



Decomposing: Debussy and the Trauma Process

by **Rebecca Henderson**

2016-11-11 11:08:23

By considering how artists are influenced by, and become influencers of, cultural trauma, and the role of this in national identity, we can understand how the impact of World War One affects our sense of self today.

The year was 1914. Living in a fashionable, elegant neighbourhood near Bois de Bologne, Claude Debussy had little on his mind beyond his growing debts.

Then the war began. Everything changed.

Debussy's friends and family become increasingly politically involved. Huge numbers of wounded began to return, the landscape became physically mutilated through trench warfare, and no end was in sight. France, and Debussy's national identity, was under very real threat.

In *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, Jeffrey Alexander states that:

?Cultural trauma occurs when members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks on their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways.?

World War One epitomises 'a horrendous event?': entire families were wiped out, a large portion of young men were killed or injured, and civilians grieved. The translation of this trauma from event to art to cultural narrative is what Jeffrey Alexander calls 'the trauma process?', and its stages can be traced through Debussy's compositions between 1914 and his death.

Step 1: Symbolic Representation

Debussy was not a natural patriot, declaring once that he never 'had occasion to handle a gun.' But after being confronted daily by newspaper reports of 'the Hun's atrocities?', his attitude changed. His first work from this period appeared in November 1914, in *King Albert's Book: A Tribute to the Belgian King and People from Representative Men and Women Throughout the World*. The *Book* was aimed to increase the Allies' support, and Debussy was one of the few composers featured. He contributed a short piano piece, *Berceuse hroque*.

Psychoanalytic descriptions of trauma generally agree that one response to trauma is to 'displace' it into another form, such as art; Debussy does this exactly. The misery of feeling powerless in events, combined with everyday unhappy shortages of necessities, is expressed in *Berceuse hroque*. Debussy acknowledges this himself, describing his piece as 'melancholy and discreet' with no pretensions other than to offer homage to so much patient suffering.' Thus Debussy's music claims to be **symbolically representing** the mood of the civilian population, with himself as spokesperson.



Two photographs showing daily life in Paris during World War One. On the left, a queue for a caf snakes around several streets. On the right, high prices for basic necessities. Copyright British Library.

Step 2: Actor in the Public Sphere

Berceuse was followed by two similar pieces: *Page d'album* and *Elgie*. With these, Debussy increasingly used his music to raise awareness of the effects of war, but also to try and alleviate them. *Page*, composed June 1915, was played as part of a concert series aiming to raise money for helping the wounded; *Elgie* was published six months later in *Pages indites sur la femme et la guerre*, a book whose profits were intended for war orphans.

His reputation continued to grow, and he became particularly regarded as a *French* composer writing about, and for, the *French people*: he became **an actor**, accepting and adopting this patriotic persona, even signing himself later as 'Claude Debussy, musicien franais'. One side effect of his growing renown was becoming a **carrier**: Debussy's work may have helped certain individuals but in fact it served to *increase cultural trauma* by drawing attention **in the public sphere** repeatedly to its extent.

Step 3: Public and Context

As the war dragged on, the public mood became more and more despairing. The **context** of Debussy's work changed: instead of composing for funds in support of the war effort, his compositions became more philosophical about the point of war itself. His *Nol des enfants qui n'ont plus des maisons* (Christmas for Homeless Children) exemplifies this. The lyrics are a prayer from homeless, orphaned French children, calling for Christ to punish German soldiers. They ask for the invaders to not be visited that coming Christmas (in fact, to 'jamais plus?', never again, be visited), and they beg for bread instead of toys as gifts. The orphans symbolise the loss of social and familial structure brought on by war: they have no history as previous generations are erased, and their very survival is uncertain as they do not even have 'pain quotidienne?', daily bread.

Furthermore, *No!* shows Debussy's idea of **audience** changing as well. He writes to God, suggesting no more faith in earthly, political powers to resolve the conflict, and he also writes to the future, for posterity. Debussy confided to a friend that he wrote 'not so much for myself, [but] to offer proof, small as it may be, that 30 million Boches can not destroy French thought . . . I think of the youth of France, senselessly mowed down by those merchants of 'Kultur' . . . What I am writing will be a secret homage to them.?'

What happens now?

Returning to Jeffrey Alexander's definition of cultural trauma, he stated that Cultural Trauma must '**mark their memories forever** and **change their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways.**' Debussy died before the end of the war, but his works lived on. They became part of a larger artistic movement which established a new cultural narrative, one which began with World War One. 1914 became 'marked forever' as the beginning of a period of pain and misery to France.

Debussy's works would go on to take a special role during World War Two, claimed by the Resistance as representing the cultural prowess of the French, and he, amongst others, became a locus for a new French identity which emphasised national pride and a staunch unbreakable resistance to invasion ' an identity which endures to this day.

REFERENCES

Jeffrey Alexander. *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*(California, US: University of California Press Books, 2004)

Licensed as Creative Commons CC-BY-NC-SA

[Original version](#)

Some Sounds of the War

by Nick Milne

2016-07-06 00:06:00

The First World War's cultural impact can be felt quite heavily in song as well as in literature and art.

A distinction should first be cast between two different kinds of songs: those that were popular on the home front and in the musical halls, and those that had their origins in the trenches themselves. The former certainly made their way into the trenches as well -- often with quite surprising additions to the lyrics -- but they were not born there.

Music Hall

Songs of this sort were written for popular, public consumption, and often with a patriotic intent. Lyrics ranged from the winkingly suggestive to the nauseatingly sentimental, and much of the pleasure your average Tommy would take from it came with inventing his own additions or substitutions.

For example, the refrain to Paul A. Reuben's popular ["We Don't Want to Lose You"](#)(1914) ran thus:

Oh! we don't want to lose you
But we think you ought to go
For your King and Country
Both need you so;
We shall want you and miss you
But with all our might and main
We shall cheer you, thank you, kiss you
When you come back again

The man in the trench, swiftly fed up with this kind of cloying sentimentality, had his own take on the matter:

Now we don't want to hurry you,
But it's time you ought to go;
For your songs and your speeches
They bore us so.
Your coaxings and pettings
Drive us nigh insane;
Oh! we'll hate you, boo you and hiss you
If you sing it again.

In a more suggestive strain we see something like Wimperis & Finck's ["I'll Make a Man of You"](#), which became a very popular recruiting song early in the war. One may perhaps see why:

The army and the navy need attention,
The outlook isn't healthy you'll admit,
But I've got a perfect dream of a new recruiting scheme,
Which I really think is absolutely it.
If only other girls would do as I do
I believe that we could manage it alone,
For I turn all suitors from me but the sailor and the Tommy,
I've an army and a navy of my own.

[Chorus]

On Sunday I walk out with a soldier,

On Monday I'm taken by a Tar,
On Tuesday I'm out with a baby Boy Scout,
On Wednesday a Hussar,
On Thursday I gang oot wi' a Scottie,
On Friday, the Captain of the crew,
But on Saturday I'm willing
If you'll only take the shilling,
To make a man of every one of you.

You'll have to pardon me -- my glasses have fogged up, here. Not content with the promises made above, the soldiers' amended version ran something like this:

On Monday I touched her on the ankle,
On Tuesday I touched her on the knee,
On Wednesday I confess, I lifted up her dress,
On Thursday I saw it, gorblimey,
On Friday I put me 'and upon it,
On Saturday she gave my balls a treat,
On Sunday after supper, I whopped me fucker up 'er,
An' now I'm paying forty bob a week!

The clips above come from the darkly satiric 1969 film *Oh What a Lovely War!*, which does a great deal to ape the music-hall culture of the time. [It also has a complex -- and at times surprising -- history.](#)

Other popular songs included:

- ["Pack Up Your Troubles in Your Old Kit Bag"](#)
- ["Good-bye-ee"](#)
- ["It's a Long Way to Tipperary"](#)
- ["Oh! It's a Lovely War"](#)
- ["Roses of Picardy"](#)

Of these, "It's a Long Way to Tipperary" has had the longest life and the most sustained popularity. Originally written in 1912, it became immensely popular both on the home front and as a marching song.

Trench Music

The most usual mode, as I've suggested above, was one of parody. This take on "My Bonnie Lies Over the Ocean" was popular among transport drivers:

I've been in the saddle for hours
I've stuck it as long as I could,
I've stuck it and stuck until I said, "Fuck it,
My arsehole is not made of wood."

Sergeant, Sergeant, oh give back my stirrups to me, to me.
Sergeant, Sergeant, oh give back my stirrups to me.

While this one, to the same tune, was more broadly applicable:

My tunic is out at the elbows,
My trousers are out at the knee,
My puttees are ragged and frazzled
But the Q.M. says nothing for me.

My tummy knocks hard on my backbone,
My dial is as thin as can be;
Still all we get handed at mealtimes
Is bully and Maconochie.

[Bully beef = tinned corned beef; Maconochie = a widely-distributed brand of tinned vegetables.]

There were countless possibilities with a tune like this:

Last night as I lay on my pillow,
Last night as I lay on my bed,
I dreamt our old corp'ral was dying,
I dreamt the old bugger was dead.

Send him,
Oh send him,
Oh send our old corporal to He-e-ell;
Oh keep him,
Oh keep him,
Oh keep the old buffer in Hell.

Even some "official" songs had a harder edge to them. One of the regimental marches of the Royal West Surrey Regiment, for example:

Here they come, here they come,
Silly great buggers every one:
Half-a-crown a week to pay
For putting a girl in a family way.

Here they come, here they come,
Second of Foot but second to none.
Here they come, here they come,
Second of Foot but second to none.
Bullshit, bullshit,
Covered from head to foot in it.
Bullshit, bullshit,
Covered from head to foot in it.

[And so on]

The wide-ranging adventures of "[Mademoiselle from Armenteers](#)" were happily recounted by men in every branch of the service:

Mademoiselle from Armenteers, parlay-voo,
Mademoiselle from Armenteers, parlay-voo,
Mademoiselle from Armenteers,
She hasn't been fucked in twenty years,
Hinky dinky parlay-voo

[And on and on, with many variations]

Mademoiselle was not always looked upon with such affection, however, as in "Aprs la Guerre Fini":

Aprs la guerre fini,
Soldat Anglais parti;
Mam'sell Fransay boko pleuray
Aprs la guerre fini.

Aprs la guerre fini,
Soldat Anglais parti,
Mademoiselle in the family way,
Aprs la guerre fini.

Aprs la guerre fini,
Soldat Anglais parti;
Mademoiselle can go to hell
Aprs la guerre fini.

My favourite, both for its conciseness and strange pathos, is [this popular riff](#) on the tune of "Auld Lang Syne":

We're here because
We're here because
We're here because
We're here!
Oh we're here because
We're here because
We're here because
We're here!

There were plenty more like all the above -- including "Do Your Balls Hang Low?", which remains weirdly well-known even today. Songs of this sort were a constant staple for the troops, who very often had to produce their own music if they wanted any at all -- Decca's charming efforts notwithstanding:



Interested parties should consult Max Arthur's *When This Bloody War is Over: Soldiers' Songs of the First World War* (2001) or Martin Pegler's *Soldiers' Songs and Slang of the Great War* (2014).

Licensed as Creative Commons CC-BY-NC-SA

[Original version](#)

Why July 1916 was an important month for professional women

by **Katrina Kirkwood**

2016-07-01 07:00:30

When I set out to trace exactly what my grandmother, Dr Isabella Stenhouse, had done in WW1, one document particularly intrigued me: her offer to serve with the British Army. This seemed to make little sense because, so far as I knew, the army had, with one exception^[i], refused to work with any of the many women doctors eager to do their patriotic duty.

This had left medical women with a conundrum. Either they stayed in civilian work, taking up the slack left by male colleagues departing for war, or they joined an independent hospital in France or Serbia and treated the wounded of Britain's allies. Isabella chose the latter and served in the Anglo-Ethiopian Hospital in France.

However, as the war dragged on, the army's need for doctors grew. Not only did the battle zones demand a constant supply, but many of the casualties required medical treatment that lasted for months or years. How was the military imperative to be met without threatening the health needs of the civilian population - the miners and factory workers whose work was vital if the war was to be won?

In December 1915 the Scottish Medical Service Emergency Committee^[ii] attempted to find out where each doctor was working and what help each one was prepared to offer. 3397 doctors replied to the questionnaire. Isabella, one of only fourteen women among 527 doctors listed in the Edinburgh area, volunteered herself for 'Group B (45 to 55) Part-time home military work.' She was only 28, but what would have been the point of offering 'Group A (under 45) Lieut. RAMC' when there was no chance of the army taking her on?

When conscription was introduced in spring 1916, the medical profession was a reserved occupation but, in June, the Director General Army Medical Services, Lt-General Sir Alfred Keogh called for, '... the mobilization of the whole of the medical services of this country for its civil needs on such lines as shall enable the pressing requirements of the Army to be met with the least possible injury to the civilian population.'

A journalist commented that '[Sir Alfred's] scheme ... is calculated to bring into the fold of national service every medical man who has the interests of his country at heart.'^[iii] He had perhaps not heard of Sir Alfred's other plan. The Director General and his advisors had been observing the professionalism and skill of medical women across the war zone and they had changed their minds: it was time to enlist the help of the medical women. A letter was sent to every woman on the medical register.

Long afterwards, Dr Letitia Fairfield remembered, 'In 1916 came a sudden and urgent appeal from the War Office for medical women to serve in Malta, Egypt, and in military hospitals at home. The reason (which had to be secret) for this reversal of policy was a demand for a large reserve of doctors to supply contemplated campaigns in the Mediterranean, at a moment when doctors were already extremely scarce.'

The War Office's about-turn at last gave Isabella and her fellow women doctors a chance to use their professional skills for their own countrymen. Yet, the men in charge of the Royal Army Medical Corps (RAMC) were cautious. Despite working with thousands of nurses, their views as to the capabilities of women were fixed. They were certain, for example, that women doctors were unsuited to working in any spot that might come under fire. They were confident that medical women could never command a company because of the reluctance of the men to serve under women. Their solution was threefold:

- They sent the women to Malta, which was busy, but where there was little risk of fighting.
- They refused them the right to wear the uniform and badges of the RAMC.
- They denied them the temporary commissions automatically given to volunteering male doctors.

These conditions of service ignored the fact that the Boer War had proved it was impossible for volunteering male doctors to function properly within the RAMC without uniform and commissioned rank. The women apparently considered the conditions so 'deplorable' that they 'only accepted ... them on the grounds of grave national emergency.'^[v]

Isabella signed up on 24th July 1916. On 12th August she set sail for Malta with fifteen other medical women^[vi] - Scottish, Irish, English, a New Zealander, a woman from India, suffragists, old hands, young doctors who had worked in France and Serbia, one who had been imprisoned in Serbia and another who had been awarded a medal. All were ready not only to help win the war but also to make the most of this chance to prove they were as good as the men - it was one more opportunity to break down the barriers they faced as professional women.

^[i]Geddes, J.F.(2006). *The Women's Hospital Corps: forgotten surgeons of the First World War*. J Med Biogr.14(2):109-17.

^[ii][Index of Doctors in Scotland During The First World War | Index to Doctors in Scotland during the First World War](#)

^[iii] Medical Mobilization. (FROM OUR MEDICAL CORRESPONDENT.). The Times (London, England), Tuesday, Jun 13, 1916; pg. 3; Issue 41192.

[iv] Fairfield, Let. al. *Medical Women in the Forces*. JMWF, 49, 1967, p.99

[v] Fairfield et al, *ibid.*

[vi] [Stenhouse Isabella](#)- Lady doctors of the Malta Garrison

Licensed as Creative Commons CC-BY-NC-SA

[Original version](#)

Lloyd George's Ministry Men

by George Campbell Gosling

2015-11-05 14:01:56



On 24 November 1918, Prime Minister David Lloyd George gave a speech in Wolverhampton. The Armistice two weeks earlier meant he was 'the man who won the war'. Yet still, he told them: 'the work is not over yet - the work of the nation, the work of the people, the work of those who have sacrificed. Let us work together first'. He continued:

"What is our task? To make Britain a fit country for heroes to live in. I am not using the word 'heroes' in any spirit of boastfulness, but in the spirit of humble recognition of fact. I cannot think what these men have gone through. I have been there at the door of the furnace and witnessed it, but that is not being in it, and I saw them march into the furnace. There are millions of men who will come back. Let us make this a land fit for such men to live in. There is no time to lose. I want us to take advantage of this new spirit. Don't let us waste this victory merely in ringing joybells."

These words were important. Not only because they constituted a promise - from the Prime Minister to those who were returning from the horrors of the war and in the memory of those who would not return. But also because this promise was in many respects the foundation stone of the Lloyd George coalition as it went to the polls, barely a month after the end of the war. A coalition between a radical Liberal PM and the Conservative Party (amongst others) had been understandable during the war. All sides were committed to refocusing the war effort and saw a greater role for the state in doing so. Conscription, for example, Lloyd George and his coalition allies were readier to consider than many Liberals. But what was their common purpose in peacetime?

Whether or not Lloyd George genuinely sought a permanent realignment in British politics by continuing his coalition beyond the war, in the short term he certainly needed it to embody a broader sense of national unity. In speeches such as this, he was laying claim to the notion that this shared spirit was one of reform. As Chancellor of the Exchequer he'd used pensions and national insurance to commit the British state for the first time to directly addressing the poverty caused by old age and sickness. Now, as Prime Minister, and he had no intention of relinquishing his reforming zeal.

Yet, by the time he left office in 1922, it had amounted to little. Nowhere was this more obvious than in the case of housing, as Kenneth (now Labour life peer Lord) Morgan explained in [his history of Lloyd George's postwar coalition](#). After six months of the house-building programme there was a shocking gulf between calls for half a million new homes and the 10,000 under construction, let alone the 180 actually occupied. The final figure of 170,000 was nowhere near the scale widely agreed as necessary, and certainly a long way short of the hopes roused by Lloyd George's stirring rhetoric.

Explaining what Philip Abrams, in [his influential 1960s *Past and Present* article](#), dubbed 'the failure of social reform' has been a long-running exercise for political historians. Was it inevitable that a Conservative-dominated government would recoil from any extensive plans for social reform? Did the wave of businessmen elected to the Tory benches in 1918 shift the centre of gravity in the party away from accommodation with Lloyd George? Was the Prime Minister himself more interested in foreign affairs or simply remaining in office at any cost? Were any ambitions for major reform hopeless in the economic circumstances of the early 1920s?

These are bigger questions than can be answered in a blog post. But I would like to briefly consider something that suggests Lloyd George's ambitions, at least, were genuine. And that is who he appointed to key positions. During the war his social reconstruction committee had brought together the social investigator Joseph Rowntree and the Fabian Beatrice Webb with the former Conservative Prime Minister and former president of the Garden Cities and Town Planning Association Lord Salisbury. This was perhaps indicative of what Lloyd George attempted to do in all areas of government, bringing together figures from across the political spectrum who might share his willingness to think big.

And the same can be said after the war of the three key appointments to the newly-established Ministry of Health, responsible not only for medical services but also housing as part of a broader understanding of 'health'. This made it the government department essentially charged with delivering on the Prime Minister's promise of *homes fit for heroes*.

Christopher Addison, 1869-1951

The UK's first Minister of Health was a medical man of some repute. Before entering politics his method for thoracoabdominal topography (locating the pancreas) had become known as "Addison's clinical plane". He'd been appointed Professor of Anatomy at University College Sheffield and gave the prestigious Hunterian lectures for the Royal College of Surgeons in 1901. His doctoring in some of the poorest areas of East London and beyond brought him a deep insight into the most crushing poverty of the earliest days of the twentieth century and this motivated his move into elected politics.

In 1910 the forty year-old Addison was elected Liberal MP for Hoxton, soon finding himself in the middle of the fierce debates over Lloyd George's health insurance plans. In [their sympathetic biography](#), Jane and Ken Morgan credited him with making the national insurance bill passable and workable, as he became the vital go-between for the Chancellor and the sceptical medical profession. Addison's role grew from key advisor to Lloyd George's under-secretary and right-hand man in the wartime Ministry of Munitions - crucial to making 'war socialism' a reality even before Asquith was relieved of the premiership. Once Lloyd George became Prime Minister, Addison took his place at the head of the Ministry of Munitions before he was charged with setting up two new government departments. In 1917 this was the Ministry of Reconstruction and then in 1919 the Ministry of Health.

His tenure as Minister of Health - of less than two years - saw plenty of bold thinking about the postwar settlement. This was best embodied in the 1919 Housing and Town Planning Act, remembered as the Addison Act, which established council housing essentially as it's been known ever since. Yet the implementation of his plans were constantly thwarted and his effective dismissal in April 1921 (to the post of Minister without Portfolio, from which he soon resigned) is often seen as the moment when Lloyd George opted to remain in office by handing over control of domestic policy to his Conservative ministers.

Like many Liberal reformers, Addison's future lay with the Labour party. His Lincolnshire farming family background served him well as Minister of Agriculture under Ramsay MacDonald, Labour's first Prime Minister, before he left office as another unlikely coalition with the Conservatives was formed. In 1945 Clement Attlee brought him back into government, this time as Leader of the House of Lords for the duration of the first Labour government with a Commons majority. He also served as Secretary of State for the Dominions, playing an important part in Labour's anti-imperial policies, until his health declined in 1947.

This means Addison held government posts under every non-Conservative Prime Minister for half a century, playing key roles in domestic, foreign and constitutional affairs. He deserves to be remembered as a major figure in the progressive politics of early and mid twentieth-century Britain.

Robert Morant, 1863-1920

The Ministry of Health's first Permanent Secretary was a very different figure. Where Addison's family had found the money (which he duly paid back) to send him to Trinity College, Harrogate then Sheffield School of Medicine, Morant's widowed mother found enough to send him to Winchester College before he needed to take up private tutoring to pay his way through New College, Oxford in the 1880s. His disappointing third-class degree in classical moderations (before a rather superfluous first in theology) didn't hold him back from ending up private tutor to the crown prince of Siam only a few years later.

His passionate advocacy of English educational values as part of an imperial civilising mission led to him being

called the Big Teacher, and less favourably accused of behaving like 'the Uncrowned King of Siam'. If he was a less controversial figure once he returned home to England, he was no less an oddity. Beatrice Webb said he was 'a strange mortal, not altogether sane', yet also 'the one man of genius in the Civil Service'; while to Florence Nightingale he was 'a good genius'.

His atypical career path and personal energies saw him work his way into, and swiftly to the head of, the Board of Education. His time there was marked by an effective reorganisation and a raft of progressive policies successfully implemented under Conservative and Liberal administrations. This earned him an offer from Lloyd George in 1909 of a significant pay rise if he moved to the Development Commission, which he turned down to stay at the Board of Education. Two years later, however, politically damaging criticism from the chief inspector of elementary schools meant he was happy to take up a new offer and move to head up Lloyd George's new National Insurance Commission.

From the beginning, Morant made it clear to Lloyd George he saw implementing the National Insurance Act as a step towards unifying the complex patchwork of medical services of the day. He was no socialist but believed strongly in effective administration. He pushed Lloyd George to devote greater resources to staffing than he had intended, over-riding financial concerns at the Treasury. So his appointment as Permanent Secretary of the new Ministry of Health can only have been intended as one in which he would continue to be a forceful advocate of progressive policies and bigger government. Indeed, if he had not died of pneumonia only a year later, the deviousness commented upon by his critics and admirers alike would undoubtedly have been aroused against the Conservative attacks on the ambitious reform plans of the new ministry.

George Newman, 1870-1948

For George Newman, studying medicine in Edinburgh then at Cambridge was an alternative to continuing the missionary work of his Quaker father. In 1900, after turning down the post of government bacteriologist in the India Office, he moved from university teaching into local government public health work, and in 1906 produced his seminal report *Infant Mortality: A Social Problem*. His successful solution of a milk depot in Finsbury Park was indicative of a shift from curative to preventive medicine he would advocate throughout his career. It also attracted the attention of Beatrice Webb, who introduced Newman to Morant, who in turn appointed him as the first Chief Medical Officer at the Board of Education in 1907.

Newman headed up the introduction of the School Medical Service from the Board of Education, something seen by many in the medical profession as a worrying expansion of the state. He was also involved, again alongside Morant, with the implementation of National Health Insurance - ensuring institutional treatment for tuberculosis was included where no other hospital services were. This fell far short of the universal health service he wanted, but like many progressives he saw it as an important step in the right direction.

Like Morant he turned down a tempting government offer away from the Board of Education out of a commitment to the pioneering reforms he could implement from there. Unlike Morant, however, the First World War saw him in demand elsewhere. He worked on the establishment of factory canteens as an alternative to less sober venues, measures to maintain the health of industrial war workers and the setting up of Quaker ambulance services on the continent.

His appointment as the first Chief Medical Officer at the Ministry of Health ensured the three highest positions in the new department were held by men with strong track records in delivering radical reforms. Yet he soon found himself without his allies. His primary contribution thereafter was to national debate, through his influential annual reports on the health of the nation, as well as a great many books and lectures. He died an old man, after a career dedicated to the cause of unified, universal and preventive medical services, just weeks

before the introduction of the National Health Service in 1948.

Addison, Morant and Newman were Lloyd George's ministry men - the radical reformers chosen to set up the government department at the heart of his ultimate failure to provide *homes fit for heroes*. Each of these men was influential in a different way. But none were second-rate appointments.

Cross-posted on [the author's personal website](#)

Licensed as Creative Commons CC-BY-NC-SA

[Original version](#)

The National Egg Collection for Wounded Soldiers and Sailors 1914-1918

by David Thomas

2015-04-02 11:01:42

The National Egg Collection was launched in November 1914 following proposals put forward by Frederick Carl, the editor of *Poultry World*. The aim initially was to provide 20,000 newly-laid eggs a week to the wounded in hospital in Boulogne. However, very soon the organisation began to aim even higher, endeavouring to collect or purchase 200,000 eggs a week: a target that was reached at Easter 1915. In the following August, partly to celebrate the fact that Queen Alexandra had become the patron of the scheme, the War Office decided to see if the number could be increased to one million eggs a week. 1,030,380 eggs were received during the week 16-23 August, not including those sent directly to local hospitals, a practice which *Poultry World* discouraged. Special boxes and labels were supplied (there were over 2000 depots run by local groups and churches) and free transport was provided by the railways. A central collection point was established in London in a warehouse initially provided free of charge by Harrods.

The National Egg Collection was one of a range of initiatives appealing to all classes and to all ages but especially to children. A variety of posters were issued, one depicting a hen wearing a red sash, a sort of honorary soldier 'enlisted for duration of the war?', thus echoing the sentiment expressed by *Poultry World* that 'every British hen should be on active service'.

Postcards, too, were produced, one of appeal to children showing a little chick looking up at her mother and saying: 'Ma! Teach me how to lay an Egg ' I want to do my bit for the wounded!' The famous graphic artist, Donald McGill, produced a card aimed at a more mature audience. Egg services were being held in a number of churches and McGill's card depicted a clergyman pronouncing from the pulpit: 'It would greatly assist the collectors of eggs for the wounded soldiers if, upon coming to Church, each lady would lay an egg in the Font!'

Cardboard or silk lapel pins and badges were sold on flag days and advertisements employing a mixture of patriotic idealism and emotional blackmail placed in the newspapers. 'Do your duty by the wounded men. You

cannot eat eggs and feel that the wounded are going without.' Those not participating were deemed to be not worthy of the name 'Britisher'.

Donors were encouraged to write their name and address on the eggs with a message for the wounded (*Poultry World* called them 'eggograms?') and often the grateful recipient of an egg would write to thank the sender. Such letters record the reception given to the arrival of fresh eggs in the hospitals. 'I wish you could see the joy on the poor fellows' faces when they get the eggs; it would fully repay you for all your trouble' is a typical observation. Indeed, the morale-boosting aspect of the receipt of a fresh egg cannot be over-emphasised. It was estimated that an egg was placed in front of a wounded serviceman, even in France, within three days of being laid.

As the war dragged on, the collection of eggs continued apace, though urgent representations were constantly being made for the number of gifts not to be decreased. Germany's 'devilish practice of sinking Hospital Ships' meant that 'thousands of wounded men cannot be brought home. In consequence the 'National Egg Collection' must send at least 250,000 eggs weekly across the Channel. There is no substitute for eggs in maintaining a man's vitality, hastening his convalescence or even in preserving life.' In October 1917 the Prime Minister, Lloyd George, wrote to the Collection what they called 'a most encouraging and appreciative letter'. Meanwhile, on 21 October 1918 *The Times* published in facsimile a letter from Field Marshal Sir Douglas Haig, expressing the gratitude of the Base hospitals in France for the eggs sent from home. A week later the letter was printed again, this time with the added enticement for donors of eggs during what the paper dubbed 'Autograph Egg Week' of receiving a copy of the letter 'reproduced in facsimile upon paper suitable for framing'. What a stampede there must have been!

The Armistice was signed on 11 November 1918 and the National Egg Collection effort was gradually wound down, drawing to a close on the last day of March 1919. Many collectors were issued with Certificates of Honour. Over 41 million eggs had been collected, of which no fewer than 32 million had been despatched to the Base hospitals in France and Belgium. Its work finally over, the National Egg Collection was able to send a cheque for the cash balance of 5,865 to the War Office. One hopes that they spent it wisely.

Licensed as Creative Commons CC-BY-NC-SA

[Original version](#)