



## C R M F Cruttwell (1887-1941) - Oxford historian. Participant and chronicler of the Great War

by Philip Dutton

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*Charles Robert Mowbray Fraser Cruttwell was an Oxford historian and academic. During the war, he served in Belgium and France until he was declared unfit for general service, and recommended for light duties at home. After the war, he returned to academic life and published a number of books, most notably ['A History of the Great War 1914-1918'](#). This post offers an introduction to Cruttwell and his work.*

In the cold spring of 1915, not long after the arrival of the men of 1/4<sup>th</sup> Battalion of the Royal Berkshire Regiment in France[1], their presence in that country was, somewhat surprisingly (at least to English ears), aggressively questioned by a local priest. In place of the more customary speech of welcome the cleric regaled its astonished Officers with a diatribe in which he loudly declared that the war in which they were now involved was primarily the consequence of the selfish, economically motivated, British desire to defeat Germany and 'take over' her markets. Understandably nonplussed by this partial version of events (and one that ignored the many selfless attitudes that had motivated the 'Terriers' to serve overseas) a Second Lieutenant (in civil life a history lecturer at Oxford University) was summoned to refute the disaffected cleric. Although this confrontation was not recorded in the Battalion War Diary (and understandably so) we have it on good authority the Lieutenant emphatically rebutted the priest's argument, and countered powerfully with the thesis that '*the French Army had not been defeated but had 'run away' and that we had arrived to bolster its morale.*'[2] The words were spoken by Lt C R M F Cruttwell and the context represented a conjunction of his roles as participant in and interpreter of an historical event that would claim his attention for the rest of his life.

### Cruttwell ' a short biography

The son of the former headmaster of Malvern, Canon C T Cruttwell and his wife Annie Maud (daughter of the Conservative MP Sir John Mowbray), **Charles Robert Mowbray Fraser Cruttwell** was born on 23 May 1887. He attended Rugby School and was a contemporary of Geoffrey Keynes and Rupert Brooke, the future poet, whom he knew.[3] In 1906 he won a scholarship to Queen's College, Oxford where he worked diligently and with great success 'winning first classes in Classical Moderations and Greats and a First in History. In November 1911 he became a Fellow of All Souls and took up History tutorial work at Hertford College. Following the outbreak of war he was gazetted, as a rather elderly subaltern (aged 27), to the 1/4<sup>th</sup> Battalion, The Royal Berkshire Regiment, a Territorial Force battalion in which his brother, George, was already serving as an officer (a factor very probably influencing his choice of unit). He served in France and Flanders from 31st March 1915, with notable stays early on in or near Ploegsteert Wood and, later, from July 1915, further south, in the Somme area, near Hbuterne, in trenches formerly occupied by the French - opposite the German-held fortified village of Gommecourt. His trench service (during which he received various mentions in the Battalion War Diary for patrols in No Man's Land) resulted in him developing myalgia and exacerbating his constitutional

pre-disposition to rheumatics. On leave in early 1916, and following a medical board in late January, he was declared unfit for general service, and recommended for light duties at home. Between January 1916 and August 1917 (during which period his condition fluctuated) he was regularly re-assessed by medical boards; he eventually (August 1917) took up an instructor's role with 4<sup>th</sup> Officer Cadet Battalion, Oxford. His intellectual gifts were not ignored and in April 1918 he was sent to assist H W V Temperley in the Intelligence Department of the War Office (M.I.E.2), where he remained until demobilization.[4] He returned to Hertford College in 1919 and the following year was appointed Dean. In these immediate post-war years he helped in the production of the *'History of the Peace Conference'* (writing the section on Alsace-Lorraine) and he also wrote an excellent short war history of his battalion, *'The War Service of the 1/4<sup>th</sup> Royal Berkshire Regiment (T.F.)'* published in 1922.[5]

His history teaching liberally embraced historical geography and political science, and although possessing a gruff exterior and an ex-soldier's capacity for picturesque language, was more admired and respected by his students than his most famous pupil's - Evelyn Waugh - infamous caricature appreciations of him might convey. [6] He also became deeply and conscientiously involved with the administration of the University. He was appointed Principal of Hertford in 1930. But almost certainly the physical strains and emotional stresses of his war service took their insidious toll. Over time, aspects of his character and behaviour - displays of irritability, eccentricity and impatience - suggest that the long shadow of the trenches increasingly darkened his mood, especially so during the late 1930s. It is not impossible that he may have experienced some sort of delayed reaction to his wartime experiences, at the very least a form of nervous exhaustion 'a variant of what we now might call 'PTS' disorder' a condition that is more willingly and openly acknowledged today. Ill-health forced him to resign as the Head of his College in 1939 and the tragic (and personally distressing) last months of his life were spent in the recently opened Burden Neurological Institute, Stapleton, near Bristol[7]. He died in obscurity at the age of 53, on 15 March 1941. Although a likely long-distance casualty of the conflict, many positive aspects of his communal war experiences on the Western Front informed the writing of his epic history, notably his breadth of vision and sympathy for ordinary soldiers and citizens caught up in its tumultuous events.

### **Cruttwell's *'History of the Great War 1914-1918'* (OUP, 1934)**

Writing in 1972 about the origins of his own single volume history of the First World War, *'Great Britain and the War of 1914-1918'*, Sir Llewellyn Woodward made clear his motivation: *'I have written it because, with one exception, the war histories which I have read do not answer the questions I would put to them. The exception is C R M F Cruttwell's 'History of the Great War', written over thirty years ago, and covering all the battle-fronts? I think it the most profound study of any war in modern times.'*

On its publication in 1934 positive endorsements for Cruttwell's history came thick and fast - notably from the *Times Literary Supplement*, the *Spectator* and the *'Manchester Guardian'*. All were agreed on the work's essential fine qualities: its excellent and clearly crafted concision (655 pages including appendices and index for the 1936 second edition) and supreme readability, a consequence of the writer's mastery of his sources and literary skill. But not all authorities were unanimous in their praise 'the review of the Royal United Services Institution was notably critical, and while admitting the history was 'entertaining?', more loudly proclaimed its dissatisfactions centring on: the view that the author had not consulted an adequate number of authoritative foreign sources; that the account of the Battle of Jutland was 'tendentious' and, perhaps more damningly, the writing was considered of poor quality. In contrast, the *Naval Review* 'although critical of Cruttwell's overall underplaying of the importance of the war at sea, regarded his account of the Battle of Jutland as admirable: *'His descriptions of actual fighting at sea are complete, skilful and readable. In particular, his description of the Battle of Jutland is well-balanced and impartial?'*[8] and fulsome praise was heaped on Cruttwell's descriptive powers, and his brilliant summary character analyses of the War's principal military and political leaders. In the final paragraph the naval reviewer commended the work *'for those who wish to gain a clear but not too detailed idea of the general course of the war, and of the relations of the different parts of it to one another, the book should be invaluable*

[9]

From the outset Cruttwell never claimed that his history was fully comprehensive ' no single volume could ever be so ' and in his Preface he gracefully acknowledged its omissions: '*it deals neither with its causes remote or immediate, nor with the so-called settlement which followed?no account is given of the campaigns in Africa, of the civil war and foreign interventions in Russia after the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, or of the Irish rebellion, while the internal history of the belligerent countries is very summarily and imperfectly sketched*'. [10] Nor is it flawless [11]. At times, the tone is high-handed and sardonic. Notably, his depictions of certain national stereotypes fall short of civility. His portrait of the Rumanian officer class in Bucharest in 1916, when that country entered the war in support of the Allies, was subject to a particularly ironic, if at times amusing, scrutiny. But in its claim to present '*the general reader with an accurate, intelligible and interesting account of the greatest conflict between civilized states?*' [12] Cruttwell was, overall, entirely successful.

This success was based on the descriptive power of his narratives; his lively critical awareness and the insights derived from his own personal experiences of war.

**Cruttwell's narratives** are lucid, dramatic and memorable. If his unit history was a close-up record of a Territorial Battalion at war displaying all the limited horizons of its trench-bound context, his 'Great War' history was stupendous in the breadth and range of its vision, and sometime reads like an epic novel. His appreciation of geography and topography served him well, positively informing his comments and analysis of strategic decisions and the actual fighting. The topographical contextualisation, for example, of the Gallipoli campaign and the battles for Verdun are supremely well done. [13]. His language is engagingly literary - picturesque or even poetic - as enemies 'prowl?', 'lurk' and 'scowl?'; or disturbingly evocative, e.g. in his appreciation of German motives at Verdun: '*A break-through was not necessary; if the battle were kept alive with limited resources, the French forces would bleed to death*'. [14] The text is liberally sprinkled with Classical and pre-20<sup>th</sup> century quotations, historical references and comparisons so as to illuminate fully the range of human fallibilities exposed by the press of events. It is also enlivened with subjective, summary character studies (pen-pictures) of the principal political and military participants. These are, variously, entertaining and insightful and at times humorous or moving. Haig is granted a respectful paragraph of twenty lines (168 words) in which criticism, sympathy and admiration are expressed in equal measure; his final judgement reading: '*Haig grew with disappointment and disaster, until he stood out in the last four months of the war as a very great general.*' [15] Evocative descriptions also enhance discussions of grand strategy, diplomacy, perspectives of the rival global powers and help make sense of the complexities of ever-changing international relations and peace negotiations.

## **Analysis and critical awareness**

Although highly praised for its descriptive qualities Cruttwell's history includes analysis and, where appropriate and evidential, striking criticisms; structural and procedural failures were ruthlessly delineated. Many of these may have a modern ring for the contemporary reader. In his discussion of the Battle of Loos (September 1915) he highlights failures in British Army Staff methods and preparations: '*The Higher Staffs studied maps and not the ground; they could not believe, sitting in their studies or workshops that the mass of destruction which they had assembled would prove less annihilating in practice than in theory.*' [16] Command and control failures at sea and on land are logged, including the delicate problem as when 'to cut losses'. Citing events at Loos, his comments were uncompromising: '*The battle should now have stopped dead. Nothing, however, in warfare demands more moral courage on the part of a commander than cutting his losses. Time after time, British, French and German generals fell through lack of will to stop, into the protracted futility of a wasting struggle.*' [17] Neither does he hold back in connection with the bloody failure on the first day of the Battle of the Somme (1 July 1916), succinctly identifying three key reasons for the disaster: the failure of the British bombardment;

the ill-conceived hour of assault; and *'the simultaneity of the attack in practically equal strength on the whole front'*<sup>[18]</sup> and, concurring with the conclusions of the Official History, *'that the methods prescribed by the directing staff made any considerable success impossible.'*<sup>[19]</sup> His comments on the military debacle in Mesopotamia (modern Iraq) in connection with General Sir John Nixon's reckless late summer 1915 advance towards Baghdad, spearheaded by the flamboyant Charles Townshend, carry a poignancy born of more recent events in that region. Quoting Oliver Cromwell's maxim *'No man goes so far as he who knows not whither he is going'*<sup>[20]</sup>, he sadly concludes *'The advance on Baghdad is perhaps the most remarkable example of an enormous military risk being taken, after full deliberation, for no definite or concrete military advantage.'*<sup>[21]</sup>

## **The personal element**

Cruttwell experienced the war intimately, at the 'sharp end', and his own personal trials filter through into his history in a clearly expressed compassion for the ordinary soldier and profound sympathy for civilian participants. His knowledge and experience of front line conditions gives authenticity and flavour to his accounts of conditions, operations and battles. Familiarity with the fighting zone allows his accounts of tactics, weaponry and battlefield innovation to be understood even by the non specialist<sup>[22]</sup>. His sympathy for the common man bearing arms is variously expressed in the text and as footnotes: the personal consequences of concentrated artillery bombardment was communicated by his description of Russian infantry in the wake of the German breakthrough in Galicia in May 1915: *'masses of ragged, demented figures ran out to meet them with uplifted arms, their faces distorted into the horrible and staring vacuity of shell-shock.'*<sup>[23]</sup> He also brings home the full horror of the individual and random casualties incurred day to day by trench garrisons: *'The extent to which a human body can be mangled by the splinters of a bomb or shell, without being deprived of consciousness, must be seen to be believed.'*<sup>[24]</sup> The plight of civilians in wartime was not ignored: describing the flight of the Serbian Army towards Albania in November 1915, he relates: *'In their train followed a great concourse of the population, escaping the savagery of the Bulgars and Austrians. The words 'Pray that your flight be not in winter' can never have been more appropriate.'*<sup>[25]</sup> Cruttwell also generously acknowledged the countless displays of courage, both at sea and on land, displayed by the enemy. If we are in any doubt about the sincerity directed to the 'ordinary participants' (and surely reflecting his own experiences) Cruttwell reminds us in his 'Epilogue': *'Yet while the war could not be won by the fighting men alone, nothing in history is more astonishing than the endurance, patience, and good humour so generally shown by the great masses of hastily trained civilians from all the great countries engaged.'* He ends his history in true scholarly style and also hopefully 'despite Hitler's recent accession to power in Germany - with a quote from Sophocles: *'Many are the marvels and nothing is more marvellous than man.'*<sup>[26]</sup>

## ***Postscript***

### **C R M F Cruttwell and Evelyn Waugh**

On the morning of Thursday, 15th December 1921<sup>[27]</sup> a precocious and sophisticated public schoolboy received two important letters from the University of Oxford; one announced that he had won the 100 Hertford College Scholarship; the other, from that College's Vice-Principal, congratulated him on this achievement. The recipient of the letters was, the future novelist, Evelyn Waugh, and the writer of the congratulatory message was the historian and Dean of Hertford, C R M F Cruttwell, who, with a sharp eye for talent, praised Waugh's English style as employed in his recent entrance examination papers.

This was the first contact between two characters, who, when required to interact clearly did not 'get on?'; in fact



their short relationship (1922-1924) was characterised by an incurable '*mutual dislike*'.<sup>[28]</sup> As far as it is possible to attribute attitudes to the complex developing personality represented by the youthful Waugh, it would seem that Cruttwell, already a distinguished historian and his tutor at Hertford, had merely the misfortune to have participated in the recent war, and thus fell foul of Waugh's youthful and faddish obsession with what he perceived to be that event's unimportance and folly. Too young to have served, Waugh missed the war (in which his older brother, Alec, had done relatively 'well?')<sup>[29]</sup> and, too self-consciously urbane to express guilt or regret, resolutely cultivated an enduring attitude of denigration towards it and those who he regarded as its mud-stained survivors. In the process he fuelled an unpleasant and continuing persecution of his tutor which is easy to exaggerate but served neither of them well.

Systematically defamed during his pupil's time at Oxford, the name '*Cruttwell*' was subsequently exploited by Waugh, the successful young novelist, being applied to a number of his more unpleasant fictional characters; it even mutated into a grotesque synonym for eccentric incompetence and deviousness. Waugh's mischievousness might, in the light of his prodigious talent, be forgiven but surely it is time to redress the balance and look again at Cruttwell the man, the soldier and academic historian with a view to rehabilitating his name from distorting fictions and accord him due respect as the author of the magisterial '*A History of the Great War*'.

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- The War Service of the 1/4 Royal Berkshire Regiment (T.F.), by Charles Robert Mowbray Fraser Cruttwell <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/22028/22028-h.htm>
- <http://oldshirburnian.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/WAUGH-Alexander-Raban.pdf> Accessed 27-Jan-2016

## NOTES:

- [1] The unit, a Territorial Force Battalion had sailed from Folkestone on the evening of 30 March and landed at Boulogne in the early morning of the 31<sup>st</sup>.
- [2] 'Personal Recollections of G H W Cruttwell pre 1914-1916. Dedicated to the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion Royal Berkshire Regiment'. The theme of Britain as 'perfidious Albion?', in the war for its own ends, was widespread in France early on; Jerome K Jerome, serving in a volunteer ambulance unit also remarks on it: 'The general opinion of the average poilu, he recorded, was that 'the English had started the war to capture German trade, and had dragged France into it'. There was no persuading them of their mistake'. (Quoted in 'The Guardian?', editorial, 4 August 2014, p.24)
- [3] Cruttwell is mentioned in letter, written by Brooke to Geoffrey Keynes, dated 3 Feb 1906: 'Last week I dined with H.A.J. & sat next to Cruttwell. We conversed amicably about A. Beardsley, whom Cruttwell disliked. I said that I adored Beardsley because he caricatured Humanity, & I was amused by caricatures of Humanity. As I spoke I beamed on him, but he did not grasp the insult: he was merely impressed, & bit his nails in wonder and perplexity'. *The Letters of Rupert Brooke?*, chosen and edited by Geoffrey Keynes, Faber and Faber, 1967, p.39.
- [4] He officially relinquished his commission 'on account of ill health contracted on active service [on] 17<sup>th</sup> April 1919' and retained the rank of Captain (see Service Record medical notes held by the National Archives, ref WO 374/17060. These papers do not include any reference to Cruttwell ever being wounded during his period of active service)
- [5] Still available today as a reprint ' *The War Service of the 1/4<sup>th</sup> Royal Berkshire Regiment (T.F.)?*, by C R M F Cruttwell, Valde Books, 2009' -and online ' <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/22028/22028-h/22028-h.htm>
- [6] See *Postscript*; also, Vera Brittain's account of Cruttwell as lecturer and tutor in *Testament of Youth?*, Fontana Paperbacks, 1979, pp. 486-488
- [7] The Burden Neurological Institute is notable for the first use of the new psychosurgical 'therapies'

- leucotomies and ECT (Electro Convulsive Therapy) - in Great Britain for the treatment of mental illness.
- [8] Naval Review May 1935, VOL. XXIII. No. 2, p.397
  - [9] Ibid p.401
  - [10] 'A History of the Great War?', C R M F Cruttwell, Oxford, 1936 (2<sup>nd</sup> edition), pp.vii-viii.
  - [11] For example, on page 275 of his history Cruttwell incorrectly names Grandcourt as being captured by the Royal Naval Division (RND) on 14 November 1916 - during the Battle of the Ancre; the actual village captured by the RND, and scene of much heroic fighting, was Beaucourt. Again a proof reading error results in an incorrect chapter reference being quoted for the Somme offensive of 1916, see Index p.640.
  - [12] A History of the Great War?, C R M F Cruttwell, Oxford, 1936 (2<sup>nd</sup> edition), p.vii
  - [13] In this respect it is of note that Cruttwell campaigned vigorously (and ultimately successfully) for an honours school of Geography to be established at Oxford.
  - [14] A History of the Great War?, C R M F Cruttwell, Oxford, 1936 (2<sup>nd</sup> edition), p.240. The imagery of a France being bled to death at Verdun was vividly employed in a 1916 German satirical medal by Walther Eberbach, 'Verdun die Weltblutpumpe'. See IWM MED 733:  
<http://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/8421>
  - [15] Ibid. p.169.
  - [16] Ibid. p.164
  - [17] Ibid. p.168
  - [18] Ibid. p.267
  - [19] Ibid. p.268
  - [20] Ibid. p.342
  - [21] Ibid. p.344
  - [22] His 'technical' descriptions of tactical innovation and new weaponry avoid jargon; e.g. his vivid description of the German barbed wire defences on the Somme has a beautiful simplicity: 'The belts were at least 20-30 yards deep, **the barbs as thick as a man's thumb**, and posts of iron.' (A History of the Great War?, C R M F Cruttwell, Oxford, 1936 (2<sup>nd</sup> edition), p.264)
  - [23] Ibid. p.176
  - [24] Ibid. p.153
  - [25] Ibid. p.233
  - [26] Ibid. p.629
  - [27] 'The Diaries of Evelyn Waugh?', edited by Michael Davie, Penguin edition, 1979, pp. 152-153
  - [28] 'A Little Learning?', Evelyn Waugh, 1964, p.175
  - [29] Commissioned into the Dorset Regiment in August 1917, he was later attached to the 23<sup>rd</sup> Machine Gun Company. He was taken prisoner near Arras in March 1918, during the German 'Spring Offensive' and wrote a lively and memorable account of his confinement: 'The Prisoners of Mainz?', Chapman & Hall, 1919

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## African Soldiers in World War One: Uprising within a Global Conflict

by Josephine Niala

2016-10-26 12:52:40

*?We should?remember the world as well as the war: all those involved, all the contributions, all the experiences, all the trauma, and the lasting legacy'.*

- Taken from the 2013 British Council report on WW1.

In 2013 when the British Council carried out a UK survey about the First World War, only 21% of people thought that there was any African involvement in the war. Yet one million people died in East Africa alone during WW1.

When reflecting on a war, the focus is often on those who were involved in combat and yet because of the situation in East Africa at the time, many more people were directly affected by the war than the soldiers. This was mainly due to the logistics of the war. There were no roads and the railway was still in its infancy meaning that supplies had to be transported long distances across British East Africa. For this reason, porters became just as critical as soldiers. The Carrier Corps carried the necessary supplies on their backs and heads across what is now Kenya. Although there is not much by the way of living memory of these porters, their mark is still noted by the market in the eastern part of Nairobi that is named after them: Kariokor.

As the war went on, women and children were also forcibly put to work. They received little or no pay and were trapped in a situation where they were looked down on by the British troops and despised by the villages' people whose harvests were plundered to literally feed the war.

There is a trail of names across the country which offer clues as to the events that took place during the Great War, including in Taveta which was then the border between the two colonial powers: Germany and Britain. For example, Salaita (derived from slaughter where 253 soldiers were killed) is one such hill. It was here in Taita, Taveta that the war was truly international. People who came from what would now be 21 nationalities lived, worked and fought alongside each other forming the Carrier Corps, Kings African Rifles and British Allied Forces. One South African labourer reported that the most remarkable part of his war time experience was 'to see the different kinds of human races from all parts of the world'.[\[1\]](#)

Aside from the war, what many of the people in Taveta at the time had in common was the colonial oppression that they were facing. WW1 gave them a different lens through which to view colonialism. This was a fact not lost on the British. 'If a 'coloured' man was trained to raise arms against another European, what guarantee was there, so the racial thinking went, that he would not one day attack his own white master?' [\[2\]](#)

Indeed, there are at least two African uprisings that took place during WW1. The East African Campaign started in what is now Tanzania and Kenya but then went on to spread as far as what is now Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Uganda and the Democratic Republic of Congo. In different places across this area, some African people began to see the war as a chance to fight for their own liberation. These uprisings were not coordinated across the continent but took place in disparate contexts with the First World War as the background trigger. The Chilembwe Uprising took place in January 1915 and although unsuccessful is celebrated annually on the 15<sup>th</sup> of January in Malawi as the beginning of the Malawi Independence struggle.

In Kenya, Mekatilili wa Menza was a Giriama woman who has in recent times been commemorated with a statue and gardens as a national heroine. What is clear is that between 1913-1915, she led the Giriama people in a sustained uprising against British colonial forces. Her reasons were complex. The Giriama had a sophisticated socio-economic structure and she like many Giriama leaders was keen that it along with their culture should not be undermined. She was particularly concerned with the issue of labour. Mekatilili was completely opposed to the exploitation of young Giriama men by the British and it can be argued that the Giriama's sustained resistance is part of the reason porters had to be brought in from different ethnic groups much further inland. The British colonial push on African labour is likely not have escalated in the same way if it were not for the First World



War.

Following the war, many leaders from around the world such as Gandhi were deeply disappointed that the efforts of their countrymen were not internationally recognised. If anything, colonial brutality increased around the world. The legacy of the war, however, remained and the connections between previously disparate people lingered. It may not have been until after the Second World War that the struggle for independence finally bore fruits for many Africans. That said, it was the First World War that unexpectedly brought people in the same place and may have planted the seeds allowing different groups of people to see each other as potential countrymen.

[1] - See more at: <https://www.bl.uk/world-war-one/articles/colonial-troops#sthash.1491Aq9A.dpuf>

[2] Ibid

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## 'Here is the secret. He is - "The Growler": a Northumberland Fusiliers Trench Newspaper

by **Emily Anderson**

**2016-10-04 15:47:38**

Between January 1915 and July 1916 ten issues of a trench newspaper called *The Growler* circulated, initially amidst some mystery, through the ranks of the Sixteenth Service Battalion, Northumberland Fusiliers.

The anonymously written first issue was 'sprung' upon them, according to its editors, 'in the dead of night.?

It set out the paper's parameters 'Camp concerns, curious customs, commonplace conversations, cookhouse complaints [?], contemptuous collared civilians, comical complications considered caustically.?

The creators declared its unofficial status, boasting that 'We merely deal with rumours, garbled versions, and perverted truth.' They added that all readers should 'don good-humoured spectacles,' and remember that 'our enemies are the Germans, and not our fellow soldiers.?

The enigma of who was behind *The Growler* grew in the second issue. The editor asked to 'whisper something in a confidential undertone.' 'Wild conjectures,' he claimed, had been made as to the identity of 'The Editor.' Here is the secret. He is 'The Growler.??

From mid-way through the battalion's training to mid-way through the war, this anonymous editor regaled his fellow servicemen with humorous gossip, complaints, and satire all relating to their lives in the military.

Like its now famous counterpart *The Wipers Times*, the self-styled 'organ' of the Northumberland Fusiliers was

primarily a space for comedic representations of military service.

Much of the comedy was to do with portraying the strangeness of war experience. The battalion was formed in response to the outbreak of the war, and for many of the volunteers military life would have been completely unfamiliar. The circulation of exaggerated rumour and bizarre anecdotes with large amounts of poetic licence were a good way of reflecting upon the seeming oddness of the men's circumstances.

Doses of such humorous content appeared at roughly monthly intervals. There was, though, a gap between the fourth and fifth issues (released in April and June 1915). The editor decided to cease production in April 1915, claiming to be climbing down from his 'throne hugging a heavy cash-box' and wishing to 'retire before the signs of old age become visible to numerous '?' friends.?

Equally abruptly, though, he was to reintroduce his paper only two months later. 'We've come back as bold as brass and you can do what you like about it.' We must, he declared, 'rest on a par with stage favourites who make numerous farewell appearances.?

It seemed that no one was safe from the newspaper's growls. Highlights include the short play, 'A Signal Success ' A Comedy of Flagging Interest.' It was based on an incident in which one of the battalion's officers mistook a shirt being put out to dry for a signal during a training exercise:

*OFFICER ' Here you signallers! What is that man with the flag saying to us?*

*SIGNALLER ' It's a white shirt fling from a clothes line, Sir.*

Favourite targets included those soldiers who, on gaining rank, also gained too much self-importance for the editor's liking. One sketch entitled 'Circumstances Alter ' Privates' told the tale of a private who 'fervently swore that he scorned stripes, the hateful emblem of tyrannical authority,' but who then gained promotion along with 'the air and authority of an emperor.?

The identity of the editor had by this point become known within the battalion ' part of the joke of many trench newspapers being that supposedly anonymous contributors were in fact identifiable to their friends.

His name was Corporal Ben Carr and he was from Newcastle. An actor in civilian life, he seems to have taken quite a lively role in the 'extra-curricular' life of his battalion. He organised a theatrical performance for the battalion, for instance, that took place in Pierregot near Amiens.

Before his company led an attack at the Battle of Thiepval on 1 July 1916, he handed a Major A. W. Little a poem entitled 'Here's to Tomorrow?', promising to produce a written copy of the show. It concluded:

*??Oh! to-morrow never comes, ' I've heard some people say,*

*With wisdom surely irritating beyond measure.*

*But I swear that when the present future is to-day,*

*If fate so wills, I gladly will disgorge the promised treasure.'*

This was to be his last literary contribution to battalion life, however. He was killed in the course of the attack, and is commemorated at the Thiepval Memorial.

His obituarist makes much of *The Growler's* success, and adds a poignant suggestion about the type of man he was.

*?He had a fund of humour and a delicate literary touch. One of the most successful Battalion periodicals was The Growler, of which he was the editor, and to which he was the chief contributor. Congratulations on the ability of its issues were received from some of the foremost journalists. It will be pathetic to turn to its pages and to reflect that the man who did so much to entertain his comrades and to keep them in good spirits is no longer with them. A loss of this character brings home to us the unspeakable sadness of war.?*

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## **The Land Girls of the First World War**

**by Connie Ruzich**

**2016-07-12 09:26:27**

*?Come out of the towns and on to the downs, where a girl gets brown and strong; with swinging pace and morning face she does her work to song.' ' The Land Army Song*

Television and film have popularized the story of the Land Girls of World War II, but few know of the sacrifices made by women agricultural workers who 'fought in the fields' of the Great War. Britain's labour shortage during the First World War was critical: over three million men had left for military service, and women workers were desperately needed to maintain the country's food supply.

Wanting to lend their assistance, numerous organizations attempted to recruit women for work on the land, including the Board of Agriculture, the Board of Trade, the Women's Farm Land Union, the Women's National Land Service Corps, the University Association of Land Workers, and local Women's War Agricultural Committees ' to name just a few. By 1917, the Government realized the necessity of founding and funding a central organization, the [Women's Land Army \(WLA\)](#), and by the end of the year, the WLA had placed over 23,000 'Land Girls.' Although official records have been destroyed or were never kept, it's estimated that over a quarter of a million women volunteered for agricultural work.

Yet, despite the need for women farm workers, resistance was high. A *London Telegraph* article published in May 1916 reported,

*?At the Ryedale Agricultural Club, held at Helmsley, yesterday, Mr. Hebron said he could not get women workers for love or money. Women labour on the land was a farce. They were simply out on spooning expeditions, trying to catch husbands. (Laughter.) Women's place was at home.?*

The president of the Board of Agriculture warned potential volunteers that they should not expect the kind of work that called for 'lilac sun-bonnets' (see [Twinch, 1990:18\[i\]](#)), and a report on a 1918 Land Girls parade in Birmingham in 1918 stated,

*?The procession attracted much attention, and to many of the watchers, it was a novelty to see the girls in their working clothes, and to realize that the girls of England are really working on the land, and not merely playing about in print frocks in the haymaking time? ([ibid:32](#))*

Most people were surprised at women's ability to capably accomplish farm tasks; some with traditional values even viewed the Land Girls' uniform trousers as disgraceful cross-dressing. In response, the [government issued posters](#) that celebrated the women's patriotic efforts and feminized the new roles in an attempt to change public attitudes.

Recruitment efforts appealed to women's patriotism and their consciences, underscoring the importance of 'doing one's bit.' Those wishing to sign up for the Women's Land Army had to be over 20 years of age, and women were required to submit references, complete paperwork that demonstrated their education and literacy, attend an interview, and pass a physical exam. If accepted, each Land Army Girl signed a six-month or one-year contract, agreeing to be sent anywhere in the country that she was needed. She was typically paid between 20 ' 25 shillings a week, and charged 17 shillings/week for room and board. The [Women's Land Army Handbook](#) asked each recruit to pledge that she would 'behave quietly,' 'secure eight hours' rest each night,' 'avoid entering

the bar of a public house,' 'not smoke in public,' and 'never wear the uniform after work without her overall, nor walk about with her hands in her breeches pockets.?

The Land Army issued each girl a knee-length tunic or overall (that could be no more than 14 inches above the ground), breeches, a hat, coat, boots, and leather leggings. After thirty days of service, she was issued a green armband to denote her patriotic service, to which was added a stripe for every six months of work. Land Girls also received a L.A.A.S. (Land Army Agriculture Service) badge after two months and were eligible to earn good service ribbons and distinguished service bars.

Volunteers who signed up with idyllic visions of the British countryside soon learned of the long days and hard work demanded by life on a farm. The women fed livestock, milked cows, trapped vermin, ploughed fields, and harvested fruits and vegetables. Formal training was scarce and offered piecemeal, but Land Army recruits were encouraged to send for leaflets on such topics as the construction of pigsties, advice to beginners in bee-keeping, thatching, potato growing, cleanliness in the dairy, and ringworm in cattle. They worked 9 to 10 hours a day in all kinds of weather, often six days a week, at wages significantly below those of women who were 'doing their bit' in munitions or clerical work.

Rose Macaulay volunteered for agricultural work in 1916. Working at Station Farm outside Cambridge, Macaulay wryly wrote of her experiences in the poem 'Spreading Manure.?

### ***Spreading Manure***

*There are forty steaming heaps in the one tree field,  
Lying in four rows of ten,  
They must be all spread out ere the earth will yield  
As it should (And it won't, even then).*

*Drive the great fork in, fling it out wide;  
Jerk it with a shoulder throw,  
The stuff must lie even, two feet on each side.  
Not in patches, but level'so!*

*When the heap is thrown you must go all round  
And flatten it out with the spade,  
It must lie quite close and trim till the ground  
Is like bread spread with marmalade.*

*The north-east wind stabs and cuts our breaths,  
The soaked clay numbs our feet,  
We are palsied like people gripped by death  
In the beating of the frozen sleet.*

*I think no soldier is so cold as we,  
Sitting in the frozen mud.  
I wish I was out there, for it might be  
A shell would burst to heat my blood.*

*I wish I was out there, for I should creep  
In my dug-out and hide my head,*



*I should feel no cold when they lay me deep  
To sleep in a six-foot bed.*

*I wish I was out there, and off the open land:  
A deep trench I could just endure.  
But things being other, I needs must stand  
Frozen, and spread wet manure.*

The first three stanzas of the poem give a sense of the tedium of the work: forty steaming piles of dung must be forked, lifted, and flung before the stinking excrement can be evenly smoothed across the field 'like bread spread with marmalade.' The simile ironically highlights the contrast between the typical domestic sphere of women and the work of the Land Girls, and the image linking manure with marmalade is both apt and disgusting.

The last four stanzas use wry humour to highlight a similarity that is even more shocking and disturbing: Macaulay dares to compare the discomforts of the Land Girls' work with the conditions of the men on the front lines of battle. Both the soldiers and the Land Girls battle the cold and wallow in the frozen mud. But 'Spreading Manure' argues that the women have it worse: without the shelter of dugouts, they suffer longer spells in the freezing sleet and cold and are more exposed to the elements. Without bursting shells, the women lack the excitement that warms the blood of the soldiers. And without the threat of death, the Land Girls cannot anticipate an end to their misery.

The poem makes these audacious claims as it subtly challenges the social order that limited women's participation in the war. The poem's repeated refrain 'I wish I was out there' can be viewed as naive and self-indulgent ' or as a protest against the cultural restrictions that consigned women to roles that were tedious and frustratingly confining.

The *Women's Land Army Handbook* sought to reassure new recruits:

*?You are now in the Women's Land Army; serving your Country just like the Soldiers and Sailors, though in a different way? When people see you pass they watch you and admire your pluck and patriotism. Make them also admire your independence and your modesty, your frankness and enthusiasm; show them that a British girl who is working for her country on the land is the best sort of girl.?*

These best-sort-of-girls have only recently been remembered with their own [National Memorial](#) at the National Arboretum in Staffordshire, dedicated in October of 2014. As Twinch (1990:52) observes, '*Theirs was a necessary but largely unspectacular heroism?*'

[i] Twinch, C. (1990). *Women on the land: Their story during two world wars*

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## 'Carry on Camping': The Bristol Boys' Brigade during the First World War

by Chris Spackman

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When news of the outbreak of the First World War broke several Boys' Brigade Companies were on their annual summer camp. For the vast majority of these Companies their 1914 camping expedition would be their last until the resolution of hostilities. Despite the historiographical consensus maintaining that camping was a key attraction for young people joining youth movements, participation in this branch of Company work was severely reduced during the war years. Thus, this negated the possible influence this activity had on membership at the time. The loss of expertise and direction of group leaders who were required for the war effort, and military restrictions imposed on sites for camps, meant that few Companies were able to continue with a summer camp during the years of war. In fact, the Boys' Brigade Gazette reported in June 1916 that it was aware of only three camps planned for that summer. Despite the multiple challenges, the port-side Companies from Bristol broke the mould as one of the few English localities that continued to camp on a large scale during the war.

Prior to the 1914 war, the Bristol Battalion of the Boys' Brigade had a proud tradition of camping. The first camp of the Battalion was held in 1891 and activities were focused on drill-based pursuits, with the expedition arranged under the influence of strict military discipline. Crucial to the organisation of these camps were H. J. Usher - President of the Battalion from 1896 to 1920 - and Mark Whitwill, who was the convenor of the Battalion Drill Committee. These men were keen advocates of good drill and maintaining firm discipline on their camps. The methods of these men set a standard for camps that would continue during the war years. Moreover, their emphasis on drill, discipline, and military-styled pursuits through the pre-war years would suit the atmosphere of the war, where leisure pursuits for British youth were marked by the notions of duty and discipline.

For Bristol boys the difference to the camping experience in the war years was immediately noticeable even before arriving on site. The usual mode of transport to the campsite for Bristol campers in the pre-war years was by train. However, as railway facilities were unavailable for this purpose during the war, the camping party marched from the city to its temporary summer destination. For the 1915 camp - the first after the outbreak of war - the trek was a distance of twenty two miles, involving an overnight stop at a school for a period of rest, before setting off at 06:30 the following morning. The contrast to the pre-war expeditions was also noticeable by the nature of the accommodation. During the war years Bristol boys resided in billets rather than the usual canvas tents. Such a compromise was deemed necessary by the organisers, who valued proximity to the sea over any disadvantages of the temporary lodgings, despite recognising that 'there is not the same grip and spirit of

comradeship that there is in an ordinary camp'. During the week away some sense of normality was evident through the activities undertaken, with sports and physical training exercises continued from pre-war camps. However, the atmosphere of the war had an influence on the nature of the drill manoeuvres, with the 1916 camp witnessing attack and defence movements by boys which 'brought home to many the danger to which many of our comrades are exposed in France'. Therefore, for campers from Bristol, the experience of camping during the war years deviated from the pre-war experience in many ways, with military restrictions altering the appearance of a camp, and the prevailing atmosphere changing the character of some activities undertaken.

The historiographical consensus has maintained that camping was the greatest pull youth movements held in order to attract new members. However, for the Boys' Brigade during the First World War, access to camping was significantly reduced, thus markedly limiting the draw of a summer camp to the overall appeal of a youth movement. Although the character of Bristol camps were altered, and came to reflect the prevailing influence of the military in all aspects of life, the example of the Bristol Boys' Brigade continuing to camp during the war reflects the regional variances in approach to youth work under the wider remit of the national organisation. Therefore, for the leaders of the Boys' Brigade in Bristol, camping was an important tool for engaging boys from its city with the object of the organisation during the challenging years of the First World War.

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