‘REMEMBER ME MOST KINDLY’

IDENTITY, MEMORY, AND MUNDANITY IN BRITISH LETTER-WRITING

FROM THE FIRST WORLD WAR

by

ALEXANDER M. NORDLUND

(Under the Direction of JOHN H. MORROW, JR.)

ABSTRACT

British history of the First World War has often turned to the letters written between soldiers and civilians as a means to understand the experience of the conflict. With a focus on trauma, emotional survival, censorship, and testimony, what is often lacking from this analysis is the sheer mundanity within these letters, which often dwelled far more on everyday life, ordinary routine, and other topics that fall outside of ‘the war’. This study, turning to emotional and epistolary history, argues that this mundane content was a conscious choice by both the writer and reader to shape their wartime experiences into a shared ‘mundane’ experience of war to allow for private prewar identity to navigate and survive the First World War. Driven by emotional urgency, the translation of war and various shared fragments of identity outside of it into the ‘mundane’ allowed soldiers to survive their experiences and be ‘remembered most kindly’ in the postwar world.

INDEX WORDS: WORLD WAR – 1914-1918, HISTORY – BRITISH, HISTORY – MILITARY, LETTER WRITING, EPISTOLARY, MUNDANE, IDENTITY

‘REMEMBER ME MOST KINDLY’

IDENTITY, MEMORY, AND MUNDANITY IN BRITISH LETTER-WRITING FROM THE FIRST WORLD WAR

by

ALEXANDER M. NORDLUND

MA, KING’S COLLEGE LONDON, UNITED KINGDOM, 2014

BA, UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN, 2011

A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

ATHENS, GEORGIA

2020

‘REMEMBER ME MOST KINDLY’

IDENTITY, MEMORY, AND MUNDANITY IN BRITISH LETTER-WRITING

FROM THE FIRST WORLD WAR

by

ALEXANDER M. NORDLUND

Major Professor:	John H. Morrow, Jr.
Committee:	Steven C. Soper
	Jane E. Garnett
	John P. Short

Electronic Version Approved:

Ron Walcott
Interim Dean of the Graduate School
The University of Georgia
May 2020

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I'd like to thank firstly my committee for taking all of the time to review and provide feedback on this project over the past several years, especially John Morrow, who showed immense trust and support in my ability to pursue this project when most others showed little interest before I had even begun. Several other scholars offered their own vital support along the way, notably John and Andrea Lynn, James Brennan, Keith Hitchins, and Kristin Hoganson at the University of Illinois, Ari Levine, Reinaldo Román, Stephen Berry, Cassia Roth, and Ben Ehlers at the University of Georgia, and Bill Philpott, David Fisher (RIP), and Alan James at King's College London. The Society for Military History community, especially Ian Isherwood and Adam Seipp, have also been a tremendous source of intellectual and career support along the way, as was Mark Towsey and the graduate student community at the University of Liverpool Department of History.

I'd also like to thank Jane Garnett, Cliff Davies (RIP), Matthew Kempshall, and David Hackney for their generosity in encouraging me to explore the archives and rich history of Wadham College, Oxford. Special thanks to Jamie McClung, Stuart Minson, Maggie Perry, Barbara Bradshaw, and the UGA at Oxford Program, without whose support I may never have finished this project. I also discovered just how useful a knowledge of Ancient Greek became during my research, and I thank Sarah Melville and Aubrey Crum for their generous help in translating the odd passage from Homer and barely-legible Greek characters that came up on various occasions.

Additional thanks go to the Gregory family – and to Jennifer Palmer for her patience with all of my submissions and emails, the Graduate School at UGA, and the Willson Center for the Humanities at UGA for their financial support of my research and writing activities revolving around this project, and to Laurie Kane, Sharon Cabe, and Bobbi Snodgrass for their vital administrative support. The Imperial War Museum archivists, especially Jane Rosen, and the archivists at the University of Leeds were all immensely helpful throughout this process as well.

While we haven't share much in terms of mutual research interests, fellow graduate students provided immense support along the way. James Wall (and all those 'lunch breaks' during comps), Ben Smith, Ashley Roseberry, Kenny Roundy, James Owen, Whitney Priest, Kathryn Veale, Bryant Barnes, Vickie Berkow, Kate Dahlstrand, Michele Johnson, Dave Thomson, Julia Steele, Melissa Whatley, and Katie Griffis at UGA were all great sources of support (and needed distraction) throughout the highs and lows of graduate school. Special thanks to my King's College London friends, particularly Max Dutton, Ashley Wilde-Evans, Danielle Gilman, Carter Palmer, Mattias Eken, and Tamás Révész. I've also had some great UGA undergraduate students along the way as well, especially my Franklin Spring and SPIA Spring students with UGA at Oxford, all of whom have just been a simple pleasure to know and to witness them evolve not just as students, but more importantly as people. Wish you all the best and thank you for your patience with me and generosity along the way. Thank you to anyone else I may have forgotten here!

While they may not have understood what I was doing for all of these years, special thanks to my family for their unconditional support along the way and their constant understanding for my dark humor about academia (sometimes a bit too dark) and the missed holidays, birthdays, and other events that it caused.

Last, but not least, on top of being a brilliant historian in her own right, my soon-to-be wife Alexa Greco has been an amazing human being, friend, and my person for support and understanding during the final few years of this journey, and a constant reminder that there is more to all of this than the work we produce. Alexa, I love you, thank you for everything, and I can't wait to share what awaits both of us here and beyond. I could not have gotten this far without you.

Beyond the people who helped inspire and support along the way, I cannot end without paying tribute to other sources that offered welcome respite, catharsis, and inspiration during these ordeals that are graduate school and the research-writing process. The gallows humor and candidness of Lego Grad Student reminded me often of the humor to be found in the reoccurring absurdity of academic life, and that it's ok to have a personal life beyond grad school. I'd also like to thank The Ring, the (sadly former) KCLSU Waterfront Bar, and the Four Corners Coffee Shop in London, the Missing Bean, King's Arms, Lamb & Flag, The Rickety Press, and Turf Tavern in Oxford, and The Royal Peasant in Athens, GA, for constantly providing the space to inspire creativity and survive the ordeal that is graduate education and research.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

LIST OF FIGURES

Page

Figure 1: Great Western Railway Memorial, Paddington Station (Platform One), London.

Photo taken by the author.

PREFACE

THE SOLDIER AND HIS LETTERS

Since Armistice Day, 1922, the Great Western Railway War Memorial (Figure 1) has stood on Platform One of Paddington Station in London. Created by the sculptor and war veteran Charles Sargeant Jagger to commemorate the 3,312 employees of the Great Western Railway (GWR) killed in the First World War, it features a solitary 'unknown' soldier, seemingly waiting for the next train to take him off to war.[1] For those that had survived the war to take trains to more mundane destinations, it represented an all-too-familiar sight from the dark days of 1914-1918. Despite its tragic undertones, the image of this ordinary soldier also features one of the most significant emotional exercises undertaken by soldiers during the conflict. Waiting for his train, the soldier engrosses himself in a letter from home, seeking a respite from whatever fate the war had in store for him. To an outside reader, the news in this letter might appear rather ordinary, unwarlike, and even 'boring'. For this unknown man and others like him, with an outlet to a seemingly mundane life left behind, these letters offered perhaps their greatest chance at personal survival beyond 'soldiering' in the First World War. Engaging in the exercise of letter-writing with family and others, this unknown soldier seizes the opportunity to remain more than just a weary, unknown 'soldier', waiting for a train to take him off to war and, possibly, his own demise. In the pages of that letter and the reply he will most certainly write, he

[1] For more on the GWR War Memorial, see 'Statue – About the Statue', *Letter to an Unknown Soldier*, (14-18-Now: WWI Centenary Arts Commission), URL: https://www.1418now.org.uk/letter/statue/ (Accessed 6 September 2019).

finds a chance to be what he once was before the war, and what he hoped to be after it: a man with a mundane life.

One letter from 2 July 1915, written by Harry Llewelyn Hughes-Jones to Joseph Wells, the warden of his old Oxford college, Wadham, shows just how mundane these wartime letters could be. Serving on the Western Front, Harry was prompted to write Wells after receiving a copy of his latest college newspaper, the *Wadham College Gazette*. Filled with news of the college he had attended from his prewar days and its fellow members, he admitted to Wells that it was 'far more interesting than the Daily Papers' – the front page alone of the *Times* from that day is filled with war news.[2] Wishing to keep receiving the college paper, he promised Wells that he would send in his subscription dues as soon as possible, but his wartime duties had so far stopped him from doing so. While Harry wrote about his wartime service, he did so in a rather mundane way, remarking on whom he had met from Oxford or Cambridge at the front and the routines of trench warfare, admitting that 'the work is for the most part unexciting and lacks all the romance commonly credited to war'. In closing, Harry asked Wells that he 'remember me most kindly' to his wife and son.[3]

Like Harry, many other Wadham students would write their own letters to Wells, and many other soldiers would write letters to people associated with lives and relationships from prewar times. Also, similarly, their letters are significant for their mundanity, focusing on ordinary, everyday life and their prewar relationships to people like Wells rather than the dark, extraordinary times that loomed and threatened to take their own lives at any moment. They communicated based on their ties with whom they wrote, offered some brief mention of their

[2] See 'Killed in Action', 'Died of Wounds', 'Italian Wounded Relief Fund', 'Indian Soldiers' Fund', 'Belgian Red Cross', *The Times* (2 July 1915), p. 1.
[3] H.L. Hughes-Jones, 2 July 1915 (#35), Warden Wells Collection (WWC), Wadham College, University of Oxford. All future citations from this collection will be labelled 'WWC'.

whereabouts and wartime lives, and closed asking in some way to be 'remembered' to others they knew at home or elsewhere. In a way, these millions of letters and the people who wrote them during the First World War had little in mind in terms of the literary or historical significance of their private communication. Indeed, this style of writing letters was in no way unique to this conflict, with ordinary soldiers from the US Civil War often writing far more about 'their health, the weather, and what milk or butter cost' rather than about principles, politics or military events.[4] Rather, emotional self-interest drove this exercise of writing about the mundane, as it was often linked to the lives, relationships, and communal ties shared between two correspondents from a more mundane prewar world. British soldiers and civilians alike turned to the mundanity of their prewar lives and relationships not simply to escape from their wartime lives, but rather to either preserve or renegotiate their prewar lives during the First World War with the goal of shaping a stable, recognizable postwar life that they could return to at the end of the conflict.

Given how often these preoccupations have appeared in the wartime and postwar records, letter-writing and letter-reading are nearly impossible to separate from the British soldier's experience of the First World War and postwar memory and commemoration. At the height of British involvement in the First World War in 1917, soldiers were sending home 8,926,831 letters *per week* – 8,150,000 from the Western Front alone.[5] Jay Winter has estimated the total output for the war 'between families at home and men in uniform' at 2 billion letters.[6] These numbers, however, do not account for the volume of civilian mail sent to soldiers, which was

[4] Christopher Hager, *I Remain Yours: Common Lives in Civil War Letters* (Harvard University Press: Cambridge, MA 2018) pp. 8-9.
[5] Peter B. Boyden, *Tommy Atkins' Letters: The History of the British Army Postal Service from 1795* (National Army Museum: London 1990) p. 28.
[6] Jay Winter, 'Families', in Winter, ed., *The Cambridge History of the First World War*, Vol. III (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge 2014) p. 52.

undoubtedly massive and, combined with parcel shipments, dwarfed even these numbers. To put into a wider perspective, the US Civil War (1861-1865), perhaps one of the first modern literary, total wars, saw an average of 180,000 letters per day *in and out* of Union army camps – roughly 1,260,000 per week.[7] Inherent in this shared, seemingly mundane exercise between the military and home fronts is the effort to share an experience of war undefined by 'fronts', 'alienation', or, more broadly, the rupture between prewar and postwar private identities.

Novels and postwar memoirs about the war have featured letters in various parts of their narratives. In his bestselling wartime novel *Mr. Britling Sees It Through* (1916), H.G. Wells features his main character corresponding with his son, who shares details of his experiences fighting on the Western Front and his descent into disillusion leading up to his death.[8] In *Under Fire* (1916), French soldier Henri Barbusse remarked that a soldier, engrossed in the act of letter-writing, had 'gone home'.[9] The war poet Robert Graves, in addition to offering excerpts of his own letters, described in his own memoir the morbid humor of a ranker dictating a letter home to his aunt to tell her that he was 'in the pink…wading in blood up to our necks' and requested 'fags and a life belt…Love and kisses'.[10] A.O. Pollard recalled letters written by his mother, friends, and his 'chief delight…the one and only girl…every time she [wrote] it gave me hope'.[11] Rebecca West opened her debut novel *The Return of the Soldier* (1918) with a wife fearing for

[7] Cited in Hager, *I Remain Yours*, p. 4. For the potential of comparative histories of the US Civil War and British First World War, see Ian Isherwood, 'When the Hurlyburly's Done/When the Battle's Lost and Won: Service, Suffering, and Survival of Civil War and Great War Veterans', *The Journal of the Civil War Era*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (March 2019), pp. 109-132.
[8] H.G. Wells, *Mr. Britling Sees It Through* (Macmillan: New York 1916) pp. 305-373.
[9] Cited in Michael Roper, *The Secret Battle: Emotional Survival in the Great War* (Manchester University Press: Machester 2009) p. 50, and Susan Grayzel, *Women's Identities at War: Gender, Motherhood, and Politics in Britain and France during the First World War* (University of North Carolina Press: Chapel Hill 1999) p. 14. The phrase is translated in this edition as 'he has reached out for home', but see also Henri Barbusse, *Under Fire*, transl. Robin Buss (Penguin Books: London 2003 – 1st ed. 1916) p. 38.
[10] Robert Graves, *Good-bye to All That* (Anchor Books: New York 1998 – 1st ed. 1930) pp. 94, 106-118.
[11] Captain A.O. Pollard, *Fire-Eater: The Memoirs of a V.C.* (Naval & Military Press: Uckfield, East Sussex 2005 – 1st ed. 1932) pp. 48-49.

her husband's safety after not receiving a letter from him and alluding to what soldiers on the Western Front commonly used as their address on their letters: 'Somewhere in France'.[12] Frederic Manning referred in his novel to the 'condolence letter' written by officers to mothers after one of their men was killed in action.[13] Even Siegfried Sassoon originally wrote his famous 'done with the war' protest from 1917 as a letter to his Colonel.[14] Regardless of how writers, readers, and publishers conceived of these literary memories of Britain and the First World War over the course of the twentieth century, what cannot be denied is the prevalence of wartime soldiers and civilians writing and reading letters within these memories.[15] Given the extent to which these letters have appeared in the record and in various studies of the conflict, it is time to have a study dedicated to the epistolary history of the First World War not simply for the extraordinary features of war it reveals, but rather the sheer mundanity of it as a whole.

'…letters for factual testimony about the war'

In the now-classic *The Great War and Modern Memory* (1975), literary critic Paul Fussell declared 'clearly, any historian would err badly who relied on letters for factual

[12] Rebecca West, *The Return of the Soldier* (Dial Press: New York 1980 – 1st ed. 1918) p. 9.
[13] Frederic Manning, *The Middle Parts of Fortune: Somme & Ancre, 1916* (Peter Davies: London 1977 – 1st ed. 1929) pp. 15-16. For more on British veterans and their memoirs, see Brian Bond, *Survivors of a Kind: Memoirs of the Western Front* (Continuum: London 2008).
[14] For the text of the protest, see Siegfried Sassoon, *Memoirs of an Infantry Officer* (Coward, McCann, Inc.: New York 1930) pp. 297-298. Ultimately, Sassoon's letter made it into British newspapers. See 'An Officer and Nerve Shock', *The Times* (31 July 1917), p. 8.
[15] For more on the history of British literary memories of the First World War and the surrounding debates, see Isherwood, *Remembering the Great War: Writing and Publishing the Experience of World War I* (I.B. Taurus: London 2017), Brian Bond, *The Unquiet Western Front: Britain's Role in Literature and History* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge 2002), Janet Watson, *Fighting Different Wars: Experience, Memory, and the First World War in Britain* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge 2004), Dan Todman, *The Great War: Myth and Memory* (Hambledon and London: London 2005), and David Reynolds, *The Long Shadow: The Legacies of the Great War in the Twentieth Century* (W.W. Norton & Co. New York 2014).

testimony' on the British experience of the First World War.[16] Ever since, historians and other scholars of the conflict have struggled to separate the practice of letter-writing from the categorization of 'testimony'. In the postwar period, families often preserved the letters of their sons and others who served in the war – notably those killed, compiling and shaping them often into what Samuel Hynes has called 'memoirs of the dead'.[17] This extended even beyond family history, where authors have used the words of 'fallen soldiers' and others to convey a narrative not just about the First World War, but for all wars. Playwright and pacifist Laurence Housman perhaps offered one of the first notable examples of this new genre in *War Letters of Fallen Englishman* (1930). Composed mainly of heavily-edited letter excerpts from British soldiers killed in the war, Housman argued that these 'war letters' represented a 'memorial that speaks…of disillusion and doubt, and a growing distrust of war as an instrument for bringing to pass any good commensurate with so huge a sacrifice of body and soul'.[18] In these postwar literary treatments of wartime letter-writing, the focus shifts from the private relationship inherent within wartime letters to offer a narrative in the form of a literary genre in its own right: the 'war letter'. In the 'war letter', the reader, with no familiarity to the original context of the letter or the relationship inherent within it, imposes a familiar, sweeping, and rigid identity upon the writer: 'soldier'. Known only as a 'soldier', the writer becomes a familiar, yet wholly-other entity to the reader, able only to voice limited 'truths' from a limited life experience on which the

[16] Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory: Illustrated Edition* (Sterling: New York 2009, 1st ed. 1975) pp. 225-234. For criticism and the legacy of Fussell's work, see Leonard Smith, 'Paul Fussell's *The Great War and Modern Memory*: Twenty-Five Years Later', *History and Theory*, 40 (May 2001), pp. 241-260. While rather volatile, for a military history assessment, see also Robin Prior and Trevor Wilson, 'Paul Fussell at War', *War in History*, 1:1 (1994) pp. 63-80.

[17] Samuel Hynes, *A War Imagined: The First World War and English Culture* (Pimlico: London 1990) p. 209. For the interpretive problems of this literary genre in relation to the war, see also Jay Winter, *Remembering War: The Great War Between Memory and History in the Twentieth Century* (Yale University Press: New Haven 2006) pp. 103-117.

[18] Laurence Housman, ed., *War Letters of Fallen Englishmen* (Pine St. Books: Pennsylvania 2002 – 1st ed. 1930) pp. xxviii-xxix.

reader themselves has no direct knowledge: war and its violence, horror, and traumatic potential to destroy the soldier.

In many ways, British historians of the First World War have struggled to come to terms with this 'literary turn' in scholarship. Recent histories on the British experience and remembrance of the conflict have focused on debunking such conceptions of futility, horror, and trauma associated with the conflict stemming from literary criticism and postwar literature itself.[19] Military historians – more specifically, historians of 'war and society' – have rejected the idea that censorship and trauma influenced the ways that soldiers wrote and insist that an assessment of their letters reveals rather frank depictions of wartime experience and offered an important source for sustaining military morale.[20] Nevertheless, the same emphasis on letter-writing remains: soldiers testifying to a civilian audience the horrors of war.

As will be seen in Chapter One, perhaps one of the greatest methodological impediments to understanding First World War British letters, particularly from soldiers, was the presence of an official censorship system imposed by the British Army and its interpretive ties to the concept of 'letters as testimony'. Historian Eberhard Demm and literary critics like Fussell and others have interpreted the sheer presence of this system as oppressive, where soldiers could not accurately 'testify' to experiences that authorities did not want civil society to know. Additionally, with a perspective on the 'alienation' of war experience, repression in letter-writing

[19] For overviews of this 'mythology' of the First World War in British culture and reactions by military historians to it, see Bond, *The Unquiet Western Front*, Gary Sheffield, *Forgotten Victory: The First World War, Myths and Realities* (Headline: London 2001), Todman, *Myth and Memory*.

[20] See Helen McCartney, *Citizen Soldiers: The Liverpool Territorials in the First World War* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge 2005) pp. 89-118, Richard Holmes, *Tommy: The British Soldier on the Western Front* (HarperCollins: London 2004), p. xxiii. For letters and military morale, see Sheffield, *Leadership in the Trenches: Officer-Man Relations, Morale and Discipline in the British Army in the Era of the First World War* (Macmillan: London 2000) pp. 135-164 and Alexander Watson, *Enduring the Great War: Combat, Morale, and Collapse in the German and British Armies, 1914-1918* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge 2008) pp. 44-84. For a non-military perspective on 'morale' as technology, see Daniel Ussishkin, *Morale: A Modern British History* (Oxford University Press: Oxford 2017).

has also remained a contentious interpretive problem.[21] While much has been made of the lack of content in letters written by British soldiers and the implications of military censorship, it is also worth noting that US Civil War soldiers, whose letters were 'uncensored by military authorities', often wrote in similarly mundane ways to their First World War British counterparts.[22] With this in mind, it is necessary to consider the role which censorship played in influencing the shape, content, and purpose of letters written by soldiers. Michael Roper has also cited the sheer number of letters written by soldiers as another factor to consider when assessing just how effective (and oppressive) censorship was to the letter-writing process, and the opportunities offered by looking at letters written by officers, who had the privilege of censoring their own letters that allowed them to 'discuss topics that were technically out of bounds'.[23] Additionally, David Englander has also acknowledged the need of military authorities for frankness in letters to analyze 'fighting effectiveness' and the various means at a soldier's disposal to bypass the censorship system.[24]

In many ways, these past studies on censorship focus far more on what soldiers did not write – or what scholars thought they ought to have written – over what these men actually did write. Furthermore, the concept of the 'epistolary relationship' within these letters is glaringly absent. To understand the influence of and reactions to censorship on the letter-writing process in the First World War, it is also important to understand the concept of 'secrecy' attached to it. As Roger Chartier noted in his overview of 'ordinary' *ancien régime* letter-writing in France,

[21] For literary criticism, see Fussell, *Great War and Modern Memory – Illustrated*, pp. 228-230, Hynes, *A War Imagined*, pp. 114-119, and Randall Stevenson, *Literature and the Great War, 1914-1918* (Oxford University Press: Oxford 2013) pp. 11-22. For a recent historical overview of First World War censorship and propaganda, see Eberhard Demm, *Censorship and Propaganda in World War I: A Comprehensive History* (Bloomsbury: London 2019).
[22] Hager, *I Remain Yours*, p. 8.
[23] Roper, *The Secret Battle*, pp. 57-58.
[24] David Englander, 'Soldiering and Identity: Reflections on the Great War', *War in History*, Vol. 1, No. 3 (1994), pp. 300-318.

secrecy was implied in the writing and reading of letters, but not simply to the intended individual reader addressed in it. Rather, there existed an implied readership extending beyond the addressee: a community where 'whatever secrets there were had nothing to do with any individual consciousness but rather formed the basis of the specific identity of a whole group, constructed by the process of exchange between those who belonged to it'.[25] With this in mind, a letter addressed to a mother was not simply intended for the mother: it was intended for the family as a whole. As seen in Chapter Two, Wadham men wrote their letters to Joseph Wells, who in turn also published excerpts as public letters for other community members in the college newspaper, who would often know who wrote the words without even seeing the name of the writer. Some examples, as seen in Chapters Three and Four, do exist, where letter-writing often was private and individual between the lone writer and a lone reader, where the content focused solely on their own private, individual relationship to one another. Whether private or communal, these letters and the process behind them shared one thing in common: the censor and military life were not an intended audience, and their intervention in the process and the inherent relationship in letters was often resented regardless of the content on which the author wrote. With this in mind, soldiers expressed their resentment for the censor and military rules not simply for what they could not share about their war experiences, but rather for the surveillance of the censor into their private, mundane lives, thereby restricting them in ways beyond just sheer 'testimony'. Testimony or not, soldiers would always resent the outside interference of the censor and, more broadly, of the war itself into its mundane relationships.

[25] Roger Chartier, 'An Ordinary Kind of Writing: Model Letters and Letter-Writing in Ancien Régime France', in Chartier et al., *Correspondence: Models of Letter-Writing from the Middle Ages to the Nineteenth Century*, transl. Christopher Woodall (Princeton University Press: Princeton 1997) p. 15.

In a way, the emphasis on military morale within letters has offered one valuable avenue to approach wartime letter-writing as something more than soldiers telling the 'truth' about war to passive civilians at home. In considering the wartime morale of soldiers, Roper has stressed the connection between military comradeship and maternal, domestic support, where 'mothers…managed the networks between them, effectively underwriting the war' through parcels shared among soldiers, prewar domestic habits that translated into military life, and coordinating leave and transmitting correspondence onward from various comrades of their sons.[26] Soldiers, however, remain the focus here, and civilians remain a passive audience with limited influence on what was an epistolary *relationship*. Beyond this limited, military-centric approach, letters remain in many ways trapped within the realm of 'testimony', which requires a rather limiting perspective to these sources. Essentially, in considering this source as testimony, individual letters with graphic depictions of war experienced by soldiers are favored over a much wider body of 'mundane' writing that on the surface has very little to do with war. And yet, this wider body of letters has *everything* to do with war, as it exhibits that identity maintenance and connections with home and life beyond the war through epistolary communication were a central aspect to war experience shared by both soldiers and civilians. From this perspective, there is a far more nebulous understanding of wartime experience shared between soldiers and civilians, who both wrote to maintain some sort of normalcy during the circumstances in wartime, to preserve their own private, prewar relationships with an eye towards creating a stable postwar life for themselves beyond the wartime life of military service. Essentially, as observed by Martha Hanna in her study of Paul and Marie Pireaud, soldiers and their civilian counterparts bridged spatial divides of experience through shared emotional closeness and mutual interests

[26] Roper, *Secret Battle*, pp. 6, 125-146.

and concerns that transcended the war itself. [27] With this non-military history of the concept of morale, the notions of soldier motivation and fighting a 'war of defense' are reshaped into more personal, identity-based struggles shared by many during the war: the defense of the self in the face of war. As David Englander has noted, these epistolary relationships offered soldiers their best chance at maintaining continuity with their home lives, which they did not necessarily want to be affected by war experience, thereby tying morale far more to home relationships than to direct war experience.[28] Additionally, in his overview of British and German family letters from the war, Jay Winter has also remarked on a 'transnational code of stoicism and reassurance in both directions' in the epistolary exchange and its ties to the maintenance of family and soldier morale.[29]

This study proposes to re-shift the understanding of wartime letter-writing from the postwar creation of the 'war letter' genre back to its original orientation as an 'epistolary relationship'. This concept of 'letters as testimony' stems from the fact that due to various circumstances or conditions on the fighting front, the letters from the civilian side of this correspondence did not survive. Essentially, faced with constant movement, questionable billets, muddy trenches, and heavy packs filled with their own equipment, soldiers often could not preserve these letters. Only in rare instances – as will be examined in Chapter Four, did soldiers preserve these letters, often mailing them back to Britain in parcels. Nevertheless, even without this side of the relationship, a soldier's letters in many instances exhibit the sheer extent to which

[27] For more on the idea of a nebulous realm of war experience shared by soldiers and civilians within letters, see Martha Hanna, *Your Death Would Be Mine: Paul and Marie Pireaud in the Great War* (Harvard University Press: Cambridge 2006).
[28] Englander, 'Soldiering and Identity', p. 304.
[29] Winter, 'Families', in Winter, ed., *The Cambridge History of the First World War*, Vol. III, p. 52. Winter here alludes to the Anglo-German comparative study by Aribert Reimann. See Reimann, *Der grosse Krieg der Sprachen: Untersuchungen zur historischen Semantik in Deutschland und England zur Zeit des Ersten Weltkriegs* (Kartext: Essen 2000).

they were part of a wider conversation alternating between mundane private affairs and news of war experiences – ranging from the mundane to the extraordinary – rather than a witness-audience relationship where the civilian remains passive and reactive to the soldier's experience. Additionally, as will be discussed in Chapter Five, the concept of 'testimony' will be reassessed in soldiers' letters, stressing that soldiers testified often to an experience of war dominated far more by mundane routines than the death, killing, and trauma of combat.

War, Emotions, and the Annihilation of the 'Self'

From considering identity, morale, and censorship, many studies of the First World War struggle with the notion that the prewar 'self', upon becoming a soldier and experiencing war, faces its own annihilation. War, death and killing, trauma, and survival reshaped this prewar civilian into a soldier. Essentially, upon becoming a wartime soldier, the prewar civilian self is destroyed, and what is left is the postwar veteran, a civilian but yet utterly alienated from the wider civilian world that did not live or witness the same war as soldiers. The veteran is once again a civilian, but, with his prewar self now destroyed, returns only as a shell of this former self, detached from the life and relationships he had left behind when he went off to become a soldier.

While in many ways a major characteristic of the 'Lost Generation' myth, scholarship has also played into this concept of soldier and veteran alienation at the hands of the First World War. The beginnings of this perception were rooted in the historiographical tradition of cultural and literary studies that treated the conflict as a 'rupture' in historical continuity. For Fussell, the war constituted a linguistic shock to those that experienced it, resulting in a postwar 'modern'

form of ironic expression that has come to define British life ever since.[30] To Eric Leed and his approach to the 'liminality' of war experience, the 'experience of combat altered the status, self-conceptions, attitudes, and fantasy lives of participants', which resulted in a 'radical discontinuity on every level of consciousness'.[31]

In his military history of the Battle of the Somme in *The Face of Battle* (1976), even John Keegan has noted that the cultural memory of the Somme gave the public a full recognition of 'what modern war could do to men, and perceived that some limit of what human beings could and could not stand on the battlefield had at last been reached'.[32] In another way, with a fixation on the 'first day of the Somme', public cultural memory shaped its own narrow conception of war and soldiering based in combat, slaughter, and futility. To George Mosse, the constant experience of death in daily life from the war resulted in a brutalization of veterans and postwar society. Battlefields and the 'reality of war' become trivialized by postwar society through 'making it mundane and reducing it to artifacts used or admired in daily life and co-opted by those who wanted to satisfy their curiosity about the fighting'.[33] Essentially, the First World War created such an overwhelming trauma as to annihilate the prewar altogether, particularly the men that went off to become soldiers.

When considering the ways in which soldiers wrote – or did not write – about their wartime experiences, it is necessary to remember that a wide majority of British soldiers came from civilian life in prewar times. Joanna Bourke has noted that, in most cases, the soldiers of

[30] Fussell, *Great War and Modern Memory – Illustrated*, pp. 394-410.
[31] Eric Leed, *No Man's Land: Combat & Identity in World War I* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge 1979) pp. 1-3.
[32] John Keegan, *The Face of Battle* (Viking Press: New York 1976) p. 283.
[33] George Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars* (Oxford University Press: Oxford 1990) pp. 155-156.

the World Wars 'were civilians first, and servicemen only by historical mishap'.[34] Even after entering military life during wartime, men did not automatically transform into 'soldiers'. Rather, as noted by Peter Carmichael in his study of US Civil War soldiers, the novel and often-conflicting features of military life 'reminds us that a "soldier" was never a state of being but always a process of becoming'.[35] With this in mind, it should not necessarily be a surprise that these soldiers, stemming from civil society rather than military life, articulated and experienced their wartime lives in a civilian manner. Indeed, French and German historiography have also noted this phenomenon in the German and French Armies of the First World War. In his analysis of the French Army Mutinies of 1917, Leonard Smith observed that French soldiers, in their grievances and demands passed on to Army command, acted in the vein of 'citizen-soldiers' of the French Third Republic, who protested based on their prewar belief in the power of their prewar 'civic identity' rather than as soldiers simply mutinying against command.[36] Benjamin Ziemann, in his study of the German Army and postwar brutalization, noted that soldiers from rural Bavaria resisted wartime brutalization and postwar political radicalization by 'resorting to traditional anchors of rural life, such as Catholic piety, the farming family and – particularly importantly at a time of severe food shortages – agrarian subsistence'.[37] Just as these soldiers experienced war from a civilian state of mind, they equally survived war through the civilian (and mundane) relationships and identities they held on to in their wartime letters. With

[34] Joanna Bourke, *An Intimate History of Killing: Face-to-Face Killing in Twentieth-Century Warfare* (Basic Books: London 1999), p. xx. Hynes has also acknowledged this with soldiers' narratives, but stresses the theme of 'redefinition', which leads to similar conclusions about the 'shock' of war to the prewar self. See Hynes, *The Soldiers' Tale: Bearing Witness to Modern War* (Penguin Books: New York 1998) pp. 31-73.
[35] Peter Carmichael, *The War for the Common Soldier: How Men Thought, Fought, and Survived in Civil War Armies* (University of North Carolina Press: Chapel Hill 2018) p. 9.
[36] Leonard V. Smith, *Between Munity and Obedience: The Case of the French Fifth Infantry Division during World War I* (Princeton University Press: Princeton 1994) p. 258.
[37] Benjamin Ziemann, *Violence and the German Soldier in the Great War: Killing, Dying, Surviving*, transl. Andrew Evans (Bloomsbury: London 2017) pp. 169-172.

this in mind, it is necessary to consider the ways in which scholars have approached 'continuity' – or, more specifically, 'survival' – in relation to the First World War. Despite early conceptions of the conflict as a creator of historical discontinuity, more recent cultural and emotional history have stressed that continuity did occur in terms of soldiers and everyday life. Gender historians, such as Susan Grayzel and Nicoletta Gullace, have stressed the continuity of traditional gender roles with the politicization of 'motherhood' in the postwar period.[38] Even prewar perceptions of masculinity found ways to survive the destruction of war dealt to the male body.[39] Using sport and other prewar analogies to articulate war experience, soldiers also attempted to cope with the brutalizing potential of killing and avoid alienating themselves from civilian life.[40] Families, communities, and states also turned to prewar forms and language to mourn and commemorate those killed in the fighting.[41] While Roper does allow for the survival of the prewar self (the son) in his emotional history of the war, the veteran that he depicts is a self that has become both brutalized and traumatized by the experience of death, killing, and even surviving the First World War. This man, with a continued prewar attachment to his mother – and the wives, sisters, and other women that 'mother' alongside or *in absentia*, either inflicts physical and mental violence upon mothers or rushes to them for continued reassurance in times of emotional distress due to their lingering emotional wounds from wartime. From this perspective, Roper does allow for soldiers-turned-veterans to hold onto their prewar lives and relationships, but it is done overwhelmingly from a place of postwar trauma and bitterness and a Freudian attachment

[38] Grayzel, *Women's Identities at War*, and Nicoletta Gullace, *'The Blood of Our Sons': Men, Women, and the Renegotiation of British Citizenship during the Great War* (Palgrave Macmillan: New York 2002).
[39] See Bourke, *Dismembering the Male: Men's Bodies, Britain, and the Great War* (University of Chicago Press: Chicago 1996), Ana Carden-Coyne, *Reconstructing the Body: Classicism, Modernism, and the First World War* (Oxford University Press: Oxford 2009), and Jessica Meyer, *Men of War: Masculinity and the First World War in Britain* (Palgrave Macmillan: New York 2011).
[40] Bourke, *Intimate History of Killing*.
[41] Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge 1998).

to the private safety of the woman as 'mother'. The 'veteran' becomes a man lionized, worshiped, and heroized, and yet also pitied, feared, and kept separate from the rest of the civilian world. It is this concept of the 'veteran' and all of the dark associations that underpin it that haunt soldiers after their wars end, and it prohibits them from fully reintegrating back into the societies, communities, and relationships they hoped to remain tied to in wartime through their letters and other efforts, as these societies, communities, and relationships have reshaped them in their image of the 'veteran'.

Despite the differences in these literatures, what remains consistent is the notion of the soldier or veteran and the brutalizing and alienating effects of war. This study seeks to weave both the older social, political and literary studies of discontinuity and the First World War with more recent cultural, gender, and emotional treatments of continuity through an analysis of war and its potential to annihilate individual, private identity. Prewar political, social, and even literary mindsets faced either annihilation or, when considering Modris Eksteins' take on Modernism and Robert Wohl's on 'the Generation of 1914', a new intellectual environment in which to thrive.[42] As noted by Susan Kent in her studies of gender and violence in Postwar Britain, sociopolitical upheaval and volatility did certainly arise in British society from the effects of the war and returning veterans.[43] And yet, in her study of disabled German and British veterans, Deborah Cohen observed that British disabled from the war often avoided radicalization compared to their German counterparts, taking solace in the meager assistance and care offered at the private and local level – through families and non-government agencies like

[42] See Modris Eksteins, *Rites of Spring: The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age* (Mariner Books: New York 2000 – 1st ed. 1989), and Robert Wohl, *The Generation of 1914* (Harvard University Press: Cambridge, MA, 1981).
[43] See Susan Kent, *Making Peace: The Reconstruction of Gender in Interwar Britain* (Princeton University Press: Princeton 1993), and Kent, *Aftershocks: Politics and Trauma in Britain, 1918-1931* (Palgrave Macmillan: New York 2009).

the British Legion.[44] By turning to letters and the perspective of 'mundanity', the study makes an attempt to blur the lines between 'civilian' and 'soldier', where the mundane in letters is used by both sides to muddle spatial distinctions within war experience and navigate shared identities into the postwar world, where the 'soldier' has their civilian identity navigated into the postwar without having a 'veteran' identity imposed upon them. As war threatened to annihilate the prewar self, this same self, driven by emotional urgency (an 'emotional self'), turned to mundane letter-writing and other means to preserve, protect, and navigate into the postwar, where the mundane self could live on once again in a private, mundane, world that they had continued to shape throughout their wartime experiences. To those relationships and communities from prewar times, this postwar mundane self is remembered more in the vein of his prewar self than the othering perspective of the 'veteran', an identity that the emotional self desperately hoped to avoid during wartime.

In a way, this analysis of wartime letters and their links to identity offer an avenue through which to understand the overwhelming number of soldiers who simply disappeared back into British society after the war rather than the highly-noticeable examples of the brutalized or traumatized veterans. Indeed, what is striking is the sheer overwhelming postwar 'silence' exhibited not just by First World War veterans, but also by those that stayed on the home front.[45] While there is more room for research on this 'silence' and its ties to cultural memory of the war, the mundanity of wartime letter-writing is perhaps a way to introduce the potential for such a study of the postwar and early commemoration efforts of war dead and military service.

---

[44] Deborah Cohen, *The War Come Home: Disabled Veterans in Britain and Germany, 1914-1939* (University of California Press: Berkeley 2001).

[45] For more on this 'silence', see Joel Morley, 'Dad "never said much" but…Young Men and Great War Veterans in Day-to-Day Life in Interwar Britain', *Twentieth Century British History*, Vol. 29, No. 2 (2017), pp. 199-224. For the relationship between 'silence' and postwar commemoration, see also Adrian Gregory, *The Silence of Memory: Armistice Day 1919-1946* (Berg: Oxford 1994).

Identity and the Soldier: The Fragmented Self

In considering the relationship between war and identity, Roper has stressed the centrality of the 'mother-son' relationship to understanding emotional survival in the First World War. Addressing the question of why soldiers call out to their mothers during times of great emotional distress – notably when close to dying, Roper turns to Freudian psychoanalysis to focus 'on the states of mind that emerge within human relationships' and provide a 'less linguistically driven way of thinking about emotions and about how they are expressed'.[46] While Roper introduces valuable insight into emotions inherent within wartime correspondence and the mutual dependency of soldiers and civilians for wartime survival, the insistence on the mother-son relationship – even broadened to family history – as the sole source of the emotional self leads to a rather reductive understanding of 'identity'. And yet, what is often forgotten is that even in the letters written by sons to mothers, these same sons often catalogue the sheer amount of epistolary relationships that they participated in beyond family throughout the First World War. While far more mother-son correspondence most certainly has survived since the conflict, it is nonetheless necessary to acknowledge that, in their immediate wartime context, these letters were not a soldier's lone epistolary relationship nor did they represent the entirety of a soldier's identity. Furthermore, it is worthwhile to consider that for some soldiers, these epistolary relationships beyond family were tended to and developed far more than the 'mother-son' relationship.

Essentially, while the mother-son relationship and family history contribute far more to understanding the ways in which wartime letters were used to transmit postwar memory, it is

[46] Roper, *Secret Battle*, p. 27.

necessary to consider other emotional outlets that soldiers shared with others beyond family.[47] The result of this is a perspective on identity that is 'fragmented' between family and the immediate circumstances of the self, 'soldiering' in wartime, and the myriad of other prewar relationships maintained through letter-writing throughout the First World War. An individual could have any number of fragments where they invested their identities, but, if letters are any indication, they certainly extended well beyond mothers or other women serving some sort of 'mother need'. Additionally, by reducing the wartime male-female dynamic to a 'mother-son' relationship, there is little space for any sort of alternate identity or relationship between men and women at war. While there is certainly a strong association with men and 'mother need' stemming from Edwardian culture, there were also many other emotional outlets that men turned to within this cultural context. One notable outlet, particularly within the framework of British elite public-school culture, was male companionship that predated the outbreak of the First World War and carried over from prewar civilian to wartime military life.[48] Indeed, Martha Hanna has exhibited this in her study of 'the couple' in First World War France, where emotional urgency and support extended far beyond just 'mother need' and resulted in more of a 'shared' experience of war.[49]

[47] For more on the emotional drive behind postwar family preservation and remembrance, see Roper and Rachel Duffett, 'Family Legacies in the Centenary: Motives for First World War Commemoration among British and German Descendants', *History & Memory*, Vol. 30, No. 1 (Spring/Summer 2018), pp. 76-115. See also Winter, *Remembering War*, pp. 40-45

[48] See Peter Parker, *The Old Lie: The Great War and the Public-School Ethos* (Constable: London 1987), Michael C.C. Adams, *The Great Adventure: Male Desire and the Coming of World War I* (Indiana University Press: Bloomington 1990), Michael Paris, *Warrior Nation: Images of War in British Popular Culture, 1850-2000* (Reaktion: London 2000).

[49] Hanna, *Your Death Would Be Mine*. For a perspective on this correspondence beyond mother-son the French context, see also Hanna, 'The Couple', in Winter, ed., *The Cambridge History of the First World War*, Vol. III, pp. 6-28.

When considering the emotional context behind wartime letter-writing, it is necessary to distinguish between 'public' and 'private' expressions of identity within it.[50] Essentially, while a son at war would often continue to express more publicly-acceptable rhetoric about military service, family loyalty, and other aspects of prewar family upbringing, they would present fragments of other aspects of their more 'private' identities within correspondence to non-family relationships. Such is seen in the case studies from Chapters Two, Three, and Four, which dwell not on mother-son letters or other family correspondence, but rather to other potential 'fragments of self' that soldiers maintain in letters beyond family, whether they be their college or school communities, male confidants that avoided military service, and sweethearts or wives. From these outlets and perhaps many more, there appears the potential to understand war motivation, identity, trauma, and resilience beyond the reductive confines of the 'family'.

Chapters 2-4 cover case studies from writers and readers of a fairly distinct class of British society – mainly upper- and middle-class. Given the longstanding literary history associated with the First World War, it seems appropriate to return to the class of the war poets and novelists in order to delve into an epistolary history of the conflict. Additionally, given the wider perspective of this study on the mundane and emotional identity within wartime letter-writing, it is equally necessary to maintain some sort of consistency in terms of class status. While military rank – junior officer versus ranks – could become another means of analysis here, class seems far more appropriate given that the ranks contained far more than 'lower class' recruits and junior officers consisted of far more than upper-class men as the war progressed.[51]

[50] Again, US Civil War scholarship also offers potential avenues for understanding distinctions between the expressions of public and private identity in wartime correspondence. See Stephen Berry, *All That Makes a Man: Love and Ambition in the Civil War South* (Oxford University Press: Oxford 2005).
[51] For more on the working class and the war, see David Silbey, *The British Working Class and Enthusiasm for War, 1914-1916* (Frank Cass: New York 2005).

Furthermore, as will be shown at various points of this study as a whole, men irrespective of rank often turned to aspects of their prewar identity, such as class, as a means of finding 'comrades' at the front rather than simply resorting to military rank. Essentially, while military rank did carry with it a wartime status, prewar status and identity still held power over wartime relationships – at least within their respective military ranks. In the end, while social class may carry some semblance of solidarity amongst its members, shared military rank did not without some sort of shared prewar social status.[52] With class consistency established here, the goal then is to look at various cases within it of the ways that private identities played out through the experience of war. Rather than giving sole authority to the mother-son or 'family' relationship to this emotional experience, the case studies here show that soldiers and civilians alike relied on various fragments of identity to experience, understand, and survive the First World War. In many ways, much like the mundane, identity could be shaped, articulated, and performed in various ways given the audience or epistolary context on which it centered.

Overall, what this British epistolary history of the First World War will reveal is that the 'testimony' interpretation of soldiers' letters is an inadequate method for understanding the epistolary experience of soldiers at war. Rather than attributing overwhelming power to military censorship and even the avoidance of self-censorship, it reasserts the agency of soldiers – and the civilians they engaged in correspondence with – to shape their communication, their identities, and their military lives in whatever way they saw fit. Testimony certainly entered these letters, but it hardly featured as the primary motivation behind the epistolary exchange over private affairs beyond the war geared towards maintaining emotional continuity with home. They did

[52] For more on the relationship between social class and military rank, see Sheffield, *Leadership in the Trenches*, pp. 61-78.

this not simply to survive trauma they confronted in combat, killing, and death on the battlefield, but also to cope with the threat of traumatic boredom they faced far behind the lines in billets, the monotony of military routine, or even their inability to establish emotionally positive relationships with their wartime comrades beyond their shared military identities.

In all of this, the mundane represented one of the most prominent features of the epistolary history of the First World War. Soldiers sought out what they found to be an emotionally positive mundanity from their prewar lives and identities and performed mundane identities in letters to remain tied to lives and relationships they wished to return to in the postwar world. In terms of the war itself, they struggled to combat the real and imagined mundanity of military and war experience, which offered far more chronic trauma that what they faced in the muddy trenches on the Western Front. Rather than remember and understand the First World War for its extraordinary features, experiences, and results, perhaps it is time to write the mundane history of this conflict and, more generally, warfare as a whole.

War and the 'Mundane'

Generally, it is rather difficult to identity past studies directly associated with the 'mundane' or 'mundanity'. In histories of warfare, aside for brief allusions to 'boredom', these are essentially absent as points of analysis – Chapter Five, however, will exhibit that the 'mundane' was not necessarily synonymous with 'boredom'. Nevertheless, there are enough studies of the 'mundane' in history and other disciplines that allow for a consideration of the ways in which mundanity is defined, interpreted, and utilized. James H. Jackson, Jr., shaped his study of 'mundane' social movements in 19th-century Germany around the concept of *Alltagsgeschichte* ('everyday history'). Focusing on industrial and urban migration, he noted the

'paradox of individual stability in the context of massive population movement' using continuous residency registers.[53] Thus, from this perspective, the 'mundane' is used as a means to describe continuity in the face of major social, cultural, and economic upheaval. For communications scholar Jun Liu, in considering collective action in China, mundanity itself becomes a political performance, stressing mundane digital media practices that 'have come to generate, influence, or sustain contentious collective action in politically repressive regimes like China' and circumvent censorship.[54] For Jay Brower, even murder could be tied to 'abject mundanity'.[55] To Daniel Chambliss, the 'excellence' in competitive swimming is essentially a mundane achievement 'accomplished through the doing of actions, ordinary in themselves, performed consistently and carefully, habitualized, compounded together, added up over time'.[56] While stemming from a wide variety of disciplines, there is perhaps many complimentary elements which, in combination, can help form a set of parameters for the meanings of the mundane and mundanity.

While integrating features from the cultural and emotional history of the First World War, this study proposes to understand war, the soldier-civilian experience, and postwar survival in terms of the 'mundane' and within the emotional realm of 'mundanity'. Beyond this intended context, the 'mundane' and 'mundanity' can be misconstrued as pejorative ways of knowing or states of being, respectively. In terms of the emotional experience of the First World War, however, these terms take on a nebulous meaning subjective to the perceiver – in this case, the

[53] James H. Jackson, Jr., '*Alltagsgeschichte*, Social Science History and the Study of Mundane Movements in 19th-Century Germany', *Historical Social Research/Historische Sozialforschung*, Vol. 16, No. 1 (57) (1991) pp. 23-47.
[54] Jun Liu, 'From "moments of madness" to the "politics of mundanity" – researching digital media and contentious collective actions in China', *Social Movement Studies*, Vol. 16, No. 4 (2017), pp. 418-432.
[55] Jay Brower, 'The Abject Mundanity of Murder', *Journal of Media Ethics*, 32:2 (2017), pp. 138-139.
[56] Daniel F. Chambliss, 'The Mundanity of Excellence: An Ethnographic Report on Stratification and Olympic Swimmers', *Sociological Theory*, 7:1 (1989) p. 85.

soldier or the civilian – that lives (or endures) the mundane. Essentially, the mundane could be either positive or negative according to the experience of the individual. In either case, the 'mundane' and 'mundanity' can best be understood as 'the ordinary' or, alternatively, 'the lack of the extraordinary'. Like Jackson, it can also be used to stress individual 'continuity' of the old in the face of radical upheaval, and, as Liu suggests, mundanity could also be a performative exercise or state of being, with letters sustaining not just military morale and will, but also the survival of the prewar self in the face of military censorship practices. As noted by Brower, the traumatic potential killing, death, and fear in war could even be reshaped by soldiers that experienced them as their own form of mundanity, where they could emotionally cope with such phenomena. Like Chambliss, even the extraordinary nature of war can be experienced and endured by soldiers and civilians alike through the mundane routines equally associated with war. From these shared mundane experiences of the First World War came early conceptions of the conflict as its own realm of mundanity. For H.G. Wells, who campaigned to shape the war into the 'last war' or the 'war to end all wars', he lamented in *Mr. Britling Sees It Through* that people's mundane perceptions of it shaped the conflict into 'a war like any other'.[57] For war correspondent Colonel Charles á Court Repington, he titled his history of the conflict as *The First World War* (1918) to 'prevent the millennium folk from forgetting that the history of the world was the history of war'.[58] Wells, apocalyptic intellectual, lamented that British society, from soldiers to politicians and civilians, had made the war a mundane affair, while Repington, a veteran of the Second Boer War (1899-1901), had insisted that war had always been mundane

[57] Wells, *Mr. Britling Sees It Through*, p. 359. Also cited in Hynes, *A War Imagined*, p. 132. See also Wells, *The War That Will End War* (Duffield & Co.: New York 1914). For more on Wells and the First World War, see Alexander Nordlund, 'A Misfit in All Times: H.G. Wells and "The Last War"', *Modern Intellectual History*, Vol. 15, No. 3 (November 2018), pp. 747-771.
[58] Cited in Hynes, *A War Imagined*, pp. 260-261.

and would always remain so. In a way, mundanity could become a wartime realm where soldiers and their counterparts could achieve continuity between the prewar and postwar.

Beyond military life and war experience, the desire expressed to maintain identities within the realm of prewar mundanity was an exercise most certainly driven by a shared emotional urgency between the soldier and civilian. This emotional urgency, in many ways, was a product of the novel circumstances faced by many British soldiers in wartime: the mundanity of war itself. Beyond the terror, violence, and trauma often associated with the First World War – and, more generally, war itself, soldiers often perceived war to be a far more mundane experience. In a way, this points to the presence of the 'emotional self', which could be either the soldier or the civilian. This emotional self, driven by an urgent need for 'mundanity' in war and life beyond it, strove to construct itself within epistolaries as a 'mundane self'. While the 'emotional self' would arise on occasions of trauma, fear, or other emotions tied to war, the 'mundane self' appears far more often in the wartime epistolary record. Essentially, driven by an underlying 'emotional self' due to wartime circumstances, the constructed 'mundane self' arose to navigate prewar life and relationships through a mundane, yet emotionally survivable, First World War. This is not to claim that the First World War was not traumatic due to its actual and interpreted mundanity. Rather, as will be noted in Chapter Five, the mundanity of war also could become a chronically traumatic experience, particularly when soldiers succumbed to an experience of war grounded in boredom and monotony. Even Ernst Jünger, whose memoir recalled his own positive experience of the First World War, nonetheless asserted that disillusion

stemmed not from combat, but rather from the 'dirt, work and sleepless nights…Worse still was the boredom, which is still more enervating for the soldier than the proximity of death'.[59]

In the case studies from Chapter Two-Chapter Four, shaped around varying wartime epistolary relationships, the mundane and emotional selves of the writers and readers take on various fragments of identity, with an emotional self (the writer) often performing a mundane self (the writing) to a preconceived audience (the reader). In the Wadham correspondence, Joseph Wells's 'mundane self' is the paternalistic Warden of Wadham College from prewar times managing the college community and its alumni network, not the 'emotional' warden of a college-turned-military barracks with an uncertain postwar future in a college devoid of students. His 'Wadham men' take on the 'mundane' shape of university students and alumni maintaining their ties to a recognizable 'Wadham College', not the 'emotional' soldiers whose college friends (and thereby their college connects) keep getting killed. In his letters to Basil, James Butlin remains the 'mundane' old school chum, not the 'traumatic neurasthenia' diagnosis after his experience at Arras, while Basil remains the old confidant of James and does not become the wartime 'shirker' of whom James disapproves. For Fred Sellers and Grace Malin, they define their 'mundane selves' as sweethearts from prewar times, not a product of emotional urgency between a soldier facing death and a young woman who feared the day that death might arrive. In other correspondence, particularly that dealing with the 'mother-son' relationship, a mother remains the 'mother' and does not become the 'worried mother', while the 'son' remains the 'son' and not the 'son in danger'. The 'worried mother' and the 'son in danger' – the emotional selves – certainly appear at times in this correspondence, but they are often overtaken by the

[59] Ernst Jünger, *Storm of Steel*, transl. Michael Hofmann (Penguin Books: London 2004 – 1st German ed. 1920, 1st English ed. 1924) p. 13.

intended performances of the ‘mother’ and ‘son’ – the mundane selves, that wish to survive the experience of the war.

In the epistolary relationships between British soldiers and civilians, the overwhelming presence of the mundane and mundanity exhibited a conscious choice, not an imposition beyond the epistolary relationship itself, to navigate prewar private life through war, which by extension was shaped into a phenomenon that was itself mundane and, by extension, survivable in emotional terms. By turning to the conception of these letters as epistolary relationships, the intent is not to discredit individual excerpts of correspondence used to conceptualize gender, identity, trauma, and other studies of war, but rather to reassess this massive undertaking from the First World War in collective terms. Essentially, when considered from this perspective, letter-writing appears as an exercise heavily grounded in the mundanity of prewar home life and wartime military life. This mundanity was not an inherent reality imposed upon the reader or the writer, but rather a reality created and imposed upon the epistolary relationship by both the writer and reader. Through this imposition of mundanity, war became not simply an annihilator of self, but rather a conduit through which the shared relationship of the soldier and civilian could not just survive war, but also navigate intact with some semblance of recognized normalcy into the postwar world. Soldiers craved the mundanity of their prewar lives and relationships, and soldiers needed to shape and know war as its own mundanity in order to survive it, and soldiers had to find some way to remain tied to the prewar mundanity that they hoped to return to after the war had ended, to have private memories of themselves tied to their prewar selves rather than their more public wartime ‘soldier’ or postwar ‘veteran’ identities. They did this through the various epistolary relationships they formed throughout the First World War.

CHAPTER 1

"AN UNINTERESTING MASS OF CORRESPONDENCE"

BRITISH MILITARY MAIL CENSORSHIP IN THEORY AND PRACTICE

Introduction

On 28 January 1917, H.E.V. Williams, a lieutenant on the Western Front, wrote a letter to his family. In it, he brings up a rather-large task expected of him as a junior officer: the censoring of all the letters written by the enlisted men (or the 'ranks') within his Company. Remarking on this experience, Williams declared that 'I…have never in my life, waded through such an uninteresting mass of correspondence. In many cases I couldn't read them myself, so am sorry for the poor wives & mothers they are intended for'.[1] Like postwar scholars and his fellow wartime censors, as an outsider to the epistolary relationships that he was ordered to review, Williams was not alone when he remarked on the 'uninteresting' – or mundane – nature of soldiers' letters. What is telling in this case, however, is that the censor found these letters uninteresting in the first place, and that the censor had not intervened to produce such mundane letters. Furthermore, it provokes questions into the motivations behind wartime letter-writing, and the extent to which censorship shaped the correspondence of soldiers during the First World War.

The attitude of Williams to the nature of wartime letter-writing continued past the First World War and found its way into British scholarship on the conflict. Driven by an interest in

[1] Letter 28 January 1917, in Private Papers of H.E.V. Williams, Doc. 15430, Ref. 07/5/1, Department of Documents and Sound, Imperial War Museum, London, UK (IWM). All subsequent citations from this archive and department will be marked as 'IWM'.

the testimony of soldiers and veterans on the experience of war, literary scholars found letters to be lacking in vivid detail on the war – or, perhaps, the details that scholars themselves wanted, with some arguing that such mundane letters were a product of censorship – including concealment by the writer himself – and the shock of the First World War to linguistic expression. Essentially, soldiers turned to mundane topics in their letters due to the powerful influence of the military on what they were allowed to say about the war, their fears of upsetting people back home with such details, and the own inability to articulate the horror of the war with conventional language.[2] What these literary studies lack that military and cultural history have sought to answer is the question of why soldiers wrote so many letters in the first place.

While military historians have stressed the importance of morale and the existence of graphic war details within letters, and the efforts of cultural history to cite the importance of identity within soldier-civilian communication, it seems necessary to uncover the lived experience of censorship in the First World War rather than simply uncover what it did or did not do.[3] This requires an analysis of the military regulations on mail censorship and the experience not just of soldiers being censored, but also officers assigned with the duty of censoring the letters of the men with whom they had daily contact. As first noted by historian David Englander, one of the most unfortunate realities of research into British military mail censorship from the First World War is that Field Censor Reports and other military mail and censorship

[2] Fussell, *Great War and Modern Memory: Illustrated*, pp. 225-234. For criticism, see Smith, '*The Great War and Modern Memory*: Twenty-Five Years Later', pp. 241-260. See also Prior and Wilson, 'Paul Fussell at War', pp. 63-80, Hynes, *A War Imagined*, pp. 114-119, and Stevenson, *Literature and the Great War*, pp. 11-22.

[3] For the military side that stresses the morale, consent, and paternalistic side to censorship, see Sheffield, *Leadership in the Trenches*, and A. Watson, *Enduring the Great War*. For the cultural side focused on identity within letters, see Englander, 'Soldiering and Identity', pp. 300-318, Helen McCartney, *Citizen Soldiers*, pp. 89-118, Meyer, *Men of War*, pp. 14-46, Roper, *The Secret Battle*, pp. 47-72.

records were either destroyed after the conflict or remain classified military documents.[4] Nevertheless, in addition to letters themselves, there are still enough military records to assess official censorship regulations and instructions given to censors and soldiers intending to write letters home from the front. Additionally, what remains of these records reveal many of the ways in which censors failed to enforce regulations and soldiers found ways to overcome these regulations.

Nevertheless, central to the study of military mail censorship are the letters themselves, which show what was censored, the attitudes of censored writers, and comments by censors themselves on the task, who also wrote their own letters home. Finally, with regards to the question of concealment or 'self-censorship' by soldiers, what remains of the epistolary record from the side of civilians is also important – even if it just appears as replies to past queries and news in soldiers' own letters. It is this perspective that shows not just when soldiers chose to censor themselves and whether civilians noticed, but also more generally what subjects dominated the conversation between soldiers and civilians. Indeed, in many cases, the war was often not the main purpose and topic behind this correspondence. In the end, letter-writing between soldiers and civilians was a means through which individuals exercised some sort of continuity with the more mundane lives they had lived before the First World War and military service, and any sort of epistolary relationship would be driven first and foremost by pre-letter and, by extension, prewar relationships.

From this perspective, although censorship certainly did affect the ways that soldiers wrote letters, it did not necessarily halt them from sharing their war experiences with civilians back home. So then, while literary critics reflect on what stopped soldiers from telling the 'truth

[4] Englander, 'Soldiering and Identity' p. 310.

about the war' and historians retort with all the grisly details of war and expressions of identity present within these letters, perhaps the problem in assessing wartime letter-writing and the impact of censorship is the recurring approach to wartime letters, particularly those written by soldiers to civilians, as testimony. Thus, it seems best to ask not what censorship did to suppress the realities of war from civilians in soldiers' letters, but rather why soldiers wrote letters in the first place, particularly in emotional terms.[5] With these ideas in mind, the question of whether military authorities thwarted this goal – or if that was their intent in the first place – can be fully answered. In the end, if letters were the conscious testimony of war written by soldiers, why did one censor ultimately declare this testimony to be just a 'mass of uninteresting correspondence'? Looking at official censorship regulations from the British Army, the experiences of censored soldiers and censoring officers to mail surveillance, and the civilian side of letter-writing, this chapter will seek to gain insight into whether this 'mass of uninteresting correspondence' was a product of censorship, or a choice made by correspondents, who wrote mundane letters for their own personal, emotionally-driven purposes beyond the First World War.

Censorship: Regulations, Military Uses, and Observations

By the outbreak of war in 1914, the British Army had a system of mail censorship in place for their small professional army for only a brief time. In 1877, an Army Post Office Corps replaced civilian postal staff traditionally associated with military mail – civilian staff had managed soldiers' mail into the Crimean War (1853-1856). It was not until the Boer War (1899-1902), however, that the Army began to censor soldiers' letters due to their potential security

[5] Roper stressed that letter-writing allowed soldiers to return to the 'lives they had left behind'. See Roper, *The Secret Battle*, p. 50. See also Hanna, *Your Death Would Be Mine*.

risks, but the practice did not become systematic until the First World War. As the Army expanded rapidly, the postal service and, by extension, censoring of letters had to keep up with the volume of mail sent home by soldiers.[6] While the practice certainly affected the ways in which soldiers wrote about their war experiences, it did not necessarily prohibit them from writing about the war itself. Additionally, by focusing simply on the sheer act of censorship, it is difficult to understand what the Army targeted for censorship in private correspondence and whether such regulations and practices stopped soldiers from achieving their primary goal in writing letters home. As the official censorship regulations and what remains of Field Censor Reports show, however, the goals of mail censorship by the Army were not necessarily in conflict with the interests of soldiers when they wrote letters. Essentially, while soldiers wrote letters and developed epistolary relationships with people outside the war itself for the primary purpose of maintaining ties to their more 'mundane' prewar lives, the British Army assessed its own morale and fighting ability through soldiers' letters and censored details beyond these objectives that would be of valued as potential military intelligence to the enemy.

By 1918, regimental officers – usually lieutenants or captains in charge of platoons or companies – expected to censor the letters of the men under their command received a lecture outlining the responsibility. In these lectures, the duty of regimental censors was defined as 'seeing that no information shall be given in letters which could be of use to the enemy'.[7] Broadly, the 'enemy' was not defined as anyone on the front lines, but rather 'spies' suspected of being hidden throughout Britain. Even beyond spies, the British Army was perhaps far more

[6] Boyden, *Tommy Atkins' Letters*, pp. 18-30

[7] Lecture on the Postal Censorship Orders, War Office – General Staff and Publicity Section, LBK .80360, IWM. Beyond these lectures, the Army had published pamphlets to troops in the field dating back to at least 1916. See War Office, *Censorship Orders and Regulations for Troops in the Field* (1916), in LBY/EPH 1401, IWM. Overall, between lectures, pamphlets, and what remains of Field Censor Reports, there is little variety in official rules and regulations on mail censorship.

concerned about letters written by soldiers before they were mailed home. In these cases, there was a fear that a soldier could be killed or captured during trench raids and other engagements, and their letters could be taken by the enemy to extract any intelligence that they could contain. As far as violations were concerned, the lectures do not lay out any punitive measures for violations discovered during the process of censoring letters. Rather, driven by a belief that most violations were not deliberate or had intended malice, officers were instructed to give 'a few short talks with the men' to 'impress upon them their personal share in this means of securing the enemy's defeat' and the 'protective' nature of mail censorship:

> No man can ever say with certainty when he either writes or says anything which would be of use to the enemy that he is not responsible for endangering his own and his comrades' lives…Accurate description of the positions of billets, dumps, headquarters or any other important points…would certainly ensure a visitation from the enemy either with shells or bombs.[8]

Beyond this fear of enemy interception of letters for their intelligence value, the lecture stressed that 'all of this does not mean that the war should never be mentioned in letters':

> There are heaps of personal experiences in battle or out of it which may give pleasure to relations at home without any risk whatever, and provided that the regulations are strictly observed, regimental censors should not unnecessarily cramp the style of the men.[9]

Broadly, content within letters in need of censoring was focused on certain details: location of writers, plans of future operations – rumored or otherwise, military organization (numbers, troop movements, unit positions, etc.), armament, defensive works, 'conditions of troops moral or physical', casualty details before official publication, military transportation conditions, and 'the effects of hostile fire.[10]

[8] Ibid.
[9] Ibid.
[10] Ibid.

In most cases, censorable material found in letters did not prompt any serious punitive response by censors beyond simply removing the offenses from letters or having letters returned to the sender for revision.[11] Nevertheless, the Army did have rules in place for letters sent in bad faith violating censorship regulations. These special violations included avoiding military post offices for mailing letters, using cyphers and codes in letters, blatant violations to the point of 'insult' against a censor, and disclosures of a 'serious crime'.[12] Generally, most of these cases were considered 'an offence of an insubordinate nature', and letters containing references to criminal activity were used 'for the purpose of obtaining other evidence; but…the letter itself is not to be used as evidence against the writer'.[13] Despite the intelligence implications of these violations, the British Army interpreted these actions as internal military matters within each respective unit, and disciplinary actions were delegated to censoring officers.[14]

In connection with mail censorship and its efforts to thwart enemy intelligence-gathering, the British Army did have punishments in place against soldiers that violated 'privileges' granted by the military related to correspondence and their relationships with the civilian world, such as the issue of 'Green Envelopes' (GE) and home leave.[15] With a need to assess the morale of their men and the potential suppressive effect of regimental censorship on letters, the British Army

[11] Court martials and field punishments did occur for gross abuses of censorship regulations. This will require a study into court martial and military legal records that is far larger than the confines of this chapter on the extent to which censorship influenced the shape of wartime correspondence.
[12] War Office, Censorship Orders and Regulations for British Forces in Italy (1918) p. 16.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Any examination of stricter measures taken by the British Army against censorship offenders and requires an analysis of military legal records (i.e. court martial proceedings), which is not part of the scope of this current study. Whether or not the Army went as far as to charge any offender with 'aiding the enemy' through censorship violations is questionable given the official rules, regulations, and instructions given to censors and soldiers writing letters.
[15] While the discussion of leave within letters is highlighted in this chapter, the study of military leave itself requires a study of its own. In any case, as shown here with Green Envelopes, the British Army extended its concerns from soldiers' letters to communication with the civilian world in general, with home leave being seen as another potential source of intelligence leaks. Like Green Envelopes, for anyone found violating these regulations on leave, the privilege of leave itself was taken away from soldiers. See War Office, *Censorship Orders and Regulations for Troops in the Field* (1916), p. 3, in LBY/EPH 1401, IWM.

Postal Service provided the ranks with official means to avoid censorship at the regimental level through the issue of the these special envelopes (Figure 1). Issued at the 'rate of one per man per week upon…the ascertained average strength of units', the GE allowed the ranks opportunities in their letters home to discuss 'intimate private matters' without a junior officer 'with whom they are in daily contact'. For anyone that violated the regulated uses of these envelopes, the Army would respond by simply stripping the privilege itself not just from an individual soldier, but also from the 'units and formations in which the offences occur'. If violations became endemic, the issue of GE's would 'cease altogether'.[16] In extraordinary cases, the British Army court martialed offenders. Writing about a recent scare with the censor, 'Jack' Sweeney wrote that 'one of our men last week was Court Martialed & received 2 years' for sharing unit details in a GE, which he claimed could have endangered his unit if the Germans had intercepted it.[17]

Additionally, for soldiers that did not have time to write a letter, the British Army assigned the Field Service Post Card (Figure 2), which had preassigned texted that the sender could leave or scratch out to articulate the most basic of communication to share with home regarding their personal welfare and the fate of letters and parcels. Censorship restrictions were limited for these postcards – nothing new was to be added and they could not be sent to neutral countries. Nevertheless, as the Field Censor Office discovered during the course of the war, soldiers did find ways to insert cyphers into what was expected to be a straightforward, streamlined, and uncontroversial form of communication, with 'Dots, pinpricks and incomplete

[16] For more on GE regulations, see Ibid., pp. 5-6.

[17] Private Papers of D.J. Sweeney, 14 January 1917, Doc. 7397, Con Shelf, IWM. What made a case like this worthy of a court martial was not just the violation itself, but that it was done using a GE intended to avoid the censor in a unit located in a dangerous area of the front lines.

striking out of the un-used sentences…the commonest forms employed, and writers often sign the name of the place where they are in place of their own names'.[18]

From these regulations, military officials treated letters written by their own soldiers – or, more generally, communication with the civilian world – as a potential source of enemy intelligence, not a means to suppress information about the soldier's personal experience of the war for civilian readers. Even the restriction on 'condition of troops moral or physical', which on the surface seems the most suppressive point to personal correspondence, did not entail a need to censor allusions to the physical and mental condition of soldiers who wished to reassure family and friends back home – censorship lectures considered that this point 'require[d] no elaboration'.[19] Even with the point on the effects of 'hostile fire', regulations allowed for 'references to individual hair-breadth escapes…provided they do not disclose the actual target'.[20] Perhaps the most restrictive measure to mail censorship was a condition forbidding 'criticism of superiors' and 'statements calculated to bring into disrepute the Army or any organisation working with it'.[21] Essentially, while censors were given a framework of regulations by the British Army to work with for what needed to be censored in soldiers' letters, they also had many generalized exceptions to rules that ultimately delegated authority to them over what they could consider worth censoring.

---

[18] War Office – General Staff and Publicity Section, Lecture on the Postal Censorship Orders, LBK .80360, IWM. For more, see Fussell, *Great War and Modern Memory: Illustrated*, pp. 230-234, and Stevenson, *Literature and the Great War*, pp. 14-15. Fussell interpreted the Field Service Post Card as the 'first widely known example of dehumanized, automated communication', where the writer was forced to display optimism in circumstances quite the opposite. What Fussell seems to ignore is that correspondence by soldiers in many ways conformed in the barest sense to this 'modern form'. Essentially, soldiers' letters, in their mundanity, were aimed at articulating their well-being in spite of physical and emotional distress and were linked to the wartime emotional needs and well-being of civilians. It is also worth noting that despite any criticism from soldiers, these postcards were nonetheless used *en masse*. Nevertheless, the history of the Field Service Post Card does require further research beyond literary criticism.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Ibid.

In censoring the letters of its soldiers, the British Army had an even more important motive than protecting itself from enemy espionage: assessing its own fighting morale. Sir Douglas Haig, the commander of the BEF, perhaps best exhibited the importance of this when he consulted with his Field Censor on the morale of his soldiers facing the enemy onslaught during the early days of the German Spring Offensive in 1918.[22] For the most part, these reports did not survive the war, but there is one case study from the Italian Expeditionary Forces in 1918 created by Captain Martin Hardie under orders from the Head Censor on the Italian Front. Using the GE letters written by the 'ranks' and non-commissioned officers (NCOs), Hardie and the Field Censors hoped to assess the ability of British forces to continue fighting effectively on their immediate front. The report exhibits the purely military logic behind mail censorship, as the analytical focus on these letters by Hardie was on what was most relevant to military conduct of the war – the mood of the troops, war weariness, conditions at the front lines for soldiers. Nevertheless, some details on the important emotional connection between soldiers and home do appear in these pages, particularly allusions to leave, parcels, and mail censorship itself. In his assessment of complaints by soldiers, Hardie concluded that 'when complaints occur, they frequently have an ulterior purpose, as a preface to a request for a parcel', with the type of parcel requests varying according to location at the front – grumbling about lice infestation and scarcity of bread being a common theme.[23] Indeed, while he noted that soldiers referred to lice infestation as 'minor matters', Hardie found it important enough of a problem to quote the letters of soldiers on what he decided was a 'great discomfort…mental as well as physical':

"I wish you could send me a tin of Harrison's pomade to keep the visitors away." (21/1/17).

[22] Sheffield and J.M. Bourne, eds., *Douglas Haig: War Diaries and Letters, 1914-1918* (Phoenix: London 2006) pp. 401-405 and editor's note on p. 402.
[23] Private Papers of M. Hardie, Field Censor Report, pp. 5-6, Doc. 4041, Ref. 84/46/1, IWM

"I am happy but chatty, so send me some Harrison's Pomade, as it is too cold to look in my shirt at night – they are like race-horses." (20/1/17).

"We have been in the line 14 days, and me and my pal killed over 100, but they was in our shirts, not Germans." (14/12/16).

"Animated shirts are all the fashion in the fighting Units." (21/1/17).[24]

Beyond the battle against 'chats' – the common slang for lice by soldiers, Hardie noted that 'leave, and the hope of leave, remains the chief theme of correspondence'. Whether or not it was imminent or frequent, the sheer prospect of leave – or the lack of it – was seen by Hardie as central to military morale and, by extension, the successful conduct of the war:

…judging by the letters, it is impossible to emphasise too strongly the importance of leave as a factor in the moral of the Army. It is the constant "lookforwardness" to eight or ten days of Blighty that, more than anything else, keeps them going. Blighty is the lodestar of their lives; leave the "crowning mercy of their existence. The immediate prospect of leave, as something viable and tangible, seems to count for far more to men's minds than the ultimate, visionary hope of Peace. The man who has just had leave rejoices in the retrospect and is "sweating on another one." For the man who cannot get leave, life is a "dud".[25]

It is this perspective on leave that gives insight into not just the nature of the letters that soldiers wrote to home, but also the centrality of home to their war experiences. While military censors were preoccupied with military morale, their own assessments from letters reveal far more the continued need expressed by soldiers to ground themselves in their identities to home, whether it be through the expectation of leave, the experience of leave, or grumbling about the lack of leave in their communications with home. Even as soldiers expressed negative attitudes about censors within their letters – such as 'Bugger the Sensor [*sic*], he doesn't count at all', Hardie

[24] Ibid., p. 6. It is perhaps important to note the selectivity of letter excerpts within these reports, which were focused on the everyday conditions and morale of the Army captured in select letters from soldiers. Due to its own self-interested military logic, it does not fully capture the motivations behind letter-writing by soldiers, but it does acknowledge the importance of ties to home for soldiers.
[25] Ibid., p. 10.

nonetheless highlights the overall positive reaction to Green Envelopes, which were still censored, but only by the Base Censor, who was 'regarded in a favourable light'.[26] Essentially, in terms of censorship of letters, soldiers preferred censors behind the lines to review their letters rather than a junior officer with whom they knew more personally and did not want delving into their private lives beyond the war. In a way, anger arose not necessarily over mail censorship as a whole, but rather over *who* was doing the censoring. With GE's, soldiers faced less risk of not just censorship, but also censorship at the hands of someone that was in a direct position of authority over them in an everyday context.

Ultimately, censorship did create resentment at times amongst soldiers not due to any wider attitude they held against the war or military authority, but rather when the war or military authority disrupted the more mundane aspects of their epistolary relationships that centered around emotional ties between writers beyond the letters they wrote. In addition to denying potential intelligence to the enemy and assessing the morale of the British Army, censors also had to 'guard the morale of [their] own Troops against subversion, deliberate of unintentional, striking at the Troops, through the mails'.[27] As the First World War took a greater toll on British life on the home front due to food shortages, labor strikes, and general war weariness, soldiers began to react to the perceived disruption of the mundanity that they hoped to link themselves to outside their own war experiences. While military censorship of letters that revolved around the wartime secrecy and espionage perhaps resulted in some grumbling from soldiers, it was the censorship of letters received by soldiers from home that caused perhaps some of the strongest

[26] Ibid., 'Report of Moral, &c.', Section III, No. 8. Beyond this, Hardie's remarks on attitudes to censorship as 'the usual kind', perhaps meaning that by 1918, Field Censors had not discovered significant enough objections to it to merit further comment and, perhaps, a review of military regulations on censorship.
[27] F.W. Daniel, *The Field Censor Systems of the Armies of the British Empire, 1914-1918: Unit Allocations, War Office Based Types 1, 2, 3, 4, & 7* (The Forces Postal History Society: Crouch, Essex 1948) p. I-2

reactions against mail censorship. According to postwar reports on the relationship between military and civilian wartime mail censorship, civilian letters to soldiers were 'liable to examination at the bases', but for much of the war military censors mainly focused on limiting the address details on envelopes, which they feared would 'give away elements of the order of battle' if intercepted by the enemy.[28] In early 1918, however, letters from civilians to soldiers were examined by censors to 'discover the temper of the home populations' amidst perceived dangers of economic depression and 'international Socialists'. While soldiers grumbled over their own letters, the censorship of home letters 'became the subject of complaint by the men, and of questions in Parliament'.[29]

Hardie also found the strong reactions of British soldiers to the censorship of letters from home important enough for his analysis of morale to include in one of his reports. Remarking on soldiers' reactions to the cancellation of leave, Hardie found their anger justifiable, writing that 'the soldier is eminently reasonable…and accepts and recognizes the fact that his own letters are censored. But if his outcoming letters are censored, without any explanation, he suspects all kinds of things, and freely expresses his indignation'.[30] In the included letter extracts, Hardie revealed the importance of allowing soldiers to maintain an unfettered connection with home through letters, with many soldiers suspecting that the military wanted to suppress news of labor strife and economic hardship at home from them – of which they were already aware.[31] In the end, it was uncensored news of home life, not the censoring of life on the military front, that was

[28] A.S.L. Farquharson, *Report on Postal Censorship during the Great War, 1914-1919* (1920), p. 196, POST 56/57, Royal Mail Archive, British Postal Museum (London, UK). All subsequent citations from this archive will be abbreviated as 'RMA'.
[29] Ibid., p. 196. Ultimately, the scheme was abandoned by March 1918 due to the general outcry against it – especially from soldiers.
[30] Private Papers of M. Hardie, Report on Postal Censorship, Italian Expeditionary Force (February-July 1918), pp. 34-35, Doc. 4041, Ref. 84/46/1, IWM.
[31] Ibid., pp. 34-35.

central to the morale of soldiers in the British Army. Although life on the home front itself lost much of its mundanity by 1918, soldiers and those they wrote to back home could still turn to letters to maintain a semblance of their mundane private lives beyond the First World War.

Despite the lack of a large body of Field Censor Reports from the British Army, there remains enough to understand the content limitations placed on the letters written by British soldiers during the First World War. Additionally, it also reveals the driving forces behind mail censorship enforced by the Army, and the Army's recognition that it could not fully suppress details on the war experiences of soldiers shared in letters home due to its own organizational need to assess the morale of its own troops from the letters that they wrote. In a way, while it had its own self-interested motivations for doing so, the British Army and its censorship system was not insensitive to the emotional ties of its soldiers to their home and prewar lives, and it created an apparatus capable of handling their correspondence. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that military mail censorship regulations focused on what could or could not be written rather than attempting to understand why soldiers wrote letters in the first place and the extent to which censorship affected their epistolary relationships, which requires a deeper look beyond official reports and regulations and into letters themselves.

The Censored

Regulations aside, the experience of censorship by those directly subjected to it – enlisted men or, in the British Army, the 'ranks' – reveals the extent to which military regulations suppressed what soldiers wrote in their letters home in reality rather than in theory. As noted, regulations did offer some flexibility with what soldiers could write about the war and offered some avenues for privacy with GEs, but regulations only tell part of the story of wartime mail

censorship. Indeed, an integral view into mail censorship comes from soldiers' letters themselves, which reveal their attitudes to censorship, what was actually censored in their letters, and the extent to which content restrictions played in what they wrote in their correspondence as a whole. In these letters, while soldiers did at time resent military authorities – particularly their own regimental officers, surveilling their private letters, these same men wrote rather frankly about their own wartime experiences and of their attitudes to the war itself. Furthermore, looking at the content about the war in letters from the ranks, there is a considerable amount of detail that violated censorship regulations in theory, thus indicating the haphazard nature of censorship in practice by officers in the British Army. Perhaps most importantly, censorship and allusions to the war in letters aside, the epistolary relationships of the ranks show not just testimony of war, but rather an emotional experience of war shared between soldiers and civilians overwhelmingly located in the mundanity of not just prewar life, but also the perceived mundanity of war itself.

According to Martha Hanna, censorship to soldiers 'was an annoyance, sometimes a convenient excuse, but rarely an absolute impediment to martial communication'.[32] In many of the fragments that remain of British soldiers' correspondence, there are quite a few instances where men expressed emotions ranging from annoyance to outrage over their letters being censored. For some soldiers, anger arose over the initial introduction of mail censorship. Following his arrival at the Western Front, after claiming in one letter that 'we are allowed to put no dates or to mention the war', A.S.C. Fox declared that 'I can quite understand how it is that officers get shot from behind in war time'. In response to mail censorship, Fox decided to keep a

[32] Hanna, 'The Couple', in Winter, ed., *Cambridge History of the First World War*, Vol. III p. 12.

diary in order to keep track of his wartime activities.[33] Nevertheless, after his early negative reaction, Fox stopped dwelling on censorship and continued to write letters home and settled into an epistolary relationship with his family focused around daily activities and news at home and on the Western Front until he was killed in action on 16 October 1915. In other cases, irritation stemmed from inconsistencies in censorship not from the system itself, but from individual censoring officers. For R. Towler, it was officers 'fresh from Blighty' over-censoring letters that led to his own annoyance, declaring in a letter that 'our officers lack so much self confidence that there is no telling what they might object to'.[34] In most of these cases, it was not the constant recognition of censorship that affected letter-writing, but rather either the introduction of these regulations or individual cases of over-censorship that provoked negative reactions from soldiers. Otherwise, wishing to carry on maintaining their links to prewar life, soldiers simply just wrote without much comment on the fact that their letters were being surveilled by military authorities until it became immediately relevant.

Overall, most allusions to censorship by soldiers arose from their inability to write their exact locations at the front for people back home, with attitudes ranging from mere acceptance to frustration. In many letters from the Western Front, it was common for a soldier to simply address their letter with 'Somewhere in France'.[35] Unable to share his location, A. Carter simply stated to his sister that 'I cannot give you names of places here as it would be interesting to you

[33] A.S.C. Fox, 19 January 1915 letter transcript p. 20, GS 0577, Liddle Collection (LC), Brotherton Library, University of Leeds, Leeds, UK. Subsequent citations to this collection will be marked 'LC'. In an excerpt from his diary, Fox also wrote 'our section censor came up to me this morning and dug me in the ribs and said "You didn't say much in your letter home, Fox, except about the censor". I said "well what could I have said that you wouldn't have cut out?"'. See pp. 20-22. Fox eventually received a commission as a junior officer, thereby freeing himself from letter censorship. Nevertheless, the continuity in the letter content from his time in the ranks to his commission is striking.

[34] R. Towler, 14 January 1918, GS 1616, LC. In the same rather large letter, he admitted attempting to avoid this disruption from overzealous censors by exclusively writing in GEs.

[35] For an example, see Private Papers of A. English, letter 27 March 1917, Doc. 6448, Ref. 97/10/1, IWM. There are many more instances of soldiers using this 'address' on the Western Front.

as they are well known'.[36] To bypass this regulation, some men turned to coded messages to share this information, with R.I. Smith admitting in his postwar recollections that 'at the ending of my letter I would put in a silly sentence which made no sense to them, but if they took the first letter of each word it would give them the clue'.[37] In most cases, however, soldiers simply accepted that they could not share this information in letters and continued to write about news from home and shared general details about their own wartime lives.

Grumbling aside, as official censorship instructions indicate later in the war, soldiers were not shy about violating military regulations to avoid censorship. With Green Envelopes only having small chance of being opened by Base Censors, some soldiers attempted to take advantage of this privilege as much as possible, with censorship lectures reminding regimental officers that 'men often have their Green Envelopes sent back to them for use a second time'.[38] Other soldiers would try to avoid the Field Post Offices altogether. When a soldier went on leave, they would often carry with them the letters of their comrades to be mailed within Britain itself through the civilian post, while wounded men could send mail through the Red Cross, which did not require military censorship. One soldier wrote to his parents telling them 'This letter is coming over by hand by a pal on leave, but say nothing to anyone how you know the news which may be in it…it is a risk this but still it is nice to be able to let you know a little more'.[39] Despite complaints from censors and enforced limits over mail volume, 'Art' Burke wrote home that 'I shall enclose letters for other people from time to time, which I ask you to

[36] Private Papers of A. Carter, undated latter from 1915, Doc. 10845, Ref. 86/8/1, IWM.
[37] Private Papers of R.I. Smith, memoir p. 6, Doc. 2737, Ref. 86/36/1, IWM
[38] Lecture on the Postal Censorship Orders, LBK .80360, IWM.
[39] F. Alder, letter 26 July 1917, GS 0012, LC. Interestingly, Alder's main objective in bypassing censorship was to mainly share more exact details about his locations on the Western Front.

forward on'.[40] Additionally, at least in the earlier years of the war on the Western Front, soldiers' letters also found their way into the French and Belgian civilian post offices. Ultimately, as the British Army grew and realized all the ways that its soldiers avoided mail censorship and 'news of impending operations…[is becoming] far more widely known than is desirable', it released pamphlets in November 1916 to stress the importance of mail regulations and censorship.[41]

With these regulations formally posted in the field and violations aside, soldiers as a rule did attempt to conform to these rules over their correspondence, but would nonetheless make joking references in letters to them at the expense of the censor. Indeed, some soldiers, knowing that their regimental officers would read their letters, would consciously address censors or mock them on certain occasions. In an attempt to bring some humor to the situation, A.S.C. Fox joked in one letter 'if I were to write more it would only be on general topics…But if you would like to send me Confucius or Marcus Aurelius I will be able to write you quite long letters with my opinions about them – giving pleasure to you, to the Censor, who will doubtless be edified, and last and of course least myself'.[42] After having many of his recent letters censored in the spring of 1917, 'Charlie' Ramsdale wrote 'I have heard the suggestion made that it would be a good idea if the dear people at home were to start a fund for supplying officers with india-rubbers, as their scissors are being so much overworked that they are liable to get stiff in the joints!'[43] After

[40] Private Papers of A.P. Burke, 13 December 1915, Doc. 1665, Con Shelf, IWM. This could either mean that, under restrictions to a single letter per week, Burke either wrote multiple letters for one envelope, or took other men's letters to place into his single envelope. Either way, this constituted a violation of military regulation.
[41] Boyden, *Tommy Atkins' Letters*, pp. 29-30. War Office, *Censorship Orders and Regulations for Troops in the Field* (1916), p. 3, LBY/EPH 1401, IWM.
[42] A.S.C. Fox, 19 January 1915 letter and diary transcript pp. 20-22, GS 0577, LC.
[43] Private Papers of C.W. Ramsdale, 10 March 1917, Doc. 2081, Con Shelf, IWM. He mentions saving this letter for a GE – included in the collection, so a Field Censor possibly read his jokes about recent censorship. In a later letter, Ramsdale claimed to have adjusted his writing habits by only writing on one side of paper in the event a

writing a long letter, 'Jack' Sweeney closed with 'Well dearest I think I must now close as the Censor is getting fed up with reading this scribble and I expect he wants to be in time for lunch'.[44] While the censor existed as a conscious element in their letters home, soldiers nonetheless found ways to make the experience of censorship humorous in some ways to themselves and, perhaps, to the censor himself.

When soldiers were given some level of discretion with GEs, some risked the inclusion of censorable materials in their letters, but many more adhered to the regulations and simply wrote with more personal and intimate detail. While he did not violate censorship regulations in one GE, A. English spoke more openly about his fears that the war and soldiering may change his civilian outlook in the aftermath, but ultimately decided 'one never knows – I've got an idea I'll resume all the joys of civilian slackness with quite an indecent amount of haste and enthusiasm'.[45] Writing with a GE after getting married on his most recent leave, Denis Henrick Jones chose to write to his new wife about their short time together, telling her to 'forget all the lonely feelings and we'll be with each other all the time…what a wonderful future I've got to live for now'.[46] Violations aside, what GEs seemed to offer soldiers was a greater opportunity not to just talk about the war and their experiences, but rather their own emotional well-being and their intimacy with civilian or home life without the surveillance of an outsider. Essentially, invested in carrying on their private life outside the war, GEs allowed them to write to that effect with less of a chance that the war or military would intervene or surveil their private lives. This reaction reveals that perhaps in most cases, grumbling and resentment over censorship was due

---

censor decided to cut out parts of a letter, but changed his habit after his mother and sister complained that he was wasting paper. See 3 April 1917 letter.

[44] Private Papers of D.J. Sweeney, 11 August 1916, Doc. 7397. Con Shelf, IWM.

[45] Private Papers of A. English, letter 17 May 1917, Doc. 6448, Ref. 97/10/1, IWM. The GE was not included, but he begins the letter indicating that it was written and posted with GE.

[46] Private Papers of D. Henrick Jones, 25 December 1916, Doc. 16345, Ref. 08/66/1, IWM.

to a perceived invasion of privacy by the military into their private lives. Given that soldiers wrote frankly in many letters about their war experiences, they perhaps found it more difficult to share more emotional, intimate details outside the war – the main objective of correspondence for many – when they knew that an outside observer would read it. For many, the GEs allowed soldiers – at least in theory – to write more frankly about what they wished to talk about in letters. Equipped with a GE for a letter, H. Humpage admitted that 'if I haven't a green envelope I don't like to put much in for an officer to read only just enough to let you know I am alright it doesn't do to let everybody know ones business [*sic*]'.[47] With the chance of military surveillance partly lifted with a GE, what is striking is that Humpage hardly mentions wartime experience or anything extraordinary. Rather, he focused far more on news from home and shared his plans for Christmas in Egypt that year. Indeed, as far as many soldiers were concerned, their private lives and relationships were no business of the censor.

Ultimately, censorship regulations certainly affected the ways that soldiers wrote letters home during the First World War. While these rules and the surveillance of their writing certainly produced grumbling and resentment, it did not stop men in the ranks from writing a large body of correspondence. These letters, with an emphasis on news from home and maintaining ties to prewar relationships, appear as mundane reading to outside observers, but it was not necessarily a product of censorship. Rather, the mundanity of letter-writing was a conscious choice of soldiers, who were far more invested in keeping up with private matters outside the war than the war itself. Indeed, given the official regulations of the British Army, the mundane home life of soldiers was in no way censorable.

[47] H. Humpage, letter 24 December 1918, EP 038, LC.

The Censors

While the experience of the ranks having their letters censored offers important insight into what information the BEF did not want exposed to potential enemy interception, it is also necessary to look at the experience of censors themselves, who also wrote their own sizable correspondence to people back home. From their own correspondence and military regulations directed at officers assigned censorship duties, the experience of censors reveals the haphazard implementation of British military mail censorship during the First World War. In many instances, these 'regimental censors' not only failed to fully censor the letters of their men, they also avoided censoring in some cases and ignored the rules in their own letters home.

Unlike the men that they censored, regimental officers – mainly junior officers on the front lines – were given the privilege to censor and frank their own letters home.[48] One officer commented on the absurdity of this in one of his letters, writing 'First of all let me tell you I have now a very strict censor to censor my letters i.e. myself'.[49] Military lectures, however, reminded these officers that they were expected to abide by the same censorship guidelines as the men under their command. Nevertheless, as the 1918 lecture on postal censorship indicates, officers did not necessarily follow these rules, noting that 'many cases have been found which give the impression that some officers consider their letters above all censorship rules'.[50] Officers were also forbidden from discussing the letters of their men that they had to censor due partly to past

[48] Given that many junior officers did face some form of censorship in their letters, it seems that there were some exceptions to this privilege. The privilege was either limited to junior officers in front line postings and regimental censorship alone. Base Censors still seem to censor letters of officers, particularly those posted behind the lines. Additionally, the fact that junior officers still used GEs for some of their correspondence indicates that there was some censorship of their letters beyond the regimental level.
[49] D.H. Fryer, letter 25 April 1916, RNMN 108, LC.
[50] Lecture on the Postal Censorship Orders, LBK .80360, IWM.

violations by censors and the military necessity to maintain good officer-man relations and trust down the ranks:

It is unfortunately only too common that regimental officers discuss among themselves the contents of letters censored by them, and there are some who even go so far as to joke over the private affairs of their men. You should never forget that the private affairs of the men must be regarded as absolutely confidential, and every officer should reflect upon what his own feelings would be if his private letters were made the subject of ribald conversation in the mess or orderly room.[51]

In his diary, 'Raymond' Preece offers a detailed description of the experience of censoring letters by a regimental junior officer – described as a 'long job':

The men I found could be divided into several classes. 1st the men who obeyed orders & mentioned nothing that was forbidden & yet continued to write an amusing letter. A very small & valued class. 2nd the men who attempted to get around orders…One of these I had to destroy altogether sending the wife however a note saying that her husband was well but exceedingly indiscreet. A small class but very annoying. 3rd the man who grumbles at everything & everybody. Small class letters usually destroyed. The worst examples are amongst non-combatant units. 4th The man who tries to bother the censor & officers generally. Sent for & told off usually very objectionable and lastly the great majority who mention nothing of interest either to Bosch hands or mine.[52]

As the case of H.E.V. Williams showed at the start of this chapter, junior officers expected to censor letters often did not exhibit enthusiasm for the work, and seemingly did not find much that was censorable. Like Williams, they would share in their own letters or diaries their reactions to the experience of censoring. Confronted with such an unusual experience, they reacted to the task of censoring with emotions ranging from affection for their men to the sheer annoyance and absurdity of having to censor such a large body of letters. Upon his arrival at the Western Front, J.C.B. Wakeford wrote to his mother about how central the task was to camp life:

[51] Lecture on the Postal Censorship Orders, LBK .80360, IWM. This same section also barred officers from writing comments on their men's censored letters.
[52] Private Papers of H.R. Preece, diary entry 27 July 1917, Doc. 12717, Ref. 04/4/1, IWM.

We put in most of the day asleep, and the rest censoring sappers' letters. Though interesting at first, they bore after a time, and the unhappy reader is driven to hope in despair that the next one will say something new. The next one is probably written in Welsh, which prevents him finding out whether his hopes were realised or not.[53]

Historian Gary Sheffield has argued that reading and censoring men's letters allowed British junior officers 'to gain real insights into the minds of their men'.[54] In a way, officers certainly could learn about their men from these letters, but the combination of the 'mundane' content of letters and the reality that censors were not a part of the epistolary relationship that they were reviewing led these officers in many cases to find the exercise of censorship a tedious exercise. At best, officers could learn as an outside observer of an ongoing relationship, but the fact that he was not part of this relationship barred him from fully understanding, thus resulting in adverse reactions to the mundanity of these letters and, by extension, the experience of censoring.

Nevertheless, despite their distaste for the task, regimental censors did at times find ways to empathize with their men and understood how strongly their emotional ties to home held despite their physical separation from it – sentiments that censors themselves most certainly shared with their men. Regimental censors did express fondness at times in their own letters home for their men from what they found in letters they had to censor. What they often found most compelling were not their men's comments on the war or their wartime experiences, but rather their more mundane relationships with home expressed in men's letters. In many cases, they remembered not simply their allusions to war experience that both the censor and censored shared, but rather the closeness that they shared with whom they wrote outside the war. As an upper-class officer in command of 'corner boys of Glasgow & the surrounding mining towns',

[53] J.C.B. Wakeford, letter 10 December 1917, GS 1666, LC. Despite the lack of officers who could read it, Welsh was permitted in soldiers' letters and was not treated as 'code' to avoid censorship. Rather, letters written in Welsh were sent to the Chief Postal Censor at the War Office. See Censorship Orders and Regulations for Troops in the Field (1917), p. 12, LBY/EPH 1402, IWM.
[54] Sheffield, *Leadership in the Trenches*, pp. 136-137.

Oliver Lyle declared that after he began censoring letters he 'got to like them all much more…Funnily enough the biggest blackguards write the kindest, most unselfish letters', while another officer remarked that 'the men write such charming letters…it quite puts me to shame'.[55] Recalling censoring to be a 'task we didn't like', A.H. Crerar still fondly recalled one letter he censored, writing in his postwar recollections that 'My prize memory was a quite affectionate letter from a tough old Regular Soldier which finished up with "Your loving husband Joe. P.S. I wunner who yer sleeping with to-night ye auld bitch"'.[56] In a letter to his brother, Edward Ramsden alluded to men's letters shared between censors, remarking that one man wrote 'My dear Mary, I would rather be in bed with you than in this trench with 6 dead Germans'.[57] Another censor shared an excerpt from one man written to his wife, remarking that 'One Jock wrote home very briefly and to the point: "Dear Jennie, I am expecting leave soon. Take a good look at the floor, you'll see nothing but the ceiling when I get home"'.[58]

Fondness aside, censors also were struck at times by the blandness of their men's letters, ranging from their form to the sheer lack of content that they could find interesting as an outside reader to an epistolary relationship, that provoked either resentment over the task of censoring or, in cases of unobjectionable letters, a distaste for invading someone's privacy. One censor found it amusing how all of his men adhered to identical writing conventions, with mundane well-wishes like 'just a line hoping you are in the pink as it leaves me at present'.[59] Writing in his diary about men whose letters 'mention nothing of interest', 'Raymond' Preece considered them

[55] O. Lyle, letter 25 August 1915, GS 0992, LC; M.F.C. Willson, letter 19 December 1916, GS 1760, LC.
[56] A.H. Crerar, postwar recollections p. 37, GS 0387, LC.
[57] E. Ramsden, letter 15 November 1914, GS 1321, LC.
[58] Tony Allen, 'Tommy's Mail & the Army Post Office – The Unit Mail Censor', Picture Postcards from the Great War, 1914-1918, URL: https://www.worldwar1postcards.com/soldiers-mail.php (Accessed 31 January 2019).
[59] G.K. Wait, 27 July 1916, GS 1664, LC. This connects with Fussell's observations of 'British Phlegm' in wartime letters by soldiers, where strict cultural and literary conventions prohibited men from saying anything 'bad' about their experiences. See Fussell, *Great War and Modern Memory: Illustrated*, pp. 227-229.

to be 'dear good fellows who send their love to baby & pages of kisses to their wives & sweethearts' and admitted that he 'hated censoring their letters - it seemed like prying into their inmost secrecies. Still it had to be done'.[60] In a way, the task of censoring letters from the ranks also provoked resentment amongst censors due to the fact that the sheer volume of letters in need of censoring stopped them from writing their own letters home. In one letter, a censor grumbled that 'I haven't had a minute to write to anyone for some time…when I have had a spare minute or two I have been too busy censoring letters'.[61] Another junior officers had to cut his own letter short with an explanation that 'I have a whole lot of letters to censor and it grows near post time so I must stop now'.[62]

Given the sheer number of letters that officers had to censor, it is worth considering whether or not officers could effectively censor their men's letters and if the resulting resentment over the task led to inconsistencies that allowed men some room to avoid regulations in their letters.[63] Indeed, with this tedium in mind, regimental censors found as many ways as possible to avoid the task of censoring their men's letters. In official military documents on censorship near the end of the war, details on the duties of censorship indicate that junior officers in many cases attempted to avoid having to censor letters. When alluding to 'Green Envelopes', the 1918 lecture had to remind officers that these envelopes 'may not be used as a means to absolve officers from the duty of censorship by inducing or compelling men to send all their letters by

[60] Private Papers of H.R. Preece, diary entry 27 July 1917, Doc. 12717, Ref. 04/4/1, IWM.
[61] A.C. Slaughter, letter 21 July 1916, GS 1485, LC.
[62] Private Papers of C.I. Johnson, 23 August 1916, Doc. 20699, Ref. 79/33/1, IWM.
[63] Roper also noted that 'the sheer bulk of the correspondence ensured that the officer's censorship was bound to be patchy'. See Roper, *The Secret Battle*, p. 50.

this means'. Officers were further reminded that they could not send ordinary letters to the Base Censors to 'save [themselves] the trouble of censoring them'.[64]

In many cases, intentionally or unintentionally, officers violated many of the censorship regulations they were meant to enforce in their own letters. In 1914, perhaps before stricter enforcement of mail censorship, E.C. Mercer wrote home giving detailed descriptions of his unit and position on the Western Front – with unit information included in the heading, sharing that 'There are quite 700 men in the battalion going strong. But I don't want you to mention anything about the strength of the regiment. Our position is very favourable and we are fairly rounding them up'.[65] Blatant violations aside, even when they did not outright ignore censorship rules, they would allude to doing so openly in their letters. During heavy fighting on the Western Front, perhaps with some added oversight by Field Censors towards junior officers and their mail, E.G.H. Power wrote home that he would share details of his experiences 'one day when Mr [*sic*] Censor will let it pass. I want this bit of a letter to get through so will not put any contraband goods in it'.[66] Many junior officers, who had obtained classical educations at British elite public schools and universities, coded some of their war experiences within allusions to Greco-Roman mythology and literature.[67] Others, wishing their families to know their location

[64] Lecture on the Postal Censorship Orders, LBK .80360, IWM.
[65] Private Papers of E.C. Mercer, 23 September 1914, Doc. 2025, Ref. 92/52/1, IWM. In a later letter, Mercer wrote that he could not share details of his movements, as 'all letters are censored by the Adjutant'. See 4 October 1914 letter.
[66] E.G.H. Power, letter 12 May 1915, GS 1292, LC. Interestingly, as a junior officer, Power was not subjected to censorship regulations on the same level as the ranks, which indicates that officers' letters were occasionally censored at the Base, or Power used it as an excuse not to share details at the time.
[67] David Englander saw the use of classical education by British soldiers in the First World War as a way to evade censorship in their letters. See Englander, 'Soldiering and Identity', p. 308. While it certainly did provide soldiers with a means of evasion, classical education also simply offered them a means to explain their war experiences in terms understood by the people they wrote to on the home front – or, more specifically, within certain epistolary relationships. For an example of this classical articulation of war experience, see the case study on community letters from Wadham College.

or other censorable details, would use Ancient Greek or Latin as a sort of cypher – a blatant violation of military regulations.[68]

In the end, junior regimental officers had trouble effectively censoring their own letters let alone those written by their men in the ranks. In their own letters, officers reacted with a mix of fondness for their men's lives beyond the war that they uncovered while censoring their letters and frustration over the sheer volume of letters that appeared to an outside observer as utterly mundane. Additionally, even in their own letters home, officers found it difficult at times to always follow military regulations that they were expected to enforce on their own men. Nevertheless, beyond the frustration over the task and the evasion of censorship, what is compelling here is what censors found most compelling about their men's letters and the similarities between the letters of censors and censored men: their need to maintain their emotional ties to home and life beyond the First World War.

Civilians and Censorship: The Centrality of Home

Commenting on the volume of letters received and epistolary relationships from home that he had to keep up with at one point during the war, Charlie Ramsdale declared 'I hope to reply to them all as I have opportunity; but the state of my correspondence is nearly enough to make me go grey, or lose my thatch altogether!'.[69] Along with military regulations and the attitudes of censors and censored to the censorship of letters, it is equally important to understand the other end of epistolary relationships that demanded so many letters from soldiers like Ramsdale: civilian readers and writers and the emotional and personal factors that shaped this

[68] For an example, see P.H. Rawson, letter 8 March 1916, GS 1332, LC. Excerpt reads 'We have come down South…to some fresh trenches at [in Ancient Greek letters] Bailleul'.
[69] Private Papers of C.W. Ramsdale, 10 March 1917, Doc. 2081, Con Shelf, IWM.

correspondence. In his censorship report, Hardie noted that 'in reading the correspondence of the Army one cannot help feeling impressed by the extent to which spirits, individually and collectively, are affected by news from home'.[70] While his concerns were for military morale in the aftermath of the German Spring Offensive, what his report does reveal beyond this is the centrality of home life to the war experiences of soldiers expressed within their communication. While conditions and experiences on the military front certainly did affect the ways in which soldiers wrote letters home, their letters were equally shaped by the civilians they corresponded with, who not only demanded frankness from soldiers about their wartime experiences, but also offered them an outlet from which to escape their immediate military surroundings and return to prewar lives that they hoped to return to in the postwar world.

In most cases, the mundanity of soldiers' letters was not grounded in their own need to hide truths about their experiences, avoid censorship, or a sense of alienation from home, but rather the shared ties between both correspondents to mundane prewar life. While many letter collections from the First World War do not contain much of the civilian side of these epistolary relationships, what remains of it in many instances reveals a correspondence grounded both in maintaining emotional ties beyond war and constant concern over the whereabouts and well-being of soldiers to whom they wrote. While Albert Baker fought on the Western Front, his sister Margaret wrote to share details about home life and provide news about others they knew fighting in the war. Beyond this, she demanded that Albert be safe while engaged in the fighting and keep writing letters, provided updates on her home life, replied to past letters, inform him about parcel items being sent to him, and pass on regards from acquaintances back home that he

[70] Private Papers of M. Hardie, Report on Postal Censorship, Italian Expeditionary Force (Feb.-July 1918), p. 22, Doc. 4041, Ref. 84/46/1, IWM

had known before the war. In his letters to Margaret, rather than straying off to share long, graphic details about his wartime experiences, Albert adhered to the established conversation as much as possible. While only fragments of this correspondence remain, what appears are hints of how wartime letter-writing between soldiers and civilians played out, with conversations over shared mundanity rather than one-sided testimonies of war.[71] In a letter written in the event of his death – which came during the Battle of the Somme in 1916, Albert dwelled not on wartime service, patriotism, or sacrifice, but rather on the emotional ties to his family and requesting that they 'remember me to all my old friends' from before the war.[72] Like Albert, many men would end letters with requests that they be remembered to others back home that they knew from before the war and their military service. In these requests, they hoped that this 'remembering' would incite memories not of men like Albert as soldiers, but rather as the people they had known in a far different, far more mundane context.

Indeed, in considering the mundane side of civilian correspondence, soldiers generally expressed a desire in their own letters for mundane news from home and avoid conversations about the war. Writing about the recent 'rush of officers to the mess when word came that the Post was in', C.I. Johnson declared 'I can see & hear enough of war, and am much more interested to hear whether the hens are "doing their bit" and how the roses are growing & that sort of thing'.[73] When his fiancée asked if he would like her to write her letters differently, Denis Henrick Jones replied 'I would much rather have you write as you always do…your letters darling are the best things I get out here. I can read them over & over again'.[74] In his brief memoir, R. Saunders recalled the arrival of mail as a major source of bonding between soldiers

[71] Private Papers of A.G. Baker, letters 1914-1916, Doc. 8576, Ref. 01/6/1, IWM.
[72] Ibid., Summer 1916 farewell letter.
[73] Private Papers of C.I Johnson, letter 20 November 1917, Doc. 20699, Ref. 79/33/1, IWM.
[74] Private Papers of D. Henrick Jones, 15 September 1915, Doc. 16345, Ref. 08/66/1, IWM.

of various peacetime backgrounds, writing that 'the fellows with parcels would share with those who did not get any. You read letters to each other and at times shared intimate details about your life'.[75] Letters written after home leave also reveal the importance of ties to life outside the war and an emotional closeness to it over an alienation from it. After one leave, 'Raymond' Preece wrote to thank his parents for his time on leave with them, declaring that each leave 'makes a hard thing easy to bear & sends one out, heartened, instead of depressed – refreshed, instead of wearied – in admiration, rather than in tears'.[76] In a way, despite the extraordinary circumstances that drove them together and the experiences that they shared, soldiers bonded far more over their shared interest in the mundane lives that they had all left than the violence of wartime.

Looking at instances where soldiers wrote about their inability to share their locations in letters and offer more detailed news about their experiences, it is necessary to wonder if these allusions to censorship stemmed from demands for further details on the civilian side of the epistolary relationship. Some civilians, anxious to know where their loved ones were in the fighting, would ask soldiers to violate their own censor regulations with requests for their location. Writing to her soon-to-be husband in France, Grace Malin asked Fred Sellers if he could write the location of his unit since he censored his own letters as a junior officer, declaring in her own letter that 'I will have no peace until I know'.[77] For the mother of E.C. Mercer, she wanted to know his location to ensure that he was receiving parcels that she had sent and that she

[75] Private Papers of R. Saunders, memoir p. 14, Doc. 6570, Ref. 79/15/1, IWM.
[76] Private Papers of H.R. Preece, 28 August 1918, Doc. 12717, Con Shelf, IWM. While difficult to analyze from wartime letters, the experience of 'home leave' during the First World War remains a subject in need of further study.
[77] Private Papers of F.A. Sellers, letter from Grace to Fred, 14 June 1917, Doc. 16954, Ref. 09/32/1, IWM.

would continue to have a consistent line of communication with him during the war.[78] To signal his wife that he was moving into the trenches or that he had left the trenches without incident, W. Parkin told her that he would send postcards (most likely the Field Service Postcard), acknowledging that 'it is awful for you' to not have news of his whereabouts.[79] After his deployment to France in 1915, 'Art' Burke's family quickly observed a decrease in 'news' from his letters, to which Burke explained that censorship forced him to be 'very careful, lest some [letters] should be thrown out'. In response to queries about his location, he wrote that 'it's a small village – its position & conditions I cannot tell – but it's alright'. He also alluded to his interest in military logistics and procedures, but ended abruptly with 'here the censor will chip in again so must reserve all the interesting news for now'.[80] After another letter stating that his family had not received any of his letters, Burke's frustration grew along with that of his family:

> I cannot understand you not getting any of my letters, in fact have written more than I should have done, the censor is complaining. As regards me not sending much news, you must understand am very restricted – in fact I am beginning to think some of mine have been burned. It shall have to be sufficient for you to know at present that I am in the very best of health - & am enjoying the life first rate – but oh for a sight of the dear home land.[81]

Even with censorship in place and complaints from home correspondents over a lack of detail in their letters from censorship regulations, soldiers like Burke continued to write letters in spite of the complaints from home and risking the ire of the censor. By extension, correspondents on the home front continued to demand letters from soldiers in spite of their protests over censorship and lack of details. In a way, the continuance of this correspondence highlights the underlying

[78] Private Papers of E.C. Mercer, mother's letter to 'Eric' 25 September 1914, Doc. 2025, Ref. 92/52/1, IWM. Sadly, 'Eric' Mercer was killed in action on 13 October 1914.
[79] Private Papers of W. Parkin, undated letter likely from between 12-19 January 1916, Doc. 12616, Ref. 03/15/1, IWM.
[80] Private Papers of A.P. Burke, undated letters from 1915, Doc. 1665, Con Shelf, IWM.
[81] Ibid., 5 December 1915.

emotional purpose behind wartime epistolary relationships. In spite of the desire to share detailed news, the complaints of those they wrote to, and the supervision of the censor, soldiers and civilians continued to write to one another with the ultimate goal of reassuring one another of their own emotional and physical well-beings. To these correspondents, this served a far greater purpose than any need to testify to war experiences and, despite ongoing frustrations, they contented themselves with mundane letters to achieve this goal. For soldiers, simply getting letters home – or even a Field Service Postcard – was more important at times than risking censorship violations by sharing more war news.

Censorship and complaints from home about the lack of news aside, many soldiers expressed in many of their letters that they had no interesting news to share, which perhaps implies an underlying mundanity to war experience itself. Asking for newspapers in his next parcel, C.A. Oldham admitted that 'we people who are in France do not know as much about the war as you in England'.[82] Writing from the safety of a GE, A. English realized in his letter 'Well, I'm not saying much about the war, am I? And me a soldier too! But there's not much in the way of news, except that we're thinking Fritz will pack up soon. And we hope he will, too'.[83] Others, perhaps aware of the possibility that censorship would inhibit their ability to post letters with vivid details of their experiences, would simply write that they would share this news the next time they were home on leave. After describing his latest posting in the trenches, W. Parkin hinted that his unit might transfer to Egypt, but decided that 'our leave starts very soon so

[82] Private Papers of C.A. Oldham, undated letter, Doc. 12728, Con Shelf, IWM.
[83] Private Papers of A. English, letter 17 May 1917, Doc. 6448, Ref. 97/10/1, IWM. While he focused more on 1914, Stuart Hallifax argues that many references to the 'short war' or expressions of optimism for the war ending were a coping mechanism for soldiers and civilians to endure the First World War. See Stuart Hallifax, '"Over by Christmas": British Popular Opinion and the Short War in 1914', *First World War Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (October 2010), pp. 103-121. For more on mental coping mechanisms, particularly optimism, for soldiers during the war, see also A. Watson, *Enduring the Great War*, pp. 92-100.

will be able to explain, talk to you in bed in the mornings (What Joy) so cheer up will be home with you soon'.[84] If these letters indicate anything of what many soldiers wanted to share about their war experiences to people back home, it was a mix of the everyday mundanity of soldiering and their eagerness for the war to end so that they could go home to an alternative mundanity that they desired far more.

If censorship did suppress much about the war that soldiers could not convey – or, conversely, if soldiers used censorship as an excuse to avoid talking about the war, civilians did show awareness of this and did not always accept information in soldiers' letters at face value. Indeed, perhaps thanks to their prewar bonds with these soldiers, civilians expressed a considerable level of skepticism over any details shared in letters that they received and intervened in their own letters when they sensed that trauma, disillusion, or a sense of alienation had entered the mindset of soldiers to whom they wrote. Fearing that his son, Harry, had become disillusioned and alienated from home due to the war, his father wrote to him a long emotional appeal after sensing a cry for help in Harry's recent correspondence and his mood while on his most recent home leave:

> Your letters appear to me to appeal for confidence and trust which is so absolute that it asks no questions, demands no evidence…I should like to see reciprocity established in candour and frankness without any reserve or mystery. You were not happy when you were here and you are not happy now…The war and a hundred other things tend to stifle many joys, no doubt, they even prevent our feelings from being cheerful, but they cannot turn our hearts, as long as we know that the essentials are all right…I suspect that subconsciously or consciously you are suffering from an oppression which affects you so deeply that its existence is evident…My dear Harry, you are more to all of

[84] Private Papers of W. Parkin, 28 February 1916, Doc. 12616, Ref. 03/15/1, IWM.

us than any words of mine can express; I have realized that more and more these four years [of war]…I do not expect an answer to my pleadings and entreaties in words, what I am hoping for is a deep, a decisive step.[85]

In a way, like Harry Siepmann and his family, the prewar ties and relationships attached to wartime letter-writing allowed civilians to be more intuitive with soldiers' letters, particularly in cases of emotional avoidance or trauma. Rather than soldiers testifying in a one-sided exchange to their experiences about the war, it was a two-sided conversation between soldiers and civilians turning to one another for emotional support that defined the exercise of wartime letter-writing. For some correspondents, war experience certainly played a role in letter-writing, but the maintenance of mundanity shared between reader and writer beyond the war remained a dominant theme, with soldiers wishing to remain tied to a life they had left behind and civilians ensuring that those who had left for the fighting remained tied to them.

Considering the mundane shape of their correspondence, soldiers perhaps were most affected by the war when they perceived that it or the military threatened to encroach on their relationships outside the conflict. Indeed, in most cases, this appears to be their primary motivation in writing letters home to civilians from their prewar lives. Perhaps what affected their experience of the war most was when they perceived that it threatened to disrupt their ties to home, especially in the later stages of the war. Hardie particularly noted this in 1918, when soldiers began to worry about food shortages at home, with excerpts of letters revealing soldiers declaring that if the issue was not resolved, their loyalty to home would come before their loyalty to the Army and the war – one letter even suggested that civilians should 'kill, bite or lynch' the

[85] H.A. Siepmann, letter from 'Father' 26 July 1918, GS 1469, LC.

Prime Minister, David Lloyd George, over the food shortages caused by the war.[86] To make matters worse, civilian letters to soldiers faced censorship regulations by 1918, which provoked enough of a reaction amongst soldiers that Hardie felt it necessary to report to the Army that there was a 'great deal of resentment' over it.[87] While soldiers in most cases consented to censorship of their own letters due to concerns over military security, they reacted most strongly to censorship when it was imposed on their relationships with home, an aspect of their correspondence that they did not see as the business of the censor. Furthermore, given the interest of the British Army in military morale, allowances for grumbling in censorship regulations allowed for soldiers to share these objections, thus helping them to preserve their emotional closeness with home.

In considering the influence of censorship on the letters written by soldiers, the civilian side of correspondence requires equal consideration. Rather than emphasizing instances of avoidance by soldiers and whether or not letters lacked enough graphic details about war experience, analyses of these letters requires an understanding of this communication as a continuation of a relationship that predated the war and, for most British soldiers of the war, military service. With this in mind, wartime letter-writing focused far more on maintaining this prewar relationship than sharing details on the war itself. When the war did enter this communication, civilians in many cases prompted soldiers into violating censorship guidelines that mediated their side of the exchange. Additionally, given the emotional closeness that accompanied prewar relationships and, by extension, wartime epistolary relationships, civilians also had the ability to discern when a soldier was alienated, traumatized, or disillusioned by their

[86] Private Papers of M. Hardie, Report on Postal Censorship, Italian Expeditionary Force (Feb.-July 1918), pp. 22-24, Doc. 4041, Ref. 84/46/1, IWM. Despite the volatile reactions shown in extracts, Hardie acknowledges that other soldiers were far more constructive in letters on the issue, with efforts made to reinforce civilian morale.
[87] Ibid., pp. 34-35.

war experiences. Coupled with the constant requests by soldiers to be 'remembered' to everyone back home in their letters, civilians perhaps equally turned to letters so that these soldiers could continue to 'remember' themselves as more than just the soldiers that they became in the First World War.

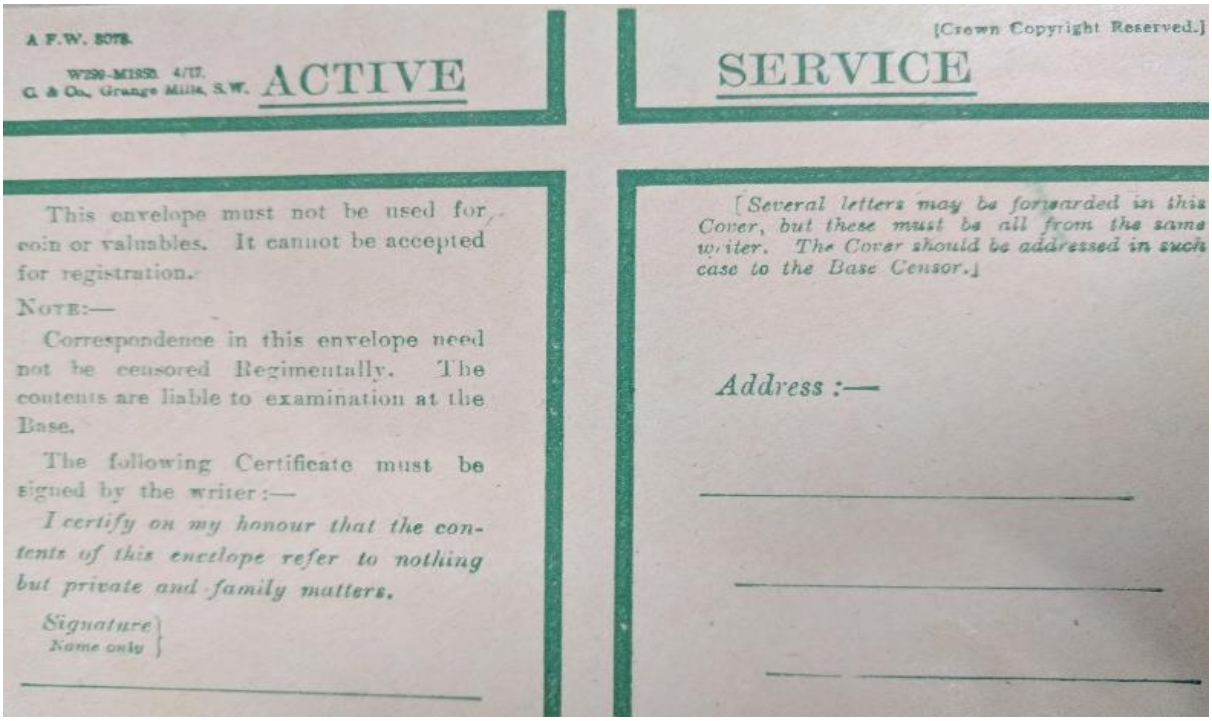
'A Mass of Uninteresting Correspondence': A Product of Censorship?

When confronted with this declaration made by H.E.V. Williams, it is necessary to wonder to what extent did censorship affect the letters written by British soldiers in the First World War. Perhaps more importantly, given the massive quantity of letters written during the conflict, it is necessary to question whether censorship – or, more broadly, suppression – defined British wartime correspondence. With military mail regulations that focused on the secrecy of military movements, casualties, and other information of use to the enemy, censors allowed a considerable amount of leeway for soldiers to not just complain, but also to articulate their experiences of the First World War in letters home provided they did not undermine military security. As instructions to censors and what remains of Field Censor Reports reveal, the British Army was far more interested in learning about the morale of their fighting force, a task that they could not accomplish without allowing soldiers to write frankly about their wartime experiences in letters.

Finally, in considering the combination of military regulations, the ability of soldiers to avoid mail censorship, and the attitudes and efforts by regimental officers like H.E.V. Williams to the task of censoring, the 'mass of uninteresting correspondence' written by soldiers was not produced by the external force of censorship, but rather their emotional ties to relationships at home beyond the First World War. By simply looking at instances of military mail censorship,

only a limited fragment of the experience of wartime letter-writing appears. In many ways, being censored, censoring, and self-awareness of censorship exhibited only a tiny fraction of the sheer letter-writing experience of British soldiers in the First World War. An analysis of censorship may show the ways in which content restrictions did – or did not – influence the ways that soldiers wrote, but it does not fully reveal the shape and emotional drives inherent within these wartime epistolary relationships, which were defined far more by their mundanity than the extraordinary oversight of military censorship and a need to testify to personal experience. To perhaps best understand the emotional nature and mundanity of First World War letter-writing, it is necessary to consider these letters not simply as individual cases of censorship or testimony, but rather as relationships that existed beyond the confines of war maintained and further developed in an epistolary context. For many, this mundanity stemmed from relationships with family or, according to Roper, the emotional centrality of the mother-son relationship. Nevertheless, these soldiers, whether youths just entering adulthood or adults with more established lives, had established prewar emotional bonds beyond family, and these bonds reveal that mundanity took on a myriad of forms in various wartime epistolary relationships. Like the maintenance of mundanity itself in wartime letters, these relationships are best understood not just by glimpsing into censorship or brief moments expressed in individual letters, but rather in the ways that epistolary relationships played out through wartime conditions and experiences, which forced soldier and civilian alike to negotiate prewar emotional bonds into recognizable postwar forms. Whether they were a college community, two friends at home and abroad, or two lovers pining for one another, these letters are extraordinary not simply for what they tell us about the First World War, but rather the centrality of mundane life to wartime experience.

Figures


A F.W. 3078.

W230-M1853 4/17.
G. & Co., Grange Mills, S.W.

ACTIVE

[Crown Copyright Reserved.]

SERVICE

This envelope must not be used for coin or valuables. It cannot be accepted for registration.

NOTE:—

Correspondence in this envelope need not be censored Regimentally. The contents are liable to examination at the Base.

The following Certificate must be signed by the writer:—

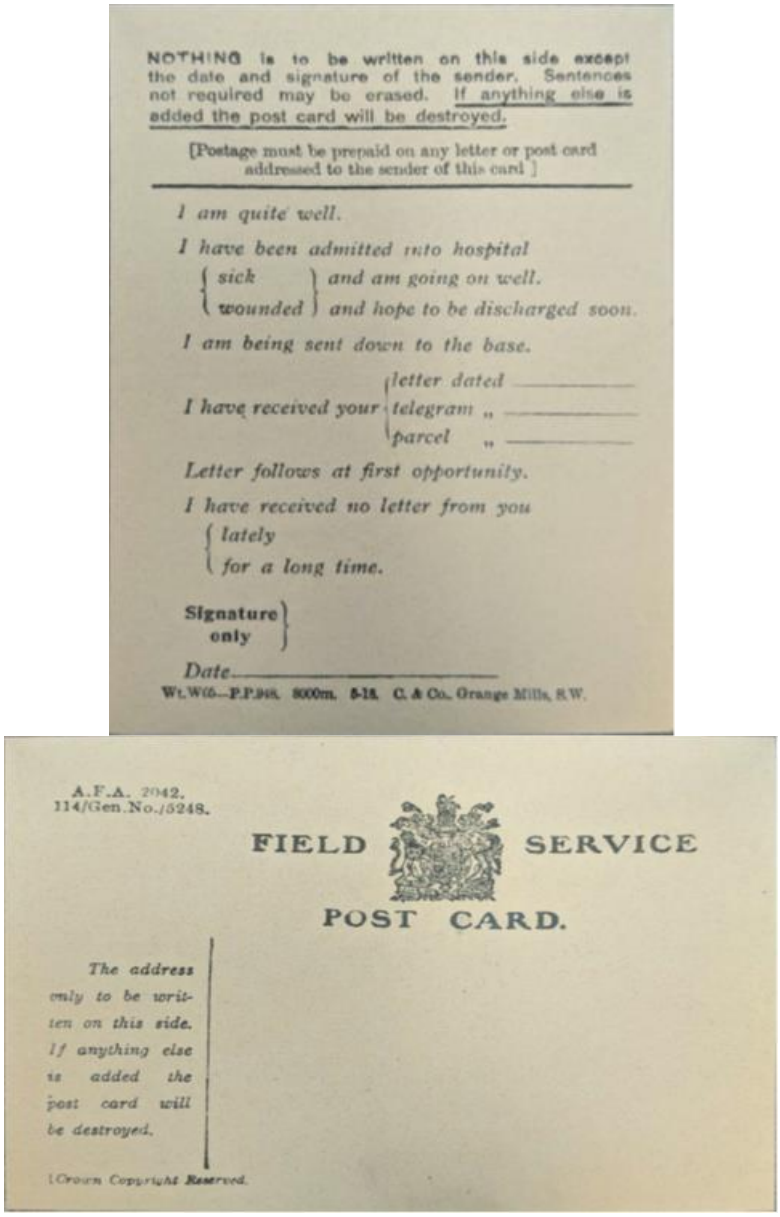
I certify on my honour that the contents of this envelope refer to nothing but private and family matters.

Signature
Name only

[*Several letters may be forwarded in this Cover, but these must be all from the same writer. The Cover should be addressed in each case to the Base Censor.*]

Address :—

Figure 2: Example of a British Army Green Envelope (GE). Sample from Lecture on the Postal Censorship Orders, War Office – General Staff and Publicity Section, LBK .80360, IWM.



NOTHING is to be written on this side except the date and signature of the sender. Sentences not required may be erased. If anything else is added the post card will be destroyed.

[Postage must be prepaid on any letter or post card addressed to the sender of this card.]

I am quite well.

I have been admitted into hospital { *sick* / *wounded* } *and am going on well.* / *and hope to be discharged soon.*

I am being sent down to the base.

I have received your { *letter dated* _____ / *telegram* „ _____ / *parcel* „ _____ }

Letter follows at first opportunity.

I have received no letter from you { *lately* / *for a long time.* }

Signature only

*Date*_____

Wt. W65—P.P.948. 8000m. 5-18. C. & Co., Orange Mills, S.W.

A.F.A. 2042.
114/Gen.No./5248.

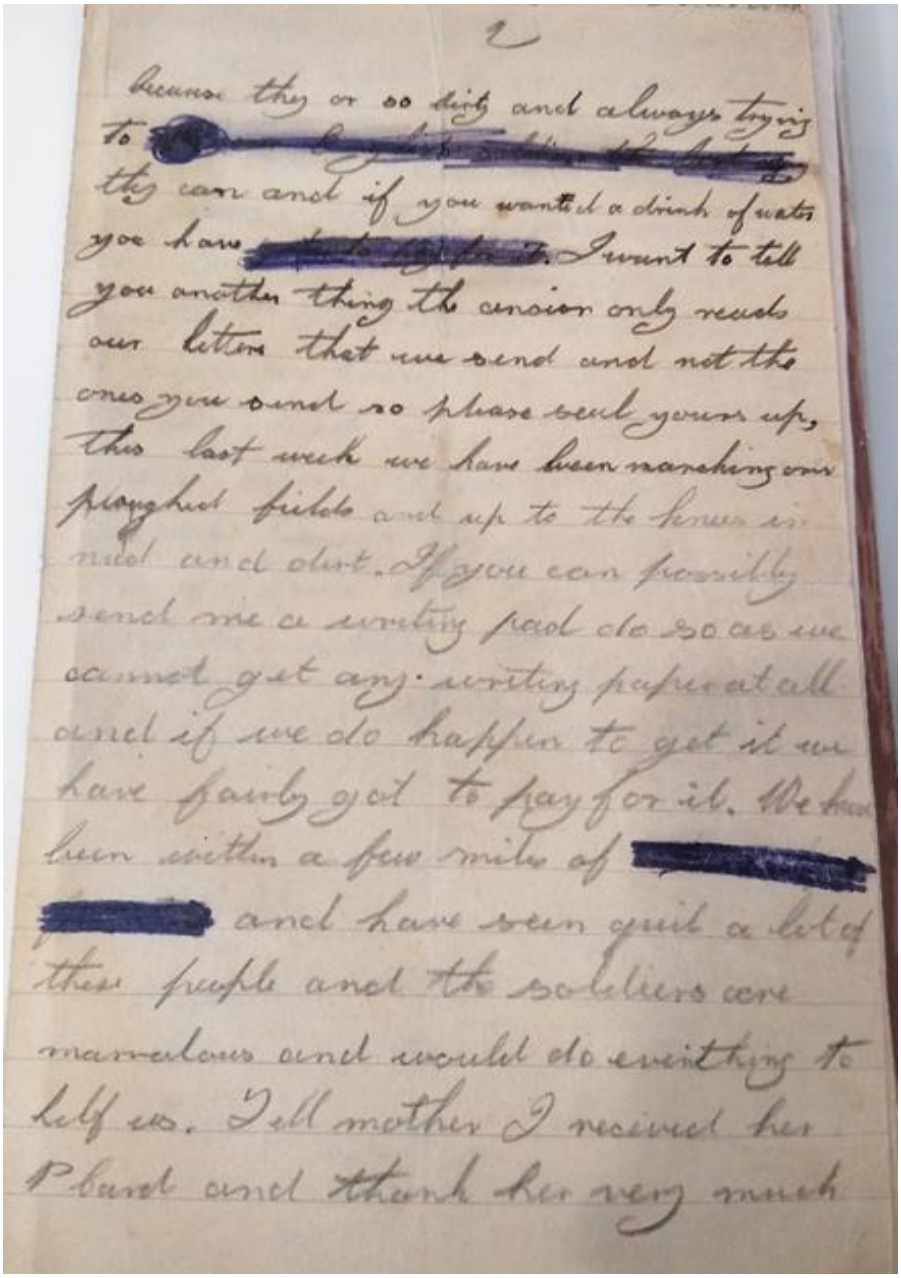
FIELD SERVICE

POST CARD.

The address only to be written on this side. If anything else is added the post card will be destroyed.

[Crown Copyright Reserved.

Figure 3:The sample front and back of a British Army Field Service Post Card.



2

because they are so dirty and always trying to [redacted] they can and if you wanted a drink of water you have [redacted]. I want to tell you another thing the censor only reads our letters that we send and not the ones you send so please send yours up, this last week we have been marching over ploughed fields and up to the knees in mud and dirt. If you can possibly send me a writing pad do so as we cannot get any writing paper at all and if we do happen to get it we have fairly got to pay for it. We have been within a few miles of [redacted] and have seen quit a lot of these people and the soldiers are marvelous and would do everything to help us. Tell mother I received her P.card and thank her very much

Figure 4: Censor marks on a letter. See Private Papers of C.A. Oldham, undated latter (February 1915), Doc. 12728, Con Shelf, IWM. The first mark censored his negative opinion of French civilians, while the second eliminated a mention of his location on the Western Front. In more extreme cases, censors would cut out entire sections of letters or destroy a letter altogether.

CHAPTER 2

‘MY DEAR WARDEN’

LETTERS FROM WADHAM COLLEGE, OXFORD

Introduction

On 20 May 1915, Harry Corbett wrote to Joseph Wells, the Warden of Wadham, his Oxford college, to share news of his experience on the Western Front. While he briefly recounted his wounding at Neuve Chapelle and other wartime matters, Corbett focused the conversation far more on the bond shared by him and Wells: their common identities as members of Wadham College at the University of Oxford. He told of how his friend and fellow college member, J.G. Sherriff, had been killed at Ypres on 26 April, mentioned who else from Wadham he had met at the front, shared his thoughts on the latest edition of the college newspaper, the *Wadham College Gazette*, and asked about the current state of the college. In closing his letter, he requested that Wells ‘remember’ him to his wife and ‘anyone I know’ and reflected on his time before the war, writing that ‘I look back on the days at Wadham as the happiest & most peaceful imaginable; Oxford has a sort of compelling charm that makes one never forget it’.[1] Even in the midst of the First World War, Corbett held fast to his identity as a member of the ‘imagined community’ of Wadham College.

Warden Joseph Wells would receive countless letters from his former pupils either fighting at the front or living somewhere throughout the globe during the First World War. Like

[1] H. Corbett, 20 May 1915 (#26), WWC. Wadham College student information – matriculation, enlistment, rank, unit, location, etc. – can be found in E.S. Craig and W.M. Gibson, eds., *Oxford University Roll of Service* (Clarendon Press: Oxford 1920) pp. 474-491.

Corbett, these 'Wadham men' – a description often used in these letters – would report their wartime activities to the paternalistic Wells. Like many letters from the war, these reports and descriptions of the front offered superficial details and little about the mind of the British soldier. They do, however, reveal the lasting influence of prewar 'imagined communities' like Wadham College on how British soldiers and civilians defined their experiences of the conflict. They also show how the war itself forced these same men to renegotiate what it meant to be a 'Wadham man' as the war progressed and the college became increasingly immersed in the experience of total war.

In considering the 'mundane' relationship between Warden Wells and his students serving in the war, this study interprets Wadham College in some respects as an 'imagined community' as defined by Benedict Anderson in *Imagined Communities* (1983). It focuses on print culture, processes of remembering and forgetting, and the relationship between war and identity formation – or, more specifically, the renegotiation of prewar identity into postwar identity. More than Anderson's study, it focuses, however, on local, tangible communities and the ways in which they contributed an important fragment of its members' identities in lieu of the more abstract emotional concepts of 'national identity' or 'national belonging'. Unlike the 'nation', an institution like a college provides a slightly different view of identity formation, as it is a community that is both 'imagined' and 'real', and therefore more easily tied to the shaping of the emotional self. It is 'imagined' in that members 'will never know most of their fellow-members' yet, unlike the more paradoxical concept of 'nation', it is 'real' in that it is a concrete space with physical boundaries, where young men – as the college was exclusively male until

1974 – joined as undergraduates and left as 'Wadham men'.[2] Additionally, in an era associated with the rise and spread of nationalism, the college as a concrete space of identity formation and tradition – real or 'invented' – provides further insight into the relationship between national and local identities and the extent to which they offered an outlet for the emotional survival of the 'soldier' or 'veteran'.[3] Essentially, Wadham College represents a concrete 'microcosm' from which an understanding of how war affected the wider 'imagined community' – Britain the nation – can be obtained.

The nineteenth-century creation of what came to be understood as the collegiate tutorial tradition was embodied in the ideal of the college as a microcosm of the wider world. It represented a miniature 'polis' in which character formation would take place, thus enabling its graduates to carry values transmitted in this local community to leadership positions in the institutions of the nation.[4] Why, however, the focus here on Wadham? Why not Magdalen, Trinity, or even Keble? What makes Wadham College a compelling case for such a study is the distinctive reputation it had earned within the University of Oxford by the early twentieth century. Within an elite university system dominated by the 'public school ethos' of British upper-class culture, Wadham stood out from this typical Oxford mold.[5] Although no Oxford

---

[2] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (Verso: New York 2006 – 1st ed. 1983) pp. 5-7

[3] The question of preserving prewar traditions at Wadham College arose in much of this wartime correspondence. The study does not attempt to trace the various 'traditions' that correspondents referred to – they were often rather vague, but rather highlight the fluid and varying traditions that Wadham men perceived to be as integral to their community belonging, whether they be old traditions dating centuries before or 'invented' in the recent past, from the wider perspective of the survival or renegotiation of prewar culture in the First World War. See Eric Hobsbawm and Terrence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge 1983). See also note 7.

[4] For an overview of this educational tradition at Oxford, see Joshua Fitch, *Thomas and Matthew Arnold and their Influence on English Education* (Heinemann: London 1897), David Newsome, *Godliness & Good Learning: Four Studies on a Victorian Ideal* (John Murray: London 1961), Christopher Stray, ed., *Oxford Classics: Teaching and Learning, 1800-2000* (Duckworth: London 2007).

[5] For more on the 'public school ethos' and masculinity in relation to the First World War, see Adams, *The Great Adventure*, Paris, *Warrior Nation*, Parker, *The Old Lie*, and Anthony Seldon and David Walsh, *Public Schools and*

college was really open to the poor in this period, Wadham was considered amongst the various Oxford colleges a 'poor man's college' with 'no particular cachet in the University at large' and a victim of 'snobbishness' from the wider student body.[6] It seems, then, that Wadham offers a perspective that cannot necessarily be found within the more 'elite' colleges of Oxford, and allows for analysis to move beyond questions of class, masculinity, and militarism towards those of culture, local identity, and how soldiers and civilians coped with the experience and memory of war. Moreover, this is neither a study of Oxford *per se* nor a class-based analysis, but rather an attempt to understand how membership within a local, tangible community – in this case, Wadham – could influence the ways in which soldiers and civilians came to internalize, maintain, and redefine prewar identities through the experience of the First World War and beyond.[7] The sheer existence of a rich archive of letters to Joseph Wells is in itself a testament to the significance of that sense of local community, played out through the epistolary relationship between the Warden and his 'Wadham men'.

The 'Wadham men' of Joseph Wells

Following the outbreak of war in 1914, the colleges of Oxford mobilized to support the British war effort. At Wadham, the number of students was 'immediately halved, and at one

---

the Great War: The Generation Lost (Pen &Sword: Barnsley 2013). For criticism, see Sheffield, *Leadership in the Trenches*, pp. 135-164.

[6] Jane Garnett, '"A Liberal Place": 1900-1938', in C.S.L. Davies and Garnett, eds., *Wadham College* (Anness Publishing Ltd.: London 1994) pp. 56-58.

[7] Overall, historical debates have revolved around the extent to which the First World War transformed the whole of British society, within which identity is linked either to the evolution of sociopolitical constructs or the effect of military service and trauma on individuals. For more on identity and its ties to the First World War in British history, see Rosa Bracco, *Merchants of Hope: British Middlebrow Writers and the First World War, 1919-1939* (Berg: Oxford 1993) pp. 88-123, Bourke, *Dismembering the Male*, and Gullace, *'The Blood of Our* Sons*'*. For a broader analysis of historical theory and military identity in the war, see Smith, 'Narrative and Identity at the Front: "Theory and the Poor Bloody Infantry"', in Winter et al., eds., *The Great War and the Twentieth Century* (Yale University Press: New Haven 2000) pp. 132-165.

point in 1917 there were only eight undergraduates in residence', and the college itself quickly became a training ground for officer cadets. It was in this atmosphere that Joseph Wells, appointed Warden in 1913, took up the task of holding the Wadham community together. To this end, he corresponded with many Wadham men and their families to maintain the 'familial spirit which he saw as fundamental to the college'.[8] Within many of the replies received by Wells, a search for normalcy and solace in a local, tangible community outside of the war remains apparent. In the midst of a conflict that would in many ways alter the sociocultural fabric of the nation, Wells offered a familiar environment for members of the Wadham community and their families during such an abnormal time. Additionally, this attachment also motivated these same Wadham men to make their college proud of their actions during the First World War.

From nearly the start of the war, Wells and his Wadham men established prewar community links through letters. For Wells, the primary objective was initially to discover where his students were serving in the war, and then to ensure that they did not lose their ties to Wadham. In many instances, Wells did not have to take the initiative, as many students wrote to him to keep up their subscription to the *Gazette*. In one case, Edward J. Bing, a Wadham man serving in the Austro-Hungarian Army, found a way to write to the Warden, asking to 'hear some news about the College, or to get a copy of the *Gazette*' through Switzerland and hoped that everyone from the college was in the 'best of health'.[9] In many instances, Wells's former

[8] Garnett, '"A Liberal Place"', in Davies and Garnett, eds., *Wadham College*, pp. 61-62.
[9] Edward J. Bing, 22 April 1915 (#24), WWC. No replies from Wells to Bing are found in the collection. Nevertheless, the recognition of a Wadham community beyond the British 'nation' existed, with the wartime *Gazette* acknowledging Wadham men from the British Empire, the United States, and France – unfortunately, Wadham men from the Central Power nations were not included in lists. See 'Notes', *Wadham College Gazette*, No. 61 (Michaelmas Term, 1917).

students took his requests for the whereabouts of Wadham men quite literally, with John de Hart, stationed in Sierra Leone, dedicating an entire section of his letter to this purpose:

> As I know you are always interested in hearing about old Wadham men I will tell you what I know. [D.G.] Learoyd is out here as an Assistant District Commissioner & [C.C.] Brown as Legal Assistant (at present Acting Police Magistrate). [C.C.] Brown & myself have joined the R.G.A. out here as volunteers as they are short of gunners & what men there are are constantly getting sick.
>
> W.H. Martin was wounded in the foot in France about 2 months ago & is still at home or was at beginning of the month.
>
> A.A. Wright has got leave from his Government till the end of the war & was in April stationed at Dover in one of the Surrey Regiments.
>
> H.G.H. Monck is out here attached to the West African Regt. I have not seen him yet but hope to do so next week.[10]

While other letters did not contain such long lists as those of de Hart, there is a common theme in many letters written to Wells to establish not simply *where* 'Wadham men' were serving, but also *how* they were serving. For combatants, unit affiliation, posting, and the description of wartime work are recurring topics. Noncombatants, perhaps in an attempt to assuage any shame they might have felt for not serving at the front, also made sure to tell the Warden how they were contributing to the war effort. G.C. Hatton, who would eventually go on to serve in the Middle East, expressed his frustration in early 1915 for not being able to serve, but still found ways to link his work to the War Office and mentions his posting in a 'Volunteer Corps', but did not 'want credit for having joined the Regular Army'.[11] Although he took pride in his son becoming a naval cadet and in the list of Wadham men in the war, R.H. Struben wrote from South Africa that despite his rejected application to join the military, he hoped to still 'be of some service to

[10] John de Hart, 16 July 1915 (#36), WWC.
[11] G.C. Hatton, 26 February 1915 (#15), WWC.

the Empire which I love, even though that service may not be rendered in the form which I wished to give it'.[12] Even Wells himself seems to have felt some guilt for remaining Warden while others went off to serve in various ways, which Leonard Peck dismissed outright:

> In your letter you remark that people might say to you "But what do <u>you</u> do?" I cannot imagine any Wadham man saying or thinking such a <u>question</u>. If I may say so, there must be many of those who have joined who, like myself, can trace back the origin of the motives which led them to do it to the years they spent at College. There are some things for which one cannot adequately thank one's Tutors; & one can only hope that they realise a little of what we feel about such things.[13]

Peck's admonishment of Wells and his guilt for remaining in Oxford during the war offers some wider historical insight into how smaller communities interpreted wartime service. Between Wadham men, while there was a desire among many to fight in the trenches, there was a lack of resentment for those serving as noncombatants or behind the lines. Peck himself expressed frustration that he was posted behind the lines, G.C. Hatton felt embarrassed to be stationed on the home front, and W.A. Macfarlane asked Wells not to post in the *Gazette* that he had left the trenches due to 'frostbite'.[14] Yet, combatant or noncombatant, the overall sentiments of Wells and his students towards service in the war was perhaps best articulated by Oswald Pulling: 'Whatever happens I shall always strive to uphold to the best of my ability the honour of Wadham in particular & that of Oxford in general'.[15] So long as their service was directed towards the war effort and for the purposes of honoring their 'imagined community' within the nation, it did not matter in what capacity they served.

---

[12] R.H. Struben, 17 June 1915 (#28), WWC. Like Hatton, Struben would eventually join up in 1917.
[13] Leonard J. Peck, 30 June 1915 (#33), WWC.
[14] Leonard Peck, 18 May 1915 (#25), G.C. Hatton, 26 February 1915 (#15), and W.A. Macfarlane, 3 January 1915 (#7), WWC.
[15] Oswald L. Pulling, 16 September 1915 (#65), WWC.

Students serving in the war also hoped in writing to Wells that they could utilize their connection to the Wadham community as a means of advancement for themselves and others. W. Leadbitter asked Wells if he could 'stir someone up' at the War Office about the application of a fellow Wadham man, A. Guillaume, to serve in the Middle East, where his knowledge of Arabic was 'badly needed'.[16] Hoping to obtain a commission for an intelligence posting, F.H. Storr sought a recommendation from Wells 'to convince the authorities that I am sufficiently educated'.[17] Claiming that he was 'absolutely miserable' serving in the cavalry, Leonard Peck asked if Wells would help him get a transfer to the infantry.[18] Discharged from the military for failing the dental requirements, H.S. Holloway asked the Warden if he knew of any government or nonmilitary openings 'for a man with some education and experience and who wants to help and whose sole handicap is a lack of teeth'.[19] In one instance, a Wadham man was bold enough to request a parcel of tobacco, which he claimed was hard to find at the front.[20] Wells himself also actively sought to find ways to assist Wadham men in various ways during the war and to ensure they were serving the war effort. After receiving a letter from G.I. Paine complaining of flies in the trenches around Belgium, Wells shipped him a parcel with 'anti-fly oil' in addition to his written reply.[21] Discovering that another Wadham man, Richard Lambert, had become a conscientious objector, Wells wrote to him to ensure that he had followed legal process. In his reply, Lambert assured him that 'there is no question of misconduct', and that he would still serve in the war effort as part of a Quaker ambulance unit.[22]

[16] W. Leadbitter, 5 March 1916 (#123), WWC.
[17] F.H. Storr, 17 August 1915 (#50), WWC.
[18] Leonard Peck, 9 September 1915 (#430), WWC.
[19] H.S. Holloway, 15 October 1915 (#76+), WWC.
[20] Arthur Smith, 20 October 1915 (#80), WWC.
[21] G.I. Paine, September 1915 (#69), G.I. Paine, 16 September 1915 (#70), WWC.
[22] Richard S. Lambert, 31 March 1916 (#137+++++++), WWC.

As the war progressed, the casualty lists at Wadham rose, causing many Wadham men to mourn the losses to the college in letters to Wells. One instance, however, hit many Wadham men perhaps more than most: the sudden death of Herbert Richards, the Sub-Warden of the college, on 18 February 1916. After its announcement in the national papers and the *Gazette*, Wells received countless letters from Wadham men recounting – sometimes in intimate detail – their memories of Richards at the college.[23] Leonard Peck expressed his shock after reading the news in the *Times*, recalling that he did not get to know him until his third year, but 'even after that his shyness and mine reacted on each other & made it difficult to talk when we met'. He went on to declare that 'his loss will affect not only Wadham, and Oxford, but also the whole of the Classical World', and hoped that a proposal would be put forward to provide him a college memorial.[24] G.I. Paine recalled 'the manner that he used to stir his tea cup when he invited men to breakfast as a signal that it was time for them to go' and a mastery of Latin prose that he had passed on to students.[25] H.G. Powers, however, considered the death of Richards within the context of the war:

> The death of Mr. Richards will undoubtedly come as a blow to all Wadham men, even in these days when deaths are numbered by the thousand. It is difficult to describe the effect he had on the individual, but apart from those traits of character which could not but impress all who knew him, however slightly, to me personally he seemed an indissoluble part of Wadham and of Oxford. A visit to Oxford in after life must in all cases have its touch of sorrow, but even with the death of so many contemporaries constantly forcing itself on one's memory, I cannot help feeling

[23] 'Death of Mr. H.P. Richards', 19 February 1916, *The Times* (London), p. 10. 'Notes', *Wadham College Gazette*, No. 56 (Hilary Term, 1916). *The Times* speculated that his sudden death had to do with the death of Richards's nephew in Flanders, but this does not appear in letters written to Wells or in the *Gazette*, which cites the return of a sudden illness that had plagued him eight years before.
[24] Leonard Peck, 29 February 1916 (#122), WWC.
[25] G.I. Paine, 6 April 1917 (#56+), WWC.

that the absence of that silent walker in the Garden would come as the most unnatural item in Oxford's altered aspect.[26]

Even writing in the aftermath of the Somme Campaign, which claimed the lives of hundreds of thousands of British soldiers alone, Powers found the loss of Richards profoundly troubling, as it signaled an end to an integral part of Wadham College predating the war and the changes that it had brought. While the deaths of Wadham men in the war certainly affected the college, the loss of Richards as a figurehead and permanent fixture of the college was felt even more by the 'imagined community'. Wadham men would mourn similarly when E.W. Webster would become the sole faculty member of the college to be killed in action in France on 9 April 1917, with W.L. Cooper remarking that 'I feel the deepest regret and…know how much the College will miss him'.[27] In the end, while many Wadham men mourned the personal loss of friends and former students, it was the loss to 'college' that affected members of the community most.

The reactions of Wadham men to the deaths of Richards, who remained in Oxford and did not serve in the war effort, and Webster, a faculty member, over other college war dead during the war can perhaps best be understood through the language used by many Wadham men to articulate their wartime experiences in letters to Wells. Even as the war came to encompass their lives over time, many students nonetheless turned to prewar knowledge that they had acquired to interpret – and, perhaps, to cope with – their experiences. Classical allusions featured in various letters written to Wells, as he was a Classicist himself and played a prewar role in the education of Wadham men.[28] Describing his post in Flanders, Willie Macqueen told

[26] H.G. Powers, 10 October 1916 (#183+++), WWC.
[27] W.L. Cooper, July 1917.
[28] For more on the role of Classical education at University of Oxford, see Stray, ed., *Oxford Classics: Teaching and Learning*, Heather Ellis, "'A Manly and Generous Discipline?': Classical Studies and Generational Conflict in Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Century Oxford', *History of Universities*, Vol. 25, No. 2 (2011) pp. 1-39. This interpretation also draws from wider arguments on the persistence of prewar knowledge in cultural understandings

Wells in 1915 that his legs 'suffer from what might be termed *furor ambulandi*' (walking fury) and, referring to the Dardanelles as the 'Trojan plains' of Homeric legend, insisted that the Western Front 'must take a back seat' until decisive action was taken at Gallipoli.[29] While acknowledging 'the terrible nature' of the war and the 'enormous loss in life and property it has involved & will involve', A.A. Wright turned to the fifth labor of Hercules to seek a seemingly positive albeit Social Darwinist interpretation of the conflict, declaring that 'it has cleansed the Augean Stable of a vast amount of refuse and has awakened…a new spirit of manliness and devotion to duty and country'.[30] In describing a run-in with another Wadham man named Anson-Jones escaping from duty, E.J.R. Edwards reshaped a passage by Ovid to muse on his situation: 'video Meliora proboque deteriora sequitur Anson-Jones' (I see and approve of better things, but Anson-Jones follows the worse).[31] Even Wells himself commented in the *Wadham Gazette* on students' Classical interpretation of their wartime experiences:

> An old Wadham man whose name we will not give tumbled on a dark night into a shell hole at the Front and came out all smeared with Flemish mud. 'Non indecoro pluvere sordidus' was his happy adaption of Horace. And yet they say the Classics are dead![32]

Essentially, the Classics represented a sort of internal knowledge shared by all Wadham men that extended beyond the conflict, thus allowing them to articulate their life as soldiers in a way that both Wells and other Wadham men would understand. To some, it even allowed them to shrug off any uncertainty caused by the war. Responding to Wells's pessimism in 1917 over when the war might end, R. Cohen simply quoted in Ancient Greek the Homeric expression 'ἀλλ᾽ ἦ τοι

---

of the First World War. See Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning*. For the use of the Classics in postwar memory, see Carden-Coyne, *Reconstructing the Body*, pp. 311-319.

[29] Willie Mcqueen, 22 July 1915 (#39), WWC.

[30] A.A. Wright, 11 August 1915 (#48), WWC.

[31] E.J.R. Edwards, 28 October 1916 (#192), WWC. The original quotation from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* translates to 'I see better things, and approve, but I follow worse'.

[32] 'Notes', *Wadham College Gazette*, No. 58 (Michaelmas Term, 1916).

μὲν ταῦτα θεῶν ἐν γούνασι κεῖται' (these things lie in the laps of the gods).[33] This knowledge would also certainly extend to other Oxford colleges, as Classical education extended beyond Wadham itself, and the other colleges at Oxford represented an 'extended' community of sorts that Wadham men would seek out during their military service. The combination of the Classics and the 'extended' community appears especially in one letter from Leonard Peck, who came across a 'man…who was either at Corpus or Merton' that wished to pass on his regards to Wells, who had 'guided him in the path of Herodotean knowledge'.[34] In a way, the classical training that Wadham men had received during their studies explains some of the reactions to the death of Sub-Warden Richards in 1916. Richards was not simply an integral part of the college, but also an important part of the lives of Wadham men serving in the war, who would turn to their prewar knowledge of the Greco-Roman world imparted on them by their deceased tutor to understand their wartime experiences. What is also telling in this case of the usage of prewar knowledge is that it continued throughout the war and, in some letters written to Wells, remained an important tool for Wadham men to describe their experiences beyond their community of soldiers. Rather than slowly reject 'the old lie' of *dulce et decorum est pro patria mori* like the war poet Wilfred Owen, Wadham men persisted to some degree with their allusions to the Classics as a means of defining their wartime experiences to civilians back home. What is also telling about this use of the Classics is that it indicated a maintenance of prewar identity associated with Wadham through the language learned under the guidance of Wells, Richards, and Webster. Despite their military service, Wadham men remained Wadham men, using language acquired from their

[33] R. Cohen, 2 August 1917 (#74+), WWC. Special thanks to Sarah Melville at the Society for Military History for helping to identify and translate this phrase from the original letter. Thanks also to Aubrey Crum at the University of Georgia for assisting with other Greek translations that arose throughout this study.
[34] Leonard Peck, 9 September 1915 (#430), WWC.

prewar community to describe their wartime experience to Wells (and perhaps others) back home.

By the summer of 1915, G.L. Heawood, who had left Wadham before the end of his studies to join the Territorials at the outbreak of war in 1914, expressed concern to Wells that his links to the college were beginning to fade. Recalling that he had wondered if he was 'neglecting [his] duties at Oxford by joining the [Territorials]', Heawood wrote that he hoped to return to Wadham after the war, but he worried that Wells would 'find [him] very empty headed when all this is over'.[35] L. Jardine remarked similarly as he recovered from wounds in the Middle East, expressing concern that he was 'half-educated' and that 'it would have been better if I had never started than to have been torn away so violently', but remained thankful for the experience and friends he had made during the war.[36] Similarly to other Oxford colleges, Wadham had a sizable contingent of men who had joined up before they could complete their studies, thus forcing them to doubt their full membership within the community. It seems to have stirred the University of Oxford into action to resolve this problem caused by the war, issuing a War Decree on 8 February 1916:

> Any member of the University who shall have been absent on Military Service and who at the termination of the period of his Military Service, or after he has been absent on such Service for not less than four Terms, shall either have kept or…be deemed to have kept, more than six and less than twelve Terms by residence, and who shall be statutably qualified for admission to the Examination in any Final Honour School…shall be permitted to supplicate for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts without passing any further Examination, so soon as he shall have completed his statutable residence, provided that he shall have paid the fee of three pounds in addition to the fees payable under the provisions of Statt. Tit. XIX. §2 and §5.[37]

[35] G.L. Heawood, 6 June 1915 (#27), WWC.
[36] L. Jardine, 10 February 1916 (#117), WWC.
[37] 'University Acts – Decree 6.3', *Oxford University Gazette*, No. 1483, Vol. XLVI (9 February 1916) p. 286.

Following this decree, Wells wrote to several Wadham men serving in the war to inform them that they could obtain a degree, thus allowing them to further cement their status as members of the college community. While some embraced the idea of obtaining a degree while serving in the war, Gifford Campion feared he would be 'slipping in a side door'.[38] Wells, however, seems to have rebutted such concerns, as Campion wrote back weeks later to thank him for helping him with the requirements of the decree.[39] Nevertheless, the combination of students' concerns and Wells's efforts to keep students in the war within the ranks of 'Wadham men' reveals a conflict that would become more apparent as the war progressed beyond 1916. While many students accepted the offer of a degree, they remained troubled by the extraordinary means through which they could obtain it, whereas Wells hoped to keep as many former students as possible linked to Wadham, and resorted to extraordinary means to achieve his goal. Essentially, as the war effort became more 'total' and all-encompassing for Britain, Wadham College itself and its members became swept up in the 'extraordinary' nature of the conflict, which would impact much of the communication between Wells and his students over time.

In some respects, the efforts of Joseph Wells to hold Wadham College together in the midst of the First World War met with some success. By maintaining epistolary relationships with his former students, Wells created a conduit for students, wherever they were, to maintain membership in the college community, both 'imagined' and 'real'. He wrote with the hope that his 'Wadham men' were making their college – and, by extension, the nation – proud with their wartime service and sought to ensure that his students, graduates and otherwise, remained 'Wadham men' beyond the war. While the shock of war experience would certainly affect those

[38] C.A.G. Campion, 3 March 1916 (#124), WWC.
[39] C.A.G. Campion, 28 March 1916 (#136), WWC.

in military service, the maintenance of this prewar identity within the 'imagined community' of Wadham College would also outlive the First World War for many. It would also offer them a space to return to physically as students, visitors, and mentally within the pages of what many 'Wadham men' requested from the Warden throughout the war: the *Wadham Gazette*.

College 'Print Culture': The *Wadham Gazette*

Similar to many other 'war letter' collections, the letters of 'Wadham men' provide some insight into the life of the 'imagined community' during the First World War, but they are one-sided in the glimpse offered into the relationship between the correspondents and Joseph Wells because Wells's letters do not survive. One means to overcome this obstacle and to hear Wells's voice are the wartime editions of the *Wadham Gazette* which, with the absence of students, Wells himself would publish during the conflict. In their letters to Wells, Wadham men would talk about the latest edition of the *Gazette*, updated addresses where it could be sent, or the subscription dues they owed to obtain copies. Within its pages, Wells spoke collectively to its subscribers, listed the various accomplishments of 'Wadham men', and provided information every term on the state of the college and the University of Oxford during the First World War. In an immediate sense, the *Gazette,* with the contents it contained and as a piece of material culture, provided students serving in the war across the globe with a tangible, psychological link to Wadham College they could carry with them during their military service.

Before the war, the students of Wadham College would publish the *Gazette* three times a year to correspond to each Oxford term – Michaelmas, Hilary, and Summer (later Trinity). Its layout consisted of the editor's notes followed by news of the college itself and of current and former Wadham men, particularly their professional appointments, publications, marriages, birth

of children, and deaths – with longer *in memoriam* sections to more prominent members. It also included information regarding graduations, lists of new students, the Oxford University Officers' Training Corps (OUOTC), college sports and other extracurricular activities, club accounts, lists of subscribers and their addresses, and newly-published works on Wadham College. The news laid out in the notes were straightforward overviews of college business and contained highlights for the other sections that would follow within each edition. According to the notes from Michaelmas Term in 1911, the *Gazette* circulated to roughly 600 subscribers. The editor, however, found these numbers upsetting, declaring that 'it would be sad to think that any old Wadham man should go down caring nothing as to his contemporaries or as to his successors'.[40] By the time of the last edition printed before the outbreak of war in 1914, the number of subscriptions remained above 500, but had decreased from the 600 reported in 1911. Nonetheless, when announcing the subscription list, the editor requested that Wadham men not simply read it, but also 'use it for their own purposes by finding out where their contemporaries are, and also that they will endeavour to make it more complete next year' by seeking out those unlisted.[41] Essentially, even outside the First World War, the *Wadham Gazette* represented a means for Wadham men to maintain their connection to their college and the fellow members of the community, and the conflict would not change this objective.

As the wartime publisher of the *Gazette*, Joseph Wells could further exercise his influence over members of the Wadham community. In many instances, the arrival of the *Gazette* often inspired Wadham men at the front to write to Wells to renew their subscriptions, report their whereabouts, or simply just to talk about the latest edition of the *Gazette*. It also

[40] 'Notes', *Wadham College Gazette*, No. 43 (Michaelmas Term, 1911). It is worth noting that his protests came along with his acknowledgement that the *Gazette* had more subscribers than any other Oxford college magazine at the time.
[41] 'List of Subscribers' and 'Notes', *Wadham College Gazette*, No. 51 (Summer Term: 1914).

gave him an opportunity to reach out collectively to those that did not write letters to him and to further dictate the content of the publication. Nevertheless, even with extraordinary changes provoked by the First World War, the layout of the *Gazette* remained unchanged by Wells in terms of what prewar editions had contained and its overall objective. In the early days of the war, however, Wells added an important section that compelled many Wadham men to write to him throughout the war:

> We are printing at the end of this number a list of Wadham men serving. It is certainly very incomplete, and it is probably inaccurate and not up to date…For these inevitable shortcomings we apologize, and only hope that our subscribers will send us *at once* any information as to themselves or other Wadham men. This will not only be published in our next number, but will enable the College to be more worthily represented in the record of men serving, which is to be undertaken officially by the University this vacation.[42]

This first edition of the *Gazette* to be published during the war would also comment on the immediate changes to Wadham and Oxford as a whole during the term. College enrollment halved, khaki came to be recognized as 'academic dress', and, perhaps most shocking to former students, 'organized games ceased'. Wells went on to reassure Wadham men in the midst of the wartime transformation of Oxford, insisting that 'till [the war] has been overcome, no man's life can be normal'. He acknowledged the death of Robert Horridge in the war – he also received a brief *in memoriam*, but otherwise moved on to information commonly covered within the *Gazette*. The section on the OUOTC addressed new developments brought about by the war, but it did not deviate in its form from prewar norms: news and events involving the corps during the Oxford term.[43] Even while Wadham College mobilized, the war and information related to it did not immediately drown out prewar forms. Rather, the war came to be integrated into them first

[42] 'Notes', *Wadham College Gazette*, No. 52 (Michaelmas Term, 1914).
[43] 'Notes', 'O.U.O.T.C.', and 'In Memoriam – Robert Horridge', *Wadham College Gazette*, No. 52 (Michaelmas Term, 1914).

as an aside, and then into everyday life and writing as it took a greater toll on Wadham – and likely other microcosms of the British nation.

Indeed, even as the war became a more visible feature within the *Gazette*, Wells integrated it into the traditional format of its prewar publications. The 'List of Subscribers' was complemented by the 'List of Wadham Men Serving', while war deaths were added into the *in memoriam* section with the names of many other community members that would never serve as soldiers. A section on 'work connected with the war' also began to appear for Wadham men not serving in the military, but engaged in activities supporting the war effort. In a way, this allowed Wadham men to know the whereabouts of their contemporaries not included in the traditional subscription list of the *Gazette*, thus giving the Wadham community an extended reach during the war. Press censorship regulations, however, would severely limit this information, but Wells told readers that they could still request the information by writing to him.[44] Even when Wells commented on the changed nature of life in Oxford caused by the war in early 1915, he reassured readers that 'some fragments of the normal life survive', reporting that the college had managed to hold a concert and set up a Torpid – albeit with the overwhelming help of American students still in Oxford.[45] By 1917, when Wadham College mostly housed military cadets, Wells found a way to turn these guests into honorary members of the college that helped maintain the traditions of the college, especially with athletics:

> Wadham athletes of the past will be glad to hear that, thought we have no sons of the College left to play, our visitors still keep up our athletic tradition. The cry of "well played, Wadham" is still heard, and men with light blue colours [of the college] are photoed at the bottom of [Staircase] No. V.[46]

[44] 'Notes', *Wadham College Gazette*, No. 57 (Summer Term, 1916).
[45] 'Notes', *Wadham College Gazette*, No. 53 (Hilary Term, 1915).
[46] 'Notes', *Wadham College Gazette*, No. 59 (Hilary Term, 1917).

As the number of Wadham students dwindled to eight by the fall of 1917, these 'military visitors' would represent to Wells a means to hold on to Wadham traditions during the war, particularly in college sports. After remarking on the athletic successes of the Wadham Company, Wells declared that 'it is pleasant to think that the Oxford spirit is shared even by our temporary residents, and that the cry of "Well played, Wadham," can still be heard, even when our own men are playing a harder and sterner game at the Front'.[47] Even though they did not fit into the community in its recognized prewar form, these military cadets seemingly entered the walls of Wadham College and took up its identity of in the absence of Wadham men. This phenomenon seems to have happened at other colleges in Oxford as well, with Wells noting in the *Gazette* that 'not the least interesting feature of Oxford in War Time has been the way in which the officer cadets have identified themselves with the colleges where they have been quartered'.[48] Interestingly, one of these cadets at Wadham College was the war poet Robert Graves, who would 'retain an affection for Wadham…even when at St. John's [College] after the war'.[49]

In the end, while Wells would use the *Wadham Gazette* to keep track of and share the information of Wadham men serving in the war, perhaps his main goal of preserving the prewar identity of the Wadham community was best expressed in the *Gazette* published in the aftermath of the Somme Campaign in 1916. It also represented a transition to a novel way of conveying his objectives to the *Gazette* readership through the increased use of letters from the front and various allusions to Wadham men and their prewar connection to Oxford during the war. In a sense, Wells used the image of prewar Oxford as a source of strength for Wadham men fighting

[47] 'Notes', *Wadham College Gazette*, No. 61 (Michaelmas Term, 1917).
[48] 'Notes', *Wadham College Gazette*, No. 63 (Summer Term, 1918).
[49] Garnett, 'A Liberal Place', in Davies and Garnett, eds., *Wadham College*, p. 62.

in the war, using their own words and actions to stress the importance of their ties to the Wadham community. On the opening page, he alluded to a brief account of a Wadham man who returned to Oxford while on leave:

> He had only twenty-four hours in Oxford, and he asked for nothing but to be left to sit in the quiet of the Garden and to drink in its beauty. Oxford is in France, at Salonica, on the Suez Canal, in Mesopotamia, on the High Seas; we who are left at home have to keep the old framework for their return.[50]

While he continued to seek the whereabouts of Wadham men serving in the war and share news regarding the college, Wells saw the maintenance of Wadham College as his most important task – which was not merely isolated to the First World War – and used the *Gazette* for that purpose. Particularly in the latter half of the war, Wells became increasingly vocal in the *Gazette* regarding the maintenance of college 'traditions'. Acknowledging the death of E.W. Webster, he asserted that 'we looked to him, perhaps above every one else, to continue the College traditions, and to bridge the gap which advancing years continually tend to make between Seniors and Juniors'. He also reprinted letters he had received from Wadham men at the front who expressed concern over rumors that the University of Oxford would close until the end of the war and the Back Quad of the college being turned into a 'Kitchen Garden'.[51] It is this use of the 'soldier's voice' to convey the wishes of Wells himself that represented a significance shift in how he articulated his objectives to the Wadham community within the pages of the *Gazette*. In order to advocate for holding onto the 'traditions' of the college in such extreme times, Wells cited the letters that he received from Wadham men at the front as his justification. It was his wish – and certainly the wish of many other Wadham men – that the college could continue as it always had

[50] 'Notes', *Wadham College Gazette*, No. 58 (Michaelmas Term, 1916).
[51] 'Notes', *Wadham College Gazette*, No. 60 (Summer Term, 1917). For the original letter regarding the Back Quad, see E.J.R. Edwards, 16 March 1917 (#46+), WWC.

during the war and beyond. Using the voices of Wadham men at the front in the *Gazette*, he could reveal the continued existence of a community that remained tied to a vision of Wadham that existed outside of the war and its traditions unaffected by it.

Nevertheless, much like Oxford itself, changes to the *Gazette* would only increase as the war progressed, and it came to partly resemble a 'war diary' of the exploits of Wadham men in the war.[52] Starting with the first wartime edition in 1914, Wells added on various occasions a section that provided a perspective on the war that Wadham men would seemingly understand within their own ranks. The first of these was entitled 'Plucky Oxford Don' – an article republished from the *Morning Post*, with the introduction stating that 'those who were at Wadham in the first decade of this century will have no difficulty in identifying its subject'.[53] As more Wadham men joined the military and became casualties, a 'Roll of Honor' was added to the *Gazette* beginning in the Summer 1915 edition. Wells even added a list of Wadham men who had applied for conscientious objector status and their results, even using it to fuel the fires of the Oxford-Cambridge rivalry with the note that 'altogether somewhat less than fifty undergraduates have claimed exemption in Oxford; in Cambridge the number is reported as about 300'.[54] Wells also would lament in the *Gazette* the loss of the College Butler, F.S. Gee, to military service, remarking that 'among the advantages that the end of the War will bring will be that we shall have our Butler back'.[55] By the summer of 1918, in the midst of some of the worst

[52] Interestingly, the Wadham College Centenary website refers to the wartime *Gazette* as 'Wadham's war diary'. See '1914-2014 Wartime Wadham Centenary', Wadham College – University of Oxford, URL: https://www.wadham.ox.ac.uk/news/2014/february/1914-2014-wartime-wadham-centenary (Accessed 12 April 2017).

[53] 'Plucky Oxford Don', *Wadham College Gazette*, No. 52 (Michaelmas Term, 1914).

[54] 'Conscientious Objectors', *Wadham College Gazette*, No. 56 (Hilary Term, 1916). While this exhibits an hostile attitude towards conscientious objection, Wells avoided using the *Gazette* as a platform to ostracize Wadham men that had applied for exemption. Rather, he simply lists their reasons – ordination to the priesthood being predominant – and the results of their legal requests.

[55] 'Notes', *Wadham College Gazette*, No. 60 (Summer Term, 1917).

fighting seen on the Western Front, the *Gazette* itself nearly became a victim of wartime paper shortages and increased postage costs, which led to the decision to only publish twice a year until the end of the war.[56]

Along with the list of military distinctions, the Roll of Honor would increase in size as the war progressed and Wadham men became casualties. Begun in the Summer edition of the *Gazette*, the section commemorated the Wadham men killed in action during the war – A. Barnsley and R. Horridge each received an *in memoriam* in earlier editions. While Wells remarked on their military service, he focused far more on their days at Wadham College and how their identities came to be shaped there into Wadham men willing to sacrifice their futures in the conflict. Commenting on the death of R.K. Ledger, Wells cited his family legacy at Wadham, his leadership in college athletics, and his desire to 'prepare for Holy Orders' before the outbreak of war. When alluding to his military service, Wells noted that his bravery and dedication was 'absolutely typical of all his work', and quoted a letter from one of Ledger's Wadham contemporaries that stated 'he was a good soldier, just as he would have been, had he lived, a good parson…We can ill spare him, and shall not soon forget him'.[57] While length and detail varied, entries in later editions would follow a similar format, with college life representing an integral aspect of their identities that shaped them into the soldiers that they became. Commenting on the death of Thomas Joy, Wells remarked that 'alike in his regiment and at College he had many who loved him and none who disliked him'.[58] D.H.S. Keep was described as a 'man who would have been trusted and followed in civil life as he was in the

[56] 'Notes', *Wadham College Gazette*, No. 63 (Summer Term, 1918). No *Gazette* was published for the 1919 Hilary Term.
[57] 'Wadham's Roll of Honour', *Wadham College Gazette*, No. 54 (Summer Term, 1915).
[58] 'Wadham's Roll of Honour', *Wadham College Gazette*, No. 56 (Hilary Term, 1916).

field'.[59] Essentially, their military identity in the war was interpreted by Wells as a product of their prewar Wadham identity.

Despite all these material changes, Joseph Wells persisted with the *Gazette*. In the Summer 1915 edition of the *Gazette*, Wells observed that the other college papers had ceased publishing and 'the small events of college life are trifles' when compared to the war. Nevertheless, he insisted that 'it is right to record [these trifles]', believing that the Wadham men serving throughout the world 'will read these lines within the sound of the guns'.[60] Even as the war progressed and encompassed more of the local community and the nation, Wadham men serving in the war echoed these sentiments in their letters to Wells. G.L. Porcher wrote to Wells in 1917 that 'I always feel so glad that you have managed to keep the *Gazette* going in spite of present difficulties…in France it is a great pleasure to read it'.[61] Cyrus Gentry, a Wadham man serving in the American Expeditionary Force (AEF), acknowledged that 'it is impossible to keep in touch with all the fellows by letter and the *Gazette* answers many questions we are all asking. A good, newsy Gazette is next best to a visit among our former haunts'.[62] Wells also quoted a letter in the *Gazette* to this effect from 'a somewhat senior Wadham man at the front':

> It is more like being at Oxford than anything…As a junior subaltern I live with men of undergraduate age; the lingo is a little different to what it was twenty years ago…and I am a fresher of the freshers.
>
> The *Wadham Gazette* is delightful. It breathes the old world air of Colleges and cathedral squares. If I could, I would tie it on to a shell, and send it to the Boche, to show how little their efforts can ruffle Oxford.[63]

These sentiments reflect the overall attachment that Wadham men serving in the war had for the *Gazette*. As the official publication of their prewar community, it represented both where they

[59] 'Wadham's Roll of Honour', Wadham College Gazette, No. 61 (Michaelmas Term, 1917).
[60] 'Notes', *Wadham College Gazette*, No. 54 (Summer Term, 1915).
[61] G.L. Porcher, 24 July 1917 (#132++), WWC.
[62] Cyrus S. Gentry, 15 March 1918 (#238+), WWC.
[63] 'Notes', *Wadham College Gazette*, No. 61 (Michaelmas Term, 1917).

had shaped their identities and what they were fighting for in the First World War. They fought not simply for the defense and survival of the British 'nation', but rather the microcosm of Wadham College that had shaped them into Wadham men willing to fight – and perhaps die – for the something more immediately tangible within the 'nation'.[64] The *Gazette* offered a concrete reminder that somewhere in the world, the Wadham community was serving in some way in the conflict. By keeping track of the service of Wadham men and their fates during the war, the *Gazette* provided Wadham men with a tangible link to their old college, much like Wadham College provided them with a concrete, local representation of the nation. As R.D. Edwards wrote to Wells from Egypt in 1918 – and perhaps other Wadham men shared similar sentiments, 'without the [*Gazette*] I should be unable to have any of the men who were up there with me'.[65]

In the end, the attachment of Wadham men to the *Wadham College Gazette* exhibited the importance they held for their prewar community and their desire to remain an active part of it despite their war experiences. By the end of the First World War, however, concern over the fate of the prewar traditions of Wadham College became a dominant theme in the correspondence between Wells and Wadham men. Using the *Gazette*, Wells attempted to dissuade such fears by continuing to report on the daily life within the college itself and the community scattered throughout the world by the conflict. Whether they were fighting as far off as the Middle East or as close as Flanders, Wadham men could carry a physical reminder of their college – or, more broadly, their prewar world – whenever they received a new edition of the *Gazette*. It also allowed them to maintain an intellectual connection with the college, thus allowing them to

[64] For an overview of how British soldiers interpreted and the war and why they fought, see A. Watson, *Enduring the Great War*, pp. 44-84.
[65] R.D. Edwards, 1 February 1918 (#229), WWC.

express their fears over the fate of Wadham College and Oxford as a whole. Perhaps like many other colleges at Oxford, this fear of how the First World War would affect Wadham College and their prewar links to it compelled Wadham men to consider if – or to what extent – the conflict would play in the shape of the postwar community. Would Wadham College be defined by the First World War and the Wadham men that fought and died in it, or would Wells and the wider community find ways to both remember the college's role in the conflict and detach its identity from it?

Remembering and Forgetting: The War and Its Aftermath at Wadham

Much as in the rest of Britain, total war became a deeper part of life at Wadham College as the conflict dragged on. This posed many problems for the Warden and 'Wadham men', who both hoped that the college community and its traditions would remain unaffected in the aftermath of the struggle. In the early stages of the war, despite many students becoming soldiers and the college itself evolving into a training ground, the letters that Wells received appear in many ways rather 'ordinary'. But with the deaths of many students in the war, there was also a sense of obligation to remember the sacrifices of Wadham in some way without altering the prewar image of the college. It is through these two mutual and yet conflicting concerns that the Warden and other 'Wadham men' embarked on a process of 'remembering and forgetting' the war and the sixty-eight members of the community that perished in it in the final years of the conflict, culminating in the construction of the college war memorial in 1923, which allowed Wadham College to move past the First World War while still remembering the wartime service of its members that died in the conflict.

To interpret the 'ordinary' nature of the letters written to Wells in the early years of the First World War, an analysis needs to go beyond just a consideration of 'war letters', a genre arbitrarily defined by the soldier's voice with little consideration of the epistolary relationship between the writer and recipient. For some time, historians and literary critics have analyzed letters through the content they provide on the experience of combat, with an emphasis on violence, censorship, and trauma expressed by the soldier, representing the authoritative voice on the 'true' nature of war.[66] This quest for the 'truth' about war, however, provokes debate on the 'history' versus the 'myth' of the British experience of the First World War, with letters rather than memoirs as the primary source of contention.[67] It also traps considerations of soldiers' letters within a victim-brute binary of wartime experience.[68] Additionally, what this interpretation of wartime letters disregards, for proponents and critics alike, is the ultimate purpose of letter-writing for soldiers and civilians during the First World War. While the details of war – violence, censorship, trauma, and the experience of the battlefield – certainly appeared in soldiers' letters, these details represented the result rather than the intent outside of war that created epistolary relationships between soldiers and civilians. In many instances, soldiers did not write letters to bear witness to the horrors of war. Rather, they wrote letters to hold fast to prewar relationships, which in many instances informed what they decided was worth defending in the First World War.

---

[66] See Fussell, *Great War and Modern Memory: Illustrated*, pp. 225-234, and Stevenson, *Literature and the Great War*, pp. 13-22. For historical criticism of this approach, see McCartney, *Citizen Soldiers*, pp. 89-103. Morale has also been stressed by historians as an aspect of letter-writing. See A. Watson, *Enduring the Great War*, pp. 44-84, and Roper, *The Secret Battle*, pp. 14-16. See Hanna, *Your Death Would Be Mine*, pp. 23-24, and Hanna, 'War Letters: Communication between Front and Home Front', in Ute Daniel et al., *International Encyclopedia of the First World War* (Freie Universität Berlin: Berlin 2014), DOI: 10.15463/ie1418.10362.

[67] See Bond, *The Unquiet Western Front*, Winter, *Remembering War*, pp. 103-117, Todman, *Myth and Memory*.

[68] For more on the victim-brute binary of the First World War, see Leonard Smith, *The Embattled Self: French Soldiers' Testimony of the Great War* (Cornell University Press: Ithaca 2014) p. 10, and Bourke, *Intimate History of Killing*, p. 362.

Although much of the immediate background revolves around service in the war, the epistolary content in its simplest sense deals with the relationship between Warden Wells and his former students. In writing to students, Wells exhibited an interest in where his former pupils were and what they were doing following their time at Wadham. In their replies, students displayed how they were representing their college in the outside world through their work, reminisced about their time at the college, and discussed topics of exclusive interest to themselves and Wells. War or no war, these are all plausible features of communication between an educator – or, more broadly, an authority figure – and a former student. As the war progressed, however, while Wells persisted with his inquiries to Wadham men – who also continued to oblige him – as to their whereabouts in the war and their interest in the college and its members, conversations began to transition to those of concern over the losses of the Wadham community and its fate in the postwar world. Essentially, 'war letters' in this case revolve around not simply the 'truths' that soldiers were exposed to in the First World War, but rather how war came to affect prewar communities and relationships. Additionally, 'war letters' in this case came to be preoccupied with how the prewar community could negotiate between the wartime trauma inflicted upon it and the memory of members killed in the conflict in order to survive with a semblance of its prewar self in the postwar world – or at least a perception of the prewar self capable of fitting into postwar circumstances.

By the second half of the war, particularly in the aftermath of the Battle of the Somme, the letters received by Wells evolved from 'ordinary' letters into 'war letters'. Talk of the changes to Wadham caused by the war evolved from that of curiosity and passing well-wishes to concern over its future in the postwar world. R.J. Selbie hoped in 1915 that 'all is well with the college – or as well as can be expected in these times', but by 1916, B.S. Bambridge wished that

'the time will soon come when Wadham starts to be itself again'.[69] While both offer the same sentiments of well-wishes for the college, the remarks of Bambridge expose concerns increasingly linked to the war. Both acknowledge the extraordinary events affecting Wadham, Selbie only notes the change in passing, whereas Bambridge views the college and the war in 1916 as inextricably linked, with the hope that Wadham could break free of it in the near future. Even Wells himself expressed concerns, remarking at the death of W.L. Howard in the *Gazette* that 'he and his contemporaries…are among our most serious losses. Of the six scholars and three exhibitioners of his year [1913], four have been killed, one is still serving after being wounded'.[70] In many ways, the perceptions of Wadham men and the state of Wadham College itself were not far off, as the college became far more a military training center run by Colonel John Stenning, who would succeed Wells as Warden in 1927, than an educational institution. In a letter written to Wells's wife, one Wadham man shared concerns over his emotional state while commenting on the experience on the Somme and the devastation it had caused:

> The extraordinary thing is that everyone is so callous to it all. I hope it does not mean a permanent deadening of the senses. I should be very distressed to feel that under normal circumstances I could gaze on some of the sights I have recently witnessed without any emotions of any kind.[71]

In a sense, the First World War threatened not just local communities such as Wadham, but also the personal lives of Wadham men – or, as indicated in the letter to Mrs. Wells, the emotions of the individual that allowed a Wadham man to maintain his emotional ties to his college. The realization that the war had changed Wadham men in a way that transcended the Wadham community became a growing concern over time, with some fearing that such change would

[69] R.J. Selbie, 12 September 1915 (#60), B.S. Bambridge, 20 July 1916 (#161), WWC.
[70] 'Wadham's Roll of Honour', *Wadham College Gazette*, No. 61 (Michaelmas Term, 1917).
[71] P. Roberts, 18 October 1916 (#186), WWC.

become permanent and that links to the college would break. This fear of personal change would often be projected onto the college itself, with Wadham men yearning for the prewar 'traditions' of the community and hoping that they would not be lost in the aftermath of the conflict. It is this fear of change over time caused by war and doubts over whether prewar communities would return to a state of recognizable normalcy after the war that transformed the correspondence between Wells and Wadham men into 'war letters'.

The fear of lost traditions within Wadham College itself was further compounded by the death of Wadham men in the First World War. While many Wadham men hoped to come across their fellow college members serving near them at the front, deaths began to mount over time. Consequently, particularly by 1917, a search for living comrades transitioned to a search for dead comrades, mourning the updated casualty lists in the *Gazette*, or dismay over not being able to locate Wadham men at the front lines. R. Cohen shared his concern with Wells that he could not find the grave of B.S. Bambridge, with whom he had matriculated at Wadham in 1914, in the 'wilderness' near his post, ending his letter with the distant hope that the war would end in time for him to return to Oxford for Michaelmas Term.[72] Reflecting on the aftermath of the Somme, C. Campion would mourn the losses that Wadham had suffered, noting especially 'three men, whose families I know well, and who were special friends of mine…will be missed greatly. In vacation times I used to see them rather a lot'.[73] Having read a recent edition of the *Gazette*, Campion would again write to Wells with a corrected the spelling of where J.C.T. Leigh was buried, also noting the proximate location of Bambridge's grave.[74] Another student also wrote that the recent casualty list in the *Gazette* was 'a very sad one to me...the really great friends I

[72] R. Cohen, 2 August 1917 (#74+), WWC.
[73] C. Campion, 11 November 1916 (#198), WWC. The three friends mentioned are J.L. Buckman, W.H. Martin, and L.A. Westmore.
[74] C. Campion, 13 January 1917 (#8), WWC.

made in Wadham have all gone'.[75] As the war continued and more Wadham men died, the links of many living Wadham men to their college community – or, more broadly, their prewar worlds – came under threat. Continued correspondence with Wells and subscriptions to the *Gazette*, however, provide a strong indication that Wadham men attempted to resist such a rupture, with R.D. Edwards citing in a letter to Wells the importance of the *Gazette* for remembering old friends from Wadham and H.R. Norton insisting into 1918 'how precious these links are out here'.[76]

Noting the beginning of Michaelmas Term in 1915, Leonard Peck feared it 'will be very different from what it used to be…I wonder whether the old traditions will ever be quite renewed'.[77] The fear of a Wadham College – or a University of Oxford – that did not survive the war became an increasingly persistent fear expressed in correspondence with Wells, particularly by 1917 and 1918 as student numbers plummeted, which to some indicated that 'many freshmen may consider the old traditions, if not actually out of date, are rather doubtfully transmitted!'.[78] Such concerns were compounded in 1917 with American entry into the war that signaled the departure of Rhodes Scholars from Oxford.[79] Richard Osborne confessed to Wells that he refused to visit to Oxford during the war and would not return 'until it is what it used to be'.[80] To some extents, the First World War provoked not just a fear of an Oxford destroyed by the war, but a nostalgic vision of an idyllic prewar Oxford that would be lost forever. For some, this nostalgia manifested itself within the novel *Sonia* (1917) by Stephen McKenna, which was partly

[75] Missing name, 28 January 1917 (#17+), WWC.
[76] R.D. Edwards, 1 February 1918 (#229) and H.R. Norton, 4 February 1918 (#231), WWC.
[77] Leonard J. Peck, 6 September 1915 (#56), WWC.
[78] G.C. Scott, 15 August 1918 (#315), WWC.
[79] D.G. Osborne Jones, July 1917 (#124+), WWC.
[80] Richard B. Osborne, 18 March 1918 (#240+), WWC.

set in turn-of-the-century Oxford and led some Wadham men to fear that Oxford would never conform to that image again.[81]

It is with these fears of lost traditions and the increasing death toll that Wells and other Wadham men embarked upon a process of 'remembering and forgetting' in the late stages of the First World War and following the Armistice of 11 November 1918. Wadham men had feared that the war would change their community throughout its duration, and yet they also desired some form of concrete remembrance for fellow members killed in the conflict. Additionally, the question of how the sacrifices of Wadham men during the conflict would be remembered persisted. Following the death of E.R. Webster, Wadham received gifts of mustard and pepper pots from Webster's sisters for the college to remember him. Each bore simple inscriptions that commemorated his academic life at the college and his death in the Battle of Arras on 9 April 1917. Writing in the *Gazette* in 1918, Wells reflected on the loss of Webster and its significance to the Wadham community of the past, present, and future:

> The simplicity of these inscriptions, which we are sure would have commended itself to Captain Webster, tells its own tale; only when the great War is forgotten, will men cease to read them and to wonder what the young don was like who died at the beginning of one of the great British victories. The question of other memorials in the Chapel or elsewhere must wait till we know that we have come to the end of our losses.[82]

Questions of establishing a war memorial came up in Wells's correspondence soon after the Armistice, with the overall consensus of those interested in the project calling for a physical monument to the Wadham war dead built within the college. Francis Farquhar feared that remembrance in the form of scholarships would be too exclusive and hoped for a 'tablet, statue or building' engraved with the names of Wadham war dead to be 'seen and noted by all' –

[81] See Stephen McKenna, *Sonia: Between Two Worlds* (George H. Doran: New York 1917). For mentions of this work, see Hamilton Monck, 11 September 1918 (#326) and Francis Richards, 15 September 1918 (#327+), WWC.
[82] 'Notes', *Wadham College Gazette*, No. 62 (Hilary Term, 1918).

Walter Hett even suggested that the nearby King's Arms pub be demolished for the purpose.[83] The project was officially launched in the summer of 1919, following the signing of the Versailles Treaty that signaled the official end of the First World War, with a call in the *Gazette* for a college memorial dedicated to Wadham's war dead. Calling for donations to this purpose, the *Gazette* declared that 'the memory of all Wadham men who have fallen in the War should be preserved by the inscription of their names on a tablet in the Cloister', and that the College Library be remodeled so that more Wadham men could access it.[84] By 1922, enough donations had been received to construct the memorial, which was designed by G.C. Drinkwater, both a Wadham man and a veteran of the First World War.[85]

On 9 February 1923, the memorial, a tablet inscribed with the names of all the Wadham men killed in the First World War, was unveiled in the college. In the dedication ceremony, Wadham men constructed their remembrance of their college's role in the conflict: Wadham men, as members of an 'imagined community' within the British nation, fought to defend what had shaped their prewar identities, which had carried them through to Allied victory. Recounting the events, the *Gazette* editor – no longer Wells at this point – stated that in attendance were 'the relatives of those we have lost, and…old and present members of the College'.[86] After Wells had recited the names of the dead, it was declared in a speech by Justice A.A. Roche, another Wadham man, that they be remembered 'collectively as representative of our College and our

[83] Francis Farquhar, 22 December 1918 (#423), Walter S. Hett, 19 January 1919 (#379), WWC.
[84] 'Wadham College War Memorial', *Wadham College Gazette*, No. 65 (Summer Term, 1919).
[85] 'Notes', *Wadham College Gazette*, No. 72 (Michaelmas Term, 1922).
[86] 'Unveiling of the War Memorial', *Wadham College Gazette*, No. 73 (Summer Term, 1923).

race; for as the race was at large so was the College in little'.[87] As to why Wadham men should take pride their sacrifices in the war, Roche had this to say:

> There were observers of events who doubted whether a nation like ours, so civilized, so comfortable, and at least half educated, could and would endure the strain and stress of a struggle so terrific and awful in its incidents as this. The issue proved the opinion wrong…And so it came about that a nation unversed in war performed so gigantic a task, each man doing his part – his duty.[88]

Leading up to the war, concerns over whether British society and its institutions could endure an industrial war loomed large.[89] In the aftermath of an Allied victory in the First World War, Roche rejected these concerns, concluding that prewar institutions – including Wadham College itself – gave British and Wadham men alike the will to fight and die in the conflict. War did not expose the weaknesses of prewar institutions and their communities. Rather, in the eyes of Roche – and perhaps many other Wadham men, it attested to their strength. Thus, it was continuity, rather than change, that came to dominate at least the early Wadham narrative of the First World War, with the memorial of Wadham war dead attesting to the strength of not just those individuals killed in the conflict, but to the community as a whole in times of upheaval.[90] Perhaps like other colleges at Oxford, Wadham College memorialized itself in the wake of the conflict as a solid community possessing a timelessness that could not be broken by social upheaval or world war that affected the wider community of the nation.

---

[87] Ibid. For more on Justice Roche, see 'Notes', *Wadham College Gazette*, No. 61 (Michaelmas Term, 1917). Despite the fact that Wadham men included those from the Commonwealth, the United States, and other countries, the commemoration of the memorial had a predominantly British national focus.

[88] Ibid.

[89] For more on this prewar cultural debate in British historiography, see Adams, *The Great Adventure*; Paris, *Warrior Nation*, pp. 83-109. A military history approach can be found in Michael Howard, 'Men against Fire: The Doctrine of the Offensive in 1914', in Peter Paret, ed., *Makers of Modern Strategy: From Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age* (Princeton University Press: Princeton 1986) pp. 510-526. For literary approaches, see Hynes, *The Edwardian Turn of Mind* (Random House: London 1992, 1st ed. 1968), and I.F. Clarke, *Voices Prophesying War: Future Wars, 1763-3749* (Oxford University Press: Oxford 1992, 1st ed. 1966).

[90] For more on the construction of community narratives, see Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, pp. 204-206.

In the end, like much of the rest of Britain, change at Wadham College was inevitable.[91] Enough of the prewar world, real or perceived, survived in some form to allow the college and its community to separate itself from the war. The war was by no means forgotten entirely by the college after the unveiling of the memorial, as physical changes to the college persisted long after the war ended. The war slowly faded from the pages of the *Gazette* and out of the college as Oxford became a university once again, but its legacy nonetheless remained a contentious topic with the arrival – or return – of war veterans and the persistence of intellectual debates on the war and its outcome.[92] Joseph Wells continued his work at the college until his death from pneumonia in 1929. Like Wadham men killed in the war, his obituary in the *Gazette* centered his legacy on his work at Wadham College, and the war received no mention.[93]

But perhaps most important to Wadham men and Warden Joseph Wells was that Wadham College continued to exist as a community dedicated to the educating and shaping of future generations of Wadham men that would share a sense of community with the college and its members long after they graduated. The form of remembrance of Wadham College that persisted among Wadham men in spite of the First World War is exhibited in a letter to Wells by T.N. Goddard in 1917. Stationed in the Falklands, Goddard came across a fellow Wadham man named Arthur Cobb, who had attended the college at a different time. During their meeting, Goddard shared with Cobb a photo album of his time at Wadham:

> Cobb, knowing scarcely a single face in all my groups, pored over [the photos] for hours. Whatever the faces in the boat were, it was still the Wadham Eight waiting to start somewhere near the Lasher, at the bottom of the First

[91] For a general overview of the changes – and turmoil – experienced at Wadham College in the immediate postwar period, see Garnett, 'A Liberal Place', in Davies and Garnett, eds., *Wadham College*, p. 62.
[92] Winter, 'Oxford and the First World War', in Brian Harrison, ed., *The History of the University of Oxford, Vol. VIII: The Twentieth Century* (Oxford Scholarship Online: October 2011, Print 1994) pp. 23-25. Interestingly, after the *Gazette* edition on the War Memorial, mention of the First World War disappears altogether from the *Gazette* editions of the 1920s and 1930s.
[93] 'Notes' and 'In Memoriam: Joseph Wells', *Wadham College Gazette*, No. 85 (Summer Term, 1929).

Division at 6 o'clock when the shadows of the willows shimmered in the still water…and Cobb had only to substitute mentally the faces of the Eights he knew for those appearing in my Eights and the resurrection was complete.[94]

While Wadham College and the world around it would change to some extents throughout its existence, there remained enough continuity in terms of emotional belonging and identity amongst various generations of Wadham men for it to continue as an imagined community tied to a more 'mundane' image of itself beyond the conflict. It did not matter whether it was Goddard's or Cobb's time at Wadham or that they met during the First World War, but that familiar traditions, such as the college Eights, continued to evoke memories of concrete places and a strong sense of belonging between Wadham men of all generations.

Conclusion

On 22 July 1916, Harry Corbett was killed in action while fighting in the Battle of the Somme. He was twenty-four years old. He and his body rest at the Thiepval Memorial in France.[95] He would be one among thousands more to suffer the same fate in that single campaign, and one of the sixty-eight Wadham men that would have his name recited by Joseph Wells on 9 February 1923 and engraved at the entrance to the Goddard building within the college that had given him the 'happiest & most peaceful' days of his life.[96] Soon after his death, the *Gazette* – written by Joseph Wells – remembered him first as a member of the College Eight rowing team and for his aspiration to become a schoolmaster, but 'The War…cut short this

[94] T.N. Goddard, 30 July 1917 (#136+++), WWC.
[95] 'Corbett, Harry', Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC), URL: http://www.cwgc.org/find-war-dead/casualty/759456/CORBETT,%20HARRY (Accessed 27 February 2017).
[96] For more details on casualty and service figures from the University of Oxford, see Winter, 'Oxford and the First World War', in Harrison, ed., *The History of the University of Oxford, Vol. VIII: The Twentieth Century*, pp. 20-23.

plan'.[97] Although he did acknowledge Corbett's military service, Wells chose instead to memorialize his prewar accomplishments and life goals, defining him through his time in Oxford and what he had hoped to do with his life 'cut short' by the First World War.

As is the case within many collections of 'war letters', nothing remains of the letters that Joseph Wells wrote to his former pupils. All that is left of his voice in this context are the replies that he received from the Wadham men serving throughout the world, and the *Gazette* editions that he published during the war. It is worth noting, however, the way in which Wells wrote of the University of Oxford in his book *The Charm of Oxford* (1920) published shortly after the war. Turning to Wadham College, he highlighted the architecture of the college, built in a 'Gothic style [which] survived in Oxford when it was being rapidly superseded elsewhere'.[98] In the aftermath of the First World War, Wells depicted the college as a physical example of an unaltered, concrete space, built on old traditions surviving in the face of times of upheaval. It is this image of the college that he shared with his Wadham men during the conflict and beyond: a place where tradition (real or invented) and emotional ties to mundanity would survive in the face of violent change. It is not difficult to imagine the strain that the war brought Wells with the emptiness of Wadham College and the undergraduates that would never return, but perhaps also the pride he surely felt for the students that he had helped turn not into soldiers, but rather Wadham men. Perhaps this is partly how these men could endure the loss and suffering that they experienced in the First World War: an emotional identity tied to tangible, mundane community instilled in them by Warden Wells and Wadham College. In the end, they fought, lived, and died

[97] 'Wadham Roll of Honour', *Wadham Gazette*, No. 58 (Michaelmas Term, 1916).
[98] Joseph Wells, *The Charm of Oxford* (Simpkin Marshall Ltd.: London 1924, 1st ed. 1920).

not simply as British men, imperial men, or ‘ordinary’ soldiers, but first and foremost as Wadham men.

CHAPTER 3

‘I LOOK FORWARD TO THE DAY WHEN WE SHALL CAROUSE TOGETHER’

THE MANY (EPISTOLARY) RELATIONSHIPS OF A JUNIOR OFFICER

Introduction

On 10 April 1915, James Heygate Butlin, a BEF lieutenant serving on the Western Front, wrote a letter to his father. Writing to thank him and his family for sending chocolates, newspapers, and further letters and parcels, he mentioned aspects of his wartime activities – postings in the trenches, going to communion for Easter, artillery fire while he wrote (‘Fancy the gunners having sport at this time!’), and getting inspected by then-BEF Commander Field Marshall Sir John French, but spent far more of his letter giving an account of his correspondence with home and others and the parcels, letters that he had received, and letters he planned to send. While recalling letters he had received, one of the names he mentioned most was that of ‘Basil’, who had sent him ‘two ripping boxes of Selfridges chocs’.[1]

Days later, James would write a letter to Basil, one of the few remaining wartime students studying at Merton College, Oxford, with a Green Envelope. Even before writing to Basil or his father, he had written to his sister ‘Doll’ about whether Basil had his address.[2] In this letter to Basil from 15 April 1915, James thanked him for his ‘perfectly splendid letter’, and declared that ‘nearly everything in it was news to me & I was immensely bucked with it’. He

[1] Private Papers of J.H. Butlin, letter to father 10 April 1915, Doc. 7915, Ref. 67/52/1, IWM. Henceforth, all citations of this collection will be abbreviated to ‘Butlin, source and date, IWM’.
[2] Butlin, letter to sister 2 April 1915, IWM.

thanked him for what he had described in his father's letter as the 'ripping boxes of Selfridges chocs', asking if he recalled his 'more than passing fancy for nut milk chocolate' and admitted that 'your tastes in chocolates & mine coincide to a nicety' when compared to what he received from his family. After acknowledging Basil's request to not 'hesitate to ask for any mortal thing', Butlin mentioned the newspapers that his family sent him, and asked if Basil could send the '*Winning Post, Snark's Annual*, or any similar shady publication' along with other reading material, and joked 'I appear to have made nothing but requests for various things throughout this letter which you, as a fairy godmother, will provide (?)'. Butlin also replied to 'political news' that Basil had shared, remarking that 'it doesn't make any odds to us whether beer or alcohol is prohibited or not'. In closing, he told Basil that 'I look forward to the day when we shall carouse together in town'.[3]

Basil G. Burnett Hall and James H. Butlin met while at Weymouth College and briefly attended Oxford together. Shortly after leaving Wadham College in late-1914 to join the British Army, Butlin kept up a lively, intimate correspondence with his old friend throughout the First World War. While Basil remained at Merton College until 1916 and worked in the War Office until the end of the war due to poor health, he provided Butlin with an outlet to mundane life outside family life and male bonding beyond his wartime military career.[4] In many instances, his letters to Basil contrasted radically with the straightforward, often muted reporting of his activities and requests for parcels in letters that Butlin sent to his family. Given the humor, subject matter, and overall honest tone of these letters, it appears that Butlin shared an emotional

[3] Butlin, letter to Basil 15 April 1915, IWM.
[4] R.G.C. Levens and C.S.C. Williams, eds., *Merton College Register, 1900-1964, With Notices of Some Older Surviving Members* (Blackwell: Oxford 1964) p. 89. Many thanks to the Merton archivist, Julian Reid, for locating and sharing this information. Unfortunately, Wadham College does not have a surviving register dating beyond 1895.

bond with his friend Basil that was on par with the one he shared with his family. These letters revealed that perhaps, like Butlin, soldiers' desire for intimacy and the maintenance of emotional ties during wartime was not the monopoly of families, wives, or sweethearts. Rather, alongside these sources, a myriad of other intimate relationships, such as male companionship beyond the military, made up various fragments of the prewar emotional self – or fragments of their mundanity – that soldiers wished to preserve for life beyond the First World War and existed alongside ties to family.

In the context of emotional history, most recent studies of emotions in wartime letter-writing have dwelled on more traditionally-understood sources of emotional intimacy: families (notably mothers), wives, and sweethearts. Much of this emphasis stems from postwar preservation efforts by the families of veterans or fallen soldiers, who were more likely (or perhaps better able) to save letters written to them.[5] While Martha Hanna has argued more broadly for a shared emotional experience of the First World War for soldiers and civilians through letters and other sources in her research on French epistolaries, Michael Roper has insisted that the emotional survival of British soldiers was rooted in their relationship to their mothers, who helped their sons negotiate the divide between 'home' and 'war', and wives, through their own sort of 'mothering', helped navigate veterans through the trauma of their wartime experiences.[6]

Nevertheless, even in their letters to mothers, wives, or other family members, the recurrent requests of soldiers asking to be 'remembered' to others beyond that circle indicates that the emotional needs of soldiers extended beyond such a limited source. In the letter Butlin

[5] For more on the emotional drive behind postwar family preservation and remembrance, see Roper and Rachel Duffett, 'Family Legacies in the Centenary', pp. 76-115. See also Winter, *Remembering War*, pp. 40-45.
[6] Hanna, *Your Death Would Be Mine*, Hanna, 'The Couple', in Winter, ed., *Cambridge History of the First World War*, Vol. III, pp. 6-28, Roper, *The Secret Battle*.

wrote to his father, perhaps the liveliest part of it came when he mentioned his excitement for having received 'two ripping boxes of Selfridge chocs' and three letters from Basil. In the subsequent letter to Basil – among many others, Butlin wrote in a way that he almost never did with his family, and wrote about subjects he would never share with his family, such as his requests for 'shady publications' and sharing details of his amorous pursuit of various women. While masculinity in the First World War remains a subject of historical debate, the emphasis focuses far more on the shaping of gender identity and, to some extents, the shattering, reconstruction, and remembering of the male body in British culture.[7] From this perspective, masculinity is seen as an identity either reaffirmed, reconstructed, or simply performed by a testifying soldier (the self), or a cultural object defined, witnessed, and redefined by cultural, social, and even political consensus due to the wartime experience of disabling wounds, physical mutilation, or mental trauma. While these approaches have offered valuable insight into the evolution of 'masculinity' in British culture during the era of the World Wars, it does not leave room for male intimacy or emotional expression beyond perceived 'traditional' – such as military comradeship – or 'private' – the family, particularly wives and mothers – emotional outlets.

This chapter proposes that it in understanding the emotional well-being of soldiers and their ties to prewar life, there existed parallel realms of emotional expression beyond male-female intimacy in the form of male-male relationships and a myriad of other sources. Indeed, given the literature dedicated to Edwardian masculinity and militarism, it seems necessary to consider the ways in which such masculinity and militarism played out on an emotional, intimate

[7] See Meyer, *Men of War*, Bourke, *Dismembering the Male*, Susan Kent, *Making Peace*, and Carden-Coyne, *Reconstructing the Body*.

level by turning to letters written between men during the First World War.[8] For a majority of these British men before 1914, military service itself was not an option (or an interest) of most men seeking to emotionally bond with other men. For many, this bonding stemmed not from military camaraderie, but rather from school, sports, work, organizational membership, or just sheer everyday proximity and mutual acquaintances. Therefore, these same men-turned-soldiers maintained prewar emotional ties to other men beyond the context of military service, which offered only a limited avenue for lasting emotional ties.

With a consideration of male intimacy and companionship in Edwardian culture, intimacy and emotion were not the sole purview of male-female relationships, and therefore the emotional bonds shared between men with contrasting experiences of wartime, much like those between peers like James Butlin and Basil Burnett Hall, also deserves further analysis.[9] Additionally, given the social disapproval of 'shirkers' and other men that did not join the British Army, the continued relationship between the soldier Butlin and Basil, who avoided military service altogether, adds another layer to the story of navigating emotional ties through wartime: the relationship between millions of soldiers and millions of other men that did not join up and 'do their bit' – volunteering, conscription, or otherwise – within the military ranks.[10] While

[8] See Wohl, *The Generation of 1914*, Adams, *The Great Adventure*, and Paris, *Warrior Nation*. For more specific details on militarism in relation to Public School culture and the war, see Seldon and Walsh, *Public Schools and the Great War*.

[9] In a way, this approach to private identity stems from the study of masculinity and wartime letters from the US Civil War. Stephen Berry has advocated for analyzing masculinity beyond public 'postures and poses' that culturally defined masculinity during wartime in favor of the '*inner* experience of masculinity…the private landscapes men negotiated in their confrontation with what their society claimed a man should do and be'. See Stephen Berry, *All That Makes a Man*, pp. 10-13. In a way, the relationship between James and his family versus James and Basil exhibits in some ways, respectively, the differences between publicly-accepted masculinity expressed by a soldier to his family and the more private masculinity communicated between a soldier and another male companion stemming beyond wartime circumstances.

[10] While 'conscientious objection' is perhaps the most studied aspect of 'shirking' in British society, there were a myriad of reasons that led many men to not 'join up' during the war. See Gregory, *The Last Great War: British Society and the First World War* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge 2008) pp. 91-95. For soldiers' attitudes to people at home, see Peter Liddle, 'British Loyalties', in Hugh Cecil and Liddle, eds., *Facing Armageddon: The*

these two men experienced different wars, they nonetheless turned to one another in wartime for emotional support and comradeship, just as they had done when they would 'carouse together' in the prewar world.

Expressing Private Wartime Masculinity: Letters to Basil

Following his first term at Wadham College, Oxford, in the fall of 1914, James Butlin left university to volunteer for military service in the Dorsetshire Regiment (the 'Dorsets').[11] In what appears to be his first letter after leaving Oxford, James thanked Basil for his 'unfailing kindness…last term & especially the last fortnight', and that he hoped to 'start wearing uniform as soon as possible…Also in Weymouth all females glare at a man in ordinary clothes'.[12] Throughout the war, James would be forced to navigate the male comradeship of military life, the social expectations in Britain of men in wartime, and his relationship with Basil, a man who not only avoided military service for much of the war, but ultimately escaped altogether the dangers, rigors, and trauma that James would face throughout his wartime service. It is the exercise of negotiating this relationship through the contrasting experiences that James and Basil faced during the war that is far more telling than James's shared experiences with fellow soldiers about how men on the battlefield not only survived, but also exhibited and reconstructed their own masculinities beyond the narrow confines of military comradeship, which would offer only a limited refuge beyond the war itself.

First World War Experienced (Leo Cooper: London 1996) pp. 525-527. For more on demographics related to British men and military service, see Winter, *The Great War and the British People* (Palgrave Macmillan: Basingstoke 2003 – 1st ed. 1986) pp. 25-64.

[11] While a member of the 'Dorsets' throughout the war, Butlin was attached to the '2nd Yorks' at the beginning of his time on the Western Front, serving with them until later in 1915, when he returned to the 'Dorsets'.

[12] Butlin, letter to Basil 2 December 1914, IWM.

From the beginning of his military service, James wrote to Basil about his changed life. In initial letters, he remarked on how different the military was from Oxford ('I…find life pretty different from the Varsity'), and the improvement in his lifestyle, stating at one point that 'I must confess I eat more & sleep better (if that is possible) than ever I did before in my life'. Alongside his details of and praise for army life, James also would comment on Basil's avoidance of the military, asking in a postscript 'When are you going to join the army? It is the duty of every able-bodied citizen to defend his country'.[13] While Basil's replies to these disapproving queries are unfortunately absent, the tension over Basil's continued life at home would remain at times within James's wartime letters. In some cases, his attitude was subtle on the surface, remarking at the start of one Oxford term that he could be one of 'the only inhabitants of Merton & I shouldn't be surprised if [the other student] hasn't enlisted'.[14] After Basil asked about conscription, James replied 'Yes, Basil, I think you'll be conscripted but you should get off lightly'.[15] Even into 1916, James continued to express his displeasure for Basil avoiding service amidst the prospects of conscription:

> Is the compulsion for single men very terrifying to you? Have you presented yourself for an armlet? I expect you've got wind up now the Daily Mail is so hot on your track. You, remember, are one of the 400,000 (?), branded in the eyes of the world as a slacker. Never mind, Basil, take heart & breathe through your heart muscle (if your heart is weak) when you go before the local tribunal.[16]

Ultimately, Basil avoided conscription due to health reasons. As seen above, James alluded to a heart condition that forced Basil to complete his studies at Merton in 1916 with an *Aegrotat*

[13] Butlin, letter to Basil 13 December 1914, IWM.
[14] Butlin, letter to Basil 24 April 1915, IWM.
[15] Butlin, letter to Basil 3 June 1915, IWM.
[16] Butlin, letter to Basil 1 January 1916, IWM.

degree and worked in the Foreign Office for the duration of the war.[17] Even as Basil graduated upon the outbreak of the Battle of the Somme, James congratulated him, but warned Basil to 'not expect any more respect on that account'.[18] As late as May 1917, Basil had only been elevated from a CIII to a CI in his military medical examinations, keeping him rather low on the list for military conscription.[19] In any case, James continued to express his skepticism over Basil's condition, either believing it was not sufficient enough for him to avoid service and, perhaps knowing Basil more personally, that Basil simply did not want to 'do his bit' one way or another. In one instance of skepticism, James brings up his memories of Basil running to chapel '99 mornings out of 100 every day at Weymouth Coll. Even then you were supposed not to run'.[20] For his part, Basil seemed to either ignore or tease James over his attitude to wartime service, as their letters continued throughout the war in spite of it all. In one instance, telling James he had written some letters containing criticism of Basil 'in rather bad taste', James simply retorted with 'I don't know what the hell you mean, but I trust you are not really offended. However, I will not be deluded into continuing the discussion'.[21]

Nevertheless, this tension over their contrasting approaches to wartime service was not enough to cause a rupture in their comradeship. James continued to write to Basil, craving the male companionship from Basil that his fellow soldiers could never fulfill. Even early into his military career, James wrote to Basil whenever offered leave to coordinate a time and place to meet him, writing 'I long to see you much as most of the subalterns at Wyke are pretty boring

[17] Levens and Williams, eds., *Merton College Register*, p. 89. In the British system, an *Aegrotat* degree is awarded to students unable to complete their final examination due to illness. For more on conscription and social responses to compulsion, see Gregory, *The Last Great War*, pp. 101-108. For more on medical examination and classification of military recruits, see Winter, *Great War and the British People*, pp. 50-64.
[18] Butlin, letter to Basil 12 July 1916, IWM.
[19] See Butlin, letter to Basil 24 May 1917, IWM.
[20] Butlin, letter to Basil 15 December 1915, IWM.
[21] Butlin, letter to Basil 15 January 1916, IWM.

fools & they doubtlessly think the same of me'.[22] After having spent a year on the Western Front, James continued to spend parts of his home leave with Basil, writing after one visit 'I enjoyed myself exceedingly at your place, dear Basil, & can never thank you enough. I still rather regret I didn't get off with that girl on the river on Sunday'.[23] Even as Basil recovered from an illness in early 1915, James still begged Basil to join him on leave, believing it would be the last before he went to the Western Front:

> Take my tip, get up & knock the Doctor over, & he'll…soon give in. Besides I expect this will be the last time before I go to the Front that I shall get proper leave, i.e. leave worth having, in which I can slope about & do what I like…it would be like old times for two or three days & we could go into town together & amuse ourselves without any trouble…I will have three ambulance waggons [*sic*] & a hearse to meet every London train at the station here tomorrow.[24]

As he prepared to deploy to France, James made sure to write Basil that 'I expect to go out to the front pretty soon now & am getting things together. Am I likely to see you before I go out?'.[25] In a way, despite his displeasure for Basil's wartime life, James continued to turn to him as a conduit to mundane life beyond the war. After receiving a letter from Basil in 1916, James replied in his letter 'my thoughts often wander back to the old gay times we spent together & the stupendously great time you have promised me for my next leave'.[26] Even without the prospects of leave, James hoped to have some more intimate contact with Basil beyond writing, wishing in his dugout for a 'phone by my bedside…connected up with Merton'.[27] In all of this, Basil was

---

[22] Butlin, letter to Basil 27 December 1914, IWM. What is equally interesting here is Butlin's acknowledgement that his fellow subalterns perhaps dislike him as well, thereby stressing the shared need among military men for emotional outlets and companionship beyond themselves.
[23] Butlin, letter to Basil 30 May 1916, IWM.
[24] Butlin, letter to Basil 3 January 1915, IWM. Unfortunately, Basil was too ill from mumps (or a mumps inoculation) to meet James. See 21 January 1915 letter.
[25] Butlin, letter to Basil 15 March 1915, IWM.
[26] Butlin, letter to Basil 5 January 1916, IWM.
[27] Butlin, letter to Basil 2 February 1916, IWM.

James's outlet to life outside the war that family could not provide. After getting his sick leave extended in 1916, James wrote almost immediately after to Basil, proposing that they spend a 'day or so' in London to 'amuse myself in the recognised way. I shall need your guidance to keep me in the straight & narrow path'.[28]

Even with their contrasting experiences of the First World War, James would continue to express concern, sympathy, and interest in Basil's wartime activities and seek out common ground for both of them. Hearing that Basil had received an inoculation for mumps, James wrote from his training camp 'best wishes for a rapid recovery…I can sympathise with you in pain as I have today been inoculated a second time…I think you are jolly lucky not to have caught mumps off me. I did my best to give it to you'.[29] He would also continue to revel in their mutual interests from before the war, notably an interest in betting on sports and horse-racing – hence James's request to Basil for copies of the *Winning Post*. James would also continue to teasingly admonish Basil over his seemingly hedonistic lifestyle during the war. After expressing sympathy for Basil coming down with influenza, James nonetheless wrote 'as I always told you, you must be careful if you drink to excess'.[30] Having known Basil from his schooldays, James also persisted in teasing him over his academic career. As Basil prepared for his final examination in 1916, James wrote to him that 'as you are hardly likely to get through…you had far better take them unseen. I hope for your people's sake you may get through'.[31] Even as their wartime lives diverged, James and Basil nonetheless found ways to bridge the divide between them from their old prewar friendship.

[28] Butlin, letter to Basil 22 July 1916, IWM.
[29] Butlin, letter to Basil 31 December 1914, IWM.
[30] Butlin, letter to Basil, undated letter from 1916 – most likely late-Spring or early-Summer, IWM.
[31] Butlin, letter to Basil 18 June 1916 – marked as 'Sunday 18th', IWM.

Perhaps where James and Basil both found the most common ground was in their amorous pursuit of women and society gossip, of which they would frequently share details in letters to one another. In the early part of the war, James shared details of his fondness for a woman named 'Edythe', declaring at one point she 'is more lovely than ever & I am hopelessly in the meshes of love'.[32] After spending a day in London with her, he wrote to Basil about their time at a vaudeville show ('a screaming show, nicely improper in parts') and teased of an encounter with her, writing 'I need hardly add I kissed her in the taxi. That is enough detail for the present'.[33] On the Western Front, he admitted that he had had 'no luck with French or Belgian girls. All decent girls have left this part of France months ago & those who are left are village wenches whose style of beauty…does not appeal to me'.[34] In another letter, James told Basil confidentially that while on leave in Bournemouth he 'did not see my beloved Eileen…but got off with a brace of very decent girls…P.S. Bournemouth affair strictly private. Keep your mouth shut'.[35] While on sick leave in 1916, James declared that 'the future is full of promise: I may yet spend some happy evenings in the shady dells of Rodepole with some one whom you can guess. However enough of women. Have you seen the Derby result?'.[36] James would also reply to Basil's own pursuit of various women, writing at one point 'your liaison (?) with the Woodhouse girl is very interesting, especially if you wrote her one of your obscene letters!'.[37] In 1917, James even teased Basil for seemingly contracting a STI:

[32] Butlin, letter to Basil 3 January 1915, IWM.
[33] Butlin, letter to Basil 1 March 1915, IWM.
[34] Butlin, letter to Basil 9 April 1915, IWM.
[35] Butlin, letter to Basil 6 November 1916, IWM.
[36] Butlin, letter to Basil 30 May 1916, IWM.
[37] Butlin, letter to Basil 3 June 1915, IWM.

It was with unfeigned sorrow that I learnt that you were stricken with German measles. Of course that's what you call it; I know what it really is & will not give you away…Mind you write on the quiet & damn infection (you can easily get some one to slip it in the post without your people seeing it).[38]

While they never outright say it was an STI, it is likely that Basil's 'German measles' was either gonorrhea or syphilis. It seemed a bad enough case that Basil switched to writing his letters on a typewriter, to which James joked that 'I can now read your letters without puzzling over each word in turn'. It also seemed that James had similar experience with whatever affected Basil, as he told him that 'it usually takes about ten days to get over it but you don't want to go to any quack'.[39] After one of his own sexual encounters with a French woman, James reassured Basil that 'I am feeling very fit & so far from catching what you said'.[40] Perhaps as a sheer testament to the private emotional masculinity shared between he and Basil, James also wrote with annoyance regarding public perceptions of STI's and sexuality, declaring after reading the *Weekly Dispatch* that 'Why can't these people keep to fiction? From what [Max Pemberton] says you would imagine that the soldier gets clap from looking at a harlot in Piccadilly. No man need get venereal disease, unless he wants to, & I should have thought Max P was old enough to know that'.[41]

So then, what emotional need and sort of companionship did Basil fulfill for James that military comrades could not? First and foremost, sharing an emotional bond with James that stemmed from their days at Weymouth and Oxford, Basil acted as a confidant to whom James could express his private fears, concerns, and other matters that he felt he could not share with

[38] Butlin, letter to Basil 18 January 1917, IWM.
[39] Butlin, letter to Basil 21 January 1917, IWM.
[40] Butlin, letter to Basil 29 March 1917, IWM.
[41] Butlin, letter to Basil 3 June 1917, IWM. James's complaint seems to have stemmed from a previous letter from Basil on the subject, as he closed this letter with 'I consider you remarks re venereal disease stupid & unworthy of any reply'.

family, fellow soldiers, and others. After arriving in France for the first time, James shared details about the devastation that he had seen, remarking that 'if only the people of England could see what I have seen, they would be a sadder & a wiser lot', but insisted that 'I wouldn't have England dull & gloomy like this place for all the world. If I come back from this war as I hope I may be spared to do, I wouldn't want to come back to a morose & pessimistic crowd'.[42] After being offered a regular commission in the British Army beyond the war, James wrote Basil declaring 'as soon as possible I am going to clear out of this show. When peace does come we shall have nothing but ceremonial parades till we nearly go off our heads'.[43] He would also turn to Basil as a source for future postings, even going as far as to ask him in 1916 if he had 'done anything about getting me a bomb proof job?' and asked him to send a book on public speaking – perhaps to prepare him for a potential job interview.[44] Upon discovering that Basil had obtained a posting in the Foreign Office in 1917, James wrote of the post that 'you may even be able to get me a staff job'.[45]

Beyond being a confidant about his own emotional turmoil and experiences that he faced on the Western Front, Basil also served as a conduit to other relationships he wished to keep up outside the war. One of these was 'Edythe', asking Basil to 'give her my love. Take her out to the theatre & treat her handsomely'.[46] In his correspondence with Basil, James also shared details of all the other epistolary relationships he maintained beyond family, perhaps exhibiting just how prolific soldiers and the home front were with their communication. Writing about another mutual acquaintance, James chided Basil for leaving out information that he had known

[42] Butlin, letter to Basil 3 April 1915 IWM.
[43] Butlin, letter to Basil 24 April 1915, IWM.
[44] Butlin, letter to Basil 18 June 1916 – marked as 'Sunday 18th', IWM.
[45] Butlin, letter to Basil 3 January 1917, IWM.
[46] Butlin, letter to Basil 3 April 1915, IWM.

from other correspondence, acknowledging that 'Your news of Bewald interested me very much…his descriptions of prostitutes & brothels…you have unfortunately omitted'.[47] He would also acknowledge the fellow 'Wadham men' that Basil came across in some letters, referring to one American member as a 'very decent sort' and recalled how he 'used to play bridge with him'.[48]

As mentioned, in what was seemingly a role delegated to the families of soldiers, Basil also joined the effort to send parcels to James in France. James would receive and request parcels from family, but these often amounted to more mainstream papers and magazines, food, cigarettes, and sometimes even 'toilet paper'.[49] Basil, however, provided items that James could supplement with those from family, notably 'shady magazines' and other items that he could not ask from family. After his initial request for these reading materials, he reminded Basil 'it was Snark's Annual I mentioned, but look for <u>any shady</u> publication on some bookstall'.[50] In some cases, James used his attempts to guilt Basil over not volunteering for military service to obtain further parcels. After admonishing Basil over his fears of being conscripted, James transitioned to asking Basil for a parcel of chocolates and to 'see if any racy magazines etc. are knocking about'.[51]

In all of his letters with Basil, James not only attempted to hold onto his relationship with a prewar comrade, but also to keep his own private masculinity grounded in emotional life beyond war, killing, and trauma. While family, wives, and sweethearts certainly played an

[47] Butlin, letter to Basil 9 April 1915, IWM.
[48] Butlin, letter to Basil 3 June 1915, IWM.
[49] Butlin, letter to mother 11 April 1915, IWM. James claimed to need a 'private supply' of toilet paper in France, declaring that '[toilet paper] is – as far as I can make out – unknown here [in France]'.
[50] Butlin, letter to Basil 30 April 1915, IWM. James did not limit his requests for the 'shady' or 'racy' publications. In one letter, James wrote 'I should love you awfully dearly, if you were to send me the January Strand'. See Butlin, letter to Basil 25 January 1916, IWM.
[51] Butlin, letter to Basil 1 January 1916, IWM.

integral part in this effort, James and other soldiers also turned to other sources of emotional support and intimacy, such as close male confidants like Basil, who had diverging wartime experiences from themselves. Like with James and Basil, tension over wartime service and 'shirking' certainly entered these conversations and relationships, but, as outlets to a more private masculinity beyond the war and family, it was not enough to destroy them. Just as families and wives sent parcels and letters to help reinforce the emotional ties they had with soldiers, male comrades and other confidants also supported another fragment of emotional identity that these more 'traditional' sources simply could not fulfill, such as sending a 'shady magazine' or 'obscene letter' to an old friend on the Western Front.

A More Public Masculinity: Fragments of Identity in Family Letters

With all of these letters that James had written to Basil, it is equally important to juxtapose this communication with that directed towards his family. While the letters are less preserved than those written to Basil, James also wrote to his mother, father, and sister 'Doll' throughout his wartime service. As previously seen, while he wrote to Basil requesting parcels with 'shady magazines' and gossiping about their mutual pursuit of women, James wrote around the same time to his father about going to 'communion' over Easter Sunday. This more muted, culturally acceptable masculinity remained a feature of James's family letters throughout the war filled with allusions to wartime duty, male responsibility, and family loyalty. What these family letters show is not self-censorship of James's identity, but rather another fragment of James's identity that he shared with his own family and, in some ways, other people with whom he had more of a public or deferential relationship. While his letters to Basil were rooted more in expressing his 'private' masculine identity, James's letters to family offer glimpses of another

part of his masculinity expressed as a 'son' and 'brother', rooted far more in his deference to the public masculine identity, which perhaps was shaped in many ways by these sources of emotional support before the war.

Even without delving deeply into the content of these letters, the surface of James's family correspondence shows far more formality than those written to Basil. The ways in which he opened and closed his letters to family were far more formal than those he wrote to Basil. To family, James simply opened with a 'My dearest mother' and closed wishing love to the rest of the family and ending with a simple 'James'.[52] To Basil, James would playfully vary the ways he would open, addressing him often as 'My dear old pal Basil' or 'My dear & excellent old Basil', and often ended with a 'Cheery ho' and closing as 'Yours ever, James'.[53] This informality remained common within these wartime letters with Basil, and James would further insist on it when Basil became too formal in his letters, such as the way Basil signed his letters, teasing him at one point that 'I was charmed to find your signature "Basil" now. Do you when writing to your Mater sign yourself "yours in haste, B.G. Burnett Hall". If you were really in a hurry you would write Basil, which is much shorter'.[54]

While he did not insist on this informality with his mother and father, James did write with some more playfulness when writing to his sister 'Doll'. Often addressing her as 'Princess', James would gossip to some extent about news back home and mutual acquaintances, but nonetheless kept his correspondence with her more focused on his well-being, tracking packages

[52] For examples, see Butlin, letter to mother 16 April 1917, letter to father 3 February 1916, letter to 'Doll' 2 April 1915, IWM. The letters to his sister vary at least in terms of the opening, closing, and content, but nonetheless as a whole these letters lack much of the intimacy and life as those written to Basil.
[53] For one example, see letter to Basil 19 July 1915, IWM.
[54] Butlin, letter to Basil 4 December 1916, IWM. This came after an earlier letter, where in a postscript James complained about the way Basil signed his letters with too much formality, writing 'P.S. Why do you always sign yourself B.G. Burnett Hall. Why not Basil occasionally?'. See letter to Basil 26 November 1915, IWM.

and letters received and sent, and reports on the weather. As for the war, he did share with her some details about his time in the trenches and the overall situation he witnessed on the Western Front. When he did speak with negativity, it was often directed towards the French and the conditions around him. In one letter, he claimed that the French 'treat this war in quite a different spirit from ourselves & are altogether glum & mournful' and complained about the 'filthy' and 'unsanitary' villages.[55] Thanking Doll for a parcel of magazines, he asserted they were 'all very welcome in this abomination of desolation'.[56] As for his time in the trenches, he complained far more about the conditions than any danger from the Germans, writing in one instance about the rain and mud that made his feet 'terribly swollen' and asked for a parcel of clothes to replace what had been ruined.[57] In instances such as these, James seemingly had an ulterior motive not to simply testify to his own suffering as a soldier, but rather to seek material assistance from family beyond the war. Aside from the war, he wrote to Doll often about their mutual acquaintances, particularly Basil and other friends he knew from Weymouth College that had also joined the British Army. In one letter, James told his sister 'Basil tells me that Alfred was at Rouen the same day as I was. Rather annoyed missing him when I would have given worlds to see him'.[58] Despite being another source of family support, Doll seemed to represent a nebulous line between 'family' and 'confidant' as his sister.

With his mother, James wrote more sensitively about his time in the war, perhaps wary that too much detail might upset her. In many instances, he perhaps spent more time reassuring family that he was safe on the Western Front over detailing the dangers he faced. While he did allude to some danger and destruction caused by the war, James avoided sharing details about his

[55] Butlin, letter to sister 2 April 1915, IWM.
[56] Butlin, letter to sister 7 April 1915, IWM.
[57] Butlin, letter to sister 4 December 1915, IWM.
[58] Butlin, letter to sister 7 April 1915, IWM.

own personal war experience with his mother, in some instances using the censor as an excuse to avoid the war and, in one case, insisted to her that 'it is quite impossible to realise the meaning of the war until you actually come up'.[59] In another letter, after writing on the 'sight of ruined homes & churches' and admitting that 'German Snipers are every bit as good as they are made out to be', James chose to end his letter with 'I could tell you lots of interesting things but unfortunately a censor exists'.[60] While he accepted her parcels, he also spent many letters reassuring his mother that he was well-off and did not need further 'mothering' beyond consistent letters and parcels providing some extra comforts at the front.[61] As for his time early on in the trenches, he would often be rather brief and avoid description, alluding to the experiences as 'quite an exciting time in the trenches'.[62] In all of this, perhaps aware of the emotional needs of his mother – whom his sister claimed wrote James 'millions of letters', James frequently reassured her of his safety, whether he was moving billets ('we got moved suddenly from our delightful billet…it is just as safe') or when he was in the trenches ('the trenches were very good our casualties were very slight').[63]

Similar to Basil, perhaps his most frank depictions of his wartime experiences appeared in letters written to his father. From his first action in the trenches in 1915, James wrote rather frankly about the fighting, hardship, and trauma he experienced while fighting on the Western Front. After one major engagement, he wrote that 'I have just been through a terrible ten days & feel very thankful to God that I am alive and well'. He went on to describe 'a perfect stream of wounded', getting 'shelled continuously' for seven days by German and friendly artillery ('a

[59] Butlin, letter to mother 2 April 1915, IWM.
[60] Butlin, letter to mother 2 April 1915, IWM.
[61] For more on letters and parcels as 'mothering' from a distance, see Roper, *The Secret Battle*, Ch. 1.
[62] Butlin, letter to mother 22 April 1915, IWM.
[63] Butlin, letter to sister 7 April 1915, letters to mother 2 June 1915 and 18 July 1915, IWM.

veritable Scylla & Cheribdes [*sic*]'), and that 'no one dared to go to sleep, they never knew they would wake up again'.[64] In another ill-fated battle that he missed, he shared his belief that 'an elaborate system of [German] spies' existed behind the lines.[65] He also shared details about soldiers' slang he learned at the front – notably 'in the pink' – and his temptation to send a unexploded German shell home in a parcel ('of course they wouldn't allow you to send a thing like that home').[66] In many of these instances, his writing to his father dwelled much more on public life – a very 'male' sphere in this time, whether it be politics, military service, or financial well-being. Even when he tried to talk about politics and Classical allusions at one point with his mother, James told her that 'this will interest Father more'.[67]

One difference, however, was perhaps the way he described the conditions in the trenches to his father as opposed to his mother, sister, and, to some extents, Basil. While he used the conditions as an indirect way to seek some form of maternal support with parcels, James in many instances shrugged off the environmental conditions in letters to his father, focusing far more on the death, destruction, and trauma of the war. In one instance, after describing an attack he took part in, he simply described the weather as 'cold…but we didn't mind that much'.[68] When he did talk more about harsh conditions, he wrote more stoically about it, telling him that a 'tin hut' he was posted in was 'all draughts & nothing else', but declared that 'I get under my blankets and sleep soundly in spite of everything!'.[69] The needs for which he would turn to his father were also different. While he would request parcels of food and clothing to his mother, his

[64] Butlin, letter to father 20 May 1915, IWM.
[65] Butlin, letter to father 18 June 1915, IWM.
[66] Butlin, letter to father 17 April 1915, IWM. Eventually, James does send a 'French 75 case & a German nose-cap' home in a parcel. See letter to father 9 October 1915.
[67] Butlin, letter to mother 28 December 1915, IWM.
[68] Butlin, letter to father 20 May 1915, IWM.
[69] Butlin, letter to father 3 February 1916, IWM.

father would ask him about his financial situation, with James in one letter ensuring him that he had 'blank cheques' with him and a 'field cashier' was nearby his posting.[70] Beyond this, he would write about parcels he received from his mother or Basil.

Perhaps what James wrote most often about in all of his family letters was his continued relationship with Basil, who would appear as another frequent source of letters and parcels. In his earliest days on the Western Front, James wrote in one of his first letters to his sister asking 'has Basil written to you for my address? If he does please give it to him'.[71] After trying to catch up on information from home with his mother, James mentioned that 'I had a tremendous long letter of about 30 sheets from Basil. He offers to send me any mortal thing I want'.[72] He also shared details on all the parcels he received from Basil, whether it be the 'two ripping boxes of Selfridges chocs', various magazines (he does not mention their 'shady' nature), or even a 'tinned tongue…which is rather a useful thing'.[73] He also joked with his sister Doll about when Basil was too formal in signing his letters, telling her in his latest letter that he 'signs himself Basil this time, as I wrote & told him to do so'.[74] Interestingly enough, in all of his talk of Basil in family letters, he did not openly criticize him over his refusal to join the Army.

Like with those written to Basil, the value of these family letters for James was the chance not to dwell on the war and any horrors he had faced, but rather to reinforce his ties with home. While he did share news of his experiences on the Western Front, these details were not the sole purpose that led James to form these epistolary relationships. Rather, in his requests for

[70] Butlin, letter to father 10 April 1915, IWM.
[71] Butlin, letter to sister 2 April 1915, IWM.
[72] Butlin, letter to mother 15 April 1915, IWM. Also mentioned in letter to father 23 April 1915, IWM.
[73] Butlin, letters to father 10 and 17 April and 13 June 1915, IWM. He does mention to his father later on that he gets the 'Pink 'Un' (slang for the sport and horse-racing newspaper *The Sporting Times*) from Basil every week. See letter to father 3 February 1916, IWM.
[74] Butlin, letter to sister 4 December 1915, IWM.

parcels, in his reassurances over his well-being, and in asking for news from home, James sought to reinforce his emotional ties with family who, like Basil, represented a important fragment of his own identity, an identity grounded not in war, but in life back home. In turning to home throughout the war in letters, James wrote not solely to testify to his experiences, but rather to maintain continuity with home in the face of the novelty of wartime life. While Basil's letters certainly offered an outlet to escape the war, James's emotional survival could not be fully realized without other sources of support, such as his family. While he valued his correspondence with Basil, James certainly put value in letters from family and others, writing in one instance to his sister that 'a letter out here means everything to me; a touch of dear old England'.[75] This could not be realized solely by family, Basil, or some other source, but rather through the collective efforts of these sources as a whole that to James represented that 'touch of dear old England'. These ties to home would become even more vital for James, who ultimately risked his own physical and emotional survival as he struggled over time with his wartime experience on the Western Front.

Expressing Trauma: Graphic Testimony, Disillusion, and 'Shell Shock' in Letters

After roughly a year and a half on the Western Front, James wrote to Basil from the hospital in Rouen, telling him that he had come down with 'acute otitis – for your benefit that means inflammation of & discharge from the ear'.[76] About a week before, James had written angrily to Basil about his leave getting cancelled, but now the illness allowed him far more time at home than normal home leave, and James admitted that 'it makes a glorious change after a

[75] Butlin, letter to sister 7 April 1915, IWM.
[76] Butlin, letter to Basil 11 March 1916, IWM.

year of trenches'.[77] On the surface, the diagnosis alone does not indicate any deeper underlying cause, but 'acute otitis' could also imply that James had begun to physically deteriorate due to the stress caused by his war experiences in France. Over time, when he would inevitably return to the front, James risked not just facing further physical trauma, but also a psychological break. James's navigation through trauma and recovery offers a case study into perhaps how many soldiers of the war not simply endured trauma, but also found a way survive it and return to some semblance of mundanity.

While James returned to Britain to recover from his illness in 1916, he could not fully enjoy the mundanity of home he desired while on leave, as he remained on active duty and had to stay in a military hospital in Southsea, which offered him a mundanity from which he had hoped for a respite. After being sent home to Weymouth for part of his recovery, James admitted to Basil 'I much prefer to be at home as I shall be my own CO. At hospital, especially military establishments, they have some absurd ideas. In many cases they think more of the beds being tidy than the patient being comfortable'.[78] Nevertheless, despite his annoyance for the mundanity of military life beyond the trenches, James expressed relief that he had returned to 'Blighty', dreading that he had escaped from France on the eve of 'great things…"great things" mean slaughter', and planned to stay in Britain 'as long as human ingenuity and cunning can contrive'. He declared that after serving 'in the infantry' for twelve months in France, he had had enough of the fighting.[79] Without being any more overt, James seems to have admitted to Basil in early 1916 that he had reached his breaking point, and any additional time in France would exceed his physical and psychological endurance.

[77] Butlin, letter to Basil 4 March and 11 March 1916, IWM. For notification of his return to Britain, see Butlin, letter to Basil 15 March 1916, IWM.
[78] Butlin, letter to Basil 19 March 1916, IWM.
[79] Ibid.

In some of his early letters from the Western Front, there are some indications that James was mentally affected by his experiences going 'over the top', particularly in the extent to which he was willing to offer graphic details to either Basil or his family. On 22 May 1915, James wrote to Basil 'with a feeling of profound gratitude to my God that I am still alive', describing being caught in a barrage of friendly fire and having to open fire on surrendering Germans equipped with 'dum dum bullets' ('I wish I could have shot them then & there'). He went on to say that 'it was impossible to bury the dead & I can never forget the sight of that trench', and by the end admitted 'my nerves were shattered' as they made their escape to safety behind the lines. Nevertheless, he allowed himself to recover from the experience, telling Basil 'I can afford to smile again now', but insisted that he had not exaggerated and had even spared him worse details.[80]

Even when he did not address details about the war, James also exhibited some emotional distance from home itself in letters over time, notably in the immediate aftermath of dangerous tours in the trenches. In closing a letter after an attack, James wrote with some bitterness to Basil 'England seems just waking up to the war! Good old England'.[81] In some ways, despite any alienation or trauma he experienced, James also seemed to turn to graphic testimony and disillusion in letters as a sort of cry for help to people back home. Replying to a letter from Basil after having shared graphic detail from a previous letter, James wrote 'one paragraph in your letter amused me somewhat, "you seem on the whole to have had a pretty rotten time". I can assure [you], my dear Basil, we did. In the trench I was in there were six officers, of whom 3

[80] Butlin, letter to Basil 22 May 1915, IWM. Butlin claimed that this battle took place at Aubers Ridge, perhaps during the 2nd Artois Offensive.
[81] Butlin, letter to Basil 22 May 1915, IWM.

were killed'.[82] In another instance, James dwelled on the death of a British pilot that lost a duel to a German plane, writing that 'it must have been an awful death…He fell to the ground just a streak of flame, one of the most unforgettable sights of a life-time'.[83] In these cases of James sharing graphic detail, it seems that Basil and family perhaps did not quite know how to react to such testimony, but they could at least gather that in reading such graphic descriptions of war or outbursts of bitterness against the home front, James was testifying to his own emotional trauma in France.

Even when James did not go 'over the top' in the trenches, he would acknowledge the mental shock of the war within abrupt asides found in some of his letters home. Just as he would express frustration to his father about the sudden sound of gunfire ('fancy the gunners having sport at this time!'), James also would turn to these same traumatic asides in his letters to Basil, interrupting the flow of his communication on other topics.[84] As he began to write a request to Basil for another parcel, James drifted off to write '(Just as I was writing that a great shell crashed through the air & frightened my life out…). Having recovered I will go on'.[85] Ultimately, while it was not necessarily 'traumatic' for James to share vivid details of his experiences, they ultimately became problematic as they began to feature more in his letters and his connection to the prewar life slipped. In a way, the more he used his letters as a space to 'testify' about war in graphic detail, it is possible that he risked creating an emotional rift over time, as his communication lost its grounding in the relationships that he had wished to preserve in the first place.

[82] Butlin, letter to Basil 3 June 1915, IWM.
[83] Butlin, letter to Basil 19 April 1917, IWM.
[84] Butlin, letter to father 10 April 1915, IWM. See also n1.
[85] Butlin, letter to Basil 15 April 1915, IWM. See also n2.

While back in Britain during 1916, James struggled to settle down during his recovery, expressing some disillusion over life on the home front. Stationed at Wyke, he railed against the local 'unspeakable crowd of bounders. I never knew things had come to this' and desperately sought a transfer to another posting, even considering going back to the Western Front as 'my last expedient'.[86] Nevertheless, perhaps after some recovery at home, James showed some signs of returning to his normal self in his letter to Basil. After staying in Wyke for some time, he admitted that 'I am growing a little more used to my surroundings & company…I play bridge a good deal & otherwise amuse myself. I do as little work as possible…'.[87] As he waited for the results of his medical examination, he wrote extensively on his pursuit of various women, sharing his plans to 'continue my romance with the beautiful brown-eyed Hilda' in Ewell, his attempted liaison with a 'blue flapper' (with 'no luck'), and his curiosity over a 'frightfully pretty red-haired flapper whom I am dying to get to know'. In the end, he declared to Basil that 'I must at all costs get further leave as I find England a very agreeable spot'.[88] James continued, however, to find any means possible to avoid going back to France, writing for Basil's help getting him a recruiting job at home, admitting that 'I feel quite unable to face the trenches again. If an interview is necessary I will come & interview any body or any thing'.[89]

As his home leave letters from 1916 show, James maintained his close ties to Basil and home, but his relationship to the war as a soldier became increasingly traumatic and disillusioned. When he would write about the war, he became far more open about what he saw as the horror and futility of it, but still directed much of his anger towards the Germans rather than home itself. Writing after the Battle of Jutland, he declared to Basil 'What a war this is! I

[86] Butlin, letter to Basil undated letter from 1916 – most likely late-Spring or early-Summer, IWM.
[87] Butlin, letter to Basil 28 June 1916, IWM.
[88] Butlin, letter to Basil 17 April 1916, IWM.
[89] Butlin, letter to Basil 4 June 1916, IWM.

am afraid there are many aching hearts over this last naval affair. Damn all Germans!'.[90] While relieved not be in France, James expressed increasing irritation over Army life. Posted to a noncombatant unit in Wyke, he railed about losing command of his own company, his attachment to an Army Service Corps (ASC) unit, getting rejected for a musketry training post – despite his self-perceived qualifications. Claiming he had no means of escape from his post and that the 'whole army system is rotten, corrupt & tainted…I shall do no more for them', he declared to Basil 'I am sinking into a state of nervous depression…if I stay here a month I shall go stark staring mad. If I stay here indefinitely, suicide is not unthinkable', and believed his only options were to return to active duty in France or go AWOL.[91] Despite his irritation for Army life, he also continued to push Basil about not joining the Army:

> Your prospects of joining a sanitary squad appear to be particularly rosy, especially in view of the fact that no fit men will be allowed to remain in this country any length of time. There is a rude awakening in store for many soldiers who have been employed on cushy jobs since the war broke out. However, speaking seriously, what are you going to do about it? I could get you a job as my servant here, if you can't get a commission. Otherwise I expect you will get some sort of office work.[92]

When he did not rail against the Germans (or Basil), he would focus on the loss of friends in the war and the effect it would have on their families. In the aftermath of the outbreak of the Somme in July 1916, James wrote to Basil that a mutual friend had 'died of wounds received in the advance on the 1st of this month. I am awfully cut up about it & I am afraid his people will never

[90] Butlin, letter to Basil 4 June 1916, IWM.
[91] Butlin, letter to Basil 13 January 1917, IWM. In a postscript, perhaps fearing that the letter would be incriminating if read by authorities, James wrote to Basil that 'All information in this letter is strictly confidential. Tear it up when you have read it'.
[92] Butlin, letter to Basil 15 October 1916, IWM.

get over it'.[93] He also expressed his annoyance for military authorities after experiencing a false alarm for a Zeppelin air raid:

> We stood to arms for about 3 hours, with the exception of a few hands like myself who crept back to bed after ten minutes. It was the most ridiculous thing ever done in Weymouth during the war. Some congenital idiot…blew the siren at the electric light station & created pandemonium in Weymouth. Oh for an intelligence department! Fancy blowing a hooter for Zeppelins about 200 miles away![94]

Despite his anger for the Germans, mourning the loss of old friends, and irritation for the incompetence of military authorities, James nevertheless seems to have avoided fully alienating himself from his family, friends, and, more broadly, his mundane identity beyond the war. In his letters to Basil, this disillusion remained a side note to his ties with prewar mundanity, and he continued to write far more on topics beyond the war. Even in his criticism of Basil for not joining up, while he still used patriotic language, James also seemed to want Basil in the Army more to have someone intimately familiar amidst the unfamiliar and unappealing environment of wartime military life, going as far as to offer him a post as his servant. What James continued to fear most, however, was ultimately being sent back to France, writing in late-1916 to Basil 'I am in a mortal funk of being passed for general service shortly but will move heaven & earth to prevent it'.[95]

Despite his requests to be posted for home duty after his sick leave, the Army found James fit enough to return to active duty on the Western Front in March 1917. As he had expected, James exceeded the limits of his endurance and suffered from 'shell shock' after returning to the trenches. While fighting in the Battle of Arras, James was abruptly removed from active duty following a seemingly acute traumatic event. The British Army found his

[93] Butlin, letter to Basil 12 July 1916, IWM.
[94] Butlin, letter to Basil 29 September 1916, IWM.
[95] Butlin, letter to Basil 6 November 1916, IWM.

condition severe enough to send him to Craiglockhart Hospital in Scotland – best known in British cultural memory for W.H.R. Rivers, the psychiatrist that treated war poets Siegfried Sassoon and Wilfred Owen.[96] Even before this acute case of 'shell shock', James did exhibit some lingering trauma in the days leading up to his removal from the trenches. To Basil, he said that the 'mud & shell fire are among the worst in my experience…it was perfect hell', and that he relied heavily on his rum ration as a 'nerve-steadier' to get him through the fighting.[97] In a letter to his mother, he detailed his actions at Arras – something he rarely offered his mother:

> We came up against a tremendous artillery & machine gun fire but gained our objective all right. My [company] was wonderfully lucky, no officers being hit. C & D [companies] had only one officer left in all…One of the worst features of the show was the weather: we were equipped as for summer campaigning & were lying in snow & mud for several days & nights. How one stands it is a marvel to me but still one does & is cheerful into the bargain.

After mentioning that he attended an Easter service in the aftermath, he admitted that 'as we left I thought of home & all that it means to me. I feel that Almighty God has been good to me & has kept me safe amid tremendous dangers'.[98] Nevertheless, in this instance, James also fell into a sense of being a 'victim' of his situation, attributing his safety to 'luck' and a higher power rather than anything he could control. In addition to this, he exhibited disillusion over being ill-equipped for the campaign. In combination, despite turning his thoughts to home, James could not escape his traumatic breakdown at Arras.

Beyond his own letters, there is not much detail to indicate what had caused James to finally break at that moment in 1917 beyond an acute traumatic moment at Arras. Despite keeping a diary through the war, James did not elaborate on his internal state at the time. On 23

[96] While not mentioning him by name, James described W.H.R. Rivers as 'a clever man, a bit of a philosopher, an eminent nerve specialist & somewhat of a crank'. See Butlin, letter to Basil 11 May 1917, IWM.
[97] Butlin, letter to Basil 16 and 19 April 1917, IWM.
[98] Butlin, letter to mother 16 April 1917, IWM.

April, he wrote 'Fine & cold [weather]. Watched attacks at various points & finally went over the top at 6pm near Lone Wood. Went to hospital & stayed all night just outside Arras'.[99] Nevertheless, his letters before his redeployment indicate that James was on the verge of a mental breakdown from his time in France and, more generally, in the Army itself. Leading up to his redeployment, James continued to dread the prospect of returning to France, admitting to Basil that if he passed his medical board that 'I am certain to be sent out for the great push which I understand is going to exceed anything that ever was' and believed that 'if I could get into something moderately bombproof I should have a reasonable chance of being alive at the end of the war'.[100] His arrival in Rouen started off seemingly well, writing to Basil about a night he spent with a French woman named Juliette, with whom he 'stayed the night…till 7 o'clock in the morning…Of course you must never mention all that I have told you to a living soul'.[101] Nevertheless, James's fragile mental state reappeared as he neared the firing line, expressing a sense of fatalism that had driven him to spend money freely and led to his most recent encounter with the French woman, writing to Basil that 'From what I heard out here I decided quickly that life must be enjoyed to the full in Rouen'.[102] As he went in and out of a tour in the trenches during the Arras Campaign, James asked Basil to write to Juliette in the event he was killed in action, and admitted to him that 'I am a bit nervy & want all the rest I can get'.[103]

After spending some time in hospital in France and England, James would not write to Basil until he had arrived at the Craiglockhart Hospital in Scotland. He wrote that 'the

[99] Butlin, diary entry 23 April 1917, IWM. For more on soldiers' diaries during the war, see Meyer, *Men of War*, pp. 47-73. While Meyer stresses that diaries allowed men to 'view the exigencies of war with resignation rather than disillusion' to construct a 'coherent masculine identity' alongside letters home, Butlin's diaries as a whole, like many other soldiers' diaries, do not offer much about his internal state, representing more of a catalogue of the weather and his daily activities with little elaboration or emotional flourishes.
[100] Butlin, letter to Basil 18 February 1917, IWM.
[101] Butlin, letter to Basil 21 March 1917, IWM.
[102] Butlin, letter to Basil 29 March 1917, IWM.
[103] Butlin, letter to Basil 9 and 16 April 1917, IWM.

inhabitants gazed at us in a peculiar manner, for which I afterwards discovered a reason' – they feared they were either 'dangerous' lunatics or 'victims of venereal disease'.[104] He recounted the psychiatrist – possibly W.H.R. Rivers himself – inviting him to join the 'Hydra', the magazine published by officers at the hospital, notably the war poets Siegfried Sassoon and Wilfred Owen that also spent time at Craiglockhart in 1917. James, however, declined the invitation, telling Basil that he had 'so far escaped lightly'.[105] While the time under treatment seemed to help his state of mind – the tone of his letters lost a lot of their previous anger and despair, James still expressed a sense of boredom to Basil and a desire to be sent home. Nevertheless, James seemed to settle into his time in Scotland, writing to Basil that 'in the intervals between love making I play a few games of tennis with my usual consummate skill'.[106] As soon as he was granted leave during his treatment, his first instinct was to write to Basil about meeting him in London for a 'day of unrivalled dissipation'.[107] After his treatment had ended at Craiglockhart, James returned to home noncombatant duty with the Army. While at times he grumbled about Army pay ('Truly the recompense of a grateful country takes a strange form'), James did so more from his frustration that he lacked the funds to escape from Army life to either visit Basil or various women he was pursuing.[108] Otherwise, his letters to Basil consisted of women, sport, and arranging plans to briefly escape the Army for leave.

James's recovery, however, was not straightforward, and his condition remained serious through the end of the war. On 20 January 1918, James wrote yet another letter to his 'dear old

[104] Butlin, letter to Basil 5 May 1917, IWM.
[105] Butlin, letter to Basil 11 May 1917, IWM.
[106] Butlin, letter to Basil 14 June 1917, IWM. It appears that James was not alone in his activities while at Craiglockhart, as he tells Basil in another letter about how a CO caught a patient with 'some harlot…in the act of copulation with her'. See letter to Basil 26 June 1917, IWM.
[107] Butlin, letter to Basil 9 July 1917, IWM.
[108] Butlin, letter to Basil 17 October 1917, IWM.

Basil'. After a relapse, James was hospitalized once again. To Basil, he admitted feeling 'rather feeble', but pretended to 'be better than I am' in order to get a better posting. Sharing details about a visit from Cynthia, he told Basil that he did not 'propose (in so many words)', and that Cynthia 'caused quite a sensation…but unfortunately till the last few days I couldn't get about much with her'. Beyond this and other news and well-wishes, he closed his letter with a postscript hoping that Basil would be part of the next draft, joking that 'you better try for the Dorsets & I will get you put on sanitary duties'.[109] Soon after, the British Army decided that James was no longer fit for active duty. Basil first received the news in a letter from James's father, who told him that James had been 'declared "permanently unfit for further military service" & told to go into the nearest military hospital for 3 or 4 weeks'. Despite protest by James and his father, a 'neurasthenic specialist' told them that if James returned to France, his trauma 'would recur & it would be a more difficult matter to get well again'.[110] Despite a brief return in late-1918 as a training officer, James's military service had ended. In the aftermath, not knowing what do to with himself, he turned first to Basil looking for employment, then to his old Wadham College Warden, Joseph Wells, on what it would take for him to obtain his degree, warning him that 'I have to take things quietly…or else I shall have a recurrence of my previous attacks'.[111] Despite these limitations, Wells welcomed James back to Wadham College for the start of the 1918 Trinity Term.

---

[109] Private Papers of Lieutenant James H. Butlin, 20 January 1918 letter to 'Basil', Doc. 7915, Ref. 67/52/1, IWM.
[110] Butlin, letter from James's father to Basil 1 March 1918, IWM. Ultimately, the problem that James faced was that British Army needed to get more men from home service on active service due to serious shortages on the Western Front, and, due to his condition, James could not return to active service and was thereby discharged. For more on British manpower in 1918, see J.M. Bourne, *Britain and the Great War, 1914-1918* (Edward Arnold: London 1994) pp. 185-187. For more on manpower allocation – military vs. industrial – during the war, see Winter, *Great War and the British People*, pp. 39-48.
[111] Butlin, letter to Basil 29 March 1918, IWM. See also J.H. Butlin, 29 March 1918 (243++), WWC.

So, then, removed from active duty, sent to Craiglockhart for psychological treatment, and ultimately discharged from service in 1918, how did James Butlin recover from his wartime trauma? In the end, after being lost to the war, he found his way back to the relationships beyond war, such as family, Wadham, and Basil, that remained an outlet for him to escape trauma and, in a way, return to some form of emotional normalcy.[112] Unlike his fellow soldiers, who could only share with him the experience of war and trauma with him, Basil, family, and even an Oxford warden offered James the emotional space to help him recover, as these relationships, maintained with varying degrees of intimacy through his wartime correspondence, were based in emotional ties beyond his trauma and, more generally, beyond war. While it is impossible to say within the limits of this study here the extent to which James recovered and continued to live a postwar life defined beyond his war experiences, there are some indications that James did indeed begin to recover from the acute trauma he suffered in 1917. In a letter dated 13 May 1917, James's father replied to Joseph Wells, who had written with concern regarding his old student that had only spent a single term at Wadham College. After explaining what had happened and where the Army sent him to recover, he reassured Wells that 'his letters home now are written more in his old style, so that one can see he is improving'.[113] Nevertheless, despite his improved mental state in letters, James admitted to having lingering physical problems from his time in France and had a relapse in January 1918 – his physical problems most likely stemming from his fragile mental state. In one of his last letters to Basil, James spoke more frankly about his condition:

---

[112] For more on 'shell shock' and postwar recovery, see Peter Leese, *Shell Shock: Traumatic Neurosis and the British Soldiers of the First World War* (Palgrave Macmillan: London 2002) pp. 155-158. For more on the impact of the war on public perceptions of 'lunacy', see also Peter Barham, *Forgotten Lunatics of the Great War* (Yale University Press: New Haven 2004).

[113] M.C. Butlin, 13 May 1917 (#91+), WWC.

I have felt & do feel extraordinary at times & I am beginning to reap the fruits of my two trips to France. To continue on home service is impossible nowadays & my prospects of general service are faint in the extreme. Whenever I do anything strenuous I am brought up against a dizzy & faint feeling in the head. I have been living a complete teetotaler etc for months now & I still get no better.[114]

While the case of James Butlin and his ultimate fate with wartime trauma cannot be fully treated here, his ordeal with trauma and his recovery reveals much about how trauma expressed itself in letters written by soldiers. In a way, it was not communication grounded in war, but rather in familiar, prewar style, that indicated to family that James had recovered – or remained emotionally grounded to life outside the war. Furthermore, with family and others exhibiting an awareness of his trauma perhaps even before James could acknowledge it himself, the fact that James could return to his 'old style' of communication with home perhaps was one of the major steps towards his recovery from wartime trauma. While it is not entirely clear, when his father refers to his 'old style' of writing, perhaps he meant not just before his hospitalization and discharge, but before James's war service altogether. Perhaps James's father, in addition to Basil and his other family, knew all along throughout the entirety of James's war service, that he was suffering, no matter how much he may have avoided it in his letters from the Western Front, but it was especially apparent when he lost his 'old style' of writing and testified to the horror of the war and his experiences in it. Finally, as James's testified to Basil and his family about his own mental trauma, he opened up an outlet not simply to help himself recover, but also to allow Basil and family to offer their own help with his recovery.

[114] Butlin, letter to Basil 2 March 1918, IWM.

Conclusion: 'My dear old Basil'

In the end, with his military service ended and his return to the mundanity of civilian life, what ultimately happened to James Heygate Butlin, BEF Lieutenant, son, brother, friend, and 'Wadham man'? As his letters end in early 1918 – just as he was discharged and returned to study at Wadham College, only a scattered record remains of what happened to him. Immediately after his discharge, James returned to Wadham to complete the degree. The Summer 1918 edition of the *Gazette* reported James as 'invalided out of the Army with traumatic neurasthenia, and has returned this term to Wadham to complete his course'.[115] This was followed by a brief interlude, when he returned to the Army as an 'anti-gas instructor in Norfolk', after which he returned to the college upon the end of the war.[116] It seems that with this brief return to home service, James had recovered to the extent that the Army was willing to accept him back as a training officer.

During this return to Wadham, there are some indications that he once again engaged in college life beyond his studies. In the minutes of the Wadham Debating Society – which he had joined during his brief tenure at the college in 1914, James is recorded on 11 February 1919 admitting 'the complications of love but declared its necessity for the average man' and arguing for 'eccentricity's noble worth'.[117] The *Gazette* also shows that James participated in the college lawn-tennis club matches and acted as the club's secretary.[118] By 1920, James had left Wadham

[115] 'Wadham Roll of Service', *Wadham College Gazette*, No. 63 (Summer 1918).
[116] 'Roll of Service: Additions and Corrections', *Wadham College Gazette*, No. 64 (Michaelmas 1918).
[117] Minutes of the Wadham College Debating Society, entry from 11 February 1919, Wadham College Archives, University of Oxford. In the 18 February 1919 entry, it appears that the secretary (A.F. Bateman) decided to record the meeting in poetic verse. The next meeting on 6 May recorded that 'the minutes of the last debate were severely criticised and finally ordered to be expunged from the minute book by an overwhelming vote of the House'. For his prewar participation, see the Wadham Minutes from 26 October 1914, where it notes 'Mr. Butlin have us an impressive, but irrelevant, description of the horrors of war which smacked of [*Daily Mail* owner] Northcliffe, but after got on to some good arguments.'.
[118] 'Wadham Athletic Clubs: W.C.L.T.C.', *Wadham College Gazette*, No. 65 (Summer 1919).

and took up a posting as Assistant Master at Wellington College, a public school in Berkshire. This appears to have been a temporary stop on the way to something more permanent, as James 'accepted a post in the Michelin Tyre Co.' in 1921 and received a M.A. from Wadham on 5 August 1922.[119] By the summer of 1924, he had moved on to a post in the 'firm of Butterworth and Co.', and had married Norah Ransome Jones, who had never made an appearance as one of the many women featured in James's letters with Basil.[120] Norah would go on to give birth to their daughter on 28 November 1927.[121] His next appearance in the *Gazette* does not appear until 1937, where he is mentioned for publishing articles in the trade journal *Printing Review* dating back to 1934, advocating for the necessity of 'brevity' in modern print advertising, home sales, and sales ability.[122] By the outbreak of the Second World War, James had rejoined the British Army, serving once again as a junior officer in the Dorset Regiment. He would survive the war and remain a member of the Territorial Army into the 1950s.[123] James died in Kent at the age of 86 in December 1982.[124]

---

[119] 'Acta Majorum: Educational', *Wadham College Gazette*, No. 67 (Summer 1920). 'Acta Majorum: Miscellaneous', *Wadham College Gazette*, No. 69 (Summer 1921). 'Graduations: M.A.', *Wadham College Gazette*, No. 72 (1922). At the University of Oxford, a B.A. with honours may obtain the title of M.A. without additional coursework. It does not imply additional studies beyond undergraduate study. For reasons unknown, the Gazette does not indicate when Butlin had received his B.A. It is likely that he received it before the publication of the Summer 1920 edition, which announced his posting at Wellington College.

[120] 'Acta Majorum: Miscellaneous' and 'Acta Majorum: Marriages', *Wadham College Gazette*, No. 75 (Trinity 1924). Despite being the name of the Oxford term itself, 'Trinity' replaced 'Summer' in the *Gazette* by this time.

[121] 'Acta Majorum: Births', *Wadham College Gazette*, No. 82 (Michaelmas 1927).

[122] J.H. Butlin, M.A., 'Brevity in Copy makes the Best Advertisement', *Printing Review*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (Autumn 1934), pp. 10-11, 'The Salesman who can Enter every Home', *Printing Review*, Vol. 4, No. 3 (Spring 1935), pp. 119-121, and 'Submitting a Process to the Prospect', *Printing Review*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (Winter 1936-37), pp. 461-462.

[123] See the *London Gazette – Supplement 34793* (20 February 1940), p. 992, and *London Gazette – Supplement 39525* (29 April 1952), p. 2296. Given his approximate age at the time and his past history with psychological trauma from the First World War, it is unlikely that Butlin served on the front lines. He most likely served on the home front or behind the lines.

[124] 'Deaths Registered in October-December 1982', in Indexes to birth, marriage, and death registrations (1837-2007), FreeBMD. URL: https://www.freebmd.org.uk/cgi/information.pl?r=268845048:9857&d=bmd_1552347617&scan=1 (Accessed 10 April 2019). His date of birth is listed as 10 February 1896. His place of death is listed as the Thanet district in Kent.

So finally, what of the relationships that James maintained during his wartime experience through letters? Unfortunately, James's letters to Basil abruptly ended when the former was discharged from the Army in 1918 and he returned to his studies at Wadham College, and his wartime letters to his family also end at roughly the same time. One exception is a letter written to his mother on 4 October 1923 to share news of his engagement to Norah. Throughout the letter, he expressed that 'I am awfully happy about things & it is lovely to feel that you are all so pleased', wrote of his work at Michelin, and wrote that 'of course Basil doesn't know [the news], though he met Norah out with me once & liked her very much'.[125] Even beyond school and the First World War, it appears that James and Basil remained close friends into the postwar years, when both of their mundane lives resumed once again. After leaving the Foreign Office in 1919, Basil became a barrister at Lincoln's Inn in 1921, co-edited several legal texts, married in 1931, and had two sons.[126] Incidentally, Basil died in West Sussex in September 1982 at the age of 88, a mere few months before his own 'dear old pal', James.[127]

While not much remains of their relationship beyond Weymouth, Oxford, and the war, perhaps James Heygate Butlin and Basil Graham Burnett Hall remained friends until their deaths in 1982. Considering that Basil preserved the wartime letters he received from James, there was certainly a continued link between them. Regardless, in preserving these letters, it seems that Basil followed an idea expressed by James in 1917 while recovering at Craiglockhart:

---

[125] Butlin, letter to 'mother' 4 October 1923, IWM.
[126] Levens and Williams, eds., *Merton College Register*, p. 89. Marriage details also appear in 'Marriages', *Times* (4 November 1931), p. 15.
[127] 'Deaths Registered in July-September 1982', in Indexes to birth, marriage, and death registrations (1837-2007), FreeBMD. URL: https://www.freebmd.org.uk/cgi/information.pl?r=268313048:1281&d=bmd_1552347617&scan=1 (Accessed 10 April 2019). His date of birth is listed as 31 October 1893. His place of death is listed as the Haywards Heath district in Sussex.

I am strongly of opinion that the correspondence which has so long gone on between us should be collected & published for the delectation & literary joy of the world. There are however a few things which I have told to you & no one else which might spoil the whole effect of a life frugally & virtuously lived. However I feel it a great joy that I can freely express my feelings to you; you are a safety valve so to speak.[128]

While never published, this letter and others that James wrote exhibit the centrality of Basil's comradeship to James's emotional survival of the First World War and, in some ways, the ways in which identity was expressed by soldiers beyond the confines of family. Their relationship most certainly evolved over the course of their lifetimes, but it is possible that it changed not due to any trauma that James continued to suffer from the First World War, but rather the more mundane circumstances of postwar life they both experienced together and in separation. While his family most certainly supported him when trauma did arise, James most certainly turned to Basil during these instances. After all, as exhibited in his wartime efforts with James, Basil could offer support – emotional, material, and otherwise – that family was not necessarily equipped to offer.

While James, like other British soldiers, certainly relied on his family as a source of emotional support during his wartime years and beyond, he also relied heavily on other emotional support networks, such as his friendship with Basil and his ties to Wadham, to survive the traumatic experiences of his wartime military career. With his emotional identity fragmented between being a son and brother to his family, a friend and confidant to Basil, a member of Wadham, and certainly several other sites, James and other soldiers needed a combination of all of these mundane relationships to survive the war as whole as possible into the postwar years. While much can be gathered from a soldier's relationship with family, wives, and sweethearts on

[128] Butlin, Letter to Basil 11 May 1917, IWM.

their emotional survival of war, these sources of support must be considered as one of many fragments of a soldier's identity, not the whole of what allows them to remain as intact as possible into their postwar years. For James Butlin, it was not simply the prospect of returning to family that was central to his survival of wartime trauma and separation, but also partly the hope that he and Basil could one day 'carouse together' in the postwar years. As much as family or military comradeship could play in maintaining the emotional whole of soldiers during and after the war, the other fragments of a man-turned-soldier's identity, such as sweethearts, wives, and even male companions beyond the war, also had a role to play in the emotional survival of soldiers in the First World War.

Even with letters to college, friends, and family, the problem remains that for most letter collections from the First World War, the soldier's voice remains the predominant side from which scholars can obtain knowledge of the experience of wartime. While the civilian voice is implied within these letters from soldiers, the voice itself is found second-hand in the written replies to queries within letters received by soldiers. To better understand this, the letters from both sides of the epistolary relationship are needed. These can be found in the rare instances where soldiers, finding a deeper emotional attachment to the materiality of the letters they received from some sources, such as sweethearts, went to considerable lengths to preserve what they had received. These sources not only offer a more complete image of wartime epistolary relationships, but also the shared emotional experience of both the soldier and the civilian in the First World War.

CHAPTER 4

‘I HAVE SOMETHING WHICH IS ETERNAL’

LETTERS BETWEEN SWEETHEARTS IN WARTIME

Introduction

On 10 January 1917, Fred Sellers wrote a letter to Grace Malin, his sweetheart whom he had begun to court before the outbreak of war. Both had written extensively to one another since before the war, but, in this letter, Fred reminisced about his most recent leave spent with Grace. Having already been wounded fighting in France during the Battle of the Somme in 1916, he hoped that she was not upset that he had left to return to his unit stationed elsewhere in Britain at the time, remarking that ‘circumstances & events change & are disappointing, but whatever they are & however they may change there is always something permanent underlying them’. He revealed that permanence to be his love for Grace, declaring that ‘I have something which is eternal – nothing can remove my deepest joy’.[1] Amidst his absence from Grace during the third year of the First World War, Fred cited in the letters he wrote to her the centrality of life beyond the conflict to soldiers and civilians alike, revealing an important human aspect of wartime correspondence. In spite of the conflict, people like Fred and Grace sought against many odds to hold fast to the personal lives that they had established before the conflict and hoped to continue living in the postwar world. In a sense, they strove to hold on to their lives not simply limited to wartime trauma, suffering, and loss. In the words of Fred, they turned to something ‘eternal’ – in

[1] Letter from Fred Sellers to Grace Malin, 10 January 1917, in Private Papers of F.A. Sellers, Doc. 16954, Ref. 09/32/1, IWM. Subsequent references to this collection will henceforth be formatted as ‘Sellers, source and date, IWM.

this case, their love for one another – to continue developing lives undefined by the circumstances of the First World War.

While the ranks of the British Army during the First World War largely consisted of young, single men, they were also comprised of a sizable minority of men with wives, fiancées, or, more generally, women they continued to court on the home front. Indeed, despite any socially expected family obligations, married men were nonetheless 'evident in the ranks from 1914 onwards'. Even in 1914, according to Martha Hanna, 'more than half a million wives…in receipt of state-paid separation allowances', which rose 'in excess of 1.5 million' by the final year of the war.[2] In many cases, the correspondence – and the changing relationship – between these men and the women they left behind gets lost in the sheer volume of letters written by sons to their families – especially to their mothers. Letters to mothers, however, held less material value than those from 'sweethearts', whose letters were driven by a need to nurture a newer, fledging relationship rather than one that had lasted a son's lifetime.[3] While the volume of correspondence favors analysis of letters between mothers and sons at war, it is the nurturing nature of letters between sweethearts that deserve closer analysis, as they reveal fragments of identity confronted by the extraordinary circumstances of wartime, where people struggled to form a lasting bond between one another to last into peacetime.

Wartime letters also offer a means for understanding how soldiers negotiated between fragments of their prewar, civilian identities and their experiences with war and, notably, the place of their new 'soldiering' identity in relation to their more 'mundane self' associated with prewar life and relationships maintained through letters. Historian Joanna Bourke has remarked

[2] Cited in Hanna, 'The Couple', in Winter, ed., *Cambridge History of the First World War*, Vol. III, p. 7.
[3] For more on family correspondence – particularly with mothers, see Roper, *The Secret Battle*, pp. 58-63

on how soldiers used 'war stories' within letters to both cope with the experience of killing and articulate it through culturally-acceptable language to avoid becoming brutalized by it.[4] For Jessica Meyer in her study on war and gender identity, letters home offered British soldiers 'an important connection for men between their lives as soldiers and the civilian lives and expectations that they had put on hold for the duration'. It also allowed them to 'present themselves to their families not only as soldiers, through their descriptions of war experiences, but also as domestic men through their continuing involvement with domestic concerns'.[5] Conscious of their domestic identities seemingly 'put on hold' by their military service, these soldiers crafted an image of themselves to the home front both heroic and domestic, thereby making their prewar, domestic selves an integral part of their heroic, soldierly identity. In this analysis, letter-writing becomes a sphere where the soldier shapes his male identity around his war experience to a seemingly passive, domestic audience on the home front. British 'domestic' men become British 'heroic' soldiers, and 'domestic' language provides the means to articulate the 'heroic' masculinity of the soldier to a 'domestic' audience.

While their domestic lives were certainly put on hold by wartime service, was war such an overwhelming experience, that it swept away the domestic 'self' in favor of the military 'self', with the former merely becoming subservient to the latter? Essentially, in understanding the content of soldiers' letters, it is necessary to assess the extent to which the 'domestic self' exhibited in letters was 'real' or 'performed'. For Martha Hanna, the letters of French soldier Paul Pireaud and his wife Marie reveal the interrelation between the 'home' and 'military' fronts, where shared emotional closeness tied both home and war to one another. Rather than creating

[4] See Bourke, *An Intimate History of Killing*.
[5] Meyer, *Men of War*, pp. 9, 15.

two radically separate spheres with no relation to one another, the letters written between Paul and Marie reveal a wartime world blurred between peacetime and wartime concerns.[6] Susan Grayzel has also remarked that soldiers, in describing their war experiences, reveal that 'women possessed the power to assist war or demoralize soldiers'.[7] Indeed, soldiers like Paul and Fred turned to the emotional support of the Marie and Grace, respectively, whom often made this support conditional upon frankness from soldiers.

In many ways, the letters of Fred and Grace reveal a similar world, where peacetime life continued in many respects despite wartime circumstances and conditions. To Fred and Grace, Paul and Marie, and many other couples, wartime was seen as temporary, and the more lasting concerns of peacetime, such as work, intimate relationships, and other personal interests, could not be put on hold. Compared to Paul and Marie, who both shaped a wartime world blurred between military and domestic concerns in their letters, what is striking about the case of Fred and Grace is not their efforts to 'blur' their wartime worlds, but rather to compartmentalize their war experiences away from their relationship experiences. While Grace offered Fred an emotional outlet to mundane life beyond his military circumstances, Fred also attempted to perform a mundane, familiar image of himself detached from war and military life. Despite her ongoing concerns for Fred's safety and his wartime journey into a 'soldiering' identity, Grace insisted on frankness from Fred in order to reinforce their emotional closeness to one another that predated the conflict. Having begun developing a relationship with letters before the war, their wartime letters followed this same epistolary – and emotional – familiarity. While the war

[6] Hanna, *Your Death Would Be Mine*. For a British perspective on the interdependence of male and female war experience, see also Carol Acton, 'Writing and Waiting: The First World War Correspondence between Vera Brittain and Roland Leighton', *Gender & History*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (April 1999), pp. 54-83.
[7] Grayzel, *Women's Identities at War*, p. 18.

certainly offered a more emotionally-urgent context for this relationship, it did not necessarily come to define it.

While masculinity and war experience are certainly viable approaches to the study of wartime letter-writing at a sociocultural level, at times these categories can strip the humanity from these letters, as war becomes the author and the soldier caught between military and civilian identities as the imperfect conduit for revealing the 'truth' about war. For many, war was not the purpose of letter-writing in the First World War, but was merely the setting. In many instances, such as with the letters of Fred and Grace, war was not the subject of letters, but rather the setting. War, killing, death, and suffering loomed very much in the background of such communication, but it did not write these letters. People like Fred and Grace, who loved and shared dreams of a life beyond the circumstances of war, wrote these letters and attempted to carry on in as normal a fashion as possible during the interim rather than shape new, blurred emotional lines between war and home. Whether or not this turn to 'business as usual' was real or illusionary, the sheer turn to this mindset in the extraordinary circumstances of wartime conditions in itself is worthy of deeper analysis.

A friend of Grace's brother Vernon (or 'Vern') while at Silcoates School in Wakefield, Yorkshire, Fred and Grace met at the age of 15 and 12, respectively. Their relationship – perhaps part friendship, part courtship at first – would evolve through Fred's studies from Silcoates to the University of Liverpool, his military service during the First World War, and beyond. Apart from visits to their respective families on holidays, much of their early interaction took place through postcards and letters, the first of which was written by Fred on 23 April

1911.[8] Both families were by no means 'ordinary' in terms of their social status within Britain, but they were of a class that has come to define the British literary memory of the First World War. In addition to the sheer volume of letters, what makes this such a compelling case study is that there are letters from both Fred and Grace – many letter collections focus on the soldier's letters, as many letters received from home during the war often had to be destroyed. Starting early in the war, Fred intentionally preserved the letters he received from Grace by returning them to her in parcels, thereby keeping them safe from military conditions in France and in camps throughout Britain. While certainly not all the letters were saved, there is more than enough to uncover the conversations between Fred and Grace, from the fears and joys to the hopes and nightmares and the affection and irritation that they expressed to one another in these letters.

It is also necessary to note that a study of this length cannot hope to give justice to the lives, interests, and love shared by Fred and Grace. What it will attempt achieve is to exhibit the extent to which the First World War affected the everyday lives and interests of Fred and Grace and the role it played in the development of their relationship. There is considerable detail from a perspective of human history held within these letters. They do not contain a cold, impersonal record of war, society, and culture in early-twentieth century Britain. Rather, like most personal letters, they expose the lives shared between Fred and Grace and how, despite the extraordinary circumstances of the First World War, they attempted to carry on at least a semblance of a normal life. Whether it be the singing lessons or anxiety over social interaction of Grace, fears

[8] In addition to the letter transcriptions themselves, family background on Fred and Grace comes from John Sellers, ed., *Watching and Waiting: The Letters of Fred and Grace, 1914-1918* (Deanprint Ltd.: Stockport, Cheshire 2008) pp. 9-12. Also found in in Private Papers of F.A. Sellers, Doc. 16954, Ref. 09/32/1, IWM. The son of both Fred and Grace, John Sellers in his introduction notes that he 'decided not to edit them at all' and transcribed them 'exactly as written regarding grammar, punctuation, spellings etc. as far as possible'. See p. 9.

over the health of respective family members, or Fred's athletic interests and uncertainty over what career path he ought to take after the war, these letters contain a picture of the everyday lives lived by countless British people at the time – perhaps expressed in different, yet similar ways depending on social and economic background. The First World War was certainly a concern for the soldiers and those that remained on the home front, but a global war did not simply sweep away the concerns and interests of a past, present, and future outside of the war. While Fred served on the Western Front, he and Grace both lived with the constant understanding that he might never return, but they nonetheless continued to develop lives and a relationship that they intended to outlast the conflict and not be defined by it.

1911-1914: Developing an (Epistolary) Relationship

In many cases, First World War letter collections rarely extend beyond the duration of the war itself, thus losing sight of letter-writing – and the state of relationships – that existed between both parties before and after the conflict. Additionally, it compels First World War scholars to thinking of wartime letter-writing as a novelty of its own defined by the tragic experience of war and the social, cultural, and political change it provoked in its aftermath. From this perspective, trauma, the desire to act as a 'witness', and a rupture with prewar literary conventions and personal relationships drive the scope and content of these 'war letters'. In the case of Fred and Grace, a relationship, at least in epistolary terms, had begun tenuously years before the war and persisted through its duration. This relationship, epistolary and otherwise, did not simply 'endure' the First World War, nor did the conflict define it. Rather, despite the added stress produced by the conflict, Fred and Grace continued to turn to each other for emotional support and their wartime letters allowed them to further develop their prewar relationship.

From the time Fred wrote his first full letter to Grace on 23 April 1911, a tenuous epistolary relationship began. In its essence, the practice of letter-writing is, in superficial terms, a form of communication but, particularly in the case of personal correspondence, it is also a relationship unto itself. When a personal letter is written, it is done so with the expectation of a letter in reply by the recipient, until a cycle of communication develops. The intimacy of these letters vary, as letter-writing in itself implies distance – at least in physical and temporal terms – that two parties attempt to bridge until there is a personal intimacy between the two beyond just the letters themselves. Thus, the predominant challenge in establishing intimate, personal communication in letters is to bridge the gap between the spatial distance implied by letter-writing itself and the personal, emotional relationship between the two correspondents when they can converse beyond writing and physically be together. Additionally, when the physical and temporal gap cannot be overcome, mutual ties to a wider social network also facilitate this process of strengthening emotional ties, as letters in many cases imply a social sphere beyond just the two correspondents.[9] Turning to Fred and Grace, wider social connections existed, as Fred attended Silcoates with Vern, Grace's older brother, and the Sellers and Malin families developed closer ties during their school days and visited one another at their homes in Great Crosby and Overdale, respectively.

As these social ties grew between the Sellers and Malin families, so did the relationship between Fred and Grace. Fred wrote his first full letter to Grace in 1911 just before he began his studies at the University of Liverpool. It is filled with considerable deference to Grace, hesitance, and self-deprecation. In a rather joking way, he began 'Don't please get angry before

[9] For more on the features of epistolary discourse, see Marina Dossena and Gabriella Del Lungo Camiciotti, 'Introduction', in Dossena and Camiciotti, eds., *Letter Writing in Late Modern Europe* (John Benjamins: Philadelphia 2012) pp. 4-6

you understand. This is not a letter…It is merely a note…a thing which you must put up with even though it is from such a creature as me'. He went on to compliment a photo of her, hoped to get another one 'in return for this thing which for some reason I am sending to you', spoke of his 'dull' life in Liverpool, apologized for his penmanship, and closed with the hope that Grace would write him a letter in the near future. While the prewar letters are sparse in number, they continued in a similar manner. Fred persisted in attempting to set up an epistolary relationship with Grace, remarking that 'no doubt this letter will suddenly bring faintly to mind a still more faint recollection of a person – if so he can be called – whose quality was that of "boring"'.[10]

Whether or not Fred actually fit the self-description of 'boring', Grace did reward his persistence in the end and reciprocated with her own letters, and the two began to determine the extent of their relationship with one another via pen and paper. Like Fred, Grace wrote on matters immediately relevant to the two of them and their mutual social network. As their correspondence developed, Fred became wary over the frequency that he wrote to Grace, who also was apologetic for the length the letters that she sent him. When Fred, perhaps feeling insecure about where he stood with Grace, asked if he should send fewer letters, Grace immediately objected, writing 'I was thoroughly annoyed at some of the absurd suggestions which you made. I'm sadly afraid I, as yet, do not quite gather whether you're trying your level best (which is your worst!) to be boorish or "humorous"!'[11] Grace also was apologetic regarding the quantity and size of her letters at the start. Responding to a letter where Grace remarked that a feeling that made her not 'want to write to [Fred] is returning', Fred declared that he 'absolutely couldn't exist' without her letters and the 'expectation of them or at the very least the

[10] Sellers, Fred to Grace, 9 October 1911, IWM.
[11] Sellers, Grace to Fred, 10 September 1913, IWM. The preservation of Grace's letters does not improve until 1914, after Fred joins the BEF following the outbreak of the First World War.

knowledge that you had the wish to write'.[12] Fred also reassured her of this in another letter, writing 'You close your letter with apologies for writing so much…fully abuse me for overdoing what in limitation is not at all a bad thing. Of course, I think limitation is bad'.[13] They also continued to use their letters as links to their mutual social networks, with both asking to be 'remembered' to friends and family on either end of the correspondence and sharing news of their various social encounters and affairs at home or school.

Even before the outbreak of war in 1914, both Fred and Grace expressed their frustration for the limitations presented in letter-writing. Physical separation and the inability to articulate emotions to one another were the most discussed between the two. Sharing news of a trip he took to Llandudno, Wales, with his sister Edith (sometimes nicknamed 'Tom'), Fred confessed to Grace how he wished she was with him despite how she 'loathe the sea', writing that 'I'm always wishing it – not wishing you on the sea I don't mean – but where I am. You always are in a away – as much as you can be considering that we are physically separated'.[14] Even when they wanted to speak to one another, letter-writing at times did not always allow them to articulate, oftentimes provoking self-conscious apologies for the content of letters. In Fred's case, his inability to articulate – or perhaps the moods in which he had written some letters – got him into trouble with Grace in several instances, and Fred had to rush to apologize:

> You have found my last two or three letters approaching to 'horrid & sarcastic'…But when you accuse me of writing in a manner suited to a 'spoilt kid of 3' – I suppose you mean they have reached the disdain which I know you so cuttingly put on anything which is 'sloppy'…

Fred continued his apology with the reassurance that he appreciated the 'correspondence between us', their 'friendship', and that he 'lacked a certain capacity in explicitness of

[12] Sellers, Fred to Grace, 6 September 1913, IWM.
[13] Sellers, Fred to Grace, 14 September 1913, IWM.
[14] Sellers, Fred to Grace, 25 September 1913, IWM.

expression'.[15] Frustrated that Grace protested to the tone of his letters – she often became annoyed at what she perceived as his 'sarcasm', Fred declared that 'faulty transmission seems to be an insuperable barrier', and expressed his desire to see her again. Grace would even challenge Fred over a 'friendship' that he had with a girl in his tennis club while at University of Liverpool, to which Fred replied with the reassurance that 'I love friends & friendship but without one which must always outshine all others…other friendships will be useless, even worse than that they will be despised'.[16] In many ways, protests and frustration would become a recurring theme in the correspondence of Fred and Grace and their prolonged physical absences from one another. Although the emotional bond between them deepened over time, neither Fred or Grace were immune to lashing out at the other in letters, whether it be based in misinterpretation, objections over what the other had written in a past letter, or simply the general personal circumstances in which they wrote.

While much of her own prewar correspondence is missing, it becomes clear over time that she cherished her correspondence and relationship with Fred. Despite her occasional irritation with his sarcasm, Grace would turn to Fred as a confidant for expressing her frustrations and the happenings of her private life. Much of the frustrations she shared with Fred revolved around much of her social interaction with others. In the aftermath of a bad visit with some friends, she wrote to Fred 'oh why are people so absurd Freddie? You're just about the only one who is sensible and consequently who doesn't detest me altogether'.[17] In some cases, she would express her irritation over restrictions imposed on her independence by her family and others. In one instance, after being forced to travel with a companion by her father, she

[15] Sellers, Fred to Grace, 9 November 1913, IWM.
[16] Sellers, Fred to Grace, 14 September 1913, IWM. Grace's original letter addressing the matter is missing.
[17] Sellers, Grace to Fred, 29 July 1914, IWM.

remarked that 'Dad's still very absurd about my travelling by myself! I believe he thinks I'll get out at the wrong station or something equally foolish like that – he's yet to learn of my independence!'[18]. She would often be apologetic about how frequently she wrote so many of these letters, but insisted that she wrote of these frustrations due to her affection for Fred, remarking in one instance that 'I hope you won't mind me always sending you so terribly feeble & sort of full of myself letters…but it's such a tremendous relief to be able to unload oneself to somebody – especially when that somebody's you'.[19]

As Fred completed his studies in Economics at Liverpool in 1913, he also expressed fears over his future career prospects as he studied law. By 1914, he had joined the Gray's Inn Court and began to study for the Bar. He confessed to Grace his doubts over his career choice in his letters, writing that 'I have gone into one of the riskiest professions…I really doubt very much whether I have a ghost of a chance for even moderate success'.[20] In these letters, he turned to Grace both as a source of advice and of comfort, admitting that she was 'one whom I would consult on everything' and that she provided a source of happiness for him 'which is more than temporary. The great things of this world must be eternal'.[21] Fred would frequently return to this idea of the 'eternal' in letters when commenting on the troubles going on in both of their lives and how the significance of their relationship would allow them to overcome such concerns. While on the surface it represented Fred's affection for Grace, it also reveals a sort of prewar resilience in the face of adversity that would eventually help Fred – and perhaps Grace as well – endure the First World War. When turmoil erupted, both Fred and Grace would turn to

[18] Sellers, Grace to Fred, 27 May 1914, IWM.
[19] Sellers, Grace to Fred, 13 August 1914, IWM. This letter is tentatively dated after the outbreak of war, but it is before Fred's enlistment and gives some additional insight into the significance of the correspondence for Grace before the war began to directly affect their lives and, more importantly, their relationship with one another.
[20] Sellers, Fred to Grace, 18 January 1914, IWM.
[21] Sellers, Fred to Grace, 18 January 1914 and 23 April 1914, IWM.

one another as a source of strength that would outlast the troubles they would face throughout their lives.

The correspondence of Fred and Grace continued like this for some time in these early years. They would continue to misunderstand what the other had written, Fred would grumble about his career path at Gray's Inn, and Grace would admonish Fred for his continued use of sarcasm and express her annoyance with those around her. And amidst all of this, both shared one thing in common: they repeatedly asked the other to keep writing to them. They did not care so much about the size, scope, or content of their correspondence. It was the letters themselves and their quantity that mattered in the end once they had firmly established an epistolary relationship, for despite their physical separation, they had letters as a means of staying together, as each piece of paper with intimately familiar handwriting on it was, in a way, Fred with Grace, or Grace with Fred. While physically separate, they were nonetheless with each other mentally, and the frequency of their letter-writing is a testament to that. This separation would be put to the test, however, when war broke out in 1914 and Fred joined the British Army.

Wartime Correspondence, 1914-1917

When Britain declared war on Germany on 4 August 1914, Fred and Grace would only briefly mention it in their letters, with Fred writing 'this war is a most devilish business & there is no knowing what there is yet in store', while Grace remarked 'isn't the war dreadful…I suppose we must hope for the best'.[22] Aside from this brief comment and talk of the possible enlistment of Grace's family horses – one of which was named 'Kaiser', their letters remained as

[22] Sellers, Fred to Grace, 4 August 1914 and Grace to Fred, 7 August 1914, IWM.

they had before the outbreak of war.[23] Fred shared details of his vacation and his latest golf outing, while Grace spoke of the family horses. By the end of August, however, Fred had decided to enlist in the Liverpool Scottish Regiment. When the news reached Grace, she expressed her dismay in a letter, but ultimately came to accept his decision:

> Although you have told me nothing about your ideas as regards the war, yet I felt somehow you'd go if things went on getting more serious – still, I'm afraid I almost hoped you wouldn't –
>
> Forgive this letter being horribly lame and the desires somewhat selfish – but if in selfishness there is ever a spark of goodness please take this as such.[24]

Despite her protests, both she and Fred agreed to see each other before he joined up, and they continued their correspondence amidst Grace's disapproval of the war and his military service. Additionally, throughout their letters and wartime relationship, Grace, who would eventually volunteer to work in a hospital, would continue to express her disapproval of the war and Fred's soldiering. It is highly plausible that Fred, fully aware of Grace's attitude, shaped the content of his letters around this concern.

Additionally, the shared mutual, noncomformist religious background of Fred and Grace may have also contributed to the ways in which both wrote about the war in their letters, as the noncomformist response was based more in acceptance rather than support of the outbreak of war.[25] In his overview of religious attitudes to the First World War, historian Adrian Gregory noted that while 'English mainstream nonconformists generally supported the national cause', they were also 'notable for strongly resisting certain "totalising" tendencies in the prosecution of

---

[23] See Sellers, Fred to Grace, 9 August 1914, IWM. In this letter, Fred joked that 'I supposed "Kaiser" would have to change his name before he would be enlisted'. For more on the question of Germanophobia at the outbreak of the First World War, see Gregory, *The Last Great War*, pp. 40-69 and Michael Neiberg, *Dance of the Furies: Europe at the Outbreak of World War I* (Belknap Press, Harvard: Cambridge, MA 2011).

[24] Sellers, Grace to Fred, 8 September 1914, IWM.

[25] For an overview of noncomformism and other British religious responses to the war, see Gregory, *The Last Great War*, pp. 21-22, 173-177.

the war', such as recognizing the right to 'conscientious objection' and opposing the 'bombing of civilians in "retaliation"'.[26] Nevertheless, their favoring of 'ordinary' news over 'wartime' news in their correspondence remains yet another prominent example of how many British soldiers and civilians wrote to each other throughout the First World War. Despite the shroud of war and the possibility that a soldier might never return, both the soldier and whom they wrote to back home often continued to write on matters unrelated to the war with the hope of continuing the lives that they had built up to that point into the postwar world.

What is also striking is that with the outbreak of war, the amount of Grace's preserved letters increased. Whether or not the frequency of her correspondence remained the same or increased, the fact that Fred had begun preserving more of her letters is rather striking. When he joined the British Army at the outbreak of war in 1914, Fred most certainly felt compelled to embrace ties to what mattered most to him from the prewar world, with Grace being one of his biggest priorities. While letters from the home front are often lacking in what remains of First World War correspondence in general, Fred – and perhaps others like him in some instances – would ship the letters back home that he had received for the sake of preservation. He first considered this while training in Britain in 1915:

> I have a large bundle of your letters here & it isn't easy to look after them in camp. I know you'll be horribly startled when I tell you I nearly sent them all to you to look after. I think I should have done so – & then I thought of your opinion of such a deed.[27]

Despite his fears over how she would react, Fred began to send the letters back to Grace in parcels, the first of which Grace received a few days later, writing 'when I got home I found the famous parcel had arrived – I did wish Freddie they'd all been from you instead of my stupid

[26] Gregory, 'Beliefs and Religion', in Winter, ed., *First World War*, Vol. III, pp. 432-433.
[27] Sellers, Fred to Grace, 25 April 1915, IWM.

epistles – however I'll treat them kindly'.[28] While much scholarship on the First World War has commented on the significance of letters to the morale of soldiers, the preserved letters of Grace to Fred also reveal that the morale of the home front also relied upon frequent communication with loved ones serving in the armed forces.[29] Throughout the war, while Fred's letters in many instances became less frequent and more concise, Grace would write a rather significant body of letters to Fred, exhibiting for every letter sent home by soldiers in the conflict, there were perhaps several more being sent from home to soldiers. It was the collective morale of soldiers *and* civilians that fed off one another, which was integral to the British military effort in the First World War.

Generally, Fred and Grace would avoid the grisly details of the war – such as talk of casualties, deaths, and more general war news – in their letters to one another. Early on in the war, partly due to his own disinterest in military life, Fred hoped to avoid sharing 'military stuff' with Grace, but often found it hard to do so given his soldierly occupations.[30] Grace herself seemed disinterested in the military side of the news as well, with Fred acknowledging as much in a description of his sentry duties, writing 'I will pass on. I know military news has no interest for you – it hasn't for myself except that "myself" is at present attached to it'.[31] Although she expressed concern for the German military gains on the Western Front in 1914, Grace would also share her distaste for British war propaganda, writing that 'the papers are too hateful almost to read'.[32] Death of acquaintances and those close to them, however, inevitably occurred as the war

[28] Sellers, Grace to Fred, 28 April 1915, IWM.
[29] See Gary Sheffield, *Leadership in the Trenches*, pp. 135-137, A. Watson, *Enduring the Great War*, pp. 82-84, Roper, *The Secret Battle*, pp. 47-72, Helen McCartney, *Citizen Soldiers*, pp. 89-118, and Meyer, *Men of War*, pp. 14-46.
[30] Sellers, Fred to Grace, 26 September 1914, IWM.
[31] Sellers, Fred to Grace, 10 October 1914, IWM.
[32] Sellers, Grace to Fred, 14 October 1914, IWM.

progressed. Both would acknowledge this when it occurred, but rarely would they dwell on it for more than a brief mention in their correspondence. In one instance, Grace spent the entirety of a letter sharing news of her activities that day and responding to Fred's previous letters with only a brief mention of a boy that she had once known having been killed, remarking that 'I feel dreadfully sorry…I remember him telling me how he just loathed the army'.[33] It is this loathing of war and military life that would often be central to how Fred and Grace wrote of the war and military life. For Fred, military service and the war meant feeling isolation and loneliness, at one point declaring to Grace 'we work war, we talk war, we think war, or if we don't think it, we have to keep our thoughts to ourselves, or I have. I can find nothing here which corresponds or coincides with mine'.[34]

Upon his enlistment in the British Army in 1914, Fred informed the Gray's Inn Bar that he needed to delay his application to join. He received a reply on 3 November, with congratulations on his enlistment, the hope that they would receive 'news' of him, and assurances that they would await his return after the war.[35] Just as Gray's Inn wished to maintain a network with prospective future members during the war, Fred did not put a stop to his career aspirations from the prewar period. Recurring concerns over his ambition to become a lawyer, would appear at various times throughout the war. His earliest concerns for life after the war and readjusting to becoming a civilian appear in his letters to Grace during training before his first tour on the Western Front:

The only thing that troubles me is the handicaps that I shall have for progressing after the war is over – if I survive it. I suppose one ought to consider sufficient to the day is the pleasure thereof, but then I think the future – or the

[33] Sellers, Grace to Fred, 13 December 1915, IWM.
[34] Sellers, Fred to Grace, 13 February 1916, IWM. Fred goes on to tell Grace that she and her letters were his 'sole companions each day – even my soul companions'.
[35] See Sellers, Sellers, ed., *Watching and Waiting*, vol. I, p. 81, IWM.

probabilities of the future – greatly affect the present. However the present is the main thing & so far all goeth well.[36]

Aside from the recognition that he may not survive the war, Fred imagined his wartime experience and postwar aspirations in separation from one another, hoping that the former would not disrupt or bleed into the latter. Even in the early stages of the war, he prepared for the possibility that his life as a soldier would produce 'handicaps' in readjusting to civilian life after the war. Part of his concern resulted from the time that the war delayed his career and the time it would take to achieve any considerable success within it, fearing that the war 'may mean that I shall be 40 instead of 35 before I am ascending the threshold of something worth calling a career - & that is reckoning on success'.[37] Despite his fears, Grace would continually reassure Fred over his future beyond the war, writing in one letter 'Freddie darling don't bother so much about what is going to happen – just leave it – it won't make it any better wondering about it – I am sure you aren't conceited in imagining that things will go alright'.[38] Nevertheless, these concerns aside, what is striking that despite the shroud of his active military service and the possibility that he could die during the war, Fred still persisted in his ambitions beyond it. Perhaps most importantly, when faced with disillusion over wartime circumstances and pessimism over his postwar goals, Fred would turn to Grace as a source of comfort and optimism.

Despite these concerns for surviving and readjusting to civilian life after the war – or perhaps due to them, Fred perhaps dedicated far more energy into the continued development of his relationship with Grace. As he progressed further into his military training before he

[36] Sellers, Fred to Grace, 12 October 1914, IWM.
[37] Sellers, Fred to Grace, 1 November 1914, IWM.
[38] Sellers, Grace to Fred, 8 May 1916, IWM.

embarked for France, Fred began to assess where he stood with Grace. After visiting her on leave, when Grace told him she felt 'sorry for [him]' over his concerns for his postwar career ambitions, Fred wrote a long letter tell her that he wished for her 'happiness always & at all times' and hoped to assist her in achieving it, declaring that present happiness cannot at present be much assistance in revealing future happiness'.[39] This letter would be one of many from Fred to Grace with the implied question of whether Grace would be happier without Fred, perhaps due in large part to his realization that he may not survive the war. Grace would follow this and similar letters in the future with shocked replies that would reaffirm her commitment to him despite her own fear for what might happen in the war:

> …I wish you'd promise me not to think whether I am happy or not – I cannot be when you suggest the horrors of the future so vividly – Surely you know that if anything did happen to you – which I trust will not – that if there is a cloud about at all it is only white now but it will become black and I know as well as I know anything it will always…remain. Therefore on those grounds alone selfish though they be I implore you to take every care it is possible to take of yourself. The world without you would indeed be a chaos.[40]

This would be one of the few letters where Grace would speak frankly of the possibility that Fred might die in what would become the First World War. While the pages of their letters would often avoid this topic and, in many instances, talk of more general war news, the constant reaffirmations by Fred and Grace of their love for one another would perhaps be driven by the fear that one fateful wartime event could result in them never see each other again. As the war progressed and Fred joined the fighting on the Western Front, he and Grace often chose to

[39] Sellers, Fred to Grace, 1 November 1914, IWM.
[40] Sellers, Grace to Fred, 3 November 1914, IWM.

continually reaffirm their commitment to each other in their letters, most likely shrouded by what they feared most from the war.[41]

In many of her wartime letters, Grace wrote with a mix of concern for the everyday life and struggles of Fred as a soldier and her own disapproval for the war and soldiering more generally. In many cases, her concerns for Fred's safety often led to her freely expressing her attitude. After Fred received a commission in the King's Liverpool Regiment, Grace wrote 'I'm both glad & sorry – glad because you'll undoubtedly have work to do I suppose…well I don't know exactly why I am sorry but I suppose just because what it means…it probably means you go out somewhat sooner than you otherwise would have done'. Suffering from the measles and facing the possibility that Fred would be sent to the Western Front in 1915, she also requested that he 'mustn't run any risks'.[42] After hear that one of Fred's friends in France had been wounded and sent home, Grace admitted that 'Freddie darling, even if you had to go through some pain I'm afraid I almost wish it had been you instead'.[43] She even expressed her frustration to Fred with some old acquaintances who were in uniform:

…half way up the road Gordon Robotham caught me up – Oh I did feel annoyed. What a pity eyes can't kill sometimes isn't it…nothing drastic happened – only my opinion of him hasn't improved I think – He's fearfully conceited can't seem to help it – told me all about how he was wounded making it as gruesome as possible…and then proceeded to make very funny jokes about me being unpatriotic & so on…[44]

[41] Fred and Grace reflect on this further as Fred neared his first tour on the Western Front in 1915. Fred feared that if he survived the war, he may be 'useless…I may have lost any concentration for study. I may be worse. At any rate I shall be still older', but still expressed his love for Grace. Grace expressed her 'faith' in him in her reply, and reassures him that 'whatever happens Freddie you'll always be you – and I shall love you always'. See Sellers, Fred to Grace, 11 April 1915, and Grace to Fred, 15 April 1915, IWM.
[42] Sellers, Grace to Fred, 29 November 1914 and 7 June 1915, IWM.
[43] Sellers, Grace to Fred, 9 May 1916, IWM.
[44] Sellers, Grace to Fred, 15 October 1915, IWM.

While Grace's attitudes surely do not reflect perhaps the nationalist sentiments of her contemporaries, they do not imply that she was antiwar on 'unpatriotic'.[45] Indeed, she would perhaps equally express her annoyance with fear-mongers at home, writing to Fred that on a car ride 'the most appalling little wretch sat behind me – quite drunk – He seemed to be very agitated about Zeppelines [*sic*] & went rambling on about them all the way up – I felt at the time I'd rather have 20 Zepps than have to listen to that little wretch!'.[46] Rather, it perhaps reveals a more layered side to the history of British women in the First World War. While history rightfully remembers the 'white feather' givers that sought to shame men into military service, the suffragettes fighting for the vote, mother's that sought to 'mother' from afar to sons serving in the war and renegotiate female citizenship based on their status in the postwar world, and the women that escaped domestic lives for work to support the war effort, Grace does not quite fit in any of these historical molds, offering the possibility of additional layers to the female experience of the conflict.[47] Coming from a rather privileged family in Derbyshire – she did, however, volunteer in a kitchen at a military hospital on the home front, Grace was not a Suffragette, was not a 'white feather' giver, nor was she a mother. Beyond the social and political struggles of British life in the era of the First World War, there is an underlying human history filled with women that, for various reasons, chose to live in the shadows or, perhaps more accurately, held fast to their everyday, private lives as a way to cope with unordinary times. In a way, much like those by Marie Pireaud, Grace's wartime letters reveal the private, local experience of women on the home front during the First World War and, as Grayzel has noted,

[45] For more on how societies received the outbreak of war and what motivated them to keep fighting, see A. Watson, *Enduring the Great War*, pp. 44-84, and Gregory, *The Last Great War*, pp. 9-39, and Neiberg, *Dance of the Furies*.
[46] Sellers, Grace to Fred, 11 February 1916, IWM.
[47] For more on British women and the First World War, see Gullace, *'The Blood of Our Sons'*, Grayzel, *Women's Identities at War*, and Kent, *Making Peace*.

the ways in which women shaped the soldiers' experience of war and emotional survival.[48] While patriotism, activism, and how everyone 'did their bit' often appear at the forefront of histories of the conflict, it is the private, local lives of these same people that is often lost to posterity, and letter-writing reveals a world where these women, like soldiers, carried on their own private affairs, concerns, and aspirations outside of the turmoil that shrouded their public lives. In many instances, Grace reveals in her letters how much more significant her local, private life – particularly her developing relationship with Fred – was over the ongoing war and public life surrounding it. Essentially, while certainly affected by wartime emotional urgency, Grace wrote to maintain the fragment of her private life attached to Fred in spite of the war and the limitations it imposed on them both.

Just as Fred had written his first letter to Grace in 1911 by complimenting a photograph of her, wartime letters continued to reveal the significance of photography, parcels, and familiar material items to not just Fred's military morale, but perhaps more importantly his increasingly intimate relationship with Grace. After receiving a photo and proofs from Grace, Fred wrote that 'I appreciate & shall never cease to appreciate the possession of these things. They mean much to me'.[49] Sending and commenting on photos that they sent one another predominated in letters, with Fred acknowledging that 'a photograph is a much more valuable thing under these circumstances than the normal…If I ever have the misfortune to lose [one]…you must immediately send me another'.[50] Additionally, Fred, like many of his fellow soldiers, also began to send requests to Grace for parcels during his time on the Western Front starting in 1915 –

[48] See Hanna, *Your Death Would Be Mine*, Grayzel, *Women's Identities at War*, and Roper, *The Secret Battle*.
[49] Sellers, Fred to Grace, 10 November 1914, IWM.
[50] Sellers, Fred to Grace, 10 October 1915, IWM.

Grace would also send items without prompting, ranging from knitted socks to cigarettes to chocolate.

And yet, despite the welcome arrival of packages, it was often what accompanied them that Fred and certainly other soldiers craved most during the war: letters. Writing from the trenches in France, Fred mentioned to Grace that he had received a parcel from his mother, but admitted that 'I want companionship & letters are my only means of getting it'.[51] While parcels certainly supplied soldiers with all the luxuries and reminders of home that they had lost during their service overseas, it was letters that served a far more vital purpose to soldiers and civilians alike by allowing them to maintain relationships with one another despite the physical distance. Although these creature comforts and soldierly camaraderie certainly helped to sustain the morale of men at the front, it was not the sole – nor the primary – source of morale for the war effort.[52] While parcels provided instant comforts and needs not offered by the military to soldiers, letters had a much longer, more significant emotional influence on soldiers. After his transfer and commission in late-1914 to the King's Liverpool Regiment – an elite unit filled with aristocratic officers, Fred felt further isolated in his army life:

As you can imagine Grace I have not altogether settled down here…Still dear if you know me at all you must know that my pleasure is not at these times derived from my surroundings…but from what seems to me to be the stream of more lasting things which runs at all times through all circumstances. When I come off parade I find your letter –

[51] Sellers, Fred to Grace, 22 March 1916, IWM. Fred also admitted in a later letter to Grace that 'I write nearly as many letters to Mother as I do to you…at any rate they are considerably shorter. However lately I have only had time to write to you…'. See Sellers, Fred to Grace, 15 May 1916, IWM.

[52] Many past histories of British morale have limited analysis to the military or, more broadly, civil-military relations. For recent studies on the impact of leadership and unit cohesion on morale, see Sheffield, *Leadership in the Trenches* and A. Watson, *Enduring the Great War*. For studies on civil-military relations and the 'civilian' nature of mass armies, see Englander, 'Soldiering and Identity', pp. 300-318, J.G. Fuller, *Troop Morale and Popular Culture in the British and Dominion Armies, 1914-1918* (Clarendon Press: Oxford 1990), McCartney, *Citizen Soldiers*, and Ussishkin, *Morale*.

that is it…You don't know how welcome it was. The very sight of your handwriting cheered me up no end. And I needed it. Not that I regret in the slightest that I joined the army…but merely that I often feel lonely.[53]

Surrounded by a seemingly 'foreign' and unfamiliar life in the military, Fred and perhaps many more British men abruptly transformed into soldiers in the First World War turned to something far more familiar to them, such as letters from home. Once they had finished their duties and training for the day, they would retreat back into their barracks or billet and immerse themselves into news from home or, more simply, the sight of familiar handwriting from life outside the war. The need for parcels and companionship through letters was not limited simply to Fred – and perhaps most certainly for other soldiers. Indeed, perhaps like many others on the home front, Grace also embraced correspondence and parcels as a means of coping with the war. Just as Grace would send photos and parcels to Fred, Fred would also reciprocate. After all, in both the case of Fred and Grace, the arrival of a parcel would also lead to a much-desired letter acknowledging its arrival and thanking the other for sending it. Aside from photos of himself in uniform, he would send Grace other intimate items, such as a tie in his regimental plaid – despite his acknowledgement that she may not want it, perhaps likely due to its military significance.[54] Nevertheless, military or not, Grace insisted that Fred send her what he had. In one instance, after Fred wrote of a photo he had showing him in his uniform kilt, Grace replied 'I do want that photo so please give it me especially as its only apart from you that its rotten!'.[55] While the support of the home front for soldiers fighting overseas was an important source of wartime morale, it was the mutual emotional support from both fronts for one another through parcels,

[53] Sellers, Fred to Grace, 7 December 1914, IWM. Although Fred himself came from a 'public school', he did not seem to fit in with many of them, particularly the officers from the prewar professional army.
[54] See Sellers, Fred to Grace, 15 November 1914, IWM. Grace replied that the tie was 'not nearly so hideous as most of them!' See Sellers, Grace to Fred, 17 November 1914, IWM.
[55] Sellers, Fred to Grace, 13 December 1914, and Grace to Fred, 16 December 1916, IWM.

letters, and other intimate exchanges that made the separation, loss, and deprivation of the First World War bearable. In a way, letters offered a tangible, emotional replacement for physical closeness, with Fred moving forward during the Somme in 1916 carrying two letters from Grace, writing to her 'you do go everywhere with me darling. I couldn't go without you'.[56]

While Fred was stationed in France, censorship arose as a new obstacle to the ways in which they communicated to one another in letters. As a junior officer, however, Fred acted as censor of enlisted men's letters, and was also expected to censor his own letters – although Base Censors would also randomly review the letters of officers.[57] When he arrived in France in 1915, Fred warned Grace of this problem, writing that 'I suppose I shall have to employ a delicate discrimination in the news I intend to give you or else you will receive a shell of thick pencil lines – my energy deleted by the censor'.[58] Nevertheless, with a desire to share news of his life in France with the BEF, Fred attempted to find ways around the censorship regulations imposed upon his communication with Grace. While he could not be specific regarding his movements and other military information, he would very clearly tell her when he was close to the front lines and when he would enter the trenches. Grace, perhaps aware of the dangers he faced in France, insisted that Fred share with her his wartime experiences and not hide anything from her, writing around Fred's first trip to the frontline trenches that 'it seems a long time Freddie since you gave me any real news of yourself. I hope you're not making a point of leaving out the details – what seem details to you – probably wouldn't to me don't forget'.[59] On

[56] Sellers, Fred to Grace, 9 July 1916, IWM.
[57] For an example of Fred self-censoring his own letters, see Fred to Grace, 10 October 1915, Ibid. For more on British censorship regulations, see Englander, 'Soldiering and Identity', pp. 300-318, Boyden, *Tommy Atkins' Letters*, pp. 29-30.
[58] Sellers, Fred to Grace, 27 September 1915, IWM. Fred would censor his own letters on occasion as well. For an example, see Sellers, Fred to Grace, 27 September 1915, IWM.
[59] Sellers, Grace to Fred, 6 December 1915, IWM.

occasion, Fred would ignore censorship regulations to share his experiences with Grace, in one instance sending her an image of his trench enclosure, writing that 'I am sending you one because you asked for it but remember they have been censored. I have no doubt that you yourself will submit it to the flames so I send it without fear'.[60]

Censorship aside, perhaps what trumped the anticipation for letters most of all was the anticipation of returning home for a brief period on leave. During these times, Fred and Grace could share information more freely with one another and experience a brief respite from the physical separation that the war had caused. Throughout his military service, Fred sought any opportunity to get leave and visit Grace, who would also continually ask him in letters when he would next be able to visit. At one point, when Fred had his leave cancelled while in France, she wrote 'the idea of your leave being cancelled I must say had scarcely entered my head – I am so dreadfully sorry…I could kill the person who's responsible for it'.[61] While stationed in Britain, he was able to visit her family home in Overdale. As he served in France and it became more difficult to reach Grace in Overdale, Fred still found opportunities to meet with her while on leave. In most instances, he coordinated with Grace through letters to meet in more central locations, such as London. The significance of these visits during the war are made clear in the letters that Fred wrote after returning to his unit, particularly with being able to stay in touch with his prewar civilian identity and cope with the experiences of his life in France. In one letter, writing from a train to Liverpool, Fred acknowledged that returning to a familiar place from before the war that 'I find it hard sometimes to believe that I am still a soldier & in uniform'.[62]

[60] Sellers, Fred to Grace, 15 June 1916, IWM. Not much is left of this letter beyond this fragment, so Grace likely did burn the rest.
[61] Sellers, Grace to Fred, 14 April 1916, IWM.
[62] Sellers, Fred to Grace, 7 January 1915, IWM.

Perhaps most importantly, however, leave allowed Fred and Grace the opportunity to experience their relationship unencumbered by distance and written communication.

Despite the circumstances of wartime, even while Fred served on the Western Front, both Fred and Grace at times found their own letters to be rather dry and uninteresting, but they would nonetheless grumble about the size and frequency of the letters they received from one another. When Fred complained that Grace did not give him enough news about herself, she replied 'really I thought I scarcely ever talked about anything else, if my next few letters are to contain no other news than that they'll be more uninteresting that ever I'm afraid'.[63] She also wrote of the 'gratitude & satisfaction' she felt from Fred's letters, but admitted that she found her own letters to be 'absolutely futile…any ordinary person might be more or less glad to get them but I don't think they can give you much pleasure'.[64] Reading this from trenches that he had described as 'appallingly bad', Fred replied to reassure Grace of the importance of her letters to him:

> Nothing could have been more welcome. I sat down on my bed & simply soaked in it. It was charming beyond my deserts. It has been a stimulus of which I was sadly in need. My darling Grace you must believe your letters to me have a value far greater than anything I can express. The last few days…I have felt myself useless & worse than ordinary. Oh darling you revive my spirits as nothing else can – how can you suggest or imagine that your letters are futile.[65]

From the home front and the Western Front, Grace and Fred, respectively, shared mutual sentiments regarding their wartime correspondence. Both cherished the letters that they received from the other, and yet also neither felt satisfied by the content and quality of the letters that they sent to one another. When Fred complained that Grace did not give him enough news about

[63] Sellers, Grace to Fred, 3 March 1916, IWM.
[64] Sellers, Grace to Fred, 4 March 1916, IWM.
[65] Sellers, Fred to Grace, 5 March 1916 and 8 March 1916, IWM.

herself, she replied 'really I thought I scarcely ever talked about anything else, if my next few letters are to contain no other news than that they'll be more uninteresting that ever I'm afraid'.[66] The frequency of letters received would also become a point of contention and anxiety. Upon hearing that a friend, Harry Pickles, only wrote to his wife twice a week, Grace declared 'Goodness Freddie I couldn't bear it I should go mad if you only wrote twice a week'.[67] Perhaps dependent on his circumstances at the front, Fred would complain about Grace's letters, at one point writing after not receiving any mail that 'I am wondering whether with short notice you have commenced to write…less frequently. Perhaps it is as well. I suppose really we haven't something important to say to each other <u>every</u> day'.[68] Fred would also on occasion tell Grace to be more frank in her letters to him, admitting to her in one instance that 'in a few of those letters you seemed to me to be hiding yourself intentionally, you were acting, they were unnatural, they were not you'.[69] Grace would also follow suit when she felt that Fred was behaving abnormally or being unreasonable, replying to one of his letters 'of the "shivery" sort' that 'if you get many letters it seems to annoy & if you don't get one one day you are annoyed too. As a matter of fact Freddie I hadn't commenced on short notice to write less frequently'.[70]

And yet, despite the arguments over what was said and not said, the self-perceived inadequacy of their own writing, and the frequency of letters, Fred and Grace continued to write to one another. In the end, it was not the letters themselves that mattered to Fred and Grace, but rather what they represented to each other in emotional terms. Amidst physical separation and

[66] Sellers, Grace to Fred, 3 March 1916, IWM.
[67] Sellers, Grace to Fred, 25 March 1916, IWM.
[68] Sellers, Fred to Grace, 11 March 1916, IWM.
[69] Sellers, Fred to Grace, 2 April 1916, IWM. So unsure of Grace's true feelings for him, Fred at one point awkwardly proposes to Grace in a letter, to which Grace gave a noncommittal reply. The matter was forgotten until Fred's official proposal to her in late-1917. See Sellers, Fred to Grace, 21 April 1916, and Grace to Fred, 27 April 1916, IWM.
[70] Sellers, Grace to Fred, 15 March 1916, IWM.

the fear that Fred may never come home, letters provided to both Fred and Grace a means of emotional closeness to one another denied to them by the First World War. Whether it be trouble at home or on in France, the letters that Fred and Grace one another allowed them to retreat to one another as a way to cope with their everyday lives and, in a way, share a means to remain emotionally close to one another in the companionship that they shared in their letters. For Fred, he just simply wanted to hear from Grace, writing that 'even if you had nothing more to say, you could at least tell me where you were'.[71] In another instance, acknowledging his own pessimism at the front, Fred reassured Grace that 'underlying it all there is something permanent & unwavering':

> Never at any time does the fundamental happiness which is derived from my love & adoration of you leave me. When the country thrills with beauty you seem to be there too. When the storm is strongest you are there making it seem calm. I have a permanent happiness which nothing can remove – it is my love for you.[72]

While this bond between Fred and Grace allowed them both to endure the early days of the First World War, carve out a private life undefined by war, and look towards the postwar with a positive outlook, the war would abruptly enter their lives like many other British people in the summer of 1916, when what would be remembered as the Battle of the Somme began, and British national involvement in the conflict escalated.

The War Hits Home: Fred's Wounding on the Somme and the Aftermath

In the spring of 1916, Fred expressed his insecurity to Grace regarding their relationship amidst the First World War, admitting he feared that the war was the source of Grace's affection

[71] Sellers, Fred to Grace, 30 May 1916, IWM.
[72] Sellers, Fred to Grace , 9 February 1916, IWM.

for him. Reflecting on how he joined the BEF 'without great consideration' and how unbearable the experience would have been without Grace, Fred offered a haphazard proposal to her despite his concern that 'this unnatural war has drawn [her] sympathies unnaturally'.[73] While Grace neither accepted nor rejected his proposal in her reply – she worried that she was not old enough and had recently turned down another suitor, Fred ultimately wrote back withdrawing his proposal, wishing to wait for the end of the war. In this letter, he reflected on the war and the importance of their relationship to him, writing that 'war makes nothing count but the things which are best expressed by terming them eternal…I shall be content to have been deprived of some happy moments to secure a permanent happiness for you'.[74] Just over two months later, Fred and Grace would both face a serious test to their relationship – specifically, whether or not it was a product of the war or their commitment to one another beyond it.

On 14 July 1916, two weeks into the Battle of the Somme, Fred sustained a shrapnel wound to his right hand. Although he fared better than most British casualties of the campaign, the BEF deemed his wound a 'Blighty one' – one severe enough to have him recover back in Britain. In his first letter to Grace in the aftermath – which he had to write with his left hand, Fred wrote that 'to account recent events is not easy'. After giving a brief overview, he admitted that 'we lost heavily & it wasn't very far into the morning when Major Ommaney & I were the only two officers left'. Finally, reassuring that it was 'a mere scratch' and he was resting comfortably, Fred acknowledged his wound to Grace and closed telling her to 'be anxious no longer'.[75] Grace replied that 'I do hope it's nothing bad…I can't always go by what you say as

[73] Sellers, Fred to Grace, 22 April 1916, IWM.
[74] Sellers, Grace to Fred, 27 April 1916, and Fred to Grace, 1 May 1916, IWM.
[75] Sellers, Fred to Grace, 18 July 1916, IWM. Fred also sent a telegram to Grace on 16 July 1916 telling her he was 'very slightly wounded in both fingers', but this is the first full letter after his wounding. See Sellers, Sellers, ed., *Watching and Waiting*, vol. I, p. 320, IWM.

I've told you before you know', and in a later letter wrote 'what appalling things you must have gone through Freddie – I'm sure you must be feeling shaken to pieces'.[76]

More details on the incident would never reach Grace – at least in Fred's letters. Even Grace's father wrote to Fred, writing that 'strange as it may seem to you – we are somewhat relieved that you are wounded…the lists of casualties are so long, and so serious, that one has terrible forebodings of what may happen'.[77] Fred also received a letter from a corporal in his unit, who wrote that his platoon wished to be 'remembered' to him, and that 'I wish you a speedy recovery, but not to come out here again'.[78] Grace continued to seek more information on Fred's condition and attempted to provide him comfort in her letters. After leaving France for a military hospital on the Isle of Wight, Fred's mood alternated between guilt for leaving his unit and a desire to return to Grace – she would meet him in London soon after his return to Britain. After seeing reports that his colonel had died and half of his unit's casualties on 14 July had 'proved fatal', he admitted to feeling 'wretched' and ended his letter abruptly with 'I will reserve my news for a cheerier mood'.[79]

In some ways, Fred's wounding on the Somme brought the war far closer to his relationship with Grace. By September 1916, after receiving approval from the Medical Board, Fred had recovered enough to return to military training in Britain. While she had previously expressed her concerns over Fred's safety in the war, Grace began to express them more openly in the aftermath of the Somme. Leading up to his examination by the Medical Board, Grace wrote 'Oh Freddie can't you do something so they can't pass you. It is all so horrible – I do feel

[76] Sellers, Grace to Fred, 19 July 1916 and 20 July 1916 (date on envelope), IWM.
[77] Sellers, 'Mr. Malin' to Fred, 19 July 1916, IWM.
[78] Sellers, 'J. Jones Cpl.' to Fred, 20 August 1916, IWM.
[79] Sellers, Fred to Grace, 22 July 1916, IWM.

miserable…Write whatever happens because it will be a very sad day for me'.[80] Fred continued feeling unsettled in military life after his return to duty at the Llanion Barracks – a place he described as 'cold and military', confessing to Grace that 'I feel that I shall never settle in this place. Why I should feel everything as badly as I do I don't know unless it is that reaction which corresponds in intensity with the joy from which I am cut off…I really should not write until my spirits rise'.[81] With a rise in military duties, Fred was able to write less often, and continued to describe his military surroundings as 'an absolute prison'. Grace continued to write letters, but felt less interested in daily routine and hobbies – such as her singing and piano playing – due to the renewed separation from Fred, admitting that 'to really get the idea firmly fixed in my head that we've come all the way back to just letters is almost unbearable – it makes me feel too desperately weary for anything'.[82] Days later, she would nearly reach a tipping point about her ability to endure wartime conditions – specifically, her separation from Fred and the uncertainty over whether or not he would return from the war:

> I am tired out with the uncertainty of everything & the monotonous constant keep bright at all cost sort of business. When you come to think of the news we get day in & day out & as regards its awfulness always the same it is really marvelous to think that the world can keep as same as it does. Oh Freddie I am indeed tired to death of the war. That the people are strong enough to endure all they have to from it but cannot end it is hard to understand. There must be as you say something very, very wrong.[83]

The intensity of this loneliness and frustration by Grace would usually dissipate as time passed in the wake of Fred's times on leave, but it would never fully disappear. In some ways, it would

[80] Sellers, Grace to Fred, 9 September 1916, IWM.
[81] Sellers, Fred to Grace, 14 September 1916, IWM.
[82] Sellers, Fred to Grace, 15 September 1916, and Grace to Fred, 15 September 1916, IWM. This would come up in later letters, with Fred expressing concern when Grace had not mentioned her singing lessons for some time. See Sellers, Fred to Grace, 13 July 1917, IWM. Ultimately, Grace reassured him that even though she had quit doing lessons – calling them a 'wretched waste of time', she wasn't going to give up her singing altogether. See Sellers, Grace to Fred, 18 January 1918, IWM.
[83] Sellers, Grace to Fred, 22 September 1916, IWM.

come up in passing or in a joking context within her letters, in one instance jokingly asking Fred to desert and accompany her to the military hospital where she worked.[84] Much like before his wounding on the Somme, Fred attempted to reassure Grace about their separation, continuing to invoke the notion of the war as fleeting and their relationship as 'eternal', and the centrality of Grace to his own emotional survival in the war, declaring after one leave that 'the two days…have given me courage & cheerfulness – they have brightened everything – the blackness has vanished'.[85] Despite the war creeping into their lives and relationship with one another, Fred and Grace remained committed to their desire to form an emotional bond that would outlast it all. In a way, after Fred's wounding, Fred and Grace worked further towards their mutual desire to form a relationship in opposition to the war. While the war would come up more into their correspondence until the end in 1918, it appeared more as an object of hostility that threatened to permanently disrupt their everyday lives outside of it. Essentially, from 1916 to the end of the war, Fred and Grace fought to protect each other from the physical and emotional strains of the war through their letters and parcels.[86] For the most part, this was done through their correspondence to one another which, despite increased mentions of the war, maintained a sense of the mundane throughout it. Indeed, Fred would remark on this aspect of his letters, writing to Grace that 'letters should scarcely be used for trivial conversation & yet such I often encourage them to be'.[87]

For the rest of Fred's time on the home front, Grace would continually express her fear that Fred would return to the Western Front – she even had a nightmare at one point about it, and

[84] Sellers, Grace to Fred, 10 October 1916, IWM.
[85] Sellers, Fred to Grace, 30 October 1916, IWM.
[86] When Fred ultimately did return to France, Grace attempted to physically protect Fred from the war, asking him if she should send him a steel chest plate in a parcel. See Sellers, Grace to Fred, 9 June 1917, IWM.
[87] Sellers, Fred to Grace, 4 December 1916, IWM.

Fred would struggle to acclimate to military life and continue to reflect on the prospects of a legal career in the postwar world.[88] Fred attempted to seek transfers to either the Royal Flying Corps or to a unit stationed in East Africa, asking Grace which one she preferred.[89] Fred would also receive the Military Cross (MC) for his actions on the Somme. Grace would attend the ceremony, and Fred would note in his diary that Grace had commented 'she thought it was distinguished not to have a decoration'.[90] Despite Grace's fears and Fred's efforts, Fred once again received orders to return to France on 10 June 1917. They would continue with the letter-writing routine, with letters recounting everyday events and reaffirming their emotional ties to one another with expressions of affection and always waited for the next letter to reach them. Even though she found this communication 'unsatisfactory', Grace admitted that she 'couldn't live without them' and insisted that Fred at least send her a postcard if he was unable to write a full letter.[91] Fred would remark similarly during gaps in their correspondence, writing that 'there seems very little news to give you – all the days are so empty without your letters' and found himself incapable of immersing himself into military life.[92] Grace would also continue to find a way to send something that would further protect Fred from the war in parcels. After Fred told her that neither a shield or chest plate would be useful, she asked him to keep his flask in one shirt pocket and decided to send him a cigarette case for the other.[93] And much like before the Somme, Fred continued to return Grace's letters to her for safekeeping.[94]

[88] Sellers, Grace to Fred, 11 April 1917, and Fred to Grace, 27 May 1917, IWM.
[89] Sellers, Fred to Grace, 13 November 1916, IWM. In the end, these transfers never materialized.
[90] Sellers, Sellers, ed., *Watching and Waiting*, vol. I, p. 378, IWM.
[91] Sellers, Grace to Fred, 13 June 1917, IWM.
[92] Sellers, Fred to Grace, 18 June 1917 and 8 July 1917, IWM.
[93] Sellers, Grace to Fred, 21 June 1917, IWM.
[94] Sellers, Fred to Grace, 28 June 1917, IWM.

Before his departure for France, Fred wrote that his relationship with Grace had 'given me courage during the destruction, it has kept me from being swamped, it has always given me a sense of fundamental happiness', Fred ultimately decided to act upon this happiness he felt with Grace after having endured so much with her and in spite of his return to the Western Front.[95] After asking her father for permission – which he gave with some reservations, Fred proposed to Grace in a letter on 27 October written sitting 'alone in a dugout of sandbags', and they married on 15 December during Fred's home leave.[96] By 28 December, Fred had to leave Grace and return to France. Reflecting on the wartime circumstances of the wedding in a letter to Grace's father, Fred insisted to him that 'it was not a war wedding – if the war had not come I would have been a barrister by now & I had long ago calculated that we should be married about this time. The war has turned everything upside down…Nothing but friendship is stable', and looked forward to the end of the war and a happier future with Grace outside of it.[97] Like their letters to one another, the relationship between Fred and Grace was formed in the backdrop of the First World War, but they refused to let the war define it.

In the final year of the war, Fred and Grace, now married, continued to frequently write letters to one another. Like their earlier letters, they continued to write about everyday matters, life after the war, and reinforced their emotional ties to one another – now with allusions to their sexual intimacy and making arrangements for married life.[98] The final year of the First World War, however, with the outbreak of the *Kaisersschlacht* in March and the Hundred Days

[95] Sellers, Fred to Grace, 1 March 1917, IWM.
[96] Sellers, Fred to Grace, 27 October 1917, IWM. Grace's father was worried that Grace was too young to get married – she was twenty-one at the time, but ultimately granted his permission to Fred. See Sellers, Grace to Fred, 2 November 1917, IWM.
[97] Sellers, Fred to 'Mr. Malin', 11 January 1918, IWM.
[98] It is unclear whether there was physical, sexual intimacy in the premarital relationship. See Sellers, Grace to Fred, 29 December 1917, IWM. This is the second preserved letter written by Grace after Fred had returned to France after their wedding. For concerns over married life – i.e. financial and living arrangements, see Sellers, Fred to Grace, 13 January and 16 January 1918, and Fred to 'Mr. Malin', 31 January 1918, IWM.

Offensive in August, reached levels of intensity that exceeded that experienced on the Somme.[99] The outbreak of the *Kaisersschlacht* on 21 March produce considerable stress for Grace, who frantically wrote to Fred to ensure that he was safe and expressed her suspicions that he knew about it and failed to tell her beforehand.[100] On 22 September, fighting in the Hundred Days Offensive, Fred would receive his second and final wound to his eyes from a gas attack, and returned to Britain on 1 October, leaving the Western Front behind for the last time. His eyes would only sustain temporary damage, and he received a second bar to his MC for his actions on that day. After briefly serving in Cork – where Grace joined him, he was discharged on 24 December 1918.[101] In an undated letter to Grace, Fred reflected on how life would be for them both at the end of the war, writing that 'long before the war I wanted your love & friendship to accompany me through life…The world will be better & happier in peace than in war.'[102] With the First World War coming to what would be its end with the Armistice on 11 November 1918, Fred and Grace could begin the lives together that they had begun to develop for themselves before it, held together throughout its duration by the epistolary relationship that allowed them in a way to experience the war together despite their physical separation from one another.

Conclusion

[99] For more on the First World War in 1918, see William Philpott, *War of Attrition: Fighting the First World War* (Overlook: New York 2014), David Stevenson, *With Our Backs to the Wall: Victory and Defeat in 1918* (Harvard, Belknap Press: Cambridge, MA 2011), and A. Watson, *Enduring the Great War*, pp. 184-231.
[100] See Sellers, Grace to Fred, 22-23 March 1918, IWM. Grace's suspicions stemmed from Fred admitting to her after being wounded on the Somme that he knew of the attack beforehand and chose not to tell her about it. See Grace to Fred, 23 March 1918, Ibid. Grace wrote two letters on this date. Fred would also admit that he could not tell her about the attack due to secrecy and the uncertainty about when the Germans would begin their offensive. See Sellers, Fred to Grace, 31 March 1918, IWM.
[101] Sellers, Sellers, ed., *Watching and Waiting*, vol. II, pp. 309, 314, 317, IWM.. John Sellers claims that his father Fred had told him that he refused an order to fight against the Irish and left for Britain, risking a court martial. There are no records of this incident, and the letters of Fred and Grace end soon after his departure from the Western Front.
[102] Sellers, Fred to Grace, undated, and see also Sellers, ed., *Watching and Waiting*, vol. II, p. 313, IWM.

Looking at the wartime letters of Paul and Marie Pireaud, Martha Hanna remarked that 'it is more appropriate to imagine these two sets of concentric circles – the home front and military front – not as stretched out at great distance from each other in two-dimensional space, but as two discs with a common center point, intersecting each other in three-dimensional space'.[103] Much like the letters of Paul and Marie, the letters of Fred and Grace reveal much about how soldiers and civilians mutually experienced the First World War from the perspective of everyday life. While both knew the fears and dangers that war brought to their lives, Fred and Grace would turn to letter-writing to continue some semblance of their peacetime relationship and, in the process, carved out a shared experience of the First World War based not in violence, trauma, deprivation and death, but rather in their emotional commitment to one another that proved, in the words of Fred, to be 'something…eternal' and detached from the conflict. Once Fred had survived the war and had returned home to Grace, the First World War became an important, but yet not a central part of the life shared between them. While they sought to have a shared experience of the war and the separation it brought in their letters to one another, Fred and Grace also used their letters to separate this shared experience from the relationship they built to withstand it.

Fred and Grace proved to be one of the lucky couples of the First World War, as countless women on the home front entered the postwar period alone, with many British men returning home mutilated or traumatized beyond recognition, or their bodies missing somewhere within the scarred landscapes of France, Belgium, or another distant, foreign battlefield. In the postwar world, disillusionment and sociocultural and political change became a prominent part of the British landscape. In everyday life and human history, many witnessed and experienced

[103] Hanna, *Your Death Would Be Mine*, pp. 23-24

these changes, but chose to return to a life they had continued to develop in the wartime years and lived in spite of the bigger social changes going on around them, and their desire to do so can be found implicitly in the mundanity of the letters that they wrote to one another. After the anxiety he expressed over his future career before and during the war, Fred completed his legal studies in 1920. Fred and Grace continued to have a long and happy marriage and went on to have five children – one of whom, John, went on to transcribe and donate their letters to the Imperial War Museum in London. They did all of this despite having to experience in their lifetimes yet another world war, during which two of their own children joined the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve.[104] Fred would die in 1979, and Grace would follow him in 1987. What is left, however, is their cherished memories of their youth that brought them together and the extraordinary events they endured apart, and yet, in a way, also together.

The story of Fred and Grace in the letters they wrote provokes deeper questions into how soldiers and civilians alike experienced, endured, and recovered from the ordeals they faced during the First World War. At the social, political, and cultural level, questions over whether the conflict represented a 'watershed moment' in history remain. This perspective also lingers at the level of human history within ideas that wartime compelled soldiers and civilians alike to put their prewar lives on hold until the postwar, when prewar lives often could not be sustained due to the experience of the conflict. As the letters of Fred and Grace – and perhaps many more – reveal, many chose not to put their lives outside of the conflict on hold and continued to develop them remotely during wartime so that they could return to them in the postwar world. In the end, while the First World War fractured sociocultural and political constructs, many people like Fred

[104] For more on this background, see Sellers, Sellers, ed., *Watching and Waiting*, vol. I, pp. 6-12, and vol. II, pp. 317-320, IWM.

and Grace denied it the power to destroy the personal lives they had built before it and hoped to continue beyond it. While written amidst the backdrop of war, these letters were written not by the war, but rather by people like Fred and Grace.

CHAPTER 5

‘LONG PERIODS OF BOREDOM…’

THE FIRST WORLD WAR: A MUNDANE HISTORY

Introduction: Seeking Testimony in Wartime Letters

In the epistolary relationships formed by Wadham men, James Butlin, and Fred Sellers, individual war experiences appear as a recurring theme in the letters they wrote, but they did not represent the central motivation behind letter-writing. Nevertheless, whether peripheral or central to letters, the question of how they testified to this experience to outside readers remains. Rather than constant terror, killing, and violence, a far more subdued, mundane, and even boring reality of war experience stands out in what can perhaps best be described as testimony from British soldiers’ letters. While in some ways a form of self-censorship and avoidance, this testimony was nonetheless both very much an *actual* and *constructed* image of war, with the latter representing a means to cope with the actual mundanity of war and the traumatic moments it inflicted upon soldiers. In a way, the wartime testimonies found within epistolary relationships, reveal a paradoxical relationship between soldiers and war itself. Essentially, what scholars perceive as the traumatic moments of war – combat, killing, death – could be testified to by soldiers as the un-traumatic, while the mundane periods of war – drilling, camp life, isolation – threatened a man-turned-soldier with their own potential for trauma.

In a letter to his wife from 1916, H. Peel declared the First World War to be 'A dreary round of monotony only relieved by moments of terror!'.[1] Indeed, there is an old adage that war is 'long periods of boredom punctuated by brief moments of terror'.[2] While perhaps it did not originate from the First World War, it nonetheless appeared as a recurring allusion expressed by soldiers to their experiences of the conflict. Even before the conflict, military theorist Carl von Clausewitz acknowledged that 'in most campaigns periods of inaction and repose have been much longer than periods of action'.[3] And yet, for scholarship on war and memory of it, it is an often-forgotten aspect of wartime military experience. Samuel Hynes's *The Soldiers' Tale* (2001) has acknowledged the existence of a literary myth on the ways in which soldiers testify to their experiences of modern war. While he focuses more on the seemingly-monolithic 'soldiers' tale' in memoirs, Hynes nonetheless observes another sort of testimony driven by the 'need to report' rather than the 'need to remember':

> The reporting instinct operates as war happens, and appears in journals and diaries and letters. These accounts have the virtues of immediacy and directness, and tend to level war experience, reporting the ordinary days with the extraordinary ones, the boredom as well as the excitement, and giving to their stories the close texture, the grain of life in war.[4]

Driven by an interest in the memory (or mythology) of war, Hynes chose to center this study on the 'need to remember' found in memoirs, and how memoirs shaped cultural 'myths' of war in the 20th century. Nevertheless, the 'need to report' found in letters requires further analysis,

---

[1] Private Papers of H. Peel, letter 13 January 1916, Doc. 22927, Ref. P391, IWM.
[2] Unclear in specific origin, this phrase continues to be an adage dating possibly to the First World War itself. It has also come to describe other aspects of life beyond war, such as the journey to obtaining a PhD. See Nazlin Bhimani, '"Long periods of boredom punctuated by moments of sheer terror"; or, surviving the PhD", *UCL Centre for Doctoral Education* (8 August 2018), URL: https://blogs.ucl.ac.uk/cde/2018/08/08/long-periods-of-boredom-punctuated-by-moments-of-sheer-terror-or-surviving-the-phd/ (Accessed 28 October 2019).
[3] Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and transl. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton University Press: Princeton 1976) p. 221.
[4] Hynes, *The Soldiers' Tale*, p. xiv.

particularly the ways that these sources reveal how soldiers in the moment experienced war and articulated it to others outside of it. Here, the boredom, the ordinary, and the mundanity of war appear far more vividly than they do in memoirs.

Additionally, Hynes favored the front-line experience of combat as the authoritative source of the 'soldiers' tale', thereby relegating the rear-echelon and support experience to the insignificant – despite the numerical superiority of rear over front-line soldiers. Furthermore, in Hynes's account, the front-line soldiers' experiences are limited to the killing, the violence, the horror, and the limited perspective of trench life rather than their extended time resting, training, and simply marching far behind the lines. When considered alongside wartime letters, with such a dogmatic insistence on the authoritative voice of the 'soldier', even the other side of the exchange – the civilian – has nothing to contribute aside from being a passive audience to the 'witness', thus stripping correspondence from its context as an 'epistolary relationship', and even war and soldiering from its total experiential potential beyond combat and fighting.

After uncovering the haphazard nature – and dubious effectiveness – of official military censorship and showing the various ways that soldiers used letters to navigate their prewar mundanity through the First World War, it seems best to return to the question of soldiers' wartime testimony. In many ways, this testimony exhibits a paradox at the heart of war experience and the underlying emotional needs that drove and shaped wartime epistolary relationships. Despite the seemingly-oxymoronic emotional urgency to construct a shared mundanity in wartime letters and the wider relationships they maintained, it is necessary to consider what sort of testimony did indeed exist in letters? How did soldiers articulate their experiences of war, and what does this testimony reveal to readers about war itself? With an interest in the 'need to report' war, the testimonies that appear in soldiers' letters reveal that the

First World War was far more mundane than exciting, but trauma could nonetheless be found in both the mundane and the exciting. Perhaps for soldiers expecting more of a 'thrill' from their wartime military lives, even the mundanity of war threatened to be in itself a traumatic experience, particularly when the mundanity reached the level of sheer 'boredom'. And yet, when faced with trauma, this mundanity also offered soldiers a means to emotionally cope. Mundanity aside, in their communication with home, soldiers certainly turned to 'avoidance' and 'self-censorship', but did so as a way to exhibit emotional control over any trauma they faced during their military service. When this form of mundane testimony in letters is understood in combination with the larger motivation behind letter-writing to remain emotionally tied to life outside war and military service, it reveals that soldiers, rather than being 'destroyed' by war, exhibited considerable agency in shaping their own experiences, and in the end offered themselves the choice between two mundane worlds: home and war itself.[5]

The Problems of Self-Censorship and Warfare as Mundane

In a letter to his family, L. Gamble complained that he did not 'know what to put' in a letter to another acquaintance. His explanation was that 'it takes me all my time to find something to write about to you because we are not allowed to put anything in that is liable to be of any use to the enemy'. Nevertheless, Gamble still insists that he will write to this acquaintance.[6] In this letter, Gamble acknowledged to his family that he had to censor himself due to military regulations. Nevertheless, with these regulations in mind, it is worth noting that

[5] In his study of the 'totality of the Civil War military experience', Peter Carmichael noted the 'hard-nose pragmatism' of soldiers to emotionally reshape themselves to whatever wartime circumstances they faced, ranging from camp life to combat. In some ways, this 'pragmatism' can be seen in the ways that First World War soldiers shaped their wartime worlds in their own epistolaries. See Carmichael, *War for the Common Soldier*, pp. 7-13.
[6] Private Papers of L. Gamble, letter 28 October 1915, Doc. 21318, Ref. 15/14/1, IWM.

Gamble still admitted to having trouble writing letters in the first place, claiming that it took considerable effort to think of what to write. While this could be seen as both a product of the oppressive nature of a military censorship system and personal avoidance, it could also be a product of what soldiers witnessed – or even imagined – about the mundane nature of their war experiences. For many like Gamble, this sensation perhaps stemmed from their everyday experiences of wartime beyond combat, where they perceived that their experiences were not of much interest to anyone back home. In the end, soldiers chose to write in the ways that they did for reasons that cannot be fully explained by external interference. Rather, it was an internal choice made for reasons relevant to the emotional needs of the writer in wartime.

While self-censorship certainly remained an obstacle in fully articulating a soldier's experience of the war, soldiers nonetheless admitted to the problem in letters, and found ways around it. After his arrival in France in 1916, John Pearce wrote to his brother that there were many 'forbidden' details about war he wanted to share, but still wrote that 'the first thing that struck me was the very heavy artillery fire which gave us a shock first day but you get quite used to it and take no notice of it'.[7] Even when John could not find a way around mail restrictions, he still indicated that he had recently gone through harsh experiences, remarking in one letter after a tour in the trenches that 'I have many ups and downs since last writing you and only wish I could relate a few of them, but am afraid they wouldn't go [through]'. While he could not share these details in a letter, he was able to share that something had happened, and that it was necessary for people at home to know at least that much. Indeed, even with censorship restrictions, small remarks like this also indicated the need for soldiers to find solace in mundane home life, as John

[7] Private Papers of J. Pearce, letter 24 September 1916, Doc. 13303, Con Shelf, IWM.

immediately turned his letter into a request for a 'rattling good letter with all the home news'.[8] When war threatened them with trauma, soldiers turned to home in their letters for emotional support, and they chose not to jeopardize that link with blatant violations of military rules. In the worlds experienced beyond letters and the identities and worlds they constructed and performed within wartime epistolary relationships, horror and the mundane existed alongside and often intermingled with one another. Like John Pearce, a soldier could confront and testify to horror found in war – or at least express their wishes to do so, and that horror could arise from experience ranging from the frightening to the mundane. In crafting their wartime letters and identities with home life, these men, having witnessed the relationship between horror and the mundane, strove to perform an image of mundane home life devoid of horror. While they firstly sought to reassure family in their letters home, soldiers certainly strove to emotionally reassure themselves when confronted with the strange relationship between the horrible and the mundane that they faced during the First World War.

Beyond reassuring family, another aspect of resorting to 'avoidance' for soldiers was to make the more acute experiences of war (i.e. combat) a more mundane, recognizable emotional experience. Essentially, soldiers shaped war into a more bearable experience by making it seem more 'mundane' not just to themselves, but also to others at home. Writing to his wife during a 'pretty stiffish battle', H. Peel insisted that he was 'being acclimatised to the horrors…no need [whatsoever] for you to worry at all'.[9] Remarking on the incessant enemy shelling surrounding his position in Salonika, 'Reg' Bailey turned to humor – perhaps as a means to exhibit his own

[8] Private Papers of J. Pearce, letter 23 November 1916, Doc. 13303, Con Shelf, IWM.
[9] Private Papers of H. Peel, letter 18 May 1915, Doc. 22927, Ref. P391, IWM. Alexander Watson links this attitude to mental 'adaption' to combat. See A. Watson, *Enduring the Great War*, pp. 85-92. Joanna Bourke this to the efforts of soldiers to remain emotionally linked to people back home by turning to mutually recognizable allusions of war and killing. See Bourke, *Intimate History of Killing*, pp. 355-357, 358-362.

agency against indiscriminate enemy shelling, equating the sound of it to 'singing' that 'only acts as a lullaby, now'. On another occasion, when the shelling became more dangerous, he nonetheless insisted that 'one gets used to it easily and ceases to wonder if it is the next shell that is destined to send us to Blessedness or Blightie'.[10] Acknowledging that 'the life out here is just mud & nothing else', R. Cohen reassured his college warden that 'you gradually acquire the gift of getting through all these difficulties but at first it wants some effort'.[11] Although he wrote that 'there is little news', A.S.C. Fox still remarked that 'not a day goes by without a German aeroplane over us – fired at by our antiaircraft guns and sometimes also by Maxims. A Maxim sounds rather like a sewing machine – the water cooling jacket…gives them a very funny hollow note'.[12] To historian Edward Madigan, these efforts at perseverance – exhibited particularly through humor – revealed soldiers exhibiting agency not just in facing their wartime experiences, but also agency in articulating and giving meaning to them as well in letters and other forms of testimony.[13] Rather than revealing the impossibility of finding mundanity in wartime, this turn towards perseverance and humor shows soldiers embracing its possibility.

This emotional need to shape war into a mundane experience perhaps also explains why, even with haphazard military censorship regulations in place, soldiers chose to avoid more traumatic details of their wartime experiences in letters. In some cases, they simply did not want graphic, traumatic details of military life in wartime to disrupt their relationships with whom they wrote, thereby disrupting their emotional ties to one another by reshaping their identities around divergent war experiences. Perhaps most importantly, these men used their letters to

[10] Private Papers of R.J. Bailey, letters 18 August and 11 October 1916, Doc. 2027, Ref. 92/36/12 and Con Shelf, IWM.
[11] R. Cohen, 3 January 1917 (#3+), WWC.
[12] A.S.C. Fox, letter 19 March 1915, GS 0577, LC.
[13] Edward Madigan, '"Sticking to a Hateful Task": Resilience, Humour, and British Understandings of Combat Courage, 1914-1918', *War in History*, Vol. 20, No. 1 (January 2013), pp. 76-98.

reassure those they wrote to back home about their current safety and emotional well-being, with one soldier writing to share that he was 'out of the Line' and away from machine guns and artillery barrages, which he admitted 'at the best of times I never much loved either, being neither a hero nor a complete ass'. John Ferguson closed one letter similarly, writing that 'well I can't think of anything which may interest you except that I'm still in the pink & as happy as a lark'.[14] For soldiers, it was a far more necessary exercise to testify to their safety and emotional normalcy in wartime than to share darker secrets of war experience to unwitting audiences. While they could acclimate to war, soldiers often could never acclimate to their separation from their prewar lives and relationships, with one soldier writing to his fiancée that 'the only real hardship is being away from…home, & nobody of course cares much about being shot at either still you can get used to that'.[15]

Even when soldiers chose to censor themselves either due to regulations or their own emotional needs, they still acknowledged that they would share the details left out in letters when they came home on leave, when military rules no longer applied. Despite his recurring acknowledgement that he left out information about his experiences in letters, John Pearce reassured that 'when I come home shall be able to tell [family] all about France etc.'.[16] Writing home to his friend Basil after telling him in an earlier letter than the 'Censor' stopped him from sharing news, James Butlin wrote that for his next leave 'I have many things to tell you so you must get away from Oxford for a day or so at least'.[17] Telling his family that 'you people have no idea of [the war]', Scott Ferguson also wrote from France that 'I'm just longing to get home

[14] J.S. Ferguson, letter 24 January 1918, GS 0552, LC.
[15] P.H. Rawson, letter 9 November 1915, GS 1332, LC.
[16] Private Papers of J. Pearce, letter 1 January 1917, Doc. 13303, Con Shelf, IWM.
[17] Butlin, letter to Basil 1 November 1915, IWM.

& tell you all I've seen. I could lecture on it now'.[18] Even while admitting the limitations imposed by censorship and, for some, a belief that civilians did not know what they had experienced, soldiers at least in many of their letters expressed a willingness to offer these details once their content restrictions had been lifted, whether that be for short periods of home leave or once the war itself had ended. In any case, the wartime letters of soldiers seemed to have served an alternate, emotional purpose aimed at maintaining mundane ties with home life. While censorship could affect the ways that soldiers wrote home, it is necessary to consider exactly what content it affected – details on the war versus details on emotional life outside war, and which content mattered most to soldiers in terms of the emotional bonds that existed within and without the epistolary relationships that they nurtured in wartime. Essentially, did soldiers start and maintain epistolary relationships simply to testify to experience beyond the shared identities of the writer and reader, or did they do so to navigate shared identities through potentially-divergent individual experiences of wartime?

In addition to leave, other soldiers wrote in letters of their plans to write further on their experiences after the war, when the censor and other wartime constraints were no longer relevant. Remarking on his observations of France, J.B. Middlebrook wrote that 'I can't really communicate impressions etc. so shall have to remember things until afterwards', as he feared that his letters would be 'bare & "newsless"' until he acclimated to censorship rules.[19] Another factor that stopped men from sharing many details was time. With the sheer physical and temporal demands from military service, soldiers simply could not write as much as they wished

[18] J.S. Ferguson, letter 20 January 1918, GS 0552, LC.
[19] Private Papers of J.B. Middlebrook, letters 3 and 8 May 1916, Doc. 7822, Con Shelf, IWM.

in many instances. Serving in an artillery unit, W.L. Cooper acknowledged how a lack of time became an impediment to keeping up with various correspondence:

> The gunners work is so various & has time so fully occupied…Then one gets no solitude if one has the leisure, out of which letters naturally spring. Perhaps also the very abundance of material causes one to shrink from the task and however much one might write it would still seem to be partial to just a true impression either of oneself or of things in general.[20]

In a way, when considering what is 'left out' of soldiers' letters from the First World War, the idea of self-censorship needs to be reconsidered as more than either personal avoidance of trauma or the imposed conditions of outside influences – notably military regulations. Rather, the shape and form of letters, notably a lack of detail found within them, was produced by the writer due to various factors. For some, it was a lack of time to articulate more than what was necessary to keep an epistolary relationship with home alive. For others, it was a perception of being either underwhelmed or overwhelmed by details to share with others on the home front, thereby leaving a writer with a decision on what details were worth sharing. Some soldiers had little to say, while others perhaps had too much to say. In all of this, there is not necessarily an underlying deceit on behalf of the writer, nor does it reflect a victimization of the writer at the hands of military suppression. Rather, it reveals the choices by soldiers as writers to shape their correspondences towards what was most relevant to keeping their correspondence – and, by extension, their relationships – going with various groups and individuals in the conditions they faced during wartime. If they ceased the correspondence, they risked losing the relationship.

Fighting in the midst of the German Spring Offensive of 1918, J.C.B. Wakeford wrote to his mother that 'we are out in so-called rest at present, which really only means a change of job

[20] W.L. Cooper, 16 March 1917 (#48+), WWC.

from digging in the front or support lines to digging somewhere else. The one thing which is as sure as sure can be is that there will be digging in it somewhere. There always is'.[21] Despite fighting in one of the most violent, costly battles of the First World War, Wakeford alludes not to the fighting, the killing, or the trauma, but rather a far more common, mundane part of wartime life: digging. In the face of their war experiences, the need to testify to graphic realities of war and soldiering were often trumped by a soldier's need to maintain an emotional connection with mundane life at home. In many cases, soldiers shared such information in-person during home leave, an ever-elusive feature in the history of modern warfare. Nevertheless, there remains a consideration that even with censorship within letters, soldiers still testified to perhaps a far more overwhelming feature of war experience: war was not just *imagined* by soldiers as mundane. War was, in *reality*, mundane.

While battles, going 'over the top', killing, and death feature heavily in historical accounts of the First World War, what is often lacking is the sheer mundane existence that soldiers faced for far longer periods of time throughout their war experiences. Indeed, throughout their letters home, soldiers testified to these mundane experiences far more often than they did the extraordinary times they faced in combat. Aside from revealing the sheer mundane nature of the war, what these letters often exhibit is that during these times, soldiers still sought out emotional assurance and support from home, as the military and their fellow soldiers did not offer sufficient outlets for them beyond the confines of combat and frontline situations. Essentially, in testifying to their mundane experiences with war, soldiers also show their struggles not just to acclimate to military life, but also to identify with their fellow soldiers outside of the fighting. Just as soldiers exhibited fragments of identity within their various

[21] J.C.B. Wakeford, letter 28 April 1918, GS 1666, LC.

epistolary relationships with home, soldiers also reveal that beyond the 'soldiering' identities they shared with their comrades, there was often not much they could turn to for emotional support beyond their shared 'soldiering' identities.

Historian Joanna Bourke has noted of the First World War that 'for every soldier in combat there were eight additional soldiers in combat support roles'.[22] Indeed, in many letters written by soldiers in wartime, life behind the lines often appears far more the norm of war experience than fighting in the trenches. Even for soldiers in combat roles, combat, battle, and going 'over the top' remained an exceptional rather than commonplace war experience. Outside of their tours in the trenches, British soldiers spent rather long periods far behind the lines in rest camps. While part of this time was for soldiers to recuperate, most of it was to continue drilling, training, and conduct support work. After sharing stories of his unit playing sports, gambling, and partaking in 'free beer and cigarettes', John Pearce insisted in his letter that life behind the lines was far more than just 'all pleasure':

> We have to do our training just the same plenty of marching and drilling etc. Up at 6 am and on the go till lights out at [10pm] after which the Huns keep us awake with his infernal bomb dropping expeditions but so far he's not dropped any on our village thank goodness.[23]

Even when men either volunteered or were conscripted for military service, they often spent long periods of time in Britain itself in an attempt to acclimate to unfamiliar military life, new routines, and relationships with other men often far different from whom they knew before the war. After volunteering in late-1915, J.B. Middlebrook did not arrive on the Western Front until May 1916. Before then, he spent several months training on the home front, where he confronted the far more mundane aspects of military life and getting to know his fellow soldiers.

[22] Bourke, *Intimate History of Killing*, p. xvii.
[23] Private Papers of J. Pearce, letter 8 September 1917, Doc. 13303, Con Shelf, IWM.

Coming from a seemingly well-off and religious background, 'J.B.' presented in his letters a rather grim depiction of military life long before he fought in the trenches – where he would eventually lose an arm. Initially based at Gidea Park, he described his encampment as 'chaos' and was shocked by the spartan eating and sleeping arrangements.[24] He admitted to his parents that 'life here is exceedingly different, temptations abound, there is an atmosphere of vice, swearing & filth which generates anything but a healthy spirituality', and described just how different the men were from him in his quarters:

> [There] are 8 in our room. Lance – an accountants clerk. Butterfield – a steam waggon [*sic*] driver has been a low comedian. Richardson – mill hand. Whitaker – been in army before. Rogers – a teacher…So you can see, we are a strange mixture.[25]

While some men certainly acquired a certain *espirit de corps* over time in the face of combat, hardship, or even shared dislike of superiors, the varying backgrounds of men often did not allow for more than that in terms of establishing lasting emotional ties or support networks within wartime circumstances. For some, this variety was not necessarily class-based, but more of a continuity with prewar life and the mix of personalities they had encountered in various situations. Referring to his military service as a 'continuation of Oxford', Francis Farquhar wrote that he appreciated the 'social side' of army life, noting that 'I've been brought into contact with all manner of persons, some of whom I will always remember with a very sincere and wholehearted love; I have met many, whose society I have appreciated, a few utterly contemptible persons, and a very few, whom I've been unable to avoid hating'.[26] For some, it was the lack of the opposite sex that provoked frustration with wartime life, with one soldier

[24] Private Papers of J.B. Middlebrook, letter 9 November 1915 Doc. 7822, Con Shelf, IWM. See Con Shelf typescript overview for biographical information.
[25] Private Papers of J.B. Middlebrook, letter 20 November 1915, Doc. 7822, Con Shelf, IWM.
[26] Francis W. Farquhar, 23 July 1918 (#305), WWC.

writing 'it is very wearisome not have any girls or even strangers to talk to. I don't suppose I shall [see] a girl again for about 2 months…I have not spoken to one now for about a fortnight'.[27] J.C.B. Wakeford remarked on how the prewar roots and personalities of soldiers could often clash with their comrades:

> There is a…1st [lieutenant] going to the same company, but all I know is that he is a dangerous rabid Irishman…he is reputed almost unsafe on the Irish question. If anyone praises anything English he always fires up and says that the Irish equivalent is much better. On the whole he sounds cheerful company – almost too cheerful.[28]

Indeed, this perhaps explains the need of soldiers to turn to home for this longer-term support in navigating wartime through their letters, as the military and fellow soldiers could only offer more immediate comfort and support.[29] Essentially, soldiers could support soldiers only on familiar terms from their shared fragment of identity: soldiering. This amounted to shared military life and all of its elements, but it did not often extend beyond this small identity fragment into other aspects of personal or emotional life that made up the wider wholes of the identities that shaped these men before the war. When not confronted by immediately-relevant shared experience, soldiers often struggled to identify – or even tolerate – one another on terms beyond 'soldiering'. Rather than a lasting 'band of brothers', these British soldiers in many cases endured shared traumatic and mundane experiences with each other until they returned to their former mundane lives and relationships.

When in need of immediate emotional support within the military, soldiers exhibited in their letters home how they often gravitated to fellow soldiers that shared similar backgrounds to

---

[27] J.S. Ferguson, letter 15(?) February 1918 – listed as #22, GS 0552, LC.
[28] J.C.B. Wakeford, letter 11 December 1917, GS 1666, LC.
[29] Generally, this 'immediate' support network between soldiers is perhaps best understood as 'morale' due to its more institutional association with 'military life' rather than the external, non-military self. For more, see A. Watson, *Enduring the Great War*, pp. 140-155. For the officer-man relationship in respect to morale, see Sheffield, *Leadership in the Trenches*, pp. 135-164. For the importance of civilian 'popular culture' to morale, see Fuller, *Troop Morale and Popular Culture*.

themselves from prewar times. Upon his arrival on the Western Front, J.C.B. Wakeford shared with his mother that a prewar friend was stationed in nearby units and that 'we should meet from time to time', hoping that they could 'grid themselves within easy riding distance', as it felt it would be 'rather pleasant to be able to go and call on one another' when stationed behind the lines.[30] Writing home from France, Scott Ferguson enquired if anyone knew when an acquaintance would make it to the Western Front, and continued to ask about the whereabouts of his friends in other letters.[31] Without prewar comrades, soldiers often sought out companions within their units to pair up with throughout the war. Upon arriving in France, H.F. Gill told his mother that a man named 'White' would be his 'partner for the present', and that his family could 'drop a line' to his family in Greenwich in case they did not hear from him.[32] Despite having comrades-in-arms to confide in, O.P. Eckhard reminded his family that prewar relationships remained the best source of wartime emotional support to many soldiers:

> It would be nice to have Norman or some old friend here. You might have thought that the companionship of people who have been so much together would be the best of all, but really it is the companionship in thought which matters most. On the other hand everyone is much more merry and entertaining among compulsory companions. I think that is one of the secrets of cheerfulness in the Army, because you are always on your best behavior and cannot afford to be dull and morose, and to put upon the others as one puts upon one's family.[33]

From this perspective, for soldiers, the sheer conditions of wartime that they shared with fellow soldiers required the suppression of their private emotional and mundane selves, which they reserved for their families and prewar friends. In the end, the relationship between soldiers is 'compulsory' and performative of what was considered publicly-acceptable behavior within the

[30] J.C.B. Wakeford, letter 13 December 1917, GS 1666, LC.
[31] J.S. Ferguson, letter 15 January 1918 and 22 January 1918, GS 0552, LC.
[32] Private Papers of H.F. Gill, letter 17 March 1915, Doc. 16456, Ref. 08/94/1, IWM.
[33] Private Papers of O.P. Eckhard, letter 14 February 1916, Doc. 6871, Ref. 78/42/1, IWM.

Army ranks. Indeed, after his brother Jack had died on the Somme, Vernon Marivale noted that 'all the Officers are in despair and the little attentions of the men are most touching', but he still wrote to his mother that 'I wish that you were here now so that I could talk to you about it all'.[34] Soon after joining the Army, Raymond Preece reassured his parents 'you are my best friends & will always have my confidence & it is to you that I shall always come in trouble'.[35] In many cases, soldierly relationships alone were inadequate in what they could offer individuals in emotional terms, and prewar ties were necessary to fully support these men in wartime and beyond. Raymond Preece perhaps best described the need of soldiers to have multiple outlets of emotional support in a letter to his parents, writing that one of his friends was 'great…but there are sides of my life…that are as apart from him as sides of his life are apart from me'.[36]

As seen in Chapter Two, the search for prewar comrades was a prominent feature in the letters of Wadham men to Warden Joseph Wells. Aside from reporting the whereabouts of Wadham men in the war, the letters to Wells reveal a community seeking out its fellow members in extraordinary circumstances. Stationed in France, one Wadham man wrote 'I saw poor Ledger before he was killed, also Shannon and Corbett. I am constantly meeting Oxford people'.[37] Another man expressed frustration over not having had contact with his fellow college members due to the demands of wartime duties, remarking that 'I have not had much news of Wadham men…poor privates have no the leisure to [keep] up acquaintances'.[38] R. Cohen wrote to Wells to see if he knew of any Wadham men located near his training post.[39]

[34] Private Papers of J.H. Marivale, Vernon letter 21 September 1916, Doc. 11174, Ref. P471, IWM.
[35] Private Papers of H.R. Preece, letter 26 November 1915, Doc. 12717, Ref. 04/41/1 and Con Shelf, IWM.
[36] Ibid., letter 22 August 1917. His main objection to the friend under discussion revolved around literary interests, complaining that 'he has read nothing but Dickens'.
[37] P.K. Goldingham, 24 July 1915 (#40), WWC.
[38] F.H. Storr, 17 August 1915 (#50), WWC.
[39] R. Cohen, c. September 1916 (#175++++), WWC.

When Wadham men could not be found in the trenches, these men sought out members of their extended community from University of Oxford. After writing Wells to discuss meeting while on his next leave, A.P. Sinkinson also shared that 'we have several Oxford men in the battalion so we keep up an undying interest in all that happens there'.[40] Leonard Peck noted that 'there is one other Oxford man in my Section – a Magdalen man. The others are rather different, but very good chaps'.[41] Another Wadham man found solace in having a friend from New College with him in the BEF, attributing it to the 'magic of Oxford's name & happy associations for its beginning'.[42] Even tangential ties to Wadham sufficed for some men, who encountered cadets that had trained at Wadham during the war, with one Wadham man writing that 'it is refreshing to talk to anyone with even a superficial knowledge of Oxford'.[43] Even for one Wadham man, being stationed at Cambridge was comparative enough to Oxford to endure his military life, reassuring Wells that 'Oxford still stands first in my esteem, though Cambridge must be very decent'.[44] This need to find prewar comrades extended even to ones killed during the war. Writing after the death of his son in 1915, the father of R.K. Ledger told Wells that 'I have such meticulous details that, whatever happens his Brothers should have no difficulty in finding the spot, if they wish, when the happy days of peace returns'.[45] R. Cohen also shared his failed efforts to seek out the grave of a Wadham man on the Western Front, writing that 'I would dearly have liked to pay my last respects to the poor boy'.[46] In all of this, for Wadham men and

[40] A.P. Sinkinson, 28 February 1915 (#16), WWC.
[41] Leonard J. Peck, 30 June 1915 (#33), WWC.
[42] A.H. Hudson, 14 August 1917 (#153++), WWC.
[43] Francis W. Farquhar, 1 December 1917 (#203+), WWC.
[44] H. Norman Hurst, 13 October 1917 (#185+++), WWC.
[45] Father of R.K. Ledger, 22 April 1915 (#23), WWC.
[46] R. Cohen, 2 August 1917 (#74+), WWC.

certainly others, prewar affiliations, whether they be based in class, community, or some other shared bond, often produced the strongest ties amongst soldiers during wartime.

While civilians expressed concerns in their letters, soldiers had to remind them that they spent long periods of time outside of the trenches, where 'there is little news'. Writing to his niece, J.B. Bagnall reassured her that 'in the trenches life is rather strenuous, but then you aren't in the trenches all the time, if you were everyone would go to sleep and Fritz would come over and capture the lot'.[47] Even behind the lines, soldiers spent much of their time occupied in the more mundane routines of military life. In a letter to his mother, J.C.B. Wakeford shared 'of news there is really little or none, as we have done nothing all day except go through a…gas course. I have already done three…'.[48] A reoccurring feature in many soldiers' letters from the First World War is the declaration that 'there is little news'. Writing soon after arriving on the Western Front, Scott Ferguson admitted that 'there is not much news I can tell you for we do nothing' and could not offer more than one-sided letters due to delays in receiving replies from home.[49] Fred Sellers, writing to his future wife, Grace, claimed that 'there seems very little news to give you – all the days are so empty without your letters'.[50] For many soldiers, much of this had to do with the monotony of life behind the lines and, in many cases, an awareness of the limited space they had to share news about the war itself to people back home. Writing 'there is nothing in the way of news', Hugh Rawson admitted that 'I almost prefer the trenches [they are] more exciting than a rest camp'.[51] The sense that 'there is no news' extended even to soldiers' own personal diary records. Realizing he had not written a diary entry in nearly two weeks, H.

[47] J.B. Bagnall, letter 18 April 1916, GS 0069, LC.
[48] J.C.B. Wakeford, letter 10 December 1917, GS 1666, LC.
[49] J.S. Ferguson, letter 27 January 1918, GS 0552, LC.
[50] Sellers, Fred to Grace, 18 June 1917, IWM.
[51] P.H. Rawson, letter 22 November 1915, GS 1332, LC.

Empson explained 'the reasons being that nothing which has appeared to me of interest has happened', with the monotony being relieved by the 'very exciting sight' of an overhead air battle.[52]

In many ways, in terms of news about the war as a whole, soldiers realized how isolated their perspective was from the front lines and deferred to civilian knowledge. Writing from behind the lines, H.F. Gill told his mother that 'the ordinary private is restricted to one mile from his billet, besides it is not much inducement to walk far when you have to carry full pack and rifle'.[53] When they did hear news in their isolated sectors, soldiers expressed skepticism over the reliability of the information they received. Noting that he had not seen any recent papers, C.I. Johnson admitted that he did not 'know much about how things go, but of course we hear bits every now & then from people on the spot, but the news apt to be inaccurate'.[54] Despite this lack of knowledge, soldiers often expressed disinterest in knowing more about the war, with one soldier telling his mother 'I have not seen a newspaper now since leaving the Base, and haven't the least idea what is going on!'. Nevertheless, despite this admitted lack of information, the same soldier declared 'I really don't care about general news very much just now, I am too busy. All I want to know is about what is going on at home'.[55] In many cases, the attitude of no news to share expressed by soldiers arose from a lack of letters from home with news to which they could respond, with one soldier telling his wife 'on account of there being no letter from you to hand for me to answer I'm sorry to say I haven't got much to say' that was beyond 'Service doings' liable to be censored.[56] Even admitting that they had to self-censor due to military

[52] Private Papers of H. Empson, diary 2 August 1916, Doc. 11943, Ref. 02/12/1, IWM.
[53] Private Papers of H.F. Gill, letter 17 March 1915, Doc. 16456, Ref. 08/94/1, IWM.
[54] Private Papers of C.I. Johnson, letter 22 August 1916, Doc. 20699, Ref. 79/33/1, IWM.
[55] Private Papers of E.F. Chapman, letter 13 August 1916, Doc. 1799, Ref. 92/3/1 and Con Shelf, IWM.
[56] Private Papers of B.J. Fielder, letter 13 December 1915, Doc. 12191, Ref. P265, IWM.

restrictions, the idea that 'there is little news' stemmed equally from a perceived lack of information from home.

While veterans' testimonies often provide more graphic descriptions of combat and the experiences of death and killing, they nonetheless recall alongside this narrative an overwise frustratingly-mundane wartime life spent with men from often radically different backgrounds. Recalling the men in his unit, G. Hodgkinson remarked that 'all sorts were there: two public school men, Scotch miners, Scotch plowmen and gamekeepers, Manchester cotton [workers], a tailor, some clerks and a school master'.[57] On his time in the trenches, he noted that 'ordinary trench routine became only too familiar and if any one of a morbid disposition wishes to reach the utmost limit of depression I offer him the following receipt: find a war and "stand to" at dawn'.[58] Despite writing considerably about combat and close calls with being killed, A.J. Jamieson did not express any frustrations with military life until after the Armistice with the Army of the Rhine, recalling a speech by Winston Churchill that was 'drowned by the booing of the disgruntled troops deprived of speedy demobilisation'.[59] A.J. Turner remarked on the 'depression' caused by the 'dull routine' of military life, which was only relieved by the prospect of leave. In France, he recalled the 'monotony' of long marches and turning to gambling 'as a means of escape from the realities of war'. He also recalled his free time outside of trench duties that would often result in thoughts of home 'if one was fortunate to have a receptive companion'.[60] Writing of his first time in the front lines in France, A.H. Crerar recalled that the 'principal sport was trying to avoid being sniped at when visiting the outposts between the lines

[57] Private Papers of G. Hodgkinson, memoir p. 7, Doc. 8166, Ref. 99/13/1, IWM.
[58] Ibid., memoir p. 8.
[59] Private Papers of A.J. Jamieson, memoir p. 2 addendum, Doc. 249, Ref. 88/52/1, IWM.
[60] Private Papers of A.J. Turner, memoir pp. 19, 26-27, 36, Doc. 4617, Ref. 81/21/1, IWM.

with a sergeant carrying the jar containing the run ration'.[61] After this first tour, he wrote rather begrudgingly of the 'life we led when not in the trenches' for his grandchildren:

> The next three or four weeks involved staying at one village after another, gradually working south towards the Somme, doing field exercises, night manoeuvres, digging parties and rehearsing for the pending attack we would be undertaking on the Somme battlefield. We seem to have a lot of rain and mud to contend with.[62]

In many cases, despite detailing the experiences of killing, death, and the hardships of military life, these veterans nonetheless looked back with mixed attitudes to their service. These attitudes aside, veterans nonetheless exhibit their recurring memories of an experience of war, whether in the trenches or in billets, that was very much mundane and, at times, almost too mundane to the point of being traumatic in itself. Despite this, as one veteran recalled, the 'Post was the bright spot in our lives', which aided in their emotional survival of the boredom and terror of the First World War.[63]

In the end, many soldiers navigated this 'mundane' experience of war and military life by turning to letters home, where the 'mundane' was far more recognizable and emotionally supportive. While fellow soldiers and the military offered ways for men to cope with wartime life, these relationships were far more limited to the ordeals that men faced on the battlefield. Essentially, for many soldiers with strong ties to mundane life outside of war, *espirit de corps* was not a sustainable feature of emotional identity beyond experiences with trauma from battlefield experience. For the mundanity of war, soldiers often struggled to find confidants and mutual acquaintances for emotionally survival beyond the battlefield. Indeed, without such

[61] A.H. Crerar, recollections p. 34, GS 0387, LC.
[62] A.H. Crerar, recollections pp. 35-37, GS 0387, LC.
[63] Private Papers of T.S. Sumner, memoir p. 23, Doc. 17421, Ref. 10/3/1, IWM.

outlets to home and kindred spirits in the military for the more mundane periods of wartime, soldiers risked succumbing to a more chronic form of trauma: boredom.

Traumatic Mundanity in Wartime: Soldiers and 'Boredom'

In a foreword to his memoir, H. Howard Cooper remarked that despite popular conceptions of the conflict where battle was a daily occurrence, his life on the Western Front featured 'days and even weeks of monotonous activity' and very little combat. Nevertheless, in the memoir itself, recalling an incident where his sergeant asked him about his time in France, Cooper replied that while there was no 'fighting and shelling…going on the whole time', he insisted that 'the effect of what does happen is as bad as what I thought the effect of my imagined continuous fighting would be'.[64] Indeed, while war could often be a far more mundane than traumatic experience defined by combat, killing, and destruction, the mundanity of war offered its own serious risks for the emotional survival of soldiers.

While a rather small field, the history of boredom offers valuable insights not just into the soldier's experience of war, but also the traumatic potential of it. Traditionally, rather than boredom, historians of the First World War have attributed traumatic rupture experienced by soldiers with the more active, extraordinary features of war – battles, killing, and witnessing death. In a now-classic work of military history, *The Face of Battle* (1976), John Keegan dwelled on how the combatant has fought – or, more generally, has behaved – on the battlefield throughout history. As he reflected on the modern battlefield, Keegan optimistically believed that, as battle became more 'unbearable' to the human experience, it would become increasingly

[64] Private Papers of H.H. Cooper, memoir, foreword and pp. 1, 150-151, Doc. 10892, Ref. DS MISC 24, IWM.

impossible to conduct.[65] Essentially, the exceptional attribute of war (battle) had become too difficult – and, perhaps, too traumatic – to successfully conduct. Paradoxically, however, perhaps some of the most traumatic moments for soldiers came not from this experience of battle, but rather the traumatic experience of war's mundanity: boredom.

In some ways, historians have even stressed that modern societies (vaguely defined) found trauma in boredom beyond the confines of war. Essentially, mundanity in peace became traumatic when perceived as 'boredom'. Military historian Michael Howard asserted that war remains a continued phenomenon in modern society due to the perceived 'boredom' of peacetime life.[66] Interpreting 'peace' as a modern 'invention', Howard argued that war offers a natural escape for society – particularly men of fighting age – from the seemingly-traumatic life of peace beyond it. Indeed, as some popular memoirs of the First World War have exhibited, many soldiers rushed to military service at the outbreak of war due to dissatisfaction with their peacetime lives. Essentially, the mundanity of life beyond war offered either only further trauma or and prewar relationships were not emotionally-sustainable to survive wartime, and these men turned to their fellow soldiers for the emotional support that they rejected from home and the mundanity it offered. Soldiers like Robert Graves, Siegfried Sassoon, and the wider 'Generation of 1914' came of age before 1914, found new emotional support in war and military life, and reentered society as the mythical 'Lost Generation' that extolled the horrors of war to those that either had either never witnessed it firsthand or were to blame for its outbreak.[67]

---

[65] Keegan, *The Face of Battle*, Ch. 5.

[66] Michael Howard, *The Invention of Peace: Reflections on War and International Order* (Yale University Press: New Haven 2000) pp. 5-6, 51-59. For more on the concept of boredom in relation to war and modernity tied to 'agency', see Jorg Kustermans and Erik Ringmar, 'Modernity, Boredom, and War: A Suggestive Essay', *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 37, No. 4 (October 2011), pp. 1775-1792. See also Todman, *Myth and Memory*, p. 5.

[67] For more on these British veteran memoirists and their relationship to the First World War, See Bond, *Survivors of a Kind*, and Wohl, *Generation of 1914*, pp. 105-121.

In all of this, however, there is essentially a paradoxical loop where trauma is found, experienced, and imprinted on societies and soldiers in peacetime *and* wartime. Boredom is the traumatic realm of 'modern society' that drives men to war, where they experience the horrors of 'battle' (rather than 'war') as soldiers and become too traumatized to return emotionally-intact and connected to the 'boring' society that had traumatized them in the first place. Additionally, from its intellectual 'invention' in the 18th century, 'boredom' as a state-of-mind evolved from a perceived moral failing of the individual into an all-encompassing atmosphere stemming from sociocultural failures and oppression beyond the self.[68] Even the trauma of wartime 'boredom' arises in this loop, as men escaped their societal boredom for the 'excitement' of war, only to face the trauma of the sheer 'boredom' of war itself. Trauma becomes ever-present and, despite efforts to perform agency, inescapable. While this certainly was the case for some soldiers that fought in the First World War, there remains a considerable number of men who went to war with the perception they were *defending* the mundane lives and relationships they left behind, yet remained emotionally tied to through correspondence, which offered an outlet to soldiers to escape not just the traumatic horrors of war, but also the traumatic boredom found within its own mundanity.[69] Furthermore, in understanding the 'boring' nature of war, it is necessary to return agency to the soldier himself, who had the individual choice to experience war as a form of 'boredom' and succumb to the trauma of it. Much like with authorship and letters, the soldier,

[68] For more on the cultural evolution of 'boredom', Patricia Meyer Spacks, *Boredom: The Literary History of a State of Mind* (University of Chicago Press: Chicago 1995) x-xi, Ch. 9. For boredom in relation to letter-writing, see pp. 84-109. For criticism and a broader psychological approach to the history of boredom, see Peter Toohey, *Boredom: A Lively History* (Yale University Press: New Haven 2011) pp. 143-169.

[69] For more on this process of wartime 'boredom' and outlets of escape from it – particularly related to the First World War, see Bård Mæland and Paul Otto Brunstad, *Enduring Military Boredom: From 1750 to Present* (Palgrave Macmillan: London 2009) pp. 18-24. For more of the idea of 'defense of home' as combat motivation for British soldiers, see A. Watson, *Enduring the Great War*, pp. 44-84.

not 'war', was the creator of this state of mind.[70] Some found outlets of escape, while others lost such outlets and fell victim to wartime trauma.

Like memoirs, letters offer valuable insight into this struggle with boredom faced by soldiers during the First World War, and perhaps reveal one of the many solutions soldiers turned to in order to cope. In one letter to his friend Basil, after having spent nearly six months on the Western Front and endured several tours in the trenches, James Butlin requested a parcel of cigarettes, explaining that 'I have to smoke to pass monotonous days in the trenches'.[71] Replying to a letter, a soldier thanked his old college warden for providing him with news of his old Oxford college, writing that 'any news from the old life has such charm and interest out here where the life if exciting and strenuous at times is yet on the whole so dull and uneventful'.[72] Even outside of the trenches, soldiers were stationed in rather isolated, rural areas, which did not allow much access to distractions during periods of rest. While making note of how much the Army paid its men, 'Reg' Bailey admitted that 'there is nothing to buy' in rural France 'except bread, candles, and vin'.[73] Outside of urban settings, soldiers also complained in letters about military rations, exhibiting just how much access to food acted as a coping mechanism for soldiers. While on iron rations ('biscuits (dog) & bully beef, jam, cheese & tea'), J.B. Middlebrook declared that the 'sameness has become sickening', and that he could not inexpensively supplement his rations with anything but beer, lamenting to his mother over not being raised as a 'teetotaler'.[74] Stationed in support trenches behind the front lines, A.S.C. Fox wrote home that 'there is absolutely nothing to do except wander round the field at the back

[70] For more on agency and soldiering in the First World War, see Tony Ashworth, *Trench Warfare, 1914-1918: The Live and Let Live System* (Pan Books: London 2000 – 1st ed. 1980).
[71] Butlin, letter to Basil 4 December 1915, IWM.
[72] Illegible name, 19 October 1917 (#188+), WWC.
[73] Private Papers of R.J. Bailey, letter 25 October 1915, Doc. 2027, Ref. 92/36/1 and Con Shelf, IWM.
[74] Private Papers of J.B. Middlebrook, letter 8 May 1916, Doc. 7822, Con Shelf, IWM.

(judiciously) and look for souvenirs'.[75] Overall, while Hugh Rawson acknowledged 'we have really more work to do out of the trenches than when in', he nonetheless observed that 'the men being in billets causes a lot of work & trouble'.[76]

As a case of post-traumatic stress brought on by the First World War, James Butlin exhibited that trauma arose not just from acute cases of fighting, but also prolonged periods of perceived, inescapable tedium during wartime military service, particularly when stationed at undesirable postings. While he recovered from an illness on the home front, James ultimately obtained a posting with a Non-Combatant Corps, over which he 'swore terribly & cursed everything within reach. I was wild with anger & am not yet really myself again'. He went on to declare to his friend Basil that 'I am sinking into a state of nervous depression. What little work I do here is utterly uncongenial to me'.[77] He went as far as to consider either volunteering again for active service in France or going AWOL. After receiving a rejection for a more desirable posting with a training unit, he began to rail against what he saw as injustices against him within the Army. In describing his experiences at his posting – what he called his 'prison life', he alluded to a sergeant dying from pneumonia and an 'Australian, who tried to murder me. I had him arrested & he is now for court martial'.[78] Ultimately, he was released from this fate with his return to active duty on the Western Front, where he would officially be diagnosed with 'traumatic neurasthenia' and sent to Craiglockhart Hospital for treatment. While he received his diagnosis of 'neurasthenia' after his combat experiences at the Battle of Arras, it is highly plausible that his life on the home front in an undesirable noncombatant posting contributed to his wartime trauma.

[75] A.S.C. Fox, letter 20 June 1915, GS 0577, LC.
[76] P.H. Rawson, letter 22 April 1916, GS 1332, LC.
[77] Butlin, letter to Basil 13 January 1917, IWM.
[78] Butlin, letter to Basil 1 February 1917, IWM.

Talk of the prospects of leave and returning home in soldiers' letters also reveal how soldiers wanted not just to escape from the horror of combat, but also the more tiring, dry aspects of military duties.[79] Indeed, in many cases, grumbling about leave often followed descriptions of life behind the lines and outside of active fighting. After writing to his wife that life was the 'same as usual…am always very busy', H. Peel immediately followed up with 'afraid no chance of getting leave' for three months, and declared that he was 'fed up with this ridiculous life'.[80] Serving in the Royal Engineers, J.C.B. Wakeford joked to his sister that while on leave 'any man who speaks of wire or light railways in my hearing is deserving of instant…death'.[81] Joking to his mother, H.A. Johnson wrote 'tell Dad I shall be able to help with the garden when I get back…we are *always* digging, improving the trenches when up there, during the night'. In one diary entry, after spending his leave in Cairo, H. Empson quipped 'we arrive back at our unit at about 2 p.m., and now for more monotony!'.[82]

While attributed more historically to the horror of the battlefield, the experience of 'mud' and the environmental effects of the First World War heavily contributed to a mundanity beyond it that could descend into trauma for various soldiers.[83] In a way, the sensation of boredom and military life beyond combat made enduring mud far more unbearable for soldiers. After serving for nearly three years on the Western Front, H. Peel admitted being 'fed up' with the war, describing it as 'tedious – & the squalor & dirt of it all becomes sickening after all this time', hoping that a friend would 'find a job for me' to escape.[84] Recovering behind the lines after a

[79] For more on Army efforts to control boredom among the ranks and soldiers' negative experiences behind the lines, see Fuller, *Troop Morale and Popular Culture*, pp. 76-80 and Ch. 8.
[80] Private Papers of H. Peel, letter 13 January 1916, Doc. 22927, Ref. P391, IWM.
[81] J.C.B. Wakeford, letter 3 March 1918, GS 1666, LC.
[82] Private Papers of H. Empson, diary 26 September 1917, Doc. 11943, Ref. 02/12/1, IWM.
[83] For more on 'mud' in relation to the memory of the First World War, see Todman, *Myth and Memory*, pp. 1-42.
[84] Private Papers of H. Peel, letter 28 January 1918, Doc. 22927, Ref. P391, IWM.

tour at the front, 'Charlie' Ramsdale wrote that 'so long as the weather holds pretty good it is a good life', perhaps dreading the prospect of rain and mud.[85] Much of this had to do with hygiene, as soldiers grumbled about mud while also not being able to clean up outside of combat situations, with one soldiers writing 'please don't mention the word mud to me for a long time. I wish you could see the state we're in'.[86] While in Army training in Britain during 1914, 'Reg' Bailey shared in a letter the tedium faced by soldiers during bad weather conditions:

> Imagine a tent about 14 feet in diameter…9 men are in the tent; 3 are endeavouring to write letters, crouch up on their kits, while 3 others carry on an uninteresting and unintelligent conversation in loud tones. One chap is mending his trousers…on an upturned pail between his knees. One is shaving with cold water…and the remaining man is perusing last week's John Bull and reading aloud portions of its contents to the rest of the occupants, who are not taking the slightest notice of him. It's pouring with rain outside, the rain is dripping through the canvas in places and the tent is filled with tobacco smoke…The ground is sloppy and muddy, making drill almost impossible. We have to remain in our tents until the rain abates.[87]

While 'Reg' insisted that 'everybody is cheerful', such conditions over time wore down many soldiers just as much – if not more than – the experience of combat. For many soldiers, even life in the trenches was more about the monotonous tasks it involved rather than actual fighting with the enemy, with one soldier sharing a cartoon he found in a letter home about how they dug and repair trenches far more than they actually went 'over the top' to fight (Figure 1). A.S.C. Fox remarked similarly to this experience of life in the trenches:

> A trench is one of those things which one could spend a year improving – there is the wire in front – the parapet, the parados (or wall behind) – the floor and the dugouts – and in addition there is the ground behind to be kept clean –

[85] Private Papers of C.W. Ramsdale, letter 21 May 1917, Doc. 2081, Con Shelf, IWM.
[86] J.S. Ferguson, letter 21 February 1918, GS 0552, LC.
[87] Private Papers of R.J. Bailey, letter 16 October 1914, Doc. 2027, Ref. 92/36/1 and Con Shelf, IWM.

hundreds of tins and any amount of rubbish every day to be disposed of and the ways of ingress and egress to be maintained.[88]

He closes this with 'you may imagine one finds plenty to do' beyond just the experience of combat. While these everyday rigorous tasks offered an alternative to simply fighting the 'enemy', they were often performed under dangerous conditions and threatened to take as much of a physical and mental toll on soldiers actively attacking or defending. In addition to mud, rats and other pests also feature heavily in letters describing trench life. One soldier wrote to his niece 'You never saw such cheeky fellows as the rats are out here, all night long they are scampering about, fighting and making love, just like us'.[89] Treatment for lice also played a prominent role in trench life, with Hugh Rawson writing home that 'I have been rather busy today, examining the people with little creatures on them, the Tommies call it being chatty'.[90] For Fred Sellers, allusions to rats in letters implied a lack of news to share with Grace, writing that 'Rats are chasing up and down the timbered ceiling…But enough of rats…Tis obvious my darling I have little news for you'.[91]

Despite the threat of 'boredom', soldiers sought out many ways to combat it by finding ways to occupy themselves in the trenches or behind the lines, which forced many to resort to distractions they preferred to avoid under ordinary circumstances. Writing on having to spend a 'day in the guard room' with a German prisoner, 'Charlie' Ramsdale admitted that 'there are some magazines here to read, but up to now have heroically resisted the temptation (although the morning is only half through, so I must not boast prematurely!)'.[92] 'Reg' Bailey grumbled about

[88] A.S.C. Fox, letter 17-19 May 1915, GS 0577, LC.
[89] J.B. Bagnall, letter 18 April 1916, GS 0069, LC.
[90] P.H. Rawson, letter 22 November 1915, GS 1332, LC.
[91] Sellers, Fred to Grace, 1 April 1916, IWM.
[92] Private Papers of C.W. Ramsdale, letter 16 March 1917, Doc. 2081, Con Shelf, IWM.

the drinks available while billeted in rural France – such as a 'watery tasteless biere', and declared that 'my thoughts linger longingly on Johnny Walker and the honest bitter'.[93] Another source of grumbling from soldiers was the efforts by the British Army itself to entertain soldiers:

> To night is a guest night in this unholy mess, and the [Royal Engineers] orchestra and concert party are going to perform. They are sure to be rotten, as is the dinner, cooked from bully and biscuits by enthusiastic WAAC's. We take their enthusiasm as an earnest of their good intentions, and cheer one another on with the reminder that, with care, they might have done worse. It is a poor and hollow consolation.[94]

In addition to entertainment efforts by the Army, either to fill their time or under orders, soldiers also resorted to attending various military lectures and training courses, which many men found rather tedious:

> I spend my odd moments now going to lectures. I wasted today at one on 'Economy in Ordinance Stores'. In the course of a long and not uneventful life I have never sat through so dull a lecture out of pure boredom![95]

In many ways, with the exhausting routine and monotony of billets and rest camps, soldiers often looked forward to returning to the trenches, as they at least offered them distractions from the boredom they faced behind the lines. Writing to his fiancée from billets, Hugh Rawson declared that 'I am so bored with this peaceful existence that I am going up the line tonight for a bit of excitement', and in a later letter wrote 'I want to get back to the trenches & do some work & get fit. Don't like being in billets'.[96] After mentioning that his unit was training behind the lines on the Western Front, 'Reg' Bailey admitted to his father that they 'shall not be sorry to get back into the trenches', writing that 'evenings are spent in billets, writing, reading, or filing souvenirs out of French bullets'. Although he acknowledged that the trenches would be 'hard &

[93] Private Papers of R.J. Bailey, letter 25 October 1915, Doc. 2027, Ref. 92/36/1 and Con Shelf, IWM.
[94] J.C.B. Wakeford, letter 11 December 1917, GS 1666, LC. 'WAAC' is the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps.
[95] J.C.B. Wakeford, letter 23 February 1918, GS 1666, LC.
[96] P.H. Rawson, letters 1 January and 18 April 1916, GS 1332, LC.

dangerous', J.B. Middlebrook insisted that 'I don't fancy sticking where we are & fiddling about' and going on 'hard marching'.[97] In a way, this perceived need of many soldiers to rush back to the trenches was perhaps one of the most problematic outlets used by soldiers to combat boredom due to the threat of battlefield trauma it offered.

While parcel requests in letters exhibit much about continuing emotional ties to home life and its centrality to emotional survival for soldiers, they also show just how much soldiers needed external stimuli to make the mundanity of war a bearable experience. With scarce – or undesirable – reading material and distractions found on the military front, perhaps some of the most-requested parcel items by soldiers were books, newspapers, and other materials to help keep themselves occupied during what they discovered were rather long periods of time devoid of fighting. 'Reg' Bailey wrote to his sibling that 'we read anything out here and glad to get it', but also asked if any cheap editions of H.G. Wells books were available.[98] Despite objections from his family, J.H. Fearnhead requested a parcel of 'playing-cards' and puzzles to keep his platoon happy, telling them that 'they have nothing to do all day, and it must be fearfully monotonous for them'.[99] Although the British Army did provide soldiers with reading materials and newspapers, soldiers still wrote home with parcel requests to supplement what they received in the trenches and elsewhere that would offer details of life beyond the war. When offered parcels of newspapers by his family, A.S.C. Fox requested they not be 'daily papers':

> One sees Daily Mirrors with pictures of troops in <u>dry</u> trenches and others of them playing football behind the trenches (100 miles). Ask any of our Division whether they play football behind the trenches! But I would like any

[97] Private Papers of J.B. Middlebrook, letter 8 May 1916, Doc. 7822, Con Shelf, IWM.
[98] Private Papers of R.J. Bailey, letter 17 June 1916, Doc. 2027, Ref. 92/36/1 and Con Shelf, IWM. 'Reg' only uses the name 'Wells', but it is highly plausible that it is H.G. Wells.
[99] J.H. Fearnhead, letters 6 and 20 June 1916, GS 0541, LC.

papers which contain something other than war news – the Literary Supplement of the Times or the Spectator or the Nation.[100]

Like A.S.C. Fox, soldiers did not just seek out any reading material, but rather the sort that offered some sort of escape from the war they were experiencing. For some, it was the chance to keep up their prewar intellectual interests. Writing to Warden Joseph Wells, R. Cohen wrote with excitement that a fellow Wadham man 'keeps me supplied in books & yesterday got from him the first two volumes of Gibbon. He's sending on the remaining four in a fortnight so I'm assured of some fine stuff to read'.[101] When books were unavailable, reading letters from home presented another highly-desired outlet, with one soldier begging his father for more of the family to write him, sharing that 'we cannot get too many letters from home, they go to make our troubles easier to bear, and give us hours of enjoyment thinking of things at home'.[102]

The letters from Fred Sellers to Grace perhaps reveal that this recurring effort by soldiers to seek out external stimuli beyond the war indicated an ongoing fear that the boredom, monotonous routines of war and military service, and separation from home threatened their abilities to continue with their prewar aspirations once the conflict had ended. For Fred, this fear took on the form of his aspirations to join the Bar and become a Gray's Inn barrister, which the war had disrupted. Soon after enlisting in 1914, Fred confessed to Grace that 'The only thing that troubles me is the handicaps that I shall have for progressing after the war is over – if I survive it'.[103] He dreaded the prospect if he survived that 'I may be useless. In a quite mild way

[100] A.S.C. Fox, letter 28 February 1915, GS 0577, LC.
[101] R. Cohen, 2 August 1917 (#74+), WWC.
[102] Private Papers of J.H. Marivale, Oscar Earnshaw letter 20 March 1916, Doc. 11174, Ref. P471, IWM.
[103] Sellers, Fred to Grace, 12 October 1914, IWM. It is worth noting that Fred received a letter from Gray's Inn, which offered to take him back once the war had ended. See Sellers, Gray's Inn to Fred, 5 November 1914 – in vol. I of Sellers, ed., *Watching and Waiting*, p. 81, IWM.

I may have lost any concentration for study. I may be worse. At any rate I shall be still older'.[104] While he hoped to remain occupied outside his military duties, Fred also exhibited just how much the boredom and routine of military life could overwhelm a soldier:

> It is so obvious that we do nothing here but exist. The hours go & yet nothing seems to be accomplished. I seem unable to fill the hours with anything useful. I might work, read low or history or something, but it is impossible to carry the books about – & if I did it is so difficult to concentrate, odd things crop up & in a way it is necessary to keep one's mind on the situation & the day's tasks – even though it can mostly be done with a brain that is almost inactive with excessive rest.[105]

In her own letters, Grace sought to reassure Fred by stressing her continued 'civilian' perception of him throughout the war. Receiving a photo from him, she noted that he looked 'so much more…barrister' than 'soldier'.[106] As he continued to express anxiety over the fate of his postwar career goals, Grace insisted 'Freddie darling don't bother so much about what is going to happen – just leave it – it won't make it any better wondering about it'.[107] Ultimately, postwar aspirations aside, what Fred dreaded most was 'in time I shall perhaps outlive my objections to war, appreciate its grandeur & be blended into its hideous absurdity…I might then perhaps be "a soldier" but I hope I can do my duty without being one'.[108] In many ways, the fears expressed by Fred were perhaps shared by many more soldiers, who relied on people back home like Grace to help navigate their mundane selves into the postwar and back into at least a semblance of the civilian lives that had planned for before the conflict. What these outlets and postwar dreams provided men at war was the prospect of escaping emotionally intact from their time as military men.

---

[104] Sellers, Fred to Grace, 11 April 1915, IWM.
[105] Sellers, Fred to Grace, 6 July 1917, IWM.
[106] Sellers, Grace to Fred, 27 June 1915, IWM.
[107] Sellers, Grace to Fred, 8 May 1916, IWM.
[108] Sellers, Fred to Grace, 14 June 1916, IWM.

Aside from books, soldiers also turned to hobbies, rituals, and preoccupations from their prewar lives to pass the time. 'Charlie' Ramsdale asked his family to send some 'male voice pieces' of music so that 'we could get a bit of a sing sometimes' at the front.[109] After being transferred from the Western Front to Salonika, 'Reg' Bailey wrote a lot about the local 'flora' and all the inadvertent archaeological discoveries made while digging trenches ('Win mentioned in her letter about our digging up museums and Olde Curiosity shoppes').[110] Sharing an intellectual interest in the classics with his mother, John Baines also wrote frequently on his ancient discoveries ('we've been finding lots of pots and coins lately. We've got trenches through an old graveyard') while stationed on the Salonika Front.[111] Armed with a revolver, Hugh Rawson wrote about how he 'went out poaching…crowds of pheasants & partridges, also hares'.[112] Sports, particularly rugby and football, also offered soldiers an outlet during their time behind the lines. Church services, religious ritual, and holidays continued to be a lasting influence for men from their prewar upbringing that could help interrupt their military routines.[113] Writing to his mother, J.C.B. Wakeford asked that she tell his father ('it may make him happy') that he had found a 'padre in a neighboring dugout' running services, which he could not attend due to being 'on the job…[this] need not be disclosed'.[114] 'Charlie' Ramsdale

[109] Private Papers of C.W. Ramsdale, 3 April 1917, Doc. 2081, Con Shelf, IWM.
[110] Private Papers of R.J. Bailey, letters 20 February 1916 and 24 April 1916, Doc. 2027, Ref. 92/36/1 and Con Shelf, IWM. While a relatively unexplored aspect of First World War experience, Classical archaeology and the Salonika Campaign may offer some new avenue for future research. For more on the relationship between war and archaeological discovery, see Bonnie Effros, *Incidental Archaeologists: French Officers and the Rediscovery of Roman North Africa* (Cornell University Press: Ithaca 2018).
[111] Andrew Baines and Joanna Palmer, eds., *Dearest Mother: First World War Letters Home from a Young Sapper Officer in France and Salonika* (Helion & Co. Ltd.: W. Midlands 2015) pp. 171, 177, 191.
[112] P.H. Rawson, letter 25 November 1916, GS 1332, LC.
[113] For more on religion in relation to Britain and the war, see Gregory, *Last Great War*, pp. 152-186. For soldiers and religion, see Fuller, *Troop Morale and Popular Culture*, pp. 155-157. Fuller views religion as a source of 'change' for soldiers due to wartime experiences, but he does not consider it as a source of continuity in terms of continued ties to private home life and cultural ritual.
[114] J.C.B. Wakeford, letter 19 January 1918, GS 1666, LC.

also made sure to tell his family that he had 'the good fortune to attend a service at the YMCA…and I greatly enjoyed it'.[115] Sharing the news that he attended a 'voluntary church service' in billets, H.A. Johnson wrote his mother about how it reminded him of a particular church service back home and that 'I often wish I had the chance of going there now'.[116] Christmas and Easter celebrations also feature in many letters as well as outlets of escapism from the war, with many soldiers hoping that they could return home for these religiously-symbolic holidays either for leave or the end of the war itself ('over by Christmas').[117] Writing on Easter Sunday, 'Charlie' Ramsdale wrote about how he wished he was home 'signing the old Easter hymns and observing the day as it should be observed'.[118] Essentially, these holidays – especially Christmas, were heavily tied to the memory and prospect of returning home rather than military life, with one soldier writing 'I have to keep saying I do wish I were coming home for Christmas, although it's nothing but a waste of time to write it down. But we all keep saying it, thousands of times daily'.[119] What is common in all of this is that soldiers, in their efforts to avoid the traumatic potential of 'boredom' from the mundanity of wartime life, turned not simply to fellow comrades, but rather to aspects of their mundane lives from prewar times for lasting emotional support and comfort.

Interestingly, in his Field Censor Reports on the Italian Front, Captain M. Hardie observed that perhaps some of the strongest unrest among soldiers occurred outside of fighting conditions, particularly after the cessation of hostilities in late-1918. Demobilization became an increasingly common theme in these post-Armistice letters, with Hardie noting that 'unrest

[115] Private Papers of C.W. Ramsdale, letter 3 April 1917, Doc. 2081, Con Shelf, IWM.
[116] Private Papers of H.A. Johnson, letter 23 January 1915, Doc. 12683, Ref. 03/30/1, IWM.
[117] For an example, see R.K. Ledger, letter to father 30 November 1914 (#3), WWC. For more on the 'home by Christmas' phenomenon in British wartime popular culture, see Stuart Hallifax, '"Over by Christmas"', pp. 103-121.
[118] Private Papers of C.W. Ramsdale, letter 8 April 1917, Doc. 2081, Con Shelf, IWM.
[119] Private Papers of A. English, letter marked 'November 1916', Doc. 6448, Ref. 97/10/1, IWM.

principally emanates from men of lengthy over-seas service who are very insistent in their claim' to demobilization priority.[120] Much like during the war, this irritation was exacerbated by the location of soldiers, with Hardie noticing that morale in the Army of Occupation in Austria remained high, whereas with soldiers remaining in Italy 'it is quite apparent that the natural anxiety…to get home as soon as possible is much accentuated by his general feeling towards the Italian nation'.[121] Indeed, the letters written by soldiers after the Armistice the extent to which men wished to strip themselves of their military identities and return to their mundane civilian lives as quickly as possible. Writing to his mother, John Wakeford admitted that 'we spend all our time discussing Demobilization and kindred subjects. Needless to say few subjects are more interesting'.[122] Bruce Puckle remarked similarly in a letter that 'Army life and army routine all seems a little flat now that the "motif" has been taken way'.[123] In a way, once combat action had ended in the First World War, military life in the British Army continued to be a potential source of mundane trauma, and men wished to immediately return to what they saw as a preferable mundane civilian life.

Despite all of these complaints, there is perhaps one indicator exhibiting not just the boredom that soldiers experienced from war, but also how they attempted to combat it: the millions of wartime letters written home. Writing to his sister and mother, 'Charlie' Ramsdale declined an offer of a parcel with books, deciding that 'I had better say "no", as I am hopelessly

[120] Private Papers of M. Hardie, Field Censor Report – undated, but post-Armistice and likely from 1919, Doc. 4041, Ref. 84/46/1, IWM.
[121] Ibid.
[122] J.C.B. Wakeford, letter 14 November 1918, GS 1666, LC. For more on attitudes to and memories of the 11 November 1918 Armistice, see Alexander Nordlund, '"Done My Bit": British Soldiers, the 1918 Armistice, and Understanding the First World War', *Journal of Military History*, Vol. 81, No. 2 (April 1917) pp. 436-445. For a more general perspective, see also Cecil and Liddle, *At the Eleventh Hour: Reflections, Hopes and Anxieties at the Closing of the Great War, 1918* (Leo Cooper: Barnsley 1998).
[123] B.H. Puckle, letter 12 November 1918, GS 1310, LC.

in arrears with letters now, and if I got more reading, I should be worse still!'.[124] When told that a letter was anticipated from him in each post, C.I. Johnson wrote 'I have lots of people to write to & not so much time for the noble art', and that 'the war makes the epistolary art still more difficult to practice'.[125] Despite their contents and what they share about the experience of the First World War, the sheer bulk of these letters alone is testimony to not just the emotional need to remain connected to the mundanity of home life, but also the need to escape from the boredom of war, which stemmed from what many soldiers discovered during their wartime service: war was mundane. While for many this mundanity was bearable, for many more it became an emotional threat to the well-being of the self when it took on the shape of boredom. With this in mind, soldiers turned to writing letters home not just to escape the horror of war limited to combat and the battlefield, but rather the overwhelmingly mundane experience of war.

Conclusion: Which Mundanity?

For Wadham men, James Butlin, and Fred Sellers, the mundanity of military life was not enough for them to discard their old, mundane lives from prewar times. While there was most certainly an immediate source of support found within it given their wartime experiences, these men nonetheless continued to embrace what they hoped to return to after the First World War ended. Wadham men kept up their affiliation with their college through the *Gazette* and, for some, the prospect of returning to their studies in postwar times. Fred turned to the 'eternal' relationship he shared with Grace, whose letters offered him a means of escape from the trauma of war and his distaste for military life. Even James, who suffered the lingering effects of post-

[124] Private Papers of C.W. Ramsdale, letter 15 March 1917, Doc. 2081, Con Shelf, IWM.
[125] Private Papers of C.I. Johnson, letter 9 August 1916, Doc. 20699, Ref. 79/33/1, IWM.

traumatic stress, persisted in looking forward to the days when he could once again 'carouse' with his 'dear old pal' Basil both during his leaves and in life after the war.

These men were certainly not alone in Britain during the First World War. Throughout their war experiences, British soldiers ultimately confronted two forms of mundanity: war itself and life beyond it from prewar times. One offered comfort in the familiar, preestablished relationships, and a lasting foundation from which they could ground their identities in postwar times. The other offered novel hardships, relationships grounded in the common experience of death and killing, and an identity that, to many, would last only as long as the war itself. Rather than censorship and traumatic testimony, it is this emotional conflict between two contrasting identities that in many ways defined letter-writing for British soldiers in the First World War. While many certainly succumbed to the pressures, mundanity, and even boredom of war and military life, it is no surprise that many others embraced their emotional ties to the mundanity they knew best and hoped to return to at the end of their military lives.

In British cultural memory, the First World War has often been reduced to the 'brief moments of terror' rather than the 'long periods of boredom', such as making the Battle of the Somme just the 'first day of the Somme' (1 July 1916) as the definitive moment of British experience in the conflict. Even then, it gets further narrowed to the 'Pal's Battalions' and other front-line fighting units that went 'over the top' on that day.[126] Given the destruction of empires, the extreme loss of life, and the lingering traumatic legacy of the First World War, it is hard to imagine the conflict in any other terms. And yet, if the 'soldiers' tale' remains the favored

[126] In terms of scholarship, perhaps some of the first works to center the British experience of the First World War on 'the first day of the Somme' are Martin Middlebrook, *First Day on the Somme: 1 July 1916* (W.W. Norton & Co.: New York 1972) and Keegan, *The Face of Battle*, Ch. 4. For contestation over this 'myth' of the Somme, see Todman, *Myth and Memory*, pp. 112-113, and Bond, *Unquiet Western Front*, pp. 62-63, 76-78. For a historical reassessment of the battle, see William Philpott, *Three Armies on the Somme: The First Battle of the Twentieth Century* (Alfred A. Knopf: New York 2010).

source of knowing the realities of war, it is necessary to remember that many of these soldiers experienced not just the terror, but also the boredom and overwhelming mundanity of war, which was partly shaped by soldiers themselves as a way to cope with the terror. Perhaps if there is anything to be understood from the 'need to report' by soldiers, it is that soldiers shaped their own wartime experiences, war did not do it for them, even in the most traumatic, mundane, or traumatically mundane of times.

Figures

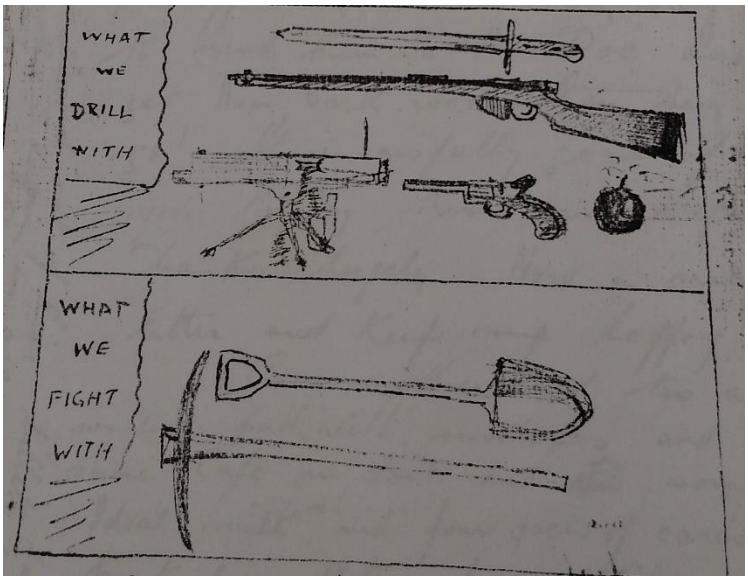


Figure 5: from J.H. Fearnhead, letter 6 June 1916, GS 0541, LC.

EPILOGUE

REMEMBERING MOST KINDLY

THE POSTWAR FATE OF WARTIME LETTERS

In closing his 2 July 1915 letter to Warden Joseph Wells from the Western Front, Harry Llewelyn Hughes-Jones asked that Wells 'remember me most kindly' to his wife and son in Oxford.[1] Amidst all the details he shared about his war experiences and his interest in life at Wadham College, Hughes-Jones still wished to remain a part of the memory not just of Wells in writing a letter to him, but also to his wife, son, and the extended ties that he had beyond Wells as a prewar 'Wadham man'. But how did he wish to be 'remembered most kindly', and how would the act of 'remembering' Hughes-Jones play out in emotional terms? While he fought in the First World War, Wells and his family remembered Hughes-Jones best as a 'Wadham man' and pupil formerly under their care and tutelage. After he was killed in action on 3 March 1916, Wells wrote in his *Gazette* obituary of his accomplishments from before the war:

> He came up to Wadham as a senior scholar from Rossall…he took honours in Law in the summer of 1914. He was reading for the Bar when the War broke out, and at once took a commission; he had always been a prominent and most useful member of the O.T.C. He had been at the Front for the greater part of last year, and had been wounded, but only slightly; he was a very keen and efficient officer. His death cut short a career from which his friends had hoped much. In all he did, as a scholar, as captain of his College Soccer Eleven, as a non-commissioned officer in the O.T.C., as a Bar student, he was sound and thorough, and he had showed the same qualities in the hard school of war.[2]

[1] H.L. Hughes-Jones, 2 July 1915 (#35), WWC.
[2] 'Wadham Roll of Honour', *Wadham College Gazette*, No. 56 (Hilary 1916)

In his wartime life and following his death, Wells and Wadham College remembered Hughes-Jones from a place of familiarity as a Wadham man, not as an unfamiliar soldier of the First World War, whose connection with life before had been shattered, and all that was left was a life defined by horror and suffering on the Western Front. His wartime service was acknowledged and praised, but it was treated as a continuation of the reputation he had crafted for himself as a Wadham man. In the end, obliging Hughes-Jones request to be 'remembered most kindly' before his death, Wells ensured that the members of Wadham College would honor and remember him in the way he had wished: as a Wadham man first and soldier last. The First World War did not define his identity, but rather it was fragments of his life before it that defined the way he lived, and his death in the war halted his aspirations to a life beyond it.

The request to be 'remembered most kindly' was in no way unique to Hughes-Jones, and the sentiment appeared in various forms throughout the letters written by British soldiers during the First World War. Many Wadham men wrote similarly to Wells in closing their letters. Stationed in India in 1914, H.G. Powers requested that Wells 'remember me to the Senior Common Room' at Wadham and hoped that the situation in wartime Oxford was 'quite so bad as I am led to believe'.[3] Fighting in the Austro-Hungarian Army, Edward Bing managed to send a letter to Oxford asking to 'give my very kind regards to the gentlemen of the Senior [Common Room] and assure them of my profound respect, and kindly remember me to my friends of the J.C.R.'.[4] Harry Corbett asked Wells to 'remember me, please, to anyone I know'.[5] Asking that Wells 'remember' him to his wife, Harold Jeffries wrote that he wanted to bring his fiancée to Wadham 'when all of this is over' – unfortunately, the war that introduced him to his fiancée

[3] H.G. Powers, 22 December 1914 (#5), WWC.
[4] Edward J. Bing, 22 April 1915 (#24), WWC.
[5] H. Corbett, 20 May 1915 (#26), WWC.

also led to his death at Ypres on 26 September 1915.[6] J.W. Nicholson also asked that Wells 'remember' him to his wife and that he hoped 'to see Wadham again in happier times', while Reginald Shannon asked to be remembered to 'Col. Stenning and to any men whom I know' from Wadham.[7] On the surface, these requests to be 'remembered' by Wells simply involve them passing on their regards to those they knew from before the war. And yet, the frequency of these requests held a deeper meaning to the men asking to be 'remembered' and to those who would 'remember'. In this transmission of remembrance, all of those involved would 'remember' Wadham men and Wadham community from prewar times, not simply distant soldiers and an empty college. In their letters and wartime experiences, Wadham men would dwell emotionally in their prewar identities, with one writing to Wells that 'Oxford…is ever present and ever far away. As I write I can see every nook and cranny of Wadham and of the Broad, the High, and the Corn…I see and remember them all, and yet they seem, as it were, the flurries of a long past dream'.[8] In their wartime letters and requests to be 'remembered', Wadham men and others turned to life beyond war and the hope that their memories and identities would remain tied to this life through wartime and into the postwar. For them, war was not just about their own physical survival, but also their emotional survival tied to prewar institutions and relationships.

The requests to be 'remembered' was not simply a limited salutation between Wadham men in letters to Wells. Another Wadham man, James Butlin, transmitted these requests to family and, in particular, his 'dear old pal' Basil Burnett Hall. In one letter, before leaving for the trenches, James asked Basil to 'remember me to everyone in general & your people in

[6] H.J. Jeffries, 28 July 1915 (#42), WWC.
[7] J.W. Nicholson, 23 May 1916 (#146+), WWC.
[8] F.W. Farquhar, 1 December 1917 (#203+), WWC.

particular'.[9] After arriving in France, James asked his mother to 'tell the people over at the [College] that I am in the trenches…say I am flourishing but so far haven't been able to do any Virgil', and to 'remember me, please, to the Cossack & any one else you can think of'.[10] Once in France, James also attempted to keep track of old friends he knew back home and in France. Writing to his sister about mutual friends, James shared that he was 'sorry I hadn't time to say good bye to them before I left' and expressed frustration that he did not get to meet another friend in Rouen.[11] Even when he did not make these requests, he would recall fond memories of other mutual acquaintances with Basil. After receiving a letter from 'Bewald', James did not simply think of him as a fellow soldier of the First World War, but rather looked back on the 'anniversary of our little dinner…& wished I was there again'.[12]

When he received letters from Basil that 'reminded [James] again of [Basil's] existence', James admitted that 'my thoughts often wander back to the old gay times we spent together & the stupendously great times you have promised me for my next leave'.[13] After uncovering news of his trauma in published casualty lists, people back home, remembering him from prewar times, rushed to write to him. After moving to Craiglockhart for treatment of his 'neurasthenia', James also shared details of these letters 'written to me in a sympathetic & loving strain', notably one from Warden Joseph Wells.[14] Recalling the deaths of fellow students from Weymouth on the Western Front while writing to his father, James reminded himself that he 'must write a line

[9] Butlin, letter to Basil 18 October 1915, IWM.
[10] Butlin, letter to mother 2 April 1915, IWM. The 'Cossack' appears on occasion in James's letters. While his actual name is never used, he is most likely a military officer that taught at Weymouth College during his tenure there – similar to Colonel Stenning at Wadham College.
[11] Butlin, letter to sister 7 April 1915, IWM.
[12] Butlin, letter to Basil 1 November 1915, IWM.
[13] Butlin, letter to Basil 5 January 1916, IWM.
[14] Butlin, letter to Basil 24 May 1917, IWM.

to Basil & Alfred'.[15] In all of these instances, whether it be James asking to be 'remembered', James 'remembering' others, or others 'remembering' James, prewar connections remained the predominant site of remembrance and the central emotional backdrop of letter-writing. While all of these relationships certainly contributed to his own emotional survival in the First World War, they also represented the significance of life outside the British Army to James's continued personal identity despite the intervention of traumatic war experiences.

In his letters to Grace, Fred Sellers also passed on his own requests in letters to be 'remembered' to others throughout the war – notably her brother 'Vern' and others, but their letters were far more geared to their own shared interest in actively 'remembering' one another.[16] In her own letters, Grace also would pass on to Fred her own requests to be 'remembered' to others – notably Fred's family, stressing that this impulse was not simply a 'soldier' phenomenon.[17] While they had begun a sort of courtship before the outbreak of the First World War, Fred and Grace further strengthened during it with constant efforts by both to ensure that the war itself not be what defined their emotional ties to one another. In remembering one another in letters, they deliberately attempted to keep the war out of their intimate communication and identities as much as possible. As Fred trained to fight on the Western Front, Grace demanded that he not create a rift with her by immersing himself in military life, writing that 'I hope…you will not get too enraptured with being "a soldier"! Chiefly because personally I am not in any way enraptured with it. Good reason!'.[18] As a form of reciprocation, Fred would continually reassure her that he had not been lost to the war, promising at one point that 'you know me now as I am before the war', with a continued ambition to become a barrister

[15] Butlin, letter to father, 9 October 1915, IWM.
[16] Sellers, Fred to Grace, 5 December 1915, IWM.
[17] Sellers, Grace to Fred, 24 January 1916, IWM.
[18] Sellers, Grace to Fred, 2 March 1915, IWM.

after the war, and confessed to Grace that 'already your life seems entwined in mine'.[19] Throughout Fred's military service, Grace would continue to remember him beyond wartime circumstances, whether it be her prewar memories of Fred or how she imagined him in the postwar world. After receiving a photo of Fred in uniform, Grace declared that 'I love it so because its [*sic*] so much more the would be or will be – shall I say – barrister than the soldier'.[20] Whenever he feared being lost to war, Fred would turn to Grace and her letters, admitting in France that the war was a 'tremendous strain & to me is hideous and gruesome…Your letters come along & save the situation every time. You can speed me very quickly from one plane to another'.[21] In all of this, it was not simply soldiers engaging in the exercise of 'remembering'. Rather, the practice of 'remembering' was a shared need between soldiers and civilians like Fred and Grace, hoping to reunite in the aftermath without the pollution of wartime experience shrouding their emotional ties and affection for one another. In his efforts to preserve Grace's wartime letters, perhaps Fred also hoped to remember 1914-1918 as a time of their growing relationship rather than anything he had experienced on the Western Front.

These closing requests to be 'remembered' and the efforts to remember took many forms in the letters written by British soldiers throughout the First World War, and reveal that efforts to 'remember' were indeed a mutual exercise shared by civilians with soldiers as well. In all of these instances, they contained not mere detached well-wishes, but rather a desire to stay emotionally connected to a life they had left behind and, once the war ended, hoped to rejoin. In most of the letters to his family, L. Gamble would close with 'Well I think that is all just for now and I hope you are all well at home', offering smaller asides about other relations like 'tell Lewis

[19] Sellers, Fred to Grace, 11 April 1915, IWM.
[20] Sellers, Grace to Fred 22 June 1915, IWM.
[21] Sellers, Fred to Grace 2 April 1916, IWM.

not to smash the bike because I am going to claim it if I come back', including postcards intended for other people with whom he wished to keep in touch, and keeping track of correspondence with and news of other mutual acquaintances.[22] For others, while writing many letters of their own, a lack of letters from home prompted concern. After not receiving any letters from his siblings for five weeks, Jim Sams frantically wrote asking if anything had happened, asserting that he had written four letters to them, wanted to know if he had 'said or done anything to upset you…let me know if I have and what it is'. He went on to include his address and told them 'you know what a letter from home means to me'.[23] In another letter, he also mentioned receiving a letter from his old 'Boss', who wrote to him admitting that 'he wished we were all back at work again'.[24] Falling behind on his correspondence not just with his mother and sister, but also several friends and other relations, 'Charlie' Ramsdale passed on his apologies and asked 'will you please remember me very kindly…to all other friends'.[25] For J.B. Bagnall, he would write his wife to keep up with news not just about her, but also about their own young daughter, asking in one letter for his wife to send him a photo of her.[26] 'Jack' Fearnhead shared details about his time in the war and coming down with an illness, but still found a way to reminisce with an old friend with inside jokes from their time in grammar school, addressing his friend as 'Heart' and signing himself as 'Ducky Darlingest Sweetums'.[27] In all of this, the predominant impulse governing this epistolary exchange was to remember – or be remembered by – life outside of the circumstances of war and within an identity recognizable to

[22] Private Papers of L. Gamble, letters 4, 8, and 18 October and 24 December 1915, Doc. 21318, Ref. 15/14/1, IWM.
[23] Private Papers of J. Sams, letter 16 December 1914, Doc. 12541, Ref. 02/55/1, IWM.
[24] Ibid., letter 19 March 1918.
[25] Private Papers of C.W. Ramsdale, letter 21 May 1917, Doc. 2081, Con Shelf, IWM.
[26] J.B. Bagnall, letter 19 November 1914, GS 0069, LC.
[27] J.H. Fearnhead, letter 13 June 1916 and biographical notes (p. 5), GS 0541, LC. According to the biographical notes, Jack and his friend addressed themselves this way 'back to when they were fourteen and had witnessed one of the school maid's romance with her soldier'. They met at Manchester Grammar School, and his friend 'eventually married his sister Doris'. Jack was killed in action in August 1916.

the reader and anyone else related to that 'fragment of identity' they shared. The circumstances of war certainly gave this effort heightened emotional urgency, but in most cases the First World War did not break this connection, and these people – soldiers and civilians alike – continued to relate and identify with one another beyond the war itself.

Beyond a college community, old male friends, or couples, British soldiers and civilians, invested in their lives and identities outside the First World War, sought to preserve and navigate various aspects of their emotional identities into the postwar world. Dealing with physical separation, they turned to frequent correspondence as a way to maintain emotional ties. While they did share news about how the war affected them and various aspects of horror and trauma present in the war, correspondents, particularly soldiers, far more compartmentalized these aspects about the war by attempting to direct their letters towards more 'mundane' aspects of their relationships with people back home. Furthermore, for many soldiers, the sheer experience of the First World War was grounded far more in the mundanity of war rather than in its horror. With these underlying motivations behind the mass of letters produced throughout the war, many soldiers returned to civilian life to families and other relationships that remained recognizable and a continued source of emotional support beyond war experience. Rather than alienation, bitterness, and trauma, many soldiers often relegated their war experiences to an important albeit limited aspect of their lives and identities, returning to what they had so desperately wished to preserve in their wartime letters.

These letters and the epistolary relationships they contained also show that the 'mundane' and 'mundanity' were by no means simple concepts or needs. In their efforts to shape war and life beyond it into a realm of mundanity, soldiers were in many ways expressing a form of emotional urgency that was in no way mundane. For writers and readers of wartime letters, the

mundane was not a simple or individual concept, nor was it either only emotionally-supportive or emotionally-traumatic. In war and military life, the mundane could allow a soldier to construct war experiences which they could survive in emotional terms, but it could also threaten these same soldiers with 'traumatic boredom'. In epistolary communication, mundane ties to home and family life also contributed to emotional survival, but the mundane could not be the sole domain of family and required added fragments of identity to ground soldiers to life beyond the First World War. Essentially, while the epistolary relationships and soldier-civilian communication of the war dwelled in the real, imagined, and performed realms of mundanity, wartime often offered its own distinctive backdrop for the mundane self, driven by the urgency of an underlying emotional self. In the postwar world, this emotionally-driven, distinctive mundanity would be reshaped by a need to remember the war, which was in itself an exercise rooted beyond the mundane.

As time passed and British culture reflected on its relationship to the First World War, however, these letters evolved beyond their original, personal wartime purposes and were reshaped into a way for postwar culture to understand not these personal relationships, but rather the war itself. Much of this memory was shaped by memoirists, poets, and novelists, many of whom had fought in the conflict.[28] While publishers and readers contested over how best to remember – and, for publishers at least, to sell – the conflict in the early postwar years, a more coherent, widely-accepted narrative began to take shape after the Second World War dwelling on the horror, tragedy, and futility of war, mostly told from the voice of the 'soldier'.[29] From this

[28] For more on this literary history of the conflict, see Hynes, *A War Imagined* and *The Soldiers' Tale*.
[29] For the early publishing and reading history of the British First World War, see Isherwood, *Remembering the Great War*. For change over time of British cultural memory, particularly post-Second World War, and the historical problems posed by it, see Reynolds, *The Long Shadow*, Bond, *Unquiet Western Front*, Sheffield, *Forgotten Victory*, J. Watson, *Fighting Different Wars*, and Todman, *Myth and Memory*.

postwar perspective, war became the author, shaper, and purpose of these letters, and people lost all agency to shape letters to their own objectives beyond it. As the First World War became more of a distant memory than a lived experience, British postwar culture demanded a story of people suffering through the horror of war, and letters were sifted through to contribute to this narrative.

From the outbreak of war to its end in 1918, the British emotional experience of the war was defined by the navigation of prewar life into the postwar. Essentially, in what was seen as extraordinary times, civilians and soldiers hoped to keep developing more mundane lives and identities outside of war rather than be swept up by it. For soldiers and civilians, this was done largely through the bulk of letters they wrote until the end of the war, when correspondence came to an abrupt halt as soldiers demobilized and returned home. Both sides overcame the physical separation by committing their identities and emotional ties to paper and pen. While they did write at times on the unfamiliar circumstances they faced, they turned far more in their communication to what defined their prewar – and now, epistolary – relationships: mundanity beyond war. This mundanity would take many forms, as mundane life was often relative to the relationship between the reader and writer.

This emotional exercise, however, did not often directly translate beyond the immediate relationship within it and the wartime circumstances that prompted it. In the immediate postwar world, for many veterans, families, and others, the navigation through wartime remained a very personal, local experience grounded in the navigation of prewar identity into the postwar. The war, the nation, and the identity of the 'soldier' were not central components of this process. Indeed, efforts to make these broader conceptions part of the dominant remembrance of the First World War were met with local protest. Upon discovering that the newly-formed Imperial War

Graves Commission would prohibit the repatriation of British war dead, S.A. Smith, a mother who had lost her own son in the war, wrote to the Prince of Wales in 1919 with a petition signed by thousands of local Yorkshire families:

> It has always been the view of every English family that their beloved dead belonged to them alone. Yet we are not permitted to have the remains brought over, nor even to erect a Cross or other emblem over their graves.
>
> Where possible, and <u>where</u> the relatives desire it, is it too much to ask that the bodies may be brought across, at our own expense, if necessary?
>
> We pray your Royal Highness will grant that the right which has ever been the privilege of the bereaved, may not be denied to us.[30]

While Smith's petition ultimately failed, she nonetheless continued to pressure the Commission through continued correspondence to end its repatriation prohibition and vigilantly inspected the cemeteries in France and Belgium until her death in 1936.[31] The failure and local nature of this protest aside, S.A. Smith's postwar efforts and her belief in tending graves to be a 'family' obligation stresses how, at least in the immediate aftermath of the First World War, the role of remembrance was contested between the nation and the local, and a public, political memory of war dead as 'soldiers' clashed with a private, emotional memory of war dead in a more intimate, prewar context tied to families and personal relationships. In a way, just as soldiers wrote letters in wartime to remain tied to their prewar lives, S.A. Smith and others protested in letters against the Commission for excluding them from their perceived role in 'remembering' war dead.[32]

---

[30] WG 783 Pt. 1, Box 1050, Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) Archives, Maidenhead, United Kingdom. In an internal note on the petition, the number of families is estimated at 1400, mostly from Yorkshire.
[31] See WG 783 Pt. 2, Box 1050, CWGC.
[32] In a way, this contestation between private and public care for war dead extended to veteran care as well. For this contestation and its effects on postwar reintegration of veterans into British society, see Cohen, *The War Come Home*, pp. 29-46. While Cohen focuses more on the negligence of the British government for disabled veteran care versus private philanthropy, her analysis does offer possible wider insights into private cultural attitudes to the care and responsibility for veterans and war dead and how they clashed with state intervention into this care.

Even before the First World War had ended, literature turned to correspondence between soldiers and civilians to begin shaping a cultural legacy of the conflict. While a relatively forgotten part of the British literary memory of the First World War, H.G. Wells contributed much to cultural allusions to postwar memory of the conflict, most notably his 1914 'War That Will End War' pamphlet that shaped the cultural idea of the 'war to end all wars' and the postwar irony that came to be associated with it over time. Additionally, while surpassed by veteran memoirs and other works, his wartime *Mr. Britling Sees It Through* (1916) was one of the bestselling novels of home front war experience during the First World War, and integrated wartime letters by soldiers within its narrative.[33] With his own prewar, apocalyptic aspirations to promote the conflict as the 'war that will end war', the semi-autobiographical novel centers on a public intellectual named Mr. Britling, who witnesses society simply settling in to make the First World War 'a war now like any other'.[34] As the character struggles with this intellectual conflict, he received letters from his son Hugh, a soldier serving on the Western Front. In this fictional wartime correspondence, Wells stresses the prewar roots of many soldiers' letters ('Hugh had always been something of a letter-writer') and the importance of letters to home ('[Britling] did not dream how many thousands of mothers and fathers were treasuring such documents').[35] While many actual letters from soldiers dwelled on the mundanity of home – and even of war itself, Wells shapes Hugh's letters into a narrative of alienation, disillusion, trauma, and, ultimately, tragic loss caused by the First World War. Hugh rails against his Army superiors (and peers), dwells on drills and the '[violent] suggestion of various exercises upon the mind', and tells his father on leave before going to France that '*this* Hugh will never come back.

[33] See Wells, *The War That Will End War*.
[34] Wells, *Mr. Britling Sees It Through*, p. 359. Also cited in Hynes, *A War Imagined*, p. 132.
[35] Ibid., p. 305.

Another one may. But I shall have been outside, and it will all be different'.[36] From France, the 'Censor' became an omnipotent, faceless force disrupting true communication between Hugh and his father ('any sort of definite information might cause the suppression of his letter'). As he experiences the war in France, his letters 'divided themselves pretty fairly between two main topics; the first was the interest of the art of war, the second the reaction against warfare', where Hugh essentially testifies to his own descent into brutalization and victimhood.[37] In his final letter before his death, Hugh wrote to his father as a soldier broken by war while writing on the death of a comrade:

> "It's been just the last straw of all this hellish foolery…."
>
> "War is just foolery – lunatic foolery – hell's foolery…."…
>
> "…Well, well, this is the way of the war, Daddy. This is what war is. Damn the Kaiser! Damn all fools…Give my love to the Mother and the bruddykins and every one…"[38]

Despite any differing reality or form within wartime correspondence between actual soldiers and civilians in wartime, cultural memory of letters had begun taking shape even before the war had ended. What soldiers and civilians wrote to one another in wartime did not have the same purpose when reshaped for postwar culture. Emotion remained, but individuality and private relationships beyond family and couples did not translate to more general interests of cultural memory. What remained from these letters – actual and fictional – was a wider testimony of war itself for future generations: war destroyed soldiers and families alike, leaving them forever changed. In his postwar review of 'war books', even Cyril Falls observed that the title was a

[36] Ibid., pp. 306, 322.
[37] Ibid. p. 327.
[38] Ibid., pp. 366, 373.

misnomer, remarking that 'The trouble with Mr. Britling is that he did not live up to the title of this his war-time record. He did not see it through'.[39]

But what about soldiers-turned-veterans? When the war ended for those soldiers that emotionally survived to become veterans, their own relationship with the First World War fundamentally changed. While soldiers and civilians alike sought to navigate the 'prewar' through the disruption of wartime, veterans and other survivors, from the relative safety of the 'postwar', attempted to remember their war experiences rather than elements outside of it. When these veterans looked back at their service in memoirs and other postwar testimony, while reflecting on some of the carnage of the war, they nonetheless expressed rather fond memories of their experiences, but saw them more as for themselves rather than anyone else. The ways in which these veterans closed their memoirs often exhibited their final thoughts on what their wartime experiences had meant to their lives as a whole. In closing his memoir on his time with the Royal Engineers, Allen Stewart found his story to be 'purely personal and of little interest to any one else' and could 'never be reconstructed'. Nonetheless, in writing for his own personal benefit, he closed with 'All these [images and stories] come back to me and with them a longing to be back among men, and live it all over once again'.[40] To veterans like Stewart, the war represented an old adventure in which they felt pride for having 'done their bit', but it was not the defining moment of their lives. In the final words of his memoir from 1976 written in the third person, Alfred Bootes greeted the end of his military service, writing that 'Fit and free, he was no longer a number but a person once more. His period of Military Service had lasted

[39] Cyril Falls, *War Books: An Annotated Bibliography of Books about the Great War* (Greenhill Books: London 1989 – 1st ed. 1930) p. 301.
[40] Private Papers of A. Stewart, memoir p. 196, Doc. 16630, Ref. 08/121/1, IWM. It is worth noting the usage of third person in this work, which perhaps indicate the sheer distance of the war from his own identity so far removed from the First World War.

precisely ONE YEAR, ELEVEN MONTHS AND ELEVEN DAYS – to a Septuagenarian, and to many an old soldier – a mere Episode!'.[41] In all of these more private recollections, the emphasis for veterans was that the First World War was an important moment in their lives, but it did not define how they lived in the postwar world. While they wanted to remember their own private roles in what had become part of history, they did not continue to live that history. In a way, for those that wrote wartime letters and kept ties with their old worlds, the First World War did not dictate how they lived after it had ended.

Nevertheless, in their postwar recollections, some veterans did have trouble reacclimating to civilian life and leaving war and the military behind them, and saw the war as central to their postwar selves. Writing on the aftermath of the 11 November 1918 Armistice, 'Pat' Campbell saw life after the war not as continuity, but rather as novelty. Having abandoned any plans for 'after the war' during the fighting, Pat looked ahead with some dread to what laid ahead for him beyond military service, with the idea of going to Oxford 'disconcerting' and a belief that the civilian war was 'unfriendly, it did not care what happened to you'.[42] He did not, however, look upon it with complete disillusion, admitting that Oxford would 'give me time to adjust myself to the new way of living. I should miss all this friendship, but I should enjoy reading again…'. In closing, Pat nonetheless insisted that his future life would remain connected to his life during the war and to his fallen comrades:

> [The dead] would lie still and at peace…They could not feel lonely, they would have one another. And they would have us also, though we were going home and leaving them behind. We belonged to them, and they would be a part of us for ever. Part of us for ever, nothing could separate us.[43]

[41] Private Papers of A. Bootes, memoir p. 11, Doc. 16921, Ref. 09/25/1, IWM.
[42] Private Papers of P.J. Campbell, memoir, Vol. II, p. 177, Doc. 12154, Ref. P91, IWM.
[43] Ibid., memoir, Vol. II, pp. 178-179.

While they may not have 'destroyed' their lives beyond it, the First World War and military service for many certainly left a lasting impact on their identities in the postwar world. For veterans like Pat, the war represented a beginning to a new postwar life, not an interlude to life before it, where 'even if I achieved nothing else in life I had done something, I need not feel my life had been altogether wasted, I had played my part'.[44] In a way, many of these postwar attempts to remember war experience exhibited not necessarily trauma, disillusion, or alienation, but rather the veteran and his recognition that war and soldiering had produced yet another fragment within his own identity. Regardless of their ability to keep the fragments of their mundane selves intact during wartime, veterans, in their turn to writing memoirs, exhibited a needed to allow their more 'emotional selves' to revisit their war experiences from the emotional safety of mundane postwar life.

In all of these postwar reflections and commemorations, the subject was the First World War, whereas in wartime letters, war acted as a setting through which people worked to preserve various fragments of their lives beyond it. In the end, while looking at letters written by British soldiers during the First World War, it is necessary to distinguish between the wartime purpose of this communication with a world they had left behind and how postwar culture reshaped it for its own understanding of war. These British soldiers, whether they be Wadham men, Fred Sellers, James Butlin, or countless others, turned to letters not to create a divide with prewar relationships by simply testifying to 'the truth about war', but rather to preserve their identities beyond war, which they wished to define them in the postwar world. When Hughes-Jones and others asked to be 'remembered most kindly' to these people back home in letters, they wanted to keep up the memory of themselves not just as soldiers, but as someone far more recognizable

[44] Ibid., memoir, Vol. II, p. 178.

to the reader and others back home. They did this not by testifying about the war, but rather by talking about what emotionally tied them to whom they wrote: community, love, comradeship, and nearly anything but war, the military, and soldiering. For those that died, the people who knew them back home, such as Joseph Wells, Grace Malin – later Sellers, Basil Burnett Hall, and others, 'remembered them most kindly' for their lives before the war, their future aspirations, and considered their military identities an extension of the person they had known from prewar times. For those veterans that chose not to share their 'war stories', or wrote private memoirs later in lives without the intent to publish, it is perhaps worth wondering whether such 'silence' from veterans was based in trauma from war, or rather from an emotional desire to not have war invade their mundane postwar lives and, perhaps more importantly, their postwar selves.[45]

Rather than presume the existence of trauma, alienation, avoidance, or disillusion in these letters, perhaps it is far more appropriate to consider what these soldiers wrote about at face value and consider their words within the context of a particular relationship, a particular fragment of self, and the extent to which war did (or did not) destroy or corrupt emotional ties and identity beyond it. With so much about First World War letters, perhaps it is best to review one in full. Written to his mother amidst the Battle of the Somme in July 1916, here is what 'Bertie' Hall wished to write about his war experiences from behind the lines:

Dear Mother,

Thanks for yours of the 7th and Father's of the 9th, and also parcel safely to hand.

The rumours about letters being stopped does not seem to be coming off, at any rate we have had no official warning yet.

[45] For more on the question of 'silence' by British veterans, see Morley, 'Dad "never said much" but…', pp. 199-224.

The parcel was O.K. and the Biscuits and Apples much appreciated. I had also two parcels from the Office on the same day so have been getting quite a good time.

I was surprised to hear about Harold Felce. You told me once that he was practically on the way here. Isn't it remarkable the number of people there are in the world "medically unfit"? it seems a shame that a man has to be perfect before he can be sent up to the Firing Line. I expect the Sergeant referred to is Palmer, or else Wells. They are the only two we had and both would know me well.

I am glad to hear the Kitchen alterations are finished and I guess you are, too. I suppose it means all the cooking being done on the Gas Stove and as you never did much on the Fire it will not make much difference.

I am at present at one of the rear Stations, on interception duty. This is rather more interesting but one cannot read or write while on it as one has to keep the indicators on the move all the time, trying to pick up the other Stations. Still it is a change and quite welcome. Also, it is a comfortable Station.

I have a hammock in it with 4 Blankets which are not so much needed as they were a week ago.

The Commission Papers are evidently still on the move as they sent down from G.H.Q. for our official Battalion numbers. Won't it be fine if that comes off too? It's a bit of sauce putting in for it. Still, it is the only theoretical side that I have to learn as there is not much of the practical that I have not done. As a matter of fact, the Sets we are now on are the first to have been worked in Action and I can claim to be one of the pioneers and certainly the first to work one in Action. I think you may take it that ours are the first decorations for Wireless work with the exception of one officer, who had the Military Cross for an invention.

You might put another half dozen Razor Blades in the next letter, otherwise there is nothing I require.

How is the Garden doing? Are the Sweet Peas any good? I suppose Tomatoes are quite off owing to the weather.

Your loving Boy,

B.[46]

While postwar memory has dwelled on the horror and trauma experienced by soldiers during those days in 1916, it is equally important to remember that for soldiers like 'Bertie' Gill, writing letters asking about kitchen alternations or the sweet peas and tomatoes in the garden back home

[46] Private Papers of H.F. Gill, Doc. 16456, Ref. 08/94/1, IWM.

was a far more important emotional exercise for soldiers than dragging the misery of war into their emotional identities and private relationships. Furthermore, while the soldiers most remembered during this time are the ones that went 'over the top', there were far more soldiers like Bertie either stationed behind the lines or elsewhere on the Western Front, and did not remain there for the duration of the conflict – Bertie returned to Britain for the remainder of the war for training on 24 July 1916. For them, even from Bertie's more 'mundane' position as a signaler during the Somme, the mundanity of home, life before war, and the hope of life after war, dominated the ways that soldiers communicated with civilians during wartime, and how they hoped to live beyond it. These motivations are exhibited far more in the overwhelming mundanity of wartime letters as a whole by soldiers, not by the individual ones filled with the grisly details of war that scholars seek out in attempting to understand the experience of the First World War. By fixating on the trauma, violence, and horror of war and presuming a lack of these traits indicates suppression or avoidance, soldiers and veterans are denied the choice to shape not just their wars, but also their lives beyond war to what would make them emotionally intact as fathers, sons, husbands, brothers, students, friends, and literally any other part of themselves unassociated with the First World War.

In closing, returning to the Great Western Railway Memorial, the image it conveys to people passing by taking their trains beyond London still resonates into the present. From the First World War to the Second and even into the so-called War on Terror, soldiers-in-uniform still waits for civilian transport to move them closer to a warzone or military base. These soldiers, of British origin and beyond, have spent their time reading or writing letters, sending telegrams, or using what spare change (and time) they had to call home. In the present day, the technology at the disposal of soldiers – cell phones, tablets, laptops, etc. – are as immense as

their means of civilian transport, but the impulse behind such devices remains the same as that unknown soldier reading his letter at Paddington Station or writing his reply with the technology of pencil and paper in a muddy trench or billet on the Western Front.

These contemporary soldiers, waiting at an airport terminal, can pull out their smartphones to read or write a text message or email to friends and family back home. Do these soldiers write about their fears about war and share testimony about 'what it's really like', or do they talk about life back at home and their general well-being? Do they dwell on the moments of violence they face in Iraq, Afghanistan, or another foreign battlefield, or do they talk about the longer periods of life at a base, their request for a new e-book or e-reader to use when off-duty, or the video game console or pool table that was just installed in a lounge? Do these soldiers write as 'soldiers', or as something far more familiar to that reader at the other end of a text message: partner, friend, colleague, acquaintance, child, sibling, parent? When they ask in a text, video chat, email, or other communication medium to 'say hi to…' or 'give my regards to…' another friend, family member, or mutual acquaintance, do they want their memories to be shaped by their military life and war, or something else entirely? Are their military lives ones shaped around the mundanity of home life balanced with a mundane experience of war, or do they succumb to the mundane trauma of war, forever lost to the world left behind? Has the mundanity of home life continued to 'remember them most kindly' as one of their own, or has it reshaped them into a 'soldier' separate from itself?

For soldiers like the Wadham men, James Butlin, and Fred Sellers in the First World War, they were lucky enough to have the support of not just their families, but also their prewar communities, comrades, partners, and all sorts of other ties to mundane life. While they certainly turned to their fellow soldiers to endure the immediate experience of war, mundane or

otherwise, they relied far more on the people they wished to return to at war's end, who equally wished them to maintain the common ties they had built together up to that point before the outbreak of war in 1914. Just as Wadham men wrote to their college warden to remain members of their college community in and out of the confines of war, Joseph Wells reached out to these men to keep them and their college identity grounded in a history beyond the conflict, even if it meant singlehandedly publishing the *Wadham College Gazette* and keeping up subscriptions to Wadham men serving across the globe. One of these Wadham men, James Butlin, remained close comrades with his old school friend Basil Burnett Hall, who, with his 'shady magazines' and misadventures on the home front, gave James an outlet to survive wartime trauma and helped him overcome his disdain for 'shirkers' for their friendship to last beyond the war. Finally, Fred Sellers, keeping up his prewar courtship with Grace, found more 'eternal' meaning to life beyond the battlefield, while Grace ensured that not only their relationship, but also Fred's prewar hopes and aspirations survived his time as a 'soldier'. In the end, as much as Wadham men, James Butlin, and Fred Sellers could reach out to be 'remembered most kindly' to their mundane worlds beyond the First World War, the people from these mundane worlds like Joseph Wells, Basil Burnett Hall, and Grace Sellers in the end had to not just acknowledge that request, but also to actively remember them and make efforts to navigate such memory and identity through the conflict and into the postwar world.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Source Material

Department of Documents and Sound, Imperial War Museum, London, UK (IWM)

Private Papers of:

- W.M. Anderson, Doc. 5092, Ref. 96/24/1
- E. Ashton, Doc. 9388, Ref. 99/75/1
- R.J. Bailey, Doc. 2027, Ref. 92/36/12 and Con Shelf
- A.G. Baker, Doc. 8576, Ref. 01/6/1
- A. Bootes, Doc. 16921, Ref. 09/25/1
- B. Broadhead, Doc. 1716, Ref. 09/56/1
- R.H. Bryan, Doc. 13953, Ref. 72/88/1
- A.P. Burke, Doc. 1665, Con Shelf
- J.H. Butlin, Doc. 7915, Ref. 67/52/1
- F.M.M. Carlisle, Doc. 1466, Ref. 87/30/1
- A. Carter, Doc. 10845, Ref. 86/8/1
- E.F. Chapman, Doc. 1799, Ref. 92/3/1 and Con Shelf
- H.H. Cooper, Doc. 10892, Ref. DS MISC 24 and P119
- J.T. Davies, Doc. 17153, Ref. 09/63/1
- D.W. Dougal, Doc. 17238, Ref. 09/79/1
- R. Downing, Doc. 12, Ref. 88/7/1

- D.D. Dunnet, Doc. 6957, Ref. 78/59/1

- O.P. Eckhard, Doc. 6871, Ref. 78/42/1

- A. Edwards, Doc. 3560, Ref. 85/15/1

- H.F. Elgood, Doc. 16690, Ref. 08/131/1

- H. Empson, Doc. 11943, Ref. 02/12/1

- A. English, Doc. 6448, Ref. 97/10/1

- F.W.H. English, Doc. 17189, Ref. 09/61/1

- B.J. Fielder, Doc. 12191, Ref. P265

- J.K.L. Fitzwilliam, Doc. 16096, Ref. 07/78/1

- A.S. Fox, Doc. 15736, Ref. 07/12/1

- M. Hardie, Doc. 4041, Ref. 84/46/1

- W.T. Hate, Doc. 2796, Ref. 86/15/1

- D. Hey, Doc. 14387, Ref. 67/72/1

- G. Hodgkinson, Doc. 8166, Ref. 99/13/1

- M. Holyroyd, Doc. 7364, Ref. 97/37/1

- L. Gamble, Doc. 21318, Ref. 15/14/1

- H.F. Gill, Doc. 16456, Ref. 08/94/1

- P.A. Glock, Doc. 9632, Ref. 99/84/1

- A.J. Jamieson, Doc. 249, Ref. 88/52/1

- C.I. Johnson, Doc. 20699, Ref. 79/33/1

- H.A. Johnson, Doc. 12683, Ref. 03/30/1

- D. Henrick Jones, Doc. 16345, Ref. 08/66/1

- Rev. M.P.G. Leonard, Doc. 16268, Ref. 08/41/1

- G.S. MacKay, Doc. 12688, Ref. 03/31/1

- J.R. Mackie, Doc. 11871, Ref. 02/16/1

- J.H. Marivale, Doc. 11174, Ref. P471

- S.C. Marriott, Doc. 14187, Ref. 67/16/1

- W.J. Martin, Doc. 2554, Con Shelf

- P. McGregor, Doc. 20192, Ref. 76/153/1

- E.C. Mercer, Doc. 2025, Ref. 92/52/1

- J.W. McFeeters, Doc. 4221, Ref. 83/23/1

- J.B. Middlebrook, Doc. 7822, Con Shelf

- F. Middleton, Doc. 16483, Ref. 08/96/1

- J.K. Miller, Doc. 14735, Ref. 67/242/1

- M.S.S. Moore, Doc. 7638, Ref. 74/29/1

- G.W. Nightingale, Doc. 12333, Ref. P216

- C.A. Oldham, Doc. 12728, Con Shelf

- J.R. Park, Doc. 20754, Ref. 13/13/1

- W. Parkin, Doc. 12616, Ref. 03/15/1

- J. Pearce, Doc. 13303, Con Shelf

- H. Peel, Doc. 22927, Ref. P391

- H.R. Preece, Doc. 12717, Ref. 04/4/1

- C.W. Ramsdale, Doc. 2081, Con Shelf

- H.V. Reed, Doc. 16703, Ref. 08/147/1

- J. Sams, Doc. 12541, Ref. 02/55/1

- C.J. Saunders, Doc. 2540, Ref. 94/3/1

- R. Saunders, Doc. 6570, Ref. 79/15/1

- F.A. Sellers, Doc. 16954, Ref. 09/32/1

- R.I. Smith, Doc. 2737, Ref. 86/36/1

- P.F.F. Spaull, Doc. 15453, Ref. 07/8/1

- A. Stewart, Doc. 16630, Ref. 08/121/1

- T.S. Sumner, Doc. 17421, Ref. 10/3/1

- D.J. Sweeney, Doc. 7397, Con Shelf

- C.G. Tennant, Doc. 8046, Ref. 68/12/1

- H. Tinsley, Doc. 8228, Ref. 99/15/1

- A.J. Turner, Doc. 4617, Ref. 81/21/1

- F.B. Wade, Doc. 7976, Con Shelf

- H. Waugh, Doc. 8058, Ref. 99/13/1

- H.E.V. Williams, Doc. 15430, Ref. 07/5/1

- War Office, *Censorship Orders and Regulations for Troops in the Field* (1916), in LBY/EPH 1401

- Censorship Orders and Regulations for Troops in the Field (1917), LBY/EPH 1402

- War Office, Censorship Orders and Regulations for British Forces in Italy (1918)

- War Office – General Staff and Publicity Section, Lecture on the Postal Censorship Orders, LBK .80360

Liddle Collection, Brotherton Library, University of Leeds, Leeds, UK (LC)

- F. Alder, GS 0012

- J.B. Bagnall, GS 0069

- E.G. Bates, GS 0098
- Sir D. Branson, GS 0187
- A.H. Crerar, GS 0387
- J.H. Fearnhead, GS 0541
- J.S. Ferguson, GS 0552
- F.G. Forman, GS 0570
- A.S.C. Fox, GS 0577
- D.H. Fryer, RNMN 108
- H. Humpage, EP 038
- O. Lyle, GS 0992
- P.R.J. Mason, GS 1066
- E.G.H. Power, GS 1292
- B.H. Puckle, GS 1310
- E. Ramsden, GS 1321
- P.H. Rawson, GS 1332
- J.W.B. Russell, GS 1405
- H.A. Siepmann, GS 1469
- A.C. Slaughter, GS 1485
- D. Storrs-Fox, GS 1547
- R. Towler, GS 1616
- G.K. Wait, GS 1664
- J.C.B. Wakeford, GS 1666
- M.F.C. Willson, GS 1760

Wadham College Archives, Wadham College, University of Oxford, Oxford UK

- Warden Wells Collection (WWC)

- Minutes of the Wadham College Debate Society

Liverpool Records Office, Liverpool, UK

- 920 NFE/2/1/1-3, 20-21: Norman Ellison Papers

The National Archives at Kew, London, UK

- MH 106/1907: Craiglockhart Hospital: Coldstream Mains – Officers

- WO 95/3987/1: Headquarters Branches and Services, Chief Censor (War Diary)

- WO 95/4989/5: Branches and Services, Chief Censor (War Diary)

- WO 95/5500/1: Deputy Director of Army Postal Services HQ, BEF (Northern Sector)

- WO 161/114: Organisation and Development of the Army Postal Service

- WO 161/115: Report on the German Field Postal Service

The Postal Museum, London, UK

- POST 47/133: Free Postage and Censorship

- POST 47/455: Army Postal Service Consolidated Orders

- POST 56/57: Report on Postal Censorship during the Great War (1914-1919)

- POST 56/58: Memoranda…Changes to Censorship of Inland Postal Packets during the First World War, and Copies of Home Office Warrants Authorising Interference with the Mails

- POST 56/63: Stephenson Report on the Re-organisation of Postal and Telegraph Censorship

- POST 56/242: Prisoners of War, Censorship Arrangements: Parcels for Prisoners

- POST 56/250: 'News of a Mother's Health for Sons at the Front'

Commonwealth War Graves Commission Archives, Maidenhead, UK

- CWGC/1/1/5/21-22, WG 783, Pt. 1-2, Box 1050: War Graves Association

- CWGC/1/1/5/23, WG 783/1, Box 1050, Catalogue #155: Petition to HM The King

The British Library: Asian and African Studies, London, UK

- Mss Eur D681/17: Weekly Reports of Evelyn Howell as Censor of Indian Mails in France

Published Primary Sources

- Andrew Baines and Joanna Palmer, eds., *Dearest Mother: First World War Letters Home from a Young Sapper Officer in France and Salonika* (Helion & Co. Ltd.: W. Midlands 2015)

- Henri Barbusse, *Under Fire*, transl. Robin Buss (Penguin Books: London 2003 – 1st ed. 1916)

- Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and transl. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton University Press: Princeton 1976)

- E.S. Craig and W.M. Gibson, eds., *Oxford University Roll of Service* (Clarendon Press: Oxford 1920)

- Cyril Falls, *War Books: An Annotated Bibliography of Books about the Great War* (Greenhill Books: London 1989 – 1st ed. 1930)

- Robert Graves, *Good-bye to All That* (Anchor Books: New York 1998 – 1st ed. 1930)

- Laurence Housman, ed., *War Letters of Fallen Englishmen* (Pine St. Books: Pennsylvania 2002 – 1st ed. 1930)

- Ernst Jünger, *Storm of Steel*, transl. Michael Hofmann (Penguin Books: London 2004 – 1st German ed. 1920, 1st English ed. 1924)

- R.G.C. Levens and C.S.C. Williams, eds., *Merton College Register, 1900-1964, With Notices of Some Older Surviving Members* (Blackwell: Oxford 1964)

- Frederic Manning, *The Middle Parts of Fortune: Somme & Ancre, 1916* (Peter Davies: London 1977 – 1st ed. 1929)

- Captain A.O. Pollard, *Fire-Eater: The Memoirs of a V.C.* (Naval & Military Press: Uckfield, East Sussex 2005 – 1st ed. 1932)

- Siegfried Sassoon, *Memoirs of an Infantry Officer* (Coward, McCann, Inc.: New York 1930)

- Sheffield and J.M. Bourne, eds., *Douglas Haig: War Diaries and Letters, 1914-1918* (Phoenix: London 2006)

- H.G. Wells, *The War That Will End War* (Duffield & Co.: New York 1914)

- Wells, *Mr. Britling Sees It Through* (Macmillan: New York 1916)

- Joseph Wells, *The Charm of Oxford* (Simpkin Marshall Ltd.: London 1924, 1st ed. 1920)

- Rebecca West, *The Return of the Soldier* (Dial Press: New York 1980 – 1st ed. 1918)

Newspapers, Magazines, and Website Collections

- *Oxford University Gazette*

- *The Times* (London)

- *Wadham College Gazette*

Secondary Source Material

Monographs and Edited Collections

- Michael C.C. Adams, *The Great Adventure: Male Desire and the Coming of World War I* (Indiana University Press: Bloomington 1990)

- Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (Verso: New York 2006 – 1st ed. 1983)

- Tony Ashworth, *Trench Warfare, 1914-1918: The Live and Let Live System* (Pan Books: London 2000 – 1st ed. 1980)

- Peter Barham, *Forgotten Lunatics of the Great War* (Yale University Press: New Haven 2004)

- Stephen Berry, *All That Makes a Man: Love and Ambition in the Civil War South* (Oxford University Press: Oxford 2005)

- Brian Bond, *Survivors of a Kind: Memoirs of the Western Front* (Continuum: London 2008)

- Bond, *The Unquiet Western Front: Britain's Role in Literature and History* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge 2002)

- Joanna Bourke, *Dismembering the Male: Men's Bodies, Britain, and the Great War* (University of Chicago Press: Chicago 1996)

- Bourke, *An Intimate History of Killing: Face-to-Face Killing in Twentieth-Century Warfare* (Basic Books: London 1999)

- J.M. Bourne, *Britain and the Great War, 1914-1918* (Edward Arnold: London 1994)

- Peter B. Boyden, *Tommy Atkins' Letters: The History of the British Army Postal Service from 1795* (National Army Museum: London 1990)

- Rosa Bracco, *Merchants of Hope: British Middlebrow Writers and the First World War, 1919-1939* (Berg: Oxford 1993)

- Ana Carden-Coyne, *Reconstructing the Body: Classicism, Modernism, and the First World War* (Oxford University Press: Oxford 2009)

- Peter Carmichael, *The War for the Common Soldier: How Men Thought, Fought, and Survived in Civil War Armies* (University of North Carolina Press: Chapel Hill 2018)

- Hugh Cecil and Peter Liddle, eds., *Facing Armageddon: The First World War Experienced* (Leo Cooper: London 1996)

- Cecil and Liddle, *At the Eleventh Hour: Reflections, Hopes and Anxieties at the Closing of the Great War, 1918* (Leo Cooper: Barnsley 1998)

- Roger Chartier et al., *Correspondence: Models of Letter-Writing from the Middle Ages to the Nineteenth Century*, transl. Christopher Woodall (Princeton University Press: Princeton 1997)

- I.F. Clarke, *Voices Prophesying War: Future Wars, 1763-3749* (Oxford University Press: Oxford 1992, 1st ed. 1966)

- Deborah Cohen, *The War Come Home: Disabled Veterans in Britain and Germany, 1914-1939* (University of California Press: Berkeley 2001)

- F.W. Daniel, *The Field Censor Systems of the Armies of the British Empire, 1914-1918: Unit Allocations, War Office Based Types 1, 2, 3, 4, & 7* (The Forces Postal History Society: Crouch, Essex 1948)

- C.S.L. Davies and Garnett, eds., *Wadham College* (Anness Publishing Ltd.: London 1994)

- Eberhard Demm, *Censorship and Propaganda in World War I: A Comprehensive History* (Bloomsbury: London 2019)

- Marina Dossena and Gabriella Del Lungo Camiciotti, eds., *Letter Writing in Late Modern Europe* (John Benjamins: Philadelphia 2012)

- Bonnie Effros, *Incidental Archaeologists: French Officers and the Rediscovery of Roman North Africa* (Cornell University Press: Ithaca 2018)

- Modris Eksteins, *Rites of Spring: The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age* (Mariner Books: New York 2000 – 1st ed. 1989)

- Joshua Fitch, *Thomas and Matthew Arnold and their Influence on English Education* (Heinemann: London 1897)

- J.G. Fuller, *Troop Morale and Popular Culture in the British and Dominion Armies, 1914-1918* (Clarendon Press: Oxford 1990)

- Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory: Illustrated Edition* (Sterling: New York 2009, 1st ed. 1975)

- Susan Grayzel, *Women's Identities at War: Gender, Motherhood, and Politics in Britain and France during the First World War* (University of North Carolina Press: Chapel Hill 1999)

- Adrian Gregory, *The Silence of Memory: Armistice Day 1919-1946* (Berg: Oxford 1994)

- Gregory, *The Last Great War: British Society and the First World War* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge 2008)

- Nicoletta Gullace, *'The Blood of Our Sons': Men, Women, and the Renegotiation of British Citizenship during the Great War* (Palgrave Macmillan: New York 2002)

- Christopher Hager, *I Remain Yours: Common Lives in Civil War Letters* (Harvard University Press: Cambridge, MA 2018)

- Martha Hanna, *Your Death Would Be Mine: Paul and Marie Pireaud in the Great War* (Harvard University Press: Cambridge 2006)

- Brian Harrison, ed., *The History of the University of Oxford, Vol. VIII: The Twentieth Century* (Oxford Scholarship Online: October 2011, Print 1994)

- Eric Hobsbawm and Terrence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge 1983)

- Richard Holmes, *Tommy: The British Soldier on the Western Front* (HarperCollins: London 2004)

- Michael Howard, *The Invention of Peace: Reflections on War and International Order* (Yale University Press: New Haven 2000)

- Samuel Hynes, *The Soldiers' Tale: Bearing Witness to Modern War* (Penguin Books: New York 1998)

- Hynes, *The Edwardian Turn of Mind* (Random House: London 1992, 1st ed. 1968)

- Hynes, *A War Imagined: The First World War and English Culture* (Pimlico: London 1990)

- Ian Isherwood, *Remembering the Great War: Writing and Publishing the Experience of World War I* (I.B. Taurus: London 2017)

- John Keegan, *The Face of Battle* (Viking Press: New York 1976)

- Susan Kent, *Making Peace: The Reconstruction of Gender in Interwar Britain* (Princeton University Press: Princeton 1993)

- Kent, *Aftershocks: Politics and Trauma in Britain, 1918-1931* (Palgrave Macmillan: New York 2009)

- Eric Leed, *No Man's Land: Combat & Identity in World War I* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge 1979)

- Peter Leese, *Shell Shock: Traumatic Neurosis and the British Soldiers of the First World War* (Palgrave Macmillan: London 2002)

- Bård Mæland and Paul Otto Brunstad, *Enduring Military Boredom: From 1750 to Present* (Palgrave Macmillan: London 2009)

- Helen McCartney, *Citizen Soldiers: The Liverpool Territorials in the First World War* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge 2005)

- Jessica Meyer, *Men of War: Masculinity and the First World War in Britain* (Palgrave Macmillan: New York 2011)

- Martin Middlebrook, *First Day on the Somme: 1 July 1916* (W.W. Norton & Co.: New York 1972)

- George Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars* (Oxford University Press: Oxford 1990)

- Michael Neiberg, *Dance of the Furies: Europe at the Outbreak of World War I* (Belknap Press, Harvard: Cambridge, MA 2011)

- David Newsome, *Godliness & Good Learning: Four Studies on a Victorian Ideal* (John Murray: London 1961)

- Peter Paret, ed., *Makers of Modern Strategy: From Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age* (Princeton University Press: Princeton 1986)

- Michael Paris, *Warrior Nation: Images of War in British Popular Culture, 1850-2000* (Reaktion: London 2000)

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

- William Philpott, *Three Armies on the Somme: The First Battle of the Twentieth Century* (Alfred A. Knopf: New York 2010)

- Philpott, *War of Attrition: Fighting the First World War* (Overlook: New York 2014)

- Aribert Reimann, *Der grosse Krieg der Sprachen: Untersuchungen zur historischen Semantik in Deutschland und England zur Zeit des Ersten Weltkriegs* (Kartext: Essen 2000)

- David Reynolds, *The Long Shadow: The Legacies of the Great War in the Twentieth Century* (W.W. Norton & Co. New York 2014)

- Michael Roper, *The Secret Battle: Emotional Survival in the Great War* (Manchester University Press: Machester 2009)

- Anthony Seldon and David Walsh, *Public Schools and the Great War: The Generation Lost* (Pen &Sword: Barnsley 2013)

- Gary Sheffield, *Forgotten Victory: The First World War, Myths and Realities* (Headline: London 2001)

- Sheffield, *Leadership in the Trenches: Officer-Man Relations, Morale and Discipline in the British Army in the Era of the First World War* (Macmillan: London 2000)

- David Silbey, *The British Working Class and Enthusiasm for War, 1914-1916* (Frank Cass: New York 2005)

- Leonard V. Smith, *Between Munity and Obedience: The Case of the French Fifth Infantry Division during World War I* (Princeton University Press: Princeton 1994)

- Smith, *The Embattled Self: French Soldiers' Testimony of the Great War* (Cornell University Press: Ithaca 2014)

- Patricia Meyer Spacks, *Boredom: The Literary History of a State of Mind* (University of Chicago Press: Chicago 1995)

- David Stevenson, *With Our Backs to the Wall: Victory and Defeat in 1918* (Harvard, Belknap Press: Cambridge, MA 2011)

- Randall Stevenson, *Literature and the Great War, 1914-1918* (Oxford University Press: Oxford 2013)

- Christopher Stray, ed., Oxford Classics: Teaching and Learning, 1800-2000 (Duckworth: London 2007)

- Dan Todman, *The Great War: Myth and Memory* (Hambledon and London: London 2005)

- Peter Toohey, *Boredom: A Lively History* (Yale University Press: New Haven 2011)

- Daniel Ussishkin, *Morale: A Modern British History* (Oxford University Press: Oxford 2017)

- Alexander Watson, *Enduring the Great War: Combat, Morale, and Collapse in the German and British Armies, 1914-1918* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge 2008)

- Janet Watson, *Fighting Different Wars: Experience, Memory, and the First World War in Britain* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge 2004)

- Jay Winter, ed., *The Cambridge History of the First World War*, 3 Vols. (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge 2014)

- Winter, *The Great War and the British People* (Palgrave Macmillan: Basingstoke 2003 – 1st ed. 1986)

- Winter et al., eds., *The Great War and the Twentieth Century* (Yale University Press: New Haven 2000)

- Winter, *Remembering War: The Great War Between Memory and History in the Twentieth Century* (Yale University Press: New Haven 2006)

- Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge 1998)

- Robert Wohl, *The Generation of 1914* (Harvard University Press: Cambridge, MA, 1981)

- Benjamin Ziemann, *Violence and the German Soldier in the Great War: Killing, Dying, Surviving*, transl. Andrew Evans (Bloomsbury: London 2017)

Peer-reviewed Journal Articles

- Carol Acton, 'Writing and Waiting: The First World War Correspondence between Vera Brittain and Roland Leighton', *Gender & History,* Vol. 11, No. 1 (April 1999), pp. 54-83

- Jay Brower, 'The Abject Mundanity of Murder', *Journal of Media Ethics,* 32:2 (2017), pp. 138-139

- Daniel F. Chambliss, 'The Mundanity of Excellence: An Ethnographic Report on Stratification and Olympic Swimmers', *Sociological Theory,* 7:1 (1989), pp. 70-86

- Heather Ellis, "'A Manly and Generous Discipline?': Classical Studies and Generational Conflict in Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Century Oxford', *History of Universities,* Vol. 25, No. 2 (2011) pp. 1-39

- David Englander, 'Soldiering and Identity: Reflections on the Great War', *War in History,* Vol. 1, No. 3 (1994), pp. 300-318

- Stuart Hallifax, '"Over by Christmas": British Popular Opinion and the Short War in 1914', *First World War Studies,* Vol. 1, No. 2 (October 2010), pp. 103-121

- Isherwood, 'When the Hurlyburly's Done/When the Battle's Lost and Won: Service, Suffering, and Survival of Civil War and Great War Veterans', *The Journal of the Civil War Era,* Vol. 9, No. 1 (March 2019), pp. 109-132

- James H. Jackson, Jr., '*Alltagsgeschichte,* Social Science History and the Study of Mundane Movements in 19th-Century Germany', *Historical Social Research/Historische Sozialforschung,* Vol. 16, No. 1 (57) (1991) pp. 23-47

- Jorg Kustermans and Erik Ringmar, 'Modernity, Boredom, and War: A Suggestive Essay', *Review of International Studies,* Vol. 37, No. 4 (October 2011), pp. 1775-1792

- Jun Liu, ‘From “moments of madness” to the “politics of mundanity” – researching digital media and contentious collective actions in China’, *Social Movement Studies,* Vol. 16, No. 4 (2017), pp. 418-432

- Edward Madigan, ‘“Sticking to a Hateful Task”: Resilience, Humour, and British Understandings of Combat Courage, 1914-1918’, *War in History,* Vol. 20, No. 1 (January 2013), pp. 76-98

- Joel Morley, ‘Dad “never said much” but…Young Men and Great War Veterans in Day-to-Day Life in Interwar Britain’, *Twentieth Century British History,* Vol. 29, No. 2 (2017), pp. 199-224

- Alexander Nordlund, ‘“Done My Bit”: British Soldiers, the 1918 Armistice, and Understanding the First World War’, *Journal of Military History,* Vol. 81, No. 2 (April 1917) pp. 436-445

- Nordlund, ‘A Misfit in All Times: H.G. Wells and “The Last War”’, *Modern Intellectual History,* Vol. 15, No. 3 (November 2018), pp. 747-771

- Robin Prior and Trevor Wilson, ‘Paul Fussell at War’, *War in History,* 1:1 (1994) pp. 63-80

- Roper and Rachel Duffett, ‘Family Legacies in the Centenary: Motives for First World War Commemoration among British and German Descendants’, *History & Memory,* Vol. 30, No. 1 (Spring/Summer 2018), pp. 76-115

- Smith, ‘Paul Fussell’s *The Great War and Modern Memory*: Twenty-Five Years Later’, *History and Theory,* 40 (May 2001), pp. 241-260

Websites and Online Articles

- 14-18-Now: WWI Centenary Arts Commission, URL: https://www.1418now.org.uk/

- ‘1914-2014 Wartime Wadham Centenary’, Wadham College – University of Oxford, URL: https://www.wadham.ox.ac.uk/news/2014/february/1914-2014-wartime-wadham-centenary

- Tony Allen, ‘Tommy’s Mail & the Army Post Office – The Unit Mail Censor’, Picture Postcards from the Great War, 1914-1918, URL: https://www.worldwar1postcards.com/soldiers-mail.php

- Nazlin Bhimani, ‘“Long periods of boredom punctuated by moments of sheer terror”; or, surviving the PhD”, *UCL Centre for Doctoral Education* (8 August 2018), URL: https://blogs.ucl.ac.uk/cde/2018/08/08/long-periods-of-boredom-punctuated-by-moments-of-sheer-terror-or-surviving-the-phd/

‘Find War Dead’, Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC), URL: https://www.cwgc.org/find/find-war-dead

- Ute Daniel et al., *International Encyclopedia of the First World War* (Freie Universität Berlin: Berlin 2014), DOI: 10.15463/ie1418.10362

Deaths Registered in October-December 1982’, in Indexes to birth, marriage, and death registrations (1837-2007), FreeBMD. URL: https://www.freebmd.org.uk/cgi/information.pl?r=268845048:9857&d=bmd_1552347617&scan=1

‘Deaths Registered in July-September 1982’, in Indexes to birth, marriage, and death registrations (1837-2007), FreeBMD. URL: https://www.freebmd.org.uk/cgi/information.pl?r=268313048:1281&d=bmd_1552347617&scan=1