

North East Research Forum for First World War Studies

New Perspectives on the First World War and Its Legacies

18 June 2015, 12.00am-4.00pm – Hatfield College, Durham University – Durham

Following a successful inaugural event at Northumbria University in May, we are very pleased to invite you to the second event of the North East Research Forum for First World War Studies. This workshop, kindly funded by the Department of History at Durham University, will showcase current research in First World War Studies undertaken in the North East.

The purpose of this event and others to be organised by the network is to facilitate regional links and collaborations, to foster cross-disciplinary conversation and bring together academic staff, students and heritage and museum professionals.

The event will take place on **Thursday, 18 June 2015, from 12.00am to 4.30pm**, in the **Birley Room, Hatfield College, North Bailey, Durham DH1 3RQ**. A light lunch, tea and coffee will be served. Please let us know, if you have any special dietary requirements.

If you would like to attend, please register by e-mailing Dr André Keil (andre.keil@durham.ac.uk) by Monday, 15th June 2015 at the latest.

Programme

12.00 – 1.00: Arrival and Lunch

1.00 – 2.15: *New Perspectives on the Great War and its Political Legacies*

Matthew Johnson (Durham): Khaki in the House of Commons: British Members of Parliament in the Armed Forces during the Great War

André Keil (Durham): In Defence of British Liberty? The National Council for Civil Liberties and the British State during the First World War

2.15 – 2.45: Coffee Break

2.45 – 4.00: *Literary Perspectives on the Great War*

Tommy Stephenson (Durham): ‘Don't those shells split 'em!’ Killing Germans in Boy's literature, 1914-1918

Katherine Baxter (Northumbria): ‘All seemed to be foreigners – judging from their accents’: Humour and Multilingualism in Popular Fiction of the First World War

3.45 – 4.15: General Meeting of the North East Research Forum for First World War Studies

Abstracts

Session I: New Perspectives on the Great War and its Political Legacies

Matthew Johnson (Durham): Khaki in the House of Commons: British Members of Parliament in the Armed Forces during the Great War

The Great War was widely seen in Britain as a struggle for civilian and constitutional standards of government against the evils of ‘Prussian militarism’. Yet the British political class itself was by no means a purely ‘civilian’ caste. During the war 264 MPs – some 40 per cent of the membership of the House of Commons – volunteered to serve in the armed forces. These men occupied a unique and controversial position both within Parliament and in the forces. A shared experience of military service could provide a common identity, and even a basis for common action, for MPs from rival parties, and many of these men came to support an apparently ‘military’ agenda at Westminster. At the same time, fighting MPs could act as agents of parliamentary oversight and control over the military establishment. Yet the importance of these ‘Service Members’ was not only evident in the realm of civil–military relations, and this paper explores the significance and consequences of attempts by Service Members to claim a special political authority as the ‘representatives’ of the armed forces in the House of Commons, to offer a new perspective on wartime British debates about the workings of representative politics, the nature of political citizenship, and the authority of Parliament as an institution.

André Keil (Durham): In Defence of British Liberty? The National Council for Civil Liberties and the British State during the First World War

This paper will discuss the emergence of modern civil liberties activism in Britain during the First World War. It will use the example of the National Council for Civil Liberties (NCCL, founded in 1916) to shed light on the changing relationship between wartime state and its citizens. The NCCL was founded in 1916 to campaign against the introduction of military and industrial conscription in Britain yet it soon also began to campaign for ‘British freedom’, democracy and civil liberties such as the freedom of speech and the freedom of assembly. This paper will argue that within the NCCL a new language of citizenship and individual rights was developed that later influenced discourses about human rights. At the same time, the organisation also developed and tested new forms of activism such as legal aid, the monitoring and reporting of civil liberties violations and press campaigning. On the whole, the paper will argue that the confrontation with the repressive wartime state facilitated the emergence of the modern civil liberties movement that would later influence and shape the emergence of human rights activism in Britain.

Session 2: Literary Perspectives on the Great War

Tommy Stephenson (Durham): 'Don't those shells split 'em!' Killing Germans in Boy's literature, 1914-1918

An outpouring of hatred and grief flooded British culture during the First World War. Whether a product of officially sponsored work, or individual effort, the artistic and literary expressions of these feelings have been much studied over the last few decades. Yet many questions remain about how the British understood the conflict at the time. Did they regard the war as a conflict between great powers? Or as a war to exterminate an incompatible culture? Drawing from Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau and Annette Becker's contention that youth culture represents a simplified version of societal values, this paper examines how authors explained the nature of the war to children. Specifically, it explores how authors depicted killing Germans in texts for British boys. The ways adults used literature to explain the conflict to the youngest members of society, says much about how they felt the war should be regarded. To further break down the violence depicted, the paper analyses who killed Germans, how they killed them, and why they killed them. The presentation today focuses on who was doing the killing, and how this differed based on genre and date written. The rise of 'revenge killing' in boys fiction provides an interesting foil to the pre-war focus on chivalry and non-fiction focus on sacrifice. The presentational also analyses the potential relationship between sacrifice and slaughter. It will close with a discussion on the lasting impact of the sources, which provide an interesting lens into the acceptability of violence in British culture post-war.

Katherine Baxter (Northumbria): 'All seemed to be foreigners – judging from their accents': Humour and Multilingualism in Popular Fiction of the First World War

This paper looks at the ways in which foreign language encounters are deployed in popular fiction of the First World War. The paper takes as its case study P.C. Wren's *Cupid in Africa* (1920), which follows the trials and tribulations of a young officer, Bertram, full of trepidation as he leads his Indian colonial troops into battle in East Africa. Bertram's struggles to master himself and his troops are frequently dramatized through instances of miscommunication and linguistic frustration and Wren presents these instances to comic effect. Moreover, Wren's text provides footnoted translations to the numerous instances of Hindustani and Swahili that pepper the novel throughout. These footnotes often serve to heighten the comic ironies of the situations in which Bertram finds himself. This paper will ask: why does Wren mobilize a specifically language-based humour so insistently in his text, and how does the presence of multilingual narrative elements in popular literature of the Great War nuance our understanding of such works?