



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 1/4th 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 1/4th 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 4th 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 1/4th 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-20th 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'*^[18] and, concurring with the conclusions of the Official History, *'that the methods prescribed by the directing staff made any considerable success impossible.'*^[19] 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'*^[20], 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.'*^[21]

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^[22]. 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.'*^[23] 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.'*^[24] 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.'*^[25] 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.'*^[26]

Postscript

C R M F Cruttwell and Evelyn Waugh

On the morning of Thursday, 15th December 1921^[27] 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*'.^[28] 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?')^[29] 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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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 31st.
- [2] 'Personal Recollections of G H W Cruttwell pre 1914-1916. Dedicated to the 4th 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] 17th 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 1/4th 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 (2nd 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 (2nd 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 (2nd 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, '*Verdundie 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 (2nd 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 23rd 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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Lloyd George's Ministry Men

by George Campbell Gosling

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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.

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Basket Case

by Christopher Harvie

2014-09-08 14:34:56

It is, without a doubt an offensive phrase. In its modern meaning, it is applied to someone who appears frazzled or mentally unstable; incapable of proper action due to emotional stress. The phrase itself is supposedly linked to the First World War due to arts and crafts therapy undertaken by patients who had been diagnosed with nervous conditions. These men were given simple, repetitive tasks such as basket weaving in the hope it would distract them from the strange and misunderstood symptoms of their condition.

It was commonly referred to at the time as 'Shell Shock?', which in itself comes from a medical misunderstanding of its cause. As much as physiological medicine of the age may appear ignorant or backward to us today, psychiatric medicine was much further behind, as it still is today. Mental illness is difficult to diagnose and even now there exists very few fully effective treatments for psychological disorders, and the general stigma of public feeling towards the mentally ill; as objects of pity, fear or weakness still surrounds our understanding of these ailments. Such attitudes only harms the sufferer further, even to the point of suffering in silence rather than to seek treatment lest they be thought of poorly.

The medical misunderstanding at the time was that close proximity concussive force of explosions somehow jarred and disordered the brain. The term was intended quite literally and was applied in a generic sense to a variety of mental illness.

The most mild cases could almost go unrecognised, usually noticed in a slight change of demeanour or a depressive or melancholy state; to more obvious signs such as complete despondency, mania, loss of sensibility or relation to surroundings, shaking or twitching, making nonsensical sounds or animalistic screaming. In extreme cases this produced 'hysterical conversion syndromes in which a mental condition had physical symptoms like paralysed limbs, blindness or deafness.' [\[1\]](#)

By December 1914 the British had noted that 3-4 per cent of listed personnel as many as 10 per cent of officers displaying neurological symptoms. [\[2\]](#) Much misunderstood by military commanders and army physicians as cowardice or malingering, sufferers were often punished by military law. This included several cases of execution by firing squad for cowardice even in the face of medical evidence supporting the existence of a nervous condition. This was the standard practice rather than properly diagnosing, as much as was possible with medical knowledge at the time not even diagnosed, no type of treatment, effective or otherwise could be applied.

It wasn't until the mid 'point of the war that a better understanding began to take hold: 'Charles Myers, a young English psychiatrist, *shell shock* was a 'singularly ill-chosen term'....It rose out of the particular conditions of trench warfare, an experience beyond anything the human psyche was built to endure.'[\[3\]](#)

It was found that quick removal from the combat area and treatment behind the lines was most effective, not of curing the condition necessarily but enough to return the patient to active duty. This may sound harsh, and does need to be tempered with contemporary understandings of such conditions partnered with the military necessity of returning all recuperated wounded, physical or psychological, whenever practicable, back to the line. Conversely the treatments could be just as terrible as the disease- extremes we wouldn't think of today such as applying electric shocks or submerging in ice water were just as common as gentle recuperation.

It is estimated that after the war about 65 000 British soldiers were on pension for 'neurasthenia' (as cases of shell shock were officially labelled). This amounted to 6 % of all pensions, with some nine thousand still in hospital, some never to be released. It was estimated from a small sample study that about 39% of cases ever returned to some kind of normalcy.[\[4\]](#)

We know better today that cases of psychological stress were not solely a First World War phenomenon. An official report of American forces in the North West European Theatre of World War II stated that all men were

susceptible to such breakdowns, and an average individual would lose effectiveness after ninety days in the combat area^[5]

Even then, during the Second World War, there were still those unconvinced that such illnesses were legitimate. The incidences of General George S Patton Jr. Striking private soldiers who had been admitted to hospital for nervous disorders are among the most well-known examples.

Today, we give the term Post Traumatic Stress Disorder to such illnesses, and even understand that they can occur in all cases of mental trauma and are not specific to the military or combat. However, modern medicine still has no comprehensive treatment of PTSD; and as long as the fear and stigma of mental illness persist, some who might benefit from treatment will remain undiagnosed from the shame, and those who admit their condition to seek help can still be handled in a marginalised way.

^[1]Holmes, Richard: Tommy: The British Soldier on the Western Front, Harper Perennial 2005 pg 484

^[2]Meyer, G.J.: A World Undone, The Story of the Great War 1914-1918, Delacorte Press 2007 pg 393

^[3]Meyer, G. *Jibid*, pg 396

^[4]Ferguson, Niall: The Pity of War 1914-1918, Penguin 2009 pg 341

^[5]Ambrose, Stephen E.: Band of Brothers, Pocket Books 2001 pg 203

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Spiritualism in Australia and the Great War

by **Peter Stanley**

2014-08-04 09:53:53

I was interested to read Suzanne Grogan's post about the largely unacknowledged, and certainly incompletely explored question of spiritualism in the Great War. As in so many aspects of the war, Robert Graves's *Goodbye to All That* alerted me forty-odd years ago to bereaved parents' recourse to spiritualism. After he had been wounded on the Somme in 1916 he stayed with a family in Kent, a son of which had been killed on Gallipoli. Graves left early, disturbed by rapping noises and shrieks in the night, and encountering the mother fully

dressed in the small hours, presumably communing with her son in his room which she had preserved exactly as he had left it. 'There were thousands of mothers like her?', he recalled, 'getting in touch with their dead sons by various spiritualistic means'.^[1]

In Australia a great deal of attention has been paid by historians to the effects of the war on the bereaved ' works of compassion and insight, such as Joy Damousi's *The Labour of Loss*, Stephen Garton's *The Cost of War*, or Bart Ziino's *A Distant Grief*.^[2] Despite the popular engagement with the history of the Great War in Australia (and with its mythology and emotion), little interest seems to have been taken in the response of spiritualism.

Australian historians, even the best of those exploring the impact of mass death, have directed little attention to spiritualism. Joy Damousi tells an affecting story of a mother communing with her dead son ' but in 1944. Stephen Garton describes a sance held in Melbourne in 1920. Bart Ziino wrote insightfully of the importance of 'phantoms' in coming to terms with the cost of war ' but largely in terms of Will Longstaff's painting *The Menin Gate at Midnight* (enormously popular in cheap reproductions) rather than individually, through, say, sances.

Writing the 'social history' chapters of a volume dealing with the Australian experience of the Great War at home, I was struck anew by the surprising dearth of reference to spiritual responses to bereavement, and included in my section on 'death and grief' a paragraph discussing spiritualism in Australia:

Throughout the war the two dozen lodges of the Theosophical Society, the formal wing of the spiritualist movement, grew, with an eight-storey headquarters in Sydney and substantial buildings in most states. Mainly middle-class, its members included bereaved parents anxious to contact dead soldier sons, or at least to be comforted that they lived on in other realms. Theosophists had reacted optimistically to its outbreak, believing that mass death in a 'noble cause created a bank of souls ready to reincarnate for higher evolutionary purposes'.^[3] Bereaved more interested in solace than higher evolutionary purposes turned to clairvoyance, which underwent a minor resurgence as women especially sought comfort. With so many men in peril, from the moment their transports left harbour, not surprisingly many civilians resorted to superstition. Fortune-tellers and clairvoyants became popular, often prosecuted by state police forces that regarded them as cheats rather than as bearers of consolation, a phenomenon awaiting investigation. Fortune-telling was illegal in some states ' in Victoria attracting relatively light fines; presumably no deterrent to amateurs filling a need for reassurance. Norman Lindsay recalled the 'universal sense of shocked insecurity ' which sent nearly everybody into the back-parlour limbo of Spiritualism'.^[1] Hardly 'nearly everybody?', but certainly Lindsay. Though her husband had decried C.J. Dennis's verse as 'maudlin rubbish [as] a consolation for their dead?', Rose Lindsay described Norman's distress when he learned of the death of his brother Reg, killed during the Somme winter. Norman acquired a Ouija board and with it tried to communicate with Reg (and, being Norman, also with Shakespeare and the god Apollo).

(To explain 'local' references in a paragraph in a volume pressed for words: C.J. Dennis was the popular poet whose books, especially *Songs of a Sentimental Bloke* and *The Moods of Ginger Mick*, became massive publishing successes (and is discussed elsewhere in the volume). Norman Lindsay was a Sydney cartoonist and artist whose self-conscious libertarian bohemianism co-existed with his creation of some of the most vicious anti-German propaganda of Australia's war. Gunner Reg Lindsay was killed on the Somme on 31 December 1917.)

Why is it that historians have generally neglected the spiritualist response to bereavement in the Great War' How common was it' Did the bereaved find fortune-tellers, clairvoyants or mediums already practising, or did they emerge to meet the demand, as it were' Who sought out spiritualist routes to contact the dead ' working class or middle class; men or women' How did laws governing fortune-telling affect the way it was used, or the way it was reported' We hardly have answers to these questions.

But we might; thanks to the availability of digitised Australian newspapers of the Great War period through the National Library of Australia's astonishing Trove data base (<http://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper?q=%20>). It enables us to trace references to 'clairvoyants?', 'fortune-tellers?', 'spiritualists?', 'sances' and (with more difficulty) 'mediums' for hundreds of metropolitan and local newspapers throughout the period ' and to compare reports and references before, during and after the war. This new tool should by itself re-invigorate the investigation of this response to the Great War.

I'm hoping that someone in Australia might take up this question. It's worthy of everything from an honours thesis (looking at spiritualism in one state, perhaps) to an MA or even a PhD. I think (if the evidence sustains it) there could be a book in this.

[1] Norman Lindsay, *My Mask: For what little I know of the man behind it*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1973, p. 196

[1] Robert Graves, *Goodbye to All That*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1960, p. 192

[2] Joy Damousi, *The Labour of Loss: Mourning, Memory and Wartime Bereavement in Australia*, CUP, Melbourne, 1999; Stephen Garton, *The Cost of War: Australians Return*, OUP, Melbourne, 1996; Tanja Luckins, *The Gates of Memory: Australian People's Experiences and Memories of Loss and the Great War*, Curtin University Press, Perth, 2004; Bart Ziino, *A Distant Grief: Australians, War Graves and the Great War*, UWA Press, Perth, 2007

[3] Jill Roe, *Beyond Belief: Theosophy in Australia 1879-1939*, UNSW Press, Sydney, 1986, p. 225

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'A solace to a tortured world...' - The Growing Interest in Spiritualism during and after WW1

by Suzie Grogan

2014-07-17 11:00:15

In the 21st century, how many of us believe in ghosts' Is commune with the dead now confined to the pages of teenage fiction and mass market horror' Or could we, as a society, once more turn to spiritualism in our hundreds of thousands as our grand and great grandparents did during and after the Great War?

I have recently been researching the rise of spiritualism from 1914 until the 1930s, from a resurgence to a decline from which it has not recovered. The work of Jenny Hazelgrove in [Spiritualism and British Society Between the Wars](#)(2000)and Professor Jay Winter [in Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning](#)(2014), have informed my work on the emotional impact of the war on society as a whole, as I make the argument for a 'Shell Shocked Britain'. Why did so many rational men and women, in secular and religious communities, place their faith in the spiritualist church' How did individual mediums convince them of the possibility of opening a channel of communication with loved ones lost in the trenches, air or seas of the conflict?

By the end of that war, few families had escaped the experience of loss. If one's own family had come home safely, a friend or family member would have suffered bereavement. A small community may have lost the majority of its young, male residents and the grieving process was a national experience, so widely felt that spiritualism found a large and ready audience. Professor Winter has said it 'provided a means through which the dead led the way'. They helped both to lift the burden of grief borne by their families and to spread the 'truth' of spirit communication'.

'Celebrity' endorsements, then as now, increased spiritualism's popularity. Believers such as Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and Sir Oliver Lodge, although not necessarily in agreement with each other (Doyle took an emotional stance, Lodge a more rational view) saw spirit communication as akin to new work on electricity and radio waves. Both men had lost loved ones to the war. Lodge wrote a book based on his communication with his son, Raymond, who was killed at Ypres in 1915. In it he described 'Summerland' where Raymond now resided, enjoying a life without the cares those on earth experienced. 100 years on, we can look at it as a cultural response to mass bereavement, but even in the 21st century there is still a yearning to believe there is a life beyond death.

Many, including those in the Catholic and Anglican churches, were wholly against the new 'craze?', described vividly by an anonymous letter writer, who had seen military service, to *The Courier* in 1919:

?Mothers and friends of fallen soldiers resorting to table-rapping, creakings, automatic writing through the medium of the planchette, Ouija, heliograph etc. in the hope of once more communicating with their loved ones'.?

The author of the letter accused mediums of being aggressive 'quacks' that preyed on the delusional and were mouthpieces of the devil himself. Warning to his subject, his rant led to a significant error ' he maintained that soldiers did not turn to spiritualism, when as Professor Jay Winter points out, the memoirs and letters of serving personnel were abound with images and legends of a spiritualist nature.

Critics called this belief in a glorious afterlife a 'menace' and suggested those who believed were 'gullible imbeciles' to fall for the 'roguery' of spiritualists. As the correspondent to *The Courier* went on:

?There are many unfortunate beings today in our lunatic asylums driven mad by demoniacal possession. They are also directly responsible for many suicides??In females it often results in hysterics, chronic insomnia &c.'

A doctor, writing to *The Western Daily Press* in 1912, replied to Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's assertion that no harm could come to anyone involved in spiritualist practices. On the contrary, he said, it was clear that there were 'fear-fascinated neurotics' for whom the sance was very dangerous, and that the same people would inevitably be drawn to self-introspection and psychoanalysis, of which he had a similarly low opinion.

The response to the rise of spiritualism at this time was often couched in misogynistic terms. Mediums were usually female, finding what they considered to be a positive role that brought them to prominence in a society still restricting and marginalising the work thought appropriate for a respectable woman to do. In fact, from spiritualism's Victorian heyday onwards, some 'sensitive' women were exploited by men who took them round wealthy parlours almost as a freak show.

The rise of spiritualism and its links to issues of gender, the role of religion and the need for certainty and succour is fascinating, and not often discussed. It would be an interesting topic for further research.

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