton, *Working Class Culture, Women, and Britain, 1914-1921* (London: St Martins, 1999), pp. 4-5, 51-75.

⁴⁷ Angela Woollacott, *On Her Their Lives Depend*, pp. 14-15, 215-216. For a different interpretation of the role of women in the First World War see Susan Pyecroft, "British Working Woman and the First World War," *Historian* 56:4 (Summer 1994): 699.

⁴⁸ See Janet Watson, *Fighting Different Wars* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 118-120.

⁴⁹ The number of women employed in agriculture declined from 5,055 in 1911 to 2,667 in 1921. Census

One of the central themes surrounding Britain's First World War home front concerns the degree of change that the war provoked. A number of historians have recently rejected Marwick's thesis that the war ushered in lasting changes, stressing instead that the war changed little or that changes were a continuation of those already in progress in the pre-war years. Gerard DeGroot argues that the war was a cataclysmic event, but the changes wrought by this conflict were largely limited to its duration. DeGroot rightfully argues that the class system was not destroyed, women were not emancipated, and, even after the Representation of the People Act of 1918 extended the franchise, voters continued, more often than not, to choose the Conservative Party.⁵⁰ Continuity rather than change characterized Devon's electoral patterns. Long-term trends show a clear shift away from the Liberal Party in the pre-war years, and between 1910 and 1935 the Conservative Party won every election in Devon with the exception of the general election of 1923. Politically, between 1886 and 1906 the county was divided between Liberals and Unionists. Liberal strength was in the north where the appeal of Nonconformity grew throughout the nineteenth century, and Unionism dominated in the south where the Established Church maintained its stronghold, despite advances by Catholicism. While the 1906 election brought a landslide victory for the Liberals (returning ten of thirteen seats), in 1910 the pendulum swung the other way. In the first election of 1910 the Conservatives secured only six of thirteen seats, but in the second election of the same year the Conservatives gained a majority, winning eleven seats.⁵¹

of England and Wales, County Series, Devon, 1911, pp. 160-163; Census of England and Wales, County Series, Devon, 1921, p. 54; Census of England and Wales, General Report, 1921, p. 118.

⁵⁰ Trevor Wilson, *The Myriad Faces of War* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1986), pp. 851, 754-756; Gerard DeGroot, *Blighty* (London: Longman, 1996), pp. 312-333.

⁵¹ Henry Pelling, *Social Geography of British Elections 1885-1910* (London: McMillan, 1967), pp. 162, 170.

The two Liberals representing Devon constituencies on the eve of the First World War were George Lambert of South Molton and Sir Geoffrey Baring of Barnstaple. Neither Lambert nor Baring could be described as ‘New Liberals;’ in fact, New Liberalism had been largely dismissed in the south-west in favour of the old values of ‘peace, retrenchment, and reform.’⁵² In northern Devon these Liberal victories were not surprising given the continued strength of Liberal support in the region, the growing influence of Nonconformity, the decline of large landowning families, and the presence of small tenant farmers.

However, the Conservative victory in 1910 was most likely connected to the issue of Home Rule in Ireland.⁵³ While the Liberals focused on class divisions and the privileges afforded to the House of Lords, Unionist and Conservative candidates emphasized the risks associated with Irish independence.⁵⁴ Devon was generally opposed to Home Rule, possibly owing to concerns about an independent Ireland so close to its northern border. Home Rule also elicited concern among fishermen, particularly in the struggling fisheries of north Devon, about their possible future exclusion from the fishing grounds around Ireland.⁵⁵ Despite the growing presence of a new category of landowner and the increasing strength of Nonconformity in the early years of the twentieth century, Devon had a large rural working-class that traditionally respected the landed aristocracy. As such, and taking into consideration the plethora of factors that influenced election results, the Conservatives were the principal beneficiaries of the gradual change in the

⁵² Michael Dawson, “Liberalism in Devon and Cornwall, 1910-1931: ‘The Old-Time Religion,’” *The Historical Journal*, 38 (1995): 425-427; Hoskins, *Devon*, p. 190.

⁵³ Pelling, *Social Geography of British Politics*, pp. 170-174.

⁵⁴ Dawson, “Liberalism in Devon and Cornwall, 1910-1931,” p. 425; Pelling, *Social Geography of British Politics*, p. 173.

⁵⁵ Bruce Coleman, “The Nineteenth Century: Nonconformity,” in *Unity and Variety: A History of the Church in Devon and Cornwall*, ed. Nicholas Orme (Exeter: Exeter University Press, 1991), p. 153.

local political climate.

As we will see, Hugh Fortescue, the fourth Earl Fortescue, was an important figure in Devon politics. As Lord Lieutenant of Devon he served as a representative of the king, a position he took over from his father, the third Earl Fortescue, in 1904. He had been involved in local politics since the mid-1880s when he served as a Liberal Member of Parliament for Tiverton (1881-1885). Prior to his appointment as Lord Lieutenant, Fortescue served as a Justice of the Peace and was well known at Court as Aide de Camp to His Majesty. The Fortescues were well-established landowners from Castle Hill near Barnstaple, and although based in Devon, owned land in Waterford, Ireland, as well. In addition, Fortescue was involved in various business ventures, including the railway and tourism in north Devon.⁵⁶ After 1886 both Fortescue and his father became Liberal Unionists, opposed Irish Home Rule, and given Liberal policy on Ireland, were likely to side with the Conservatives in 1914.

Finally, the religious character of the county had an important impact on how clergymen responded to the problems and challenges initiated by the First World War. As we will see in Chapter Four, rather than encouraging cooperation, attitudes toward recruitment, conscription, and conscientious objection varied. Although the willingness and enthusiasm with which the Established Church supported the war has been well established in the secondary literature,⁵⁷ Trevor Wilson's study of wartime Britain offers a slight revision of earlier findings by suggesting that not all Anglican clergymen were as

⁵⁶ Travis, *The Rise of the Devon Seaside Resorts*, p. 133. Fortescue served as Lord Lieutenant until 1928 when Francis Bingham Mildmay, who had served for thirty-seven years as a Conservative member of the British House of Commons for Totnes, replaced him.

⁵⁷ Albert Marrin, *The Last Crusade: The Church of England in the First World War* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1974), p. 147. Alan Wilkinson notes that although "Anglican opinion was almost unanimous in rejecting pacifism," there were pacifists within the Established Church. Alan Wilkinson, *The Church of England and the First World War* (London: SPCK, 1978), p. 54.

tingoistic as was previously assumed.⁵⁸ In Devon, unlike in the Catholic Church where support appeared uniform and unanimous, there was diversity of opinion among Anglican clergymen. Some ministers refused to recruit from the pulpit, and opposed conscription. Opposition on these grounds does not necessarily mean that these vicars were pacifists, but some Anglican clergymen believed that political objectives and religious beliefs had become conflated in an attempt to justify British involvement in the war against Germany. Similar concerns about the war were also found among Methodist and Baptist clergymen. Dedicated in their commitment to liberty of conscience and the right to self-determination, few recruited from the pulpit and many were supportive of those who refused military service for religious reasons. In addition, the majority of Devon's small Quaker community, dedicated to the maintenance of peace, opposed British involvement in the conflict. While some Quakers abandoned their faith and others chose to serve their country in non-combative roles, Friends in Devon saw just a two percent decline in membership during the war and quickly recouped their losses in the post-war period.

Competition between ministries and places of worship in the pre-war period had long-term consequences for Devon's religious institutions. Although at the turn of the twentieth century the Church of England was the single largest religious group in the county with 588 Anglican churches and chapels, employing 666 full-time parish clergy, Nonconformity had a powerful influence on the area's religious profile.⁵⁹ The second largest religious group was the Wesleyan Methodists with 264 places of worship, and the Baptists comprised the third largest group with 159 places of worship.⁶⁰ In 1901 there

⁵⁸ Wilson, *The Myriad Faces of War*, p. 178.

⁵⁹ Orme, "The Twentieth Century: Devon and General," p. 182.

⁶⁰ Wesleyan Methodist Circuit, Devon, 1900-1911, Devon Record Office, Devon Mission, 2399-O-1-

were fifty-two Catholic places of worship employing 111 priests.⁶¹ In 1916 the Catholic population of Devon was estimated at 16,251, up from just 2,006 in 1851. The majority were Irish immigrants who lived in or around a single district, Stonehouse, which became the seat of the new Roman Catholic Diocese for the south-west after the restoration of the Roman hierarchy in 1851.⁶² Although the Quakers did not experience the same pattern of growth as Catholicism, between 1851 and 1901 they continued to increase in influence and membership in the south-west corner of the county. By 1900 the number of Quaker houses in Devon had grown from seven in 1851 to twelve with 464 members.

The uncommonly low clergy-to-laity ratio in Devon can be explained by the geographical nature of the county. Small villages and isolated rural communities maintained their own churches attended by fewer and fewer members as the attractions of urban life and the decline of traditional industries led people away from the countryside and into the growing towns. From 1830 onward Baptists, Methodists, and Roman Catholics embarked on a mission of expansion into Devon's villages and their growth between 1850 and 1900 largely came at the expense of the Established Church. While the Anglican churches were spread fairly evenly throughout the county, there was a degree of regional distribution among the other denominations. Take for example that Wesleyan Methodism was generally, but not entirely, confined to the working classes, and tended to be most dominant in the mining and agricultural communities of northern and western Devon. Wesleyan Methodism grew until the 1860s when the mining industry began to stagnate and suffered further setbacks in the 1870s and 1880s due to the agricultural

10; List of churches by region, Devon and Cornwall Baptist Union, 1913, Devon Record Office, Union Papers, 2682D-O-6/8.

⁶¹ Orme, "The Twentieth Century: Devon and General," pp. 191-192.

⁶² Ibid, p. 148. The first Roman Catholic Bishop in Plymouth was George Errington (1851-1855).

depression.⁶³ In its place, Primitive Methodism, which was largely absent in Devon until 1870, began to grow, particularly around Plymouth and along the Devon-Cornwall border and primarily appealed to the middle classes. In the West Country the largest gathering of Baptists was in Devon and although they were recorded in all twenty of Devon's registration districts, the majority settled in eastern Devon.⁶⁴ At the same time, Roman Catholicism continued its growth in the districts around Plymouth and Portsmouth gradually making its way along Devon's south coast.⁶⁵ The growth of Nonconformity and its stronghold in the south meant that the major urban centres of Plymouth and Exeter had very different religious compositions than other areas of the county. Exeter was dominated by the Established Church, with several Methodist and Baptist churches, but Plymouth was home to a growing Nonconformist majority.⁶⁶ The presence of two groups, the Christian Brethren, and Roman Catholic immigrants from Ireland helped reshaped the religious profile of Plymouth. The Christian Brethren, also known as the Plymouth Brethren, was a locally established sect and enjoyed a presence in at least eleven districts in Devon, all in the southern half of the county.⁶⁷ Throughout the early twentieth century the Christian Brethren remained largely confined to the south with one hundred churches by 1911.⁶⁸

Between 1914 and 1918 attendance figures for the Church of England remained relatively stable, but the pressures of competing ministries continued to pose a challenge

⁶³ Ibid, p. 151.

⁶⁴ Ibid, p. 143.

⁶⁵ Orme, "The Twentieth Century: Devon and General," pp. 182-195.

⁶⁶ In 1900 Plymouth was one-third Anglican and two-thirds Nonconformist. Ibid, p. 148.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Despite the significance of the Christian Brethren in the south there are very few sources available regarding their activities in Devon. Consequently, although I recognize their importance, they will not be dealt with in this dissertation.

to the position of the Church within Devon society. With regards to the religious make-up of the county, pre-war trends continued once the war ended. Whereas the Established Church experienced stagnation and some decline in the post-war years, the Catholic Church benefited significantly from the war and continued to gain strength in Devon throughout the inter-war period. Throughout the 1920s Methodists and Baptists increasingly united in one church, particularly in small rural communities where out migration meant that the individual ministries could no longer afford to maintain separate churches. However, neither the Methodists nor Baptists experienced considerable decline until the early 1930s.⁶⁹

This dissertation seeks to reassess common assumptions about how individuals and groups responded to the challenges and demands created by war. While there was considerable support for British involvement in the conflict among Devonians in general, I argue that support was never axiomatic, static, or uncontested. There was significant variation of opinion among the civilian population and people's responses were often more diverse and ambiguous than other studies have suggested. In Chapter One I look at the public's response to state intervention into civilian life and show that although Devonians were supportive of the war effort, they were willing to protest against government policies that they believed were being unequally enforced. The perception of inequality led to increased social tensions at the community level. Chapter Two explores the contributions made by Devon's agricultural sector in meeting the nation's food requirements, and argues that although farmers held back men in their employ and negotiated with the government for labour and supply guarantees, their hesitations and

⁶⁹ Orme, "The 20th Century," pp. 191-194.

demands were not symptomatic of their lack of patriotism. Chapter Three examines recruiting tactics and the public's response to conscription, and argues that Devon's enlistment patterns were influenced by not only the urban-rural and north-south divides that characterized the county, but also by the county's demographic and industrial make-up. In Chapter Four, I investigate the differing views towards, and competing motives of, Devon's Christian churches and the war effort. This chapter demonstrates that opposition to British involvement in the war did exist among the parochial clergy, even if it was limited, and argues that divided loyalties and competing ministries prevented the achievement of inter- and intra-denominational unity.

In examining Devonians' responses to the First World War we begin to appreciate and more fully understand the difficulties, triumphs, and defeats that the civilian population experienced on the home front. Britons had only seven days to make the adjustment from peace to war, between Austria-Hungary's declaration of war on Serbia on 28 July and the British government's decision to enter the conflict a week later. It is not surprising that it took longer than a week for the people of Devon to truly comprehend the ramifications of an international war. This study of Devon demonstrates the complexities of the local experience by taking into account the myriad factors and circumstances that shaped people's lives between 1914 and 1918. And it is to understanding how the state intruded into civilian lives in Devon during the war, and the consequences of that interference, that we first turn.

1 The Home Front and State Intervention

The efforts of the state to wage war and its dedication to a military victory brought substantial changes to the home front. This chapter aims to understand how the civilian population dealt with the physical, emotional, and psychological effects of the war. It examines the subjugation of the population to increased regulations under the Defence of the Realm Acts, the regimentation of consumption, and the mounting discomforts of daily life. The impact of war was not uniform; rather, issues of gender, class, and geographic locale influenced the extent to which the war impinged on the lives of Devonians. The state required of its citizenry a new level of obedience, acceptance, and subordination to government authority. But as the inequality of state initiated regulations entered public awareness, the perception developed that the local authorities did not always act in accordance with the best interests of the people as a whole. The extent of these inequalities will be seen in four specific areas: the provisions for refugee care; inadequate housing conditions; the unequal enforcement of lighting restrictions; and price inflation and food shortages. In these instances, conflict was often the result of competing interests that arose between different social groups as wartime conditions and the enforcement of state laws under the Defence of the Realm Acts highlighted class differences. We need to recognize that some of these issues were experienced differently across Devon. Refugees were not housed in Devon's northern communities, and although lighting restrictions were not imposed to the same extent on northern towns, shortages and price increases were felt in small rural communities more so than in the larger market towns of the south. This chapter argues that although Devonians were willing to make sacrifices for the war effort, their willingness to do so was dependent on the perception

that government policies treated all segments of society equally.

In the 1960s and early 1970s historians such as Arthur Marwick and John Williams presented the war as a unifying experience, suggesting that a heightened national awareness harnessed and dampened gender inequalities, class antagonisms, and religious conflicts.¹ However, in the 1970s and 80s historians focused on workers' unrest, state intervention and the role of the war in exacerbating class conflicts, particularly over the issue of dilution and substitution of skilled workers with unskilled labour. The debate surrounding Red Clydeside demonstrates that state intervention into labour practices resulted in social conflict in Scotland when the 'dilution' of the skilled workforce encouraged thousands of workers to strike for higher wages and the protection of craft privileges. The debate in the 1970s was over whether this social conflict was revolutionary; while the consensus is now that it was not, the debate highlights the extent of conflict between labour and the government during the war.²

Dilution and substitution were also important issues for historians in the late 1980s and 90s who sought to understand the diversity of worker experience. For example, John Horne and Gerry Rubin argued that conflict over dilution and substitution was the result of the trade unionists' perception that the Munitions of War Acts impinged

¹ Arthur Marwick, *The Deluge: British Society and the First World War* (London: Norton, 1970), p. 300; John Williams, *The Other Battleground: The Home Fronts in Britain, France, and Germany, 1914-1918* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1972), pp. 28, 49-50, 55-58, 64-71, 114-115, 121-124, 128-129, 183-187, 195-196, 290.

² John Morris, "Skilled Workers and the Politics of 'Red' Clyde: a Discussion Paper," *Journal of the Scottish Labour History Society* 19 (1984): 6-14; John Foster, "Strike Action and Working-Class Politics on Clydeside, 1914-1919," *International Review of Social History*, 35 (1990): 38-60; Joseph Melling, 'Work, Culture and Politics on 'Red Clydeside': the ILP during the First World War,' in *The ILP on Clydeside: From Foundations to Disintegration*, ed. Alan McKinley and R.H. Morris (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991), 83-116. For an extended discussion of the historiography and issues surrounding Red Clydeside see Myra Baillie's *The Women of Red Clydeside: Women Munitions Workers in the West of Scotland During the First World War*, PhD dissertation, McMaster University, 2002, pp. 111-173.

on the rights of Britain's workers. Despite the rumblings of the trade unions, Horne argues that the majority of the working-classes in Britain cooperated with the state on industrial mobilization and supported the war effort.³ In addition, Deborah Thom, Gail Braybon, and Anne Summers' important work on gender and labour expand the historiography by arguing that dilution and substitution exacerbated gender tensions and created worker resentment and hostility toward female employees, particularly those in positions of authority.⁴

George Robb argues that the intrusion of the state into almost every aspect of daily life occurred within the dynamics of the British class system and created a resurgence of class antagonisms, while at the same time promoting a more egalitarian vision of society. The result was a more politically conscious working-class with "greater expectations and a greater sense of entitlement."⁵ Although the circumstance of the war did encourage an atmosphere of solidarity, the old class hierarchy remained largely

³ Gerry Rubin, *War, Law and Labour* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), pp. 95-96, 138-139; John N. Horne, *Labour at War: France and Britain, 1914-1918* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), pp. 78-83, 295-301. Also see, Bernard Waites, *A Class Society at War: England 1914-1918* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987), pp. 200-221; Keith Grieves, *The Politics of Manpower, 1914-18* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), pp. 4, 70-71, 181-199.

⁴ Deborah Thom, *Nice Girls and Rude Girls: Women Workers in World War I* (New York: Taures, 2000), pp. 144-150, 205; Gail Braybon, *Women Workers In the First World War* (London: Routledge, 1981), pp. 167-168, 229-232; Anne Summers, "Public Functions, Private Premises: Female Professional Identity and the Domestic-Service Paradigm in Britain, c. 1850-1930," in *Borderlines: Gender and Identities in War and Peace, 1870-1930* ed. Billie Melman (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 362-364. For more on gender and war work see, Sarah Boston, *Women Workers and the Trade Union Movement* (London: Davis-Poynter, 1981), pp. 96-130, 132-134; Jane Lewis, *Women in England* (London: Wheatsheaf, 1984), pp. 145-158; Gail Braybon and Penny Summerfield, *Out of the Cage: Women's Experiences in Two World Wars* (London: 1987), pp. 1-7, 77-78, 111-113, 129; Angela Woollacott, *On Her Their Lives Depend: Munitions Workers in the Great War* (California: University of California Press, 1994), pp. 1-14, 188-192, 214-216; Claire Culleton, *Working Class Culture, Women, and Britain, 1914-1921* (London: St Martins, 1999), pp. 4-5, 51-75; Susan Pyecroft, "British Working Women and the First World War," *Historian* 56: 4 (Summer 1994): 699. On the post-war reaction, see Deirdre Beddoe, *Back to Home and Duty: Women between the Wars, 1918-1939* (London: Pandora, 1989), pp. 3, 7, 48-50, 60-62.

⁵ George Robb, *British Culture and the First World War* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), pp. 92-95, 94. For more on the extent of cultural change created by the war see, Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), pp. 3-35; Samuel Hynes, *A War Imagined* (London: Bodley Head, 1990), pp. 57-98; Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning*, pp. 1-11.

intact, gender equality was not achieved, and wartime discontent provided ample fuel for the resurgence of class, gender, and religious conflict after 1918. Similarly, Richard Van Emden and Steve Humphries argue that there was considerable social unease created by new statutory laws and the rescinding of civil liberties. Van Emden and Humphries recognize that public violence was both contained and limited, but they argue that the censorship laws implemented under the Defence of the Realm Acts⁶ exacerbated public fear, leading to riots, strikes, and public disobedience.⁷

Conversely, Edward Green's study of Downton in the First World War argued that although social conflict arose as a result of state intervention, it was quickly resolved and transformed into a positive wartime experience. Green presents a largely unified picture of the war's impact suggesting that while issues of temperance, refugees, and government restrictions created social conflict, they were quickly resolved and ultimately strengthened the public's resolve.⁸ A similar study by Frank Meeres on Norfolk during the war also neglects the importance of social conflict created by the war and by state intervention. Although he indicates that blackout laws, curfews, evacuations, and the relocation of families living in coastal areas created conflict, he fails to examine the social consequences of that conflict, suggesting instead that, like the national whole, the

⁶ The Defence of the Real Acts were originally designed to manage the flow of information, particularly information that could harm the British war effort or be useful to the enemy; they were not intended for the control of public opinion at home. However, as the war progressed the government expanded its powers under DORA to include such things as the appropriation of factories and munitions production, as well as to prevent non-essential industries from hiring men of military age (1917), but controls were much less restrictive than John Williams and others have suggested. John Williams, *The Home Fronts*, p. 23; Robb, *British Culture and the First World War*, pp. 110-111; Wilson, *The Myriad Faces of War*, pp. 220, 535; Brock Millman, *Managing Domestic Dissent in First World War Britain* (London: Frank Cass, 2000), pp. 38-39.

⁷ Richard Van Emden and Steve Humphries, *All Quiet on the Home Front: An Oral History of Britain During the First World War* (London: Headline Book Publishing, 2003), pp. 21, 61-64, 89-100, 107-108, 219, 221-226, 242-264.

⁸ Edward Green, *Downton and the First World War* (Salisbury: Meerstone Publications, 2002), pp. 137-164.

public was generally accepting of the war and the need for increased government controls.⁹

While the work of Green and Meeres contributes to our understanding of the local experience, both studies have limitations. Green's argument that the people of Downton greeted the war with 'idealistic enthusiasm' as women cheered in the streets and men traveled long distances to volunteer for military service is difficult given that his study suggests considerable conflict created by panic buying, the pressures and uncertainty that young men felt regarding enlistment, and his argument that Lord Kitchener's stern visage was menacing to young men who were uncertain about what role they should play in the war with Germany.¹⁰ Likewise, Meeres notes that throughout Norfolk, conflict occurred as prices rose rapidly and shortages became more apparent, but he dismisses the disturbances without explanation. The same is true of his examination of industrial unrest where he demonstrates that in October 1916 3,000 juvenile factory workers struck over war bonuses and wages, but he says little about the social impact of the strike.¹¹ Additionally, his contention that Belgian refugees were treated with hostility and suspicion was left largely unexamined.¹²

On the contrary, Gerald Wasley's study of wartime Devon suggests less unity in terms of how the war was experienced by Devonians, but provides little context. Wasley's primary focus is Devon's military contribution, specifically that of Plymouth, and although he does not delve into the complexities of the local experience, his work

⁹ Frank Meeres, *Norfolk in the First World War* (Sussex: Phillimore, 2004), pp. 91, 86-98, 113-118, 122-123.

¹⁰ Green, *Downton and the First World War*, pp. 40, 45-49, 154, 161.

¹¹ Meeres, *Norfolk in the First World War*, p. 112.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 135-137.

does provide a foundation for further study.¹³ This chapter builds on Wasley's work and contributes to the existing historiography by demonstrating that although Devonians were willing to endure hardships and make sacrifices for the war effort, their willingness to do so was dependent on cooperation and trust between themselves and the local authorities. The breakdown of that trust led to class conflict over inadequate housing conditions, which was exacerbated by the arrival of thousands of refugees, the unequal implementation of lighting restrictions, and price increases.

Belgian Refugees and the Housing Shortage

As the German armies crossed the border into neutral Belgium, anxiety, fear, and excitement dominated the British response to the German invasion. The attack on Belgium was met with an explosion of public energy. The British public expected the French Army to march forward and curtail the German advance, but the French Army stalled with the failure of Plan XVII and the German forces continued their inexorable push through Belgium. The German invasion and occupation of Belgium forced thousands of civilians to flee from their homes. In response, the British government tried to implement emergency measures to absorb the influx of refugees. Yet when refugees were brought across the English Channel to relocation centres, the tight control of a single governing body was absent. The War Refugee Committee was in its infancy and although a number of smaller bodies were in place, coordination between organizations was rudimentary and a lack of communication with local boards in Belgium meant that it was difficult to harmonize international efforts.

While London and the east coast towns absorbed the majority of the refugees,

¹³ Gerald Wasley, *Devon and the Great War, 1914-1918* (Tiverton: Devon Books, 2000), pp. 114-116.

counties in the west, south, and north also provided care for families displaced by the war. The arrival of thousands of refugees daily overwhelmed the efforts of the volunteers, and while the government struggled to make preparations for refugee care, it took two weeks before the government was able to make a concerted effort.¹⁴ In Devon the ability of the county to assist in the relief effort was initially halted by the slow response of the county government to wartime needs. It took several weeks for a refugee relief committee to be formed, and in the meantime a number of civilian organizations rose to the challenge. In the city of Exeter more than twenty refugee relief committees, staffed mostly by women, were created between August and October 1914.¹⁵ The Devon County Council finally founded a central organization for refugee relief in late August.¹⁶

The first task of the county's Relief of War Refugees Committee was to find suitable accommodations for Devon's refugee population. Exeter was the first place in the county to receive refugee families.¹⁷ By the end of October 1914 there were more than 800 refugees living in Exeter alone and by 1 February 1915 the Relief of War Refugees Committee had reported that more than 3,000 refugees had been placed in the city.¹⁸ In a renewed attempt to accommodate the growing refugee population in Devon and Cornwall, in 1915 Earl Hugh Fortescue, the Lord Lieutenant of Devon, and Lord William Henry Edgcumbe, the Lord Lieutenant of Cornwall, formed a joint committee

¹⁴ Peter Cahalan, *Belgian Refugee Relief in England During the Great War* (London: Garland, 1982), pp. 18-25.

¹⁵ Letter from Lady Fortescue to Devon County Council, 25 August 1914, Devon Record Office, Fortescue of Castle Hill, 3248A/14.

¹⁶ The Devon and Cornwall War Refugees Committee Report, 22 August 1914, Devon Record Office, Fortescue of Castle Hill, 1262MM/O/LD/ 138-139.

¹⁷ The city of Exeter initially received more than 120 refugee families and by mid-1915 there were more than 10,000 refugees living in the Devon.

¹⁸ Devon and Cornwall War Refugees Committee Report for 1917, 30 January 1918, Devon Record Office, Fortescue of Castle Hill, 1262MM/O/LD/ 138-139.

under the title Devon and Cornwall War Refugees Committee. Exeter, the largest center for refugee care in both counties, housed more than 8,000 refugee families during the war and Devon as a whole provided care and accommodation for more than 28,000 refugees between August 1914 and January 1919.¹⁹ Local volunteers, whose most pressing concern was finding suitable housing, were responsible for refugee care in the county.²⁰ There were two primary methods of allocation. The first was that refugees would share a dwelling with a local family. Responsibility for the care of the refugees would fall to the host family with some aid provided by local charities. The second option was that the refugees would be housed separately in cottages, hostels, or church rooms that were designated for such a purpose. Private hospitality saved the outlay of money, while separate accommodations prevented unnecessary cultural clashes. While each method had its benefits, each also presented problems for local communities.

In August 1914, Devonians were largely enthusiastic about offering aid to Belgium's displaced refugee population. Exeter resident Violet Clutton described the scene at Exeter station on 11 October 1914:

A train of Belgian refugees was expected to arrive and the station was crowded with those who, having already escaped from the devastation in Belgium and having been separated from their friends, now hoped that here they might recognize some well-known face among the new arrivals from the seat of war. It was a wonderfully impressive moment, and as we made our way out of the station through the dense masses of people, a stranger everywhere, somehow the terrible side of the war seemed far more real than ever before. Poor things, many of them had lost all they possessed in the world.²¹

¹⁹ Devon and Cornwall War Refugees Committee Report for 1917, Report for 1919, 12 January 1920, Devon Record Office, Fortescue of Castle Hill, 1262MM/O/LD/ 138-139. The city of Exeter retained a separate committee until February 1916 when it was amalgamated with the Devon and Cornwall Committee.

²⁰ Ibid. Refugees most often arrived in groups of 200 to 300 at all hours of the day and cost the county £2000 per month for each group.

²¹ Clutton diaries, October 1914, Devon Record Office, Clutton of Devon, 6258-0.

In Teignmouth, support manifested itself in terms of fundraising, clothing drives, and the gathering of countless necessities that were brought to collection depots for redistribution. The Teignmouth Women's Working Party also collected clothing, materials, and monetary donations for refugees in England and forwarded the gifts to the Belgian Legation for dispersal.²² Devon's residents worked tirelessly to send packages to devastated areas in Belgium and France, and in the small town of Kilkhampton the "ladies of the parish" were reported to be "knitting things for about 50 Belgians being cared for by the local relief committee."²³ An extra fifty people to feed and clothe was a burden for the parish, but support from surrounding areas helped to offset the cost to Kilkhampton's parishioners. The majority of Devon's refugees were housed in the southern districts of the county. North Devon was somewhat detached from the southern half of the county and travel during wartime could be difficult. However, despite the fact that many towns and villages in northern and western Devon never hosted refugees, collection sites were established in most communities throughout the county.²⁴

By November 1914 the first wave of patriotic euphoria began to subside and was replaced with a grim awareness that the struggle would be longer than initial estimates suggested. This change in attitude was caused by the first battle of Ypres and was reflected in the reduction in the number of committees and public support for refugee programmes. Declining support for the refugees was in part due to the financial burden of

²² Lucy B. Spencer, "Belgian Refugees," *Teignmouth Post*, 11 September 1914.

²³ "Kilkhampton," *Hartland and West Country Chronicle*, 18 November 1914, p. 5; F. Mackenzie, *Hartland and West Country Chronicle*, 18 November 1914, p. 3; William Bate, "Clovelly," *Hartland and West Country Chronicle*, 18 November 1914, p. 5; "South Brixham: Support for Refugees," *Paignton Western Guardian*, 6 January 1916; "Report of Torquay Advisory Committee," *Paignton Western Guardian*, 24 February 1916, p. 8; "Belgium Refugees," *Dawlish Gazette*, 5 September 1914.

²⁴ Refugee Placement Scheme, Letter to Lady Fortescue at Castle Hill, 23 May 1916, Devon Record Office, Lord Lieutenant Papers, 1262MM/12/3.

feeding extra mouths, but it was also compounded by the emotional strain of living so closely with another family, as well as communication problems and cultural differences. In Devon, middle- and upper-class families were among the first to respond to the refugee problem. Primarily the care of refugees was left to the host family, although there was the possibility of receiving some financial support from local philanthropic organizations. Due to the financial burdens associated with refugee care, few working- or lower-middle class families were able to provide assistance to Belgian and French citizens displaced by the war. For those who could and did provide care, most requested refugees of 'good character.' However, many host families were disappointed since wealthier refugees were able to provide their own accommodation and food, at least initially, resulting in a lack of 'desirable' refugees for Devon's upper classes. Discontent emerged quickly amongst refugee hosts. Margaret Wesley of Exeter explained that "our refugee family is unable or simply too lazy to care for themselves. I wait on them hand and foot and rather than pitching in to keep their quarters in good repair, they take long afternoon walks and seem unfurled by the state of their living quarters."²⁵ Roger Hilbert cautioned other families that "it is best to keep to yourself. My wife has provided numerous meals for our refugee family and they refuse to eat, saying that it is quite dreadful."²⁶ Issues of work ethic caused problems and rumours quickly spread that the Belgians were taking advantage of their hosts. One man noted that

I am not opposed to working with the Belgians or helping in other ways so long as they are willing to help themselves, whether that means fighting for better conditions at home or supporting their families during their stay in Britain. What I can't accept is those Belgians who lag around town all day, willing to take from those men and women who offer a helping hand,

²⁵ Mary Wesley, "Belgian Refugees," *Exeter Flying Post*, 7 December 1914, no page number.

²⁶ Roger Hilbert, "Refugee Relief?" *Salcombe Gazette*, 6 January 1915, no page number.

but do nothing in return. I believe they will be reluctant to leave us when the war is over.²⁷

J.J. Mallock hosted a refugee family, but returned the family to the relocation centre after only three weeks. He explained that the “reduction in the number of our refugees has been largely due to the difficulty of getting [Belgian] families to do their fair share of work around the home after having been supported in idleness in London, as is too often the case.”²⁸ At the Belgian Relocation Centre in South Devon, Mr. Holland reported in October 1914 to the Belgian Council that “Refugee families have been returned by their hosts in alarming numbers over the past several weeks. Refugees have been [c]ited as unreasonable, attached to old habits and reluctant to provide assistance to their hosts beyond their own subsistence.”²⁹ Undeniably, the clash of two cultures under tense conditions contributed to animosity and hard feelings. Devonians felt that they were taking in ‘helpless Belgians’ in need of firm treatment, a theory that was propagated by the press, only to find out that the Belgians were not helpless after all. In 1916 Beatrix Cresswell noted in her diary: “Tonight I was out for a walk and I saw Belgian refugees still coming with all their children. They are completely dependent, hardly able to fend for themselves when they arrive, but when they leave they take with them the spoils of war. I hope this town builds up again and destroys its honorable scars.”³⁰ Cresswell felt that the Belgians were a blight on Devon and that their presence somehow damaged the integrity of the county. ‘Poor little Belgium,’ a rallying cry for British involvement in the

²⁷ Vulcan, “Belgian Refugees,” *Clarion*, 19 February 1915, p. 6.

²⁸ J.J. Mallock, “Refugees,” *Totnes Times*, 9 October 1915, p. 5; E. Thompson, “Aliens,” *Totnes Times* 22 August 1914, p.5; William Trend, “Belgian Refugees,” *Totnes Times*, 12 February 1915, p. 5; [Untitled], *Totnes Times*, 5 May 1916, p. 5.

²⁹ Bampton Committee Report, 1 October 1914, Devon Record Office, Belgian Refugee Relief Committee, 1044B-11G.

³⁰ Beatrix Cresswell, diary, 5 November 1916, Devon Record Office, Cresswell of Devon, 4486M/F52.

war, was counteracted by complaints that the Belgians were ungrateful and avaricious.

There was also some chatter in the local press regarding the refusal of those refugees living in Britain to support the war by offering to enlist. Residents who saw young Belgian men around town criticized the refugees for not enlisting in the Belgian Army or seeking employment with the Labour Exchange. 'Vulcan' from Totnes wrote to the *Clarion* to enquire why "we have so many Belgians who are quite young enough to be serving in the Belgian Army, and I cannot understand why they, who are conscripts, are not now in their own country."³¹ Frank Phillips, of the Council for Belgium Refugees in Plymouth, noted that

I have received several complaints from committees in Devon with regard to the fact that so many young Belgians amongst the refugees have failed to come forward to volunteer to join the army. I have received from the Belgian Bureau Militaire the enclosed circular which they have asked me to make public.

NOTICE TO THE BELGIANS:

The Belgian government has called to arms the militias of the class of 1914. Making appeal to the patriotism of the Belgians, the King solicits the voluntary engagement of all Belgians, who are physically fit, between 18 and 35 years and up to 45 years if they have already served or belonged to the Civic Guard. The cities of Exeter and Plymouth have been issued special notices, as complaints seem to emanate from these districts.³²

At the end of March 1915 Hamilton Young, a representative of the Belgian Council in Plymouth, announced that after careful examination of the situation in Shaldon and Teignmouth and "South Devon generally, the Council found that not a single Belgian

³¹ Vulcan, "Belgian Refugees," *Clarion*, 19 February 1915, p. 6; "Idle Belgians," *Teignmouth Post*, 24 March 1915, p. 4; C. Jennings, "Belgians," *Teignmouth Post*, 11 September 1914, p. 4; Letter from the Mayor of Okehampton regarding Belgian Refugees, 23 November 1916, Devon Record Office, Okehampton Town Council Records, 3248A/13/76.

³² Frank Phillips, "Belgians in England and the War," *Western Evening Herald*, 6 March 1915, p. 5.

living in South Devon at present is capable of active service in the Belgian Army.”³³ Yet, negative experiences were frequently publicized in the press and at town gatherings and served to discourage others from opening up their homes to refugees.

Criticisms leveled against refugee families certainly fuelled discontent, but the main issue of concern was centered on those refugees living in separate buildings such as cottages, houses, and hostels. In August 1914 there was a surplus of vacant houses in Devon. Many were large country homes owned by Devon’s upper classes who agreed to convert their establishments into centres for wounded soldiers or hostels to house refugees. However, after October 1914 the wealthy began to withdraw their support for the Belgians. The number of British wounded continued to rise, and some families believed that their country homes were better suited for the care of wounded soldiers and sailors than as refugee homes. Hospitals and convalescent facilities were in short supply in Devon and there were few accommodations for those who required extended care. In February 1915 there were reports that refugees were being returned to relocation centers at an alarming rate. The Devon and Cornwall Committee reported that in that month alone “more than twenty homes in the county that had previously been used to house refugees have since been transformed for convalescent use. Public support has experienced a gradual decline since October and more assistance is likely to be needed from the War Relief Committee in London.”³⁴ By early November support for the Belgian cause had dropped among Devon’s upper- and middle-classes. C. J. Narrew of the South Devon Refugee Committee reported that “there are reports of residents

³³ Hamilton Young, *Teignmouth Post*, 26 March 1915, p. 4.

³⁴ Letter from Mr. Holly to Lord Fortescue, 5 February 1915, Devon Record Office, Fortescue of Castle Hill, 3248A/13.

dropping off refugees at train stations without provisions or a ticket. I would like, through the medium of your paper, to caution residents that there are steps to be taken if you are no longer able to support the refugee family in your care.”³⁵ Support for refugees continued to decline throughout the war and in June 1917 K. Tealeven, Chair of the Launceston Refugee Relief Committee reported that,

The committee regrets that the monetary support for our refugees from both town and country have lessened substantially over the past year, and it has become necessary to draw upon the reserve fund to meet current expenditures. This is a serious position, for even should the war end this year the reserve will in all probability be exhausted before the refugees can go back to their own country. The request is for people to do their part and contribute to the costs of taking in Belgian refugees or to donate money to the reserve fund.³⁶

Of equal concern was that most of the volunteers used to staff Devon refugee organizations were middle-class women, but rising prices and shortages meant that many were forced to abandon volunteerism for paid employment. May Buckle, a volunteer with the Devon Patriotic Fund, had to leave her position to work with a local insurance firm. In a letter to Lady Fortescue she explained, “I have greatly enjoyed my work with the Patriotic Fund, but the conditions of war are such that we are all required to make sacrifices for the betterment of our families and country.”³⁷ With funding, accommodations, and volunteers in decline the burden of refugee care was directed back upon the county.³⁸

³⁵ C.J. Narrew, “Belgian Refugees,” *Salcombe Gazette*, 19 February 1915, no page number.

³⁶ K. Treleaven, “Belgians in Launceston,” *Cornish and Devon Post*, 30 June 1915, p. 5.

³⁷ Letter from Mary Buckle to Lady Fortescue, 6 January 1915, Devon Record Office, Fortescue of Castle Hill, 1262M/145.

³⁸ The Devon and Cornwall War Refugees Committee Report 1917, 30 January 1918, Devon Record Office, Fortescue of Castle Hill, 1262MM/LD/ 138-139. A government fund was started and made available to those refugee families that were not cared for by philanthropic organizations.

Housing:

The housing situation was a particular source of tension in Devon, and in Britain generally. At the outbreak of war working-class housing conditions were appalling, and although the housing issue affected the county generally, Exeter and the port towns of Devon's south coast were the most negatively impacted. While the northern communities suffered from poor housing conditions, overcrowding compounded the situation in the south. In the pre-war years the government cast the responsibility for housing management upon local authorities who were reluctant to make reforms due to the rising costs of labour and supplies. The result was "an almost total stoppage of house-building for the lower income groups between 1890 and 1918."³⁹ The consequence of stagnant building activity was that working-class dwellings tended to be old, overcrowded houses, and in 1911 more than thirty percent of the British population lived in unsuitable conditions that lacked basic amenities such as running water.⁴⁰ While the housing problem was most acute in Britain's industrial areas, in Devon pre-war concerns about housing did not cease with the declaration of war; rather, they were exacerbated by the arrival of thousands of refugee families, the suspension of building projects in August 1914, and wartime inflation that made supplies costly and repairs unlikely.⁴¹ Further, the housing industry was not free from wartime profiteering that kept accommodations in short supply and rents high. To get around rent restrictions many property owners completed superficial repairs to their properties and landlords were careful when selecting tenants, preferring to rent to those who could pay the most. Also of concern for

³⁹ Enid Gauldie, *Cruel Habitations: A History of Working-Class Housing 1780-1918* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1974), p. 81.

⁴⁰ Robert Roberts, *The Classic Slum* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1973), p. 37.

⁴¹ For more on the problems facing housing see J.M. Winter, *The Great War and the British People*, pp. 242-245.

working-class families in Devon was that although the government introduced rent regulations in 1915, these restrictions served to aggravate shortages and increase class conflict. Wartime legislation discouraged the building of new homes for working families since they could not afford to pay the rent required to make the deal lucrative and the Rent Act did not set rent limits for new buildings.⁴² In Devon, in the years prior to the First World War it was estimated that eighty-five percent of working-class families rented and after August 1914, due to the housing shortage, some families were forced to rent homes that were previously deemed uninhabitable.⁴³ The difficulties of wartime housing were especially devastating for semi- and unskilled labourers who were particularly affected by the wartime market and could not afford to pay increased rates.

A plan to solve the *refugee* housing problem was introduced in the winter of 1915 when the Devon and Cornwall Committee petitioned the Devon County Council for the use of working-class homes in Exeter and Plymouth that had been abandoned prior to the outbreak of hostilities. The conversion of these dwellings was part of the Exeter Garden City Project and was intended to clean up slum areas and convert them into respectable middle-class districts. This was part of a broader government programme to reduce slum areas across the country, but the government failed to offer financial assistance and the programme was slow to get underway.⁴⁴ More than fifty homes were vacant in Exeter's

⁴² Wilson, *The Myriad Faces of War*, p. 809.

⁴³ Report on Housing, November 1911, Devon County Council, Devon Record Office, Okehampton Borough, 3248A-0/12/59; Housing Committee Minutes, 22 April 1913, R4/1-0/C/47; Housing and Town Improvement Committee Minute Book (No. 1), Devon Record Office, Paignton Urban District Council Clerk's Departments, R4582A-P/PC/57; Housing and Accommodation Committee Minute Book, April 1913, Devon Record Office, Newton Abbot Clerk's Department, R2365A-O/C/63; Working Class Housing Committee Minutes, 22 April 1913, Devon Record Office, R7/7-O/C110; Sidmouth Urban District Council, A.L. Bowley, *Some Economic Consequences of the Great War* (London: Thornton Butterworth, 1930), p. 81.

⁴⁴ A new housing scheme for Devon was initiated in 1906 after the Liberals won a landslide victory in

east end, and the Exeter Relief Committee believed that these dwellings would provide a partial solution to the refugee problem. The Devon County Council commissioned the use of the buildings in November and refugee families were moved in immediately. The Council alleged that returning the former residents to these areas would create unnecessary complications by forcing a second withdrawal at the end of the war. Instead, it was accepted that when the war was over and the building projects resumed, the refugees would be returned to Belgium and the homes would be vacant once again, although this was not always the case.⁴⁵

Prior to the war families living in the identified slum areas were relocated to cottages and temporary buildings while new homes were being constructed. However, as Alison Ravetz points out, “other than [for] war purposes, virtually no new building, maintenance or repairs were carried out” after 4 August 1914.⁴⁶ Although the 1914 Housing Act and the Rent and Mortgage Act of 1915 prevented the inflation of rents and mortgages on working-class housing above the rate set on 4 August 1914, rental costs were already high and there was a shortage of affordable, working class housing in

Devon taking ten of thirteen seats. However, housing plans for Exeter, and Devon generally, were downgraded in 1910 when the Conservatives won a majority, although housing developments continued in Barnstaple, a Liberal stronghold under Sir Geoffrey Baring, albeit at a slower pace than originally determined in 1906. Housing Report, 7 May 1906, Devon Record Office, Barnstaple Borough Council, 2654-4; Housing Report, 9 May 1910, Devon Record Office, Barnstaple Borough Council, 2654-. For more on housing developments in Britain see John Burnett, *A Social History of Housing, 1815-1985* (London: Methuen, 1986), pp. 183-187, 220-221.

⁴⁵ The Devon and Cornwall War Refugees Committee Report for 1914, 25 January 1915, Devon Record Office, Fortescue of Castle Hill, 1262M/145. The Devon and Cornwall War Refugees Committee Report for 1915, 27 January 1916, Devon Record Office, Fortescue of Castle Hill, 1262MM/LD/ 138-139.

⁴⁶ Alison Ravetz, *Council Housing and Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2001), pp. 71, 72. Although this was generally the case, there were exceptions. For example, the Well Hall Estate was constructed during the war to house workers at the Woolwich Arsenal and there were other such building projects between 1914 and 1918, but they were few. Wilson, *The Myriad Faces of War*, p. 810.

Devon.⁴⁷ Also the Acts only applied to ‘small dwelling houses’ and only offered protection to tenants who remained in a tenancy—if a family moved from their fixed rate accommodations to a vacant property then rents were deregulated and most likely higher.⁴⁸ The inability of owners to increase rents during the war, coupled with inflation and general shortages, resulted in deteriorating housing conditions and depressed building activity. Building costs more than doubled in the four years of war, the labour force was dispersed, and between August and December 1914 the index for rents rose substantially. J. M. Winter demonstrates that although the government’s rent regulations did force the real costs of rent to decline, which benefited working class families, there was no attempt at housing reform during the war years.⁴⁹ As a result, the private housing market was unable or unwilling to respond to the public demand.⁵⁰ The government’s decision to abandon local building projects and the local authorities’ dedication to finding adequate living accommodations for Devon’s refugee population, meant that working-class Devonians were forced into more crowded living conditions and as a result, housing shortages became a cause of wider civil unrest.

In November 1914 petitions for Lord Fortescue to find a solution to Devon’s housing shortage increased substantially. In a letter to M.W. Cecil of the Housing Committee, Fortescue reported receiving “upwards of one hundred letters in the last fortnight on the matter of housing in Devon. Residents have secured the assistance of

⁴⁷ All working-class houses under twenty-six pounds per annum were fixed at the rate they were obtained prior to 4 August 1914.

⁴⁸ Alison Ravetz, *Council Housing and Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2001), pp. 71, 72.

⁴⁹ J. M. Winter, *The Great War and the British People* (London: McMillan, 1986), pp. 242-243.

⁵⁰ Wilson, *The Myriad Faces of War*, p. 809.

community leaders and the situation cannot be stalled any further.”⁵¹ Fortescue’s letter to Cecil came after a public statement by Father Daniels, an Anglican minister from Dartmouth who was quite vocal regarding the deplorable state of living conditions in Devon. The Rentpayers’ Association⁵² held a large public meeting at Dartmouth to consider the state of housing conditions in the county. Father Daniels referred to the housing conditions as being the “greatest evil in their midst,” and stated that there was little attempt by the government to remedy them. He reported that he knew many people in the town who had “broken their lives and their hearts in their efforts for the good of the people generally. They have supported this war and have found themselves homeless. A great deal of the immorality, misery and disease in the town could be traced to the housing conditions.”⁵³ After a series of meetings, the Devon County Council decided to relocate refugee families and working-class residents to the resort towns located along Devon’s south coast.⁵⁴

This plan was not without problems. The south coast of Devon was a popular vacation destination and had developed considerably since the early 1840s. For example, resort towns like Torquay experienced a population growth of more than thirty percent between 1841 and 1901, as well as increased building activity between 1900 and 1910.⁵⁵ While the construction of new hotels and motels meant that these resorts were able to accommodate several hundred displaced persons, the problem was that the south-coast

⁵¹ Letter from Fortescue of Castle Hill to M.W. Cecil, 6 November 1914, Devon Record Office, Fortescue of Castle Hill, 1262M/L18.

⁵² Formed in 1910 the Rentpayers’ Association represented tenants’ rights and fought for rent legislation (rent control) and an appeals process for wrongful evictions.

⁵³ Reverend Father Daniels, “Housing at Dartmouth,” *Paignton Western Guardian*, 18 October 1914, p. 2.

⁵⁴ Housing Relief, Report for October 1914 [not date provided], Devon Record Office, Fortescue of Castle Hill, 1262M/L126.

⁵⁵ John Travis, “The Rise of Devon Seaside Resorts, 1750-1900,” in *The New Maritime History of Devon* (London: Conway Maritime Press, 1994), pp. 140-141.

resorts, unlike those in the north, were accustomed to an upper-class clientele. Rents tended to be higher in the south than in other areas of the county, a trend that predated the war, and in many cases resort owners chose to rent to families from the East Coast and Midlands, as well as refugee families who could pay more, instead of working-class Devonians, many of whom could not afford the basic rates. Furthermore, community funds and subsidies from the local government covered the costs of refugee housing and owners were guaranteed payment, which was not the case with working-class residents. In the north, few owners were able to take advantage of the influx of refugees and government subsidies. These resorts tended to be smaller, were more secluded, and many lacked the necessary amenities for a long-term stay.⁵⁶ Conversely, some resort owners in the south benefited from wartime rates. For example, the Mallock and Cary families of Torquay, traditional landowners who developed their resorts over time, retained their upper-class clientele and were able to maximize profits and benefited from the war. This was especially true for those owners who rented to wealthy refugee families. Conversely, resort owners who had recently invested in expansion and updates, such as the Fletchers who purchased land in south Devon in the late nineteenth century to build villas, or those whose business came primarily from the middle classes, were hit hard by price inflation and the loss of visitors. Initially, over one hundred refugees were housed in the resort towns of Torquay and Teignmouth and some resort owners in these areas did particularly

⁵⁶ It is worth noting that the northern rural areas of Devon experienced more severe shortages and, due to continual disruptions to rail lines, were impractical for housing refugees. Also, although some northern resorts like the one at Ilfracombe experienced growth between 1880 and 1912, others experienced stagnation during the war years. The character of perspective lodgers was also an issue for consideration among some landlords. Landlords were picky about who they rented to and many were hesitant about renting to the working classes. On the other hand, some landlords chose not to rent to outsiders. For more on this issue see, David Englander, *Landlord and Tenant in Urban Britain, 1838-1918* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), pp. 237-241.

well.⁵⁷ However, new problems arose in the summer when resort owners who wished to rent to wealthy Londoners forced many refugees to abandon their lodgings. Refugees were either sent back to the relocation centres or had to find alternative accommodations.

The relocation scheme thus did not solve the housing problem and public agitation increased, particularly in Exeter and Devon's large towns. In Exeter 'Members of the Public,' a loose organization of Devonians who were dissatisfied with local housing conditions, came together in an effort to pressure the local government to improve conditions at home.⁵⁸ In a letter to the editor of the *Western Times* J. Landfear Lucas inquired how the

Government expects the people to be productive and supportive of the war when we face hardship at home everyday? Are our Devon and Cornwall Members of Parliament pressing the Government for this [public works projects] to be carried out? What of our magistrates and local authorities at Exeter, Plymouth, Bristol, Bodem, etc.? In this matter local initiative is necessary, as the Government can hardly be expected to take a lead, with their daily war distractions in London. I look around Exeter and I see our "Guests of the Nation" (great hulky, healthy looking chaps) that have engaged in the most nominal of tasks, or, in other words, wasting their time away. It is not practical for England to keep feeding them by the thousands when they do nothing to earn our help or respect. We have saved them from death and we are not using their labour on urgent public works that have been neglected for years on the very score of no suitable or available labour.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Refugee Relief Committee Report to Lord Fortescue, 2 October 1914, Devon Record Office, Fortescue of Castle Hill, 1262M/L129. Mr. A Cary, 10 August 1900, Villa, Cary Park, Devon Record Office, Cary R4582A-7/1; Report for Cary Park, 7 June 1920, Cary R4582A; Mallock Property, Torquay, 17 June 1917, Devon Record Office, Mallock of Cockington, 48/13/17-21.

⁵⁸ Although it is difficult to know how many Devonians participated in this group, they appear numerous times and in several areas of Devon, and seem to have been most active in the first two years of the war. They were also referenced as a 'group' by both the People's Light Brigade and the Rentpayer's Association, and had some contact with those fighting for better housing conditions in Devon, such as Father Daniels. Further, in a memorandum to Lord Fortescue on the issue of housing, the Mayor of Exeter refers to "Members of the Public" as a loose organization of disgruntled citizens.' Letter from Mayor's Office to Lord Fortescue, 17 November 1915, Devon Record Office, Fortescue of Castle Hill, 1262M/L151.

⁵⁹ J. Landfear Lucas, "Public Works," *Western Times*, 25 October 1915, p. 3.

In a series of letters to Lord Fortescue the group cautioned that “The housing conditions are shocking in all the city and large towns. Now, the question you should ask is, Why do such bad conditions exist?”⁶⁰ The group was less interested in waiting for Fortescue’s response than it was in making its own point: “Our magistrates and local representatives have mismanaged our resources, time and the allocation of housing and labour supplies. If something is to be done we must be finished with platitudes and meaningless nothings and mobilize a work force.”⁶¹ Members of the Public suggested that housing projects that were terminated in August 1914 be resumed under the authority of local contractors who could complete the projects by using available labourers, including refugees and prisoners of war.

Lord Fortescue’s response was less committal than Members of the Public had hoped it would be. Fortescue accepted the government’s programme that the refugees would be taken care of by the government and philanthropic organizations, and that all building projects were to be suspended until the end of the war.⁶² His reason, understandably, was that “the war’s management is and must be the primary concern of government at all levels.” He also stated that “the Belgian refugees in our care are our guests, and will not be forced to work on local building projects. This situation will be resolved in good time, but not until the war has been brought to a successful end.”⁶³ However, the ‘Guests of the Nation’ policy, as it was termed in August 1914, was adopted early in the war when it looked as though unemployment would pose a problem

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ R.W. Stephens, “The Housing of the People,” *Western Times*, 21 November 1915, p. 3.

⁶² Lord Fortescue did not reply to Members of the Public, but did address the housing issue in a letter to the Mayor of Exeter. Letter from Lord Fortescue to the Mayor of Exeter, 22 November 1914, Devon Record Office, Lord Lieutenant Papers, 1262M.

⁶³ Letter from Lord Fortescue to Mr. Potts, 13 November 1914, Devon Record Office, Fortescue of Castle Hill, 1262M/L151.

for native-born workers. Refugees were discouraged from working so that Britain's men could be afforded every opportunity to find employment.⁶⁴ Concerns about unemployment were short lived and by late-1915 there was a certain incongruity to Fortescue's continued support for the Guests of the Nation policy. On the one hand, Fortescue was attempting to protect the integrity of British involvement in the war by pandering to middle-class patriots who saw the refugees as the embodiment of the British cause. But on the other hand, and perhaps of more practical concern, neither Lord Fortescue nor the Devon County Council had any appreciable control over local contractors.

When public works projects were put on hold, and the guaranteed work that had been promised under the Exeter Garden City Project failed to materialize, the Exeter building trade went on strike in early August 1914. Most of the dispute was quickly settled and carpenters and labourers returned to work in late August, but the bricklayers refused to go back to work until an hourly wage increase was agreed upon, in mid-October, but there were still few building projects undertaken.⁶⁵ When in 1915 local contractors proposed to build cottages throughout the county, they were only willing to do so at double the pre-war cost to the county. Tenants would be asked to pay rent at 8s per week until 1919 and then 8s 2d beginning in 1920 (the cost would continue to rise in subsequent years). This was dramatically above Devon's pre-war rents of 5s per week in January 1914.⁶⁶ The cost to build the cottages was to be paid over a longer period of time and the bill would ultimately fall on the taxpayers. Also, although rents could not be

⁶⁴ Cahalan, *Belgian Refugee Relief*, pp, 217-227.

⁶⁵ "City Talk," *Express and Echo*, 2 October 1914, p. 6.

⁶⁶ Report for Building Plan submitted to the Devon County Council, 15 October 1915, Devon Record Office, Fortescue of Castle Hill, 1262M/L141/1.

raised above the set price, once the cottages were built landlords could force all expenses for repairs on tenants, therefore raising rents beyond the 8s per week set by the government.

In Plymouth the housing situation was considerably worse than it was in Exeter. Plymouth, one of Britain's main passenger ports, had a large and diverse population in 1914.⁶⁷ The Anglo-German naval race resulted in the expansion of the shipbuilding industry in Devon and the sudden availability of new jobs brought an influx of workers from North Devon and South Wales in the years 1909 to 1912.⁶⁸ Unfortunately, the housing industry in Plymouth had not kept pace with population growth, leading to an acute housing shortage by 1914. Between 1914 and 1917 the city experienced a large influx of residents, naval staff and personnel, adding to its overcrowding. Church rooms and community buildings were filled to capacity and working- and middle-class tenants received eviction notices with little warning. Maud MacLean of Plymouth rented on a quarterly basis, and after being evicted from her home noted that

there are too many people in this uncertain position. People are being made aware of the profitable sale of their residence, with enormous benefit to the landlord, without any interference from the local authorities. The government has implemented measures to protect the people from these war profiteers, but what are we to do when our local magistrates do nothing to stop said injustices?⁶⁹

While some families, such as those employed in the fisheries, may have been spared the initial shock of the wartime economy (many were in the naval reserve and were given a reserve income of £1 5s a week), dockyard employees were particularly hard hit, as were

⁶⁷ Mark Brayshay, "The Emigration Trade in Nineteenth-Century Devon," in *The New Maritime History of Devon* (London: Conway Maritime Press, 1994), pp. 104-117.

⁶⁸ Peter Hidlitch, "Devon Naval Strategy since 1815," in *The New Maritime History of Devon* (London: Conway Maritime Press, 1994), pp. 156-159.

⁶⁹ Maud MacLean, "The Housing Problem," *Western Evening Herald*, 15 March 1917, p. 3.

those who worked for the railways. The incomes of both groups were fixed and stable,⁷⁰ which benefited each in the prewar years, but with wartime inflation, these families would have been especially affected.⁷¹

The issue of suitable and affordable living accommodations was not confined to the working class. The middle-class in Devon was relatively small and tended to be concentrated in Exeter and coastal areas. Many of these families were involved in small businesses and manufacturing trades and were negatively affected by the nature of the wartime economy. In late 1917 rates of cottages for middle-class families rose, forcing many to leave their private dwellings and find accommodation with family or neighbours. Furthermore, rent protection for working-class families set in 1915 afforded no protection for eviction or sale of property. One way for landlords to get around the government's cap on working-class rents was to evict these families, complete superficial repairs, and then rent to middle-class families who could afford to pay more.⁷² For example, the Waller family found themselves in this predicament when they were forced to abandon their home in Plymouth. After the landlord evicted them in order to rent to a family from Essex that was willing to pay a higher rent, Mr. Waller complained that "after living in that residence for more than four years the landlord evicted my family with only a week's notice. While he lines his pockets, we find ourselves homeless. Is this really patriotism? Aliens, slums, and traitors have destroyed all sense of honour in this

⁷⁰ County of Devon, Quarter Sessions, August-September 1914 General Report, Devon Record Office, QS/107/66/Plymouth.

⁷¹ County of Devon, Quarter Sessions, Employment Report for April-June 1914, Railways, Devon Record Office, 4558Z-0/11. County of Devon, Quarter Sessions, Employment Report for July-September 1914, Railways, Devon Record Office, 4558Z-0/12.

⁷² "Overcrowding and Housing in Plymouth," *Western Evening Herald*, 15 January 1917, p. 4.

war.”⁷³ In Devon, the adversity experienced by some middle-class residents resulted in increased hardships for Devon’s poorer classes.

Outside of Devon’s major urban areas living conditions were equally deplorable. In the town of Barnstaple servicemen were returning to discover that their wives and children had been forced from their homes. ‘A Sailor’s Wife with Three Children’ wrote to the editor of the *Western Evening Herald* to draw attention to the fact that while waiting for her separation allowance she was evicted from her home for not paying her rent on time. She was unable to find another apartment in Salcombe and “After several inquiries I have met with nothing but contempt from landlords. Knowing that separation allowances have been infrequent they have refused to rent to us.”⁷⁴ In other instances military men had to spend their leaves doing home repairs because landlords refused to buy supplies at wartime rates, or to pay labourers the increased wages granted by the Devon County Council. In the *Western Evening Herald* Edith Stark called attention to an increase in “requests to local charity organizations for assistance with housing repairs. There have been several reports of soldiers doing repairs while on leave and the S.S.F.A. [Soldiers’ and Sailors’ Families Association] would like to ask for donations and support to help our men in uniform” to have a healthier place to come home to.⁷⁵ While the intentions of the S.S.F.A. were honourable, limited resources and the introduction of

⁷³ The Waller Family, “Homeless in Plymouth,” *South Devon Weekly News*, 14 May 1915, p. 5. Also see, “No Rooms for Rent: Stonehouse,” *Brixham Western Guardian*, 26 January 1917, no page number; “Housing in Plymouth: Your Legal Position,” *Western Evening Herald*, 16 January 1917, p. 4.

⁷⁴ A Sailor’s Wife with Three Children, “Encumbrances,” *Western Evening Herald*, 18 August 1915, p. 5; Edward Southcomb, Letter regarding the position of army families in Devon, 23 April 1917, Devon Record Office, 4131add/F51/1917; Soldiers’ and Sailors’ Families Association, report on service families in Devon, 23 February 1916, Devon Record Office, War No. 12, 2162A/PM288, p. 2; Devonshire Patriotic Fund, Servicemen Fund, Letter from Lord Fortescue to Mayor of Exeter, Devon Record Office, Devon County Lieutenancy, 16 September 1914, 2165A/PM294.

⁷⁵ Edith Stark, “What Herald Readers Think,” *Western Evening Herald*, 5 January 1917, p. 3.

conscription prevented any substantial effort from taking form. Parishes were drained of men and many service families, as well as those in occupations that did not benefit from wartime wage increases, such as dockhands and semi-skilled men employed in the fisheries, were forced to relocate to Cornwall where housing conditions were less onerous due to a series of housing reforms conducted between 1900 and 1910.⁷⁶ Further, relocation was only available to a few and for those who did leave, the question was whether or not the men and their families would return once the war was over.

To alleviate predicted post-war pressures in Barnstaple the Town Council decided to resume building projects against the advice of the Devon County Council. Local building contractors agreed to use remaining supplies and labour in the construction of eight new cottages, as well as to begin immediate repairs on cottages built before 1913. Business owners agreed to support the project by offering families a wage increase where possible and local philanthropic organizations arranged to redirect their financial support away from sustaining refugee families in the area and instead to support local building projects that would benefit their home communities. Some additional labour was secured by enlisting the help of refugees, but results remained limited throughout the war. Instead, local contractors relied on the labour of older men, teenage boys, and women.⁷⁷

With the building project underway in Barnstaple, other communities felt pressure to assuage living conditions in their own areas. In Dawlish a new strategy was worked out between local magistrates and building contractors, but the scheme was less

⁷⁶ Report on Housing Shortage and Working-Class Families, Clerk's Department, Barnstaple, 17 April 1915, Devon Record Office, 1342/0/23; Housing Committee Minutes, 7 June 1910, Devon Record Office, Clerk's Department, R7/4-0/C/53; Housing Authority, 4 January 1911, Cornwall Record Office, Borough of Truro, BTRU/525; Mr Woollcombe, Soldiers' and Sailors' Families Committee, Report to Lord Fortescue, 16 September 1914, Devon Record Office, 1262M/L/129..

⁷⁷ Town Council, "Working Class Conditions Deplored at Barnstaple," *Western Independent*, 17 October 1917, p. 5; "Alternative Labour Sources," *North Devon Herald*, 4 September 1915, no page number.

successful than it was in Barnstaple. The cottages were erected for approximately £270 each (actual cost), and as one local man put it, they “resembled wigwams rather than cottages.”⁷⁸ The buildings were intended to be temporary and building codes had to be slightly relaxed in order for the structures to meet the requirements of the local government board. In actual fact, it would take longer to pay for the cottages than the buildings were expected to last and they would only provide new homes for a few families. Nevertheless, the Dawlish Council agreed to a capital outlay of £1550 and rent at no less than 8s per week. P. Williams of Dawlish cautioned the local government that “the burden on the people is excessive and greatly impedes local support for the war effort. These proposals are crude, untrustworthy and invite stern criticism of the local authorities.”⁷⁹ The residents of Dawlish were outraged over the cost considering that in Barnstaple similar cottages were being constructed and rented at a rate of 6s. 6d. per week.⁸⁰ When war was declared the people of Dawlish received assurances from local authorities that a respectable standard of living would be maintained, but the length of the conflict complicated their feelings about the government’s response: “We have spent thousands of millions on war and there is no indication that we have come to anything like the end of our resources. Would anyone agree that for the purpose of Human Betterment we can afford to end needless civilian suffering?”⁸¹ Across Devon the housing question was not addressed until the 1920s and even then it took considerable

⁷⁸ Ratepayer, “Workmen’s Dwellings,” *Dawlish Gazette*, 30 December 1916, p. 4. See, “Totnes Board of Guardians: Housing,” *Western Guardian*, 13 January 1916, p. 7;

⁷⁹ P. Williams, “Workman’s Dwellings,” *Dawlish Gazette*, 30 December 1916, p. 4.

⁸⁰ Resident, *Dawlish Gazette*, 30 December 1916, p. 3.

⁸¹ “Against Poverty,” *Western Times*, 28 October 1916, p. 2.

time for the populace to experience a real rise in the standard of living.⁸²

Ultimately, improvements to housing conditions in Devon were hampered by the government's inability to effectively administer the housing crisis in the pre-war years and this problem was exacerbated when the local authorities accepted thousands of refugees without making the subsequent necessary housing provisions for working-class families. For the working-classes, living conditions were made worse by the willingness of middle-class resort owners and landlords to exploit the situation by renting to wealthy or government subsidized refugees, rather than working-class families. Landlords circumvented government rent controls by evicting working-class families and renting to the middle-classes who were able and willing to pay higher rent. In addition, some middle-class shop owners struggled under a wartime economy forcing lower-middle-class families to move into working-class areas, thereby lessening the gap between the upper working-class and the lower middle-class. Those citizens affected by the housing shortage enlisted the help of Farther Daniels and Members of the Public to bring attention to the unequal distribution of available housing and the appalling conditions that many Devonians were forced to live in. Although they did make moderate advances in places like Barnstaple and Dawlish, social tensions resulting from the housing shortage continued throughout the war, and significant improvements in housing did not occur

⁸² Housing Committee Minutes, 6 October 1925, Devon Record Office, Clerk's Department, Tiverton Borough Council, R4/1-0/C/47; Housing and Town Improvement Committee Book, 25 September 1925, Devon Record Office, Torbay County Borough Council, R4582A-O/PC; Housing Committee of Rural District Council Minute Books, 5 May 1927, Devon Record Office, Crediton Rural District Council, R4/3-0/C/12; Housing Accommodation Committee Minute Book, 3 June 1929, Devon Record Office, Newton Abbot Rural District Council, R2365A-)/C/64; Highways, Buildings and Housing Committee Minutes, 4 January 1927, Devon Record Office, Seaton Urban District Council, R7/6-0/C/36; Sanitary and Housing Committee, 5 January 1925, Devon Record Office, Okehampton Municipal Borough Council, R3/3-0/41/21. For information on the social impact of the housing crisis in Britain see Gordon Phillips, "The Social Impact," in *The First World War in British History*, ed. Stephen Constantine et al. (London: Edward Arnold, 1995), pp. 129-131.

until well into the post-war period.

Lighting Restrictions

The housing question in Devon was not unique in its ability to shape class dynamics during the war. To protect the home front from a possible aerial or naval assault, lighting and noise restrictions were also imposed on the civilian population. In August 1914 the Devon County Council issued a statement to the residents of Devon to “take precautions with respect to dimming lights in the evening.”⁸³ The notice followed earlier suggestions to restrict civilian access to the sea and to limit noise around coastal areas after dusk. Noise, which applied particularly to church bells, and lighting restrictions were especially important around coastal areas, and had a dramatic impact on the communities they affected. South-coast resorts tended to be large establishments and costly to run, so many owners could no longer afford to maintain their establishments and were forced to close their doors to both tourists and refugees.⁸⁴ Walks along Teignmouth’s piers were restricted to the daytime and bands were forbidden apart from naval and military purposes. Lights had to be dimmed, and once rationing was implemented restaurants were forced to limit their menus and reduce portion sizes, even though prices remained high, and in many cases rose due to the wartime market.⁸⁵ Yet, the people of Teignmouth did not complain excessively about the restrictions. Jean Miles noted that “We are all aware of the consequences. The Germans are out there laying mines and their ships wait

⁸³ Report of Lighting Regulations issued to Residents of Devon, 10 August 1914, Devon Record Office, Fortescue of Castle Hill, 1262M/ L141. The request to reduce lighting was primarily issued for the southern towns. Towns on Devon’s north coast and those in the interior were less affected by wartime lighting restrictions.

⁸⁴ Administrative History of Exmouth, Torbay, Brixham, Paignton, and Teignmouth 1906-1915, Devon Record Office, R4582/O.

⁸⁵ James Withers, “Teignmouth,” *Teignmouth Post*, 28 August 1914, p. 5.

silently in the darkness. The Royal Navy cannot protect this entire Island from attack, so we must do our part and make sacrifices for the protection of this nation.”⁸⁶ Residents living in coastal communities were troubled by alarmist stories about a German invasion and, consequently, many people willingly adhered to government-imposed restrictions.

In January 1915 more rigorous and invasive restrictions were put in place. At night all streetlights were to be dimmed, shop lighting was restricted, trains had to travel with the blinds drawn, and car lights had to be directed straight ahead. The government implemented these general restrictions under DORA, but individual town councils were responsible to set any further limitations and to enforce the existing laws. In November 1915 in the town of Brixham all streetlights were turned off, public parks were closed and homes were fined £3 per offence for improper window coverings.⁸⁷ Likewise, in Teignmouth and Salcombe streetlights were not only turned off but were actually removed altogether and placed in storage. The decision to remove the streetlamps was that of the local magistrates, because there was no state sanctioned blackout instituted for Devon.⁸⁸ In response, a meeting of the Teignmouth Urban District Council was called to respond to a petition by the townspeople to have the lights returned.⁸⁹ A representative for the people asked that “the lamps be lit in the village. It is unsafe for people to be gropingabout [sic] in the dark risking personal injury.” H.T. Parker, Chairman of the Council, explained that if the “authorities of Newton Abbot, Paignton, and Torquay keep

⁸⁶ Jean Miles, “Lights of Teignmouth,” *Teignmouth Post*, 26 August 1914, p. 3.

⁸⁷ Report of Street Lights for Brixham, 4 November 1914, Devon Record Office, Brixham Urban Council, R5980/PC/12/3. This was far above the maximum fine permitted by the Devon County Council.

⁸⁸ Teignmouth, Salcombe, Torbay, Brixham, Paignton, Torquay Urban District Council Lighting Committee Minutes, 30 December 1914, Devon Record Office, South Devon Lighting Committee, R4582A-01/PC/57.

⁸⁹ Petition to the Urban District Council Lighting Committee Minutes (representing the towns of Teignmouth, Salcombe, Torbay, Brixham, Paignton, and Torquay), 30 October 1915, Devon Record Office, South Devon Lighting Committee, R4582A-01/PC/60. The petition contains the names of 154 families/residents.

their people in the dark, it is necessary for Teignmouth to follow similar guidelines.” He added that “All towns and communities have been directed to practice economy and there are many other more important places without their lights.”⁹⁰ The petition of the townspeople was put to a vote, but was unanimously rejected by the Council.

Similar incidents were reported in other areas. In Newton Abbot townspeople put forward a petition, which contained the names of seventy-two residents/families to their Urban Council for more balanced lighting regulations. Residents complained that only those streets above Highweek Village were without lights, while the lower part of the town, which could also be seen from the sea, was “brightly lit.”⁹¹ Comparable complaints were voiced in Torquay where citizens wrote in to the *Teignmouth Post* to complain that while “we sit in darkness, we see other towns along the coast where lights are gleaming.”⁹² In Crapstone residents were told to restrict lights in their homes and businesses, and although streetlights were left on, they were dimmed. Yet, the town of Saltash, visible from Crapstone and the sea, had “brilliant illumination far into the night.” Parts of Plymouth were also brightly lit and as Charles Tozer noted, given its location a ship or aeroplane would have had very little difficulty finding Plymouth, a major British naval port, “helped by all these needless lights. If the government is correct and there is no other defence against attack than darkness, then why is it that some suffer, while

⁹⁰ “Newtonians support Teignmouth’s Plea,” *Teignmouth Post*, 19 November 1915, p. 8; “Lights at Teignmouth,” *Teignmouth Post*, 29 December 1916, p. 4. For more examples see, “Lighting Restrictions,” *Western Evening Herald*, 14 January 1915, p. 4; “Demand for Lights: Ashburton,” *Western Morning News*, 12 February 1915, p. 3; “The Public and the War: More Lights Needed,” *Dawlish Gazette*, 4 September 1915, p. 2; “Torquay Echoes,” *Express and Echo*, 26 January 1917, p. 4.

⁹¹ Ibid. The number of names on the petition is not certain due to the way the petitioners signed under ‘family’ names.

⁹² Resident, “Torquay in Darkness,” *Teignmouth Post*, 19 November 1915, p. 8.

others do not?”⁹³ Complaints were not confined to southern Devon; at the Barum Council in Barnstaple, residents petitioned the council to issue “one notice for lighting restrictions, rather than street by street. It is preposterous that my house is in darkness on Richmond Street, but two streets down the lights are on.”⁹⁴ In the town of Bideford streetlights were abandoned in late 1916 causing considerable unease among the townspeople.⁹⁵ Reverend Garland of the Anglican Church argued that although there was serious risk from air raids, nightfall was also fraught with danger to the public. The local police reported that there was a sharp rise in vandalism and juvenile delinquency in Bideford between January and September 1916 and that there were several reported cases of residents on their way home from evening prayer being accosted by “groups of youngsters.”⁹⁶ Reverend Garland noted that “It is well to take precautions against possible enemy attacks, but the present arrangement savours more of panic than wisdom.”⁹⁷ The following week the *Bideford Gazette* reported that some streetlights had been returned in an effort to ensure public safety.⁹⁸ The issue was not simply that people were unhappy with the lighting restrictions, but that the enforcement of the government’s policy was unequal.

⁹³ Charles John Tozer, “Air Raids,” *Western Morning News*, 10 February 1916, p. 3; “Lights and the Sea,” *Totnes Times*, 7 June 1915, p. 7; “Ashburton Lighting Regulations,” *Totnes Times*, 19 June 1915, p. 8.

⁹⁴ “More Light Wanted: Interesting Discussion at Barum Council,” *Express and Echo*, 23 October 1917, p. 6.

⁹⁵ Minutes for Lighting Regulations Meeting, 18 April 1916, Devon Record Office, Torbay Council, R44582-A/O/PC/62.

⁹⁶ Reverend C.H. Garland, “The Lighting Restrictions,” *Western Express and Torrington Chronicle*, 14 October 1916, p. 3. For more examples see, Z, “Material For Thought,” *Western Express and Torrington Chronicle*, 14 October 1916, p. 3; “Lighting Regulations,” *Express and Echo*, 15 January 1916, p. 6; “Safety,” *Western Times*, 27 June 1917, p. 2; “How the War Strains,” *Western Times*, 9 June 1917, p. 2; “A Most Serious Subject,” *Teignmouth Post*, 28 September 1917, p. 3; A Soldier, “More Lights Wanted,” *Express and Echo*, 20 October 1917, p. 4.

⁹⁷ Reverend C.H. Garland, “The Lighting Restrictions,” *Western Express and Torrington Chronicle*, 14 October 1916, p. 3.

⁹⁸ “Devon’s Lights,” *Bideford Gazette*, 20 October 1916, no page number.

In the city of Exeter the lighting restrictions were less invasive, likely because Exeter was not coastal. Residents were told to dim their lights, and lighting in public areas was reduced, but most streetlamps were left on. Shop windows remained exposed and many private residences did not have adequate window coverings. Part of the problem was that the enforcement of lighting restrictions was left in the hands of local police, whose duties had been extended during the war. Supervision of the population placed considerable strain on police departments and early in the war many areas enlisted the help of special constables. These were private citizens above the age of military service who volunteered to prevent local disorder and to encourage public compliance with the new emergency laws enacted by the town councils. These men were often enthusiastic volunteers who were caught up in the spy mania and volunteerism that accompanied the declaration of war. Special Constables were part of the Volunteer Home Defence Movement and Caroline Dakers points out that magazines like *Country Life* “made them sound like overgrown Boy Scouts, ‘squads of more or less elderly gentlemen...enjoying a surprising renewal of youth.’”⁹⁹ The constables were men, primarily from the middle-class, and accusations of class bias arose almost immediately.

In Exeter one resident complained that

sweet shops, fruit shops, tobacconists’ shops, etc. are made very prominent by the blaze of their lights and wealthy home owners continue to cast needless light over their properties. We must remember that Exeter

⁹⁹ Quoted in Dakers, *The Countryside at War*, pp. 118-119. In August 1914 a report was issued from Lord Fortescue outlining the duties of the special constables. There were different types of special constables. Those who worked in the major towns and cities were generally civilian men above the age of military service, or unfit for military service. On the other hand, those who patrolled coastal areas (see Chapter Three) were generally volunteers with the Territorial Force (for home service and who remained in the county). “Special Constables and the War: Report from Lord Fortescue,” *Western Morning News*, 6 August 1914, p. 2.

is built on a hill and its lights can be seen far into the night. I have heard criticisms from other areas of Devon as well and I wonder if something can't be done to address this matter at once.¹⁰⁰

The following day nine articles appeared in the *Exeter Flying Post* regarding the inequality of lighting restrictions. Local columnist 'Cit' reported that many residents claimed that while the "Rich continue in their uncalled for excesses, constables have been visiting working-class neighbourhoods and imposing fines on all violators. How can this be acceptable when the shops of the middle-classes continue to glow?"¹⁰¹ Devonians were not only upset that fines were being issued, they felt, discriminately, but those who violated the lighting restrictions were angered that their names were printed in local newspapers.

Throughout January and February 1916 protests about class bias were made before the local Lighting Committees in Plymouth, Ashburton, Tiverton, and Seaton. The appeal was for the authorities to adopt a uniform policy for lighting and noise restrictions for the entire county, regardless of class or location, and that efforts should also be coordinated with the authorities in Cornwall and Somerset.¹⁰² In March 1916 the Devon County Council addressed the issue at a public meeting held in Exeter. After several speeches from local magistrates, town councilors, and police officers, who all attested to the equality of the lighting restrictions, County Council representative T.M. Clearly told

¹⁰⁰ "The Lights of Exeter," *Exeter Flying Post*, 26 February 1916.

¹⁰¹ Local Gossip by Cit, "Lighting Restrictions," *Exeter Flying Post*, 4 March 1916. 'Cit' was a popular columnist for the *Exeter Flying Post* and during the war years published a weekly column that claimed to reflect the attitudes and opinions of Devonians.

¹⁰² "South Devon Up In Arms Over Lights," *Western Independent*, 3 April 1916, p. 3. Ashburton Urban District Council, meeting minutes, 15 February 1916, Devon Record Office, R2373A-0/C/23. Minutes for meeting on Lighting Regulations, 25 January 1916, Devon Record Office, Tiverton Borough Council, R4/1-0/C/32/ 7. Minutes for Meeting on Lighting Regulations in Newton Abbot, 4 February 1916, Devon Record Office, Newton Abbot Rural District Council, R2365A-0/C/109/19. Seaton Lighting Committee Minutes, 23 February 1916, Devon Record Office, Seaton Urban District Council, R7/6-0/C/17/15.

the public that the lighting restrictions were fair and that all violators were fined 5-10s per infringement. Cleary assured the people of Devon that no special treatment was being administered and “it is outside my knowledge that working-class families are being penalized while the wealthier classes are allowed to violate the restrictions handed down by the Government under the Defence of the Realm Act.”¹⁰³

Unhappy with the Council’s decision, a group of citizens known as the People’s Light Brigade began a neighbourhood watch programme. The programme began in the coastal town of Teignmouth and quickly spread to Dawlish, Torquay, Sidmouth, Taunton, Newton Abbot, Exeter, and South Hans. The purpose of these groups was two fold: its first duty was to heighten public safety by patrolling neighbourhoods and communities. Patrols were conducted by groups of three to five men and women and served as a supplementary aid to the local constables and police forces. Its second duty was to take down names and addresses of those private homes and shops that were violating the lighting regulations. Lists were compiled and then turned over to the local authorities.¹⁰⁴

At first the plan did not yield noteworthy results. Members of the Brigade were told that fines had already been meted out to the violators and that the local police were handling the situation. However, in the following weeks dozens of homes that had been cited for light violations by the People’s Light Brigade still had their homes illuminated. The People’s Light Brigade issued a statement in the *Exeter Flying Post* that

the Rich continue to disobey orders. It is an inconvenience and they are not prepared to make this small sacrifice in order that the coastline of

¹⁰³ “Meeting of the Devon County Council: The Lights of Devon,” *Exeter Flying Post*, 8 March 1916.

¹⁰⁴ Consideration of the People’s Watch Organization, 21 March 1916, Devon Record Office, Tiverton Borough Council, R4/1-0/C/32/67.

England may be protected. When one sees such behaviour, one begins to think that there is some truth in the rumour that England does not yet realise that we are taking part in a desperate war.¹⁰⁵

In the meantime in the town of Exmouth a soldier's family, his wife and their sick son, was given a fine of 10s, the maximum fine allotted for light violations. The windows of the home were covered with dark cloth, but some light could still be seen on the pavement. The family's story was made public when the People's Light Brigade wrote to the editor of the *Teignmouth Post* to report the incident. In the same article the Brigade called on Devonians to report similar injustices in their own neighbourhoods: "What are we to do when the authorities ignore infractions of the wealthy while penalizing a soldier's family the maximum fine allowed under the law? In such circumstance how can we speak sincerely about the nobility of our cause?"¹⁰⁶ The article required residents to write to local newspapers to complain about the problem and to provide the dates of infractions and the names and/or street addresses of all offenders.

The response was immediate. Under the heading "People of the Privileged Classes" a woman asked how "will you feel when Exeter is attacked by a roving hostile aircraft? A number of you continue to send streams of light out into the darkness, and especially if the night is wet the reflection skywards is marked."¹⁰⁷ She continued:

Some of this non-compliance with the practice asked for on behalf of public safety is undoubtedly due to indifference and for some the savour of defiance. Perhaps it is too difficult for you to have a handyman or butler or gardener to hang a sheet of brown paper over your windows, but regardless, having visible lighting is forbidden and must affect us all equally.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁵ Ernest Gould, "No Light Order," *Exeter Flying Post*, 20 March 1916.

¹⁰⁶ "Grave Injustice," *Teignmouth Post*, 24 March 1916, p. 2.

¹⁰⁷ A Working Woman, "People of the Privileged Classes," *Exeter Flying Post*, 27 March 1916.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid. Also see, "Patriotism," *Teignmouth Post*, 29 December 1916, p. 4; "Exeter's Lights Stay On!," *Tiverton Gazette*, 28 December 1916, no page number.

The names of sixteen violators followed the article. Likewise, Evelyn Harnsworth wrote the following letter to the editor of the *Exeter Flying Post*:

The Home Office has ordered us to dim our lights, but here in Devon there has been no great rush to the drapers for thick curtains or green blinds. Even those who were at one time adhering to the lighting restrictions have since stopped doing so. Experience has shown that it is useless to expect the public to carry out completely any appeal for uniform reduction when the law has been enforced so unequally. There is an invincible tendency in all of us to wait and see what our neighbours do, but in most areas of the county practically no notice has been taken of the appeal. Slowly the lights are coming back on and will continue to do so until the authorities take responsibility for their actions in this matter and impose the law without bias.¹⁰⁹

The results were successful, at least to some degree. While the appearance of violators' names did not do much in the way of eliciting a police response, it may have shamed some residents into complying with the lighting restrictions.

In January 1917 the Devon County Council announced its plan to crack down on all residents who violated the mandatory lighting regulations. A warning was sent to shop keepers in Exeter, Plymouth, Dawlish, Crediton, and Axminster when the Council reported that twenty-seven shops from the above areas were guilty of lighting violations and "jeopardizing the safety of the nation."¹¹⁰ In the same month, 154 residents were called before the Exeter Police Court where fines were raised to a possible maximum of 11s per person/shop. Evening church services were cancelled, streetlights were dimmed, but in most areas not removed entirely, shops were forced to reduce lights cast onto footpaths and roadways or to accept early closing, and wagon lights were restricted to one lamp per wagon. In February seventy-two violators were brought before the Exeter

¹⁰⁹ Evelyn Harnsworth, "Our Darkness," *Exeter Flying Post*, 15 April 1916.

¹¹⁰ Report on Lighting Restrictions for Exeter and Devon, 16 January 1917, Devon Record Office, Devon County Council, 1262M/142.

Police Court, and a further sixty-nine residents were fined for lighting violations in March.¹¹¹

In August 1917 Lord Fortescue reported to the War Office that the lighting problem was under control in Devon and that the actions of the Devon County Council were successful in easing public criticism by providing more lights in an effort to reduce them.¹¹² Although complaints about reduced lighting continued to flow in to town councils and police departments, the leveling of fines and strategically placed shaded streetlamps promoted the belief that equality of sacrifice had been restored.¹¹³

The debate surrounding lighting restrictions underscored class tensions in Devon. The perception among some working-class residents was that while they were being harassed and fined by local constables for lighting infractions, middle-class shops and upper-class homes remained brightly lit. This discrepancy attracted the attention of the People's Light Brigade who unsuccessfully petitioned the government and local police to standardize the enforcement of government lighting restrictions. Only after the press took up the issue and the inequalities were made public did significant changes occur. In an effort to subdue rising class tensions, local authorities set and enforced mandatory lighting regulations for the county.

¹¹¹ Lighting Restriction Under D.O.R.A for City of Exeter under the District Lighting Committee, 30 January 1917, Devon Record Office, Lord Lieutenantcy Records, 1262M/L149. Lighting Restriction Under D.O.R.A for City of Exeter under the District Lighting Committee, 27 February 1917, Devon Record Office, Lord Lieutenantcy Records, 1262M/L149. Lighting Restriction Under D.O.R.A for the City of Exeter, under the District Lighting Committee, 29 March 1917, Devon Record Office, Lord Lieutenantcy Records, 1262M/L149.

¹¹² Letter from Lord Fortescue to War Office, Letter, 22 August 1917, Devon Record Office, Fortescue of Castle Hill, 262M/153.

¹¹³ For examples see, "Lighting Unsatisfactory," *Express and Echo*, 26 January 1917, p. 4; "Lights at Holsworthy," *Weekly News*, 14 April 1917, no page number; "Holsworthy in the Dark," *Weekly News*, 14 April 1917, no page number.

Food Price Increases

From the declaration of war the British government stressed the need for consumer sensitivity and economy, but initial panic buying, primarily carried out by the affluent classes, created unease. In Devon the rise in prices was immediately felt and shortages were common across the county. Exeter grocers adopted the scale recommended by the wholesaler's representative to the Cabinet Committee on Food Supplies for butter, cheese, margarine, and bacon, but the increased cost of wheat, barley, and oats made products such as bread and beer suddenly unavailable to the poorer classes. Between August 1914 and January 1915 the cost of wheat rose by seventy-two percent, barley by forty percent, and oats by thirty-four percent. In Exeter the price of flour rose from 1s 9d per pound before the outbreak of hostilities to 2s 3d per pound on 8 August 1914 (see Appendix 1-1). As can be seen from this table, many staples of the English diet became increasingly expensive despite the fact that shortages had not yet occurred. Although the British population was never close to starvation, the real issue was that many believed that they were. As will be seen in Chapter Two the switch from meat to grains reduced overall fat intake and because the body metabolizes grains faster than fats, the absence of fat in the English diet resulted in feelings of hunger. So although the population may not have been starving, the perception of hunger was enough to convince the population that there was a shortage of food.¹¹⁴ Furthermore, the issue of food shortages was particularly sensitive in Devon. As an agricultural region residents expected prices to remain steady

¹¹⁴Avner Offer, *The First World War: An Agrarian Interpretation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), pp. 51-52. Peter Dewey argues that although protein intake declined from 101g per day to 95g per day, losses were offset by increases in bread and potatoes and he notes that there was more bacon available during the war years, even to the working classes. Peter Dewey, "Nutrition and Living Standards in Wartime Britain," in *The Upheaval of War* ed. Richard Wall and Jay Winter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 200-207.

and as J. C. Ker Fox explained, “many here are disgusted and shocked to see hundreds of men and women swarming local shops securing as many provisions as their pocket books will allow. Does anyone understand that stripping the shops of supplies will only force prices to go up?”¹¹⁵ Exeter shop owners reported that their wealthier customers were placing extravagant orders, thereby limiting the provisions available to the general public. By the end of the first week, angry mobs had formed outside general stores demanding supplies at ‘reasonable prices.’ The *Exeter Flying Post* reported that groups of women were inquiring what they should do “When the bread-winner is suddenly taken away? How will we provide for our children?” In the meantime, “The well-to-do women of this county are purchasing hosiery and hats, while many can no longer afford the basic amenities.”¹¹⁶ Public discontent in Exeter and Plymouth was contained by an increased police presence throughout the month of August.

Outside of Exeter the rise in prices was more marked and the public’s response was considerably more aggressive. In the market town of Newton Abbot the scene was described as “terrifying. People displayed the most awful behaviour. Fighting broke out at several places throughout the market as all sense of decency was abandoned.”¹¹⁷

Several business establishments in Tiverton reported that

We have had a terrible time over the last few days in trying to cope with orders, and it has meant working day and night. We have had to refuse to supply many orders and have tried to maintain some provisions for those members of the public with fewer resources, but we have practically

¹¹⁵ J.C. Ker Fox, “Hoarding Food,” *Express and Echo*, 6 August 1914, p. 5. Also see, Fair Play, “The Food Monopolizers,” *Western Morning News*, 6 August 1914, p. 6; “Fears of Shortages,” *Exeter Flying Post*, 15 August 1914; “Events in Exeter,” *Exeter Flying Post*, 8 August 1914; “Scenes at Plymouth,” *Western Morning News*, 14 August 1914, p. 4.

¹¹⁶ M.D. Armstrong, “Families of Reservists,” *Express and Echo*, 6 August 1914, p. 4.

¹¹⁷ “Panic at Newton Abbot,” *Exeter Flying Post*, 7 August 1914.

cleared out the whole of our stock.¹¹⁸

At a grocer's shop in Tiverton the price of sugar doubled in two days. One shop owner reported to the *Tiverton Gazette* that he was already completely out of flour and that the demand for bacon had forced prices to rise from 10d on Wednesday to 1s 8d on Thursday.¹¹⁹ Butter that sold at 2d per lb in Exeter sold at 3d per lb in Chudleigh by 8 August, and flour had risen to 2s 6d, almost double the pre-war price.¹²⁰

Although the price of meat remained steady, butcher shops were careful with their supplies. A report in the *Crediton Chronicle* identified several butchers who admitted to having meat to sell, but were not making it available to the public. One butcher noted that "So great is the demand for bacon that I've only got 56lbs left. I can sell at the current market value, or wait a few days and sell when the price goes up. The demand will only increase and people will be willing to pay more for less."¹²¹ Another butcher reported that in the first week of the war wealthy businessmen came early in the morning trying to secure meat supplies for their family and friends, leaving little for the other customers. The butcher noted that many were willing to pay above market value and "it is awful to say but I sold them most of what I had."¹²² At other shops only regular customers were being served, and some shops closed for "private sale only."¹²³

¹¹⁸ "Prices Trebled," *Crediton Chronicle*, 8 August 1914, no page number. Public concerns over food prices and shortages were not confined to the opening stages of the war. For later examples see, "Price of Bread," *Western Morning News*, 14 August 1914, p. 4; "Food Prices," *Exeter Flying Post*, 24 April 1915; "Food Shortages," *Western Morning News*, 21 July 1915, p. 3; "Price Control in Wartime," *Western Morning News*, 5 August 1915, p. 3; "The Nations Food Supply," *Western News*, 26 February 1915, p. 3; "Holsworthy Market," *Weekly News*, 16 January 1915, no page number.

¹¹⁹ "Local Shops Plundered," *Tiverton Gazette*, 8 August 1914, no page number.

¹²⁰ "Prices Trebled," *Crediton Chronicle*, 8 August 1914, p. 5. Also see, "Butchers' Meat: Dartmouth," *Exeter Flying Post*, 8 August 1914; "Meeting of Exeter Grocers: Prices Rise," *Exeter Flying Post*, 8 August 1914.

¹²¹ "The Folly of Hoarding," *Crediton Chronicle*, 8 August 1914. Neither the name of the man or his shop were printed in the *Crediton Chronicle*.

¹²² *Ibid.*

¹²³ "Wicked vs Poor," *Crediton Chronicle*, 10 August 1914.

Many residents called for immediate government intervention to ensure the equal distribution of supplies. In the first week of the war the government took action to requisition foodstuffs being withheld unreasonably, and the Devon Food Control Board in conjunction with the Devon County Council issued a notice to all shop owners that hoarding and profiteering would carry a heavy penalty.¹²⁴ Although the Food Control Board made price recommendations, prices were left in the hands of shop owners. Government actions did not curtail increases, but it did limit them, particularly with regard to wheat prices. A successful harvest in 1914 gradually lowered the price of wheat, which made flour affordable for even the poorest classes by the summer of 1915.

Nevertheless, in the opening months of the war the inability of the poor, including the families of unskilled labourers and service men, to afford adequate provisions led to an increased dependence on charities.¹²⁵ Prior to the declaration of war working-class families on average “spent 67 per cent of their income on food.”¹²⁶ In September 1914 a Special Food Committee was established by the Devon County Council to provide the basic necessities to families experiencing economic hardship. Notices were posted in newspapers announcing “Fresh Vegetables and Fruit Wanted.”¹²⁷ The collected fruit and vegetables were made available at local distribution points and were free of charge. Also,

¹²⁴ Notice to Food Control Board from Devon County Council, 15 August 1914, Devon Record Office, Fortescue of Castle Hill, 1262M/R/ LM/ 14.

¹²⁵ Letter from Mr. Woollcome to Lord Fortescue, 14 September 1914, Devon Record Office, Fortescue of Castle Hill, 1262M/L129; Soldiers’ and Sailors’ Families Association, War No. 2, Devon Record Office, SSFA Records, 2165A/PM; Report on High Prices and Working Class Budgets: Charity Distribution, 1 February 1915, Devon Record Office, Fortescue of Castle Hill, 1262M/L113; Devonshire Patriotic Fund, Report to Lady Fortescue from the Food Distribution Volunteers and Red Cross, 16 September 1916, Devon Record Office, Devon County Lieutenancy, 16 September 1916, 2165A/PM298; Food Distribution Committee, Exeter Volunteer Society, Central Depot, 26 September 1916, Devon Record Office, Voluntary Aid Division, 1262M/L145.

¹²⁶ John Stevenson, *British Society, 1914-45*, (Suffolk: Northumberland Press, 1984), p. 42.

¹²⁷ Florence E. Maunder, “Fresh Vegetables and Fruit Wanted,” *Teignmouth Post*, 4 September 1914, p. 4.

weekly collections were taken at local markets by middle-class volunteers, usually women or retired men, and the funds were allotted to primarily working-class families in the form of tickets for the purchase of milk and coal.¹²⁸ In February 1915 the Special Food Committee announced

The war has opened the eyes of many people, either directly or indirectly, to the stern realities of life. Poverty has increased, food prices are detrimental to the poorest among us, and housing conditions continue to deteriorate without concern from our government. Some are content to blame the farmer or butcher, but the State is responsible for the degradation of the lower orders.¹²⁹

In some ways, however, working-class families resented the efforts of the Special Food Committee. “The Poverty Fund,” as one woman called it, “is collected by women in fancy hats and stockings who don’t know the first thing about hardship.”¹³⁰ There was also some tension surrounding where the funds came from and how assistance was provided. Rachel Harris, a mother of two from Dawlish, refused to take “charity” from the Special Food Committee, stating that she would rather “go hungry than stand in line with my hand out.”¹³¹ The imagery of women in ‘fancy hats and stockings’ distributing food to waiting women with their hands out reflected class anxiety. The division between the classes was particularly prominent at markets where working- and lower-middle-class families, usually women, bargained with farmers and businessmen for supplies. Further, charity work performed by middle-class women on behalf of the Special Food Committee also served to undermine notions of gender solidarity. In this instance, the markings of class explicitly separated the women giving from the women receiving,

¹²⁸ Special Food Committee, Report to Lady Fortescue, 14 September 1915, Devon Record Office, Charity Papers/Fortescue of Castle Hill, 2165A/234.

¹²⁹ “Food Supplies,” *Teignmouth Post*, 19 February 1915, p. 3.

¹³⁰ “The Poverty Fund,” *Dawlish Gazette*, 23 February 1915, no page number.

¹³¹ Rachel Harris, “Help for the Poor?” *Dawlish Gazette*, 23 February 1915, no page number.

distinctions that were not overcome by a shared gender.

Class conflict, however, was not confined to tensions between the working classes and their social superiors, and the food question evoked the escalation of class tensions at all levels of society. Although some did well financially out of the war, such as skilled workers, many did not and suffered as a result of wartime inflation. Rising prices and shortages were of particular concern for the families of semi- and unskilled labourers and members of the lower middle classes, such as bank tellers and small shop owners, many of whom were put out of work by the war. Many coal lumpers, for example, were forced to abandon their jobs to join the military where regular pay, along with separation allowances, brought in more income than their current jobs afforded. In Barnstaple, cabinetmakers went on strike due to insufficient wages and bank tellers threatened to strike for a minimum wage of £1.80p for a fifty-four hour week.¹³² Some of these families suffered as a result of the changing wartime market, particularly where wages did not keep pace with inflation, and others, whose husbands and fathers had joined the service, were reliant on separation allowances. Particularly in the opening stages of the war, service families, plagued by the slow receipt of separation allowances, were reliant on the Servicemen Support Fund for food and rent, and it was not uncommon for two or more families to share a single dwelling. However, as the war went on, service families began to be targeted by other groups. Some groups, particularly women whose husbands were employed in essential industries, but who did not benefit from government bonuses, perceived the allocation of separation allowances to service families as an unfair advantage. Many of these women felt that service families were

¹³² Wasley, *Devon in the First World War*, p. 97.

given excess money and preferential treatment at local shops when the men working in essential industries were also doing important work for their country, work that often meant that they were not allowed to enlist. The perception was that service families did particularly well from the war, and also that wartime charities catered to service families specifically—some shop owners set aside supplies for the wives and children of servicemen in their areas.¹³³ By the end of 1916 some working-class women chided the wives of servicemen, accusing them of wasting money on jewelry and fur coats, while others went without the basic necessities. Regardless of the benefits that separation allowances may have afforded, the lack of adequate housing, rising food prices, and shortages were a wartime reality and the wives of servicemen struggled as well to secure the necessary provisions for their families. Further, service families complained that the inadequate funds available to the S.S.F.A. meant that limited support could be offered and many families relied on the assistance of charity groups like the Special Food Committees.¹³⁴ The most disgruntled groups appear to have been dockworkers, railway men, and skilled and semi-skilled labourers who worked in the mines. Although these groups were well paid during the war, the issue appears to have been that their war work

¹³³ The debate between service families and other groups began in 1914 and continued until the end of the war. "Working Men Profiteers," *Express and Echo*, 10 December 1917, p. 4; "Food Prices," *Western Morning News*, 29 November 1917, p. 3; "Families of Reservists," *Western Morning News*, 6 August 1915, p. 5; Mother of Four, Letter to the editor [untitled], 22 October 1918, p. 4; Wife of One of the Old Contemptibles, Letter to the editor [untitled], *Western Morning News*, 22 October 1918, p. 4; "Service Families and Supplies at Exeter," *Dawlish Gazette*, 3 December 1917, p. 3; "No Public Sympathy," *Okehampton News*, 15 May 1915, no page number.

¹³⁴ Not Downhearted Yet, Letter to the editor [untitled], *Western Evening Herald*, 5 January 1917, p. 3; A Separation Lady or One of "These People," Letter to the editor [untitled], *Western Evening Herald*, 5 January 1917, p. 3; A Lover of Fair Play But Can't Get It, Letter to the editor [untitled], *Western Evening Herald*, 5 January 1917, p. 3; A Sailor's Wife, Letter to the editor [untitled], *Western Evening Herald*, 5 January 1917, p. 3; C.P. Letter to the editor [untitled], *Western Evening Herald*, 5 January 1917, p. 3; "Grain and Coal Corners," *Crediton Chronicle*, 15 May 1915, p. 7.

was not recognized in the same way as those who served in the military.¹³⁵ A heated public debate among the wives of dockworkers, railway men, mine workers, and service men took place in the local press in January 1917 and highlighted the nature and nuances of class conflict in Devon.¹³⁶

Despite some opposition, resistance to the Special Food Committees was not widespread, mainly because although some assistance was available, it was limited. The Devon County Council did provide some support for the programme, but the Committee relied on volunteers and private donations and reached a very small segment of the population.¹³⁷ The food problem went unsolved and in February 1915 the Plymouth Police Council noted an increasing number of children and women in the streets in the early hours of the morning seeking to purchase day-old bread and less than fresh fruit at a reduced price. The Special Constables described a group of children outside the bakeries in Plymouth at 4am waiting for the baker to open his doors at 6am. The bakers operated on a first come first served basis and lines that started at 5am the previous week now started at 4am.¹³⁸ Similar reports were noted in Exeter and Torquay, and there were daily sightings of women attempting to negotiate prices with shopkeepers before business hours. A local woman wrote in to the *South Devon Weekly Express* to express her dismay at the many women who waited in the “wee hours of the morning, often with their children, to fetch a good price on milk or bread. The current circumstances must change, and the government must soon realise the mistakes made in handling the nation’s food

¹³⁵ For more on the positions of dockworkers, railway men, and miners see Chapter Three.

¹³⁶ See footnote 134.

¹³⁷ Report from the Special Food Committee to the Devon County Council, 29 September 1915, Devon Record Office, Fortescue of Castle Hill, 1262M/R/ LM/ 14.

¹³⁸ “War Economy,” *Western Times*, 19 February 1915, p. 7.

supply.”¹³⁹ Prior to the formation of the Ministry of Food, the government was slow to respond to public concerns regarding food control and supply.

Although the public was generally agitated by the hardships brought on by the war, for some (particularly the wealthy) life continued as normal. The Exeter Hotel and the Cathedral Restaurant continued to advertise suppers (at a high price) and entertainment, such as dances. Okehampton Castle continued to entertain visitors and served Sunday brunch in the gardens, and special events were held to raise money for the navy and charity organizations. Old Cognac and special Scotch whisky were available throughout the war, despite some protests against the sale of alcohol, and although hours were limited, drinking establishments were open for business to all classes, although at reduced hours.¹⁴⁰ Some small villages were hardly affected by the war. In the village of Upton Pyne, three miles outside Exeter, some families lived successfully off the land where wild rabbits were plentiful, and many families, such as the Lott family, kept small vegetable gardens and raised chickens.

However, for the majority of the population the social unease created by inflation was exacerbated by the uneven demands of the war. Ada Nield explained the problem facing many Devonians, as she perceived it, in her letter to the *Western Independent*:

Mr. Asquith's estimate of the present extra cost of food is 23 per cent. My experience, as a woman buying food every day for a family, would clearly demonstrate that to be below the actual. Do we quite realise what this means to a woman who has to keep a family on anything less than 25s per

¹³⁹ A Working Woman, "False Economy," *South Devon Weekly Express*, 17 February 1915, p. 2.

¹⁴⁰ "Wartime Devon," *Express & Echo*, 2 January 1915, p. 4. For more on the issue of drink in wartime see, "Drink and National Waste," *Express and Echo*, 10 April 1917, p. 3.; "Beer v. Food," *Express and Echo*, 6 March 1917, p. 4; "Prohibition Conference at Exeter Guildhall," *Western Times*, 20 December 1914, p. 2; "The Great Drink Problem," *Western Morning News*, 11 May 1917, p. 4; "Food and Drink," *Western Herald*, 2 February 1917, p. 4; "War-Time Prohibition," 28 June 1918, p. 1; "The Drink Problem," *Crediton Chronicle*, 5 May 1915, p. 2; "Drink and the War," *Express and Echo*, 13 June 1917, p. 4; "Sacrifices," 27 September 1917, p. 2; "Voluntary Abstinence," *Crediton Chronicle*, 10 April 1915, p. 3.

week? Fourteen years ago Rowntree proved to us that the irreducible minimum required to keep a man, wife, and four children in a state of physical efficiency was 15s (for food alone). Nowadays that means that 19s (at least—the 23 percent is calculated only since the beginning of the war) is required to buy the minimum of food for a family of that size. It is absolutely certain, therefore, that in the thousands of cases where families of fighting men have incomes below that figure, not to mention the recent rise in the numbers of women and children brokering deals to obtain the necessary supplies, that there is an actual stinting of the necessities of life. A vast number have incomes below that figure, and we may take to heart that while our men are facing death our women and children are facing partial starvation, homelessness and social neglect.¹⁴¹

Although all classes were affected by food shortages and rising prices, many Devonians were displeased that lectures on economy were being delivered by the “over-dressed and over-paid” who babbled on about “eating beans and giving up coal and meat.” As ‘A Mother’ explained, meat and coal were necessities, but “cheap trimmings, endless hats, cinemas, and amusements are not. Some people never had them; others gave them up; but the majority will have them as long as they are flaunted before their eyes.”¹⁴² The war entailed hardships,

but we know hardship. It is time the stuffy classes gave up their large houses, gardeners, chauffeurs, maid-servants - - all who are wasting their time on these solitary people. Sure it would be uncomfortable, but what of those who have given up their occupation, lives, children, husbands, and any scraps of dignity that we had before this war. We cannot be left alone to bear the burden of England’s rescue...let some real and national plan be adopted and let ‘white feathers’ and persecution be dealt out to those who refuse to help England’s need by real self-sacrifice and self-abnegation rather than by self-adulation and advertisement.¹⁴³

Class tensions were further heightened in Devon in the winter of 1916-1917. At a public meeting in Tavistock a protest by local women against milk prices got out of hand and

¹⁴¹ Ada Nield, “The Rise in Food Prices,” *Western Independent*, 23 February 1915, p. 4.

¹⁴² A Mother, “Economy!” *Western Express and Torrington Chronicle*, 11 March 1916, p. 7.

¹⁴³ Ibid. Also see, “Food Shortage has Become Very Serious,” *Express and Echo*, 27 December 1916, p. 5; Torquay Echoes, *Express and Echo*, 4 September 1917, p. 3.

residents accused the local authorities of pandering to the social elite at the expense of the “working man.”¹⁴⁴ In some cases milk prices had already risen above 4d a quart compared with 3d a quart in Exeter. Carpenter Harry Irwin spoke out against the prices that were making food dear to working-class families. He noted that, “we all know that food is scarce, but the problem is made worse by profiteers who see this war as a way to make a profit with little concern for the safety and well being of his [sic] fellow citizens.” He continued, “at this time when food is scarce, suppliers must be cautious about selling their souls to the highest bidder.”¹⁴⁵ The Tavistock Worker’s Union made a public announcement that “Government action is two years too late. When the government took action on rents, prices stayed the same, but when the government did nothing about the price of meat and milk, prices went up. Must we educate the government on how to govern?”¹⁴⁶ The Union demanded that more be done to regulate not only prices, but also the distribution of supplies.

The lack of government control over supplies and prices led to public frustration and resulted in an increased reliance on the black-market. In the larger urban areas like Exeter, Plymouth, Barnstaple, and Torquay hawkers and ‘specialty shops’ provided a variety of goods that were in high demand but not readily available. Some were small farmers, or their sons, who tried to increase their profits by selling their goods directly or small shop owners who had been put out of business and were now selling goods (not

¹⁴⁴ J.J. Edwards, “Public Meeting At Tavistock,” *Salcombe Gazette*, 20 December 1916, no page number.

¹⁴⁵ Harry Irwin, “Working Class Economy,” *Salcombe Gazette*, 20 December 1916, no page number. Also see, Food Shortage has Become Very Serious,” *Express and Echo*, 27 December 1916, p. 5; Torquay Echoes, *Express and Echo*, 4 September 1917, p. 3; “Improvements Needed: Churston Market,” *Western Guardian*, 27 January 1916, p. 3; “Food Problem at Exmouth,” *Western Times*, 13 March 1917, p. 4; “The Supply of Milk,” *Western Morning News*, 20 November 1917, p. 3.

¹⁴⁶ H.C. Prince, “Tavistock Worker’s Union: Economy of Leadership,” *Salcombe Gazette*, 20 December 1916, no page number.

always food) on the street to recoup some of their losses.¹⁴⁷ The marked rise in business experienced by these 'shops' during the war years made them a more well-known and visible target for the authorities. In an early attempt to shutdown these illegal shops, the local police established Watch Committees in August 1914. The role of the Exeter Watch Committee was to assist the city police by discovering the location of the 'specialty shops'/hawkers and reporting them to the authorities. However, some members of the Watch Committee, who tended to be the sons of local business owners, took matters further by attempting to close the shops by detaining owners and customers themselves. The engagements were often violent and word spread that members of the Watch Committee were beating customers and ransacking shops.¹⁴⁸ But by the winter of 1916 reports of hawkers and 'specialty shops' were common, yet the public was generally supportive of their presence and denounced the action taken against the hawkers. An anonymous letter argued that the hawkers supplied a public need. If they did not, then their lack of trade would soon put them out of business.¹⁴⁹ In Bideford a mother of four commented that "If a man can make a living by providing the public with basic necessities in this time of war, how is that any different than those shop owners who raise prices to make a profit before our bewildered eyes?"¹⁵⁰ Others questioned how it was that the wealthy were able to maintain some standard of decent living while mothers are

¹⁴⁷ "Illegal Farmers," *Bideford and North Devon Gazette*, 13 March 1917, p. 2; "Food Problem: A Practical Suggestion," *Express and Echo*, 13 March 1917, p. 4; "Hawkers," *Express and Echo*, 1 May 1918, p. 3; "Plymouth Food Control Committee," *Western Morning News*, 22 December 1917, p. 3; "False Markets: Exeter," *Western Guardian*, 27 January 1916, p. 3. However, hawkers were not confined to farmers and shop keepers. Hawker generally refers to people who traveled around selling goods. Not all hawkers traveled and some set up carts or small shops in Exeter or Plymouth to sell their goods. It is not entirely clear, but the shops may have been in abandoned buildings or in someone's home.

¹⁴⁸ "Hawkers at High Street," *Launceston Weekly News*, 13 December 1916, no page number.

¹⁴⁹ HIGHSTREET, "Hawkers in High-Street," *Western Times*, 29 May 1916, p. 6.

¹⁵⁰ "Economy," *Western Express and Torrington Chronicle*, 11 March 1916, p. 7.

forced into the streets to collect the basic necessities?¹⁵¹ In the summer the warm weather and a recent jump in the price of bread and milk throughout Devon led to escalating hostility. The increasing number of women and children in the streets resulted in a stronger police presence and clashes between these groups rose over the next several months.¹⁵² A ‘Working Man’ from Bovey Tracey, who admitted to using the services of the hawkers, commented that

One does not have to go far to see women fleeing from the Watch Committee. It is no longer safe for them to go out on their own. The war is brought home to us more and more everyday in the increased prices of the food which we have to buy to enable our wives, our children and ourselves to exist. Cannot the Watch Committees understand that such drastic action is unnecessary and even understandable? Hospitals are not required to bring home the war in reality—we have sad cases in our midst. There is no repentance in me.¹⁵³

The authorities were not unresponsive to the problem, but they did little to solve it. Peter Dewey contends that “before the end of 1916 there could not be said to be a food problem in any but a rather superficial sense.”¹⁵⁴ However, what Dewey described as a “comparatively trivial degree of hardship” (when compared with the food situation in other combatant nations, or in Britain itself after 1916) resulted in public violence in Devon.¹⁵⁵ In May 1916 news of shops being pillaged was reported in towns and communities. A special report of the Press Association in Devon noted that in Exeter a group of “armed rebels” smashed the windows of shops and the contents of the stores

¹⁵¹ “Economy,” *Western Times*, 27 May 1916, p. 2; “Forgiveness is not Required,” *Western Express and Torrington Chronicle*, 1 July 1916, p. 5.

¹⁵² Report on Local Food Disturbances, 1916-1917, Devon Record Office, Juvenile Court Registers, 4576P, 4840P.

¹⁵³ A Working Man, “False Economy,” *South Devon Weekly Express*, 14 April 1914, p. 3.

¹⁵⁴ Peter Dewey, “Nutrition and Living Standards in Wartime Britain,” in *The Upheaval of War: Family, Work and Welfare in Europe, 1914-1918*, ed. Richard Wall and Jay Winter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 216.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

were thrown into the streets. The “armed rebels” were described as young men, and were most likely from small rural communities where supply shortages were most pressing. The goal was not to rob the shops, but rather to make a point about the dire situation faced by the people of Devon. In the preceding six months several small rural shops in northern and western Devon had been forced to close due to a shortage of supplies and residents were required to travel to larger district centers to collect provisions. There had been several reports about farmers making arrangements with the larger city stores for the sale of certain goods, thereby forcing small shops out of business. By making supplies visible to the public, the ‘rebels’ hoped to discredit circulating myths about shortages. However, with goods strewn across High Street the scene quickly attracted a crowd and, looters, mainly women and children, made off with food and other goods. In an attempt to stop the looting and disperse the crowds, the ‘rebels’ fired warning shots and, in the chaos that ensued, accidentally injured a woman and killed an eight-year-old boy.¹⁵⁶

Popular discontent in Devon was further fuelled by the conflict that arose between urban and rural interests. The decline of supplies and rising prices struck rural areas first, and gave credence to the belief that the authorities were doing little to ensure the fair distribution of food and supplies. In 1916 the government presented shop owners with the option of fixing bread prices. Due to the increased cost of flour the price of bread had risen. The fixed price system set the price of bread per loaf, but the weight of each loaf was to be decided by the baker or shop owner. Bread that was sold in 4lb loafs was reduced to 52oz loafs, thereby increasing the overall price. In protest against the

¹⁵⁶ Special Report of the Press Association, 1 May 1916, Devon Record Office, Fortescue of Castle Hill, 1262M.

advances, angry mobs formed outside the shops of bakers who adopted the fixed price system. “A Poor Man” commented that

a 3d loaf weighs from 1lb to 1lb 3oz, and the 6d loaf from 2lb 4oz to 2lb 8oz. It appears that bakers are allowed to do just what they please, both as to weights given and prices charged. To many people it is a mystery why our County Council apparently do not give the slightest attention to this important and vital question.¹⁵⁷

At the end of October the price of bread in Totnes was 7.5d compared with 6d in Exeter. Less than a week later, the price of bread in Totnes had risen to 9d. Customers were told that bakers had the option of either raising prices or adopting the fixed price system. Although bread prices were on the rise across the county, ‘Hard Hit’ from Totnes noted that “wages are significantly higher in Portsmouth and Plymouth than those in Totnes and wages will not go up to meet their demands.”¹⁵⁸ At the end of 1916 Devon’s rural areas were short on bread, sugar, butter, meat, and potatoes.

In 1917 the prices of milk, fish, and potatoes also became sources of provocation. On 1 January the government set milk prices not to exceed 6d per quart. Prior to 1 January the average price of milk in Devon was 4d per quart,¹⁵⁹ and in November sold in Teignmouth at the full government price of 1s 9d per gallon. Further, a shortage of 500 gallons of milk in Teignmouth for the same month led the Food Control Committee to approach farmers to reduce prices to 1s 8d until January 1918, although the cost per quart would rise to 7d.¹⁶⁰ In other areas the Food Control Committee reported that those retailers who failed to deliver supplies beyond Exeter and the larger towns had their

¹⁵⁷ A Poor Man, “Bread in War Time,” *Western Morning News*, 2 February 1916, p. 3.

¹⁵⁸ Hard Hit, “The Price of Necessities in Totnes,” *Totnes Times*, 4 November 1916, p. 6; “The Food Problem,” *Exmouth Journal*, 25 November 1916, no page number.

¹⁵⁹ Report on Price Increases to the Devon County Council from the Food Controller, Northern Division, 5 January 1917, Devon Record Office, County Food Control Records, L132/P2.

¹⁶⁰ Special Report by the Food Control Committee, “The Milk Supply,” *Teignmouth Post*, 23 November 1917, p. 2.

supplies commandeered when they were brought to market.¹⁶¹ Stewart H. Hunt, in a letter to the *Express and Echo*, voiced his concern that his wife was no longer able to purchase milk due to insufficient supplies. He believed that this was not an isolated case and that because the large farming estates were squeezing small traders and yeoman farmers out by making deals with local shops, many rural families were no longer being supplied.¹⁶²

In March fish was in such short supply that it was nearly impossible to acquire beyond Devon's seaside markets and even then, was expensive. At the same time, as a consequence of the meagre harvest of 1915-1916, potato shortages were reported in Teignmouth, Lynton, Holsworthy, and Newton Abbot.¹⁶³ In Newton market some farmers refused to sell their produce at government prices, thereby forcing up the prices. In other instances, farmers sold directly to a household or to a dealer and "many persons had to go away with empty baskets. The result of the scarcity is that in many households in Teignmouth the potato has become an unknown quantity at dinner on Sunday."¹⁶⁴ The *Teignmouth Post* also reported that there was a potato shortage in Lynton/Lynmouth, Holsworthy, and North Moulton, as well at various communities across south Devon.¹⁶⁵ In January 1917 the price for potatoes was set at 1s per stone, but farmers in Newton Abbot continued to withhold supplies forcing customers to pay an illegal price of 2s per

¹⁶¹ Ibid; Dawlish Food Committee, *Express and Echo*, 5 December 1917, p. 4; "Compulsory Rationing: Dartmouth," *Express and Echo*, 5 December 1917, p. 4.

¹⁶² Stewart H. Hunt, "The Milk Shortage" *Express and Echo*, 26 November 1917, p. 3; "Dear Potatoes at Exmouth," *Western Times*, 12 March 1917, p. 4; "The Supply of Milk," *Western Morning News*, 21 November 1917, p. 4; "Potato Scarcity," *Express and Echo*, 6 March 1917, p. 4; "Shortages, Shortages, Shortages," *Express and Echo*, 4 September 1917, p. 3.

¹⁶³ "Holsworthy Market," *Western Express and Torrington Chronicle*, 27 March 1917, p. 4.

¹⁶⁴ "The Potato Famine," *Teignmouth Post*, 2 March 1917, p. 2; James Veysey, "Potatoes," *Teignmouth Post*, 13 April 1917, p. 3. Also see, "Prices to be Reduced," *Express and Echo*, 27 July 1917, p. 4; "Plymouth Food Control Committee: Potato Shortage," *Western Morning News*, 22 December 1917, p. 3.

¹⁶⁵ "The Potato Famine," *Teignmouth Post*, 2 March 1917, p. 2; "Government Action Required," *Express and Echo*, 2 August 1917, p. 3.

stone, an example of profiteering among farmers.¹⁶⁶ The Women's Committee of Newton Abbot led a march against the farmers in the market who were withholding supplies and after destroying several booths and carts they requisitioned the potatoes and handed them out to women and children in the crowd.¹⁶⁷ At Maryport Market women refused to pay the illegal price of 1s 10d per stone and when sellers refused to lower their prices, "potatoes and turnips were used as missiles with which to pelt the sellers."¹⁶⁸ In Okehampton and Hartland trade unions and women's groups led similar protests against milk prices, and public disturbances were reported in several locations.¹⁶⁹ Letters to the editors of local newspapers called for a boycott of milk and cheese, and asked Devonians not to purchase any more than was absolutely necessary for their households. In a letter to the *Salcombe Gazette* Jean P. Rogers requested that Devonians

Boycott the dairymen concerned as much as possible.

- (1) Don't buy one drop of milk more than is absolutely necessary, rather go short.
- (2) Use the substitute, condensed milk, where possible.
- (3) Don't buy any cream.

Use margarine in place of butter. May I earnestly plead with those who have plenty of this world's goods to assist their poorer neighbours in this matter, for it is only by a counter combine that this "trust" can be smashed. From letters which have appeared in the Plymouth papers this week I notice the Co-operative Society at Plymouth are only charging 5d per quart for new milk, and at Ilfracombe, which is a town about twice the size of this, only 4d is charged.¹⁷⁰

Devon's working-class women were not only protesting against milk prices, but they

¹⁶⁶ "The Cost of Provisions in South Devon," *South Devon Weekly Gazette*, 3 September 1917, p. 5. It is not clear from the article which farmers were withholding goods to drive prices up.

¹⁶⁷ "Scene at Newton Market," *Western Times*, 2 January 1917, p. 3.

¹⁶⁸ "Potato Prices Cause a Riot," *Totnes Times*, 20 January 1917, p. 4.

¹⁶⁹ "Milk Prices at Torpoint," *Western Morning News*, 3 November 1917; Dora Whitmore, "Milk Distribution Devonshire," *Western Morning News*, 23 November 1917, p. 6; "Prices in Newton District," *Western Morning News*, 23 November 1917, p. 6; "Milk Shortage at Instow," *Western Morning News*, 23 November 1917, p. 6.

¹⁷⁰ Jean P. Rogers, "Milk Prices," *Salcombe Gazette*, 19 January 1917, no page number.

were also engaged in the larger process of fighting social inequalities that were exacerbated by wartime conditions and the lack of government controls.

Women's participation in protesting against food prices was certainly not new in Britain. Malcolm I. Thomis and Jennifer Grimmett explain that women often played a prominent role in food protests and although most were not violent, throwing stones or overturning carts was not unheard of or unexpected in certain situations. However, Thomis and Grimmett refer to a different set of cultural beliefs to explain women's roles in nineteenth century food riots. They suggest that due to the customary role of women in the domestic economy, they were less likely to be arrested or subject to violence by the authorities when they rioted over the cost of food.¹⁷¹ However, during the First World War women were often at the centre of food riots and subject to escalating acts of violence. Anthony James Coles argues that the protesters were guided by the "basic tenets of the moral economy of the crowd": producers had a moral obligation to sell what was available, rather than withholding supplies in an attempt to force prices up. Violation of these "rules," could, in times of hardship, initiate rebellious activity.¹⁷² Coles concedes that although women were often the primary participants in food riots, this was not always the case. During the 1916-17 food crisis in Cumberland, it was a group of miners who led protests against rising prices, and in several other locales through West Cumberland, trade unions and working-class men supported the women's efforts.¹⁷³ This study of wartime Devon asserts that women's motivations for participating in the food riots were not entirely gender-based. Women were responsible for providing for their

¹⁷¹ Malcolm I. Thomis and Jennifer Grimmett, *Women in Protest 1800-1850* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1982), pp. 28-37, 41-45.

¹⁷² Anthony James Coles, "The Moral Economy of the Crowd: Some Twentieth-Century Food Riots," *The Journal of British Studies* 18: 1 (1978): 158, 159.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, pp. 165, 160, 176.

families, and with husbands off at war many assumed the role of head of the household. But women were also motivated by what Iain Robertson calls “common justice.”¹⁷⁴ Protests arose from the conviction that farmers and shopkeepers were selfishly profiting from the war. In many cases, women seized food and other supplies because, like men, they believed they had a right to them. Women were making ideological claims, claims that Thomis, Grimmett and others have ascribed only to men.¹⁷⁵ If the war required equality of sacrifice from all members of society, then why were some profiting from the war while others were forced to conform to restrictive regulations?

In some ways, the boycott held at the Okehampton market was effective in that it forced some farmers to drop their prices. However, many were unwilling to do so and continued to sell their products above the fixed prices, presumably into the black market. The response of the farmers was simply to stay away from the markets. In the Newton Abbot market few farmers appeared the day following the rioting, and suppliers were slow to materialize in Lynton and Honiton. Farmers felt that the only way to protect “ourselves is to withhold stocks until some order can be restored. The local police and magistrates have done little to help either side. They don’t enforce prices, or protect the farmers from market mobs.”¹⁷⁶ Withholding stock did not solve the problem; instead, it served to reinforce public suspicions that local merchants and shopkeepers were responsible for the shortages and price increases, and fuelled further accusations that the authorities were not interested in protecting the rights of the people. Although farmers

¹⁷⁴ Iain Robertson, “The Role of Women in Social Protest in the Highlands of Scotland, c. 1880-1939,” *Journal of Historical Geography* 23: 2 (1997): 196.

¹⁷⁵ See E.P. Thompson, “The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century,” *Past and Present* 50 (1971): 116-118.

¹⁷⁶ M. Gilbert, “Devon Farmers,” *Teignmouth Post*, 17 January 1917, p. 5.

and local businessmen were accused of profiteering, Jonathan S. Boswell and Bruce R. Johns argue that most businessmen conformed to price controls and cooperated with the government. However, some did exaggerate costs and refused to submit to government controls.¹⁷⁷ In response, local residents, determined to secure supplies, raided farmers' fields, stole chickens and rabbits from pens, and made off with rakes and hoes.¹⁷⁸

It is necessary to note that dealers/retailers were not always guilty of 'robbing' the people. An interesting event was witnessed in Newton Abbot in March 1917 when a local dealer announced in large letters across the window of his shop that he would sell potatoes to the working classes at a loss to himself. Within a few hours his supplies were exhausted and a sign reading "sold out" was added to the window. A second article in the *Western Times* in May 1917 expressed confidence that the Food Control Committee was doing everything in its power to control the "food-mongers" and that most dealers were not guilty of making excessive profits. This was evidenced by the fact that the Food Control Committees had already successfully broken up rings involving 'meat-rigging' and other food products in several locations throughout the county.¹⁷⁹ Those guilty of rigging wartime markets, an activity carried out by producers and retailers to withhold supplies thereby forcing prices up, were named in the local press and were especially susceptible to public criticisms.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁷ Jonathan Boswell and Bruce Johns, "Patriots or Profiteers? British Businessmen and the First World War," *Journal of European Economic History* 11(1982): 435-437, 444-445.

¹⁷⁸ "Police Apprehend Potato Thieves in Local Farmers' Fields," *Salcombe Gazette*, 31 January 1917, no page numbers.

¹⁷⁹ Report of the Food Control Committee on Meat Rings in Devon, 14 September 1917, Devon Record Office, Fortescue of Castle Hill, 1262M/LD/153/2/1.

¹⁸⁰ "Cost of Living," *Western Times*, 26 May 1917, p. 2; "Meat-Rigging in Devon," *Okehampton News*, 20 April 1917, no page number; E.C. Webb, "Meat-Rings: Devon Butchers Charged," *South Molton Gazette*, 29 November 1917, no page number; "War Profiteers at Tiverton Market," *South Molton Gazette*, 29 November 1917, no page number.

By 1917 food supply and distribution problems were the most acute they had been since the start of the war and the inability of the government to settle price inflation and prevent shortages led to public unrest over the next two years. Following his appointment as Prime Minister in December 1916, David Lloyd George's administration began a series of new controls designed to increase efficiency in such areas as shipping, food supply and management, and manpower. By spring of 1917 the situation was dire: two million tons of food and supplies had been lost to the German U-Boat campaign, and it was estimated that home supplies would last only three to four weeks. Further, the introduction of conscription in 1916 created a perceived manpower shortage on the land and raised concerns that Britain would not be able to grow enough food to sustain itself. Under the Lloyd George government Lord Devonport was appointed Food Controller, a position created under the newly reorganized Food Ministry, but his reliance on voluntary rationing, asking Britons to consume less food and only buy the essentials, proved to be ineffective.¹⁸¹

In Devon, growing frustration related to shortages (of some items), price inflation, and long food queues meant that rioting and acts of violence became more common. Although there were reports of rioting in other parts of the country, most Britons accepted rationing as a necessary part of the war.¹⁸² Overall, the British system worked well.¹⁸³ Britons were not actually starving, despite perceptions to the contrary, a distinction that is especially important given that thousands of Germans died of starvation during the war. In Devon, riots relating to food shortages were generally

¹⁸¹ Robb, *British Culture and the First World War*, p. 82.

¹⁸² Coles, "The Moral Economy of the Crowd: Some Twentieth-Century Food Riots": 168.

¹⁸³ For more on the debate surrounding nutrition and the First World War see, J.M. Winter, *The Great War and the British People*, pp. 279, 77; Linda Bryder, "The First World War: Healthy or Hungry? *History Workshop Journal* 24 (1987): 144, 150, 153-154.

confined to small sections of the population, mainly working-class men and women, but they did receive wider community support. In the winter of 1917 the *Western Times*, the *Express and Echo*, the *South Devon Weekly Express* and the *Western Independent* ran reports on the ‘food problem in Devon.’ The *Express and Echo* carried a series of public speeches by local residents calling for compulsory rationing and the establishment of state monitored distribution points.¹⁸⁴ The Dawlish Food Committee reported that 200 people attended a meeting outside the town hall to protest against illegal milk prices and the Ilfracombe town council noted similar scenes relating to the sugar shortage.¹⁸⁵ In Exeter, the theft of milk, meat, and potatoes was frequent, but the local police rarely doled out penalties. When offenders were punished, the penalty was generally a small fine.¹⁸⁶

In response to civilian discontent and talk about a possible famine in the winter of 1917, Lord Fortescue appealed to Devonians to “Stop Grumbling.”

It is urgent that each district of this county becomes self-supporting. A large proportion of our population is apparently callous as to the fate of their country. Every board and committee in the county has received letters of grievance and our police services are strained to manage the volume of people with daily complaints. Now is the time for action, but I compel you to use the fork and spade for farm work, not violence.¹⁸⁷

Devonians were not unresponsive or unsympathetic to Fortescue’s plea and the introduction of rationing had solved some of the counties food problems. But Lord Devonport’s reliance on a system of voluntary rationing was inadequate and failed to secure public approval.

¹⁸⁴ “North Devon Food Committee,” *Express and Echo*, 13 March 1917, p. 4; Mayor Wilson, “Compulsory Rationing,” *Express and Echo*, 5 December 1917, p. 4.

¹⁸⁵ “Food Queues,” *Crediton Chronicle*, 29 November 1917.

¹⁸⁶ “Rationing,” *Western Times*, 29 December 1917, p. 2.

¹⁸⁷ “Lord Fortescue’s appeal to Stop Grumbling,” *Salcombe Gazette*, 22 December 1917, no page number.

By January 1918 the British government introduced civilian rationing in an attempt to regulate the country's food supplies. Beginning with sugar, and later adding some meats, butter, jams and, in specified locations, tea,¹⁸⁸ the principle behind the plan was a leveling of wartime food supplies – the upper classes would receive less in order to diminish shortages for the working classes.¹⁸⁹ The problem with the system was that it did not reduce consumption or solve the problem of shortages, and the policy was not applied uniformly. For example, although some things such as meat were rationed by price, other foodstuffs such as bread were not rationed at all.¹⁹⁰ Also, until the introduction of rationing cards near the end of the war, it was a difficult system to monitor. In January the county set food quotas in order to determine how much food could be exported and still maintain adequate supplies for the population of the county. Each county was responsible for reporting population statistics and the Food Committees determined the appropriate procedures for food distribution in each town or district.¹⁹¹ Early in the year food levels were maintained and although the system worked well, long queues resulted. Under DORA the authorities had the ability to requisition food and supplies for redistribution. Although this had been possible since the beginning of the war, the authorities had been reluctant to do so after the initial hoarding of August 1914. In January 1918 the situation demanded further action and the Exeter police collected supplies from large stores within the city and redistributed them to smaller shops to reduce the length of food queues, as well as to ensure the equal distribution of goods. The redistribution of food on this scale had not been seen since the first weeks of the war.

¹⁸⁸ Winter, *The Great War and the British People*, p. 239; Wilson, *The Myriad Faces of War*, pp. 648-649.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.; Wilson, *The Myriad Faces of War*, p. 649.

¹⁹⁰ Robb, *British Culture and the First World War*, pp. 82-83

¹⁹¹ "New Regulations for Rationing: Report for January 1918," 18 January 1918, Devon Record Office, County Food Control Records, L132/P2.

Strict rules were put in place to prevent shopkeepers from over-selling to wealthy families. Those who violated the mandate were given a fine and their goods were requisitioned by the authorities for sale elsewhere. According to the Devon County Council, the system worked well and although prices remained a problem for the very poor, there was a more even distribution of provisions.¹⁹²

The introduction of rationing in Devon did not initially result in shortages, rather the prohibitive cost of some food items meant that those groups hit particularly hard by the changes in the wartime economy were unable to afford supplies at war prices. But, in the spring of 1918 various towns once again began reporting food shortages. The South Devon Food Committee informed Lord Fortescue that bacon and milk supplies were dangerously low, as were butter, margarine and sugar supplies. The Newton Abbot Food Control Committee blamed the Ministry of Food for not supplying offices and committees with the necessary means to guarantee that proper food control measures were followed.¹⁹³ Instead, in Newton Abbot, Exeter, Plymouth, Barnstaple, Exmouth, Teignmouth, and Torquay the population numbers were wrong, making the Food Control Board's estimations for the county's food requirements drastically inaccurate.¹⁹⁴ A report from the South Devon Food Committee estimated that population numbers were off by 30,000 people, or 4.5 percent of the total population of the county.¹⁹⁵ In Exeter those displaced by the quashed Garden City Project were not re-counted in their new areas of residence and official records of the number of Belgian refugees residing in the county

¹⁹² "War Drags," *Western Times*, 28 February 1918, p. 4.

¹⁹³ "Newton Abbot District Committee," *Express and Echo*, 20 April 1918, p. 5.

¹⁹⁴ "Storm the Food Ministry," *Express and Echo*, 20 September 1918, p. 5.

¹⁹⁵ Report for January 1918, 31 January 1918, Devon Record Office, South Devon Food Committee, R1264/1-0/35. Report for January 1918, 31 January 1918, Devon Record Office, North Devon Food Committee R1321/PC/25/3.

were incomplete until the end of the war. The numbers were estimations at best.¹⁹⁶ In the coastal areas of Plymouth, Torquay, and Salcombe the influx of refugees, as well as families who had migrated from the east to Devon's resort communities, had not been added to the most recent population numbers for the region.¹⁹⁷

Furthermore, excessive prices were not eradicated by the introduction of rationing. The Food Controller for South Devon, Mr. Collins, reported to the Devon County Council that the "wages of workingmen did not permit them to pay the price." He complained that there were not enough police to enforce price restrictions and that the "Food Ministry has done nothing to protect the interests of the urban poor."¹⁹⁸ On 25 January 1918 H. Lloyd Perry, Executive Office for the Exeter Local Food Control Committee, reported bread riots in Exeter and noted that the butter queue was bigger than it was at any other stage of the war.¹⁹⁹ These protests came after the Newton Conference on Food Control, held earlier in January, failed to gain the support of local suppliers to keep milk and meat prices steady.²⁰⁰ F.J. Cocker from the Torquay Food Committee suggested that "every Food Committee ought to storm the Food Ministry and every Mayor must call a town's meeting to protest against the excessive prices."²⁰¹ On 24 January 1918 Tiverton, Exeter, Collumpton, Tavistock, Brixham, Torquay, Salcombe,

¹⁹⁶ "The Food Crisis," *Teignmouth Post*, 3 May 1918, p. 3.

¹⁹⁷ Report for January 1918, 15 January 1918, Devon Record Office, South Devon Food Committee, R1264/1-0/35.

¹⁹⁸ "South Devon Up in Arms Against the Excesses," *Express and Echo*, 20 September 1918, p. 5. For other examples see, "The Meat Shortage," *Weekly News*, 12 January 1918, no page number; "Distribution of Butter and Meat," *Western Morning News*, 25 January 1918, p. 6; "The Meat Shortage," *Express and Echo*, 1 February 1918, p. 4; "Shortages at Newton Abbot," *Express and Echo*, 1 May 1918, p. 3; "Exmouth Council and the Food Crisis," *Express and Echo*, 19 July 1918, p. 4.

¹⁹⁹ H. Lloyd Perry, "Butter Queue Bigger than Ever," *Express and Echo*, 25 January 1918, p. 2.

²⁰⁰ "Meat Distribution: A Better System," *Express and Echo*, 25 September 1918, p. 4; "Dartmouth Food Control Committee," *Express and Echo*, 25 September 1918, p. 4.

²⁰¹ "South Devon Up in Arms Against the Excesses," *Express and Echo*, 20 September 1918, p. 5.

Newton Abbot, and Dartmouth reported public protests.²⁰² Crowds of between one and two hundred citizens formed outside town halls and called for increased police action against profiteers and stiffer penalties for convicted offenders. Clerics, mayors, trade union representatives, the Women's Patriotic Organization (Exeter), as well as representatives from the Food Control Committees and the Food Production Department supported the protesters.²⁰³ The authorities had mismanaged the situation at the local and county levels and public protest regarding food supplies and living conditions continued until the cessation of hostilities.

In Devon socio-economic circumstances shaped responses to inflation and food shortages. In 1916 and 1917 Devonians were faced with what they believed was an acute shortage of basic foods for which there was no substitute; the available supplies could only be had at what was regarded as profiteering prices. Tensions were also heightened by the knowledge that locally produced food was being exported to other areas of the country for even higher prices. Hoarding by farmers and shop owners only served to fire up the crowd as working-class women, who were the vanguard of crowd activity, insisted on obtaining their shares. Those particularly disaffected by the war, the families of semi- and un-skilled labourers employed in essential industries but not guaranteed government protections against conscription and not afforded the same raises and war bonuses that were given to skilled workers, lashed out at those groups who they believed were benefiting from the war. In the meantime, upper-class Devonians, willing and able to pay higher prices, made arrangements for food and other supplies with local shops, thereby

²⁰² Report for January 1918, 15 January 1918, Devon Record Office, South Devon Food Committee, R1264/1-0/35; Report for January 1918, 17 January 1918, Devon Record Office, North Devon Food Committee, R1321/PC/25/3.

²⁰³ "Displays of Patriotism?" *Salcombe Gazette*, 27 January 1918, no page number; "Our Social Conditions," *Western Times*, 1 June 1918, p. 2.

limiting what was available to the rest of the population. Unrest and tensions continued unabated until the local and national authorities enforced a more stringent food policy.

The introduction of civilian rationing was coupled with further restrictions on coal, electricity, and the curtailment of public transportation in 1918. These restrictions and the extension of rationing in April added to the general discomfort of the war. In Devon, schools were closed and attendance at places of entertainment and public meetings diminished. However, the situation was not entirely bleak and the extension of government powers came with some benefits. Adequate food supplies were restored and available throughout the county, and in May the Devon County Council aided the poorer classes by providing further assistance through charities and local churches.²⁰⁴ In the summer, lighting restrictions for some areas of the county were slightly relaxed and would have done much to boost civilian morale had the influenza epidemic not struck communities across the nation in June 1918.²⁰⁵ However, as difficult as the summer of 1918 was for the civilian population, the first real signs that the war might soon be over did begin to appear. The German army was retreating eastwards, and the steady arrival of American troops provided new hope that the Allied situation was changing for the better.

Conclusion

The circumstances of the war compelled state intervention into many aspects of British society, from housing, to food control and distribution, to the regulation of lighting, and the management of resources and manpower. The pressures of war were enormous, but volunteerism thrived on the spirit of self-sacrifice and represented a form of symbolic

²⁰⁴ Report on Poor Relief, 28 March 1918, Devon Record Office, Fortescue of Castle Hill, 1262M/OL/DD/ 151.

²⁰⁵ Lighting Regulations 1918, 29 November 1918, Devon Record Office, Seaton Urban District Council, R7/6-0/C/17/15.

enlistment for those who were too old, too frail, or of the wrong sex to enlist for military service. Yet, the arrival of thousands of refugees in the opening weeks of the war contributed to the difficulty of managing the home front effectively. The burden of refugee care was primarily born by Devon's eastern and southern communities. While Devonians were initially supportive of local efforts to aid Belgian and French refugees, many working-class families were displaced by their arrival. Public acceptance of the state's orders to cease building projects was complicated by the county's need to find accommodations for refugees. The decision by local magistrates to move refugees into former working class homes created a wave of popular discontent regarding the state of living conditions in the county, and, perhaps more than any other single factor, served to aggravate class antagonisms. Although the war provided new economic opportunities, the cessation of building activity meant that working-class families were forced to remain in inhospitable and overcrowded living environments.

While the housing question went unanswered, the reach of the government was felt when mandatory lighting restrictions were implemented under DORA. Devonians were generally receptive to wartime lighting restrictions and most understood that reduced lighting was intended to protect the citizenry from roving aircraft and German ships lurking off England's coasts. However, travel and views from coastal areas quickly revealed the inconsistencies in the enforcement of the law. Some areas remained brilliantly lit, while others were confined to total darkness. Local constables were accused of pandering to the needs of the upper-middle classes, while imposing fines for lighting violations on working-class citizens. Under the direction of the People's Light Brigade public criticism increased until 1917 when the Devon County Council imposed

more consistent lighting regulations for the county.

The successful prosecution of the war meant that the government had to carefully balance the needs of the military with the needs of the civilian population. However, the military requirements of the state made it necessary for the government to redirect resources to the armed forces thereby creating shortages in the supply of goods for civilian use. Initially, the government did little to solve the problem, preferring instead to rely on the free market to meet the demands of the nation. Attempts were made at the local level to control the supply and distribution of necessities, but the reluctance of local authorities to intervene in the market led to hoarding, profiteering, and a drastic rise in prices in the first year of the war. Rising prices and shortages were common across the county and the public's annoyance was expressed in terms of protests, rioting, attacks against suppliers, and theft. Fears of a food shortage combined with frustration at inflation fostered a demand for further government intervention. However, the introduction of compulsory rationing in 1918 did not prevent profiteering or regulate prices, and the mismanagement of the county's food supply by the Food Control Committee undermined the intended benefits of government control. By the spring of 1918 Lord Rhondda, who became Food Controller in June 1917, implemented a price-control system for basic foods like bread and potatoes, and although he had been more successful than his predecessor, the disruption caused by the local mismanagement of resources was an economic reality and, more importantly, exacerbated pre-existing social tensions within the county.

During the war most Devonians were not opposed to government intervention. Rather, they wanted the restrictions imposed under DORA to be enforced equally at the

local level. Many residents called for further government involvement in areas of housing and the distribution of food and supplies, and accepted restrictions placed on lighting in an effort to meet the military requirements of the nation. However, as will be seen in Chapter Two, calls for government intervention were frequently tempered by personal circumstances, economic considerations, and familial obligations.

2

Devon's Farming Community at War

The First World War placed tremendous strain on Britain's farming community.

The declaration of war threatened to rob farms of their labour through enlistment and, from 1915, concerns about the German submarine campaign and its threat to Britain's shipping and supply lines meant that the farming community had to drastically increase home food production. The war presented a dilemma for farmers: in order to increase production they would have to collectively alter their farming practices, but because farming was an individual enterprise, what was in the best interests of one farm was not necessarily in the best interests of another. The problem facing agriculturalists was that governmental initiatives did not take into consideration the diversities of experience that characterized the farming community. Instead, policies were passed on to farm owners and managers through the Board of Agriculture and its various bodies, with little consideration for local farming practices. In Devon, farmers came in many varieties, and farm sizes, practices, and production differed from region to region and from farm to farm. Likewise, the labourers that worked the land had different skill sets and there was little uniformity in terms of wages, the work performed, or the nature of the relationship between the farm employer and the men he employed. These differences not only influenced the way that individual farmers and their labourers responded to the new conditions generated by the war, but it also helps to explain why it was difficult to formulate a comprehensive agricultural programme for Britain.

Government intervention in agriculture was minimal until 1916, but in the first

two years of the war Devon's farmers faced innumerable challenges. Individual farmers had to decide what to produce, how to increase production with dwindling labour supplies, and how to balance self-interest with the needs of the nation. Not surprisingly, a harmonious balance was not always attainable. The reluctance of many farmers to make changes without price or labour guarantees, their unwillingness to turn over their labourers and sons to the army, and the disinclination of many to use alternative labour supplies, particularly women, brought condemnation from both the government and the public. While the government accused the farming community of self-interest, the public criticized 'the farmers' (a term that was often used indiscriminately despite the variety of types of farmers that existed) for unfairly protecting their sons and skilled men against conscription and their refusal to use alternative labour supplies. In an effort to negotiate labour and price guarantees with the government and reduce public hostility, Devon's farmers enlisted the support of local committees, agricultural boards, and the Devon Farmers' Union. Although the farming community never achieved a consensus with regard to labour, supplies, or government directives, the farmers and supporting bodies successfully negotiated the demands placed on agriculture by the government and, with the help of the Women's Land Army, slowly assuaged public criticisms of the farming community.

The popular image of the farming community at war has been largely understood against the backdrop of governmental agricultural policy or in terms of farming profits and their effect on the post-war economy. While early studies credited the Board of Agriculture and the Ministry of Food for the success of Britain's food programme, later

studies suggested that it was the formation of the Food Production Department (1917) under the Lloyd George administration that finally put agriculture on a wartime footing. However, there has been little attempt to evaluate the role of the farming community in Britain's food programme and there is only slight mention of the relationship between farmers and local government.¹ Studies like Peter Dewey's began to address this imbalance through his comprehensive analysis of the troubles that faced agriculturalists during the war. Through statistical analysis of agricultural trends from the 1850s through to 1925, Dewey argues that Britain's wartime food policy was a success due to the ability of farmers to manage wartime conditions, together with a "high degree of political and social unity in British society."²

Broadening the historical perspective meant that the farming experience was reexamined within the larger context of the countryside at war. Caroline Dakers argues that most Britons were not so far removed from a rural past and upon the declaration of war the land suddenly became the "concern of every English man and woman."³ However, Dakers' study oversimplifies the range of responses of the rural population to the conflict. Devon's agricultural community was not a homogenous group; rather, there

¹ Benjamin Hibbard, *Effects of the Great War Upon Agriculture in the United States and Great Britain* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1919), p. 183; Thomas Hudson Middleton, *Food Production in War* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1923), pp. 176-180; Lord Ernle, *English Farming: Past and Present* (London: Frank Cass & Co., 1961), pp. 403-408; Andrew Fenton Cooper, *British Agricultural Policy, 1912-1936: A Study in Conservative Politics* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989), pp. 1, 22-30; Mancur Olson, Jr, *The Economics of the Wartime Shortage: A History of British Food Supplies in the Napoleonic War and in World Wars I and II* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1963), pp. 73-77, 93-99, 115. The Board of Agriculture was created in 1889 and during the war it was responsible for all agricultural matters, including food safety. The Ministry of Food on the other hand was created in December 1916 to regulate the supply and consumption of food in the counties, as well as to encourage food production. Christabel S. Orwin and Edith H. Whetham, *History of British Agriculture, 1846-1914* (Newton Abbot: David & Charles, 1971), p. 182; Middleton, *Food Production in War*, p. 103.

² P.E. Dewey, *British Agriculture in the First World War* (London: Routledge, 1989), pp. 240-241, 242.

³ Caroline Dakers, *The Countryside at War, 1914-1918* (London: Constable and Company Limited, 1987), pp. 14-15.

was considerable diversity of experience that was tied to the work performed, as well as social and economic circumstances. Farmers came in many varieties, so the term requires some explanation. The term ‘farmer’ is used in this chapter to refer to those who operated a farm and/or oversaw its cultivation. It does not refer to landowners who owned but did not work the land or the agricultural labour force. Owner-occupiers were usually skilled agriculturalists who owned between 200 and 250 acres of land. Their farms were generally family run or employed a small labour force and it was this group that was particularly affected by the introduction of conscription in 1916. Tenant farmers in Devon, meanwhile, varied from a cottager renting a small plot of land to grow vegetables, to farm managers who rented sizable farms earning a healthy return on their land. Tenant farmers were generally responsible for the working of the farm in terms of manpower, machinery, and the purchasing of feed and fertilizer, and given wartime conditions, these farmers, depending on the landowner-tenant agreement, could have been among those most negatively affected by wartime conditions or may have suffered relatively little in comparison to freeholders.⁴ In the north there were a growing number of smaller farms including smallholders, market gardeners, fruit growers, poultry keepers, and hobby-farms. Conversely, farms in eastern and south-eastern Devon tended to be larger, with sizable labour forces, and had greater access to farming equipment and their landowners may have had some influence over local boards, on which he or his land agent may have sat. Large farms, although they suffered a more drastic decline in their labour forces, had

⁴ Subsistence farmer was not a term commonly used beyond the mid-nineteenth century, but as a descriptive term it is still useful considering that many farmers in Britain consumed as much as they sold. There were also hobby-farms and market gardeners, which tended to be small, but their importance should not be overlooked. Some hobby-farms and market gardens were as profitable as larger grain farms. So, it was not necessarily the size of the farm that was important, but what was produced. B.A. Holderness, “The Victorian Farmer,” in *The Victorian Countryside vol. 1* (ed) G.E. Mingay (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), pp. 227-232.

greater access to capital and may have done fairly well during the war.⁵

It is important to note that although there were many different kinds of farmers, these differences were not always preserved in the press or by the public in their discussions about the agricultural community. While both groups recognized that there were several types of farmers and understood the distinctions between them, often times the blanket term ‘farmer’ was used making it difficult to determine what kind of farmer they were referring to. For example, on the issue of the employment of women in agriculture the Devon Women’s War Service Committee noted that the one thing that “militated against the employment of women was the absurd price that farmers were paying for labour. It ought to be strongly put to farmers that if they wanted women labour they must pay reasonable rates.” Likewise, a newspaper columnist wrote, “Profiteering by farmers has existed since the beginning of the war. Food is being produced by farmers at double the pre-war prices, the increased expenses in no way keeping pace with the profits.”⁶ While this chapter seeks to explore the diversity of experience within the agricultural community, sometimes identifying which group was being discussed is impossible. In such instances, the term farmer has been carried over when a more accurate term is unavailable.

As with the differing experience among farmers, there was also considerable variety among the rural labour force and the war affected these groups in different ways. Although skilled men, horsemen, cowmen, bailiffs, thatchers, black smiths, and

⁵ Not all landowners were wealthy and their estate management had much to do with rents, as well as other assets and incomes. Further, the productivity of their land was likely determined by the nature of their landlord-tenant relationship—whether it was a tenancy or lease agreement. T.W. Beastall, “Landlords and Tenants,” in *The Victorian Countryside vol. II* (ed) G.E. Mingay (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), p. 428.

⁶ “Farmers’ Profits,” *Express and Echo*, 8 October 1917, p. 4; “Women on the Land,” *Totnes Times*, 28 October 1916, p. 4.

mechanics, to name a few, were protected by the government and offered monetary incentives by farm owners/managers to remain in their jobs, semi-skilled workers, like tractor drivers, and unskilled workers, such as field hands, were not afforded the same protections, did not experience the same economic advancements, and after 1916 were at risk of being conscripted into Britain's armed forces. Further, skilled agriculturalists received higher wages during the war and by the end of 1917 may have had a higher annual income than some middle-income farmers who owned their land.⁷ So, although Dakers suggests a fair degree of unity, Devon's agricultural community was often divided along social, economic, and cultural lines.

Food Supply and Government Policy

The experience of Devon's farming community was connected to the British government's agricultural policies. Despite Britain's reliance on imports, the outbreak of the war did not lead to immediate changes with regard to Britain's food policy.⁸ On the eve of the First World War British farmers only produced enough grain to feed the population for approximately 125 days of the year.⁹ Between 1870 and 1904 the production of wheat in Britain was cut in half, dropping from 3.68 million acres to 1.37 million acres.¹⁰ Four-fifths of all wheat and wheaten flour consumed in Britain came from overseas, and one-third of Britain's beef supplies and two-fifths of its sheep meat

⁷ Some tenant farmers did very well for themselves and worked their way up the farming hierarchy by purchasing their own land, but most reinvested in their working capital to improve productivity. G.E. Mingay, *The Transformation of Britain* (London: Routledge, 1985), p. 117.

⁸ Peter Dewey, "Nutrition and Living Standards in Wartime Britain, in *The Upheaval of War: Family, Work and Welfare in Europe, 1914-1918*, ed. Richard Wall and Jay Winter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p.201.

⁹ John Sheail, "Land Improvement and Reclamation: The Experiences of the First World War in England and Wales," *Agricultural History Review* 24: 2 (1976): 111.

¹⁰ Avner Offer, *The First World War: An Agrarian Interpretation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), p. 93.

were imported. In 1913 Britons spent approximately £669 million on food, and between 1909 and 1913 an average of £269 million went toward the purchase of food, tobacco, and drink from overseas markets.¹¹ Although Britain relied extensively on imports to feed the population, in 1914 the weather was good, the harvest fruitful, and it was estimated that home supplies of grain would last for five months. The Board of Agriculture anticipated no immediate problem since the war was supposed to be over by Christmas and British imports would remain largely unaffected.¹² This lack of intervention was partly because initial concerns were not about supply, but rather prices, which reflected the inflationary nature of war finance, the high cost of imports, and rising shipping costs.

However, Asquith did take some action on the nation's potential food problems. In December 1916 he appointed a Food Controller (Lord Devonport was the first but was not actually appointed until David Lloyd George became Prime Minister) to control food prices, and later civilian rationing. In the same month he also established the Food Production Department to increase home food production. The result of these changes was the control of imports, production, and the sale of much of the nation's food supply. From the perspective of the populace, these changes had the benefit of slowing the rate of inflation (for food), and eventually led to the stabilization of bread prices between 1917 and 1919. Although the Asquith government failed to transform the nation's food production, by the end of 1914 the state was directly responsible for buying and shipping

¹¹ Orwin and Whetham, *History of British Agriculture, 1846-1914*, pp. 341-342; Dewey, *British Agriculture in the First World War*, pp. 15-17; P.E. Dewey, *War and Progress: Britain, 1914-1945* (London: Longman: 1997), p. 19.

¹² The only "executive action of note in the first eighteenth months of the war was the establishment of a Sugar Commission (August 1914), whose main purpose was to rectify the situation caused by the disappearance of imports from Europe, which before the war supplied some two-thirds of the sugar consumed in the United Kingdom." Dewey, "Nutrition and Living Standards," p. 201.

the bulk of Britain's imported foodstuffs and was considering the regulation of prices and the distribution of food items.¹³

The problem was that by the end of 1915 the Asquith government was unable to effectively manage the nation's food supply and prices continued to rise. It was not until late 1916 that non-intervention in agriculture was finally abandoned. Interventionist policies were adopted by the Lloyd George government, and were connected to wider political issues that were tied to the fall of the Asquith ministry. Early in the war, and certainly by the spring of 1915, there was concern that Asquith was not forceful enough as a wartime leader. Nationalistic Conservatives were eager for greater government intervention and the Gallipoli disaster and the shells scandal of May 1915 did little to inspire confidence in Asquith's leadership.¹⁴ Further concerns over Asquith's leadership abilities were also raised with regard to Britain's shipping and supply lines. In the first two years of the war a number of merchant ships had been requisitioned to provide essential supplies to Britain's troops on the continent, which decreased the number of ships available for civilian food imports. The shortage of shipping space drove the average freight rates in 1916 forty-three percent above those in 1913¹⁵ and volunteerism in the early days and weeks of the war led to a shortage of dockhands to manage Britain's imports, leading to congestion and delays in British ports. In addition, the submarine campaign against Germany meant that shipping had to be diverted to ports away from the English Channel,¹⁶ many of which were not initially equipped to handle the new loads.

¹³ Margaret Barnett, *British Food Policy During the First World War* (Boston: George Allen & Unwin, 1985), pp. xviii-xix, 63- 65.

¹⁴ Thomas William Heyck, *The Peoples of the British Isles: A New History* (Chicago: Lyceum, 2008), p. 121.

¹⁵ Dewey, *War and Progress*, p. 27.

¹⁶ Wilson, *The Myriad Faces of War*, p. 536.

There was also concern that the U-Boat campaign would intensify as the war progressed, a problem that was compounded by the fact that the Royal Navy was slow to adopt convoy practices until there was no other recourse in 1917. Shipping losses meant higher prices at home, which had already provoked consumer discontent. In order to make up for losses in shipping and imports, Britain's farming community had to increase home food production. To assist, the Asquith government established the Agricultural Consultative Committee, one of two groups created by the Board of Agriculture in 1914. The other group was the Cabinet Committee on Food Supply which was mainly concerned with imported supplies, and assuring that prices were not unreasonably inflated. In the first two months of the war the levels of imports remained steady and the Committee had little advice in terms of future food policy.¹⁷ However, the only practical way to increase home food production was to abandon the livestock regime (production focused on meat) for cereals and grains. Even under ideal conditions this would have been a tricky undertaking given the nature of British farming. Changing from livestock to cereals would have required massive intervention and the implementation of restrictive government controls to manage Britain's farms, which Asquith's Liberal government opposed. So, until late 1916 Britain's food supply was left in the hands of individual farmers, who were guided as much by self-interest as they were by national interests.

This policy changed in December 1916 when Lloyd George came into power. The Ministry of Food was established under the New Ministries & Secretaries Act of 1916 and Lord Devonport was appointed Food Controller. However, it was not until the formation of the Food Production Department (1917) under the Board of Agriculture that

¹⁷ Dewey, *British Agriculture in the First World War*, pp. 23-29.

a domestic food policy was formalized. The Food Production Department was given the task of organizing and regulating agricultural inputs, such as labour, machinery, feed, and fertilizer, increasing crop production, and ensuring that food production levels did not fall below critical levels. Cooperation between the War Office and the Board was intended to regulate manpower needs and prevent shortages. Under the Ministry of Food the Corn Production Act was introduced in 1917 and guaranteed wheat prices, increased wages for agricultural workers, and established a more comprehensive plough policy, all of which were designed to increase crop outputs and reduce the nation's reliance of food imports.¹⁸ The reason for the reliance on the plough policy was that livestock were "wasteful converters of crops into food," whereas consuming crops directly would maximize the nation's food supply and the production of crops became mandatory under the new system.¹⁹

The problem with this policy was that it did not satisfy the public or the farmers who were invested in livestock. As was shown in Chapter One, government food policy had repercussions on public morale. The switch from a meat to a vegetable diet left Britons feeling hungry and dissatisfied, and although national nutritional standards were met, discontent was a wartime reality.²⁰ For livestock farms in particular, restoring land to productivity was a costly undertaking. Due to the decline in agricultural production in the second half of the nineteenth-century the number of agricultural labourers had declined from three million in 1870 to 2.3 million in 1911.²¹ This decline alone would not have been particularly problematic given the nature of British farming, but early

¹⁸ Maurice Kirby, "Industry, Agriculture and Trade Unions," in *The First World War in British History*, ed. Stephen Constantine, Maurice Kirby and Mary Rose (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), pp. 63, 64.

¹⁹ Dewey, *War and Progress*, p. 210.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Offer, *The First World War*, p. 94.

enlistments, conscription, and lack of government labour guarantees complicated matters. In the pre-war period surplus labour and a reliance on horsepower meant that smallholders and livestock farms were less likely to use machinery; increasing crop production would require more manpower than livestock. Further, there was no guarantee crops would be successful, and some farmers lost their farms after switching from livestock to grains.

The experience of Devon's farmers was tied to government policy in two stages. In the first stage, August 1914 until May 1916, few changes were made to the agricultural sector and Devon's farmers continued to operate within a *laissez-faire* framework. Farmers were left to produce what they thought they should and the impact of the war on farming remained indirect. In the second stage – mid 1916 until the end of the war – the rise in demand for farm products clashed with the expansion of the armed forces under the new conscription laws, resulting in a decline in agricultural production. The inability of the farmers to meet quotas forced the government to change its agricultural policies.

Upon the outbreak of war the government made several proposals to farmers through the medium of press releases by the Agricultural Consultative Committee. The policy favoured by the Committee was released on 18 August 1914, when it encouraged farmers to increase the production of staple crops by breaking-up grasslands.²² There were no incentives offered to the farmers; instead the Committee was content to offer *suggestions* that it hoped the farmers would take. The Committee's suggestion to the farmers was part of the broader 'business as usual' approach adopted by the Asquith government at the beginning of the war. Under the 'business as usual' plan, Britain would

²² "Land Improvements for Britain," *Daily News*, 15 October 1914, p. 4.

participate in the European war through limited military, industrial, and financial means, and with minimal disruption to the domestic life of the nation.²³

In response to the Committee's suggestion, the Council of the Devon Farmers' Union, which represented approximately sixty percent of Devon's farmers, and other farmers' unions throughout the country, brought up the question of guarantees.²⁴ The National Farmers' Union (NFU), created in 1908 to protect farmers against exploitation and to promote the prosperity of the agricultural industry, took up the issue. During the war farmers' unions played a central role in organizing and protecting members rights, but their efforts were initially unsuccessful. Many farmers, whether owner-occupiers or tenant farmers, were reluctant to plough up their fields because they wanted government assurance that prices and demands for their crops could be secured; the issue of price guarantees was an important part of pre-war discussions between the government and the NFU. They also worried about the requisite labour for such an undertaking. Similarly, farmers sought improved wages for their labourers in the hopes of preventing further losses of manpower to manufacturing and other industries where wages were considerably higher.²⁵ This was especially important for those farmers who had limited access to machinery. In October 1914 the NFU's organizing secretary reported that the Union had "absolutely failed to get a guarantee" of government support in return for

²³ Cooper, *British Agricultural Policy, 1912-36: A Study in Conservative Politics*, pp. 22-23; Dewey, *British Agriculture in the First World War*, pp. 23-24; Trevor Wilson, *The Myriad Faces of War* (New York: Polity Press, 1986), p. 163, 216.

²⁴ Report of the Devon Farmers' Union, 22 December 1917, Devon Record Office, Fortescue of Castle Hill, 1262M/114. The only statistic available is from December 1917. Membership numbers for 1914, 1915, and 1916 are unavailable. However, membership rose by sixty percent in this time (approximately 3,000 in 1914 to 4,700 in 1917). Although the Devon Farmers' Union represented the interests of its members, this diverse grouping did not have one set of goals or expectations. Consequently, it would be impossible for the Union to represent all views when it spoke with one voice.

²⁵ Report of Farm Holdings for the County of Devon, 21 August 1914, Devon Record Office, Fortescue of Castle Hill, 1262M/L/OD/138.

increasing the acreage of grain.²⁶

Meanwhile, Lord Selborne, President of the Board of Agriculture, was given the responsibility of managing the nation's food supply. In early 1915 he established the Milner Committee, comprised of three councils for England, Ireland and Scotland, to consider the NFU's position. The unanimous finding of the English Committee in December 1915 was that a 'plough-up policy' was the only way for England to increase substantially the gross production of food for the 1916 harvest. The committee recommended offering farmers a minimum price for wheat over the next several years, but only if the farmers were successful in increasing the percentage of arable land by ploughing up their fields to plant staple crops. However, the Irish Committee rejected the idea of guaranteeing prices for any longer than one year, and the Scottish Committee was opposed to definite prices for cereals, believing that the 1916 harvest would be bountiful and price guarantees would be unnecessary.²⁷ The findings of the Milner Committee eventually formed the basis of the food policy adopted for 1917-1918, but until then, intervention was rejected.²⁸

Nevertheless, Selborne continued to stress the need for increased government action and encouraged the NFU to maintain pressure for government guarantees. Selborne also suggested that farmers offer a token of goodwill by voluntarily planting more potatoes and wheat, which some of Devon's farmers did by abandoning their normal crop rotations. This was only a temporary solution as the land soon became

²⁶ Jonathan Brown, "Agricultural Policy and the National Farmers' Union, 1908-1939," in *Agriculture and Politics in England, 1815-1939* ed. R.J. Wordie (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), p. 182.

²⁷ Dewey, *British Agriculture in the First World War*, pp. 24-27. Milner Committee Report on Home Production of Food, 28 December 1915, National Archive, MAF 42/9/3.

²⁸ Lord Selborne was unhappy with the results of the Milner Committee and felt that the Asquith government was too preoccupied with issues in Ireland, as well as with labour and munitions shortages to give adequate attention to agriculture. Dewey, *British Agriculture in the First World War*, pp. 26-28.

weedy and infertile and instead of improving the productivity of the county, the move resulted in financial losses and a drop in agricultural production.²⁹

Despite Selborne's protests his scheme received little support from the War Committee. Supporters of laissez-faire policies, including Reginald McKenna, Chancellor of the Exchequer, and Arthur Balfour, First Lord of the Admiralty, blocked all recommendations of regulation.³⁰ Of primary concern was the scope of Selborne's scheme. Both McKenna and Balfour were apprehensive about the intended timeline for the proposal -- was this to be a permanent policy or would it be terminated with the cessation of hostilities in Europe? Selborne's plan was to guarantee prices for an indeterminate amount of time, which was unacceptable to all but David Lloyd George, who supported government intervention in terms of price guarantees. The War Committee was also worried that the scheme would require a considerable commitment of personnel, rail lines for the transportation of equipment, horses and supplies, and funds to change grazing land into arable land. Due to the war the rail lines and the treasury were already over-extended.³¹ Despite disapproval from the War Committee, Selborne's programme was intended to reduce maritime shipping needs and negate foreign exchange demands by growing food at home, thereby protecting Britain's food supply from the vulnerability of a wartime market, and later, the German submarine campaign.³²

²⁹ Devon War Agricultural Committee, 29 December 1915, Devon Record Office, Fortescue of Castle Hill, 1262M/L138.

³⁰ Reginald McKenna was a member of the Liberal Party and served as Home Secretary (1911-1915) and Chancellor of the Exchequer (1915-1916). When Lloyd George came to power in 1916 McKenna was part of an Asquithian Liberal group that went to the backbenches. Arthur Balfour was leader of the Conservative Party until 1911 and returned to government in 1915 to serve as First Lord of the Admiralty (coalition government) and later Foreign Secretary (under Lloyd George).

³¹ Milner Committee Report on Home Production of Food, 28 December 1915, National Archive, MAF 42/9/3.

³² Dewey, *British Agriculture in the First World War*, pp. 29-30.

The issue of government management of the agricultural industry is one of crucial importance, but the issue is much more complex than reorganizing and centralizing Britain's food production programme.³³ As the remainder of this chapter will show, it took considerable time for an agricultural plan to be implemented and the success of the plan was dependent on the participation of Britain's farmers. Action taken by Lloyd George was successful in that it did eventually save shipping space and had the potential to provide substantial increases in food production before the war's end, but the real success of the programme was due to ingenuity on the part of Britain's farmers in dealing with shortages and the problems of a wartime economy.³⁴ This task was especially challenging given the divisions within Devon's agricultural community. Initially, cooperation among farmers was slow to materialize, making it difficult for them to effectively negotiate labour and supply needs with the government. The crucial shift in agriculture took place in 1916 when the pressing labour shortage forced farmers to modify farming practices to suit wartime conditions. Within this context, historians have overstated the importance of the December 1916-January 1917 period when a new agricultural policy was adopted by the Lloyd George government.³⁵

Agricultural Production and Labour Issues

Official statistics for the United Kingdom show that under the Asquith administration

³³ Maurice Kirby, "Industry, Agriculture and Trade Unions," in *The First World War in British History*, ed. Stephen Constantine, Maurice Kirby and Mary Rose (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), p. 63; Barnett, *British Food Policy During the First World War*, pp. 63- 65; Cooper, *British Agricultural Policy, 1912-36*, pp. 22-23, 2-3, 42, 59.

³⁴ Dewey, *British Agriculture in the First World War*, pp. 2-6, 242.

³⁵ This argument is part of a broader historiographical debate regarding the extent to which Lloyd George's government represented a decisive break from its Asquithian predecessor. See, David French, *The Strategy of the Lloyd George Coalition, 1916-1918* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), pp. 13-39; David Powell, *British Politics, 1910-35: The Crisis of the Party System* (London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 73-81.

there was an increase in the production of wheat and oats, but that the production of barley and beans declined between 1914 and 1915, and wheat, oats, and hay declined between 1915 and 1916 (see Appendix 2-1).³⁶ The Board of Agriculture determined that losses were in part due to poor land practices by farmers, but more importantly, they were also the result of indiscriminate recruiting in the first year of the war.³⁷ From August 1914 to May 1915 agricultural labour was susceptible to the blandishments of the armed forces; enlistment was voluntary and until the introduction of the first Military Service Act there was no barrier to skilled workers joining the military.

Based on studies of enlistment numbers, historians have generally accepted the notion that farm workers enlisted in very high numbers during the first years of the war. However, Devon's farms were largely spared the initial rush of young men joining the colours.³⁸ Although enlistment will be dealt with in greater detail in Chapter Three, some explanation of its impact on the farming community is required here. One reason for low enlistment among agricultural labourers was that in order to maintain labour supplies

³⁶ Part of the significance of these numbers is that the decline of barley was tied to the production of beer and government restrictions placed on the supply of alcohol to consumers. Alcohol and tobacco had for centuries proved to be "popular stimulants, relaxants and aids to sociability," and it is not surprising that the reduction in barley, which equaled a reduction in beer, was tied to the decline in public morale. Between 1914 and 1918 beer production declined from 30,486,000 standard barrels, to 21,265,000 standard barrels, and tobacco was restricted in the second half of the war to save shipping space. So, although, generally, food and nutritional standards were maintained throughout the war there was a decline in consumer satisfaction based on changing agricultural practices. Furthermore, the largest productive values were for hay and oats, both of which were for animal, not human, consumption, and the majority of this was allotted to horses for military use. Dewey, *War and Progress*, pp. 192, 193, 206.

³⁷ Dewey, *British Agriculture in the First World War*, pp.28, 38, 79-86, 91-103, 106, 138-142; Keith Grieves, *The Politics of Manpower, 1914-18* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988), pp. 54-55.

³⁸ Report of Recruitment Numbers for the County of Devon, 27 October 1914, Devon Record Office, Lord Lieutenantcy Papers, 1262M/L144. Report of Recruitment in the West Country, 30 October 1914, Devon Record Office, Lord Lieutenantcy Papers, 1262M/L144. Devon had a considerable amount of grazing land, which meant that there was more work to be done in the winter months due to animal care, and so the work season was longer in Devon than in other counties. E. J.T Collins, "The Age of Machinery," in *The Victorian Countryside vol. I* (ed) G.E. Mingay (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), p. 201.

farmer owners and managers were willing to offer monetary incentives to skilled men if they stayed on until the winter.³⁹ Many believed that if they could stave off labour shortages the war would be over and the repercussions would be less severe. At the same time, however, farm labourers found themselves in a precarious situation. Some men remained on the land in the hope that the importance of agriculture during the war would bring much needed changes to the industry, specifically that wages would improve or that the monetary incentives offered to skilled men would be accorded to other groups as well. Another explanation was that some labourers were bound to the land by yearly contracts and could not enlist without the permission of the estate owner, the estate manager, or the tenant farmer, depending on the nature of the contract. Others still were tied to the land due to their cottage rental agreements. If a man left to join the army, his wife and family would have to vacate their cottage, and given the housing shortage in Devon, this was not an attractive option. It is also likely that farmers negotiated with their labourers to prevent them from enlisting. The promise of continued or permanent employment once the war ended could have been a powerful incentive to keep men at home. In instances such as these, low recruitment numbers may have said more about the desire of farm employers or managers to protect their own interests than it did the ‘patriotism’ of the agricultural labour force. The men from agriculture who enlisted early in the war were most often casual labourers or those who were not bound by contractual or familial obligations.

Although some farm labourers enlisted to escape poor pay and working conditions, this

³⁹ Labour on the Land, 1 October 1914, Devon Record Office, Lord Fortescue Papers, 1262M/O/LD/144. For statistics on Devon’s workforce see Table 2.4. The willingness of the farmers to offer monetary incentive to these men may be partly explained by the fact that there was a decline in the number of rural craftsmen between 1851 and 1911. Many skilled men from agriculture moved into the towns or found employment in the timber trade which was still fairly productive in the West Country at the end of the nineteenth century. W.A. Armstrong, “The Flight from the Land,” in *The Victorian Countryside vol. 1* (ed) G.E. Mingay (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), pp. 124-125.

study argues that there was a considerable range of experience among agricultural labourers that help to explain why many were unwilling or unable to leave the land.⁴⁰

With no end to the war in sight by the end of February 1915, voluntary enlistment numbers for Devon were on the rise resulting in the labour shortages that had been avoided earlier in the war.⁴¹ Individual farmers initially attempted to resolve the labour problems by negotiating with the government through their town councils. When this proved ineffective, the Devon Farmers' Union protested that more attention had to be paid to the problems facing the agricultural community. The Devon Farmers' Union suggested in March 1915 that

Yes we want more men, but we also want organization and organizing minds. The plan by Lord Selborne [the one previously rejected by Cabinet] offers some protection. Instead of depleting the countryside and asking the farmers to make unreasonable sacrifices he understands that the policies of this government require drastic revision or we are to pass through this terrible experience in vain.⁴²

While committees were established to take account of the labour problem and to offer solutions, the immediate problem was to meet recruiting expectations while retaining enough men to satisfy the food production demands of the county. Once formed, the local committees reported to Lord Fortescue that there was a shortage of farm labour owing to the drastic improvement in recruitment numbers, as well as the increased number of labourers required to make the change from livestock to crops, but that it could largely be met by employing carpenters and bricklayers since all building projects had been

⁴⁰ Unfortunately the enlistment figures for Devon have not survived. As such, the following evaluation of enlistment and recruitment for the county is based on surviving reports and statistics provided by the Devon County Council, county military records, the Lord Lieutenancy papers, and the period press.

⁴¹ Voluntary Recruitment for Devon, 18 May 1915, Devon Record Office, Lord Lieutenancy Papers, 1262M/O/LD/144 Bundle 30.

⁴² Devon Farmers' Union, "Our Need," *Devon and Exeter Gazette*, 13 March 1915, p. 2.

suspended until after the war.⁴³ The Council also recommended the use of men who were not eligible for military service and those men who had been rejected as medically unfit.⁴⁴

In May 1915 the Devon County Council, in conjunction with military authorities, put forth a plan to temporarily use soldiers on the land, but the plan required sacrifices that most farmers were unwilling to make. In the spring of 1915 there were twenty-seven volunteer training corps in the county with approximately 2,500 men.⁴⁵ These men were not likely to be used in the impending spring offensives and it was suggested, as both a way to solve the labour shortage and to promote recruiting in the smaller parishes, that the young men would be released from service to give assistance to the farmers for the forthcoming harvest. This option would not be made available to farmers who still had sons at home or if the parish had few men of military age under arms. No assistance would be offered to “unpatriotic farmers where there was no genuine shortage of labour.”⁴⁶ But most farmers, particularly owner-occupiers who were dependent on their sons’ labour, were not willing to accept the Devon County Council’s offer and send their sons to war with only fleeting guarantees that replacement labourers would be found.

In mid-1915 the government compiled a National Register to take account of the nation’s labour supply. Under this programme certain farm workers were to be ‘starred,’ meaning that skilled workers “between the ages of fifteen and sixty-five not already in

⁴³ Agricultural Committee Report, 15 April 1915, Lord Fortescue Papers, Devon Record Office, 1262M/O/LD/146.

⁴⁴ Labour Report for 1915, 27 April 1915, Devon Record Office, Lord Lieutenancy Papers, 1262M/L153 Bundle 17. Drewsteignton Council Minute Book, 16 April 1915, Devon Record Office, 2165A/PX.

⁴⁵ Letter from Lord Fortescue to the Recruiting Office, 26 May 1915, Devon Record Office, Lord Lieutenancy Papers, 1262M/L138 Bundle 27.

⁴⁶ Letter from Lord Fortescue to the recruiting office, 26 May 1915, Devon Record Office, Lord Lieutenancy Papers, 1262M/L138 Bundle 27.

the forces,” would be not be accepted or solicited for military service.⁴⁷ This meant that those skilled workers listed under the May scheme, horsemen, bailiffs, and cowmen would not be accepted into the armed forces, with the addition of mechanics. Farmers who were reliant on a hired workforce (this would mostly apply to tenant or yeoman farmers with sizable farms) considered the starring of certain occupations to be a partial victory. The programme covered most of the skilled labour needed on a farm, but it did not include ancillary machine operators or general labourers. In essence, the starring programme divided the agricultural community into two groups: ‘official,’ skilled labourers in protected industries, and ‘unofficial,’ unskilled labourers who were afforded no government protection. In May 1915 this was an important division. The starring programme not only created divisions between skilled and unskilled workers, it also created tensions within the working classes. Unskilled labourers were increasingly taken from the land and replaced with women, soldiers, and prisoners who the Board of Agriculture believed were adequate replacements, while skilled men remained at home.⁴⁸

With fewer labourers and no price or supply guarantees, the Devon Farmers’ Union encouraged its members to refuse to comply with the government’s suggestions for replacement labour and improved productivity.⁴⁹ Alfred Loram, a small tenant farmer from South Tawton, believed that the new starring programme showed the

serious discrepancy between the statements of the Minister for Agriculture and the doings of the local authorities. Lord Selborne tells us Lord Kitchener will allow men to leave from the trenches for a few months ploughing and corn sowing. Yet, men are taken from the land weekly and

⁴⁷ Horn, *Rural Life in England*, p. 76.

⁴⁸ For more on replacement labour see Peter Dewey, *British Agriculture in the First World War*, pp. 106-141.

⁴⁹ Report of the Devon Farmers’ Union, 17 November 1915, Devon Record Office, Wallcott Family of Tiverton, 317/M/26.

this week the recruiting sergeant in this district is making visits to men, married and single, with half veiled threats that if they don't join now their brothers, sons and neighbours will soon be compelled.⁵⁰

While some farmers were frustrated by the limitations of the starring programme they had to be careful in their actions; they wanted some government intervention, but they did not want conscription.

In January 1915 the Farmers' Union released a statement to the *Western Evening Herald* encouraging men to enlist, but also to consider that "a nation that does not have sufficient food supplies will make a poor showing on the battlefield."⁵¹ To protect their labourers farmers took it upon themselves to shelter their men from military service by putting unskilled labourers down as bailiffs or cowmen.⁵² In October 1915 James Hubbard, an owner-occupier from Tiverton, tried to protect one of his general farm labourers by registering him as a tractor driver, but when the man was forced before the military tribunal it was discovered that he was "a fraud and your employer a liar."⁵³ The farmer was fined and the man was registered as a general farm labourer. Farm employers were responsible for registering their men as skilled, semi-skilled, or unskilled, and it is possible that the unskilled labourer was unaware of the farm employer's dishonesty until

⁵⁰ Alfred Loram, "Recruiting Farm Labourers: A Protest," *Western Times*, 15 October 1915, p. 9. For other examples see, "Farmers," *Illustrated Western Weekly News*, 14 June 1915, p. 14; "Recruiting Farm Labourers: A Protest," *Western Times*, 15 October 1915, p. 9; "Farm Labour and War," *Hartland and West Country Chronicle*, 27 October 1915, p. 12; "Devon Farmers," *Totnes Times*, 20 November 1915.

⁵¹ "Devon Farmers" *Western Evening Herald*, 14 January 1915, p. 4.

⁵² Tiverton Tribunal Report for Earl Fortescue, 10 March 1915, Devon Record Office, Lord Lieutenancy Papers, 1262M/L 141.

⁵³ "Military Tribunal At Exmouth," *Western Morning News*, 29 October 1915, p. 5. The relationship between agricultural and the military tribunals was a difficult one and grievances persisted throughout the war. See, "Torrington Rural Tribunal," *Western Express and Torrington Chronicle*, 10 June 1916; "Dawlish Tribunal," *Dawlish Gazette*, 17 June 1916, p. 4; "Brixham Military Tribunal: Agricultural Cases," *Western Guardian*, 8 June 1916, p. 5; "Totnes Tribunal," *Western Guardian*, 26 October 1916, p. 2; "Procedure for Agricultural Exemption," *Weekly News*, 12 February 1916, no page number; "Devon Appeal Tribunal: Call Upon Agriculture," *Express and Echo*, 25 May 1918, p. 5; "Tavistock Rural—Unpatriotic Farmers," *Cornish and Devon Post*, 24 March 1917.

he was called before the military tribunal. Reports of fraudulent behaviour on the part of farm employers frequented the pages of Devon's newspapers. The majority of the reports condemned the farmer for his duplicity, but expressed sympathy for the labourer.⁵⁴

Despite the united voice presented by the Devon Farmer's Union, some farmers were unwilling to lie to, or were tired of negotiating manpower needs with, the military authorities. Escalating difficulties and the pressures to produce with dwindling resources led some to leave agriculture for the military. Tom Marshall, an owner-occupier from Okehampton, wrote a letter to Lord Fortescue explaining that

This war has done little to show me that agriculture has gained any respect. The Government asked me to abandon my cattle. I did and planted more crops, but as I increased acreage my farm of eight labourers before the war was reduced to four and now I can't get the corn off the field. So, I leave my farm to you Lord Fortescue. Do with it what you can, I am going to France where my efforts will be appreciated.⁵⁵

Marshall was not alone and in Huntsham tenant farmer Joseph Keap also responded to the labour problem by abandoning his farm and joining the army. Keap had worked a farm on the Huntsham Court Estate and after losing four of his seven labourers and being harassed by soldiers recruiting in the area, he and his three remaining labourers decided to join the military.⁵⁶

The experiences of Marshall and Keap were exceptions, but they were not isolated. Farm holdings in Devon remained stable between 1914 and 1919 and most instances of farmers leaving the land to join the army happened in the first year of the

⁵⁴ "Protesting," *Express and Echo*, 10 February 1917, p. 3; "Farms and Military Service," *Western Daily Mercury*, 2 June 1916, p. 7; "Crediton Urban Tribunal," *Crediton Chronicle*, 15 April 1916; "St Thomas Tribunal," *Western Morning News*, 12 May 1917, p. 2.

⁵⁵ Letter to Lord Fortescue from Tom Marshall, 4 November 1915, Devon Record Office, Lord Lieutenancy Papers, 1262M/L153 Bundle 42.

⁵⁶ Joseph Keap, "An Unpatriotic Farmer?" *Bideford Gazette*, 24 July 1915, no page number. Huntsham Court is owned by the Williams' Troyte of Huntsham Court, Esq, Bampton.

conflict. Despite the decision of some farmers to leave agriculture, the Devon Farmers' Union and the NFU continued to negotiate manpower demands with the government. Although they were not always successful, the Asquith government did recognize the need to make some changes to the nation's agricultural policy.

The Derby Scheme and the County War Agricultural Committees

The last attempt to regulate labour supplies under the voluntary system was the Derby Scheme. Asquith appointed Lord Edward Derby, an opponent of conscription, as Director-General of Recruitment and assigned him the job of boosting Britain's volunteer army. His solution was a scheme which encouraged men to register their names voluntarily on the principle that once registered they would be called up for service only when necessary.⁵⁷ As an added incentive married men were advised that they would only be called up once the supply of single men was exhausted.⁵⁸ The scheme was announced on 21 October 1915 and aimed to find an additional 500,000 men to serve by 31 March 1916. It involved a canvas of all men between eighteen and forty-five listed by the Parliamentary Recruiting Committee, but it also contained a provision for the protection of 'certified occupations' and sheltered the same skilled workmen from military service who were listed under the National Register, with the addition of ancillary machine operators.⁵⁹

In the fall of 1915, in concert with the Derby Scheme, the Board of Agriculture extended the power of County War Agricultural Committees. These committees were established in 1914 to ascertain the needs of farmers and the best means of assisting them

⁵⁷ Wilson, *The Myriad Faces of War*, pp. 167-169.

⁵⁸ Stevenson, *British Society 1914-45*, p. 63; Bourne, *Britain and the Great War*, pp. 121-122.

⁵⁹ Army Recruiting: Derby Scheme, 27 September 1916, National Archive, CAB 17/158/14.

in cultivating their land and to develop the agricultural resources within each county.⁶⁰ Although in 1915 these committees lacked the power to force change or implement policy, they were given more power to negotiate labour demands and to keep the lines of communication open between the farmers and the Board of Agriculture. The debate over agricultural labour was part of a larger argument within the Asquith coalition regarding the British commitment to the war effort. The failure of the Derby Scheme, Bulgaria's entry in to the war, the collapse of Serbia, the defeats at Gallipoli and Kut, and growing signs of war weariness among the allies added new pressures on the Asquith administration to take further action by abandoning the voluntary system in favour of conscription. David French explains that between December 1915 and April 1916 the Asquith government engaged in grueling debates about the risks involved if the British government agreed to a complete continental commitment. Conscriptionists like Kitchener and Field Marshal Sir William Robertson believed that if Britain continued to hold back, their allies might desert them and sue for peace. On the other hand, the anti-conscriptionists, Asquith included, pointed out that even with the introduction of conscription neither Kitchener nor Robertson could guarantee victory. R.J.Q. Adams and Philip Poirier contend that following the failure of Lord Derby to secure new recruits Asquith attempted to appease McKenna and others who were cautious about the viability of fielding an army of conscripts. McKenna believed that if conscription was introduced that the size of the army would have to be limited to provide export industries with the necessary manpower to generate revenue. Furthermore, Walter Runciman, President of

⁶⁰ The plan for the establishment of county war agricultural committees was first introduced by the Milner Committee. Coordination with the local authorities took time and the first committees became operational in Devon in October 1915.

the Board of Trade, cautioned Asquith that further extending the military in terms of manpower might bankrupt Britain.⁶¹ The problem was that political infighting delayed important decisions from being made. The debate remained open until the spring of 1916 when the conscriptionists won a complete victory,⁶² but until then dissent and conflict within the Asquith administration continued to obstruct agricultural production.

By the end of 1915 Asquith's indecision led to greater divergence between the Board of Agriculture and farmers' unions and threatened to hinder the 1916 harvest. Although the farmer's unions had done their best to convince the Asquith government of the need to implement a more stringent labour policy, Asquith was unwilling to make such assurances. In turn, some farmers became increasingly particular in terms of labour supplies, refusing to use what they considered to be 'inadequate' alternatives. The result was that to some extent the farmers undermined both their own efforts to increase production values and the ability of the county to meet government quotas, thereby demonstrating that the farmers' objective was not necessarily to increase production, but rather to maximize profits and to increase that portion of the workforce most profitably employed.

Labour Shortage and Public Opinion

It is difficult to gauge the actual labour shortage in agriculture between 1914 and 1918. Uninhibited recruiting in the first two years severely undermined the farmers' ability to increase production, and the plough policy, introduced in 1916, intensified the labour

⁶¹ R.J.Q. Adams and Philip Poirier, *The Conscription Controversy in Great Britain, 1900-1918* (London: McMillan Press, 1987), pp. 145-152. Walter Runciman was a liberal MP and was appointed to the position President of the Board of Trade in 1914. Runciman refused to take part in the Lloyd George government of December 1916 but stayed in Parliament on the opposition front benches.

⁶² David French, *British Strategy and War Aims, 1914-1916* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1986), pp.169-176.

shortage. Through an examination of the country's recruiting numbers G.E. Mingay argues that the labour force had declined to eighty-nine percent of the pre-war level and that many of these men were lost from the agricultural sector.⁶³ Due to poor pay for agricultural labourers, they were among the first to sign up, leaving a shortage of men to work the land. Although Mingay concludes that the labour force declined by approximately eleven percent, others have suggested a more substantial drop in the agricultural labour force. Studies carried out by A.W. Ashby suggested that 243,000 men left agriculture during the war and a similar study by T.H. Middleton calculated that between August 1914 and April 1918 approximately 273,000 men between the ages of eighteen and forty-one left agriculture for military service or munitions work.⁶⁴ According to the Board of Trade's Z8 reports, approximately 816,667 men were employed in agriculture in 1914. The problem with calculating the exact losses for the industry is that the government kept less than adequate records for the first year of the war and once restrictions were placed on skilled workmen, many lied about their occupations to escape agricultural work. The Z8 reports show agricultural losses at approximately thirty percent or 245,000 men, on par with the estimates made by Ashby and Middleton.⁶⁵ One point of concern is that the Z8 reports did not take into consideration farm owners or their relatives, nor did they consider the use of women or children as replacement labour during the war. They also did not consider that increased mechanization after 1916 would have helped to offset the decline in the labour force.

⁶³ G.E. Mingay, *A Social History of the English Countryside* (London: Routledge, Chapman and Hall, Inc, 1990), p. 200.

⁶⁴ Figures for Ashby are cited in Dewey, *British Agriculture in the First World War*, p. 40; Middleton, *Food Production in War*, p. 266.

⁶⁵ War Enquiries Branch "Survey of Agricultural Employment" 1914-1916, National Archive, Board of Trade, BT/Z8, pp. 42-46.

Taking farm owners and replacement labour into consideration, the estimated loss to agriculture was approximately twenty-two percent.⁶⁶

The loss of twenty-two percent of the agricultural labour force was due to early recruitment efforts, but also due to the introduction of the first Military Service Act in January 1916. This measure provided for the call-up of single men and childless widowers between the ages of eighteen and forty-one, while at the same time exempting those in essential industries.⁶⁷ The starring programme was discontinued under the second Military Service Act, passed into law in May 1916, and those who were previously protected were now reconsidered under the new system.⁶⁸ Under this system the starred occupations were replaced with exemptions. Exemption categories changed over the course of the war in order to accommodate changing manpower demands. Men who were exempted in July 1916 may not have been exempted in July 1917, or vice versa. The second Military Service Act extended the parameters set by the first bill to include all men between the ages of eighteen and forty-one, and although it contained a provision that protected skilled agriculturalists, general labourers remained unprotected. Men could plead their cases before the military tribunals, and Lord Selborne did arrange for agricultural representatives to appear at local tribunals to prevent the further depletion of labour on the land, but his actions were heavily criticized by the Devon Farmers'

⁶⁶ Dewey, *British Agriculture in the First World War*, p. 43.

⁶⁷ Adams and Poirier, *The Conscription Controversy*, pp. 139-140. For more information on the labour shortage in agriculture see Horn, *Rural Life in England*, pp. 74-81.

⁶⁸ Regulations for Starred Occupations, January 1916, Devon War Agricultural Committee Report, Devon Record Office, 1262M/L/OD/138 Bundle 27. The regulations for the starring programme were also printed in the *Launceston Weekly News*. "Agricultural Exemption," *Launceston Weekly News*, 12 February 1916, no page number.

Union.⁶⁹ Richard Denning, a Union representative, accused him of “disgraceful behaviour” by encouraging support for the farmer’s position, while pushing for conscription.⁷⁰ J. H. Roberts, a farm owner from Clovelly, cautioned Lord Selborne that “you may think you are being lenient and aiding the position of the farmers with offers of price guarantees, but with the other hand you seek to rob the farmer of his labour. What our farms in Devonshire could produce if they were left to be properly run.”⁷¹ Lord Selborne was part of the Cabinet faction pushing for the immediate introduction of conscription in 1915, but in April 1916 he appears to have been trying to meet the military needs of the country without placing the nation’s food supply in jeopardy. Lord Selborne’s position was complicated; he wanted to meet the manpower needs of both the military and agriculture, but to the farmers, his actions appeared to be contradictory. His earlier suggestions to protect agricultural production did not mesh with his pro-conscription actions.

However, Asquith was unwilling to offer labour guarantees and the Devon Farmers’ Union believed that the Military Service Acts undermined the little progress that had been made in terms of labour supplies.⁷² Some farmers felt betrayed and believed that the government was unreasonable in its demands. J. Fowler, an owner-occupier from Salcombe, noted

at the rate horses are being commandeered and men enlisted, What Will Happen? The farms will become vacant. Already through a lack of labour we are unable to produce as much as we ought. You say all the able-

⁶⁹ Devon War Agricultural Committee Report, 19 May 1916, Devon Record Office, Fortescue of Castle Hill, 1262M/L/OD/138 Bundle 27.

⁷⁰ Richard Denning, “Selborne Disgraced,” *Western Daily Mercury*, 2 June 1916, no page number. Denning was a landowner from Bridgewater, Somerset, who owned farmland in Ottery St. Mary, south Devon.

⁷¹ J.H. Roberts, “Farms and Military Service,” *Western Daily Mercury*, 2 June 1916, no page number.

⁷² “Military Service: Position of the Farmers,” *Launceston Weekly News*, 18 November 1916, no page number.

bodied men must enlist and the farming be carried on by the old men, women and boys. Now we contend that these are unable to carry on the work on an average farm. I have already lost 150 acres of my land because it has not been tilled and the government does little but threaten to take it from me if I don't produce more food. I ask this government, trade unions and committees aside, to consider the plight of the farmer.⁷³

Likewise, Christopher Turnor, a dairy farmer before the war, was forced to

give up my dairy cows entirely and [was] obliged to plant crops. Many of us are holding the best we can, largely from patriotic motives. People's memories are short. Prior to the war nobody cared where the food came from so long as it was cheap. Now prices are rising, supplies harder to come by and rather than thank the farmer for his hard work, you rob his fields, take his men and horses and demand pre-war prices and quantities. With our hands tied what do you expect the farmer to do?⁷⁴

Following the introduction of conscription the complaints voiced by farmers were given additional weight by the decline in agricultural production in the West Country. The Western Counties' Conference of the National Farmers' Union was held at Gloucester in August 1916. Crop returns presented from the counties of Gloucester, Devon, Worcester, and Hereford gave an estimated total of 307.4 tons of fruit for 1916 as compared to 7,782 tons a year earlier and a decrease of 18,000 acres of fruit lost in the same period in Devon alone.⁷⁵ The decline in production was primarily due to the failure of many crops following the harsh winter of 1915-16, but farmers also reported that some crops were rotting in the fields because of the difficulties of transport.

⁷³ J. Fowler, "Farming in Devon," *Salcombe Gazette*, 19 January 1916, no page number.

⁷⁴ Christopher Turnor, "Farmers and the Price of Food," *Western Daily Mercury*, 13 October 1916, no page number. Turnor was a tenant farmer from Chulmleigh, north Devon. Also see, "Land and Labour," *Western Times*, 16 December 1916, p. 4; "Devon Farmers and Substitution," *Weekly News*, 21 October 1916, no page number; "Farm Work: Farmers' Challenge," *Western Guardian*, 11 May 1916, p. 4; "T. Toovey, "Farm Production and Farming," *Weekly News*, 21 October 1916, no page number; G. Hurley, "The Case for the Farmer," *Weekly News*, 13 October 1916, no page number; "Farmers and the War," 18 November 1916, *Exeter Flying Post*.

⁷⁵ The Western Counties' Conference of the National Farmers' Union," *Western Illustrated Weekly News*, 29 August 1916, p. 4.

Furthermore, the ability of the farmers or landowners⁷⁶ to plead their cases successfully before the military tribunals was hampered by public hostility that began with low enlistment numbers among agricultural labourers early in the war. Despite protests by the Council of the Devon Farmers' Union that "farmers have made greater sacrifices in men and horses than any other industry in England,"⁷⁷ the continued presence of farmers and their sons throughout the county sparked resentment:

While Devon's young men take their place on the battlefield the farmer and his sons hide on their farms. Men are not like they use [sic] to be fifty years ago when honour and pride meant something and king and country were worthy of defending. Instead the farmer keeps his land and his family and feels that the Garden of Eden was made for his special benefit. But war has been declared. Why must others suffer and many never return while you live in comfort. I feel sorry for the farmer who will never know the value of an honourable man.⁷⁸

And at the Dunmow Rural Tribunal protests were heard regarding men fifty years of age being taken for the army, "while fit young men remain on the land."⁷⁹ This issue was particularly sensitive after the introduction of conscription. Farmers were exempt from military service,⁸⁰ and they also appealed to the military tribunals on behalf of their skilled workers. Although the Executive Committees determined who was exempt, which

⁷⁶ It was not uncommon for a landowner to intervene on behalf of a tenant farmer who was called before an appeals tribunal, nor was it uncommon for an estate owner to send a representative, likely the estate manager, to speak on behalf of a tenant farmer.

⁷⁷ "Farmers and the War," *Crediton Chronicle*, 5 December 1914, p. 3.

⁷⁸ A Soldiers Wife, "A Reply to Devon Farmers," *Western Evening Herald*, 21 January 1915, p. 1; Henry Mingo, "A Devon Farmer," *Western Evening Herald*, 23 February 1915, p. 4; "Farmers' Sons at Home," *Express and Echo*, 23 January 1918, p. 4; "Food Production," *Crediton Chronicle*, 30 December 1916; Ella Hough, "Personal Spite," *Express and Echo*, 24 November 1916, p. 1; "How the Farmers can be Patriotic," *Express and Echo*, 10 February 1917, p. 3; R. Rolins, "Farmers' Sons," *Tiverton Gazette*, 12 January 1915, no page number; Isabel Wells, "Farmers and War," *Dawlish Gazette*, 30 November 1914; James Bower, [Untitled], *Teignmouth Post*, 18 February 1916, p. 4; "Reply to Devonshire Farmer," *Western Evening Herald*, 21 January 1915, p. 1; "Farmer's Sons and Recruiting," *Western Express and Torrington Chronicle*, 21 November 1914, p. 7.

⁷⁹ "Fit Young Men on Farms," 20 April 1918, *Launceston Weekly News*, no page number.

⁸⁰ Exemptions were granted to those farmers who were responsible for the daily operation of the land. In some instances market gardeners and smallholders would have been granted exemptions, depending on what and how much was being produced. Hobby farmers would not have been granted exemptions.

was evaluated on a regional basis, the willingness of farmers/landowners to speak on behalf of their skilled men exacerbated divisions within the farming community. General labourers who were not conscripted remained on the land where they were paid lower wages than the military offered and no separation allowances were accorded to their wives.⁸¹ Disappointing enlistment numbers and the expectation that men would verify their commitment to the nation on the battlefield meant that young men who remained at home were disparaged. The perception was that while farmers kept their labourers and skilled workers were protected and rewarded for their wartime service, general farm labourers and their families suffered economically. While references to the farming community were often general and somewhat blurred in the newspapers, the families of skilled and semi-skilled men were well aware of the financial benefits that were granted to skilled agriculturalists and yet denied to unskilled labourers.

The war exacerbated divisions between men who worked in official occupations and those who worked in unofficial occupations, even if they belonged to the same class. Skilled workers were protected not only by the government, but also by local committees and boards, and by the farm employers themselves. Unskilled men were increasingly vulnerable and although farmers fought to maintain all available male labourers, their efforts were naturally concentrated on skilled men. However, agricultural labourers as a group were often the subjects of collective public condemnation, as were the farmers who employed them. Beginning in the fall of 1914 when there was no labour crisis in the county, the press and the public embellished the harmful effects that local farmers'

⁸¹ Historians have debated the extent to which improved wage rates narrowed the gap between skilled and unskilled workers, thereby reducing tensions between the groups. See, Alastair Reid, "World War I and the Working Class in Britain" in *Total War and Social Change*, (ed) Arthur Marwick (London: MacMillan Press, 1988), pp. 16-23.

behaviour had on England's war effort. The lack of public support undermined the ability of the farmers to negotiate labour and price guarantees with the government.

Horses, Machinery, and Supplies

What the public did not understand was that during the war farmers who operated farms of 200 acres or less, typical in Devon, experienced shortages at every turn. Under DORA the Board of Agriculture had the power to requisition horses, machinery, and supplies in order to improve the food situation. Large numbers of horses were required for the army leaving insufficient animals to reclaim the grasslands.⁸² Farms of less than 200 acres had a small workforce, usually only a few men and horses, and, consequently, shortages were felt more immediately than on larger farms. In 1916 the Devon War Agricultural Committee reported substantial shortages to the Board of Agriculture and complained that when horses did become available they were often of substandard quality for farm work. Many were old or sick, or they were light vanners that were not of the proper weight and size to pull a plough. Ploughman F. Goldman explained that "the poor horses are now being overworked to an awful extent. They are laden and fatigued almost to death. This is a terrible way to farm."⁸³ Cecil Doidge, an owner-occupier from Holsworthy, explained that "We cannot be expected to increase production with limited manpower, short of horses, and ploughs that have proven useless. Besides, what should we use to pull the ploughs? What should we do with tractors that are unsuited for the land in Devon?"⁸⁴ At the end of 1916 an inadequate supply of horse harnesses and a

⁸² Minutes of the meeting of the Devon Agricultural Committee, 16 July 1918, Devon Record Office, Fortescue of Castle Hill, 1262M/L140.

⁸³ F. Goldman, "Overworked Horses," *Western Morning News*, 6 August 1915, p. 6.

⁸⁴ Cecil Doidge, "Holsworthy Urban Council," *Weekly News*, 14 April 1917, no page numbers. Doidge was a cattle farmer before the war, but switched to crops.

deficiency of skilled ploughmen made the problems in Devon even more acute. It was not until June 1917 that the Board of Agriculture took steps to protect the supply of horses for agricultural use when under Regulation 2T of DORA the sale of farm horses was prevented without a license from the local agricultural board.⁸⁵

With the number of men and horses dwindling, the Board of Agriculture recommended that farmers rely more heavily on farm machinery. Until 1917, however, farm machinery was in short supply, often shared between several farms, and primarily confined to larger farms in southern and eastern Devon.⁸⁶ Though limited, the practice of borrowing machines remained in place until May 1917 when the 'government tractor scheme,' which provided £350,000 for the purchasing of tractors from the United States, was put in place by the Food Production Department. Each county had its own committee to supervise supplies and local agricultural engineers were appointed to supply fuel and spare parts. However, Devon's farmers complained about the substandard machines provided by the government and argued that the tractors spent more time being repaired than ploughing fields.⁸⁷ The government cautioned that the designs for the new machines were still in the experimental stages and urged farmers to avoid misuse by only ploughing new pastures. Of course the problem with the scheme was that in late 1916 the government had made requests for the farmers to increase the acreage of arable land, which could only be done by ploughing up older fields.

The initial decision of the government to leave the fate of the nation's homegrown

⁸⁵ Minutes of the meeting of the Devon Agricultural Committee, 16 July 1918, Devon Record Office, Fortescue of Castle Hill, 1262M/L140.

⁸⁶ Report of the Devon War Agricultural Committee, 6 June 1916, Devon Record Office, Fortescue of Castle Hill, 1262M/L139.

⁸⁷ Report of the Devon War Agricultural Committee, 4 June 1917, Devon Record Office, Fortescue of Castle Hill, 1262M/L139.

food supply to the farmers, with little assistance from the Board of Agriculture proved to be a mistake. In 1915 the county of Devon was divided into four sections based on land holdings. Men, horses, and farming equipment were distributed based on the production portfolios of each region. Appendix 2-2 shows the breakdown of farmland under crop in Devon between 1915 and 1919. As can be seen, the total amount of land farmed in Devon declined during 1916 and 1918, but experienced growth in 1917 and 1919. The total farming acreage for the county was 1,638,000 acres, including 50,000 acres in Dartmoor that were hardly farmable. This total also includes 328,000 acres of pastureland and additional land that lay fallow on four-year rotations. In December 1915 the County War Agricultural Committee for Devon was asked to increase tillage in Devon by 60,000 acres for 1916. An increase of 60,000 acres would require a workforce of 1,200 men and 2,400 horses given that each additional fifty acres required one man and two horses. The Committee concluded that neither the men nor the horses were readily available in Devon. There was a plan to use soldiers on the land for the 1916 corn harvest and for general farm labour, but soldiers were most effectively used on the land in the eastern counties where they could be called back quickly for service. In Devon the only available soldiers for work on the land were those in training camps waiting to be transferred to the east. In June 1915 a plan was put in place that allowed for the release of soldiers from the Territorial battalions between 11 July and 15 October. However, the conditions of work were left up to private contracts between soldiers and farmers, and because call-ups could come at any time, “only about half of the soldiers applied for by agriculturists were actually supplied.”⁸⁸ Therefore, farmers had to work with what they were given. Often

⁸⁸ Horn, *Rural Life in England*, p. 93.

the soldiers were inexperienced farm labourers and required extensive training that made them a costly and sometimes inadequate investment.⁸⁹ The County War Agricultural Committee estimated that if it could secure enough horses and make the most of available labour from women, boys, and soldiers, the county could increase tillage by 30,000 acres, half the amount required by the Board of Agriculture.⁹⁰

However, the Devon War Agricultural Committee was not able to acquire the necessary horses or manpower and without the available replacement labour the county experienced a *loss* of 29,000 acres farmed in 1916. The decline cannot be traced entirely to the fact that there were not enough men and horses on the land, but was also due to a tractor shortage as well as a decline in the number of skilled labourers, including tractor mechanics. As can be seen in Appendix 2-3, the county experienced a decline in the production of cereals and potatoes (although root vegetables increased overall) for the 1916 growing season. The county also witnessed a decline in milk, cheese, pigs, horses, and fruit over the same period. Lord Selborne immediately recommended offering the farmers financial incentives along with better assistance from cultivators and agricultural experts in an attempt to improve production. His plan was rejected in March, but it was revisited in November. Wet weather impaired the autumn harvest and threatened spring cultivation, and the German submarine menace caused further unease. It was again recommended by the Board of Agriculture that the government offer price guarantees for next year's corn harvest and that the labour problem be immediately brought under control. Asquith recognized that the agricultural problem was largely owing to the labour

⁸⁹ Ibid., pp. 95-96.

⁹⁰ County Agricultural Records for Devon: Report for January 1917, 8 January 1917, National Archive, MAF 80/4998.

shortage and that labourers should remain on the land without interference. The Board of Agriculture accepted that the farmers' complaints were just and that the "facts of the situation do not correspond with the Government's decisions." The Board criticized the War Office for overlooking the strategic value of food and stated that disputes between the two had placed considerable pressure on the nation's farmers. It was recommended that local military tribunals be instructed to ensure labour supplies in the counties, as thus far there had been

considerable disparity in the treatment of labour for the land. In the larger producing counties of the southwest [Devon being the largest] labour supplies have been neglected to the point where it is no longer the question of maintaining adequate labour standards, but whether cultivation will cease completely.⁹¹

The Board of Agriculture also recognized that the current wheat and potato crises were the result of the inadequate number of skilled ploughmen and horsemen, as well as the removal of skilled mechanics to solve the tractor problem. By the end of 1916 the Board of Agriculture urged the War Committee that the policies suggested by Lord Selborne in March now be implemented.⁹²

The proposed changes suggested by the Board of Agriculture were reported on in local newspapers where the Board admitted that "recruiting had in some districts depleted the land of the labour necessary to produce sufficient food" and stressed that "everything will be done to stimulate production in the upcoming season. The War Office will not deplete the farms of labour necessary for the spring sowing."⁹³ The Devon Farmers' Union, which found validation for its efforts in the government's recognition of poor

⁹¹ Home Food Supplies Report Printed for the Cabinet, 16 November 1916, National Archive, MAF 60/105, p. 1.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ "Farmers and the War: Government Response," *Exeter Flying Post*, 18 November 1916.

management in the agricultural sector, welcomed the suggested changes. However, it remained critical of past government policy and was skeptical that the labour problem would be solved. Shortly after the Board of Agriculture's report appeared in local newspapers the Council of the Devon Farmers' Union responded:

We have been asking to be governed ever since the war broke upon us, but we haven't seen any signs of it yet! Had we been governed properly two years ago the cost of wheat would not be what it is today at market. The Government couldn't guarantee prices because of the existing fiscal policy which cannot be altered. OH, NO! Had we been governed we should have had plenty of wheat in store and we should have retained the ploughmen to grow more... What a farce it is to say that people want to be governed! That is what we elect members of Parliament to do and then we are told that they have been driven to things against their will! Public opinion has to make our Government do things. They were told that the farms needed labour and supplies and nothing was done. The public then turns on the farmers because of high prices and calls us turncoats because we don't send our labourers to war. Might they be reminded that there are two battles being waged, one against the Germans and the other against our own Government. It is not the farmers' patriotism that should be questioned.⁹⁴

This statement in no way suggests that Devon's farmers were unpatriotic or unaware of Britain's food problems. On the contrary, most farmers supported the war effort and worked to increase agricultural production. The complaint was to reassert the Unions' position that elected representatives were not properly caring for the interests of the farming community. The Union asserted that Devon's farmers felt pressure from the government and at the same time the public had turned on them due to high prices and the perception that farmers and their sons received special treatment by the government and

⁹⁴ Jan Ridd, "Farmers and the War," *Exeter Flying Post*, 25 November 1916. Farmers remained skeptical of government assurances throughout the war. See, "Food Production: A Gloomy Outlook," *Weekly News*, 21 October 1916, no page number; "Englishmen First, Farmers Second," *South Devon Weekly Express*, 24 November 1916, p. 2; Barbara Willows, "Shortage of Labour on Farms: Complaints at Dawlish," *Express and Echo*, 28 March 1917, p. 4; A Tenant Farmer, "Parish Agriculture," *Western Morning News*, 28 March 1917, p. 3; "Concessions," *Western Times*, 26 January 1917, p. 6; "Farmers Unite over Labour Supplies," *Weekly News*, 1 November 1918, no page number.

military tribunals. What the Farmers' Union wanted was increased government controls beyond what was in place by November 1916. Rather than the Board of Agriculture simply affirming that mistakes had been made, the Farmers' Union wanted tighter controls placed on manpower, supplies, and equipment, but they also wanted government recognition of the farmers' efforts and the sacrifices they had made.⁹⁵ The County War Agricultural Committee supported the grievances outlined by the Devon Farmers' Union and encouraged further action by the agricultural representatives to protect the county's labour supplies.⁹⁶

At the end of 1916 the complaints raised by Devon's farmers were considerable, but comparable with farmers across the country. Farmers experienced pressure from the government to increase the food supply, while at the same time suffering criticisms from the local population and the press. The end result was that many farmers, particularly owner-occupiers and smallholders who were especially affected by conscription and the removal of horses from the land, became increasingly frustrated at the government, Devonians, and the war itself. Although Devon's farmers remained divided on issues pertaining to labour, machinery, and government directives, they recognized the need for cooperation. The ability of the farmers' to influence government policy was tied to the work of the County War Agricultural Committees and the Devon Farmers' Union, which eventually succeeded in obtaining government guarantees, but until 1917 the Liberal government was reluctant to make substantial policy changes.

A New Agricultural Policy

⁹⁵ Letter from the C.R. Beatly of the Devon Farmers' Union to R. Searle of the County War Agricultural Committee, 17 November 1917, Devon Record Office, Lord Lieutenancy Papers, 1262M/L146.

⁹⁶ Devon War Agricultural Committee Report to Lord Fortescue, 21 November 1916, Devon Record Office, Lord Lieutenancy Papers, 1262M/L146.

While Asquith dithered, the course of the war forced unprecedented government intervention into the agricultural sector. The removal of Asquith from power and the appointment of Lloyd George as Prime Minister led to the implementation of agricultural policies that had first been introduced earlier in the war. In January 1917 the Prime Minister and R. E. Prothero, President of the Board of Agriculture,⁹⁷ outlined a new plan in favour of government intervention in the nation's agricultural policy. In a speech to the Board of Agriculture, Prothero appealed to the farmers' sense of loyalty and reminded them that the threat posed to the nation by Germany was not the fault of the British and that "under the pressure of War, we are associated from top to bottom as one family, for one aim, victory." He stressed that Britain's dependence on foreign products was a great weakness and that it was time for the farmers to now put aside their desire for profits and to think "first and last, and all the time, how you can best meet the national necessities...It is up to you, the farmers and labourers of this country, to make victory sure by putting out the last ounce of your strength and of your skill." To help ensure increased production the government was confident that labour demands would be met and those men of military age who were working on the land would not be called for service.⁹⁸

Apart from a resolution to the labour problems, Prothero also announced that a new programme was needed to assist the farmers and that wage increases and price guarantees had to be considered. Prothero stated that the "farmers' ignorance of the agriculture situation only makes our task more difficult" and that greater assistance to the

⁹⁷ R.E. Prothero was a Conservative MP for Oxford University from 1914 to 1919.

⁹⁸ Board of Agriculture Report of Speech by Mr. Prothero, 18 January 1917, Devon Record Office, Lord Lieutenancy Papers, 1262M/L113.

farmers was required to prevent further losses in 1917.⁹⁹ On 1 January 1917 the Board of Agriculture established the Food Production Department (FPD), and T.H. Middleton, its first director, was given the job of stimulating arable cultivation. The FPD immediately put into effect the 'plough policy' that sought to increase the arable land by three million acres, a return to the 1870 position when British agriculture fed twenty-six million people compared to the sixteen million fed under the livestock regime of 1914. To assist the plough policy the FPD, under Regulation 2L of DORA, was granted permission to access unoccupied land and under Regulation 2M had the power to take possession of land already in use, commandeer horses and equipment or take any action that would secure higher food production. The last plank of the new agricultural policy was the founding of Executive Committees to ensure that the Board's policies were carried out. The continued decentralization of agriculture, as seen through the formation of the Executive Committees, was important. It demonstrated the government's awareness of the regional variations that afflicted Britain's agricultural industry and showed a willingness on the part of policy makers to make the necessary changes. These committees, comprised of farmers and landowners, had the power to advance cultivation by demanding improvements in husbandry on any farm or field or prohibit the growing of non-essential crops. They could also negotiate with the military authorities to secure necessary labour by temporarily releasing men from the armed forces. The Executive Committees possessed more authority than the County War Agricultural Committees and in theory could ensure that the farmers had the necessary labour, horses, supplies, and fertilizer. Members could also serve as arbitrators between the farmers, individually or collectively,

⁹⁹ Ibid.

and the Board of Agriculture on questions such as crop rotations, quotas, and prices.

The farmers' victory was short lived and the authority of the Executive Committees, designed to protect agriculture, was discredited when in January 1917 the government announced the decision of the War Office to remove an additional 30,000 men from agriculture. The Devon War Agricultural Committee protested the move and sent a letter to the Board of Agriculture stating: "This Committee views with most serious alarm the recent decision of the War Office to call from Agriculture 30,000 of the most valuable workers on the land and urge that the order be at once revoked and the men already called up be returned to their civil occupations."¹⁰⁰ The War Agricultural Committee was assured that replacement labour in the form of 800 German prisoners-of-war was being sent to the western counties.¹⁰¹ The Council of the Devon Farmers' Union called an emergency meeting to address the new demands made by the government and reported that their "efforts have not been taken seriously, nor have our sacrifices in this war. The Government made promises that it had no intention to keep and now the military authorities are calling up more men from agriculture."¹⁰² Attempts by the farmers to negotiate labour supplies proved to be ineffective and the County War Agricultural Committees were powerless to defend the position of the farmers. In Totnes the War Agricultural Committee commented that although farmers were skeptical that increased production was possible, it reminded local farmers' unions that they had been "calling for a strong Government for the last two or three years and now that they had

¹⁰⁰ Report by the Devon County War Agricultural Committee sent to the Board of Agriculture, 16 January 1917, National Archive, MAF 80/4998. There is no indication as to whether or not the move was protested by the Executive Committees.

¹⁰¹ Letter for the Board of Agriculture, 24 January 1917, Devon Record Office, Lord Lieutenantcy Papers, 1262M/L113.

¹⁰² Report of the Council of the Devon Farmers' Union to Devon County Council, 3 February 1917, Devon Record Office, Lord Lieutenantcy Papers, 1262M/7/0/145.

one, it was their duty to support the Government to the fullest extent they could.” The Chairman of the Committee recognized that the farmers had been ‘pin-pricked’ by the government in recent years, but if they refused to help at the present time and the country was reduced to the verge of starvation, the towns people would come out and perhaps some farmers would be hung up in the trees.”¹⁰³ Gregory Nelson, a farmer from South Hans, noted that

The recent decisions made by the Board of Agriculture are ridiculous. And why? The explanation is this: It is a most delicate organism, the agricultural community. It is not like a grocery trade. There you possess a machine under your control. But in agriculture you must have good will; you must implant confidence in those involved. You must be liked; you must understand the art of making people work for you. It seems ridiculous, but it is so. The State has made grievous errors in dealing with the agrarian population in the manner it has.¹⁰⁴

Similarly, Henry Pearse, a farm owner from Plympton, stated,

The Board of Agriculture preaches about patriotism and the need for farmers to do their part. Patriotism has been so overused in this war that it ceases to have any meaning. The Press and Government call on the farmers to do more. But all that is needed is for the government and its various committees to cease talking about it and act by sending back the agricultural labourers without delay, not from the Army alone, but the Dockyards and other places before it is too late. Thousands of acres of corn will need to come in, and anyone who knows anything about farming knows that it is after the harvest when all the work needs to be done. The government gives us men for the harvest and then takes them immediately. But how would you like us to guarantee corn and crops in the spring when we have no men to help plant them? If the men are not available in January and February no ploughing for spring corn can possibly be done.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³ “Totnes War Agricultural Committee,” *Western Guardian*, 1 February 1917, p. 4.

¹⁰⁴ Gregory Nelson, “The Farmer and the State,” *Western Morning News*, 5 February 1917, p. 4. See also, Letter from William Aubrey to Lord Fortescue, 14 May 1917, Devon Record Office, Fortescue of Castle Hill, 1262M/L151. Aubrey was an owner-occupier from Ottery St. Mary and was protesting the recent decision of the Board of Agriculture to remove more men from agriculture.

¹⁰⁵ Henry Pearse, “Farmers and the War,” *Western Morning News*, 1 December 1917, p. 3. Pearse owned a sizable farm, around 450 acres, in south Devon (just north of Plymouth). Also see, W.H. Chamings, “The 30,000 Men that Matter,” *Western Daily Mercury*, 7 August 1918, p. 4. The issue of concern was that in

The reactions of Nelson, Pearse, and others were understandable. In the first two years of the war the laissez-faire system remained unchanged and although farmers called for more government intervention the changes they hoped for were guarantees for corn prices, as well as labour and supplies. Instead, the new government policy introduced changes to agriculture that further limited the farmers' ability to meet the government's demands.

Although protests from farmers and the Devon War Agricultural Committee did not prevent the removal of more men from agriculture, the farmers' demands were not completely rejected. Recognizing that the number of men on the land continued to decrease, in Part I of the Act the government agreed to guarantee corn prices for the next six years. This policy was enshrined in the Corn Production Act introduced to the House of Commons in April 1917 and passed into law on 21 August. Labour and the Liberals believed that such guarantees gave an unfair advantage to the farmer at the expense of the community and that such a policy was designed to buy the farmers cooperation. However, despite those objections, the Board of Agriculture believed that price guarantees were the best way to entice farmers to increase production without the fear of suffering substantial losses. Part II of the Act guaranteed wages for farm labourers at 25s per week (a good wage for farm labourers), which would be enforced by fines for employers who did not comply, and was also intended to protect labour supplies for agriculture after the war.¹⁰⁶ While Parts I and II offered some protection to the farmers, Part III of the Act imposed rent restrictions on landowners and ultimately denied them the

other counties the number of men taken from the land exceeded what the Board of Agriculture laid down in January 1917. See, "The Danger of Taking More Men from the Land," *Western Times*, 1 June 1917, p. 2.

¹⁰⁶ Dewey, *British Agriculture in the First World War*, pp. 93-94.

right to profit from wartime inflation. Part IV gave the Board of Agriculture considerable power over land cultivation. The rights of landowners were further curtailed as the Board had the ability to decide how land would be used most effectively. Offenders did have the right to appeal decisions made by the Board, but if the appeal was rejected the Board could enter and cultivate the holding as it saw fit.¹⁰⁷

Although the farmers did not succeed in preventing the government from removing more men from the land, they did succeed in a number of other ways. Prior to the declaration of war the agricultural sector in Devon experienced a dramatic decline in its labour force and the farmers hoped that the new wage scheme for agricultural labours would prevent further losses in the post-war period. Also, the war brought attention to the deficiencies of farm equipment in the county and the new tractor scheme was intended to boost production in upcoming years. As will be seen, the government's willingness to compromise encouraged Devon's farmers to do the same, at least to some degree.

Prisoners of War, Conscientious Objectors, and the Women's Land Army

In early 1917 the Board of Agriculture issued a new plough order for Devon.¹⁰⁸ There was considerable opposition to the plough campaign, particularly from farmers who owned small to medium sized farms, and concerns were mostly connected to labour shortages and the distribution of farm equipment to replace horses. In January 1917 it was suggested that POWs be used in batches of seventy-five guarded by thirty-five soldiers. The counties of the south-west responded positively – Wiltshire and Somerset agreed to the programme – but the authorities in Devon were hesitant. The Board of Agriculture

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 94-95. This section of the Act was limited to one year from the date the Act was passed.

¹⁰⁸ County Executive Committee, 27 November 1916, Devon Record Office, Fortescue of Castle Hill, 1262M/L151.

had tried to use prisoners of war in the spring of 1916 but the public was unreceptive. Devonians were cautious about the dangers of having prisoners, even if supervised, free on the land. The only prisoners-of-war employed on the land in Devon before 1916 were on farms on Dartmoor (where the prison was located), a relatively secluded area.¹⁰⁹ The concern was providing adequate housing for workers and the Devon County Council and the Devon Farmers' Union were cautious about using prisoner labour.¹¹⁰ However, the acute shortage of skilled ploughmen in Devon in late 1917 overcame these hesitations. In September the Council agreed to the use of an additional 350 prisoners on the land, particularly for heavy labour. Overall the prisoners employed in Devon worked well, but slowly due to poor housing and food, and the lack of motivation. Devon's farmers were thankful for male replacement labour, but there was always concern about the integrity of the programme. Merrill Spencer, a tenant farmer from St. Sidwell's parish, Exeter, conveyed his opinion that

few understand the complexity of this war. Farmers want to produce and to retain enough labour to do so. But when the government offers prisoners of war we must consider carefully what their use will mean. Has our war effort come to the point where we must enlist the help of our enemy? If so, where does the error lie? Is the government incapable of maintaining the most basic of necessities, or has it so little faith in the ability of the people that it is willing to turn our efforts over to the enemy?¹¹¹

Many farmers did not want to admit or show need or vulnerability to the enemy, and

¹⁰⁹ Devon County Report, 28 December 1916, Devon Record Office, Fortescue of Castle Hill, 1262M/L151.

¹¹⁰ There was a shortage of cottages in Devon and those that were available were in need of repair. Report on Housing August 1914, 23 August 1914, Devon Record Office, Okehampton, Sanitation and Housing Committee, R3/3-0/41 Bundle 32. Report on Housing, 29 January 1917, Devon Record Office, Torbay Housing and Town Improvement Committee, R4582A-0/PC/57. Report of Housing for 1914-1918, 1 February 1919, Devon Record Office, Crediton Housing Committee, R4/3-0/C/12.

¹¹¹ Merrill Spencer, "The Farmer's Position," *Salcombe Gazette*, 28 August 1917, no page number.

some were uncomfortable with having enemy soldiers working on their land.¹¹² For others, the need for labour won out. A farm owner from Peter Tavy petitioned the Devon County Council to accept the assistance of prisoners-of-war on the land, at least in limited numbers.¹¹³ Six hundred POWs were employed in Devon during the First World War, but it remained a source of unease until the end of the war.¹¹⁴

Other forms of labour were also considered but proved to be ineffective. The use of school children that began in 1916 was limited and remained so throughout the war. Children were not suited to manual labour and had limited availability during the school year.¹¹⁵ Attempts were also made to use interned aliens but they were not permitted to work in coastal areas or around military camps.¹¹⁶ The most complete failure was the use of conscientious objectors. Here the problem was the strength of public hostility. Some farmers refused to use conscientious objectors out of fear that it would attract further public criticism. The War Agricultural Committee reported that “any suggestion for the use of conscientious objectors on the land in Devon will not be considered by local farmers.”¹¹⁷ In a Letter to the Editor of the *Western Times* a farmer from Totnes wrote “We farmers have already come under much criticism from people about the county

¹¹² Report of the Devon Farmers’ Union, 23 October 1917, Devon Record Office, Wallcott Family of Tiverton, 317/M/26.

¹¹³ Letter from C.P. Wale to Devon County Council, 26 November 1917, Devon Record Office, Fortescue of Castle Hill, 1262/L151.

¹¹⁴ Prisoners of War in Devon, Report to Lord Fortescue December 1917, Devon Record Office, Fortescue of Castle Hill, 1262M/LH2 and 1262M/M/6122. Not all of these men were employed in agriculture.

¹¹⁵ The use of school children could be troublesome and although they were used on the land throughout the war there were strict regulations in place regarding their employment. For example, children were only allowed to work nine hours a day and if farmers violated these regulations they were fined 20s. The result was that some farmers were reluctant to employ child labourers. “Farmers’ Woes,” 6 July 1915, *Western Morning News*, p. 6; “Farmers’ Labour: Swansea,” *North Devon Herald*, 17 May 1917, no page number.

¹¹⁶ County Executive Committee, 26 December 1916, Devon Record Office, Lord Fortescue Papers, 1262M/L151.

¹¹⁷ Devon War Agricultural Committee, 23 March 1917, National Archive, MAF 80/4998.

calling us unpatriotic and profiteers that I fear employing traitors would only further madden the public.”¹¹⁸ Public opinion dissuaded the Executive Committees from pressuring local farmers to use conscientious objectors on the land.

Suggestions advocating the use of women in agriculture had been brought before the County War Agricultural Committee in March 1915, and in late 1915 Women’s War Agricultural Committees were formed.¹¹⁹ Lord Selborne met with representatives from all of the counties of England and Wales to work out a plan to bring women to the land and to encourage the farmers’ acceptance. Initial reports from the War Agricultural Committees showed that some farmers were skeptical about the use of women in agriculture, but the Committees reminded farmers that if the war continued, they would not be able to surmount labour difficulties without the use of female labour.¹²⁰ In February 1916 the Devon War Agricultural Committee established a Register of Women Pupils to identify how many women in the county were willing to learn milking and general farm practices and how many farmers were willing to provide training. In August 1916 the Women’s War Service Committee determined that there was a total of 2,472 women in Devon available to work on the land, but that the response from farmers remained muted.¹²¹ Part of the problem was that the response from women did not encourage confidence. Susan Grayzel argues that since the Land Army generally attracted single women from the middle classes, many had to be persuaded of the need for their

¹¹⁸ A Farmer, “The Farmer’s Position,” *Western Times*, 9 March 1917, p. 3.

¹¹⁹ The use of women on the land was first introduced in early 1915 but the plan was not well organized before 1917 and the decision to use women was left up to individual farmers. Horn, *Rural Life in England*, pp. 114–115.

¹²⁰ Report on Conference Between Representatives of County Committees and The Right Hon. The Earl of Selborne: “Women’s Labour on the Land,” 31 December 1915, Devon Record Office, Fortescue of Castle Hill, 1262M/L141. The War Agricultural Committees’ reports are not specific as to which farmers were opposed to the use of women on the land.

¹²¹ Devon War Agricultural Committee Minutes, 16 August 1916, National Archive, MAF 80/4998.

employment.¹²² And, women were aware of other employment opportunities where the work was less arduous, which helps to explain the overall decline of women in agriculture in the years prior to the war, and the difficulties in brining women to the land.¹²³ Many women, particularly in Devon's smaller parishes, did not want to leave home to contribute to the war effort, but they were willing to do light work in their own communities.¹²⁴ There was no inclination on the part of many farmers to let them do what was considered 'women's work,' nor was there a need for it because the farmers had the assistance of daughters and wives to do lighter chores. A report from the Devon County Council printed in the *Weekly News* noted that the "response from women and farmers was not encouraging and that lists gathered by the Women's War Agricultural Committees do not reflect the actual attitudes of the people of Devon."¹²⁵ The lists compiled by the Committee suggested more acceptance of female agricultural labours than was determined by the County Council.¹²⁶ Some felt that it was unreasonable to expect women to perform "manual work when there were men about the community," and many farmers believed that the need for women was not so pressing because there were still eligible men "if the rich would reduce their staffs—gardeners, gatekeepers and

¹²² Susan Grayzel, *Women and the First World War* (London: Pearson, 2002), pp. 42-43.

¹²³ Horn, *Rural Life in England*, pp. 113-114.

¹²⁴ Board of Agriculture Report: "How to Enrol[sic.] Country Women For War Service in Their Spare Time," 22 March 1916, Devon Record Office, Fortescue of Castle Hill, 1262L/L14; Report on Women's Labour in War Time, Devon Agricultural Committee, Women's Land Army, Devon Record Office, Fortescue of Castle Hill, 1262M/L122. See. T. McKay, "The Shortage of Labour: Harvest Work for Women," *Weekly News*, 21 June 1915, no page number; "Women and the Food Supply," *Weekly News*, 24 June 1915, no page number; Kathleen McLeod, "Women and Farm Labour," *Weekly News*, 12 February 1915, no page number; "Notes By the Way," *Weekly News*, 12 June 1915, no page number.

¹²⁵ "Women and Farm Work," *Weekly News, Cornwall & Devon Times*, 1 January 1916. A similar response was noted in North Cornwall where only a few dozen names had been gathered for female labour in agriculture. While the use of women on the land was limited in Devon, the programme was much more effective in Cornwall where women's committees were plentiful and many farmers had been willing to use and train women in farm work. Horn, *Rural Life in England*, pp. 117-118.

¹²⁶ There is no indication of how the Devon County Council came to this conclusion.

butlers.”¹²⁷ Each group measured the worth of their own sacrifice against the perceived sacrifice of others. In this sense, neither the farmers nor the women considered their hesitations to be unpatriotic.

To determine the extent of opposition or support town meetings were held in Devon in the final months of 1916. In December 1916, Alice Midmay, president of the Women’s War Service Committee for Devon, held demonstrations to show how effective women could be on the land. However, her efforts proved unproductive and ceased in late 1917. In conjunction with the demonstrations a committee was established in late 1916 to address concerns from the farmers and to answer questions and provide information for women considering work in agriculture.¹²⁸ Initially questions from farmers mocked the system. The farmers’ inquiries as to “What kind of dresses the women would wear in the fields?” demonstrated that the very idea of women as replacement labour was still not being taken seriously. Likewise, there were reports of farmers (unidentified) harassing women who had undertaken agricultural work in the county.¹²⁹ A farmer from Stoke Fleming was convinced that women “would not even be able to hoe potatoes for dinner, and to expect a woman to use a plough is ridiculous” and another farmer in Dartmouth was stubborn in his belief that one twelve-year-old boy was the equivalent of two women workers. In response to government suggestions that alternative labour be used, at the Annual Meeting of the Dartmouth and District Farmers the farmers decided to petition the Education Authorities to allow children over the age of twelve to leave school for the duration of the war, rather than employ women, or at the very least, to employ women in

¹²⁷ A Concerned Woman, “Women on the Land,” *Totnes Times*, 28 October 1916, p. 4.

¹²⁸ Circular letter to the Women’s County Farm Labour Committees, 5 December 1916, Devon Record Office, Fortescue of Castle Hill, 1262M/L141 Bundle 30, pp. 1-3.

¹²⁹ “Women to work the Land?” *Crediton Chronicle*, 30 December 1916; “Blackguarded by Farmers” *Western Guardian*, 27 January 1916, p. 2.

conjunction with school age boys.¹³⁰

The agricultural community was not unified on the issue of replacement labour, and its response to the labour crisis is an interesting one. Women were capable of performing heavy manual labour in munitions factories and women had been assisting farmers, particularly those who owned smaller farms, on the land long before the outbreak of the war. Prior to 1914, 246 women worked as agricultural labourers in Devon and many farmers' wives and daughters often took part in farm activities, particularly around harvest time. Women were able to perform a number of jobs on a farm, such as haying, harvesting fruits and vegetables, and feeding animals, and rural women may have been able to drive heavy farm equipment, and run a team of horses. Further, the physical labour performed by women on a daily basis in the home was completely ignored by some male workers and employers. Conversely, women would not have been able to do heavy lifting, such as putting wheels on wagons, lifting sacks of potatoes, or castrating bullocks which required considerable upper body strength. The belief that women were inadequate as labourers, a view most likely held by members of the gentry and yeomanry,¹³¹ was reinforced by high unemployment among women prior to 1914, and the fact that they were wives and mothers reinforced the idea that "women were inherently deficient as workers."¹³² Some of Devon's farmers were thus motivated by

¹³⁰ "Dartmouth Farmers' Meeting," *Dartmouth & South Hans Chronicle*, 17 March 1916, no page number. With regard to the employment of children, the Devon County Council Local Education Authority issued Labour Certificates that allowed children to aged eleven and older to leave school for full-time employment so long as they had already met the yearly attendance requirements.

¹³¹ Women from the working classes may well have worked on farms or participated in the operation of a farm on some level during their lives, but this was certainly not a role performed by women of a higher social status and so it is not surprising that farmers from these social groups would have considered women unfit for farm work, and in some cases this would have been true. See, "War Work for Women," *Western Guardian*, 27 January 1916, p. 2.

¹³² Thom, *Nice Girls and Rude Girls*, pp. 26-29, 28. For example, A.M. Alford, the owner of a large

gender presumptions and the dictates of tradition rather than by arguments based on rational efficiency. Another explanation for why certain farmers were reluctant to use women on the land was that the larger estate farms generally employed a permanent male labour force, as well as casual labourers during peak periods and, because there was no shortage of male labourers in Devon until 1915, the use of alternative labour had not been a major source of concern. The reluctance of some farmers to employ women had as much to do with self-interest as it did the perceived quality of replacement labourers.

Skepticism regarding the use of women on the land was both condemned and supported by locals. Men and women were hesitant about imperiling traditional values and considered it “a disgrace to take young women from the home and place them in trousers and boots on a field like a man.”¹³³ Others supported the use of female labour and thought that where “the men have gone the woman has quietly stepped in to pick up the dropped work and it is a splendid scene to see the women and men working as comrades, not as rivals.” Even the sympathetic voices assumed that “after the war she will surrender it again to take up the homework of wifehood and motherhood, a woman’s true and noblest vocation.”¹³⁴ Regardless of the sluggish response to the Women’s Land Army in 1916, the Devon County Council was convinced that it could have useful application on the land in Devon.

estate in south Devon, told the Appeals Tribunal that he could not employ women on his farms because while women were “all very well for a little haymaking,” they “cannot do the dirty, heavy work in the yards during the winter.” “Farmers Must Try Women,” *Teignmouth Post*, 27 October 1916, p. 5.

¹³³ Jack and Olive Hareford, “Women and Agriculture,” *Western Morning News*, 9 May 1916, p. 3; “Women to Work on the Farms,” *Totnes Times*, 5 February 1916; “War Work for Women: Prejudices,” *Western Guardian*, 27 January 1916, p. 2.

¹³⁴ A Bystander, “Women and the War,” *Western Morning News*, 17 June 1916, p. 7; Bernard Wale, “Women Workers on the Land,” *Crediton Chronicle*, 30 December 1916; Jessica Symons, “Women’s Work on the Land,” *Totnes Times*, 2 December 1916; “Women in Agriculture,” *Western Morning News*, 9 May 1916, p. 3.

Despite the disinclination of some farmers to use women in agriculture, the Women's Land Army (WLA) was established in January 1917 to provide a trained permanent source of labour. 'Doing one's bit' was the clarion call of the WLA and the government relied on the spirit of volunteerism to bring women to the land. At the same time, Alice Midmay began a campaign to encourage support for the WLA. In April 1917 the following article appeared in the *Salcombe Gazette*:

A large and daily increasing number of women in Devon are enrolling for the duration of the war as National Service Volunteers, in the Women's Land Army, but provision has to be made for their training in agriculture, and for their placing on the land.

With this end in view we are earnestly appealing to all landowners and farmers:

1. to apply for the services of women already trained at Seale Hayne College, or elsewhere.
2. to give facilities for training a succession of pupils, taking one or two or more at a time and training them for four weeks, thus providing "Practice Farms" under the scheme.
3. to engage "Bursary recruits" ie. women who will go to a farmer with the intention of staying on and who will receive from the Board of Agriculture for the first three weeks a maintenance grant of 15/-a week. During these three weeks the employers pays nothing for the services of the worker, after that time he will be expected to pay her full wages.

I firmly believe that women will realize the immense opportunity endeavour open to them on the land and will rise to the emergency and if agriculturists will equally patriotically come forward with offers to train them, then agriculture will come triumphantly out of the crisis in which it finds itself at present and the increased production of food which is absolutely vital to the attainment of ultimate and complete victory in this supreme struggle for right and humanity will be ensured.¹³⁵

No training was promised, but the women often received instruction. Initially the programme allowed for a wage of 15s a week, a uniform, and a free rail ticket. There was

¹³⁵ Alice Midmay, "Employment of Women on the Land," *Salcombe Gazette*, 27 April 1917, no page number.

a rush to join in the spring of 1917, but numbers dropped considerably in the autumn and winter.¹³⁶ The first wave of volunteers experienced public scrutiny regarding their participation in a male dominated industry and farm workers begrudged the recruitment of unskilled female labour. The substitution of female for male labour was a contentious issue in wartime Britain. This new labour force was paid less money, 15s compared to 25s for a general farm labourer, and with the arrival of women on the land more men were released for military service. As Violet Milbrow explained, “many of the men felt ill toward us. We understood what our presence meant for them.”¹³⁷ The Board of Agriculture quickly realized that proper training was needed to counter the farmer’s opposition, as well as to increase the credibility of the WLA, and proper pay was the best way to convince women to work on the land. The Board of Agriculture set up a programme that required courses in milking, feeding calves, hoeing, haymaking, and harvesting duties to be completed before the women were sent to work on farms.¹³⁸

Regardless of training, the women of the Land Army had little practical experience and farmers often had to spend weeks retraining them. By the summer of 1917 the programme had been so poorly received that the Farmers’ Union recommended to the Devon War Agricultural Committee that the FPD scrap it and use local labour supplies instead.¹³⁹ Pamela Horn has suggested that the women of Devon refused to work until more farmers’ sons gave themselves over for military service, directly connecting

¹³⁶ Wilfred Edward Shewell-Cooper, *Land Girl: A Handbook for the Women’s Land Army* (London: The English Universities Press, LTD., 1942), pp. 8-9.

¹³⁷ War Diaries of Violet Milbrow, 27 August 1917, Pelar Family, Devon Record Office, P289.

¹³⁸ Shewell-Cooper, *Land Girl: A Handbook for the Women’s Land Army*, pp. 8-9. In late 1916 the Seale-Hayne Agricultural College, Newton Abbot, announced its decision to provide a month’s free training for women at the College. However, training was not guaranteed and women wishing to enroll had to apply at the nearest Registrar (Women’s War Service). “Women Workers on the Land,” *Crediton Chronicle*, 20 December 1916. During training women were paid only 10s 6d a week.

¹³⁹ Devon War Agricultural Committee, 25 July 1917, National Archive, MAF 80/4998.

women's work on the land to a display of their patriotism. Furthermore, she argues that it was the farmers' refusal to use women that prevented the programme from becoming a success. Instead, local villagers were forced to carry the weight of extra work.¹⁴⁰ Horn's argument does not deny the farmers' patriotism, but it does bring it into question. While her point is valid, it is possible that recruiters faced other problems. The Women's War Service Committee report suggested that low numbers for the Land Army could have been explained by its late development and the number of organizations vying for women's labour. The Land Army had to compete with the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps and the Voluntary Aid Detachments, both of which enjoyed considerable popularity during the war, and had already absorbed a large number of potential recruits.¹⁴¹ Further, there could be significant waiting time between joining, training, testing, and employment and in the meantime some women found employment elsewhere. Once trained the women were dependent on the farmers for employment and this could take a substantial amount of time because even if a woman was accepted as a farm labourer there remained the question of billeting, which was in short supply. Although some farmers were unwilling to billet women, they were willing to find accommodations for soldiers.¹⁴² The WLA was hastily planned and implemented and time was needed to make adjustments based on the practical application of female labour on the land.¹⁴³ Suggesting that the women's actions were entirely patriotic over-generalizes the attitudes and beliefs of those women who participated in the Land Army.

Despite low recruitment numbers the programme was not jettisoned and

¹⁴⁰ Horn, *Rural Life in England*, pp. 81-82, 72-86, 136.

¹⁴¹ Devon War Agricultural Committee Minutes, 29 January 1917, National Archive, MAF 80/4998.

¹⁴² Horn, *Rural Life in England*, p. 128.

¹⁴³ Shewell-Cooper, *Land Girl*, pp. 10-11.

resistance eventually faded. This can partly be explained by the desire of some farmers to appear more sympathetic to the military tribunals. At a meeting of the Honiton War Agricultural Committee a farm owner asked if employing women would be detrimental when he applied for exemption for a male labourer. The Chairman of the Committee (who was also the Chairman of the local military tribunal) replied that a farmer who employed women “showed that he was doing his best to obtain what labour he was able. But when a farmer did not employ women the Tribunal was inclined to think that the man had not been taking advantage of women labour because he had plenty of men to work for him.”¹⁴⁴ Farmers’ approval of women agricultural labourers was also tied to economic considerations. In Dartmouth branch of the Farmers’ Union quickly agreed to the use of women on the land and the Dartmouth Farmers’ Committee sent out representatives to every home in the borough seeking volunteers for agricultural work. According to the Committee this change of heart came from the Committee’s recognition that women were successfully serving the United Kingdom as nurses and doctors on the continent and were encouraged by the “willingness of Suffragettes to set aside their personal agendas for the greater good.”¹⁴⁵ While this is undoubtedly true, in 1916 Dartmouth farmers experienced a decline in production values making the use of alternative labour necessary. Although opposition to the use of female labour was slow to change, and in many ways continued to be connected to pre-war ideas about gender appropriate work, farmers were ultimately motivated by both patriotic and economic reasons.

¹⁴⁴ “Tribunals and Unpatriotic Farmers” *Cornish and Devon Post*, 24 March 1917, p. 4.

¹⁴⁵ Wasley, *Devon in the Great War*, p. 85. See also, Sylvia Calmady-Hamlyn, “Farmers and women Labour: Good Work at Bridestowe,” *Launceston Weekly News*, 25 November 1916, no page number.

The removal of 30,000 men from agriculture in January 1917 was followed by the removal of 20,000 more in June and the need for new sources of labour became critical.¹⁴⁶ By mid-year it was not simply that men were being removed from the land, agricultural practices had also changed from 1916. The plough campaign meant that the nature of the work was more labour intensive than it had been for livestock and more labourers were required than were needed in 1914. The decision by some farmers to employ women had little to do with patriotism and much to do with personal circumstances. Wilfred Denning owned a 250 acre farm in western Devon that had been passed down from his father and his father before him. Denning complained,

I worked hard my whole life. My sons and I have worked this land for 20 years and my men have been with me for 10 years or more. People think that the farms are making so much money, and some do, but many don't, especially small farms. People don't realise that this is our livelihood, we have spent our lives on the land and it is no shame to protect it.¹⁴⁷

Denning willingly employed women and young boys on his farm. Others, however, were more concerned with protecting production rates and profits. 'A Devon Farmer,' who refused to join the Devon Farmers' Union during the war, demonstrates this point. He felt that the

farmers are guided by their wallets, not their patriotism. Statements and resolutions passed at the Union meetings are to benefit the farmers and are not fair or reasonable. An increase in wages is granted to farm workers to keep them on the farms, but farmers and landowners try to recoup their losses by charging more for rents. We make money from the poorest labourers and their families, but give nothing in return. We claim to attach such great importance to our men when we plead with the Tribunals, but we do not share the profits we are getting. We don't encourage women to help us, we don't accept offers for prisoner assistance and when it comes

¹⁴⁶ Devon Agricultural Executive Committee, 19 June 1916, Devon Record Office, Lord Lieutenantcy Papers, 1262M/LD/151.

¹⁴⁷ Wilfred Denning, "Devon Farms," *Salcombe Gazette*, 18 October 1916, no page number.

to conscientious objectors we all of a sudden find our patriotism.¹⁴⁸

Likewise, William Laity, another farmer, expressed his opinion that

I cannot keep silent while the Devon Farmers' Union continues its disgraceful haggling for more money amid the immeasurable sacrifices of millions of our fellow countrymen. I hope Lord Rhondda will stick to his guns. If the farmers will not produce, it has nothing to do with patriotism, and everything to do with greed.¹⁴⁹

As can be seen, the farmers were not a wholly unified group guided by a single set of class interests. Some tenant farmers and owner-occupiers suffered economic hardship between 1914 and 1918, while some larger farms made substantial economic gains and profited from the wartime market. Although the Cerd Production Act tried to regulate rents, the Act was flawed. Prices fluctuated, as did transportation costs, but rents, once set, were upheld and maintained by the landowners.¹⁵⁰ Depending on the nature of the landlord-tenant agreement, rent changes could have been especially detrimental for tenant farmers. If prices dropped and transportation costs went up, rents were beyond what they could reasonably afford to pay.¹⁵¹ Smallholder owner-occupiers were hurt most by labour shortages because they generally depended on their sons and daughters for the daily running of the farm. However, because their farms were small the authorities often determined that the farm could be run with less labour, perhaps one son (or none), and the farmer's daughters and wife. The other option was to employ rotating casual labourers for times of heavy work. By late 1916 some smallholders were forced to sell their farms,

¹⁴⁸ A Devon Farmer, "Farm Labourers' Wages," *Western Express and Torrington Chronicle*, 24 March 1917, p. 6.

¹⁴⁹ William Laity, "An Outspoken Protest," *Express and Echo*, 8 October 1917, p. 4.

¹⁵⁰ In 1914 rents were relatively high due to improved prices. Cannadine, *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy*, p. 93.

¹⁵¹ Dewey, *British Agriculture in the First World War*, pp. 93-93, 182. Devon Agricultural Executive Committee, Regulations of Rents and Prices, January 1917, Devon Record Office, Lord Lieutenantcy Papers, 1262M/LD/151.

which were purchased by landowners from the gentry, most likely by those who owned more than 10,000 acres, had greater assets, and perhaps more clout to retain their workforce.¹⁵² Additionally, although some farmers were primarily concerned with profits, others saw themselves as part of a wider national effort to maintain food supplies and were more willing to make sacrifices to meet those goals.¹⁵³

Farmers wanted to protect their land, their livelihood and their families so it is not surprising that at times the actions taken by the farmers and the Devon Farmers' Union were not always in the best interests of the nation or in support of the war effort; rather, "A Tenant Farmer" believed that the government only

seeks to take advantage of the poor position of the farmer under these present conditions. The Farmers' Union is in existence to protect our interest and so far it has prevented the government from walking over us and forcing action that may be harmful. It is the position of the Farmers' Union to give us lead on matters affecting agriculture.¹⁵⁴

Others also believed that government actions were detrimental to the interests of the farmers and relied on the Farmers' Union to bring attention to the problems facing agriculture. J. Coaker, the Secretary of the Dartmouth Branch of the Devon Farmers' Union, relied on the Union to protect his interests, and encouraged Devon's farmers to protest against government procedures.¹⁵⁵ Mr. Bond of Dittisham cautioned members that "they [government] say they will send us horses, but we cannot pay the Government

¹⁵² Between 1870 and 1930 few landowners bought large parcels of land, but those who did increase their agricultural landholdings were likely not minor gentry, those who owned between 1,000 and 10,000 acres, since this group was most affected by the depression and taxation. David Cannadine, *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy* (Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1990), pp. 9, 99, 126.

¹⁵³ Special Meeting of Agricultural Representatives with Lord Fortescue, minutes, 3 November 1917, Devon Record Office, Lord Lieutenancy Papers, 1262M/LD/151.

¹⁵⁴ A Tenant Farmer, "Parish Agricultural Committees," *Western Morning News*, 3 December 1917, p. 3; "Dartmouth Farmers' Meeting," 13 September 1916, *Totnes Times*, p. 5.

¹⁵⁵ J. Coaker is a member of the Coaker family of Stanter Farms, Marldon, yeoman. Francis Coaker of Stanter Farm in the Parish of Marldon, Devon Record Office, Mallock of Cockington, 48/13 /3/2/17.

prices for ploughing... I think if the government would go through the county and see the corn ricks rotting, and the hay ricks not thatched, they would see how serious it is.” And Mr. Munford of Townstal, referring to the shortage of smiths and thatchers, believed it was necessary for the Union to take a stand so that the government would recognize the extent to which the farmers were suffering.¹⁵⁶ In some instances, it was only after the farmers realized that they would not be able to maintain their male labour supplies that they were more accepting of government alternatives.

Despite attempts by some farmers to maintain distance between themselves and the “Land Girls,” their experiences were not that distinct and both groups tended to express their war experience in a similar way. The popular perception was that women joined the Land Army out of patriotism and therefore their contribution in the war has often been evaluated in terms of women’s war service. Janet Watson argues that women’s participation in the war effort was more complex than wartime commentators and the press allowed. Certainly the “language of essential service was used to outweigh the stolid work associations of heavy farm labour” for both working- and middle-class women, but not all women identified with the war effort in the same way.¹⁵⁷ Middle-class women, like middle-class men, tended to see their war work in terms of service. This was, in part, a result of the effort put forward by British propagandists and politicians to equate land work with patriotism and war service. A speech given by the Minister of Agriculture in London confirmed this connection:

¹⁵⁶ “Shortage of Smiths and Thatchers,” 13 October 1917, *Totnes Times*, p. 4. Mr. Munford owned a sizable farm and may have been a member of the Munford family, landowners originally from Seaton. The family owned land near Dartmouth and were involved in the tourist industry early in the twentieth century. Ford Family of Branscombe, 4 June 1903, Devon Record Office, Ford of Branscombe, 1037M/112.

¹⁵⁷ Watson, *Fighting Different Wars*, p. 118.

It is hard work—fatiguing, backaching, monotonous, dirty work in all sorts of weather. It is poorly paid, the accommodation is rough, and those who undertake it have to face physical discomforts. In all respects it is comparable to the work of your men-folk are doing in the trenches at the front. It is not a case of “lilac sunbonnets.” There is no romance in it; it is prose.”¹⁵⁸

Although the work was hard and performed with little financial reward, many middle-class women were enticed by powerful appeals to patriotism and service. Others, however, viewed their employment in terms of war work. M. Hodgson explained that the women of the Land Army had an important job to do and with the men off at war, it was up to the women to do their part. Hodgson seemed to be motivated, at least in part, by a sense of duty, but she also noted that as much as she disliked the work, she felt she had little choice in the matter. Her father owned a small supply shop and because of the cost of provisions and competition with larger stores, he was forced to close in late 1916. Hodgson entered the work force to help her family and although she was always aware of the war, she “didn’t dwell on it. The war was always in the background, but it was hardly noticeable to me.”¹⁵⁹ Hodgson noted that her war work was not what she expected, “It was very different from what you saw on the posters. I rarely saw soldiers in uniform and there were very few men around at all. Most often only older gentlemen in the nearby towns.” Like Hodgson, Beatrice Gilbert noted that when the armistice was declared, “we didn’t hear any bells, and there was no huge celebration. We went about our work and when we were finished we went to church.”¹⁶⁰ Hodgson, like many middle-class women

¹⁵⁸ Quoted in Watson, *Fighting Different Wars*, pp. 118-120, 120.

¹⁵⁹ Seale-Hayne Agricultural College, September 1917, Devon Record Office, MISC, Newton Abbot Farms, 4577M; Papers of Miss M. Hodgson, 3 December 1917, Imperial War Museum, Department of Documents, 94/27/1.

¹⁶⁰ Beatrice Gilbert. 1977. Interview by BBC. Tape Recording. Imperial War Museum, Sound Department, 3076/1.

of the Land Army, entered the work force because of the war, but patriotism alone did not bring her to the land. Neither Hodgson nor her sister entered the workforce until her family's economic circumstances demanded it. Hodgson and Gilbert described the work as grueling and unforgiving and both expressed that their efforts were not always appreciated or recognized. Nevertheless, for Hodgson, the money she earned contributed to her family's care and eased their financial difficulties.

Like the farmers, most accounts recorded by women in the Land Army focused on work, with little mention of the war itself or even their contribution to the war effort.¹⁶¹ Certainly there were women who joined the WLA for patriotic reasons. Olive Hockin's personal account *Two Girls on the Land: Wartime on a Dartmoor Farm* (1918) stressed that the women who worked the land were

prepared to do their bit in spite of the drawbacks, and ready to face the inevitable daily fatigue—the long tedious hours in heat and cold, the paralyzing monotony and mental stagnation—with the same cheerful stoicism with which her brother faces the incomparably greater discomforts (not to mention the dangers) of life in the trenches...Above all, every girl who come in to take a share of the work not only provides her contribution to the country's needs—gaining for herself in the process increased health, strength, and a permanent and invaluable practical training—but she tends also to lighten the weight of labour for those who are already overburdened. And even though the difference in the sum of human toil be infinitesimal, yet for this alone the work is well worthwhile.¹⁶²

However, Hockin, an educated women, did not provide an entirely positive picture of her work on the land: she wrote about her experience critically, she complained about the

¹⁶¹ Women of the Land Army, "Women on the Land: Sweated by the Farmers in South Devon," *Totnes Times*, 26 October 1918, p. 6; "Women and Farm Work," *Express and Echo*, 23 September 1918, p. 3; "A Woman Who Works the Land," *Weekly News*, 5 26 July 1918, no page number; One who Knows, "Women of the Land Army, *Weekly News*, 2 march 1918, no page number.

¹⁶² Olive Hockin, *Two Girls on the Land: Wartime on a Dartmoor Farm* (London: Edward Arnold, 1918), p. iii.

stress and daunting nature of her work, and was insulted by the perception that the educated urban woman was weak and incapable of farm work. Nevertheless, Hockin carried on.¹⁶³ But for the majority of women patriotism alone was not enough to keep them on the land. Farm work took its toll and many stayed for the money, both for themselves and to send home to help their families, or to escape domestic life. For some women the war provided a new opportunity and for Mary Bale the Women's Land Army was her chance to no longer be "a parasite, but an active worker." Her accounts focused on the daily activities of farm life,

I started work at 5:30am milking, tending to the sheep and general work on the field. I was paid eighteen shillings a week and another if I worked on Sunday. It cost fourteen shillings a week for room and board—so much for making money. I sent a couple of shillings home and I bought myself a treat at the end of the week. We worked hard and made our own way.¹⁶⁴

Bale's motivations for working on the land were complex. Her complaint that they did not earn much money suggests that her motivation was not entirely financial, but like Gilbert she did feel a sense of responsibility to her family. Bale also took pride in her work, suggesting that it was difficult, but rewarding. Others had similar experiences. After seeing posters looking for young women to join the Land Army, Lilian Miles and her friends decided to join: "Well, I think we really came because we thought we were going to get big money, which we were very disappointed over." Miles described her experience on the land and said that it was like "being let out of a cage."¹⁶⁵ Her motivation was not financial or necessarily patriotic; she worked on the land and

¹⁶³ Ibid., p.158.

¹⁶⁴ Mary Bale. 1977. Interview by Imperial War Museum. Transcript. Imperial War Museum, Department of Documents, P360.

¹⁶⁵ Lilian Annie Miles. 1976. Interview by Imperial War Museum. Tape Recording. October 27. Imperial War Museum, Sound Department, 854/4.

continued to do so for more than two years because of the way it made her feel.

The work was very hard for some women, and neither patriotism nor pay was enough to keep them on the land. J.M. Winter argues that although propaganda images suggest that women resolutely supported the war, women's attitudes were as diverse as their experiences.¹⁶⁶ Mary Lees was one of the first women to work on the land in Devon, and after nine months she had had enough: "I was there to work, not to dilly dally. But the work was hard and the farmers needed more men. Farm labour was absolute hell and in the end the money wasn't enough, so I went home."¹⁶⁷ The view of the patriotic Land Girl serving her country was imposed on society by the press and government to avoid any notion that acceptable gender behaviour was being transgressed. If the Land Girl's contribution was seen as service to the nation, despite the intensity of the work, then the distinction between how men and women exercised their patriotism was not clouded and war service within this framework did not represent undesired social change. Popular romance novels like Berta Ruck's *The Land Girl's Love Story* (1919) were used to allay post-war fears by showing that traditional gender roles had not been destroyed by the war--women were patriotic, but they remained feminine.¹⁶⁸ Although the secondary literature surrounding the Women's Land Army is scant and mainly confined to the Second World War, Susan Grayzel contends that the significance of the Land Army was less in the labour they performed and more in how it affected the perception of women's participation in the war effort. The press propagated the idea that the Women's Land Army was part of a larger process of reconnecting with England's rural past—Britain's

¹⁶⁶ J.M. Winter, *The Experience of World War I* (London: McMillan, 1988), p. 176.

¹⁶⁷ Mary Lees. 1974. Interview by Imperial War Museum. Tape Recording. November 30. Imperial War Museum, Sound Department, 3078/1.

¹⁶⁸ Berta Ruck, *The Land Girl's Love Story* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1919), p. 352.

women participated in the war effort by providing “raspberry jam for the fighting forces” and “feeding hay to gentle horses”—their work was domestic and patriotic.¹⁶⁹ Further, the fact that many women did work the land exclusively for the money does not mean that they were unpatriotic. Not unlike the farmer, patriotism was not the only motivating or sustaining factor.

By April 1917 the number of women on the land had increased substantially and the willingness of the farmers to employ them weakened public agitation against both groups. Rallies held throughout the county called on women to join the farmers in “protecting the fabric upon which the whole nation rested.”¹⁷⁰ The idea of farmers and women working together enhanced the credibility of the wartime experience of both groups. The fact that the farmers were willing to cooperate on labour issues helped to reinforce their case that the government’s neglect of agriculture early in the war was responsible for current shortages and made the farmers more sympathetic, both to the military tribunals and to the public.¹⁷¹ As such, the formation of the Women’s Land Army became a crucial component of the farmers’ strategy to negotiate with the government. Following the success of the Land Army campaign, the Council of the Devon Farmers’ Union seized the opportunity to launch its attack on what it believed was the “Government’s gross indifference and mismanagement of the nation’s food and labour supply.”¹⁷² The Union stressed that the “few men left are doing all that is possible,

¹⁶⁹ Susan Grayzel, “Nostalgia, Gender and the Countryside: Placing the ‘Land Girl’ in First World War Britain,” *Rural History* 10: 2 (1999): 156-157, 159.

¹⁷⁰ “Land Army Appeal: Results of the Recruiting Rallies in Devon,” *Express and Echo*, 28 May 1917, p.4.

¹⁷¹ By mid-1917 shortages of bread, milk and sugar were experienced across the country and long food queues served to further intensify the situation. For more on public unrest and the food question see Howard Weinroth, “Labour Unrest and the Food Question in Great Britain,” *Europa* 1: 2 (1978): 138-143.

¹⁷² Report issued to the Devon Agricultural Executive Committee, 25 February 1918, Devon Record Office, Fortescue of Castle Hill, 1262M/L140.

but it is manifest to those of us who carry on this important business that more help must be afforded.”¹⁷³ Devon’s farmers found support within the Women’s Land Army. Mary Lees described the labour situation in Devon as

absolutely dreadful. Lord Rhondda was a funny old man and absolutely useless as the Minister of Food. His idea of looking after agriculture was to come down and stand in a field and announce that he was there to oversee food production. He was conceited and wanted his picture in the paper, but he didn’t know the first thing about working the land.¹⁷⁴

The plough campaign was arduous work and deficient labour supplies affected the war experience of both groups.

In Devon, many farmers appreciated the work their female employees performed, but their employment was never simple. Some farmers accepted female agricultural workers because there was no perceivable alternative, while others did so in an attempt to appear sympathetic at the tribunals and to the public. Others still, benefited from the use of women on the land. They could replace male labourers with female labourers for almost half the cost, and once the women were trained, production values could be maintained (of course this was not always the case). Conversely, some farmers resented the presence of women on their farms, knowing that their sons and male workforce would be conscripted. At the same time, the war came with a wide range of opportunities for women, and the Land Army was presented as an opportunity for women “interested in working for overwhelmingly *patriotic* reasons.”¹⁷⁵ However, patriotism alone was not always an adequate motivator, and many middle-class women worked for monetary reasons, either for themselves or to assist their families, and there were others still who

¹⁷³ “Labour Supply,” *Western Morning News*, 12 February 1918, p. 8.

¹⁷⁴ Mary Lees. 1974. Interview by Imperial War Museum. Tape Recording, November 30. Imperial War Museum, Sound Department, 3078/1.

¹⁷⁵ Grayzel, *Women and the First World War*, p. 42.

worked simply for the freedom it afforded. But this does not mean that they were unpatriotic. A sense of duty to one's family, or even the desire for some financial independence did not negate or undermine their loyalty to the nation.

Farmers and the Executive Committee

The combined efforts of the farmers and the women of the Land Army helped to win public support, but it proved to be detrimental for relations between the farmers and the Devon Agricultural Executive Committee. In 1918 Lord Fortescue, Chairman of the Executive Committee, cautioned the farmers to stop publicly voicing their criticisms against the government. This was not an indication that Fortescue was unsympathetic to the position of the farmers, but rather was a reflection of the fact that "public discontent has risen sharply in the county over the past several months and the farmers protests serve to inflame public grievances."¹⁷⁶ In late 1917 continuing supply problems and inflation caused some Devonians to reexamine the position of the farmers and many determined that it was the government that was ultimately responsible for the country's food problems.¹⁷⁷ This was an important turning point for the farmers. From the earliest days of the war the food question fuelled animosity against farmers and shop keepers, but the inability of the government to gain control of the nation's food supply and to stifle the German submarine threat brought the farmers and the public closer. The farmers were not completely in the clear because part of the public's grievance was profiteering, which

¹⁷⁶ Lord Fortescue's Response to the Farmers, 20 February 1918, Devon Record Office, Lord Lieutenancy Papers, 1262M/L140.

¹⁷⁷ "Agriculture in Devonshire," *Exmouth Journal*, 23 November 1918, no page number; Thomas Berns, "The Calling Up of Farmers' Sons," *Western Morning News*, 21 June 1918, p. 1; "Farmers and the War," *Western Express and Torrington Chronicle*, 1 June 1918, p. 4; "The Labour Problem," *Express and Echo*, 16 September 1918, p. 3 "Not Enough Men to Gather the Harvest," *Totnes Times*, 6 July 1918; Edgar Forester, "Government Departments," *Western Morning News*, 26 August 1918, p. 4.

continued despite the government's promise to stamp it out. However, Howard Weinroth has demonstrated that the "main salvos of working-class fire were saved for wholesalers, importers and shippers" and the government itself.¹⁷⁸

By the end of the war, many, including Lord Fortescue, sympathized with the position of the farmers.¹⁷⁹ In April 1918 Mr. Batemen, the Deputy Director of Labour Supply, informed Lord Fortescue that men were being taken from the land in Devon for work on government timber contracts. Lord Fortescue instructed the Director of National Service that the "labour situation in the county is dire and the current level of food production cannot be maintained if contractors are permitted to employ men engaged in full time work on the land."¹⁸⁰ The Labour Report for the county explained that the employment of soldiers, POWs, and women did not solve the labour problem. Throughout 1918 the use of alternative labour turned out mediocre results. The April report revealed a decline in the number of women, agricultural volunteers, and unskilled agricultural labourers (see Appendix 2-4). Where increases were notable, particularly among soldiers and POWs, there were only two bailiffs, one mechanic and two tractor drivers--the majority were unskilled. Further, although the number of POWs on the land exceeded losses suffered by the Land Army, the majority of these men were never placed on farms. Between 150 and two hundred POWs were employed in agriculture and the rest worked on government timber contracts or in a variety of other jobs. The report also

¹⁷⁸ Weinroth, "Labour Unrest and the Food Question in Great Britain, 1914-1918," p. 138-139.

¹⁷⁹ Although Lord Fortescue was sympathetic to the farmers' needs, he was not a pushover. In May 1918 he cautioned farmers who were threatening to ignore government directives regarding the further reduction of grazing lands. Fortescue reminded farmers that they could be fined up to one hundred pounds and/or imprisoned under DORA for failure to comply with the orders issued by the Executive Committees. Fortescue, "A Warning to Angry Farmers," *Express and Echo*, 31 May 1918, p. 3.

¹⁸⁰ Lord Fortescue's Response to the Farmers, April 1918, Devon Record Office, Lord Lieutenantcy Papers, 1262M/L140.

showed that ploughshares and other parts remained in short supply, and “tractors continue to breakdown on good suitable land and under ideal conditions.”¹⁸¹ The farmers had little response except to seek exemptions for their men through the military tribunals.

From April to August 1918 the tribunal records for the county reveal that the majority of men under consideration for exemptions worked in the agricultural sector.¹⁸² But, cases that were objected to far exceeded those approved. Among the men rejected for exemption were general farm labourers, thatchers, woodmen, rabbit trappers, tractor drivers, and dairymen.¹⁸³ Although some of these men were skilled labourers, they continued to be called-up by the military authorities. Pamela Horn argues that skilled labourers were called-up because the labour crisis was not as dire as the Board of Agriculture suggested and that the press exacerbated stories about shortages thereby embellishing the extent of labour and supply problems. The percentage of enlistees for agriculture was based on pre-war employment numbers in the industry, which Horn argues was not an adequate reflection of the labour supply. Horn concludes that the labour crisis was less severe than was assumed at the time.¹⁸⁴ However, the labour officer’s report for August 1918 shows that the labour problem in Devon was exacerbated by the decrease in the number of women on the land. The April report indicated that 178 women worked on the land in April 1918, but by September the number of women on the

¹⁸¹ Meeting of the Devon Agricultural Executive Committee, 18 October 1918, Devon Record Office, Fortescue of Castle Hill, 1262M/L140.

¹⁸² Crediton Rural District Local Tribunal, 17 June 1916, Devon Record Office, Pedlar Family, 317M/D1. Enlistment Report: Totnes, 10 June 1916, Devon Record Office, Totnes Rural District Local Tribunal, 1262 M/L 140 Bundle 29. Teignmouth Enlistment Report for July 1916, 21 July 1916, Devon Record Office, Teignmouth Rural District Local Tribunal 1262M/L140.

¹⁸³ Labour Officers Report, 31 August 1918, Devon Record Office, Fortescue of Castle Hill, 1262M/L140.

¹⁸⁴ Horn, *Rural Life in England*, pp. 73-74.

land had decreased to 122 owing to the intensity of the plough campaign.¹⁸⁵ The Labour Report also revealed that despite the use of unskilled labour, Devon's farmers were still short 400 labourers and 200 horses.¹⁸⁶ This was primarily due to the fact that the promised replacements from June 1917 did not arrive until May 1918 and due to the German spring offensive of 1918 fewer men were sent than were originally promised. Without tractor drivers, mechanics, ploughmen, or horsemen the county could not meet the quotas set for the 1918 yield, resulting in a loss of 23,000 acres farmed between January and November 1918. Rabbits were damaging farmers' fields and hundreds of acres of corn and potatoes were rotting because there were not enough workers to take in the harvest. Cottages and homes were in serious disrepair and the few remaining agricultural smiths could not keep up with the demands of local farmers.¹⁸⁷

In August the introduction of the Corn Production (Amendment) Act initiated a second plough order to increase returns for 1918-1919. The Act placed greater demands on agriculture and resulted in an upsurge in the number of appeals over plough orders.¹⁸⁸ Men who refused to obey plough orders faced the threat of losing their land to a farmer who was willing to act in accordance with the rulings of the Executive Committees. However, in Devon the cases of land being requisitioned in 1918 were small in number. In October 1918 the County Executive Committee reported that there were seventeen open cases where action was to be taken against local farmers, but Fortescue recommended that punishments be suspended. Part of the reason was that by 1918 there

¹⁸⁵ Labour Officers Report, 17 April 1918, Devon Record Office, Fortescue of Castle Hill, 1262M/L140.

¹⁸⁶ Labour Officer's Report, 21 September 1918, Devon Record Office, Fortescue of Castle Hill, 1262M/L140.

¹⁸⁷ Devon County Executive Committee, December 1918, Devon Record Office, Fortescue of Castle Hill, 1262M/L142.

¹⁸⁸ Labour Officer's Report, 21 September 1918, Devon Record Office, Fortescue of Castle Hill, 1262M/L140.

were few farmers willing to take another man's farm, partly out of civility and support for the farmer's position, and partly because with so few labourers at their disposal farmers were reluctant to take on the added pressures of running another farm.¹⁸⁹ The second reason was that Fortescue and the Devon County Council believed that Devon's farmers had been amenable to the government's demands and that despite inadequate labour supplies the county made a valuable contribution to the nation's food supply.

Conclusion

There was considerable diversity of experience within Devon's agricultural community that influenced how the various groups responded to the pressures created by the war, government directives, and public criticisms. While the conditions of war eventually necessitated the coordination of local and national efforts, such cooperation was slow to materialize in Devon. Part of the reason was that at the community level farmers were divided over land practices as well as labour and supply needs. While some accepted the government's suggestion to plough up their fields, others refused. Converting pastures to crop and altering crop rotations was risky, especially in the absence of government price and labour guarantees. Like farm owners and managers, agricultural labourers also faced difficult choices. The 1914 harvest had been plentiful and there was no shortage of work on Devon's farms, and with no certainty as to the war's length, many chose to remain on the land. At the same time, the war presented an opportunity to bring much needed change to the hierarchal nature of agriculture that kept wages low and men bound to the land through labour contracts and cottage rental agreements. Throughout the fall and

¹⁸⁹ Devon County Executive Committee, 3 October 1918, Devon Record Office, Fortescue of Castle Hill, 1262M/L142.

winter of 1914 there was little government interference in the agricultural industry and Devon's farming community continued to operate within a laissez-faire framework.

However, the continuation of the war beyond January 1915 meant a steady decline in the number of agricultural labourers. Sensing a potential labour shortage and facing public criticisms for low volunteer numbers among agricultural labourers, Devon's farmers recognized the need for greater cooperation. With the assistance of the Devon Farmers' Union and the Devon County Council, farmers attempted to negotiate labour supplies with the Board of Agriculture. Their attempts were partly successful in that the starring programme introduced in 1915 protected skilled labourers by preventing them from enlisting in the armed forces. While the starring programme offered a partial and temporary solution to the labour problem, it created further divisions within the agricultural labour force, further separating the skilled from the unskilled, and did little to ease public criticisms that farmers manipulated the system to protect their own interests.

The farmers' victory was short lived. Increased recruitment numbers for the county in late-1915 and the introduction of conscription in 1916 led to a declining agricultural workforce. Owner-occupiers were hit particularly hard by dwindling labour supplies, a problem that was exacerbated by the decline in the number of horses for use on the land and insufficient machinery to replace them. Ploughing up fields required considerable manpower, and with the loss of men and horses to the army, the number of acres farmed in Devon declined in 1916.

Following the unsuccessful harvest on 1916 Lloyd George conceded that the government had made grievous errors in terms of its agricultural policy and made assurances that agricultural labourers would be protected. However, in 1917 the

government conscripted an additional 50,000 men from agriculture, forcing farmers to accept alternative labour supplies. The most motivate replacement labour used on the land in Devon was the Women's Land Army. The WLA performed a number of important roles and aided the efforts of Devon's farmers, but, like the farmers, their reasons for doing so were complicated. Some endured the grueling intensity of agricultural work out of a sense of duty, while others did it for the money, but most were guided by a mixture of the two. Although some farmers, particularly those who managed large estate farms, were hesitant to employ women in 'male occupations,' the situation proved beneficial to both groups. For some farmers, the use of women on the land meant that they could maintain the productive value of their farms. Owner-occupiers seemed most willing to use women as replacement labour, possibly because they had employed women for general farm work prior to the First World War. For others, their willingness use women on the land won them the sympathy of the Devon County Council and the military tribunals, and helped to alleviate public criticisms of both groups. After considerable pressure from Lord Selborne, the Board of Agriculture increased funding for tractors, guaranteed corn prices, set a minimum wage for agricultural workers, and established Executive Committees to improve production and to serve as a liaison between the Board and the farmers. The Executive Committees served both groups well. They successfully increased production by negotiating price and labour supplies, while simultaneously protecting farmers from undue prosecution under DORA.

While Devon's farming community was not a homogenous group and never fully agreed on land practices, labour usage, or government directives, they did recognize the need for some level of solidarity if they were going to successfully increase home food

production while minimizing personal losses. Until government intervention into the agricultural industry demanded changes to local farming practices and conscription robbed Devon's farms of its labour, farmers were largely guided by self-interest. Despite mistakes and the vacillation of policy, the success of Britain's food programme was supported by the ability of Devon's farmers, tenuously united under the Farmers' Union, to negotiate the demands placed on them by the Board of Agriculture and the ability of the Lloyd George government to redress the inadequacies of the food supply system. As will be explored in greater detail in Chapter Three, recruitment numbers in Devon began to rise after mid-1915, necessitating greater cooperation between the population and government authorities.

3 Recruitment Patterns and Techniques

Between Lord Kitchener's appeal for men on 7 August 1914 and the introduction of conscription in 1916, 2.5 million men volunteered for service in Britain's armed forces. It was a powerful display of patriotism by Britain's citizenry. Yet, this wave of volunteerism was not immediately evident in Devon. In the first month of the war recruitment numbers in Devon were considerably lower than they were nationally. Part of the problem was the lack of centralized recruiting agencies in Devon. It took considerably more time to organize recruitment efforts in the county than it did in the larger urban centres such as London. Further, within the county there was a discrepancy between the response of the urban population and those living in Devon's rural countryside and in smaller towns and villages. This discrepancy was largely due to the demographic nature of the county; two-thirds of the population lived in Devon's countryside, and apart from the larger market towns, rural communities tended to be sparsely populated. Urban environments were more conducive to recruitment rallies and patriotic concerts due to greater population densities. As such, recruitment was most successful in the south, whereas in the remote areas of north-west Devon the recruitment campaign failed to convey the gravity of the country's position and the residents of rural Devon were sluggish in their response to the war effort. Though the 'national spirit' was slow to emerge in Devon, by the end of 1915 its major cities and ports were awash with troops and became the major recruiting centers of the county. Devon's rural communities eventually acquiesced to the needs of the country, but in many areas efforts remained underdeveloped until the end of the war. By mid-1916 recruitment was in decline in both urban areas. Much of the population responded negatively to the introduction of universal

conscription, and by early 1917 recruitment rallies and military parades had become rare. Growing frustration with the war led some Devonians to support Lord Lansdowne's peace proposal, and by the time the German offensive was launched in the spring of 1918, Lord Fortescue and members of the Devon County Council were actively working against the military authorities and hindering the recruitment process. However, despite the fact that Devonians were divided on conscription and demonstrated a desire to negotiate the level and nature of their participation in the war, most were committed to British involvement in the conflict and supported the national effort until the armistice in 1918.

Many of the early studies of First World War recruitment and propaganda focused on the role of government recruiting agencies and the ability of propagandists to communicate with the public and foreign powers.¹ Harold D. Lasswell argues that Britain's recruiting efforts were initially successful because the propaganda campaign adequately mobilized hatred of the enemy thereby encouraging men to enlist, preserving the friendship of allied countries and the cooperation of neutrals while demoralizing the enemy, all under the guise of a defensive war waged for peace.² Lasswell's study assumes considerable coordination on the part of Britain's recruiting and propaganda agencies in the early stages of the war, which was not the case. Roy Douglas has convincingly argued that in the opening stages of the war Britain's recruitment efforts were disjointed. The Parliamentary Recruiting Committee (PRC) was thrown into existence too quickly to operate effectively and ad hoc committees that were organized to

¹ Harold D. Lasswell, *Propaganda Technique in the World War* (London: Garland Publishing, 1972), pp 1-13.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 47-55, 88, 102-103, 130-134.

deal with specific problems with recruiting tended to impinge on the efforts of the PRC. The PRC's main function was to encourage enlistment, and while Douglas argues that the PRC did not engage in such actions as "bullying conscientious objectors or ferreting out men who should have become unstarred," in some areas, like Devon, the PRC did engage in an aggressive press campaign to encourage voluntary enlistment, questioned the patriotism of Devonians, and supported the activities of other organizations like the National Service League in its efforts to convince men to join Britain's armed forces.³

The complicated nature of the British recruitment campaign was revealed in Peter Dewey's study on recruitment techniques and the British labour force. Dewey finds that just over one million men enlisted by the end of 1914. Thereafter, civilian enthusiasm waned, and the government had to employ other means to stimulate the flow of recruits. Dewey's work examines who was recruited and when, and what factors influenced the process. Ultimately, he questions the conclusions reached by both Humbert Wolfe and Correlli Barnett.⁴ Writing in 1923, Wolfe argued that the influx of volunteers in the opening months of the war was from "all classes, and ... all types of industry gave equally." More recently, Barnett suggested that recruits answered the call to service with "enthusiasm." They were "Moved by patriotism, by desire for a bit of adventure, by a desire to escape from poverty and unemployment, the crowds queued outside the

³ Roy Douglas, "Voluntary Enlistment in the First World War and the Work of the Parliamentary Recruiting Committee," *The Journal of Modern History*, 42: 4. (Dec., 1970): 585. Report to Lord Fortescue Devon Parliamentary Recruiting Committee, 30 June 1915, Devon Record Office, 1262M/L153. Although Douglas correctly points out that the PRCs were never formally dissolved, in Devon the committee continued to play an important role in the propaganda campaign until the end of the war, generally in conjunction with other committees. Also see, Alice Goldfarb Marquis, "Words as Weapons: Propaganda in Britain and Germany During the First World War," *Journal of Contemporary History* 13 (1978): 469-470.

⁴ P. E. Dewey, "Military Recruiting and the British Labour Force during the First World War," *The Historical Journal*, 27: 1 (Mar., 1984): 200.

recruiting offices.”⁵ However, Dewey explains that during the war the impact of recruiting differed significantly from one industry to another, and that “the forces were clearly not a cross-section of the nation.” Enlistment within the labour force was not necessarily determined by conceptions of patriotism, but by economic, demographic, medical, and institutional circumstances. Dewey concludes that national enlistment rates for men from manufacturing and building trades were considerably higher than those coming from agriculture and the railways.⁶ Dewey’s conclusions about recruitment and labour have important implications for patterns in Devon. As was seen in Chapter Two, Devon’s large agricultural sector was slow to respond to the call to enlist, and as will be seen in this chapter, demographics also had a powerful impact on the county’s recruitment patterns.

As Dewey has shown, enlistment percentages and profiles had to do with more than just the methods employed by wartime propaganda agencies. Troy R.E. Paddock’s study of propaganda and public opinion explores the difference between what was printed in newspapers and how it was interpreted by the public. He argues that the public has often been regarded as a passive entity, assuming that propaganda was effectual regardless of whether or not there was proof of its effectiveness. Yet, both Paddock and Adrian Gregory contend that the press influenced public opinion but was constrained by the fact that the vast majority of readers read newspapers that reflected their political and social views.⁷ Gregory argues that the “press certainly did not produce a united voice

⁵ Humbert Wolfe, *Labour Supply and Regulation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1923), p. 13; Correlli Barnett, *Britain and Her Army, 1509-1970: A Military, Political and Social Survey* (London: Penguin Press, 1970), p. 377.

⁶ Dewey, “Military Recruiting and the British Labour Force during the First World War,” p. 220-221.

⁷ Troy R.E. Paddock, *A Call to Arms: Propaganda, Public Opinion and Newspapers in the Great War* (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2004), pp. 4-10; Adrian Gregory, “A Clash of Cultures: The British Press

urging the nation to war,” and although it did influence the attitudes of the public, he agrees with Paddock that Britons were not uncritical readers.⁸

Recruitment and propaganda histories generally lack a community perspective and careful examination of the available literature shows that existing interpretations are incomplete. As Dewey has shown, the ‘rally’ enlistment period at the beginning of the war did not appeal to all segments of society equally and was followed by localized attempts to promote the war and encourage a spirit of volunteerism. Such attempts led to a series of tactics employed by local groups and prominent members of the community that resulted in a more systematized method for recruitment in Devon. Raising manpower was a difficult task that imposed on the daily lives of Devonians and pressure by the military authorities for more and more men never relented.

Early Recruitment Efforts

It took several weeks for the Devon Parliamentary Recruiting Committee to be established under Lord Fortescue and to coordinate the formation of the Division Executive Committees for the major districts and towns in the county. In Devon these committees were not fully functioning until late October 1914, which was considerably longer than it took to make similar preparations in other counties.⁹ The reason for the slow development of the Devon Parliamentary Recruiting Committee and the Executive Committees was that Lord Fortescue did not believe that these committees were necessary; rather, he believed that the Devon County Council, together with the District

and the Opening of the Great War,” in *A Call to Arms: Propaganda, Public Opinion and Newspapers in the Great War*, ed. Troy Paddock (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2004), p. 19.

⁸ Ibid., p. 41.

⁹ Recruitment in Cornwall, 30 August 1914, Cornwall Record Office, SEC Recruiting Committee, SDC2/6/4; Military Recruitment Campaign for Somerset, Somerset Archive and Record Service, Mrs. Cooke-Houle Papers, DD/CO/3/2.

Councils could manage Devon's recruitment efforts. It is worth noting that although Lord Fortescue participated in recruiting activities, his efforts were mainly confined to south Devon. For example, Fortescue made several appearances at recruitment rallies in Plymouth, Exeter, and Tiverton (the majority of which appear to have been in 1914), but his efforts were mainly confined to appeals for recruits in the local press. He also served on the Executive Committee that oversaw recruitment from Devon's industries and was consulted on appeals that went before the County Appeal Tribunals. As Lord Lieutenant Fortescue had the power to call on men to fight, but he seems to have relied on the efforts of local notables, the clergy, and the military to encourage men to volunteer. Fortescue believed that Devonians who wished to volunteer for military service would report to the High Street barracks, or other barracks throughout the county, and the military authorities would handle recruitment policies and procedures in conjunction with the District Councils.¹⁰

When the committees were eventually formed they were comprised of retired officers, notable citizens, representatives of major industries such as mining, shipping, railroads, and the Devon Farmer's Union, as well as clergymen, local councilmen, and members of the district government. The Devon Parliamentary Recruiting Committee organized and oversaw the Division Executive Committees, whose primary role it was to manage enlistment numbers in the county. Ralph Buller Hughes was appointed Regional Director of Recruiting in mid-August 1914 and was put in charge of managing recruiting drives, appointing recruiting agents, and overseeing Devon's recruiting efforts.¹¹ He also

¹⁰ Meeting minutes for 8 August 1914, 8 August 1914, Devon Record Office, Devon County Council Papers, 1262M/L127.

¹¹ Also known as Hughes-Buller—the Bullers of Bovey Tracey were wealthy landowners for many generations and army officers as well.

served as a liaison between the civilian representatives and the military authorities.

The declaration of war brought into question the ability of the small British Expeditionary Force to offer effective assistance to France on the continent. The task of raising a citizen army fell to Field Marshal Lord Kitchener, appointed Secretary of State for war in August 1914. Kitchener acted under the assumption that the war would not be short, possibly three years, and determined that if the BEF was to be effective in France an additional one million men were required. Although some members of the British government, including Henry Wilson, Deputy Chief of Staff of the BEF, thought Kitchener to be “half-mad” and a “menace to the Allied cause,” he was nevertheless authorized to increase the army by five hundred thousand men.¹² While Devon’s recruiting committees were being established, the promotion of the war was left in the hands of various organizations. The most immediate response came from the National Service League, Devon Branch, which was represented by Col. M. W. Skinner. To aid Kitchener’s efforts the National Service League made several appeals in the press and at local rallies for able-bodied men between the ages of sixteen and thirty to join the New Army, not the Devonshire Territorials. The reason for the distinction was that Kitchener felt that the territorial units were untrained, unprofessional, and had an “amateur spirit which he regarded as incurable.” There was also concern about what part the territorial units would play in the war. Kitchener believed that it was best to dedicate the territorial units to home service and to raise a new army of volunteers.¹³

In Devon, the initial results to Kitchener’s call were mediocre and there was no

¹² George H. Cassar, *Kitchener’s War: British Strategy from 1914 to 1916* (Washington: Potomac Books, 2004), pp. 32-33.

¹³ Philip Magnus, *Kitchener: Portrait of an Imperialist* (London: Penguin Books, 1968), pp. 279, 289-290.

immediate rush. The rallies organized by the National Service League were not well attended and reports from the League suggested that the demonstrations had little impact on the population. In 1988 W. J. Reader noted that in the first few days of August men flocked to recruiting stations, whether volunteering or compelled, and recruiting stations quickly became a “seething mass” of men wanting to enlist.¹⁴ While enlistment figures appeared to support Reader’s conclusion, in 1998 Niall Ferguson questioned the extent to which volunteer numbers were evidence of enthusiasm. Rather than agreeing with Reader’s assessment, Ferguson suggested that a more critical evaluation of the volunteer movement “qualifies, if it does not wholly refute, the thesis of mass bellicosity.” Public manifestations of solidarity were generalized and although there was support for Belgium, the population was far from unified over the issue of Belgian neutrality, and public opinion would not sanction a war to protect Serbian or French interests. According to Ferguson, not all classes gave equally, and, not all were motivated by appeals to patriotism.¹⁵ He notes that nationally volunteers came overwhelmingly from the service sector (forty percent), and industries such as mining, but that textiles were

¹⁴ Col. M.W. Skinner, “National Service League,” *Express and Echo*, 10 August 1914. W.J. Reader, *At Duty’s Call* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), p.103. Similarly, Arthur Marwick wrote that “British society in 1914 was strongly jingoistic and showed marked enthusiasm at the outbreak of war,” and yet discusses the mixed reactions to war in his introduction. A. Marwick, *The Deluge: British Society and the First World War* (New York: McMillan, 1965), pp. 309, 10-11.

¹⁵ Niall Ferguson, *The Pity of War* (New York: The Penguin Press, 1998), pp. 177, 198-207. Also see Adrian Gregory, “British ‘War Enthusiasm’ in 1914: a Reassessment,” in *Evidence, History and the Great War: Historians and the Impact of 1914-1918*, ed. Gail Braybon (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2003), pp. 68-69, 73-81. Complementary studies for France and Germany completed by Jean-Jacques Becker and Jeffrey Verhey suggest that the ‘Spirit of 1914’ has been exaggerated and both suggest a more subdued public response to the outbreak of war. Both studies benefited from the use of domestic surveillance records and government documents that provided the basis of their research. Verhey also had the advantage of using unpublished government public opinion surveys that were written by local schoolteachers. In Britain similar records are largely absent and where records do exist they are too vague or incomplete to provide an accurate account of public opinion. Jean-Jacques Becker, *The Great War and the French People* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1986), pp. 1-17; Jeffrey Verhey, *Spirit of 1914: Militarism, Myth and Mobilization in Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 12-20, 58, 72-114, 134-135.

underrepresented.¹⁶ In Devon volunteers came predominately from industries such as construction, railways, mining, as well as the service sector. On the other hand, agriculture and forestry were notably underrepresented, which, according to Dewey, was not unlike other areas of the country.¹⁷ Historians have differed over the degree to which war enthusiasm gripped the country in August 1914, and while there certainly was an initial rush to join the colours, more dramatic voluntary enlistment occurred in September 1914 when the BEF seemed to be in trouble and mass unemployment struck the country.

The recruiting campaign in Devon did not began to take shape until the end of August and although information was made available to potential recruits at local postal offices and military depots, recruiting stations were slow to appear, particularly outside the major centres of Exeter and Plymouth. In the southern coastal towns of Devon military parades at the outset of the war, particularly in Plymouth and Devonport, helped to encourage men to come forward, but persuading men to come forward in other parts of the county was a much slower process. The number of recruiting officers was limited in north and west Devon and in the town of Teignmouth only one, Colonel Davie, had been appointed as an authorized recruiting agent by 31 August. Several others were authorized to aid in the recruitment efforts, but the numbers were disappointing. In the town of Okehampton only one recruiting officer had been appointed as of 10 October and residents in the town of Clovelly and neighbouring areas had to travel to Okehampton or other centres to enlist.¹⁸ It was generally the case in Devon's rural areas that the men had

¹⁶ Ferguson, *The Pity of War*, p. 199.

¹⁷ Enlistment Records by name, age, and occupation, 1914-1918, Local Government: World War I, Devon Record Office, Ref. 1037M-O/1. Voluntary Enlistment of men Category B, Army Reserve, 1914-1915, Devon Record Office, 1037M-O/4. These records are incomplete and so accurate statistics are difficult to determine. Dewey, "Military Recruiting and the British Labour Force," p. 220-221.

¹⁸ David J Starkey, "The Ports, Seaborne Trade and Shipping Industry of South Devon, 1786-1914," in *The*

to walk long distances to recruiting stations and often times there was no recruiting agent available once they arrived. There was also considerable confusion regarding who was too young or old to enlist, which occupations were too valuable for men to leave, and the physical requirements for military service.

In the opening weeks of the war another major problem with the recruitment effort in Devon was the lack of cooperation between the National Service League and the local press. Calls for men were printed in Devon's newspapers, but the press was initially uncommitted to recruitment efforts. Instead, Devon's newspapers ran reports on what was happening in London and along the east coast. The front pages were filled with military reports, maps of Europe, news from the continent, and the parliamentary actions taken by the Asquith government. 'Calls for Men' could be found only in short obscured articles often or untitled letters to the editor on the back pages of Devon newspapers.

The fact is that the urgency of the war was not immediately felt and this partly explains why new volunteers were slow to enlist. The agreement of the press to self-censor meant that little negative news from the continent appeared in print. On 5 August 1914 all of the major newspapers in Devon ran headlines 'Britain Declares War!' and over the next several days reported on the celebrations in London and the influx of young men to recruiting stations. In Plymouth crowds gathered to celebrate the declaration of war and on the 14 August a crowd of "several thousand" sang "Rule Britannia" and cheered the navy men who were in port at Plymouth Sound. However, reports of singing and celebrations in other areas of Devon were largely absent. Crowds were reported in

New Maritime History of Devon ed. Michael Duffy et. al. (Exeter: Conway Martin Press, 1992), pp. 33-35; Anthony Northway, "The Devon Fishing Industry in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries," in *The New Maritime History of Devon* ed. Michael Duffy et. al. (Exeter: Conway Martin Press, 1992), p. 132.

Torquay, Dartmouth, and Bedford Circle, but the mood of the people was more uncertain. Some cheered, while others expressed shock, fear, and frustration.¹⁹ From the available sources it is evident that on the day following the declaration of war the mood in the county was quiet. Beatrix Cresswell set the scene in her diary where she noted that citizens “gathered in small numbers outside town halls, at local restaurants, and at parish churches waiting for news, but there were few celebrations.” Instead, “we were waiting to find out what happened. All the talk had been about the dreadful situation in Ireland and then we were at war.”²⁰ William Huntley recorded in his war diary that he went to the “town hall to see what was going on. There was a crowd of about twenty people all waiting for the Mayor. When he came out he told us that after the most careful attempts at negotiation England declared war on Germany.”²¹ In the northern towns the atmosphere was similar to Exeter. In West Buckland the postman, having ridden in from South Molton, delivered news of the declaration of war to the villagers.²² He noted that there was little response from the people and similar situations were reported in Marwood, Foxlore, and Parracombe. A local reporter noted that the atmosphere in the villages was “quiet.”²³ In Stoodleigh news of the war was delivered to the crowd gathered at the local cricket field where a match was being played. Upon receiving the news the owner of Stoodleigh Court ordered “champagne to be brought out for the cricketers, not as a cause of celebration, but because he foresaw...that many of the young

¹⁹ “War Declared: Torquay Responds,” *Weekly News*, 10 August 1914, no page number; “Mood in South Devon,” *Tiverton Gazette*, 10 August 1914, no page number; Wasley, *Devon in the Great War*, p. 31.

²⁰ Cresswell diaries, 5 August 1914, Devon Record Office, Cresswell of Devon, 4686M/F51.

²¹ Huntley diaries, 5 August 1914, Devon Record Office, Huntley of Devon, 4332M/F27 Bundle 12.

²² Wasley, *Devon in the Great War*, p. 31.

²³ “Britain’s Declaration of War,” *North Devon Herald*, 10 August 1914, no page number.

men playing the match would not be alive to enjoy it after the war had ended.”²⁴

Following the declaration of war letters poured in to Lord Fortescue inquiring about disruptions to rail lines and community works projects that were immediately put on hold. The fisheries expressed concerns about labour and price guarantees, and local shopkeepers were worried about the maintenance of supplies. At town halls and community gatherings men inquired about pay scales, the length of service, and the frequency of leaves. Like in other communities across the country, Devonians were anxious and apprehensive about leaving their communities for military service.²⁵ On 20 August A.G. Sparrow wrote a letter to the editor of the *Western Morning News*. He explained that it had been some time since Britain declared war, but there was little sign of war fervor in the county. He asked, “Men want to join the King’s army but many areas don’t have recruiting stations and men who wish to provide horses to be sent to France don’t know where to bring them. I hope that some action will be taken to mobilize the county.”²⁶ There was considerable confusion in August 1914 and without the proper mechanisms for the distribution of information, many people continued on with their daily routines.

In response to public concerns, Lord Fortescue made a plea to Devon’s newspaper proprietors to assist in the war effort by encouraging enlistment.²⁷ On 25 August Fortescue’s plea appeared in the final pages of the *Hartland and West Country Chronicle*. The statement read,

²⁴ Wasley, *Devon in the Great War*, p. 31.

²⁵ John G.E. Cox, *Be Proud: Hertfordshire and the Great War: An Anthology* (St. Albans: Eddington Press, 2002), p. 20; Nicholas Mansfield, “Volunteers and Recruiting,” in Gerald Gliddon, *Norfolk & Suffolk in the Great War* (Norwich: Gliddon Books, 1988), pp. 18-20.

²⁶ A.G. Sparrow, “Lord Fortescue,” *The Western Morning News*, 19 August 1914, p. 7.

²⁷ Plea to Devonians, 21 August 1914, Devon Record Office, Lord Fortescue Papers, 1262M/L129.

At this time when every effort is being made to induce all able bodied young men to enlist, may I plead that the people of Devon answer the call to arms and that the newspapers aid in this venture by assisting recruiting agents and the Devon County Council in our efforts to meet Lord Kitchener's call for 100,000 men.²⁸

Lord Fortescue's letter did not appear in the *Exeter Flying Post*, the *Express and Echo*, or the *Western Morning News*, three of Devon's most widely circulated newspapers. The owners of the newspapers censored recruiting ads and many of the calls for enlistment made by the National Service League and the Devon Parliamentary Recruiting Committee were omitted. The explanation for the lack of publicity given to Lord Fortescue's plea might be found in the fact that before the war there was some unpleasantness between the press and Lord Fortescue over complaints about housing and working conditions in Devon. Both the *Exeter Flying Post* and the *Express and Echo* publicly criticized the Devon County Council for not appropriating sufficient funding for housing and sanitation reforms. In response, Fortescue criticized the press for their "poor form" and indifference to the efforts put forward by the local government.²⁹ It is possible that some newspapers chose not to include Fortescue's address due to these preexisting tensions.

Until the end of August, Devon's newspapers focused on stories about troops training, Britain's leaders, and the 'good' relationship between Britain and its allies. However, it was the *Times* report on the British retreat at Mons that had a startling impact on enlistment numbers. The paper reported that the battle of Mons "has so far gone ill for the Allies" and "we fear that more [bad news] must follow." In the same article the *Times*

²⁸ Lord Fortescue, "Recruiting in Devon," *The Hartland and West Country Chronicle*, 25 August 1914. Hartland is a small community in northwestern Devon.

²⁹ Newspaper clippings with hand written notes, no dates available, Devon Record Office, Lord Lieutenant's Papers 1881-1914, 1262M/O/LD/112.

criticized those at home who took “shelter behind those who had left their homes and businesses to answer the call of duty.”³⁰ A few days later the ‘Amiens dispatch’ appeared in the *Times* and called the BEF a “broken army” unprepared for the resolve of the enemy. The report ended with the melancholic cry that the BEF “needs men, men and yet more men.”³¹ Peter Simkins argues that the article shocked those at home and enlistment numbers shot up first in London and then at recruiting stations throughout Britain.³² In Devon the news of the defeat at Mons appeared the next day, but the response was more mixed. By the end of August, Plymouth was swarming with regular and territorial soldiers, so much so that many areas of the city were cordoned off. In Exeter there was a drastic rise in recruitment numbers as men volunteered to serve with the Devonshire Territorials and the Devonshire Regiment. But, in the outlying communities the response was more reserved. In the northern towns of North Molton, Lynton, Hartland, and Chulmleigh the war was hardly noticeable. Few men appeared in uniform, recruiting stations and agents were sparse and there were no lines of men waiting to enlist. In the first month of the war there were no patriotic concerts reported for the above towns in either the press or the town council records, and recruiting posters were largely absent until early October.

Devon’s various town councils established recruiting committees to arrange rallies and to ensure the participation of a local recruiting agent, church representatives, the mayor, as well as for live music and snacks for children. Recruiting rallies were made into family affairs, stressing that all Britons had an important role to play in the war

³⁰ Quoted in Peter Simkins, *Kitchener’s Army: The Raising of New Armies, 1914-16* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), pp. 58-59, 59.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 59.

effort. The rallies not only encouraged young men to enlist, but also made direct appeals for women to make sacrifices for their country and for all able children to participate where possible. At a rally in the Newton District, Captain Phillpotts asked the people of Newton Abbot to

look upon our allies across the sea and see how their countries have been devastated, their homes burned and their women and children slaughtered. It is the duty of every man to protect his King, Country, wife and child. Women of Newton Abbot, we ask that you don't hold your men to their homes, but encourage them to offer their service and join a Rifle Corps or the Royal Navy.

The rally was well attended, but of the 600 people present from Newton Abbot and the surrounding district, only twelve volunteered for service.³³

Local businesses also participated in the recruiting campaign and some men felt pressure from their employers to enlist.³⁴ Fraser's Insurance Company rewarded men who enlisted with a £1 bonus, the Shell Oil Company offered its employees a £2 bonus, and the John Heathcoat and Co. Ltd and the Devon Clay Company sought to convince men to enlist by promising that their jobs would be returned when the war was over. The *Great Western Railway Magazine* also contributed to the recruitment efforts of the county by printing stories about the men who had volunteered, as well as thanking their families and communities for supporting the national effort. By the end of the war 3,587 railway men were serving with the armed forces.³⁵ Contrary to Dewey's assertion that railway men tended to be underrepresented, by March 1915 the response of Devon's railway men

³³ "Newton District Response," *Western Morning News*, 24 August 1914, p. 6. *The Great Western Railway Magazine* 30: 3, West Country Studies Library, p. 3.

³⁴ David Silbey, *The British Working Class and Enthusiasm for War, 1914-1916* (London: Frank Cass, 2005), pp. 116-117.

³⁵ County of Devon Quarter Sessions, Great Western Railways, Labour Books 1914-1919, Devon Record Office, QS/DP/687. Courtney of Powerham, Labour Books Rail Operation, 1915-1917, Devon Record Office, Devon Whitchurch, D1508M/64.

to the war was overwhelming and in many instances led to delays and accidents due to inadequate staff to run the lines.³⁶

The role of some businesses in encouraging recruitment was somewhat controversial. John Heathcoat's lace manufacturers, owned by Sir Ian Murry Heathcoat-Amory, gave small bonuses to the families of the men who volunteered for service and men who had been employed with the company for more than five years were given a £1 bonus for each year of service.³⁷ However, this practice was only carried out early in the war when excess employment numbers permitted.³⁸ In the spring of 1916 Heathcoat's came under scrutiny for seeking exemptions for fourteen lace-makers, which the company argued was a skilled occupation (all of the applications for single men were denied and judgments for the married men were postponed). When four HM Inspectors arrived at the factories from the Home Office to enquire what was being done to replace male labourers with women, it was explained that fifty employees had already enlisted and that the company had hired twenty-three women to replace male workers. The situation led to a second visit to the Heathcoat factories by two superintendent Inspectors of Factories to make sure that female labour was being used and that the company was taking every opportunity to employ women so that available men could enlist.³⁹ The result of the inspectors' visit was that the married men's exemptions that were previously

³⁶ Join the War Effort, 26 August 1914, Devon Record Office, Fraser's Insurance Company, PR 8661/51. Letter to employees, 1 October 1914, Devon Record Office, Shell Oil Company, PJ 5496/17. "Enlist Today," *The Great Western Railway Magazine*, 30: 6 (West Country Studies Library): 3; Peter Kay, *Exeter-Newton Abbot: A Railway History* (Newton Abbot: Platform 5 Publishing Limited, 1993), pp. 66-67.

³⁷ Notice to Employees, 14 August 1914, Devon Record Office, Heathcoat of Tiverton, 4302B/B/43. Heathcoat's lace manufacturing was the only major industry in Tiverton.

³⁸ John Heathcoat and Co. LTD. Records, September 1914, Devon Record Office, 4302B/B/43.

³⁹ Wasley, *Devon in the First World War*, p. 84.

put on hold were now rejected.⁴⁰

Despite the best efforts of the National Service League and local businesses to promote enlistment, the number of new recruits for the county remained low. Without a coordinated effort to manage the recruitment campaign for the county, efforts were disjointed and lacked the necessary commitment from Devon's local leaders. The scarcity of recruiting depots and agents, as well as the lack of information about the war meant that the true gravity of the situation was not adequately felt by the population and many men, rather than leaving their families and loved ones, chose to stay at home.

Parliamentary Recruiting Committee and District Divisions

In late September 1914 the Parliamentary Recruiting Committee and the District Divisions became operational and by the beginning of October the number of recruiting stations had grown and recruiting agents began to visit rural districts to encourage enlistment. The District Committees were encouraged to make appeals specific to the various counties and to increase the number of recruiting agents in places where recruitment numbers were low. At a town meeting in Tavistock the Division Executive Committee made a "Call to Devon" at a rally of approximately 300 people. Lord Fortescue attended and told the people of Tavistock that "it was very much to be regretted that our representative bodies had not been more successful in stimulating recruiting."⁴¹ Fortescue did not subscribe to the short-war illusion; rather, he believed that the efforts of the county were lacking because the severity of the situation was not fully appreciated by Devonians:

⁴⁰ Letter from Amory to Fortescue, 12 May 1916, Devon Record Office, Fortescue of Castle Hill, 1262M/L122. Of note here was that Amory was an active recruiter for the county and often criticized Devon's men for their failure to come forward.

⁴¹ Speech at Tavistock, 29 September 1914, Devon Record Office, Fortescue of Castle Hill, 1262M/L158.

Our Ministers have told us that this country was fighting for its existence. But this does not seem to make an impression on the people of Devon. Possibly one reason for the lack of enthusiasm is that the newspapers have failed to report on the dismal numbers for this county. We are not going to win the war by simply holding ground or by making progress to the extent of 50 yards in one place or 200 in another on such an extensive front. If we are going to win –and defeat is something that we absolutely refuse to contemplate—we must carry the war into the enemy’s country. It is an undignified—some might say cowardly—attitude for a county like this to say that we are content to mark time and to enter hereafter into the fruits of victory gained by other people who had made greater exertions and sacrifices than we were prepared to make. People who flattered themselves that everything was going well because the enemy had had heavy losses must remember that we also had had very heavy losses. The first recruits to join thought it would be a short war and here we see that men are afraid of the alternative. It was not to be one big push and the war would be over, and the list of casualties has made the risks of war very real for all. We must not be afraid. Instead we must do our duty.⁴²

In conjunction with Fortescue’s efforts, the Devon Parliamentary Recruiting Committee distributed a seven-page pamphlet entitled “Men of Devon” throughout the county and made a specific appeal to Devonians:

In past time, England has often called to her men for help, and the Men of Devon have never been deaf to her call. They sailed with Drake against the Armada, they went with Marlborough into Flanders, with Wellington to the Peninsula and Waterloo, with Roberts to Afghanistan, and with Buller to Africa. Wherever in the world their country has wanted them Men of Devon have ever been to the fore.

But, Men of Devon!—your country never needed you more than she needs you now. Never in all the mighty story of the English people has the Motherland been faced by a more tremendous task or threatened with dangers so terrible.⁴³

A speech given at the distribution point by representatives of the National Service League reminded Devonians that it was not so long ago that Devon was “threatened by the

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ “Men of Devon,” 3 October 1914, Devon Record Office, Civilian Recruiting Committee, 1037M/L941, pp, 1-7.

Spanish Armada. Thankfully, Drake and the brave men of Devon sailed out to meet the Spanish fleet, risking their lives for the protection of this land. Will you not protect England now?"⁴⁴ The League also called attention to the long history of the Buller family in Devon and asked Devonians to "not disappoint Mr. Hughes-Buller, Director of Recruiting For Devon. His family has successfully served this nation in the past and he is here to carry on the noble tradition of service to King and Country."⁴⁵ Major-General Laye held a similar rally in Dawlish where he told the citizens that "Devonians are too content here away from the war in the sunshine and quietude of lovely Devon, they hardly realise the seriousness of the situation." He continued by calling attention to the great work of Devon men in the past: "Devon men defeated France in the time of William III, and defeated the great Napoleon after a terrible struggle of over 20 years, and I have little doubt that we shall deal in a like manner with those who hope to Prussianise Europe."⁴⁶

The pleas of recruiting agents had little effect, especially in rural areas. In the countryside there were few large recruitment rallies or military parades to infuse the public with a sense of enthusiasm. Instead, representatives of the National Service League visited local farms and harassed the men of military age, goading them into enlisting by questioning their patriotism. They also went door to door, often during dinner hours when the men were sure to be home, intruding into the private sphere of the

⁴⁴ Ibid. The relationship between the Devon Parliamentary Recruiting Committee and the National Service League was an important one, particularly in the first three months of the war. While the first was mainly concerned with indoor meetings and coordinating efforts between departments and committees, the National Service League, in conjunction with the Division Executive Committees, was the public voice for propaganda until the formation of a civilian committee in 1915.

⁴⁵ "Men of Devon," 3 October 1914, Devon Record Office, Civilian Recruiting Committee, 1037M/L941, pp. 1-7.

⁴⁶ Major-General Laye, "The Nation's Call," *Dawlish Gazette*, 15 September 1914, p. 3.

family in a way that many Devonians found distasteful. Stanley Humont of Dunsford stated that the “Wild rants of the National Service League are a ridiculous spectacle. Have men no sense of decency?”⁴⁷ The Devon County Council records show that in Tiverton and Stoke Cannon recruiting agents who went door to door were largely ignored. In a letter to the Devon County Council Wilber Mason of Stoke Cannon expressed his frustration that every morning for more than a week there were two recruiting officers looking for his sons. The same agents also bothered his neighbour, who was a widow with two sons of military age. Both families were distressed by the war, but noted that the situation was made worse by the presence of the agents in their homes and communities.⁴⁸ In letters to the County Council residents requested that action be taken to prevent canvassing by recruiting agents.⁴⁹ However, the Council took no action; instead, the recruitment efforts for the county were intensified and recruiting agents became permanent fixtures in most communities.

In mid-October the National Service League, with the support of the Devon Parliamentary Recruiting Committee, launched a press campaign that compared the response of Devonians to the war with the response of other counties in the West Country. A letter from Colonel Symesis was printed in the *Western Morning News* entitled ‘Unpatriotic Devon.’ The article made specific reference to recruiting numbers in the region and a comparison with the county of Dorset revealed the poor response of Devonians. In 1911 Dorset had a population of 223,266 and in the first two months of the war had recruited 1,800 men. The population of Devon was 662,196 and for the same

⁴⁷ Stanley Humont, *Salcombe Gazette*, 20 September 1914, no page number.

⁴⁸ Wilber Mason, Letter to the Devon County Council, 17 September 1914, Lord Lieutenancy 1914-1918 Bundle 18, 1262M/L129.

⁴⁹ Report for September 1914, 30 September 1914, Devon Record Office, Devon County Council, Bundle 18, 1262M/L129.

period Devon had recruited only 1,200 men. The article was quick to place blame and noted that of the 1,200 recruits slightly less than twenty percent of whom were from the working-classes. The article also pointed out that in the county of Cornwall, which had a population of 328,098, the number of recruits was more than 2,500 for the same period.⁵⁰

Appendix 3-1 shows the population breakdown of Devon by age group and gender and reveals that prior to the war approximately fourteen percent (93,150) of the male population of Devon was between the ages of twenty and thirty-nine. Appendix 3-2 illustrates that a significant proportion of Devon's population worked in agriculture, defence, construction, and unspecified occupations.⁵¹ The census shows that more than 15,000 of the men employed in agriculture were unskilled labourers and that more than 24,000 of the men were 'men of the army, navy or marines,' which excluded officers. The existing recruitment records for Devon reveal that in the opening months of the war the groups most represented in terms of volunteers were construction workers (largest showing from Exeter and Plymouth), railway workers (fairly even distribution throughout south Devon), the service sector, dockers (H.M. Dockyard, south Devon), miners (central Devon), fishermen (south Devon), university students, and those employed in tourism (north and south Devon). As noted above, agriculture and forestry were noticeably absent in the early stages of the war, as were bricklayers, metal workers, and machinists, as well as the fisheries and shipbuilding industries in north Devon. The absence of these last two groups is understandable given that the major trading period in the north was between March and November (it was more spread out in the south), and the peak of activity was

⁵⁰ Report from Colonel Symesis to the Devon Parliamentary Recruiting Committee, Devon Record Office, Fortescue of Castle Hill, 1262M/L129. Printed in the *Western Morning News*, 17 October 1914.

⁵¹ Unspecified refers to retired from business, pensioners, students, scholars, private means, and others.

August.⁵²

Following the publication of the report, many Devonians expressed shock at the county's lack of commitment to the war effort. In a letter to Lord Fortescue W.H. Bolt desired to know if "these figures relating to Devon recruiting (a reflection on the County's Patriotism) are correct? I can hardly believe it and if wrong could you please make the necessary correction."⁵³ Similar letters appeared in local newspapers asking the editors to investigate and report on the 'real' recruiting numbers for the county. A letter to the *Teignmouth Post* read: "The numbers published in the *Western Morning News* should be of great concern to us all and I for one would like to know where the numbers came from and if they are real or accurate."⁵⁴ In a letter to the *Exeter Flying Post* S. Jones inquired if "the recruiting numbers in the *Western Morning News* are official numbers for the county or are they estimations? If they are estimations then the correction should be made and quickly."⁵⁵ In the *Western Express and Torrington Chronicle* an Optimist noted that he had "served my country for thirty years and I am astonished that Devon has been so poorly represented. If the numbers are true then I appeal to the local residents to let their actions speak for them. It is our duty as Englishmen to help each other."⁵⁶ In response, the *Western Morning News* and the *Western Independent* reported similar numbers to the ones released by Colonel Symesis. Both papers reported that 800

⁵² Enlistment Records by name, age, and occupation, 1914-1918, Local Government: World War I, Devon Record Office, Ref. 1037M-O/1. Voluntary Enlistment of men Category B, Army Reserve, 1914-1915, Devon Record Office, 1037M-O/4. By 1915 the number of dockers who enlisted was reduced considerably, as were miners. Ian Beckett argues that from the start of the war there was a certain degree of protectionism for men employed in essential industries, which may explain why the number of dockers and miners decreased after November 1914. Ian Beckett, *A Nation in Arms: A Social Study of the British Army in the First World War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985), pp. 9-10.

⁵³ Letter from W.H. Bolt to Earl Fortescue, 25 October 1914, Devon Record Office, Fortescue of Castle Hill, 1262M/L129.

⁵⁴ Edward Gordon, *Teignmouth Post*, 25 October 1914, p. 6.

⁵⁵ S. Jones, *Exeter Flying Post*, 27 October 1914.

⁵⁶ Optimist, "Patriotism," *Western Express and Torrington Chronicle*, 29 October 1914, p. 3.

men from Devon enlisted in the armed forces in the first month of the war and another 600 during September and October. The numbers were provided by the Devon Parliamentary Recruiting Committee, but were not entirely accurate. Lord Fortescue's records show that approximately one thousand men enlisted in the Devonshire Territorials and the Devonshire Regiment in the first week of the war and by mid-September the records demonstrated that approximately two hundred men per day had reported to the Higher Street Barracks for enlistment. However, approximately thirty percent of these men were enlisting for home service and another twenty percent were rejected as medically unfit.⁵⁷ A report in early October 1914 by the Devon Parliamentary Recruiting Committee explained that although more than 1,200 men had come forward, the "discrepancy was necessary to encourage enlistment. Like the vast majority of our countrymen I feel and deplore the horrors of war, but where circumstances arise, (as in the present crisis) when the nation is at stake, I most heartedly and aggressively must proceed with what is needed."⁵⁸ The inconsistency in recruitment numbers is simply due to presentation. The Devon Parliamentary Recruiting Committee was only reporting enlistees who had been found medically fit and were enlisted for service in the regular army. The numbers presented in the Fortescue papers were raw numbers of potential recruits for the county, not the number of actual enlistees. It is also important to note that in Dorset and Cornwall the numbers provided were the total numbers that had come forward, not the total number accepted.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Higher Street Barracks, 27 September 1914, Devon Record Office, Lord Lieutenancy Papers, 1262M/L129/57.

⁵⁸ Letter to Lord Fortescue from Alex Duncan, National Service League, Devon Division, 6 October 1914, Devon Record Office, Fortescue of Castle Hill, 1262M/L142.

⁵⁹ Unfortunately the recruitment numbers for Devon have not survived and so a cross-county comparison is not possible.

While recruiting rallies provided a venue for Devonians to express their patriotism, letters to the editor and personal correspondence allude to a slightly different response, one that was defensive yet patriotic. These letters suggest that there was an eagerness on the part of Devonians to publicly explain their so-called ‘lack of patriotism.’ In a letter entitled “Failure of Military Authorities” James Walken blamed the military authorities for the poor recruitment numbers in Devon:

If you pick up any copy of the *Times* since the war began one will find calls for recruits and a list of recruiting stations where men can go to offer their services. Everyday the *Times* has reports about the Germans and the need for men, but has there been any kind of propaganda for the counties? NO! People treat the war as a joke, it will soon be over they say.⁶⁰

Other letters suggested to the National Service League that the problem was not a lack of patriotism among Devonians, but rather that “Englishmen are over-confident. They say, ‘We have the Royal Navy and until it is defeated the Germans cannot land on this Island.’”⁶¹ Lawrence James argues that compulsory service was considered unnecessary in Britain “since the navy remained the basic defence against invasion...and there were plenty of willing amateurs to fill the ranks of the volunteers.”⁶² In Devon many expressed their faith in Britain’s navy and believed that when the Royal Navy “has its chance it will show the Germans its noble fighting qualities and be worthy of its great traditions!”⁶³ Devon had traditionally been a recruiting ground for the Royal Navy and this might explain some men’s reluctance to join the army. In August 1914 the Royal Navy was in many ways already mobilized for war due to the Royal Spithead Review. The fleet had

⁶⁰ James Walken, “Failure of Military Authorities,” *Exeter Flying Post*, 5 November 1914.

⁶¹ W.P. “Enlistment,” *Teignmouth Post*, 4 December 1914, p. 6.

⁶² Lawrence James, *Warrior Race: A History of the British at War* (London: Abracus, 2002), p. 403.

⁶³ Clutton diaries, 28 August 1914, Devon Record Office, Clutton of Devon, 6258-0.

been engaged in naval exercises and in light of the political situation in Europe, the men had not been discharged or granted leave.⁶⁴ With such a strong naval tradition, it is not surprising that many Devonians were confident in the ability of the navy to protect Britain's shores.

In an attempt to bolster enlistment and increase enthusiasm for the war, the government encouraged the formation of community/city battalions. Men who grew up together would serve together, thus reinforcing both community and regimental loyalty.⁶⁵ In Plymouth the Mount Wise Battalion was formed, and local footballers and cricketers joined to form part of a platoon. When the Devonshire City Battalion formed in Exeter eight hundred men joined.⁶⁶ These battalions often received their training locally, allowing some to return home on weekends or in the evenings. The purpose was to keep the men visible and connected to their home communities to encourage friends, neighbours, and family members to enlist. Local groups were able to make a specific appeal to local residents, and they were fairly successful in Exeter and Plymouth. Residents lined the streets to watch and children followed behind mimicking the soldiers.

John Stevenson argues that in some areas of Britain even the smallest community was able to raise an entire battalion. This was possible due to the strong social networks that existed in rural areas. Work, schools, churches, and leisure activities helped to prevent social isolation and aided in the development of community bonds and identities-

⁶⁴ Gerald Wasley, *Devon in the Great War* (Tiverton: Devon Books, 2000), p. 32. During the war the Naval College at Dartmouth was expanded and doubled its intake of cadets, while the training of senior cadets was cut short resulting in the deaths of forty-one cadets from Dartmouth alone in the first six months of the war.

⁶⁵ Simkins, *Kitchener's Army: The Raising of New Armies*, pp. 80-87; John Hartigan, "Volunteering in the First World War: The Birmingham Experience, August 1914-May 1915," *Midland History* 24 (1999): 176-177.

⁶⁶ Public Office: correspondence and papers concerning recruiting, 1914-1915, Devon Record Office, Lord Lieutenant Papers, 1262M/O/LD/153.

- the primary appeal of such battalions.⁶⁷ Since approximately 420,000, or two-thirds, of Devon's 662,196 residents lived outside the major centres of Plymouth and Exeter it would be expected that community battalions would have had a powerful impact on rural areas.⁶⁸ However, the strong opposition to recruitment and propaganda techniques in Devon's rural areas, particularly in northern and western regions, may have undermined recruiting efforts. The towns of north Devon were small and close-knit, generally centered on a particular industry such as coal mining, fishing, or shipbuilding. The dangerous nature of this work contributed to the strengthening of community bonds and made residents acutely aware of the economic and social concerns of their neighbours. Although these conditions were conducive to the formation of community battalions, the halfhearted response of many churches, particularly Nonconformist, to recruiting, together with poor road networks in west and north Devon may have prevented recruiting agents from accessing potential recruits. Also of importance was that the few northern industries that survived were dependent on a relatively small pool of male labourers, so it is not surprising that recruitment numbers remained low.

Furthermore, outside of Exeter and Plymouth, small rural newspapers were less enthusiastic about promoting the formation of community battalions. The *Launceston Weekly News* mocked the young men who appeared in Plymouth's streets without uniforms or rifles and described them as an "adolescent mockery of the BEF."⁶⁹ In

⁶⁷ John Stevenson, *British Society 1914-1915* (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1984), pp. 50-52.

⁶⁸ Population of Devon by parish 1801 to 2001, provided by the Devon Library Local Studies Service in conjunction with the Devon Record Office, Devon Record Office, Census Records, CENSATA.

⁶⁹ "The Plymouth Pals," *Launceston Weekly News*, 6 November 1914, no page number; Charles Ubricht, "The Pals Battalions," *Salcombe Gazette*, 3 December 1914, no page number; "Plymouth Pals," *Hartland and West Country Chronicle*, 7 November 1914; James Walken, *Hartland and West Country Chronicle*, 5 November 1914. Although there were no Pals battalions formed in Devon during the war, the press often

Devon most new volunteers did not have uniforms; instead they wore matching colours and marched without rifles.⁷⁰ Due to incentives from employers many men who worked in textiles enlisted in the armed forces creating a temporary shortage of workers. As a result, uniforms and supplies were shipped into the county from elsewhere. However, a series of train accidents in October and November 1914, led to further delays in the arrival of uniforms and supplies in Devon.⁷¹ The image of soldiers marching without uniforms did little to inspire confidence in Britain's army and did even less to convince men to enlist. John Hartigan's study of Pals battalions in Birmingham notes that over time appeals to group dynamics, which was an important component of the Pals, "may have provided more of an opportunity to shame men into enlisting than providing the means by which they could volunteer more easily."⁷² This 'manipulation,' as he terms it, may have undermined the intended effects of group movements like the Pals.

Resistance to recruitment strategies was also found in reports from recruiting agents across the county. The recruiting officer for north Devon, Colonel Alexander, reported that the poster campaign was a

complete failure. I continue to have difficulty in getting recruiting posters put up in the towns. In September and October posters were placed at the post offices, town halls, local restaurants and pubs, but soon after they were affixed they were torn down. I have recently gone around and no posters remain in Okehampton, Barnstaple, or Ilfracombe. The depot has been repeatedly vandalized and residents are hostile to my efforts.

He also noted that private businesses were offering to attach posters, but were requesting

referred to city/community battalions as 'Pals.' This practice was likely picked up from the national press and applied locally.

⁷⁰ The rifles that were available were Lee-Enfield rifles that were only suitable for drilling.

⁷¹ "Rail Crisis in Devon," 29 October 1914, Devon Record Office, *Great Western Railway*, QS/DP/671.

⁷² Hartigan, "Volunteering in the First World War: The Birmingham Experience, August 1914-May 1915": 178.

a small fee: "It is difficult to believe, but apparently patriotism is not free in Devon."

Colonel Alexander's report stated that if the War Office wished posters to be placed in north Devon he would need further assistance from the Devon Parliamentary Recruiting Committee "for more posters and for people to affix them weekly. It is my opinion that such efforts would be wasted."⁷³ Similarly, in the town of Newton Abbot the recruiting officer reported that groups of young boys were vandalizing recruiting depots and buildings that bore recruiting posters, and in Okehampton and Tavistock "recruiting agents have been the recipients of the most foul criticisms."⁷⁴ In August 1915 Charles Sprague of the Division Executive Committee in Tavistock reported that

I have spent considerable time trying to understand how to reach the people of Tavistock. Since the commencement of the war I have not had much success as apparently no authoritative body can compel these men to come forward. Perhaps this is a matter that could be taken up by the Tavistock Town Council. If councilors can undertake a voluntary canvass maybe our efforts will serve a greater purpose.⁷⁵

Reports from Dawlish and Totnes revealed comparable circumstances, and at a recruiting rally in Budleigh Salterton in June 1915 less than fifty people attended. The *Totnes Times* reported that at a recruiting rally in Totnes angry residents accosted a recruiting agent after he criticized their participation in the war effort.⁷⁶ Similar incidents were reported in

⁷³ Recruiting in North Devon, 25 November 1914, Devon Record Office, Town Clerks Office Okehampton, 3268A/13/76. It is unclear from Colonel Alexander's reports who was responsible for removing the recruiting posters. Of note is that in North Devon many fishermen were in the naval reserve and stayed in their occupations until late 1916 when they were replaced with fishermen from Scotland. In 1916 two hundred Brixham fishermen were recruited to serve in HM minesweepers. This left more than twenty fishing boats idle and led to rising fish prices throughout 1916. Wasley, *Devon in the First World War*, pp. 67-68.

⁷⁴ Recruiting Report, 18 January 1915, Devon Record Office, Fortescue of Castle Hill, 1262M/L153.

⁷⁵ Report from Charles Sprague, 7 August 1915, Devon Record Office, Devon Parliamentary Recruiting Committee, Tavistock Division Executive Committee, 3248A/13/76. By August 1915 recruiting efforts in other parts of the county was on the rise, but Okehampton remained considerably below the county average.

⁷⁶ "A Turn for the Worse: Recruitment in Totnes," *Totnes Times*, 14 June 1915.

Tiverton, Chudleigh, and Torquay. At the rally in Tiverton the recruiting officer was heckled by several men in the audience who shouted at him demanding to know “What keeps you from France?” and at the recruiting rally in Chudleigh agents were questioned about pay scales, separation allowances, and who would care for their wives and children once they were gone.⁷⁷

Throughout Devon the recruitment campaign attracted criticism and during the first half of 1915 some residents did not believe that the situation required action. One young man, in a letter to Lord Fortescue, described his feelings about the war:

In Abbots Clayton it is commonly understood that there is a war going on somewhere. Many believe that the county is actually involved in it...The truth is that we cannot imagine Abbots Clayton as part of England, and England as part of the British Empire...Why don't the men go to war?...If they want me, why don't they come and fetch me?⁷⁸

And, as another man put it,

We doant think nought, Zur, o'them advertaizements and noospaper talk about going soldgering. When Guv'ment need soldgers really sore, Guv'ment'll say so clear enough, like it does when it wants taxes...“Come 'long, Frank Halls, your're wanted.” And when Guv'ment taps Frank Halls on showder, and sez this, I'll go right enough, but I'll not stir foot till Guv'ment zays; nor'll any many of sense this zide Exeter.⁷⁹

In the same month the 3rd Battalion Devon's began its campaign around the county visiting the small rural communities of north Devon. They made their way through Yeoford, Colebrooke, Witherridge, and South Molton, and even though the marches were well planned and announced in the local press, few supporters came out to meet them and even fewer enlisted. At Beaford and Langtree children of all ages excitedly greeted the

⁷⁷ “Animosity Brews in Tiverton: Recruitment Efforts fall Short,” *Bideford Gazette*, 26 June 1915.

⁷⁸ “Abbots Clayton,” Anonymous Letter to Lord Fortescue, 15 January 1915, Devon Record Office, Lord Lieutenancy Papers, 1262M/L112.

⁷⁹ Quoted in Wasley, *Devon in the Great War*, pp. 60-61.

soldiers and dinners were held in support of the troops as they made emotional appeals to the men of these towns, as well as to the men of Stubbs Cross and Shebbear. Certainly some men came forward, but ultimately the public's response was unsatisfactory. What is particularly telling was that the *Western Morning News* reporter who went along with the soldiers on their marches reported that the young men of these communities appeared indifferent. At one farm the labourers called out that they would only go "when the farmers' sons go" and another stated, "We will stay at home and do the farming, let others do the fighting." According to this reporter, the most common response to the request for volunteers was "I'll go when compelled" or as another young man stated, "When the Germans come we will join the Army." In the end the Devon's had not achieved the results they wanted and after six days of marching on the poor roads of north Devon, they returned to Exeter with only fifty-four additional men.⁸⁰

Recruiting tactics in Devon were thus met with resistance between August 1914 and mid-1915. Mass rallies and public speeches failed to win over the public and many citizens recognized propaganda techniques for what they were—a ploy to convince young men to enlist. While the city battalions enjoyed more success, the rural countryside was home to two-thirds of Devon's residents, and attempts to badger men into enlisting there were met with considerable unease. Many recruiting agents described being accosted by angry citizens who resented their efforts to fill the ranks of Britain's armed forces. The end result was that the tactics employed by the Devon Parliamentary Recruiting Committee to bolster enlistment in Devon were not much more effective than the results achieved prior to its formation in late September 1914.

⁸⁰"Recruitment in North Devon," *Bideford and North Devon Gazette*, 23 February 1915, no page number.

The Civilian Recruiting Committee and New Recruitment Tactics

Changes to the propaganda efforts in Devon were necessitated not only by public hostility, but also by the war itself. Between September 1914 and February 1915 the Devonshire Regiment sustained high casualties. At the end of October the 2nd Battalion had been without rest for over a month and with more than one hundred losses in the first two months of the war, Lord Fortescue was anxious to encourage replacements. To do so, he decided to support the formation of a civilian committee to manage public opinion by way of a centralized agency for propaganda in Devon. A civilian-recruiting agency had been suggested in November 1914 but was dismissed when it did not receive support from Lord Fortescue or the Devon County Council. The Mayor of Exeter warned that “residents are already upset by the appearance of recruiting agents in their towns. It is important to push, but gently.”⁸¹ And Lord Fortescue recognized that the men of Devon were hesitant, but hoped they would soon understand the needs of the country and volunteer for service. He told the committee that “Devonians will not put the future of this nation at risk. The severity of the war has not yet settled in, but when it does our recruiting depots will be overwhelmed by men volunteering to defend her.” Fortescue’s ‘wait and see’ policy was met with opposition from the town councils of Okehampton, Sidmouth, South Hans, and Bideford whose mayors believed that a civilian recruiting committee was essential. Not only was recruitment low in these areas, but war societies and charity organizations were also slow to emerge. Hughes-Buller expressed a similar concern: “As the man responsible for recruiting in this county I must strongly impress

⁸¹ Meeting of the Devon County Council, 5 November 1914, Devon Record Office, Fortescue of Castle Hill, 1262M/L143.

upon you the need to reach our fellow citizens. The majority of available men from the county have not yet volunteered for service and we need to determine why.” Despite protests, the issue was dropped and was not revisited until January 1915.⁸² In February 1915 a Civilian Recruiting Committee was established under the Devon Parliamentary Recruiting Committee and operated in conjunction with the military authorities. Its primary objective was to promote enlistment by managing the morale of the civilian population. Four Civilian Recruiting Committees were put into operation in Devon during the war operating regionally in the north, south, east, and west. The message of the Committee was simple: an appeal to patriotism, to ‘Rally round the Flag,’ and the assiduously repeated, ‘Your Country needs YOU.’⁸³

In March 1915 the Civilian Recruiting Committee launched a new poster campaign. Posters had been used since the beginning of the war but the committee determined that the earlier campaign, dull letterpress posters, had not been successful, and in some places had a negative effect on public opinion. The new campaign focused on posters with bold images and a simple message. Between July and August 1915, 2,000 copies of Kitchener’s ‘Does The Call of Duty Find No Response In You Until Reinforced...By The Call Of Compulsion?’ were distributed throughout Devon’s towns and villages.⁸⁴ The revamped poster campaign was successful in visualizing the need for men in urban areas and from March recruitment numbers for the county began a steady

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid. For more on the poster campaign see Nicholas Hiley, “‘Kitchener Wants You’ and ‘Daddy, What did YOU do in the Great War?’: the Myth of British Recruiting Posters,” *Imperial War Museum Review* 11 (1997): 40-43.

⁸⁴ Local Government: World War I, correspondence, posters and appeals relating to the war effort, Report for September 1915, 3 September 1915, Devon Record Office, Ford family of Branscombe, 1037M-0; Public Office: correspondence and papers concerning recruiting, 1914-1915, Devon Record Office, Lord Lieutenant Papers, 1262M/O/LD/153.

climb. In the countryside the poster campaign made slow but steady progress, and by mid-1915 affixed posters had a much longer life expectancy than in 1914. The poster campaign in Britain ran for just over a year and produced 6.7 million posters, but its sheer volume should not conceal the complexities of wartime recruiting.⁸⁵

News stories about the German atrocities committed in Belgium and France also aided the efforts of Devon's recruiting agents. On 2 January 1915 the front page of the *Weekly News* ran the headline "Belgian Atrocities: German Cruelty to Women and Children." On the same page was a reference to Zeppelin raids on the East Coast and the recruiting efforts of the Southwest. The local press reported stories of civilians being forced to march in front of the German soldiers where they faced machine gun fire from the Belgian army. Stories such as these were successful in fomenting and maintaining a high level of public support. F. C. Bartlett argues that creating and maintaining enthusiasm had to be done predominantly through appeals to emotion and during the First World War atrocity stories were used to help the public overcome pacifist tendencies. The unprovoked attack on Belgium reinforced Britain's case regarding the failings of German morality and early reports from the French and Belgian governments demonstrated the barbarity of the enemy.⁸⁶ In May 1915 the Bryce Commission reinforced the atrocity propaganda that appeared in the press by launching an investigation into the crimes reported by the civilian populations in Belgium and France. The report was sensationalist and concluded that the Germans were guilty of unnecessarily destroying buildings, raping women, and committing grievous crimes

⁸⁵ Hiley, "Kitchener Wants You," p. 40.

⁸⁶ F.C. Bartlett, *Political Propaganda* (New York: Octagon Books, 1973), pp. 12, 129.

against children.⁸⁷ Despite suggestions that the conclusions of the Bryce Report were exaggerated or part of the Allied propaganda campaign, John Horne and Alan Kramer argue that although there was a strong desire in Britain to condemn German action given the importance of Belgium in the British declaration of war, the findings of the Bryce Report were generally accurate.⁸⁸

There is little doubt that the events of 1915 aided British propagandists in their attempts to justify British involvement in the war.⁸⁹ In April the Germans used poison gas against Allied soldiers, in October the Turks began their attacks on Armenian Christians, and the Germans executed nurse Edith Cavell for helping Allied troops cross the Belgian border. All of these events “were presented so as to maximize their propagandistic effect.”⁹⁰ Further, on 7 May 1915, off the south coast of Ireland, a German submarine sank the *Lusitania* drowning 1,198 people. Unlike the German attack on Belgium, carried out against a foreign people on foreign land, this attack involved British civilians whose bodies washed up on British shores. On 10 May the *Devon and Exeter Gazette* published an article entitled “Internment: The Time is Now!” calling for

⁸⁷ There have been suggestions that the Bryce Commission’s Report was exaggerated and that it wanted to avoid any conclusions that could have been harmful to Britain’s war effort. The committee reached its conclusion after interviewing soldiers and civilians, but there was no indication of which stories were first hand accounts and which ones were stories that were circulating throughout local towns and villages—stories that were fantasies or inventions that helped people cope with the emotional effects of war. Bryce had been opposed to the war until the violation of Belgian neutrality and the crimes against Belgian and French civilians converted it into a crusade. Although he did not set out to manipulate public opinion, he did want the information to be available to the public. Messenger, *British Propaganda and the State in the First World War*, pp. 73-75.

⁸⁸ John Horne and Alan Kramer, *German Atrocities, 1914: A History of Denial* (London: Yale University Press, 2001), pp. 10-15.

⁸⁹ William Trend, “Guilty,” *Exeter Flying Post*, 6 February 1915, p. 4; William Trend, Comments on “Guilty,” *Exeter Flying Post*, 6 February 1915, p. 4; Margaret Tilly, “Home,” *Devon and Exeter Post*, 12 March 1915, p. 2; C. E. Leisching, “The National Peril,” *Crediton Chronicle*, 26 June 1915, p. 7; Anonymous, “The British Traitor,” *The Crediton Chronicle*, 29 June 1915, p. 4; A Patriot, “Internment,” *Crediton Chronicle*, 29 June 1915, p. 4.

⁹⁰ Robb, *British Culture and the First World War*, p. 102.

the government to take immediate action for the internment of all Germans living in Britain.⁹¹ The sinking provoked extensive anti-German riots in London and elsewhere and on 13 May Prime Minister Asquith made known his internment policy.⁹² Devonians were encouraged to act as informants and Lord Fortescue asked residents to report all foreigners living in their communities.⁹³ In Devon, eight attacks against German residents were reported following the publication of the sinking. In one such instance a group of three young men vandalized the home of a retired German railway worker. All three men were the sons of local businessmen and after explaining to the authorities that they felt threatened by the presence of the German man in their neighbourhood, the men were released. All eight instances involved young men and five of the eight cases involved men from the middle classes.⁹⁴ There were similar reports of middle-class youths patrolling wooded areas in Dawlish and Teignmouth watching for ‘suspicious behaviour,’ and although reports of violence were rare for these communities, special constables were detached to several areas throughout the county.⁹⁵ Among their duties was guarding valuable points, including coastal areas and railways, to protect against vandalism, and to watch for and report any suspicious activity. James Owen, the Mayor

⁹¹ “Internment: The Time is Now!,” *Devon and Exeter Gazette*, 10 May 1915. It is estimated that there were approximately 50,000 enemy aliens (Germans, Austrians, and Hungarians) living in Britain in 1914. See, James Munson, *Echoes of the Great War: The Diary of the Reverend Andrew Clark, 1914-1918* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 11.

⁹² Panikos Panayi, *The Enemy in Our Midst: Germans in Britain during the First World War* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1991), pp. 76-78.

⁹³ “Special Constables and the War: Report from Lord Fortescue,” *Western Morning News*, 6 August 1914, p. 2.

⁹⁴ Police records for 1916, 30 December 1916, Devon Record Office, County Clerk’s Department, R4/1-0/C/321. In the other three instances the men were not identified.

⁹⁵ “Enemy Aliens,” *Dawlish Gazette*, 6 October 1916, no page number. Acts of violence against German residents was not uncommon in Devon and began with the outbreak of war in August 1914. For other examples see, “Enemy Within,” *North Devon Herald*, 13 August 1914, no page number; “Enemy Aliens in South Molton,” *South Molton Gazette*, 13 August 1914; Letters to the editor [untitled], *Western Times*, 24 June 1915, p. 6; Letters to the editor [untitled], *Brixham Western Guardian*, 7 January 1915, no page number; “Germans in Devon,” *Okehampton News*, 6 August 1915.

of Exeter, reported to Lord Fortescue that the “young men were caught up in the excitement of the war and were doing their patriotic duty.”⁹⁶ Acts of vandalism were not uncommon in Exeter and Plymouth, and for many youths attacking German residents was one way to fight the war. Unease regarding the German threat may have emanated from the German naval programme and scares about a possible cross-channel invasion, but they were also connected to concerns about trade and economic competition that threatened the jobs and social position of Britain’s lower middle-class.⁹⁷ Arno Mayer suggests that points of crisis could stimulate anxiety or competition, or it could heighten class awareness by emphasizing common economic and social interests among members of the lower-middle class. Within this context, it is possible that certain members of the lower-middle class were “prone to metapolitical appeals of a xenophobic and conspiratorial nature” when faced with the “conjunctural threat of economic and social decline.”⁹⁸

Growing levels of hostility and acts of vandalism spurred by the sinking of the *Lusitania* were also partly the result of the real or imagined relationship between Britain and its empire and commonwealth. Among the victims were Canadian citizens, as well as Americans, with ties to the United Kingdom, and many of them were women and children. Nicoletta Gullace notes that among the shock and distress that followed from

⁹⁶ Letter from Mayor Owen to Lord Fortescue, 15 May 1915, Devon Record Office, Fortescue of Castle Hill, 1262M/L142 Bundle 16.

⁹⁷ For more on the impact on invasion literature on public opinion see David Stafford, “Conspiracy and Xenophobia: The Popular Spy Novels of William LeQueux, 1893-1914,” *Europa* 4: 2 (1981): 163. For more on the presentation of casualty lists in the national and local press see J.M. Bourne, *Britain and The Great War, 1914-1918* (London: Edward Arnold, 1989), pp. 205-206. Arno Mayer, “The Lower Middle Class as Historical Problem,” *Journal of Modern History* 47: 3 (1975): 409-430.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 434-346. This is not to suggest that the working classes were not jingoistic or that they did not engage in similar acts of vandalism. Rather, it is reflective of the available source material. For more information on the use of atrocity propaganda and the *Times* see James Morgan Read, *Atrocity Propaganda, 1914-1919* (New York: Arno Press, 1972), pp. 195-196.

the sinking of the *Lusitania* “the boundaries between kinship and fictional kinship became blurred.” Rioting that first began among the family and friends of the victims soon spread across the country and as far away as Johannesburg, South Africa.⁹⁹ Devonians “from all classes and categories” called for immediate steps to be taken for the removal of German residents in the county.¹⁰⁰ Contemporaries justified internment in view of German actions – a willingness to attack the civilians of combatant nations and neutral countries, as well. An internment camp was established on Dartmoor to house non-naturalized, adult male German aliens. Although many German residents gave themselves over to the authorities, the process was slow. In the meantime, the newly-revealed ‘threat’ posed by German civilians created a sense of panic in Devon. In May 1915 Devonians called for the formation of a Devon Volunteer Regiment to assist the authorities in arresting and interning enemy aliens, and across Devon the response was overwhelming. Thirty-one volunteer units were formed in Barnstaple, Bideford, Exeter, Exmouth, Ilfracombe, Kingsbridge, Newton Abbot, Northam, Ottery, Paignton, Plymouth (two corps), Salcombe, Seaton, Sidmouth, Tavistock, Teignmouth, Topsham, Torquay, Uffculme, and Yealmpton.¹⁰¹ Some communities, such as Budleigh-Salterton, Dawlish, Lymington, North Molton, Marwood, and Hartland, areas that were primarily agricultural

⁹⁹ Nicoletta F. Gullace, “Friends, Aliens, and Enemies: Fictive Communities and the Lusitania Riots of 1915,” *Journal of Social History* 39: 2 (Winter 2005): 350.

¹⁰⁰ Internment at Dartmoor, 25 June 1915, Devon Record Office, Fortescue of Castle Hill, 1262M/L151. The camp was part of Dartmoor prison that would later house conscientious objectors. Some German residents had already been interned under the Government’s Aliens Restriction Act, but these tended to be retired soldiers/sailors or reservists, and even then, generally only in coastal areas or in areas that housed military barracks. However, under the Act German nationals had to register at their local police station.

¹⁰¹ “The Need of a Devon Volunteer Regiment,” *Crediton Chronicle*, 22 May 1915. Three of these towns were in north Devon: Barnstaple, Ilfracombe, and Northam.

with a significant number of rural labourers, did not respond to the call for men.¹⁰²

Beckett and Simpson note that increased numbers for the Territorials in the spring and summer of 1915 was not surprising given that the campaign was loosely based on Lord Derby's model. In comparison with the New Armies, the Territorial Forces were less likely to go abroad and would only be called for foreign service when absolutely necessary. Although these men were volunteers, there was some confusion about what they were volunteering for. Prior to March 1915 men could make the distinction between home and imperial service and the majority chose home service.¹⁰³ Many of the volunteers from Devon remained in the county (or the United Kingdom), were generally responsible for home defense, and so the perception was that they were a home force. Those who stayed in the county and were employed in essential industries often remained in their home communities and in their current occupations. Many of the men who came forward in the spring of 1915 were from the dockyards, railways, and the fishing communities of north Devon, the majority of which would have remained at home. Territorial forces like the 1/7th Cyclist battalion were formed and expanded in response to local concerns (fear of enemy invasion), centered around town loyalties (a land force that complimented the county's long naval traditions), and were maintained by the infrastructure of the county.

¹⁰² "The Need of a Devon Volunteer Regiment," *Crediton Chronicle*, 22 May 1915. During the war, Tiverton and Budleigh were among the communities with the lowest number of enlisted men for the county. Tiverton and Budleigh were numbers two and three following Okehampton. Volunteer enlistment reports for Okehampton were not released to the press by the Okehampton Town Council.

¹⁰³ Ian Beckett and Keith Simpson, *A Nation in Arms* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985), pp. 139, 135.

In the pre-war period the growth of Cyclist battalions, and the Territorials generally, was partly the work of the Fortescues. Lord Fortescue and his father before him, were involved in and supported the Territorials and believed that they could play an important role in the war. The Lord Lieutenant was an Hon. Col. of the North Devon Yeomanry Cavalry and was disappointed that volunteer numbers for the Territorials were poor in the opening months of the war. Despite Kitchener's exclusion of the Territorials as a component of the New Army, Fortescue encouraged Devonians to join the Territorials and made several appeals in local newspapers stressing the value of such units. As Kitchener predicted, the Territorials shared a local outlook and were motivated to join out of local pride, and perhaps even local rivalries. Further, several of Devon's Territorial forces remained in Britain and reinforced the belief that the Territorials were a home force. The 1/7th Cyclist Battalion, for example, remained in Devon throughout the war patrolling the south coast and the Scout Cycling Programme, a training programme for middle-class youths between the ages of fourteen and seventeen, was organized in response to pre-war fears of invasion and expanded due to wartime concerns about coastal security.¹⁰⁴ Further, not all who volunteered for home service were fit to serve overseas, and were instead employed as special constables.¹⁰⁵ These men were often

¹⁰⁴ The Cyclist battalion increased in numbers from two hundred before 1914 to 463 in the early months of the war. Although the Cyclist battalion was fairly new, formed in 1908, the Royal North Devon Yeomanry and the Royal Devon Yeomanry enjoyed a long history in Devon and drew their members from the gentry. However, late in the nineteenth century the traditions of the Yeomanry were disrupted. In need of reform and declining in numbers, both were dismounted in September 1914, much to the displeasure of Lord Fortescue, and formed part of the 74th Yeomanry Wessex Division, but stayed in Devon until October 1915 when they were sent to Gallipoli. [Author unknown], "A Short History of Devon Volunteerism" [unpublished], Devon Record Office, Lord Lieutenancy Papers, Fortescue of Castle Hill, 1262M/MM12.

¹⁰⁵ Public Office, Territorial Force Association for Devon, Devon Record Office, Fortescue of Castle Hill, 1262M/O/LD/156; Territorial Force Association for Devon, Devon Record Office, Fortescue of Castle Hill, 1262M/O/LD/119; Territorial Force Association for Devon, Devon Record Office, Local 17/5C/TA2-5.

given the difficult task of recruiting outside of the major centres. For those men who enlisted after March 1915 it is not surprising that when their units were called-up under the Group System that many men did not come forward (see Appendix 3-3).¹⁰⁶

Despite some hesitations, the sinking of the *Lusitania* dramatically increased anti-German sentiment in the county. In June 1915 the Plymouth Volunteer Battalion was formed, and in late May the Plymouth Rifle Club created the Scouts, a volunteer organization that patrolled coastal areas.¹⁰⁷ The Scouts were comprised of older men, above the age of military service, who, armed with a rifle, and often a dog, described themselves as Britain's "last line of defence. We will hold this land until the Empire can come to our aid."¹⁰⁸ Gisela Lebzelter argues that the "myth of a hidden hand"—that German spies were promoting pacifist propaganda, causing food shortages, and "manipulating international finance" against British interests—lead to expressions of anti-German sentiment across Britain.¹⁰⁹ In response to these fears, the Anti-German League, formed in May 1915.¹¹⁰ Similarly, the Anti-German Union (which changed its name to the British Empire Union in 1916) was also "aimed at fighting German influence within Britain" and was created out of the hostility that arose after the sinking of the

Also see, Gerald Wasley, *Devon and the Great War*, pp. 34-35.

¹⁰⁶ Local Government: World War I, Notebook list of volunteers for May 1915, called-up under 'Group System' by area and occupation, Devon Record Office, 1037-O/LG/4/7/25.

¹⁰⁷ A Member, "Devon Volunteer Battalion," *Western Morning News*, 10 June 1915, p. 4.

¹⁰⁸ Letter to Lord Fortescue from L. McKeen, 24 May 1915, Devon Record Office, Fortescue of Castle Hill, 1262M/L129.

¹⁰⁹ Gisela C. Lebzelter, "Anti-Semitism—a Focal Point for the British Radical Right," in *Nationalist and Racist Movements in Britain and Germany Before 1914* ed. Paul Kennedy and Anthony Nicholls (London: McMillan Press, 1981), p. 96.

¹¹⁰ John B., "An Anti-German League," *Exeter Flying Post*, 17 April 1915; W. Lewis, "An Anti-German League," *Exeter Flying Post*, 24 April 1915.

Lusitania.¹¹¹ The formation of an Anti-German League in Exeter in June 1915 sought to remind Devonians through demonstrations, speeches, and letters to the editor of the “killing of defenceless women, the butchering of non-combatants, the wanton destruction of cities, the killing of our soldiers after having surrendered, and the laughing Hun whilst their victims drown.” The League asked Devonians to keep in mind that “We are fighting an enemy unscrupulous in warfare and who will be equally so in commerce when the war is over.”¹¹² Likewise the All-British Women’s League of Devon advocated for a “Britain for the British.” The All-British League stressed that it was not enough to sing patriotic songs, “we must go further and put our principles into practice.” If every British woman would “realise that it is shameful and treacherous to give financial help to the Germans by buying German goods, we would be able to take back this country.”¹¹³ By mid-1915 the success of the local propaganda campaign in Devon, now embraced by the newspapers, found new expression as Devonians became actively engaged in the promotion of the war.

Part of the success of the recruitment campaign was that it equated Britishness with nobility of action. The notion that true patriots were prepared to offer their lives for

¹¹¹ Panayi, *The Enemy in Our Midst*, pp. 202, 207, 207-208. The League had six goals: to enroll one million men to take the anti-German Pledge; to amend laws pertaining to Alien immigration; to legislate for a protective tariff on all German and Austrian made goods; to investigate German patents, processes and monopolies to provide important information to British traders; to provide financial assistance to British traders for the manufacture of British goods; and to assist in returning to parliament or office all candidates whose objectives are complementary to those of the League.

¹¹² “Exeter Anti-German League,” *Exeter Flying Post*, 11 June 1915. The Anti-German League aimed to recruit one million members to take the anti-German pledge, they fought to amend Britain’s immigration laws, and lobbied the government to impose a protective tariff on German and Austrian goods. The Anti-German Union was created in 1915 and held anti-German demonstrations across Britain. It had a membership of approximately 10,000. It survived until the late-1970s but shifted its focus to anti-socialism and fears about the spread of communism. Due to insufficient records, it is unclear how many people in Devon participated in these organizations.

¹¹³ Editha Glanusk, *Exeter Flying Post*, 17 May 1915. It is unclear how many people in Devon participated in these organizations.

their country moved beyond the pages of newspapers and pamphlets and into the mindset and actions of the public. In a letter to the editor of the *Western Morning News* Charles Jerram wrote that, "I applaud the voluntary system and the desire of Roberts to maintain the traditions of this country by calling on men to do their duty. Recruiting officers are doing their best and I believe that the voluntary system will be sufficient to meet the military needs of the country."¹¹⁴ By June 1915 enlistment numbers for Devon had rebounded. Appendix 3-3 shows recruitment numbers for Devon as compared to other counties between March and June 1915. This shows substantial improvement in the number of enlistments in Devon. Between March and June thirty eight percent of those called up reported for duty, compared to twenty-eight percent between January and March 1915.¹¹⁵ Further, reports from the Devon Parliamentary Recruiting Committee show that in many areas of Devon recruiting efforts witnessed considerable change between January and June 1915, despite the fact that many volunteers did not report for duty. A letter from C.A.L. Fursdaus to Lord Fortescue in May reported that of those who did come forward between August 1914 and May 1915 "218,000 [volunteers] were from the poorest classes and deemed unfit for military service. These numbers are quite unacceptable when compared with England's east and I'm afraid that recruiting numbers for Devon continue to be an embarrassment to your Lordship."¹¹⁶ However, in June Hughes-Buller reported that

¹¹⁴ Charles Jarram, "Recruiting" *Western Morning Post*, 27 August 1914, p. 3.

¹¹⁵ Western Recruiting Report, 31 March 1915, Devon Record Office, Fortescue of Castle Hill, 1262M/L129. The report shows that between January and March 1915 2,103 men were called up, of which 589 reported to recruiting depots. Called up may refer to men who were volunteers, including men in starred occupations.

¹¹⁶ Letter from C.A.L. Fursdaus to Lord Fortescue, 31 May 1915, Devon Record Office, Fortescue of Castle Hill, 1262M/L153. Although the source does not specify, the number 218,000 probably refers to the West Country, not just Devon alone.

significant headway has been made in Newton Abbot where recruiting numbers are on the rise and shop assistants in Bideford and labourers in Tiverton have since come forward. Barnstaple has been very active and the upper classes have done especially well, as have the lower classes in some districts. Recruitment in the county is finally showing signs of life.¹¹⁷

Nationally, the trend was quite different. Peter Simkins notes that between October 1914 and May 1915 enlistment numbers declined in most areas of the country. The recruitment boom in the first two months of the war congested recruiting depots and training facilities causing considerable discomfort, which in turn, deterred large numbers of men from enlisting. Perhaps more importantly, however, was that in September 1914 the height restriction was raised to 5ft 6in, which had a dampening effect on enlistments.¹¹⁸

A number of historians have argued that it was not just moral pressure, propaganda, or war posters that drove men to enlist, but also various conceptions of patriotisms or ‘allegiance’ to their country. Yet, David Silbey carefully points out that this sense of duty cannot be understood without analyzing the way it was expressed, identified, and embodied during the war.¹¹⁹ Propaganda appealed to a particular kind of masculinity centering on loyalty to the state and family. Nicoletta Gullace argues that the Liberal government adopted a conservative image of national identity that defined military service as the sole basis of righteous masculine behaviour. While the roles of men were clearly defined, women’s roles were more ambiguous. The Order of the White Feather or the White Feather Brigade was initiated by Admiral Charles Penrose

¹¹⁷ Report from Mr. Hughes-Buller to Lord Fortescue, June 1915, Devon Record Office, Devon Parliamentary Recruiting Committee, 1262M/L153.

¹¹⁸ Simkins, *Kitchener’s Army: The Raising of New Armies*, p. 104.

¹¹⁹ Paul Ward, *Red Flag and Union Jack: Englishness, Patriotism and the British Left, 1881-1921* (New York: Boydell Press, 1998), pp. 4-6, 121-123; Franz Coetzee, “English Nationalism and the First World War,” *History of Contemporary Ideas* 15: 3 (1993): 363-366; David Silbey, *The British Working Class and Enthusiasm for War, 1914-1916*, pp. 106-116.

Fitzgerald in August 1914 when he authorized thirty women in Folkstone to hand out white feathers as a symbol of cowardice to men of military age not in uniform. The White Feather Brigade originated within the voluntary system and Fitzgerald believed that women had enough influence over Britain's men that publicly branding men cowards would convince even the most hesitant man to go to war.¹²⁰ Women who gave out white feathers helped set the parameters of male citizenship by equating khaki with virtuous masculinity and national service, while simultaneously proclaiming themselves to be acting in the service of national interests. But by transgressing the norms of feminine behaviour, the White Feather Brigade also invited and received public criticism and a backlash developed over the course of the war.

The activities of the Brigade were covered in national and local newspapers and repeated by women across the country.¹²¹ In Devon, the White Feather campaign found a limited degree of support. Initially, recruiting agents, the press, and Lord Fortescue supported the activity and believed it to be a useful recruitment technique. The National Service League, Devon Branch, published a letter entitled "Men of Devon Have YOU No Shame?" in which it alluded to the hard work performed by the White Feather Brigade. The article stated that the "Women of the White Feather Brigade are performing a noble service by asking the men of Devon to come forward and offer service to their nation. In this time of great national peril, all who do not come forward are shirking from their

¹²⁰ Nicoletta F. Gullace, "White Feathers and Wounded Men: Female Patriotism and the Memory of the Great War," *Journal of British Studies* 36 (April 1997): 178-181.

¹²¹ It is likely that the activities of the White Feather Brigade were popularized in the press, but there was no formal organization at the local level. Although the activities of the participants were generally carried out anonymously, it is safe to assume that their actions were motivated by a desire to participate in some way in the war effort. Ibid, pp. 190-192.

duty.”¹²² The *Tiverton Gazette* reported in two separate articles its “support for the brave and patriotic women of the White Feather Brigade who have put the needs of King and Country before personal loyalties” and offered “Congratulations to Devon’s women who have answered the call of service and who have led by example and encouraged all men to provide a worthy example for their sons and brothers to answer the King’s call for service.”¹²³ Similarly, Lord Fortescue and Lady Fortescue gave support to the Brigade in the first month of the war. On 30 August 1914 Lady Fortescue responded to a woman who was complaining about the “inappropriate actions” of the White Feather Brigade. She wrote, “My husband and I support the efforts of the White Feather Brigade to assist recruiting in Devon. The numbers, as we know, are dismal and necessary and dramatic steps are required to rectify the situation.”¹²⁴ A woman from Devoran responded to the flurry of criticisms leveled against the White Feather Brigade in the local press. She wrote that in her opinion “individual recruiting did as much good as recruiting meetings,” and that all women should “use their influences to convince men that they might do their duty.” She continued that “it is the women in Devon who are holding the men back” and that “any woman who holds her man back was almost a criminal. The White Feather Brigade has done its part, even if only one recruit is obtained.”¹²⁵

Despite some initial support for the White Feather Brigade the campaign quickly came under heavy criticism. A woman performing the role of a soldier undermined the image of female vulnerability and was perceived as an inversion of femininity. Gullace

¹²² National Service League, Devon Branch, “Men of Devon Have *YOU* No Shame?” *Western Independent*, 27 August 1914, p. 3.

¹²³ “White Feather Brigade,” *Tiverton Gazette*, 4 September 1914, no page number; “Devon’s Brave Women,” *Tiverton Gazette*, 9 September 1914, no page number.

¹²⁴ Lady Fortescue on the White Feather Brigade, 30 August 1914, Devon Record Office, Fortescue of Castle Hill, 1262M/O/LD/141.

¹²⁵ Mrs. Hood, “Lady’s Criticism,” *Illustrated Western Weekly News*, 3 July 1915, p. 15.

argues that within the parameters of the white feather campaign female patriotism became masculinized and menacing because it questioned notions of service and citizenship. The white feather campaign implied that a man unwilling to defend his country was a poor citizen and an unfit husband and father.¹²⁶ A man from Exeter criticized the efforts of the Brigade by pointing out that it was “Doubtless these ladies are able at a glance to distinguish whether a young man is married or single, whether he has responsibilities or not, and so avoid gratuitously insulting and publicly branding with cowardice the wrong man. Let each help and ‘judge not, that ye be not judged.’”¹²⁷ It is likely that as the war progressed and the human costs became visibly apparent, giving white feathers to men not in uniform became increasingly unacceptable and excited enormous hostility. A man in Crediton remarked that the “women sending the feathers fail to realise, I hope, that they are causing needless pain to sensitive natures. Our old town has done full well its share of providing recruits in proportion to the population and in any case to insult a man is not a means to attract him to one’s object.”¹²⁸ Women of the white feather campaign became associated with the enemy; both inflicted considerable pain and both appeared careless about the consequences of their actions. Cajoling men to enlist contrasted dramatically with perceptions of women’s nurturing roles and the white feather became a sign of a world gone awry—a world where men were not only sacrificed by politicians and generals, but also by the women at home.

Nevertheless, postcards were sent to the homes of young men of military age charging them with a failure to do their duty. In a letter to the *Teignmouth Post* H. W.

¹²⁶ Gullace, “White Feathers and Wounded Men,” pp. 184-191.

¹²⁷ “The White Feather,” *Exeter Flying Post*, 6 August 1915.

¹²⁸ A Disgusted Townsman, “The White Feather Brigade,” *Crediton Chronicle*, 19 September 1914, p.2.

Michelmores stated, "whoever is sending these anonymous postcards is acting very unwisely indeed, and very unfairly and unjustly to a number of men."¹²⁹ Michelmores stated that while he admired the patriotic zeal of Devon's women, the behaviour was objectionable and prejudicial rather than beneficial to the recruiting campaign. According to Gullace, women participated in the campaign not only as sign of their patriotism, and suggests that there was also an erotic pleasure to be gained from converting men into soldiers and soldiers into men.¹³⁰ In the context of war where self-sacrifice was the single most important civic task, women could gain a similar attachment to the war by vicariously participating in the fighting through their male recruits. However, it was not only women who took part in the White Feather campaign. Many men participated, and it is possible that the giving of a white feather was a form of patriotic expression for them as well. Maurice C. Bolt received a card in the post with a white feather sewn on the back from "A Retired Man, White Feather Brigade."¹³¹ The note accused him of "unmanly and cowardly behaviour" and questioned why he allowed others to risk their lives while he stayed at home.¹³² Two letters were sent to Lady Fortescue by men asking for her to support the efforts of the Brigade in the local press. The letters were signed "A Disabled Man, White Feather Brigade" and "A Working Man and Member," and between them claimed to have sent more than twenty feathers since the start of the war.¹³³ Both men likely perceived the sending of a white feather as a symbol of their patriotism justified by

¹²⁹ H.W. Michelmores, "Protest Against Postcard Device for Recruiting," *Teignmouth Post*, 7 May 1915, p. 4.

¹³⁰ Gullace, "White Feathers and Wounded Men," pp. 193-194.

¹³¹ Maurice Bolt, "A Protest," *Dawlish Gazette*, 3 October 1914.

¹³² *Ibid.*

¹³³ White Feather Brigade, 5 October 1915, Devon Record Office, Fortescue of Castle Hill, 1262M/O/LD/141. White Feather Brigade, 16 June 1915, Devon Record Office, Fortescue of Castle Hill, 1262M/O/LD/141.

their individual relationships to the war, as well as the exigencies of a national emergency. The records of the Civilian Recruiting Committee demonstrate that numerous men took part in the postcard campaign and neighbours and friends reported more than a dozen men who admitted to participating in the campaign by sending postcards to men of military age who had not yet enlisted. Almost all of the men reported to the authorities were above the age of military service.¹³⁴

Although men were involved in the campaign, it was the actions of Devon's women that aroused ferocious debate in the press. Women were encouraged to do their part and they participated in the recruitment campaign in a number of ways. At recruiting rallies across the county women demonstrated their patriotism by offering to enlist when the men failed to do so. A young woman in Lynton offered to "take the place of any slacker here who would rather hear stories about the mutilation of women and children, and risk the possibility of similar action here in Britain, than to fight the Hun and destroy all possibility."¹³⁵ The efforts of the woman were applauded in the local press but were also dismissed as harmless antics. Likewise, countless poems appeared in the press to aid the national recruiting effort by asking men to go to war. E.C. Gerrard submitted a poem entitled "Duty's Call to Men Who Will Not Go," in which she asked:

Are you dead, oh Men of Britain! Dead as those who rise no more
On the battlefield, from carnage, and the sea that has no shore?
Are you sleeping men of Britain! Is it now you take your rest?
When brave women send their husbands, sons and brothers—ay—their best—
Break love's fetters which have bound them, cast forth from enfolding arms,

¹³⁴ Order of the White Feather, 3 November 1915, Devon Record Office, Devon Parliamentary Recruiting Committee, 1262M/L153. While 'A Disabled Man' or 'A Retired Man' could have been an injured soldier or a retired sailor, both were unable to serve their countries (at least for the time being) and may have sent a white feather as a way to continue their service.

¹³⁵ "Young Lady Who Wanted To Go," *Illustrated Western Weekly News*, 5 June 1915, p. 14.

To make warfare for humanity—to stay life's shrieks, alarms!¹³⁶

It is not surprising that some women were confused by the outrage expressed in local newspapers against the white feather campaign. In a letter to the *Dawlish Gazette* a member of the White Feather Brigade wrote: "I am a proud member of the White Feather Brigade and it is my patriotic duty to convince the young men of this town that they are needed for Kitchener's Army." She saw no difference between her actions, presenting a white feather to men in civilian clothes, and the behaviour of the recruiting officer in her town: "Why should I be criticised for doing my part when a man can stand on the street and call men cowards and shirkers and convince them to sacrifice their lives. Why is one patriotic and the other not?"¹³⁷ In response a women explained, "Here in Devon we do not expect women to be so scrupulous and conniving as to send feathers through the post branding men, who are complete strangers, cowards. That is something only women in London do."¹³⁸ The women of the White Feather Brigade became the subject of male inquiry, suspicion, and disrespect. The authorities, and to a large extent the public, were appalled when women actively engaged in such behaviour. Within this context, the image of a woman could be disfigured by her conduct in the war and the giving of a white feather was seen as an "emblem of all that was wrong with female patriotism."¹³⁹

Despite the disapproving efforts of the White Feather Brigade, between February 1915 and January 1916 the Civilian Recruiting Committee enjoyed noticeably more

¹³⁶ E.C. Gerrard, "Duty's Call To Men Who Will Not Go," *Western Express and Torrington Chronicle*, 12 June 1915, p. 2. For other examples see, F.B. "For England," *South Devon Weekly Express*, 11 September 1914, p. 3; "The Country's Call," *Dawlish Gazette*, 26 September 1914, p. 4; "Devon's Challenge," *Exeter Flying Post*, 17 April 1915, p. 8; "A Mother's Call," *Exeter Flying Post*, 26 December 1916; "Mobilizing the Nation," *Crediton Chronicle*, 29 January 1917.

¹³⁷ A Patriotic Woman, "The White Feather Brigade," *Dawlish Gazette*, 19 September 1914.

¹³⁸ Katherine C. Willows, "White Feather," *Paignton Chronicle*, 29 September 1915.

¹³⁹ Gullace, *The Blood of Our Sons*, pp. 83, 84.

success than the Parliamentary Recruiting Committee. The increased participation of the local press in the recruitment and propaganda campaigns made the gravity of the situation abundantly clear and the sinking of the *Lusitania* sparked public outrage against the enemy. In response, ‘dutiful’ citizens demanded the internment of enemy aliens and formed volunteer organizations to patrol Devon’s towns and cities. The formation of the Scouts and the Anti-German League demonstrated the willingness of Devonians to protect their families, homes, and country from the enemy. Women also lent their support through the ‘Britain for the British’ campaign and the White Feather Brigade. Through these groups, Devon’s women believed they were contributing to the war effort in a positive and meaningful way, and although many Devonians considered the white feather campaign to be a disgraceful display of unfeminine behaviour, the women who participated believed they were aiding their country by transforming Britain’s men into soldiers. By mid-1915 recruitment in Devon was on the rise, but it was at precisely the same time that it began to decline in most other parts of the country.

1916 and the Introduction of Conscription

By the beginning of 1916 the propaganda campaign in Devon was fully operational. The Theatre Royal in Exeter and the Grand Theatre and Palace Theatre in Plymouth were filled to capacity as artists and musicians staged productions with patriotic themes. Jokes were told about the Kaiser and the audience was encouraged to join the services.

Performances at music halls were lively and thriving and moving pictures were a slow but affecting form of entertainment. Short films focused on the gallantry of British soldiers and the national anthem played in cinemas and theatres at the end of every show. Traveling showmen toured the county presenting short films in rented halls or at fair

grounds and featured newsreels with glimpses of the heroic fighting on the Western Front.¹⁴⁰ The *Illustrated Western Weekly News* featured weekly pictures of the Devonshire Regiment, pictures of children marching and saluting one another, volunteers in uniform in Plymouth, and of the ships stationed along Devon's south coast. Recruitment ads ran almost every day in most of the major newspapers in the county and on 6 January 1916 Lord Fortescue described the cities as "full of enthusiasm for war. Plymouth has awoken to the war and spirits are very high. In Torquay the presences of soldiers has heightened moods and residents are now more resolved to the task ahead."¹⁴¹ The Civilian Recruiting Committee wrote to Fortescue in mid-January that participation in war activities was on the rise. The 'county competition campaign,' an informal competition between counties for knitting socks, raising money and so on, was well underway. Patriotic dances were popular in the cities and were organized by the Civilian Recruiting Committee in conjunction with local organizations. Particularly prominent in the southern port communities of Dartmouth and Plymouth, these dances brought soldiers, sailors, and local residents together and served both as a form of entertainment and as an encouragement to enlisting.

This is not to suggest that the propaganda campaign alone changed the recruitment profile of the county. Outside of the cities the mood was more reserved. In the small community of Chudleigh a man explained:

While I am pleased to see that the inhabitants of our towns and cities are enjoying various forms of entertainment in these dark days, there are people in other areas of the county who have difficulty getting the basic necessities like meat and groceries and has [sic] little money to afford

¹⁴⁰ Wasley, *Devon and the Great War 1914-1918*, pp. 81-82.

¹⁴¹ War Enthusiasm in Devon, 6 January 1916, Devon Record Office, Fortescue of Castle Hill, 1262M/L126.

boots or anything else. In the meantime, the cities enjoy dances, not to mention the drastic rise in prostitution in Plymouth and Torquay.¹⁴²

Entertainment was scarce in Devon's rural areas, particularly in northern and eastern regions, and the presence of soldiers was limited. Few refugees were billeted in rural areas and with most of Devon's temporary hospitals located in the south and east, residents in the north and west had to rely on the newspapers and word of mouth for war news. As such, the 'stories' printed in Devon's papers were frowned upon by some residents because it was difficult for rural residents to obtain substantive information about the war. Rather than the newspapers creating an air of enthusiasm and exhilaration, in some rural areas they made the population nervous. Dorothy Holman wrote in her diary that, "No posts, no papers tell us what is really happening and I wonder how bad it must be if the papers would rather say nothing at all. How are we to know what is happening all around us. We are cut off from this war and no one can trust what the newspapers report." Holman's father was a preacher at the Dawlish church and he encouraged young men in his parish to go to war. Holman did not support her father's efforts and instead felt "sorry for her friends Charles and Paul who have to go to war but don't want to. They say that they don't know what to expect over there and all the young men about the community feel troubled owing to the secrecy that surrounds the war and its progress."¹⁴³ Instead, communities were left with gossip and rumours that often served only to heighten the level of anxiety, rather than providing comfort.

A glimpse into the small community newspapers during the war reveals something about the mindset of the rural population in 1915. While the larger newspapers

¹⁴² "A Chudleigh Working Man," *South Devon Weekly Express*, 29 January 1915, p. 3.

¹⁴³ Holman diaries 1 October 1916, Devon Record Office, Holman of Devon, 3830M/F9 Bundle 17.

in Devon practiced self-censorship and did not print horror stories about the war, the smaller newspapers at times included letters from members of the community who were involved in the fighting and did not concern themselves with omitting potentially demoralizing stories, even if that was not the author's intended purpose. In a letter to the *Dawlish Gazette* a soldier on the Western Front wrote:

Wounded are brought in from everywhere along the firing line, horses and cattle lying about dead, villages and towns blown to pieces—hardly a complete house anywhere—whilst farms are burning almost every night. As I write, within a few hundred yards, shells are tearing through houses as though they were but matchwood.¹⁴⁴

The *Teignmouth Post* published a similar letter from the front: "Whilst I am writing shells are bursting all around us. One morning we were being nearly blown out of our trenches and under strong fire from the Germans, we had to retire. We keep losing horses fast, through shrapnel. This is not war, but a deadly wicked slaughter."¹⁴⁵ The *Salcombe Gazette* published a letter that detailed the death of a man while his company attempted to save him: "Willy had been shot in the neck and was bleeding bad. I tried to get him but shells were exploding every few minutes and bits of buildings were flying everywhere. It was not until the fighting ended that we found him. Doc says he was shot eight times. He died, but nobody really knows when."¹⁴⁶ Although the purpose of these letters was not necessarily to dishearten the public but rather to share news about the war, young men and families waiting at home may have interpreted them that way.¹⁴⁷ Meanwhile, the message of the larger newspapers was decidedly upbeat. The *Weekly News* reported that

¹⁴⁴ "Soldiers Letter," *Dawlish Gazette*, 4 December 1915.

¹⁴⁵ Private A. Allchin, "Letter from the Front," *Teignmouth Post*, 20 November 1914, p. 7.

¹⁴⁶ Private C.T. Dunn, "Our Losses," *Salcombe Gazette*, 26 June 1916, no page number.

¹⁴⁷ Robb, *British Culture and the First World War*, pp. 111-112. Also of practical concern was that newspapers that chose to publish such accounts were taking a chance and could have been prosecuted under DORA, which permitted the government to suppress any report that it considered to be harmful to the war effort.

“200,000 Germans Retreat From Antwerp,” “The Glorious Devon’s Get the Job Done” and “German Food Supplies Are Running Low.”¹⁴⁸ On 7 August 1916 the *Exeter Flying Post* reported that the “Germans are close to defeat” and the *Western Times* announced that the “German tactics fail at Verdun: Britain on the road to victory.”¹⁴⁹

Robert Wohl correctly points out that it was not until 1916 that a “new image of the war” began to materialize among Britain’s soldiers, even if this view was shared by a minority of the civilian population. After the Somme morale among Britain’s soldiers began to decline and the conscripts that replaced the “fallen volunteers” were of inferior physical quality and less enthusiastic.¹⁵⁰ This unenthusiastic response among some conscripts is not surprising given that they were conscripts rather than volunteers. The introduction of conscription under the Military Service Acts of January and May 1916 rescinded civil rights in practice, while the construction of British wartime identity, which had been generated within the parameters of the defence of liberty and freedom, was reevaluated. Conscription never enjoyed unanimous support among the population, but in January it was presented as a necessary step. Devon’s newspapers declared that the Allies were in a good position to strike at Germany, but more men were needed for Kitchener’s army. On 17 January the National Service League, Devon Branch, reported that it “does not advocate conscription but only compulsory training in the Territorials and compulsory service in this country if it is invaded.”¹⁵¹ Lord Fortescue also tried to allay public discontent by stating that “conscription will only be necessary if men fail to

¹⁴⁸ The *Weekly News*, 5 January 1915, p. 1.

¹⁴⁹ “Germany Close to Defeat,” *Exeter Flying Post*, 7 August 1916. “German tactics fail at Verdun: Britain on the road to victory,” *Western Times*, 7 March 1916, p. 4.

¹⁵⁰ Robert Wohl, *The Generation of 1914*, pp. 94, 94–95. For more on soldier’s attitudes to war see Helen McCartney, *Citizen Soldiers: The Liverpool Territorials in the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 114–115.

¹⁵¹ National Service League, Devon Branch, “Conscription,” *Western Times*, 17 January 1916, p. 7.

come forward. The current system, without modification, is not sufficient to secure victory.”¹⁵²

However, even before the first Military Service Act was passed the Newton Abbot Branch of the Independent Labour Party applied to the local Urban District Council to hold a meeting against conscription and the Council decided “not to grant the use of any building or place for which the Council was answerable for such a purpose.” After two petitions by the townspeople, the Newton Abbot Town Council decided to resist conscription by stating that “this town views conscription very seriously, but we respect the wishes of the people of Newton Abbot and believe that the traditions of freedom should not be replaced by compulsion.”¹⁵³ Similarly, the Okehampton Town Council agreed that “conscription is a bold and unnecessary step. It is one thing to force years of war on the people of this great nation, but how can we justify forced military service?”¹⁵⁴ The market town had been largely unaffected by the war and residents feared that the community, with a population of only 3,000, would “cease to operate if the men are forced to leave.”¹⁵⁵

Despite resistance, the newspapers continued their attempts to convince the public that conscription was necessary for victory. The *Exeter Flying Post* stated “HONOUR BEFORE FREEDOM,” the *Western Morning News* ran stories about “The Continued Sinking of British Ships by the Germans,” and several articles appeared in the *Western*

¹⁵² “Fortescue on Conscription,” *Western Times*, 6 January 1916, p. 7.

¹⁵³ “Newton-Anti Conscriptionists,” *Teignmouth Post*, 21 January 1916, p. 4.

¹⁵⁴ Town Clerk’s Office Okehampton, 6 January 1916, Devon Record Office, 3248A/13/80.

¹⁵⁵ “Okehampton and Conscription,” *Ilfracombe Chronicle*, 10 January 1916, p. 7.

Evening Herald about the “Dark Times: Experiences of the Zeppelin.”¹⁵⁶ Stories about German military gaffes, low food supplies in German cities, and reports of declining morale among the populations of the enemy nations were intended to warm the population to the need for compulsory service. In January 1916, propagandists sought to convince the public that conscription was necessary for a final ‘big push’ and then the war would be over.

These attempts were in part successful, but the success was due to the fact that with the introduction of conscription the recruitment campaign was thrust into civilian hands. The Civilian Recruiting Committee reported to the Devon County Council that the “push for compliance is better left in the hands of civilians, than government agencies. The clergy and community leaders will have more success in reaching the people, than will recruiting agents.”¹⁵⁷ In 1916 Sir Ian Amory announced that conscription would ensure equality of sacrifice among men:

On the same street there are two families each with sons of military age. In one family no son has enlisted, and instead all members of the family earn money due to wartime industry, while the other family has three sons at war. Victory will be good for us all, but one family will no doubt experience heartache, death and suffering. In the one case all is lost save honour, while the other will gain everything that freedom offers, but will have sacrificed nothing. There is no honour in that.¹⁵⁸

Equality of sacrifice was an important aspect of the wartime experience and the idea that conscription would ‘level the playing field’ was a popular topic for discussion (the issue of conscientious objection will be dealt with in Chapter Four). S. Tucker wrote to the

¹⁵⁶ “HONOUR BEFORE FREEDOM,” *Exeter Flying Post*, 27 January 1916. “The Continued Sinking of British Ships by the Germans,” *Western Morning News*, 24 February 1916, p. 7. “Dark Times: Experiences of the Zeppelin,” *Western Evening Herald*, 7 February 1916, p. 3.

¹⁵⁷ Meeting of the Devon County Council, 5 April 1916, Devon Record Office, Fortescue of Castle Hill, 1262M/L140

¹⁵⁸ Sir Ian Amory, “Equality of Sacrifice,” *Teignmouth Post*, 21 January 1916, p. 4.

letter of the *Western Times* that it is very “strange and vexatious to those of us who have, and are, giving of our best, in life, money, etc., to see, as one sees, daily in our streets, men eligible, both in physique and age, who should have dropped the pen long ago and taken up the rifle, instead of doing girls work.”¹⁵⁹ Similarly, Reverend Russell Canbey urged Devonians that conscription was necessary and that it would be a temporary and insignificant “blip in the history of this great nation, but the Germans shall never forget the force and gallantry of the British army that ended the greatest war in our history.”¹⁶⁰ Following the introduction of the first Military Service Act some local residents and community leaders encouraged their fellow citizens to accept conscription as a necessary tool to win the war.

On 25 May 1916 a second Military Service Act was passed into law, extending eligibility of military service to all men between the ages of eighteen and forty-one. With the introduction of the second bill, the belief that Germany was close to defeat was shattered. The Local Gossip section of the *Exeter Flying Post* criticized the government for false information. Under the heading “Two Lessons for Two Years,” the *Exeter Flying Post* noted that “there is daily accumulating evidence that we are not close to victory...the enemy will fight on.” Public agitation was on the rise and in September the *Exeter Flying Post* announced that “Pessimism is Growing in Devon.” After receiving more than seventy letters the *Exeter Flying Post* published a one page article called ‘Local Gossip,’ written by local columnist Cit. The article noted that “People are

¹⁵⁹ S. Tucker, “Indulgence and War,” *Western Times*, 29 May 1916, p. 3. Also see, A.H. Mitford, “Nationalization of State Service,” *Western Morning News*, 14 January 1916, p. 3; E.D. Wylie, “Lord Kitchener and Compulsion,” *Western Morning News*, 8 January 1916, p. 7; “The Military Service Bill,” *Western Guardian*, 20 January 1916, p. 5; “Local Gossip: Sleeping Beauties,” *Exeter Flying Post*, 5 February 1916, p. 8.

¹⁶⁰ Reverend Russell Canbey, “The Necessity of Conscription,” *Western News*, 14 January 1916, no page number.

complaining about the progress of the war. 'Look at the map,' the big push is the entire Western Front. People complain that we are not making any real gains and that many men have been sacrificed in our efforts. Germany has not starved, nor has it collapsed militarily."¹⁶¹ Shortly after the introduction of the Act one man declared that "Our declaration of war is a *fait accompli*. But does this mean that we are to throw overboard our principles altogether. Are we to now abdicate our rights? British liberalism at this present moment is at a lower ebb than it has been since before 1900."¹⁶² The *Teignmouth Post* also noted that feeling in the county alternated between "jubilation and warning, though the pendulum swings closer to the latter."¹⁶³ These criticisms were not directed at the war per se, but rather at the way the British government had handled the war, particularly with regard to recruiting: the Derby Scheme, the First Military Service Act, and finally universal conscription. By mid-1916 the population had become anxious about the protracted nature of the war and many began to question tactics employed by the government to guarantee new recruits and to bring the war to a successful conclusion.¹⁶⁴

The following month a report in the *Exeter Flying Post*, based on a public opinion survey conducted in sixteen locations throughout the county, confirmed that declining public support was, in part, a result of dwindling faith in government, and more

¹⁶¹ 'Cit', "Local Gossip: The Pessimists at Home," *Exeter Flying Post*, 30 September 1916, p. 8.

¹⁶² Anonymous, "Conscription," *Salcombe Gazette*, 28 May 1916, no page number.

¹⁶³ "The Mood in Devon Dampens," *Teignmouth Post*, 1 October 1916, p. 5. Also see, C.R.N. "Strain and Sorrow," *Exeter Flying Post*, 18 November 1916, p. 8; Mr. Freeman, "Civilization has gone Hopelessly Backwards," *Exeter Flying Post*, 25 November 1916, p. 7; A Concerned Citizen, "War Rages," *Exeter Flying Post*, 2 December 1916, p. 2.

¹⁶⁴ Violet Clutton, diary, 29 November 1916, Devon Record Office, Clutton Papers, 6258/39.3; Letter From Gilbert to his sister Kate, 5 June 1916, Devon Record Office, Gilbert Papers, 3828M/F35; Whitaker Memoir [unpublished], no date, Devon Record Office, Whitaker Papers, 2667M/F11; Elizabeth Ellen Wood, diary, 24 June 1916, Devon Record Office, Wood Papers, D6407.

specifically, Asquith's ability to bring the war to an end. The report stated:

The falling off of popularity for the Asquith led coalition government is due to the manifest lack of firmness in dealing with the problems before it. The Cabinet appears to be unable to take a strong line in anything. It is laying itself open to suspicion to the situation in Greece, Ireland, and the Dardanelles and it is acting haltingly in regard to the many questions at home.¹⁶⁵

As the war progressed many liberal principles were discredited and the public became increasingly uneasy about Asquith's leadership. Free trade was challenged, free speech was curtailed, low armaments production culminated in the 'shells scandal,' the stalemate on the western front, and high casualties in every theatre of war opened the Asquith government to public criticisms. However, criticisms were not confined to the newspapers. Private correspondence also expressed a lack of confidence in Britain's leadership. Beatrix Cresswell blamed the Asquith government for the needless death of Britain's young men and wrote in her diary that, "Asquith's incompetence has undermined this country's war effort at every turn. He is incapable of understanding the complexities of this war and is afraid of his own generals. Instead, he does nothing."¹⁶⁶ Cecilia Roberts believed that Asquith was incapable of leading the country to victory, and Patrick Gough opined that although the Prime Minister had done his best, "he has been unable to stand strong against his opponents. Pacifism is dangerous in times such as these."¹⁶⁷ The *South Devon Weekly Express* reported that while it was impossible to gauge the prospects of the new government, it was their determination that the country

¹⁶⁵ "The Mood in Devon," *Exeter Flying Post*, 3 November 1916, p. 4. Also see, "Okehampton Rural Council," *Western Times*, 9 May 1916, p. 3;"Local Gossip," *Exeter Flying Post*, 20 May 1916.

¹⁶⁶ Beatrix Cresswell, 15 July 1916, Devon Record Office, Cresswell of Devon, 4686M/F51.

¹⁶⁷ Cecilia Roberts, "Britain's Leader," *Launceston Weekly*, 22 August 1916, no page numbers; Patrick Gough, "Asquith's Leadership," *Launceston Weekly*, 22 August 1916, no page numbers.

would support any Ministry that will prosecute the war vigorously.¹⁶⁸ When a coalition government headed by David Lloyd George replaced the Asquith ministry in December 1916, the public's faith in the country's leadership seemed to improve. Lloyd George's popularity, initiated by the People's Budget of 1909,¹⁶⁹ was reinforced following the shell crisis of 1915, and as minister of munitions he captured the popular imagination as the man "to get things done" who desired above all "to end the war in a victory for the Allies."¹⁷⁰

In the autumn of 1916, the Devon Parliamentary Recruiting Committee was forced to report to Lord Fortescue that "volunteer enlistment numbers have dropped to below October 1914 levels."¹⁷¹ Although conscription had been introduced and would provide the military with the necessary manpower, the Devon County Council was concerned about public opinion. With fewer and fewer men volunteering to enlist, more men had to be forced into service. Fortescue was worried that forced service would further enflame public resentment, especially in the context of food riots, protests, and acts of vandalism that were already sources of concern for the local authorities. Despite the best efforts of the press and the Parliamentary Recruiting Committee to maintain morale, by December 1916 Lord Fortescue described the situation in Devon as "worrisome."¹⁷² The *Express and Echo* tried to revive volunteerism in the county when in January 1917 it published an article entitled "What They Were Fighting For." The

¹⁶⁸ "1916," Editorial, *South Devon Weekly Express*, 7 December 1916, p. 4. D.W. "The New Premier," *Western Times*, 11 December 1916, p. 2.

¹⁶⁹ Walter Arnstein, *Britain Yesterday and Today* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2001), p. 267.

¹⁷⁰ D.W. "The New Premier," *Western Times*, 11 December 1916, p. 2; Shelly Caldwell, "David Lloyd George," *Express and Echo*, 13 December 1916, p. 4.

¹⁷¹ Recruitment Report for Devon, 28 September 1916, Devon Record Office, Fortescue of Castle Hill, 1262M/L144 Bundle 13.

¹⁷² Letter from Lord Fortescue to the Devon County Council, 30 September 1916, Devon Record Office, Fortescue of Castle Hill, 1262M/L144 Bundle 13.

article attacked the West Country for the “dramatic and shocking decline of volunteerism in the region” and informed Devonians that to resist now “will not only jeopardise Britain’s war effort, but the lives of your fellow men will have been lost in vain.”¹⁷³ In March the rural recruiting councils in Devon received an urgent message from the National Service Office “requiring an active campaign to be conducted by the local authorities, with a view of canvassing the whole district, and urging the enrolment of all males not engaged in military service between the ages of 18 and 61.” However, the Chairman of the meeting, Mr. G. Lobb of Launceston announced that the civilian authorities would not conduct such a canvass. He cautioned that the war and its conduct had been misrepresented for long enough and if it was necessary to have all men of military age, why did the authorities wait until 1916 to introduce conscription. He stressed that the men in Devon were needed and should not be interfered with and asserted that if a canvass was necessary that it was the responsibility of the Devon Parliamentary Recruiting Committee or some other organization, but he would not ask for any more from the people of Devon.¹⁷⁴ And in Okehampton the public was unsympathetic to Mayor Holley’s effort to encourage enlistment and attendees shouted “Sit down” at the military representatives who tried to address the crowd. When the need for compulsory service was being addressed, audience members called the counselors “War Lords” and interruptions continued until they were removed from the stage.¹⁷⁵ The introduction of conscription did much to undermine the gains made by the Civilian Recruiting Committee throughout 1915. Volunteerism had been on the rise in Devon and

¹⁷³ “What They Were Fighting For,” *Express and Echo*, 18 January 1918, p. 3.

¹⁷⁴ “National Service League: Rural Councils Take No Action,” *Weekly News*, 23 March 1917.

¹⁷⁵ “National Service: Personal Remarks at Okehampton Last Night,” *Express and Echo*, 27 March 1917.

enlistment numbers were higher in late 1915 than at any other point during the war. The introduction of the first conscription bill made the population nervous, but it did not significantly dampen the mood of the county. In fact, many Devonians were willing to accept the conscription of single men. However, the introduction of universal conscription destroyed the hope that Britain was close to victory. Devonians felt they had been lied to and the 'spirit of volunteerism' ground to a halt, revealing the delicate nature of the relationship between the government, local and national, and the populace. Devonians were willing to make sacrifices, but in return they expected a 'truthful,' even if incomplete, exchange of information.

Declining Morale and Lord Lansdowne's Plan for Peace

The introduction of conscription and the prolongation of the war had a dampening effect on public morale. By the spring of 1917 the Civilian Recruiting Committee noted in its report to the Devon County Council that "morale in the cities has fallen and it seems that volunteerism in Devon has reached an end."¹⁷⁶ In March and April recruiting meetings held in Exeter and Plymouth failed to stimulate enlistment, but the problem was particularly evident in Exeter. In Exeter the attendance of the general public at recruiting rallies from mid-1916 onwards was "disappointingly small." Mayor Owen noted that there is "no doubt that for some reason or other the men of Exeter have stopped coming forward."¹⁷⁷ In November an article in the *Western Times* reported that "attitudes about the county are that the news from the war fronts is quite unsatisfactory. The authorities

¹⁷⁶ Recruitment Report for Devon, March 1917, Devon Record Office, Civilian Recruiting Committee, 1262M/L144 Bundle 13. Also see, "Local Gossip," *Exeter Flying Post*, 5 February 1916; "National Service Campaign," *Weekly News*, 24 March 1917, no page number; "Devon Volunteers?" *Express and Echo*, 30 May 1918, p. 2; Barbara Oakley, "Patriotism," *Exeter Flying Post*, 24 February 1917.

¹⁷⁷ "Meeting to Stimulate Recruiting at Exeter," *Western Times*, 20 June 1917, p. 2.

hardly succeed in securing one advance before another is put forward, all the while asking for men, men and more men. It is any wonder that morale is at an all time low.”¹⁷⁸ Although there is no objective way to measure the level of morale in Devon, it can be said that in addition to low volunteer numbers, dances and patriotic concerts were considerably fewer in 1917 than in 1915 and membership numbers for patriotic organizations were also in decline.¹⁷⁹

By the time Lord Lansdowne’s letter appeared in the *Daily Telegraph* suggesting a negotiated peace with Germany, most had already made up their minds about how they believed the war should end. On 29 November 1917 Lansdowne argued:

We are now in the fourth year of the most dreadful war the world has even known, a war in which, as Sir W. Robertson has recently informed us, the killed alone can be counted by the million, while the total number of men engaged amounts to nearly 24 millions. Ministers continue to tell us that they scan the horizon in vain for the prospect of a lasting peace. And without a lasting peace we all feel that the task we have set ourselves will remain unaccomplished.

But those who look forward with horror to the prolongation of the War, who believe that its wanton prolongation would be a crime, differing only in degree from that of the criminals who provoked it, may be excused if they, too, scan the horizon anxiously in the hope of discovering there indications that the outlook may, after all, not be so hopeless as supposed.¹⁸⁰

Those who longed for a peaceful conclusion to the hostilities welcomed the publication of the letter. In a letter to the *South Devon Weekly Express* W.M. Prater expressed his

¹⁷⁸ “Difficulties,” *Western Times*, 27 November 1917, p. 4.

¹⁷⁹ Devon Charity Commission Report for 1917, 13 January 1918, Devon Record Office, Charity Commission, D15/1/2. Charities, 23 January 1918, Devon Record Office, County of Devon, Quarter Sessions, N/U/ COS/7/11. Some measure of the county’s mood can also be gleaned from local opinion columns like City Talk. Although City Talk is not a perfect reflection of opinion in Devon, its purpose is to share opinions about a variety of topics, which makes the column useful. See, “City Talk,” *Express and Echo*, 16 June 1917, p. 6; “City Talk,” *Express and Echo*, 21 July 1917, p. 6; “City Talk,” *Express and Echo*, 4 August 1917, p. 6; “City Talk,” *Express and Echo*, 8 September 1917, p. 6; 19 January 1918, p. 6.

¹⁸⁰ Lord Newton, *Lord Lansdowne: A Biography* (London: MacMillan & Co. Limited, 1929), p. 466.

surprise regarding the public's response to the Lansdowne letter: "Why there should be people who hold the very idea of peace in such abhorrence passes comprehension, but in point of fact history shows that we have suffered more from belated peaces than we ever have from premature ones." Some Devonians felt that Lansdowne's views should not be brushed aside, but rather that the letter deserved "respectful treatment and represents views too widely held to be merely shouted down."¹⁸¹ In November 1917 the *South Devon Weekly Express* conducted a public opinion poll in thirteen locations across central and southern Devon regarding the 'Lansdowne Letter' and revealed that the peace proposal had support in the county. Of the 1,000 people interviewed, thirty percent said that a negotiated peace would be acceptable.¹⁸²

However, seventy percent of those interviewed believed that Britain should fight on to victory and following the publication of the letter there was a flood of abusive correspondence in the local press. The prevailing opinion was expressed in C.A. Millman's letter to the *Western Morning News*:

Have we forgotten the devastation of Belgium, the crucifixion of Serbia, the wholesale raping of the women of those territories, and the helpless children, the hellish crimes of the u-boats, to witness the sinking of the Lusitania, the horrors of the prison camps in Germany, the murder of Capt. Fryatt and the thousand and one crimes committed by the Kaiser and his hordes? A peace such as Lord Lansdowne desiderates would cover this country with eternal infamy, and we should be everlastingly haunted by the spirits of the glorious dead, whom we should have sent to a premature and purposeless death.¹⁸³

¹⁸¹ W.M. Prater, "Premature Peace-Feelers?" *South Devon Weekly Express*, 3 December 1917, p. 4; Charlie Chadwick, *Dawlish Gazette*, 8 December 1917, no page number. Also see, Lansdowne Letter," *South Devon Weekly Express*, 7 December 1917, p. 4; "Guarantee for Peace," *Western Morning News*, 26 December 1917, p. 3; "Lansdowne's Peace," *Dawlish Gazette*, 8 December 1917, no page number.

¹⁸² "South Devon Speaks Out," *South Devon Weekly Express*, 7 December 1917, p. 4. The poll was based on the acceptability of a negotiated peace, not support for Lansdowne himself or his political position.

¹⁸³ C.A. Millman, "The Marquis of Lansdowne and the War," *Western Morning News*, 3 December 1917, p. 3; Similar sentiments were expressed in letters to other newspapers, see "Junkerism has been exported to England." H.J.B. Ward, "Lord Lansdowne Letter," *Western Morning News*, 10 December 1917, p. 4;

For some, the idea of a premature, negotiated peace would have been similar to a British defeat, and many Devonians believed that this was not a fitting end to their sacrifices. At the end of 1917 Devonians were split on the issue of a negotiated peace. Residents either wanted the option of peace by way of an Allied coordinated negotiation of aims with Germany or, after more than three years of war, believed only victory would justify the sacrifices they had made.

The British government did not accept the Lansdowne peace proposal and the year 1918 presented new challenges for the British population. The last German push in the spring of 1918 and the Allied counter offensive that began with the Second Battle of the Marne in July were the further tests of faith for the people of Devon. Massive British losses between March and August resulted in a heightened propaganda campaign to bring more men to the front. This time, however, propagandists launched a direct attack on the civilian population. By the time of the German advances of March, propagandists were already targeting Devon's low morale. For instance, in January, the Devon Parliamentary Recruiting Committee released a statement to the press accusing Devonians of having a false idea of citizenship. The statement read,

What is wrong is that the population of the United Kingdom as a whole is deficient in the highest form of Patriotism and Citizenship. No State can prosper unless there is a public spirit and a willingness to undergo sacrifice for the common weal. These characteristics that define Citizen and Patriot are largely absent in Devon.¹⁸⁴

Recruiting agents were sent to most communities in Devon to bring in "recruits, slackers

William Stephens, "Peace by Negotiation," *Western Morning News*, 29 December 1917, p. 6; "Uncertainty," *Western Times*, 3 December 1917, p. 2; Ilbert, "Lansdowne's Letter," 3 December 1917, *Western Morning News*, p. 3; "The Lansdowne Letter," *Express and Echo*, 1 December 1917, p. 4.

¹⁸⁴ Devon Parliamentary Recruiting Committee, "Citizenship," *Western Times*, 14 January 1918, p. 2.

and cowards” and were increasingly aggressive in their activities. The military authorities searched properties for men who failed to report for duty and recruiting agents confronted young men in restaurants, cinemas, and on the streets.¹⁸⁵

However, the efforts of recruiting agents and the military authorities were somewhat stalled by Lord Fortescue, Hughes-Buller, Director of Recruiting for Devon, and the Devon County Council. In early February 1918 a series of private correspondences took place between L. Horn, Herbert Harding (both of whom were recruitment representatives for the Devon County Council), Hughes-Buller, and Lord Fortescue regarding Devon’s recruitment quotas. On 16 February, Horn, in a confidential letter to Hughes-Buller, expressed his concern that the recruitment quotas for Devon would not be met for the second quarter, which ended in the last week of February. He believed that the army should not be allowed to remove any more men from agriculture and that all military “efforts to do so must be resisted from the highest levels. Until food production quotas can be met, it is impossible to allow the military authorities any further leeway on this matter.”¹⁸⁶ In the meantime, Hughes-Buller had been working with the Devon County Council and the Executive Committee to substitute agricultural workers enlisted with the volunteer units for potential soldiers from other industries, but not from the fisheries, forestry, or mining. Hughes-Buller reported to Horn that all conversations between the Council, the Executive Committee, and himself were

purely private and confidential and any specifics of said meetings cannot be confirmed. I would imagine that the National Service Dept. and the Food Production Dept. would agree [to hold back men called up from

¹⁸⁵ Report on Recruitment from Director of Recruitment to the Devon County Council, 10 January 1918, Devon Record Office, Fortescue of Castle Hill, 1262M/O/LD/151.

¹⁸⁶ Letter from L. Horn to Hughes-Buller, 13 February 1918, Lord Lieutenancy Papers, Devon Record Office, Fortescue of Castle Hill, 1262M/151.

certain industries], but for now the need for men at home is urgent making it necessary to avoid the appropriate departments at this juncture. I believe that all departments are fully alive to the importance of our food production.¹⁸⁷

Not only did Hughes-Buller want to prevent some men from being conscripted, he also wanted his own opinions and efforts regarding the matter to be kept quiet.

However, in late February, J. Woodcock of the Western Divisional Committee called a meeting of the Devon County Council to discuss

rumours that some members are unwilling to take the steps necessary to provide the full number [of recruits] allocated to them on the ground that the food production needs of this county take precedent over set military quotas. I believe that any such decision should be passed to the National Service Dept., and the same to the Food Production Dept., and that such weighty matters should not be decided by local representatives.¹⁸⁸

Following Woodcock's comments, all rumours were put to rest when Hughes-Buller announced that the recruitment quotas for Devon's four divisions had been met for the second quarter. He assured the Council that all necessary steps were being taken to meet the recruitment quotas set by the War Office and that he had every confidence that the quotas would continue to be met.¹⁸⁹

What is particularly interesting about Hughes-Buller's statements to the Council is that throughout 1918 he and Lord Fortescue had continually intervened in the recruitment process by compiling lists of men who they believed were 'required labour' for the county. These lists were comprised of semi-skilled or skilled men who were needed for work in agriculture, forestry, fishing, and mining. In a private letter Hughes-

¹⁸⁷ Letter from Hughes-Buller to L. Horn, 17 February 1918, Devon Record Office, Fortescue of Castle Hill, 1262M/151.

¹⁸⁸ Letter from Lord Fortescue to Hughes-Buller, 21 February 1918, Devon Record Office, Fortescue of Castle Hill, 1262M/151.

¹⁸⁹ Recruitment for the Four Districts, 25 February 1918, Devon Record Office, Fortescue of Castle Hill, 1262M/151.

Buller told Fortescue that the

recruitment numbers for the county are still short of men. The Devon Farmers' Union has assured me that production values will continue to rise so long as no further men are removed. In all likelihood the agricultural quotas will return to schedule by late June. I oblige you to arrange for someone in your council to meet with the Executive Committee on this matter. At this time it is unwise for me to assume said position.¹⁹⁰

Fortescue responded by telling Hughes-Buller,

I sincerely hope that it will not be necessary to call men up as it would be manifestly unfair to those parts of the county which have found the men, even after such horrifying neglect by other committees, or that taken into account the shortage of men in the county, it is unfair that further requisition be made of them. I suggest that you do not put your powers into force but instead leave arrangements to be made with the Executive Committee. Members of the Council have been notified that quotas will not be met for the next quarter and that we will leave it to the National Service Dept. to obtain the men in their own way. I have completed the necessary list of men who will not be conscripted and several members of the [military] tribunals have given their approval.¹⁹¹

The list of men that Fortescue was referring to was a revised list that had been provided to him by Hughes-Buller from the military authorities. The list contained the names of men who would be called for military service, the majority of whom were from agriculture, fishing, mining, and forestry. Although these men were employed in protected industries, the Manpower Act of 1918 raised the age of conscription from forty-one to fifty, making more men from these industries eligible for conscription. Also, the manpower shortage in 1918 made it necessary to reduce industries to a bare-bones work force. When Hughes-Buller presented the list of men to be conscripted to the Devon County Council, Lord Fortescue expressed his concern that "too many skilled men have

¹⁹⁰ Letter from Hughes-Buller to Lord Fortescue, 17 February 1918, Devon Record Office, Honiton Borough Council, R71-0.

¹⁹¹ Letter from Lord Fortescue to Hughes-Buller, 23 February 1918, Devon Record Office, Honiton Borough Council, R71-0.

already been taken from the county and it is my sincerest opinion that our local industries cannot afford to be deprived of essential labourers.”¹⁹² Together with Hughes-Buller and Harding, Fortescue drafted a new list with the names of those men whom they believed could not be spared. These names were given to selected members of the Executive Committee, presumably to ensure that they were not conscripted.

Fortescue was not unsympathetic to the needs of the military authorities, but he conveyed to Hughes-Buller that there was a “fair degree of contradiction between the needs of the armed forces and the needs of the county,” which he believed the National Service Department would understand “once the dizziness of war has past.” Apart from intervening in the proceedings of the Executive Committee, he also encouraged the military tribunals to be lenient with exemptions, suggesting that the mood of the county would continue to decline if the populace were not “properly cared for.”¹⁹³ The government had the complicated job of harmonizing the needs of the military with the needs of home industries. Therefore, the military tribunals were at times encouraged to consider the manpower needs of the county and to grant exemptions or revise exemption lists by adding a particular trade or category. These tribunals were very local in nature, serving a relatively small area. The members were not only aware of local economic needs, they often knew the appellants personally and were generally concerned for the well being of the people and communities in which they served. Furthermore, many of the men who sat on the military tribunals were involved in local industries and so their

¹⁹² Recruitment for the Four Districts, 25 February 1918, Devon Record Office, Devon County Council, 1262M/151.

¹⁹³ Letter from Lord Fortescue to Hughes-Buller, March 1918, Devon Record Office, Fortescue of Castle Hill, 1262M/151.

desire to comply with the needs of the county is not entirely surprising.¹⁹⁴

Lord Fortescue's decision to intervene in the recruitment process came at a crucial point in the war. In May 1918 a letter from Major-General Sir Frederick Maurice, former Director of Military Operations (DMO) at the War Office, appeared in several London newspapers. The letter accused Lloyd George of having intentionally misled the House of Commons in his speech on 9 April.¹⁹⁵ The part of the speech in question was Lloyd George's statement about the relative British and German numerical strength on the western front and the number of divisions under British command in the Middle East. In the House of Commons the opposition blamed Lloyd George for the BEF's defeat on 21 March 1918, claiming that he deprived Field Marshal Douglas Haig of the necessary troops to effectively meet General Ludendorff's advance.¹⁹⁶ Lloyd George was displeased with Haig's leadership and, although he wanted to have him replaced, was concerned about the possible political fallout. Maurice believed that Lloyd George deliberately held back men on the Western Front in an attempt to undermine Haig's position. He accused Lloyd George of trying to conceal this error by making 'selective' reports to Parliament about the condition of Britain's armed forces.¹⁹⁷ On 18 April a Liberal back-bencher raised the question in Parliament as to whether or not the numerical strength of the British forces on the Western Front was truly representative of the army's

¹⁹⁴ Slocombe, "Recruitment into the Armed Forces During the First World War: The Work of Military Tribunals in Wiltshire, 1915-1918," 108-110. Unfortunately, many of the records of the military tribunals are not available. It is likely that they were either destroyed in 1921, along with similar records across the country, or they were destroyed during the Second World War when the building they were housed in was bombed.

¹⁹⁵ David French, *The Strategy of the Lloyd George Coalition, 1916-1918* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), pp. 213-220, 230, 234-235.

¹⁹⁶ John Grigg, *Lloyd George: War Leader, 1916-1918* (London: Penguin Books, 2003), pp. 446-464, 489-512.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 411-412, 496-512. Also see David Stevenson, *Cataclysm: The First World War as Political Tragedy* (New York: Basic Books, 2004), p. 373.

combat strength, or if it included labour battalions and other non-combat units. Ian Macpherson, under-secretary at the War Office confirmed Lloyd George's figures as combat strength, but four days later the DMO report showed that the Germans had a rifle-strength superiority of 330,000 in the west.¹⁹⁸ Despite Maurice's statistical evidence that implicated Lloyd George, he was dismissed for breach of army conduct.

The questions that surrounded Lloyd George's leadership had much to do with local recruitment efforts. At such a late stage of the war, when the number of men available to serve was rapidly declining, there was no way for Macpherson or Lloyd George to know, or to even suspect, that recruitment efforts were being undermined at the local level. At this point in the war the demands for manpower, for both the military and the home front, were impossible to meet and consequently one or both would have to suffer. On the one hand, given the national manpower shortage and the dire situation faced by the British Expeditionary Force in 1918, it is surprising that the Lord Lieutenant was involved in a plan to limit the number of men conscripted into the armed forces. This is especially true when one takes into account Hughes-Buller's explanation for why he failed to meet the recruitment quota set for March 1918. Only a month after telling the Devon County Council that Devon was successfully meeting its recruitment quotas and would continue to do so in the future, Hughes-Buller reported to the War Office that in Devon a large number of the men called for service were infirm and unfit for military service, and that the War Office had overestimated the number of available men in the county. Further, he noted that, due to the industrial demands of the county, it was

¹⁹⁸ Grigg, *Lloyd George: War Leader*, pp. 506-507.

impossible to maintain production if manpower continued to be reduced.¹⁹⁹ On the other hand, Fortescue defended his actions in terms of a necessary compromise between local and national needs. In a private letter to Hughes-Buller, Fortescue noted that he was in a difficult position and felt that “local industries will no longer be capable of contributing to this great cause if the proper resources are not made available. The failure of our industrial sectors will detract more from the war effort than a hundred extra men would contribute to a military victory.”²⁰⁰ Fortescue understood the government’s need for more men, but he also believed that local industries were an invaluable part of Britain’s war effort and supporting them by retaining much needed manpower would make a more important contribution to the war effort than those same men could make in military terms.

The decision by both men to interfere in the county’s recruitment efforts complicated Hughes-Buller’s position as the director of recruitment for Devon. In April, Hughes-Buller asked the War Office to either extend the timeline given to meet the recruitment quotas or to reduce the number of recruits requested. However, no extensions or reductions were granted and Hughes-Buller failed to meet the recruitment quotas set by the War Office. Consequently, between May and July the county provided just over sixty percent of the recruits requested.²⁰¹

Conclusion

The actions taken by Fortescue, Hughes-Buller, Harding, and others not only undermined

¹⁹⁹ Recruitment Report from Hughes-Buller to the War Office, March 1918, National Archive, WO 32/4766.

²⁰⁰ Letter from Lord Fortescue to Hughes-Buller, 7 June 1918, Devon Record Office, Honiton Borough Council, R71-0.

²⁰¹ Recruitment report for August 1918 from L. Horn to Hughes-Buller, 30 August 1918, Devon Record Office, Fortescue of Castle Hill, 1262M/151.

local recruitment efforts and contributed to the national manpower crisis in 1918, but they also protected Devon's industries from further setbacks. As was seen in Chapter Two, by the end of the war Fortescue was sympathetic to the needs of agriculture and he worked hard to keep farmers from being unduly tried before the military tribunals. He also prevented the authorities from taking action against those farmers who failed to comply with government plough orders. His intervention into the recruitment process was thus not surprising, given his willingness to intercede on behalf of Devon's farmers in other circumstances. Fortescue's protection was extended to skilled and semi-skilled men employed in fishing, mining, and timber as he sought to defend Devon's industries against what he believed were excessive and harmful conscription demands. The decline in recruitment reveals the degree to which war weariness had set in by mid-1918, and the extent to which it not only affected the decisions made by the public, but by the local authorities as well.

The fact is that the war was slow to come to Devon. During the first three weeks, information was scarce and the self-censorship practiced by Devon's larger newspapers prevented any real information from reaching the civilian population. Moreover, it took approximately seven weeks for a central agency for recruitment and propaganda to be developed in Devon. In its absence, early efforts were left in civilian hands and it was not until late September that a centralized authority for recruitment and propaganda was implemented in the form of the Devon Parliamentary Recruiting Committee and its various divisions. This took considerably longer than it did in the neighbouring counties of Somerset and Cornwall and helps to explain the ineffectiveness of Devon's early recruitment efforts. Early tactics such as posters, badgering, and threats were poorly

received and largely ineffective in Devon's rural areas. Protests against the appearance of recruiting agents in communities were common. Local inhabitants destroyed recruiting posters, vandalized depots, and accosted recruiting agents. In Exeter and Plymouth the formation of battalions, patriotic dances and concerts, and large Saturday evening recruiting rallies had a more powerful impact than they did in the sparsely populated villages and small rural communities of Devon's northern and western regions. In light of these circumstances, recruitment numbers remained low until early 1915 when they began a steady climb reaching a peak in the late summer of 1915. The change in the recruitment profile of the county can be linked to the publicized actions of the enemy and a more effective propaganda campaign initiated by the press following the sinking of the *Lusitania* in May 1915, as well as the involvement of civilian groups once the 'over by Christmas' myth was shattered.

Recruitment numbers in Devon were on the rise, but they were in decline in most other areas of Britain, thereby prompting the introduction of conscription in January 1916. While recruitment in Devon between June and December 1915 surpassed the other counties in the West County, the spirit of volunteerism ended with the introduction of the second Military Service Act, first in rural areas and then in urban centres where manufacturing industries and munition shops competed with the military for the services of the men who remained. Furthermore, the refusal by smaller newspapers to practice self-censorship throughout the war exposed the public to the chilling realities of war and the introduction of universal conscription in the spring of 1916 undermined earlier suggestions that Britain was close to victory.

Throughout the war the public expected a reasonable level of trust to be

maintained between the British government and the citizenry. While most understood that much had to be kept from the public, the threat of physical violence by recruiting agents, propagandists who exposed and exploited the fears of the populace, and the decision of the government and local authorities to mislead the public regarding the introduction of partial conscription in January 1916 severely hampered the recruitment efforts of the county. Further, the decision by Lord Fortescue and Hughes-Buller to intentionally reduce the number of recruits from Devon reveals the complexities of the war at the local level. Devon's example suggests that it is possible that other recruitment agencies in other counties were similarly reluctant in the final years of the war to continue to provide men for military service. And, as will be seen in the next chapter, recruitment efforts were not only complicated by personal and community relationships, but also by the religious presentation of the war.

4 Denominational Responses to the First World War

It is not surprising that religious faith complicates the reception and representation of war. When the war began, Devon's religious institutions exerted a significant influence on the population. The county's churches participated in the war effort by deciding what information to print in church magazines, how the war was reported in sermons, and the crucial decision of whether or not to use the pulpit to encourage men to enlist. It is difficult to measure the exact extent of the churches' influence. To what extent did the clergy promote acceptance of the war and what part did they play in aiding the national cause by providing Devonians with a moral justification for British participation? Officially, the state received the support of Britain's religious institutions, but at the community level their responses were disjointed and varied. The 'official' position of the Established Church was that it stood firmly behind the Liberal government, convinced that the war was just and that British participation was right. Many Anglican churches used church grounds as auxiliary recruiting stations, and used the pulpit to encourage men to do their duty and warn against cowardice. However, there was dissent among a minority of Anglican ministers who opposed the war and rejected the suggestion that British participation was ordained by God. Although Devon was primarily Anglican, there were a number of other denominations that were part of the religious make-up of the county that made their voices heard during the war. Not unlike the position of the Established hierarchy, the Catholic Church was wholly devoted to the war effort and encouraged all Catholics to accept and contribute to the national cause. Catholic priests vigorously participated in recruiting drives and conscientious objection was rejected as a legitimate reason for refusing military service. Conversely, Methodist and Baptist pastors

struggled to reconcile their commitment to Christian principles while accepting that the war would require a tremendous sacrifice of human life. Ultimately, the majority of pastors were convinced to support the national cause, but their response to the conflict was more uncertain than that experienced in the Anglican or Catholic churches. Some Methodist and Baptist clergymen found it repugnant to use the church to manipulate men into going to the front, and the introduction of conscription in 1916 clashed with their commitment to liberalism and freedom of conscience. For Devon's Quakers Christian pacifist principles prevailed. Many objected to the war and refused all accommodation with the 'warrior state;' the rest reconciled their religious and national beliefs by, temporarily or permanently, abandoning their faith and undertaking some form of national service.

Throughout the war Devon's churches remained divided and although the churches did cooperate on certain issues, the war did not suspend religious conflict. The purpose of this chapter is not to assess the success or failure of the churches as recruiting agents or to evaluate the extent to which the laity accepted or rejected the various messages and positions presented by the clergy; rather, this chapter offers an inter- and intra-denominational examination of the various churches in Devon in order to understand more clearly how the clergy responded to the challenges of war at the local level. Further, it argues that the debates about the rights and wrongs of the war took place not only at the national level, but also among local clergymen and revolved around many of the issues that separated the churches in the first place. Denominational infighting created rifts within the religious community that were not easily overcome during the

war.¹ An examination of the responses of the Anglican, Catholic, Methodist, Baptist, and Quaker churches to the declaration of war, recruitment, the introduction of conscription, and the response of the clergy to conscientious objectors reveals the complex motives and interests that were at work between 1914 and 1918, and helps explain why religious unity was so difficult to achieve even at the local level.

The changing religious profile of the nation has led to some bold assertions regarding the state of religious belief in Britain on the eve of the First World War. Most notably, E.R. Wickham and Robert Currie contend that the First World War had “devastating effects on the religious life of the nation”² and rather than leading to an increase in religious activity, the outbreak of the war accelerated the process of secularization in Britain, as evidenced by declining numbers of churchgoers by mid-1915.³ However, more recent studies, such as the work of A.J. Hoover, reject the conclusions reached by Wickham and Currie and argue instead that due to the dedicated work of the clergy, religion became a “key ingredient in the ‘war fervor’ of the Great War” by producing a strong national consciousness among British Christians.⁴

A number of historians have explored the contribution of the churches to the formation and maintenance of British nationalism. Keith Robbins stresses that the

¹ Infighting among Anglican clergymen predated the war and was centered around the changing position of the Established Church in British society, the relationship between Church and state, and theological disputes. Further, interdenominational conflict was connected to the growth of Nonconformity in the latter years of the nineteenth century. For more on this issue see, Albert Marrin, *The Last Crusade: The Church of England in the First World War* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1974), pp. 3-49.

² E.R. Wickham, *Church and People in an Industrial City* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1957) p. 206. For a similar argument see Roger Lloyd, *The Church of England 1900-1965* (London: SCM Press, 1966), pp. 226-231.

³ Robert Currie, et al., *Churches and Churchgoers: Patterns in Church Growth in the British Isles Since 1700* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), pp. 113-115.

⁴ A.J. Hoover, *God, Germany, and Britain in the Great War: A Study in Clerical Nationalism* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1989), pp. xi-xii, 5, 14, 115-116. For a similar argument see Albert Marrin, *The Last Crusade: The Church of England in the First World War* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1974), pp. vii-viii, 82-97.

Established Church “rarely hesitated to claim that it embodied the Englishness of English religion,” and argues that although the role of the church was diminished between 1870 and 1914, it was not usurped.⁵ Robbins argues that “Pulpit prophets of 1914-18 were telling the people what they wanted to hear,” and although the war was popular, the “moral claims made for it were rejected as ill founded.”⁶ The Established Church became a tool of the war effort but its success was also the source of its demise. Once the war ended, the church lost its purpose. Robbins and Hoover are particularly concerned with the role of religion in the construction of a British national identity and its contribution to national or institutional morale, rather than analyzing the church (or the clergy) as an autonomous component of community life.⁷

Hoover and Robbins’ work added a new dimension to the debate surrounding the declining importance of the church, without achieving consensus within the historical community. Recent studies continue to contest the revivalist nature of the war from a military perspective. Richard Schweitzer stresses that the First World War did not reinstate the church or religion to its former position of centrality within British society.⁸ As the war progressed the Established Church became increasingly unable to connect with soldiers, and the rejection of church-orientated religion, Anglican or otherwise, that began in the pre-war period was greatly exacerbated by 1918. Schweitzer’s rejection of

⁵ Keith Robbins, *History, Religion, and Identity in Modern Britain* (London: The Hambledon Press, 1993), p. 87, 90, 119-132.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 114.

⁷ For information on British religious beliefs in the twentieth century see Sarah Williams, *Religious Belief and Popular Culture in Southwark* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 3-15; Callum G. Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain* (London: Routledge, 2001), pp. 9, 58-86, 104-105, 150-160; Callum G. Brown, *Religion and Society in Twentieth Century Britain* (New York: Longman Publishers, 2006), pp. 16, 40-70; Jeffrey Cox, *The English Churches in a Secular Society: Lambeth, 1870-1930* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), pp. 5, 13, 23, 36.

⁸ Richard Schweitzer, *The Cross and the Trenches: Religious Faith and Doubt among British and American Great War Soldiers* (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2003), pp. xxi-xxiv, 4-6, 9-10.

the revivalist interpretation relies heavily on the post-war campaigns that criticized the churches for preaching doctrine without attending to the needs of the people.⁹ Other scholars, like Allen Frantzen, have suggested that since there was a long and tangible connection between the Christian churches and war in Britain, the First World War provided the opportunity for the churches and clergy to Christianize the British soldier in the popular imagination by connecting Christendom to the war itself.¹⁰ However, the shape and advancement of the war tested the ability of the churches to reconcile Christian principles with the destruction brought on by war and the annulment of civilian rights. As the conflict progressed, deep divides within and between the denominations became increasingly apparent. While the various bodies shared certain attitudes toward the war, the presentation of the conflict and issues related to recruitment, conscription, and conscientious objection revealed the conflicting motives of churches and clergymen that prevented the development of a religious consensus.

Church Responses to the Declaration of War

In the days and weeks preceding the declaration of war, there were divisions voiced within the Established Church regarding Britain's involvement in a European conflict. Many Anglican clergymen proclaimed that a future war involving Britain was just and necessary, while Archibald Robertson, the Bishop of Exeter (1903-1916), expressed the popular sentiment that "war is not a Christian weapon" and emphasized the evils and

⁹ Ibid., pp. 67-75, 210-212, 260-261.

¹⁰ Olive Anderson, "The Growth of Christian Militarism in Mid-Victorian England," *English Historical Review* 86 (1971): 52-53, 61-67; Anne Summers, "Militarism in Britain before the Great War," *History Workshop Journal* 2 (1976): 118-120.

suffering that it would bring.¹¹ Alan Wilkinson and Albert Marrin rightfully point out that before the war many in the Established Church were neutralists and promoted peace and international cooperation. Prior to 4 August 1914 Anglican clergymen encouraged diplomacy not war, and cautioned the British government to negotiate with Germany. However, once war was declared, many neutralists changed their minds and supported the government's decision to intervene in the conflict and to encourage the laity to do the same. For some clergymen, the war represented a judgment from God regarding the materialistic, industrialized, secularized nature of modern society. Bible reading and church attendance were in decline, and the government had done little to stem the tide of irreligion that many believed characterized the first decade of the twentieth century. Proponents of this theory were guided by the belief that the future of Britain and the future of the Established Church were one in the same.¹²

Marrin argues that the actions of the clergy represented a sincere effort on the part of the Established Church to promote and protect the religious health of the nation, concerns that were intimately connected with the health and safety of the British nation as a whole.¹³ As such, the Anglican hierarchy actively supported the war effort as evidenced by Archdeacon Wilberforce's sermon of 7 August to a congregation at Westminster Abbey where he preached that, "There was such a thing as a righteous war and if ever there was a righteous war, it was the present struggle with Germany."¹⁴ Anglican religious leaders

¹¹ Bishop of Exeter, "Exeter Cathedral," *Express and Echo*, 2 August 1914, p. 6. "War is not a Christian weapon" was a popular phrase during the war and was employed by a number of Anglican clergymen in the days leading up to the declaration of war.

¹² Alan Wilkinson, *The Church of England and the First World War* (London: Spck, 1974), pp. 21-24, 33-48, 91-108.

¹³ Marrin, *The Last Crusade*, pp. 83-84.

¹⁴ Archdeacon Wilberforce, "The European Crisis and the Anglican Church," *Exeter Flying Post*, 7 August 1914, p. 4.

largely adopted the official stance of the Church of England and Devon's clergymen were no exception. On 7 August 1914 Bishop Robertson stated that "given the immoral and corrupt actions taken by Germany, the decision of Prime Minister Asquith is justified and the evidence of Britain's cause overwhelming."¹⁵ Similar affirmations of Britain's noble cause followed and in a statement to the *Western Times* the Bishop of Crediton expressed the conviction that under the circumstances, British participation in the conflict was condoned by God.¹⁶ At the community level the Anglican churches in Devon supported the national cause. Reverend F.B. Meyer at the Launceston parish, for example, reported to his congregation that Britain was fully justified in taking action against Germany and that at this important time it was necessary for every man and woman of Christ to do his or her part, knowing that they would be judged accordingly.¹⁷ At the Effculme Church of England, the sin of war was placed entirely upon Germany. The vicar preached that Germany was a nation that had "suffered severe moral degradation under the influence of Kaiserism," and while Britain had done its best to avoid war, "she cannot bow down to the forces of *Realpolitik* and *Bernhardism* that have engulfed the German national soul and brought the European nations to war."¹⁸ Many Anglican ministers expressed the belief that the war had been forced on Britain after every effort by the British government to maintain peace.

This is not to suggest that all Anglican ministers in Devon unquestionably supported the war effort.¹⁹ A few clergymen struggled with using the war to promote a

¹⁵ Bishop of Exeter, "The Call of War," *Crediton Chronicle*, 7 August 1914.

¹⁶ Bishop of Crediton, "Call to the Nation," *Western Times*, 10 August 1914, p. 4.

¹⁷ "Rev. F.B. Meyer at Launceston," *Cornish and Devon Post*, 26 September 1914, p. 5.

¹⁸ Minute book, September 1914, Devon Record Office, Effculme Parish Church of England, 1920A/PX2.

¹⁹ This is not to suggest that there was widespread dissent. From the available sources it is evident that although dissenting views were scarce, they are nevertheless present and important. Albert Marrin argues

religious agenda and believed that if Devonians were to return to church, this could not be accomplished by force or deceit. Vicar Arthur Huxley Thompson expressed concerns about the war and believed that the war “is contrary to the teachings of the Gospel. The High Church has made a grievous error in its support of this war.” Thompson believed that the war would bring considerable hardship to Britain and the Established Church’s backing of the war would result in “inestimable damage that may possibly never be repaired.”²⁰ Vicar Michael of the Lympstone Parish Church of England expressed a similar conviction, believing that war in and of itself would solve nothing. Instead, he argued that “It will plunge this nation into unheard of chaos without solving any of the social ills that plague this great nation.”²¹ Reverend Taylor, an Anglican minister from Exeter, wrote that he was astonished at the level of support offered from the Bishop of London and was confused by the sudden reversal to the teachings of the Old Testament. He believed that ‘an eye for an eye’ and a vengeful Lord was a terrible departure from the teachings of the modern church.²² For others, the response was more neutral, neither promoting the war nor opposing it. A sermon by Reverend H.G. Chalk at the Exeter Cathedral explained that the war would bring hardship, but that a valuable lesson could be learned. He said, “In all the sorrow and sadness, in all the suffering and pain, we are learning God’s lesson. His will for man is unity, not external or material, but inward and

that although “it is unlikely that the clergy supported the war with absolute unanimity, the Anglican newspapers, periodicals, diocesan magazines, theological journals and the regular provincial newspapers...never mention any who opposed it.” At the same time, he recognized that it is possible that these sources may have practiced self-censorship. Judging from the newspapers in Devon it is likely that this is true, or that many clergymen were uncomfortable, given the degree of support for the war, attaching their names to letters to the editor. Instead, most omitted identifying markers and instead signed their letters “Reverend” or “Clergy,” or only used initials. See. Marrin, *The Last Crusade*, p. 81.

²⁰ Arthur Huxley Thompson, private papers, no date, Devon Record Office, Thompson Papers, 1857 A.

²¹ Minute book, 9 August 1914, Devon Record Office, Lympstone Parish Church of England 527A-6/PM.

²² Reverend Taylor, “Old versus New?” *Salcombe Gazette*, 15 August 1914, no page number.

spiritual. Future wars can be prevented, but only when the children of Christ return to worship.”²³ Although the Anglican hierarchy supported the war, there was some doubt, even if rarely outright opposition, among Anglican clergymen regarding Britain’s participation in the war.²⁴

In response to questions among the parochial clergy about the church’s role in the war the Bishop of Exeter released a statement concerning the role of the Established Church in the conflict. On 17 August 1914 he requested that

All ministers of the Established Church support the Government and our military leaders in this time of great national danger. Unity at home is as important to victory as our armies in the field or our Great Navy on the sea. The Church has an important role in the current crisis. Duty rests on the Church to foster a strong commitment to the war, which cannot be done if a state of disunity persists. I ask you to think not of self-concerns, but rather of mutual considerations. I ask that this Sunday all Churches in Devon end their service with the hymn “O God our help in ages past” to demonstrate our dedication to this great cause.²⁵

Although there is no way to ascertain how many Anglican churches in Devon ended their services with the requested hymn, the *Weekly News* reported that a few churches decided not to end Sunday service with the hymn. The article noted that the Ide Parish ended its service with the hymn “Lord God of hosts,” Totnes Parish with the “Lord’s Prayer” and St. Margaret’s Parish with “Shepard Divine,” and although specifics were not provided, the piece noted that four others also chose not to comply with the Bishop’s request.²⁶ Though there was considerable support for the war among Anglican clergymen, the decision of a few clergymen not to comply with Bishop Robertson’s request may suggest that some, albeit a minority, had concerns about the church’s position regarding the war.

²³ “Sermon by Reverend H.G. Chalk at the Exeter Cathedral,” *Express and Echo*, 29 October 1917, p. 4.

²⁴ Wilkinson, *The Church of England and the First World War*, pp. 46, 53-54.

²⁵ “Bishop of Exeter on the Churches and the War,” *Weekly News*, 17 August 1914, no page number.

²⁶ “Services at Devon,” *Weekly News*, 25 August 1914, no page number.

Similar to the position of the Church of England, in August 1914 the Catholic circuit in Devon declared that the German violation of international law and its attack on the Christian nation of Belgium justified British military action.²⁷ Michael Snape argues that the Catholic response to the war can be explained by examining the role of the Catholic Church in Britain prior to the war. Although representing only five percent of the population in 1911, Snape argues that “British Catholicism nevertheless harboured a strong military tradition at the outbreak of war in 1914.” Their prominence in the British officer corps and the formation of the Catholic Soldiers Association and the Confraternity for Catholic Soldiers demonstrated that British Catholics accepted the Christian militarism that had infiltrated late Victorian and Edwardian Britain.²⁸ An acceptance of this trend was evident in the Volunteer Movement in the 1850s and the establishment and popularity of several ‘boys’ brigades’ in the 1880s and 1890s. Catholic public schools actively promoted and cultivated cadet organizations and Bishop Francis Bournes’ pamphlet, “The Paramount Need for Training in Youth,” reflected the tolerance of the Catholic Church for this new militaristic trend.²⁹

When war broke out “it was not surprising that Catholics should have flocked to arms for the defence” of their country; not because it had been so good to them in the

²⁷ Although Catholics in Devon were a minority, their inclusion here is important given that the Church of England, at times, presented the war as a Holy War against a Catholic enemy. Further, the response of the Catholic Church in England has received little attention in the secondary literature. D. Mathew allotted a single paragraph to the First World War and G.A. Beck reviewed the role of Catholicism in the war, but only in the broader context of twentieth century change. Similarly, although Kester Aspden’s *Fortress Church* allots a chapter to the period 1906 to 1918, there is little mention of the war itself. D. Mathew, *Catholicism in England, 1535-1935: The Portrait of a Minority: Its Culture and Tradition*, (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1936), pp. 29-50, 252; K. Aspden, *Fortress Church: The English Roman Catholic Bishops and Politics, 1903-63*, (Herefordshire: Gracewing, 2002), pp. 20-63.

²⁸ Michael Snape, “British Catholicism and the British Army in the First World War,” *Recusant History* 26: 2 (2002): 314, 315-316.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 316, 315.

past, but because it was their country and the roots of patriotism ran deep.³⁰ Snape argues that Catholic poor schools provided their students with religious instruction and, perhaps more importantly within the context of the First World War, “a strong sense of English identity.” Aside from a policy for national integration, a Catholic education stressed the importance of reverence, respect for the established social hierarchy, strong conservative values, and recognition and contentment with the value afforded to one’s life.

Although the same could be said for the Church of England, the point here is that the position of the Established Church was not called into question in the same way that the Catholic position was at the outbreak of the First World War. Hugh MacLeod argues that Protestant antagonism towards Catholics was evident throughout the nineteenth century, even if religious intolerance was less significant than in the previous century. Britain’s rivalry with Catholic France, though abating, shaped British imperialism and international ventures into the late-nineteenth century, and perhaps more importantly were long-running concerns over Home Rule in Ireland. Irish Catholics continued to be looked upon with suspicion and were “feared and despised” by some.³¹ Given that even in the early years of the twentieth century, concerns about the loyalty of Catholics to the British Protestant state remained, it is not surprising that there was an eagerness among British Catholics to demonstrate their patriotism. Upon the declaration of war, Catholic bishops encouraged patriotism among Britain’s Catholic communities, and Devon’s Catholic churches stressed the need for Catholics to make sacrifices in order to refute

³⁰ Ibid., pp. 318, 318-320.

³¹ Hugh MacLeod, “Protestantism and British National Identity”, in P. Van de Veer & H. Lehmann (eds.), *Nation and Religion: Perspectives on Europe and Asia*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), p. 47.

charges of disloyalty.³² Devon's Catholic community was similarly motivated by a desire to demonstrate their loyalty to a Protestant nation without appearing to be dissenters for religious reasons. The strong actions taken by Catholic priests were in part a response to the accusations made by several Free Presbyterian ministers. Immediately following the declaration of war, some of the Free Presbyterian churches in Devon had questioned the extent of the Catholic community's loyalty to the British war effort, reminding Devonians that unlike Britain, Germany and Austria were Catholic nations, despite the fact that Germany was predominately Protestant.³³ Throughout the war some Free Presbyterian clergymen engaged in virulent attacks on Germany and its relationship with Austria in an attempt to create a clear division between Protestant Britain and the 'Catholic' enemy. Their vocal attacks on the Pope, Rome, and Germany were loud and published in local newspapers. In September 1914 the Devon and Cornwall Free Presbyterian Union printed the following statement in the *Exeter Flying Post*: "The Catholic churches in the Westcountry through their commitment and allegiance to the Pope are aiding our enemies, the Catholic nations of Germany and Austria, and seek to undermine Britain's war effort."³⁴ The attacks by the Free Presbyterians did not go unanswered. The Catholic circuit in Devon accused the Free Presbyterians of attempting to foment sectarian discord and, in an effort to defend not only their faith but also their patriotism, the Blessed Sacrament in Exeter and the Sacred Heart in Paignton issued the following joint statement: "The Catholic Church has encouraged its parishioners to join in the defence of their nation and to spare neither effort nor blood for the protection of

³² R. Dowden, *Northern Ireland and the Catholic Church in Britain* (Abbots Langley, 1975), p. 23.

³³ James Retallack, *The German Right, 1860-1920: Political Limits of the Authoritarian Imagination* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), pp. 283, 285.

³⁴ "The Catholic Threat," *Exeter Flying Post*, 7 September 1914.

their beliefs.”³⁵ Despite the fact that the British army came predominately from the Church of England, Catholics responded positively to the call to arms.³⁶ There were approximately 2,619,415 Catholics in England, Scotland, and Wales in 1914 and of those, approximately 400,000 served in the British army during the First World War.³⁷

The Catholic circuit’s positive response to the war was not immediately resonant in Devon’s Nonconformist churches. Michael Hughes argues that, traditionally, Methodists were divided on the issue of war and while many ministers struggled to reconcile war with the teachings of Christ, most were accepting of men and women who believed it was their responsibility to contribute, militarily or otherwise, to the war effort. Hughes notes that many Methodists, like Anglicans and Catholics, accepted the war, believing that sometimes, in the most extreme of circumstances, that force was a necessary response to senseless aggression. However, he also argues that Methodist support for the war was often expressed in secular language; it was not religious per se, but rather was a response to international hostility and the belief that Belgium had a right to remain neutral without negative repercussions.³⁸ Although support for the war was never unanimous within the main Methodist connections, resistance to the war was more likely to be found in small churches or outside the main connections. In the days following the declaration of war many Methodists supported the beliefs of Reverend J.P.

³⁵ “Catholicism and the War,” *Exeter Flying Post*, 17 September 1914. Also see, Reverend Windsley, “Catholicism and the War,” *Weekly News*, 3 October 1914, no page number; Bishop of Exeter at Exeter Cathedral,” *Bideford Gazette*, 7 October 1914, no page number. The available records for the Catholic churches in Devon show no divergent opinions.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 322, 325. Snape asserts that over seventy percent of the army’s rank and file were Anglican in 1913 and in 1915 between seventy and seventy-five percent of the soldiers in the infantry brigades were Anglican. Michael Snape, *God and the British Soldier: Religion and the British Army in the First and Second World Wars* (New York: Routledge, 2005), p. 143.

³⁷ Ian Beckett, “The Nation in Arms, 1914-18” in Ian Beckett and K. Simpson, *A Nation in Arms* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985), p. 11.

³⁸ Michael Hughes, “British Methodists and the First World War,” *Methodist History* 41: 1 (October 2002): 316, 319-320.

Milum who professed that Christians “should take the lead in a movement against war.”³⁹ In Devon the existing records show that in the early stages of the war it was the belief of many Methodists that diplomacy was the best way to resolve the conflict. In August 1914 the pastors of the Higher Brixham Methodist Church and the Kenton Methodist Church cautioned their members to be patient and to wait for the restoration of peace.⁴⁰ Pastor Wyatt refused to promote the conflict believing that war had no place in Britain’s religious institutions. He saw it as his duty to protect the sanctity of worship and devotion to the Almighty against those who would use it in the pursuit of other goals.⁴¹ Other Methodist churches in Devon responded to the war effort by offering to counsel troops stationed at camps throughout the country and to continue in their parish duties, but few actively promoted the war.

By the late fall of 1914 Methodists who opposed the war were undoubtedly overwhelmed by societal pressures for conformity, while others, like their Anglican and Catholic counterparts, accepted that the war was just. In September 1914 the Extraordinary Committee of Privileges, the highest decision making body in the Wesleyan Church, published the following “Resolution on the National Crisis,” which appeared in the *Launceston Weekly News*:

Britain’s part...in the war, is one on which she can appeal for victory to the God of righteousness and peace and one which she must prosecute until success crowns her efforts. The crisis through which we are passing is one of unparalleled magnitude and solemnity. The liberties not of

³⁹ Quoted in Hughes, “British Methodists and the First World War,” p. 320.

⁴⁰ Church minutes, 18 August 1914, Devon Record Office, Higher Brixham Methodist Church 2606D-6-5. Church minutes, 20 August 1914, Devon Record Office, Kenton Teignmouth Methodists Church, 2272D-10/1. Also see, Minutes of parish meeting, 23 September 1915, Devon Record Office, Methodist Church of Tiverton, 2514D add 3/2.

⁴¹ Pastor Wyatt, Letter to the editor, *Bideford Gazette*, 7 August 1914, no page number; “Methodism and War in Tavistock,” *Express and Echo*, 12 August 1914, p. 5.

Britain only, but of Europe, would perish if German militarism should conquer.

The Committee of Privileges recognizes with satisfaction and pride the alacrity with which the young manhood of our Church has responded and is responding to the call of their country in its hour of need. We would also like to extend that it is not only combatants who are doing a part and all are encouraged to find their way of expressing their faith and patriotism in this conflict.⁴²

Hughes argues that although Methodists were divided in the early days of August, once war was declared many accepted British participation in the conflict, but they were not naive. As one clergymen expressed, believing in the probability of an “immediate, permanent peace” was one of the “most foolish fancies man has ever been the victim of.”⁴³ As the war progressed, Methodist opinion conformed more frequently with the official position of the Established Church. In December 1914 Rev. W. T. Shallard expressed his view that “we are passing through very dark days. Great Sacrifices were being made in the world today, especially on the battlefield. True sacrifice is when we hurt ourselves to make it as Christ did.”⁴⁴ After the first months of the war, objection to British participation in the conflict was often viewed as un-British, un-patriotic, and possibly even un-Christian.

However, for some Methodists the change of opinion was not so quick. Reverend Gregory Harnom of the Exeter Methodist Church penned several letters to the editor of the *Express and Echo* over the course of the war. In his first letter in August 1914 he wrote, “War is a sin and cannot be condoned by the Church.”⁴⁵ Harmon’s opinion was in

⁴² Wesleyan Church Conference, “Resolution on the National Crisis,” *Launceston Weekly News*, 25 September 1914, p. 4.

⁴³ Quoted in Hughes, “British Methodists and the First World War,” p. 320. Also see, Hoover, *God, Germany, and Britain in the Great War*, pp. 103-113.

⁴⁴ Rev. W.T. Shallard, “Christianity and the War,” 29 December 1914, p. 6.

⁴⁵ Reverend Gregory Harnom, “War and Sin,” *Express and Echo*, 14 August 1914.

line with other Methodists. In another letter in January 1915 Harnom expressed the view that the “war has tested the faith of all Christians and it is the responsibility of each of us to decide for ourselves what our role will be in this conflict.” This was a reflection of Methodist opinion beginning to waver. The change can in part be explained by heightened patriotism, but it can also be explained in terms of the clergy’s fear that they were sending mixed messages to their parishioners. Harnom noted that there had been considerable backbiting among the clergy of the Established Church and that “Methodist ministers should be attentive and learn from its mistakes.”⁴⁶ The level of confusion created by the conflicting interpretations of the war was alarming to many ministers. The Okehampton Methodist Church commented that there are a

number of parishioners who are confused regarding the position of the Church in this conflict. The Established Church claims it is a holy war and the Presbyterian and Catholic churches support its position. The Nonconformist Union has already declared the German attack on Belgium to be a sin and a violation of international law, can any other conclusion be drawn but to declare the war a just war of defence?⁴⁷

Methodist opinion was slow to change, and it was not until June 1915 that Harnom’s position swung the other way. He wrote, “It is our Christian duty to support this war against evil and to play our part as Christians and Britons to bring everlasting peace to this world.”⁴⁸ To clarify this change in attitude, D.W. Bebbington explained that early in the war attitudes had hardened with the news of German atrocities against Belgian and French civilians, and the yearnings for peace were largely extinguished among Nonconformists. However, Hughes has argued that the “horrors of the Somme and Ypres

⁴⁶ Reverend Gregory Harnom, “Liberty of Conscience,” *Express and Echo*, 21 January 1915.

⁴⁷ Church minute book, 28 February 1915, Devon Record Office, Okehampton Methodist Circuit, 1812D-O/6. Although some Anglican clergymen described the war as a holy war, the laity first applied the term to the First World War.

⁴⁸ Gregory Harnom, “Christians and Duty,” *Express and Echo*, 6 June 1915.

encouraged an increasing number of Methodists to argue that war could never, under any circumstances, be reconciled with the teachings of Christ,” a view that was held by a growing pacifist minority within the main Methodist connection.⁴⁹

As such, one must be careful not to over generalize the degree of unity within the Methodist community. Reverend Edward Rees argued that “Christian ethics regards all war as evil. War springs from evil and makes for the increase of evil. I understand the teachings of this war. Germany sinned and must be punished. But this response is a Christian fallacy and unduly simplifies the complexity of life.”⁵⁰ Similarly, Reverend Michael, a Methodist minister from Holsworthy, explained that “It is difficult to condemn a nation for a commitment to nationalism, expansionism and military glory when all of the leading nations of the world today pursue the same objectives in their international policies.”⁵¹ Reverend Michael believed that both peace and war were relative, but this war had become one of absolutes. Some Free Church clergymen complained that the Established ministry exuded self-complacency, disdainful spiritual pride, airs of criticisms, and even scorn regarding divergent religious trends and opinions, which some understood was an attack on Nonconformity’s separation from

⁴⁹ D.W. Bebbington, *The Nonconformist Conscience: Chapel and Politics, 1870-1914* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1982), pp. 125-126; Hughes, “British Methodists and the First World War,” p. 318.

⁵⁰ Reverend Edward Rees, “Christian Ethics and the War,” *Salcombe Gazette*, 12 March 1915, no page number.

⁵¹ “Methodism and the War: A Word From Holsworthy,” *Weekly News*, 15 May 1915, p. no page number. Also see, A Methodist Minister, “Christianity and Ethics,” *Western Daily Mercury*, 15 July 1915, p. 3; Primitive Methodists Minister, “War and Peace,” *Tiverton Gazette*, 21 February 1917, no page number; C.P.N. “Methodism and War: The International Peace Initiative,” *Tiverton Gazette*, 11 July 1917, no page number.

the Established Church, and felt that the real causes of the war were being conveniently concealed by religious references.⁵²

Akin to the stance of the Methodists, the Baptists strongly identified with the anti-militaristic principles of Nonconformity, and its dedication to the international association of Baptist groups.⁵³ However, not all Baptists were pacifists. Most Baptists believed that pacifism represented ‘facile idealism,’ and peace without judgment was not in line with the precepts of Christianity.⁵⁴ But, the declaration of war was a painful realization for those Baptists who supported nonconformity’s peace principles. Further, accepting that war was a necessary part of modern society, and accepting that there was no other way but war in 1914, were very different things and Baptists who chose peace did so for the same reasons as other peace-supporting groups.

Prior to the war British Baptists participated in the intercontinental peace initiatives of the churches and “Baptists took the lead in seeking closer ties with the Continent and particularly with Germany in the half-decade before 1914.”⁵⁵ On 31 July 1914 an article in the *Baptist Times* dismissed the whole idea of war, believing that the right men were in power to prevent such a catastrophe.⁵⁶ Baptist opinion in Devon was similar to that expressed in the *Baptist Times* and at a meeting of the Devon and Cornwall Baptists, Reverend Andrews of the Baptist Church, Plymouth, expressed his conviction

⁵² “Meeting of the Free Church Council,” *Salcombe Gazette*, 26 May 1915, no page number.

⁵³ The International Congregational council was formed in 1891; the Baptist World Alliance met in London in 1905 with representatives from 23 countries; the first European Baptist Congress took place in Berlin in 1908 where 1800 delegates gathered from all over Europe.

⁵⁴ Alan Wilkinson notes that most Nonconformists rejected pacifism as “heretical and immoral.” Alan Wilkinson, *Dissent or Conform? War, Peace and the English Churches, 1900-1945* (London: SCM Press, 1986), p. 51.

⁵⁵ K. W. Clements, “Baptists and the Outbreak of the First World War,” *Baptist Quarterly* 26: 2 (1975): 79; James Greenlee and Charles Johnston, *Good Citizens: British Missionaries and Imperial States, 1870-1918* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1999), p. 161.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 74.

that, “Diplomacy will prevail so long as Britain and Germany maintain the cordial relations that have guided them so successfully through past crises.”⁵⁷ At the outbreak of war Nonconformists in Britain respected the “contributions a bourgeois, cultured Germany was making to a European civilization already illumined by Britain’s example.”⁵⁸ Despite the press’ attempts to build mistrust toward Germany the tone of the Baptists remained apologetic, believing that Germany did not pose a threat to Britain.⁵⁹

Nevertheless, after the declaration of war the situation for most Baptists changed.⁶⁰ On 14 August the National Baptist Council issued a 1,100-word manifesto on the war that conveyed the Baptist dedication to peace, but also that the Council accepted the government’s decision to enter the war because it believed that war was the last resort after the most arduous efforts to secure a peaceful solution.⁶¹ In Devon, Reverend G. Franklin Owen of the Totnes United Free Baptist Church expressed his belief that, “We must accept that war is upon us,” but he stressed the need for members of the congregation to attend service as much as possible as “it is only through prayer that peaceful relations will be regained between our two nations.”⁶² The Baptist community accepted that participation in a defensive war was permissible for a Christian society, but many remained committed to pursuing a peaceful resolution to the conflict.

⁵⁷ Reverend Andrews, Meeting of Baptists of Devon and Cornwall, Devon Association of Baptists, 31 July 1914, Devon Record Office, 74/97.

⁵⁸ Greenlee and Johnston, *British Missionaries*, p. 161; Clements, “Baptists and the Outbreak of the First World War,” pp. 78-79.

⁵⁹ For example see, Church minute book, 1 August 1914, Devon Record Office, Salcombe Baptist Church, 6230D-O/PI; Church minute book, 30 June 1914, Devon Record Office, Thorverton Baptist Church 3905D-O/A/3.

⁶⁰ Quoted in Clements, “Baptists and the Outbreak of the First World War,” p. 74.

⁶¹ *Ibid*, p. 75.

⁶² Reverend Franklin Owen, August 1914, Devon Record Office, Totnes United Free Baptist Church, 3881D-O/2.

Unlike most Nonconformists, the Quakers rejected all acts of aggression, but in the opening weeks of the war more than two hundred of the 27,406 Quakers in England enlisted in the armed forces to serve as combatants.⁶³ At the outbreak of war the Society of Friends revived the Peace Testimony as a guide for the basic tenets of their faith and in November 1914 the Society published an “unequivocal reaffirmation of its belief that all war was wrong,” as true Quakerism rejected violence as contrary to its core principles.⁶⁴ Following the declaration of war the Quaker community in Britain, which included the Fellowship of Reconciliation and the Young Men’s Service Committee, united with other pacifist groups in the belief that the war posed a threat to the “dignity of the human personality.”⁶⁵ Thomas C. Kennedy argues that Quakers, despite their commitment to peace, participated in the war effort because prior to the war the peace testimony remained “an unexamined inheritance for the majority of Quakers.” Children were born into and accepted the faith passed down from the parents without critically evaluating or questioning those beliefs. When war was declared, young Quakers, often for the first time, questioned their commitment to their faith, and some chose to reject Quakerism.⁶⁶ Yet, Kennedy’s explanation does not negate the fact that the majority of British Quakers continued to object to the war. In Devon, “Friends, with few exceptions, remain true to our convictions in this war. Christ said love our enemies, to turn the other cheek, and we

⁶³ Annual Tabular Statement for 1914, contained in the London Yearly Meetings Proceedings for 1915, The Library of the Religious Society of Friends, p. 470.

⁶⁴ Martin Ceadel, *Pacifism in Britain 1914-1945: The Defining of A Faith* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), pp. 41-42; E. Jane Bowen, “Attitudes to Peace and War: Sussex Peace Groups, 1914-1945,” *Southern History: A Review of the History of Southern England* 9 (1987): 142; Thomas C. Kennedy, *The Hound of Conscience: A History of the No-Conscription Fellowship, 1914-1919* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1981), pp. 20-2; Ceadel, *Pacifism in Britain*, p. 12.

⁶⁵ Jonathan Atkin, *A War of Individuals: Bloomsbury Attitudes to the Great War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), p. 12.

⁶⁶ Thomas Kennedy, *British Quakerism, 1860-1920: The Transformation of a Religious Community* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 313-314.

take this to mean that we must not maim or kill them.”⁶⁷ In the opening stages of the war the Society of Friends wanted to express that its objection was not to the government, but to the war. Between 1914 and 1916 Devon’s Quakers lost two percent of their 464 members.⁶⁸

The most concerted effort to defend the war in theological terms came from the Established and Catholic churches. Clergymen from both denominations accepted that in the case of war the state had to treat divine law as an unattainable ideal; it was a general guide for action to protect the spiritual well being of Christians, but when applied to the international arena it was sometimes necessary for a country to respond to unprovoked aggression with the use of force. Prior to the declaration of war most churches in Devon opposed a conflict, but after 4 August opinions began to change as each church was influenced by different motives. The position of the Church of England was that the future of the Established Church was tied to the future of the British nation—the survival of one was dependent on the survival of the other. The Catholic Church was in part guided by the opportunity for consolidation and the advancement of Catholicism in Devon, and in Britain generally, and was also guided by a desire to counter attacks about the alleged connections between British Catholics and their ‘Catholic’ enemies. Methodists seized the opportunity to cast aside internal strife and promote unity within the main connections, and Baptists, although committed to internationalism, believed that the war would bring out the best in people -- a sense of chivalry and self-sacrifice that

⁶⁷ Miss O. Rinder, Meeting of Friends, Exeter, 1 September 1914, Devon Record Office, Rinder Papers, 99/25/1.

⁶⁸ Annual Tabular Statement for 1914, contained in the London Yearly Meetings Proceedings for 1915, The Library of the Religious Society of Friends, p. 470. It was not until conscription became an issue of public debate that the opinion shifted to include the government. Quakers believed that if the banishment of war lay in human control then its causes also lay within the human institutions that allowed war in the first place.

had been lacking before the war. Many Baptist pastors believed that the war would improve the moral state of Europe, and prayer and devotion would resume their centrality in the lives of the people. Conversely, Devon's Quaker community felt that the war was a war of a different kind—it would not renew the centrality of Christian principles but would rather destroy them. Although most clergymen accepted the war, at least to some degree, there were objections, however few, regarding Britain's participation in the conflict.

Recruitment Efforts and Objections

Many Anglican clergymen believed that it was not only their responsibility to convince the population of the legitimacy of Britain's cause, according to Alan Wilkinson, clergymen also understood recruitment as central to their sense of duty.⁶⁹ In October 1914 Lord Kitchener stressed that he had no desire to encourage recruiting campaigns from Britain's pulpits, a sentiment that was echoed by Archbishop Davidson who, in November 1915, refused Lord Derby's request that the clergy ask for recruits in their weekly sermons. However, bishops and clergy did appeal for recruits in a number of ways. For example, Archbishop Davidson wrote in his Pastoral Letter of December 1914:

The well-being, nay the very life of our Empire may depend upon the response which is given to the call for men, and I think I can say deliberately that no household or home will be acting worthily if, in timidity or self-love, it keeps back any of those who can loyally bear a man's part in the great enterprise on the part of the land we love.⁷⁰

At the same time, he warned that Britain would find itself in the same position as Belgium if Britons failed to answer Kitchener's call. Although not a direct call for men to

⁶⁹ Wilkinson, *The Church of England and the First World War*, pp. 33-42.

⁷⁰ Quoted in Wilkinson, *The Church of England and the First World War*, pp. 32-33.

enlist, his message was clear enough. Unofficially, bishops and clergy were left to decide for themselves the course they would take, and the responses varied from overt calls for service, to a rejection of the Established position. The Bishop of Exeter clearly stated that, "It is the duty of all men who are able to fight in the defence of this great nation and all it stands for. We can not hope for the preservation of our country or faith if you will not fight to protect it."⁷¹ A.H. Simms, the Archdeacon of Totnes, noted that the number of men serving in the military would reinvigorate the church, and he asked churchwardens to do what they could to encourage men to come forward.⁷² Similarly, the Bishop of Plymouth was not opposed to the clergy promoting recruitment and preached that it was "better to die than to see England in German hands."⁷³ Diocesan publications and county newspapers indicate that many bishops and church dignitaries participated in some way in the recruitment drives. The call for men and women to do their duty was prominent in Anglican magazines like *The Kingdom*:

What can one do for their country? To begin with be ready for any call to duty which may come, and then go on calmly with the job that is at hand. Women must do their part to safeguard the home and aid men in their service. Men must be brave and do what the nation requires. Work in a factory, or on a farm, and if able, heed Kitchener's call. And it is not enough to do our job, we must do it cheerfully, uncomplainingly. Half the troubles in the world are born of the complaining spirit, and in the time through which we are passing such an attitude is near to treachery.⁷⁴

Such advice was complemented by Sunday sermons. At the Anglican Church in Exwick the Sunday sermon made clear that

⁷¹ "The Bishop of Exeter at Exeter Cathedral," *Cornish and Devon Post*, 25 September 1914.

⁷² "Religion and the War," *Totnes Times*, 24 April 1915. Also see, Bishop of Exeter, "Call to Churchmen," *Crediton Chronicle*, 5 June 1915, p. 5; "Bishop of Exeter's Plea," *Devon and Exeter Gazette*, 5 August 1915, no page number.

⁷³ "The Bishop of Plymouth," *Western Independent*, 23 September 1914, p. 4.

⁷⁴ *The Kingdom Magazine*, 18 July 1914, vol. X, Devon Record Office, p. 1.

men must do their duty, even in the face of death, knowing that it is in the name of righteousness. We are fighting for righteousness, and men and women alike must be worthy of their calling, must be steadfast, enduring, until righteousness forces a peace which shall give rest to a stricken world.⁷⁵

The message of the Anglican clergy helped to reinforce the appeal of religion in a time of national distress and gave the war additional meaning with which the population could identify.

Shannon Ty Bontrager suggests that during the war Britain's Anglican community exuded a spirit of self-righteousness, whereby Anglicans assumed that "Germany's perverted evolution could only be corrected by a Chaucer-esque British nation."⁷⁶ A good Christian was by definition a good citizen, a loyal subject and a patriot and in the First World War, 'duty' was charged with deep religious and national significance. A. R. Fuller, vicar at the Paignton Church of England, conveyed to his parishioners that the

war in which we have been compelled to take part has stirred our nation to its very depths and has brought out all the finest qualities that can be seen in men and women: a calm reliance on God, a high sense of patriotism, a profound recognition of the call of duty, a wonderful spirit of unselfishness and self-sacrifice...It may be long weeks before the sword is sheathed, and many homes in England may be desolate, but the great stream of prayer will continue to reach to throne of God and God will answer by the victory of right.⁷⁷

Likewise, at a public meeting in September 1914 vicar F. R. B. Simpson of Dartmouth told the clergy and laity in attendance to "Preach to all around you the glorious right of this war in which we had to take part of hide our heads in shame. Cheer others on and

⁷⁵ Exwick Parish Records, Church minute book, Devon Record Office, 3336A-1/PZ.

⁷⁶ Shannon Ty Bontrager, "The Imagined Crusade: The Church of England and the Mythology of Nationalism and Christianity During the Great War" *Church History*, 71(4) (December 2002): 781.

⁷⁷ A. R. Fuller, "Vicar of Paignton and the War," *Paignton Western Guardian*, 3 September 1914, p. 6.

help them to endure hardships, privations and sorrow in the spirit of true patriotism.

Those who do are doing God's work and are true patriots in this great national cause."⁷⁸

The connection between religion and patriotism can most clearly be seen in the promise of entry into heaven, whereby some Anglican ministers believed that soldiers and the act of soldiering were granted not only national importance, but religious importance as well. As such, during the war some Anglican clergymen took up the call of the 'holy war.' Although the war had been described as a religious crusade from the opening stages of the conflict, the Bryce Commission's Report confirmed stories of German atrocities and legitimized this claim. After the publication of the Commission's report, the clergy intensified the campaign, which found wider expression by mid-1916.⁷⁹ As evidence that the conflict was a holy war, some clergymen promised entry into heaven for all Christians who fought and died in 'God's War.' The assumption was that Christian soldiers had already accepted Jesus Christ as their personal Saviour and their willingness to sacrifice their lives for the cause, which was condoned by God, made them worthy of eternal peace.⁸⁰ There was a sense of immortality to be gained from the war as heroes and protectors, and in April 1915 the Archdeacon of Totnes preached that "out of this war God will bring new power into the religious life of men. Out of the horrors and darkness of the war God will bring men back to Him and they will rest in

⁷⁸ F. R. B. Simpson, "Vicar of Dartmouth and the War," *Paignton Western Guardian*, 12 November 1914, p. 3. Also see, Reverend H. A. Birks, *Salcombe Gazette*, 14 August 1914, no page number; "Bishop of Truro at St. Andrew's Church Plymouth," *Launceston Weekly News*, 31 October 1914, no page number.

⁷⁹ Marrin, *The Last Crusade*, pp. 135-136.

⁸⁰ Ibid, pp. 152-157. Marrin argues that the Church of England had traditionally recognized and honoured the profession of arms. For some Anglican clergymen, soldiers were instruments of the Lord.

the light of God.”⁸¹ Not all Anglican clergymen were comfortable with the suggestion that death in battle would ensure entry into heaven, and Nonconformists largely rejected the idea,⁸² but the pressures of war resulted in some modifying the traditional doctrines about life and death. Although it is difficult to say with any certainty what impact such a message had on enlistment numbers, it is clear that there was a tendency by those at home, bombarded with horror stories and worried about their loved ones, to make the conflict a divine testament to the British cause.⁸³

The willingness of Anglican clergymen to participate in recruitment and the promotion of the war has been well established in the secondary literature, but those who objected to the war have not been afforded the same attention. Certainly support for the war was widespread within the Established Church, but there were a few devoted pacifists among the parochial clergy. Vicar T.A. Tippen of Chudleigh, a small community in west Devon, was a committed socialist and pacifist and when his churchyard was used for recruiting he found the act deeply repugnant. He started his own campaign to denounce the war and those in the church who supported it. Tippen wrote many letters to the editor throughout the war criticizing the behaviour of Anglican clergymen:

⁸¹ “Archdeacon’s Visitation to Torquay,” *Totnes Times*, 24 April 1915, p. 2; Exeter Cathedral, Sermon by Reverend Chalk, *Express and Echo*, 29 October 1917, p. 4; “The Sermon,” *Express and Echo*, 23 April 1917, p. 4; Reverend Draper, “Christianity and War,” *Cornish and Devon Post*, 6 January 1917, p. 6.

⁸² Ronald Davies, “Christianity and Ethics,” *British Weekly: A Journal of Social and Christian Progress* vol. 57; M. Nole, Parish Council, Church minute book, Newton Abbot Methodist Church, 1 April 1915, Devon Record Office, 3934D/4; E.W.D. “The Sacredness of Heaven,” *The Friend*, 18 June 1915, p. 486.

⁸³ Clara Wadsford, “God’s War,” *Western Express and Torrington Chronicle*, 19 September 1914; Peter Liddell, *Western Express and Torrington Chronicle*, 28 June 1915, no page number; William Trend, “O Germany,” *Western Independent*, 7 October 1914, p. 4; “Rally at Totnes Town Hall: Britannia!” *Totnes Times*, 7 August 1915, p. 3; “Plymouth Amateur Theatricals,” *Western Morning News*, 10 May 1916, p. 7.

I understand the desire of the High Church to want to bring the people back to worship, but it is not the role of the church to convince citizens to engage in violence and commit murderous acts against another people. I cannot conceive of greater spiritual misfortune for this country than to encourage participation in this horrible war.⁸⁴

Reverend Ellis, a retired Anglican minister from Bideford, publicly supported Tippen. In a lengthy letter to the *Bideford Gazette*, Ellis wrote:

We shall never forget the heroism of days past, and we shall not forget the men of our navy and armies who are presently risking their lives, but we must learn from history. Is this really a war for the protection of the British nation? Has Britain been attacked? Is it really a war of defence, and if so, the defence of what? In one swift moment the Church has uprooted its principles, withered away its commitment to betterment and its commitment to the Christian way. Self-indulgence, uncleanness, drunkenness, pride and avarice are all national sins and to be quite frank it is my conviction that this war will accelerate the deterioration of the English nation. We cannot sanction this war simply because we fear the results if we don't.⁸⁵

Others were less open about their criticisms. Arthur Huxley Thompson sympathized with the beliefs of Tippen and Ellis, but rather than publicly expressing his sympathy he felt it was best to allow his congregation to determine for themselves what course they should take:

The conduct of this war breaks my heart, but I cannot bring myself to voice my objections. It is not my place to force my convictions on those who rely on me for understanding and unconditional acceptance. Instead, these feelings must remain private until the time is right, when the war has ended and future generations judge the actions of their forbearers.⁸⁶

Thompson's diary is filled with contradictions and concerns about the war. In some ways he accepts that the war was necessary, but he is filled with grief about its consequences. He writes about the daily sorrow he encounters and the hardships experienced at home,

⁸⁴ Reverend Tippen, "Christianity and War," *Launceston Weekly News*, 24 July 1916, no page number.

⁸⁵ "Christian Principles and War," *Express and Echo*, 23 August 1916.

⁸⁶ Un-addressed letter [inside diary], 18 January 1917, Devon Record Office, Huxley Papers, 1857.

but he was aware that defeatism would not provide a solution to the war and, rather than writing what he wanted to about his experiences and feelings, he often wrote nothing.⁸⁷

At the same time, Thompson believed that there was much to be learned from the Nonconformist churches; all Anglicans had to be more compassionate, tolerant, and worthy of their faith. Despite modest support, Tippen continued to voice his objections and left the Established Church in May 1917. There is no doubt that Tippen was among the minority, but his feelings and opinions complicated the responses of Devon's Anglican ministers to the conflict. Not all were in agreement with the 'official line,' but most were apprehensive about expressing oppositional opinions.

For Devon's Catholic priests the issue of recruitment was not a source of contestation and many responded to the need for volunteers by vigorously participating in the recruitment campaign. From the available sources it appears that there was little difference in the attitudes or presentation of the war within Devon's Catholic community, and several reports in local papers highlight the astounding call for men made by the Catholic churches.⁸⁸ This continued to be true even after the Pope addressed the peoples and rulers of the belligerent nations in August 1915:

Put away mutual desire for destruction and reflect that nations to not die; if humiliated and oppressed they prepare to retaliate by transmitting from generation to generation hatred and desire for revenge... This is our cry for peace, and we invite all the friends of peace to unite with us in our desire to terminate this war and re-establish the empire of right, resolving henceforth to solve differences not by the sword, but by equality and justice. We impart our apostolic benediction to the Roman Church.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ Diary, 19 April 1916, Devon Record Office, Huxley Papers, 1857.

⁸⁸ "Demonstration at Cathedral Church," *South Devon Weekly Express*, 5 October 1916, p. 5. See, Father Elsworth, "A Catholic Duty," *South Devon Weekly Express*, 12 August 1914. Also see, St. Joseph's Catholic School, Boys Department, Devonport, 7 August 1914, Devon Record Office, 2069/3; "Catholics To Answer the Nation's Call," *Express and Echo*, 17 August 1914, p. 2.

⁸⁹ "The Vatican and Peace: Pope's Offer of Mediation," *Dawlish Gazette*, 7 August 1915.

Following the publication of this article, various Catholic churches in Devon participated in two recruiting rallies held in Plymouth on 14 and 28 August 1915.⁹⁰ Both rallies were covered in the local press and in response to the Pope's call for peace one Catholic priest in attendance stated that "the Pope's belated venture came as a surprise," but little else was said on the issue.⁹¹

Despite public pronouncements of Catholic support for the war, the problems of Catholic Ireland and Pope Benedict XV's 1917 Peace Note provided ammunition for those groups that questioned the extent of Catholic support for the war in Britain. The introduction of the third Military Service Act in the spring of 1916 created suspicion and alarm among those who feared that conscription would be extended to Ireland. In Ireland, although some Catholic clergy participated in the recruitment campaign as late as the autumn of 1916, there were pro-Austrian and anti-French sentiments among the clergy. Many Irish Catholics favoured the Catholic Habsburgs over the Third Republic, rejected recruitment, and few Irish Catholics volunteered to serve as army chaplains.⁹² Questions about Catholic support that surrounded the Easter Rising were revisited when Pope Benedict XV's Peace Note appeared in August 1917. The Pope's determined efforts to bring about a negotiated peace provoked hostility from British Protestants and "met with an imperfect sympathy in some Catholic circles."⁹³ The issue here was that the Pope's call for peace appeared on the front pages of newspapers around the world and Catholics

⁹⁰ "Church Support for the War," *Tiverton Gazette*, 16 August 1915, no page number; "Rally at Exeter: Catholic Response to Pope's Peace Initiative," *Dawlish Gazette*, 30 August 1915.

⁹¹ "Not a question of Peace," *Teignmouth Post*, 10 August 1915, no page number.

⁹² D.W. Miller, *Church, State and Nation in Ireland 1898-1921* (Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh University Press, 1973), pp. 312-313.

⁹³ E.I. Watkin, *Roman Catholicism in England from the Reformation to 1950* (London: Oxford University Press, 1958), p. 221; J.F. Pollard, *The Unknown Pope: Benedict XV (1914-1922) and the Pursuit of Peace* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1999), p. 123, Matthew, *Catholicism in England*, p.252.

and non-Catholics alike were forced to confront the Pope's peace message.⁹⁴ On 3 September 1917 the Catholic Circuit in Devon published a full page article entitled "Papal Absence" and expressed the view that the "Holy See failed to appreciate the true moralities" of the Allies' case against Germany.⁹⁵ There was

damning evidence of Prussian brutality, as well as flagrant disregard of every ordinance that civilisation holds dear. And the Pope, from his remarks, is blind to this. In deal with this aspect of the question 'New Europe' emphasises that this war owes its special character to the confessed wrong-doing of a powerful military State against a weak non-military people—an intensely Roman Catholic people, whose neutrality the aggressor had sworn to protect. His Holiness is not here in the United Kingdom, and has not bore witness to the shedding of blood in this effort.⁹⁵

To be certain, this was not a rejection of the Pope's Peace Note, but rather an offer of explanation in a hostile environment and it was not the first time that Catholics in Devon responded in this way to the Pope's appeal for peace. After the publication of the Peace Note Devon's Catholic clergymen continued their recruitment efforts in Plymouth, Devonport and other communities along Devon's south coast.⁹⁶ Few Catholic priests tried to influence public opinion in favour of the Pope's message and those who continued their support for Britain's cause did so without making direct statements about the Peace Note.

⁹⁴ The Pope's peace message was not unfounded considering that the Asquith government sent a diplomatic mission to the Holy See in 1914 in part to make its case for involvement in the war against Germany, but the British government also invited cooperation with the Vatican in managing the situation in Ireland. Taouk, "The Roman Catholic Church in Britain," pp. 19-20.

⁹⁵ "Papal Absence," *Western Daily Mercury*, 3 September 1917, no page number.

⁹⁶ "Recruitment at St. Joseph's," *Teignmouth Post*, 8 September 1917, no page number; "Pope Benedict XV: Catholic Sermon at Plymouth Pier," *Tavistock Gazette*, 27 September 1917, no page number; "Catholic Support for Britain's Efforts," *South Devon Express*, 1917, no page number [newspaper clipping from the personal papers of Beatrix Cresswell, Devon Record Office, 4686M/F82]. Although few Catholics publicly opposed the Peace Note, *The Tablet* judged it contrary to the British cause and rejected the Pope's call for peace. *The Tablet*, 18 August 1917, p. 196.

Unlike the Catholic zeal for recruiting, few Methodist or Baptist clergymen were willing to participate in such an overt manner and fewer still were willing to use the pulpit to convince men to go to war or to use church grounds as supplementary recruiting stations. A newsletter that was disseminated within the Methodist circuit in Devon explained that while it was up to individual clergymen to decide their own course of action, it was not acceptable to use religion as a tool for recruitment purposes.⁹⁷ At the Newton Abbot Methodist Church the government's request to use the church's schoolroom in the event of troops being sent to Newton Abbot for training purposes was met with dismay, both among the clergy and parishioners. The subject was addressed at a church meeting where both members of the congregation and the pastor felt that letting the building to the military authorities was unnecessary and, after careful consideration, refused the request. The record keeper made a note that if the issue was pressing, the Church Council would reconsider it at a later date.⁹⁸ The government made a second request to use the schoolroom in November 1916. This time the church's refusal to allow the schoolroom to be used for billeting troops was absolute, and the Church Council stated that it wished to avoid all association with the military aspects of the war.⁹⁹ Instead, the Wesleyan Methodist pastors of Newton Abbot and the surrounding areas suggested that they contribute to the war effort through clothing drives, collecting funds for those who were displaced by the war, and, most importantly, by helping Devonians who had been negatively affected by the conflict.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ Church minute book, July 1916, Devon Record Office, Torquay-Paignton Methodist Church, 2330/D57.

⁹⁸ Parish Council records for, 31 October 1916, Devon Record Office, Newton Abbot Methodist, 3934D/4.

⁹⁹ Parish Council records for Newton Abbot, 28 November 1916, Devon Record Office, 3934D/4.

¹⁰⁰ Exeter and Shabbear District of the United Methodist Connection, "The Church and the War," *Cornish and Devon Post*, 19 May 1917, p. 2. A similar response was recorded at the Torquay-Paignton Methodist

In October 1914 the *Manchester Guardian* reported that although Nonconformists were opposed to using religion to beguile men to enlist in the armed forces, two Methodist ministers were preaching recruiting sermons with the permission of their congregations.¹⁰¹ In the *Western Express and Torrington Chronicle* a “Wesleyan Methodist Minister” noted that despite the Free Churches’ commitment to peace, he realized as “vividly as any section of the nation the peril which besets all the ideals for which they have striven, and the duty at whatever sacrifice is making their commitment to the national effort at this crisis.”¹⁰² These ministers were not specifically telling men to enlist, or that it was a sin not to do so, but they did urge parishioners not to fall too far behind in offering themselves for service. Methodist ministers who wished to preach pro-war sermons generally sought approval from their congregations before doing so.¹⁰³

In Devon, the Baptist community was slow to connect with the war effort,¹⁰⁴ and this hesitation resulted in the accusation that Baptists were not satisfactorily contributing

Church. Church minute book, 16 March 1916, Devon Record Office, Torquay-Paignton Methodist 2330/D57.

¹⁰¹ “Nonconformity and the War,” *Manchester Guardian*, 8 October 1914, p. 12.

¹⁰² “Wesleyan Methodist Minister,” *Western Express and Torrington Chronicle*, 24 November 1914, p. 3; “The Free Churches: Primitive Methodists in Devon,” *Western Express and Torrington Chronicle*, 8 October 1914, p. 3.

¹⁰³ Part of the reason for such caution among Methodist ministers was that within the United Methodist, Primitive Methodist, and Wesleyan Methodist churches in Devon there were deep divisions regarding the role of religion in the war that threatened the stability of the church, and most ministers were careful not to exacerbate those divisions. Although Methodists were not pacifists, on the eve of the war the Peace Society, established in 1816, counted many Methodist ministers among its members. The position of the Peace Society was that war could never be justified under any circumstances. However, Wesleyan Methodists who accepted the “call to duty” were praised and others were encouraged to assist the government in meeting wartime demands. Hughes, “British Methodists and the First World War,” p. 319; for more on Methodist theology see Ian M. Randall, “Full Salvation: Expressions of Traditional Wesleyan Holiness in the Early Twentieth Century,” *Methodist History* 36: 3 (1998): 176-190; Anderson, “The Growth of Christian Militarism in mid-Victorian Britain,” pp. 57-61. The United Methodists believed that participation in a defensive war was acceptable, but a minority emphasized Christ’s Sermon on the Mount to “turn the other cheek” when faced with aggression. Conversely, “Apart from the Quakers, Primitive Methodism up to 1914 thought itself the most pacifist or peace-loving of all the denominations.” Wilkinson, *Dissent or Conform*, p. 29.

¹⁰⁴ “Message from the Pastor of Collumpton Baptist,” *Exeter Flying Post*, 5 September 1915.

to the war effort. In December 1914, Lord Fortescue chided, “The Baptists of Devon have allowed their peace principles to carry them too far and have not volunteered for service of King and country. In fact, they have done little to aid this country in its hour of need.”¹⁰⁵ At a meeting of the Launceston Free Church Council, Reverend Balman addressed the concerns of many Nonconformist clergymen in Devon. He acknowledged that there was considerable debate among the denominations about the current war, and he concluded that the position of the Anglican and Catholic churches was too extreme, but that the Quaker position was also unsatisfactory. War was not condemned in the New Testament and Reverend Balman noted that it is often during times of crisis that many Christians, soldiers and civilians, felt close to God and religion became a greater reality for them. Yet he also recognized that there were many objections to the war that were also valid:

Many Christians have refused to bear arms. Early Christians were subject to the dictates of a heathen Empire. Caesar was worshiped like a god, but they could not recognise him as such. Military service involved pagan sacrifice. In the course of time the Empire became nominally Christian, and then found no difficulty in bearing the sword... We must now ask ourselves if can we accept the consequences of a military system? You have been granted the gift of free will and you must rely on your own conscience to determine your course of action. This council will not usurp the Word of God.¹⁰⁶

Reverend Balman observed that there was a great deal of division in Devon, which he believed weakened the position of the churches and their contributions to the war effort.

¹⁰⁵ The North Devon and Cornwall Association of Baptists, “Do Nonconformists Enlist?” *Launceston Weekly*, 5 December 1914, no page number. For their response see, “Response of the Devon and Cornwall Association of Baptists to Lord Fortescue’s call to Service,” *Devon and Cornwall Gazette*, 10 December 1914, p. 3; Exeter St. Baptist Church, Church Pamphlet for the Year 1915, Devon Record Office, 76/44/1/8; The North Devon and Cornwall Association of Baptists, “Do Baptists Enlist?” *Launceston Weekly*, 4 December 1914, no page number.

¹⁰⁶ Launceston Free Church Council, “Christians and War,” *Weekly News*, 22 January 1916, no page number.

But, he also believed that it was the openness of the Nonconformist churches that protected them from the ill effects of such divisions. While Anglican ministers were scorned for dissenting views, diversity of opinion was respected among Nonconformists.

However, diversity of belief was much less acceptable within Devon's Quaker community. Under the guidance of the Society of Friends and the Quaker connection to the No-Conscription Fellowship (NCF), there was a campaign to convince Devonians that the war was immoral.¹⁰⁷ The Society of Friends and the NCF disseminated information through pamphlets and public speeches and carried on their 'Propaganda for Peace' through two committees, the Peace Committee of the Meeting for Sufferings and the Northern Friends Peace Board, the first of which operated in Devon.¹⁰⁸ In Exeter the Peace Committee under William Brown was committed to the message that it was the duty of every man and woman who seeks to follow Christ to commit to the Peace Testimony, even if it meant taking a stance contrary to the law.¹⁰⁹ The Quakers were not alone in their dedication to peace and found some support for their cause from a small group of Baptist churches in southern Devon. The group was a loose configuration of

¹⁰⁷ By the end of 1915 pacifists became targets of public criticisms and, as Thomas C. Kennedy explains, by the end of the war the No-Conscription Fellowship (NCF) was the subject of more public acrimony than any other dissenting group. Quakers were the predominant group within the NCF and exerted considerable influence both in numbers and in terms of their financial contributions to the League. However, after the introduction of conscription the authorities treated religious objectors fairly leniently and there was a break with the NCF. The exception was the Friends' Service League, a small group of Quaker absolutists who maintained their connections to the NCF until 1919. Kennedy, "Public Opinion and the Conscientious Objector, 1915-1919": 106; Kennedy, *The Hound of Conscience*, pp. 48-49, Thomas C. Kennedy, "Fighting About Peace: The No-Conscription Fellowship and the British Friends' Service Committee, 1915-1919" *Quaker History* 69 (1980): 3-22.

¹⁰⁸ Kennedy, *British Quakerism*, pp. 303-304; for more on the association of Quakerism with pacifism see Thomas C. Kennedy, "Quaker Women and the Pacifist Impulse in Britain, 1900-1920," in *The Pacifist Impulse in Historical Perspective*, ed. Harvery L. Dyck (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1996), pp. 182-195.

¹⁰⁹ Society of Friends, minute book, 31 August 1915, Plymouth and West Devon Record Office, 1444/7/8; Society of Friends, minute book, 29 November 1916, Plymouth and West Devon Record Office, 1444/7/8; Henry J. Hornsnaill, "The Defence of Rights," *The Friend*, 30 June 1916, p. 513; John W. Graham, "Friends and Enlistment," *The Friend*, 1 January 1915, p. 16.

Baptist ministers who supported pacifism and believed that international cooperation was the only path to a meaningful and lasting peace. Throughout the war they sustained their international connections by maintaining communications with fellow Baptist supporters in Germany. Communications were carried out in secret and available records, although limited, show that the groups sent communications through Cornwall to Switzerland and then on to Baptist groups in Germany. A Cornwall Quaker noted in his journal that “Baptists in Cornwall and Devon have worked hard to maintain their commitment to internationalism in the true spirit of the Christian faith. Communications with G[erman] B[aptists] have reassured me that internationalism will play an important role whence the conflict has ended.”¹¹⁰ What is crucial here is that Baptists and Quakers were dedicated to freedom of thought and worship that found expression in the internationalist movement and took considerable risks to maintain their transnational connections.

Although the Established hierarchy stated that it would not use the pulpit to encourage enlistment, many clergymen used it for such purposes and turned their churches and grounds into auxiliary recruiting stations. Many Anglican vicars tried to make religion a key component of British patriotism, but despite such manifestations of patriotic ardour, there were devoted pacifists among the Anglican clergy who openly and fervently denounced the war. Not unlike the official position of the Established Church, the Catholic press made much of the heroism of Catholic soldiers—brave, self-sacrificing, and noble—and asserted that they were living embodiments of endurance, fortitude, and brotherly love. The majority of Catholic priests were mindful of their past

¹¹⁰ Westcountry Society of Friends, no date, Cornwall Record Office, Stephens of Ashfield ST/375. The correspondence was couched in the language of the international peace movement and from the available records it appears that the rights and wrongs of each country, or specifics about British and German participation in the war, was omitted. The concern was largely post-war reconstruction and the reestablishment of international connections.

commitment to their country, and during the war participated in its defence by vigorously encouraging enlistment among its parishioners. However, the Anglican and Catholic eagerness for recruiting was not emulated by many Methodist and Baptist ministers who considered their antics to be distasteful. Rather than unduly influencing their parishioners, many chose to say nothing about recruitment, while others forbade recruiting officers from operating on church grounds. The Quakers not only opposed the recruiting efforts of some clergymen, but they actively engaged in denouncing the war through the 'Propaganda for Peace' campaign. The clergy were cautious in their presentation of the war and whether they accepted or rejected the role of clergymen as recruiting agents, their actions were determined by the standards set by each parish, not by a national council.

Conscription and Conscientious Objection

Despite contradictory interpretations regarding the place of the church in a time of war, the various denominations, with the exception of the Quakers, tried to prevent religious and social disunity by stressing that the war affected all Britons equally. Whether one enlisted in the armed forces or not, the country as a whole suffered under wartime conditions and this suffering provided the opportunity for national unity and personal betterment. However, the introduction of conscription complicated this view. First, the conscription bill contained a clause that exempted all members of the clergy from compulsory military service. Second, the introduction of conscription brought to the fore the issue of conscientious objection. This section seeks to understand how the clergy responded to the introduction of conscription and the suspension of freedom of choice, as

well as clerical opinion and actions regarding conscientious objectors who opposed military service on religious grounds.

At first, the response of the Established Church to conscription was confused. While many Anglican clergymen continued to speak of the ‘holiness of patriotism,’ almost all Anglican clergy rejected the idea of the clergy as combatants. From the beginning of the war Bishop Robertson informed the public that no one was exempt from offering some form of service to the nation, but stressed the non-combatant role of the clergy.¹¹¹ The Church of England believed that the clergy were needed at home and at the front, and that their service should be confined to religious guidance.¹¹² In a letter to the editor of the *Western Independent* the Bishop of Plymouth addressed the issue of why the clergy should not serve as combatants. His message was brief and direct: “The clergy will not and shall not serve as combatants. Ordination and the whole history of the church support this view.”¹¹³ Many Anglican clergymen, including Andrew McGrevie of the Axmouth Christ Anglican Church, supported this position and believed that “conscription was necessary for the protection of civilization and that individuality and freedom had to be sacrificed for the sake of the national effort,” but he also believed that “the clergy should not be forced to perform a military role.”¹¹⁴ The problem was that many people, clergymen and lay people alike, believed that discouraging Anglican ministers from enlisting was contradictory to the Church of England’s official self-appointed role as

¹¹¹ Bishop of Exeter, *Exeter Flying Post*, 3 September 1915.

¹¹² “Clergy as Combatants, Bishop of London’s Opinion,” *Launceston Weekly News*, 15 January 1916, no page number.

¹¹³ Bishop of Plymouth, *Western Independent*, 7 September 1916, p. 4.

¹¹⁴ Andrew McGrevie, private notes, 6 June 1915, Devon Record Office, Axmouth Christ Anglican Church, A5621/P21.

supplementary recruiters. It was hypocritical for a clergyman to ask another man to sacrifice his life when he himself was not willing to do so.

Despite the clause that exempted them from combative service, many Anglican clergymen did serve their country as chaplains and soon after the outbreak of the war the bishops agreed not to ordain men who were fit for military service and participated in releasing men of military age from seminary schools. During the war both Bishop Robertson and Bishop Cecil encouraged the clergy to serve as chaplains, but only those who could be spared from their posts. However, in several letters to local newspapers Bishop Robertson expressed concern that this was not the time for the clergy to leave their home duties. He recognized that they were needed at the front, and that their “value would be infinitesimal,” but he also believed that the clergy was “more sorely needed at home,” and he passionately fought against the closure of several small rural churches, which was suggested as a possible way to release more clergymen for chaplainry duty.¹¹⁵ However, the new Bishop of Exeter, Lord William Cecil (1916-1936),¹¹⁶ proved to be more accepting of this plan. Three of Lord Cecil’s sons were killed in action in the First World War and after the loss of his first son he considered service as a military chaplain. He believed in service to his country and rejected any notion that Christianity and war were incompatible.¹¹⁷ After receiving notice that one clergyman from his Diocese was ministering to five thousand soldiers in France, he noted: “I am aware that the closing of

¹¹⁵ “Bishop’s Plea,” *Western Times*, 5 November 1915, p. 7; “Bishop of Exeter’s Statement,” *Crediton Chronicle*, 6 November 1915; “Bishop’s Call to Prayer and Service,” *Crediton Chronicle*, 10 July 1915; “Bishop of Exeter and the War,” *Crediton Chronicle*, 10 April 1915.

¹¹⁶ Lord William Cecil was the Rector of Hatfield, Hertfordshire (1888-1916), before becoming Bishop of Exeter. He was the son of former prime minister Lord Salisbury, but had little interest in politics. He was very paternal in his relationships with his clergy and demanded complete obedience on matters of church doctrine.

¹¹⁷ David Cecil, *The Cecils of Hatfield House* (London: Constable, 1973), p. 294; Kenneth Rose, *The Later Cecils* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1975), pp. 119-120.

churches must be unpopular, but all of the churches that have been mentioned are small churches with others close at hand.” He added, “The cry is more men [chaplains] for the front; do not let the clergy hang back, or Churchmen impede them in their duty.”

However, he was strongly opposed to a combatant role for the clergy, and believed that the military role performed by the clergy in France was shameful, fearing that the war provided the “irreligious government of France the opportunity to persecute the clergy [which he believed was] a deadly insult to the Roman Catholic Church.”¹¹⁸

From the beginning of the war the question of whether or not the clergy should serve as combatants was a source of debate.¹¹⁹ Public discontent was such that in September 1916 the Bishop of Exeter criticized the public for treating the clergy like shirkers.¹²⁰ In parishes throughout Devon young boys, men and women accosted the clergy shouting “Kitchener Wants You!”¹²¹ In the parish of Teignmouth clergymen were harassed by young men of military age and such instances were frequent enough to warrant an advisory from the Urban District Council urging “tolerance from both sides.”¹²² Similar cases were reported in other areas throughout the south-west. A curate from Plymouth stated that “We cannot blame the public in this matter when one considers the disgraceful behaviour of Anglican priests and bishops.”¹²³ A clergymen from Holsworthy understood the

impatience and distress that such action causes. From pulpit and High Altar we have encouraged all able to come forward. The Bishop of

¹¹⁸ “Closing of City Churches: Bishop of Exeter and the Needs of the Army,” *Western Times*, 26 July 1918, p. 3; “Call to the Nation: Lord Bishop of Exeter,” *Western Times*, 29 May 1917, p. 6.

¹¹⁹ Snape, *God and the British Soldier*, pp. 150-155.

¹²⁰ Bishop of Exeter, *Exeter Flying Post*, 4 September 1916, p. 4.

¹²¹ Letter to Lord Fortescue from the Bishop of Exeter, 7 June 1916, Devon Record Office, Fortescue of Castle Hill, 1262M/L147.

¹²² Teignmouth Urban District Council, *Teignmouth Post*, 30 October 1916, p. 3.

¹²³ “Clergy as Combatants,” *Weekly News*, 26 September 1916, no page number.

London has confirmed that 'No church must have a third priest giving his whole time to the work of the parish connected with it without special permission,' but many churches are closing and there are more and more clergymen available for military service. The Church must choose a side.¹²⁴

Reverend West of the Rawdon Church spoke of the need for the mobilization of the churches and believed the continued centrality of the church in the lives of the people would be impossible without some degree of cooperation.¹²⁵

In an attempt to promote religious solidarity and to achieve some form of consensus within the Anglican community, some Anglican ministers in Devon began to stress the importance of those clergymen who left to join the war effort. Vicar Henry C. Brenton in the Exwick Parish Magazine asked parishioners to pray for Reverend Blakiston who had enlisted in the army and was on his way to France:

Reverend Blakiston has decided to join our brave men in France who are expecting at any moment a great hostile offensive. It may commence at any hour and the strain upon the men must be intense. Join your prayers in mine, commending them to God's mercy and protection. He has gained the affection of every man and boy of Exwick Parish.¹²⁶

Several Anglican churches in Devon participated in the 'Call to Sacrifice' by stressing that "We must call men to serve Christ in that spirit which offers the last cartridge, the last shilling, the last man, in the defence of this great principle."¹²⁷ The 'Call to Service' encouraged all men to join the armed forces, including eligible clergymen (as chaplains). The purpose of this activity was to demonstrate to the public that the clergy was participating in the war by tending to the religious needs of Britain's soldiers,

¹²⁴ "Notes on the war," *Express and Echo*, 11 December 1916, p. 6.

¹²⁵ "Annual Meetings, Kilmington Devon," *British Weekly*, December 1916, p. 15.

¹²⁶ Vicar Henry C. Brenton, Letter from the Vicar, *Exwick Parish Magazine* (22 April 1917), Devon Record Office.

¹²⁷ "A Call to Sacrifice," *The Church Record: A Magazine for the Home* 26: 302 (February 1917), British Library, PP441.H.

a role that was just as important to the national cause as carrying a rifle. However, by late 1917 government and official Anglican opinion began to waver and by the time the Germans launched their offensives in March and April 1918, the need for men resulted in the government's withdrawal of the clause that exempted the clergy from military service. This does not mean that the clergy were conscripted. Although Archbishop Davidson agreed to conscription for the clergy, the government quickly reversed the decision because it feared "the consequences if it attempted to conscript Roman Catholic clergy in Ireland."¹²⁸ Rather than conscription, the clergy were permitted to join Britain's armed forces without restrictions and no protest was put forward by the Established Church.

Directly connected to the issue of conscription was conscientious objection to military service, and what role the clergy played in supporting those who objected for religious reasons.¹²⁹ Although conscription allowed the government to compel men to serve, it also permitted exemptions on the basis of personal hardship and religious objections, and in some instance exemptions would be granted to families that had already lost one or more sons in the war. Between 1916 and 1919 approximately 16,500 British men requested that last form of exemption.¹³⁰ In Devon there were more than fifty

¹²⁸ Wilkinson, *The Church of England and the First World War*, p. 40.

¹²⁹ This chapter is concerned with the clergy's response to the introduction of conscription and attitudes toward those who refused to serve their country in a combative role. For more on conscientious objection in a larger context see Jo Vellacott, *Bertrand Russell and the Pacifists in the First World War* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1981), pp. 45-47, 190-203; Jonathan Aitkin, *A War of Individuals: Bloomsbury Attitudes to the Great War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), pp. 4-7, 10-14, 135-136; Thomas C. Kennedy, "Public Opinion and The Conscientious Objector, 1915-1915," *The Journal of British Studies* 12: 2 (May 1973): 105-119; Keith Robbins, "The British Experience of Conscientious Objection," in *Facing Armageddon: The First World War Experienced*, ed. Hugh Cecil and Peter Liddle (London: Leo Cooper, 1996), pp. 694-697.

¹³⁰ Thomas Kennedy, "Public Opinion and the Conscientious Objector, 1915-1919," *Journal of British Studies* 12: 2 (May 1973): p. 105.

cases of conscientious objection reported in the press, and more than 1,800 requests for exemptions (usually related to employment) over the course of the war.¹³¹

The enactment of the first Military Service Bill breached a long tradition of volunteerism in recruiting and replaced it with a further extension of government power. With the introduction of conscription conscientious objection was allowed, partly as a way to placate liberal opinion, but also as a way to diminish public hostility regarding forced service. Yet, deciding what to do with conscientious objectors was a problematic undertaking, primarily because, as Keith Robbins explains, there was no specific definition of conscientious objection during the First World War.¹³² Such objections could have been based on religious beliefs, in which case the tribunals (and the public) tended to be more lenient, or the objection could have been political or ideological, usually an adherence to socialist principles. Although some conscientious objectors accepted alternative service—for example, some Quakers accepted service with the Friends' Ambulance Service—there were 1,350 absolutists who refused to participate in work that would support the war effort.¹³³ Absolutists were treated harshly, sentenced to two years in prison and, once the war was over, were disenfranchised for five years. Some 5,000 conscientious objectors were imprisoned and seventy-three “died as a result of harsh treatment.”¹³⁴ Others were sent to France

¹³¹ Report from Mr. J.H. Ley to Lord Fortescue, exemption requests to May 1918, 18 June 1918, Devon Record Office, Fortescue of Castle Hill, 1262M/O/LD/151.

¹³² Keith Robbins, “The British Experience of Conscientious Objection,” in *Facing Armageddon: The First World War Experienced*, ed. Hugh Cecil and Peter Liddle (London: Leo Cooper, 1996), pp. 694-697.

¹³³ Robb, *British Culture and the First World War*, p. 118. For more on the mistreatment of conscientious objectors see DeGroot, *Blighty*, p. 155.

¹³⁴ Millman, *Managing Domestic Dissent in First World War Britain*, p. 194; Robb, *British Culture in the First World War*, p. 118.

and “once in the war zone they could be shot for refusing to follow orders.”¹³⁵ In the cases of political and ideological objections, little sympathy was afforded, although this differed from tribunal to tribunal.

Local tribunals consisted of five members, usually made up of local notables such as councilors, justices of the peace, and clergymen, and were established by the Town Councils, Urban District Councils, and Rural District Councils to evaluate requests for exemptions.¹³⁶ It is important to note that the work of the tribunals took place in a “very local context. The tribunals constituted a site in which competing societal interests were weighed up.”¹³⁷ In Devon, there was a mixture of responses to conscientious objectors among clergymen, but leading Anglican opinion largely rejected pacifism and little understanding was granted to absolutists who objected on political grounds. Jerry T. Wright of the Uffculme Parish Council recommended that there should be a clear distinction made between those citizens who “object to the war for political reasons, and those, who as Christians, cannot comprehend the taking of another life. The man who objects due to his religious beliefs has morality on his side. The other is a shirker and should be charged with treason and hanged.”¹³⁸ And a minister from Plympton stated that he had “no respect for conscientious objectors” and

¹³⁵ Ibid, p. 118.

¹³⁶ A detailed circular was sent out in February 1916 explaining the regulations governing these bodies. Circular Relating to the Constitution, Functions and Procedures of Local Tribunals, Submitted to the Counties in February 1916, Devon Record Office, 1262M/LG/12/O. Gerard DeGroot notes that eighty percent of objectors were granted exemptions, although the majority of these would have been conditional, and that the government eased the punishments for those who refused to comply. The Pelham Committee was also established to offer non-combatant service to objectors and a Central Appeals Tribunal was set up to reconsider the cases of those in prison to determine whether or not these men qualified for alternative service. DeGroot, *Blighty*, pp. 154-155.

¹³⁷ Adrian Gregory, “Military Service Tribunals: Civil Society in Action 1916-1918,” in *Civil Society in British History*, ed. Jose Harris (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003): 189, 183.

¹³⁸ Uffculme Parish Records, Church of England, minute book, February 1917, Devon Record Office, Uffculme Anglican Church, 1920A PX1.

viewed them with “contempt.”¹³⁹ Likewise, in October 1916 Bishop Cecil, proclaimed that, “all political objectors should be placed in an area of Britain most likely to be bombed, but all religious objectors should be not only released but also protected.”¹⁴⁰ Bishop Cecil’s opinion that there should be a separation between political and religious objection was generally accepted within the Established Church, but not all agreed that political objectors should be punished, while religious objectors were granted protection from church and state. The vicar from St. Leonard’s parish wrote that Bishop Cecil’s suggestion that “a man should be sentenced to death for his [political] beliefs is a very dangerous proposition.”¹⁴¹ Although there was considerable support for Bishop Cecil’s view of conscientious objectors, the diocesan records for Devon show that clergymen in Torrington, Kingsbridge, Totnes, and Holsworthy, as well as in Truro and Camelford in the county of Cornwall, rejected Bishop Cecil’s statement concerning conscientious objectors.¹⁴² While most Anglican ministers rejected conscientious objection, there was some flexibility at the local level.

Reflecting these concerns, in June 1916 the War Office attempted to clarify matters. The outcome was that the issue of conscience was to be judged by individual military tribunals, but if a “particular conscientious objector was well known to hold religious scruples against war before the passing of the Military Service Act they

¹³⁹ “Clergymen and Conscientious Objection,” *Western Daily Mercury*, 4 July 1916.

¹⁴⁰ Bishop of Exeter, “Conscience and the War,” *Exeter Flying Post*, 17 October 1916.

¹⁴¹ Letter to the Lord Bishop of Exeter, 23 October 1916, Devon Record Office, St. Leonard’s Parish, 1862A.

¹⁴² Millman, *Managing Domestic Dissent*, pp. 195-196. Exeter Diocesan Records, (Exeter 1921), Devon Record Office, 3/33. Letter to the Lord Bishop of Exeter, 23 October 1916, Devon Record Office, St. Leonard’s Parish, 1862A. This does not mean that the Bishop of Exeter believed that political objectors should have been hanged. But the suggestion that they should be placed in an area of Britain most likely to be bombed encouraged the belief that he had little regard for their lives. Whether or not this was the Bishop’s opinion cannot be determined from his statement at the time.

should not press appeals against exemption.”¹⁴³ Although the government could not regulate church opinion, genuine religious objectors, and specifically those belonging to the Christadelphians or Christian Brethren, qualified for exemption from combatant service.

However, even when religious reasons were cited, not all Anglican clergymen were willing to offer their support. Reverend Morrow of the Crediton Parish, Church of England, told his parishioners that, “If Britain is to be successful in this war we must set the course. It is not acceptable to force some to fight for the defence of this nation, while others do nothing.”¹⁴⁴ The Chagford Parish, Church of England, also cautioned its members that, “Conscientious objection is a dangerous path and will not be afforded protection in this time of crisis.”¹⁴⁵ The individual parishes were guided by the opinions and actions of the vicar in charge and Anglican opinion occasionally differed from parish to parish.

While the Church of England was willing to offer some support to religious objectors, commitment to the war was such that conscientious objection was very limited among Devon’s Catholic community. The Catholic Church issued a statement that the war had been deemed a ‘just’ war, and since the Catholic Church in Britain did not condemn killing in a just war, a Catholic conscientious objector who “protested the inherent sinfulness of war, [was] a heretic in all but name.” Although Catholics were distinct in terms of their religious beliefs, the Catholic leadership in Britain focused on

¹⁴³ “Conscientious Objectors: Deputation in Relation to Conscientious Objectors At the War Office on June 1st 1916,” National Archive, WO 30/57/74.

¹⁴⁴ Reverend Morrow, 25 October 1916, Devon Record Office, Crediton Parish Records, Church of England, PX1263/28.

¹⁴⁵ Parish records, 19 November 1916, Devon Record Office, Chagford Parish, Church of England, 1429A.

promoting support for the war and the British state.¹⁴⁶ Catholic opinion held that conscientious objectors were guided by the “freaks and vagaries of individual opinions and had no place in the Catholic Church.”¹⁴⁷ On 8 August 1914 the *Tablet* applauded the government’s actions and believed that Britain was “striking for the noblest of all causes—conscription is a noble and honourable response to the threat of barbaric militarism.”¹⁴⁸ John Keily, the Bishop of Plymouth, proclaimed that “the war is just and all Catholics should lend their support for the sake of victory in ‘God’s war.’”¹⁴⁹ Due to the strong position of the Catholic Church, most priests did not struggle with the question of the war’s morality.¹⁵⁰

The Military Service Acts of 1916 opened new areas of debate for Devon’s Methodist and Baptist communities. Britain’s main Methodist newspapers opposed the introduction of compulsory service, and the *Methodist Times* blamed the Northcliffe press for forcing conscription on the Asquith government. The *Primitive Methodist Leader* also encouraged Methodists to oppose conscription, and the *United Methodist* declared that conscription betrayed the principles of liberalism and had to be resisted.¹⁵¹ Following the introduction of conscription, Wilfred Wellock, a Methodist preacher from Lancashire, began to publish the *New Crusader*, a pacifist journal that promoted his conviction that “Pacifism is simply applied Christianity.”¹⁵² At the National Wesleyan Methodist

¹⁴⁶ D. Gwynn, “Growth of the Catholic Community”, in G. A. Beck, p. 423.

¹⁴⁷ Snape, “British Catholicism and the British Army in the First World War”: 328.

¹⁴⁸ *The Tablet*, 8 August 1914, p. 200.

¹⁴⁹ Bishop of Plymouth, *Western Evening Herald*, 4 January 1917, p. 3.

¹⁵⁰ Michael Snape suggests that there were Catholic clergymen who were willing to question the justness of the war, but Catholic dissent from the Church’s position was virtually non-existent in local newspapers and there are no available primary records to support this conclusion in Devon. See Michael Snape, “British Catholicism and the British Army in the First World War,” *Recusant History* 26: 2 (2002): 328.

¹⁵¹ Hughes, “British Methodists in the First World War,” p. 321.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 325.

Conference held in Westminster, the secretary, Simpson Johnson, noted that the “Wesleyan Methodist Church never asked for exemption on behalf of its ministers and from the beginning of the war it permitted all its ministers of military age to serve as chaplains in the army. We do not ask for special rights for our ministers, we ask for the rights of the British people to be maintained.”¹⁵³ Johnson added that his message was not conceived in antagonism to the Church of England, but rather as an explanation that the Methodist Council encouraged its ministers to perform religious roles either as parish ministers, chaplains, or as officiating clergymen to the naval and military hospitals, but that those who wished to undertake military service would not be prohibited from doing so. The records show that forty-seven Wesleyan Methodist ministers from Devon served as soldiers or ministers in front-line units as of October 1916.¹⁵⁴

Many Methodists and Baptists respected the voluntary nature of British military service, and so the introduction of conscription in 1916 was met with unease. Baptist records in Devon show overwhelming disapproval of the government’s decision to force men to fight. For the majority of Baptists the issue of conscription was irreconcilable with their dedication to liberty of conscience, specifically because it introduced the issue of conscience and went against the aims of the war. Baptists believed that the war was being fought for freedom and Reverend Casey Puley expressed the conviction that freedom of conscience, choice and action had been granted by the Lord Jesus Christ and

¹⁵³ Simpson Johnson, “Wesleyan Ministers and the War,” *Daily News*, 2 October 1916, p. 4.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid; Chagford United Methodist, sermon, no date, Devon Record Office, Chagford Methodist, 2200D-6/1 191; “Methodism and the World Crisis,” *Weekly News*, 22 March 1917, no page number; Buckfastleigh Methodist Church, September 1916, Devon Record Office, Buckfastleigh Methodist Minutes, 2275D-O/5; Tiverton Methodist Church Council, May 1916, Devon Record Office, Tiverton Methodist Circuit, 2514D/3/20; Fore Street Brixham Methodist Church, 2 April 1916, Devon Record Office, Brixham Methodist, 2606D-6/4.

that the suspension of such freedom was not the responsibility or right of the state.¹⁵⁵

E.B. Michaels of the Exeter Methodist Church willingly spoke on behalf of conscientious objectors and commented that forcing men to fight went against the Methodist belief and that they would rather be harmed than to harm another unjustly.¹⁵⁶ And ‘A Wesleyan Methodist Minister’ commented in the *Express and Echo* that the “whole body of the Free Churches is committed by long and noble traditions to resist any tampering with the rights of conscience. Any measure of compulsion will spell the ruin of Liberalism.”¹⁵⁷

For those who opposed the poor treatment of conscientious objectors, their beliefs may have been grounded in the language of nineteenth century Nonconformist liberalism.¹⁵⁸

Nonconformity was closely linked to Liberalism and stressed the independent and positive characteristics of the denominations. Between 1885 and 1914 anti-Catholicism and anti-Anglicanism was particularly strong among Wesleyan Methodists who feared the repercussions of the turn away from liberalism, to social conservatism.¹⁵⁹ According to Nonconformity, the suspension of individual rights and the maltreatment of those whose beliefs did not suit the needs of the state was a consequence of that change. Many Baptists accepted the inviolability of spiritual freedom and offered assistance to those who refused accommodation with the state. At the same time, most Nonconformists did not overtly or actively challenge those who chose military service.

¹⁵⁵ Casey Puley, “Conscription and Conscience,” *Exmouth Journal*, 4 August 1916, no page number.

¹⁵⁶ E.B. Michaels, “The Nonconformist Conscience,” *Express and Echo*, 6 November 1916, p. 3; Notes for Sunday Sermon, 26 September 1916, Devon Record Office, Bartholomew St. Baptist Church, 76/44/1/3.

¹⁵⁷ Wesleyan Methodist Minister, “Free Churches and Conscience,” *Express and Echo*, 6 January 1916, p. 2.

¹⁵⁸ Bebbington, *The Nonconformist Conscience*, pp. 11-17.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 82-83, 111, 113.

However, not all Baptists were opposed to conscription. The popular view that conscription was a necessary evil was expressed by Reverend R. Cummings in the following letter to the *Tiverton Times*:

Conscription is a necessary evil for a nation trapped in the bowels of war. It has not been taken upon lightly, but only after the heart wrenching toils of our leaders determined that there was no other option available to us. It would be easy to cast judgment on those forced to make the tough decisions, but I believe the Christian faith is strong enough to overcome the fear of conscription and the pains of war that have infected the most loyal of hearts.¹⁶⁰

Similarly, the pastor at the Totnes United Free Baptist Church encouraged his parishioners to “be true to your own beliefs, but there is no need to suffer unnecessarily.”¹⁶¹ Reverend T.R. Williams of the Ilfracombe Baptist Church expressed astonishment to his congregation that “So many are willing to set aside their beliefs, their faith in the sanctity of human life, for a war that high ranking officials have deemed to be Holy.” A member of his congregation reminded him that, “The current struggle takes from us all and only some are granted the right of conscience.”¹⁶² Only the clergy had the *right* to oppose the war on religious grounds; others could do so, but, unlike the clergy, their beliefs were questioned and evaluated by a military tribunal before their opposition was legitimized by the state.

Prior to the introduction of the first conscription bill the Society of Friends found support among Protestant Non-Conformists in its opposition to compulsory military service, but unlike the majority of Baptists and Methodists, the Fellowship truly believed that “we [the Society of Friends] are going to succeed in preventing the imposition of

¹⁶⁰ R. Cummings, “the choice for Conscription,” *Tiverton Times*, 10 October 1916, no page number.

¹⁶¹ Totnes United Free Baptist Church, church minutes, November 1916, Devon Record Office, Totnes Baptist Circuit, 3881D-O/2.

¹⁶² T.R. Williams, “Ilfracombe Baptist Church,” *Ilfracombe Chronicle*, 2 February 1917, p. 3.

conscription.”¹⁶³ Although the Society of Friends ultimately failed in its goal, the Fellowship of Reconciliation, a union of Christian pacifists of all denominations who held the Quaker view of the war, continued to oppose conscription and by 1918 had a membership of 8,000 in Britain, nearly 200 of whom lived in Exeter.¹⁶⁴ In a Memorandum on Universal National Service the Service Committee of the Society of Friends and the No-Conscription Fellowship issued the following statement:

Those who object not merely to taking human life themselves, but to any non-combatant or alternative work will find themselves placed in a very difficult position by the introduction of universal war service. The Prime Minister made it quite clear in the course of his speech that the principle, if not the whole objective of the proposed scheme of UNIVERSAL service is that every individual coming within its scope may be organised for WAR service... We must continue our protest and continue to stand for the liberty to love all men.¹⁶⁵

At the beginning of the war there was no popular anti-pacifist feeling – most of the public and the press continued to lump anti-war dissenters with ‘slackers,’ those who had not yet volunteered for service.¹⁶⁶ However, the introduction of conscription and the issue of conscience caused a split within the Society of Friends between those who would accept some cooperation and those who refused all association with the war effort. Nearly two-thirds of all Quakers in Britain refused to serve in a military capacity,¹⁶⁷ and the Society

¹⁶³ Society of Friends Annual Meeting Devon, December 1915, Devon Record Office, Society of Friends, 74/95/5.

¹⁶⁴ Society of Friends Reconciliation Scheme, Exeter Fellowship, December 1916, Devon Record Office, Society of Friends, 74/96/7.

¹⁶⁵ Miss Rinder, “Memorandum on Universal National Service Issued by the Service Committee of the Society of Friends and the No-Conscription Fellowship,” January 1917, Devon Record Office, Rinder of Devon, 99/25/1. Explanation for this lack of distinction, particularly with regard to Quakers, may be found in John Punshon’s study of the Peace Testimony, which explains that for Quakers, “peace is given a higher value than justice.” Quakers found military symbolism and violence to be “distasteful, precisely because it does not grasp the essence of peace as meekness.” John Punshon, “The Peace Testimony,” *Quaker Religious Thought*, 23: 4 (1988): 55, 69.

¹⁶⁶ John Punshon, “The Peace Testimony,” *Quaker Religious Thought*, 23: 4 (1988): 55, 69.

¹⁶⁷ Tony Adams, *A Far-Seeing Vision: The Socialist Quaker Society, 1898-1924* (London: Calvert’s

of Friends and the Fellowship of Reconciliation were so committed to their opposition to conscription that they accepted that such resistance could result in a lengthy prison sentence and possibly even death. At the National Meeting of Quakers, the Fellowship of Reconciliation released the following statement:

Throughout our Yearly Meeting we have had continually in mind the fact that some of our members are in prison or are otherwise suffering for loyalty to conscience in respect to the Peace Testimony which had been ours since the earliest days of the Society. God has honoured us by accounting these our dear Friends worthy to suffer shame for His name. We assure them of our loving remembrance, and pray that they may know Divine support in this their hour of trial.¹⁶⁸

Following the introduction of conscription Plymouth Quakers sought out objectors, not to recruit them into the Society, but to offer assistance. This activity was quickly brought to the attention of the Military Representatives in Plymouth who attempted to break up Quaker meetings with threats of imprisonment. Despite these threats, Quakers continued to assist objectors, and local meetings grew bigger and bigger. Most attendees were not Quakers, but Anglicans and Catholics (laity and clergymen) who felt abandoned by their own churches; according to one member, “Peace meetings were held every Sunday after the regular services. Every Pacifist or near Pacifist in the county stood up to declare his belief in peace.”¹⁶⁹ Records from the Society of Friends in Exeter, Plymouth, and Barnstaple show that approximately seven percent of Devon’s Quakers eventually agreed to some form of non-combatant service, many Quakers joining the Friends Ambulance

Press, 1993), pp. 31-32. This does not mean that the other third accepted combatant service, but rather that they agreed to do alternative service that was associated in some way with the war effort. Few Friends were absolutists and the FSC was very small compared to the NCF. See, Kennedy, “Fighting About Peace,” p. 4.

¹⁶⁸ Quoted in John W. Graham, *Conscription and Conscience: A History, 1916-1919* (New York: Augustus M. Kelley Publishers, 1969), p. 163.

¹⁶⁹ Westcountry Society of Friends, Cornwall Record Office, Stephens of Ashfield, ST/375.

Service, but the vast majority continued to reject all association with the war.¹⁷⁰

Absolutists and members of the Friends' Service Committee were sent to Dartmoor Prison where they were kept isolated from other conscientious objectors due to the 'political' nature of their objection, which was defined less by their conscience, and more by their affiliation with the NCF.¹⁷¹

The introduction of conscription greatly complicated the position of Devon's religious institutions. During the 'honeymoon period,' August 1914 to January 1916, the press lumped objectors and slackers together, and even within the churches those who supported the war believed that it was only a matter of time before objectors changed their minds. However, conscription brought into focus the dividing line between patriots and traitors/objectors, and led to increased hostility on both sides. Many clergymen accepted conscription and felt that it was a necessary, even if unwelcome, alternative to volunteerism. Others, although a minority, were committed pacifists and unequivocally rejected forced service. There was considerable pressure for the churches to support conscription, mainly as a way to encourage public acceptance for the war, and those clergymen who opposed compulsory military service felt increasingly isolated from their colleagues and their respective churches.

Conclusion

¹⁷⁰ Society of Friends Yearly Meeting 1918, 29 January 1918, Devon Record Office, Records for Exeter, Plymouth and Barnstaple, 1444/7/9. *The Friend* contains lists of all men who joined the Friends Ambulance Service or undertook some other form of military service between 1914 and 1918

¹⁷¹ Kennedy notes that as the "war dragged on and public hostility against the pacifist minority intensified, the N.C.F. and the F.S.C. rapidly developed a close and sympathetic relationship." Although many Friends were willing to perform alternative service, the FSC was "unalterably opposed to any compromise." Kennedy, "Fighting About Peace," pp. 5, 7.

This chapter has sought to shed some light on the experiences, motives and attitudes of Devon's clergymen to the First World War. It suggests that the war provided the opportunity for the churches to reassert themselves more centrally in the lives of Devonians, but in many instances these efforts were frustrated by inter- and intra-denominational conflicts. For the Established Church the war provided the chance for the consolidation and advancement of this process by reversing the trend of the Edwardian period, which witnessed a substantial decline in attendance at Sunday services. Many Anglican vicars readily took up the call of the Established hierarchy and declared the war a just war of defence, encouraged their parishioners to enlist in Britain's armed forces, accepted conscription as a necessary consequence of the war, and scorned conscientious objectors who did not cite religion as the guiding force for their objection. However, an investigation of the local experience reveals the diversity of opinion that existed between parishes and clergymen at the local level. Some of Devon's Anglican ministers struggled to reconcile justifying the war with the belief that war was always wrong. A commitment to the New Testament stressed that God would not fan hatred, and yet, some members of the clergy preached hatred of the enemy and encouraged their congregations to take the lives of their foes. The teachings of the Gospel and the words and lessons of the Bible were reinterpreted. Although there was overwhelming support for the war effort among Devon's Anglican clergymen, the few dissenting voices provide some insight into the complexities of the war at the local level, and the process by which Devonians, clergy and laity alike, formulated their responses to the First World War.

Catholic enthusiasm for the war stemmed from a number of factors. In part it was guided by the desire to promote Catholic interests by ensuring a ready and patriotic effort

by the Catholic laity in general. This action was both to encourage conversions to Catholicism and to thwart criticisms that the Catholic Church was an agent in the German war against Britain. The Catholic Church was also influenced by the rise of Christian militarism in the mid-Victorian period, and actively worked to promote and strengthen the position of Catholic soldiers in the armed forces. Although Michael Snape suggests that the level of unity within the Catholic Church was somewhat romanticized and embellished in the *Catholic Press*, the quarrels that afflicted Anglican vicars were largely absent among Catholic priests in Devon, or at the very least there is no evidence available to suggest that similar conflict existed. The Catholic message was kept simple; the Catholic circuit in Devon declared that the war was a just war of defence, thereby nullifying any contradiction between the convictions of the Catholic Church and the war. Rather than intra-denominational squabbling, the Catholic Church provided strong leadership and a straightforward message.

While Devon's Nonconformist groups willingly accepted the war, there was more room for variation of opinion among Methodist and Baptist clergymen than was evident in the Church of England or the Catholic Church. The Nonconformist Union in Devon and Cornwall announced its support for the war effort and encouraged its members to support the Prime Minister and the British government, but there was noticeably less pressure for ministers to conform. Rather, the Free Church Council of Exeter urged its pastors and members to follow their own conscience. Within Devon's Methodist and Baptist churches there was some variance of opinion in terms of what role pastors should play in the conflict, and how the war should be presented to the public. For some, the declaration that the war was just was not sufficient to explain the introduction of

conscription or the temporary suspension of the right to liberty of conscience by the Asquith and Lloyd George governments.

The Quaker dedication to the Peace Testimony meant that most struggled with the contradictions of accepting a 'war of defence' and remaining true to their faith. The Peace Testimony asserted that war was contrary to the principles of Christianity, and could not be justified despite suggestions to the contrary. As such, the Quakers rejected the recruitment efforts of the Anglican and Catholic churches, opposed the introduction of conscription, and fought to protect the rights of conscientious objectors. However, the war proved challenging for many Quakers who believed that patriotism and Quakerism did not have to be contradictory. By choosing non-combative service some young Quakers reconciled their religious and patriotic beliefs; however, as in Britain generally, the majority did not and refused all association with war effort.

During the war the component parts of the religious community failed to achieve inter-denominational unity, as the groups remained keenly aware of their separate identities and beliefs. At the same time, intra-denominational unity proved to be equally challenging. The few dissenting voices were evidence of the fact that personal interests and opinions (along with Scripture and a dedication to the principals of their faith) played a part in guiding the actions of Devon's clergymen. Opposition to the war, or to some aspect of the war, however small, was a valid response to Britain's involvement in the European conflict, despite the overwhelming support of religious leaders for the war. The divisions within the religious community were connected to the larger issues that separated the churches in the pre-war years, and, within the context of an international war, such divisions were not easily overcome.

Conclusion

The war ended much differently than it began. News of the armistice spread quickly and there were mass celebrations in Devon's towns and villages. The *Crediton Chronicle* reported that "Unprecedented scenes of enthusiasm" were witnessed when the news arrived, and that crowds numbering in the thousands gathered in Exeter, Plymouth, Barnstaple, and Torquay.¹ In Exeter, all work stopped, bands played, and a fireworks display ended a large parade held to honour Britain's brave men. Men, women, and children traveled by rail from the countryside to take part in the festivities, and for those who chose to stay at home, even in the rural communities of the north and west, there were smaller scale celebrations as residents gathered around postal huts to receive the latest news.

The war was certainly a period of disruption and in some ways it permanently changed Devon, its people, and its social and economic structure. But in other ways, pre-war trends that had been temporarily suspended by the war continued after 1918, and some aspects of Devon life remained largely unchanged by the conflict. The extent to which Devonians accepted or participated in the patriotic ardor that was present in the early months of the First World War is difficult to determine with absolute certainty. It is evident, however, that the majority accepted the war to some degree. Devon's young men enlisted in the New Army and volunteered for service in the Territorial Force. At the same time, Devon's women presented white feathers to unenlisted men, worked the land as members of the Women's Land Army, and cared for the thousands of refugees who found asylum in Devon. And yet, the war did not have a unifying effect on the county. This study has shown that the sacrifices required of the population were never, and could

¹ "Armistice Celebrations," *Crediton Chronicle*, 16 November 1918, p. 2

not be, uniform, despite government assurances that all Britons were expected to give equally in support of the war effort. Apart from the disapproval of a small minority, it was not British participation in the war that was objectionable, but rather the government's handling of the war, which was evaluated and questioned within a primarily local context. The illusion of equality of sacrifice was destroyed almost immediately when rising prices, shortages and restrictions, and dilapidated living conditions among the working- and lower-middle classes led to an escalation of social discontent. Problems with the food supply were always more marked in the rural countryside than in the larger urban centres, and the burden of refugee care was largely the responsibility of Devon's southern towns. From the outset of the war the people of Devon called for government intervention to regulate prices and lighting restrictions, and they demanded that new houses be built to relieve the strain of overcrowding.

While the government did eventually institute civilian rationing and standardized lighting restrictions and fines for offenders, which temporarily softened public criticisms, the issue of housing was only partially resolved. During the war new building schemes in rural areas helped to relieve overcrowding, but Exeter, Plymouth, Devonport, and Torquay became home to a swelling refugee population, military personnel, and Londoners and residents from east-coast towns who wanted to escape from their closer proximity to the war. The local government assured Devonians that the housing situation would be a priority once the war was over and Lloyd George's planned post-war housing policy, encapsulated in the phrase 'homes fit for heroes,' raised expectations that worsening conditions would soon be rectified.

The post-war housing shortage was accentuated, but not caused, by the war and in 1921 it was estimated that Britain was short approximately 805,000 homes. In 1919, Minister for Reconstruction Christopher Addison introduced a plan for state-supported

housing. The Housing and Town Planning Act required local authorities to determine housing needs in their areas and fixed rents in the meantime for existing working-class residences. However, despite promises of new houses the Addison Acts failed² and successive Conservative victories in Devon did little to fulfill government pledges.³

In 1921 the population of Devon was 709,314 and approximately thirty-eight percent lived in the cities of Exeter and Plymouth.⁴ In working-class areas surrounding the Devonport dockyards and Plymouth fisheries, homes were in need of repair and 49,623 families in Devon lived two or more to a single dwelling.⁵ In Exeter and Barnstaple residents were forced to live in tents during the warmer months while arrangements were being made for more permanent accommodations.⁶ It was not until 1935 that conditions for the working classes in Plymouth began to improve substantially, mainly because the government decided to rearm. The construction of warships once again revived the shipbuilding industries in Dartmouth and Plymouth, thereby relieving unemployment and making investors more willing to invest in new construction projects.⁷ Newly built private houses were erected just beyond the city boundaries, and in

² Addison had a plan to build 500,000 houses to relieve the housing shortage in Britain. His plan called for the requisition of building materials, but the initial labour shortage prevented immediate construction. Instead of building homes for the working classes, the available materials were used for commercial and luxury building. Burnett, *A Social History of Housing*, pp. 219-231.

³ Devon remained politically mixed, Conservative and Liberal, with marginal Conservative victories in every election between the world wars with the exception of 1923. The Liberals continued to win seats in Devon until 1929, but were losing ground to Labour. Labour did not contest a constituency until 1929 when one of the two seats in Plymouth went left. But, this victory was short lived and the 1931 election brought into power nine conservatives and two liberals in South Molton and Devonport. No Labour MP was elected during the 1930s for a Devon constituency. Dawson, "Liberalism in Devon and Cornwall," p. 426; Hoskins, *Devon*, p. 190. Also see, F.W.S Craig (ed), *British Parliamentary Election Results, 1918-1949* (West Yorkshire: Scholar Press, 1977), pp. 327-333.

⁴ Census of England and Wales, General Tables, 1921, p. 66. Although the records for Exeter are incomplete, the extent of over crowding in Plymouth can be seen in the 1921 housing report. Census of England and Wales, General Report, 1921, pp. 54-55.

⁵ Census of England and Wales, County Series, Devon, 1921, p. xiii.

⁶ Gerald Wasley, *Devon in the 1930s: The Way We Were* (Tiverton: Halsgrove, 1998), pp. 112-115.

⁷ Gerald Wasley, *Plymouth: A Shattered City* (Tiverton: Halsgrove), pp. 26-27.

Exeter slum areas were cleaned up and new houses were built. Although the housing scheme was slow to develop, existing cottages were repaired, new cottages were erected, and living standards had finally begun to improve by the start of the Second World War.⁸

The class conflict exacerbated by the war was not confined to housing, of course. While full employment was assured for many workers, the war created new divisions within the workforce. Jobs freed by men serving in the military, particularly in war-related industries, created labour shortages and led to the use of women, children, prisoners-of-war, and conscientious objectors in the labour force. The reality of the war was that it created different categories of service. Wage increases benefited those employed in essential industries, while the Derby Scheme and the Munitions of War Acts protected the same category of men against enlistment/conscription, creating bitter rivalries between those who benefited, financially or otherwise, from the war and those who did not. The intricacies of class relations in Devon are particularly revealing of how the war was experienced at the local level. The inequality of sacrifice and the inconsistencies of wartime demands were major sources of conflict. Rather than promoting solidarity, the war often increased social discontent and made class differences more prominent.

Despite the benefits afforded to particular industries during the war, pre-war economic trends resumed in the post-war period. Plymouth remained an important port for ocean-going liners, an industry that reached a peak there in 1930 and then began to decline. The dockyard continued to be a major employer, but without war contracts the yards at Devonport and Dartmouth reduced their workforces. In Dartmouth in particular, the decline of the dockyards meant that there was a growing reliance on soup kitchens and charities. Although some residents found work in

⁸ Ibid, pp. 15,17-18, 61-65, 73.

nearby Torbay, many others could not afford to pay bus or train fares to commute, and were forced to remain in low-paying jobs.⁹

However, in many ways life in north Devon was changed from pre-1914. The coalmines had closed, and there was less reliance on the fishing and shipbuilding industries and more dependence on the tourist industry. Work at the Appledore shipyard in north Devon, a yard that was diminishing before it was temporarily revived by government naval contracts between 1910 and 1918, experienced stagnation and decline again after 1919. North Devon fishermen and shipbuilders traveled south to Devonport to find work at the Royal Dockyard, while others traveled further to the east coast of England or to Hayes (Middlesex) to work at the Fairey Aviation aircraft factory. In contrast, the resort towns of northern Devon grew and prospered in the post-war period as the beautiful coasts attracted a wealthier clientele who wished to escape the crowded resorts of the south.¹⁰

Despite the growth of the tourist industry in the post-war period, agriculture was Devon's largest industry on the eve of the First World War. Given the diversity of experience within the farming community, it is not surprising that the war did not impact the industry uniformly. On the one hand, owner-occupiers who prospered under pre-1914 conditions were hit hard during the war and, in the post-war years, their farms were greatly reduced in size and replaced by small freeholder farms. Unlike the tenant farmer who was protected by the landowner, the owner-occupier owned and worked his land and was most susceptible to fluctuating prices and declining labour supplies. On the whole, the circumstances of the farmer owners were not unmanageable. During the war, the labour crisis was certainly real enough, in that these farmers had fewer men to do more

⁹ Ibid, pp. 98-102.

¹⁰ Ibid, pp. 16, 34.

work. And yet, the labour crisis was in part based on the farmers' own perceptions that crop production required a set number of men and horses, and that unskilled labourers could not reasonably replace skilled men or the farmers' sons. On the other hand, the war was generally profitable for the larger, wealthier estate farms. These landowners generally had greater access to capital to assist tenant farmers in making the adjustment from livestock to crops and, due to low rents in the pre-war years, some tenant farmers were more profitable than owner-occupiers. Many of these tenants reinvested in their land (instead of buying land and becoming owner-occupiers), benefited from a roaming skilled labour force, and purchased new machinery for use on the land. These farmers were less susceptible to wartime labour shortages and had greater access to supplies, machinery, and horses that were shared by several farms on one estate.

At the same time, the war temporarily stalled some pre-war trends. Land holdings stabilized during the war and after 1917 the acreage of land under crop exceeded pre-war numbers. However, in the post-war period the situation for Devon's agricultural industry changed as the need for home production declined. Although large landowning estates survived, the war accelerated a process already well underway and once the war was over their lands continued to be reduced in size. The decline of the landed elite was a slow and gradual process, but after 1918 higher taxation, increased death duties, the lack of surviving heirs, and changing attitudes about the land led estate owners to sell off greater parcels of land.¹¹ In the twenty years after the First World War many large estates were passed over to the National Trust, Oxford and Cambridge colleges, the Ecclesiastical

¹¹ F.M. L Thompson, *English Landed Society in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1963), pp. 327-335. Between 1880 and 1923 twenty-one percent of the land in England changed ownership. In approximately half of these instances the landowning family had no further association with the land. Beckett, *The Aristocracy in England*, p. 475.

Commissioners, and the Co-operative Societies.¹² Between 1914 and 1918 the farmland in Devon was over-farmed, making the land less fertile and less lucrative, and as rents fell owner-occupiers increasingly replaced tenant farmers.¹³ Many of these farmers bought the land that was sold off by the estates and the larger owner-occupiers who did not fare well during the war. Once the war ended, converting cropland to livestock was costly and time consuming; consequently, many owner-occupiers sold off portions of their land to pay for this transition, which helped speed up the transfer of land from one group to another. The new owner-occupier farms tended to be much smaller, generally between twenty and fifty acres, and more than one-half of the farms in Devon were less than fifty acres.¹⁴ Also of importance was that as the land became depleted and therefore less profitable, in some areas of Devon after 1918 there could be up to a thousand changes in occupiers in a single year.¹⁵ There was also considerable migration to Canada, particularly among farm workers, and only fourteen percent of the population of Devon made their living from the land on the eve of the Second World War.¹⁶

The importance of the urban-rural and north-south divides evident in industry and agriculture was particularly revealing in terms of wartime recruiting. In every community in Devon men volunteered to serve their county, but recruitment was most successful in the southern half of the county, and miners, railway men, and dockworkers were among the most enthusiastic volunteers. Conversely, enlistment numbers were low in agricultural areas and the northern fisheries. However, it is important not to equate enlistment patterns with attitudes towards the war. Rather than viewing underrepresented

¹² Hoskin, *Devon*, p. 302.

¹³ Jay Winter and Antoine Prost, *The Great War in History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 166.

¹⁴ Wasley, *Devon in the 1930s*, pp. 39-40, 96-102.

¹⁵ Hoskin, *Devon*, pp. 302-303.

¹⁶ Wasley, *Devon in the 1930s*, p. 16.

groups as unpatriotic, it is clear that they often had compelling economic reasons for hesitating to enlist. The same can be said for groups well represented in the rolls of volunteers. The mining industry in Devon had been in a state of decline for several decades, and mining was difficult and dangerous work with poor pay. Similar circumstances help to explain the willingness of dockworkers and railway men to enlist. High rates of volunteerism among other groups, such as those employed in the service sector and tourism, can be explained by the declining demand for these occupations during wartime. Although agricultural wages were low, bonuses and the perceived importance of agriculture during the war helped to persuade men to stay in their current jobs. And with a large number of Devon's farms headed by owner-occupiers, farmers' sons were hesitant to enlist and it is not surprising that enlistment numbers were low in agricultural districts.

Although enlistment numbers in Devon grew throughout 1915, the introduction of universal conscription undermined earlier promises that the war would soon be over. Consequently, tensions grew, first in rural areas and then in the cities, and the 'spirit of volunteerism' that characterized 1915 slowly dissipated. However, this was not necessarily reflective of a lack of patriotism among Devonians. The workforce in Devon had already been depleted and there were fewer and fewer men who could be released for military service. There were some industries where, regardless of the situation, the men simply could not be spared if the British war effort was to continue at a productive pace. In recognition of this stark fact, the Lord Lieutenant of Devon and the Regional Director of Recruitment for the county set a plan in motion in 1917 to reduce the number of men conscripted into the armed forces. Both Fortescue and Hughes-Buller believed that the men at risk of being conscripted would serve a greater purpose at home, employed in local industries, than they would in France or some other theatre of war. Lord Fortescue

was in a difficult position. As Lord Lieutenant of Devon he understandably wished to protect local interests, while at the same time recognizing the needs of the military in the latter stages of the war.

Part of the complexity of life in wartime Devon was the mixture of competing ideas about the war that helped to inform public responses. In this sense, religion served a dual purpose. First, it assisted in raising the moral standard of the war by suggesting that the conflict was part of a larger battle between good and evil and, second, the war raised important questions about the moral standards of Britain's religious institutions. What right did the churches have to encourage enlistment and the taking of lives, or to condemn conscientious objectors who refused? While some clergymen agonized over these issues, the responses of the various denominations were part of a larger struggle for religious awareness and survival. The willingness of the Established Church to support the war was necessarily influenced by its relationship to the state; the protection of one was synonymous with the protection of the other and Anglican clergymen vigorously supported the war effort. However, despite considerable support for the war among Anglican clergymen, not all were jingoistic, not all recruited from the pulpit, and not all justified the war in religious terms. Conversely, there was considerable uniformity of opinion within Devon's Catholic Community. Considering that the war was often presented as a conflict between Protestant Britain and a Catholic enemy, there was a need for Catholics to publicly demonstrate their commitment to the British war effort. Catholic priests participated in recruiting drives, and conscientious objection was rejected as a legitimate reason for refusing military service.¹⁷ Nonconformity took the opposite

¹⁷ A recent study of the Catholic response to the war has suggested that there were various shades of gray in terms of Catholic opinion in Britain. See, Youssef Taouk, "The Roman Catholic Church in Britain during the First World War: A Study in Political Leadership" (unpublished PhD dissertation) University of Western Sydney, June 2003, pp. 383-384.

approach to that of the Catholic Church, but with similar success. While Methodist and Baptist ministers in Devon generally accepted participation in the war, the willingness of both groups to accept dissenting views set them apart from many Anglican and Catholic clergymen. Although some Quakers did acquiesce to the demands of the state and accepted some form of non-combative service, most refused all association with the war effort.

The religious composition of Devon changed after the war. To nullify the negative impact of competing places of worship in the post-war period the Primitive, United, and Wesleyan Methodists joined together to form the new Methodist Church and an increasing number of Baptist churches united with Congregationalists in an attempt to reduce the number of contending ministries, particularly in rural areas.¹⁸ Although the Society of Friends suffered a decline in membership between 1916 and 1918, they largely recouped those losses between 1919 and 1926.¹⁹ The inter-war years witnessed a particularly significant rise in Catholicism in the south-west with the construction of more than thirty churches over a ten year period. By 1930 there were 154 Catholic priests in Devon, more than eighty places of worship, and the Catholic population in the county increased from 16,251 in 1916 to 19,895.²⁰ The impact of the war on the Established Church is more difficult to assess. In the years immediately following the war there were fewer clergymen and assistant clergymen, as well as a decline in the number of

¹⁸ Orme, "The Twentieth Century: Devon and General," p. 191; Extension of Methodism in Exeter, 1919-1922, 4 April 1922, Devon Record Office, Exeter Methodist Circuit, 62/4; Administrative History of Methodism in Newton Abbot, 1848-1966, Devon Record Office, Newton Abbot Methodist Circuit, 1517D-O, Brief History of Methodism in Newton Abbot, completed in 1966, Devon Record Office, Newton Abbot Methodist Circuit, 1517D-3.

¹⁹ Society of Friends Yearly Meeting 1919, Devon Record Office, Records for Exeter, Plymouth and Barnstaple, 1444/7/10. Society of Friends Yearly Meeting 1926, Devon Record Office, Records for Exeter, Plymouth and Barnstaple, 1444/7/14.

²⁰ Orme, "The Twentieth Century: Devon and General," p. 192; *The Catholic Directory* (London: 1838 to 1991), p. 432.

ordinations and the closure of several churches, particularly in northern Devon. However, by 1930 the Established Church in Devon experienced growth when several new churches were built, primarily in the southern half of the county, and the number of Easter communicants rose steadily from 1901 until 1940.²¹ Undoubtedly, the war affected clergymen deeply and took its toll on Devon's religious institutions. The consolidation of churches and chapels was a post-war reality for several denominations and given that the demographic nature of the county was changing in the post-war years, this was not unexpected.

The war involved issues that were deeply personal despite the international nature of the conflict and, as the war progressed, the issues that surrounded British involvement became increasingly complex. The preoccupations with daily living and the erosion of individual freedoms that were seen as a consequence of the war made some people cautious and, at times, skeptical of state policies. For others, the inequality of sacrifice, most evident at the community level, was representative of broader concerns about the decline of Britain's liberal values. Conversely, many Devonians accepted the image of a united Britain that was passionately marketed by propagandists and recruiting agents. This study suggests that people's experiences were firmly rooted in individual, familial, and community concerns even when faced with an international crisis. The question that remains, therefore, is where does this leave Devon in the wider picture of British society at war? Were Devonians' uncertainties and questions regarding state policies exceptional or were they

²¹ Statistics compiled from the Exeter Diocesan Directory (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1963). It is important to note that this source is incomplete. It does not cover all years between 1910 and 1920 and several churches are missing from the record. Nicholas Orme's study of Devon's churches reveals similar numbers, and although he used the same source, his conclusions are supported by the private records of Ven. R.H. Herniman. For more information see Nicholas Orme, "The Twentieth Century: Devon and General," pp. 184-186.

symptomatic of similar experiences and attitudes in other parts of England? While no definitive answers can be provided here, Beatrix Creswell seems to have captured the conflicting emotions that many Devonians and others beyond the county's borders likely struggled with when she wrote in November 1918: "there have been times when we all faltered in our belief in this war. It takes courage to admit it, but ...[i]n the darkest times, when the threat of death and starvation pierced our optimism, we cursed this war."²² Even though Creswell was focused on Devon throughout her war diary and maintained clear distinctions between Devonians and others, the signing of the armistice marked a new phase of the war whereby she was willing to look back and generalize about her experiences. Once the war ended it became retrospectively a national experience, even though it was not necessarily understood that way during the war. This dissertation resists the impulse toward such retrospection and the imposition of a national narrative, but alerts us to the possibility that what was experienced in Devon may have been experienced in others parts of England as well. Future studies of this kind can help to create a more accurate picture of Britain during the First World War.

²² Beatrix Creswell, 20 November 1918, Devon Record Office, Creswell papers, 4686M/F51.

Appendices

Appendix I-1
Sample of Devon Towns by population, 1851, 1901, 1931

Town	1851	1901	1931
Ashburton	3,432	2,628	2,505
Axminster	1,293	1,113	1,280
Axmouthe	680	643	641
Barnstaple	8,667	9,698	14,700
Beer	1,281	1,118	1,266
Bideford	5,775	8,754	8,778
Bovey Tracey	2,086	2,658	3,056
Brixham	5,936	8,092	8,145
Buckfastleigh	2,613	2,781	2,410
Chagford	1,557	1,397	1,584
Chudleigh	2,401	1,820	1,944
Clovelly	937	621	528
Combe Martin	1,441	1,521	1,920
Collumpton	3,655	2,922	2,973
Dartmouth	3,147	3,702	6,708
Dawlish	3,546	4,584	5,424
Exeter	32,823	47,185	66,029
Exminster	1,623	2,560	2,807
Exmouth	N/A	10,485	14,591
Holne	386	273	301
Holsworthy	1,833	2,076	1,403
Ilfracombe	3,677	8,557	9,175
Instow	626	634	646
Lynton/Lynmouth	1,059	1,641	2,011
Kelly	1,098	781	770
Milton Abbot	1,242	719	649
Marwood	1,054	681	612
Molton, North	1,982	1,069	938
Molton, South	4,482	2,892	2,832
Newton Abbot	N/A	N/A	15,010
Okehampton	2,165	3,223	3,352
Paignton	2,746	8,385	18,414
Plymouth	52,933	107,636	208,182
Parracombe	460	315	329
Seaton	766	2,443	2,349
Sidmouth	3,441	4,033	6,126
Stoke Canon	480	383	366
Tavistock	8,147	5,841	4,471
Teignmouth	5,149	7,366	8,723
Tiverton	11,144	10,382	9,610
Uffculme	2,098	1,704	1,672

Source: W.G. Hoskins, *A New Survey of England: Devon* (London: Collins, 1954), pp. 523-534.

Appendix I-2
Ownership of Land in Devon 1873

Size of Estate	Number of Owners	Total Acreage Held
Over 10,000	16	309,000
5,000-10,000	28	177,000
1,000-5,000	154	303,000
1-1,000	9,964	725,000
Under 1 acre	21,647	3,000

Source: W.G. Hoskins, *A New Survey of England: Devon* (London: Collins, 1954), p. 88.

Appendix I-3
General Trend in Land Usage, 1870-1930

Year	Arable (000 acres)	Permanent Grass (000 acres)	Rough Grazing (000 acres)
1870	642	372	N/A
1880	641	510	N/A
1890	593	615	N/A
1900	576	634	157
1910	521	690	161
1920	522	640	197
1930	436	701	302

Source: W.G. Hoskins, *A New Survey of England: Devon* (London: Collins, 1954), p. 102.

Appendix 1-1
Per Pound Cost of Provisions in Exeter

Provision	Week of 1 August 1914		Week of 7 August 1914	
	(s)	(d)	(s)	(d)
Rice		3		4
Split peas	2		3	
Haricot beans	2	5	3	4
Butter beans	3	5	5	5
Lentils		2		4
Oatmeal	2	5	4	
Moist sugar	2		3	5
Granulated	2		4	
Castor		3	4	5
Icing		4		6
Cheese		7		10
English bacon		11	1	8
Lard		7	1	
Flour	1	9	2	3

Source: "Food Control Report," *Exeter Flying Post*, 8 August 1914, p. 1.

Appendix 2-1
Food Productions for the United Kingdom, 1913-1917

	Wheat Quarters	Barley Quarters	Oats Quarters	Beans Quarters	Hay Tons
1913	7,087,050	8,204,066	20,660,279	950,309	15,395,088
1914	7,804,041	8,065,678	20,663,537	1,120,078	12,403,479
1915	9,239,355	5,862,244	22,308,395	892,572	15,197,872
1916	7,471,884	6,612,550	21,333,782	474,081	13,162,627
1917	8,041,000	7,190,000	27,550,000	--	--

Source: Hibbard, *Effects of the Great War Upon Agriculture*, p. 220.¹

¹ In Britain one quarter equals twenty-eight pounds. The chart covers the years 1913 to 1917 as no figures are available for 1918.

Appendix 2-2
Total Acreage Farmed in Devon, 1915-1919

	1915	1916	1917	1918	1919
North	314,000	303,000	316,000	300,000	310,000
South	135,000	126,000	131,000	128,000	130,000
East	293,000	290,000	294,000	295,000	290,000
West	196,000	190,000	190,000	185,000	185,000
Total	938,000	909,000	931,000	908,000	915,000

Source: Food Production Returns, November 1915-November 1919, Lord Lieutenancy Papers, Devon Record Office, 1262M/L140.²

Appendix 2-3
Acreage under crop, 1913-1917 (number of acres farmed)

	1913	1914	1915	1916	1917
Corn ³	200,000	214,000	209,000	202,000	208,000
Roots	80,000	86,000	80,000	85,000	82,000
Wheat	87,000	91,500	92,000	87,000	92,000
Barley	53,000	58,000	60,000	54,000	61,000

Source: Agricultural Production Yearly Reports for Devon, reports 1913-1917, National Archive, MAF 80/4998.⁴

² North district includes Barnstaple, Bideford, South Molton, and Torrington Unions; the south district includes Newton Abbot, Kingsbridge, Plympton, and Totnes Unions; the east district includes Axminster, Crediton, Honiton, Tiverton, and St. Thomas; and the west district includes Holsworthy, Okehampton, Tavistock, and Dartmoor. Figures were tallied at different points of the year and what is provided here is an average of those numbers. The chart begins in 1915 because before this time the county was not divided into sections.

³ Corn statistics include wheat, oats and barley, however, there are no statistics available for the total acreage of oats. Corn Prices for Harvest 1918 (new prices to be set for 1918/statistics for summer and fall of 1917), National Archive, MAF 60/105.

⁴ Production figures are calculated at the end of the year, usually in late November. Statistics are taken from December to November. The statistics for the acreage of beans and hay farmed in Devon between 1913 and 1917 are not available. The table ends in 1917 because the statistics for 1918 are not available.

Appendix 2-4
Agricultural Workforce for Devon, 1914-1918

	1914	1915	1916	1917	1918
WLA	--	--	--	176	122
Soldiers	--	2,500	1,786	2,433	2,593
Farmers	10,204	9,726	8,592	7,994	7,833
Agricultural Volunteers	123	316	456	516	505
Farmers' sons	5,598	4,532	4,461	3,397	2,261
Gardeners	3,509	2,678	1,552	1,212	989
Skilled	10,229	9,795	9,001	8,337	7,020
Unskilled	12,277	11,748	11,442	11,013	8,832
Plough horses	2,500	1,811	1,701	1,325	707
POWs	--	150	225	375	1,175 ⁵
Other	501	419	381	254	176

Source: Labour Officers Report, Fortescue of Castle Hill, 17 April 1918, Devon Record Office, 1262M/L140.⁶

Appendix 3-1
Population of Devon by age and gender, 1901, 1911 and 1921

	1901		1911		1921	
Age	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females
0-1	33,143	33,305	N/A	N/A	13,560	12,884
2-9	33,672	33,568	N/A	N/A	42,476	41,977
10-19	60,892	65,307	N/A	N/A	61,498	60,389
20-29	51,778	61,480	N/A	N/A	46,173	59,952
30-39	41,372	49,232	N/A	N/A	51,714	57,063
40-59	62,643	68,098	N/A	N/A	78,706	94,027
60+	29,036	38,670	N/A	N/A	37,857	51,338
Total	312,536	349,660	332,660	366,890	331,984	377,630

Source: Census of England and Wales, County Series, Devon, 1901, p. 61; Census of England and Wales, 1911, p. 64; Census of England and Wales, County Series, Devon, 1921 p. XXII.⁷

⁵ This number does not refer to the number of POWs employed in Devon. During the war large groups of POWs were sent to counties and were then sent out in migratory gangs to other areas. It is likely that Devon was a feeder area for Cornwall, Dorset, and Somerset. Although the National Archive notes that official records of German POWs in Devon have been lost, the Fortescue records show that approximately six hundred POWs worked in Devon in various occupations during the First World War. For more on migratory gangs see Dewey, *British Agriculture in the First World War*, pp. 123-124.

⁶ Agricultural volunteers were unpaid workers including farmers' wives and daughters. Although the women of the Land Army received some training they were not considered to be skilled labourers. Statistics for soldiers and POWs are not provided prior for 1914 because they were not yet used in agriculture, and the statistics for the WLA did not begin until 1917.

⁷ The 1901 county census of Devon lists the total population of the county as 669,703. However, the total number of males and females provided in this census adds up to 662,196. The *Kelly's Directory*

Appendix 3-2
Occupational Structure of Devon by gender, 1911

Occupation	Male	Female	Occupation	Male	Female
government	5,604	907	Defence	26,913	--
Professionals	7,501	7,851	Fishing	1,725	1
Agriculture	42,609	5,055	Metals/Machines	17,054	197
Precious metals	1,356	198	Brick/pottery/ glass	1,121	204
Construction	21,011	9	Wood/furniture	3,993	430
Food/tobacco/ drink/lodging	16,681	9,496	Gas/ water/ electricity	1,383	1
Textile fabrics	2,438	5,216	Paper	3,066	1,291
Chemicals	1,276	231	Domestic	9,824	45,374
Commercial	7,234	1,259	Silks/ leather	1,365	233
Textile dress	7,257	15,720	Unspecified	49,883	207,894

Source: Census of England and Wales, Occupations and Industries, 1911, pp. 160-163.

Appendix 3-3
Western Recruiting from March 1915 to June 1915

County	Number Called up	Number Presented	Number Accepted	Number Rejected
Devon	2,239	849	331	518
Somerset	709	267	106	161
Cornwall	160	123	33	40
Hants	1,562	333	145	188
Dorset	534	150	108	42
Wiltshire	1,886	284	109	175

Source: Western Recruiting Report June 1915, Lord Lieutenancy Papers, Devon Record Office, 1262M/L129.⁸

of Devonshire list the total population of the county as 662,196. *Kelly's Directory of Devonshire*, 1914 (London: Kelly's Directories, Ltd., 1915), p. 1.

⁸ The first category refers to the number of men requested by the military authorities. The second category refers to the number of men who reported to recruiting depots. The last two categories are the number who were accepted or rejected for military service. Further, the number presented category for Cornwall includes fifty men who were called up from protected industries or who where starved.

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Tittle Tattle

Newspapers:

The Cornish and Devon Post
The Daily Mail
The Daily News
The Exmouth Journal
The Launceston Weekly News
The Manchester Guardian
The Paignton Chronicle
The Paignton Western Guardian
The Plymouth Pictorial and Western Figaro
The Salcombe Gazette
The Western Independent

Cornwall Record Office, Truro

Diaries and Private Papers:

Stephens of Ashfield, Westcountry Society of Friends

Government and Committee Papers:

SEC Recruiting Committee records

Devon and Exeter Institution, Exeter**Newspapers:**

The Western Morning News
The Western Times

Devon Record Office, Exeter**Parish Records:**

Axmouth Christ Anglican Church
Bartholomew St. Baptist Church
Buckfastleigh Methodist Church
Chagford United Methodist Church
Devon Association of Baptists
Exeter Diocesan records
Exeter Methodist Church
Exeter South St. Baptist Church
Exwick Parish records, Church of England
Fore St. Brixham Methodist Church
Higher Brixham Methodist Church
Ide Parish Church of England
Kenton-Teignmouth Methodist Church
Methodist Church of Tiverton
Newton Abbot Methodist Church
Newton Abbot Parish Council Records, Church of England
Northlew Methodist Church
Okehampton Methodist Church
Salcombe Baptist Church
Society of Friends Annual Meeting reports
St. Joseph's Catholic School
St. Leonard's Parish records
St. Thomas Baptist Church
Stoke Canon Parish, Church of England
Tiverton Wesleyan Methodist Church
Thorverton Baptist Church
Torquay-Paignton Methodist Church
Totnes United Free Baptist Church
Uffculme Church of England

Diaries and Private Papers:

Clutton, Violet, diary, 6258-0
Cresswell, Beatrix, diary, 4686M/F82
Ford family of Branscombe, 1037M-0
Gilbert, Thomas, private papers, 3828M/F35
Haswell, William, unpublished autobiography, 3749M/F1
Holman, Dorothy, diary, 3930/F9
Pedlar Family, private papers, 317M/D1
Rider, O., private papers, 99/25/1
Saunders, M., diary, 5179M/F30
Thompson, Arthur Huxley, diary, 1857A add/P18
Whitaker, Ruth, unpublished memoir, 2667M/F1
Wallcott Family of Tiverton, private papers, 317/M/26
White, Geraldine, private papers, 6258-0
Wood, Elizabeth Ellen, diary, D6407

Government and Committee Papers:

Barnstaple Rural District records
Belgian Refugee Relief Committee
Board of Agricultural Reports
County War Agricultural Executive Committee records
Crediton Housing Committee
Crediton Rural District records
Dawlish Council records
Devon and Cornwall War Refugees Committee
Devon Miners Association
Devon Patriotic Fund records
Devonshire Voluntary Aid Organization
Drewsteignton Council Records Tiverton Tribunal Reports
Devon War Agricultural Committee records
Heathcoat of Tiverton, Business records
Linen League Branch records
Lord Lieutenancy Records, Fortescue of Castle Hill
Devon County Council papers
Devon Farmer's Union records
Food Production Reports 1915-1919
Great Western Railway Records, Newton Abbot
Labour Officer's Reports: County of Devon
National Reserve Records, Devon
Newton Abbot Rural District Council records
North Devon Agricultural Board
Okehampton Division for Recruitment records
Okehampton Housing and Sanitary Committee records
Okehampton Municipal Borough Council

Paignton Rural District records
 Plymouth Housing Committee
 Seale-Hayes Agricultural College
 Seaton Urban District Council
 South Devon Agricultural Board
 Tavistock Division Executive Committee records
 Teignmouth Rural District Tribunal
 Teignmouth Urban District Tribunal
 Territorial Force Association of Devon
 Tiverton Council records
 Torbay County Borough Council
 Torbay Housing and Town Improvement Council
 Totnes Rural District Tribunal
 Women's County Farm Labour Committee records

Imperial War Museum, London

Diaries and Private Papers:

Bale, Mary, Sound Department, P360
 Bilborough, E.M., diary, Department of Documents, 90/10/1
 Coules, M., Department of Documents, 97/21/1
 Crosse, E.C., Department of Documents, 80/22/1
 Fernside, E., Department of Documents, 92/49/1
 Gilbert, Beatrice, Sound Department, 3076/1
 Hawcutt, V., Department of Documents, 95/32/1
 Hodgson, M., Department of Sound, 94/21/1
 Lees, Mary, Department of Sound, 3078/1
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 Rickman, A.P., diary, Department of Documents, PP/MCR/319
 Robinson, F.A., diary, Department of Documents, P402M
 Vile, E., Department of Documents, 01/39/1
 West, G.M., Department of Documents, 77/156/1
 Whitehead, L., Department of Documents, 97/34/1

The Library of the Religious Society of Friends

Meeting Reports:

London Yearly Meeting Proceedings of 1915

National Archive, KewGovernment Records and Papers:

Cabinet Office Records

CAB 21 Propaganda—Department of Information

Department of Education and Science

ED Devon War Economy Education Programme

Home Office

HO 45 Internment Camp Dartmoor records

HO 144 Recruitment records

Conscientious Objectors records

No-Conscription Fellowship records

Ministry of Food: Agriculture, Fisheries and Food Departments

MAF 80 County War Agricultural Committee, Devon

MAF 60 Prices for 1916 Harvest records

Prison Commission and Home Office Prison Department

PCOM 7 Committee on Employment of Conscientious Objectors

War Office

WO 32 Conscientious Objectors and Military Service records

North Devon Record Office, BarnstapleParish Records:

Bratton Fleming Parish Council

Chittlehampton Parish Council

Hartland Parish records

Northam Parish records

Diaries and Private Papers:

W. Shelley, parish magazines and notes, 1621A/PZ27

Plymouth and South Devon Record Office, Plymouth

Parish Records:

Brotherhood of the Bible records
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Hayle Baptist Church
Peverell Park Brotherhood records
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