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IN THE SHADOW OF WAR

**Continuities and Discontinuities
in the construction of the
masculine identities of British soldiers, 1914 - 1924**

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Thesis
UNIVERSITY OF GREENWICH LIBRARY

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements of the University of Greenwich
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

July 2002

ABSTRACT

The upheavals of the cataclysm of the First World War reverberated through every corner of British society; how society was reconstructed afterwards is the subject of enormous critical debate. This study examines how masculinities were disrupted and reconstructed during and after the war. It is a study of British men, previously civilians, who became servicemen in the First World War. It aims to map the continuities and discontinuities in the construction of their masculine identities during war and in its aftermath in the 1920s.

Pioneered by feminist scholars concerned with analysing the historical construction of femininity, the study of gender relations has become a significant area of historical enquiry. This has resulted in a substantial body of historical scholarship on the history of masculinities and the increasing visibility of men as gendered subjects whose masculinities are lived and imagined. This thesis is informed by, and engages with, the histories of masculinities. It also draws on recent historical research on the cultural legacy of the war.

The first chapter explores the subjective responses to becoming a soldier through an examination of personal memoirs; largely unpublished sources drawn from memories and written or recorded by men as narratives of their wartime experiences. The subject of the second chapter is shell shock. The outbreak of shell shock among the troops aroused anxieties about masculinity. The competing versions of masculinities which emerged in military and medical discourses is examined. Returning to individual memoirs, the chapter examines how men produced their own representations of the shell shocked man contesting other versions. Chapters 3 and 4 focus their attention on the relatively neglected subject of ex-servicemen's organisations and the collectivities of ex-servicemen. During and after the war a movement of ex-servicemen emerged to campaign for justice and fair treatment. Comradeship underpinned the attempt to forge an ex-serviceman identity and an examination of veterans' publications, a largely neglected source, has revealed the tensions and conflicts which contested this form of masculine identity. Masculine identities, as citizens and workers, presented a challenge to the potential for a unified, apolitical movement. Unemployment was a challenge to male identities traditionally secured through work and masculine codes of independence.

Unlike many studies, this thesis intentionally straddles war and peace. It begins in 1914 and ends a decade later in a society restored to peace but still essentially in the shadow of war.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	2
Chapter One	19
'Incidents that haunt me'	
<i>Soldiers' Stories</i>	
Chapter Two	75
'War makes sane men mad'	
<i>Shell shocked soldiers and competing masculinities</i>	
Chapter Three	148
'Soldiers from the war returning'	
<i>Comradeship and the imagined community of ex-servicemen</i>	
Chapter Four	203
'We are citizens... we are workers'	
<i>Broken bodies and the body politic</i>	
CONCLUSION	272
BIBLIOGRAPHY	282

INTRODUCTION

The images and iconography of the Great War of 1914-18 still resonate in the imagination today. Trench warfare, gas attacks, barbed wire, poppies and No Man's Land are shared cultural referents of that war. The pity of war remains entrenched in collective memory. Prior to, and especially during, the eightieth anniversary of the Armistice in 1998 the First World War was subjected to a new wave of cultural representations when a spate of novels, films, television documentaries and journalism appeared. In the 1990s Pat Barker's *Regeneration* trilogy and Sebastian Faulks's *Birdsong* (1994) became best sellers. In a review of the film, *The Trench* (1999), the directorial debut of the novelist William Boyd, the young male reviewer wrote 'the trenches are scars on the national psyche; the War was the fulcrum of the modern age. People like me can't imagine it.'¹

Yet we continue to imagine it. As recently as May of this year, the BBC produced a documentary series, *The Trench*, in which a group volunteers from Hull, men between eighteen and thirty-eight years of age, volunteered to recreate the experiences of the 10th battalion of the East Yorkshire Regiment. The First World War, now in supposedly authentically created trenches, was once again the subject of imaginative recreation. The persistence of such popular imaginings have been mirrored in the renewed and substantial body of academic writing about the First World War emerging from across a range of disciplines from military and diplomatic history, economic, social and gender history to literary and cultural studies. The war and its impact continue to be

¹ Andrew O'Hagan, *The Daily Telegraph*, September 17, 1999

the subjects of intense scrutiny and debate, with previously accepted conventions challenged and revised. The meaning of the war continues to be a struggle over representation and a conflict over which dominant memory of the war remains in the collective and national memory.

The image of the soldier is central to all the popular cultural representations which are testimony to the persistence of the imaginings of a powerful form of masculinity. War has been one of the most gendered of human activities; soldiering one of the most sexually differentiated. The imaginings of masculinity are central to this study which explores the lived experiences of servicemen in the First World War and in the period immediately following it. Within the extensive body of historical research which exists on the First World War, servicemen are ever-present as objects of study, their experiences filtered through official statistics, surveys and reports. In addition, their attitudes to war have largely been represented and refracted through the literary output of, for example, Siegfried Sassoon, Wilfred Owen and Robert Graves. Yet, their presence as gendered subjects, their *masculinities* have been largely left unexplored. This study addresses the omission by making an examination of the masculinities of servicemen its central focus. It explores the extent to which the war precipitated changes to former codes of masculinity. It aims to map the continuities and discontinuities in the construction of the masculinities of British soldiers in the context of the war but its trajectory moves into the post war period of the 1920s. War brought the experience of soldiering to a significant section of the male population, men who were generally

soldiers 'for the duration only'.² The war experience did not end with the cessation of hostilities but was framed in private memories as well as in public representations. The meanings the men sought to give to those experiences and the dislocations they felt in their sense of themselves as men determined the selection of sources and how they were used. I have prioritised the writings, mainly unpublished and some neglected, of the unknown men who volunteered for war service and who, on their return, constituted the body of men known as ex-servicemen. I have also submitted official sources and public documents to new interrogations as to what insights they might yield into the structuring and restructuring of masculine identities.

In recent years the objective of 'making men visible as gendered subjects'³ and to interrogate the construction of masculinity has produced a significant contribution to the study and understanding of sexual difference and its manifestations which has been so much part of a feminist approach. For historians, this has entailed exploring the historical diversity of masculinities and their formation within specific historical contexts. The collection of essays in *Manful Assertions* edited by John Tosh and Michael Roper (1991) illuminates the social and historical production of, for example, the Respectable Working Man, Imperial Man, the post-war Public School Man and Company Man. These varied masculinities demonstrate the shift in men's gender identities in different historical periods, particularly at times of social change and upheaval, while at the same time they indicate that male power is more contingent than the term patriarchy allows.

² Estimates of the percentage vary: Jay Winter estimates that it was almost fifty per cent; others like Bourke suggest it was nearer twenty two per cent.

³ Michael Roper and John Tosh (eds), *Manful Assertions: Masculinities in Britain since 1800*, London: Routledge, 1991, p. 1

The use of the term *masculinities* emphasises the plurality and diversity of men's experiences, attitudes, beliefs and so on and which, in turn, are structured by class, sexual orientation, ethnicity, age and other categories marking difference. Moreover, in their analysis, Tosh and Roper argue that masculinities are affirmed not only by the social roles ascribed to men but in their lived experiences, in subjective identities.

The historiography of pre-war masculinity provides a framework for interpreting the changes war may have wrought on prevailing ideals of manhood. Much of the work focussed on manliness as a particular construct of Victorian and Edwardian middle-class manhood, associated in particular with the public schools.⁴ The qualities of physical strength, endurance and courage were developed in the new cult of athleticism. Games played in the public schools had become codified and rationalised, representing an instrument of discipline for boys learning how to be men with future careers in government, the military and the administration, both in Britain and in the Empire. While the historiography of dominant forms of masculinity prior to the First World War are pertinent to this study, elsewhere evidence points to the challenges to hegemonic masculinity at the end of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century. Competing versions of masculinity are constructed in relation to the 'other', women and other men; normative male heterosexuality always defined in opposition to homosexuality. As Lynne Segal argues 'masculinity is never the undivided, seamless construction it becomes in its symbolic manifestation'.⁵

⁴ See, for example, J. A. Mangan and James Walvin (eds), *Manliness and Morality: Middle-Class Masculinity in Britain and America, 1800-1914*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987

⁵ Lynne Segal, *Slow Motion: Changing Masculinities, Changing Men*, London: Virago, 1990, p. 108

The rise of an organised and increasingly assertive feminist movement claiming rights to social and economic independence and political enfranchisement constituted a challenge to male authority. The challenge was also taking place in the family when the authority of the father was perceptibly shifted by a series of legislative acts such as the Married Women's Property Acts of 1870 and 1882 and the Guardianship of Infants Act of 1886.

The same period saw the emergence of non-normative male sexual identities. Medical, scientific and psychological discourses sought to distinguish the manly man from the homosexual. Changes in the law, notably the Labouchere Amendment to the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885 made all homosexual acts, private and public, illegal. This was most famously applied in the Oscar Wilde trials which have been seen as a critical moment in the opposition between homosexual and heterosexual identities. The apparent collapse of the boundaries of sexual difference provoked a constellation of anxieties about what has been termed the troubling 'sexual anarchy' of the pre-war years.⁶

With the outbreak of the First World War, gender relations were reinscribed in the most traditional ways by calling on perceived age old truths about sexual difference: men as warriors, protecting the fragile sex thereby appearing to reassert the sexual order. The extent to which the war altered prevailing ideas about gender relations has been a question explored in particular by feminist historians seeking to analyse how femininity was disrupted, constructed and reconstructed during and after the First World War.

⁶ See Elaine Showalter, *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin de Siècle*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990; Ed Cohen, *Talk on the Wilde Side*, London: Routledge, 1993

Susan Kingsley Kent has studied the restructuring of gender relations in the interwar period and its impact on the feminist movement. She argues that the war was conceived in gendered terms and that, in the post war period, 'sexual conflict and polarization between the sexes provided one of the few adequate means by which the political, economic and social upheaval occasioned by the war could be depicted.'⁷ Sexualised discourses were appropriated as part of the attempt to re-establish the gender order and sexual conflict, based on new discourses of sexual difference, was apparent, in particular in the competitive post war labour market. However, Kent's case that the war was represented predominantly through sexual metaphor and imagery is overstated and predicated on an assumption of monolithic masculinity invested with undifferentiated power to dominate women. Her reading takes no account of the disruptive effects of war on notions of masculinity which, for example, Elaine Showalter explored in her illuminating study of male war neuroses. The effects of shell shock resulting in male hysteria, she argues, undermined 'an ideology of absolute and natural differences between women and men.'⁸ More fragmentary and contradictory masculinities emerge from Showalter's study.

However, the arguments about the disruption and reconstruction of femininity during the war raise the possibility of different but equally troubling questions relating to ideas of masculinity in the post-war years. The theoretical frameworks for understanding how masculinities are produced have taken account of the institutionalisation of

⁷ Susan Kingsley Kent, *Making Peace: The Reconstruction of Gender in Interwar Britain*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993, pp. 9-10

⁸ Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady, Women, Madness and English Culture, 1830-1980*, London: Virago, 1985, p. 168

masculinity in relation to the state, the labour market and the family⁹ and the complex ways in which dominant definitions of masculinity are affirmed or contested. Thus, as it has been aptly summarised, 'manliness is a contested territory; it is an ideological battlefield'.¹⁰ David Morgan's argument that 'of all the sites where masculinities are constructed, reproduced and deployed, those associated with war and the military are some of the most direct'¹¹ is pertinent in the context of this study. However, by exploring some of the contradictions and ambivalences in military life he suggests that the linkages between masculinity and the military are, in fact, more tenuous than they might appear.

Joanna Bourke has made a significant contribution to the study of men and the First World War. *Dismembering the Male* approaches the interaction between masculinity and the First World War 'only through the corporeal body'.¹² In an exhaustively detailed account of the physical degradation and mutilation of men, she vividly demonstrates the damage wrought on men's bodies on an unprecedented scale. The ways in which the male body was disciplined, inspected and policed by military, medical and civilian institutions are thoroughly delineated. She also explores the relationship between the body and the mind through her analysis of malingering in

⁹ See, for example, R. W. Connell, *Gender and Power*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989

¹⁰ Nigel Edley and Margaret Wetherell, 'Masculinity, power and identity', in Mairtin Mac an Ghail (ed.), *Understanding Masculinities: Social Relations and Cultural Relations*, Buckingham: Open University Press, 1996, p. 106

¹¹ David H. J. Morgan 'Theatre of War: Combat, the Military and Masculinities' in Harry Brod and Michael Kaufman (eds), *Theorizing Masculinities*, London: Sage, 1994, p. 165

¹² Joanna Bourke, *Dismembering the Male: Men's Bodies, Britain and the Great War*, London: Reaktion Books, 1996, p. 27

relation to war neuroses. A major preoccupation is with the debate about the decisiveness of the war in changing British society and as the 'contending authorities waged war over the male body' Bourke argues that 'the techniques used to discipline men within military contexts were applied to civilian workers between the wars.'¹³ After the war as the country forgot the corporeal crisis, the disabled and maimed found themselves occupying a marginalised existence which they shared with disabled children and injured workmen. Nevertheless, Bourke's final conclusion is that 'military experiences led to a greater sharing of gender identities'.¹⁴ Yet, gender identities and indeed masculinity itself cannot be fully fathomed only through the body. In Bourke's analysis, the psychic and social dimensions of gender and the interaction between social roles, social relations and subjectivities are left unexplored. Similarly, I suggest, the reiterated assertion that 'most men returned gratefully, and happily, to the domestic fold'¹⁵, although modified sometimes to acknowledge that returning was not always easy, also fails to take account of the family as a site of contestation and negotiation of masculinity and femininity. Moreover, increased female emancipation, politically, socially and sexually as well as their increased presence in the labour market had turned 'home' into a different space.

In contrast to Bourke's analysis, Graham Dawson's approach in *Soldier Heroes* is to interrogate how masculinities are shaped by a range of cultural representations which, in turn, constitute subjective identities. He argues that 'masculine identities are

¹³ *ibid.* pp. 30, 252

¹⁴ *ibid.* p. 252

¹⁵ *ibid.* p. 167

lived out in the flesh, but fashioned in the imagination'; the soldier hero being a powerful form of imagined masculinity.'¹⁶ Dawson examines the imperialist masculinities of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries embodied in two popular heroes, Havelock of Lucknow and Lawrence of Arabia. Adopting a Kleinian psychoanalytical framework, he explores how the imagining of masculinities through phantasy organise a sense of self through the interaction of the psychic and social dimensions of gender. His insights into the processes involved in establishing a relatively coherent sense of a masculine self have made a complex but valuable contribution to the theorising of masculinities.

Some of his insights have influenced the way in which some of the sources in this study have been used. A further influence has come from the important contribution made by historians of the cultural legacy of the First World War. Historians have long debated the impact of the First World War on British society trying to disentangle pre-war trends from post-war developments and to assess the extent to which the war accelerated or precipitated change. Arthur Marwick was one of the early exponents of the view that the 'deluge' of war fundamentally changed society after 1918.¹⁷ His views have been modified in the light of further studies of class formation and class structure as well as social policies, standards of living and health and demographic changes. The debates about the extent to which war changed society have incorporated perspectives on wider cultural discourses about how the war was remembered.

¹⁶ Graham Dawson, *Soldier Heroes: British Adventure, Empire and the Imaginings of Masculinities*, London: Routledge, 1994, p. 1

¹⁷ Arthur Marwick, *War and Social Change in the Twentieth Century*, London: Longman, 1974

An early and influential work which explored how the war was 'remembered, conventionalised and mythologised'¹⁸ is Paul Fussell's *The Great War and Modern Memory* (1975). He argues that the war represented a rupturing of pre-war cultural traditions and modernism, which had developed pre war, came of age during the war and in its aftermath. Fussell identifies the use of irony as an example of a new mode of expression appropriate to convey the meaning of war, in opposition to the traditional shibboleths of patriotism and Victorian certainties and ideals incorporating notions of honour, glory and valour in battle.

In his illuminating study, *A War Imagined* (1992), Samuel Hynes also examines the cultural legacy of the war in recognition that the war was 'the great military and political event of its time; but it was also the great *imaginative* event'.¹⁹ While stressing the continuities with pre-war traditions, he suggests the radical discontinuity between the past and present opened up a space where the Myth of War was created in which:

a generation of innocent young men, their heads full of high abstractions like Honour, Glory, and England, went off to war to make the world safe for democracy. They were slaughtered in stupid battle planned by stupid generals. Those who survived were shocked, disillusioned and embittered by their war experiences and saw that their real enemies were not the Germans, but the old men who had lied to them. They rejected the values of the society that had sent them to war, and in doing so separated their own generation from the past and from their cultural inheritance.²⁰

¹⁸ Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975, Preface

¹⁹ Samuel Hynes, *A War Imagined: The First World War and English Culture*, London: Pimlico 1992, p. ix

²⁰ *ibid.* p. xii

The themes of betrayal and disillusionment formed part of the way in which the war was mythologised particularly, as Hynes argues, in the late 1920s and the following decade. Bitterness and disillusionment may constitute powerful and resonant elements of a particular imagining of war and its expression but they could not preclude others. The experience of grief and loss touched millions of individuals while at the same time its public expression produced a culture of commemoration. Jay Winter's study of mourning, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning* (1995) explores how bereaved communities expressed their grief, publicly and privately in the process of coming to terms with their loss. Concentrating on the theme of loss, his significant contention is that 'the Great War brought the search for an appropriate language of loss to the centre of cultural and political life'.²¹ In his detailed analysis of a rich array of European cultural forms, film, painting, literature and the social practices of commemoration, Winter dissents from previous debates about the 'onward ascent of modernism'. Instead he points to the enduring appeal of many traditional motifs:

The strength of what may be termed 'traditional' forms in social and cultural life, in art, poetry, and ritual, lay in their power to mediate bereavement. The cutting edge of 'modern memory', its multi-faceted sense of dislocation, paradox, and the ironic, could express anger and despair, and did so in enduring ways; it was melancholic, but it could not heal.²²

The need for consolation and the search for meaning was widespread after the war. The ways in which the war was remembered were critical to the mourning process

²¹ Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995, p. 5

²² *ibid.*

and acts of commemoration for both individuals and the nation. Understanding the processes of remembering *and* forgetting as well as the mythologies created from war experiences have therefore been crucial elements in the cultural historiography of the First World War.

The theorising of masculinities and subjective experiences as well as the literature on memory and commemoration of the First World War have informed this study. The chapters follow a form of narrative following men's journeys to the front and then their return home. I wanted to discover how men represented their experiences and how, in the process, their sense of themselves as men was reflected. I turned to the written, predominantly unpublished memoirs of ordinary soldiers who served in their varying capacities, mainly on the Western Front. The memoirs were sometimes based on the diaries which many of these men kept and as relatives frequently preserved their letters they too were incorporated into memoirs. Others were personal narratives often carefully constructed from memories, written and revised after the war was over. They are self-reflective texts and as such, a rich source for interrogating the ways men recorded their experiences but also the language they used to represent themselves and their reactions to those experiences. In addition, the sound recordings held in the Sound Archive in the Imperial War Museum in London provided another rich source. The collection of oral interviews with veterans of the First World War were the result of a project started in 1973. The interviewees were drawn from a range of men of different classes and geographical locations. They were primarily concerned with men's experiences of war and their remembered accounts. Nevertheless, oral histories are never literal narrations and therefore open to differently - inflected interpretations. The sources represent, then, personal memories the use of which brings methodological

issues into play. These have been explored in Chapter One which examines soldiers' stories and the compulsion to re-tell stories and to return to the memories of war. Memories were recalled at different moments in men's life histories and were therefore shaped by both past and present experiences. The meanings attached to war experiences and the language in which they were expressed raises the question of interpretation; these sources bear testimony to the emotional lives of soldiers. Language and memory provide a way of trying to understand the dynamics of subjectivity giving clues as to how masculine identities were disrupted during the war. The chosen themes of the chapter emerged from the sources; *going to war* provided the opportunity for exploring the different motivations which impelled men to volunteer; *estrangement* reflected men's increasing estrangement from their former selves and from those at home while *loss* explores how men reacted to their perceived loss of themselves. It also incorporates the profound sense of loss engendered by the death of comrades.

A major source of disruption to any coherent sense of masculine identity was war neuroses. Chapter Two examines the phenomenon known as shell shock as it was represented in military and medical discourses. The authorities tried to contend with the psychic effects of war on the troops within traditional military and medical terms. Psychological explanations of shellshock emerged to challenge traditional medical diagnoses. All the texts are open to different readings and I have examined the ways in which assumptions about masculinity are both hidden and explicit. The equation of male war neuroses with the hysteria associated with femininity, as Elaine Showalter argues, disturbed some traditional assumptions. However, shellshock invoked other disturbing representations of masculinity which also threatened traditional assumptions about normative masculinity. Although the subjective experience of shell shock is rarely

accessible for it is usually mediated through those who witnessed its effects or were authorised to deal with the consequences, the ways in which the shell shocked man is represented by his fellow men is a central theme of this chapter. In order to pursue this line of enquiry I interrogated personal memoirs and some published accounts for what they might reveal about whether men's perceptions of the shell shocked man challenge or confirm the categories adopted by the military and medical authorities to account for its incidence among certain groups of men.

Most personal accounts are framed by the events of the war itself with little or cursory attention given to the post-war period. Yet the process of the reintegration of men into society is critical to an analysis of the re-ordering of gender relations after the crisis of war and to the question to what extent this represented a transformation in gender relations as masculinities were reconstructed. In chapters 3 and 4 the study turns its focus on collective and public, rather than individual, identities. During the war, as sick and wounded men were discharged from the army, associations of ex-servicemen were formed in response to the problems associated with return. In the light of the perceived inadequacies in the treatment of veterans by the state and voluntary authorities, veterans organised collectively to redress their grievances. As many of the personal memoirs used here frequently end with Armistice, I found instead a little-used and largely neglected source of material in the journals of the ex-servicemen's organisations, *The Bulletin*, the journal of the National Federation of Discharged and Demobilised Sailors and Soldiers and *The Comrades Journal* of the Comrades of the Great War Association. In addition, the newspaper dedicated to the cause of ex-servicemen, *The Ex-Service Man* as well as the miscellaneous papers of, in particular, the National Union of Ex-Servicemen were examined. The voices which emerge from the

ex-servicemen's movement are never uniform for they represent a broad body of men with diverse opinions and perspectives. Moreover, in their differences they represent the tensions and negotiations involved in the struggle to create an ex-serviceman identity.

Stephen Ward and Graham Wootton, the official biographer of the British Legion, have written histories of the ex-servicemen's movements.²³ Ward's account appears in a comparative study of other European and American veteran's organisations which aimed to look at the impact of veterans on their respective societies in the aftermath of war. While Ward concludes that their impact was minimal, Wootton's argument is that 'they were probably high among the important agents of cultural change... by reconciling change with stability'.²⁴ Their accounts inevitably do not address the central pre-occupations of this study. Other accounts which analyse the experiences of Australian, French and German veterans have taken a more thematic approach.²⁵ All three are concerned with attitudes, perceptions and memory; the ways in which war experience was mediated by past affiliations and present discontents are given full weight. Prost's examination of the language of the veterans and their political opinions is particularly resonant with the pre-occupations about gender identity being examined here. Prost concludes that the political influence of veterans was limited and

²³ Stephen Ward, *The War Generation: Veterans of the First World War*, New York: Kennikat Press, 1975; Graham Wootton, *The Official History of the British Legion*, London: MacDonald and Evans, 1956; Graham Wootton, *The Politics of Influence: British ex-Servicemen, Cabinet decisions and cultural change, 1917-1957*, London: RKP, 1963

²⁴ Wootton, *Official History*, p. 47

²⁵ Stephen Garton, *The Cost of War: Australians Return*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996; Antoine Prost, *In the Wake of War: 'Les Anciens Combattants' and French Society 1914-1939*, Oxford: Berg, 1992; Robert Whalen, *Bitter Wounds: German Victims of the Great War 1914-1939*, London: Cornell University Press, 1984

their ambitious objectives unmet; more significant was 'the day-to-day evidence of camaraderie and mutual help. The prime aim of these unsophisticated and tirelessly devoted men was to serve their comrades.'²⁶ Elsewhere ex-servicemen's organisations have been easily dismissed; 'all these associations failed to elicit widespread support in part because their *raison d'être* was modelled too closely on a militaristic rhetoric of mateship'.²⁷ Bourke's dismissal is mainly predicated on her repudiation of male-bonding as anything other than the 'spurious rhetoric of wartime comradeship.'²⁸

Comradeship is a central pre-occupation of Chapter Three which explores the formation of the differing associations and interrogates the concept of comradeship which they all espoused and in which they made emotional investments. The contention here is that comradeship is a more complex concept than is sometimes acknowledged; how it was articulated in the veterans' movement and the meanings attributed to it will be examined. The commitment to their dead comrades influenced veterans' attitudes to the nation's memorialisation of the dead expressed in national and local commemorative acts. The ex-servicemen's publications, especially their journals and newspapers provide the major source for an examination of their competing representations of the ex-serviceman and questions the male identities they conferred.

Some ex-servicemen's organisations insisted on their political neutrality. Using some of the same sources, Chapter Four turns the attention to soldiers' politics; political struggles within and between the organisations and in the wider political and economic

²⁶ Prost, *In the Wake of War*, p. 148

²⁷ Bourke, *Dismembering the Male*, p. 155

²⁸ *ibid.* p. 153

context. For the first time in 1918, with the passing of the Representation of the People Act, previously disenfranchised men were incorporated into the national polity as citizens. This gave added weight to their demands for justice and for full inclusion in the nation for which they had served in war. The return to the much-heralded 'land fit for heroes' was a painful one for many ex-servicemen. Loss, a recurring motif, registered powerfully as veterans sought reintegration into civil society. Re-establishing relatively secure male identities associated with work proved elusive as ex-servicemen constituted a significant percentage of the unemployed resulting from the end of the post-war boom.

Assumptions about the masculinity embodied in the men who went to fight in the First World War, to do their duty for King, Country and Empire, seemed to re-establish traditional notions of sexual difference. The instability, sexual, political and social, of the pre-war years appeared to fade away as the nation harnessed its war effort on all fronts. However, the war unleashed new uncertainties and opened up new fissures. The search for consensus after the war was implicated in the reconstruction policies designed to herald the transition to peace. Received ideas about the soldier hero construct of masculinity, like male bodies, foundered in the onslaught of mechanised warfare. Soldiers are the subjects of this study. The ways in which war disturbed their imagined and lived masculine identities and how they were reconstructed in the transition to peace are its central themes.

Chapter One

'INCIDENTS THAT HAUNT ME'

Soldiers' Stories

'I, and I expect, those who returned, still go through it at the fireside or in nightmares.'¹ So wrote Hiram Sturdy in his memoir of the First World War. Sturdy was Scottish but enlisted at the recruiting station in Caerphilly, South Wales where he insisted on joining the artillery as a gunner. His war story, written twenty years after the war, unfolds in carefully crafted hand-written pages illustrated throughout by simple but evocative water colour drawings. The inability to forget and the involuntary recurrence of war memories, even in the apparent tranquility of the domestic hearth, was a condition Hiram Sturdy shared with many other veterans:

It is now ten years since those four years of slaughter came to an end, but there are incidents that stand out in my memory as if they happened but yesterday, incidents that stand out in every little detail, incidents that I shall never forget. In fact, incidents that haunt me.²

The repetition of the word 'incidents' signals the compulsion to return to the war experiences and to find a way of incorporating them and giving them meaning. The enduring effects of the war experience are suggested by their ability to recur as haunting

¹ Hiram Sturdy, IWM Con Shelf

² W. A. Quinton, IWM 79/35/1

memories. Shortly before his death in 1974, at the age of seventy seven, Edmund Blunden poignantly acknowledged:

My experiences in the First World War have haunted me all my life and for many days I have, it seemed, lived in that world rather than this.³

Re-remembering the war for many veterans 'became something like a life work'. This chapter examines the stories told by men of a central emotional experience in their life histories, that of being a soldier in the First World War. Memories, for some, continued to inhabit their psyches long after the war was over. In revealing the psychic as well as the social structuring of memory, the stories also reveal the impact of war on individual subjectivities. For war and the military represent one of the major sites where hegemonic masculinity is constructed and reproduced. Thus men's stories afford insights into the ways war confirmed, challenged or disrupted a form of hegemonic masculinity represented in the figure of the soldier hero. The personal stories which are the subjects of this chapter are not only men's stories but specifically *soldiers'* stories.

Samuel Hynes entitled his study and reflections on men's accounts of their experiences in the two world wars and the Vietnam war, *The Soldiers' Tale*.⁴ His concern too is with personal narratives, usually written retrospectively, and how these war memoirs form a particular class of writing which he distinguishes from autobiography, travel writing and history while suggesting they contain elements of each.

³ Quoted in Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977, p. 256

⁴ Samuel Hynes, *The Soldiers' Tale: Bearing Witness to Modern War*, London: Allen Lane, 1997

Stories are what he finally opted for, echoed by one of his storytellers, Philip Caputo. In the prologue to his memoir of the war in Vietnam, Caputo points to the complex layering in his apparently *simple* story, a story which is shared by other soldier writers in different wars:

This book does not pretend to be history. It has nothing to do with politics, power, strategy, influence, national interests, or foreign policy.... It is simply a story about war, about things men do in war and the things war does to them.⁵

The stories that soldiers tell are as Edmund Blunden wrote 'very local, limited, incoherent' while Richard Holmes, the military historian, similarly suggests that what is recalled is not the big picture but 'disconnected snatches of unrelated events glimpsed over the parapet of a trench, through a rifle -sight or across the tail-board of a truck'.⁶ The desire expressed by Blunden's 'I must go over the ground again'⁷ is also what compels other soldier writers to give form and meaning to these random images. Caputo also asserts the validity of individuals to bear witness to their actions in war and the legitimacy of their stories, perhaps perceived as marginal to or subversive of the official public narratives in cultural circulation. National imaginings at the outbreak of the First World War invoked the abstract qualities of the soldier hero or warrior knight, chivalrous, dutiful and patriotic, ready to fight and, if necessary die for King, Country

⁵ Philip Caputo, *A Rumor of War*, London: Macmillan, 1977, p. xi

⁶ Richard Holmes, *Firing Line*, London: Pimlico, 1994, p. 154

⁷ Edmund Blunden, *Undertones of War*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982, p. 8

and Empire. Nevertheless darker, less readily acknowledged images frequently lurk in opposition to officially sponsored models of masculinity.

For war demands of men that they transgress the moral values of civil society, to engage in violent acts against other human beings, to break the taboo of killing and 'to make use of powers that civil life forbids to the ordinary citizen'.⁸ The things war does to men are to inflict physical hardship, privation and suffering. And in the process, something else war does to men is to change them. Samuel Hynes, who was a Marine bomber in the Second World War, emphasises:

No man goes through a war without being changed by it, and in fundamental ways. And though that process will not be explicit in every narrative - not all men are self-conscious or reflective enough for that - it will be there. Change - *inner* change - is the other motive for war stories: not only what happened, but what happened to *me*.⁹

Similarly Richard Holmes, who also has personal experience of combat, writes:

Battle is a watershed even in the lives of those who survive it without visible scars.... Most ex-soldiers remember war with mixed feelings, aware that it has altered the way they look at the world, conscious that they have faced perhaps the greatest challenge of their lives, grateful for some elements of the experience and profoundly moved by others.¹⁰

In his study *No Man's Land*, Eric Leed examines the precise ways in which personalities were transformed by the First World War, how men were made strange by their

⁸ Martin Green, *The Adventurous Male*, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania University Press, 1993, p. 4

⁹ Hynes, *Soldiers' Tale* p. 3

¹⁰ Holmes, *Firing Line*, p. 394

experiences and how they drew on 'the cultural repertoires of meaning to define felt alterations in themselves.'¹¹ Soldiers' stories provide a means of examining these assertions for they are concerned with, and work through, the relationship of the past to the present and the interaction between public narratives of war and private memory. Individual reactions to war expressed within the narratives of soldiering also represent the struggle to establish meaning in the process of integrating the experiences into a sense of self.

The sources of the stories under consideration are both written and oral, from both working- class and middle-class men with experiences on the Western Front. Many ordinary men in the extraordinary circumstances of soldiering in the First World War kept diaries, wrote letters (albeit censored) and in some cases after the war, wrote their memoirs, sometimes based on their diaries and usually never intended for publication. Memoirs written after the war provide the main source with some additional material from letters and diaries. Some writers worked and re-worked their personal accounts long after the war was over, sometimes revising their views as their experiences took different shape in their memories over time. Captain Dible who served as a Medical Officer in the Royal Army Medical Corps wrote his memoirs based on letters and diaries as well as his own recall of events. He wrote the preface in 1964 in which he writes:

¹¹ Eric Leed, *No Man's Land, Combat and Identity in World War I*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979, p. ix

This is not a diary; neither is it a history. It is a series of disconnected monologues, interspersed with occasional letters; written from time to time and as the spirit moved me; discoursing upon happenings to myself and those around me...I have written here my ideas, my trials, and my sorrows-for this is mostly a chronicle of troubles and vain efforts-for my own later amusement.¹²

Similarly, another memoir was first drafted in 1922, re-written between 1936 and 1937 and then put aside for fifteen years and slowly re-written until it was completed in January 1960. Although it was never intended for publication it was not destroyed, nevertheless there was a hope that it would 'come to rest in some museum or junk-heap, and there be fingered by searchers for detail.'¹³ It is significant that both these memoirs were written by officers serving as Medical Officers and both, in their different ways, allude to the fact that they were not combatants on the front line and thus were unable to write, in Gameson's phrase, 'epic accounts', those associated with the 'warriors'. Nonetheless, their memories of war were central emotional experiences of their lives to which they were compelled to return. Several of the accounts by men of the ranks testify to the same process of the compulsion to tell their stories, often carefully typed or hand-written, sometimes with titles and prefaces as if to constitute 'proper' books. Some show evidence of re-drafting or the production of alternative versions of particular events or responses indicative of the struggle to find an appropriate language which continued well into the post war period.

¹² Captain J. H. Dible, IWM Con Shelf

¹³ Captain L. Gameson, IWM P.397

The other source of stories used here is oral interviews from the collection in the Sound Archive at the Imperial War Museum. The project to record military and civilian experiences of the First World War was started in 1973. Most of the interviews used here were recorded in the 1980s by which time most of the men were coming to the end of their lives, being late eighty and ninety year olds. Their memories were therefore of events which had taken place nearly seventy years previously so their recollections were those of old men looking back on their young past selves mediated by many other life experiences. The direction of questioning was set by the male interviewers with the form of each interview starting with pre-war life and ending with some reflections on the impact of war. Some of the areas covered therefore had a direct bearing on the issues being explored here.¹⁴ While the use of oral history sources is usually made by the practitioners involving a personal relationship with the narrator, this was clearly not the case here. However, most of the interviews used here, are without transcripts so that the active process of listening to the stories being recounted was not mediated by the written word and therefore, importantly, retained what Alessandro Portelli has called the *orality* of oral sources.¹⁵ As Portelli argues, transcripts follow grammatical rules, particularly of punctuation, which 'hardly ever coincide with rhythms and pauses of the speaking

¹⁴ The interviews were not at all formulaic and encouraged informants to express far more than the 'facts' of the events of the First World War. Thanks to Peter Hart of the Sound Archives at the Imperial War Museum, London for discussing his experience of interviewing veterans. The written sources were selected from the collection of unpublished diaries, letters and memoirs held in the Department of Documents at the Imperial War Museum.

¹⁵ Alessandro Portelli, 'The Peculiarities of Oral History', *History Workshop Journal*, No. 12, Autumn 1981

subject'.¹⁶ Similarly, silences, body language and changes of tone and intonation can be flattened out in the process of transcription whereas the process of listening retains a vividness and emotional impact for the listener. However, arguments such as Portelli's are responses to the critical scrutiny which has been applied to the use and validity of oral sources in reconstructing the past, especially the relation of personal reminiscence, seen as small-scale, to the historians' task of mapping large-scale continuities and discontinuities. The question of how to read the stories being told in both the written and oral testimonies under consideration here has entailed engaging with the debates on oral history and popular memory which are pertinent to the issues of memory and masculinity.

The soldiers' stories under discussion form part of the genre of war literature created during and after the First World War. The focus is on 'unknown' soldiers as opposed to the writers whose work constitutes what are regarded as the classics of the genre, for example, Robert Graves's *Goodbye To All That*, Edmund Blunden's *Undertones of War*, Siegfried Sassoon's *The Complete Memoirs of George Sherston* along with their German counterparts, Erich Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front* and Ernst Junger's *Storm of Steel*. Inevitably, the genre of war literature has been dominated by male writers nonetheless women's lives too were profoundly affected by the war and some were equally compelled to make sense of the catastrophe through the telling of a personal story. Vera Brittain's *Testament of Youth* is perhaps the best known example, produced by 'a growing sense of urgency' to record what the war meant to her generation. In exploring why she chose finally to write her own story, rather than

¹⁶ *ibid.* p. 98

pursuing her original idea of a novel or reproducing parts of the diary which she kept from 1913 to 1918, she concludes:

There was only one possible course left - to tell my own fairly typical story as truthfully as I could against the larger background, and take the risk of offending all those who believe that a personal story should be kept private, however great its public significance and however wide its general application. In no other fashion, it seemed, could I carry out my endeavour to put the life of an ordinary individual into its niche in contemporary history, and thus illustrate the influence of world-wide events and movements upon the personal destinies of men and women.¹⁷

The telling of war stories stimulated a particular consciousness of language and literature for, as Fussell suggests, 'the presumed inadequacy of language itself to convey the facts about trench warfare is one of the motifs of all who wrote about the war'.¹⁸ He also vividly demonstrates how men of all ranks sought, through traditional literature, euphemism, cliché and jargon to express the inexpressible. The struggle to find an appropriate language to reflect the realities of warfare also entailed an engagement with form. The narrative or story is a form which shapes and organises experience but it is not merely a reflection of the real, a literal narration. For stories are not only told they are lived through in the imagination and in the social and psychic shaping of memory. Narrative is an interpretative device through which the narrators discover meaning and a sense of themselves in terms of class and gender as Carolyn Steedman's *Landscape For*

¹⁷ Vera Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, 1933: London: Virago edition 1978, p. 12

¹⁸ Fussell, *Modern Memory*, p. 170

*A Good Woman*¹⁹ demonstrates in the story of two lives, her own and her mother's. Steedman explores further the uses of narrative as an interpretative device in her analysis of a nineteenth century radical, John Pearman who was a soldier and in later life, a policeman.²⁰ His autobiographical memoir is set in the context of other nineteenth century military autobiographies written by working-class men. Although as she points out, soldiering was an uncommon experience in the nineteenth century there were more military autobiographies than for example those written by miners or agricultural workers whose experiences were far more common.

What, then, is the significance of these soldiers' stories as Steedman calls them? Soldiering, she suggests, 'was the most common metaphorical expression of a man's life'.²¹ In one sense these stories are gender specific in reverberating with powerful imaginings of masculinity with, as Graham Dawson delineates, the epitome of manhood embodied by the soldier hero:

The soldier hero has proved to be one of the most durable and powerful forms of idealised masculinity within Western cultural traditions since the time of the Ancient Greeks. Military virtues such as aggression, strength, courage and endurance have repeatedly been defined as the natural and inherent qualities of manhood, whose apogee is attainable only in battle. Celebrated as hero in adventure stories telling of his dangerous and daring exploits, the soldier has become a quintessential figure of masculinity.²²

¹⁹ See Carolyn Steedman, *Landscape for a Good Woman*, London: Virago, 1986, especially Part One, 'Stories', pp. 3-24

²⁰ Carolyn Steedman, *The Radical Soldier's Tale*, London: Routledge, 1988

²¹ *ibid.* p. 37

²² Graham Dawson, *Soldier Heroes: British adventure, Empire and the Imaginings of Masculinities*, London: Routledge, 1994, p. 1

The soldiers' stories work within the tradition of romance, of male romance and adventure, one which engages with audience expectation. The underlying narrative structure of 'a drama of alienation, journeying and arrival; and of course the compulsion of conflict'²³ is precisely what renders these stories their mythical and metaphorical qualities. However, these stories may exist as marginal to other stories central to the dominant cultural discourses and from that conflict emerge stories which allow 'the expression of psychological complexity to some men using them'.²⁴ For the journey at the heart of the soldiers' stories is not only an external one but also a psychic one through an imaginative landscape where the soldier confronts fear, aggression, loneliness and powerlessness. For Steedman, the powerlessness of the soldiers and the unacknowledged recognition that war was '*something not to do with them*'²⁵, was something done to them, means that these narratives cut across gender and are narratives of class rather than masculinity. However, as Graham Dawson suggests, these stories can be read as 'class-specific *masculinities*' and he further argues that in the contrast between suffering and privation and the romance of adventure 'the soldier now appears as a complex, nuanced imaginative figure, and soldiers' stories as modes for imagining alternative forms of masculinity'.²⁶ Since the soldier hero is a hegemonic form of masculinity, soldiers' stories may reveal the tensions between idealised versions of masculinity and lived experiences.

²³ Steedman, *Soldier's Tale*, p. 37

²⁴ *ibid.* p. 17

²⁵ *ibid.* p. 42

²⁶ Dawson, *Soldier Heroes*, p. 22

The 'popular-memory' approach developed by Dawson and others has offered a way of understanding the interaction between public narratives of war and private memory. The cultural practice of composing stories works within public narratives, shared images of the soldier hero, for example, which are in cultural circulation in the form of comics, popular fiction and school texts. These cultural forms often represent idealised masculinities in which the individual may make investments since 'men may strive to become the man they would like to imagine themselves to be.'²⁷ At another level, the composing of a story of a personal past involves a striving 'for a version of the self that can be lived with in relative psychic comfort'.²⁸ In this approach, the act of remembering involved in the structuring of personal narratives is both socially and psychically situated.

The 'popular-memory' approach developed and built on some of the early critiques of oral history. Since some of the accounts under consideration here are oral testimonies, the debates are pertinent. Critics of oral history pointed to the unreliability of memory which implied distortion or misrepresentation of the 'facts' coupled with misgivings about the unrepresentativeness or atypicality of the interviewees. In other words, how 'factual' are oral sources? A further area of criticism questioned the value of subjective, individual memories set against objective historical analyses of the processes of social change. In response to such theoretical and methodological criticisms, oral history practitioners defended their practice by reference to the inherent bias in all historical sources and the necessity for interpretation and selection in any

²⁷ *ibid.* p. 23

²⁸ *ibid.*

historical writing. Furthermore, the validity of oral sources could be safeguarded by the checking of individual respondents' 'facts' against other sources. Similarly, the interview method itself was justified by recourse to methodologies employed in other academic disciplines, for example, quantitative sociology with its sampling techniques and in the careful attention to ensuring the standardisation of sets of questions and in some cases, statistical analysis of the data gained from the interviews.²⁹ Utilising these frameworks, it was argued, made it possible to reconstruct the past 'as it really was'.

However, an early radical critique of oral history was offered by Luisa Passerini, herself involved in oral history in her study of Turin factory workers' attitudes to fascism in the inter-war years.³⁰ Arguing against the predominantly factual use of oral sources, she asserts the 'peculiar specificity of oral material' and the use of different conceptual approaches to reveal those specificities:

Above all, we should not ignore that the raw material of oral history consists not just in factual statements, but is pre-eminently an expression and representation of culture, and therefore includes not only literal narrations, but also dimensions of memory, ideology and subconscious desires.³¹

By rejecting the idea of memory as simple recall, Passerini suggested a far more complex reading of oral history sources which embraces culture, ideology and

²⁹ For an example of an early response to critics, see Trevor Lummis, 'Structure and validity in oral evidence', in Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (eds), *The Oral History Reader*, London: Routledge, 1998

³⁰ Luisa Passerini, 'Work Ideology and Consensus under Italian Fascism', *History Workshop Journal*, No. 8, Autumn 1979.

³¹ *ibid.* p. 84

consciousness and an understanding of subjectivity. The term subjectivity refers to individuality and self awareness while incorporating the sense of the subject as dynamic, shaped in relation to particular discourses and practices through conscious and unconscious processes. Individual memories draw on cultural repertoires of language and meaning which may influence what is being expressed but also on the symbolic content of individual desires and fantasies. Understanding that memories are not necessarily fixed but are transformed by subsequent experiences, changes in personal circumstances and in individual subjective consciousness, points not to the 'unreliability' of individuals' memories but rather to the complex links between the past and the present:

Memories of the past are, like all common-sense forms, strangely composite constructions, resembling a kind of geology, the selective sedimentation of past traces.³²

In the process of sedimentation, some past traces may be deeply repressed; traumatic memories of war experiences for example. The desire to forget involves strategies of containment of feelings of loss, fear and pain which are then expressed through silences, omissions, slips of the tongue, dreams, body language and so on.

An illustration of how personal stories involve an effort to contain some of the conflicts of the past is the work of Alistair Thomson. In his interviews with veteran Anzacs (the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps) Alistair Thomson suggests that acknowledging psychological processes led to 'new understandings of the personal

³² Popular Memory Group, 'Popular memory: theory, politics, method' in R. Johnson et al (eds), *Making Histories; Studies in history-writing and politics*, London: Hutchinson, 1982

impact of war, and of what could not be publicly expressed'.³³ Repressing painful, troubling memories and past traumas or trying to resolve contradictions involves an engagement with dominant forms of memory. The public Anzac legend, associated with Gallipoli, which developed post war was intrinsic to the making of Australian manhood and nation and provided the framework for his veterans' stories. Thomson's study of the dynamic relationship between the legend of the Anzacs, including its recent cultural representations in films such as Peter Weir's *Gallipoli*, and veterans' memories shows the power of national myth in the construction of individual memories. Thomson demonstrates the interactions between public or popular memory and individual memory and the constant negotiation between them. He adopts the 'aptly ambiguous' term 'composure' to describe the processes of negotiation which enable individuals to achieve 'an alignment of our past, present and future lives'.³⁴ However, subjective composure is not just a private process for it depends on social recognition and the confirmation of identity and a view of the world which fits other collective identities. Soldiers' stories accordingly may be shaped by certain public perceptions and may differ in what is told to different audiences. Different kinds of recognition also influence which imaginings of masculinities enable some form of subjective composure. The ways in which individual memories draw on cultural repertoires of the meaning of war and secondly, their impact on constructing male identities provide an interpretative framework for exploring the stories told by First World War soldiers.

³³ Alistair Thomson, 'Anzac Memories: Putting popular memory theory into practice in Australia', in Perks and Thomson (eds), *Oral History Reader*, p. 302.

³⁴ *ibid.* pp. 300-1

The following discussion is structured around three themes which have been chosen from the personal testimonies as representative of key moments in a man's retelling of his experiences of being a soldier. As the majority of the narratives were produced by men who volunteered rather than being conscripted, the first theme, *going to war*, relates to the motivations of men as they made the transition from civilian life to a military one. The second theme, *estrangement*, analyses the experience of being made strange and the ways in which the familiar and the known were transformed. The final theme addresses *loss*. Feelings of loss run through many of the personal stories.

Unlike the nineteenth century armies engaged in minor campaigns in colonial wars, the First World War brought the experience of soldiering to a wide cross-section of men. The enthusiasm with which thousands of men all over Europe volunteered was unexpected. In Britain, the causes of political and social unrest appeared to be set aside as men of all political persuasions and social classes flocked to the recruiting stations fired with a common purpose. From a society which was fractured and fragmented came a unifying national sentiment, a feeling of community. An effective war propaganda machine rolled into action urging men to take up arms against the hideous 'Huns' in defence of Belgium which was represented as small, weak and feminine. The propaganda appealed to traditional qualities of manhood; duty, chivalry, and honour, both in patriotic terms, for the nation and country and in the familial sphere for protecting their women and children. The propaganda called up the gendered associations of war reproducing deeply embedded divisions between masculinity and femininity. For many, intrinsic to the notion of being a soldier was, as J. B. Priestley wrote 'a challenge to what we felt was our untested manhood'. Indeed, the propaganda of the recruitment campaigns had effectively appealed to traditional manly imagery; the

subliminal message of the now famous Kitchener poster *Your Country Needs You* was the injunction - to be a man. The figure of the soldier occupied a central place in the national narrative of war which called on traditions of past military and imperial glories; men were expected to fight and, if necessary, die for their country. The outbreak of war in August 1914 offered men the opportunity to participate in what Richard Holmes evocatively calls 'the most passionate drama of all'.³⁵ In the first eighteen months of the war 2.4 million men responded to the call and volunteered.

Contrary to the view that military service was an escape from unemployment, Jay Winter has concluded that the early rush to enlist was from men in the most well-paid manual occupations with even higher levels of recruitment of non-manual workers:

Unemployment did not fill the ranks of Kitchener's army, popular sentiment did. The protection of 'little Belgium', the defence of the empire, the need to be seen to be doing one's military duty alongside the men of one's district or village; these may sound like outworn clichés today, but in 1914 they had force and substance in the minds of ordinary people.³⁶

For example, by mid-1915, over 230,000 miners - approximately one-quarter of the workforce - had enlisted, especially from areas such as Durham, Glamorgan and Northumberland despite their history of pre-war militancy; 'sentiments about nation and empire, rather than discontent, were behind mass enlistment in this industry.'³⁷ The

³⁵ Holmes, *Firing Line*, p. 6

³⁶ Jay Winter, 'The Army and Society', in I. Beckett and K. Simpson (eds), *A Nation in Arms*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985, p. 197

³⁷ Jay Winter, *The Great War and the British People*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985, p. 35

response of the miners was reflected in other skilled trades and by February 1915, 15 per cent of the industrial workforce were in uniform and 'particularly high enlistment rates were registered in engineering, chemicals and iron and steel' rather than in the more precarious trades.³⁸

These skilled men often found themselves under the command of young ex-public schoolmen who swelled the ranks of the officer class. A man who at the age of twenty was an officer in charge of a battalion which included many Durham miners, recalled an incident in training at Blandford in Dorset:

You can imagine Durham miners didn't need much teaching how to dig! I'll never forget, one of the other battalions challenged our company to a trench digging competition. We didn't say a word, after all they were challenging us. When the day came, our chaps were pretty well down and out of sight and our challengers were still scratching the surface. We had to admit that our chaps were all miners.³⁹

Inculcated on the sports field of his minor public school with notions of the healthy body as an attribute of manliness, he commented on the 'physical unfitness of the troops' he observed during basic training. A certain pride can be detected in the apparent health and vigour demonstrated by his company of miners as they defeat their opponents with ease. What could not have been anticipated was that this seemingly innocent game played out in Dorset would be transformed into a nightmare when faced with the horrors of trench warfare.

³⁸ *ibid.*

³⁹ Arthur Watts, IWM 8278

As the military historian S. L. A. Marshall observed, the average soldier goes to battle, 'the supremely testing experience of his lifetime, almost as a total stranger.'⁴⁰ The unreality of their visions of war were probably shared by the officer and his men but their class position would have influenced their motivations for volunteering. The young officer would have been conditioned by his education to associate war with honour, glory and heroic self-sacrifice and to readily assume his position as a leader of other men. Patriotism and the power of nationalist and imperialist rhetoric and propaganda also had its appeal for sections of the working class despite the high level of industrial unrest prior to the outbreak of war.

What was also being appealed to were specific versions of masculinity associated with the skilled working man. Keith McClelland argues that while work was the place where skilled men's identities were partly constructed, collective organisation especially the trade union shaped their sense of being independent men, sustaining a collective and individual moral responsibility. Such independence and a culture of respectability was maintained by the ability to support a wife and children, the wife playing a crucial role in cultivating domestic skills and providing a respectable retreat from the world of labour.⁴¹ The call to enlist may well have resonated with a sense of moral responsibility to the nation coupled with the desire to protect their families and communities and by extension, small, feminised Belgium. Perhaps too a relatively secure male identity, or at least male pride afforded by the mastery of a skill and some degree of control over their

⁴⁰ Quoted in Holmes, *Firing Line*, p. 73

⁴¹ Keith McClelland, 'Masculinity and the representative artisan in Britain, 1850-1880', in Michael Roper and John Tosh (eds), *Manful Assertions, Masculinities in Britain since 1800*, London: Routledge, 1991, pp. 74-87

work and working conditions could resonate with public representations of the soldier hero as confirming, and conforming to, what it means to be a man.

Yet while the *idealised* soldier hero was a powerful imagining of masculinity, regular soldiers were frequently regarded with contempt and displays of militarism with fear. The objects of the Boy Scouts movement which were designed to instil discipline in boys were not always seen in a favourable light among the classes it set out to improve. It has been argued that organisations such as the Boy Scouts and Boys' Brigade were more attractive to the upwardly- aspiring working classes and lower middle classes; the 'hooligans' or 'rough lads' remained impervious to the ideals of Christian manliness.⁴² One man who enlisted at the age of eighteen in 1915 wrote of local attitudes to his pre-war activities at a Boy Scout camp:

There must have been more than a hundred boys at the camp. We did a lot of work during the day- you could call it playing at soldiers. It really was army training for boys and, of course, it wasn't approved of by a good many people for that reason. They thought it was turning us into soldiers. Two or three years later we were all soldiers anyway.⁴³

Nonetheless, many boys and men had a stake in defining their masculinity in the public representations in circulation in the call to arms. The war cast its shadow over

⁴² John Springhall, 'Building character in the British boy: the attempt to extend Christian manliness to working-class adolescents, 1880-1914', in J. A. Mangan and James Walvin (eds), *Manliness and Morality: Middle-Class Masculinity in Britain and America, 1800-1940*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987

⁴³ S. E. Butler, IWM 86/2/1

men who were not combatants who were too young to fight. Christopher Isherwood was of that generation, yet the war provoked the question of identity for Isherwood:

Like most of my generation, I was obsessed by a complex of terrors and longings connected with the idea of 'War'. 'War', in this purely neurotic sense, meant, The Test. The test of your courage, your maturity, of your sexual prowess. 'Are you really a Man?' Subconsciously, I believe, I longed to be subjected to this test; but I also dreaded failure. I dreaded failure so much - indeed I was so certain that I *should* fail - that consciously, I denied my longing to be tested altogether. I denied my all-consuming morbid interest in the idea of 'war'.⁴⁴

Being a soldier was the ultimate test and hopefully, proof of a coherent and secure masculine identity, emphasised by the use of capital letters. Yet at the same time the precariousness of such an identity is acknowledged by reference to unconscious desires, fantasies and fears. Fear of failure, of not passing 'The Test', undermined a man's sense of himself. A similar conflict was expressed in a London journalist's memoir published in 1930. On board a troopship he reflected:

I began to think that I was rather a mug for being there. I needn't have been. I had joined rather late, but still as a volunteer... I had no inclination at all for soldiering and privately knew myself to be a coward. Then what was I doing in that rotten cattle-boat, probably on my way to a bloody death? Professor Freud might answer the question. I hated being thought a funk. I had the strongest disapproval of young and fit civilians without dependents, but could not express it while I was a civilian myself. I found it very uncomfortable to crawl about in a lounge suit while most men of my age were in khaki.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Christopher Isherwood, *Lions and Shadows*, London: Hogarth Press, 1938, p. 16

⁴⁵ *Ex-Private X, War is War*, quoted in Hynes, *Soldiers' Tale*, pp. 49-50

Volunteering was not always a matter of free choice, even a reluctant one as in the example above. There was often pressure on men to enlist from family, community and in some cases, from employers. Although much of the propaganda utilised images of women to urge men to enlist nevertheless, as Michael Kimmel suggests 'manhood is demonstrated by other men's approval. It is other men who evaluate the performance... masculinity as a homosocial enactment is fraught with danger.'⁴⁶ Displaying weakness in the face of other men was something to be feared:

I was loath to go. I had no romantic illusions. I was not eager, or even resigned to self - sacrifice, and my heart gave back no answering throb to the thought of England. In fact, I was very much afraid, and again, afraid of being afraid, anxious less I should show it.⁴⁷

The competitive scrutiny of other men and the fear of non-conformity would have played its part in, for example, the formation of the Pals battalions, units made up of friends and workmates from the same localities or workplaces. However, there were other motivations for enlisting and accepting the challenge of becoming a soldier.

Eric Leed argues that war was an imagined liberation from and counterweight to industrialisation and the conflicts of economic and social life endemic to the 'machine age'. Similarly war also offered a release from normal economic activity of a commercial age, 'the antithesis of the boredom, materiality and mechanization of everyday life'.⁴⁸ An illustration of Leed's thesis was provided by a man who had been a Post Office clerk at

⁴⁶ Michael S. Kimmel, 'Masculinity as Homophobia', in H. Brod and M. Kaufmann (eds), *Theorizing Masculinities*, London: Sage, 1994, pp. 128-129

⁴⁷ Guy Chapman, *A Passionate Prodigality*, London: Mayflower-Dell edition, 1967, p. 8

⁴⁸ Leed, *No Man's Land*, p. 66

the time who recalled, 'it was to me a great relief to get away from the office, I hated being tied to a desk.'⁴⁹ Moreover, clerical work had been transformed by the perceived invasion of large numbers of women into an area of 'women's work'. Male clerks experienced the process as emasculating.⁵⁰ The possibility of escape from the monotonous routines of daily work and perhaps domesticity as well meant the war could be imagined as a release into new freedoms and new challenges. For the call to volunteer was also an invitation to engage imaginatively and concretely in the risks and challenges of adventure and in the imaginings of alternative masculinities.

The adventure romance takes the soldier hero on his quest from a safe familiar world into the unknown where, having conquered all manner of physical obstacles, fought valiantly in battle and proved his moral and physical courage, he returns home, unharmed and triumphant, a hero. In his memoir, John McCauley records his anticipation of going to war, already imagining himself as a hero of an adventure story:

My own reflections then were: How romantic it will be, what can war be like? I might just be in time to see the end if I join up at once. My imagination was running away with me. The spirit of adventure impelled me, as it did millions of boys and young men like me all over the world. I was getting elated at the promise of the great adventure. I pictured myself coming back and telling my friends what a glorious thing war was.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Clifford Lane, IWM 7257

⁵⁰ Meta Zimmeck, 'Jobs for the Girls: the Expansion of Clerical Work for Women, 1850-1914' in Angela V. John (ed.), *Unequal Opportunities: Women's Employment in England 1850-1914*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986

⁵¹ John McCauley, IWM 97/10/1

The sense of excitement and adventure was clearly the impetus to enlist for Rowland Luther, a nineteen year old from a South Wales mining town:

The strange thing about it all was that we knew we were going to the front to kill, die or suffer terrible wounds, yet not one man was dispirited. This indeed was a wonderful army - civilians turned soldiers in a few months. We were all young - I was nineteen - I do not think there was anyone over 24 years of age, except the Major and Sergeant-Major.⁵²

Being aware of the harsh realities of war was not necessarily a deterrent as the psychologist William James observed in 1910, 'showing war's irrationality is of no effect upon [modern man]. The horror is the fascination. War is the strong life; it is life *in extremis*'.⁵³ The desire to go to war outweighed even the evidence of what war might inflict on men. While in barracks in Shoeburyness, John McCauley met wounded men returning from the front:

I listened to their stories of the horrors and hardships they encountered in the fields of Flanders and France. They had seen war. Their spirits were subdued. Their harrowing tales left no impression upon me. My desire to get out to the front and see for myself what it was like grew stronger than ever.⁵⁴

For young men particularly, the opportunity to leave civilian life for unknown adventures as soldiers was almost irresistible. A man who joined up at the age of fifteen and a half

⁵² Rowland Luther, IWM 87/8/1

⁵³ Quoted in Holmes, *Firing Line*, p. 59

⁵⁴ John McCauley, IWM 97/10/1

relived the enthusiasm seventy years later: 'I wanted to be in it, it was something, when the war started I wanted to be in it'.⁵⁵

Adventure stories, especially war stories, were the staple of juvenile literature from the 1870s onwards, aimed specifically at boys and furnishing their imaginations with heroic figures. Perhaps going to France held out similar possibilities of adventure as the Frontier and the exotic regions of the Empire which were the locations of G. A. Henty's stories, for example. Henty's output was prodigious as were the sales of his books, each selling about 150,000 copies in Britain alone. He wrote eighty historical adventure stories for boys as well as contributing to the *Boys' Own Paper*. The class readership of this genre of gender-differentiated juvenile literature has been defined by some historians as lower middle class and upper working class⁵⁶ and therefore they argue did not influence the imaginations of the majority of working-class boys. However, similar adventure stories appeared in *The Gem* and *The Magnet* which were designed for a mass popular readership and were full of the exploits of heroes winning victories, whether at school, in the classroom or sports field or in fulfilling their imperial mission.⁵⁷ There is certainly evidence of a spirit of adventure compelling young men to volunteer from the sources being used here. A private described 'four hundred happy-go-lucky fellows' starting on a great adventure:

⁵⁵ Joseph Pickard, IWM 8946

⁵⁶ Springhall, 'Building Character', pp. 63-68

⁵⁷ See, for example, Kelly Boyd, 'Knowing Your Place: the tensions of manliness in boys' story papers, 1918-39', in Roper and Tosh (eds), *Manful assertions*, pp. 146-8

War to us was a glorious thing, an affair of honour and we discussed (the) future with enthusiasm. Not that we spoke of the battle front, and the fact that some of us would never come back for, strange to say, this was never mentioned⁵⁸

Some older men especially those with families or established careers experienced a conflict of interest when considering volunteering. At the outbreak of war, Guy Buckeridge was thirty four years old, unmarried and a member of a 'united family, a little dull and homely perhaps... life appeared settled in easy paths.'⁵⁹ However:

after discussion, we all decided to volunteer, though we were convinced that in the end we should all suffer loss of ordinary opportunity of progress, pecuniary loss and a breakdown of our personal hopes and ambitions.⁶⁰

Sadly, their predictions were correct; a cousin who lived with them was killed and three brothers were wounded. Consequently, 'none of these have since been able to reach their previous standard of living.' What was at stake for a middle-class recruit was the potential loss of earnings which would threaten a middle-class man's status and sense of independence. The reference to 'personal hopes and ambitions' emphasise the importance of individual achievement in the construction of middle-class masculinities. Moreover, the individual decision made within the confines of the family circle contrasts with the more collective responses found among the miners for example or in the Pals battalions. Although Guy Buckeridge felt he had neither experience nor knowledge that

⁵⁸ W. A. Quinton, IWM 79/35/1

⁵⁹ Guy Buckeridge, IWM P273

⁶⁰ *ibid.*

was useful for active service, nevertheless his sense of duty finally overrode his individual concerns and he enlisted in February 1915.

In the climate produced by the outbreak of war he may also have felt compelled to prove his manhood, to pass the test. However he experienced a sense of discomfort when he joined his fellow recruits carrying a suitcase containing his belongings:

At that time I felt I was unusual and cursed the suitcase and all it contained. There is nothing a normal man resents more than appearing different from the accepted conception of what is correct.⁶¹

Under the gaze of the other recruits, he felt humiliated by his attention to his personal belongings, a fastidiousness more associated with feminine behaviour. His acute sense of not conforming to the shared manly image of the potential soldier was significant enough to be recorded in his 'Memoirs of His Army Service in the Great War 1914-18 by Guy Buckeridge'. Clearly never intended for publication, his memoirs were found after his death in 1956 but as they were undated it is impossible to verify when they were written. In the process of composing his memoirs he had to explore, and finally express, the tension between his image of himself and what he saw as a 'correct' version of masculinity constituted by the behaviour and attitudes of the other recruits. On occasions he felt his sense of self threatened by alternative versions of masculinity. However, his middle-class attributes of self control reasserted his power over his own actions and gave him a sense of superiority over his fellow working-class recruits. For example, in the midst of the *mêlée* of leave takings as men set out for the front 'some

⁶¹ *ibid.*

were hysterical, some ribald, some maudlin, according to the nature of those concerned' which Buckeridge found 'very disturbing', he reflected 'I have no use at any time for emotion, it seems to me that one can never do justice to feelings and they are better left unexpressed'.⁶² Nonetheless, the act of writing itself forces him beyond a mere factual recording of events which took place into the articulation of the meaning and exploration of the emotional and psychic responses engendered by those experiences and finally to give expression to them. The award of a Distinguished Conduct Medal which publicly affirmed and recognised his contribution in the war and the private process of recording his memoirs allowed him to acknowledge and come to terms with other discomfiting selves.

As argued earlier, many soldiers' stories are structured similarly to adventure narratives but there is also another narrative which can be detected; that of a narrative of self or selves, the pre-war, civilian self, the soldier or war self, and the post-war self. The sense of disruption and discontinuity is what drives the narratives of soldiers' stories and what distinguishes them from the Western tradition of male autobiography which Bella Brodzki and Celeste Schenck delineate as the presentation of a unified, transcendent and representative self. In their project to theorise women's autobiographical writings, they cite the example of Barthes subversion of the male autobiographical form, *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* as a model of 'nonrepresentative, dispersed, displaced subjectivity',⁶³ more aligned with women's

⁶² *ibid.*

⁶³ Bella Brodzki and Celeste Schenck, *Life/Lives, Theorising Women's Autobiography*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988, pp. 1-6

subjectivities. While with a post modern sensibility, it is impossible to understand female and male subjectivity as either unified or coherent, reading soldiers' stories as disruptive of a sense of identity points to the ways in which war provoked male gender anxieties. Being a soldier is a defining moment in the construction of self, a particular version of masculinity but also simultaneously, because war legitimises killing and opens up the possibility of the humiliation of being a coward it can also represent a 'potential shameful moment filled with meanings that must continue to be repressed and distorted if a viable self is to be maintained.'⁶⁴ Maintaining a viable or coherent sense of self can be achieved by forgetting. As Bert Rudge put it: 'I forgot it all. You had to go back to work'.⁶⁵ When in the interviews men were asked to reflect on whether the war had changed them some were certain it had not: 'I don't think it's affected me much. It's not made my character any different.'⁶⁶ Indeed, some men felt the war had been a positive experience, a rite of passage into manhood:

I was determined to go, I was glad I went, I've never complained about being in the war. It made me a man because I was standing on my feet by the time I was fifteen and a half amongst men and you had to stand up for yourself. I had me fights.⁶⁷

However, for those aware of less positive changes wrought by their war experience, the sense of being 'made strange' was profound.

⁶⁴ Stanley D. Rosenberg, 'The Threshold of Thrill' in Miriam Cooke and Angela Woollacott (eds), *Gendering War Talk*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993, p. 47

⁶⁵ Bert Rudge, IWM 85/39/1

⁶⁶ George Ashurst, IWM 9875

⁶⁷ Joseph Pickard, IWM 8946

It is generally recognised that military personnel returning for combat often feel a sense of estrangement from the civilian world to which they are returning. The sense of estrangement, however, could also be experienced in the course of the war itself engendering a sense of discontinuity. In Leed's evocative phrase men were 'made strange' and this sense of estrangement is a recurring motif in many of the memoirs:

Our entire thoughts and feelings are completely rearranged; if I was not afraid of being misunderstood, I could almost say that we are somehow 'estranged' from the men and things of our former life. ⁶⁸

Severed from their past civilian lives and social and domestic relations, men found themselves in an alien landscape, literally unimaginable prior to the war. A landscape, moreover, suffused with mutilation, carnage and death:

The whole landscape is so outside my ken that I feel I am not seeing France's living face but the nebulous country of dream life. ⁶⁹

Although the writer thought later that his language was 'approaching the high-flown' he went on to describe a 'sense of unease, which was almost overwhelming, derived in part from the sense of separation from a normally ordered world.'⁷⁰ War has disturbed the familiar world, even the natural world becomes incoherent and strange as in a scene described by a correspondent in a letter to his wife:

⁶⁸ P. Witcop (ed.), *Kriegsbriefe gefallener Studenten*, Munich, 1936, p. 210 quoted in Leed, *No Man's Land*, p. 22

⁶⁹ Captain L. Gameson, IWM P.397

⁷⁰ *ibid.*

At B. I was struggling over heaps of stones, bricks etc. and suddenly felt myself held up by a- a mass of snowdrops. It really was the most pathetic thing I have ever experienced. My groom, who was following me closely, absolutely wept when I drew his attention to them, and I had a big lump in my throat myself.⁷¹

Since being a soldier confirms a dominant model of masculinity, war allows the opportunity for men to display characteristics traditionally associated with the feminine such as weeping for example. Nevertheless, while the sight of snowdrops provoked an intense emotional reaction in both men the officer represents himself as a man capable of maintaining his manly self-control as befitting a man of his class and authority. It is the groom, the working-class man, probably known as a lad, who is depicted as weeping.

The sense of estrangement from their previous lives represented not only a change in external circumstances but also a lack of recognition of a previous civilian identity, a sense of discontinuity As one man expressed in terms almost of astonishment, 'hard to believe. Impossible to believe. That other life, so near in time and distance, was something led by different men. Two lives that bore no relation to each other. That was what they all felt, the bloody lot of them.'⁷²

One of the processes which attempts to transform civilians into soldiers is military training, especially basic training. While its main purpose is to produce effectiveness on the battlefield it also seeks to ensure that individual civilian values are 'replaced by the

⁷¹ Captain H. J. C. Leland, IWM 96/5/1

⁷² Stuart Cloete, *How Young They Died*, 1969, quoted in Fussell, *Modern Memory*, p. 64

group spirit and group loyalties that underlie all military organisations.’⁷³ Great emphasis is laid on virility and an exaggerated masculinity which eschews anything perceived as weakness, as ‘feminine’. John McCauley vividly described his transformation during his training:

I had grown hard, even selfish, and tainted with a kind of viciousness. Strange circumstances and environment were moulding me this way and ‘I don’t care a damn’ sort of mood gripped me, and my hold on civilisation and the ordered life that I had been used to was weakening.⁷⁴

Moreover, the disjuncture between the soldier of the imagination - heroic, masterful, a man of action - and the soldier in the trenches only served to confirm a sense of discontinuity. Heroic visions of soldiering and adventure which had captured many young men’s imaginations slowly evaporated in the realities of trench warfare as men were rendered powerless. The mechanisation of warfare with new weapons of destruction, long-range weaponry and high explosive shells, was as horrific as it was unexpected for the regular soldiers as well as the new civilian army. Public perceptions of battle belonged to the past but they were the ones which would have furnished the minds of many volunteers; ‘Battles should ideally be on a human scale. They should take place in a relatively confined space and occupy a limited amount of time. They should be clear-cut in their result and decided by identifiable acts of heroism. This was how battles were painted by generations of war artists in the great Victorian and Edwardian

⁷³ Holmes, *Firing Line*, p. 36

⁷⁴ John McCauley, IWM 97/10/1

illustrated press. This is how they were painted in 1914.’⁷⁵ The industrialised warfare of the First World War was far removed from the images of battle from the past. As John Keegan points out, the Battle of Waterloo was a three day ordeal for some regiments while others experienced only one day of battle; battles of the First World War in stark contrast, could last for months: ⁷⁶

Trench warfare was far from spectacular; the misery of standing in one spot for weeks on end, never advancing, never retiring, being shelled incessantly and suffering incalculable hardships can never be understood by those who have never experienced it. ⁷⁷

The image of battle as ‘spectacular’ was in reality replaced by passivity, boredom and what could seem like endless waiting for action often against an invisible enemy:

Such courage and nerve as I possessed were stolen from me on the blood-drenched plains of northern France. How often do I feel the loss today? Devil’s Trench and many other trenches in France and Flanders have helped to make me a weakling. They took away many of the attributes which contributed to my manhood, sapped up my courage, shattered my nerves and threw me back into a ‘civilised’ world again, broken in spirit and nerve and the coward that I am. ⁷⁸

John McCauley’s anguish at his apparent loss of manhood was experienced both psychically and physically. Psychic disorientation and disturbance were mirrored by a reduction of the physical self, his body. Virility and physical strength were attributes

⁷⁵ J. M. Bourne, *Britain and the Great War, 1914-1918*, London: Edward Arnold, 1989, p. 27

⁷⁶ John Keegan, *The Face of Battle*, London: Jonathan Cape, 1976, pp. 302-3

⁷⁷ Harold Clegg, IWM 88/18/1

⁷⁸ John McCauley, IWM 97/10/1

which embodied masculinity and a man's sense of self includes an image of the body as potent and effective. In war, the male body is always at risk of damage, mutilation or final annihilation. The loss of mastery of physical performance and the loss of self-control results in a terrifying helplessness and fear that the sense of maleness is in danger. The resort to metaphor becomes the mode of expression as men felt they were reduced to animals burrowing in the earth for their survival. In a letter to Siegfried Sassoon in 1929, Julian Dadd reflected that his war experience while being 'by far the largest experience of my life' was mainly a 'wearisome and beastly one'. '*Beastly*' here has significance for he continues:

For a long time after I came back I felt like a crushed reptile that has been stamped on in the road, but has managed to wiggle through dust and filth to safety.⁷⁹

Eric Leed has described the battlefield as a landscape suffused with ambivalence, both empty of men and yet saturated with men, and cites ex-combatants drawing similar animal metaphors: 'rabbits concealed', 'perfect moles'.⁸⁰ Hiram Sturdy too resorts to metaphor to express the discordance between the fantasies of the warrior fighting for King and Country and being stripped of a sense of self:

No quoting of passages from patriotic speeches or gems from the great writers about Patris, Paterland or Motherland then. All one wants to be is a worm, driven by some strong force, which will drive one down, down, down away from these hellish devices which civilisation has made.⁸¹

⁷⁹ Letter from Julian Dadd to Siegfried Sassoon July 7 1929, Siegfried Sassoon Papers, IWM P444/552

⁸⁰ Leed, *No Man's Land*, pp. 20, 92

⁸¹ Hiram Sturdy, IWM Con Shelf

The static and mechanised nature of trench warfare rendered it frequently impossible for men to embody themselves as powerful or effective agents. Some historians have suggested that the dull monotony of trench life, the obedience to orders only mirrored many working-class men's experience of work and labour relations. More so, it has been argued, their low expectations, poor housing conditions, low wages and high mortality rates prepared men for adjustment to army life. On one hand, this argument ignores the fundamental differences between military and civilian life while on the other hand, it can be argued, that it was precisely these factors which mitigated against well-being and good health and the necessary physical fitness required in army life. The physicality associated with masculinity and the capacity for physical endurance represents a certain class specific masculinity. Some sections of working-class men were unfit before ever experiencing the hardships and privations of trench warfare as a Medical Officer observed about recruits from 'the back streets of Preston':

The results of the enthusiastic and not over-conscientious recruiting were enough to drive one to despair. Now, five years afterward, I can write down in cold blood that I have had men sent down in my drafts, passed as fit for active service in the army by some member of my own profession who had open tuberculous sinuses of bone; tuberculous glands in the neck the size of walnuts; men lacking three fingers on their trigger hand; men with ankylosed joints; men, innumerable, with hernia; men with varicose veins good enough for the illustration of a surgical textbook⁸²

Long periods of boredom when soldiers were immobilised, waiting for action but always against a background of the noise of explosions and artillery fire were juxtaposed

⁸² Captain J. H. Dible, IWM Con Shelf

by the intensity of going on the attack against an often invisible enemy. Not surprisingly, their emotions were constantly in flux often recorded in written and oral memories as contradictions and inconsistencies. One of Britain's highest scoring ace pilots who was killed in 1918 and awarded the VC a year after his death was Lieutenant Edward Mannock. He combined a fervent socialist outlook with a virulent hatred of the Germans. His callousness towards the enemy involved him in taking enormous risks which incidentally, resulted in accusations of 'non-gentlemanly' behaviour that probably had more to do with his class background which was not the conventional one of pilots in the First World War. Despite his reputation for courage and for his fearless exploits, his diary entries attest to a man's inner turmoil as he struggles to overcome fear and to psychologically accommodate his acts of 'murder'. On June 7 1917 Edward Mannock recorded in his diary, 'I let him have 60 rounds at that range so there wasn't much left of him. Rough luck, but it's war and they're Huns.' Two weeks later having shot down another German pilot, his diary entry for June 20 1917 read:

I felt exactly like a murderer. The journey to the trenches was rather nauseating - dead men's legs sticking through the sides with puttees and boots still on - bits of bones and skulls with the hair peeling off, and tons of equipment and clothes lying about. This sort of thing, together with a strong graveyard stench and the dead and mangled body of the pilot (an NCO) combined to upset me for a few days.⁸³

⁸³ Thanks to Peter Hart of the Department of Sound Archives at the Imperial War Museum for information and references about Edward Mannock. Nigel Steel and Peter M. Hart, *Tumult in the Clouds: The British Experience of the War in the Air, 1914-1918*, London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1997, pp. 216-7

Decades after the war and with the hindsight of maturity and age, men still experienced the painful contradictions and complexities of their soldiering experiences:

I had just as much pleasure out of it as what I did the bad times. It's true I saw horrific scenes, bombardments when bits of men ... the point was you were so disciplined that you took it all for granted as if it was a normal thing⁸⁴

The break in the sentence and the inability to describe fully what he had witnessed suggests it was anything but 'a normal thing'. The attempt to situate the extraordinary circumstances of war within some meaningful context was a long term process and not easily resolved in the more normal surroundings of home. Home became increasingly idealised as the site for the restoration of masculine agency and for the achievement of some form of psychological composure.

Soldiers going home on leave may well have imagined home as a place of safety where normal values and meanings would be re-established within a familiar environment and familiar social relations, far away from the nightmare of the battlefields. Going on leave could however exacerbate the feelings of discontinuity; 'this leave has been nothing more than a dream. I cannot really realise yet that I have been at home. How I hate leave. The returning is just too damnable.'⁸⁵ Moreover, the sense of estrangement could remain with them even when they were at home. Rowland Luther, who enlisted in September 1914, described his feelings when at home on leave in Wales on Boxing Day 1916:

⁸⁴ William Holmes, IWM 8868

⁸⁵ Captain H. J. C. Leland, IWM 96/5/1

It was still snowing next day and I went out to have a look around, but things had changed here too. I called in a pub or two, but they were almost empty. There seemed no enjoyment anywhere. Many people had lost relations, and food was getting scarce ... there was nothing particularly pleasant about this leave, except a soft bed, a clean body and freedom from the danger of gunfire.⁸⁶

The image of snow serves here to heighten Rowland Luther's sense of alienation and isolation. The imagined warmth and comfort to be found in the familiar surrounding of home and mining community, especially at Christmas, were lacking. Instead, home too had *changed* with the community also suffering material privations and the personal loss of men at the front. In the face of grief and bereavement, consolation was gained not from human relations but from the provision of basic needs, 'a soft bed, a clean body'. There was also a valued temporary escape from the fear of death but which would have to be faced again at the end of his leave.

For Sergeant Bernard Brookes, the escape was permanent. *Notes compiled from my diary: A True Personal Record of Experiences as a Signaller in the Army, at Home and Abroad during the European War (1914)* were written while he was convalescing in Epsom hospital after being declared unfit and receiving his discharge papers. Bernard Brookes records how he broke down when a shell burst in his trench, flooding it with water and dead bodies. He was taken to a hospital near Etaples where he was in a state of 'semi-consciousness and could not speak. I remember that I cried without ceasing and could not stop myself.' On being sent home, he was admitted to a hospital in Walmer in Kent:

⁸⁶ Rowland Luther, IWM 87/8/1

I could not help thinking how *very strange* (my italics) that less than a week before I was in the most terrible part of the line in Flanders, and only a few days ago in the midst of a raging battle, but now I was in England at the seaside where all was peace and quietness.⁸⁷

Here is another example of the recurring motif of strangeness, a rupturing of a sense of reality and where to position himself in two vividly contrasting worlds. The strangeness was reinforced by his inability to stop crying, an inability to feel in control. While men returning home, temporarily or permanently, experienced such personal discontinuity they might also have appeared strange to those they had left at home, not least to their children. An example of the effects of an unfamiliar father figure returning home was discovered in an oral interview conducted with a Second World War veteran. Memories of the First World War can result in trans-generational haunting as they are lived through by succeeding generations of children and grandchildren. Norman Kirby tells of his reaction to his father coming home on leave and walking into the dining room of their small terraced house:

I ran and hid behind the curtain. I could only have been a toddler and I was absolutely scared to death of this man because I had never seen a man like that before, all covered in mud and he kissed my mother. He went up to her and kissed her and I came out from behind the curtain and - they told me later on - 'how dare you kiss my Mummy.' You know the idea of him touching her was awful. Years later I thought what a terrible thing for this man, gone through all the hell of Passchendale to come home and be rejected by this baby.⁸⁸

⁸⁷ Bernard Brookes, IWM PP/MCR/283

⁸⁸ Norman Kirby, IWM 16084/21

While it is impossible to extrapolate from one example, nevertheless it is indicative of the inherent tensions and conflicts in the process of reintegrating soldiers into post war society. The process of post war reconstruction took place not only in the public realm of social and economic policies but also in private, intimate family relations. Norman Kirby's long account of his childhood and adolescence is a moving testimony of the processes by which one man came to terms with his relationship with his father. Their relationship was structured, in part, by the father's emotional reactions to the First World War. He came into his son's life as a stranger and the strangeness was exacerbated by the fact that the father was suffering from 'nerves', a condition incomprehensible to the son. The son related how his father never spoke about the war except, when the son was older, his father recalled a single haunting memory of a single corpse among so many:

This was the one thing he spoke about to do with the horror. There was a corpse, a man with his head hanging over the parapet with his mouth open and he watched this corpse turn into a skeleton. They were there long enough for this body to decompose but nobody moved it and he had to walk past this every day and he came back.... it couldn't have been the only corpse he saw but it was this awful position with the mouth open.⁸⁹

The residues of war experience were manifested in the proness to anxiety states which affected the rest of his life. Nonetheless, the estrangement between father and son was overcome in time and the father's recuperation, five or six years after the war ended, was

⁸⁹ *ibid.*

due to 'the warmth of the family. We had a large family, lots of aunts and uncles and cousins- music round the piano and I think the gradual sort of healthiness of a family life might have helped'.⁹⁰

Others were not so fortunate as intimate relationships broke down during, and indeed, after the war. A captain writing to his wife explained why one of his men had been so 'strange' recently:

He told me the reason. His wife has gone off the rails, and has written saying she wants nothing more to do with him. No wonder the poor devil is worried, and at his wit's end.⁹¹

The reiteration of estrangement denotes some of the barriers erected between home and front, between men and women, between language and experience for how were men to communicate their experience to those at home? Official barriers to communication between home and front existed in the censoring of letters sent by men to those at home but there was also self-censorship:

You liked to get a letter, of course. But the people at home had got no idea of what was going on, and they never will have - it's no good telling them, you couldn't possibly do it. Anyway, human nature won't stand that sort of thing.⁹²

The interview from which this extract is taken was recorded in 1983. The relationship with past and present consciousness breaks through in the language in the mixing of past

⁹⁰ *ibid.*

⁹¹ Captain H. J. C. Leland, IWM 96/5/1

⁹² Clifford Lane, IWM 7257

and present tenses. The respondent can tell his story to a member of staff of the Imperial War Museum but shows a reluctance to share it with a wider audience because they will not understand and furthermore should be spared such knowledge. In several of the testimonies there is evidence of the gulf opening up during the war between men at the front and those at home. Representations of themselves in the press as cheerful Tommies valiantly triumphing against the Hun was a source of anger, contributing to their sense of estrangement:

the papers at home made us sick with their twaddle about 'Tommy' in the trenches being happy and in good spirits and never grumbling and laughing at danger. We knew different, and many times have we wished that those editors could be dragged from their comfortable offices and dumped among us to share with us the happy life we are supposed to be leading.⁹³

As men turned inwards, their sense of connectedness with home and the home front became increasingly fragile confirming the perception that those at home would never understand the experiences of those abroad:

To those at home reading the news in their morning papers, this victory will bring great satisfaction. To me it brings nothing but a great weariness and an oppressive sense of the utter stupidity and futility of it all.⁹⁴

Conversing, when men returned home they felt unable to understand those they had left behind:

⁹³ W. A. Quinton, IWM 79/35/1

⁹⁴ Captain J. H. Dibble, IWM Con Shelf

It is very nice to be at home again. Yet am I at home? One sometimes doubts it. There are occasions when I feel like a visitor among strangers whose intentions are kindly, but whose modes of thought I neither altogether understand nor altogether approve... Yet I don't think I'm mad, for I find that other soldiers have somewhat the same experience as myself.⁹⁵

Lack of understanding and disapproval was also felt in relation to other sections of society at home. The seeds of discontent and the potential for antipathies towards other men who were not combatants were being sown during the war ready to be reaped in the post war period. Trade unionists were one group of men who became part of the demonology which some soldiers would carry from the front back into their post war world:

We had about fifteen or twenty Welsh miners come to us. God knows why ... they caused a lot of trouble because there'd been a miners' strike during the latter part of the war and we in the army didn't think much about it, you see. When these fellows were drafted out it caused a lot of ill-feeling, culminating in physical fights at times... we chaps in France didn't agree with them going on strike during the war, interrupting munitions. There was a lot of ill-feeling about it at the time.⁹⁶

Most strikes in 1917 and 1918 were prompted by wage claims in the face of steadily escalating prices and food shortages, the latter perceived as partly a result of profiteering. The motivations for the strikes mattered less to the men at the front than

⁹⁵ This was written by R. H. Tawney and published anonymously in *The Nation*, October 21, 1916, see Guy Chapman, *Vain Glory: A Miscellany of the Great War 1914-1918*, London: Cassell, 1937, pp. ix and 377-8

⁹⁶ Leonard Ounsworth, IWM 332

what they felt and continued to feel was a profound lack of understanding and appreciation of the sacrifices they had made. The home front at large came increasingly to be identified with incomprehension and a lack of understanding. Charles Carrington, in a much quoted extract, expressed a generation of men's estrangement from those at home:

Middle-aged men, strenuously as they attempted to deny it, are united by a secret bond and separated from their fellows who were too old or too young to fight in the Great War. Generally speaking, this secret army presents to the world a front of silence and bitterness which it has been fashionable to describe as disenchantment.⁹⁷

The cluster of the words 'silence', 'bitterness' and 'disenchantment' resonate powerfully with loss, the final theme of this chapter. The inability to speak, coupled with bitterness and disillusionment suggest a loss of self, the loss of an officially sponsored construction of the soldier and a loss of shared beliefs and values. Loss of faith pervaded an important book which spoke of disconnection with the past; published in 1922 C. E. Montague entitled his book *Disenchantment*. 'Its power lay in the form it gave to recent English history- to pre-war and post-war, and the gap that the war had opened up.'⁹⁸ He contrasts the cross-class enthusiasm for the war with post-war insecurity and disillusionment:

⁹⁷ Charles Carrington, *Soldiers from the Wars Returning*, London: Hutchinson, 1965, p. 87

⁹⁸ Samuel Hynes, *A War Imagined: The First World War and English Culture*, London: Pimlico, 1992, p. 310. Hynes argues that while the war is at the centre of the book, it is the loss of England and its past values, its betrayal, which is the key motif.

It seems hardly credible now, in this soured and quarrelsome country that so many men of different classes and kinds, thrown together at random, should ever have been so simply and happily friendly, trustful and keen. But they were, and they imagined that all their betters were too. That was the paradise that the bottom fell out of.⁹⁹

It was not until the autumn of 1928 that, ten years after the war, a new genre of war literature began to make its impact with soldier writers finally able to communicate their experiences and find a language to represent the war. Edmund Blunden's *Undertones of War* was one of the first to appear in November 1928 followed by a second wave of war books in 1929-30. A notable success was Erich Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front*, first published in serial form in a German newspaper and then in book form in 1929 with an English edition in March of the same year. In six months 300,000 copies of the English edition had been sold and in 1930 the film was released. The distinguishing feature of many of these war books was the processing of personal experience of individual combatants by confronting and detailing the horrors and carnage of war. They were the survivors of the world tragedy but they were also its casualties and its victims. Little wonder then they appeared unanimous in their condemnation of war. Few could have analysed the nature of that experience as eloquently, and elegiacally, as Walter Benjamin:

⁹⁹ C. E. Montague, *Disenchantment*, London: Chatto and Windus, 1922, reprinted 1939, p. 12

Was it not noticeable at the end of the war that men returned from the battlefield grown silent - not richer but poorer in communicable experience? What ten years later was poured out in the flood of war books was anything but experience that goes from mouth to mouth. And there was nothing remarkable about that. For never has experience been contradicted more thoroughly than strategic experience by tactical warfare... bodily experience by mechanical warfare, moral experience by those in power. A generation that had gone to school on a horse-drawn streetcar now stood under the open sky in a countryside in which nothing remained unchanged but the clouds, and beneath these clouds, in a field of force of destructive torrents and explosions, was the tiny, fragile human body.¹⁰⁰

The fragility of men's bodies in the onslaught of mechanised warfare as told in the war literature was, by the late 1920s, a version of the story of war that was publicly circulated. The genre allowed men to express their feelings of discontinuity of self, conflicts, fears, tensions and the traumatic disturbance provoked in their war world. However, this version was contested; by 1930 what was known as the war books controversy erupted when some critics questioned the validity of individual accounts which ignored the larger, strategic perspective and by doing so presented the war as futile, needlessly destructive of human life and deeply damaging to those who survived it. The controversy indicated the struggle between private memories and those who wanted to preserve an official version of national memory.

The loss and disillusionment of the war itself was intimately intertwined with the disillusionment many returning soldiers felt as they sought to reintegrate into society after the war. Some historians have argued that disillusionment was part of the

¹⁰⁰ Walter Benjamin, 'The Storyteller' in *Illuminations*, London: Fontana, 1977, p. 84

mythologising of the First World War. For example, Joanna Bourke argues that she does not adhere to the disillusionment thesis, regarding the 'self-proclaimed truth-tellers' such as Robert Graves, Edmund Blunden and Wilfred Owen among others as unrepresentative. However, the evidence found here suggests that disillusionment with the war was more widespread than Bourke acknowledges and evident in the ranks and the officer class. Further, Bourke's claim that the men in her study were 'more likely to view their surprising survival as a lucky and joyous opportunity to create a sphere of comfortable domesticity'¹⁰¹ can be modified by some of the evidence above. Establishing 'comfortable domesticity' could involve considerable tension and negotiation between men and women estranged by war.

Sometimes disillusionment provided a framework for veterans to articulate their immediate post war feelings; several express a feeling of bitterness:

I always felt bitter. If it had been.. I learned it was a waste, what the devil were you doing, killing fellows that were nowt to do with it. We had nowt to do with it, it's only them in Parliament, we ought to let them have a battle between them. You lost your patriotism - it was so stupid.¹⁰²

The voice of the angry, anguished young man can still be heard in the short, staccato rhythms, in the unfinished sentence, 'if it had been...' What? Worthwhile, meaningful but it was not, 'it was a waste'. Some of the bitterness of youth was transformed by a determination to work, to overcome the humiliation, indifference and cost cutting by

¹⁰¹ Joanna Bourke, *Dismembering the Male: Men's Bodies, Britain and the Great War*, London: Reaktion Books, 1996, pp. 19-20

¹⁰² Bill Towers, IWM 11038

medical authorities and in the administration of pensions to the war wounded. The interviewee, Bill Towers had part of his leg amputated as a result of a war wound. He was eighteen at the time. Traces of bitterness still remain and justifiably so given the callousness with which he was treated. However, disillusionment was not in his case a lasting sentiment, physical and psychic healing had taken place:

In 1919 I wanted to die. Now I don't want to die, I've enjoyed life since. I've enjoyed helping others, I'd do anything to help anybody else, it's been my life has that, I think.¹⁰³

Another veteran who insisted that the war 'never altered me, it's never made me bitter' continued in the same sentence 'as a matter of fact I think it was a daft excursion, it was absolutely ridiculous. I didn't know what I was fighting for.'¹⁰⁴ In contrast, an interviewee reflected on war as a positive experience 'it was an experience - it gave you an outlook on life, a broader one'¹⁰⁵ while a railway booking office clerk who became an NCO felt 'it made me. I was responsible - it was marvellous really, I felt I could do any job.'¹⁰⁶ These men were recalling a past of seventy odd years ago. Since then other achievements and events in their life course might have mediated earlier discontents.

To what extent the written memoirs were influenced by the genre of war literature signifying disillusionment is a matter of speculation. John McCauley's memoir was rare in that it was published. It was published anonymously in the *Manx Examiner*

¹⁰³ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ George Ashurst, IWM 9875

¹⁰⁵ Horace Calvert, IWM 9955

¹⁰⁶ William Cowley, IWM 8866

in 1932 under the title 'A Manx Soldier's War Diary'. His identity was subsequently revealed; he was a furnaceman working in the foundry in Douglas, active in the labour movement and an 'enthusiastic worker for the British Legion and Chair of the recently formed branch'. Self-consciously reflective and literary, it is a powerful and moving testimony of a man's struggle to come to terms with his war experience and in the process to understand himself. In making public his memoir, his motive was also, returning to Caputo's phrase, to demonstrate the *things war does to men*. Given the date of publication, 1932, it is possible to speculate on why McCauley felt able to place his personal memoirs in the public domain, perhaps because other accounts of horrors of war and what it does to men were already available for public consumption. The struggle over the cultural representations of the war intersected with political discourses about peace and disarmament and for example, the role of the League of Nations in securing international peace. John McCauley's narrative is fractured at points by reflections on these issues expressing his hopes and desires for international peace. Since he was described as active in the labour movement, a further impulse to make public his memoirs may have been a political one. By detailing what happened to him, how he was changed by the war and how he came to perceive the enemy as men who suffered equally he could address an audience receptive to the ideals of international peace. Actively campaigning for peace was part of the process of recuperating his manhood which he had described as being 'stolen from him', the loss of which he still feels.

One of the most agonising losses which stayed in the memories of men was the death of comrades. The homosocial world of the army encourages group solidarity and male bonding. It operates at a military, institutional level where group identity and solidarity are necessary for effectiveness in battle and therefore fostered by a variety of

rituals ranging through military uniforms and military training. *Esprit de corps* maintains morale. All construct a hegemonic heterosexual masculinity. At the same time, there were contradictions in the informal groupings of comrades where more feminine characteristics were displayed in the 'domesticity' of life lived in constant intimacy with other men, including nurturing, the need for affection, care and concern for:

A soldier spends virtually all his time, awake and asleep, with his mates; he is with them more continuously than most men are with their wives. And at critical moments his life may depend on their fidelity and courage. ¹⁰⁷

Intense emotions were provoked by remembering fellow men who shared the war experience:

I always remember all those mates of mine in the trenches. We were just a band of brothers, no brothers were more united, because living as we were we never knew whether we were going to be killed. ¹⁰⁸

The disbanding of the regiments at the end of the war sometimes stirred deep feelings of loss and separation:

They were all our friends, men that we had served with sometimes for years. When you have lived with men for that length of time there's a lot of deep affection. Most of us were free to do what we wanted at Staples (sic) and we always went to the station to see the chaps off. Some of us did a bit of crying particularly the old soldiers who had been out there for a long time. ¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷ Hynes, *Soldiers' Tale*, p. 9

¹⁰⁸ William Holmes, IWM 8868

¹⁰⁹ S. E. Butler, IWM 86/2/1

Loss and grief were what gave the notion of brotherhood its powerful emotional appeal but also compounded the difficulties of returning:

To identify with the battalion at war and with the narrow circle of one's comrades was to open a large, vertiginous emotional drain, and to begin a seemingly endless process of mourning.¹¹⁰

In the very different circumstances of peace, the differences between men of class, age, political affiliation and so on made these bonds difficult to sustain but the memories of comradeship remained either as the tragedy of war in reflections on the dead or as one of its pleasures, as gratitude to those who helped one's survival. Some men who referred to 'brotherhood' also acknowledged that they did not keep in touch with their comrades after the war had ended. For men who wanted to forget their wartime experiences this was a possible strategy of containment. Maintaining contact with those who shared the same experiences kept the memories alive, making the process of repression more difficult. One example of a cross-class friendship which endured for a lifetime was probably unusual. The young officer referred to earlier kept in touch after the war with the Durham miner who had been this officer's servant. In five years after the war, the miner who was married with two children had only found work for about six months. The officer meanwhile had returned to the family firm in London:

¹¹⁰ Leed, *No Man's Land*, p. 210

I asked him if he would like to come and work for our company and he did and we both carried on for about thirty eight years until we both retired. I kept in touch with him since then and he only died in January this year (1984). He was a great chap.¹¹¹

The loss of self, a sense of discontinuity, engendered by the war was a process some men reflected on in their writing trying, through the re-telling of their stories, to resolve some of the conflicts. While some felt the war had made 'men' of them, others mourned the loss of their youth as does, for example, the young narrator of *All Quiet on the Western Front*:

We are not youth any longer. We don't want to take the world by storm. We are fleeing. We fly from ourselves. From our life. We were eighteen and had begun to love life and the world; and we had to shoot it to pieces. The first bomb, the first explosion burst in our hearts. We are cut off from activity, from striving, from progress... We are forlorn like children, and experienced like old men, we are crude and sorrowful and superficial - I believe we are lost.¹¹²

What is lost is the adult man represented in the gap, a negative space, between 'forlorn children' and 'experienced old men'. The Armistice, signalling the end of the war, did not resolve the sense of loss. Bill Towers, discharged from the army because of his severe war wound was sitting in a cafe in Leeds on Armistice Day:

¹¹¹ Arthur Watts, IWM 8278

¹¹² Erich Maria Remarque, *All Quiet on the Western Front*, The Folio Society, London, 1966 pp. 59-60, 80

My own battery was coming home, passing the Town Hall and the Lord Mayor taking the salute. It was one of the saddest times of my life when I saw them...oh God, all them they're all fit and there am I, a crock and they're coming back and being cheered and here I am, a wreck. I wish I hadn't been there to see my particular battery passing.¹¹³

At the time, death seemed preferable to a young man whose physical integrity had been shattered by the loss of his leg. His sense of emasculation in comparison with his 'fit' comrades threatens to overwhelm him situating him outside and as 'other' in the display of masculine prowess and heroism in the marching troops. He has to sit, observing.

Like the Armistice, the war memorial has a symbolic significance in some of the written memoirs. The war memorial is the site for the shared act of mourning the dead but also the site for self-reflection, for grieving for a loss of self. Remembrance Day is always a powerful reminder of war and loss. John McCauley brings his memoir to its narrative close on Remembrance Day 1932:

In the Two Minutes Silence I see great hosts of phantom figures, the ghosts of yesterday. The long line of soldier comrades, such noble comrades they were, march before my blurred vision. I see them in battalions, brigades, divisions army corps, and I distinctly hear their cry - 'In honouring the dead, forget not the living. Remember us, but remember, too, those who survived.' 'If ye break faith with us who died, We shall not sleep, though poppies grow in Flanders' Fields.'¹¹⁴

¹¹³ Bill Towers, IWM 11038

¹¹⁴ John McCauley, IWM 97/10/1

In honouring the dead, John McCauley represents war as noble, memorialising the bravery and comradeship. He follows the conventions of public narratives associated with legends of the return of the dead as ghostly apparitions and ends with one of the most popular war poems *In Flanders' Fields* by John McCrae. Following the disclosure of his identity as the author of 'A Manx Soldier's War Diary', he contributed to a section of the *Manx Examiner* called 'Memories'. Again, he writes his reflections as he stands with others at the Douglas War Memorial but this time the memories which are recalled are of the darker side of war, his own haunting memories of pain and loss:

...That is the great purpose of Armistice; it is to celebrate peace not war. Let us hold on to it, it is a great anchor in this troubled world.... My mind flashed to 1914, barracks, ships, Le Havre, Rouen, railheads and the final destination front line trenches. Yes, it all came before me. Wounded, screaming for help, dead bodies littered all over the place, men crying to be shot out of their agony. God what a sight. The maroon went to end the two minutes silence. What a sigh of relief to be awakened and brought back to civilisation.¹¹⁵

The presentation of competing versions of his war reflections indicates the conflicts which, still in the 1930s, engage him in making his experiences comprehensible to himself and his readership. The struggle to find a form of subjective composure, between past and present remains to some extent unresolved despite the attempt to write an ending for his memoir. 'War memories are always agonising' he wrote:

¹¹⁵ John McCauley, IWM 97/10/1

The war had become a thing of the past until the War Memorial was erected, and I stood and gazed at the names of so many of the men I knew- there were over 400, and I pictured my own name there- to what purpose, I do not know. ¹¹⁶

Rowland Luther was also haunted by his war memories; he 'cracked up and became just skin and bone:'

My life had been in despair, but by good attention, I picked up again, after being delirious and re-living my life as a soldier ¹¹⁷

Men returned from the war with some bearing its impact on their fractured minds and bodies, affording public recognition of the damage done to men by war. For as Eric Leed maintains, the Armistice did not signal the end of war experience 'but rather the beginning of a process in which that experience was framed, institutionalised, given ideological content and relived in political action as well as fiction.'¹¹⁸ However, the experience was also framed in private memories, memories which for many continued to haunt them. The compulsion to re-tell their stories, whether preserved in their own private memoirs or put into public circulation, is indicative of the enduring effects of their war experiences. The popular memory approach outlined above has shown how individual memory is structured by shared images of public narratives of war. The soldier hero was a source of imaginings of masculinity, a powerful gendered narrative

¹¹⁶ *ibid.*

¹¹⁷ Rowland Luther, IWM 87/8/1

¹¹⁸ Leed, *No Man's Land*, p. xi

and a dominant form of masculinity. However, the stories examined here which reveal some of the pleasures as well as the pain and grief of war, suggest that coming to terms with 'felt alterations in themselves' not only draws on cultural imaginings but on the individual psychological and unconscious processes which structure memories and in turn, individual masculine identities. For some men, the desire to forget afforded them the possibility that war had left them unchanged, for others, the sense of discontinuity and disruption was profound.

Chapter Two

'WAR MAKES SANE MEN MAD'

Shell shocked soldiers and competing masculinities

The term shell shock was first adopted by Dr. Charles Myers in an article in *The Lancet* in 1915 to describe the mental condition of men he was treating in a temporary hospital in France. At its inception the term, with its striking alliteration, appeared to encapsulate precisely the cause and effect of a nervous disorder which was afflicting so many men at the front. Proximity to the physical force of exploding shells caused damage to the central nervous system, a seemingly straightforward organic dysfunction. In 1922 the Report of the War Office Committee of Enquiry into 'Shell-Shock' was published. How then did the certainty of the condition and diagnosis of shell shock become transformed into the more hesitant and ambivalent 'shell-shock' of the 1922 War Office Committee?

The question can be answered simply by reference to Myers's own repudiation of the term as a 'singularly, ill-chosen' one since a shell 'may play no part whatever in the causation and that its 'onset so gradual, that its origin hardly deserves the name of 'shock''.¹ Or by reference to the War Office Committee which stated that shell shock was 'a grievous misnomer' while having to concede that it was 'a popular or vulgar term

¹ C. Myers, *Shell Shock in France 1914-18*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1940, p. 26

in use'², a term that the general public would understand since it had become common currency in the national press since mid-1916.³ Nevertheless, six years later the Report of the War Office Committee of Enquiry into 'Shell-Shock' began with a long discussion about the meaning of the word. The very slipperiness of the term and the unease with which it was used signifies then a more complex answer.

Shell shock was an epidemic of *male* mental disorders occurring at a time when manly values and traditional masculine virtues were evoked and embedded in the idealised image of the soldier. At the centre of the heated debates about shell shock were the men who suffered, some temporarily and some bearing the scars long after the war was over, the very antithesis of the manly fighter. Thus the debates over shell shock were powerfully inflected by dominant discourses about manliness and masculinity; time and again the aetiology of the disease was perceived as inextricably linked to the nature and character of the men suffering from it. For if even its nomenclature provoked confusion and anxiety, greater gender anxieties arose from the 'parade of emotionally incapacitated men'.⁴

Shell shock, then, provides a lens through which to focus on the ways in which the war disrupted gender relations and traditional ideas about the nation's manhood. In her study of women and madness, Elaine Showalter devoted one chapter to 'male

² *Report of the Report of Enquiry into 'Shell-Shock'*, London: HMSO, 1922, p. 4 (hereafter referred to as the Report)

³ Ted Bogacz, 'War Neurosis and Cultural Change in England, 1914-22: The work of the Report of Enquiry into 'Shell-Shock'', *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 24, 1989, p. 234

⁴ Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady, Women, Madness and English Culture, 1830-1980*, London: Virago, 1985, p. 169

hysteria' in which she argued that 'the Great War was a crisis of masculinity and a trial of the Victorian masculine ideal'.⁵ Drawing parallels between soldiers rendered powerless in the trenches and the confinement of Victorian women within a narrowly defined femininity, she argues that the war, 'that most masculine of enterprises', feminised its soldiers by taking away their sense of control. More recently, George Mosse has identified shell shock as a social disease, a 'fusion of medical diagnosis and social prejudice'. Such prejudice was predicated on not only gender divisions, but also on divisions between men for 'war was the supreme test of manliness, and those who were the victims of shellshock had failed this test.'⁶ Thus, he argues, those men suffering from mental disorders were considered as outsiders and as failures as men unable to fulfill the ideals of manliness. Crucially in time of war, their failure was further compounded by their apparent inability to undertake service for a national ideal with a commitment to the national cause. These interpretations of shell shock and its associations with masculinity inform this chapter, the aim of which is to interrogate how the conceptions and perceptions of the range of mental disorders which afflicted men during and after the war interacted with the prevailing ideas of masculinity. What has received less attention in some of the historiography of shell shock was how the combatants themselves constructed shell shock and in so doing, may have rejected or revised some of the prevailing discourses. Did they generate oppositional or alternative versions of masculine identities?

⁵ *ibid.* p. 171

⁶ George Mosse, 'Shell-shock as a Social Disease', *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 35, No. 1, January 2000, p.104.

The following discussion will be framed by soldiers' narratives, drawn from the same sources as in Chapter One but including additions as well as some published sources, in which representations of shell shock help shape their memories of war. With a few exceptions, most of the memoirs contain eye witness accounts of incidents of men breaking down or are accounts by those, such as R. A. M. C. doctors who were involved in the diagnosis and treatment of men in their care. Usually written years after the war, they are always mediated by time and memory. Nevertheless, in writing about their individual experiences which were subject to revisions and re-interpretations, the authors open up the possibilities of reading their texts as a working through of the traumas of war. In the acts of writing and revisiting the often traumatic memories of war, the rawness and intensity of the experience generated a mode of expression which was self-reflective. If as Eric Leed has argued 'the front was an isolated, cut-off world of marginalised men among whom all the correlates of identity had turned inward',⁷ then by returning to the front in their imaginations, they were confronted again with the fears, desires, pleasures, grief and loss which challenged and in some cases, transformed their sense of self. Hiram Sturdy's bitter assertion 'war makes sane men mad', that it was the war itself that propelled men to anger, neuroses and in some cases mental breakdown, was highly contentious.

Yet psychic casualties in battle were not new, although what was new was the scale of numbers of combatants who suffered in the First World War. In the seventeenth century the Swiss physician, Johannes Hofer identified a state of deep despair which assailed fighting men as 'nostalgia'; 'a continuing melancholy, incessant thinking of

⁷ Eric Leed, *No Man's Land*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979, p. 90

home, disturbed sleep or insomnia, weakness, loss of appetite, anxiety, cardiac palpitations, stupor and fever'.⁸ During the Napoleonic wars the French troops suffered from a similar condition with comparable symptoms which they also named 'nostalgie'. 'Soldiers' heart' or the 'irritable heart of soldiers' produced a similar cluster of symptoms to which the government responded in 1864 by setting up a committee of three generals and two doctors. In an attempt to locate mental disorders within biological and physical events their task was to consider a modification in patterns of equipment to avoid the restrictions on soldiers' hearts. Silas Weir Mitchell, a prominent American neurologist known for his technique of the rest cure, famously associated with women and effete artistic 'types', treated soldiers who succumbed to forms of mental illness, sometimes identified as nostalgia, during the American Civil War while later, the Anglo-Boer Wars and Russo-Japanese War produced similar war neuroses among combatants. Nevertheless, despite the recognition and treatment of mental and nervous disorders produced in the stress of battle, suspicion always lurked about their potential for deception by malingerers. They could also be marginalised as the patients were often designated 'insane'⁹, a diagnosis which blamed the victims and excluded them from the ranks of 'normal' fighting men. However evidence from the Russo-Japanese War offered another dimension to the understanding of battle trauma. Captain R. L. Richards of the US Medical Corps concluded:

⁸ Anthony Babington, *Shell Shock: A History of the Changing Attitudes to War Neuroses*, London: Leo Cooper, 1997, p. 7

⁹ *ibid.* pp. 34-41

A future war will call at least equally large numbers of men into action. The tremendous endurance, bodily and mental, required for the days of fighting over increasingly large areas, and the mysterious and widely destructive effects of modern artillery fire will test men as they have never been tested before. We can surely count then on a much larger percentage of mental diseases requiring our attention in a future war.¹⁰

Captain Richards's prescient comments attributed the effects of new war technology and ever larger theatres of war as potential contributing factors in mental breakdown.

Nevertheless, warnings were not heeded from such predictions for, as W. H. R. Rivers observed:

the medical administration of our own and other armies was wholly unprepared for the vast extent and varied forms in which modern warfare is able to upset the higher functions of the nervous system and the mental activity of those called upon to take part in it.¹¹

The consequences were that in the early months of the First World War soldiers suffering from shell shock were diagnosed as insane and dispatched home to mental hospitals. However, as the incidence of shell shock increased so too did the controversies with which it was surrounded; shell shock itself became a battlefield.

As the early trickle of cases turned into a flood after the Battle of the Somme in July 1916, the incidence of mental breakdown took on epidemic proportions. In 1916, shell shock accounted for nearly 40% of casualties on the battlefields. By the end of the

¹⁰ Captain R. L. Richards, 'Mental and Nervous Diseases in the Russo-Japanese War,' *Military Surgeon*, Vol. 26, 1910, p. 177 quoted in Babington, *Shell Shock*, p. 38

¹¹ W. H. R. Rivers, *Instinct and the Unconscious*, Cambridge: University Press, 1920, p. 2

war, 80,000 cases of war neuroses had passed through army hospitals.¹² The unprecedented numbers of psychic casualties could not be ignored since they threatened the demands for manpower as well as military discipline and order. The banning of the word shell shock as a medical term by the Army Medical Services in 1917 did nothing to resolve the confusion or the condition. Furthermore, cases of shell shock were still a significant presence in the inter-war years. A year after the War Office Committee was established, 65,000 ex-servicemen were still drawing disability pensions for neurasthenia, 9,000 of whom were still undergoing hospital treatment.¹³ In March 1939, some 120,000 ex-servicemen were either receiving pensions or had received a final award for war-related psychiatric disability.¹⁴

Shell shock was disruptive; it challenged military, medical and administrative authorities as they were forced to manage incapacitated men. In the process, the practices involved in diagnosing causes and symptoms, providing treatment and care and administering pensions came under scrutiny. These practices were derived from sets of differing and often competing assumptions about for example, mental illness, military and medical professionalism and army discipline. Underpinning them all were assumptions about normative masculinity. Shell shock profoundly challenged these assumptions and subjected them to change and revision. Yet it was not simply that the exigencies of war demanded and produced responses to the incidence of shell shock, rather it was that these processes constituted the disease and were implicated in its aetiology. For

¹² Showalter, *Female Malady*, p. 168

¹³ Bogacz, 'War Neurosis', p. 227

¹⁴ Babington, *Shell Shock*, p. 121

example, Martin Stone has examined how the 'clinical phenomena' of shell shock and the 'systematic nature of its reproduction as a set of illnesses'¹⁵ were 'constituted by military social relations'.¹⁶ Chris Feudtner has argued for an analysis of shell shock as a 'disease-system' whereby various elements come together to constitute the disease. He identified these components as ranging from 'the bodies and minds of soldiers to the theories and practices of doctors, to wartime politics and social attitudes.' Moreover, the concept of a disease system allows for a consideration of the ways in which it is 'interactive and dynamic' and how shell shock was 'continuously created and recreated'.¹⁷ The primary context in which both writers were engaged was an exploration of the legacy of shell shock and its impact on concepts of mental illness, its treatments as well as developments in civilian psychiatry. However, they both point to a further significant element which can be identified; inscribed on the image of the shell shocked soldier was a set of anxieties about masculinities.

The mechanisation of warfare with new weapons of destruction, long-range weaponry and high explosive shells, was as horrific as it was unexpected for the regular soldiers as well as the new civilian army. The constant process of attrition on the bodies, minds and spirits of men was recorded by many men who laid claim to their authority of knowledge, legitimised by their experiences which set them apart from those who neither

¹⁵ Martin Stone, 'Shellshock and the Pyschologists' in W. F. Bynum, Roy Porter and Michael Shepherd, *The Anatomy of Madness: Essays in the History of Psychiatry*, London: Tavistock, 1985, p. 258

¹⁶ *ibid.* p. 242

¹⁷ Chris Feudtner, ' "Minds the Dead have Ravished": Shell Shock, History, and the Ecology of Disease-Systems', *History of Science*, Vol. 31, 1993, p. 381

knew nor understood, especially those at home. What the soldiers knew was that the effects of serving in the trenches with their 'incalculable hardships' could result in temporary or permanent mental breakdown. However, even when war neuroses were accepted and mental wounds recognised alongside physical ones, arguments still raged about their aetiology. Nevertheless, twenty years after the war Hiram Sturdy remained adamant that 'war makes sane men mad'. Heroic visions of soldiering and adventure which had captured many young men's imaginations slowly evaporated in the realities of trench warfare as men were rendered powerless. The image of battle as 'spectacular' was in reality replaced by passivity, boredom and what could seem like endless waiting for action often against an invisible enemy. Worse, they felt stripped of their masculine selves, reduced to animals burrowing in the earth for their survival. One combatant wrote 'we were washed out things. With noses to the cold earth, like rats in a trap, we waited for the next moment, which might land us in eternity.' W. N. Maxwell quoted this in his *A Psychological Retrospect of the Great War* published in 1923; he followed it with his own reflection of how 'all the dignity and pride of manhood is cast aside at such a time.' War not only stripped men of their humanity but also of their imagined soldierly identities supposedly constituted by military service and joining the army. However many men found that being soldiers did not confer on them the masculine qualities they had anticipated but instead the war unmanned them. Hiram Sturdy's memory was of humiliation and emasculation:

How degrading and *unmanly* (my italics) were the positions that one was forced to get into, to keep hanging on to that little bit of breath and now, that it is all over, I twist my face when I see all the splendour of uniforms, glistening bayonets, everything pointing to the glories of soldiers and soldiering, to the young ignorant mind, at our day, when we are supposed to remember the men who for years were forced to live like beasts of the jungle.¹⁸

Since war transgresses normal categories of experience, thought, attitudes and human relations, men could feel that they had no recourse either to their civilian identities so the capacity for self-recognition could sometimes only be expressed through metaphor to ensure their psychic survival. For psychic survival was continuously threatened by the conditions of war. Physical fatigue, lack of sleep, mud, lice, filth all contributed to the stresses of the combatants but it was the static nature of warfare which confined and enclosed men in a nightmare world in which they were immobilised:

To be confined to a trench, within view of the enemy, day and night for weeks at a stretch, during the severe days of winter, was enough to lower the spirits of the stoutest heart.¹⁹

As Leed argues 'it was precisely the memory of having inhabited for an unimaginable time a landscape saturated with invisible men and controlled by an unapproachable technology that remained the longest with many combatants'.²⁰ The immobilisation of men in the trenches, a feature of static trench warfare, provoked profound anxiety which

¹⁸ Hiram Sturdy, IWM Con Shelf

¹⁹ W. A. Quinton, IWM 79/35/1

²⁰ Leed, *No Man's Land*, p. 20

was compounded by the dangers of shell-fire. It took its toll on men's capacity for mental endurance, and for some, destroyed it.

The language of battle and the fight against the enemy was appropriated as men fought against their own mental terrors as they tried to maintain their own psychic defences:

This was not our idea of fighting. To be kept like prisoners in our own trench and be pounded day and night by high explosives, without any chance of retaliation, reduced the 'fighting' part of the business to a farce.... far better if we went over the top and got to grips with the enemy man to man. That would be fighting but one could not fight these shells that screamed and crashed amongst us, or this gas that could choke the life out of a man in a long drawn out agony. The biggest fight was not fighting the enemy, it was the fight within ourselves. -- The fight to keep our reason. -- The fight to keep ourselves from going stark raving mad, as we had seen one or two of our comrades do.²¹

While the military and medical authorities struggled to come to terms with mental breakdown, the combatants identified its aetiology and its manifestations as they witnessed fellow soldiers succumb to what they themselves feared, 'going stark raving mad'. The term shell shock would have dramatically resonated with their reactions to the incessant bombardments and the other strains of war; a profound emotional disturbance. Other accounts confirmed Sturdy's assertion that it was the nature of the war itself and the intolerable pressures imposed on their bodies and more so on their minds that made men 'mad'. An R. A. M. C. Captain recorded his 'vivid memories' of shelling: 'the noise is entirely outside my experience and I do not know how the Infantry

²¹ W. A. Quinton, IWM /79/35/1

stand its continuity... and still stay sane'.²² Moreover, there were other terrors in the unpredictability of the weaponry and nature of First World War warfare, being buried alive for example and especially gas attacks. W. A. Quinton recalled the reactions following a gas attack:

Next morning we were all nerves, fearing another gas attack. We watched the wind anxiously. There is no doubt about it, every man jack of us were absolutely terrified by the thought of it. I have seen the faces of men with iron nerve turn a sickly white when some fool has hissed out, gas!²³

Loneliness, especially when carrying out duties alone, exacerbated fear and contributed to men's loss of nerve, a shameful state not readily admitted and sometimes possible to record only in retrospect. For example, Harold Clegg's duties at one point involved carrying rations from the cookhouse to the front line; he recorded the events of one dark night:

I completely lost my nerve, the heavy shelling and loneliness contributed to it I suppose... That was the only time my courage gave way; I emptied out the tea and returned, telling nobody of my action.²⁴

Similarly, another ex-serviceman alluded to his loss of nerve but even writing ten years after the war was over was unable to acknowledge its full impact:

²² Captain L. Gameson, IWM P.397

²³ W. A. Quinton, IWM 79/35/1

²⁴ Harold Clegg, IWM 88/18/1

The feeling one can have when alone under shell and rifle fire is one that drives men mad. I had this experience, (long after I had been hardened to the firing line) and I never wanted it again.²⁵

In the midst of all the conflicting evidence given to the War Office Committee of Enquiry into 'Shell-Shock', some military witnesses acknowledged the nature of warfare as conducive to men breaking down, thus confirming the soldiers' accounts of shell shock as a gradual process of attrition. Colonel J. F. C. Fuller, DSO, Deputy Director of Staff Duties (Training) argued that it was not sudden danger that produced shell shock but 'prolonged danger in a static position, where the man cannot get away from it. It is the wear and tear and slow sapping of his nervous power.'²⁶ Similarly, Lieutenant-General Sir John Goodwin, Director General, Army Medical Service, testified on a point about which he felt very strongly, 'that men should not be left too long in any lonely position or in a lonely nature of employment. It is very trying indeed for them.'²⁷ Thus there was a recognition of the effects of the external and physical conditions in which war was conducted on men's mental capacity for endurance. Emotions which contributed to men's sense of 'going mad' and in some cases, to their mental collapse were identified as 'the strange things that happened to men's nervous systems at the Front'²⁸. How men coped with such emotional turmoil and how in turn it was perceived and managed by the

²⁵ W. A. Quinton, IWM 79/35/1

²⁶ Report, p. 28

²⁷ Report, p. 15

²⁸ W. N. Maxwell, *A Psychological Retrospect of the Great War*, London: Allen & Unwin, 1923, p. 89

army and medical establishment was critical in the interpretations of shell shock and of the men who suffered from it.

From the outset, the aetiology of shell shock was contentious within both the military establishment and the medical profession. However, some commentators, predominantly a small group of psychologists including C. S. Myers, William McDougall and W. H. R. Rivers²⁹ shared an understanding with the men of how the war tested men's endurance in terrifying ways; 'War imposed on a multitude of men a moral strain which, in respect of intensity and duration, has never been equalled in civil life or in previous wars, save only in rare cases.'³⁰ Others argued on the same lines, for example, in an article in the *Lancet* in 1915, Dr. D. Forsyth wrote that the 'intensest strain' of the present war, unlike previous wars, was shell-fire:

The detonation, the flash, the heat of the explosion, the air-concussion, the upheaval of the ground, and the acrid, suffocating fumes combine in producing a violent assault on practically all the senses simultaneously... experience has shown that a high degree of nervous tension is commonest among men who have, perforce, to remain inactive while being shelled.³¹

C. Stanford Read supported the view that 'enormously high explosives, poisoned gases and liquid fire' as well as aerial bombing and trench strategy 'added so greatly to the

²⁹ Myers and McDougall were Rivers' students and worked together in the field of experimental psychology at Cambridge as well as going on an anthropological expedition together in 1898; see Richard Slobodin, *W. H. R. Rivers*, Stroud: Sutton, 1997, pp. 18-24

³⁰ William McDougall, *An Outline of Abnormal Psychology*, London: Methuen, 1926, p. 2

³¹ Dr. D. Forsyth, 'Functional Nerve Disease and Shock of Battle', *The Lancet*, December 1915, p. 1399

mental and physical strain of the combatants'.³² The observations of this group of psychologists that the underlying cause of shell shock was psychological was fiercely contested as others insisted it was physical in origin.

Early in the war influential neurologists such as Sir Frederick Mott attributed shell shock to the commotional effects of exploding shells which caused physical damage to the central nervous system while other physical causes such as the power of the blast from exploding shells or the inhalation of poisonous gases were also proposed. For others, the cause was far more simple, shell shock victims were malingerers, a view that some military personnel maintained throughout the war, and after. For example, a Lieutenant-Colonel giving evidence to the War Office Committee on 'Shell Shock' asserted that 'many cases of neurasthenia and shell shock were skrim-shanking of the worst kind.'³³ Similarly, William McDougall who was stationed at Netley Hospital where most of the cases of shell shock were sent in the early days of the war was confronted by such attitudes: 'in the early days of the war I heard a medical officer of the rank of General declare emphatically that every case of 'shell shock' should be shot forthwith as a malingerer. That remark expressed very well a prevalent medical attitude.'³⁴

Captain James Dible who served as a RMO with the Loyal North Lancashire Regiment expressed this common sentiment when he wrote 'I cannot abide these neurasthenic people. R. A. M. C. officers call them 'Skrimshankers'... No doubt they

³² C. Stanford Read, *Military Psychiatry in Peace and War*, London: H. K. Lewis, 1920, p. 24

³³ Report, p. 16

³⁴ McDougall, *Abnormal Psychology*, p. 2

suffer, and their own woes are very real to themselves: all the same they exasperate me beyond endurance.’³⁵ The fragmentary, self-reflective form of his writing revealed how his attitudes changed during the course of his war service in the R. A. M. C. and how he too came to an understanding of how the strains of war could wear men down psychologically:

Men accustomed to what the Englishman has fought for generations, personal freedom, are suddenly deprived of this greatest of possessions. They are being worked seven days a week for long periods without rest or change. The strain is wearing tempers thin and the breaking point is often very near.³⁶

Personal freedom was of course far less available to his working-class patients for whom long hours and working a seven day week would not have been unfamiliar. Prior to the war, Captain Dible had held junior hospital posts in Medicine and Surgery in Glasgow and in 1914 was a junior demonstrator in pathology at the University of Sheffield. His memoir of his service with the R. A. M. C. with its sometimes contradictory attitudes points to the dilemmas facing military physicians charged ‘to act as disciplinary gatekeepers. They were caught in a potential double bind: to distinguish between neurotic and malingerer forced them to choose between their medical calling and their military duty.’³⁷ Dible encapsulated this dilemma as he negotiated the ‘debasing idea pervading everyone that the men ‘go sick’ to escape duty.’ Despite his personal antipathy to neurasthenics, he nevertheless refused ‘to co-operate in schemes for catching

³⁵ Captain J. H. Dible, IWM Con Shelf

³⁶ *ibid.*

³⁷ Feudtner, ‘Minds’, p. 396

scrimshankers, because in the event of a mistake such shocking miscarriages of justice would occur.³⁸

Indeed, miscarriages of justice did occur and subsequent research into courts-martial and the imposition of death sentences has provided substantial evidence that in many cases shell shock accounted for cases of desertion, leaving a post or cowardice.³⁹ The death penalty was also the subject of enquiry and concern during the war and in the immediate aftermath; Philip Snowden, the Independent Labour Party M. P., raised questions in Parliament and a committee convened to examine military justice reported in 1919.⁴⁰ In the House of Lords debate in April 1920 when Lord Southborough proposed his motion to establish a committee of investigation into shell shock the question of possible injustices relating to the 346 executions were also raised by him, Lord Horne and Viscount Haldane, particularly in the early part of the war when shell shock was little understood.⁴¹ The debate about the unjust treatment of soldiers suffering from shell shock being brought before the firing squad focussed on the differences between civil and military law in regard to definitions of insanity while also bringing into question the abilities of medical officers to report on men's mental states. The dilemma in which Captain Dible found himself was echoed by another Medical Officer serving with the 45th Field Ambulance and Royal Field Artillery; Captain Gameson recorded his

³⁸ Captain J. H. Dible, IWM Con Shelf

³⁹ For specific cases see Gerard Oram, *Worthless Men: Race, eugenics and the death penalty in the British Army during the First World War*, London: Francis Boutle, 1998; A. Babington, *For the Sake of Example*, London: Paladin 1983; Babington, 'Shell- Shock'

⁴⁰ Oram, *Worthless Men*, p. 19

⁴¹ *Hansard*, House of Lords, 28 April 1920, Vol. 39, cols. 1094-1105

reflections on appearing at a court-martial to give evidence on behalf of a 'boy' accused of cowardice:

As an ordinary M. O., with no experience whatever outside hospital, I was inexpert in both the thorny matter of mental states and the technique of presenting a case... which is not to say that medical evidence with all its demerits was useless, only that it was not sought as a matter of routine...Some, by no means necessarily blimps, would have no quarter at any price. They would shoot every deserter mitigating circumstances or not. To men of this stamp medical officers were intruders.⁴²

For what medical officers intruded upon were the disciplinary procedures of the army which underpinned its military ethos and its organisational practices. Shell shock exposed the contradictory position in which many military physicians were positioned since most, like many of the men they treated, had no previous experience of military service⁴³ and many, like Captain Gameson, had little or no experience nor knowledge of mental illness. Yet they could be called upon to hold the balance between life and death. As they mediated between men suffering from shell shock and military authorities who resisted acknowledging its existence, some military physicians found themselves in conflict with the values and attitudes prevalent in the army. These attitudes and values had a long tradition; moreover the new armies of volunteers and, later, conscripts were unknown quantities.

⁴² Captain L. Gameson, IWM P.397

⁴³ By July 1915, a quarter of the medical profession had joined up; for an account of the creation and work of the Central Medical War Committee, see J. Winter, *The Great War and the British People*, London: Macmillan, 1985, chapter 5.

At the outbreak of the First World War, the British army was faced with inculcating military values amongst a wide cross - section of civilian volunteers. The British army, unlike most of its European counterparts which had a long tradition of conscription, had always relied on volunteers. Since Britain's imperial strength and her national security lay in the Royal Navy, the army was a relatively small volunteer force. Their training equipped them for overseas wars by which the Empire was maintained; most of the commanders in the First World War had learnt their craft in the campaigns of the Sudan and South Africa.⁴⁴ The effectiveness of the army was maintained by adherence to certain traditions. For example, recruitment was on a local basis, thus loyalty and *esprit de corps* were fostered in local regiments, often named after individual counties. Regimental names and histories were a source of pride and attachment through which men were expected to be loyal to their particular regiments and their leaders as well as to the army in general and to their country.

Loyalty between comrades was also encouraged as a part of the network of loyalties upon which morale, a key feature of army ethos and tradition, depended. High morale among the troops was considered critical to success in warfare. In 1914, faced with the need of increased manpower to supplement the existing armed forces, Lord Derby and Lord Kitchener tapped into existing loyalties to work, town, county and community through the formation of the 'Pals' battalions. Morale and *esprit de corps* would be forged from existing allegiances as the battalions were made up of friends and workmates from the same localities or workplaces. The idea was enthusiastically received; for example, Manchester was to raise fifteen battalions in all, Hull raised four

⁴⁴ Oram, *Worthless Men*, p. 25

and even Accrington, a small Lancashire cotton town raised a complete battalion.⁴⁵ Despite the shortages of weaponry and uniforms made from Post Office blue serge giving the men the resemblance of convicts rather than soldiers, the strategy of highly localised recruitment contributed to the morale among volunteers. Tradition also had a powerful influence on the command structure of the army which J. M. Bourne has depicted as 'fundamentally hierarchical and dependent for its success upon the initiative and driving power of those at the top.' The most senior officers had all attended the most prestigious public schools such as Eton, Harrow and Winchester and rigid divisions based on rank mirrored the class divisions and social hierarchy of civilian society. The structure discouraged initiative and in common with many British civilian institutions, the army was 'deeply rooted in cultural values which emphasised class distinction, hierarchy and deference.'⁴⁶ Class distinction and hierarchy were also inflected by traditional assumptions about masculinity, the hegemonic masculinity forged in the public schools and on its playing fields.

The British army, then, was dominated by tradition but in the period following the Anglo Boer War and the emergence of modern warfare it had been facing challenges. One of those challenges centred on tactics in the face of increased firepower with new weaponry which was more efficient and destructive. T. H. E. Travers has examined in detail the ensuing debates in the military. He concluded that the army, in defence of tradition and with a resistance to innovation, refused the need for a change of tactics and instead gave the highest priority to 'the moral and psychological qualities of the

⁴⁵ John Stevenson, *British Society 1914-45*, London: Penguin, 1990, p. 51

⁴⁶ J. M. Bourne, *Britain and the Great War*, London: Edward Arnold, 1987, p171

individual'⁴⁷. He cites, for example, the topic of the *Journal of the Royal United Service Institute* prize essay for 1913: 'How can moral qualities best be developed during the preparation of the officer and the man for the duties each will carry out in war?' For, as Travers vividly illuminates, many army officers felt that those necessary qualities were being eroded and undermined as the virility of the nation seemed to be in decline. Political unrest in the forms of socialism, trade union agitation, demonstrations of the unemployed, women's suffrage activities all pointed to social and political disorder which threatened national stability. However as Travers demonstrates, with reference to Baden-Powell's *Scouting for Boys*, Edwardian conservative fears were cast in terms of the lack of individual moral qualities: 'loss of manliness and military qualities, decline of patriotism, agitators, invasion fears, hooligans, loafing and lack of discipline'. Nowhere was this more in evidence than in football crowds where:

thousands of boys and young men, pale, narrow-chested,
hunched-up miserable specimens, smoking endless cigarettes,
numbers of them betting, all of them learning to be
hysterical....the worst sound of all being the *hysterical*
scream of laughter (my italics)⁴⁸

The image of the crowd as feminine, hysteria being a condition primarily attributed to women, drew on discourses of crowd science notably the popular work of the French anthropologist Gustave Le Bon. Le Bon argued that the crowd's psychology was characteristically feminine: 'like women it goes at once to extremes'. For Le Bon

⁴⁷ T. H. E. Travers, 'Technology, tactics and Morale: Jean de Bloch, the Boer War, and British Military Theory, 1900-1914', *Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 51, No. 2, June 1979, p. 276

⁴⁸ R. Baden-Powell, *Scouting for Boys*, London, 1908, quoted in *ibid.* p. 280

women were constitutionally weak and hysterical while also in the images of the *tricoteuses* and *petroleuses*, represented as agents of revolutionary anarchy. Thus, according to Le Bon, the crowd was an ominous force from which irrational forces were unleashed and in which personal characteristics vanished and the rational individual regressed, 'a throw back to the evolutionary past.'⁴⁹ Fear of the mob was not a new phenomenon but as Daniel Pick has suggested the crowd 'becomes a sociological category in the understanding of society. This was no longer in response to a specific threat (some isolated strike or riot), but a commentary upon modernity itself and the supposed dangers of socialism and mass democracy'.⁵⁰

Concern about the inherent irrationality of the crowd resurfaced with mass mobilisation; the volatility and unpredictability of the crowd was not just feminine but constituted by non manly men: those of poor physique, the physically and mentally unfit, non independent wage earners. There were also deep suspicions in the army command about the patriotism of the working classes who would comprise a mass army. In the pre-war period, military commentators shared a pessimism with other political and social commentators about national decline, the crisis in the social order and the decline of the race with its implications of evolutionary regression, as mapped on the bodies of the 'miserable specimens' of Baden-Powell's depiction. For the military leaders the question focussed inevitably on the restoration of the military qualities of the nation; how were masculine qualities to be fostered to counter the threats, return order to the nation and

⁴⁹ Daniel Pick, *Faces of Degeneration*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989, pp 90-93

⁵⁰ *ibid.*, p. 223

restore military strength? The answers lay in the imposition of discipline through 'education, national service and moral reform'.⁵¹

Like other conservative elements in society, solutions to political and social problems were cast in terms of moral reform with the emphasis on the individual, a legacy of Victorian individualism. Individual moral reform, as encapsulated in Baden-Powell's doctrine 'to form character in boys - to make them manly, good citizens', depended on self-discipline and self-control, for only with self-control could the individual consciously steel himself to self-sacrifice and death on the battlefield.⁵² Character was the means by which a man exercised his innate mental power over his thoughts and actions while will-power confirmed 'the special dignity of man and his moral nature.'⁵³ Lord Moran, author of *The Anatomy of Courage* and a medical officer in the First World War, defined war as the ultimate test of character when he argued; 'I contend that fortitude in war has its roots in morality; that selection is a search for character; and that war itself is one more test - the supreme and final test if you will - of character.'⁵⁴

Ted Bogacz has suggested that the decade and a half prior to the First World War was 'the high water mark of the celebration of character and the will' with the public schools dedicated to promoting such qualities in their male pupils. Thus the advocates of national service and moral reform looked to military training to inculcate character coupled with will-power and self-control in the 'lower orders' of men to

⁵¹ Travers, 'Technology', p. 280

⁵² Baden-Powell, 'Scouting for Boys', quoted in *ibid.* pp. 280-1

⁵³ Bogacz, 'War Neuroses', p. 230

⁵⁴ Lord Moran, *The Anatomy of Courage*, London: Constable, 1945, p. 170

produce not only manly citizens but also manly fighters. Some working-class masculinities were resistant to change; shell shock was the evidence of this and helps explain military attitudes, antagonism and confusion towards shell shocked soldiers. Such men were perceived as lacking the very qualities on which the notion of manliness depended- courage, duty, self-sacrifice and loyalty; in sum, they lacked character. Labelled as cowards, deserters, malingerers or insane, their individual pathology rendered them failures. As such, in the early part of the war they could be disposed of by being dispatched home to asylums, undergoing severe disciplinary measures including courts-martial and, in some cases facing the firing squad. Practices in the army, based on tradition and shaped by pre-war discourses of masculinities, provided the mechanisms which were at first deemed sufficient to control the cases of shell shock in order to maintain military efficiency and rid the army of 'worthless' men from its ranks.

However there was an inherent contradiction between the emphasis and reliance on individual character and the military ethos of morale and *esprit de corps*. The initiation process of becoming a soldier entails breaking down a sense of individuality in order to promote group loyalty. 'The new recruit is first stripped, literally and metaphorically, of his civilian identity. He is examined, allocated, uniformed, tagged and numbered. Foul-mouthed and brutal NCOs then rob him of the last vestiges of individualism and humiliate him into submission and conformity.'⁵⁵ This popular representation of the transformation of the civilian into a soldier contains some kernels of truth for part of the purpose of basic military training is to replace individual values by

⁵⁵ Bourne, *Great War*, p. 217

the group spirit and group loyalty.⁵⁶ Despite efforts to forge group loyalties, for example in the formation of Pals' Battalions mentioned earlier, the mass of civilians who made up the army did not necessarily understand nor share military values, after all they were only soldiers for the duration:

They had their traditions, their code of honour, their moral judgements... the man who held as a firm article in his creed the inalienable right of refusing work or going on strike soon learned to submit to conditions and make a joke of matters which in civilian life would have aroused his fiercest resentment.⁵⁷

Jokes, satire, parody and irony were often deployed to counter the attempts to inculcate military values and to make bearable some of the harsher aspects of army life. Although an editorial in 1918 in *The Wipers Times*, one of the trench magazines, commented 'remember that the hilarity was more often hysterical than natural' nevertheless fierce resentment was also expressed against the discipline imposed. Discipline was one of the principal functions of the army's command structure, the ordinary soldier receiving his orders from his superiors down a chain of command through which behaviour was prescribed by laws and regulations.⁵⁸

It has been argued that discipline in the British army was particularly harsh; its most extreme form demonstrated by the army hierarchy's defence of the death penalty as a deterrent. Men could be executed for sleeping on post, striking a senior officer, quitting a post, cowardice and the most common crime, desertion. Malingering, shirking

⁵⁶ Richard Holmes, *Firing Line*, London: Pimlico, 1994, p. 36

⁵⁷ Maxwell, *Psychological Retrospect*, p. 157

⁵⁸ Bourne, *Great War*, p. 217

and other serious offences were punishable by the notorious Field Punishment No. 1 in which a man was lashed to a gun wheel by his wrists and ankles. For many sectors of the civilian population this form of military punishment was tantamount to torture and there were many protesting voices raised against its appropriateness for a volunteer and conscript army.⁵⁹ Within the army itself, harsh discipline was deeply resented for as Captain Dible observed 'officers and NCOs are often unable to differentiate between discipline and tyranny.'⁶⁰

Tyrannical acts by those in authority sometimes led to eruptions of anger and violence when men were shamed and humiliated. In one example a man, feeling he had been made a fool of by an officer in front of the other men, had attacked the officer with the point of a bayonet. Explaining his rage, he replied that 'he felt mad'.⁶¹ Here is another meaning of Sturdy's assertion that 'war makes sane men mad'; uncontrollable temper and violent rage could violate a man's sense of himself. After violently attacking an officer who 'found fault with everything' the soldier reflected 'never have I felt like this',⁶² adding to his feelings of alienation and disassociation with his previous self. The sense of loss of individuality reinforced by severe discipline was deeply felt and contributed to men's loss of self-esteem and powerlessness:

⁵⁹ For a full discussion of public protests, see Joanna Bourke, *Dismembering the Male: Male Bodies, Britain and the Great War*, London: Reaktion Books, 1996, pp. 100-102

⁶⁰ Captain J. H. Dible, IWM Con Shelf

⁶¹ Maxwell, *Psychological Retrospect*, p. 7

⁶² Hiram Sturdy, IWM Con Shelf

There is a feeling of hatred and bitterness creeps up, of the helplessness of we men, here we are, now for years utterly hopeless. If you use your own thinking or kick against cast iron rules you're flopped as flat as a pancake.⁶³

It was not only the disciplinary codes which undermined self-esteem. Despite the ideologies of shaping and promoting character by means of military training, in practice the duties of the rank and file soldier required little more than being able to respond to orders. The process could be humiliating and destructive of self-assertion and initiative as Sturdy's colourful simile implied. For 'all these things take down your pride, make you feel small, and in some ways fit you to accept the role of cannon-fodder on the battle-ground'.⁶⁴ It could also be part of the cumulative process by which men broke down. The interaction between individual subjectivities and the requirements and ethos of the military authorities produced a tension between men's conception of themselves and the military demands of being a soldier and 'it is against the background of this tension that we must understand war neurosis as an attempt, through the neurotic symptom, to repudiate a role that, objectively, was self-destructive.'⁶⁵

When C. S. Myers first investigated cases of breakdown of soldiers he assumed that they were organic in origin but finally concluded that 'the close relation of these cases to 'hysteria' appears fairly certain.'⁶⁶ As already mentioned, Myers shared an understanding with a group of psychologists that the aetiology of shell shock was

⁶³ Hiram Sturdy, IWM Con Shelf

⁶⁴ Stephen Graham, *A Private in the Guards*, London: Macmillan, 1919, p. 58

⁶⁵ Leed, *No Man's Land*, p. 112

⁶⁶ C. S. Myers, 'A Contribution to the Study of Shell Shock', *The Lancet*, February 1915, p. 320

psychological, a result of unconscious mental conflict. However, for many in the army command the use of the term hysteria raised the spectre of the volatility of the crowd constituted by an undisciplined rabble of men who were likely to infect others by their unrestrained behaviour. The removal of men suffering from shell shock because of fears that they would contaminate the rest of the army had its roots in late nineteenth-century anxieties about the residuum's contagion of the respectable poor and re-articulated in the newer discourses based on crowd psychology. The deep suspicions of military commanders about the quality of the new recruits to the army were confirmed by the perceived presence of men unable to perform their military and national duties. Moreover they challenged and disrupted disciplinary codes by which the army maintained morale and *esprit de corps* and in so doing threatened the belief in the power of military training to promote national and racial regeneration. As importantly, they wanted to 'make men' from the weaklings and wastrels they perceived in their army.

However, the army's implicit failure to manage shell shocked soldiers was exculpated by medico-psychiatric theories which were similarly inflected by moral concepts and traditional Victorian and Edwardian values in language invested and shot through with representations of normative masculinity. When Myers and others proposed that symptoms of shell shock had similarities with hysteria and neurasthenia they encountered protests and hostility from others in the medical profession for both conditions were 'neglected and despised' by neurologists and psychiatrists⁶⁷.

Traditionally hysteria had been associated primarily with women, equated with their emotional constitutions and above all their sexuality which was regarded as dangerous.

⁶⁷ McDougall, *Abnormal Psychology*, p. 33

Male neurasthenics were classified as unmanly and effeminate while insanity generally carried the stigma of pauper lunacy.

In the continuing search to understand the cause of shell shock, and locate it within an individual's responsibility, some psychiatrists turned from 'commotional' explanations of shell shock to personal and family histories, pre-war mental deficiencies or moral invalidism as explanatory tools; in short, they blamed hereditary taint. The irony did not escape W. H. R. Rivers, well known for his pioneering work at Craiglockhart Hospital:

It would be humorous if it were not pathetic, that many of those who object most strongly to Freud's view concerning the unconscious individual experience in the production of abnormal bodily and mental states should be the loudest in the appreciation of the part taken by ancestral experience for which they use the term, too often the shibboleth, heredity.⁶⁸

The concept of heredity not only infused medico-psychiatric language but was powerfully inflected in debates and theories propounded by fears of national and racial deterioration. In the 1880s the theory of hereditary urban degeneration gained sway amongst many middle class social reformers and social commentators. Fears of demonstrations, riots and the emergence of socialism, particularly in London, focussed attention on the urban poor and the extent of urban poverty. The causes were seen to reside in the process of physical degeneration, which also implied mental and moral

⁶⁸ W. H. R. Rivers, 'Freud's Psychology of the Unconscious', *The Lancet*, June 16, 1917

degeneration, and which was fostered in the pathology of the city and mapped on the bodies and minds of its inhabitants.⁶⁹

The fear of urban degeneration 'found its apotheosis'⁷⁰ in the context of the revelations about the poor physique of potential recruits for the second Anglo-Boer War when, for example, in 1899 over three hundred out of every thousand were rejected as physically unfit. As many potential recruits were drawn from urban areas, the spotlight again focussed on the stunted lives and physiques of urban slum dwellers who appeared to be proliferating. Among them, high fertility rates with the reproduction of physical and mental deficiencies from one generation to the next appeared to represent a regressive evolutionary model, threatening the 'Imperial Race'. The early disasters of the Boer War also fuelled anxieties about the links between military performance and power and the state of health and vitality of the civilian population, particularly the virility of the urban poor. In 1903 W. Taylor, the Director-General of the Army Medical Service, raised the connection pointedly in his question:

But the want of physique, thus shown to exist with regard to a large section of the community, is not only serious from its military aspect, it is serious also from its civil standpoint, for if these men are unfit for military service, what are they good for?⁷¹

⁶⁹ See Gareth Stedman Jones, *Outcast London*, 1971, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984, particularly chapter 6

⁷⁰ Pick, *Degeneration*, p. 202

⁷¹ Memorandum of the Director-General, Army Medical Service, on the Physical Unfitness of Men Offering Themselves for Enlistment in the Army, London: HMSO, 1903, p. 3, cited in Oram, *Worthless Men*, p. 75

The implication of course was that these puny men who made up the ranks of the chronically unemployed, underemployed and unskilled casual poor were a financial burden on the state, unable to fulfill their manly duties either as soldiers or workers and completely lacking manly independence. At a time when Britain's economic position was being rivalled by competition from Germany and the United States their presence along with vagrants, criminals, alcoholics and the other categories of the 'unfit', even if it was 'a phantom army'⁷², nevertheless raised the spectre of imperial decline.

The Inter-Departmental Committee on Physical Deterioration established in 1904 in response to the findings of the inadequacies of potential recruits heard several hereditarian opinions about degeneration. However, they were generally rebutted by the environmentalist view that conditions of life in the slums, especially over-crowding, were the cause of poverty and malnutrition. Yet as Daniel Pick has observed, while the Committee may have abandoned degenerationism, its recommendations were based on 'a vision of an immutably feckless and hopeless stratum of the poor'⁷³, persons of the lowest type. While a myriad of voluntary organisations and local and national bodies sought to alleviate social problems after having identified the need 'to take charge of the lives of those, who from whatever cause, are incapable of independent existence up to the standards of decency'.⁷⁴ Physical and mental deficiencies and stunted townsmen continued to haunt the mental landscape of many within the army; 'the stereotype of the

⁷² Stedman Jones, *Outcast London*, p. 336

⁷³ Pick, *Degeneration*, p. 186

⁷⁴ *ibid.* p. 186. For an excellent discussion of the importance of motherhood in debates and practices, see Anna Davin, 'Imperialism and Motherhood', *History Workshop Journal*, No. 5, Spring 1978, pp. 9-65

degenerate city-dweller formed by the Boer War crisis remained part of the collective mind-set during the First World War'⁷⁵, and indeed into the post war period. In his evidence to the War Office Committee on 'Shell Shock', General Lord Horne opined that 'miners and agricultural labourers, and men who lived open-air lives, such as shepherds and game keepers were less likely to the disorder than the clerk or the artisan.'⁷⁶ In July 1916 the Commanding Officer of the 5th Royal Warwicks had complained about the 'large percentage of utterly useless men' in his battalion following the capture of a German trench which was then almost re-captured when many of his detachment were incapable of using their rifles or their bayonets. His view was endorsed by his Brigadier who referred to them as 'wasters' while higher up the army hierarchy the Corps Commander recorded in a minute he sent that 'these men are degenerates. They are a source of danger to their comrades, their battalion, and the brigade.'⁷⁷ The fact that many of the volunteers received inadequate training and were issued with defective weaponry could be discounted by the army command blinkered by its suspicion of the new army, class prejudice and its adherence to the belief in character.

In many quarters of the army such soldiers compounded their failure to conform to the ideal of the manly soldier by their apparent refusal to adapt to the army and to war for the assumption was that the 'normal' man, the man of character, could endure all the horrors of war. For example, Bogacz cites a psychologist who as late as 1917 maintained that men from public schools were less prone to shell shock 'for they had had

⁷⁵ Oram, *Worthless Men*, p. 76

⁷⁶ Report, p. 16

⁷⁷ Quoted in Babington, *Shell Shock*, p. 76

the benefit of that 'atmosphere... in which character and manliness are developed side by side with learning' and which 'seems to prevent neurasthenia'.⁷⁸ Implicitly, and more often explicitly, men perceived as lacking the necessary qualities of character were labelled cowards. However, there were critical voices raised in opposition, for example, W. H. R. Rivers in his article "War Neurosis and Military Training" cited insufficient training as a cause of the prevalence of nervous disorders:

There is little question that one of the chief causes of the great prevalence of nervous disorders in the present war is that vast numbers of men have been called upon to endure hardships and dangers of unprecedented severity with a quite insufficient training.⁷⁹

While recognising that changes in training had occurred in response to the nature of modern warfare, he nevertheless recommended that for the ranks, 'the encouragement of independence and less mechanical training' would 'diminish the occurrence of suggestion neurosis'. In the case of officers with anxiety neurosis he argued that 'much could be done in the prevention of anxiety neurosis if the commanding officer and battalion medical officer were alive to the conditions upon which this state depends.' Thus intervention could occur at an earlier stage preventing the loss of 'many a valuable career'.⁸⁰ He reiterated his views when appearing as a witness before the 'Shell Shock' Committee.

⁷⁸ Bogacz, 'War Neurosis', p. 231

⁷⁹ W. H. R. Rivers, 'War Neurosis and Military Training', *Mental Hygiene*, Vol. 11, No. 4, October 1918

⁸⁰ *ibid.* pp. 18-19

His views were supported by other military men, signifying a shift in some quarters at least; Lieutenant-General Sir John Goodwin supported Rivers's view that troops 'who had been rushed through a short period of training would be much more liable to break down.' Nevertheless, even where there was a recognition that shell shock resulted from mental conflict there remained the implicit assumption that, with adequate training, 'normal' men would adapt to the army and endure all the exigencies of war. In 1920, after all his experience at Maghull and Craiglockhart hospitals, Rivers wrote of how military training 'should bring the soldier into such a state that even the utmost horrors and rigours of warfare are hardly noticed, so inured is he to their presence and so absorbed in the immediate task presented by his military duties.'⁸¹ Even the most enlightened and humane psychologists such as Rivers were working inside the military machine with its requirements of military efficiency.

Among other witnesses to the 'Shell-Shock' Committee the old guard was represented by Brevet Lieutenant-Colonel Viscount Gort of the Grenadier Guards who asserted the belief that discipline and drill would effect strong morale and *esprit de corps* in the face of which 'shell shock' would be practically 'non-existent'. While arguing that 'the man with 14 weeks training had not been taught to control himself' he nevertheless concluded that 'he was probably a Yahoo before he was taken into the army and he could not get his nerves under restraint.' The fault lay not with the army but the hereditary dispositions of individual men for:

⁸¹ Rivers, *Instinct*, p. 210

Lord Gort thought that a large number of the men who two or three years after the war were still suffering from 'shell shock' symptoms were probably bordering on lunacy before.⁸²

Similarly the language of degeneracy was invoked by one Medical Officer called as a witness at the court-martial of a man who had deserted. In the M. O. 's view the man was 'a pitiful degenerate' and his diary recorded that 'I went to the trial determined to give him no help of any sort, for I detest his type.'⁸³ However, he later reflected on whether cowardice ought to be considered a crime; a question he found difficult to resolve when 'so many splendid fellows lay down their lives so bravely'.⁸⁴ Cowardice also transformed 'already poor specimens of manhood into something too horribly near a beast'.⁸⁵ According to some commentators, such 'types' had their failure to conform to the manly ideal visibly inscribed on their bodies, for example, Major E. Barton White, R.

A. M. C observed:

When passing through the wards and gardens of the Mental Division one did not find the majority of the patients the well-built, symmetrically featured and intelligent looking youths that might have been expected. True, there were many of these but the large number of obviously congenitally deficient caught the eye first... the appearance of their degenerative stigmata has been pitiable in uniform.⁸⁶

⁸² Report, p. 50-1

⁸³ Harold Dearden, *Medicine and Duty*, London: Heinemann, 1928, p. 154

⁸⁴ *ibid.* p. 170

⁸⁵ *ibid.*

⁸⁶ 'Abstract of a Report on the Mental Division of the Welsh Metropolitan War Hospital, Whitchurch, Cardiff, Sept.1917- Sept.1919', *Journal of Mental Science*, October 1920, pp. 440-441

The discourse of degeneration and the notion of 'type' was called upon to identify and distinguish certain categories of men susceptible to shell shock. Adherence to the notion of 'type', whether degenerate, physically, mentally or morally deficient effectively constructed groups of marginalised men, groups which George Mosse identified as 'outsiders', those placed outside the confines of established society and seen as a menace to its norms.⁸⁷

Class was a crucial factor in this construction of otherness and was implicated in the diagnosis and treatment of men suffering from shell shock but so too was ethnicity. For many Medical Officers and psychiatrists the symptoms of shell shock bore a marked resemblance to their 'despised' diagnostic categories of hysteria, neurasthenia, nervousness and insanity. Further, these classifications were also articulated within the discourses of degeneracy and national deterioration which imbued certain racial groups with characteristics which determined their degeneracy. In the late nineteenth century immigrants to Britain's cities added to fears of deterioration; the Irish and Jews especially were perceived as degenerate types. One witness to the Interdepartmental Committee on physical deterioration declared that 'Jews have been shown to be an exceedingly degenerate type in Europe' and 'there is a high percentage of insanity among Jews, much higher than among the surrounding gentile races,'⁸⁸ while another witness clearly thought he was expressing a common sense assumption when he stated that during the Boer War 'Jews weren't worth their salt'. Another group 'not worth their salt' were the Irish; the high levels of lunacy among the Irish being 'a legacy of mental

⁸⁷ Mosse, 'Shell Shock as a Social Disease', pp. 102-103

⁸⁸ Quoted in Winter, *The Great War and the British People*, p. 15

weakness dating from the sufferings of the famine years', according to a contributor to the *Lancet* in September 1914.⁸⁹ The enduring representation of the Irish as children inevitably contributed to the perception of their unreliability as soldiers while their predisposition to break down in war was supposedly destined by their heredity. The marginalisation of certain groups of men whose masculinity was suspect, mainly among the urban working classes and specific ethnic groups, nevertheless included some middle-class men whose effeminacy precluded them from the ranks of the manly.

Effeminacy was frequently attributed to 'artistic' or 'imaginative' types, those who failed to demonstrate appropriate manliness. Their lack was perceived in opposition to a construction of middle-class masculinity defined in medical, religious and familial, among others, discourses as married, industrious and in possession of a healthy body capable of reproduction. The homophobia aroused by the so-called decadents of the 1890s was recreated in the face of shell shocked men. Such types continued to haunt the mental landscapes of many in the military and medical authorities; 'the type of man most liable to breakdown is the man who is probably called 'neurotic'; a man who has the artistic temperament, a man who is more emotional than the average type of man'.⁹⁰ Even sympathetic observers such as the American John McCurdy wrote of how a young soldier who had not exhibited 'neurotic symptoms' prior to the war nonetheless 'showed a tendency to abnormality in his make-up 'for not only was he 'tender-hearted' but also:

⁸⁹ Quoted in Bourke, 'Effeminacy, Ethnicity and the End of Trauma: The Sufferings of 'Shell-shocked' Men in Great Britain and Ireland, 1914-39', *Journal of Contemporary History*, Volume 35, No. 1, January 2000. See also, G. Oram, *Worthless Men*, The Irish Question, pp. 60-73

⁹⁰ Report, p. 26

Socially, he was rather self-conscious, inclined to keep to himself and he had not been a perfectly *normal*, (my italics) mischievous boy, but was rather more virtuous than his companions. He had always been shy with girls and never thought of getting married.⁹¹

The construction of normative masculinity in the context of soldiering was founded on notions of self-control, manly duty, courage but also implicitly invoked efficiency as a normative value. The categorisation and classification involved in identifying 'types' were borrowed from medical and psychiatric diagnostic tests but were also influenced by the requirements of military efficiency. In the *History of the Great War* it was stated that while psycho-neuroses cannot be ignored:

the subject is, however, so bound up with the maintenance of morale in the army that every soldier who is non-effective owing to nervous breakdown must be made the subject of careful enquiry. In no case is he to be evacuated to base unless his condition warrants such a procedure.⁹²

All psychiatrists and psychologists with their differing medical theories and practices were nonetheless implicated in maintaining fighting efficiency among the troops.

Whatever their notion of cure they operated within military social relations for as Martin Stone suggests 'fitness for duty was the criterion of therapeutic success'.⁹³ His view is supported by Chris Feudtner who observes that the restoration of distressed men to

⁹¹ John T. MacCurdy, *War Neuroses*, Cambridge: University Press, 1918, pp. 7-8

⁹² W. G. Macpherson et al., *History of the Great War, Based on Official Documents, Medical Services, Diseases of the War*, Vol. 11, London, 1923, p. 11

⁹³ Stone, 'Shell Shock', p. 264

health and manly self-control which 'led to the 'efficient' return of many men to battle is a final bitter and tragic twist to the tale.'⁹⁴ Moreover, in the all-male institution of the army, shell shock aroused strong emotions in the personal encounters between men as they came to terms with the phenomena of other men breaking down.

Clinical judgements were made under pressure of military efficiency but also reflected their own attitudes to other men whose masculinities were measured against the doctors assumed hegemonic masculinity. Forced to make judgements about men's mental states particularly between the genuine sufferer and the possible malingerer meant that among military medical officers suspicion and contempt vied with compassion and understanding, punishment with cure. Those judgements were also predicated on shared notions of manliness from which certain types of men were excluded and which seemingly provided explanations for their failure in the supreme test of war. Expressions of personal antagonism towards men suffering from shell shock continued after the war; for instance, Bogacz has commented on the occasional irritation and exasperation expressed by witnesses to the War Office Committee as well as the social and class prejudices of some of the members of the Committee.⁹⁵ The evidence of the fifty-nine witnesses, including army officers, regimental and battalion commanders, medical officers, neurologists, psychologists, Ministry of Pensions officials and six men who had suffered or were still suffering from war neuroses,⁹⁶ far from providing clarification about the distinction between courage and cowardice only served to illustrate how

⁹⁴ Feudtner, 'Minds', p. 405

⁹⁵ Bogacz, 'War Neuroses', p. 236-7

⁹⁶ Bogacz, 'War Neuroses', p. 238

troubling and vexed the question was. For implicated at the heart of the question were fundamental assumptions about traditional masculinity which appeared to be under threat.

In his analysis of the image of manliness as an ideal, George Mosse has pointed to the importance of the unity of body and mind whereby bodily integrity was maintained by emotional self-control, thus giving the image its cohesion. The ability of man to be in control of himself, Mosse argues was even more of a necessity in war when duty and sacrifice for a higher ideal, the nation, were demanded for 'this ideal in its harmony and rigidly controlled power stood for national strength, dynamic and purpose.'⁹⁷ The image of the shell shocked soldier was the betrayal of all these ideals; a man in the uniform, literally and metaphorically, of national service who had completely lost control of himself and his emotions. One witness to the War Office Committee grappled with the vexed question of masculine self-control, the 'linchpin of male identity'⁹⁸. He stated that 'a man instinctively masks his emotions almost as a matter of routine. In trifling everyday affairs this is involuntary and automatic with a negligible expense of nervous energy'. Nervous energy was critical because it was what determined will-power and self-control. Using an economic model, he made the analogy between a man's store of nervous energy and a current and capital account at the bank. The continuous crises of war 'without intervals for replacing spent energy exhausts the capital account and you get a run on the bank, followed by loss of control, hysteria, irresponsible chattering, mutism, amnesia, inhibition of the senses, acute mania, insensibility etc. with the

⁹⁷ Mosse, 'Shell-shock', pp. 101, 105

⁹⁸ Feudtner, 'Minds', p. 403

diagnosis of nervous breakdown or 'shell shock'. He tried to define what sort of man was susceptible to breakdown- 'brooding, introspective, self-analysing'- while simultaneously arguing that ' 'shell-shock' is born of fear... All men know fear. Some conceal it better than others. A few bury it out of sight, but it is there all the same.'⁹⁹

Squadron Leader W. Tyrell's evidence, based on his service on the Western Front as a Regimental Medical Officer and subsequently as a Field Ambulance Commander, was not based on the study of any clinical works on the subject but 'notes [which] are crude, unrevised and unedited. They leave much unwritten. I have not the language to describe the things which I have seen, experienced and now know.'¹⁰⁰ His evidence, with examples from his own experiences, was often contradictory as he sought genuinely to understand the aetiology of mental breakdown whether in the individual man's will-power or in the conditions of war as exemplified in 'fatigue, mud and cold, misery and monotony, nauseating environment etc.' He also looked to the military itself in terms of leadership, morale and *esprit de corps* and to the responsibilities of Medical Officers for detection, diagnoses and treatment and their difficult role in distinguishing between malingerers and genuine cases of breakdown. As he recognised, the pursuit of military efficiency, underpinned by military discipline, could have fatal results:

⁹⁹ Report, p. 30

¹⁰⁰ Notes attached to written evidence presented to the Committee in the Tyrell Collection: papers of Air Vice Marshall Sir William Tyrell, IWM 68/84 Box 29. The papers contain newspaper cuttings, reviews of fiction and clinical works relating to shell shock, the psychology of fear etc. which demonstrate a continuing interest and research into the subject long after the war ended.

He had seen cases of an emotive state in the form of irresistible fear of danger, associated with crises of terror and anxiety at the front, leading up to desertion from post of duty or reckless behaviour; one of whom, a regular serving non-commissioned officer, with an excellent pre-war character, was eventually shot as a persistent deserter.¹⁰¹

Clearly deeply troubled by such injustices, he nevertheless concluded that 'in my experience, every man executed by order of courts -martial was given every loophole of escape.' This evidence has been quoted at length since it encapsulates the ambivalences and contradictions within the debates about shell shock and implicitly, about masculinity; W. Tyrell's final summary was that 'the whole question of shell shock appears to me at one and the same time to be childishly simple and profoundly complex'.¹⁰²

However, another perspective on this complex issue can be viewed by turning to an examination of the ways in which the authors of memoirs and diaries represented shell shocked men. In the process of negotiation with military and medical discourses which constituted particular forms of male subjectivity, the personal accounts frequently resist and challenge those representations. What was most shocking to the writers was that *any* man could, often without warning, break down, regardless of rank, physical strength or perceived qualities of bravery:

¹⁰¹ Report, p. 33

¹⁰² Notes attached to evidence given at Committee interviews, Tyrell Collection, IWM 68/84 Box 29

Another gunner and I almost carried one of the Ayrshire farmers to a dressing station, muttering, slavering and shaking from head to foot. A big strong man of the soil. He was sheltering from one one of those hell spasms and a shell buried itself, almost at his feet and it was during that few seconds interval, waiting, on the explosion waiting to be hurled up into the air in pieces, that broke Jock. He collapsed, fell over at the knees, shivering and muttering...¹⁰³

In another incident following a terrific bombardment, Hiram Sturdy recalled a man falling to the ground, 'foaming at the mouth, jabbering, and [who] starts to tear at himself:

Those round him are on him in a few seconds for although this was the first we had seen go like that, we had heard of this kind of case and when one has been under terrific shellfire, he knows the symptoms alright, as most of us at times have had to fight against this madness caused by pure unadulterated fear.¹⁰⁴

Similarly, witnessing an officer who had 'completely lost control', an R. A. M. C Captain reflected:

Atkinson was a very brave man; and here I am on a matter about which I know a great deal. He was physically brave in a way I never was, nor could be nor am. Because of this the incident was significant.¹⁰⁵

In his book of memoirs published in 1932 Arthur Osborn, a regular soldier and doctor who had served in the Boer War evocatively entitled one chapter *The Shape that*

¹⁰³ Hiram Sturdy, IWM Con Shelf P

¹⁰⁴ Hiram Sturdy, IWM Con Shelf P

¹⁰⁵ Captain L. Gameson, IWM P.397

Walketh at Noonday. In it he described a number of incidents of shell shock he had witnessed as well as recording his reflections. In one such incident he recorded a Colonel (acting Brigadier) sobbing uncontrollably, 'shaking and twitching all over' yet 'he was one of the bravest men I knew.'

Highly thought of by both Divisional and Corps Commanders, his was an heroic case of endurance. Certainly he was of the bull-necked type, probably well-endowed with vigour and with good nerves.¹⁰⁶

Because he was an officer and also had the support of a sympathetic Medical Officer who interceded on his behalf with the Divisional Commander, the man was granted six months leave. He recovered and returned to gain 'further promotion and distinction'. The outcome of a case of shellshock that Captain Gameson dealt with was more uncertain; he was called to attend to a young soldier following a shell attack. The 'youth' was not hurt and had helped with a man who had been wounded. The boy was 'classed as normal' and 'had always come up to scratch' and had witnessed his friends being wounded before. Yet according to Captain Gameson, for whom 'the scene is still most vivid to me', this 'stray incident broke him' and he found him 'gibbering'. For much of the night the boy sat on his bunk gripping hard to an upright and shouting. None of the other men complained as Captain Gameson 'quite completely failed to comfort him' until, after an injection of morphine, 'this rather handsome undoubtedly intelligent child had drowsed into a restless sleep.'¹⁰⁷ Gameson's compassion for the boy

¹⁰⁶ Arthur Osburn, *Unwilling Passenger*, London: Faber and Faber, 1932, p. 293

¹⁰⁷ Captain L. Gameson, IWM P.397

is evident, but his feelings of guilt for his inadequacy both as a doctor and a man in providing comfort are implied in the final sentences of his account, 'I did not hear of the boy again. I have no record of his name. I cannot remember what diagnosis I sent with him.' While there is narrative closure, the feelings remained unresolved but registered in the vivid memories of the event.

The language used to describe these eye witness accounts is of significance when subjected to further scrutiny. The 'brave' man in these accounts as in others is positioned within the dominant pre-war codes of masculinity and the soldier hero but is also simultaneously dissolved by the actions of 'sobbing', 'muttering', 'slavering' and 'twitching'. The writers of the memoirs quoted above challenge the notion that the men afflicted by shell shock were to blame because of some inherent weakness or more simply, because they were cowards. They eschew moral judgements and write from a position of compassion and understanding which collapses the categories of cowardice and courage. They knew how close to completely losing their nerve they had been; for them men who broke down were not cowards but other men pushed beyond the point of endurance.

One interpretation of the resistance to the traditional imagery of the heroic and courageous soldier is that by the time many of these memoirs were written, in the late 1920s, there were other 'anti-war' narratives in public circulation within a general climate of disillusionment, exemplified by C. E. Montague's *Disenchantment* published in 1922. This afforded a space for representations of men who were the victims of a war which provoked intense physical and mental suffering and intolerable ordeals. While the outcome was not necessarily complete breakdown nor permanent incapacitation they nonetheless indicated how men were pushed to the limits of their endurance - and

beyond, the point at which men did break down. The rawness and intensity of the writing in the descriptions of men breaking down suggests that these episodes continued to be troubling, traumatic memories. At the point of breakdown, the soldier was represented as not only unmanned but reduced to a level of instinctual primitivism. The terror of those witnessing the appalling spectacle of breakdown was mirrored by the terror of the victim as mind, body and speech lost all coherence:

Driven mad with terror, slobbering and moaning, he clawed and scrabbled violently in the mud. It was like a terrified and overrun fox going to ground, trying to dig his way back to safety through the very bowels of the earth. His behaviour was less than human. Extreme terror had driven him back through a thousand generations to some pre-human form of life.¹⁰⁸

However they named these inner terrors - loss of reason, madness, loss of nerve- what they were remembering was the removal of 'the military mask of masculinity designed to contain fear and to suppress emotions contravening endurance of war.'¹⁰⁹ Without that 'military mask', men became incapacitated and broke down. The image of the unity of body and mind referred to by George Mosse is fractured and in so doing, the boundaries between dominant forms of masculinity and subordinate masculinities are rendered unstable, allowing a space in which alternative versions can be generated and articulated.

In another example, Captain Leland's letters poignantly document his struggle against losing his nerve; as a professional soldier and an officer he had much to lose as he

¹⁰⁸ Osburn, *Unwilling Passenger*, p. 291

¹⁰⁹ Eric Leed, 'Fateful Memories: Industrialized War and Traumatic Neuroses', *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 35, No. 1, January 2000, p. 95

tried valiantly to conceal what he saw as weakness from other officers and the men for whom he had responsibility. His letters to his wife are riven with the conflicts of duty, responsibility and setting an example with his overwhelming desire to escape, to return home. Leave provides no respite; 'I hate leave. The returning is just too damnable.' A further responsibility was to assure his wife, despite confiding to her all his fears, sleeplessness and 'awful dreams', that he would hang on, be all right. In one letter, he confided to his wife:

They have started bombing again, damn them, and the place is rocking, and so is my hand. I am losing my nerve. It is no use pretending that I am not... when I saw some of our own men getting the wind up, it pulled me together and I was alright again.¹¹⁰

Four days later, he described the effects of being under shell bombardment compounded by taking no offensive action, illustrating again how static warfare so disempowered men by breaking down their psychic defences as apprehension turned to fear and then frequently to terror:

When you have to sit placidly in the back areas and receive in an equally placid manner, High Velocity shells - then the nerve goes. Mine has quite gone and I acknowledge it. Yet when I go up to D. H. Q and see these smug looking Staff Officers I do pull myself together.¹¹¹

Sadly despite all his efforts to 'pull himself together', Captain Leland finally succumbed and was admitted to Palace Green hospital in London, one of the private homes founded

¹¹⁰ Captain Leland, IWM 96/51/1

¹¹¹ *ibid.*

by Lord Knutsford for officers suffering from shell shock. His correspondence which charts one officer's journey through mental anguish towards breakdown ends here leaving the question of his recovery unanswered.

Captain Leland provides an almost classic case study confirming the psychologists' view that war neuroses were the product of mental conflict. Whilst utilising Freud's concepts of mental conflict, the unconscious and repression, they repudiated their associations with infantile sexual impulses. Instead, they focussed on the impulse of another instinct 'one even more fundamental than that of sex - the instinct of self-preservation'.¹¹² The roots of the conflict lay between the instinct of self-preservation, fear and duty and caused the 'flight into illness', the desire to escape from the intolerable situation of the war. Since 'fear and its expression are regarded as reprehensible'¹¹³, fear had to be repressed. Many of the personal accounts testify to how the symptoms of fear could be detected even in the bravest of men as well as how, in order to fight, indeed survive, fear had to be repressed. The result of this central conflict was the array of symptoms and somatic disorders constituting shell shock and furthermore, since the conflict was unconscious therefore the symptoms were not willed by the patient but expressions of unconscious rather than rational or willed processes.

In the circumstances of war it was the emotion of fear which was identified in the aetiology of shellshock; fear of course is inevitable in war, a normal and necessary response to danger and the overwhelming majority of soldiers experience fear before and during battle. As Richard Holmes states 'fear is the common bond between fighting

¹¹² Rivers, *Instinct*, p. 5

¹¹³ Rivers, 'War Neurosis', p. 27

men'.¹¹⁴ As discussed earlier, many writers analysed how conditions at the front - the incessant noise, shelling, artillery fire and an often invisible enemy - induced fear. The static nature of warfare which imposed long periods of inactivity, combined with the men's inability to respond with some form of manipulative activity, deprived them of their defences against fear and provoked a 'prominent condition for the occurrence of neurosis in some form or another'.¹¹⁵ Fearing fear itself was a torment; fear of the unknown left men prey to irrational fears and imaginings:

Every return to the trenches was a new battle for the individual Tommy. It mattered little to him what was going on at other parts of the Front. His fight was chiefly against the fears within himself.... The magnitude of a great battle stirred his blood, but there were many long and lonely hours of sentry vigil at night, when in his imaginings, phantasmagorical Jerries swarmed across No Man's Land in fearsome numbers.¹¹⁶

However, the nature of fear was more complex than a single response and adaptation to the external terrors and threats associated with industrialised warfare. A major fear was showing fear which was seen as a source of shame, a stigma to be borne in the face of other men and therefore to be concealed at any cost. For measuring a man's masculinity against other men and to be found wanting, threatens a man's sense of himself. Showing signs of fear was also to show weakness, a failure to possess manly virtues, especially those associated with emotional self-control, for as Elliott Smith and T. H. Pear, writing in 1917, observed 'the suppression of fear and other strong emotions is not demanded

¹¹⁴ Holmes, *Firing Line*, p204

¹¹⁵ Report, p. 58

¹¹⁶ George Coppard, *With a Machine Gun to Cambrai*, London: HMSO, 1969, p. 117

only of men in the trenches. It is constantly expected in ordinary society'.¹¹⁷ In time of war it was permissible for men to express fear and even military men publicly confessed before the War Office Committee to such feelings and a recognition of it among all ranks of men. Brevet Colonel G. C. Stubbs, DSO, of the 1st Suffolk Regiment stated while young soldiers had the idea that fear should not exist he thought 'I was in an awful funk the whole time, and I think most people were'. He was supported by Lieutenant-Colonel J. S. Y. Rogers, late Regimental Medical Officer, 4th Black Watch who argued 'I think every man, no matter how brave at the front, has experienced fear. You cannot avoid it with the various things that are going on.' Squadron Leader W. Tyrell stated unequivocally that 'shell-shock is born of fear. Its grandparents are self-preservation and the fear of being found afraid.'¹¹⁸ W. N. Maxwell concluded that 'fearlessness as a psychological experience was practically unknown.'¹¹⁹

Fear of death, military commentators have observed is less pronounced than fear of being wounded or mutilated while fear of being a coward constituted a major conflict. For while there was almost unanimity that feelings of fear were permissible, there was far more equivocation about the management of those feelings. Brevet Colonel G. C. Stubbs succinctly summed up the situation; 'it is not cowardly to be afraid, but it is cowardly to let fear get control of your actions. 'In this equation, being afraid was a shared common experience, whereas being a coward was an individual failing which 'if revealed will call down ignominy upon his head and disgrace him in the eyes of his

¹¹⁷ Elliott Smith and T. H. Pear, *Shell-Shock and Its Lessons*, London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1917, p. 7

¹¹⁸ Report, p. 31

¹¹⁹ Maxwell, *Psychological Retrospect*, p. 60

fellows. He must save his self-respect and self-esteem at all costs.'¹²⁰ To show cowardice threatened public recognition of what was manly, especially in time of war when masculine qualities of mastery, courage and endurance were particularly invoked. Masculine self-identity, however, was also structured by men's imaginings of the soldier hero; hence the psychic conflicts and fears engendered by the attribution of cowardice. In many of the memoirs under consideration here the evidence points to how powerfully the fear of being a coward was internalised and the intense feelings generated continued in the post war construction of war memoirs. In his *A Psychological Retrospect of the Great War* W. N. Maxwell attributed the following words to a soldier who after a few days at the front 'could do nothing but lie and quake' until 'he says he took himself in hand.'

He summoned the whole strength of his manhood to his aid, feeling that if he lived, he would be ashamed to stand before his fellow-men, a coward, and that if he died, he would be ashamed to come before his Maker, a coward. His self-respect was the triumphant factor that entered into the act of will that put fear away from him.¹²¹

Whatever the individual's expressions of fear of being a coward they have clearly been overlaid by the moral and religious sentiments of the author who was an army Chaplain.

However, such certainties embedded in the clear distinctions between courage and cowardice were precisely those which were obfuscated by shell shock and the debates surrounding it. An anonymous witness, a regimental medical officer, to the War

¹²⁰ W. Tyrell, evidence to Report

¹²¹ Maxwell, *Psychological Retrospect*, p. 130

Office Committee provided a full account of his breakdown during which he could not control his tears and cried for a week. Nevertheless, after six months he returned to the front where 'I had no difficulty whatever in controlling myself - not the slightest.'¹²² In the eyes of the Committee the 'coward' was recuperated as a 'gallant officer' because he had recovered his self-control and gone on to perform his military duties. Millais Culpin's opinion based on his experience was of 'meeting men with a history of three or four years of strenuous warfare before their breakdown leads me to believe that everyone, subjected to sufficient of the terrors of modern warfare, would eventually reach the limits of physical and mental endurance'.¹²³ Culpin's opinion was subject to contestation but could be accommodated when men successfully managed to win their 'individual psychological battle' and conform to the image of the good soldier.

The debates about the causes of shell shock focussed primarily on the emotion of fear, an emotion which was sanctioned within military discourses and legitimate in time of war. At the same time it blurred the clear cut distinctions between courage and cowardice as the War Office Committee had to admit in conclusion to their report, 'in many cases it is extremely difficult to distinguish cowardice from neurosis since in both fear is the chief causal factor.'¹²⁴ The efficient management of fear was also implicated in the discussion about military training, morale and *esprit de corps* as well as practical considerations of leave, rest from military duties and general physical conditions. Such discussions centred on the army as a public institution but the army was also a space

¹²² Quoted in Bogacz, 'War Neuroses', p. 247

¹²³ Millais Culpin, *Psychoneuroses in War and Peace*, quoted in Maxwell, *Psychological Retrospect*, p. 150

¹²⁴ Report, Appendix A, p. 223

where the boundaries between public and private intersected, a domestic space where men worked, ate and slept together with the ever present possibility that they would die together. In the absence of women, consolation and comfort were to be found from other men, nurturing and sustaining each other through their terrifying ordeals. In such an intense, highly charged atmosphere there were the inevitable antagonisms which could erupt between men divided by class, status, religion, politics and ethnicity. Army discipline, as we have seen, sometimes provoked rage and violence. While some may have found pleasure and excitement in combat and killing,¹²⁵ others found the transgression of civilian taboos a source of conflict and distress. Arguably then, fear could be publicly articulated and legitimated within the emotional vocabulary allowed in the construction of masculine identity. However, although the limiting notion of self-control and the suppression of emotion might be sustainable in civilian life but war experience lived out in an intense homo-social world provoked other strong emotional reactions. In turn they contributed to the processes of mental conflict identified in the aetiology of shell shock.

As many of the personal memories struggle to express the conflicts, pain and desires engendered by their emotional reactions to their war experiences they echo Freud's observation in relation to war neurosis that 'the thing feared is after all an inner foe'.¹²⁶ These inner foes took a variety of forms and manifestations, some of which were observed by the more psychoanalytically-orientated psychologists. Scenarios of familial

¹²⁵ Bourke, 'Effeminacy, Ethnicity and the End of Trauma', p. 57

¹²⁶ S. Ferenczi, K. Abraham et al., *Psychoanalysis and the War Neurosis*, London: International Psychoanalytical Press, 1918

relationships were re-enacted in the organisation of the army command structure.

Rivers, for example, observed how the relationship between an officer and his men resembled that of a father and son; some officers being 'actuated by interest which could not be greater if those under his command were his own children.'¹²⁷ In Rivers' interpretation, the father figure was benign but the converse was the tyrannical father represented by the officer who 'found fault with everything' and aroused hostility and 'feelings of bitterness and hatred'.¹²⁸

Comradeship and the close emotional bonds which were forged between men could nevertheless be a source of mental conflict. According to C. Stanford Read:

It is highly probable that the herding together of men so closely does tend to lighten up latent homosexual trends, resulting perhaps in definite homosexual acts or leading to mental conflicts which in their resolution may produce abnormal mental symptoms.¹²⁹

The relationship between war and homoeroticism has been the subject of much analysis¹³⁰ and certainly in some of the personal accounts there are examples of tenderness and kindness as well as expressions of love towards other men for the homosocial world evoked desires and prohibitions. Comradeship with and loyalties to other men were often intense and the bonds which were established between 'brothers'

¹²⁷ Rivers, 'War Neurosis', p. 38

¹²⁸ Hiram Sturdy, IWM Con Shelf

¹²⁹ Read, *Military Psychiatry*, p. 12

¹³⁰ See, for example, Adrian Caesar, *Taking it like a man: Suffering, sexuality and the War Poets*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993, and Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975

and 'comrades' were frequently recalled and recorded post war with a deep sense of loss. One writer describing how every man had a 'chum' claimed that 'such comradeship can never be found in civilian life'. He went to describe how he and his friend were inseparable:

Sharing everything, down to the last cigarette-end, the last army biscuit, the last bit of cover under an enemy bombardment, can you wonder when I say we almost loved each other. Facing hardships and death together day after day, brings out that something in a man that lies dormant in the monotonous round of everyday civilian life.¹³¹

However, in relation to the subject of war neurosis, the feelings aroused in heterosexual men for other men may well have been disturbing or threatening to a man's sense of his sexual identity. Nonetheless, such bonds of love and friendship were crucial for men's psychic survival but when these bonds were cruelly and tragically severed as they were, for example during the severe losses of the Pal's battalions at the Battle of the Somme, the strains imposed on the survivors were immense.

The deaths and mutilation of one's comrades were unbearable traumas among the many horrors and privations of war. For, as Eric Leed argues, there were psychic dangers in identification with the men of one's unit contributing to a loss of self for 'to identify with the battalion at war and with the narrow circle of one's comrades was to open a large vertiginous emotional drain, and to begin a seemingly endless process of mourning'.¹³² After the Battle of the Somme death was omnipresent:

¹³¹ W. A. Quinton, IWM 79/35/1

¹³² Leed, *No Man's Land*, pp. 210-11

The sight of the dead laying about us, and then as the weather grew warmer, the terrible, indescribable smell as they rotted, formed part of our everyday lives.¹³³

In a number of letters to his wife, Captain Leland describes the impact of so many deaths:

About the only friend I ever had out here has just died. Five whole men out of thirty two. Not a bad record. That is ours. And they say the war is won. Do not take the slightest notice of anything you read in the papers. They lie. Every word.

Five months earlier he had written:

One has grown into such a state that nothing seems to affect us as it should. We are always mourning someone or other. The Angel of Death has been very busy lately.¹³⁴

The exigencies of war, however, inhibited the normal processes of mourning which often involve 'grave departures from the normal attitude to life', a painful mood and require time for the mourning process to be worked through.¹³⁵ Adrian Gregory has shown that, in order to maintain national morale during wartime, extravagant mourning on the home front was prevented 'forcing prominent people to mourn for only a short time in public and with as stoic an attitude as they could muster.'¹³⁶ The maintenance of army morale was even more imperative; men were expected and encouraged to repress their

¹³³ W. A. Quinton, IWM 79/35/1

¹³⁴ Captain Leland, IWM 96/51/1

¹³⁵ S. Freud, *Mourning and Melancholia*, 1917, Vol. 11, London: Pelican Books, 1984, p. 251-267

¹³⁶ Adrian Gregory, *The Silence of Memory*, Oxford: Berg 1994, p. 21

experience, 'to put it out of your mind, old fellow, and do not think about it. Imagine you are in your garden or home.' In his evidence to the War Office Committee of Enquiry into 'Shell Shock' W. H. R. Rivers denounced such platitudes:

If you think about the experiences which men went through in France, seeing their friends at their side with their heads blown off and things of that sort, the process of repression is altogether unsuited for an experience of that kind, and yet that process was going on on an enormous scale.¹³⁷

The admonition 'to forget about it' prevented expressions of grief and loss which would have been detrimental to army morale. W. H. R. Rivers's statement was a comparatively rare acknowledgment of the emotional impact of the deaths of comrades and how the feelings generated might also be constitutive of neuroses when any expression of them was actively discouraged. In 1918 in an article in the *Lancet*¹³⁸ Rivers had utilised Freud's concept of the normal processes of repression by which certain painful memories were buried in the unconscious and forgotten while also arguing that in the specific circumstances of war such mechanisms only contributed to the 'maintenance of neurosis'. His contention was that painful memories, while not being dwelt on, should be faced.

The conflicts involved in the psychic process of repression produced altered states of mind and mood. One result was that many men, like Captain Leland, found themselves growing 'callous' or falling into a state of misery, 'no, not misery-

¹³⁷ Report. p. 58

¹³⁸ W. H. R. Rivers, 'The Repression of War Experience', *The Lancet*, February 2 1918, pp. 173-177

melancholy'.¹³⁹ The same state of mind was found amongst the French troops. The French *poilus* identified *le cafard*, a word with no linguistic equivalent in English and therefore untranslatable but which refers to a deep melancholy, an overwhelming sense of depression and misery. Stephane Audoin-Rouzeau's study of French trench journalism shows how the term first appeared in January 1915 and remained prominent until the end of the war and argues that 'this multiform, endemic and intangible *cafard* was a misfortune against which nothing would prevail'.¹⁴⁰ As such it was a term which conveyed a range of feelings experienced by combatants, from, for example, disappointment over delays in receiving letters, or the despair which could assail men unpredictably 'when you feel invaded by a mysterious terror of the unknown' or worse, the feelings induced by omnipresent death when 'everyone turns in on himself; few words are exchanged; everyone looks into his own depths, seeking the mental strength to lift himself above this overwhelming atmosphere of death.'¹⁴¹ While arguing that *le cafard* 'does not of itself sum up the whole of the soldiers' mental universe' Audoin-Rouzeau's analysis nevertheless points to the multi-faceted nature of psychic trauma which many combatants experienced at times during the course of the war. Nevertheless, the introduction of the concept of unconscious processes met with a hostile reaction.

Freud's theories of the unconscious which increasingly informed the debates about shell shock once again raised antipathy among other groups of psychiatrists who again rejected the 'Teutonic science. When Ernest Jones, one of Freud's most energetic

¹³⁹ Captain Leland, IWM 96/51/1

¹⁴⁰ Stephane Audoin-Rouzeau, *Men At War 1914-18: National Sentiment and Trench Journalism in France during the First World War*, Oxford: Berg, 1992, p. 55. See also Translator's notes.

¹⁴¹ *ibid.* pp. 54-55

advocates in England, wrote of how the war had confirmed Freud's view of the human mind as 'containing beneath the surface a body of imperfectly controlled and explosive forces' and that 'the manhood of a nation is in war not only allowed, but encouraged and ordered to indulge in behaviour of a kind that is throughout abhorrent to the civilised mind, to commit deeds and witness sights that are profoundly revolting to our aesthetic and moral disposition,' he was accused of impugning British manhood. In the first Maudsley Lecture delivered in 1920, Sir James Crichton-Browne responded directly to Jones's arguments that 'all sorts of previously forbidden and buried impulses, cruel, sadistic, murderous and so on are stirred to greater activity.'¹⁴²

that is, as regards our men, at any rate, a gross libel and a cruel insult to those of us who have graves in France and Flanders to tend...Our men went over the top, or suffered long-drawn out misery in the trenches in no spirit of wanton aggression and brutality, but for self-defence, for the protection of those united to them by family affection, by friendly association, patriotic sentiment or for righteous conviction. The flame of modern knight-errantry was lambent among them.¹⁴³

Inveighing against 'subterranean devilry' which Jones had argued led to the intrapsychical conflicts and were the cause of all neurotic disorders, Crichton-Browne countered with the suggestion that in almost all cases of war neuroses 'strong psychopathic tendencies had existed before the war.' The concept of the unconscious flew in the face of traditional beliefs about will power, the crucial mechanism by which a man exerted self

¹⁴² Ernest Jones, 'War Shock and Freud's theory of the Neuroses' in Ferenczi, Abraham et al., *Psycho-analysis and the War Neuroses*, p. 47

¹⁴³ Sir James Crichton-Browne, *Journal of Mental Science*, Vol. LXVI, No. 274, p. 231

control for 'the presence of these conflicts absolved the soldier, releasing him from the responsibility for his unsoldierly conduct,'¹⁴⁴ that is when he manifested signs of shell shock. If a man's actions were propelled by the unconscious he could not be held responsible for actions over which he had no control. Thus the seemingly fixed categories of cowardice and courage were destabilised, categories which were crucial in framing many of the debates about shell shock and which informed the institutions and social practices which managed the men suffering from it. Gradually, however, psychological explanations of shell shock were accepted by the military who were forced by sheer numbers of shell shock casualties to respond in alternative ways.

The example of Captain Leland's final breakdown and his admission to a hospital for officers is significant for more than its illustration of a process of gradual breakdown and the intense conflict between fear and duty. The fact that he was a regular soldier and an officer throws light on one of the reasons for the army's change of attitude. Traditional military values and codes of conduct were put under threat as the incidence of shell shock among officers became apparent; in 1917, for example, the ratio of officers to men at the front was 1:30, the ratio of officers to men in hospitals for war neurasthenics was 1:6.¹⁴⁵ Army statistics revealed that officers were twice as likely to break down as men of the ranks. Experienced soldiers, regulars, officers and NCOs too were succumbing to war neuroses, men who 'beyond the slightest doubt had been normally men of steady and fearless character'¹⁴⁶ while others were known for their dare-

¹⁴⁴ Feudtner, 'Minds', p. 394

¹⁴⁵ Bourke, *Dismembering the Male*, p. 112

¹⁴⁶ George Rutherford Jeffrey, 'Some Points of Interest in connection with the Psychoneuroses of War', *Journal of Mental Science*, Vol. LXVI, No. 273, April 1920, p. 132

devilry and their valiant behaviour. Was the peak of the nation's manhood also to be found wanting, to be labelled as cowards and transferred to asylums or worse, put before a firing squad?

The stigmatising labelling which attributed neuroses to certain types of 'useless' men was difficult to maintain in the face of men of the social class which aspired to and had been trained for the ideals of manly duty and self-control. Moreover, as Stone has pointed out the military authorities could no longer rely on their usual disciplinary procedures since it would have been 'a rather difficult, and in manpower terms, inefficient bureaucratic enterprise to court-martial all those concerned.'¹⁴⁷ In 1916 Charles Myers was promoted to Lieutenant-Colonel 'Consulting Psychologist' and by the middle of that year he had seen 'upwards of two thousand cases of 'shell shock'.¹⁴⁸ After the Battle of the Somme, particularly when the Pals battalions suffered massive casualties, shell shock became a major problem and a military crisis; in the summer of 1916 a General Order went out under the heading 'Officers - Fitness For Duty' expressing concern within the High Command:

Instances have recently come to notice where an officer without any definite manifestations of a physical disability or injury, has asserted his inability to perform military duty, on the ground that he is the subject of defects in health or temperament...the officer will be required to sign a written statement clearly setting forth the history and present particulars of the condition which brings his capacity, physically or temperamentally into question.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁷ Stone, 'Shell Shock', p. 250

¹⁴⁸ Myers, *Shell Shock in France*, p. 17

¹⁴⁹ Quoted in Babington, *Shell Shock*, p. 76

'Temperament' was clearly a military euphemism for mental incapacity which demonstrates the reluctance to see the inability to 'perform military duty' as anything other than a dereliction of that duty. However by the end of 1916 under Myers's direction, Advanced Neurological Centres were established near the front line for the treatment of psychological casualties and provided for the observation and examination of individual cases and their treatment as well as maintaining army discipline; army drill and marching were included in the regime. Chris Feudtner has observed that 'permitting psychological medicine to adjudicate responsibility was, for the military, both effective and palatable because it allowed them to retain control of the men as patients and to maintain a sense of discipline.'¹⁵⁰ In 1917 a General Routine Order on the 'Classification and disposal of officers and other ranks who without any visible wound become non-effective from physical conditions claimed or presumed to have originated from the effects of British or enemy weapons in action'¹⁵¹ in which the diagnosis 'shell shock' was banned and replaced by the bureaucratic term Not Yet Diagnosed (Nervous?). On receipt of the order, Captain Gameson of the R. A. M. C reflected on the ambiguities and ambivalences expressed in its contents; he agreed on the necessity of identifying malingerers as 'it was a sound move to prevent abuse of the diagnosis' but, on the other hand, 'we seemed to be getting dangerously near the abuse of preventing the diagnosis'. He also felt that the primary consideration was 'almost entirely economic' because the 'grave concern about those cases under review was solely due to the fact that they might

¹⁵⁰ Feudtner, 'Minds', p. 398

¹⁵¹ General Routine Order No. 2384 dated 17/6/17 a copy of which is in Captain Gameson's memoir, Captain L. Gameson, IWM P.397

well be long, intractable- and expensive'. He was referring here to the troubled question of pension awards which he had previously noted in relation to the designation 'wound' or 'sickness': 'once a man had been officially labelled 'W' he was in a much better bargaining position than one marked 'S'.¹⁵² Nonetheless, he concluded that the G. R. O., however 'strangely worded, represented the first tentative foundations of an understanding psychiatric approach to 'N' or nervous cases generally. It may, perhaps, be regarded as heralding the neutral twilight which preceded the tardy dawn.'

Undoubtedly medical men like Myers and Rivers contributed to the emerging 'tardy dawn' with their psychological understanding of shell shock which however reluctantly, many in the army command gradually came to accept. This was partly, as Martin Stone, suggests because the psychological 'fix' 'combined both military and medical concerns in a manner which valorised the importance of bureaucratic efficiency'¹⁵³ since it incorporated both discipline and therapy, prevention and cure. The notion of efficiency was also bound up with the concept of manly duty and while the language of psychology created 'the ideological social havens for shell shocked soldiers (which paralleled the institutional haven of the mental hospital).¹⁵⁴ The use of terms such as shell shock or war neuroses were certainly more palatable than malingering or cowardice. However the language used in the diagnoses and the practices involved in differing treatments were powerfully inflected by class. The personal accounts have

¹⁵² After the war Captain Gameson 'spent much time on the voluntary work of helping neglected men to substantiate their claims on the Ministry of Pensions, and sometimes of getting increased the pittances they were already receiving'. Captain Gameson, IWM P.397

¹⁵³ Stone, 'Shell Shock', p. 256

¹⁵⁴ Feudtner, 'Minds', p. 399

indicated that, at the point of breakdown, men of all ranks were reduced to the same level of loss of control. Yet class distinctions framed and informed the diagnoses of men suffering from war neuroses; hysterical symptoms such as mutism, paralysis, blindness and contractures of the arms, legs, hands and feet appeared in the ranks while the officer class manifested symptoms associated with neurasthenia or anxiety neuroses such as insomnia, depression, amnesia and nightmares. As Elaine Showalter aptly points out 'this extraordinarily tidy distribution of symptoms and diagnoses is consistent with late Victorian moralistic and class-oriented attitudes to hysteria and neurasthenia in women' and suggests that military doctors were reluctant to apply the feminine label of hysteria to men of their own class.¹⁵⁵ Hysteria not only imputed unmanly behaviour but also cowardice whereas anxiety neurosis or neurasthenia did not. In his discussion of the 'very unsatisfactory state' of the nomenclature Rivers proposed that even for the private soldier, suggestion neurosis was a better term since it was 'very unlikely to acquire the inconvenient associations which have become attached to hysteria.'¹⁵⁶

The explanations for the division of symptoms along class lines were sought both in class backgrounds and in the different responsibilities and duties inherent in the army's command structure. Although the flight into illness resolved the conflict between fear and duty the process of repression operated differently in the two groups. The moral standards of public school education equipped the officer 'successfully to repress, not only expressions of fear, but also the emotion itself' while the private soldier with 'his simpler mental training' and 'less complex and varied mental life' was 'more likely to be

¹⁵⁵ Showalter, *Female Malady*, p. 174.

¹⁵⁶ Rivers, 'War Neurosis', p. 25

content with the crude solution of the conflict between instinct and duty which is provided by such disabilities as dumbness or the helplessness of a limb.'¹⁵⁷

Following from these educational differences were the differences in war work; as Rivers and others noted the duties of the ranks were to obey orders and to submit to prolonged mechanical drill. Officers, on the other hand, had the responsibilities of giving orders, taking responsibility for their men and, above all, setting an example, in John MacCurdy's words in order 'to inspire the men beneath them with courage and enthusiasm'.¹⁵⁸ Having to 'appear calm and unconcerned in the midst of danger' produced a state of persistent anxiety aggravated by the fact that 'the officer is less free to employ the picturesque or sulphurous language by which the Tommy finds a safety valve for repressed emotion.'¹⁵⁹ The image of the officer fulfils the ideal of the soldier hero defined by his class and a specific construction of masculinity yet at the same time, Rivers recognised how the deference and lack of initiative expected from the ranks contributed to war neurosis as they had to restrain:

the expression of sentiments of dislike or disrespect for those of superior rank, and these restraints become particularly trying when those who are disliked or despised are the instruments by which the many restrictions of military life are imposed or enforced.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁵⁸ MacCurdy, *War Neuroses*, p. 21

¹⁵⁹ Rivers, 'War Neurosis', p. 13

¹⁶⁰ *ibid.* p. 14

After all, in the army, 'a self-assertive man is a mutinous man'¹⁶¹ and Elaine Showalter rightly points out that by turning their anger and hostility to their superior officers in upon themselves, the men defused mutiny. Shell shock then may have served 'a functional purpose in military life.'¹⁶²

However, in terms of military efficiency and the need for manpower, shell shock was dysfunctional in removing men from the fighting lines. These considerations were brought to bear in the treatment of men suffering from war neuroses and most historians agree that in the range of therapeutic treatments offered they were all ultimately coercive in that their aim was to heal or cure men and in so doing, restore their capacities to fight. Earlier it was contended that the army reluctantly came to accept psychological explanations of war neuroses but when turning to the subject of treatment the opposition to the psycho-therapeutic doctors emerges again, a psychological approach to treatment remaining anathema to many neurologists working in army hospitals. C. S. Myers was so disillusioned with the medical authorities that he left his post as consultant psychologist and refused to give evidence to the War Office Enquiry into 'Shell Shock'. Many neurologists were asylum -trained doctors and held fast to their familiar, civilian classifications of mental disorders. Their professionalism, as well as their methods, were challenged by, among others, C. Stanford Read who was in charge of 'D' Block, Royal Victoria Hospital, Netley where many of the early cases of shell shock were sent.¹⁶³ He felt that comparisons were difficult to make between mental disorders in war and peace

¹⁶¹ Maxwell, *Psychological Retrospect*, p. 154

¹⁶² Showalter, *Female Malady*, p. 175

¹⁶³ Despite enquiries, it appears that no records of the hospital exist for the period of the First World War

and specifically argued that many regarded as mentally defective were more likely to have been manifesting early symptoms of shell shock. Further, he argued, loss of memory was a very common symptom of war neuroses and amnesiac fugues which were constantly seen in the front line had been often wrongly interpreted as desertion. His criticism also extended to the lack of insufficient skilled psychiatrists in War Mental Hospitals; 'medical men with insufficient or no experience have had tasks given them for which they were in no way fitted.'¹⁶⁴ The theories held by the likes of C. Stanford Read informed their therapeutic practices and necessarily differed from those of the doctors whom he criticised. Similarly, the class divisions on which the symptomology was based was reflected in the differences between disciplinary treatment and suggestive psychotherapy, a term adopted for a form of psychoanalysis as developed by Freud. However, there were more variations in treatment than these two extremes imply as many physicians were eclectic in their therapeutic regimes.

In order to restore men's loss of physical capabilities manifested in the symptoms of mutism, paralysis and contracture of the muscles special exercises were devised. Within a framework of military discipline, will power and self control had to be summoned to return the body to functional and military efficiency as outlined in a booklet entitled *Daily Drill for the Voice. A Book of Exercises Composed to Help Men Whose Speech Has Been Affected by Shell Shock or Other Cases*, published in 1917.¹⁶⁵ In some cases rest and quiet surroundings were recommended but there was always a fear that this would lead to laziness. Moreover it had not proved effective; after rest

¹⁶⁴ Read, *Military Psychiatry*, pp. 53, 58

¹⁶⁵ Quoted in Bourke, *Dismembering the Male*, p. 118

cures and a return to duty many men had broken down again. The treatment programme involved in re-education included work for not only did it ensure against a man languishing in idleness it also provided 'a useful gauge of his progress towards active citizenship'.¹⁶⁶ Thus a man was re-educated into an awareness of his manly duty in the present - and for the future. There was another impetus in ensuring men were engaged in useful work and that was to prevent them from morbidly dwelling on their experiences, the suspicion being that shell shocked men were either malingerers or that they would become fixated in their symptoms slowing their recovering, or worse their case becoming intractable.

While the ranks were encouraged back to work, officers were treated in 'Special hospitals for officers' with facilities deemed appropriate to their class position. Palace Green hospital to which Captain Leland was admitted consisted of thirty three single bedrooms with 'plain grey walls with no pictures or ornaments or anything else to distract the attention of the tired men to whom complete and absolute rest of body and mind is the first essential of recovery.' There they ate alone and were allowed one short walk alone in Kensington Gardens during their three to four week stay.¹⁶⁷ In other hospitals activities such as billiards and croquet were encouraged and 'full scope ...[was to be] given for individual development and personal tastes'.¹⁶⁸ The purpose of the therapy was to explain to the patient 'the mechanism of his retarded mental process'.

¹⁶⁶ H. Crichton-Miller (ed.), *Functional Nerve Disease*, London, 1920, quoted in Feudtner, 'Minds', p. 401

¹⁶⁷ Lord Knutsford's 'Special Hospitals for Officers', *The Lancet*, 1915, Vol. 2, quoted in Babington, *Shell Shock* p. 54

¹⁶⁸ Crichton-Miller (ed.), *Functional Nerve Disease*, quoted in Feudtner, 'Minds', p. 402

Despite the class distinctions drawn between symptoms and forms of treatment, the element of persuasion was common to both, demonstrating to the patient his individual failing and enabling him to regain self-control. Despite the adoption of psychological explanations and language, the underlying assumption was that recovery depended on a man's will power once he was made to understand his affliction through rational processes.

The most extreme forms of disciplinary treatment operated within a similar framework; men could be relieved of their symptoms by a stimulus/response mechanism. Major W. J. Adie M. D explained the success of his use of ether and pricking the larynx with a pin in 'curing' patients of mutism. In his evidence to the War Office Committee he concluded that 'there was no doubt in my own mind that these cures were permanent.'¹⁶⁹ Punishment was also evident in the other extreme form of treatment, 'faradization' or electric shock treatment associated particularly with Dr. Lewis Yealland, most of whose patients came from the ranks.¹⁷⁰ Yealland saw the 'flight into illness' as subversive and his patients as malingerers. Such practices were used in other armies and in Germany drew the wrath of psychoanalysts. Freud declared:

It did not aim at the patient's recovery, or not in the first instance; it aimed, above all, at restoring his fitness for service. Here Medicine was serving purposes foreign to its essence. the physician himself was under military command and had his own personal dangers to fear - loss of seniority or a charge of neglecting his duty- if he allowed himself to be led by considerations other than those prescribed for him.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁹ Report, p. 18

¹⁷⁰ For an account of Yealland's methods, see Showalter, *Female Malady*, pp. 176-8

¹⁷¹ S. Freud, *Memorandum on the Electrical Treatment of War Neurotics*, 1920, quoted in Babington, *Shell Shock*, p. 66

Ernst Simmel described such treatment as torture and ‘an inversion of the fundamental principles’ of Freudian theory since the doctors resorting to such methods ‘make a torture of the treatment in order to force the neurotic to ‘flee into health.’¹⁷² He identified other tortures in ‘dark rooms’ and ‘prohibition of letters’, a view echoed by Rivers in his critique of institutional practices which forbade patients to talk about their experiences. As we have seen, Rivers had used the Freudian concept of repression to explain the causes of shellshock and it also informed his practice of suggestive psychotherapy or abreaction which encouraged men to face their traumatic memories, rather than repress them. In the process the patient would arrive at a deeper understanding of himself and begin to restore his masculine self-esteem. The impact of psycho-therapeutic ideas was not insignificant, by the end of the war at Maghull military hospital fifty R. A. M. C officers were receiving training in techniques of ‘abreactive’ psychotherapy, including dream analysis.¹⁷³ In other military hospitals created from county asylums similar practices were introduced. Yet while there were significant improvements in the understanding and treatment of shellshock even the most radical and compassionate of physicians worked within a set of assumptions about masculinity and manliness:

True, manly and firm sympathy is, I hold, the greatest therapeutic measure that we have in such cases...although sympathy must be shown, he must be induced to face his illness in a manly way.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷² Ferenczi, Abraham et al., *Psycho-analysis and the War Neuroses*, p. 43

¹⁷³ Stone, ‘Shell Shock’, p. 243

¹⁷⁴ Jeffrey, ‘Some points of interest’, p. 140

He also had to face his responsibilities as a man; McDougall felt that 'if the patient has a strong sentiment of patriotism or of family pride' it was necessary to point out to him 'how his disorder renders him a mere burden on his country or on his family.'¹⁷⁵ Trapped within the military machine which required the return of healthy men to the front and within their own ideals of masculinity, the psycho-therapeutically oriented psychologists ended up conforming to the idea that men must endure the unendurable in war. In 1917 Rivers wrote 'it is characteristic of the painful experience of warfare that it usually has a good or even a noble side, which in his condition of misery the patient does not see at all, or greatly underestimates'.¹⁷⁶ As with others, Rivers offered no critique of the war itself but carried out his duties by aiding his patients towards achieving fitness for duty. His later pacifist dreams occurring during his treatment of Siegfried Sassoon were evidence of his own unresolved conflicts. His war experiences as those of many other men returned to haunt him in the post war years.

Hiram Sturdy's assertion that 'war makes sane men mad'¹⁷⁷ was the starting point of this chapter and in the same way as many combatants had the compulsion to return to their war experiences, so the conclusion returns to Sturdy's statement. The madness was shell shock produced by the unbearable horrors and intense strains of the war which drove men to the limits of their endurance. Yet as many observed, what was most surprising was that more men did not break down. Those who did succumb to a variety of war neuroses, however, provoked anxieties in a number of ways.

¹⁷⁵ McDougall, *Abnormal Psychology*, p. 472

¹⁷⁶ Rivers, 'Freud's Psychology'

¹⁷⁷ Hiram Sturdy, IWM Con Shelf

The army high command had relied on the notion of 'character' in the face of modern technological warfare. The pre-war codes of masculinity constructed on concepts of character and will power faltered in the face of the increasing incidence of shell shock amongst the officer class. Their predominantly public school education and training rendered them no less invincible to war-induced mental disorders than the men of the ranks. The War Office Committee Report of 1922 conceded that 'any type of individual' might suffer from war neuroses and that 'it is extremely difficult to say beforehand what type of man is most likely to break down.' At the beginning of the war 'worthless' men were derided and discarded as discourses of degeneracy, heredity and urban pathology provided legitimization for positioning certain types of men as failures with their congenital inability to conform to standards of manliness and manly duty. By the end of the war, there was little doubt that shell shock was no respect of class or type; in modern war every man was liable to break down.

The language of degeneration and tainted heredity was partly displaced by the language of psychology and psychoanalysis. Mental conflicts were identified instead in the aetiology of shell shock and concepts of the unconscious and repression competed with traditional notions of will power and self control. Fault lines opened up in the pre-war certainties of the distinctions between insanity and sanity, normality and pathology and even more so between courage and cowardice. The ambiguities and contradictions in the conclusions of the War Office report were testimony to the fracturing of some key notions in the construction of masculinity for they argued simultaneously that 'the military aspect of cowardice is justified' while 'seeming cowardice may be beyond the individual's control'.

Ultimately, no clear definition of cowardice emerged. What continued to surface in the aftermath of war were numbers of shell shocked ex-servicemen to add to the thousands placed in hospitals during the war; others beyond the reach of official statistics carried their traumas back to their homes and families.

By turning away from the public discourses around shell shock to the memoirs and memories of ex-servicemen what is revealed is the emotional life of the soldier. The range of tone, the powerful use of metaphor and alliteration and in some cases, the re-workings and revisions of the narrative indicates the struggle to find a language appropriate to convey the intensity of the emotional reactions to the war experience. The range of emotions repudiates the notion of self-control as bitterness, anger, loss, tenderness and compassion all find expression. Here we find critiques of the war and its conduct but more significantly its impact on male subjectivities. The experiences of being soldier did not confer or confirm the stable identity imagined in the ideal of the soldier hero; instead many of the conflicts identified in shell shock are worked through, consciously and unconsciously, and in the process of writing, remembering, and forgetting. Whether they resulted in alternative versions of masculinity lived out in the new political and cultural landscape of the post war years remains a question to be explored.

Chapter Three

SOLDIERS FROM THE WAR RETURNING

Comradeship and the imagined community of ex-servicemen

The front cover of the first edition of *The Ex-Service Man* carried an illustration of an immediately recognisable cultural figure: an 'old soldier'.¹ An aged man, disabled by blindness and wearing tattered 'civvies' to further signify his poverty, he is holding a tray on which he offers a number of small worthless items for sale. His war medals stand out against this display of poverty, destitution and neglect. The caption underneath proclaims 'NEVER AGAIN! NEVER AGAIN!' The intentions behind the publication of a new newspaper whose constituency was addressed in its title were thus made clear. The expressed determination was that the fate of returning soldiers of previous wars, discarded and neglected and left to the mercy of public pity and private charity, would not be repeated after the Great War. Moreover there was a resolve to organise against its repetition. Elsewhere in another journal for ex-servicemen, *The Comrades Journal*, the publication of the Comrades of the Great War Association, its Chairman Lt.-Colonel Wilfred Ashley M. P. reiterated the same theme when he wrote 'after former wars the Service men have been forgotten and neglected. We look to this organisation to prevent such a calamity happening again.'²

¹ *The Ex-Service Man*, Vol. 1, No. 8, September 11 1918

² *The Comrades Journal*, February 1919

The abject representation of the ex-serviceman, ignored by the society for which he fought, was the complete antithesis of heroic military masculinity in which the triumphant returning warrior was the final part of the narrative. If the repetition of the past treatment of discharged servicemen was feared, nevertheless there was an optimism that the present circumstances would be controlled by the men themselves, by sheer force of numbers:

A 'grateful country' might forget these men, even as it forgot the 'handful of heroes' who fought in our previous wars'.
But there's no 'handful' now, it's a matter of millions.³

These were not the old soldiers of past conflicts and campaigns, a lower order of men who were despised and easily castigated as outsiders, drunks or villains. The returning mass army was comprised predominantly of volunteers and conscripts, soldiers 'for the duration only' for whom demobilisation meant the desired return to Blighty, to home and the resumption of their civilian status as workers, to their communities and their familial roles as fathers, husbands, brothers and sons. Nevertheless, the recurring juxtaposition of the discarded and abject individual of past conflicts and the returning heroes of the present war were indicative of the tensions and ambivalences surrounding the return of ex-service men.

In earlier chapters the written and in some examples, recorded memoirs of men serving in the armed forces during the Great War have been interrogated for what they revealed about its impact on male subjectivities. The meanings attached to manhood and

³ *The Ex-Service Man*, Vol. 1, No. 8, December 18 1918

male identity were brought into question by the psychic and social disruption which occurred when vast numbers of previously civilian men took up arms as soldiers. Significantly, most of those memoirs ended with the Armistice or at most the process of demobilisation which returned men to their former existence in civilian society. While the Armistice provided a sense of an ending there was no necessary closure. Yet the immediate post war years warrants little or at most brief examination in many of the memoirs. Based on his evidence of Australian veterans, Stephen Garton argues that 'the post war years are a hiatus, an abyss'.⁴ Nevertheless, the experience of war dominated many post-war lives whether inscribed on bodies as physical wounds or as psychic wounds from which haunting memories disturbed and disrupted the present, invoking a sense of estrangement and dissonance. One ex-servicemen characterised it as living in a 'mental internment camp'.⁵

While personal memoirs throw shards of light on individual processes of integration into civilian society, some of the problems and contradictions are further revealed by focusing on the collectivity of veterans and their public expression in the activities of their organisations and through their publications. This chapter initially examines the formation and purpose of ex-servicemen's organisations and their objectives. All attempted to harness the collective entity of ex-servicemen and to lay claim to speak for them and to represent their interests. Veterans organisations were concerned at one level with the practical problems involved in the return to civilian society and the practices of the bureaucratic systems which developed to aid

⁴ Stephen Garton, *The Cost of War: Australians Return*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996, p. 19

⁵ Charles Carrington, *Soldiers from the Wars Returning*, London: Hutchinson, 1965, p. 252

resettlement. Demobilisation schemes, pensions for the disabled and for dependents of men killed, training and unemployment assistance, employment policies all became issues for which veterans campaigned in order to obtain rights and justice for themselves, the disabled and the dependents of the dead. The language and rhetoric used in the various publications produced by different organisations will be examined to explore how ex-servicemen were represented. The class tensions within the organisations were implicated in the notions of masculinity centred on the identity of ex-servicemen which emerged. The chapter will analyse how these were articulated and at times, contested. The concept of comradeship, critical to the ideology of the veterans' movement, will also be interrogated.

The transition from service man to civilian raises critical questions about the impact of the war on a generation of veterans and in turn, of their impact on the society to which they returned. However, veterans did not constitute a homogenous group; they were divided by class, political allegiances, pre-war experience and occupation, age, geographical location, military status and indeed, differing experiences of the war itself. Nevertheless, the intensity of the war experience was pivotal representing a rupture between past and present selves. What their past status as servicemen conferred on them was, in Benedict Anderson's phrase, to be part of an 'imagined community' of ex-servicemen who had served their country, a community which incorporated not only the living but also the dead.⁶ Veterans invested meanings in the imagined identities within that community to give shape and direction to their lives as well as to provide meaning to

⁶ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London: Verso, 1991

their past experiences at war. The term ex-serviceman conferred a shared identity based on past war service; it represented an identifiable group of men claiming special interests and just treatment in recognition of the services they had rendered for their country. The construction of this shared identity was fragile, while the process of defining themselves as *ex-servicemen* imposed boundaries and limitations.. Even when the soldierly self was relinquished, the experience and memories of war were powerfully incorporated into the returned soldiers' identity shaping their responses to the culture to which they returned. As they tried to reinscribe and reposition themselves in relation to women and to other men in the post war world 'the complexities of any such identity as it is lived out amidst the contradictory demands and recognitions generated by actual social relations'⁷ emerged. Furthermore, the impact of war on the subjectivities of veterans marked by their experiences set them apart from those at home. It also gave them claim to special status and to a particular male identity which sometimes challenging existing forms of hegemonic masculinity.

Kaya Silverman argues that historical events which 'sometimes manage to *interrupt* or even deconstitute what a society assumes to be its master narratives' precipitate 'historical trauma'. She suggests that disruption such as that engendered by the First World War, has ramifications extending beyond the individual psyche.⁸ When the Armistice was declared on November 11 1918 and hostilities suspended, the nation looked forward to the restitution of peace and normality. Behind the public victory

⁷ Graham Dawson, 'The Blond Bedouin' in Michael Roper. and John Tosh (eds), *Manful Assertions: Masculinities in Britain since 1800*, London: Routledge, 1991

⁸ Kaya Silverman, *Male Subjectivity at the Margins*, London: Routledge, 1992, pp. 52-55

celebrations lay enormous private grief; the total military dead numbered 722,785.⁹ Over 514,000 men under thirty had lost their lives. Death and loss touched every part of the nation. Disturbances were felt deep within the national psyche in the aftermath of war producing, it could be argued, a state of national post-traumatic stress. What such disturbances signalled was the instability of former codes of masculinity. Was the heroic masculinity associated with the soldier assimilable to post-war representations of the ex-serviceman? In her analysis of interwar culture and national temperament, Alison Light identifies a strongly anti-heroic mood 'as characterising the aftermath of war [which] made a lasting and deep impression right across cultural life and idioms at home' reflecting 'a move away from formerly heroic and officially masculine public rhetorics of national destiny.' The process, she argues, 'shook to the core former definitions of sexual difference' producing a realignment of sexual identities.¹⁰ In her view, conventional masculinity was threatened and rendered vulnerable, not least by increased female emancipation, politically, socially and sexually. Men returned from the war then not only to a society in which they had to negotiate their role in relation to women and other men but also to one coming to terms with public and private loss on an unprecedented scale. Ex-servicemen were engaged in their own recuperation, both physical recovery and social re-integration, as well as dealing with personal economic and psychic losses.

⁹ Estimates of the war dead vary considerably; the figure used here is taken from J. Winter's exhaustive demographic study, see J. Winter, *The Great War and the British People*, London: Macmillan, 1985, pp. 68-9

¹⁰ Alison Light, *Forever England: Femininity, Literature and Conservatism Between the Wars*, London: Routledge, 1991, p. 8

Veterans' organisations appealed to the past meaning of fraternity, the homosocial bonds of the brotherhood of the trenches:

The front line was a charged emotional environment of deep masculine bonds, bonds of such intensity it is not surprising that men hungered for them after the war. But these intensities were also fuelled by anger, resentment and frustration, much of it directed at the home front ¹¹

Comradeship was a key word in the ex-servicemen's lexicon and was frequently invoked as the affective tie which had bound men together in the past, forged in their experiences at the front. When faced by the 'chasm of imminent annihilation' comradeship provided men with 'the comfort of being in the company of friends, of having those beside you who shared your thoughts and fears... someone there to protect you if you stumbled or mourn you if you fell'.¹² Eloquent testimony to the intensity of the emotional commitment to one's pals is found in many soldiers' memoirs, encapsulated in, for example, Guy Chapman's reflections on demobilisation:

Looking back at those firm ranks as they marched into billets, I found that a body of men had become so much a part of me that its disintegration would tear away something I cared for more dearly than I could have believed.¹³

¹¹ Stephen Garton, 'Longing for War: Nostalgia and Australian returned soldiers after the First World War', in Timothy Ashplant, Graham Dawson and Michael Roper, *The Politics of War Memory and Commemoration*, London: Routledge, 2000, p. 236

¹² Garton, *Cost of War*, p. 50

¹³ Guy Chapman, *A Passionate Prodigality: Fragments of Autobiography*, London: Ivor Nicholson and Watson, 1933, Mayflower - Dell Paperback edition, 1967; p. 33

Substantial historical evidence attests to the importance of small, informal friendship groups, the 'trench households' bound by 'ties deriving from shared experience, values, trust and reciprocal services' which sustained men in combat.¹⁴ Loyalty and mutual dependence were crucial in maintaining morale and to each man's survival when facing the dangers of life and death. Comradeship therefore registered powerfully when invoked as an organising principle of ex-servicemen's organisations, the foundation stone on which those organisations were built. It also addressed the psychic needs of men as they struggled with their individual adjustments to their return and to make their experiences meaningful. For some, the identity of an ex-serviceman was repudiated in the desire to renew their lives as civilians and forget their war experiences. For others, the identity of the ex-serviceman gave them a sense of belonging to a fraternity based on the positive memories of war, of comradeship. However, the concept was riven with paradoxes and open to conflicting meanings in the ways it was evoked and reinterpreted in the present. How comradeship was inflected was critical to the structures and practices which developed in the various organisations, both in providing shared aims and in formenting divisions.

Like their counterparts in France and Germany, the formal associations of British veterans took shape during the war. The first wave of returning soldiers were men who were discharged due to wounds or ill-health which rendered them unfit for further service. The unpreparedness of the government to deal with the casualties of war was

¹⁴ Tony Ashworth, 'Trench warfare 1914-1918', p. 155 see also for example, J. M. Bourne, *Britain and the Great War, 1914-1918*, London: Edward Arnold, 1989; Richard Holmes, *Firing Line*, London: Pimlico, 1994; John Keegan, *The Face of Battle*, London: Jonathan Cape, 1976

made clear by 1915 to the men who had responded to the state's call to take up arms. Old army practices whereby disabled soldiers were the responsibility of the Chelsea commissioners of the Royal Chelsea Hospital, while officers were dealt with by the War Office were inadequate to deal with the scale of casualties produced by a mass civilian army. Moreover, the assumption that a military man was single meant that as the Select Committee on Naval and Military Service (Pensions and Grants) stated in 1915, 'His family circumstances, children or dependents, have never entered into the matter of the pensions to which the incidents of his military service have entitled him.'¹⁵ Dependents suffering from hardship were thus obliged to seek recourse to established voluntary organisations such as the Soldiers' and Sailors' Families Association, the Patriotic Fund, and the Prince of Wales's National Relief Fund in addition to the Poor Law and local Boards of Guardians. Inevitably the voluntary system was unable to cope with this increasing pressure; it also came under attack for attitudes akin to nineteenth century moralising philanthropy. As Sylvia Pankhurst remarked 'the notion that the women were entitled to separation allowance as a right, not as a charitable act of grace, seemed difficult for the Association's officials to assimilate.'¹⁶ The hardship and humiliation of the voluntary system stimulated demands for government intervention with costs to be borne by the exchequer. As G. D. H. Cole insisted, relief should be officially provided in

¹⁵ Quoted in Graham Wootton, *The Politics of Influence: British Ex-servicemen, Cabinet decisions and cultural change (1917-1957)*, London: RKP, 1963, p. 11

¹⁶ Sylvia Pankhurst, *The Home Front*, London: The Cresset Library, 1987, p. 25

Throughout the war Sylvia Pankhurst worked in the East End of London where she observed and recorded the privations and hardships endured on the home front and with members of the East London Federation of Suffragettes, now the Workers' Suffrage Federation, campaigned to redress them.

recognition of 'the right of the citizen to be maintained by the community in a crisis not of his making' and to 'save him from the charity-mongering excesses of unemployed members of the middle and upper classes.'¹⁷ In 1915 state funds were made available by the Naval and Military War Pensions Act controlled by the War Pensions Statutory Committee with offices in central London. Local War Pensions Committees were established in every county and large town with local representatives including the voluntary bodies.¹⁸ However the voluntary principle and the assumption that the army should take care of its own became untenable in the face of compulsory military service after its introduction in 1916 for single men aged 18-41. From May 1916 all men of the same age cohort, regardless of marital status, were conscripted. Thus by the end of 1916 the Government was compelled to acknowledge its responsibility to returning veterans by establishing the Ministry of Pensions with George N. Barnes as the first Minister of Pensions.

The association of pensions with charity was an affront to men's dignity and carried the stigma of shame and dependency embedded in nineteenth century social welfare discourses. Additionally, it undermined one of the central tenets of masculinity, the idea of manly independence. Despite the formation of a separate ministry, pensions were not a statutory right. Decisions on the award of pensions were determined by proof as to whether the disability or ill-health was service related 'caused or aggravated by military service either at home or abroad, provided always that it was not the result of

¹⁷ G. D. H. Cole, *Labour in War Time*, 1915, p. 95, quoted in Wootton, *The Politics of Influence*, p. 33

¹⁸ Address by Sir Arthur Griffin-Boscawen, M. P. to Inter-Allied Conference at Paris on the Treatment and Training of Disabled Soldiers, *Recalled to Life*, No. 1, June 1917

their own serious negligence or misconduct.’¹⁹ Further humiliation was caused by the suspicion of malingering and the surveillance by medical boards was resented as impugning men’s sacrifice. The administrative delays, inadequate pensions for the disabled and war widows, the treatment meted out to men who had suffered in pursuance of their duty all contributed to veterans’ anger and frustration.

The number of casualties and the nature of the injuries sustained were unprecedented and by the end of December 1916 270,275 men had been discharged from the services as unfit, the largest proportion of whom were suffering from wounds and injuries to their legs or arms.²⁰ Wounded soldiers returned to make demands on a government grappling with scarcity: ‘scarcity of funds, scarcity of materials, scarcity of manpower and above all scarcity of organisation.’²¹ From the start of the war the state was inexorably drawn into extending its intervention to mobilise manpower, industry and resources like food, raw materials and services and to find methods of financing all the wartime demands. As a result the society in which the early returnees arrived was experiencing social and industrial unrest including a strike by several thousand engineers on Clydeside and, later in 1915, by South Wales miners partly in response to rises in the cost of living but also in defiance of the increasing control by the state of the labour force culminating in the Munitions of War Act. The greater integration of the population into the labour process during the war gave a boost to trade union membership which rose steadily from 4,145,000 in 1914 to 6,533,000 by 1918.²² Trade unionism therefore

¹⁹ *Recalled to Life*, No. 1, June 1917

²⁰ C. W. Hutt, *The Future of the Disabled Soldier*, London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1917, p. 2

²¹ Keith Burgess, *The Challenge of Labour*, London: Croom Helm, 1980, p. 155

²² *ibid.* pp. 165-66

provided the model for the formation of the first ex-servicemen's organisation as they sought to defend their rights, not as workers but as men to whom society owed an obligation for services rendered.

In 1916 the Blackburn and District Discharged Sailors and Soldiers Association was formed to press for improvements in benefits and pensions for ex-servicemen. This small local organisation later became the National Association of Discharged Sailors and Soldiers. It initially had links with the Trade Union and labour movement; of its six divisional committees, four were based in areas of traditional working-class unionism and solidarity, Lancashire and Cheshire, Yorkshire, South Wales and Durham and surrounding districts. In 1917 the Executive Committee, comprising four members of Trades Councils and four discharged men, announced that the Association was 'a purely working-class organisation', and:

that the discharged men should not be exploited by the capitalist class. This will certainly happen if the Trade Union movement does not actively interest itself in getting the men together.²³

They further emphasised their working-class credentials by at first refusing membership to officers thereby asserting the strength of their class loyalties and looking to the labour movement for support. Its first conference was held in Blackburn in October 1917 with delegates from all 79 branches attending. Philip Snowden, M.P. for Blackburn and a well-known opponent of the war, was undoubtedly lending his support to the National Association based on the experiences of his own constituents. During 1917 he kept a

²³ Quoted in Wootton, *Politics of Influence*, p. 95

record of the letters he received, over 30,000, from 'parents dissatisfied with separation allowances, disabled soldiers who experienced difficulty in getting their pensions, men who had been taken into the army in an unfit physical condition - a state of things which was simply appalling.'²⁴

At the same time a leading advocate of pensions for servicemen, James Hogge, the Liberal M. P. for East Edinburgh, was calling on the state to fulfill its moral and legal obligation to those who had volunteered or were compelled to serve in the armed forces. In an effort to secure that obligation he formed the Naval and Military War Pensions League in 1917 which 'proposed to eradicate inequalities that appeared in granting and administering pensions, to organise all ex-servicemen and their dependents, to protect their future interests, and to represent those interests in Parliament.'²⁵ Pensions became and remained an important campaigning issue but it was the continuing prosecution of the war and the government's response to manpower needs that provoked the further ire of ex-soldiers, resulting in the formation of a second ex-servicemen's organisation.

Following the huge numbers of casualties on the Somme from July to November 1916 the government sought new sources of manpower as replacements for the armed forces. The result was the Military Service (Review of Exceptions) Bill which authorised the medical re-examination of not only those who had previously been rejected as medically unfit but also those who had been discharged with a view to possible further service. Many of those already discharged had been officially declared disabled

²⁴ Philip Viscount Snowden, *An Autobiography*, London: Ivor Nicholson and Watson Limited, 1934, p. 406

²⁵ Stephen R. Ward (ed.), *Veterans of the First World War*, New York: Kennikat Press, 1975, p. 13

nevertheless the director general of recruiting argued that 'there is not a man who is able to make a living in ordinary life who cannot be employed in the Army somewhere.'²⁶

Meanwhile, those who were employed in munitions factories and government offices retained their exemptions. Philip Snowden and James Hogge were among the protesting voices raised in Parliament against the legislation and the attempt to recall the disabled to the front. Snowden argued for an amendment to the Bill:

We have been told repeatedly, in the course of these discussions, that already more than 10,000 men have been discharged from the Army as disabled. If this Sub-section is operative in the Bill, all those men will be liable at any time to be recalled for medical re-examination, and they will be liable not only to be called once, but to be called at periods of six months. This, I think, would not only be an outrage to those men – it would be a cruel and, I might also say, a wicked thing to do in regard to men who have been disabled in the service of their country.²⁷

James Hogge argued that the 'shame' of such a proposal should prevent the House from 'asking any of those men to submit themselves again for medical examination.' Colonel Sir C. Seely also objected to the idea of badly wounded men being expected to serve again, considering it 'a very cruel and very unfair act.' Furthermore, as William Pringle pointed out, not all disabilities were visible and 'large numbers of officers and men have been discharged from the Army on account of nervous breakdown.' Returning such men to the front could have disastrous consequences:

²⁶ Ward, *Veterans*, p. 14

²⁷ *Hansard*, House of Commons Debates, Vol. 92, col. 825 30 March 1917

These are cases where it is most difficult for any medical man to determine whether or not a man is fit. A man may apparently be absolutely fit for service and yet break down again immediately he is subjected to a renewal of the strain. Could there be anything more dangerous to the efficient conduct of the War than to put men in this condition in the Army again.²⁸

Questions were also raised by others, including Winston Churchill, about the actual numbers of men who would be obtained under the scheme and whether these numbers were significant to the continuing prosecution of the war. In the face of the range of opinions, from specific reservations to downright opposition, the argument was succinctly put 'the thing we have to bear in mind is: Are the men fit? If they are fit, it is their duty to come back. I am sorry, indeed, that we cannot exempt them from service, but the need of men is paramount.' The objectors failed and the bill became law on April 5 1917.

Inevitably the injustice of the legislation provoked a further storm of protest from wounded ex-servicemen who were already protesting against the inadequacy of the benefits they were receiving. According to Major H. Jellicorse who wrote a series of articles in *The Ex-Service Man* on 'The History of the Ex-Service Movement', a second organisation was born out of the ferment, the National Federation of Discharged and

²⁸ *ibid.* col. 837

Demobilised Sailors and Soldiers with James Hogge as its president.²⁹ Major Jellicorse cites two bodies of ex-service men in London as the originating forces behind the Federation. In north London a deputation led by Mr. Rumsey protested to the employers of the firm where he was employed about the way discharged men were being treated. Meanwhile in Poplar, east London, discharged men were holding protest meeting against the 'miserable benefits' they were being offered. The two bodies came together to demonstrate in Trafalgar Square where they were addressed by, among others, James Hogge. He was reported as arguing that:

The medical boards were a supreme farce. It made one ashamed of the medical profession to have found doctors so ready to pass into the Army men who they knew were absolutely unfit to go.

The Poplar contingent carried banners proclaiming 'We protest against being recalled to the colours when medically fit men are still retained in Government offices and workshops.' The demonstrators 'counselled active resistance to the new Act, which was characterised, amidst cheers, as a rotten Act' and committed themselves to furthering their aims by means of collective action.³⁰

Although the Federation was headed by an M. P., like the National Association it initially refused membership to officers and insisted that the membership be responsible

²⁹ According to his own account, Major H. Jellicorse was stationed in Sussex in 1916 where he gave lectures on pension regulations in the Military Hospital and served on the Local Pensions Committee. Later, in London, he made contact with James Hogge and addressed branches of the Federation on pensions issues. He also met Clifford who became editor of *The Ex-Service Man*. His personal account of the development of ex-servicemen's organisations is illuminating.

³⁰ *The Times*, April 23, 1917

for the running of the organisation. Its first annual conference was held at the end of June 1917 at which delegates from the branches put forward resolutions for debate. The mobilisation of ex-servicemen, supported by radical M. P.s, and the emergence of two organisations with links to the labour movement with structures modelled on trade unionism brought the grievances of ex-servicemen into public view. The protests by men no longer constrained by military discipline also brought into question the nature and class of the men involved.

In 1917 Field Marshal Haig had argued that character and the sense of duty was severely wanting among conscripts:

The influence of these men and their antecedents are not such as to foster any spirit but that of unrest and discontent; they came forward under compulsion and they will depart the Army with relief. Men of this stamp are not satisfied with remaining quiet, they come from a class which like to air real or fancied grievances, and their teaching in this respect is a regrettable antidote to the spirit of devotion and duty of earlier troops.³¹

In Haig's view, the conscripts were men who had already displayed their moral, and class, deficiencies by their failure to respond to the imperatives of duty and service to the nation, unlike the men who volunteered. Haig's statement repudiated that duty was also a function of working-class manhood; for working-class men duty connoted the obligations of the male breadwinner so central to middle-class masculinity and domesticity, and incorporated workingmen's obligations to defend their rights and interests and to collectively organise against unjust opposition; it 'signified the necessity

³¹ Ward, *Veterans*, p. 28

and power of worker's collective manly agency'.³² Manly agency was now being re-asserted within the Association and Federation, drawing on workingmen's traditions of solidarity and organisation as they campaigned and demonstrated against the unjust treatment they were experiencing as ex-servicemen.

Such public demonstrations and expressions of discontent by ex-servicemen were causing considerable unease, particularly among the higher echelons of the military. Veterans and their supporters were viewed as attempting to influence government policy and, by extension, challenge its authority. In order to counter the threat, moves were made to establish another veterans' organisation. Lord Derby with two Conservative M. P. s, John Norton-Griffiths and Wilfred Ashley put forward their proposal to the Army Council and the War Office for the formation of the Comrades of the Great War. When the suggestion of the formation of an alternative organisation had been put to the Army Council in 1917, it welcomed the move:

the formation of an organisation of this character would serve the useful secondary purpose of countering the activities of the promoters of other associations amongst soldiers and ex-soldiers which avowedly have for their object an organised opposition to authority.³³

Furthermore, the War Office and the higher echelons of the military and civilian establishment considered ex-servicemen to be easy prey to political machinations as Lord Derby, drawing on his experience as Director of Recruiting, opined:

³² Gregory L. Kaster, 'Labour's True Man: Organised Workingmen and the Language of Manliness in the USA, 1827-1877', *Gender and History*, Vol 13, No. 1, April 2001, pp. 24-64

³³ Army Council Minutes, War Office Papers, August 1 1917, (WO 163/22), quoted in Ward, *Veterans*, p. 17

In view of the fact that the Army today is by no means as highly disciplined as that in existence before the war, and also that classes of men serving at the present moment include individuals of every shade of education and opinion, it is probable that the movement to encourage soldiers to take part in political questions will be fanned by certain factions for their own ends.³⁴

The establishment of a third ex-servicemen's organisation was not merely as a rival of the first two but part of a broader strategy to contain the potentially radical and disruptive elements among ex-servicemen. With the backing of powerful and wealthy establishment figures such as Lord Beaverbrook, Lord Rothermere and Field Marshall Lord French³⁵ the organisation, the Comrades of the Great War, was officially constituted at Mansion House in November 1917. In a press statement the Comrades declared that it was not a political organisation and:

The Comrades do not believe that it is in the best interests of the discharged men to involve them in party manouevres with the attendant hostilities, recriminations and disappointments... his hopes will be more rapidly realised than by pitting him against all the forces arrayed in the political arena and thereby dividing the nation.³⁶

Despite such protestations of political neutrality, the first Chairman of the Comrades was Colonel Wilfred Ashley, Unionist M. P.; in addition, six out of the nine members of the first executive committee were also M. P.s. Unlike the Association and the Federation, the Comrades initially attracted mainly officers. Its leadership, reflecting

³⁴ Quoted in Stephen Ward, 'Intelligence Surveillance of British Ex-Servicemen, 1918-1920', *Historical Journal*, Vol. XVI, No. 1, 1973, p. 181

³⁵ Graham Wootton, *The Official History of the British Legion*, London: Macdonald Evans, 1956, p. 5

³⁶ *The Comrades Journal*, Vol. 1, No. 1, November 1918

military hierarchies, spoke for the ranks. However, any accusation that it only served the interests of the officer class was countered by the Comrades; 'the Comrades is a democratic organisation' with 'a determination to secure justice for *all* who have served their country, irrespective of rank.' Moreover, the name *Comrades* was deliberately chosen to invoke the comradeship of the trenches and thereby attempt to appeal to the broadest constituency of ex-servicemen. As its Chairman declared 'the root idea of the movement was Comradeship.' With its claims to be 'democratic' and apolitical the Comrades sought to obfuscate the class divisions and status which obtained in the military and to neutralise them in the present. Nonetheless, paternalism based on pre-war class relations structured the organisation unlike the grassroots associations which encouraged the resolute agency of the men themselves. Instead of direct action, the Comrades worked through influential political and military leaders in their pursuit of justice for ex-servicemen. According to Major Jellicorse, the emergence of the Comrades provoked very bitter feelings within the Federation and amongst the London officials of the Association:

They considered that this organisation had been started officially by officers to break up theirs, and they strongly objected to the appeals for money which were appearing in the press; they themselves were trying to finance their organisations out of their own pockets.³⁷

One of the results of their financial backing was that the Comrades were able to publish their own journal. In November 1918 the first edition of *The Comrades Journal*

³⁷ *The Ex-Service Man*, Vol. 1, No. 34, July 7 1919

was published to provide information, advice and discussion for the membership of its branches, 499 of which were in England, 38 in Wales, 40 in Scotland and 18 in Ireland. There were also branches in South Africa and Rhodesia. By September 1918, 614 branches and posts had been established. The membership were informed of developments, or the lack of them, through the pages of the *Comrades Journal*. At the same time, the practical application of comradeship was fostered in the Comrades' clubs formed across the country where Comrades would meet mainly, it appears, for recreational purposes. Great emphasis was made in the journal on the extension of the clubs throughout the country; according to the first edition of *The Comrades Journal*, 135 clubs had been opened varying from 'a couple of rooms to up-to-date buildings with Baths, Billiard Tables etc.'³⁸ The accounts were fully illustrated by photographs of the members often in formally posed group photographs which gave the impression of a proliferation of small gentlemen's clubs, despite the inclusion of women on some occasions. Members of other organisations could be scathing about the activities of the Comrades viewing them as divisive with a policy of containment of ex-servicemen's justifiable attempts to redress their grievances pursued under the spurious guise of comradeship:

The Comrades were set up as a rival to the Federation- in order to split its ranks and break its power or better still, smash it out of existence. It offered bribes in the way of buns and billiards to ex-service men to become members. It became a meek and mild autocratic organisation on similar lines to a Bible class to keep the ex-service men in order. It has achieved nothing of note to benefit ex-service men.³⁹

³⁸ *The Comrades Journal*, Vol. 1, No. 1, November 1918

³⁹ *The Bulletin*, No. 18, November 6 1919

The contestation over the meaning attached to the identity of the ex-serviceman was further compounded by the appearance in September 1918 of a sixteen page newspaper *The Ex-Service Man, An Independent Journal for Those who have Served*. It was not connected with any existing organisation and was financed solely by ex-servicemen's subscriptions and 'not subsidised by any sinister financial influence'.⁴⁰ Its editor was W.G. Clifford, late R. A, who described himself in a later edition as 'an old Regular Soldier, as a man who has lived for years on the pitiful pittance doled out to married gunners' and who had 'laid for months on end in a military hospital with a go of enteric with complications.'⁴¹ The purpose of the newspaper was deceptively simple, it was founded 'to help the men by every means within its power' while 'every shade of opinion on the problem of the ex-Service men will be allowed free expression in our columns'. Furthermore, the category of ex-service men was all inclusive, without 'odious' class distinction, and therefore embraced the retired general officer as well as his pensioned servant. However, the ulterior purpose was made transparent from the first issue. Leading articles by Edgar Wallace, John Galsworthy and Lt.-General Sir Edward Bethune carried the same exhortations to the readership - to refuse all overtures by 'self-seeking politicians', to remain outside politics and to unite in one ex-servicemen's society. For example, in his article 'My Advice to the Men' Edgar Wallace urged 'the more you stand together amongst yourselves the stronger will you be' and, in

⁴⁰ Financial backing for the newspaper remains questionable; the editor W. G. Clifford clearly had connections in the War Office

⁴¹ *The Ex-Service Man*, Vol. 1, No. 6, November 20 1918

paternalistic tones, warned 'take no notice of socialistic organisations, alleged Labour Parties and camouflaged 'conchies'.⁴² The demand for unity was the message repeatedly carried through most of the articles and one which was constantly emphasised in its cover illustrations. In his first editorial 'The Demand for Unity' W. G Clifford referred to the 'deplorable' situation represented by the existence of three competing organisations claiming to represent ex-service men. Appealing to masculine rationality, mastery, independence and self-sufficiency, he claimed:

The men desire unity... I hope that the men will talk things over, think things over and get ready to play their part like thinking, reasonable, intelligent human beings, *like men* (my italics) who know what they want and mean to have it.⁴³

W. G. Clifford's constantly reiterated call for unity among ex-servicemen increasingly mirrored the demand for national unity which certain elements among the body of ex-service men, working-class men, appeared to threaten. Unity, a particular inflection of comradeship, therefore represented a mechanism for the containment of those subversive elements and the forms of action they were taking to redress their grievances and express their disaffection and frustration.

Part of that frustration was being vented against the members and leadership of other organisations, played out amidst differing class and political allegiances. The formation of another ex-servicemen's organisation, the National Union of Ex-servicemen (NUX) in the early months of 1919 demonstrated such frustration. The NUX had strong

⁴² *The Ex-Service Man*, Vol. 1, No. 1, September 11 1918

⁴³ *ibid*

links to the Independent Labour Party and was 'in closest sympathy with the general labour movement'. It has been argued that it was a breakaway group of Federation members increasingly dissatisfied with their organisation's refusal to align itself politically. According to David Englander the emergence of the NUX is 'best understood as a response to those chauvinist, anti-Bolshevist and pro-imperial forces that were so buoyant during the First World War and so apprehensive in its aftermath.'⁴⁴ The avowedly socialist NUX clearly stated where its allegiances lay, by, on the one hand, claiming special status and, on the other, by aligning its members to other sectors of society with the same class interests. The NUX inflected 'the spirit of comradeship which existed in the services' to exhort their members 'who are still fighting together, but this time for political and industrial aims at home.'

We are ex-Service men, but we are also citizens, and we realize that our general interests are inseparably bound up with the general interests of the people as a whole

and further:

*We are ex-Servicemen, but we are also Workers, and we realize that our general interests are identical with those of all our fellow-workers.*⁴⁵

To secure their aims, they gave their support to both the Labour party and the Trade Unions in order to share in the struggle between capital and labour. Although it was not

⁴⁴ David Englander, 'The National Union of Ex-Servicemen and the Labour Movement, 1918-1920', *History*, Vol. 76, No. 246, February 1991, p. 25

⁴⁵ National Union of Ex-Servicemen, *Statement of Aims and Policy*, leaflet, n.d.

eligible for affiliation to the Labour party, the Executive Committee of the party pledged its assistance:

We have decided to recognise the Union as an ally, and to recommend our supporters throughout the country to render it all possible assistance... As an Executive (of the Labour party) we have secured its assistance in forming a new Advisory Committee to deal with Service and ex-Service men's problems. We urge our members everywhere to give the Union their special support.⁴⁶

Unlike the other organisations who declared their political neutrality and indeed their hostility to party politics, the NUX from the start made clear its political agenda. Support for the NUX had come from the second wave of returning men when demobilisation swelled the membership of the existing organisations. Further expressions of discontent by ex-servicemen were fuelled in January 1919 by the explosions of disaffection and anger over the unfairness of the demobilisation schemes by men desperate to return home.

The problem of large scale demobilisation was unprecedented; when the Armistice was signed there were about 3,500,000 officers and men in the army. Solutions to the problem of how to effect a controlled demobilisation programme had begun to be devised as early as the summer of 1916 and were further developed under the auspices of the Ministry of Reconstruction.⁴⁷ The major impulse behind the scheme was to avoid mass unemployment as veterans returned to no secure employment. Thus

⁴⁶ NUX leaflet, n.d

⁴⁷ Most of the following discussion of demobilisation is based on Stephen Graubbard, 'Military Demobilisation in Great Britain following the First World War', *Journal of Modern History*, Vol. XIX, No. 4, December 1947, pp. 297-311

the order in which men were to be demobilised was to be controlled, based on the needs of industry rather than any other criteria such as length of service. A bureaucratic classification divided personnel into five groups; the first being the 'demobilisers', the small group who would administer the demobilisation process. The second group were the 'pivotal men', those who would create opportunities for others and the third major group, the 'slip men' were those who had definite promises of employment at home. These men were to be released according to the importance given to their occupation by the needs of reconstruction. The rest were divided into two further groups; those who did not have definite jobs waiting for them but who worked in an industry vital to reconstruction and lastly, the 'non-slip' group who were to be released in order of the importance of their civilian employment. In addition, unemployment benefits of 29s per week for the man, 6s for his first child and 3s for each additional child were payable for twenty weeks following demobilisation as well as a cash payment for the purchase of civilian clothes. A railway warrant and ration book were also provided. The *Daily Herald* heaped scorn on the inadequacy of the benefits which 'work out to an average of about 9s a week for fifty-two weeks, provided he is unemployed for twenty of them' and continued:

It is superb, immense. None but an imperial people, victorious against its enemies, but overcome with emotion and thankfulness before its returning heroes, could have done it.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ *Daily Herald*, November 23 1918

However, the paucity of benefits on their eventual return home was not the only concern of the 'returning heroes'. The administration of the demobilisation scheme, which was not begun until December 9, involved long delays and provoked criticism from those in the services and at home. *The Times* reported on the 'delays and muddles' and 'apparent chaos' as employers in Birmingham, Bradford, Bristol and Leeds waited impatiently for the release of pivotal men.⁴⁹ The *Daily Express* warned of 'the depth of hostile feeling that has been raised among all classes, and particularly among the fighting men, by all this deplorable delay.'⁵⁰ Furthermore, the scheme was proving inherently unjust for it favoured men with a short service record. Those who were the first to be demobilised were often the last to have been sent out on active service and had therefore retained links with former employers. Winston Churchill, appointed by the War Ministry to speed the implementation of demobilisation commented on the injustice:

The ordinary soldier without these advantages saw his lately joined comrade hurrying home to take his job, or somebody's job, in England, while he, after years of perils and privations on soldiers' pay, wounded and sent back to the carnage three or sometimes four times, was to be left until all the plums at home had been picked up and every vacancy filled. The fighting man has a grim sense of justice, which it is dangerous to affront

The result was that discipline 'in every single separate unit was swiftly and simultaneously rotted and undermined' as 'a wave of intense impatience and resentment accompanied by serious breaches of discipline spread across the splendid armies.'⁵¹

⁴⁹ *The Times*, January 4, 6 1919

⁵⁰ *Daily Express*, December 28 1918

⁵¹ Winston Churchill, *The World Crisis: the Aftermath*, London: Thornton Butterworth, 1929, p. 54

Administrative delays in a system increasingly condemned as unjust were indeed provoking protests and demonstrations. On January 3 1919, 10,000 soldiers protested at Folkestone, followed by 2,000 at Dover although as *The Times* reported 'there was not the slightest implication of rowdyism' despite the breakdown of military discipline with the men disobeying orders. The tone of *The Times*'s editorial was generally sympathetic explaining that the cause of the discontent 'was the feeling that they were not all being treated alike, but that some were getting advantages denied without apparent reason to others.'⁵²

However, the tone changed as the return of demobilised men, angry and volatile, posed a serious threat to social order, especially when they brought their grievances into the centre of London. According to the report in *The Times* when demonstrators appeared in Whitehall in lorries chalked with signs 'We won the war, give us our tickets'; 'Get a move on; No more red tape'; 'We want civvie suits' the men received 'a distinctly cool reception from the people in the street'. Urging patience, the editorial evoked wartime rhetoric in the hope that 'the spirit of unity and patient sacrifice which has been so splendidly maintained during four years of hard fighting will continue until peace has been signed and general demobilisation can begin.'⁵³

Nevertheless, the process of demobilisation continued to be marked by protests and demonstrations. A further cause of the protests was that the troops feared being dispatched to Russia to fight against the 'Bolshevist menace' and strikes and demonstrations spread throughout the country including Kent, Sussex, Hampshire with

⁵² *The Times*, January 6 1919

⁵³ *The Times*, January 8 1919

the largest disruption occurring in Calais when men refused to return to their units.⁵⁴ Events in Calais attested to the serious breakdown of military discipline causing grave concern amongst the military hierarchy and the War Office, particularly to Field Marshal Haig. In his view, the protesting soldiers were being led astray by 'Bolshevist agitators' compounding his fears of the susceptibility to political influences of so many in the new army. His solution was to restore army discipline by advocating that the ringleaders be shot. However, Churchill intervened and demanded leniency to prevent exacerbating a potentially explosive situation. Churchill also reversed the previous policy by instituting a scheme based on age, length of service and combat experience. This scheme found favourable support among both the troops and the public since it was patently based on fairer principles than the original plan. By mid-April, 55 per cent of army officers were demobilised and 78 per cent of the ranks.

While it had been hoped that a speedier and fairer demobilisation plan would quell the spirit of discontent, demobilised men returned to swell the numbers of ex-servicemen's organisations and the readership of the journals. The growth of the Federation was stimulated by 'an influx of new members' and although it was hampered by 'lack of finance' the Federation was finally able to publish its own journal. The first issue of *The Bulletin* appeared on March 13 1919. Published fortnightly, and at first limited to four pages, its purpose was 'to disseminate news to the branches.' *The Bulletin* reported in June that 105 new branches had opened in the last three months bringing the total number to 641. By November 1919, the Federation boasted over one

⁵⁴ For a full discussion of the strikes, see Andrew Rothstein, *The Soldiers' Strikes of 1919*, London: Macmillan, 1980

million members. By the same month, it was estimated that the NUX had grown from one branch with fifty members to over one hundred branches with 100,000 members.⁵⁵ Similarly, in January 1919, *The Ex-Service Man* was no longer available only by subscription but was sold everywhere through W. H. Smith's Bookstalls and at newsagents, price 2d. and issued weekly. By that time, sales had increased tenfold since the first issue.⁵⁶ The appeal of the organisations was in their commitment to the special interests of ex-servicemen and in their campaigns to ensure that the nation fulfilled its obligations to those who had performed their duties in its service, not as charity but as a right. The organisations also provided advice for men negotiating the bureaucratic systems set up to make provision for returning soldiers pensions and war gratuities for the able-bodied, disabled and dependent widows and children as well informing them about the variety of training and education and employment schemes.

Despite their differing constituencies and political perspectives, all the organisations shared the same three aims regarding their duties towards widows and dependents, their disabled comrades and themselves. The reason for the agreement on the aims of the movement as a whole was that they were based on moral principles including that of justice and as such were uncontentious. They spoke to the needs of all those who had been affected by the war, thus embracing women and children into the fraternity of ex-service men. More significantly, apart from the further aims incorporated by the NUX they avoided any definite plans of action or any political programme. On

⁵⁵ Englander, 'The National Union of Ex-Servicemen', p. 24

⁵⁶ *The Ex-Service Man*, Vol. 1, No. 9, January 9 1919

the first page of the first issue of *The Bulletin*, the aims of the Federation were clearly set out:

Much remains to be done to obtain justice for the disabled men, the widows and dependents, and for the demobilised men, such conditions of life as will assure them of being able to reap the full fruits of our noble sacrifices in the glorious victory which has been achieved ⁵⁷

While it is possible to interpret 'the glorious victory' as a sign of militarist rhetoric, it is counteracted by 'our noble sacrifices'. The war may have been won but the costs of victory were borne by many, including women and children, to whom society owed a debt for their sacrifices. The statement therefore can be read as a plea for that obligation to be met rather than as eulogy to the glories of war. It further presented ex-servicemen as shouldering the responsibility of ensuring a just future, especially for widows and orphans and those who had also made sacrifices of their health and virility. Similarly, the first aim of the NUX incorporated in their Statement of Aims and Policy was:

To protect our special interests as ex-Servicemen and especially to watch over the interests of our disabled comrades and the dependents of those who have fallen.⁵⁸

While insisting that the State fulfill its obligations they also recognised their own obligations by 'doing what we can ourselves to help them'. They had fulfilled their duty as men by going to war to protect women and children and were now extending that sense of masculine duty in peace by 'watching over' those in need of their protective

⁵⁷ *The Bulletin*, No. 1, March 13 1919

⁵⁸ National Union of Ex-Servicemen, leaflet, n.d.

care. In the case of war widows and children, protection was afforded in the symbols of familial male roles. A protective stance towards their disabled comrades was, however, double-edged.

By the end of the war 40,000 of the 500,000 seriously maimed were totally or near-totally disabled. British veterans did not foreground disability in the names of their organisations unlike their French counterparts. The latter's first organisation established in 1915, the Association generale des mutilés de la guerre (General Association of War-Disabled), was explicit about its membership. Moreover, some organisations did not initially accept demobilised soldiers as members.⁵⁹ While the same situation did not pertain in Britain, nevertheless the differing claims of the disabled and the able-bodied men also point to tensions within veterans organisations despite the apparent unity of the 'discharged and demobilised'.

The voices of the disabled themselves were rarely heard on the pages of the journals, although there was plenty of concern about their well-being. For example, in articles and correspondence columns the hospital treatment of disabled men was criticised, particularly the incarceration of shell shock victims in lunatic asylums. Medical advice and information on neurasthenia, tuberculosis and prosthetics for amputees was made available to the readership along with information about employment opportunities and pensions.⁶⁰ The vexed issue of employment for disabled ex-servicemen also afforded ample opportunities for fulminations against the

⁵⁹ Antoine Prost, *In the Wake of War: 'Les Anciens Combattants' and French Society 1914-1939*, Oxford: Berg, 1992, pp. 28-33

⁶⁰ The next chapter provides a more detailed account of work and disabled ex-servicemen.

obstructiveness and selfishness of trade unions. Nevertheless, the language deployed particularly in *The Ex-Service Man* served only to further emasculate a man whose bodily and mental integrity was already damaged by his war wounds, making them 'less of a man'. References in *The Ex-Service Man* to 'battered and broken men', 'human wreckage' and the permanently disabled man as 'the saddest relic of the war' were partially appeals for the necessary sympathy for the sacrifices these men had made. However, they were counteracted by injunctions to the men to face the battle of life and not to give into masculine self-pity by dwelling on their loss:

To prevent him brooding in envy of the happier man who was left dead on the Field of Honour is one of the problems which Government and private citizens should study with sympathy... It is not wise for the disabled man himself to think of these things which are lost to him ⁶¹

As disabled men defined themselves against other men, even the dead, they found their manhood rejected so it not surprising that silence marked their shame and humiliation. Compensation was hardly to be found from being informed that they were carrying the 'honourable scars of war.' Similarly, the sentiments expressed in an anonymous letter from 'A Wounded NCO' were unlikely to be shared by the vast majority of the disabled except for the refusal of charity:

⁶¹ *The Ex-Service Man*, Vol. 1, No. 17, March 6 1919

He has the knowledge that he has spilt his blood and suffered in defence of country and loved ones. He has enlarged vision, clearer conscience, in other words, he has been through the fire of sacrifice and suffering, and has come out more of a MAN than he was before although, perhaps, part of his body lies 'out there', his soul is bigger. And, therefore, he does not want anything that has the semblance of charity but only his RIGHTS.⁶²

While the disabled men experienced the most acute sense of suffering and loss, many veterans felt themselves transformed by the war, that they had experienced a loss of their former selves. As civilians, each had 'exchanged his private self and his individual self-interest for a public and communal identity represented in the uniform.'⁶³ It was that sense of shared loss which forged one of the bonds of comradeship coupled with the notion of sacrifice. While their dead comrades had paid the ultimate sacrifice, nevertheless the surviving too had made sacrifices. The failure of society to express its gratitude and obligations to sacrifices made was a constant source of grievance. On the other hand, the language of sacrifice drawn from the Christian tradition which 'provided a hierarchical model of service and sacrifice' through the iconography of Christ's suffering and endurance on the cross represented a form of redemptive masculinity.⁶⁴ For example, the Reverend F. S. Myers in distinguishing ex-service men from 'noisy shirkers' and 'conchies' wrote:

⁶² *The Ex-Service Man*, Vol. 1, No. 5, November 6 1918

⁶³ *ibid.*

⁶⁴ Adrian Caesar, *Taking it like a man: Suffering, sexuality and the War Poets*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993, pp. 4-6

The National Federation is the voice of clean, strong men who have learned to think in the university of Armageddon, men purified by fire, hardened by discipline, made gentle and wise by heroic suffering for others ⁶⁵

At times when society appeared unwilling to acknowledge its 'returning heroes' the notion of sacrifice helped sustain the heroic ideal as exemplified in a letter to the *Bulletin* from the President of Monmouthshire Divisional Council:

I claim that the best men in England are those who gave up their all for their country, that the test of worth is sacrifice, and by this test the ex-service man has proved himself. I am apt to look on all other men as not quite up to our standard and that it is for us to lead and others to follow.⁶⁶

By claiming special status and superior character because they had proved their manly worth as soldiers, ex-servicemen could equally make a claim on the future direction of post war society. In the second issue of *The Bulletin* the 'Message from the Chairman', T. F. Lister (ex-gunner), elaborated the aims of the Federation:

The goal is the enrolment of EVERY discharged and demobilised man. The purpose is that the men who won victory in foreign fields must be determined upon victory at home. The partnership of death must give place to the partnership of life.

⁶⁵ *The Bulletin*, No. 6, May 22 1919

⁶⁶ *The Bulletin*, No. 24, February 5 1920

However, the responsibility of ex-servicemen was not only to secure fair treatment for themselves but, as he continued in more utopian vein, to ensure a better society in the future, in the post war world:

Men who have borne the liability of service in War must give service in Peace, and not rest content until the people really have liberty by the assurance of home conditions which will make life worth living. DO YOUR BIT.⁶⁷

One of the ways in which a better future would be assured related back to the war itself.

While some tried to translate men's sufferings and sacrifices into some form of male transcendence, other ex-servicemen seized the opportunity, once released from army discipline, to vent their anger against the war. The Federation's Chairman, T. F. Lister advocated informing the public about the realities of war:

Use your experience of the past four and a half years to ensure the public knowing all about war. Do not spare the public the horrors of it. Always pronounce the misery of it.

However, the critique of the war was combined with searing admonitions against the institutional practices of the armed services, particularly the extreme disciplinary measures:

⁶⁷ *The Bulletin*, No. 2, March 27 1919

Spare nothing in preaching the necessity for an overhaul of the manuals that govern the Services... The evils you know to exist under the cloak of discipline are to be remedied, not by Bottomleys or Generals and Admirals, but by the men. Submit resolution after resolution to your Member of Parliament.⁶⁸

The extremes of military discipline such as Field Punishment Number 1 and the death penalty came under fire. When the Parliamentary Committee of Enquiry was set up to investigate courts martial, *The Bulletin* roundly declared its opposition to the workings of the courts:

We hope that this Committee will give careful consideration to the root of the evil. If the conditions of service were thoroughly re-modelled on more democratic principles, it would be found that the functions of Courts Martial would be almost entirely eliminated. Agreeing that some form of Military Law is essential, it should be framed entirely on the lines governing Civil Law.⁶⁹

However, members of the Federation did more than express their disaffection with army practices in the pages of their journal. At a conference at the War Office on May 14 1919 delegates raised the question of representation at Courts Martial demanding the inclusion of NCOs and men. They also suggested better training in army life 'in order that men on discharge may be more fitted for occupation in civil life.'⁷⁰

Class hostilities formed an integral part of the critique of the hierarchical structure of the army. The humiliations often suffered among the ranks surfaced again in ex-

⁶⁸ *The Bulletin*, No. 5, May 8 1919

⁶⁹ *The Bulletin*, No. 4, April 24 1919

⁷⁰ *The Bulletin*, No. 6, May 22 1919

servicemen's organisations where, now in peacetime, they could be freely expressed.

Moreover, the loss of agency forced on them in the army was a source of remembered bitterness and humiliation:

The theory on which the old Army was rigidly constituted no longer obtains - the old Army regulations should be immediately scrapped, and new regulations to meet the present day position supplant them. The day when a soldier was considered as a mere unit, a necessary piece of machinery, with no brains or initiative is passed.⁷¹

Resentments were deeply felt by working-class men against the perception of their lack of 'brains or initiative', capable only of blindly obeying orders. The insistence that the men should run the organisations and the exclusion of officers was part of the process of regaining their self-esteem and manly pride and asserting their own codes of masculinity which had been rejected. The Association had made clear its own class allegiances by asserting that it was 'a working-class' organisation and like the Federation initially refused officers entry to its membership. The argument that 'this Federation is a Federation of men, run by men themselves'⁷² was a heated topic of debate at conferences; for example, Ernest Thurtle from the Bethnal Green branch who had himself risen to officer status from the ranks nevertheless argued at the Annual Conference in Manchester in 1919:

⁷¹ *The Bulletin*, No. 4, April 24 1919

⁷² *The Bulletin*, No. 8, June 19 1919

The Federation was the people's organisation. He might say a working-class organisation. The Trade Unions were not asked to take in employers of labour. The commissioned officer had a different training, a different social position, different needs and a different outlook on life generally. His entry into the Federation would not be a source of strength to them, but a source of weakness.⁷³

The NUX was the most virulent in its condemnation of the war and of the persistence of militarism fostered in the Comrades organisation. For them, the Comrades served only to perpetuate class inequalities:

The Union stands solidly against the perpetuation of militarism and the making of further wars. The ex-Service men know, as no civilian can know, what war really means. And they are determined that neither they nor their children shall ever again be dragged through such a foul and accursed hell as they passed through in 1914-18. Never again!⁷⁴

The charge against the Comrades was that it was 'run almost entirely by retired officers of high rank; and their whole outlook is militaristic... the Comrades Association exists to resurrect the illusions of the glamour and glory of warfare.'⁷⁵

The Comrades encountered criticism not only from other organisations but also within the columns of *The Ex-Service Man*. They were accused of 'methods calculated to encourage class hatred, for they lay themselves out to enrol the better educated man and care little for those who are obviously just as much our pals.'⁷⁶ As such they

⁷³ *ibid.*

⁷⁴ National Union of Ex-Servicemen, Leaflet 12, n.d.

⁷⁵ *ibid.*

⁷⁶ *The Ex-Service Man*, Vol. 1, No. 34, June 28 1919

threatened the potential unity of the ex-servicemen' movement which the paper vigorously advocated. This was in sharp contrast to opinions expressed in an earlier issue when Sir Frederick Milner described the Comrades as 'an association after my own heart' for:

it is keeping alive the splendid spirit of comradeship that has grown up between officers and men of all ranks in the trenches and battlefields. One is always reading in the obituary notices of officers how their men loved them and would follow them anywhere. This is the feeling that that we want to keep going when war has ceased.⁷⁷

Nonetheless, the paper expressed a commitment to a plurality of views although in practice, discordant opinions, especially on the issue of unity, were usually represented as those of a small, misguided minority.

In the same issue, the anniversary of the Armistice, the editor reported on a conference chaired by General Sir Ian Hamilton and held under the authority of the Admiralty, the War Office and the Air Ministry 'to consider a report on the best method of fostering the spirit of comradeship and mutual help among all who served and are serving in the Royal Navy, the Army and the Royal Air Force.' The Hon. Sec. Major H. Jellicorse, Reserve of Officers was quoted as saying: 'an outstanding feature of the war, both in the field and at home, has been the growth and the extension of a higher unity best expressed in the word comradeship.'⁷⁸ The comradeship of the trenches was now being ideologically exploited in the interests of national unity as conservative forces

⁷⁷ *The Ex-Service Man*, Vol. 1, No. 6, November 20 1918

⁷⁸ *ibid.*

attempted to rein in the warring factions which were yet again emerging in the post war world of political and industrial unrest.

The Comrades frequently utilised the language of brotherhood and comradeship to appeal to the supposed solidarity of ex-servicemen and, more significantly, to saturate it with nationalist meanings. In February 1919 Lt.-Colonel Wilfred Ashley wrote of the foundation of the Comrades:

The root idea of the movement was Comradeship... a comradeship which would stimulate and enoble every branch of National effort, and which would create of itself such National influence as would promote the interests, protect the rights and remedy the grievances of every man who has served.⁷⁹

Establishment figures were called on to lend support to the nationalist rhetoric couching it in the language of brotherhood and sacrifice, for example Lloyd George was quoted:

this knowledge of a common sacrifice, of a common brotherhood of suffering and effort, has sunk deep into the minds of the people of this country. There is, as I have never witnessed before, a new COMRADESHIP of classes.⁸⁰

The Comrades inflected the notion of comradeship with particular meaning. For them it meant harmony and social order: between employers and employees and between classes and above all for the restitution of the unity of the nation, undisturbed by political conflicts and class antagonisms. In other words, it sought to preserve the old social and political order based on privilege and wealth whereby the superior classes spoke for and

⁷⁹ *The Comrades Journal*, February 1919

⁸⁰ *ibid.*

disciplined the 'lower orders' into obedience. In stark contrast, a member of the Scottish Federation remonstrated against any sentiment of comradeship during the war and in its aftermath:

It was simply a case of members of the working classes held down by brutal and iron discipline. Different rations, different pay and different risk. The class line was as clear in France as it is at home; there was no comradeship in the trenches to perpetuate.⁸¹

While the notions of comradeship and unity within and between organisations were being contested and struggled over in the present, ex-servicemen were also engaged in the politics of war memory and commemoration.⁸² The search for consolation among all the communities of the bereaved was the process of giving meaning to the catastrophe of the First World War. Over three million Britons lost a close relative in the war while few were untouched by the loss of colleagues, friends or neighbours.⁸³ Ex-servicemen represented another community of the bereaved who were struggling to find the appropriate language and actions through which to express their grief and to make meaningful their memories of war. In the process they shared in the

⁸¹ John Campbell, *Edinburgh Review*, January 1917, quoted in Wootton, *Politics of Influence*, p. 42

⁸² There now exists a major body of literature on commemoration of the First World War: see, for example Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995; Adrian Gregory, *The Silence Of Memory*, Oxford: Berg, 1994; David W. Lloyd, *Battlefield Tourism, Pilgrimage and the Commemoration of the Great War in Britain, Australia and Canada*, Oxford: Berg, 1998; Timothy Ashplant, Graham Dawson and Michael Roper, *The Politics of War Memory and Commemoration*, London: Routledge, 2000

⁸³ Gregory, *Silence*, p. 19

public rituals of commemoration organised by the state, as well as developing their own forms of memorialisation of their dead comrades within their organisations:

We ex-Service men have sacred memories of them which in a very special way are ours alone... they were our pals. Others revere their achievements and pay tribute to their memory; but we lived the same life as they did; we had a share with them in that great comradeship of the trenches which was like nothing else that we have ever known. We went out as they did, shared rations and billets with them, trained and stunted and fought and rested and groused and laughed, and everything else that they did, we did too... And they died, whereas we came back and are here thinking of them today.

On November 14 1920 the Federation organised its own Memorial Service to the Fallen at St. Martin's Church, Leicester. The address was given by The Reverend Canon F. B. Macnutt, Late Senior Chaplain to the Forces in the B. E. F 1915-1918.⁸⁴ His appeal to remember the 'great comradeship of the trenches' was not simply nostalgia. It supplied a language of mourning and consolation for men who had witnessed so much death but who had had very little opportunity to mourn their losses. With such an excess of dead bodies it was impossible to mourn each individual death; at the same time experiences of the deaths of mates, of pals, sometimes prolonged and agonised, were unbearably painful. Soldiers in the frontline witnessed death in all its horror, lived with the fear of the power of technological weaponry to ravage human bodies and minds. For they had an intimate knowledge of death, painfully learnt in the trenches when death was ever present with corpses and dismembered bodies strewn on the battlefields or in the

⁸⁴ The address was published as a pamphlet, *The Unknown Warrior's Call to Living Warriors*, with a Foreword by Field Marshal The Earl Haig, Leicester: Alfred Tacey, 1920, p. 8

trenches, sometimes remaining unburied and decomposing. That knowledge gave them a sense of themselves as a group set apart, made special by their experiences.

David Cannadine draws a powerful distinction between death on the battlefield and death in civilian life: 'the deaths which they saw were violent, horrible, bloody, degrading and brutal, when, if they had been civilians all their lives, they would probably have limited their repertoire of death to old age and natural causes.'⁸⁵ At the time, reactions ranging from indifference, callousness, black humour and badinage furnished a defence against the appalling sights of slaughter on an overwhelming scale:

On the surface, they had developed what seemed to be a callous indifference to death, and if someone was killed, might say 'he's had it', or 'that's another gonner'(sic), but this was their defence against feelings which they might otherwise not have been able to master. They looked after one another with protective care.⁸⁶

Such protective care which was an element of the 'comradeship of the trenches' surfaced again within the ex-servicemen's rhetoric and their repeated desire to keep the memory of the dead sacred. Thus they were the guardians of the past with the obligation to remember and honour those comrades who had paid the ultimate sacrifice with their lives. 'Soldier organisations provided a framework for remembering (comradeship rather than battle) through the language of sacrifice, honour and national self-realisation'.⁸⁷ The language of 'sacrifice' and 'nobility' of the sacrifice was an attempt to give meaning

⁸⁵ David Cannadine, 'War and Death, Grief and Mourning in Modern Britain', in J. Whaley (ed.), *Mirrors of Mortality: Studies in the Social History of Death*, London: Europa Publications Ltd., 1981

⁸⁶ C. M. Bowra, *Memories, 1898-1939*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1966, pp. 89-90

⁸⁷ Garton, *Cost of War*, p. 31

to death which was unpredictable, random and pointless. The memories of the realities of death in war which haunted the survivors in the present - 'the memory of the carnage and the filth has never left me'⁸⁸ - could thus be transcended and transformed into the sacrosanct. Death was rendered noble and heroic, recast in the romantic imagination of Keats's 'easeful death' or Shelley's exhortation 'Mourn not for Adonais' who 'has outsoared the shadow of our night' and whose soul 'beacons from the abode where the Eternal are.' As Jay Winter argues, older romantic traditions expressed 'at one and the same time the dignity of the men who fought and the degradation to which they had been subjected.'⁸⁹ Comradeship with the dead, had then a restorative function:

They sleep now under those foreign skies, amid sights and scenes which we shall never forget- Ypres, Loos, Givenchy, Arras, Vimy, the Somme. Still our pals - there is something about them which cannot die; the spirit of duty, service and self-sacrifice which is immortal and cannot be buried in any grave.⁹⁰

As survivors, they determined not to 'break faith with those who died in Flanders fields'.⁹¹ By imaginatively transforming the battlefields into sacred places of peaceful, dignified, repose for the dead they might impose some order amid the chaos of their own traumatic memories of war and carnage. Nevertheless, as David Cannadine rightly points out the battlefields were the sites where men not only saw death but purveyed it:

⁸⁸ Bowra, *Memories*, p. 91

⁸⁹ Winter, *Sites of Memory*, p. 204

⁹⁰ *The Unknown Warrior's Call to Living Warriors*, p. 10

⁹¹ A quotation from the popular poem *In Flanders Fields* by the Canadian Medical Officer, John McCrae, first published in *Punch* in 1915

At the same time, the soldiers themselves had been the agents of death, killing, maiming and wounding in a manner which would be unimaginable in civvy street. Shock, guilt, anguish, grief, remorse; these were only some of the emotions which such an experience left behind: above all, a desire to forget, and yet also a recognition that such experiences could not be, must not be, forgotten⁹²

Arguably too the notion of comradeship with the dead enabled them to make reparation, to eradicate or alleviate the sense of guilt felt by the survivors and, in addition, the shame and remorse for their participation in the carnage of war. If remembered, the ironic words of the song soldiers sang as they marched to the Front: 'The bells of hell go ting-a-ling-a-ling/ For you but not for me' may well have resonated quite differently to men in peacetime. The process of coming to terms with the trauma of having been witness to such a carnival of death while at the same time having the responsibility of causing other men's deaths was, not surprisingly, fraught with complex and contradictory emotions for ex-servicemen. For as Freud remarked, in the face of the deaths of tens of thousands in a single day, 'We are unable to maintain our former attitudes towards death, and have not yet found a new one.'⁹³

Veterans remained fiercely protective of the battlefield sites and cemeteries where many of their comrades were buried. During the war battlefields had already become sacred places and servicemen were a common sight in the cemeteries which were being

⁹² Cannadine, 'War and Death', p. 217

⁹³ Freud, 'Our Attitude Towards Death' in *Group Psychology, Civilization and its Discontents, and other works*, Vol. 12, Pelican Freud Library, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984, p. 80

constructed along the battlefield.⁹⁴ The first organised visits to the graveyards were known as pilgrimages but before long the travel agent Thomas Cook began to organise tours and were followed by other major travel agencies such as Pickfords and Frames Tours. In 1920 representatives of the Federation visited the battlefields, 'the resting place of our fallen comrades'. The deputation was unanimous in giving its assurance to the relatives that that 'every care and consideration is being taken both as regards the reinternment of bodies and the registration of graves.'⁹⁵ Nevertheless, newspaper accounts of tourist trips to the battlefields where 'the popping of champagne corks and ribald laughter may be heard where but recently men fought and died in their thousands' was evidence yet again of civilian callousness. Ex-servicemen always identified the tourist with the war profiteer.⁹⁶ Financed by their ill-gotten gains during the war, their tourist trips provoked further anger on behalf of the many wives and relatives who could not afford visits. Nonetheless, the representative of the Federation assured the readership of *The Bulletin*:

Fortunately, our dead comrades sleep well. There is a majestic serenity in their repose which all the coarse, unfeeling antics of the war profiteers cannot disturb or belittle.⁹⁷

⁹⁴ David W. Lloyd, *Battlefield Tourism: Pilgrimage and the Commemoration of the Great War in Britain, Australia and Canada*, Oxford: Berg, 1998, pp. 25-27

⁹⁵ *The Bulletin*, No. 29, April 15 1920

⁹⁶ Lloyd, *Battlefield Tourism*, p. 43

⁹⁷ *The Bulletin*, No. 30, April 29 1920

Similarly, *The Comrades Journal* expressed outrage at the desecration of the battlefields by the 'invasions of tourists':

During the war we were hard put to it to find words to express our opinion of conchies, profiteers and the like, but the worst of these misfits were more human than those who would seek mere profit or sensation over the graves of our glorious dead.⁹⁸

Ypres was another sacred site of contestation. The Ypres League was founded by Lt. Colonel Beckles Wilson in 1920, not as 'an ex-soldiers' federation or benefit society', but on 'sentiment':

the sentiment of a nation whose Calvary was at Ypres, and its objects are to perpetuate the memory of all that Ypres means to us by keeping alive the spirit of comradeship, and by commemorating our 200,000 dead now lying in the Salient.⁹⁹

The Ypres Times reprinted a letter which had appeared in the *Daily News* under the heading 'Not My Ypres: This is Holy Ground' which fulminated against the presence of a fair with its roundabouts, side shows, shooting galleries and dancing saloons with, ironically, 'a hellish cacophony of machine-made noises.' The writer saw this as evidence of how 'the world in its mad, selfish, sottish onrush quickly forgets the price that others paid, and cares not.'¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ *The Comrades Journal*, November 19 1919

⁹⁹ *The Ypres Times*, Vol. 1, No. 1, October 1921. *The Ypres Times* was a successor to the trench journal, *Wipers Times*.

¹⁰⁰ *The Ypres Times*, Vol. 1, No. 1, October 1921

As well as preserving the sacredness of the battlefield site, the intention was to erect a hostelry for pilgrims with 'beds available for widows and members who could not afford the usual expenses of a hotel.'¹⁰¹ Asserting the practical aspects of commemoration formed an integral part of the sacred duty inherited by the survivors. As the November 20 1918 issue of *The Ex-Service Man* celebrated 'Over at Last', ex-servicemen were reminded of 'A Sacred Trust:'

The men who have fought and won through safe and sound regard as a sacred trust the welfare of the widows, orphans and other dependants of that vast army of those who will never come back... It is a cause dear to the big-hearted men who have saved us from things words cannot describe, and represents an ideal they will never forget for a moment.¹⁰²

While this ideal was frequently couched in the religious language of the sacred, branches of the Federation and the NUX sought to translate it into practical action. As the nation sought ways to mourn the dead in acts of commemoration instituted in national and local forms of public memorials and remembrance services, ex-service men's attitudes to memorialisation and commemoration and the different meanings they attached to them became apparent. Throughout the country local committees were established to decide on the form the local war memorial should take but as Angela Gaffney concluded from her work on commemoration in Wales 'ironically it was the most affected by the war who were often marginalised in the commemorative process.'¹⁰³ While the journals

¹⁰¹ *The Ypres Times*, Vol. 1, No. 1, October 1921

¹⁰² *The Ex-Service Man*, Vol. 1, No. 6, November 20 1918

¹⁰³ Angela Gaffney, *Aftermath: Remembering the Great War in Wales*, Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1998, p. 26

record the range of practical proposals put forward by ex-servicemen it is doubtful how many were heeded. For example, the Croydon Branch of the Federation wanted the local war memorial to be 'an expression of practical sympathy to benefit the children of the men who had died'. They suggested a Committee be set up to assist the children to secure further education or apprenticeships to a trade or articles to a profession. The Committee would 'take the place of the father in seeing the children have a fair start in life.'¹⁰⁴ Similarly, a letter regarding the war memorial in Birmingham proposed that its usefulness should not be sacrificed to ornament for through its 'outward and visible beauty it would symbolise the spiritual loveliness of the supreme sacrifice made in the cause of Right and Liberty.' At the same time the provision of practical services to the widows and dependents of fallen men would reflect and 'be a witness to the gratitude and reverence of the citizens of Birmingham to their beloved dead.'¹⁰⁵

Conflicts emerged between ex-servicemen and local committees about appropriate memorials adding to their sense that not only were their views silenced but that society was ignoring their needs and the needs of those widows and children to whom they had pledged their trust. In Rhymney, in south east Wales, for example, members of the Association proposal for the building of two terraces of houses to be let free to the widows and dependents of men killed in action was rejected in favour of a War Memorial Park. To add further injury, widows, orphans, dependents and ex-servicemen were not invited to the opening ceremony. This provoked an angry letter of protest to the local newspaper attacking the local council; 'we can scarcely conceive of a

¹⁰⁴ *The Bulletin*, No. 3, April 10 1919

¹⁰⁵ *The Comrades Journal*, March 1919

more despicable, mean and ungrateful action than that of Rhymney Urban District Council in failing to recognise these men.’¹⁰⁶ A further example of the humiliating exclusion of ex-servicemen occurred in Horsforth in Yorkshire where the War Memorial Committee consisted of fourteen local worthies and twelve ex-servicemen. They proposed the erection of a cenotaph and an institute for ex-servicemen. The scheme provoked consternation amongst local church leaders who delivered a circular to homes in the town urging the townspeople to attend a meeting ‘to save Horsforth from unspeakable disgrace’ occasioned by A Drinking Club considered ‘utterly unfitting and offensive’. The report in *The Ex-Service Man* was outraged by the ‘wanton slander by innuendo on men, who as all the world knows, splendidly showed that in point of morals and efficiency, they were second to none.’ The clergymen later made a public apology in the *Horsforth Weekly Advertiser* pronouncing ‘their utmost respect for ex-servicemen whom they held in honour.’¹⁰⁷

The marginalisation of ex-servicemen from local commemoration adds weight to Adrian Gregory’s argument that ex-servicemen occupied a subordinate place in the public memorialisation of the dead. He effectively demonstrates how the ‘invented tradition’ of Armistice Day with the ritual of the Silence and the laying of wreaths at the Cenotaph helped shape the image of the bereaved as primarily women. Further, he argues that the symbolic power of the Tomb of the Unknown Warrior, buried in Westminster Abbey on Armistice Day 1920, demonstrated by the thousands of people who paid homage at the tomb within a week failed to have the same emotional impact on

¹⁰⁶ Gaffney, *Aftermath*, pp. 29-30

¹⁰⁷ *The Ex-Service Man*, Vol. 1, No. 44, September 27 1919

ex-servicemen. They had too many memories of 'the sheer quantity of unknown and unknowable dead bodies that littered the battlefields'.¹⁰⁸ However, the ex-servicemen's responses to the rituals of remembrance were more complex than Gregory suggests.

They continued to maintain an almost proprietorial attachment to 'our glorious dead' and to the sacred trust bestowed on them to preserve the memory of the dead. On the first anniversary of the Armistice the leading article in *The Bulletin* entitled 'Our Tribute to the Dead' stated:

We paid our tribute without ostentatious ceremony by placing our simple token upon the spot which had been made sacred to the memory of our fallen comrades and in token of our resolve to build by our lives and the care of their widows and orphans, an everlasting Memorial of their sacrifices. We now dedicate ourselves to the work of building a world in accordance with the ideals of the League of Nations for which our Comrades undoubtedly died.¹⁰⁹

The Comrades Journal similarly emphasised each man's obligations to 'your fallen pals, to their widows and fatherless children, to your blinded, maimed and broken pals that they may be treated justly and that their interests may neither be overlooked nor forgotten'.¹¹⁰ In the December issue the 'joy-bells and junketings, relief and hilarity, fireworks and fun' of Armistice Day were contrasted with the solemn remembrance of November 1919:

¹⁰⁸ Gregory, *Silence*, pp. 26-7, 33-34

¹⁰⁹ *The Bulletin*, No. 19, November 27 1919

¹¹⁰ *The Comrades Journal*, November 1919

Nothing was ever staged that could compare with that scene around the Cenotaph. No play or opera ever produced has had the power to thrill with such sureness and intensity, or to stir without exception the emotions of so vast a multitude as the spectacle of the veterans broken in the war standing bareheaded before the memorial raised to those who had fallen fighting beside them.¹¹¹

The evidence from the ex-servicemen's journals points not to the lack of affective response to the nation's rituals of remembrance but to the *conflicting* emotions experienced and expressed by ex-servicemen. In an article 'The Dead and the Living' the cause of the conflict was made apparent:

The great act of commemoration is over... Our innermost feelings, which we are apt to keep back from public view, have now been laid bare

and with reference to Lord Haig's call for employers to put their names on the King's National Roll as a duty owed to ex-servicemen to be able to find work, the article continues:

The duty owing to these men has been brought home to us afresh during these last few days. *Their time of remembrance is now.*¹¹²

Surviving ex-servicemen realised their position in the postwar world was at best precarious and at worst unacknowledged. The sense that society's obligation to those

¹¹¹ *The Comrades Journal*, December 1919

¹¹² *The Bulletin*, No. 19, November 27 1919

who had made sacrifices was not being met fuelled anger among veterans further emphasising their separateness and estrangement from those at home. Increasingly they came to the realisation that the 'mutuality of sacrifice' between home and front had been disrupted, deepening the sense of estrangement for 'it was the collapse of this mutuality that, more than anything else, gave veterans a consciousness of themselves as an exploited and abused group'.¹¹³ Yet simultaneously, they sought re-integration at home for while they had been at war, it had often been idealised for 'the idealisation of home preserved some sense of a possible continuity and sameness, some hope for a unified identity.'¹¹⁴ Home also encompassed a broader meaning, that of the nation which men had fought to defend and for which their dead comrades had sacrificed their lives. The nation now in peacetime appeared to renege on its moral obligations to the men who had served it in war and by doing so had proved their moral worth. The continuing need to plead their case rather than receiving fair restitution signalled 'the fragmentation of the moral nexus between front and home, the nexus that made the suffering and death at the front meaningful in terms of the preservation of a larger entity, the nation.'¹¹⁵

The meanings of the 'nation', never fixed, were opened up again to change and contestation after the cataclysm of the First World War and ex-servicemen's struggle to defined their own sense of national belonging was critical to the veterans' movement. The process challenged the 'imagined community' of ex-servicemen, contested the meaning of the concept of comradeship amongst them and the different interpretations

¹¹³ Leed, *No Man's Land*, p. 204

¹¹⁴ *ibid.* p. 189

¹¹⁵ *ibid.* p. 204

put on it in the post war period. Comradeship had been the bedrock on which the organisations were founded but conflicts between the organisations had been present from their inception and further tensions were emerging between the leadership and the membership as well as between ex-service men and society at large. As the ideal of comradeship fractured it simultaneously revealed the lack of a coherent male identity imposed by the identity of the ex-serviceman.

Chapter Four

‘WE ARE CITIZENS...WE ARE WORKERS’

Broken bodies and the body politic

One of the originating impulses in the formation of ex-servicemen’s organisations was to prevent the neglect and abandonment of veterans which occurred after past wars. The organisations had shared with the nation in honouring the dead and commemorating the sacrifices they had made and in doing so, they fulfilled the sacred trust they felt obligated to render their dead comrades. Heroic status was conferred on the dead but where did that leave the living as they struggled to resume their place in a re-ordered society? Increasingly, the difficult process of readjustment and reintegration into the social and political world they had left behind laid bare the problems and anxieties of those who had survived. While the nation conferred on the dead, ‘our fallen comrades’, their rightful status as heroes, the status of living veterans was increasingly precarious. When the Armistice came a new mood of national unity and a desire for peace and reconstruction following the carnage of war. Ex-servicemen shared the hope of a better future; they were now citizens prepared to fulfil their responsibilities and claim their rights.

The NUX in its Statement of Aims called upon its members to recognise not solely their “special interests’ as ex-servicemen but to incorporate the political and social identities invested in the citizen and the worker: *‘we are also citizens, and we realise that our general interests are inseparably bound up with the general interests of the people as*

a whole' and '*we are also Workers* and we realise that our general interests are identical with those of all our fellow-workers.' For the NUX members such public recognition was to be found and confirmed within the working-class labour movement, specifically by forming political allegiances with the Labour party and the trade union movement. This was an agenda which other ex-servicemen did not share or to which they were openly hostile. Nevertheless, the aims of the NUX identified two arenas, politics and work, in which ex-servicemen would struggle to assert their postwar identity. The claim to exercise their rights of citizenship and the important corollary, the right to work were also means by which they could renegotiate their masculine status. This chapter examines how ex-servicemen operated in the political sphere and how the strategies advocated by the different organisations led to conflict within and between them. The implications this had for a unified veterans' movement and for the construction of a coherent ex-serviceman identity will be explored. Work is an important arena for the construction of male identities yet increasingly after the war ex-servicemen found they were excluded; the battle against unemployment was a battle fought on the home front.

The sense of social exclusion was the more keenly felt by ex-servicemen who, by the end of the war, had made the transition into the institutionalised realm of the nation state's political life. Before 1914 approximately only 59 per cent of the adult male population was registered to vote in parliamentary elections; existing residency requirements disenfranchised many men. For example, soldiers living in barracks were one group of disenfranchised men as they did not qualify as householders. In August 1916 the Asquith coalition established an all-party Speaker's Conference on the franchise. It met numerous times in order to produce a franchise bill, the terms of which would be acceptable to the whole House of Commons.

The question of the impact of the war on the broadening of democratic representation has been the subject of much historical debate¹ but it is generally agreed that certain degrees of national and social cohesion which obtained through the course of the war lessened fears of mass democracy, especially among the conservative forces. For them, the patriotic response to the war among the working class, including the 'Leaders of Labour' indicated the possibility of a political accommodation with the working classes. During the course of the war trade unions officials had been drawn into the decision making process and government and 'constitutional' trade unionists were now viewed as responsible members of the working class. Concessions would therefore have to be made in order to harness the working class to Conservatism: the extension of the franchise was a major concession.² Nevertheless, while the case for franchise reform was compelling, certain groups of the electorate became the focus of debate, particularly of course, women but also servicemen. Indeed, some of the debates about women's suffrage pitted their entitlement to vote against servicemen whose service and sacrifice in the trenches, it was argued, rendered them worthy of the vote. During the debates about franchise reform Lloyd George invoked the patriotism of the men who had served. He spoke of the pressing importance of granting the franchise to soldiers and sailors, arguing particularly on the behalf of young servicemen:

¹ See Martin Pugh, *The Making of Modern British Politics 1867-1939* Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1982; Kenneth O. Morgan, *Consensus and Disunity*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979; Ross McKibbin, *The Ideologies of Class*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994; Bernard Waites, *A Class Society at War: England 1914-18*, Leamington Spa: Berg, 1987

² Pugh, *Modern British Politics*, p. 174

There are hundreds and thousands of them and in all classes. They are not merely privates, but officers. What would happen to them? The England they have fought for, the Wales, the Scotland, the Ireland, the Empire they have fought for, when we come to settle the conditions under which they and their children are to live – the country for which they had fought would say ‘We do not want your opinion; we are not asking for your voice’. How could you say that.³

Bonar Law echoed his sentiments on behalf of ex-servicemen:

We are going to have a new world when this war is over... no party need attempt to exist which cannot hope to win the support of the men- they are the bulk of the nation- who have saved us the liberties of the Empire.⁴

Arguments were put forward by some anti-suffragists that granting the vote to women would be against the interests or at the expense of soldiers and sailors,⁵ but they carried little weight as the argument for women’s suffrage was effectively won. The Representation of the People Act 1918 finally enfranchised women but limited the franchise to women over thirty while at the same time granting virtually universal manhood suffrage. As Pugh has observed ‘the limit on women was almost an insult’ especially given the fact that a special franchise was extended to men of nineteen who had been on active service. One of the reasons for imposing an age limit on women was that many politicians feared the young immature voter who, lacking sound opinions, was

³ *Hansard*, House of Commons Vol. 92, col. 489, March 28 1917

⁴ *ibid.* col. 557

⁵ See Susan Kingsley Kent, *Making Peace: the Reconstruction of Gender in Interwar Britain*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993, pp. 86-90; Brian Harrison, *Separate Spheres*, London: Croom Helm 1978, chapter 10

susceptible to any emotional appeal.⁶ When Arnold Ward M. P., one of the leaders of the National League for Opposing Woman Suffrage, described women as 'a mass of necessarily inexperienced voters liable to be swayed by the arguments of hysterical agitators'⁷ he could equally have been voicing widespread fears about returning ex-servicemen, especially the young.

The franchise reforms of 1918 created an electorate of 21 million soldiers and civilians which now encompassed 95 percent of the male population.⁸ In order to allay concerns that servicemen should not be excluded from the election, a system of postal and proxy votes was devised. Just over 3.9 million service voters were registered and of these 2.7 million postal ballot papers were issued. The country went to the polls on December 14 1918 but as it was administratively impossible for men to exercise their vote on the day of the poll the count was extended over the Christmas holidays to allow the forces postal votes to be returned. Efforts were made to help overcome the inevitable isolation from politics at home; newspapers with advertising were sent to France and it was suggested that the men could be helped by having someone at hand, an officer or a padre, to enlighten them. Such paternalism was further indication of the fear of the immaturity and capriciousness of sections of the new working-class male electorate. Nonetheless, participation was low; by December 28,641,632 soldiers had voted while 3,200 ballot papers arrived too late.⁹ Irritation and anger with politicians

⁶ Pugh, *Modern British Politics*, p. 175

⁷ Harrison, *Separate Spheres*, p. 193

⁸ *ibid.* p. 140

⁹ John Turner, *British Politics and the Great War*, London: Yale University Press, 1992, p. 331. Pugh suggests that 900,000 voted, Pugh, *Modern British Politics* p. 197

who thought an election more important than getting the troops home accounted in part for the low participation rates; Pugh has noted that soldiers sometimes inscribed 'demobilise first' on their ballot papers.¹⁰ However, the final turnout overall was low at 57.2%, compared with turnouts of over 80% in 1906 and 1910. The result was that the Coalition government led by Lloyd George was returned with a large majority, 526 seats out of 707. The new mood of national unity which had followed the triumph of Lloyd George as Prime Minister in 1916 when 'the passion for a new kind of government, transcending the sectionalism of the past, became almost overwhelming'¹¹ was now embodied in the newly elected government's appeal for postwar reconstruction, reform and consensus. The part ex-servicemen were to play in the much-heralded reconstruction and in the 'new world' envisioned by Bonar Law was open to question and contestation. So too were the meanings veterans themselves attached to citizenship and how, in practice, they sought to exercise their newly acquired status as citizens.

However, ex-servicemen occupied an ambiguous position within the new mass democracy for these were men returning from a war which had wrecked carnage and horrors on an unprecedented scale. The certainties associated with heroic masculinity had already been undermined by the formation of ex-servicemen's organisations during the war when men joined forces to redress their collective grievances. As it was argued in the last chapter, one of the main motives behind the formation of the Comrades was to contain working-class ex-servicemen in particular who were perceived as susceptible to agitators fermenting discontent among the troops. There was no automatic continuity

¹⁰ Pugh, *Modern British Politics* p. 197

¹¹ Morgan, *Consensus and Disunity*, p. 16

between their perceived patriotic response to war and their return to take up their position in post-war society; the patriotic volunteer could become a violent revolutionary. Moreover, the low esteem in which conscripts were held within certain quarters of the military establishment further compounded the distrust of returning men. Efforts to avoid the consequences of millions of demobilised men returning home to unemployment had underpinned all the demobilisation schemes. Moreover, the anger and frustration which erupted in protests and strikes during demobilisation fuelled fears of the disruptive influences within the body of ex-servicemen. The national mood reflected a desire for peace and reconstruction and the rhetoric of national and social solidarity was summoned to call on national unity and conciliation to maintain social stability and future prosperity. Revolution and unemployment were the twin dangers which threatened to undermine post-war stability and the returning troops were implicated in both.

On the one hand, they were perceived as heroes whose service and sacrifice was recognised in the promised reconstruction of a 'land fit for heroes'. On the other, the public representations of ex-servicemen acknowledged what the war had done to these same 'heroes' and provoked considerable alarm and anxieties about the transformation of ex-soldiers' identities. Patriotic heroes who had served their country became metamorphosed into dark forces, represented by images of brutalised manhood, which might be unleashed into the body politic:

All of them had been through the mill of prolonged inconceivable pressures and innumerable tearing teeth. To all, sudden and violent death, the woeful spectacle of shattered men and dwellings was, either to see in others or expect and face for oneself, the commonest incident of everyday life. If these armies formed a united resolve, if they were seduced from the standards of duty and patriotism, there was no power which could even have attempted to withstand them.¹²

The context in which Churchill wrote of his reflections was the rioting and demonstrations which accompanied demobilisation. He was not alone in fearing that the return of vast numbers of men who 'had been taught for years how to kill', men who had experienced the 'methodically inculcated butchery and barbarism of war' constituted a major threat to 'British Democracy'. Unless these men were harnessed and contained by inclusion in the new democracy they could represent the vanguard in the eruption of anarchy and violent disorder. In many imaginations, revolution in the form of Bolshevism loomed large as an impending storm over the political landscape: 'the spectre of red and white armies haunted capital and labour respectively', according to David Englander and James Osborne.¹³ Further, they argue, the Labour movement was ambivalent in its attitudes to ex-servicemen demonstrated in its 'ragged attempt to

¹² Winston Churchill, *The World Crisis: the Aftermath*, London: Thornton Butterworth, 1929, pp. 60-61

¹³ David Englander and James Osborne, 'Jack, Tommy and Henry Dubb: The Armed Forces and the Working Class,' *Historical Journal*, Vol. 21, No. 3, September 1978, p. 620

prevent the returning soldier becoming the cats-paw of Labour's enemies'.¹⁴ Such attitudes served only to reinforce ex-servicemen's isolation and sense of betrayal, contributing to the representation of them as volatile and violent. Arthur Henderson, Labour M. P. and Minister without Portfolio in Lloyd George's War Cabinet had visited Russia in 1917 during the revolutionary upheaval. He, too, saw discharged servicemen as a serious threat to social order at home. He argued for the reconstruction of the Labour Party as 'the bulwark of the British parliamentary system' and social change by constitutional methods as an alternative to revolution because 'thousands have become habituated to thoughts of violence:'

When the war ends this country and every other will be flooded with hardy veterans of the great campaigns. Among them will be thousands who have exercised authority over their fellows in actual warfare, and who will be capable of assuming leadership again if insurrectionary movements come into existence. We may be warned by a perception of these facts that if barricades are indeed likely to be erected in our streets they will be manned by men who have learned how to fight¹⁵

The state had legitimised male violence and aggression in its prosecution of war now it was feared that such violence would be unleashed at home. The fears expressed by Churchill and Henderson were not assertions that violence and brutality were inherent

¹⁴ *ibid.* p 619 David Englander also argues that the labour movement was not interested in soldiers and veterans since the army was regarded with fear and contempt. David Englander, 'The National Union of Ex-Servicemen and the Labour Movement, 1918-1920,' *History*, Vol. 76, No. 246, February 1991, p. 25

¹⁵ J. Winter, *Socialism and the Challenge of War: Ideas and Politics in Britain 1912-1918*, London: Routledge, 1974, p. 260-1

masculine qualities rather, the opposite. Men had *learned* violence and brutal aggression in the crucible of war. However, the violence of ex-servicemen caused considerable debate and alarm. Susan Kingsley Kent, for example, records the incidence of attacks on women and notes the concern being expressed in women's journals of increasing displays of male aggression. She concludes that:

contemporaries could readily believe, on the basis of immediate past experiences, that aggression, destructiveness, and violence were inherent characteristics of masculinity¹⁶

Kent goes on to explore the controversies which raged about the aggression unleashed in war. Psychologists, psychiatrists, sexologists and feminists all engaged in debates about the nature of femininity and masculinity in terms, she argues, of a sex war now being fought over in the intimate, sexual relations between men and women.¹⁷ The aggression of men in war, including the First World War, continues to be the subject of recent controversy about killing and the pleasures of war, partly in response to arguments about war as trauma.¹⁸ One alternative response to the violence of death and destruction with which they had lived was furnished by a clerk working in a large Ordnance Depot at Vendroux where a strike committee had been formed in protest about the conditions in the camp while the men were waiting to be demobilised. He later wrote:

¹⁶ Kent, *Making Peace*, p. 99

¹⁷ *ibid.* pp. 102-113

¹⁸ See Joanna Bourke, *An Intimate Art of Killing*, London: Granta, 1999 and Niall Ferguson, *The Pity of War*, London: Penguin, 1999, chapter 12

The thought of using guns never entered our heads...the majority of the men had been up the line. There were plenty of new guns in the Ordnance Depot and millions of rounds of ammunition, but we had seen enough of that nonsense to last us a lifetime.¹⁹

It is worth recording that none of the ex-servicemen's publications responded to the controversies happening around them. On the one hand, as we shall see, the disabling effects among men of war neuroses were pressing issues surrounding the reintegration of men. On the other, the organisations responded to the perceived violence and aggression of men only within the parameters of Bolshevism.

Against the background of the Bolshevik revolution, the threat posed by insurrectionary troops caused considerable alarm; democracy itself would be undermined. At the same time, the notion of masculinity predicated on rationality and self-control was also undermined. Philip Gibbs, the war correspondent also reflected on the violent behaviour of some of the returning troops. Like Churchill and Henderson, he attributed this in part to their war experiences, firstly the 'intensive culture of brutality' established in the army and supported by the disciplinary regimes which tended 'to destroy personal initiative and will-power' and was a 'bad training for the individualism of civil life'. Secondly, he pointed to the justifiable grievances being expressed by the returning veterans; the ineptitude of the officials organising demobilisation and the inherent unfairness of the process; the attempts to mobilise the same men to intervene in

¹⁹ B. G. A. Cannell, *From Monk to Busman*, London: Skeffington, 1935 quoted in T. H. Wintringham, *Mutiny*, London: Stanley Nott 1936, pp. 324-5

Russia against the Bolsheviks; the search for work and the paltry pensions allocated to wounded and disabled men:

Who cared for the men who had risked their lives and bore on their bodies the scars of war? The pensions doled out to blinded soldiers would not keep them alive. The consumptives, the gassed, the paralysed, were forgotten in institutions where they lay hidden from the public eye. Before the war had been over six months 'our heroes' 'our brave boys in the trenches' were without preference in the struggle for existence.²⁰

The 'heroes' returning with their physical or psychic wounds were rendered superfluous or worse, invisible, to the society for whom they made their sacrifices. When Gibbs acknowledged the heroism of the men who fought and 'resisted the education of brutality' he drew on the symbols of the heroic ideal; the hero who as a man of action undergoes dangerous adventures and performs great deeds in battle and returns to redeem his people. He is transformed by his experiences and returns with the knowledge and wisdom to resolve conflict at home; 'out of the dark depths of their experience they looked up to the light, and had visions of some better law of life than that which led to the world tragedy.'²¹

At one level, Gibbs identified with the notion of the transcendent hero who does not receive the respect and gratitude of the nation but at the same time destabilises the category of the hero by his representation of some returning veterans as men of violence

²⁰ Philip Gibbs, *Realities of War*, London: Hutchinson, 1929, p. 347

²¹ *ibid.* p. 350

with the revolutionary potential for bringing disorder. Those he characterised as morally deficient:

the weak men, the vicious, the murderous, the primitive, were overwhelmed by these influences, and all that was base in them was intensified, and their passions were unleashed, with what result we have seen, and shall see, to our sorrow, and the nation's peril.²²

While Gibbs does not actually deploy the term 'degenerate' his language is freighted with its connotations. Unlike the hero who transcended class barriers, the designation 'weak' men was implicitly class-specific with resonances of the urban degenerate. Similarly he distinguished legitimate forms of protest against the delays in demobilisation when men 'bordering on mutiny elected spokesmen to represent their grievances like Trade Unionists'²³ from riots and the destruction of property such as occurred, for example, in Luton when the Town Hall was damaged by veterans protesting about the refusal to allow them to hold a memorial service during the Peace Day celebrations. Nonetheless, protests about justifiable grievances constituted 'a serious business, subversive of discipline'. Furthermore, other violent crimes especially against women exemplified the 'disease and insanity' with which post war society had become infected.

Gibbs' competing representations of the returning man in the first half of 1919, as hero, victim, or as violent threatening presence to peaceful, ordered society point to the cultural unease with which these men's reintegration into society was viewed. At the same time, these were the very men whom the nation acclaimed as heroes. Their

²² *ibid.*

²³ *ibid.* p. 344

heroism had brought victory against German militarism and achieved peace after the long war-torn years. The instabilities of masculinities which the competing representations suggest the ways in which feelings of estrangement which were discussed in Chapter One were manifested as men began the process of return.

The terms shell shock and neurasthenia provided a language for interpreting the psychic effects of war and its impact on men's ability to resume 'normal' working life. Writing in *The Ex-Service Man* in November 1918, L. Fielding Ould, a member of the Special Medical Board at Lancaster Gate estimated that 70-80% of the men who had been at the front 'suffer more or less from neurasthenia', including the physically disabled, a disturbing number since 'on these men will depend to a great extent the future industrial prosperity of the country'. He identified 'several marked effects on practically everyone', especially a man's loss of self-confidence:

He feels himself inadequate; he feels that whatever job is suggested to him he cannot do. His capacity of work per hour is very seriously lessened; his power of endurance is by no means good; his power of concentration and application is almost entirely gone; he is very sensitive to criticism; he dislikes noise and bustle of every kind

It was imperative that they should be cured and the cure was work for 'if men can get through two or three months work, then they are practically cured'.²⁴ The cluster of symptoms observed by Ould constitute what today would be diagnosed as post-traumatic stress disorder, a concept created out of the consciousness of trauma associated with the

²⁴ *The Ex-Service Man*, Vol. 1, No. 5, November 6 1918

Vietnam war.²⁵ While Ould may well have over-estimated the numbers, nevertheless the representations of men suffering the psychological effects of war were part of the cultural legacy of the war. Robert Graves and Alan Hodge in *The Long Week-End*, for example, asserted that any man serving in the trenches for as much as five months was an 'invalid'. 'Shell-shock', from which all suffered to a greater or lesser degree' rendered men 'with no capacity for concentrated thinking and warped their critical sense'.²⁶ Philip Gibbs, the war correspondent observed similar dislocating effects:

All was not right with the spirit of the men who came back. Something was wrong. They put on civilian clothes again... but they had not come back the same men. Something had altered in them. They were subject to queer moods, queer tempers, fits of profound depression alternating with a restless desire for pleasure. Many of them were easily moved to passion when they lost control of themselves. Many were bitter in their speech, violent in opinion, frightening.²⁷

Unlike Ould's optimistic forecast that a few months work would effect a cure, Robert Graves was far less sanguine: 'in most cases the blood was not running pure again for four or five years; and in numerous cases men who had managed to avoid a nervous breakdown during the war collapsed badly in 1921 or 1922.' Furthermore, they argued, many officers and NCOs had become addicted to whisky and rum, therefore the 're-absorption of these men into civil life was complicated by their unfitness for any work

²⁵ For a critical discussion of the history of the culture of trauma, see Ben Shephard, *A War of Nerves: Soldiers and Psychiatrists 1914-1994*, London: Pimlico, 2002, pp. 385-399

²⁶ Robert Graves and Alan Hodge, *The Long Week-End: A Social History of Great Britain 1918-1939*, London: Faber and Faber, 1941, p. 27

²⁷ Philip Gibbs, *Realities of War*, p. 346

that needed reliable judgement and steady application.’²⁸ Individual problems associated with return were compounded by societal ones.

Returning ex-servicemen during the war were discharged into a fractured society where industrial unrest and uncertainty prevailed. The consensus which had supported, even embraced, the outbreak of war was breaking down in the face of the competing demands and needs of the wartime economy. In 1917 in the midst of industrial conflict at home, the Bolshevik revolution had attracted the support of various groups within the labour movement. Bolshevism was perceived as the inspiration behind the waves of industrial unrest sweeping the country and the cause of revolutionary ferment among certain sections of the working class. Support for the Bolshevik revolution was expressed in the Leeds Conference held in June in 1917 where figures like Ramsay MacDonald and Philip Snowden of the ILP as well as members of the British Socialist Party welcomed the Russian Revolution unreservedly.²⁹ At the conference there were calls for the establishment of Workers and Soldiers Councils in Britain following the Russian example. Philip Snowden argued that while ‘the press seized upon the resolution and grossly misrepresented its purpose’ it was in fact a ‘harmless’ resolution which demanded only that the Councils would:

²⁸ Graves and Hodge, *The Long Week-End*, p. 27

²⁹ Raymond Postgate, *The Life of George Lansbury*, London: Longmans, Green and Co. Ltd, 1951, p.

resist every encroachment upon individual and civil liberty; pay special attention to the position of women in industry, support the work of trade unions, concern themselves with questions affecting the pensions of wounded and disabled soldiers, the maintenance of grants payable to dependents of men serving with the Army and Navy, the making of adequate provision for the training of disabled soldiers and for suitable and remunerative work for men on their return to civil life.³⁰

The legitimate call for fair treatment for ex-servicemen was 'described as an incitement to the subversion of army discipline and military authority'. Nonetheless, the Councils occupied another imaginative space in which ex-servicemen would become the prey of extremists who would co-opt a body of disgruntled men for their own ends, men who were already engaging in what was interpreted as unconstitutional political activism and who could be easily influenced.

The evidence which exists about one Workers and Soldiers Council suggests that rather than being subversive or revolutionary it was pre-eminently the voice of the respectable working man. On June 24 1917, representatives of the 4th, 5th and 6th battalions of the Royal Sussex, the 10th Middlesex and several other battalions formed the Home Counties and Training Reserve Branch of the Workers and Soldiers Council. They passed a number of resolutions which addressed their specific grievances but more significantly, contained protests about their treatment by Army Council orders which demeaned and humiliated them as men: 'we be neither dogs, criminals, or children'. They also protested against the denial of their citizenship rights stating that 'we plead as beggars for what our comrades can demand as citizens. We ask to be citizens with

³⁰ Philip Viscount Snowden, *An Autobiography*, London: Ivor Nicholson and Watson, 1934, p. 455

privileges as well as the responsibilities.’³¹ There were no revolutionary demands nor plans for actions to undermine the state’s constituted authority by resorting to violent measures. The fear of Bolshevism remained a major pre-occupation for it represented what, Philip Gibbs, among others, diagnosed as the ‘disease and insanity’ at the heart of the nation. In 1919 the fear of Bolshevism provoked debates in the House of Commons when questions were asked about whether the government were taking any steps to deal with Bolshevism. During one of the debates, Winston Churchill reiterated the idea of Bolshevism as a ‘disease’ and ‘pestilence’. Continuing the metaphor of disease, he saw it as ‘contagious’ for:

It breaks out with great suddenness; it is violently contagious; it throws people into a frenzy of excitement; it spreads with enormous rapidity; the mortality is terrible.³²

In the climate of fear and suspicion, one group identified as responsible for infecting the nation were ex-servicemen.

The editorials of the ex-servicemen’s journals responded to the implied accusations against their members by incontrovertibly refuting any alliance with extremist political views and practices. They launched their own attacks on Bolsheviks whom they represented as ‘destructive men’ in opposition to heroic ex-servicemen whose patriotism was already proven by their public duty and service in time of war. Under the auspices of the Federation, a film was produced *Bolshevism: A Message of its Evils* which purported to demonstrate how Bolsheviks were part of a conspiracy to ‘keep ex-

³¹ Englander and Osborne, ‘Jack, Tommy and Henry Dubb’, pp. 604-5

³² *Hansard*, House of Commons, Vol. 116, col. 1526, May 29 1919

servicemen unemployed'.³³ In June 1919 the leading article 'Federationists Shun Bolshevism' by the Chairman, T. F. Lister stated:

I am quite well aware that there a few people who are urging the ex-service men to resort to violent measures. Some of the men are honest, although wrong-headed. The majority are dishonest, and are the very men who, during the war, afraid to face danger themselves did everything to hamper the men who were fighting for their lives. Depend upon it, that to give credence to Bolshevik doctrines would produce a far greater volume of employment than, unfortunately, there is at the moment. The revolutionary is a man who may know how to destroy; he has no constructive capacity. Justice can only be secured by Constitutional methods.³⁴

The 'constructive' man, the heroic man who had faced danger, was embodied in the ex-serviceman who submitted his claims through constitutional means to the authority of Parliament. *The Comrades Journal* contained articles in a more strident vein. In April 1919 the leading article threw down a challenge 'Will British Comradeship Beat Bolshevism?' One answer came from a 'discharged wounded Non-Com:'

It will if the discharged millions of ex-service men in this country remain *sane*! We *must* hit out- and at once! Why? Because otherwise our pensions and allowances would not be safe! Those Russian maniacs would pinch the pennies from a blind man's plate.³⁵

Brigadier General H. Page Croft of the National Party was enlisted to add his comments to the rabid anti-Bolshevist scare: 'the comradeship of the British race is founded on

³³ *The Bulletin*, No. 14, September 11 1919

³⁴ *The Bulletin*, No. 7, June 5 1919

³⁵ *The Comrades Journal*, April 1919

justice which is the very antithesis of Bolshevism.' Two months later *The Comrades Journal* carried a similar article 'Why British Comradeship will Beat Bolshevism:'

Discontent is the life-blood of the destructive agitation. Remove the causes of the discontent and the Bolshevik propaganda will be but the idle vapourings on an empty wind.³⁶

The ex-servicemen's papers were responding to the general climate of anti-Bolshevism which was permeating the nation. However, the leadership was also responding to the discordant voices emerging from its membership and to the activities at local level within some branches. As political activism increased among some ex-servicemen and, with the NUX calling for alliances with other radical groups, the leadership of the organisations urged patience and moderation. The notion of a moderate man is inflected by class; a middle-class construct of rational individualism and concern with status. The selflessness of the heroic ex-serviceman was contrasted with the selfishness and greed displayed in the repertoire of male actors in the returned-soldier demonology- conchies, Bolshies, obstructionist trade unionists, strikers, war profiteers, cowards. An ex-serviceman was a superior man compared to any of these other men whose actions were perceived of as selfish and against the national interest. Such resentment had been fostered during the war itself in the attitudes sometimes adopted towards the home front. It had been further stimulated by the bitterness of delays over demobilisation, the paucity of pensions and the failure to secure preferential treatment in the labour market. The claim to moral superiority was a camouflage against the

³⁶ *The Comrades Journal*, June 1919

humiliations experienced by veterans as they measured their manhood against other men. Some gave vent to their bitterness and frustration in what was seen by the leadership as illegitimate forms of action. Any language deployed by ex-servicemen which hinted at direct action was frequently interpreted as extremist. Signs of frustration were appearing from the pens, at least, of ex-servicemen.

In a pamphlet entitled *Is this a fit country for heroes to live in?* the author William Robertson, a demobilised soldier, had been approached by 'a large number of discharged and demobilised men' to write of their grievances. He had responded because 'I consider it my duty as a soldier, as a man, and as a British subject.'

I know there is revolution in the air; there is a feeling of disgust and a feeling of rebellion in this country. Revolution, if one of force, means 'undreamt of hardships, privations and atrocities.'

Nevertheless, William Robertson warned:

The heroes know too well what sufferings are, but unless the government is prepared to do something, and do it at once, to alleviate the sufferings, the heroes cannot be held responsible for the trouble which is bound to arise in the near future.³⁷

Despite the language of conflict, much of the pamphlet contained Haig's evidence to the Royal Commission. This enquired into the circumstances of disabled veterans. Haig was harsh in his criticism of the inadequacy of state pensions and the hardship being suffered through bureaucratic delays and the lack of sympathy from many medical board

³⁷ William Robertson, *Is this a fit country for heroes to live in?* Glasgow: R. E. Robertson, 1919, p. 14

members. Whilst there was agreement about the injustices being meted out to the 'heroes' there were also attempts to channel expressions of discontent in appropriate ways.

It was as though the 'heroes' were still serving soldiers and subject to codes of behaviour which obtained in the army and where the army discipline subjected the ranks to mute obedience. The fact was that these men were now civilians and citizens who felt that their manly worth had been proved during the war. They were trying to secure recognition of the needs of the living. The sense that the working-class man should have his views represented by his superiors was often present in both *The Comrades Journal* and *The Ex-Service Man* representing as they did the most conservative views within the veterans movement. For example, in one issue of *The Ex-Service Man*. Captain H. H. C. Baird wrote a report of his address to a branch meeting of one of the organisations in which he argued that the men 'knew that they still have to wait patiently for such fruits of victory as the country may be able to bring within their reach'. In the same issue, there was a letter from Captain E. S. Donisthorpe, Hon. Sec. of the Discharged Consumptive Society arguing for just rewards and rights for ex-servicemen for which 'capitalists and profiteers must disgorge to make it practicable'. For, he warned, 'the ex-serviceman intends to persist in his demands for justice, if not by arbitration - then by sterner methods.' The editor of *The Ex-Service Man* fiercely attacked the 'ungentlemanly' sentiments:

It's very easy to fling a jibe at the 'capitalist', it's the sort of thing which used to be specialised in by unwashed gents who hold forth from barrel tops at street corners. What we want is constructive criticism - just the sort of thing a gentleman in the position of Captain Donisthorpe ought to be able to supply.³⁸

Captain Donisthorpe's comments were doubly transgressive; firstly by advocating so-called illegitimate forms of action based on the conflict between labour and capital and secondly, by repudiating his class role in providing responsible leadership to his inferiors. Instead, he appeared to be joining forces with extremist 'unrespectable' working-class agitators ranting at street corners. The fact that army discipline no longer obtained among the returning men was a cause of concern as expressions of discontent were increasingly being heard. More alarmingly, they were being voiced in the context of broader unrest in the nation. As 'Scrutator', a regular contributor to *The Ex-Service Man*, warned:

We have to guard against two evils. The first of these is unrest in the realms of Labour. The second is discontent among our returned and disabled heroes. There are far too many who will take the line of least resistance now they have escaped the terrors of the battlefield and are free from the discipline which obtained with the Service.³⁹

'Labour' men were particularly feared by the Comrades and portrayed in the pages of *The Ex-Service Man* as divisive within the community of ex-servicemen. They were the supporters of the party politics which had to be avoided in order to maintain

³⁸ *The Ex-Service Man*, Vol. 1, No. 6, November 20 1918

³⁹ *The Ex-Service Man*, Vol. 1, No. 19, March 20 1919

unity. They were also viewed as allies of the disruptive forces threatening peace and harmony; the trade unionists, the apogee of 'selfish men.'

Within a month of the election, there were industrial disputes in many sectors of industry; 'the unrest of the trade union movement seemed to penetrate to every recess of the social and economic fabric'.⁴⁰ At the beginning of 1919 there was unrest in the engineering and shipbuilding trades, a threatened strike on London Underground, increased wage demands by the miners and the possibility of a strike by the police. Militant trade union activity contributed to the rising alarm of the Bolshevik menace. One response by the government was to set up the Cabinet Committee on Industrial Unrest in February 1919. Another response with particular significance to ex-servicemen was the new Directorate of Intelligence, a section of the Home Office established in the spring of 1919 which published weekly reports to cabinet ministers entitled 'Report on Revolutionary Organisations in the United Kingdom'. During the war surveillance activities had been carried out by the Special Branch of the Criminal Investigation Department, headed by Basil Thomson. Early in 1918 they had begun targeting ex-servicemen's groups for surveillance as possible sources of revolutionary activity. The Federation, perceived as the most vocal organisation in its criticism of government policy, came under close scrutiny. It was conjectured that:

⁴⁰ Morgan, *Consensus and Disunity*, p. 47

there is a determined attempt among extremists to capture the Discharged Soldiers' Federation, and the demand for better allowances should be carefully watched for if they succeed in getting the soldiers and their wives to back them, they will be a very numerous and dangerous body.⁴¹

According to Basil Thompson, 'in the first three months of 1919 unrest touched its high water mark' and 'in the months following the Armistice some of the societies of ex-servicemen began to give anxiety'.⁴² In February 1919, the recently-formed Soldiers', Sailors' and Airmen's Union (S.S.A.U.) became the focus of increasing concern, seen as plotting 'a conspiracy to induce serving soldiers who enlisted under the Derby scheme and under conscription to 'demobilise themselves' on May 11.'⁴³ The organisation was supported by the *Daily Herald* and, interestingly Stephen Ward writes 'according to intelligence sources a writer for *The Herald*, Captain E. S. Donisthorpe, organised the S. S. A. U. in late 1918' which was associated with the 'Hands Off Russia' campaign. It was the same Captain Donisthorpe, letter writer to *The Ex-Service Man* quoted above, who was castigated by the editor for his political stance in suggesting that 'sterner methods' may be required to gain justice for ex-servicemen's demands. No acts of mutiny occurred on May 11 but the emergence of the radical NUX and the International Union of Ex-Servicemen (IUX) in May 1919 were immediate targets for investigation.

⁴¹ Stephen R. Ward, 'Intelligence Surveillance of British Ex-Servicemen, 1918-1920', *Historical Journal*, Vol. XVI, No. 1, 1973, p. 182. This article provides a full analysis of the activities of Special Branch.

⁴² Basil Thompson, *Queer People*, London: Hodder and Stoughton 1922, pp. 276, 296

⁴³ *ibid.* p. 277

The NUX, as previously discussed, was a splinter group formed by the more radical elements of the Federation impatient with their non-political position. Its affiliation to the Labour party belies the perception of its revolutionary intentions while the IUX, founded in Glasgow, although stating its 'determination to fight for the overthrow of the capitalist system' only ever secured a small membership. Intelligence surveillance of veterans organisations has been examined elsewhere demonstrating how returning ex-servicemen were perceived as threatening national stability, particularly in the context of the alarm raised by the Bolshevik 'menace'. Intelligence surveillance was not the only method adopted to control ex-servicemen. The Comrades had been formed with that intention but there were other moves to harness the actions of veterans.

In November 1918, a week before the Armistice, a conference was convened under the authority of the Admiralty, the War Office and the Air Ministry. Its Chairman was Sir Ian Hamilton. Its aim was to foster the spirit of comradeship amongst all those who had served in the forces but its main purpose was:

to try and rope in, to co-ordinate two, three or four or more bodies of Associations of Discharged Soldiers who are already existing in this country and who have, some of them, taken on a political bias.⁴⁴

The return of demobilised men likely to swell the numbers of the existing organisations was anticipated with trepidation. General Ruggles-Brice representing the forces in France wanted the organisation to be ready to receive the men and inform them that

⁴⁴ Report of Conference held at Horse Guards, November 5 1918, Sir Ian Hamilton papers, Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, Kings College, London, 11/1/1

'there is the Association to look after you and you will be alright as long as you behave yourselves'.

The experiences of war had done little to shift the perception of working-class men as children, unable to exercise their own judgments once freed from army discipline. They were to be brought under the control of a single organisation, the Empire Services League. One of the strong advocates of the embryonic organisation was Sir Douglas Haig. Fearing the involvement of ex-servicemen in disruptive agitation, he was the driving force behind a unified ex-servicemen's organisation free from politics.

Immediately after the Armistice he had warned that the men:

are still soldiers, though without arms, and no doubt will go in for fresh groupings for new objectives, hitherto unthought of by the present race of politicians! Above all, they will take vigorous action to right any real or supposed wrong!⁴⁵

Although Haig publicly supported a democratic organisation, his aim was to ensure that ex-servicemen would be steered away from left-wing politics by their 'real leaders' by which he meant, of course, the officer class.⁴⁶ Utilising the rhetoric of comradeship and self-sacrifice as well as calling for unity was part of a strategy to contain ex-servicemen in a single, apolitical association. The objective of such an organisation was to tame any disruptive elements among the body of ex-servicemen which appeared to be threatening social order and stability. However, the responses to the attempts to form a single

⁴⁵ Quoted in Gerard J. DeGroot, *Blighty: British Society in the Era of the Great War*, London: Longman, 1996, p. 268

⁴⁶ *ibid.*

organisation were mixed, even from the Comrades which had been formed with similar objectives to those expressed in the proposed Empire League.

In February 1919, delegates were invited from the Association, Federation and Comrades to attend a meeting of the League. Wilfred Ashley of the Comrades expressed his reservations about the willingness of ex-servicemen to join an organisation sponsored by the War Office for 'they are very suspicious of the War Office, and any organisation that seems to be run by the War Office is at once shunned by them.' He also feared that since the organisation mirrored his own, 'large numbers of our members may be forced into the ranks of the more militant organisations, namely the Federation and association, and instead of unity there will be only greater discord, confusion and extremist action.'⁴⁷ Under the Chairmanship of Sir Ian Hamilton, consultative committees were established and plans to make the organisation democratic devised; half its members were to be under the rank of commissioned officer. The proposals were submitted to Churchill and Lord Peel for further discussion but it was not until July that a public announcement was made about a government organisation for the dispersal of the canteen profits accumulated during the war, popularly known as Byng's millions. By this time, Sir Ian Hamilton was no longer involved but he privately expressed his view of the government's 'distrust of ex-servicemen'; 'a ghastly error' for 'if the ex-servicemen are got into one group they will prove a steady influence in this country'.⁴⁸ Clearly his was a minority view.

⁴⁷ Letter to Sir Ian Hamilton from Wilfred Ashley, February 3 1919, Hamilton papers, 11/1/1

⁴⁸ Letter to H. C. Baird (he had taken over the editorship of *The Ex-Service Man*) from Sir Ian Hamilton, September 9 1918, Hamilton papers, 11/1/5

The perceptions of ex-servicemen operating as an unconstitutional force, a group of potentially violent and volatile men threatening national stability were shaped by in part by conceptions of working-class masculinity inherited from the pre-war period. They were compounded by post war fears of the rise of a more confident and assertive labour movement which challenged consensus and harmony. Conservative forces were alarmed by these developments and their insistence that ex-servicemen should steer clear of politics and remain apolitical effectively meant conservatism. A letter in *The Ex-Service Man* articulated the dilemmas; 'you cannot make unity by tying together a Bolshevik, an orderly Democrat and an old-fashioned Tory'.⁴⁹ The call for unity among the organisations, dominated by Haig, ensured that when eventually the British Legion emerged in 1921 as the product of a unified movement, it was conservative, avoided controversy and had limited influence. It was also numerically small; the membership in 1921 numbered only 18,000. By 1938 it reached a pre-war peak of 400,000 and even at its height the membership represented less than 20% of ex-servicemen and usually less than 10%.⁵⁰

The call for unity in the ex-servicemen's organisations, emanating particularly from the *Ex-Service Man* and the *Comrades Journal* and reinforced by others mirrored the rhetoric of national unity; the sectionalism of party politics was to avoided at all costs. Denying that their own agenda was deeply conservative, they constantly urged ex-servicemen to stay out of party politics and to keep the movement apolitical. The *Ex-*

⁴⁹ *The Ex-Service Man*, Vol. 1, No. 11, January 23 1919

⁵⁰ Adrian Gregory, *The Silence of Memory*, Oxford: Berg, 1994, p. 98. For a full account of the formation of the British Legion, see Graham Wootton, *The Official History of the British Legion*, London: Macdonald Evans, 1956

Service Man, in particular, denounced politicians for trying to take over the ex-servicemen's movement and accusing them of being responsible for the divisions between rival organisations which 'fosters a spirit of hatred among those who have fought and served together'.⁵¹ In similar vein, the editor denounced the attempts by the Federation and the Association to field their own candidates in the election in December 1918 calling it 'a monstrous proposal' since 'the men want to think for themselves, pick for themselves, vote for themselves and make their own choice from whatever candidate may appear before them.'⁵² His attempts to warn against the emergence of a 'semi-military party' nevertheless poised problems for the direction of an apolitical veteran's movement.

Identifying ex-servicemen as politically neutral within their organisations while asserting their political rights outside caused considerable tensions as men, trying to reintegrate into civil life, sought to make sense of their masculinity in a re-ordered world. The ex-servicemen's newspaper committed to preventing the repetition of the past neglect and abandonment of veterans of previous wars was itself one of the conservative forces bent on constraining ex-servicemen's actions. The insularity of its approach to the problems besetting ex-servicemen on their return ironically confirmed, rather than contested, the representation of the ex-soldier as a marginalised outsider; a single man divorced from any family, community or workplace networks and loyalties.

As efforts were being made to control ex-servicemen and harness them into one, non political body some local branches were taking their case into their local

⁵¹ *The Ex-Service Man*, Vol. 1, No. 6, November 20 1918

⁵² *The Ex-Service Man*, Vol. 1, No. 7, December 4 1918

communities where they received support for their claims for just treatment. The slow response to their claims for justice for those who had served, coupled with the failure of the vision of 'a land fit for heroes' to materialise provoked angry responses, even as the nation was celebrating peace. In July 1919, following the signing of the peace treaty, the official victory celebration took place in London with contingents from all parts of the Empire taking part in the march in the streets of the capital. The centrepiece of the parade was the Cenotaph in Whitehall, initially a temporary structure but later transformed in 1920 into a permanent war memorial by public demand. In addition, peace was heralded throughout the nation with plans put forward for celebrations at local levels. The Federation recommended that its members boycott their local communities' peace celebrations. *The Ex-Service Man* was appalled at 'an illimitably insane but none the less mischievous proposal' demanding to know 'how much comfort and happiness such a boycott would bring to disabled men and widows' and accusing the Federation of 'driving the community into separate hostile camps'.⁵³

In fact in some local communities, ex-servicemen found support for their acts of resistance. For example, the St. Pancras branch of the Federation gained the support of the Mayor who announced that no peace celebrations would be held in the borough until the grievances of ex-servicemen were remedied. At a meeting of local residents to discuss the forthcoming peace celebrations, Mr. W. J. Paton, Chairman of the St. Pancras Branch of the Federation moved the following amendment:

⁵³ *The Ex-Service Man*, Vol. 1, No. 31, June 14 1919

That in view of the treatment of discharged and demobilised men and their dependents by the Government, also the number of ex-service men now unemployed (over 2,000) in this borough and the unjustifiable profiteering still being carried on, and the fact that many of our comrades are still fighting in distant lands, we 2,500 discharged and demobilized men of St.Pancras, strongly protest against anything in the nature of a peace celebration until these grievances have been removed.⁵⁴

The amendment was passed by a large majority and the Mayor conceded that no peace celebrations should take place, although this caused consternation from some councillors at a Council meeting a few days later. In Norwich, where the Eastern Counties Division of the Federation was holding its national conference, a mass demonstration in the market place passed the following resolution: 'that we, the citizens of Norwich protest against the so-called peace, while all ex-servicemen and their dependents are given such scurvy treatment by the Government.'⁵⁵ Ex-servicemen were included in the body of citizens of Norwich and as such were claiming their rights of entitlement which citizenship conferred. Equally, they had fulfilled their obligations by their service to their country in time of war.

Elsewhere, in Shrewsbury, the official peace celebrations coincided with the strike of the National Union of Agricultural Workers (NUAW). The local Federation had made links with the labour movement and the NUAW supported the Federation's campaign against the peace celebrations and its resolution 'not to recognise the civic reception held on 5 August, but instead hold a public demonstration.' Headed by the

⁵⁴ *St. Pancras Gazette*, June 27 1919

⁵⁵ *The Bulletin*, No. 13, August 28 1919

Grinshill Ex-Service Band, the demonstrators carried a banner declaring 'We want adequate pensions, employment and justice for all who served during the war.'⁵⁶ *The Times* reported on similar events around the country; in Merthyr Tydvil 25,000 people attended a thanksgiving service and later passed a resolution calling for an increase in pensions for ex-servicemen and their dependents.⁵⁷ Even in the suburbs which held celebrations for children there were also, according to *The Times*, demonstrations by ex-servicemen.⁵⁸ A discordant note was inserted when the planned weekend of celebrations in Luton was disrupted by ex-servicemen expressing dissatisfaction over pensions. Further trouble occurred when the local Corporation refused to allow them to hold their own commemorative service in a local park resulting in damage to the Town Hall and a number of casualties. However, 'organised ex-servicemen disclaimed all responsibility for the trouble.'⁵⁹ The activities of local branches reflected the discontent felt by the membership of the various ex-servicemen's organisations in their lack of progress in fulfilling their commitments to their dead comrades' dependents and in securing just treatment for themselves.

Frustration amongst the membership of the Federation about its lack of direction had already emerged. In response to members' demands for some form of coherent programme dealing with economic and social questions, a comprehensive and wide ranging set of aims was drawn up and published in the second issue of *The Bulletin* in

⁵⁶ Quoted in Nicholas Mansfield, *English Farmworkers and Local Patriotism, 1900-1930*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001, pp. 150-1

⁵⁷ *The Times*, July 21 1919

⁵⁸ *ibid.*

⁵⁹ *ibid.*

March 1919. The General Programme contained a number of sections, including those dealing with constitutional issues in which the abolition of the House of Lords and universal adult suffrage were called for. Other women's rights were also included ranging from the endowment of motherhood, representation of women on local committees especially housing committees, equal pay and even, the reduction in housework. On the economic front, a minimum wage was demanded along with public ownership of all monopolies and including public ownership of land. This utopian vision of a fairer, more democratic society encompassed far more than the immediate demands of ex-servicemen, extending into their families and the wider community. Moreover, it addressed the needs and desires of men prepared to play their full part in national life. As the Federation continued to insist on political neutrality, its broader aims receded from view and the pressing need to secure justice for ex-servicemen, widows and children dominated its activities. This suggests a developing insularity within the Federation which was already present in the Comrades. It also had implications for the forging of an ex-serviceman identity for it denied other possible male identities at a time when men's identities as workers were under threat. The denial of a political identity attached to the ex-serviceman identity was, for some, emasculating. However, individual branches appeared frequently to work autonomously, working within their local communities, as was demonstrated in the activities associated with the peace celebrations.

Nevertheless, the leadership increasingly found itself at odds with sections of its membership, especially Labour men, as controversies were aired on the pages of the journals. Although the Federation, Association and Comrades were political, their insistence on their political neutrality was motivated, in part, by their attempt to appeal to

as wide a constituency of veterans as possible. They were also seeking special treatment from society which owed them obligations in respect of their war service. In turn, the claim for preferential treatment in housing, in unemployment benefits and especially, in employment set them apart from other needy groups. In contrast, the NUX with its open and clear political agenda sought alliances with non-veteran workers and citizens positioning their struggle in the broader context of class struggle. Further, it can be argued that the organisations were responding to representations in circulation of ex-servicemen as a body of threatening and potentially destructive men. For their part, they attempted to counter such representations by presenting normalising images of ex-servicemen as embodying respectable and honourable manhood, capable of exercising rational judgement and self-control.

At the same time, however, other contradictory images of masculinity surfaced as ex-servicemen were represented as abject; victims of society's ingratitude, powerless to effect change and left only to humbly plead their case. In the first issue of 1920 *The Bulletin* declared the year to be 'Critical in the History of the Federation', an organisation whose power lay in its 'political independence'. The issue of political neutrality and the consequent lack of a coherent political platform provoked a lively debate in the correspondence columns. L. Forrest of the Newbury branch deplored the running of separate Federation candidates against Labour men in the Municipal elections:

This suicidal policy is placing many members in a very difficult position. Some of us, for instance, are members of both the Federation and the Labour Party, being desirous of doing our bit towards both the small matter of 'justice to ex-soldiers' and the larger and grave national issue of justice to all workers... Personally, I have not yet resigned and shall do so only with very great reluctance.⁶⁰

Some members, sharing his views, had already demonstrated their disaffection with the Federation by abandoning it to join the NUX where they were urged 'to stand shoulder to shoulder with all the rest of the workers... and to make this country for all ex Service men, for all other workers, for all women-folk and for all our children a good country to live in.'⁶¹ The lack of a similar political perspective in the Federation was challenged by the Chairman of the Civil Service branch, S. A. Tilley when he wrote that the 'members feel the Federation is working an engine without coal in not adopting a policy or political action' for:

No ordinary man of common sense could vote simply on our policy of complaints; the country needs a party with a programme of construction.⁶²

A branch member from Leighton Buzzard agreed, arguing that, while the Federation should embrace men of differing shades of political and religious thought, nevertheless the task was to convince them that 'the Labour Party was the most helpful

⁶⁰ *The Bulletin*, No. 22, January 8 1920,

⁶¹ National Union of Ex-Service Men, leaflet, n.d.

⁶² *The Bulletin*, No. 23, January 22 1920

to ex-servicemen.’⁶³ This elicited an angry question from J. C. Hayden of the Uxbridge branch demanding to know ‘in what manner has the Party concerned advocated our cause?’ Instead he proposed:

Eschew politics as a party. Let our old political views be submerged and stand as independent men, which gives us the right to criticise all parties and vote for the right without fear or favour of any. ⁶⁴

The correspondence columns reflected the differing views of the membership, even among those who considered themselves labour men, such as C. A. Walker, for example, who wrote as ‘a labour man’ in support of non-affiliation to the Labour Party because:

the present so-called Labour party is practically dominated by the extreme revolutionists... trying to spread discontent amongst our comrades. ⁶⁵

The most vociferous voices supporting a political programme came from the ranks of labour men, nevertheless, as the debates demonstrate there were divisions between them. Unlike the Second World War, the troops returning from the First World War were not radicalised to the same extent that they lent their support to the Labour Party; neither were trade unionists necessarily Labour supporters. Historians have argued that the inclusion of Clause Four in the Labour Party constitution was more of a symbolic change heralding not socialism but a more regulated form of capitalism.⁶⁶

⁶³ *ibid.*

⁶⁴ *The Bulletin*, No. 24, February 5 1920

⁶⁵ *The Bulletin*, No. 26, March 4 1920

⁶⁶ Pugh, *Modern British Politics*, pp. 215- 217

Nonetheless, in some sections of the veterans' movement the Labour Party was viewed as extremist.

These debates reflect the opinions of some members of the growing isolation of the Federation from the views of its membership as to the participation of ex-servicemen, as citizens and as workers, in the post-war nation. In the report of the National Conference of the Federation in *The Bulletin* in June 1920 there were expressions of discontent from some branches about the continuing apolitical stance of the organisation. Some branches called for a broader political platform in order to, as the North West Ham Branch amendment stated, 'enable the Federation to enter into the social, economic and industrial life of the community.'⁶⁷ By limiting their demands to pensions, Mr. J. Shepherd from Stockport argued that 'as a fighting force, they would become entirely alienated because they had no definite aim. He took it that they came into the Federation to make the world better.'⁶⁸ The South Liverpool branch among others called for the Federation to work with the Labour Party and when a delegate from Birmingham characterised his local Trades and Labour Council as containing some of 'the foulest-mouthed men' he was interrupted and shouted down.⁶⁹ Despite the vigorous arguments in favour of working with the Labour Party the conference voted overwhelmingly against the motion with 31 delegates in favour but 140 against. Political neutrality won the day.

⁶⁷ *The Bulletin*, No. 33, June 10 1920

⁶⁸ *ibid.*

⁶⁹ *ibid.*

Ernest Thurtle put forward a strong case for ex-servicemen 'becoming more citizens of the country' and as such they needed a political programme carried out by political methods for:

They had to play their part in altering the present day conditions. They had seen humanity crucified in France and Flanders, but they could see humanity being crucified in England today and they were going to stand against that sort of thing. At present they were neuters, and a neuter either in biology or politics was always a subject for contempt.⁷⁰

Ernest Thurtle's imagery denotes more than isolation from the body politic; it speaks of a loss of power, of any manly agency and of a sense of complete emasculation. Attempts at removing men from the realm of politics in which they could exercise their legitimate rights as citizens was tantamount to returning them to No Man's Land, to memories of powerlessness and impotency. Neutrality gave men neither a social nor self definition; the identity of the ex-serviceman was becoming one located in the past, trapping men in stasis and unable to assume alternative male identities in the present and future. It engendered passivity and helplessness and as Thurtle indirectly suggests, humiliation in the face of other men. Moreover, the gains some women had made during the war and their victory in securing the vote for women over thirty signalled changes against which ex-servicemen registered their own impotence.

Reflecting on the position of ex-servicemen in July 1919, editorials in both *The Bulletin* and *The Comrades Journal* exemplify such passivity:

⁷⁰ *ibid.*

Unemployment, starvation, and oblivion faces the Hero of yesterday, the ex-service men of today. The widows and dependents of those who made the supreme sacrifice - what of these?

The erstwhile, neglected justice to the dependents, disabled men and the returning Service men stands solemnly before us. When the Country, and the Government representing it, realises its duty to its heroes, and honestly takes steps to make England a country fit for heroes to live in, *we will rejoice; till then, we weep.*⁷¹

Marginalised and superfluous to the society which they protected, their position was now exposed in the editorial in all its fragility and vulnerability, connoted by the suggestion of tears and its association with the feminine and emotional expressiveness. The sense of loss associated with mourning for the dead has now become melancholic imbued with masculine self-pity. Loss is also loss of self-esteem. The editorial in *The Comrades Journal* under the heading 'Discharged and Disillusioned' adopted a similar melancholic tone when it contrasted the ideal of the triumphant return of the conquering war hero with the sad male figures emerging from the social realities of neglect and abandonment:

No disillusionment like the disillusionment of returning. No trial so severe as that of fitting a civilian harness to backs bent and battered and lacerated by long campaigning. But the transition from that spacious and glowing horizon of war, against which men are silhouetted as giants, to the little life of drab, mean streets has been rudely abrupt. The psychical counterpart of this shock has been the sudden drop, as it were, from that limelight position in the centre of the world's stage to a humble place in a long bedraggled queue leading to the gallery door outside.⁷²

⁷¹ *The Bulletin*, No. 9, July 3 1919

⁷² *The Comrades Journal*, July 1919

The contrast between the hero and the ex-serviceman is powerfully drawn. The dead are rightly honoured and remembered as heroes, meanwhile the living are dislodged from the dominant heroic narrative. The effect of the editorial was to transmute the 'hero' into the victim of the nation's ingratitude, a metaphorically marginal and small, weak outsider. Instead of assuming their rightful place in the social order and within traditional gender norms, ex-servicemen were now taking their place in 'the long bedraggled queue' with the powerless classes of unemployed and the poor.

However, the attempt to resurrect the glories of war when men were 'giants' would have rung deeply hollow with men whose experience of war was frequently perceived as de-manning, analogous to animals burrowing in the earth. The attempt by *The Comrades Journal* to eulogise the war and position the men who fought it within a traditional heroic narrative served only to relocate men's identity in the past where their loss was constantly revisited. Thus, the identity of the ex-serviceman constructed by both these editorials opened up a chasm between an idealised male hero and a present self-pitying, emasculated male identity. The editorials also reflect the lack of any direction of the organisations which became a source of frustration among the membership as unemployment became an urgent concern. While the leadership resorted to an abject resignation, local branches were taking action.

In sharp contrast, the first photograph which appeared in *The Bulletin* in September 1919 was of unemployed members walking from Manchester to London. Reproduced from the *Daily Graphic* it showed a large group of determined men, wearing caps and holding banners which read 'Keep the Home Fires Burning - with

government promises' and 'Demobilised, Demoralised, Pauperised and Pulverised.'⁷³

Work, independence, self worth, the ability to provide for the family were central to the construction of working-class masculinity; all were being denied, threatening their very existence as men. Nonetheless, they were refusing their marginalisation and taking collective action to demand their rights as citizens.

Citizenship defines the formal rights and obligations of its citizens through its legal and administrative frameworks. Nevertheless, the boundaries of belonging, entitlement and participation are controlled and therefore contested by those who are marginalised from fulfilling their status as full citizens. Within the ex-servicemen's movement, the sense of belonging intrinsic to citizenship was sometimes ambivalent as they experienced themselves as excluded from some citizenship rights. The language and discourse of citizenship was taken up by sections of the ex-servicemen's movement to make claims upon the nation, state and local communities, inflected by their particular claim of having served their country. Their claim for recompense for services rendered, in the form of adequate pensions, medical treatment and unemployment insurance was part of the process by which they inscribed meaning to the concept of being a citizen. This entailed not only being recipients of that to which they were entitled but also active agents within the institutional practices of administering such entitlements. Thus they made claims for democratic representation on bodies such as Local War Pensions Committees and medical boards. The much-repeated phrase 'Justice, not charity' was a demand for inclusion on the basis of the rights embodied in being a citizen.

⁷³ *The Bulletin*, No. 16, October 9 1919

We have never lost sight of those aims and objects to get JUSTICE AND RIGHT, NOT CHARITY, for those who have answered the Country's call. Surely the Discharged Men have the energy and brainpower to stand fast together and not be hoodwinked and deluded into blind-alley organisations which are today giving out charity in shovelful.⁷⁴

Fear of charity loomed large in working-class men's minds; dependence on charity challenged central codes of masculinity which had been established in the nineteenth century and were articulated in the concept of the wage-earning man as the family breadwinner. Being in receipt of charity robbed a man of his independence and emasculated him. Charity could transform a man into a pauper; a spectre of complete loss of manhood. As the Chairman of the Stoke Newington branch of the NUX declared:

we demand the right to work and enjoy the comforts of life; to do useful service as citizens, as we did as soldiers, for the country WE fought for. Our manhood fiercely resents being pauperised and demoralised.⁷⁵

Representation on committees for the administration of pensions was also a way of reclaiming manly dignity as well ensuring fair treatment. Fair treatment was also demanded from Medical Boards for they made critical decisions involving proof of war-sustained injuries and sickness. The Second Annual Conference of the Association recorded that representations had been made to the Pensions Minister stating that it is

⁷⁴ Leaflet, Gloucester Branch of the National Association, n.d. Quoted in Graham Wootton, *The Politics of Influence: British ex-Servicemen, Cabinet decisions and cultural change, 1917-1957*, London: RKP, 1963, p. 85

⁷⁵ *New World*, February 1920

'essential that our Discharged Soldiers should be appointed to sit in an advisory capacity on all Medical Boards to see that their comrades get fair treatment when their pension is being discussed'. Representation on Local War Pensions Committees was an important objective which was finally achieved when every local committee was to have at least two discharged, disabled members. *The Bulletin* appealed to its readers to

Keep ever before your mind the sacred nature of the duties of your office. If you are not of a religious nature, the fact that you have the welfare of your disabled comrades resting upon your shoulders should be incentive enough to compel your best efforts.⁷⁶

Class antagonism surfaced against the middle-class 'ladies' who sat on Local Pensions Committees, reinforcing the stigma of charity. In a letter to *The Bulletin* a correspondent wrote

You rarely find the wife of a serving or discharged soldier sitting on the Committee. The ladies who usually occupy these positions are invariably of the well-to-do type, charitably disposed but absolutely incapable of solving the problem of how to feed oneself and two hungry mites, find them in clothes and shoe leather, pay rent, coal, gas etc. on about 3/6 a week... there is a need for good, honest, intelligent working women on Local War Pensions Committees⁷⁷

The desire for the women of their own class to be involved on committees was part of the vision of a more democratic society in which working-class men and women would not be subject to the patronising interference in their lives which had been a feature of

⁷⁶ *The Bulletin*, No. 3, April 10 1919

⁷⁷ *The Bulletin*, No. 2, March 27 1919

pre-war working-class life. Nevertheless, the sexual division of labour remained inscribed in the vision.

The image of the old soldier of previous wars, abandoned, neglected *and* unemployed returned to haunt the ex-servicemen's organisations. In the preface to his book *The Future of the Disabled Soldier* written in 1917 C. W. Hutt observed that 'already the disabled soldier is to be seen begging in the streets'.⁷⁸ The position of disabled men had been a central concern when the organisations were formed. The return of damaged men, particularly those with visible physical disabilities, provoked concern about how their needs were to be addressed. State institutions, voluntary organisations and medical authorities were all involved in dealing with the unprecedented numbers of injured men. New developments in mechanised warfare had inflicted equally unprecedented bodily damage and dismemberment; the Disabled Society estimated that 41,050 ex-servicemen had had at least one limb amputated.⁷⁹ Approximately, seventy percent of amputees were under thirty years of age. By 1918, the government was providing medical care and pensions for over 400,000 disabled soldiers and sailors. The extent of disablement was carefully and bureaucratically weighted; men who suffered the loss of two or more limbs, a hand and a foot, severe facial disfigurement or incurable disease resulting in their being permanently bedridden were entitled to a 100 per cent pension. For amputees, the extent of the amputation of arm or leg warranted between 80 and 50 per cent while the loss of two fingers of either hand accounted for 20 per cent of

⁷⁸ C. W. Hutt, *The Future of the Disabled Soldier*, London: T. Fisher Unwin Ltd., 1917, p. v

⁷⁹ Seth Koven, 'Remembering and Dismemberment: Crippled Children, Wounded Soldiers and the Great War in Great Britain', *American Historical Review*, Vol. XCIX, No. 4, October 1994, p. 1186

the full pension. A full pension was worth 27s 6d while others were awarded on a sliding scale downwards to 5s 6d. according to the degree of disablement.

As men and their families struggled for survival on paltry pensions, the nation was exhorted to protect those who had been maimed and mutilated in their service and sacrifice for the country for these men were, as *The Times* stated, 'the cream of our race. In their bodies they bear the heritage of all our endeavours since we became a people ; the qualities they incarnate are those that upheld our name in strength and honour'.⁸⁰ The nation's identity resided, then, in these men's bodies which were to be entrusted to the nation's care in recognition of its gratitude for their sacrifice. 'Let the nation adopt the disabled men as their children' echoed an article in the *Comrades Journal*.⁸¹ However, the war had impaired men's bodies and the association with crippled children undermined both the nation's and men's virility: 'I purposely avoid using the word 'cripple' as that word carries with it an implication of helplessness and inefficiency'.⁸²

Inefficiency challenged the doctrine of national efficiency which depended in part on the healthy male body as worker and citizen. Disabled men challenged male competency and ideas about masculine independence and the restoration of men's bodies also implied restoring them to their masculine roles especially as independent wage-earners and family breadwinners. The imperative was then to guide men back into the labour market where they could prove their usefulness as manly citizens. There was

⁸⁰ *The Times*, March 2 1917

⁸¹ *The Comrades Journal*, Vol. 1, No. 1, November 1918, p. 8. For an excellent discussion of the convergences between crippled children and disabled veterans, see Koven, 'Remembering and Dismemberment'

⁸² *The Ex-Service Man*, Vol. 1, No. 1, September 11 1918

plenty of advice in the ex-servicemen's journals about the openings and opportunities for disabled men and they were constantly urged to follow courses of training provided by local and national schemes. The importance of paid work is a central source of masculine identity, power and status; all were undermined by the disabled man's impaired capacity for work. The existence of a significant group of disabled men, potentially swelling the ranks of the unemployed, provoked anxieties which ranged beyond their well-being and loss of status and economic power. In the first issue of *The Comrades Journal*, Major Robert Mitchell, Director of Training at the Ministry of Pensions warned:

There is much risk that our disabled men, *if left to their own resources*, (my italics) will by sheer force of circumstances drift into the channels of unskilled labour, poorly paid and perpetually discontented, a danger to themselves and a menace to the nation, their discontent aggravated by the constant recollection that they owe their misery to having served their country in the hour of need.⁸³

Anxiety that veterans' discontent could be channelled into extremist agitation stemmed from the fears associated with Bolshevism but there were other implications associated with the effects of the lack of work or work which conferred neither status nor required any skill. The drift into idleness had to be guarded against at all costs indeed it was claimed that the prevention of idleness was one of the purposes of training. It also underpinned the ethos in hospitals where, during medical treatment and recovery which often required long stays, the effects of 'want of occupation' were observed with dismay. Even patients confined to bed were encouraged to spend time in pursuits such as embroidery, painting and plaque decoration in order to stave off a descent into

⁸³ *The Comrades Journal*, Vol. 1, No. 1, November 1918

idleness. Such activities with their associations with femininity were differentiated from training for an occupation. Additionally, idleness and its associated bad habits 'of getting through the day without doing anything more energetic than smoking, playing cards, listening to a concert, or if out, going to the Kinematograph show' were actively discouraged too in recovering and convalescing patients. For, it was noted, 'when the patient is in an atmosphere of work, he soon recovers some hold on himself'.⁸⁴

Once a man's body had been rendered unfit and he could no longer be considered healthy and able-bodied attention became focussed on the relationship between the body and the mind, what was described as the mental outlook of the man. The imperative was not only to reconstruct men's bodies but also to sever the interconnection between the helplessness of the body and the hopelessness of the mind because 'body and mind alike degenerate when unemployed'.⁸⁵ Despondency, despair, lack of confidence and hopelessness were the terms applied to the degeneracy of the mind. In an article in *The Ex-Service Man* a medical referee expressed his concern about 'men who have lost confidence... who have lost the will-power which brings the stiff upper lip. The recovery of a battered and broken man is a long-drawn out and dreary business.'⁸⁶ The language of degeneracy, lack of will-power, loss of confidence represented the antithesis of the construction of middle-class manliness. The cherished ideals attached to the concept were being undermined by the disabled men's loss of pride and self-esteem. What was increasingly recognised as the psychological impact of their injuries threatened

⁸⁴ Hutt, *Disabled Soldier*, pp. 78, 88

⁸⁵ *The Ex-Service Man*, Vol. 1, No. 1, September 11 1918

⁸⁶ *The Ex-Service Man*, Vol. 1, No. 2, September 25 1918

to erode the middle-class image of an independent, striving and achieving individual. The process of the reconstruction of men's bodies was shaped by representations of normative masculinity as defined by a class-specific middle-class masculinity. As the values and traditions embedded in this representation were seen to be under threat, differing responses were provoked ranging from sympathy, condescension to coercion. Moreover, the remedy was sought by individual solutions, by efforts to transform the man's 'mental outlook', in other words, to restore him to the man he was imagined to be. Some warned that sympathy would not last; the national pride which transformed disabilities, mutilations and dismemberment into 'badges of honour' would not last as 'the course of negligence on the part of the community, the public, the state and the National Government' resulting in 'the consequent degeneration of the disabled man'.⁸⁷

The emphasis on the individual's responsibility for his own mental and moral regeneration, particularly articulated in the pages of *The Ex-Service Man* and the *Comrades Journal*, militated against the collective efforts being espoused elsewhere in the publications, appealing rather to the tenets of middle-class manly individualism. While all the veterans' organisations campaigned for adequate pensions, men were warned about the demoralising effects of dependence on state provision and cautioned against taking political action to secure their claims. In an 'Open letter to a Soldier on Leaving the Army' Lt. General Sir Edward Bethune acknowledged that because of wounds or sickness men may well have lost skills permanently, nevertheless he warned:

⁸⁷ Garrard Harris, *The Redemption of the Disabled*, New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1919, p. 17

Life is hard for most of us, and you cannot expect to be granted such a pension as will keep you in idleness for the rest of your life. You must get on your perch and help yourself. Don't get impatient and mix up things by trying to set matters right by joining political bodies, supposed to be your 'very own'⁸⁸

More optimistically, the first issue of *Recalled to Life*, a journal sponsored by the Ministry of Pensions for disabled men, argued that:

Now he has a pension, and is, perhaps, inclined to look forward most of all to a continuance of relative ease coupled with greater freedom...very soon will be added to that the desire to do the best with himself as a man; for a disabled sailor or soldier is not less of a man, but more of a man than he was before the War.⁸⁹

Some efforts were made to aid recuperation by the equivalent of what would now be called self-help. Significantly, these developments were instituted not by an Englishman but 'a well-known American authority on the disabled', Douglas McMurtie of the Red Cross Institute for Crippled and Disabled Men. He reported his good results in setting up 'cripple parties', meetings where disabled men could exchange their personal experiences of disablement for, he argued:

⁸⁸ *The Ex-Service Man*, Vol. 1, No. 3, October 9 1918

⁸⁹ *Recalled to Life*, No. 1, June 1917. The journal was renamed *Reveille* under the editorship of John Galsworthy who was committed to securing just treatment for the disabled and the nation's obligation to honour its debt to its wounded men.

The greatest task in dealing with disabled men is not comprised in training, employment, provision of appliances and the like, but in putting men out of the disheartened class into the company of those who are marching forward on the high road to accomplishment. The aim is a conquest of the spirit.... Many are ashamed of their disability beaten by their handicap or deep in the slough of dependency.⁹⁰

The visible presence of disabled men's bodies contributed an added emotionally charged rhetoric into the debates and concerns about how to reabsorb such men into the labour market but financial help was far less fulsome as John Galsworthy observed:

The State, like the humblest citizen, cannot have it both ways. If it talks - as it does-, with the mouth of every public man who speaks on this subject- of heroes, and of doing all it can for them, then it must not cheese-pare as well, for that makes it ridiculous.⁹¹

Far less visible were men whose minds had been war damaged; many were literally out of sight in institutions and asylums.

Concern was expressed in the pages of *The Bulletin* particularly about the treatment of men in institutions and the relegation of fellow comrades to the level of pauper lunatics. Many recuperated at home where they made efforts towards recovery. There is very little evidence of how shell shocked men fared in the post war period for unlike the attention drawn to the physically disabled, shell shocked men remained largely invisible. However, an American study starting in 1919 studied the lives of 3,000 war neurotics in order to assess how they coped on their return. They were followed up in

⁹⁰ *The Ex-Service Man*, Vol. 1, No. 20, March 27 1919

⁹¹ *Reveille*, November 1918, p. 182

1924 -5.⁹² The study established five categories of adaptability and readjustment to work: normal, neurotic, fatigued, disabled and psychotic. The conclusions were disturbing; they estimated that 'for two-fifths of the men in 1919-20 and one-fifth in 1924-5 readaption is difficult, painful or impossible'.⁹³ A further finding was that the divorce rate was significantly 'higher in the follow-up group than all the census age groups for males in the country at large.'⁹⁴ Much attention, in pursuit of national efficiency, was focused on the rehabilitation of damaged men's masculinities as workers. Meanwhile, the effects on their families and in family relationships were obscured. This American study is rare in directing the attention to masculine familial identities as husbands and fathers and how the traumatic effects of war reverberated in the personal and intimate realm.

Shell shock with its associations of loss of self-control and self-restraint exposed emotional expressiveness which certain masculinities sought to control and repress in opposition to femininity. Other men, especially those with authority and obligation to restore men to their productive functions, could react to the blurring of gender boundaries with fear and hostility. Malingering often provided an explanatory tool while personal failure and lack of male striving could also be blamed.

An example of this can be glimpsed in a report about the efforts to settle disabled men, especially those suffering from shell shock or tuberculosis, on the land by providing them with small holdings. In a report in 1923 by the Ministry of Agriculture and

⁹² Norman Fenton, *Shell Shock and its aftermath*, London: Henry Kimpton, 1926.

⁹³ *ibid.* p. 165

⁹⁴ *ibid.* p. 144

Fisheries the failure of many of the schemes was attributed to the agricultural depression and the fact that men lacked both experience and capital which undermined their efforts.

Nonetheless, the report stated:

Fresh from the Forces, they were inclined to look upon the State or their County Council as not only their landlord, but also as their foster parent... The men have come to realise that their success or failure depends primarily on themselves and that their landlords, while willing and anxious to give them every opportunity of "making good", cannot and will not allow them to remain in occupation of their holdings indefinitely if they lack either the ability or energy to succeed.⁹⁵

Individual failure to achieve an appropriate male response to opportunities offered had implications for the national coffers:

The probability is that, owing to their disabilities (they are mostly tuberculosis and shell shock cases) and the state of the employment market generally, they will remain in any case a charge on public funds.⁹⁶

In the light of these attitudes, the emergence of an organisation dedicated to the needs of 'cases of acute nervous and mental breakdown as would otherwise be sent to asylums'⁹⁷ among ex-servicemen of all ranks is perhaps less surprising than might first appear. The women who founded the organisation were not the much-despised 'ladies'

⁹⁵ Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, *Report on the Present Position and Future Prospects of Ex-Servicemen Settled on the Land in England and Wales*, London: HMSO, 1923, p. 9

⁹⁶ *ibid.*

⁹⁷ Ex-Service Men's Welfare Society, Minute Book, May 12 1919. The organisation still exists today, re-named Combat Stress, and continues to work with veterans suffering from war trauma.

of the charitable organisations but women who were affiliated to or in contact with other women' groups, including the Women's Freedom League, the Federation of Women's Village Institutes and the Church League for Women's Suffrage League. These were women with experience of political campaigning and with the vote virtually achieved ready to play their full part in the nation. Women dominated the organisation initially, but it soon became a mixed organisation with men included on the committee. It held its first meeting on November 1 1918 and first called itself the Fellowship of Reconstruction and Welfare Bureau for ex -servicemen of all ranks and all services, their wives, widows and relatives. It finally resolved on the title of Ex- Servicemen's Welfare Society and set about trying to establish homes for the care of men suffering breakdowns. The full account of its activities cannot be told here; the significant point is that they immediately made contact with the Federation informing them of their support for soldier candidates in the forthcoming election. They appeared to have much more success in gaining support and interest from the local branches than the leadership who refused to meet with their request for a meeting on the grounds that 'it was the policy of the N. F. D. S. S. to see that the State provided the Discharged men with anything they required'.⁹⁸

The refusal to accept the organisation's offers of support demonstrates the dislike of anything which hinted at charity but also the negative aspects of the claim to comradeship. For comradeship could be politically insular, looking inwards only to the body of ex-servicemen rather than reaching into the wider community. However, there appears to have been a change of heart and a more co-operative relationship was established. In 1923, for example, the British Legion was represented at their meetings

⁹⁸ *ibid.* January 27 1919

which by this time were lobbying in protest against the 6, 000 ex-servicemen languishing in asylums.

These men represented a group of the most severely war damaged. The war damaged man was an image appearing elsewhere, in literary representations famously in Rebecca West's *Return of the Soldier* (1918), Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) and Dorothy L. Sayers *The Unpleasantness of the Belladonna Club* (1928). However, there were a group of novels written by men which were centrally concerned with the problems of reintegration of men: Warwick Deeping's *Sorrel and Son* (1923) and the war correspondent Philip Gibbs's *The Middle of the Road* (1922) are two examples. While neither of the main male protagonists, both ex-officers, are identified as suffering from shell shock specifically, their 'nervousness' contributes to their troubled sense of displacement and disorientation in the new re-ordered world. Bertram Pollard, the hero of *The Middle of the Road* is accused by his young, aristocratic wife of being 'too beastly emotional' while he himself recognises that 'he was nervy, he knew that. The war had left him all on edge'.⁹⁹ The central themes explore the gap that the war had opened up between the imagined stability of the past represented by notions of traditional English values and the new democracy, symbolised by emancipated women and an assertive working class. The ways in which the male protagonists have to negotiate their lives in the new order cuts across both class and masculinity. In both novels, the anxieties expressed by both central characters in relation to their disturbed sense of self are compounded by their fears of being superfluous and redundant in their struggle to assert their manly independence through work.

⁹⁹ Philip Gibbs, *The Middle of the Road*, London: Hutchinson, 1922, p. 9

The plight of the unemployed ex-officer captured the middle-class imagination. 'The moneyless ex-officer was a new social phenomenon in England'¹⁰⁰ as well as a cultural one, a particular class-inflected representation of wounded masculinity. The plight of the ex-officer spoke to the fears of the middle class whose position in post-war England appeared under threat, not only in the perceived precariousness of its economic security but also in the undermining of its values and traditions.¹⁰¹ Gibbs's Bertram Pollard tries to find work through his local Labour Exchange in a desperate attempt to release himself from his financial dependence on his wife. The lack of opportunities, even for a middle-class ex-officer, were frustrating and bewildering: 'I was at St. Paul's school and a year at Oxford. I'm a jolly good gunner and I was brought up as a gentleman. Hasn't England any place for my sort?... 'Impossible that he should be useless and unused!'¹⁰² *Sorrel and Son* first published in 1925 was a best-seller, running to forty-one editions also encapsulated middle-class fears of an England whose traditions and values were lost in the war. Described by its author as 'a product of the war' it extols the qualities of 'character and courage' as opposed to 'negative cynicism [which] seems to me to be a form of cowardice'.¹⁰³ The narrative traces the vicissitudes of post-war life through its hero Stephen Sorrel, an ex-officer and 'temporary gentleman'. On his return from the war, he is faced with spectre of unemployment before finally finding

¹⁰⁰ Graves and Hodge, *The Long Week-End*, p. 66

¹⁰¹ McKibbin, *The Ideologies of Class*, pp. 269-271

¹⁰² Gibbs, *The Middle of the Road*, pp. 27, 30. For an interesting discussion of Gibbs's novels and their relation to political events and contemporary social problems, see Stuart Laing 'Philip Gibbs and the Newsreel Novel', *Literature and History*, Vol. 7, No. 2, Autumn 1981

¹⁰³ Stanley J. Kunitz and Howard Haycraft, *Twentieth Century Authors: A Biographical Dictionary of Modern Literature*, New York: H. W. Wilson Co, 1942, p. 361

work as a porter in a shabby, run-down hotel. Fear haunts Sorrel and the novel; fear of economic insecurity, loss of status associated with military status as an officer: even after finding employment, 'he felt a sudden, sordid tremor of fear':

The keenness of his own anxiety was a humiliation, and he accepted the humiliation, explaining it to himself quite frankly as though he were wearing a shabby suit of clothes. He was alarmed at the possibility of his being pushed out into the street, of losing his thirty shillings, his keep and his tips.¹⁰⁴

The other sources of fear, and contempt, are personified in the predatory women, including his ex-wife, who stalk the pages and labour, in the form of the 'smelly' and dirty working classes and the grasping organised labour movement. Sorrel, the epitome of an honourable and courageous man, triumphs by exhibiting the qualities of stoicism and endurance. His careful management of his resources makes him a wealthy, independent man and more significantly, enables him to provide for his son's upward social mobility into his well-deserved place in the professional classes as a surgeon. The rugged individualism of Sorrel defeats all opposition to traditional values; even his son's lover, an emancipated woman novelist, finally agrees to the marriage and domesticity which she had eschewed. The popularity of the novel lay in its confirmation of stability; the social upheaval of war had settled back on to familiar, apparently secure, terrain underpinned by the courage and virtue of Sorrel.

While the middle classes may have gained some reassurance from such images, the search for work was becoming more desperate. The pre-occupations of the plight of

¹⁰⁴ Warwick Deeping, *Sorrell and Son*, London: Cassell and Company Ltd., 1925, 1951 edition, p. 34

the officer class, particularly the 'temporary gentlemen' status of those from the ranks, central to Warwick Deeping's novel were pre-figured in the pages of *The Ex-Service Man*. An article entitled 'The Problem of the Ex-Ranker by One of Them', which has the quality of an abbreviated short story, related the problem of return for a former salesman in a high-class store who had obtained a commission. Socialising with officers of a higher class had raised his expectations yet, unlike them he faced a return to 'dingy dwellings, the rush for the tube, the mean meals in mean restaurants, the fortnight at Margate' and the return to deference with 'the 'yes', Madam again'.¹⁰⁵ The editor added his commentary claiming that such men had displayed 'inherent qualities which make for success in any walk of life' gained as a result of their military experience. A later article condemned the 'sheer ingratitude which would be a stain on the nation' if such men who had risen from the ranks 'should find themselves back again in some obscure menial position' citing the example of a young railway-porter who had become a lieutenant: 'I hate the thought that that man might again have to go back to his luggage-carrying and tip-receiving.'¹⁰⁶ Servility and servitude fitted ill with the officer status acquired in the army. Aspirations that wartime status would be confirmed at home were often disappointing and some ex-officers experienced being demobilised and de-officered. Wartime status carried little weight in civilian society.¹⁰⁷ Instead, it appeared to disadvantage not only ex-officers but all ranks as they pursued their search for work; a search that created hostility between ex-servicemen and trade unions and women, both of

¹⁰⁵ *The Ex-Service Man*, Vol. 1, No. 5, November 6 1918

¹⁰⁶ *The Ex-Service Man*, Vol. 1, No. 8, December 18 1918

¹⁰⁷ See Martin Petter, 'Temporary Gentlemen in the aftermath of the Great War: Rank, status and the ex-officer problem', *Historical Journal*, Vol. 37, No. 1, 1994

which groups were perceived as obstructionist in ex-servicemen's search for work and their entitlement to special preference.

The opportunities for finding work were decreasing rapidly in 1920. In the late spring the post-war boom collapsed resulting in industrial stagnation and mass unemployment and by December the unemployed total had risen to 540,000. By the summer of 1921, after the coal strike, the unemployed total exceeded 2 million.¹⁰⁸ Ex-servicemen were inevitably adversely affected and unemployment among them became an urgent issue as well a source of demoralisation and bitterness. Despite the efforts of a range of government departments, voluntary organisations and the men themselves, in July 1922 the British Legion estimated that ex-servicemen represented over a quarter of the unemployed male workforce.

The search for work was an individual endeavour as well the impetus for collective effort. The desperation experienced by lack of success was recorded in the final entry in a diary dated May 22 1920. The writer recorded that, since his discharge from the army, he had found it impossible to find work; 'they don't seem to want anything to do with anyone who served in the war'. He had been a regular soldier before the war and therefore had no trade; he had been discharged from the army on medical grounds and had spent time in a mental hospital. He was particularly bitter about those who had kept their jobs throughout the war:

¹⁰⁸ Morgan, *Consensus and Disunity*, pp. 256-7

I cannot understand why they never went out to France etc. because they were as fit as I was, of that I am certain and they still have their jobs but us with no trades etc. do not seem to be wanted at all.¹⁰⁹

Young men whose rite of passage into manhood was combat rather than an apprenticeship were especially vulnerable to post war unemployment:

The youth had become a man but with only the capabilities of a youth to meet adult realities in civvy street. Although an expert machine gunner, I was a numbskull so far as any trade or craft was concerned... I joined the queues for jobs as messengers, window cleaners and scullions. It was a complete let down for thousands like me, and for some young officers too.¹¹⁰

Their lack of experience and trade was noted in several government reports concerned with the training and employment of ex-servicemen The Committee of Re-Employment of Ex-Service Men reported that:

A considerable number of the unemployed ex-servicemen are between the ages of 19 and 25; they had acquired little or no experience in any trade before joining the Forces. They are consequently not able to offer an adequate return for a skilled or semi-skilled man's wage and are therefore somewhat handicapped when seeking employment.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ W. F. West, IWM 92/10/1

¹¹⁰ George Coppard, *With a machine gun to Cambrai: the tale of a young Tommy in Kitchener's army, 1914-18*, London: HMSO, 1969, p. 133

¹¹¹ Committee on the Re-Employment of Ex-Service Men: Interim Report, 12 August 1920, London: HMSO, 1920, p. 3

In the absence of the availability of work, skilled or even unskilled, some ex-servicemen resorted to novel strategies for survival such as selling cards on which were written verses about the plight of unemployed ex-servicemen. One example, *The Unemployed Ex-Soldiers' Appeal*, was penned by Private Harris of the Royal West Kent regiment which began:

Kind friends and good people I am now on my way
Travelling the country without any pay

and concluded in the last verse:

Meantime, I must live the best way I can;
And make my appeal to every good man
So just buy a copy and try if you please,
My desires, my wishes, my wants to appease.¹¹²

The sight of men tramping through the country was greeted with anger and dismay. A letter to the *Comrades Journal* from the Secretary of the Derby branch reported receiving calls from 'out-of-work ex-servicemen who are destitute and tramping from town to town in an endeavour to obtain work.'¹¹³

Other men sought recourse to their problems by contacting their old officers who would have had connections within the class who employed the services of chauffeurs, drivers, gardeners and so on.¹¹⁴ Such appeals probably prompted the letter from a Captain of a London regiment, now living in Surrey, who wrote to the *St. Pancreas*

¹¹² This is one of the collection of eighteen broadsides purchased in the streets of London between 1920 and 1931 and deposited in the British Library in 1944 by Margaret Steppart

¹¹³ *The Comrades Journal*, April 1921

¹¹⁴ Sir Ian Hamilton, for example, regularly received correspondence from ex-servicemen well into the 1920s. Hamilton papers 11/1/5

Gazette requesting help from local employers in finding employment for his lads from St. Pancras, Kentish Town and Marylebone. He provided an example:

Pte. F - has been out of work for some time, and is so reduced in circumstances that he has had to sell part of his home to keep his wife and himself and pay the rent. He was in my company during the war and was one of the smartest lads in it - honest, a real hard worker, and thoroughly willing.¹¹⁵

Paternalism structures the class relationship between the officer and his lads; the 'willing' man is an obedient, deferential working-class man. Elsewhere, some of the 'lads' were taking matters into their own hands. A joint committee meeting of the St. Pancras branches of the Comrades and Federation was organised in September 1920 to discuss the problem of the unemployed. At the meeting, they decided to call a conference with local employers to discuss relief works to ensure employment in the winter. They also called for employment opportunities in the borough departments since 'we are of the opinion that ex-servicemen should fill those positions now held by women and we demand that such action be taken as early as possible.'¹¹⁶ The collaboration between the St. Pancras Comrades and Federation members is interesting; the rivalries fought over in the pages of the publications were of less significance than joint efforts to find work. Moreover, what united them was the presence of women in jobs that ex-servicemen, in particular, the disabled, were entitled to.

As their expectations of preferential treatment were unforthcoming, antagonism towards women, especially in local government posts, developed. The expansion of

¹¹⁵ *St. Pancras Gazette*, March 26 1920

¹¹⁶ *St. Pancras Gazette*, September 3 1920

women clerks had started before the war and most were employed by commercial firms, the Civil Service and local government, in areas which had become associated with 'women's work' rather than 'men's work'¹¹⁷ Their public presence in local government jobs provoked calls for their dismissal and for them to return to domestic work, seen as a more appropriate area of women's employment. To be asking for work in areas now more associated with the feminine was another blow to masculine self-esteem as working-class masculinities are frequently embodied in physical strength. For a disabled man, the assignment to women's work or 'soft' jobs was doubly humiliating.

Antagonism to women workers is expressed in the publications, for example, 'those women you dreamed of, ethereal visions, well, they've got your job'¹¹⁸ usually referred to young women, the flappers. There is far less misogyny and hostility expressed than might have been expected from other accounts of the period.¹¹⁹ Women workers were perceived as obstructionist but some women workers were the widows of dead comrades and therefore obliged to earn their livings and this was acknowledged in the occasional references to women. Antagonism towards other men as expressed in the publications is as strong, if not more so, than sexual antagonism.

The hostility expressed by the Association of Ex - Civil Servants to both women and other men, especially non-combatants, flows in equal measure. The Association was founded in 1920 by nine ex-servicemen described as 'earnest, determined and far-

¹¹⁷ See Meta Zimmeck, 'Jobs for the Girls: The expansion of clerical work for women, 1850-1914' in Angela V. John (ed.), *Unequal Opportunities*, Oxford; Basil Blackwell, 1986

¹¹⁸ *The Comrades Journal*, July 1919.

¹¹⁹ See Kent, *Making Peace*, chapter 5 which describes women's view of men returning from war

seeing'.¹²⁰ They were equally hostile to the women who had taken their place during the war and who remained in their posts as they were to the Temporaries, men who were 'conchies' or non-combatants. Both threatened their jobs and their opportunities for promotion: 'men who stayed at home and were then their juniors, while they fought had stepped into their shoes or become their superiors.'¹²¹

The relationship between ex-servicemen and trade unionists was complex and contradictory, deserving of a much more detailed analysis than is possible here. The demarcations between skills and regulated entry into certain trades and occupations which trade unions had secured were often seen in some sections of the veterans movement as deliberate obstructionism. In the *Comrades Journal* and *The Ex-Service Man* views about the selfishness of trade unionists, usually depicted as non-combatants, were given full vent, described in one article as:

false individuals who seem to be imagine that the sacrifice of
of blood and treason of the last five years has been made
solely to establish an anarchical Trade Unionism.¹²²

A contradictory view was expressed two weeks later when *The Ex-Service Man* printed a letter from a member of the NUX arguing that organising outside the Labour movement would give

¹²⁰ Association of Ex-Service Civil Servants, *Milestones in our Fight for Justice* leaflet, n.d

¹²¹ *ibid.* p. 4

¹²² *The Ex-Service Man*, Vol. 1, No. 40, August 16 1919

the anti-Labour class a glorious opportunity to injure the cause of organised Labour by 'playing off' the ex-servicemen against the trade unions and the trade unions against the ex-servicemen.¹²³

The NUX worked with trade unionists and women, indeed women were included in the membership. For example, in an account in the local paper about the St. Pancras Council of Action which was established to protest against the increase in the cost of living and to demand the repeal of the Rents Increase Act, the NUX was among the list of participants which also included representatives of trade unions, the ILP, NUX and the Railway Women's Guild. The picture of the relationship between the unions and ex-servicemen is more complicated when turning to the strength of union organisation in different trades and in different geographical areas. Earlier we saw the united efforts of the agricultural workers' unions and ex-servicemen in rural Shropshire. In contrast, Geoffrey Moorhouse's study of Bury cites the example of the Lancashire and Cheshire Miners Federation's refusal to employ anyone who had not been a skilled miner before the war.¹²⁴

For ex-service trade unionists and non-unionists alike, some of their attitudes to the union movement were forged pre-war and then further shaped during the war itself. For some men involved in combat on the battlefields news of strikes at home were received with varying degrees of antagonism and hostility. Strikers were men who not only men who had escaped the sufferings of war but those who were also causing further

¹²³ *The Ex-Service Man*, Vol. 1, No. 44, August 30 1919

¹²⁴ Geoffrey Moorhouse, *Hell's Foundations*, London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1992, p. 114

disruption and privation at home. Moreover, as some ex-servicemen were reduced to begging on the streets, a shameful act, they looked upon trade unionists in work as men who belittled their own sense of the self worth. On their return, veterans had found the trade union movement occupying a different relation to the state and the government. Trade union membership had grown steadily during the war from four million in 1914 to six and a half million in 1918. The introduction of the Treasury Agreement and the Munitions Acts had drawn concessions from trade unionists in relation to the dilution of skills and the putting aside of certain trade practices. The *Manchester Guardian*, for example, expressed some sympathy with the concessions made by trade unionists during the war while at the same time, pointing to future difficulties:

The government induced them to surrender customs and practices that were all-important in their eyes, as the charter which they and their forefathers had won by generations of struggle and sacrifice... the ordinary workman believes that he will find himself at the end of the war with a flood of non-unionised labour in the workshops with his trade union rights lost and a very doubtful prospect of recovering those rights.¹²⁵

Maintaining those rights, however, for some veterans constituted merely the acts of selfish men, men over whom ex-servicemen could claim moral superiority as the President of the Association articulated at the Birmingham Conference in 1919. What the country needed, he argued, was 'real, live men, real unselfish men, real genuine men... who will inspire mankind with the ability of their example.'¹²⁶ Being an ex-

¹²⁵ *Manchester Guardian*, October 14 1918

¹²⁶ *The Ex-Service Man*, Vol. 2, No. 58, December 13 1919

serviceman might bestow some moral authority but how this might be practically achieved was left open to question.

Trades unions were under pressure from sources other than sections of the veteran's movement. The *British Trades Union Review* reported on the debates in the House Commons when trade unionists came under attack. Throughout 1920 and 1921 the re-employment of ex-servicemen was discussed in regular columns in the *British Trades Union Review*. One of the concerns expressed was that the training being offered ex-servicemen was often in already overcrowded trades or where there were few future prospects owing to the decline in trade. In 1921 a pamphlet, *Trade Unions and the Ex-Service Man* was published, written by Fred Bramley, Assistant Secretary, Parliamentary Committee, Trades Union Congress, which systematically answered the criticisms levelled at the labour movement, concluding that 'the conspiracy to divide the workers of the country, the attempt to antagonise the ex-servicemen against their fellows, to protect vested interests by the employers... will fail if the facts are carefully considered.'¹²⁷ A government report of 1920 shared the same conclusions, stating that, with a few exceptions, the trade unions had secured the reinstatement of ex-servicemen in their pre-war employment as well as co-operating in ensuring opportunities for the disabled.¹²⁸

As unemployment began to rise, ex-servicemen became a visible presence in the beginnings of an unemployed workers movement. The presence of ex-servicemen and women on the first marches of the Unemployed Workers Movement (NUWM) led by

¹²⁷ Fred Bramley, *Trade Unions and the Ex-Service Men*, London: Caledonian Press, 1921, p. 20

¹²⁸ Committee on the Re-employment of Ex-Service Men, Interim Report, London: HMSO, 1920, p. 4

Wal Hannington have been well-documented.¹²⁹ Wal Hannington found support from members of the NUX in St. Pancras. In a report on a court case three members of the NUX were summoned to court charged with carrying collecting boxes without a permit. They had marched with fifty other men to the local Labour Exchange carrying a red banner bearing the words 'St. Pancras Unemployed'. They were selling scented cards advertising a certain scent with the words National Union of Ex-Service Men - St. Pancras Branch - Organising Fund - Price One Penny. Wal Hannington was another defendant accused of aiding and abetting. During the case he claimed to be the Secretary of the organisation.¹³⁰

In the histories of the veterans' movement the NUX appears to have disbanded. When the other organisations eventually achieved unity and formed the British Legion the NUX refused to join, not that their political stance was welcomed. However, some ex-members appear to have relinquished their ex-servicemen's identities to join with the unemployed movement. *Out of Work*, published by the London District Council of the Unemployed contains references to unemployed ex-servicemen in its organisation. As unemployed men, their claim to be citizens and workers was unachievable, nevertheless the identity constructed within the ex-servicemen's organisations proved too constraining. Other ex-servicemen clearly felt the same.

The point at which the ex-servicemen's organisations amalgamated to form the small membership of the British Legion intersected with a growing sense of alienation

¹²⁹ Wal Hannington, *Unemployed Struggles 1919-1936: My Life and Struggles Amongst the Unemployed*, 1936, London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1979

¹³⁰ *St. Pancras Gazette*, November 26 1920

from the identity as an ex-serviceman. The result of the efforts to keep men out of party politics, while espousing a conservative agenda, left the movement directionless with no clear aims and objectives except, as one veteran expressed it above, 'a policy of complaints.'

In 1921 the *Comrades Journal* identified 'lions to conquer' which were the apathy among ex-servicemen, a growing public weariness with anything to do with war and the feelings among men who did not fight of 'secret jealousy of the man who went through Hell a dozen times for him'.¹³¹ The claim of moral superiority over other men proved not only divisive but also located ex-servicemen's identities in the past while providing no masculine agency in the present. It engendered the forms of passivity and abjection which emerged at times in the columns of the publications. 'Timidity' was how it was perceived by the Secretary of the NUX, Ernest Mander: 'generally speaking, the main characteristics of the ex-servicemen has been their timidity.'¹³² He continued: 'they are beginning to realise the futility of begging with feeble, hesitating voices for trivial concessions'.¹³³ Instead, he saw signs of change. How those changes were manifested in the construction of masculinities in the inter war years is open to question.

¹³¹ *Comrades Journal*, January 1921

¹³² *New World*, No. 5, February 1920

¹³³ *ibid.*

CONCLUSION

This study has traced the journey of British men from civilian to soldier and back to the resumption of civilian status. The First World War brought social upheaval in its wake; part of that turmoil was the disordering of gender relations and the central pre-occupation of this study has been with masculinity. The questions of how Victorian and Edwardian codes of masculinity were disturbed by the war and the ways in which masculinities were re-established have framed this study. The parameters were drawn by focussing on the formation and re-formation of masculine identities of men who became soldiers, not as career soldiers but for the duration of the war only. War offered the opportunity for men and their manhood to be, in Christopher Isherwood's words, 'put to the test'.¹

The starting point of this thesis was the stories men narrated about their war experiences, predominantly on the Western Front. The stories men wrote, often revised and re-written long after the war was over, were not part of the official record; analyses of military strategies, of battles won and lost and the various accumulations of official statistics were for others to document and record. Soldiers' stories are fragmentary, full of disconnected incidents and random images in much the same way as the soldier experiences battle. As the military historian, John Keegan observes, a soldier has no well-ordered or clear-cut vision in war; 'battle, for him, takes place in a wildly unstable physical environment'.² Incidents and images, now reconstructed in memory, are drawn

¹ Christopher Isherwood, *Lions and Shadows*, London: Hogarth Press, 1938, p. 16

² J. Keegan, *The Face of Battle*, London: Jonathan Cape, 1976, p. 47

together into narrative form in the process of telling the story and creating an account of the past. The unstable external environment was mirrored by equally unstable mental states as a soldier experienced a range of emotions from 'boredom, exultation, panic, fear, anger, sorrow, bewilderment, even that sublime emotion we call courage'.³ War afforded men the opportunity for emotional expressiveness usually associated with the feminine. It was the intense emotional experiences of war which continued to haunt, as some men expressed it. They returned, in their memories, driving the compulsion to re-tell their stories. They were attempts to find meaning, to make sense of the experience of war in order to achieve some form of psychological composure. The compulsion to re-tell stories reveals the struggle to find a coherent narrative and a coherent self; soldiers' stories frequently demonstrated the inability to do so. Remembering could invoke painful memories, such as the humiliations associated with military discipline or recall horrific images of death and dismemberment. Some men spent years revising and revising their memoirs - for them psychological composure was elusive.

Thus memoirs shed light on the unconscious processes involved in structuring memory and masculine identities. They also make visible the ambivalences and conflicts about war experience and masculinity. What was revealed was the disruptions the war effected on men's sense of themselves and how they imagined their masculine identities as soldiers. In the process, they experienced a profound sense of dislocation from their previous selves which they articulated in various ways: in angry or sorrowful expressions of the loss of manhood and being made 'strange', in descriptions of irrational feelings and inexplicable changes of mood and in the use of metaphors of burrowing animals.

³ *ibid.*

Fear, and the fear of fear, dominated their thoughts and states of feeling. More troublingly, these affective states represented the antithesis of the masculine qualities associated with heroism and bravery embodied in the soldier. Instead, men experienced times when competency and mastery were undermined, the capacity for endurance was stretched to the limit and the ability to maintain self-control and fearlessness in the face of danger were constantly under threat. Being a soldier did not confer a secure masculine identity. Managing the external terrors and horrors of mechanised warfare, trench life and the apparent limitless slaughter and mutilation with the inner turmoils which were created was a process in which all servicemen were engaged.

Nevertheless, reactions were never unitary and emotional responses to war experience involved remembering *and* forgetting. Individual male subjectivities which are uncovered by these stories contribute to an understanding of the structuring of male identities. They can also shed light on the public record, and indeed on later interpretations. The profound sense of dislocation in a large body of men had ramifications beyond individual psyches, extending into the social world. For example, the problems associated with the reintegration of men with psychical and psychic wounds exposed their vulnerability in relation to other men and, disturbingly, to women. Shell shock was a further manifestation.

The evidence of individual masculine instabilities which emerged from the personal narratives examined in Chapter One became the focus for public anxieties about traditional codes about shell shock. War experiences were traumatic; substantial numbers of men finally succumbed to breakdown during the war or during the following years, some did not. In 1932 36% of British veterans receiving disability pensions were

listed as psychiatric casualties of war.⁴ The renewed interest in the study of shell shock has coincided with the concept of trauma which developed in the 1980s in relation to the psychological effects of war on Vietnam veterans. The use of the term has extended beyond war neuroses to include the effects on civilian populations from natural disasters, accidents and domestic and sexual abuse. While its popular usage and the accompanying term, post-traumatic stress disorder, are the subject of debate and contention, nevertheless the concept of trauma is a useful tool for enhancing our understanding of the transformative effects on men at war.

The incidence of shell shock and its implications for military efficiency, discipline and morale caused alarm in the army hierarchy. Moreover, it removed men from the front line, a situation which became pressing at times of acute manpower shortage. The full force of the military's coercive and disciplinary powers, often in the form of courts-martial, were brought to bear against the exceptional displays of perceived cowardice. Shell shock disturbed the previously secure opposition between courage and cowardice: between the brave heroic man and the coward. Courage was one of the qualities embedded in hegemonic masculinity constructed primarily in the public schools of the nineteenth century which extolled character and duty. The loss of reason and self-control exhibited by shell shocked men was the antithesis of a masculine model which was constructed on rationality, self-control and endurance. Failure to perform military duties was interpreted as a sign of want of character. Victorian and Edwardian notions of degenerate types of men, the 'other' - non-respectable working-class men, homosexuals, artists, aliens- against which traditional masculinity defined itself were

⁴ Eric Leed, *No Man's Land*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979, p. 185

paraded in order to account for the increasing numbers suffering from shell shock. The spectacle of breakdown among the officer class unravelled such certainties. Assumed masculine moral qualities embodied in character and willpower underpinned the tenacious attempts to uphold them. They also informed the attitudes and the practices of some medical men when faced with the presumed lack exhibited by the patients. These moral qualities underpinned some of the medical diagnoses and treatment utilised by military doctors whose role was to 'cure' men and render them fit to return to duty. Medical diagnoses competed with psychological interpretations which, by revealing unconscious processes, provoked further anxieties and insecurities about conceptions of masculinity associated with rationality and self-control. More disturbingly, the Report of the War Office Committee of Enquiry into 'Shell-Shock' in 1922 failed to deliver a clear-cut definition of cowardice and courage despite the evidence of eminent witnesses from the military and medical establishments including some from shell shocked men.

Competing military and medical representations of the shell shocked man were examined in order to explore some of the ways in which anxieties about masculine identities emerged as a result of the war but were also projected into the post war period. However, my emphasis on subjective experiences led me to pursue a further line of enquiry. Set against the official representations, I looked for evidence of alternative representations of the shell shocked man which appeared in personal testimonies and examined how these were interpreted. The personal testimonies, especially perceptible in the written memoirs, are inflected with expressions of trauma. The loss of bodily and psychological control was profoundly disturbing to those who witnessed a man suffering:

disturbances reverberate in the vivid imagery found in the memoirs: as one man insisted 'war makes sane men mad.'⁵

In many of the memoirs, the shell shocked man is a 'brave man' pushed beyond the limits of his endurance. The writers identify with him while at the same time experiencing fear, fear that they might do the same. The processes, physical and psychological, by which men become 'mad' can be traced in the fragmentary reflections and descriptions which fill the personal accounts. The physical hardships and privations are set out alongside, for example, the humiliations of military discipline, the presence of unburied corpses which transgress the taboos of any society and the desires and prohibitions evoked in the male homosocial world of the front. There are, inevitably references to men 'swinging the lead', malingering, but from the evidence found here, moral judgements of shell shocked men are few and far between.

The memoirs of doctors serving with the R. A. M. C. present a more class-based perspective. Refusing shell shock as a medically definable disease they turned to malingering as an explanation. However, for some, in the doctor/patient relationship, categories of degeneracy became harder to sustain and, as they admit in their accounts, came to modify their opinions. Furthermore, their medical evidence was called for in courts-martial: they could hold the balance between life and the firing squad. It is, perhaps significant that two R.A.M.C. doctors who found themselves in this situation provide examples of the compulsion to revisit, revise and rewrite their memoirs decades after the war; one wrote his preface in 1958, the other in 1964. The division between

⁵ Hiram Sturdy, IWM Con Shelf

war and peace did not represent a decisive break; rather the post-war lives of many ex-servicemen and others were led on the borderland; in the shadow of war.

The subject of return formed the second part of this study. Many ex-servicemen returned bearing physical and psychic wounds and, from the evidence in Chapter One, a sense of dislocation from the self and from those at home. As ex-servicemen were discharged and demobilised, charities, voluntary organisations, government departments and state institutions were mobilised to deal with the problems of reintegration. Dependence on charitable efforts, inadequate pension provision, poor medical treatment and training and employment opportunities spurred veterans to take action to remedy their grievances.

Associations of ex-servicemen were formed during and after the war with the objectives of securing justice for ex-servicemen and protecting the rights of widows and children of the dead. In 1921, the three main organisations united to form the British Legion. Membership of the Legion was small, never representing more than 20% of ex-servicemen and usually only 10%. It has been characterised as conservative and as having limited political influence. However, the veterans movement prior to amalgamation has afforded a more complex and nuanced perspective on the collectivity of men who had become *ex-servicemen*. The thesis moves, then, between a study of individual subjectivities and public masculinities, focussing on the meanings attached to an ex-serviceman identity and how this was contested within and between the organisations. The largely neglected publications of the ex-servicemen's movement proved a surprisingly rich source for exploring contending masculinities and how they were given expression, not only in the actions of the organisations, but also in the written word in the editorials, articles and correspondence columns of the publications.

The examination of the differing origins, formation and structures of the associations demonstrated their differing political and class allegiances and the tensions and rivalries generated between them. Nevertheless, the notion of comradeship as an organising principle was shared. It was demonstrated in the shared obligation to honour dead comrades understood as a sacred trust bestowed on the living. It also represented a bond between men with shared experiences and memories of war. Comradeship, however indefinable, could represent what Prost, in his study of French veterans, has called the 'veteran spirit'.⁶ It was, however, inflected with different political meanings; on the one hand, for the conservative wing of the movement it represented political consensus and class harmony. As such, it was utilised to contain ex-servicemen and to ensure their political neutrality. It was perceived as political emasculation and a denial of their rights of citizenship recently gained. On the other hand, comradeship signified the struggle between capital and labour and class antagonism. It also meant comradeship with other workers outside the body defining themselves as ex-servicemen.

The relationship between the leadership and its membership, especially in the Federation, became strained. However, the activities of the local branches, some of which are documented in the journals, display a certain amount of autonomy. This suggests that the picture of the national movement may need to be modified by more local studies. Nicholas Mansfield's research on English farmworkers points to the productive alliances between trade unionists and ex-servicemen but also to the increasing conservatism of some of the rural branches coupled with a declining Federation

⁶ Antoine Prost, *In the Wake of War*, Oxford: Berg, 1992, p. 98

membership.⁷ Similarly, Geoffrey Moorhouse's fascinating study of Bury⁸ illuminates the tensions in the position of ex-servicemen returning to their home town especially in the labour market. Furthermore, his careful examination of the local press demonstrates some of the conflicts and instabilities in the domestic sphere. A fruitful area of further research would focus on the family and domesticity. Feminist historians have examined the heightened emphasis on motherhood in the inter-war and have offered important insights into the varying experiences of wives and mothers in the post-war period. The instabilities of masculine identities generated by war points to a further productive area of research into how ex-servicemen renegotiated their roles as husbands and fathers in the private, domestic sphere in the more feminised and conservative culture of the inter war years.

The resumption of their roles as breadwinners and independent wage earners became an increasing problem for ex-servicemen. Despite their appeals for preferential treatment in employment and their efforts to achieve training and employment opportunities for the disabled, ex-servicemen represented a significant percentage of the increasing numbers of unemployed in the 1920s. This represented a bitter outcome of the promises of reconstruction and a 'land fit for heroes'. The problem of unemployment fuelled ex-servicemen's anger and frustration which was vented both at women and at other men. The humiliations of their position measured against other men and women was signified by wounded masculine pride and emasculation. Disillusionment and

⁷ Nicholas Mansfield, *English Farmworkers and Local Patriotism, 1900-1930*, Aldershot: Aldgate, 2001, pp. 148-154

⁸ Geoffrey Moorhouse, *Hell's Foundations*, London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1992

despair are tones which surface in the publications of the ex-servicemen's organisations, evidence of frustration and hopes dashed.

However, this also reflects the refusal by the leadership of the movement to develop a coherent political programme and strategy. Instead, efforts to contain ex-servicemen, partly as a response to fears being expressed about their potential for violence and revolutionary activities, undermined their masculine agency, mirroring what many men, especially in the ranks, had experienced in the war. The identity attached to that of an ex-serviceman was passive endurance. My conclusion is that it was repudiated by many; some to retreat to domesticity or a quiet life of recuperation. Others, such as those who appear in the records of the unemployment movement, attempted to secure a better future which had been an early vision of the veterans movement which expressed the hopes and desires of ex-servicemen to play a part in the reconstruction of the nation at peace. Others looked to the Labour Party for hope of a more democratic future. The failure of the ex-servicemen's movement was that, at a crucial moment of transformation and restructuring after the war, it tried to contain men within an identity forged in the past and therefore resisted the possibility of change and alternative imaginings of masculinity.

Nevertheless, it was not easily attained for as Charles Carrington wrote:

For long I lived a double life between the external world of the nineteen-twenties and the inner world of war which was neverlong out of mind.⁹

⁹ Charles Carrington, *Soldiers from the Wars Returning*, London: Hutchinson, 1965, p. 252

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