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# Belief and the People's War

*Heterodoxy in Second World War Britain*

OLIVER PARKEN

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements  
of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in History

School of History, Division of Arts and Humanities  
University of Kent  
April 2021

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O. P.  
Avon, North Carolina, United States, April 2021

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## *List of Abbreviations*

ABCA	Army Bureau of Current Affairs
AChD	Army Chaplain's Department
AEC	Army Education Corps
AFS	Auxiliary Fire Service
ARP	Air Raid Precautions
ATIS	Allied Translator and Interpreter Section
ATS	Auxiliary Territorial Service
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BEF	British Expeditionary Force
CO	Colonial Office/Commissioned Officer
D	Diary
DR	Directive Response
DQ	Directive Questionnaire
ECO	Emergency Commissioned Officer
FR	File Report
HI	Home Intelligence
IJA	Imperial Japanese Army
INA	Indian National Army
LMF	'Lack of Moral Fibre'
IOR	Indian Other Ranks
MO	Mass Observation
MoI	Ministry of Information
MoHS	Ministry of Home Security
MRC	Medical Research Council
NCO	Non Commissioned Officer
OR	Other Ranks
OWI	US Office of War Information
POW	Prisoner of War
PWE	Political Warfare Executive



*List of Abbreviations*

PSGB	Psychological Society of Great Britain
RACHD	Royal Army Chaplain's Department
RAF	Royal Air Force
RAMC	Royal Army Medical Corps
RASC	Royal Army Service Corps
RIO	Regional Information Officers
RWAF	Royal West African Frontier Force
SEAC	South-East Asia Command
SNU	Spiritualist National Union
SOE	Special Operations Executive
SPR	Society for Psychical Research
SWPA	South-West Pacific Area
TC	Topic Collection
TS	Theosophical Society
USAAF	United States Army Air Force
VCO	Viceroy's Commissioned Officer
WAAC	War Artists' Advisory Committee
WAAF	Women's Auxiliary Air Force
WVS	Women's Volunteer Service

## *Abstract*

Britain's Second World War looms large in popular cultural memory. Yet the war is rarely considered as being distinctly religious or spiritual in both academic and popular histories. This thesis addresses this omission by reconsidering the pressing significance of beliefs and believing in the total war context. Using the concept of 'heterodoxy' to reconstruct wartime debates on the policing of belief by state, military, and cultural agents, it argues that these discourses were shaped by specific wartime conditions as well as longer-term factors. It was here in the 'People's War' context that pre-existing social tensions and technological, military, and political developments stemming from the nineteenth century influenced debates on believing. Social and cultural methods are utilised in order to connect these debates with beliefs' lived experience. Ultimately, ideas on heterodoxy were shaped by the relationship between belief and morale. This was both classed and gendered. Perceived differences between home and front, men and women, West and non-West at the cultural level masked the infinite ways beliefs traversed imagined social binaries. To illustrate this, the thesis draws on thematic case studies which showcase different sites and contexts of war. These include the workings of ghosts in the metropole; spiritualism, mediumship, and psychical research in organised context; astrology propaganda and its relationship to domestic morale; superstition within the military sphere; and soldiers' engagement with belief cultures in South/South-East Asia. Adopting an expanded approach to the 'archive', the thesis blends traditional document-based sources with material/visual culture, contemporary media products (newspapers, film and music), rumours and ephemera, as well as sources of the self and ethnographic materials (notably diaries, letters, oral testimonies, and Mass Observation reports). In terms of original contribution, the thesis offers a fresh analysis of class and gender in wartime through the prism of belief. It also develops conceptual readings of religion and belief in modern Britain; pushing discussion beyond 'diffusive Christianity' and 'popular religion', and challenging twentieth century secularising arguments from a broader interpretation of 'belief' during a neglected time period.

## *Introduction*

We are surrounded by Superstition to-day. It is all around us to a degree hardly suspected by educated people...There is no excuse for the widespread superstition of the present day.<sup>1</sup>

Readers would be forgiven for thinking that this vitriolic attack on ‘superstition’ came from clerical writings of the medieval or early-modern period. The words were penned by a theologian, the Reverend Clement F. Rogers, but the publication date was April 1941. Rogers was no shrinking violet when it came to expressing his theological and spiritual views publicly. Serving parishes in Yorkshire and London as a priest in the 1890s–1900s before taking a lectureship position in pastoral theology at King’s College London in 1907 (promoted to Professor in 1919), Rogers published extensively on a wide-range of spiritual themes.<sup>2</sup> The widespread turn to superstition in wartime was noted in shock by Rogers: ‘There are stories of how [through] mere thought power people...watched a bomb fall “and ordered it to fall where it would do the least harm”’.<sup>3</sup> For Rogers, it was the tension between the public and private dynamics of belief which were critical to understanding the pull towards heterodoxy amongst

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<sup>1</sup> Clement F. Rogers, *Astrology in the Light of Science and Religion* (London: SCM Press, 1941), p. 10, 18.

<sup>2</sup> Little has been published on Rogers’ life and work outside of cursory references. For his obituary, see ‘Rev. C. F. Rogers’, *The Times*, 24 June 1949, p. 7. For a sample of Rogers’ published work, see Clement F. Rogers, *An Introduction to the Study of Pastoral Theology* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1912); idem, *The Case for Christianity: An Outline of Popular Apologetics* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1928); idem, *The Case for Miracles* (London: S. P. C. K., 1936).

<sup>3</sup> Rogers, *Astrology in the Light of Science and Religion*, pp. 15–6.

the ‘masses’.<sup>4</sup> Much like other contemporary commentators, his view of the ‘mass’ was classed and gendered, alluding as he did to the susceptibility of ‘uneducated’ individuals to the pull of ‘harmful’ belief systems.<sup>5</sup> Yet his indictment featured a curious mix of pre-existing anxieties on the transformative power of belief, its adaptation to the present context of war, and its possible shaping of future spirituality and popular mentalities.

This study captures the interplay between longer-term religious and spiritual trajectories and their adaptation to the wartime context touched on by Rogers. It explores the prevalence of heterodox beliefs in wartime Britain, and the wide ranging, cross-cultural discourse which helped shape which beliefs were ‘acceptable’ in the context of ‘total war’ and for which reasons. Adopting a socio-cultural methodology, and drawing inspiration from the wider historiographies of class and gender, it argues that wartime debates on heterodoxy were not simply created by the specific dynamics of war or longer term religious/spiritual shifts. It encompasses a far broader network of historical currents within modern British social and cultural life—thus placing the concept of belief into wider contexts and cultures. Wartime belief, and debates on believing, were rooted in notions of the ‘public’ and ‘private’; ideas at the heart of Victorian and Edwardian society.<sup>6</sup> Crucially, it was beliefs’ public/private dimensions, and their proximity to ambiguous contemporary understandings of ‘morale’, which dictated which kinds were accepted or challenged at the state/cultural level. Exploring heterodoxy’s classed and gendered aspects, as well as connections between the two World Wars, the study challenges notions of ‘secularisation’ and mid twentieth century secularising cultures associated with ‘modernity’ from an eclectic mix of sources; offering a new analysis of the rhetorical and power-related dimensions of belief in wartime. In order to trace this history, and its implicit political components, the study engages with two core areas of historiography: studies on the ‘people’s war’ and Second World War Britain, and transformations in British religion and belief since the mid nineteenth century. As Clement Rogers alluded to in the opening vignette,

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<sup>4</sup> See Clement F. Rogers, *Lectures in Hyde Park: Why We Believe in God* (London: S. P. C. K., 1925).

<sup>5</sup> Rogers, *Astrology in the Light of Science and Religion*, pp. 14–5.

<sup>6</sup> On historical gendering of the ‘separate spheres’ in the Victorian period, see Anne Digby, ‘Victorian Values and Women in Public and Private’, *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 78 (1992), pp. 195–215; Catherine Hall, ‘The Early Formation of Victorian Domestic Ideology’, in Robert B. Shoemaker and Mary Vincent (eds.), *Gender and History in Western Europe* (London: Arnold, 1998), pp. 181–96. Critiques of the concept can be found in Lawrence E. Klein, ‘Gender and the Public/Private Distinction in the Eighteenth Century: Some Questions about Evidence and Analytic Procedure’, *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 29 (1995), pp. 97–109; Amanda Vickery, ‘Golden Age to Separate Spheres? A Review of the Categories and Chronology of English Women’s History’, *Historical Journal*, 36 (1993), pp. 383–414; Lynn Abrams, ‘The Unseamed Picture: Conflicting Narratives of Women in the Modern European Past’, *Gender and History*, 20 (2008), pp. 628–43.

it was fundamentally the socio-political transformation of the ‘mass’, the ‘people’ of the ‘people’s war’, which became central to heterodoxy’s discourse—as the public and private aspects of individual and collective wartime lives were of significance to morale and the stability of the nation at war.

## RELIGION AND BELIEF IN MODERN BRITAIN

### *The Secularisation Debate*

More than any theory of religious change, the ‘secularisation thesis’, and its core proposition that the ‘prolonged and inevitable’ march towards modernity generated religious decline (both institutionally and individually) has come to dominate debates on religion and belief in modern British history.<sup>7</sup> Whilst an active point of contention for modern day scholars, secularisation’s roots stretch back to at least the socio-religious upheavals of the nineteenth century.<sup>8</sup> In the face of growing opposition from a chorus of radical voices (including non-Anglican denominationalists, deists, and secularists), contemporary clerics and churchmen frequently reflected on the century’s disastrous impact on institutional religion.<sup>9</sup> Dr Thomas Chalmers of the Church of Scotland, for example, noted in the early 1820s the adverse impact of ‘modernity’ (chiefly through urbanisation and industrialisation). The growth of science ‘destroyed’ the churches’ parochial influence over the common people, generating a sense of religious freedom and an evangelising individualism.<sup>10</sup> By

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<sup>7</sup> Callum Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain: Understanding Secularisation 1800–2000* (London: Arnold, 2001), p. 11. Also see Roy Wallis and Steve Bruce, ‘Secularization: The Orthodox Model’, in Steve Bruce (ed.), *Religion and Modernization: Sociologists and Historians Debate the Secularization Thesis* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992), pp. 8–30.

<sup>8</sup> Debate exists on the ‘onset’ of secularisation, and ‘modernisation’ more broadly, in history. For succinct overviews covering different time periods, see Jonathan Sheehan, ‘Enlightenment, Religion, and the Enigma of Secularization: A Review Essay’, *American Historical Review*, 108 (2003), pp. 1061–80; Dale van Kley, ‘Christianity as Casualty and Chrysalis of Modernity: The Problem of Dechristianization in the French Revolution’, *American Historical Review*, 108 (2003), pp. 1081–1104; Alexandra Walsham, ‘The Reformation and the “Disenchantment of the World” Reassessed’, *Historical Journal*, 51 (2008), pp. 497–528; Jonathan C. D. Clark, ‘Secularization and Modernization: The Failure of a “Grand Narrative”’, *Historical Journal*, 55 (2012), pp. 161–94.

<sup>9</sup> Jeremy Morris, ‘Secularization and Religious Experience: Arguments in the Historiography of Modern British Religion’, *Historical Journal*, 55 (2012), p. 196. On radical opposition to the established Church, see Edward Royle, *Victorian Infidels: The Origins of the British Secularist Movement 1791–1866* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1974); E. Groth Lyon, *Politicians in the Pulpit: Christian Radicalism in Britain from the Fall of the Bastille to the Disintegration of Chartism* (Aldershot: Routledge, 1999); Timothy Larsen, *Crisis of Doubt: Honest Faith in Nineteenth Century England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

<sup>10</sup> Thomas Chambers, *The Christian and Civic Economy of Large Towns*, 3 vols. (Glasgow: Chalmers & Collins, 1821–1826); quoted in Callum Brown, ‘Did Urbanization Secularize Britain?’, *Urban History*, 15 (1988), p. 1. On loss of rural support, see Alan Everitt, *The Pattern of Rural Dissent: The Nineteenth Century* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1972).

the 1860s ‘secularisation’ began to seep into sociological discussions on the nature of religious change in both Britain and Western Christendom,<sup>11</sup> before becoming a central category for foundational religious sociologists at the turn of the twentieth century (chiefly Durkheim, Weber, Mauss, Halbwachs, and Tönnies).<sup>12</sup> From its inception, secularisation was designed to explain the so-called Victorian ‘crisis of faith’ from a structural, empirical vantage-point. It provided a salve for the numerous internal schisms emerging within the Church of England and the scientific challenge posed by Darwin’s *Origins of Species* (1859), before forming a key aspect of social theory.<sup>13</sup> Whilst more sophisticated works adopt philosophical and intellectual historical methods to track the concept’s shifts from its theological beginnings to its ‘truth revealing’ power amongst social scientists,<sup>14</sup> the ‘master narrative’ of secularisation continues to polarise opinion, especially between historians and sociologists.<sup>15</sup> The groundwork for these debates were laid during the 1950s and 1960s, in which historical focus turned towards available numerical data on nineteenth century churchgoing.

For the most part, evidence on nineteenth century churchgoing remains fragmented and difficult to analyse systematically.<sup>16</sup> In light of this (and due to established thinking on the mutual links between urbanisation and secularisation), early work on the subject took a metropolitan

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<sup>11</sup> Morris, ‘Secularization and Religious Experience’, p. 196.

<sup>12</sup> Annette Becker, ‘Memory Gaps: Maurice Halbwachs, Memory and the Great War’, *Journal of European Studies*, 35 (2005), pp. 102–14.

<sup>13</sup> On the ‘crisis of faith’, see Anthony Symondson (ed.), *The Victorian Crisis of Faith* (London: S. P. C. K., 1970); Elisabeth Jay, *Faith and Doubt in Victorian Britain* (London: Macmillan, 1989); Richard J. Helmstadter and Bernard Lightmann (eds.), *Victorian Faith in Crisis: Essays on Continuity and Change in Nineteenth-Century Religious Belief* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1990). For a recent challenge, see Larsen, *Crisis of Doubt*.

<sup>14</sup> John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990); Dominic Erdozian, ‘The Secularisation of Sin in the Nineteenth Century’, *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 62 (2011), pp. 59–88; Morris, ‘Secularization and Religious Experience’, pp. 206–7. For a discussion on the birth of secularisation from radical Evangelism, hence Christianity sowing the seeds of ‘secularisation’, within late modernity, see Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007). Also see David Nash, ‘Believing in Secularisation—Stories of Decline, Potential, and Resurgence’, *Journal of Religious History*, 41 (2017), pp. 505–31.

<sup>15</sup> In particular, see Bruce (ed.), *Religion and Modernization*. The classic sociological study remains Bryan R. Wilson, *Religion in Secular Society: A Sociological Comment* (London: Watts, 1966). For a more nuanced theory of secularisation, see David Martin, *A General Theory of Secularisation* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1978). On secularisation as a ‘grand narrative’, see Jeffrey Cox, ‘Master Narratives of Long-Term Religious Change’, in Hugh McLeod and Werner Ustorf (eds.), *The Decline of Christendom in Western Europe 1750–2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 201–17. Calls for secularisation’s ‘elimination’ as a concept can be found in David Martin, ‘Towards Eliminating the Concept of Secularization’, in Julius Gould (ed.), *Penguin Survey of the Social Sciences* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965), pp. 169–82; Jeffrey Cox, ‘Towards Eliminating the Concept of Secularization: A Progress Report’, in Callum Brown and Michael Snape (eds.), *Secularization in the Christian World: Essays in Honour of Hugh McLeod* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), pp. 13–26. For a recent defence of secularisation, see Steve Bruce, *Secularization: In Defence of an Unfashionable Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

<sup>16</sup> Jose Harris, *Private Lives, Public Spirit: A Social History of Britain 1870–1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 153.

focus.<sup>17</sup> For E. R. Wickham, the relationship between urbanisation and church decline in the context of Sheffield was ‘transparently clear to any who are not wilfully blind’.<sup>18</sup> At its heart *Church and People in an Industrial City* painted a bleak ecclesiastical picture. From the origins of industrial towns in the eighteenth century, organised Christianity (specifically the Church of England) failed to remedy shifting cultural patterns of the ‘working class, the labouring poor, and common people’. Whilst the onset of decline proper began in the early nineteenth century (a result, Wickham argues, of the loss of the ‘middling-classes’) it was working-class apathy and alienation in the previous century which kick-started the process of secularisation through high pew-rents and the churches’ disregard for working-class culture.<sup>19</sup> The period was less a gradual decline of working-class participation in church life than a realisation amongst clerics that they never really enjoyed their involvement in the first place.<sup>20</sup> Similar conclusions were made by K. S. Inglis in the following decade in the broader context of England. Others impressed the notion of the churches instituting repressive, class-based social control.<sup>21</sup>

Given the paradigmatic shift towards Marxist modes of analysis during the postwar period (particularly during the 1960s), it is of little surprise that writers such as Wickham and Inglis saw ‘class’ as the overarching category explaining secularisation.<sup>22</sup> Yet the positivist, structural approach adopted by both ultimately undermined and warped their analysis of the ‘working classes’. Accepting the process of secularisation as a historically occurring phenomenon, rather than one in need of explanation and interrogation, both authors (Wickham in particular) failed to recognise their regurgitation of contemporary ‘elite religion’ and clerical fears over church decline at the hands of evangelical and revivalist impulses; a significant component of the

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<sup>17</sup> E. R. Wickham, *Church and People in an Industrial City* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1957).

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>20</sup> E. R. Wickham, *Encounter with Modern Society* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1954), p. 35.

<sup>21</sup> K. S. Inglis, *Churches and the Working Classes in Victorian England* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963); Hugh McLeod, *Class and Religion in the Late Victorian City* (London: Croom Helm, 1974); Jennifer Hart, ‘Religion and Social Control in the mid-Nineteenth Century’, in A. P. Donajgradski (ed.), *Social Control in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (London: Croom Helm, 1977), pp. 108–37.

<sup>22</sup> For key contributions to the historiography on class in modern Britain and England, see E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1963); Gareth Stedman Jones, *Languages of Class: Studies in English Working Class History 1832–1982* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Ross McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures: England, 1918–1951* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780–1850* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); Patrick Joyce, *Visions of the People: Industrial England and the Question of Class, 1840–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Sonya Rose, *Limited Livelihoods: Gender and Class in Nineteenth-Century England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991); Joanna Bourke, *Working Class Cultures in Britain 1890–1960: Gender, Class and Ethnicity* (London: Routledge, 1994); Mike Savage and Andrew Miles, *The Remaking of the British Working Class, 1840–1940* (London: Routledge, 1994); David Cannadine, *Class in Britain* (London: Penguin, 2000).

secularisation thesis' early entrenchment.<sup>23</sup> This was in part due to Wickham's outlook as well as his treatment of contemporary source material. A committed Anglican, rather than a professional historian, Wickham helped found the modern industrial mission with an eye on the present context of closing churches and shrinking congregations.<sup>24</sup> The 1851 religious census of England and Wales, a problematic source which claimed that only 58 per-cent of the 12,500,000 people able to attend Census Sunday did so, proved fruitful evidence for the Wickham/Inglis orthodoxy.<sup>25</sup> Compared with additional local sources, the evidence for an increasingly secular mid-century working-class appeared to pile up.<sup>26</sup> Yet the census did little to illustrate the ebb-and-flow of churchgoing over time, and both Wickham and Inglis downplayed the 'augmented' rather than 'diminished' extent of middle and upper-class churchgoing recorded. Whilst a low point of church decline was reached around 1880, by the *fin de siècle* a higher proportion of people were active members of religious dominations than at any other time during Queen Victoria's reign. The combined membership of the English, Scottish, and Protestant Nonconformist was (as a proportion of the adult population) 3 per-cent higher at this time than in 1860. The number of Roman Catholics in England, Wales, and Scotland doubled during the period, whilst the prospects of the Anglican church appeared numerically more optimistic into the 1900s.<sup>27</sup> Despite sociological insistence that the thesis was historically and culturally rooted, early works failed to explain secularisation's relationship with causation or offer tailored assessments of its utility in light of specific historical contexts.<sup>28</sup> As this study reveals, even short time periods of historical investigation can reveal how beliefs adapt and evolve significantly over time. Secularisation cannot be viewed as a 'one-size fits all' theory.

It was precisely the complexity of British institutional religion of the nineteenth century, within and beyond its relationship to the working-classes, which the secularising historiography

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<sup>23</sup> For an overview of 'elite' and 'popular' religion, see Kate Cooper and Jeremy Gregory (eds.), *Elite Religion and Popular Religion* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2006).

<sup>24</sup> Morris, 'Secularization and Religious Experience', p. 198.

<sup>25</sup> Owen Chadwick, *The Victorian Church, 1829–1859* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1966), pp. 363–66; B. I. Coleman, *The Church of England in the Nineteenth Century: A Social Geography* (London: Historical Association, 1980); Morris, 'Secularization and Religious Experience', p. 199. For the classic statistical interpretation of churchgoing during this period, see Robert Currie, Alan D. Gilbert, and Lee Horsley, *Churches and Churchgoers: Patterns of Church Growth in the British Isles Since 1700* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1977).

<sup>26</sup> See K. S. Inglis, 'Patterns of Religious Worship in 1851', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 11 (1960), pp. 74–86; William Pickering, 'The 1851 Religious Census: A Useless Experiment?', *British Journal of Sociology*, 18 (1967), pp. 382–407; David Thompson, 'The 1851 Religious Census: Problems and Possibilities', *Victorian Studies*, 11 (1967), pp. 87–97.

<sup>27</sup> Harris, *Private Lives, Public Spirit*, pp. 153–54.

<sup>28</sup> Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1967), p. 107.



of the 1950s–1970s either failed to notice or actively ignored. As Jose Harris makes clear, arguments for the waning influence of organised religion, both privately and publicly, fail to consider the more complex, shifting socio-political landscape in which it operated within nineteenth and early twentieth century Britain.<sup>29</sup> Whilst ‘disestablishment’—separation of church and state after the granting of political rights to Nonconformists (1828), Catholics (1829), and Jews (1890)—undoubtedly curtailed the influence of the Church of England from the 1870s, it did not render it (or other religious institutions) ‘recessive’ in an age of secularisation, as Eric Hobsbawm has stressed.<sup>30</sup> The Oxford movement within the Church of England and the Irish ‘devotional revolution’ attest to the vitality of institutional religion of the nineteenth century.<sup>31</sup> Chronological and geographical variants are also important. The swell of Victorian Nonconformism imposed greater influence on the state of the established Church in the 1860s and 1870s compared to the end of the century, especially amongst remote agricultural and mining villages.<sup>32</sup> Whilst challenges came from middling Nonconformism, continued efforts by the Church of England and other denominations were made towards ‘re-Christianising’ the working-classes from the 1820s; expanding their civic work (notably through middle-class women’s volunteerism in sites where the vulnerable urban poor sought help and refuge such as shelters and orphanages) as well diversifying their various commercial ventures.<sup>33</sup> Churchgoing and social

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<sup>29</sup> Harris, *Private Lives, Public Spirit*. Of course, the term ‘Britain’ has complexities when applied to the churches (and the government and state) during the period. See John Wolffe, *God and Greater Britain: Religion and National Life in Britain and Ireland, 1843–1945* (London: Routledge, 1994); Keith Robbins, *England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales: The Christian Church, 1900–2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008). The historiography on ‘Britain’ and the ‘United Kingdom’ during the period is vast. For a useful overview, see David Martin, ‘Great Britain: England’, in David Martin (ed.), *A Sociology of English Religion* (London: Heinemann, 1967), pp. 229–47.

<sup>30</sup> Eric J. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution: Europe 1789–1848* (London: Cardinal, 1973), p. 261; idem, *The Age of Empire 1875–1914* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1987), p. 266. The Church of England and Ireland’s privileges were dismantled in Ireland in 1871 and Wales in 1920. The Free Church of Scotland broke away from the established Church of Scotland in 1843.

<sup>31</sup> Peter B. Nockles, *The Oxford Movement in Context: Anglican High Churchmanship, 1760–1857* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Emmet Larkin, ‘The Devotional Revolution in Ireland, 1850–75’, *American Historical Review*, 77 (1972), pp. 625–52.

<sup>32</sup> Harris, *Private Lives, Public Spirit*, p. 156; Dale Johnson, *The Changing Shape of English Nonconformity, 1825–1925* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

<sup>33</sup> Harris, *Private Lives, Public Spirit*, p. 157; Alison Twells, ‘The Heathen at Home and Overseas: The Middle Class and the Civilizing Mission, Sheffield 1790–1840’, unpublished DPhil thesis (University of York, 1998); Alison Fletcher, ‘“With My Precious Salvation and My Umbrella”: The London Missionary Society in Early and Mid-Victorian Britain’, unpublished PhD thesis, Johns Hopkins University (2003). For broad overviews of the mid-Victorian volunteer/reforming ethos, see Jane Lewis, *Women and Social Action in Victorian and Edwardian England* (Aldershot: Edward Elgar, 1991); Robert Humphreys, *Sin, Organised Charity and the Poor Law in Victorian England* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995). For an opposing view to Harris, see Stephen Yeo, *Religion and Voluntary Organisations in Crisis* (London: Croom Helm, 1976). On the social reach of Anglicanism, Nonconformism, and Evangelicalism, see F. Stuart Piggin, *Making Evangelical Missionaries, 1789–1858: The Social Background, Motives, and the Training of British Protestant Missionaries to India* (Abingdon: Sutton Courtney Press, 1984); Brian

improvement were linked in the minds of many contemporary clerics and, as one historian puts it, 'both fit into a general concept of civic responsibility in which the churches played a key role as a wholesome and civilizing influence'.<sup>34</sup> This was not just a product of the nineteenth century. As recent work shows, the voluntary, community-focused underpinnings of Victorian religion were of 'enduring importance' into the twentieth century.<sup>35</sup> Alongside their 'implicit' functions, the churches retained strong political ties with the state and government; although by the early twentieth century this had become less dichotomous than liberal associations with Nonconformity and conservative sympathies with the Church of England.<sup>36</sup> A growing religious pluralism emerged in which a 'tacit alliance', to borrow Philip Williamson's phrase, existed between the churches led by the Church of England, the monarchy, and the government into the twentieth century.<sup>37</sup> The influence of the established denominations, and more broadly emergent Nonconformist movements, not only highlight the continued importance of growing pluralised religion during the period but their central role as 'promoter[s]' and 'carrier[s]' of the new ideas of the age.<sup>38</sup>

Debates on secularization, and its often confused relationship with religious decline, have led to fundamental shifts in the periodisation of institutional religion's waning fortunes in the modern period. More frequently, it is the twentieth century rather than the nineteenth which recent work charts as the critical period of analysis. Precise timings on institutional decline

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Stanley, *The Bible and the Flag: Protestant Missions and British Imperialism in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Leicester: Apollos, 1990); Boyd Hilton, *The Age of Atonement: The Influence of Evangelicalism on Social and Economic Thought 1795–1865* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991); Andrew Porter, 'Religion and Empire: British Expansion in the Long Nineteenth Century, 1780–1914', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 20 (1992), pp. 370–90; Susan Thorne, *Congregational Missions and the Making of an Imperial Culture in Nineteenth-Century England* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999); Rhonda Anne Semple, *Missionary Women: Gender, Professionalism and the Victorian Idea of Christian Mission* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2003).

<sup>34</sup> Jeffrey Cox, *The English Churches in a Secular Society: Lambeth, 1870–1930* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 119.

<sup>35</sup> Phil Child, 'Blacktown, Mass Observation, and the Dynamics of Voluntary Action in mid-Twentieth-Century England', *Historical Journal*, 63 (2019), pp. 754–76.

<sup>36</sup> On 'implicit religion', see Timothy Jenkins, *Religion in English Everyday Life* (New York: Berghahn Books, 1999).

<sup>37</sup> Philip Williamson, 'National Days of Prayer: The Churches, the State and Public Worship in Britain, 1899–1957', *English Historical Review*, 128 (2013), p. 325. On the churches and politics broadly, see G. I. T. Machin, *Politics and the Churches in Great Britain, 1832–1868* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1977). On the Church of England, see Matthew Grimley, *Citizenship, Community and the Church of England: Liberal Anglican Theories of the State between the Wars* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Tom Rodger, Philip Williamson, and Matthew Grimley (eds.), *The Church of England and British Politics since 1900* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2020). On Nonconformism, see J. R. Vincent, *The Formation of the Liberal Party, 1857–1868* (London: Constable, 1966); D. W. Bebbington, *The Nonconformist Conscience: Chapel and Politics, 1870–1914* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1982). On religion and the media, see Kenneth M. Wolfe, *The Churches and the BBC 1922–1956: The Politics of Broadcast Religion* (London: SCM Press, 1984).

<sup>38</sup> Harris, *Private Lives, Public Spirit*, p. 166.

are rarely agreed. Edwardian society, broadly covering the years 1901–1914, has been characterised as both a period of ‘crisis’ for established religion and as a ‘faith society’.<sup>39</sup> Others stress the dislocating impact of the First World War on institutional religion and its continued impact into the interwar period.<sup>40</sup> More recently still scholars have turned their attention to the ‘long’ 1950s and the socio-political turbulence of the 1960s as the onset of Christian Britain’s ‘death’, with Hugh McLeod describing its ruptures potentially as significant as the Reformation.<sup>41</sup> Debate also exists on the revolutionary or gradual onset of secularisation and/or religious decline.<sup>42</sup> Despite acknowledgement of the distinctions between ‘secularisation’ and ‘religious decline’ and attempts to break down differences, for example, between churchgoing and church membership across broader classes and sectional divisions, the historiography is still myopically concerned with plotting institutional religion’s downturn.<sup>43</sup> Little room is left for considering how religious decline and sacralisation could operate conterminously, or, in more problematic cases, explaining critical distinctions between numerical data on religious affiliation/attendance and wider public spirituality.<sup>44</sup> Aside from the rare example, moreover, the 1939–1945 period and the intense ruptures and possibilities it brought to the nation’s spiritual fabric are hardly mentioned within

<sup>39</sup> On Edwardian faith ‘in crisis’, see Keith Robbins, ‘The Churches in Edwardian Society,’ in Donald Read (ed.), *Edwardian England* (London: Historical Association, 1982), pp. 112–27; idem, *History, Religion and Identity in Modern Britain* (London: Hambledon, 1993), pp. 119–32; Hugh McLeod, *Religion and Society in England, 1850–1914* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996), pp. 169–224. As a ‘faith society’, see Callum Brown, *Religion and Society in Twentieth-Century Britain* (Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2006), pp. 40–87; idem, *The Death of Christian Britain*, p. 7. For a more nuanced version of Brown’s position, see Clive D. Field, ‘“The Faith Society”? Quantifying Religious Belonging in Edwardian Britain, 1901–1914’, *Journal of Religious History*, 37 (2013), pp. 39–63.

<sup>40</sup> See, in particular, Alan Wilkinson, *Dissent or Conform? War, Peace and the English Churches, 1900–1945* (London: SCM Press, 1986), p. 55; Alan Ruston, ‘Protestant Nonconformist Attitudes towards the First World War’, in Alan P. F. Sell and Anthony C. Cross (eds.), *Protestant Nonconformity in the Twentieth Century* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2003), p. 241; Clive D. Field, ‘Keep the Spiritual Home Fires Burning: Religious Belonging in Britain during the First World War’, *War & Society*, 33 (2014), pp. 244–68. On the interwar period, see Simon J. D. Green, *The Passing of Protestant England: Secularisation and Social Change, c.1920–1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Clive D. Field, ‘Gradualist or Revolutionary Secularization? A Case Study of Religious Belonging in Inter-War Britain, 1918–1939’, *Church History and Religious Culture*, 93 (2013), pp. 57–93.

<sup>41</sup> Callum Brown, ‘The Secularisation Decade’, in Hugh McLeod and Werner Ostorff (eds.), *The Decline of Christendom in Western Europe, 1750–2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 29–46; Hugh McLeod, *The Religious Crisis of the 1960s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Callum Brown, ‘What Was the Religious Crisis of the 1960s?’, *Journal of Religious History*, 34 (2010), pp. 468–79; Clive D. Field, *Britain’s Last Religious Revival? Quantifying Belonging, Behaving, and Believing in the Long 1950s* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015); idem, *Secularization in the Long 1960s: Numerating Religion in Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

<sup>42</sup> On revolutionary secularisation, see Brown, ‘What Was the Religious Crisis of the 1960s?’ On gradual secularisation, see Steve Bruce and Tony Glendinning, ‘When Was Secularization?’, *British Journal of Sociology*, 61 (2010), pp. 107–26; Field, ‘Gradualist or Revolutionary Secularization?’. For a more thorough interpretation of the ‘gradualist’ school, see Clive D. Field, *Periodizing Secularization: Religious Allegiance and Attendance in Britain, 1880–1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

<sup>43</sup> This remains true of Hugh McLeod’s concept of ‘Christendom’s’ decline. See idem and Ustorff (eds.), *The Decline of Christendom in Western Europe*.

<sup>44</sup> Harris, *Private Lives, Public Spirit*, p. 153. For the classic argument distinguishing the two, see Grace Davie, *Religion in Britain since 1945: Believing Without Belonging* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994).

longer term religious trajectories.<sup>45</sup> As anthropologically and culturally inspired works turned to argue, obsession over structural shifts in religion neglected the adaptability and fluidity of religious belief in social life—a key finding shared by this study.

*Diffusive Christianity, Popular Religion*

Given the predominance of secularisation theory and arguments on ecclesiastical decline, how were historians to handle evidence of religious vitality in the nineteenth century? Evangelicalism, rejecting the dogmas of High-Anglicanism for a more personal and privatised relationship with God, pervaded all aspects of Victorian life.<sup>46</sup> Methodism appealed to upper working-class shopkeepers and artisans. The number of adults previously exposed to institutional religion as children was also incredibly high, as ‘virtually every working-class child’ of the Victorian period attended some form of Sunday School at one stage or another.<sup>47</sup> Whilst ‘class’ remained the operative category of analysis, ways in which social historians of religion read or approached it began to change. Instead of analysing ecclesiastical records and clerical letters uncritically as representative of contemporary working-class religiosity, concerted efforts were made to access (as in the present study) the ‘rich flora and fauna of religious beliefs and practices’ from ‘below’.<sup>48</sup>

By the 1970s the notion of ‘popular religion’, an often vague concept denoting the place of official religious practices and beliefs within working-class culture, had become a fixed entity within the historiography of earlier time periods.<sup>49</sup> Yet notions of spiritual decline by the onset of

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<sup>45</sup> Clive D. Field, ‘Puzzled People Revisited: Religious Believing and Belonging in Wartime Britain, 1939–45’, *Twentieth Century British History*, 19 (2008).

<sup>46</sup> D. W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989); Susie L. Steinbach, *Understanding the Victorians: Politics, Culture and Society in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012), p. 223.

<sup>47</sup> Susan Thorne, ‘Religion and Empire at Home’, in Catherine Hall and Sonya O. Rose (eds.), *At Home with the Empire: Metropolitan Culture and the Imperial World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 143; Thomas Laqueur, *Religion and Respectability: Sunday Schools and Working-Class Culture 1780–1850* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976). On continued rites of passage, see John Kent, ‘Feelings and Festivals: An Interpretation of some Working-Class Religious Attitudes’, in Harold J. Dyos and Michael Wolff (eds.) *The Victorian City: Images and Realities*, vol II: *Shapes on the Ground and a Change of Accent* (London: Routledge, 1978), pp. 855–72.

<sup>48</sup> Richard Sykes, ‘Popular Religion in Decline: A Study from the Black Country’, *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 56 (2005), p. 288. On history ‘from below’, see the work of scholars associated with the ‘History Workshop Movement’, particularly Raphael Samuel. Idem, *People’s History and Socialist Theory* (London: Routledge, 1981). For recent appraisals of the movement, see Kynan Gentry, ‘Ruskin, Radicalism and Raphael Samuel: Politics, Pedagogy and the Origins of the History Workshop Movement’, *History Workshop Journal*, 76 (2013), pp. 187–221; Ian Gwinn, ‘“History Should Become Common Property”: Raphael Samuel, History Workshop, and the Practice of Socialist History, 1966–1980’, *Socialist History*, 51 (2017), pp. 96–117.

<sup>49</sup> Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century England* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1971). For pioneering works on popular religion in early time periods, see Natalie Z. Davis, ‘Some Tasks and Themes in the Study of Popular Religion,’ in Charles Trinkaus and Heiko

modernity proved unsatisfactory given both the ‘swarm of religious activity’ in mid-Victorian society and the continued importance of the supernatural to lay folk.<sup>50</sup> Focusing on the Churches of Lambeth between 1870 and 1930, Jeffrey Cox did much to rehabilitate contemporary clerical views of popular religion beyond its false associations with paganism and irreligion; countering notions of modern urban society as uniformly secular.<sup>51</sup> Even to the casual observer it was clear Cox had a particular axe to grind. ‘The social changes involved in secularisation’, he penned, ‘do not invariably and inevitably lead to the decay of religious ideas and institutions’.<sup>52</sup> Secularisation theory, he stressed, does little to establish how religion is always embedded in concrete historical and social circumstances.<sup>53</sup>

Whilst Cox undoubtedly had a stake in debates on the timing of institutional religious decline, a process he originated to the 1880s before becoming irreversible by the 1920s, he identified how churchgoing and ‘diffusive Christianity’ (encompassing a ‘general belief in God’ and the incorporation of Christian ethics in everyday life) were in a healthier state prior to the 1880s than many historians and contemporaries gave credit. Although many clerics recognised the pollination of Christianity’s influence through the pull to church and the wider diffusion of Christian teachings, others continued to obsess over working-class religious affiliation. The issue of gender became critical here. Male working-class congregations were dwindling and had been for some time.<sup>54</sup> But it was the prevalence of privatised and personalised faith amongst working-class women, stripped of its orthodox associations, which caused most concern. Women were invariably responsible for organising religious-focused rites of passage such as marriages, baptisms, and funerals. Their break-away from local institutions, as Cox suggests in connection with the downturn of Nonconformism by the *fin de siècle*, deprived churches and chapels from

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A. Oberman (eds.), *The Pursuit of Holiness in Late Medieval and Renaissance Religion* (Leiden: Brill, 1974), pp. 307–36; Robert W. Scribner, ‘Interpreting Religion in Early Modern Europe’, *European Studies Review*, 13 (1983), pp. 89–105; Craig Harline, ‘Official Religion–Popular Religion in Recent Historiography of the Catholic Reformation’, *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte*, 81 (1990), pp. 239–62. On the influence of cultural history on popular religion studies, and the need for research on ‘religious cultures’, see Natalie Z. Davis, ‘From “Popular Religion” to “Religious Cultures”’, in Steven Ozment (ed.), *Reformation Europe: A Guide to Research* (St Louis: Centre for Reformation Research, 1982), pp. 321–41.

<sup>50</sup> Cox, *The English Churches*, p. 4, 12.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 92. Also see James Obelkevich, *Religion and Rural Society in South Lindsey, 1825–1875* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1976).

<sup>52</sup> Cox, *The English Churches*, p. 266.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p. 271.

<sup>54</sup> Attempts to attract male believers came through ‘muscular’ or ‘militant’ Christianity. See Donald E. Hall (ed.), *Muscular Christianity: Embodying the Victorian Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Hugh McLeod, ‘The “Sportsman” and the “Muscular Christian”: Rival Ideals in Nineteenth-Century England’, in Patrick Pasture, Jan Art, and Thomas Buerman (eds.), *Beyond the Feminization Thesis: Gender and Christianity in Modern Europe* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2012), pp. 85–105.

indoctrinating the next generation of believers.<sup>55</sup> Given the growing equation of Christianity with femininity, and women's religiosity as increasingly privatised amongst contemporaries, Cox's point could easily be used to buttress gendered notions of secularisation, validating the separate spheres ideology. Yet equating femininity with Christianity's decline, and masculinity with emergent science and materialism, paints a false and chauvinistic distinction Cox was careful to avoid. Growing domestic piety and religious philanthropy amongst middle-class women ultimately led to militant political activism against sexual immorality and alcoholism, as Adrian Gregory notes.<sup>56</sup> Gendered and classed readings of socio-religious experience have the potential to mask the more complex workings of religion in the nineteenth century alongside significant interconnections between the false dichotomies of public (masculine) and private (feminine) worlds. Belief transfer between classes and genders was historically extremely fluid—a dynamic heightened in the context of war.

*The English Churches in a Secular Society* did much to illuminate the religious pluralism of the late nineteenth century and its wider social context. Yet Cox's view of 'diffusive Christianity', and the commercial/philanthropic workings of religion, was decisively top-down. The introduction of new evidence aided revisionist approaches in accessing the more elusive working-class religious cultures of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>57</sup> Oral history methods, as Hugh McLeod put it, have the potential to illuminate the more privatised, inner workings of religion.<sup>58</sup> Indeed, it was partly the use of oral testimony by Sarah C. Williams which marked her study of Southwark between 1880 and 1939 as a landmark contribution to the revisionist historiography.<sup>59</sup> Drawing critical links between religion and popular culture within the urban setting, Williams presented a radical reinterpretation of 'popular religion' and its relationship to class. Moving beyond Cox's view of 'popular religion' as a 'simple theism' in opposition to diffusive Christianity, Williams revealed the extent of working-class appropriation and adaptation of folk, superstitious,

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<sup>55</sup> Cox, *The English Churches*, p. 103, 99, 274. On the continued importance of 'class' beyond Cox's study, see Theodore Koditschek, *Class Formation and Urban Industrial Society: Bradford, 1750-1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

<sup>56</sup> Adrian Gregory, 'Beliefs and Religion', in Jay Winter (ed.), *The Cambridge History of the First World War*, vol. III: *Civil Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 419.

<sup>57</sup> Hugh McLeod, 'New Perspectives on Victorian Class Religion: The Oral Evidence', *Oral History*, 14 (1986), pp. 31-49; Alan B. Bartlett, 'The Churches in Bermondsey 1880-1939', unpublished PhD thesis, Birmingham University (1987).

<sup>58</sup> McLeod, 'New Perspectives on Victorian Class Religion', p. 32.

<sup>59</sup> Sarah C. Williams, *Religious Belief and Popular Culture in Southwark, c. 1880-1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

and orthodox beliefs and its significance within the popular culture of the community.<sup>60</sup> A fresh approach to class, influenced by the innovations of the linguistic turn and cultural history, abandoned its structural aspects in favour of a more expansive and subjective approach.<sup>61</sup> Through its 'construction', 'popular religion' unearths 'cultural meaning and identity' through overlaps between classes rather than accentuating cross-class division.<sup>62</sup> It formed a core part of the contemporary working-class' cultural and symbolic worlds—worlds which, contrary to arguments put forward by James Obelkevich, the working-class had significant agency in shaping.<sup>63</sup> Yet Williams' study also advances points on popular religion's relationship with wider patterns of change. 'Adaptation and continuity' of belief ruled over any dislocating aspects. Tradition, heritage, and memory were frequently readapted in the modern context: it was in the 'arena of heritage and identity... that religious values, traditions, and customs thrived'.<sup>64</sup> In writing an anthropologically and culturally rooted history, Williams did much to free religion and belief from the restrictive straight-jackets of structural and deterministic categories and expose the extent of spiritual subscription in a borough previously thought to have been heathen. Taking the metropolitan and local as her focus, much is needed to broaden the scope of Williams' approach to the national and (inter)-national levels; a key objective of this study.

Given the potency of secularisation theory, arguments on popular religious vitality have not gone unchallenged. For Steve Bruce, its proponents ignore or fail to explain the interlocking fortunes of institutional religious fortunes and wider folk practices.<sup>65</sup> Religion and religiosity beyond the Churches, he argues with reference to the north Yorkshire fishing village of Staithes during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, remains 'doubly vulnerable' to secularisation.<sup>66</sup> It is directly

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<sup>60</sup> Cox, *The English Churches*, p. 95; Williams, *Religious Belief*, p. 11. On the dangers of 'popular religion' imposing a false dichotomy between elite/official religion and wider religious convictions, see Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, 1400–1580* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), pp. 1–4.

<sup>61</sup> Williams, *Religious Belief*, p. 9. For the core works which influenced Williams' argument here, see Jones, *Languages of Class*; James E. Cronin, 'Language, Politics and the Critique of Social History: Languages of Class', *Journal of Social History*, 20 (1986), pp. 177–84; James Thompson, 'After the Fall: Class and Political Language in Britain, 1780–1900', *Historical Journal*, 39 (1996), pp. 785–806.

<sup>62</sup> Williams, *Religious Belief*, p. 14.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., p. 13, 167; Obelkevich, *Religion and Rural Society*, *passim*. On religion and symbolic worlds, see Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*, ch. 4 'Religion as a Cultural System' (New York: Basic Books, 1973). On religion and Victorian social control, see F. M. L. Thompson, 'Social Control in Victorian Britain', *Economic History Review*, 34 (1981), pp. 189–208.

<sup>64</sup> Williams, *Religious Belief*, p. 174.

<sup>65</sup> For a more balanced view on the decline of popular religion, see Sykes, 'Popular Religion in Decline'. Also see John Rule, 'Methodism, Popular Belief and Village Culture in Cornwall', in Robert Storch (ed.), *Popular Culture and Custom in Nineteenth-Century England* (London: Croom Helm, 1982), pp. 48–70.

<sup>66</sup> Steve Bruce, 'Secularisation, Church and Popular Religion', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 62 (2011), p. 544. Also see Hugh McLeod, *Class and Religion*, ch. 8 on the relationship between popular religion and church decline.

affected by the same changes as institutional religion and indirectly affected by the collapse of the Churches themselves—removing as this does one of the main sources of religious knowledge and their wider implicit influence.<sup>67</sup> ‘Although elements of popular religion...can endure for some time after the [institutional] core begins to shrink’, he asserts, ‘such survivals require a climate of collusion between committed Christians and the wider population’.<sup>68</sup> Whilst this may explain changes in the specific context of Staithes, problems arise when considering its applicability at the broader national level. It not only ignores the extent of the debate on when institutional decline actually occurred, but it also deliberately neglects the Churches’ continued political and implicit power into the twentieth century as more recent work by Philip Williamson confirms.<sup>69</sup> Yet Bruce’s research on the coastal village of Staithes pinpoints a broader problem within revisionist approaches adopting ‘diffusive Christianity’ and ‘popular religion’ as central concepts. By working on micro-historical or urban case-studies, breadth of analysis, both in terms of geographical scale as well as conceptually in relation to class and working-class belief, is subservient to *depth* of analysis. Broader geographies of scale and organising categories are clearly needed in moving the discussion beyond class-dominated histories—pushing Williams’ emphasis on the ‘communal’ aspects of religiosity in different directions.<sup>70</sup>

### *Alternative Creeds, Privatised Beliefs*

By the late nineteenth century both religion and belief were increasingly determined by ‘private conscience’ and ‘personal taste’.<sup>71</sup> The turn towards the ‘self’, of which belief and spirituality formed a core component, became a hallmark of debates on ‘modernity’.<sup>72</sup> Why did men and women seek the solace of spiritualists and theosophists, to name a few, at this distinctly modern

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<sup>67</sup> Bruce, ‘Secularisation’, p. 560.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 544.

<sup>69</sup> Williamson, ‘National Days of Prayer’, *passim*.

<sup>70</sup> Hugh McLeod, ‘Class, Community and Religion: The Religious Geography of Nineteenth-Century England’, *Sociological Yearbook of Religion in Britain*, 6 (1973), pp. 29–73; Williams, *Religious Belief and Popular Culture*, p. 11.

<sup>71</sup> Hugh McLeod, *Religion and the People of Western Europe 1789–1989* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981); Harris, *Private Lives, Public Spirit*, p. 176.

<sup>72</sup> For Anthony Giddens, the interpretation of self through language and reflection remains at the core of modern self-identity. See *idem*, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991). For a recent discussion on the issues of ‘modernity’ for historians, see Zvi Ben-Dor Benite et. al, ‘Historians and the Question of “Modernity”’, *American Historical Review*, 116 (2011), pp. 631–751. In the British case, see Martin Daunton and Bernhard Rieger (eds.), *Meanings of Modernity: Britain from the Late-Victorian Era to World War Two* (Oxford: Berg, 2001).



moment?<sup>73</sup> Explanations vary, but the very question implies an uncertainty in deviation from the modernisation narrative of which secularisation was a part. Scholars have firmly rejected the notion of modernity as the culmination of post-Enlightenment reason, or the confrontation of binary forces such as rationality and Romanticism.<sup>74</sup> Multiple approaches to modernity, as historical periodisation, socio-cultural experience, or historical/ideological project, reveal not only its varied meanings but the numerous intersections *between* meanings.<sup>75</sup> Whilst ‘antinomian’ approaches explore modernity’s ability to simultaneously enchant and disenchant through the ironic imagination, more recent work emphasises the significance of power structures in imposing beliefs through the modalities and technologies of ‘modern’ society.<sup>76</sup> At the human level, particularly amongst the middle- and upper-classes, *fin de siècle* heterodoxy was partly an expression of curiosity and ‘selfhood’. Yet more broadly, it was shaped by complex historical currents and shifting socio-cultural contexts. The relationship between belief and power was both reinforced through and challenged by gendered and classed divisions; a previously unexplored point, as we will see, at the heart of Britain’s war experience.

Whilst hinted at by both Cox and Williams, the turn towards religion’s increasing determination by ‘private conviction and personal taste’ and anxieties over its governance had critical implications for gender and contemporary gender constructs.<sup>77</sup> As Callum Brown noted back in 2003, gender ‘is emerging as possibly the single most important definer of the timing and content of long-term [religious] change’.<sup>78</sup> Given the paradigmatic shift towards gender as a ‘useful’ category of

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<sup>73</sup> Alex Owen, *The Place of Enchantment: British Occultism and the Culture of the Modern* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), p. 7.

<sup>74</sup> See Johann P. Arnason, ‘Reason, Imagination, Interpretation’, in Gillian Robinson and John Rundell (eds.), *Rethinking Imagination: Culture and Creativity* (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 155–70; Karl Bell, ‘Breaking Modernity’s Spell: Magic and Modern History’, *Cultural and Social History*, 4 (2007), pp. 1–22.

<sup>75</sup> Karl Bell, *The Magical Imagination: Magic and Modernity in Urban England, 1780–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 20, 25. Also see James Vernon, *Distant Strangers: How Britain Became Modern* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), ch. 1.

<sup>76</sup> On this view, see Pamela Thurschwell, *Literature, Technology and Magical Thinking, 1800–1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). Also see Michael Saler, ‘“Clap if you Believe in Sherlock Holmes”: Mass Culture and the Re-Enchantment of Modernity, c. 1890–1940’, *The Historical Journal*, 46 (2003), pp. 599–622; idem, ‘Modernity and Enchantment: A Historiographic Review’, *American Historical Review*, 111 (2006), pp. 692–716; Joshua Landy and Michael Saler (eds.), *The Re-Enchantment of the World: Secular Magic in a Rational Age* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009); Bell, *Magical Imagination*, *passim*.

<sup>77</sup> Cox, *The English Churches*, p. 98, 103–4; Williams, *Religious Belief*, pp. 77–9, 98, 122–23, 146–47; Harris, *Private Lives, Public Spirit*, p. 176. The historiography on gender and religion/belief in modern Britain is vast. For useful introductory texts on femininities, see Sue Morgan and Jacqueline DeVries (eds.), *Women, Gender and Religious Cultures in Britain, 1800–1940* (London: Routledge, 2010). On masculinities, see Lucy Delap and Sue Morgan (eds.), *Men, Masculinities and Religious Change in Twentieth-Century Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

<sup>78</sup> Brown, ‘The Secularisation Decade’, p. 39.

analysis proposed by Joan Scott in the mid 1980s, it is of little surprise that social and newly emerging cultural histories began to explore the gendered dimensions of religion and belief more closely.<sup>79</sup> Scott's core proposition, adapted from Judith Butler, that gender's construction remains a fluid and contextually specific historical phenomena lay at the heart of Alex Owen's analysis of female mediums in late-Victorian England.<sup>80</sup> Blending gender and cultural history with psychoanalysis and poststructuralism, Owen successfully placed contemporary 'discourse' on spiritualism within wider Victorian gender dynamics and their implicit power struggles.<sup>81</sup> Whilst revealing the extent of patriarchy's reach within the socio-political landscape, *The Darkened Room* was by no means a gloomy re-telling of contemporary female subordination. Following Michel Foucault's work on power, authority, and agency, Owen demonstrates the extent to which female mediums and their largely female followers (often from working or lower-middle-class backgrounds) subverted dominant expectations of femininity and womanhood within the séance room.<sup>82</sup> Notions of the sexually and politically controlled 'motherly' woman were traversed. Women found power—spiritually, sexually, and physically—within mediumship, but this was inadvertently and often unconsciously discovered. Rather, it was *through* dominant notions of maternal femininity (which many female mediums aspired to) where power and agency lay—rendering female mediumship both 'liberating and restricting'.<sup>83</sup> It remains important, therefore, to consider the interactions between competing constructions of gender operating within the same historical time period. Similar to Owen's argument, this study finds that power

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<sup>79</sup> Joan Scott, 'Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis', *American Historical Review*, 91 (1986), pp. 1053–1075.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., p. 1053, 1074; Alex Owen, *The Darkened Room: Women, Power and Spiritualism in Late Victorian England* (London: Virago, 1990).

<sup>81</sup> On contemporary gender politics, see Ben Griffin, *The Politics of Gender in Victorian Britain: Masculinity, Political Culture and the Struggle for Women's Rights* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012). Also see Susan Kingsley Kent, *Gender and Power in Britain 1640–1900* (London: Routledge, 1999); Lynn Abrams, *The Making of the Modern Woman: Europe 1789–1918* (London: Longman, 2002); Martin Francis, 'The Domestification of the Male? Recent Research on Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century British Masculinity', *Historical Journal*, 45 (2002), pp. 637–52; John Tosh, *Manliness and Masculinities in Nineteenth-Century Britain: Essays on Family, Gender and Empire* (New York: Pearson Education, 2005); idem, *A Man's Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007).

<sup>82</sup> Michel Foucault, 'Governmentality', in Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon, and Peter Miller (eds.), *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), pp. 87–104. Also see James Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998). On military style 'discipline' bleeding into state/democratic apparatus, see Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punishment: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. by Alan Sheridan (London: Penguin, 2019).

<sup>83</sup> Owen, *The Darkened Room*, pp. 8–9. For a similar position in relation to magic, see Bell, *The Magical Imagination*, pp. 160–61.

lay in historical actors' ability to fuse different aspects of gendered expectation. This was not always smooth, and often led to private conflicts over the self.

Owen's illustration of the power/powerless dynamic within female spirit mediumship both strengthened and challenged gendered notions of the public and private. In the setting of the séance room, 'the social and psychic came face to face in a remarkable public circulation of the intensely personal and private'. Indeed, it was largely due to the unconscious agency mediums wielded that 'every effort' was made to contain their public exposure within and outside the established Church.<sup>84</sup> As Owen indicates, the spiritual was deeply political. Yet in the context of the 1870s–1890s Victorian mediumship was a form of protest and dissent which pre-dated focused 'political' awareness.<sup>85</sup> Whilst feminism found expression within established religion, the rise of 'new spiritual movements' of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, coinciding with the increasing politicisation of women's rights, provided a targeted outlet for mounting gender frustrations.<sup>86</sup> *Fin de siècle* esoteric groups such as the Theosophical Society, for example, featured strong feminist impulses in its championing of new wave spirituality (both western and eastern mysticism), providing women 'significant' social and intellectual opportunities.<sup>87</sup> However true this may have been, women's spiritual and/or political imperatives within such organisations were not only mixed and often contradictory. Their 'opportunities' were couched in classed, gendered, and racial inequalities—inequalities theosophical feminists both suffered and inflicted. The Society's masculine structure and 'clublike' atmosphere made breakthrough difficult. It preserved much of the ritualistic behaviour of Freemasonry and incorporated ideas from experimental science—a distinctly masculine preserve of the contemporary elite.<sup>88</sup> Yet the status of its female members (white, middle-class and politically radical) often led to the stigmatisation of both English working-class women and

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<sup>84</sup> Owen, *The Darkened Room*, p. 221, 16.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 240.

<sup>86</sup> Olive Anderson, 'Women Preachers in Mid-Victorian Britain: Some Reflections on Feminism, Popular Religion and Social Change', *Historical Journal*, 12 (1969), pp. 467–84. Also see Robert Saunders, "'A Great and Holy War': Religious Routes to Women's Suffrage, 1909–1914', *English Historical Review*, 134 (2019), pp. 1471–1502.

<sup>87</sup> Joy Dixon, *Divine Feminine: Theosophy and Feminism in England* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2001), pp. 63–4; Owen, *The Place of Enchantment*; Christine Ferguson and Andrew Radford, *The Occult Imagination in Britain, 1875–1947* (London: Routledge, 2017). For more on the spiritual lives of contemporary feminists, see Philippa Levine, *Feminist Lives in Victorian England: Private Roles and Public Commitment* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990).

<sup>88</sup> Dixon, *Divine Feminine*, p. 25.

their ‘mystical’ Indian counterparts whose religious heritage was so critical.<sup>89</sup> Importantly, contradictions within the Society had critical implications for its stance on contemporary public/private discourse, as Joy Dixon highlights. Despite the Society’s position that such divisions were illusionary, the separation of its public face from the more private and secretive activities of its Esoteric Section awkwardly reinforced the divisions it claimed were fictional. These tensions, and their classed, gendered, and racial dimensions, shifted over time. Their evolving construction, like links between the feminine and the private, was historically rather than naturally rooted.<sup>90</sup> It remains important, as in this study, to interrogate the political workings of organisations such as the Theosophical Society and assess whether their claims to progress and knowledge transfer were simply covering deeper inequalities.

Evidence unearthed by Sarah Williams reveals the extent of working-class belief in a matrix of magical, superstitious, and folk practices well into the twentieth century. Yet ‘popular religion’ and ‘popular supernaturalism’ ‘should not be simply equated with the ‘working class’.<sup>91</sup> Whilst more recent work reinforces the notion that Victorian Britain was far from a disenchanted place, featuring the spread of mesmerism, spiritualism, occultism, and psychical research, traditional class divisions are frequently linked with the themes of spiritual decline and ‘disenchantment’.<sup>92</sup> By the nineteenth century, so the dominant historiographical view goes, the middle-classes had abandoned belief in witchcraft, ghosts, and other superstitions associated with ‘customary magic’ as the educational improvements and rationalisation of the Enlightenment reached fruition.<sup>93</sup> James Obelkevich, for example, asserts that by the late nineteenth century the ‘educated classes rejected’ magic, whilst work by Owen Davies and more recently Karl Bell

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid., p. 64, 145, 155–56; Matthew Beaumont, ‘Socialism and Occultism at the “Fin de Siècle”: Elective Affinities’, *Victorian Review*, 36 (2010), pp. 217–32. On anti-colonial thought and the adoption of eastern spirituality, see Leela Gandhi, *Affective Communities: Anti-Colonial Thought, Fin-de-Siècle Radicalism, and the Politics of Friendship* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005).

<sup>90</sup> Dixon, *Divine Feminine*, p. 68.

<sup>91</sup> Williams, *Religious Belief*, p. 14; Bell, *The Magical Imagination*, p. 54.

<sup>92</sup> Thomas Waters, ‘Magic and the British Middle Classes, 1750–1900’, *Journal of British Studies*, 54 (2015), p. 632. See, for example, Janet Oppenheim, *The Other World: Spiritualism and Psychical Research in England 1850–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); Logie Barrow, *Independent Spirits: Spiritualism and the English Plebeians, 1850–1910* (London: Routledge and Keegan Paul, 1986); Owen Davies, *Witchcraft, Magic and Culture: 1739–1951* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991); Alex Owen, “‘Borderland Forms’: Arthur Conan Doyle, Albion’s Daughters, and the Politics of the Cottingley Fairies’, *History Workshop Journal*, 38 (1994), pp. 48–85; Owen Davies, *A People Bewitched: Witchcraft and Magic in Nineteenth-Century Somerset* (Wiltshire: David & Charles, 1999); Owen, *The Place of Enchantment*; Owen Davies, *The Haunted: A Social History of Ghosts* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); Shane McCorristine, *Spectres of the Self: Thinking about Ghosts and Ghost Seeing in England, 1750–1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

<sup>93</sup> Waters, ‘Magic and the British Middle Classes’, p. 633. For the classic study linking magical belief and the middle-classes with decline, see Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*. For a rebuttal of supernaturalism as inconsistent with ‘modernity’, see Davies, *Witchcraft, Magic and Culture*.

stress middle-class hostility to magical modes of behaviour.<sup>94</sup> Such descriptions of ‘alternative creeds’, linked with but further apart from orthodox religion than ‘popular religion’, not only risk stratifying belief warned against by Eamon Duffy.<sup>95</sup> They also impose a similar determinism to spiritual trajectories found within secularising arguments. As Thomas Waters highlights, the middle-classes’ relationship with magic went through a critical series of peaks-and-troughs during the nineteenth century. ‘The chronology and character’ of magical beliefs means that they ‘cannot be satisfactorily accounted for or explained by linear, gradualist schemes of disenchantment or magical decline’.<sup>96</sup> Moreover, up to 1900 belief in customary magic was ‘regarded sympathetically’ by both the middle- and upper-classes and continued into the ‘total war’ era.<sup>97</sup>

When subscription to alternative creeds provoked cross-class tensions, explanations as to how and why are varied. Between 1820 and 1860, Waters notes that middle- and upper-class interest in all things magical and preternatural quickly dissipated before turning towards their active condemnation. This condemnation was distinctly classed. ‘Ghosts, witches, and omens were...increasingly classified as “*popular* superstitions” worthy of only the uneducated and the lowly [emphasis added]’.<sup>98</sup> For many contemporary clergymen attacks on ‘popular superstition’ were engineered to bolster their personal or theological views, whilst newspaper reporters used enticing and catchy phrasing to draw in readers from divergent social backgrounds.<sup>99</sup> Yet the social workings of such beliefs had important political and legal dimensions—particularly when the lucid boundaries of ‘private’ and ‘public’ were traversed. The 1824 Vagrancy Act, for example, lent greater powers to prosecute cunning-folk and fortune tellers looking to ‘deceive or impose’.<sup>100</sup> The professionalisation of the police, when combined with bourgeois anxieties over ‘popular superstition’, also led to greater state manipulation over the boundaries of acceptable and unacceptable belief. ‘As agents of the ratepayers, as well as of the state, the police played an important role in restraining the more raucous and visible expressions of plebeian supernaturalism’—illustration, Waters argues, of a desired ‘improvement’ and ‘pacification’ of the populace in contemporary middle- and upper-

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<sup>94</sup> Obelkevich, *Religion and Rural Society*, p. 262; Owen Davies, ‘Newspapers and the Popular Belief in Witchcraft and Magic in the Modern Period’, *Journal of British Studies*, 37 (1998), p. 164; Bell, *Magical Imagination*, p. 119.

<sup>95</sup> Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*, pp. 1–4.

<sup>96</sup> Waters, ‘Magic and the British Middle Classes’, pp. 652–53.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 653.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 639. On Victorian élites’ use of the emergent language of social class to uphold the social order, see Asa Briggs, *The Age of Improvement: 1783–1867* (London: Longman, 1974), p. 65, 170, 297.

<sup>99</sup> Waters, ‘Magic and the British Middle Classes’, pp. 647–48, 638–40.

<sup>100</sup> Davies, *Witchcraft, Magic and Culture*, p. 54.

class estimations.<sup>101</sup> For those concerned with governing the boundaries of belief, however, the impact of war in 1914 made the task extremely difficult.

*Total War, Religion, and Belief*

Recent scholarship on the experience, mobilisation, and impact of the World Wars stresses the greater need for comparative analysis of their similarities and differences.<sup>102</sup> As Susan Grayzel indicates in relation to the specific theme of aerial bombardment, the Blitz can only be truly understood when considering its origins in the Zeppelin raids on civilians during the First World War.<sup>103</sup> Martin Francis makes a similar point, highlighting the need for more focused attention on the ‘correspondence, continuity, and convergence’ between the First and Second World Wars, exposing the ‘dense network of commonalities and cross-referencing’ between them.<sup>104</sup> Whilst the task may be complicated by key military and operational differences, social and cultural comparisons remain instructive—particularly, for our purposes, in the realms of religiosity and belief.<sup>105</sup> Considering the age of ‘total war’ including the interwar period as a single historical arc reveals important aspects of continuity and change within the spiritual landscape of the nation—crucially as the resolve, participation, and spiritual reserves of citizens were increasingly called on as distinctions between ‘combatants’ and ‘civilians’ collapsed.<sup>106</sup>

Emphasis on the Great War as a defining moment of ‘modernity’ and ‘modernism’ has led much work to view the period between 1914 and 1945 as critical in the trajectory of secularisation

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<sup>101</sup> Waters, ‘Magic and the British Middle Classes’, p. 645; Davies, *Witcraft, Magic and Culture*, p. 115, 288.

<sup>102</sup> In particular, see Robert Gerwath (ed.), *Twisted Paths: Europe 1914–1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Lothar Kettenacker and Torsten Rott (eds.), *The Legacies of Two World Wars: European Societies in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2011); Nicholas Doumanis (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of European History, 1914–1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016); Catriona Pennell and Filipe Ribeiro de Menezes (eds.), *A World at War 1911–1949: Explorations in the Cultural History of War* (Leiden: Brill, 2019).

<sup>103</sup> Susan Grayzel, *At Home and Under Fire: Air Raids and Culture in Britain from the Great War to the Blitz* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

<sup>104</sup> Martin Francis, ‘Attending to Ghosts: Some Reflections on the Disavowals of British Great War Historiography’, *Twentieth Century British History*, 25 (2014), p. 357.

<sup>105</sup> On distinctions and similarities between the World Wars, see John Horne, ‘A World at War: 1911–1949: Conclusion’, in Catriona Pennell and Filipe Ribeiro de Menezes (eds.), *A World at War 1911–1949*, pp. 286–7. For comparative analyses of religion and belief in the British context of the two World Wars, see Stephen Parker and Michael Snape, ‘Keeping Faith and Coping: Belief, Popular Religiosity, and the British People’, in John Bourne, Peter Liddle, and Ian Whitehead (eds.), *The Great World War, 1914–45*, vol II: *Who Won? Who Lost?* (London: Harper Collins, 2001), pp. 397–420; Michael Snape, *God and the British Soldier: Religion and the British Army in the First and Second World Wars* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005); Vanessa Chambers, ‘Fighting Chance: War, Popular Belief and British Society, 1900–51’, unpublished PhD thesis, University of London (2007).

<sup>106</sup> Catriona Pennell and Filipe Ribeiro de Menezes, ‘Introduction’, in Catriona Pennell and Filipe Ribeiro de Menezes (eds.), *A World at War 1911–1949*, p. 9.

(or at least spiritual and religious decline).<sup>107</sup> Yet closer examination of the not unproblematic wealth of statistical evidence reveals a complex picture. Indicators of decline were punctured by moments of organised religious intensity, often at key moments of both wars. Whilst active adherents of the major Christian denominations fell in relative terms from 8,071,000 in 1914 to 8,124,000 by 1946, this was not a steady process of decline.<sup>108</sup> National Days of Prayer, designed for all members of the nation, attracted a 'very high proportion' of participants through local church attendance or listening to their broadcast on radio.<sup>109</sup> Prayers were organised shortly after the onset of both conflicts for spiritual resolve (21<sup>st</sup> August 1914 and 1<sup>st</sup> October 1939) and in the aftermath of particularly bloody periods or campaigns (31<sup>st</sup> December 1916, following the Somme offensive, and 7<sup>th</sup> September 1941, several months after the Blitz had ended in May 1941).<sup>110</sup>

The issue of institutional decline becomes more complex still when considering geographical and denominational shifts over time. The onset of war in August 1914 boosted attendance in all denominations for a few weeks despite the loss of some one million regular churchgoers to active service, with a similar boost occurring in October 1939.<sup>111</sup> Roman Catholic churchgoing and membership increased between 1914 and 1918, whilst Scottish and Welsh Presbyterians, the Free Churches, Anglo-Jewry, and Anglo-Muslims all experienced absolute growth by 1918.<sup>112</sup> National statistics on churchgoing in the interwar period elude the historian, but membership figures, even for the Church of England, indicate flux rather than stagnation or simple decline.<sup>113</sup> All Protestant denominations enjoyed growth for much of the 1920s—notably Presbyterian members of the Church of Scotland—or saw marginal decreases.<sup>114</sup> Although decline became more widespread between 1939 and 1945 this was by no means catastrophic. Best available estimates on membership amongst the Anglican Churches of England, Wales, and the Scottish Episcopal Church illustrate a decline of 6.6 per-cent (3,709,0671 to 3,462,673),

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<sup>107</sup> See Alan Wilkinson, *The Church of England and the First World War* (London: SCM Press, 1978); Field, 'Keeping the Spiritual Home Fires Burning'.

<sup>108</sup> Parker and Snape, 'Keeping Faith and Coping', p. 397.

<sup>109</sup> Williamson, 'National Days of Prayer', p. 324, 327.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 364–65.

<sup>111</sup> Field, 'Keeping the Spiritual Home Fires Burning', p. 266; Adrian Gregory, *The Last Great War: British Society and the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 158; Philip Williamson, 'Christian Conservatives and the Totalitarian Challenge 1933–40', *English Historical Review*, 115 (2000), p. 609.

<sup>112</sup> Field, 'Keeping the Spiritual Home Fires Burning', p. 267.

<sup>113</sup> Field, 'Gradualist or Revolutionary Secularisation?', p. 62, 80.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 82; Matthew Grimley, 'The Religion of Englishness: Puritanism, Providentialism, and "National Character," 1918–1945', *Journal of British Studies*, 46 (2007), p. 887.

a rate far lower than the decline experienced by Nonconformism. Baptist members fell by 6.4 per-cent, whilst the same figure for Congregationalists stood at 7.4 per-cent. Roman Catholic membership increased in England, Wales, and Scotland, whilst the figure for Methodism in Scotland increased slightly.<sup>115</sup> If anything, the statistics reveal a diverse and evolving picture of organised religious subscription between 1914 and 1945 and crucially, one where religion continued to play a significant role at the national level.<sup>116</sup>

Moral and ethical questions posed by the World Wars ensured that organised religion enjoyed what Matthew Grimley terms ‘soft-power’.<sup>117</sup> The languages of holy war and crusading were used in both conflicts as justification of war, often appealing to a specifically English form of national memory.<sup>118</sup> Yet the rise of pacifist and anti-war arguments in the interwar period rendered neo-crusading diction ‘hollow’ during the Second World War.<sup>119</sup> Providentialist arguments for British victory, popular during the First World War, became tempered in the interwar period before resurging in a more ‘assertive’ form during the Second.<sup>120</sup> Atrocities committed against Belgian civilians in 1914, the impact of the Blitz, and the unprecedented scale of mass-murder committed during the Holocaust<sup>121</sup> led many Anglicans to attack Prussian militarism and

<sup>115</sup> Field, ‘*Puzzled People Revisited*’, pp. 447–48.

<sup>116</sup> Snape, *God and the British Solider*, p. 21.

<sup>117</sup> Grimley, ‘The Religion of Englishness’, p. 887.

<sup>118</sup> Shannon Ty Bontrager, ‘The Imagined Crusade: The Church of England and the Mythology of Nationalism and Christianity during the Great War’, *Church History*, 71 (2002), pp. 774–98; Snape and Parker, ‘Keeping Faith and Coping’, p. 403; Stefan Goebel, *The Great War and Medieval Memory: War, Remembrance and Medievalism in Britain and Germany, 1914–1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), ch. 2; Adrian Gregory and Annette Becker, ‘Religious Sites and Practices’, in Jay Winter and Jean-Louis Robert (eds.), *Capital Cities at War: Paris, London, Berlin 1914–1919* vol. II: *A Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 391–93; Stefan Goebel, ‘Britain’s “Last Crusade”: From War Propaganda to War Commemoration’, in David Welch and Jo Fox (eds.), *Justifying War: Propaganda, Politics and the Modern Age* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp. 159–178; Mike Horswell, *The Rise and Fall of British Crusader Medievalism, c. 1825–1945* (London: Routledge, 2018). For complications of ‘crusading’ language and symbolism for the Church of England, see Gregory, *The Last Great War*, p. 185. For more on just war theory in the modern context, see Welch and Fox (eds.), *Justifying War*.

<sup>119</sup> Snape, *God and the British Solider*, p. 184.

<sup>120</sup> Matthew Grimley, ‘The Religion of Englishness’, p. 903.

<sup>121</sup> On Anglican responses to the ‘rape’ of Belgium, see Albert Marrin, *The Last Crusade: The Church of England and the First World War* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1974), p. 109; Wilkinson, *The Church of England*, pp. 37–9; Arlie J. Hoover, *God, Germany and Britain in the Great War: A Study in Clerical Nationalism* (New York and London: Praeger, 1989), pp. 40–1. For an overview of clerical responses to the impact of the Blitz, see Dietmar Süß, *Death from the Skies: How the British and Germans Survived the Bombing in World War II*, trans. by Lesley Sharpe and Jeremy Noakes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), ch. 5. Literature on religious responses to the Holocaust in Britain is vast. For useful starting points, see Tony Kushner, *The Holocaust and the Liberal Imagination: A Social and Cultural History* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), pp. 164–8; idem, ‘Ambivalence or Antisemitism? Christian Attitudes and Responses in Britain to the Crisis of European Jewry during the Second World War’, in Yehuda Bauer, Alice L. Eckardt, and Franklin Hamlin Littell (eds.), *Remembering for the Future: Working Papers and Addenda*, vol. I: *Jews and Christians during and After the Holocaust* (Oxford: Pergamon, 1989), pp. 404–16; Tom Lawson, *The Church of England and the Holocaust: Christianity, Memory*



Nazi/totalitarian barbarity in defence of ‘Christian civilisation’.<sup>122</sup> Yet others, keen to maintain a pan-European Christian alliance, emphasised distinctions between ‘German’ liberal Christians and Prussian militarists and Nazis. Concerns were also raised over the legitimacy of Allied bombing raids on cities such as Dresden and Berlin towards the end of the Second World War.<sup>123</sup> Yet despite the very public standing of official religion in wartime, and the widespread support for both wars amongst British denominations, contemporary churchmen were concerned by many of the same observations regarding quantifiable religious devotion which plagued their nineteenth century forebears.<sup>124</sup> As the Vicar of St James in Piccadilly (and son of the Archbishop of Canterbury) William Temple put it in 1916: ‘[whilst] the right of religion in private life is now universally admitted, it still has to be won as regards public life’.<sup>125</sup> For many Anglicans, both wars served as opportunities to galvanise ‘true religion’ and resettle the place of the Church of England at the heart of the state (notably through the work of local clergy and military chaplains on the ground).<sup>126</sup> Yet Temple’s reference to the place of ‘private’ religion highlights a growing unease within ecclesiastical circles regarding popular religion and concern over

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and Nazism (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2006); Ulkrike Ehret, *Church, Nation, and Race: Catholics and Antisemitism in Germany and England, 1918–1945* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012). For Anglo-Jewish responses, see Richard Bolchover, *British Jewry and the Holocaust* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

<sup>122</sup> In particular, see Stuart Mews, ‘The Sword of the Spirit: A Catholic Cultural Crusade of 1940’, *The Church and War*, 20 (1983), pp. 409–30; Keith G. Robbins, ‘Britain, 1940, and “Christian Civilization”’, in Derek E. D. Beales and Geoffrey F. A. Best (eds.), *History, Society, and the Churches: Essays in Honour of Owen Chadwick* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 195–213; Aimee E. Barbeau, ‘Christian Empire and National Crusade: The Rhetoric of Anglican Clergy in the First World War’, *Anglican and Episcopal History*, 85 (2016), pp. 24–62. Also see Williamson, ‘Christian Conservatives’; John Carter Wood, *This Is Your Hour: Christian Intellectuals and the Crisis of Europe, 1937–1949* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019). On clerical responses in the run up to the Second World War, see Andrew Chandler, ‘Munich and Morality: The Bishops of the Church of England and Appeasement’, *Twentieth Century British History*, 5 (1994), pp. 77–99.

<sup>123</sup> Andrew Chandler, ‘The Church of England and the Obliteration Bombing of Germany in the Second World War’, *English Historical Review*, 108 (1993), pp. 920–46; Mark Connelly, ‘The British People, the Press and the Strategic Air Campaign against Germany, 1939–45’, *Contemporary British History*, 16 (2000), p. 52. Also see Stephen A. Garrett, *Ethics and Airpower in World War Two: The British Bombing of German Cities* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1993).

<sup>124</sup> The key exception being Protestant forms of conscientious objection during the First World War. See Gregory, ‘Beliefs and Religion’, p. 433.

<sup>125</sup> William Temple, *The Church’s Mission to the Nation*, National Mission Pamphlet T (London: National Mission, 1916), p. 12.

<sup>126</sup> Gregory, *The Last Great War*, p. 160. For useful introductions to military chaplains and the World Wars, see Michael Snape, *The Royal Army Chaplains’ Department, 1796–1953: Clergy under Fire* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2008); Edward Madigan, *Faith Under Fire: Anglican Army Chaplains and the Great War* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001); Michael Snape and Edward Madigan (eds.), *The Clergy in Khaki: New Perspectives on British Army Chaplaincy in the First World War* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013). For an extended bibliography of wartime chaplaincy covering all denominations, see Clive Field, *British Religion and the World Wars: A Subject Bibliography of Modern Literature* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2019), pp. 124–30.

its individualised nature. Attempts to ‘police’ the spiritual lives of contemporaries, particularly the working-class, were met with hostility.<sup>127</sup>

In large part it was the introduction of mass death characteristic of total war which exposed and galvanised the plurality of belief in British society. It was in this context which the established Church in fact gave a ‘boost to heterodoxy’, as Adrian Gregory puts it—unclear on its position over soldierly sacrifice and Christian symbolism of the First World War.<sup>128</sup> Both conflicts saw a continuation of popular religious tropes as coping devices, whilst aspects of folk belief, superstition, and magic were used to prevent random death amongst both civilians and combatants.<sup>129</sup> Yet key distinctions also existed, rooted in the differing natures of the wars and the workings of death. The spiritualist movement for example, widespread across wartime and interwar Europe, increased its nineteenth century popularity by responding to mass fatalities at the front where established religion did not.<sup>130</sup> Geographical, cultural, and gendered notions of ‘home’ and ‘fighting’ fronts kept civilians distant from the physical space of the Western Front, even though significant overlaps existed between them.<sup>131</sup> The human need to grieve and find solace through commemoration came as a result of these distinctions, in which, for British civilians at least, the deaths of male family members and friends largely occurred overseas. Whilst this naturally continued during the Second World War, numbers of civilian fatalities at the home front mushroomed. Spiritualism became less publicly urgent, whilst commemorative practices (in focus and style) shifted as distinctions between ‘civilian’ and ‘combatant’ collapsed. Between 1939 and 1945, deaths were more frequently navigated and processed in real-time. Whilst war memorials continued to take forms established during the interwar years (and the newly created ‘Remembrance Sunday’ continued to single-out military dead in typical interwar commemorative fashion at the national level) a growing sense that their design should hold ‘functional’ purpose created a

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<sup>127</sup> Gregory, ‘Beliefs and Religion’, p. 441.

<sup>128</sup> Gregory, *The Last Great War*, p. 157.

<sup>129</sup> Williams, *Religious Belief*, *passim*; Stephen Parker, *Faith on the Home Front: Aspects of Church Life and Popular Religion in Birmingham 1939–1945* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2005), ch. 2. A pioneering study in the French context is Annette Becker, *War and Faith: The Religious Imagination in France, 1914–1930* (Oxford: Berg, 1998). For a succinct overview of the range of alternative beliefs in existence in Second World War Britain, see Lucy Noakes, *Dying for the Nation: Death, Grief and Bereavement in Second World War Britain* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020), ch. 4.

<sup>130</sup> David Cannadine, ‘War and Death, Grief and Mourning in Modern Britain’, in Joachim Whaley (ed.), *Mirrors of Morality: Studies in the Social History of Death* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1982), pp. 218–19. On spiritualism, see Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), ch. 3; Jenny Hazelgrove, *Spiritualism and British Society Between the Wars* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000).

<sup>131</sup> For a complication, particularly in terms of gender, see Juliette Pattinson, *Women of War: Gender, Modernity and the First Aid Nursing Yeomanry* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020).

sense of the dead as part of, rather than distinct from, the living.<sup>132</sup> Moreover, classed and gendered divisions of belief were increasingly broken down during the Second World War, far beyond the extent of the First, due to civilian/combatant interconnections.<sup>133</sup>

What made the context of war, particularly the Second World War, such an important moment in the spiritual history of the nation? The spread and influence of Christian religion, and ‘belief’ more broadly, certainly exceeded Ross McKibbin’s summation of its ‘marginal’ status between 1914 and 1945.<sup>134</sup> The impact of nineteenth century disestablishment created a buyer’s market of spiritual sustenance in wartime.<sup>135</sup> In other ways, war accelerated the gendering of religious observance, with more women participating in religious life in 1918 than 1914.<sup>136</sup> What set the years of ‘total war’ apart from pre-1914 society was their heightened focus on civilians turned combatants. Here, resolve of the ‘people’ was demanded, monitored, and controlled on a previously unseen scale. Historians have still to assess such dynamics beyond the boundaries of wartime ‘popular religion’. Aspects of religion and belief, moreover, remain under-researched themes even within the most recent, methodologically sophisticated re-framings of Britain’s war experience from 1939 into the mid to late 1940s.<sup>137</sup> Considering the rich historiography on the ‘people’s war’ places the theme of belief within a more specific set of historical contexts and circumstances, in which tensions between agency and structure, and public and private, were central.

## THE ‘PEOPLE’S WAR’ AND SECOND WORLD WAR BRITAIN

Like the literature on ‘secularisation’, historiography on Britain’s Second World War sits within a dominant master narrative. The notion of Britain’s war as a ‘people’s war’ remains a central

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<sup>132</sup> Noakes, *Dying for the Nation*. For more on the ‘workings’ of the dead in interwar Britain and Germany, see Stefan Goebel, ‘Re-membered and Re-mobilized: the “Sleeping Dead” in Interwar Germany and Britain’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 39 (2004), pp. 487–501.

<sup>133</sup> On the beginnings of this process during the First World War, see Annette Becker, ‘Faith, Ideologies, and the “Cultures of War”’, in John Horne (ed.), *A Companion to World War I* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), pp. 241–42.

<sup>134</sup> McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, p. 290.

<sup>135</sup> Harris, *Private Lives, Public Spirit*, pp. 176–77.

<sup>136</sup> Gregory, *The Last Great War*, p. 182; idem, ‘Beliefs and Religion’, p. 419.

<sup>137</sup> In particular, see Daniel Todman, *Britain’s War: Into Battle, 1937–1941* (London: Allen Lane, 2016); idem, *Britain’s War: A New World, 1942–1947* (London: Allen Lane, 2020).

category for understanding its socio-cultural experience.<sup>138</sup> Novelist and playwright J. B. Priestley presented the concept as one of civilian-minded heroes acting for the collective good.<sup>139</sup> For Angus Calder, the ‘people’s war’ encapsulated the sense that ‘rich and poor, civilians and fighters, were “all in it together”, that privilege was or should be in abeyance and that even conscripted effort had a voluntary character’.<sup>140</sup> The experience of the Second World War ‘heightened national consciousness’ by creating the ‘potentially inclusive, democratic sentiment of the “People’s War” and in doing so, it prompted a thorough examination of what constituted British national identity’.<sup>141</sup> Concerted efforts were made by official and cultural agents to present narratives, images, and sounds of heroic national ‘togetherness’ during and soon after the Blitz.<sup>142</sup> The deliberate targeting of civilians as combatants led to concerns over the more privatised opinions, behaviours, and emotions of the ‘mass’. Intricate, if methodologically confused, efforts were made to gauge levels of morale at both the home and fighting fronts.<sup>143</sup> The experience of war was clearly a fear-inducing phase of life for many contemporaries, yet equally a large number

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<sup>138</sup> For key contributions on the social and political impact of the war, and debates over consensus and division, continuity and revolution, see Paul Addison, *The Road to 1945: British Politics and the Second World War* (London: Pimlico, 1975); Kevin Jeffereys, ‘British Politics and Social Policy during the Second World War’, *Historical Journal*, 30 (1987), pp. 123–44; Rodney Lowe, ‘The Second World War, Consensus and the Foundation of the Welfare State’, *Twentieth Century British History*, 1 (1990), pp. 152–82; Steven Fielding, ‘What did “the People” Want? The Meaning of the 1945 General Election’, *Historical Journal*, 35 (1992), pp. 623–39; Brian Brivati and Harriet Jones (eds.), *What Difference Did the War Make?* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1993); Steve Fielding, Peter Thompson, and Nick Tiratsoo, *England Arise! The Labour Party and Popular Politics in 1940s Britain* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995); Harold L. Smith (ed.), *Britain in the Second World War: A Social History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996).

<sup>139</sup> Alan Allport, *Britain at Bay 1938–1941: The Epic Story of the Second World War* (London: Profile Books, 2020), p. 7.

<sup>140</sup> Angus Calder, ‘Britain’s Good War?’, *History Today*, May (1995), p. 56. Also see Peter Lewis, *A People’s War* (London, 1986); Jose Harris, ‘Great Britain: The People’s War?’, in David Reynolds, Warren F. Kimball, and A. O. Chubarian (eds.), *Allies at War: The Soviet, American, and British Experience, 1939–1945* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1994), pp. 233–60.

<sup>141</sup> Wendy Ugolini and Juliette Pattinson ‘Negotiating Identities in Multinational Britain during the Second World War’, in Wendy Ugolini and Juliette Pattinson (eds.), *Fighting for Britain? Negotiating Identities in Britain during the Second World War* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2015), p. 2.

<sup>142</sup> John Ramsden, ‘Myths and Realities of the “People’s War” in Britain’, in Jörg Echternkamp and Stefan Martens (eds.), *Experience and Memory: The Second World War in Europe* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2010), p. 46.

<sup>143</sup> On morale and the state, see Ian McLaine, *Ministry of Morale: Home Front Morale and the Ministry of Information in World War II* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1979); Robert Mackay, *The Test of War: Inside Britain, 1939–45* (London: University College London Press, 1999); idem, *Half the Battle: Civilian Morale in Britain during the Second World War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002). Less work exists on morale in the military context, and typically relates to the Army. See Jeremy Crang, ‘The British Soldier on the Home Front: Army Morale Reports, 1940–1945’, in Paul Addison and Angus Calder (eds.), *Time to Kill: The Soldier’s Experience of War in the West 1939–1945* (London: Pimlico, 1997), pp. 60–74; Jonathan Fennell, *Combat and Morale in the North Africa Campaign* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); idem, ‘Air Power and Morale in the North African Campaign of the Second World War’, *Air Power Review*, 15 (2012), pp. 1–16; idem, *Fighting the People’s War: The British and Commonwealth Armies and the Second World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

of people also recognised the magnitude of events unfolding around them and their significance in the history of the nation.<sup>144</sup> Historians approaching the concept of the ‘people’s war’ are forced to acknowledge a master narrative riddled with complications as well as possibilities. As well as functioning as a dominant contemporary propaganda narrative, as Mark Donnelly highlights, it was also central to wartime debates on social reconstruction and the increasingly intrusive impact of the state on individual civil liberties.<sup>145</sup> Whilst encapsulating the synergy between individual and nation in wartime, the ‘people’s war’ also points towards important sectional divisions. It highlights resonances, tensions, and areas of negotiation between history, its experience, and its representation.

Aside from a small number of histories which problematically attempt to divorce the war experience from aspects of myth making,<sup>146</sup> the best syntheses recognise such intricacies within the ‘people’s war’ and actively pull these to the fore.<sup>147</sup> So much was clear for Angus Calder in the late-1960s, whose revisionist approach marked a major break from pre-existing works which were themselves deeply political and uncritically presented images of wartime national unity and togetherness. For A. J. P. Taylor, writing at a time when Britain’s place on the international stage had dramatically diminished (largely due to the breakup of its empire), the war represented a distinct site in Britain’s history where its people ‘came of age’:

In the Second World War the British people came of age. This was a People’s War. Not only were their needs considered. They themselves wanted to win...Traditional values lost much of their force. Other values took their place. Imperial greatness was on the way out; the welfare state on the way in. The British Empire declined; the condition of the people improved. Few now sang ‘Land of Hope and Glory’. Few even sang ‘England Arise’. England had risen all the same.<sup>148</sup>

Whilst Taylor’s assessment rang of nostalgia for ‘better’ times, Richard Titmuss’ foundational official history of evacuation, *Problems of Social Policy*, represented an exemplary piece of political argument in the context of the Labour Government’s creation of a postwar welfare state.<sup>149</sup> Morale and social unity remained solid across the war not because of civilians’ psychological resolve.

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<sup>144</sup> Lucy Noakes, *War and the British: Gender and National Identity, 1939–1991* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1998), p. 3.

<sup>145</sup> Mark Donnelly, *Britain in the Second World War* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 33. For more on wartime civil liberties, see Neil Stammers, *Civil Liberties in Britain during the Second World War* (London: Canberra, 1983).

<sup>146</sup> In particular, see Nicholas Harman, *Dunkirk: The Necessary Myth* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1980); Clive Pointing, *1940: Myth and Reality* (London: Hamilton, 1990).

<sup>147</sup> See Mackay, *Half the Battle*; Mark Connelly, *We Can Take It! Britain and the Memory of the Second World War* (Harlow: Longman, 2004); Lucy Noakes and Juliette Pattinson (eds.), *British Cultural Memory and the Second World War* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014).

<sup>148</sup> A. J. P. Taylor, *English History 1914–1945* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1965), p. 600.

<sup>149</sup> Richard Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy* (London: H.M. Stationary Office, 1950).

It was the awakening of the middle- and upper-classes to the plight of the poor and working-class—and government policy to back this beginning with the lessons learned from civilian evacuation—which altered the state of play.<sup>150</sup> For Titmuss, the case for increased state intervention and care of the vulnerable in wartime set a political precedent for its continuation in the postwar era in motion; an ‘important moment’, one historian notes, in the forging of the ‘people’s war’ idea.<sup>151</sup> Drawing on a wealth of previously hidden Mass Observation archival material and the emergent methodologies of social history, Angus Calder presented a more rounded and nuanced analysis by highlighting the voices of ‘the people’.<sup>152</sup> Quoting wartime Prime Minister Winston Churchill, Calder illustrated a war of ‘unknown soldiers’ across ‘the entire population’ in which the ‘fronts were everywhere’.<sup>153</sup> *The People’s War*, and Calder’s later work *The Myth of the Blitz*, recognised the fractured but stable nature of wartime British society, featuring instances of high and low morale and national unity and disunity.<sup>154</sup> Social cohesion during the Blitz was juxtaposed with images of looting, violence, and street crime.<sup>155</sup> Crucially, Calder emphasised the potentially divisive aspects of the ‘people’s war’ narrative ignored by the likes of Taylor. Arguments which essentially ‘bought-into’ the myths of the war by analysing politically loaded sources (often with overt propaganda imperatives) failed to recognise the contested nature of the ‘people’s war’s’ transmission. It appealed, as Calder argued, to different sections of wartime society in different ways:

The concept of the People’s War was never universally accepted...‘us’ for the ‘People’ of the People’s War meant several different things. For the miners, it meant the miners. For the working-class, it meant the working-class. For the middle-class, it meant teachers, clerics, managers. These groups opposed the ‘Old Gang’, the bankers and elites who once controlled the world.<sup>156</sup>

The impact of Calder’s work was confirmed by Arthur Marwick in the mid-1970s—revealing, in Marwick’s words, the ‘complexities of the war experience, the shabbiness and the selfishness, as

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<sup>150</sup> Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, p. 86.

<sup>151</sup> Allport, *Britain at Bay*, p. 184.

<sup>152</sup> Angus Calder, *The People’s War: Britain 1939–45* (London: Cape, 1969). On the UK civil series’ official history, see Sir Keith Hancock (eds.), *British History of the Second World War, UK Civil Series* (London: H.M. Stationary Office, 1949–1956).

<sup>153</sup> Calder, *The People’s War*, p. 17.

<sup>154</sup> Angus Calder, *The Myth of the Blitz* (London: Cape, 1991).

<sup>155</sup> On the darker, more dislocating aspects of the war, see Henry Pelling, *Britain and the Second World War* (London: Collins, 1970); Edward Smithies, *Crimes in Wartime: A Social History of Crime in World War II* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1982); Travis Crosby, *The Impact of Civilian Evacuation in the Second World War* (London: Croom Helm, 1986); Mark Roodhouse, *Black Market Britain: 1939–1955* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

<sup>156</sup> Calder, *The People’s War*, p. 138.

well as the heroics'.<sup>157</sup> Marwick's *The Home Front* recognised the power of myth within both popular and academic treatments of the war; a 'perfectly understandable' fact given that the war was a 'powerful experience' for those who lived through it.<sup>158</sup> Through the social histories of Calder and Marwick, the 'people's war' had developed into a fundamental analytical category for understanding Britain's war; provided that temptations of over exaggerating the 'bulldog spirit' and social dislocation were avoided.<sup>159</sup>

Calder and Marwick's interpretations were politically conscious, both of the war's contemporary impact and its lingering influence in postwar Britain. Both were concerned by the broader, structural changes of war. Yet their conclusions differed. In part due to his socialist leanings, Calder saw the postwar return to 'business as usual' after the 1945 general election as a betrayal of hard-fought changes in 'citizenship' and the wartime re-definition of the social contract illustrated by William Beveridge's 'Beveridge Report' of 1942.<sup>160</sup> For Marwick, on the other hand, the war's impact was generally more positive. 'The majority of British people', he claimed, 'were better off after the Second World War than they had been before it', continuing a trend of socio-economic improvement initiated by the First World War.<sup>161</sup> With the expansion of social history from the 1970s, and the introduction of micro-historical approaches, the themes and questions raised by Calder and Marwick were tested in light of new evidence and in more specific contexts. The idea that the 'people's war' bought with it fairer economic distribution, and a 'levelling of class', was called into question. Income and consumption figures showed a different, and more democratic wartime picture compared to, say, property ownership—the latter better illustrating long-term financial standings which changed little.<sup>162</sup> Feminist historians were critical

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<sup>157</sup> Arthur Marwick, 'People's War and Top People's Peace? British Society and the Second World War', in Alan Sked and Chris Cook (eds.), *Crisis and Controversy: Essays in Honour of A. J. P. Taylor* (London: Macmillan, 1976), p. 149; idem, *The Home Front: The British and the Second World War* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1976).

<sup>158</sup> Marwick, *The Home Front*, p. 10.

<sup>159</sup> Marwick, 'People's War and Top People's Peace?', p. 149.

<sup>160</sup> Calder, *The People's War*, pp. 17–18. Also see Pelling, *Britain and the Second World War*, pp. 325–6. On wartime 'citizenship', see David Morgan and Mary Evans, *The Battle for Britain: Citizenship and Ideology in the Second World War* (London: Routledge, 1993); Sonya O. Rose, *Which People's War? National Identity and Citizenship in Wartime Britain 1939–1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), introduction. On citizenship before and after the war, see Brad Beaven and John Griffiths, 'Creating the Exemplary Citizen: The Changing Notion of Citizenship in Britain 1870–1939', *Contemporary British History*, 22 (2008), pp. 203–25; Matthew Grant, 'Historicising Citizenship in Post-War Britain', *Historical Journal*, 59 (2016), pp. 1187–1206.

<sup>161</sup> Marwick, *The Home Front*, p. 184; Arthur Marwick, *The Deluge: British Society and the First World War* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965). For a later affirmation of Marwick's main argument in relation to the First World War, see Jay Winter, *The Great War and the British People* (London: Macmillan, 1985).

<sup>162</sup> Penny Summerfield, 'The "Levelling of Class"', in H. L. Smith (ed.), *War and Social Change: British Society in the Second World War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986), pp. 179–207.

of Marwick's insistence on the 'emancipatory' impact of both the First and Second World Wars on the lives of contemporary women. As Gail Braybon and Penny Summerfield put it in 1987:

the belief that men and women naturally occupy separate spheres within which they pursue quite different tasks was not shaken during either [World] war: men were not expected to take an equal share of domestic responsibilities; nor was it considered proper that women, like men, should die for their country.<sup>163</sup>

Published two years later, Penny Summerfield's *Women Workers in the Second World War* noted that women drawn into essential wartime labour were caught between societal expectations of 'production' and 'patriarchy'—preserving both the domestic sphere and performing new labour roles at the demand of the state.<sup>164</sup> A radical, long term shift in the lives of women this was not. At the same time, James Hinton explored the difficulties (and ultimate failure) of workers, notably within the engineering trades, to find a foothold within key industrial decision-making initiatives during the 1940s. Similar continuities of class-based social stratification were explored in *Women, Social Leadership, and the Second World War*, only here the prism of gender was also used. As Hinton forcefully argues, the war made possible a return to more traditional, Victorian notions of classed gender roles in which women were pushed back into the domestic, 'private' sphere in the 1950s. Classed analysis of gender was central here, as it was in large part due to middle-class Women's Voluntary Service members (WVS) who propelled the cyclical return to structured inequality for lower-class women in the postwar period.<sup>165</sup>

By the 1990s nuanced investigations of the home front problematised Marwick's points on war and social change. Similar questions began to be applied to the military context of the

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<sup>163</sup> Gail Braybon and Penny Summerfield, *Out of the Cage: Women's Experiences in Two World Wars* (New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1987), p. 2.

<sup>164</sup> Penny Summerfield, *Women Workers in the Second World War: Production and Patriarchy in Conflict* (London: Croom Helm, 1989); idem, 'Approaches to Women and Social Change in the Second World War', in Brian Brivati and Harriet Jones (eds.), *What Difference Did the War Make?* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1993), pp. 63–79. Aside from Summerfield's study, the majority of works explore women's role in the creation of the welfare state. See Gisela Bock and Pat Thane (eds.), *Maternity and Gender Policies: Women and the Rise of the European Welfare States, 1880s–1950s* (London: Routledge, 1991); Jane Lewis, *Women in Britain Since 1945: Women, Family, Work and the State in the Post-War Years* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1992); idem, 'Gender, the Family and Women's Agency in the Building of "Welfare States": the British Case', *Social History*, 19 (1994), pp. 37–55; Hilary Land, 'Gender Care and the Changing Role of the State', in Jane Lewis (ed.), *Gender, Social Care and Welfare State Restructuring in Europe* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998), pp. 51–84.

<sup>165</sup> James Hinton, *Shop Floor Citizens: Engineering Democracy in 1940s Britain* (Aldershot: E. Elgar, 1994); idem, *Women, Social Leadership, and the Second World War: Continuities of Class* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). On voluntary associations and democratic politics in the interwar period with particular attention to gender, see Helen McCarthy, 'Parties, Voluntary Associations, and Democratic Politics in Interwar Britain', *Historical Journal*, 50 (2007), pp. 891–912.



‘citizen soldier’.<sup>166</sup> Whilst previous and emergent works rightly explored the intricacies of soldiers’ behaviours, morale, cohesion, education, and training, the influence of the home front focused historiography began to bleed into the realms of more ‘traditional’ military history.<sup>167</sup> As Jeremy Crang explained, little was known about the impact of war on military institutions compared to their home front counterparts—particularly in the context of the ‘monumental’ challenge facing those tasked with turning the almost three million men absorbed into the Army between 1939 and 1945 into an effective fighting force.<sup>168</sup> From an institutional perspective *The British Army* drew a number of important points. Major reforms, particularly between 1941–1942, were made to improve the efficiency of personnel allocation and combat popular perceptions of the Army as an ineffectual fighting force. Yet Crang also concludes that although the ‘People’s War might have brought army and nation closer together...in many ways the army remained a nation apart’.<sup>169</sup> Whilst the Second World War often feels more like a ‘people’s’ than ‘soldiers’ war’, the workings of wartime societies can be ‘more fully comprehended by assessing the conduct of citizens in military service to the state’.<sup>170</sup> Acknowledging the fractured nature of a ‘united’ ‘people’s war’, Jonathan Fennell highlights how soldiers played a significant role in shaping wartime socio-political reform, displaying levels of agency overlooked by contemporaries and subsequent historians.<sup>171</sup> Other works have begun to locate the place of military spheres within more expansive readings of the war as a conflict of peoples —notably Martin Francis’ cultural treatment

<sup>166</sup> For a recent overviews of the ‘citizen soldier’ within the Second World War context, see Geoffrey G. Field, *Blood, Sweat, and Toil: Remaking the British Working Class, 1939–1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), ch. 7; idem, “‘Civilians Into Uniform’: Class and Politics in the British Armed Forces, 1939–1945”, *International Labour and Working-Class History*, 80 (2011), pp. 121–47; Emma Newlands, *Civilians into Soldiers: War, the Body and British Army Recruits 1939–45* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014); Alan Allport, *Browned Off and Bloody Minded: The British Soldier Goes to War, 1939–1945* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), ch. 4.

<sup>167</sup> See, for example, John Ellis, *The Sharp End: The Fighting Man in World War II* (London: Corgi, 1980); Penelope Summerfield, ‘Education and Politics in the British Armed Forces in the Second World War’, *International Review of Social History*, 26 (1981), pp. 133–58; Simon P. MacKenzie, *Politics and Military Morale: Current Affairs and Citizenship Education in the British Army 1914–1950* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992); David French, “‘Tommy Is No Soldier’: The Morale of the Second British Army in Normandy, June–August 1944’, in Brian Holden Reid (eds.), *Military Power: Land Warfare in Theory and Practice* (London: Frank Cass, 1997), pp. 154–78; idem, ‘Discipline and the Death Penalty in the British Army in the War Against Germany during the Second World War’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 33 (1998), pp. 531–45; idem, *Raising Churchill’s Army: The British Army and the War Against Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Timothy Harrison, *Military Training in the British Army, 1940–1944: From Dunkirk to D-Day* (London: Frank Cass, 2000).

<sup>168</sup> Jeremy Crang, *The British Army and the People’s War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), p. 2.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid., p. 142.

<sup>170</sup> Dan Todman, ‘Defining Deaths: Richard Titmuss’s *Problems of Social Policy* and the Meaning of Britain’s Second World War’, in Nicholas Martin, Tim Hauton and Pierre Purseigle (eds.), *Aftermath: Legacies and Memories of War in Europe, 1918–1945–1989* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), p. 60; Fennell, *Fighting the People’s War*, p. 1.

<sup>171</sup> Fennell, *Fighting the People’s War*, ch. 16.

of wartime RAF pilots—but more work is needed to integrate these and other sites of conflict within the broader literature on the ‘people’s war’.<sup>172</sup>

The impact of the ‘cultural turn’ allowed the findings of social historians to be pushed in different directions. Having established the fractured nature of the wartime social economy, and the vast social energy it took to generate it, questions surrounding the cultural mobilisation of wartime society remained unanswered.<sup>173</sup> How were the people comprising the ‘people’s war’ being envisaged at the time, which people were being envisaged, and what were the dimensions and contours of wartime public culture?<sup>174</sup> For Sonya Rose, the answers to these questions reveal further instabilities and broader wartime tensions at the national and regional levels. Focusing on the relationship between wartime citizenship and national belonging, *Which People’s War?* exposes the ‘fragility of a unitary national identity’ along the fault lines of class, gender, geography, and race.<sup>175</sup> Post-structuralist debates are critical here, particularly in relation to the ways people can negotiate or resist dominant wartime discourses and Foucault’s notion that ‘identity’ is constructed through language and contextually specific knowledge forms.<sup>176</sup> As wartime society and culture collaboratively ‘imagined’ the nation, to borrow Benedict Anderson’s phrase, the result was a ‘muddled’ and ‘contested’ self-image.<sup>177</sup> Yet despite instabilities in who represented the ‘nation’ and how the ‘nation’ itself was represented, being unified did not depend on a single core national identity. For Rose, the ‘personal as well as collective threat’ of war sufficed to ‘forge solidarity’ amongst the constituent parts of ‘Britain’.<sup>178</sup> War affected individuals, groups, populations, and localities differently; the intensity of its demands necessitating multiple imaginings of the ‘unified’ national collective.<sup>179</sup>

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<sup>172</sup> Martin Francis, *The Flyer: British Culture and the Royal Air Force, 1939–1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

<sup>173</sup> Michael Geyer and Adam Tooze, ‘Introduction to Part II’, in Michael Geyer and Adam Tooze (eds.), *The Cambridge History of the Second World War*, vol. III: *Total War: Economy, Society and Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 247.

<sup>174</sup> Rose, *Which People’s War?*, p. 2.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid.

<sup>176</sup> Stuart Hall, ‘Introduction: Who Needs Identity?’, in Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay (eds.), *Questions of Cultural Identity* (London: Sage, 1996), pp. 1–17.

<sup>177</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983); Sonya O. Rose, ‘Sex, Citizenship, and the Nation in World War II Britain’, *American Historical Review*, 103 (1998), p. 1147; Jo Fox, ‘Careless Talk: Tensions within British Domestic Propaganda during the Second World War’, *Journal of British Studies*, 51 (2012), p. 938. The historiography on ‘nations’ and ‘nationalism(s)’ is vast. For key summaries of the field from the works of Ernest Renan to more recent approaches, see Geoff Eley and Ronald Grigor Sunney (eds.), *Becoming National: A Reader* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996); Len Scales and Oliver Zimmer (eds.), *Power and the Nation in European History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

<sup>178</sup> Rose, *Which People’s War?*, p. 290.

<sup>179</sup> Geyer and Tooze, ‘Introduction’, p. 247.

The emergent field of Second World War cultural history continues to explore the limits of Rose's arguments for the simultaneous existence of unity and division within wartime society. Building on historiographical interest in the development and tradition of 'Britishness', Wendy Ugolini and Juliette Pattinson's work devotes more focused attention to the 'hybrid' and 'multiple' identities at work within the imagined wartime community.<sup>180</sup> Locating the complex meanings of wartime 'national identity' within and between the four nations (England, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland), Ugolini and Pattinson assert the 'fluidity' of identities underpinning a 'pluralistic Britishness'.<sup>181</sup> Moving beyond Rose's illustration of the political and nationalistic fissures within 'Britain', a more complex pattern of 'hybrid "dual identities"' between the home fronts emerges.<sup>182</sup> Despite the existence of these dual pulls to nationalist allegiance, the overall impact of the war was, in the authors' final analysis, 'cohesive'.<sup>183</sup> Alongside national and regional analyses of the 'people's war', more recent work illustrates the ubiquity of considering localised pockets of community construction and their relationship with broader national trends. As Jessica Hammett shows in relation to the work of civil defence personnel, local constructions of community served as spaces where the dominant narrative of the 'people's war' could be refashioned.<sup>184</sup> Civilians played an important role in the 'bottom up' shaping of wartime cultural codes and, importantly, this was influenced by imaginary bonds beyond the pull of the nation. It is this dynamic between macro and micro approaches to the 'people's war' and its construction which the thesis seeks to capture. It is less concerned with revealing examples which cover all four nations equally—much of the evidence itself pertains to England—than pointing towards broader trends across Britain.

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<sup>180</sup> Ugolini and Pattinson 'Negotiating Identities', p. 2.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid., p. 22; Graham Dawson and Bob West, 'Our Finest Hour: The Popular Memory of World War Two and the Struggle Over National Identity', in Geoff Hurd (ed.), *Nationalising Fictions: World War Two in British Films and Television* (London: BFI Publishing, 1984), p. 8; Wendy Ugolini, 'The "Welsh" Pimpernel: Richard Llewellyn and the Search for Authenticity in Second World War Britain', *Cultural and Social History*, 16 (2019), pp. 185–203.

<sup>182</sup> Thomas Hajkowski, *The BBC and National Identity in Britain, 1922–53* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), p. 2. For more on 'dual identities' in twentieth century Britain, see Tony Kushner, *The Persistence of Prejudice* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989); Keiko Itoh, *The Japanese Community in Pre-War Britain: From Integration to Disintegration* (London: Routledge, 2001); Wendy Ugolini, *Experiencing War as the "Enemy Other": Italian Scottish Experience in World War II* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011). Also see Paul Ward and Daniel Travers, 'Narrating Britain's War: A "Four Nations and More" Approach to the People's War', in Manuel Bragança and Peter Tame (eds.), *The Long Aftermath: Cultural Legacies of Europe at War, 1936–2016* (New York: Berghahn Book, 2016), pp. 77–95.

<sup>183</sup> Ugolini and Pattinson 'Negotiating Identities', p. 20.

<sup>184</sup> Jessica Hammett, '"The Invisible Chain by Which All Are Bound to Each Other": Civil Defence Magazines and the Development of Community during the Second World War', *Journal of War & Culture Studies*, 11 (2018), p. 133, 117; idem, 'Representations of Community in Second World War Civil Defence', unpublished PhD thesis, University of Sussex (2017).

Other ways of locating wartime experience highlighted by Rose have also received revised thinking. Images of the ‘ordinary’, ‘everyday’ citizen ‘doing their bit’ played an important role in the contemporary visualisation of the nation.<sup>185</sup> Whilst cultural approaches such as Rose’s rightly touch on E. P. Thompson’s pioneering ideas about class (meaning structured inequality produced and reproduced through economic, social, cultural, and political relations) as both process and relationship, they do not fully recognise its central place within the re-imagination of the wartime nation.<sup>186</sup> For the first time, Geoffrey Field highlights, the period between 1939 and 1945 witnessed the image of the worker as symbolic of, and synonymous with, the nation ‘as producers, members of the armed forces, firemen, and air raid victims’.<sup>187</sup> As *Blood, Sweat, and Toil* makes clear, the kind of social patriotism binding the different social strata together in wartime was based on collective images of working-class sacrifice and selflessness. The collaborative initiative to ‘remake’ the working-class in wartime, based on interactions and negotiations between classes, had major socio-political ramifications leading to political reform and shifts towards a more democratic and egalitarian politics.<sup>188</sup> Field’s study encourages us to think about class less as a structural reality than one of many competing wartime identities constructed historically.<sup>189</sup>

Recent cultural histories emphasise the importance of class in different contexts. As Martin Francis makes clear, wartime class dynamics were dependant on situational and institutional contexts. In the case of the RAF (particularly within Bomber Command), lack of formality and emphasis on a technocratic and meritocratic vision of military culture led to self-styled ‘classlessness’ symptomatic of the ‘people’s war’.<sup>190</sup> Yet fighter pilots typically owed their notions of class to chivalric, public-school masculinity—in one sense disruptive to the newfound ‘equality’ of the working-class but equally illustrative of cross-class wartime sacrifice.<sup>191</sup> Taken together, the literature emphasises the need to consider the differing contexts in which wartime notions of class were performed as well as its place within the broader cultural construction of British society

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<sup>185</sup> Rose, *Which People’s War?*, p. 5. Also see Linsey Robb, *Men At Work: The Working Man in British Culture, 1939–1945* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

<sup>186</sup> Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*; Philippa Levine and Susan R. Grayzel, ‘Introduction’, in Philippa Levine and Susan R. Grayzel (eds.), *Gender, Labour, War and Empire: Essays on Modern Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 1.

<sup>187</sup> Field, *Blood, Sweat, and Toil*, p. 377.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid., p. 6; Penny Summerfield, *Histories of the Self: Personal Narratives and Historical Practice* (London: Routledge, 2019), p. 8. Also see Jon Lawrence, ‘Class, “Affluence” and the Study of Everyday Life in Britain, c.1930–64’, *Cultural and Social History* 10 (2013), pp. 273–99, on the ‘fuzzy’ nature of class in the everyday mid-century.

<sup>190</sup> Francis, *The Flyer*, p. 5.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid., p. 5; idem, ‘The Domestification of the Male?’, p. 648.

at war. Propaganda played a critical function here—particularly in feature films and documentary pictures—as specific indicators of social class and regional identity were bound in presenting differing pictures of idealised ‘Britishness’.<sup>192</sup> The question of how class was created and presented in wartime, and crucially why, remains a fundamental component of understanding the dynamics underpinning the ‘people’s war’.

Closely linked with problems of class, as Martin Francis indicates, are the wartime workings of gender.<sup>193</sup> The power of analysing the gender politics of wartime, and uniting socio-cultural approaches, was initially highlighted by Penny Summerfield using oral testimonies.<sup>194</sup> Deploying popular memory theory and cultural frames from after the Second World War, *Reconstructing Women’s Wartime Lives* left significant room for a sustained analysis of gender identities and cultural expectations surrounding them during the war itself. Picking up the discussion in *Which People’s War?*, Rose illustrates how visions of wartime masculinity were dominated by the ‘temperate hero’ model. This hegemonic view of wartime masculinity, both classed and gendered, saw a rejection of elitist, chivalrous masculinity of the First World War in favour of more self-deprecating courage of the ‘little man’ blended with visions of the ‘soldier hero’. At the same time, demands on femininity were torn between traditional expectations of motherhood and a ‘modulated form of sexualized femininity’.<sup>195</sup> Whilst the image of the ‘temperate hero’ was frequently made in opposition to expectations of female behaviour—in order, as Lucy Noakes highlights, to disassociate home front civil defence from ‘women’s work’—

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<sup>192</sup> In particular, see Jo Fox, ‘Millions Like Us? Accented Language and the “Ordinary” in British Films of the Second World War’, *Journal of British Studies*, 45 (2006), pp. 819–45.

<sup>193</sup> For gender, see Margaret Randolph Higonnet, Jane Jenson, Sonya Michel, and Margaret Collins Weitz (eds.), *Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987); Nicoletta Gullace, *The Blood of Our Sons: Men, Women and the Renegotiation of British Citizenship During the Great War* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002); Rose, *Which People’s War?*; Ana Carden-Coyne (ed.), *Gender and Conflict since 1914: Historical and Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012). Applied to women, Summerfield, *Women Workers in the Second World War*; Antonia Lant, *Blackout: Reinventing Women for Wartime British Cinema* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991); Christine Gledhill and Gillian Swanson (eds.), *Nationalising Femininity: Culture, Sexuality and British Cinema in the Second World War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996); Susan R. Grayzel, *Women’s Identities At War: Gender, Motherhood, and Politics in Britain and France during the First World War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999); Noakes, *War and the British*. Applied to men, Graham Dawson *Soldier Heroes: British Adventure, Empire and the Imagining of Masculinities* (London: Routledge, 1994); Joanna Bourke, *Dismembering the Male: Men’s Bodies, Britain and the Great War* (London: Reaktion Books, 1996); idem, *An Intimate History of Killing: Face-To-Face Killing In Twentieth-Century Warfare* (London: Granta, 1999); Deborah Cohen, *The War Come Home: Disabled Veterans in Britain and Germany, 1914–1939* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Stefan Dudnik, John Tosh, and Karen Hagemann (eds.), *Masculinities in Politics and War: Gendering Modern History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004).

<sup>194</sup> Penny Summerfield, *Reconstructing Women’s Wartime Lives: Discourse and Subjectivity in Oral Histories of the Second World War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998).

<sup>195</sup> Rose, *Which People’s War?*, ch. 4–5.

the emerging historiography on British masculinities at war accommodates a broader range of both military and civilian representations of men in conflict.<sup>196</sup> As Juliette Pattinson, Arthur McIvor, and Linsey Robb indicate in relation to civilian men, ‘wartime constructions of masculinity remained open to contestation’.<sup>197</sup> Much like other aspects of wartime identity, masculinity needs to be seen in the plural; built on multiple, shifting, and competing dynamics.<sup>198</sup> Recent innovations not only expose a wide range of domestic and military masculinities, but point towards the silences and absence of war within its contemporary construction.<sup>199</sup>

Recent work on femininities at war reaffirms Rose’s emphasis on the sexual and emotional demands placed on women; particularly those at the home fronts. Social and cultural discourses placed competing and often contradictory demands on women’s wartime behaviour at odds with growing shifts in gender modernity since the turn of the century. Whilst traditional images of the domestic housewife persisted (maternal and subservient to male breadwinners), a range of sexual standards were imposed. Young, single women drawn into new kinds of work as a result of the war were expected to maintain an ‘appealing’ aesthetic. Yet anxieties over the faithfulness of wives and girlfriends—presented as they were with new and exciting opportunities for romantic, emotional, and sexual fulfillment—imposed that all women were to remain loyal to their British husbands and sweethearts.<sup>200</sup> Growing interest in the history of emotions highlights a far broader nexus of demands on wartime female behaviour, particularly in relation to the emotional management of fear and grief.<sup>201</sup> Women were advised that restrained self-management was the

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<sup>196</sup> Lucy Noakes, “‘Serve to Save’: Gender, Citizenship and Civil Defence in Britain 1937–41”, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 47 (2012), pp. 734–53.

<sup>197</sup> Juliette Pattinson, Arthur McIvor, and Linsey Robb, *Men in Reserve: British Civilian Masculinities in the Second World War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017), p. 4; Linsey Robb and Juliette Pattinson (eds.), *Men, Masculinities, and Male Culture in the Second World War* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).

<sup>198</sup> Pattinson, McIvor, and Robb, *Men in Reserve*, p. 13.

<sup>199</sup> Corinna Peniston-Bird and Penny Summerfield, *Contesting Home Defence: Men, Women and the Home Guard in the Second World War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007); Emma Vickers, *Queen and Country: Same-Sex Desire in the British Armed Forces, 1939–1945* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013); Robb, *Men At Work*; Pattinson, McIvor, and Robb, *Men in Reserve*; Corinna Peniston-Bird and Emma Vickers (eds.), *Gender and the Second World War: Lessons of Culture* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017); Robb and Pattinson (eds.), *Men, Masculinities, and Male Culture*.

<sup>200</sup> In particular, see Jennifer Purcell, ‘Beyond Home: Housewives and the Nation, Public and Private Identities 1939–1945’, unpublished PhD thesis, University of Sussex (2008); Wendy Webster, *Mixing It: Diversity in World War II Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), ch. 6; Maggie Andrews, *Women and Evacuation in the Second World War: Femininity, Domesticity and Motherhood* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019).

<sup>201</sup> For more on the history of emotions and ‘total’ war, see Joanna Bourke, *Fear: A Cultural History* (London: Virago Press, 2005), ch. 4; Amy Bell, ‘Landscapes of Fear: Wartime London, 1939–1945’, *Journal of British Studies*, 48 (2009), pp. 153–75; Michael Roper, *The Secret Battle: Emotional Survival in The Great War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010); Lucy Noakes, Claire Langhamer, and Claudia Siebrecht (eds.), *Total War: An Emotional History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020).

‘most patriotic response to bereavement’, in which private grief was represented as subordinate to the collective war effort.<sup>202</sup> Yet even the most conservative aspects of discourse on wartime female behaviour and mentalities were not passively accepted by contemporary women. Like national identity and class, Maggie Andrews notes, dominant socio-cultural discourses were ‘stretched, sometimes challenged and reworked’.<sup>203</sup> In a similar vein, recent work shows how the same was true for civilian and combatant men.<sup>204</sup> Masculine connections to ‘combat’ in traditional military histories have also been questioned in accounting for the meaningful roles women played in wartime.<sup>205</sup> The study of gender in its wartime context clearly opens up avenues for exploring the increasingly fraught relationship between the individual and state, the private and the public, at times of national intensity. Yet the literature consistently reaffirms Joan Scott’s argument that masculinities and femininities are always ‘constructed’ in reference to each other. This process of meaning-making is one of continual renewal.<sup>206</sup> In the context of war, it remains important to consider how different cultural and state agents massaged pre-existing ideas to create their own constructions of gender and how this shifted over time.

Attention has also shifted to exploring the significance of race and empire within the broader narrative of the ‘people’s war’.<sup>207</sup> Contrary to the image of Britain ‘standing alone’ against Nazism in 1940, the vast resources of empire were drawn on in order to wage total, global war. As Daniel Todman has recently reminded us, the experience of the conflict must be viewed not simply as a ‘people’s war’ of nation and empire but a ‘peoples’ war’, accounting for the global dimensions of

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<sup>202</sup> Lucy Noakes, ‘Gender, Grief, and Bereavement in Second World War Britain’, *Journal of War & Culture Studies*, 8 (2015), p. 72, 88.

<sup>203</sup> Andrews, *Women and Evacuation*, p. 3.

<sup>204</sup> Pattinson, McIvor, and Robb, *Men in Reserve*, p. 4; Robb and Pattinson (eds.), *Men, Masculinities, and Male Culture*.

<sup>205</sup> See Lucy Noakes, *Women in the British Army: War and the Gentle Sex, 1907–1948* (London: Routledge, 2006); Pattinson, *Women of War*; Jeremy A. Crang, *Sisters in Arms: Women in the British Armed Forces During the Second World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020). On the traditional masculine reading of ‘combat’ in military histories, see Ellis, *The Sharp End*; John Keegan, *A History of Warfare* (London: Vintage Digital, 1993).

<sup>206</sup> Scott, ‘Gender’, *passim*; Noakes, *War and the British*, p. 50; Francis, *The Flyer*, p. 5.

<sup>207</sup> The literature on the British empire and ‘total’ war is vast. For key contributions, see Ashley Jackson, *The British Empire and the Second World War* (London: Hambledon Continuum, 2006); John H. Morrow, ‘The Imperial Framework’, in Jay Winter (ed.), *The Cambridge History of the First World War*, vol. I: *Global War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 405–32; Ashley Jackson, ‘The British Empire, 1939–1945’, in Richard J. B. Bosworth and Joseph A. Maiolo (eds.), *The Cambridge History of the Second World War*, vol. II: *Politics and Ideology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 558–580; Ashley Jackson, Yasmin Khan, and Gajendra Singh (eds.), *An Imperial World at War: The British Empire, 1939–45* (London: Routledge, 2016); Michael J. K. Walsh and Andrekos Varnava (eds.), *The Great War and the British Empire: Culture and Society* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017).

Britain's involvement.<sup>208</sup> Interactions between British citizens and various national populations brought their own social tensions, captured by Yasmin Khan in her exploration of the 'people's history' of India during the Second World War.<sup>209</sup> But the image and rhetoric of empire, mobilised in the context of global war, exposed a fundamental contradiction between British national identity and the British involvement in conflict. As Rose identifies, 'Britain's imperial relations across the globe subverted the framing of the war as one being fought to secure freedom and democracy for both the country and the empire'.<sup>210</sup> Efforts to present a united 'people's empire' were undercut and contradicted by private opinions at various levels of society, so Wendy Webster suggests.<sup>211</sup> Important moves towards a so-called 'New Imperial History' facilitate cultural and linguistic explorations of Britain's relationship with empire in the total war context—posing fundamental questions about the position and self-image of the imperial motherland.<sup>212</sup> Compared to the more saturated literatures on national identity, class, and gender, more work is needed to uncover the social and cultural interactions between war and empire pioneered by Rose—particularly outside of the home front context. The challenge for historians remains to hold the personal and subjective experience of empire in productive tension with its cultural, political, and military shifts at the global level.

Social and cultural approaches to Britain's war expose various aspects of wartime experience and its workings within the broader cultural climate of a 'people's war'. The literature emphasises how, far from being separate entities, these sectional diversities were inherently interconnected. Notions of national belonging, class, gender, and race were tied up in personal and collective visions of society at war, with the ability to reinforce each other and cause strain. At the same

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<sup>208</sup> Daniel Todman, 'People's War/Total War: Problems and Possibilities in the History of Britain's Second World War', Second World War Research Group Conference Lecture, 'The Peoples' Wars?—The Second World War in Socio-Political Perspective', King's College London, 14 June 2018.

<sup>209</sup> Yasmin Khan, *The Raj At War: A People's History of India's Second World War* (London: Vintage Digital, 2015).

<sup>210</sup> Rose, *Which People's War?*, p. 283.

<sup>211</sup> Webster, *Mixing It*, *passim*. Also see idem, *Englishness and Empire 1939–1965* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); idem, 'The Empire Answers: Imperial Identity on Radio and Film, 1939–1945', in Phillip Buckner and R. Douglas Francis (eds.), *Rediscovering the British World* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2005), pp. 321–39. On the postwar period, see Wendy Webster, *Imagining Home: Gender, Race And National Identity, 1945–1964* (London: University College London Press, 1998).

<sup>212</sup> Robert H. Macdonald, *The Language of Empire: Myths and Metaphors of Popular Imperialism, 1880–1918* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991); Santanu Das, *Race, Empire and First World War Writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Martin Thomas and Richard Toye, *Arguing About Empire: Imperial Rhetoric in Britain and France, 1882–1956* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017); Santanu Das, *India, Empire and First World War Culture: Writings, Images and Songs* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018). On 'New Imperial History', see Stephen Howe (ed.), *The New Imperial Histories Reader* (London: Routledge, 2010). In the context of the wartime home fronts of empire, see Mark J. Crowley and Sandra Trudgen Dawson (eds.), *Home Fronts: Britain and the Empire at War, 1939–45* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2017).



time, we are presented with a picture of wartime identity as being fluid and malleable in nature. The 'people's war' narrative was fashioned from a variety of voices and sources, with no one-size-fits-all definition. Indeed, it was precisely its vague nature, Geoffrey Field argues, which made it such a potent slogan.<sup>213</sup> Contemporaries had significant maneuverability to create their own definitions of their 'place' within wartime society, and, ironically, were at least partly encouraged to think individualistically (as the lone individual was featured as the 'ideal' heroic role model).<sup>214</sup> Despite the willingness of recent work to explore the dynamics of the 'people's war' through alternative sources and methods, particularly in relation to commemorative practices and mourning, the place of belief remains strangely absent from the literature.<sup>215</sup> Belief, so crucial to public and private understandings of modern British society, has not been properly analysed within this wartime context.<sup>216</sup> As Jose Harris highlights, the context of war profoundly disrupted some aspects of religious worship but simultaneously spawned a 'revival' of others in 'certain specific contexts'.<sup>217</sup> As the thesis demonstrates, the place of belief and believing (distinct but overlapping with orthodox religion) played a far more significant role in British culture and society at war than Harris suggests.

## ARGUMENT AND METHODOLOGY

The 'people's war' clearly has a varied conceptual history, and it remains important to distinguish how its meaning will be approached and why this is significant. Unlike works concerned with questions over the political impact of war in terms of party politics and electoral shifts, notably the postwar projection of a 'New Jerusalem', this study focuses on the socio-cultural implications of the 'people's war' as an exercise in the mass participation of warfare. It explores the experience and management of belief in wartime as political and organising tool, pushing ideas pioneered

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<sup>213</sup> Field, *Blood, Sweat and Toil*, p. 377.

<sup>214</sup> Juliette Pattinson, 'Fantasies of the "Soldier Hero", Frustrations of the Jedburghs', in Robb and Pattinson (eds.), *Men, Masculinities and Male Culture*, p. 26.

<sup>215</sup> Corinna Peniston-Bird, 'The People's War in Personal Testimony and Bronze: Sorority and the Memorial to The Women of World War II', in Noakes and Pattinson (eds.), *British Cultural Memory*, pp. 67–87; Lucy Noakes, 'Valuing the Dead: Death, Burial, and the Body in Second World War Britain', *Critical Military Studies*, 6 (2020), pp. 224–42; idem, 'The "Worth" of Grief and the "Value" of Bodies: Managing the Civilian Corpse in Second World War Britain', in Zahra Newby and Ruth Toulson (eds.), *The Materiality of Mourning: Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 2018), pp. 175–90. Also see idem, *Dying for the Nation*, *passim*.

<sup>216</sup> Harris, *Private Lives, Public Spirit*, ch. 6.

<sup>217</sup> Harris, 'Great Britain: The People's War?', pp. 251–52.

by Sonya Rose in new directions.<sup>218</sup> Whilst overlapping with religious history and aspects of ‘popular religion’, chiefly but not exclusively the Anglican church, the study considers a range of beliefs which fused elements of the supernatural, fatalism, mysticism and superstition as well as ‘orthodox’ religion.<sup>219</sup> Precise terminology is important here. Breaking away from the class-laden ‘popular religion’ and the prescriptive categories of ‘alternative’ and ‘non-standard’ belief, the thesis utilises ‘heterodoxy’ as its central organising concept. Historians of modern British history have used the term with surprisingly little analytical explanation, leaving the foundational arguments of Pierre Bourdieu and religious sociology the closest we have to a working theory.<sup>220</sup> As Philip Lockley notes, the term is typically used to denote beliefs and movements which centre on claims to modern prophecy rather than institutions or scripture, hence the ‘orthodox’/‘heterodox’ dichotomy.<sup>221</sup> Clive Field, for example, uses it to categorise various astrological, supernatural, superstitious, and telepathic beliefs, whilst Joy Dixon highlights its utility in analysing the ‘secular religions’ outside of mainstream religion in late nineteenth and early twentieth century society.<sup>222</sup> Yet the lack of consensus on heterodoxy’s meaning presents distinct possibilities. As Joan Scott put it in relation to gender, historians must ‘problematize and historicize the categories that are our objects of study, as well as those we deploy in our analyses’.<sup>223</sup> Or as Dixon highlights in relation to ‘spirituality’, our terminology and organising categories must be ‘understood in dynamic rather than static terms’ alongside their relationships to various ‘discursive constructions’.<sup>224</sup> ‘Heterodoxy’ not only provides a useful tool in the categorisation of certain belief systems. It also allows us to better interrogate the constructed boundaries between acceptable/unacceptable belief in wartime, the grey space in between, and to whom wartime believing was such a critical issue and why. In order to achieve this, the study fuses elements of social and cultural history.

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<sup>218</sup> For a similar approach in relation to death, see Noakes, *Dying for the Nation*.

<sup>219</sup> As the Anglican church remained the principal spiritual point of authority in wartime, and co-ordinated many of the functions of Roman Catholic/non-denominational churches as part of a spiritual coalition, emphasis has been placed on accessing Church of England records in the first instance.

<sup>220</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), ch. 4.

<sup>221</sup> Philip Lockley, ‘Histories of Heterodoxy: Shifting Approaches to a Millenarian Tradition in Modern Church History’, *Studies in Church History*, 49 (2013), p. 387.

<sup>222</sup> Field, *Britain’s Last Religious Revival?*, pp. 77–78; Joy Dixon, ‘Modernity, Heterodoxy, and the Transformation of Religious Cultures’, in Sue Morgan and Jacqueline de Vries (eds.), *Women, Gender and Religious Cultures in Britain, 1800–1940* (London: Routledge, 2010), p. 226.

<sup>223</sup> Joan Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), p. 218.

<sup>224</sup> Dixon, *Divine Feminine*, p. 12.

*A Socio-Cultural Approach to Belief*

Social and cultural approaches to history boast rich traditions—featuring areas of overlap as well as important points of tension.<sup>225</sup> Given that cultural histories were born of innovations of social history this perhaps seems unsurprising. Both, in their broadest sense, are concerned with uncovering hidden or marginalised forces affecting historical realities—uncovering ways of living and ways of interpreting disruptive to prevailing political and economic orthodoxies. By extension, both are also concerned with understanding the lived ‘experience’ of historical actors. Yet the methods used to address these concerns are often sharply distinct. Following trends set by the French *Annales* school of the interwar period, social histories typically adopt a *longue durée* approach to measure structural change over longer time periods.<sup>226</sup> Cultural historians are, by contrast, often more concerned with exploring contextually rich case studies than establishing historical causality.<sup>227</sup> The ways in which the ‘experience’ of historical actors is treated also differs. For cultural historians, this is shaped through and even against ‘representations’ in culture. Yet this often downplays, or rather fails to fully explore, the historical ‘agency’ of past actors so crucial to micro-historical and poststructuralist approaches.<sup>228</sup> The place of class within this context also raises theoretical differences. For social and labour historians of the Marxist tradition, class analysis remains a fundamental tool for interpreting social realities of the past. Writing in the context of the cultural and linguistic turns, however, historians of the 1990s often found ‘class’ (and all its master narrative generating potential) less useful compared to the historically contingent nature of ‘identity’ and paradigmatic shifts towards gender.<sup>229</sup> The question for historians now is whether social and cultural approaches can usefully be brought together, and what benefits this might yield.

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<sup>225</sup> For a succinct overview of social and cultural historical traditions, see Sasha Handley, Rohan McWilliam, and Lucy Noakes, ‘Introduction’, in Sasha Handley, Rohan McWilliam, and Lucy Noakes (eds.), *New Directions in Social and Cultural History* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), pp. 3–11.

<sup>226</sup> On the *Annales* school, see Peter Burke, *The French Historical Revolution: The Annales School 1928–89* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990). For the classic *longue durée* approach, see Marc Bloch, *Feudal Society* (London: Routledge, 1965 [1939]). For a recent call for a return to *longue durée* approaches, see Jo Guldi and David Armitage, *The History Manifesto* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), chs. 1–2.

<sup>227</sup> Peter Mandler, ‘The Problem with Cultural History’, *Cultural and Social History*, 1 (2004), p. 94.

<sup>228</sup> Notions of ‘representation’ were central to the ‘new’ cultural history as it emerged in the 1980s. See Lynn Hunt (ed.), *The New Cultural History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989); Peter Burke, *What Is Cultural History?* (Cambridge: Polity, 2004).

<sup>229</sup> For Foucault in particular, ‘identity’ is not a fixed entity but the product of contextually specific language and knowledge forms. See Handley, McWilliam, and Noakes, ‘Introduction’, p. 9

Historians of war, particularly those working in the modern period, have played an instrumental role in shaping the fields of social and cultural history. As we have seen, early social approaches to the history of war have explored the broader impact of war on society—stemming from Arthur Marwick’s influential ‘war and social change’ school.<sup>230</sup> Whilst this approach found more focused analysis in Summerfield and Hinton’s works on the Second World War, the search for meaning and meaning making in wartime—so crucial to cultural treatments of history—became particularly important to scholars of the First World War. Cultural approaches not only ‘set the agenda’ for much of the work on the First World War from the 1980s to 2014–2018. It played a critical role in aligning ‘traditional/new military histories’ with a burgeoning literature on the home front experience of war, transforming scholarly readings of war from ‘combat’ to ‘conflict’.<sup>231</sup> The methodological and analytical benefits of cross-disciplinary approaches to war, in all its guises, were recognised from the 1970s. Paul Fussell’s divisive *The Great War and Modern Memory*, for example, sparked an enduring debate over the war’s relationship to ‘modernity’. Using the literary works of wounded (ex) servicemen, Fussell argued that the cultural outpourings of war amounted to nothing less than a distinctly modern form of ironic scepticism.<sup>232</sup> The field of memory studies found new fertility when applied to the First World War from the 1990s. This amounted, in Jay Winter’s view, to a master category outstripping class or gender.<sup>233</sup> Yet accessing ‘memory’—defining what it means and locating which sources it could be accessed through—remained complex.<sup>234</sup> For Winter, Fussell’s reliance on textual evidence and the language of middle/upper-middle class contemporaries missed an avalanche of more traditional modes of remembrance and mourning expressed through a diverse set of cultural products

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<sup>230</sup> Marwick, *The Deluge*; idem, *War and Social Change in the Twentieth Century: A Comparative Study of Britain, France, Germany, Russia and the United States* (London: Macmillan, 1974).

<sup>231</sup> John Horne, ‘End of a Paradigm? The Cultural History of the Great War’, *Past and Present*, 242 (2019), p. 155; Das, *India, Empire and First World War Culture*, p. 26. On ‘new military’ approaches to history, see Joanna Bourke, ‘New Military History’, in Matthew Hughes and William J. Philpott (eds.), *Palgrave Advances in Modern Military History* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), pp. 258–80; Jeremy Black, *Rethinking Military History* (London: Routledge, 2004).

<sup>232</sup> Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975). On the Great War as a ‘rupture’ in twentieth century history, see Samuel Hynes, *A War Imagined: The First World War and English Culture* (London: Bodley Head, 1990).

<sup>233</sup> Jay Winter, ‘The Generation of Memory: Reflections on the “Memory Boom” in Contemporary Historical Studies’, *Bulletin of the German Historical Institute*, 27 (2000), pp. 69–92. Also see Stefan Goebel, ‘Intersecting Memories: War and Remembrance in Twentieth-Century Europe’, *Historical Journal*, 44 (2001), pp. 853–58; Stephen Heathorn, ‘The Mnemonic Turn in the Cultural History of Britain’s Great War’, *Historical Journal*, 48 (2005), pp. 1103–24.

<sup>234</sup> See Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan, ‘Setting the Framework’, in Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan (eds.), *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 6–39; Jay Winter, *Remembering War: The Great War Between Historical Memory and History in the Twentieth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006).

including film, popular religion, art, literature, poetry, and war memorials.<sup>235</sup> A more expansive interpretation of culture, accounting for its 'high' and 'low' forms and the myriad codes, gestures, and representations used to ascribe meaning to the war through 'thick description', was required.<sup>236</sup>

As John Horne recently highlights, the reach of Great War cultural history has extended far beyond artistic and commemorative debates over the war's relationship to 'modernity'. It has addressed 'culture' in the broader sense of the production and circulation of ideas (particularly with reference to propaganda), as well as emphasising the primacy of experience.<sup>237</sup> Whilst aspects of these innovations can be found in histories of the Second World War, work on its cultural outpourings tends to be more restrictive and has yet to expose in fullest detail the mutual connections between lived experiences and wider wartime discourse.<sup>238</sup> Moreover, unlike the historiography of the First World War, the unhelpful division of home and fighting fronts creates a false sense of separation of the domestic and military, the private and public.<sup>239</sup> Greater care is needed in connecting the various spaces and experiences of war whilst paying attention to the varied intentions of culture in separating or uniting them.

It is only recently that attention has turned to fusing the analytical benefits of social and cultural history more consciously, at least in the modern and twentieth century contexts.<sup>240</sup> As Peter Mandler urged in the inaugural issue of *Cultural and Social History*, the ways in which cultural historians 'construct' meaning are too often analytically and methodologically lacking. More sophisticated approaches should consider, as Jay Winter also recognised, different forms of 'cultural evidence', the ways in which these were produced and received, and offer a more sustained

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<sup>235</sup> On language and cultural history, see Jay Winter, 'Shell Shock and the Cultural History of the Great War', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 35 (2000), pp. 7–11; idem, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning*.

<sup>236</sup> Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning*, p. 227. On 'thick description', see Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*.

<sup>237</sup> Horne, 'End of a Paradigm?', p. 158, 161.

<sup>238</sup> In particular, see Adam Piette, *Imagination at War: British Fiction and Poetry, 1939–1945* (London: Papermac, 1995); Brian Foss, *War Paint: Art, War, and State Identity in Britain 1939–1945* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007); Robb, *Men at Work*; Patrick Deer, *Culture in Camouflage: War, Empire, and Modern British Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

<sup>239</sup> For recent attempts to reconnect the home and fighting fronts, see Deer, *Culture in Camouflage*; Todman, *Britain's War: Into Battle*; idem, *Britain's War: A New World*.

<sup>240</sup> On attempts to fuse social and cultural methods in modern history, see Mandler, 'The Problem with Cultural History'; Geoff Eley, *A Crooked Line: From Cultural History to the History of Society* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2005); Michael Roper, 'Slipping Out of View: Subjectivity and Emotion in Gender History', *History Workshop Journal*, 59 (2005), pp. 57–72; Lyndal Roper, 'Beyond Discourse Theory', *Women's History Review*, 19 (2010), pp. 307–19. In earlier time periods, see Natalie Z. Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1975).

engagement with the multi-layered nature of ‘meaning’ beyond discourse.<sup>241</sup> ‘To account for change’, Mandler indicates, ‘we need to have an idea of the range of influences that impinge upon meaning’ with reference to the innovations of neighbouring and more distant academic disciplines.<sup>242</sup>

Whilst the interdisciplinary approach Mandler urges remains familiar territory for scholars of religion and belief, socio-cultural hybrid histories have only recently been adopted by historians of modern Britain more broadly.<sup>243</sup> For Laura King, writing on the history of fatherhood and masculinity, socio-cultural histories pay close attention to ‘attitudes, emotions and subjectivities’ in history whilst situating these within wider ‘social, cultural...[and] political’ contexts.<sup>244</sup> As Sasha Handley, Rohan McWilliam, and Lucy Noakes similarly argue, the future of socio-cultural history lies within its variety and ability to connect with different approaches and methods. Such histories should fully expose the ‘inter-connectedness of different fields’ whilst situating historical actors in ‘dynamic relation to objects and materials, the built environment, natural landscapes and in relation to fellow human beings and even animals’.<sup>245</sup> In the context of war, John Horne indicates the ability of culturally expansive histories to illuminate broader political, military, and economic trajectories. Martin Francis notes the power of socio-cultural approaches which critically engage with the widest range of categories and contextualise their historical construction including national identity, class, gender, sexuality, race, emotions, senses, and memory.<sup>246</sup> It is from these more sophisticated interpretations which the thesis draws.

### Arguments

The wide-ranging potential of socio-cultural history is fundamental when considering ‘belief’ as an historical phenomenon—largely due to belief’s infinite adaptability and transcendence of neat categorisation. Socio-cultural methods may also provide a solution to problems encountered by earlier histories of *mentalité* with regards to the relationship between the subjective psychological

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<sup>241</sup> Mandler, ‘The Problem with Cultural History’, *passim*; Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning*; idem, *War Beyond Words: Languages of Remembrance from the Great War to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

<sup>242</sup> Mandler, ‘The Problem with Cultural History’, p. 109, 116.

<sup>243</sup> Owen, *The Darkened Room*; idem, *The Place of Enchantment*; Byrne, *Modern Spiritualism*.

<sup>244</sup> Laura King, *Family Men: Fatherhood and Masculinity in Britain, 1914–1960* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 2. Works such as *Family Men* represent the culmination of ideas since the late-1990s in connecting masculinities with wider historical impulses.

<sup>245</sup> Handley, McWilliam, and Noakes, ‘Introduction’, p. 11, 13.

<sup>246</sup> Horne, ‘End of a Paradigm?’; Francis, *The Flyer*.

dimension and the empiricists' demand for historical 'facts'.<sup>247</sup> As Sandra Holton puts it, 'divine intervention is not capable of being established as a historical fact'—yet beliefs and believing have 'powerful historical effects'.<sup>248</sup> As such, the study engages with various aspects of religious, political, medical, psychoanalytical, legal, military, propaganda, and media history in order to outline the social workings of belief and the cultural discourses which rendered certain wartime beliefs 'heterodox'. Works on long-term spiritual shifts in modern Britain and their social implications by Hugh McLeod and Jose Harris are aligned with the poststructuralist ideas of Michel Foucault on discourse, power, and agency. Whilst various conceptual categories are interwoven within these approaches, gender and class emerge as the most dominant. Particular attention has been given to uncovering the beliefs of the lower, middle, and technical classes and those of military leaders and public figures. Crucially, the study also finds advantages in the wide-ranging opinion on wartime belief across these groups. Contrary to well versed warnings on scholars' regurgitation of middle-class opinion on working-class religiosity, it highlights how such opinions held important implications for contemporary gender, class, and power dynamics.<sup>249</sup>

The study makes a number of interlocking arguments, grounded in a wide range of historical literatures. At its core, it argues that wartime debates on heterodoxy and the belief systems it encompassed were not simply the product of the war, or even 'total war'. Rather, they represented the culmination and interaction of various medium- and longer-term historical currents—all of which had major implications for class and gender. These include the socio-religious ruptures of the nineteenth century; the impact of universal suffrage (particularly its extension to women in 1929) and changing notions of 'citizenship'; changes in military doctrine and shifting attitudes on governing expanding armies; technological and media advancements associated with 'modernity'; the growth of psychological science and methods of analysing popular opinions and mentalities; imperial legacies; and the removal of structural boundaries towards 'self-realisation'.<sup>250</sup> How and why these factors were so important to discourse on heterodoxy will be explored in detail across

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<sup>247</sup> Notable examples of the history of *mentalité* are typically associated with the *Annales* School. For the critical text, see Marc Bloch, *The Royal Touch: Sacred Monarchy and Scrofula in England and France*, trans. by J. E. Anderson (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973 [1924]). On 'historical facts', see E. H. Carr, *What Is History?* (London: Macmillan, 1961), ch. 1.

<sup>248</sup> Sandra S. Houlton, 'Feminism, History and Movements of the Soul: Christian Science in the Life of Alice Clark', *Australian Feminist Studies*, 13 (1998), p. 283; Dixon, *Divine Feminine*, p. 12. Also see Owen, *The Darkened Room*, pp. xvii–xviii; Bernice Martin, 'Beyond Measurement: The Non-Quantifiable Religious Dimension in Social Life', in Paul Avis (ed.), *Public Faith? The State of Religious Belief and Practice in Britain* (London: SPCK, 2003), pp. 1–18.

<sup>249</sup> In particular, see Williams, *Religious Belief and Popular Culture*, pp. 14–17.

<sup>250</sup> Harris, *Private Lives, Public Spirit*, p. 13.

the study. Together, they indicate a shifting relationship between the individual and society, and society and the state/nation across the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in which democratic, scientific, philosophical, and industrial changes gave 'mass' society newfound significance. Pluralised spiritual opportunities, particularly for the working-class and women, formed the tip of a far larger iceberg of socio-political democratisation in British cultural life in which inner thoughts, feelings, and beliefs were of public significance. The wave of democratising processes in early- and mid- twentieth century Britain, Lucy Noakes reminds us, meant that 'external actions' and 'internal feelings' became sites of enquiry and concern. This shift came in conjunction with growing interest in domestic psychologies, contributing, as Matthew Thompson argues, to moves towards inner thoughts and feelings compared to external markers of 'character'.<sup>251</sup> Yet the more negative concept of the 'mass' rooted in nineteenth century notions of illiteracy, suggestibility, and polity in need of control persisted and adapted, retaining its classed and gendered foundations. It was within this rich context that wartime debates on heterodoxy lay.

The context of war played a critical part in centring 'mass society' as the foundation of victory. Although this was a prominent feature of Britain's First World War, it reached fever-pitch by the Second. Civilian exposure to violence was undoubtedly high during and after the First World War, but the experience and imagination of aerial bombardment during the Second turned civilians into combatants.<sup>252</sup> Domestic morale, moreover, was elevated in importance accordingly. The psychological and emotional resolve of the citizen-combatant to 'go on' was equal to military combatants in ensuring victory. Notions of national unity were, as we have seen, central to state-sponsored culture and propaganda outpourings in which contemporary materials visualised, described, and pointed towards a collective 'people's war'. This pull to collective unity did not simply plaster the cracks in societal cohesion or undo the forces bolstering individualism and growing notions of selfhood, however. As Jose Harris makes clear, the war saw legitimisation of 'highly privatised and unstructured psychological individualism'.<sup>253</sup> Although a noticeable swing towards 'homogenous' views of society took hold in the nineteenth century (inspired by growing scientific naturalism) which stressed the natural

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<sup>251</sup> Noakes, *Dying for the Nation*, p. 60; Matthew Thomson, *Psychological Subjects: Identity, Culture, and Health in Twentieth-Century Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

<sup>252</sup> Jon Lawrence, 'Forging a Peaceable Kingdom: War, Violence, and Fear of Brutalization in Post-First World War Britain', *Journal of Modern History*, 75 (2003), pp. 557–89.

<sup>253</sup> Jose Harris, 'War and Social History: Britain and the Home Front during the Second World War', *Contemporary British History*, 1 (1992), p. 32.



‘evolution’ of the body politic towards greater social cohesion, individualistic, ‘atomised’ views of society persisted.<sup>254</sup> These were buttressed by popular responses to specific propaganda campaigns and wider wartime expectations, in which certain sections of the population felt the state had intruded too closely on the inner-most layers of their privatised worlds. This also created a strong sense of individual opposition to wartime codes and a closing off of personal attitudes.<sup>255</sup> Tensions between the individual and collective, the private and public, were of fundamental significance between 1939 and 1945. This relationship was also central to developments in British social life since the nineteenth century—indicating how the spiritual lives of contemporaries were of wider concern to the state and structures orchestrating Britain’s war effort.

Tensions between the public and private, and their connections with belief, were rooted in the context of morale.<sup>256</sup> Measuring and massaging the resolve of contemporaries was vital, given the large numbers of citizens involved in war-work or drawn into active military service. Yet contemporary methods of achieving this, and defining what ‘morale’ even meant, were mixed and contradictory. As Angus Calder recognised, ‘morale’ was a term which ‘haunted...politicians, civil servants, and generals’.<sup>257</sup> State readings of morale were concerned by the psychological impact of war on those at the ‘home’ fronts. Images, narratives, and codes seen as further atomising society within wartime culture were discussed at length by senior civil servants—although in some cases inability to act caused internal state tensions. Fears over the susceptibility of the ‘mass’ to psychological warfare, sustained attack, and harmful messaging came through in classed and gendered classifications; with the working-class, and more frequently women, demonised by the state. Whilst the place of certain beliefs caused concern within military circles, here mentalities and spirituality were seen as part of a wider net of factors influencing a very different kind of ‘combatant’ morale. Despite attempts to control and mould discourse on wartime believing, particularly by the state, contemporaries of all backgrounds had agency in fashioning their own spiritual lives. The realm of belief formed one aspect of contemporary life that the ‘total war’ state could not colonise for its own despite rigorous efforts to pull privatised belief into

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<sup>254</sup> Harris, *Private Lives, Public Spirit*, ch. 7.

<sup>255</sup> Fox, ‘Careless Talk’, *passim*.

<sup>256</sup> Existing studies of morale are typically split between ‘accessing’ contemporary mentalities and exploring institutional ‘readings’ of it, although overlap exists. See Daniel Ussishkin, *Morale: A Modern British History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 3–4. For earlier approaches to morale (typically in relation to the martial spheres), see John Baynes, *Morale: A Study of Men and Courage; the Second Scottish Rifles at the Battle of Neuve Chapelle, 1915* (London: Cassell, 1967).

<sup>257</sup> Calder, *The People’s War*, p. 18.

controlled public forms. For Daniel Ussishkin, ‘morale’ (far from a technical debate over collective or emotional mental states) represented a series of contestations of the social and political transformations war supposedly unleashed. As the ‘yardstick’ by which collective hopes and dreams were measured, its measurement was not only political but subjective.<sup>258</sup> The same can be said of believing in wartime. Attempts to measure its impact were always political, as were its connections to morale.

As David Nash indicates, definitions of religiosity and belief which explore where beliefs enter and leave both public and private spaces have the potential to do more than reveal fresh ideas about specific historical contexts such as war. They have the power to destabilise potent secularising arguments and reconnect religion with social and cultural history.<sup>259</sup> By linking debates and trends in wartime belief to medium- and longer-term factors, the thesis contests secularising arguments from a different vantage-point and source base. Not only did established religion and religious symbols continue to play an important, if adapted, function in the mid-century. These co-existed and overlapped with a whole host of supernatural, esoteric, and fatalistic modalities frequently driven by the tenants of ‘modernity’, accompanied by a wide-ranging socio-cultural and socio-political debate on the ‘acceptability’ of certain beliefs.

### Sources

Given the discourse over heterodoxy was largely conducted ‘in the margins’, which sources are available to reconstruct its history?<sup>260</sup> A two-pronged challenge complicates the task; the first relating to *accessing* contemporary belief systems and the second *gauging* their social, cultural and political traction. As James Hinton urges, life writings and personal testimonies ‘cannot be treated as transparent windows of the soul’.<sup>261</sup> Collectively such sources point towards privatised expressions of the self—and in more focused examples such as Mass Observation materials might constitute archives of ‘feeling’—but their evidential content has limits.<sup>262</sup> Yet for the purposes of the thesis,

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<sup>258</sup> Ussishkin, *Morale*, pp. 6–7.

<sup>259</sup> David Nash, ‘Reconnecting Religion with Social and Cultural History’, *Cultural and Social History*, 1 (2004), p. 307, 303. For a similar approach linking the personal and social, private and public, see Owen, *The Place of Enchantment*, p. 14.

<sup>260</sup> For a recent discussion on ‘marginal’ histories of the Second World War, see Catriona Pennell and Daniel Todman, ‘Introduction: Marginalised Histories of the Second World War’, *War & Society*, 39 (2020), pp. 145–54.

<sup>261</sup> James Hinton *Nine Wartime Lives: Nine Wartime Lives: Mass-Observation and the Making of the Modern Self* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 6.

<sup>262</sup> See, for example, Claire Langhamer, ‘An Archive of Feeling? Mass Observation and the mid-Century Moment’, *Insights*, 9 (2016), pp. 1–15; Matt Cook, “Archives of Feeling”: The AIDS Crisis in Britain 1987’, *History Workshop Journal*, 83 (2017), pp. 51–78.

diaries, letters, and other auto-ethnographic sources hold distinct possibilities. They reveal, as Joe Moran notes, how the ‘collective experience of an historical moment comes up against the seeming randomness and singularity of everyday life as it is being lived’.<sup>263</sup> Previously hidden connections between public and private beliefs, structure and agency, are exposed.

Of course, written narratives are not the only sources to reveal the socio-cultural place of belief. Drawing inspiration from Santanu Das, the thesis adopts an expanded approach to the ‘archive’ and culture, placing paintings, photographs, rumours, music, newspapers, films, ephemera, and material culture at its core.<sup>264</sup> A large body of state/official documents and personal private papers have also been consulted—including Ministry of Information morale reports, Church of England records, police reports, medical and scientific journals, and political/military correspondence—in order to uncover the wider forces engaged in shaping the boundaries of acceptable/unacceptable belief between 1939 and 1945. By bringing these sources into critical dialogue, the thesis makes an original contribution to the broader literatures on Second World War studies and religion/belief in modern British history by revealing just how much the mentalities, behaviours, and languages of heterodoxy permeated and influenced the conduct of war.

*Scale, Scope, and Structure*

In exploring the contemporary construction of heterodoxy and its relationship to morale and public/private discourse, the thesis considers a range of thematic examples loosely bound chronologically. Particular emphasis has been placed on accessing various ‘sites’ of wartime belief (spanning physical, psychological, social, and cultural spaces) in order to illustrate the rich tapestry of agents and influences which massaged and manipulated wartime spirituality. Emphasis has also been placed on finding examples rooted in uniquely different contexts to reveal the workings of ‘heterodoxy’ in different zones of conflict; making connections and comparisons between the various ‘fronts’ of war where possible. A thematic, case study approach of this kind is not designed to reveal a representative history of heterodoxy’s construction across all four nations of ‘Great Britain’. Like other markers of mid twentieth century society, beliefs and believing were in large part shaped by regional identities and histories. Whilst this suggests distinct variations in the kinds of belief practices in existence within wartime Britain,

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<sup>263</sup> Joe Moran, ‘Private Lives, Public Histories: The Diary in Twentieth-Century Britain’, *Journal of British Studies*, 54 (2015), p. 160.

<sup>264</sup> Das, *India, Empire, and First World War Culture*, p. 23.

histories of this kind have the potential to divorce believing from the pressing context of war and debates on morale—thus resulting in a history of belief *in* war rather than belief as *shaped by* or *transformed by* war. The case studies which follow are specifically chosen to paint a broader, albeit incomplete, picture of the latter. Chapters focus on beliefs and believing thematically—covering ghosts, psychical research, astrology, superstition, and their connection to transnational belief cultures—and are organised to illustrate chronological change across the war. As the Second World War was a distinctly modern war in terms of technological advancements, scientific/military developments, and communications, the case studies are also designed to capture where debates on heterodoxy overlapped with war's modernising impact on society and culture.

Chapter 1 begins with the quintessential site of the Second World War home front—life under fire. Focusing on wartime London, it traces the capital's 'spectro-landscapes' from the pre-war period to the impact of Germany's V-1 and V-2 rocket attacks. Paying particular attention to interactions between civilian experience, cultural products, and state/official narratives, it illustrates how the various 'ghosts' of the home front both stabilised and depressed domestic morale—categorised as 'heterodox' and 'unifying'. Metaphors of London as a ghostly environment ran across private and public spaces, rendering the socio-cultural experience and representation of bombardment a dynamic one between civilians and wider cultural, political, and medical authorities.

Chapter 2 continues the metropolitan theme, instead focusing on the wartime working of the Society for Psychical Research (SPR). Best known for its activities during the First World War, the SPR continued to explore unexplained, or supernormal, occurrences during the Second. Yet by 1939–1945 its work was largely concerned with phenomena outside the context of war. The chapter challenges the dominant category of 'total war' by revealing the semi-private bubble the SPR created for its members, whilst revealing its support for repressive class and gender-based inequalities as gatekeeper of secretive 'knowledge' and information.

Chapter 3 focuses on the place of astrology columns and charts within the popular wartime press. Outlining state concerns over the tone and content of newspaper astrology—particularly its private reception—the chapter reassess its function as a propaganda/entertainment hybrid. Drawing on a sample of contemporary life writings, it demonstrates how many wartime civilians (particularly women) drew on astrology for a multitude of reasons beyond abject fear. State fears recorded in Home Intelligence and Ministry of Information morale reports tell the historian

more about classed and gendered readings of domestic morale 'from above'; revealing the political biases behind domestic morale measurement.

Chapter 4 follows a similar line of questioning to chapter 3, exploring the place of superstition within the wartime military context. It considers the evolution of military superstition from the First World War to the Second, revealing the place of enchantment within 'modern', technological warfare and its representation at the home front through popular war-based feature films and docu-dramas. Whilst creating a good deal of opposition from various military and ecclesiastical voices, military superstition was widely recognised as a strengthening agent within the homo-social world of combat. Whilst simultaneously binding and dividing combatants (similar, in many ways, to home front newspaper astrology), its influence was less regularly policed due to its perceived ability to psychologically and emotionally bond men of war. Tensions between the public context of war, the semi-private world of armed units/groups, and privatised individual beliefs are considered.

Chapter 5 focuses on the experiences of British soldiers in the Asian theatre and tensions fighting with and against the 'Other' in the context of empire. Fusing the themes of imperialism, masculinity, and age, it reappraises perceptions of Asian beliefs amongst rank-and-file soldiers and officers. Whilst racial narratives of difference continued to shape soldiers' views of war in South/Southeast Asia and Asiatic populations (underpinned by literary and cultural narratives from the nineteenth century), the theatre also provided space for the profoundly personal transfer of cross-cultural beliefs. This aspect of the war, tied as it was to the context of a pan-imperial *peoples'* war, complicated official army policy on the structuring of colonial martial religion ('martial race' discourse).

This thesis offers a new analysis of belief, and debates on believing, in wartime. It analyses the significance of believing in relation to the broader theme of morale and its classed and gendered construction. It also places the war years within the broader historical arch of modern British history—challenging arguments on secularisation from a previously neglected time period. Adopting a socio-cultural methodology, it presents an original conceptual framework through its deployment of 'heterodoxy' as an organising category. Advancing previous work on 'diffusive Christianity', 'popular religion' and 'alternative creeds/beliefs' (much of which is concerned with the beliefs of specific classes and cultures), the thesis illustrates the broad appeal of non-standard beliefs across sectional groups in wartime. This reality, it argues, could never be fully contained by wartime cultural discourses designed to categorise, massage, and

## *Introduction*

police believing. In order to reveal this history, the thesis begins by considering the ghostly and spectral elements of life at the home front and in the immediate pre-war period.

*Metropolitan Ghosts: Wartime London's  
Spectro-Geographies*

In *Post D* (1941), a loosely fictionalised account of his personal experiences as a London air-raid warden, John Strachey picked up on the extra-ordinary ordinariness of life under fire. 'What a domestic sort of war this is. It happens in the kitchen, on landings, beside washing-baskets...Even its catastrophes are made terrible not by strangeness but by familiarity'.<sup>1</sup> For Strachey, it was war's ability to transform once familiar spaces into other-worldly environments which defined its jarring nature. A similar picture was painted by Joyce Weiner, recalling a journey through London on the 24 November 1940: 'The face of London changed. [Blasted] houses like stage sets faced a gaping world. Unimaginable dust and chaos marked the spot where houses once had been', transforming wartime London into an unrecognisable ghost town.<sup>2</sup> This metamorphosis of the capital into a 'liminal' world had complex implications for the relationship between Londoners and their city. Psychologically, repressed fears and dark emotions were unleashed.<sup>3</sup> Cultural agents such as Graham Greene and Elizabeth Bowen drew real-life comparisons with hallucinatory London in wartime plays and through fiction.<sup>4</sup> Through its shattering of domesticity and exposure of private space, total war rendered the home front both disturbed and haunted.<sup>5</sup>

In order to combat this frightening vision of the home front painted by Greene and Bowen,

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<sup>1</sup> John Strachey, *Post D: Some Experiences of an Air-Raid Warden* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1941), p. 48.

<sup>2</sup> Imperial War Museum (hereafter IWM), Department of Documents (hereafter DoD), Papers of Joyce Weiner (77/176/1), Diary, 24 November 1940.

<sup>3</sup> Bell, 'Landscapes of Fear', p. 154.

<sup>4</sup> On Bowen and Greene, see Deer, *Culture in Camouflage*, ch. 4; Laura Feigel, *The Love Charm of Bombs: Restless Lives in the Second World War* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013). Also see Piette, *Imagination at War*.

<sup>5</sup> Deer, *Culture in Camouflage*, p. 159.

official culture cultivated a ‘taking it’ mentality of stoicism and steadfastness.<sup>6</sup> Developing a ‘Blitz spirit’ through propaganda and persuasion drew heavily on romanticised evocations of the past.<sup>7</sup> Competing visions of culture under fire—one promoting unity and steadfastness, the other highlighting disruption, fear, and distortion—present two very different pictures. Yet considering the workings of ghosts helps reveal the porous boundaries between them. Ghosts were not merely seen or used metaphorically to describe sinister goings on. They were also deployed by official agents and propagandists in creating a national spirit, and a Blitz spirit, which embodied the ideals and values of the nation at war.

This chapter explores how the concept of ‘ghosts’ was weaved inside and outside official narratives of war at the home front and their relationship to lived experiences. Exploring metropolitan experiences and representations of life under fire seems an obvious choice given the recent scholarly interest in metropolitan readings of total war as part of a wider ‘spatial turn’ in historical studies.<sup>8</sup> As Stefan Goebel and Derek Keene suggest, ‘catastrophe is quintessentially a metropolitan event’.<sup>9</sup> Yet capital cities offer significant interpretative potential for historians. For Jay Winter, they carry uniqueness yet remain representative of other metropolitan experiences of war.<sup>10</sup> In a similar vein, Raymond Willis chose to frame wartime London as an ‘island within an island’, its experience featuring resonances with broader national trends whilst remaining culturally distinct.<sup>11</sup> Whilst London may have ‘stood for the nation’ as political, cultural, economic, and imperial centre in wartime, it was, as Willis correctly highlights, a space apart the rest of the United Kingdom.<sup>12</sup> Wartime London featured distinct geographical and communal variations from borough-to-borough and even street-to-street, as Philip Ziegler indicates.<sup>13</sup> As well as representing a large-scale physical unit, London also constituted an *imagined* space of possibility

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<sup>6</sup> Grayzel, *At Home and Under Fire*, p. 315.

<sup>7</sup> For an introduction to the construction of the Blitz spirit, see Calder, *The Myth of the Blitz*.

<sup>8</sup> Marcus Funck and Roger Chickering (eds.), *Endangered Cities: Military Power and Urban Societies in the Era of the World Wars* (Boston: Brill, 2004); Jay Winter and Jean-Louis Robert (eds.), *Capital Cities at War: Paris, London, Berlin 1914–1919*, vol. II: *A Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Stefan Goebel and Derek Keene (eds.), *Cities into Battlefields: Metropolitan Scenarios, Experiences and Commemorations of Total War* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011); Stefan Goebel and Jerry White, ‘London and the First World War’, *London Journal*, 41 (2016), pp. 199–218.

<sup>9</sup> Stefan Goebel and Derek Keene, ‘Towards a Metropolitan History of Total War: An Introduction’, in Goebel and Keene (eds.), *Cities into Battlefields*, p. 46.

<sup>10</sup> Jay Winter, ‘Introduction: The Practices of Metropolitan Life in Wartime’, in Winter and Robert (eds.), *Capital Cities at War*, p. 5.

<sup>11</sup> Raymond Williams, *The English Novel from Dickens to Lawrence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 122.

<sup>12</sup> Webster, *Englishness and Empire*, p. 21.

<sup>13</sup> Philip Ziegler, *London at War, 1939–1945* (New York: Knopf, 1995).



and danger, familiarity and otherness.<sup>14</sup> Paying attention to local variations within the capital and contextualising London's experience of life under fire with the nation at-large, the chapter brings local/micro and national approaches to war together in a specific urban context.

Recent work on ghosts and ghost-lore in the modern period highlights the conceptual utility of a metropolitan focus.<sup>15</sup> Karl Bell, for example, notes how civic rhetoric and ghostly tales offer 'differing but not mutually exclusive spatial narratives', subverting 'official' interpretations of civic culture by challenging notions of industrialised cities as sites of modernity and rationality.<sup>16</sup> Conceptions of ghosts and the ghostly within urban spheres are historically contingent, too. Moulding to social, religious, scientific, and cultural changes, ghosts remain 'infinitely adaptable' and, to some extent at least, will always allude the historian.<sup>17</sup> Working on the relationship between ghosts and total war, Monica Black plots a potential path forward through the methodological distortion ghosts create. Whilst their roles and functions differed significantly across the two World Wars, ghosts remain crucial cultural signifiers when remembering and grieving the dead—heightened in the context of violent, mass death born of aerial bombardment.<sup>18</sup> Previous work on death in modern British history reveals a shifting relationship between the living and dead from the late nineteenth century; from elaborate funerals and public expressions of grief to a more privatised handling of emotions around loss and bereavement from the 1870s.<sup>19</sup> No wonder the psychological and emotional impact of mass death, experienced a second time in the first half of the twentieth century but now sharply focused on domestic society, caused

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<sup>14</sup> Matt Houlbrook, *Queer London: Perils and Pleasures in the Sexual Metropolis, 1918–1957* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2005), pp. 8–9.

<sup>15</sup> Karl Bell, 'Civic Spirits? Ghost Lore and Civic Narratives in Nineteenth-Century Portsmouth', *Cultural and Social History*, 11 (2014), pp. 51–68; idem (ed.), *Supernatural Cities: Enchantment, Anxiety and Spectrality* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2019).

<sup>16</sup> Bell, 'Civic Spirits?', p. 63; Williams, *Religious Belief*, *passim*. On historical notions of cities as centres of modernity and progress, see James Greenhalgh, *Reconstructing Modernity: Space, Power and Governance in mid-Twentieth Century British Cities* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018), pp. 13–4.

<sup>17</sup> Owen Davies, 'Ghosts', in Christopher Moreman (ed.), *The Routledge Companion to Death and Dying* (London: Routledge, 2018), p. 343. Also see see Carl S. Watkins, *History and the Supernatural in Medieval England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 174–85.

<sup>18</sup> Monica Black, 'The Ghosts of War', in Michael Geyer and Adam Tooze (eds.), *The Cambridge History of the Second World War*, vol. III: *Total War: Economy, Society, Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 654–74.

<sup>19</sup> Julie-Marie Strange, *Death, Grief and Poverty in Britain, 1870–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009). Also see Pat Jalland, *Death in the Victorian Family* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996); idem, *Death in War and Peace: A History of Loss and Grief in England, 1914–1970* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010). On the dead in the total war context, see Antoine Prost, 'The Dead', in Jay Winter (ed.), *The Cambridge History of the First World War*, vol. III: *Civil Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 561–91; Richard Bessel, 'Death and Survival in the Second World War', in Michael Geyer and Adam Tooze (eds.), *The Cambridge History of the Second World War*, vol. III: *Total War: Economy, Society and Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 252–76.

the eruption of ghosts within an emotionally restrictive economy.<sup>20</sup> Alongside their social and personal functions, ghosts were also put to 'work' at the political and cultural levels in war.<sup>21</sup> Part of a wider process of cultural mobilisation, they were deliberately deployed in bolstering national memory linking past, present, and future, capturing the tragedy and triumphalism of life under fire. As Jay Winter highlights with reference to the wartime artist Henry Moore, contemporary wartime thinking relied on an 'unbroken line between past and future' in which memories and ghosts of the past and present shaped imaginings of the future.<sup>22</sup> The relationship between death and memory in wartime London took personal, communal, and national forms, signalling variations in the experience and representation of the war.

Rooted in the metropolitan context, this chapter fuses urban historical approaches, contemporary medical discourse, artistic representations, and commemorative practices in considering the various ghosts which roamed wartime London. It charts how neutral 'ghosts', sinister 'spectres', and jingoistic 'spirits' were weaved within debates around the built environment, the psychological worlds of civilians, the cultural history of the nation as well as the war dead. Drawing inspiration from 'hauntology'—a term coined by French philosopher Jacques Derrida to denote the timeless quality of history and the spectral aspects of experience, communication, and understanding—the chapter borrows Jo Frances Maddern and Peter Adey's term 'spectro-geographies' in its exploration of London's wartime ghosts.<sup>23</sup> For Maddern and Adey, spectro-geographies reveal the spatial frameworks through which Derrida's spectro-politics might work, unearthing the 'hidden politics that haunts spaces in intimate and complex ways'.<sup>24</sup> Given its metropolitan focus the chapter naturally considers the role of the built-environment in ghostly framings of war and the physical breakdown of past, present, and future through its destruction and reconstruction. Paying attention to works which explore the cultural and psychological impact of life under fire, it

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<sup>20</sup> Noakes, *Dying for the Nation*, ch. 1.

<sup>21</sup> Thomas Laqueur, *The Work of the Dead: A Cultural History of Mortal Remains* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015).

<sup>22</sup> Jay Winter, 'Cultural Mobilization: Henry Moore and the Two World Wars', in Catriona Pennell and Filipe Ribeiro de Meneses (eds.), *A World at War 1911–1949: Explorations in the Cultural History of War* (Leiden: Brill, 2019), pp. 19–41. For the now classic thesis, see Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory*, vol. I: *Past and Present in Contemporary Culture* (London: Verso, 1994).

<sup>23</sup> Jaques Derrida, *Spectres of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International* (London: Routledge, 1993); Jo Frances Maddern and Peter Adey, 'Editorial: Spectro-Geographies', *Cultural Geographies*, 15 (2008), pp. 291–95. Also see Peter Buse and Andrew Scott (eds.), *Ghosts: Deconstruction, Psychoanalysis, History* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999). On the psychoanalytical workings of the 'uncanny', which overlap with many of the themes of the chapter, see Sigmund Freud, 'The Uncanny', [1919] in Philip Rieff (ed.), *Studies in Parapsychology* (New York: Collier, 1963), pp. 19–60.

<sup>24</sup> Maddern and Adey, 'Editorial', pp. 291–2, 293.

also considers spectro-geographies of the mind and the porous boundaries between physical and imagined space in wartime London. In this way, ghosts help us to recognise the paradoxes between the capital as exemplar of popular morale and the psychological distortion/trauma aerial bombardment created.<sup>25</sup> These experiences and their representations were classed and gendered.

As well as revealing marginalised experiences of life under fire, the chapter argues that ghosts are a useful conceptual tool for the growing scholarship on Second World War London.<sup>26</sup> They illustrate the tensions and resonances between official and lay perceptions of the wartime city, highlighting how the imagination and experience of life under fire was born of a dialogue between state, culture, and people. Contemporary and historical notions of the public and private were shattered in the midst of bombardment and increasingly collapsed into each other. Exploring the workings of ghosts draws attention to the universal characteristics of life under fire as well as its highly localised variations. Whilst a 'taking it' mentality was demanded of all (especially women), the evocation of ghosts was often used to present areas of London as 'taking it' more proudly and heroically than others. The City in particular was frequently represented as an exemplar of popular resolve to neighbouring boroughs and the nation more broadly. As we will see, 'ghosts' came to mean different things at different times in wartime London, but these adaptations to the total war context drew on a rich history of the capital as a haunted environment.

## THE CULTURAL HISTORY OF LONDON'S GHOSTS

To the popular imagination, London has often been interpreted through the prism of the ghostly and spectral. As Peter Ackroyd notes, local boroughs and indeed whole areas of the capital have often been viewed as 'haunted'.<sup>27</sup> Yet London's relationship with the supernatural extends beyond alleged apparitions in specific locales. This affinity bleeds deeply into its geology, history, and culture. Hemmed in by low hills, the Thames basin has always been prone to low-lying fogs and

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<sup>25</sup> Similar, in ways, to Foucault's concept of the 'heterotopia' (sites where contradictory spaces converge). See Michel Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', *Diacritics*, 16 (1986), pp. 22–27.

<sup>26</sup> On the historiography of Second World War London, see Joanna Mack and Steve Humphries, *The Making of Modern London: London at War, 1939–45* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1985); Ziegler, *London at War*; Amy Bell, *London Was Ours: Diaries and Memoirs of the London Blitz* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2008); Bell, 'Landscapes of Fear'.

<sup>27</sup> Peter Ackroyd, *London: The Biography* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2000), p. 503.

mists; atmospheric changes which naturally lend themselves to ghostly associations.<sup>28</sup> During the late nineteenth century in particular, London's propensity to thick fog, or 'pea-soupers' as they were known, meant that large swathes of the city were often engulfed in impenetrable murk. Once recognisable hallmarks of the urban landscape became distorted and misshapen. Nineteenth and twentieth century impressionists did much to cement this surreal image of London, representing contemporary fears around smogs and epidemics. In *Westminster* (1878) (fig. 1.1), the Italian impressionist Giuseppe de Nittis depicted the Houses of Parliament as blurred and distorted, sitting behind a thin layer of fog.<sup>29</sup> Fleeing Paris after the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War in 1870, Claude Monet painted many frescos of the Thames' changing light and atmosphere.<sup>30</sup> In *The Houses of Parliament, London* (1904) (fig. 1.2) Monet also depicts Westminster surrounded by fog. Unlike Nittis' painting, the interaction between the fog and the sun creates far greater distortion. Westminster appears almost charred, engulfed by apocalyptic hellfire.<sup>31</sup>

Nineteenth and early twentieth century writers also depicted London in ghostly terms. The work of Charles Dickens in particular played on the capital as a surreal environment. In *Our Mutual Friend* (1864–5), for example, Dickens referred to 'Inanimate London' as a 'snooty spectre, divided in purposes between being visible and invisible, and so being wholly neither'.<sup>32</sup> In the twentieth century, Henry V. Morton described London as a 'city of the dead' in *A London Year* (1926).<sup>33</sup> Although mortality rates had been in decline for all except infants for several decades by the end of the nineteenth century, access to healthcare remained uneven and poor families were viewed as 'apathetic' in the face of death.<sup>34</sup> Technological developments also enhanced the capital's affinity with the spectral. In the first decades of the eighteenth century, initiatives were put in place to illuminate the city. The introduction of gas lighting brightened the main streets and heavily populated areas, symbolising the capital's modernisation. Yet the popular association of night-time London as a 'liminal' environment persisted. To many, gas lamps created a sense of mystery, with pools of light fringed by blackness and silence.<sup>35</sup> Moreover, the introduction

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<sup>28</sup> Christine L. Corton, *London Fog: The Biography* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015), p. 1.

<sup>29</sup> Corton, *London Fog*, p. 166.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 182.

<sup>31</sup> For more on Monet's 'London Series', see John E. Thornes and Gemma Metherell, 'Monet's 'London Series' and the Cultural Climate of London at the Turn of the Twentieth Century', in Sarah Strauss and Ben Orlove (eds.), *Weather, Climate, Culture* (Oxford: Berg, 2004), pp. 141–60.

<sup>32</sup> Charles Dickens, *Our Mutual Friend*, Stephen Gill (ed.) (1864–5, repr., Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971), p. 479.

<sup>33</sup> Henry V. Morton, *A London Year* (London: Methuen, 1926), p. 195.

<sup>34</sup> Strange, *Death, Grief and Poverty in Britain*, pp. 27–8. For more on Victorian morality statistics, see Robert Woods and Nicola Shelton, *An Atlas of Victorian Mortality* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1997).

<sup>35</sup> Ackroyd, *London*, p. 444.



**Figure 1.1** *Westminster* (1878), Giuseppe de Nittis

Source: Private Collection.



**Figure 1.2** *The Houses of Parliament, London...* (1904), Claude Monet

Source: Musee d'Orsay, Paris, France.

of electric light in 1878 added further elements of surrealism. As one contemporary put it, the lights gave a ‘corpse-like quality’ to the faces of those they passed on the street, a relationship which would resurface in profound ways during the blackout.<sup>36</sup>

London’s spectral landscape was multi-layered as it was multi-sensory. Lurking beneath the surface of the city lay a subterranean underworld of the past. The bones of London’s dead lay alongside and above the old Roman foundations of the city, whilst a series of vaults, passageways, sewers, and tunnels built up over hundreds of years created an alternate city underground.<sup>37</sup> The construction of the Tube, or Underground, network from the 1860s marked a shift in the spatial dimensions ghosts could operate in. Mirroring the city streets above it the Underground took on its own geography of haunting, with numerous accounts of ghosts, or ‘presences’, recorded across the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.<sup>38</sup> As Londoners took to the shelter of Tube stations and underground spaces during the Zeppelin raids of the First World War, they entered a world which was not entirely owned by the living. Claustrophobia led some to stay at home rather than risk a phobic attack in the shelters, trapped in constricting, grave like spaces.<sup>39</sup> Large numbers were prepared to endure these conditions, yet demand for space far outweighed supply.<sup>40</sup> In 1917 some 5,000 people used Elephant and Castle nightly before the Harvest Moon raids.<sup>41</sup> The authorities began to re-open spaces reserved for war-related purposes by October 1917, such as the Rotherhithe Tunnel (previously a public roadway) which accommodated 30,000 nightly.<sup>42</sup>

London’s relationship with ghosts—specifically the spirits of the war dead rather than cultural metaphors of London *as ghostly*—took on a renewed immediacy and significance during and after the Armistice. The mass burial of military and civilian dead, often ceremonially without a physical corpse, created a disconnect in traditional burial practices. This in part explains the marked rise in spiritualist followers during and after the war, as bereaved families desperately searched for ways of laying to rest their loved ones.<sup>43</sup> Memorialisation initiatives helped fill part of the void. As well as holding national days of mourning, notably Armistice Day centred around the newly

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<sup>36</sup> Ackroyd, *London*, p. 445, 453.

<sup>37</sup> On London’s geographical ‘underworld’, see David Ashford, *London Underground: A Cultural Geography* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013); Samuel Merrill, *Networked Remembrance: Evacuating Buried Memories of the Railways beneath London and Berlin* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2017).

<sup>38</sup> Ackroyd, *London*, pp. 568–69.

<sup>39</sup> Bourke, *Fear*, p. 229.

<sup>40</sup> Jerry White, *Zeppelin Nights: London in the First World War* (London: Vintage Digital, 2014), p. 217.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> See, in particular, Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning*, ch. 3; Hazelgrove, *Spiritualism and British Society Between the Wars*.

built Cenotaph in Whitehall, London featured a range of localised war memorials influenced by the communities they represented.<sup>44</sup> Memorials established in places of work, schools, colleges, and clubs played a more communal function than their religious counterparts,<sup>45</sup> whilst civic war memorials commemorated the part played by specific London regiments.<sup>46</sup> With an absence of physical burial, the interwar imagination continued to obsess over ghosts, apparitions, and spirits.

Just as interwar Britain was processing the perceived brutalisation of the First World War on martial and imperial masculinity, and forging a 'peaceable' self-image to combat it, imagined forms of future warfare surfaced in the spectre of aerial bombardment.<sup>47</sup> Military theorists such as John Frederick Charles Fuller and Basil Liddell Hart predicted the untold damage aerial attack could unleash on civilians—tested out in Britain's colonies in the Middle East and further reinforced through the *Luftwaffe's* bombing of the Spanish town of Guernica in 1937.<sup>48</sup> Images of the dead, dying, and injured, Lucy Noakes reminds us, were widespread in the 1930s, seen in both popular fictional imaginings of the war and in journalistic accounts of war in China and Spain.<sup>49</sup> The prospect of another war, more destructive and apocalyptic than the First World War, loomed large in the national psyche. In its observations of 'Worktown', the code name for Bolton, on Armistice Day 1937, the social research organisation Mass Observation (MO)—an organisation which came to collect a wealth of information of the supernatural impact of life under fire—noted the collective imagining of past and present forms of war. As one contemporary admitted, the 'awful spectre of "what if it happens again"...haunts every thought'.<sup>50</sup> The rhetoric of the First World War's commemorative legacy, Joel Morley indicates, became of critical importance here in articulating feelings of betrayal within Britain that the "Last War" failed to maintain a need for peace.<sup>51</sup> Moreover, feelings of fatalism and apathy marked popular opinion in Hammersmith, London by the time of the Munich crisis in 1938 according to MO.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Adrian Gregory, *The Silence of Memory: Armistice Day 1919–1946* (Oxford: Berg, 1994); Mark Connelly, *The Great War, Memory and Ritual: Commemoration in the City and East London, 1916–1939* (London: Royal Historical Society, 2001).

<sup>45</sup> Connelly, *The Great War, Memory and Ritual*, p. 96.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 98–103.

<sup>47</sup> Lawrence, 'Forging a Peaceable Kingdom'.

<sup>48</sup> Ussishkin, *Morale*, p. 78. Also see Brett Holman, *The Next War in the Air: Britain's Fear of the Bomber, 1908–1941* (London: Routledge, 2014).

<sup>49</sup> Noakes, *Dying for the Nation*, p. 79.

<sup>50</sup> Mass Observation Archive (hereafter MOA), Day Survey Respondents (hereafter DSR), F004; quoted in Noakes, *Dying for the Nation*, p. 83.

<sup>51</sup> Joel Morley, 'The Memory of the Great War and Morale during Britain's Phoney War', *Historical Journal*, 63 (2020), p. 442.

<sup>52</sup> Mass Observation, *Britain by Mass Observation* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1939), p. 31.

Authorities feared the psychological impact of bombardment on an already sensitive civilian psyche, particularly crowd hallucinations and, by extension, the public implications of privatised mental breakdown.<sup>53</sup>

#### LONDON'S SUPERNATURAL BLITZ-GEOGRAPHY

Although the reality of aerial bombardment never reached the apocalyptic heights imagined in the interwar period, its experience was nonetheless highly distorting. Wartime London transformed into a reality where H. G. Wells' *The War in the Air* (1908) dropped on everybody's doorsteps.<sup>54</sup> Social and cultural sources reveal a civic geography wrapped in surrealism. As Owen Davies reminds us, changes in landscapes have important ramifications for broader perceptions of haunting across time and space.<sup>55</sup> This was particularly significant in the context of wartime London—a period of the capital's history which saw its urban infrastructure transformed on an often-nightly basis by the devastation of bombardment. The following explores how a 'supernatural geography' emerged across London during the Blitz, and how changes to the built environment—both awe-inspiring and frightening—were articulated by contemporaries through the lens of the ghostly.

As Mark Connelly shows, the experience and memory of the Blitz was strongly visual in nature.<sup>56</sup> Contemporary accounts penned during the early days of the Blitz attest to its cinematic qualities, and the changes it brought to the urban and natural environments. As a diary published in the *East End News* of October 1940 suggests, Londoners, particularly 'East Enders' who endured the worst of the bombing in the early weeks of the Blitz, witnessed sobering atmospheric changes of 'much grandeur':<sup>57</sup>

There has been much grandeur in night skies...But those on guard in some parts of the country, and especially in the great city, have seen the tranquillity of the heavens shattered by white bursts of shells, and not infrequently the soft whiteness of the clouds takes on a crimson glow, reflecting fire caused by incendiaries.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> See, for example, Wilfred Trotter, *Instincts of the Herd in Peace and War* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1919), pp. 150–51.

<sup>54</sup> Bourke, *Fear*, p. 224.

<sup>55</sup> Davies, *The Haunted*, p. 46.

<sup>56</sup> Connelly, *We Can Take It!*, p. 131.

<sup>57</sup> Todman, *Britain's War: Into Battle*, p. 474.

<sup>58</sup> 'War-Time Diary', *East End News*, 4 October 1940, p. 2.



Similar descriptions of the awe-inspiring disruption of tranquillity were penned in the moments before the bombs fell. As Ivy Haslewood of Chelsea put it on 3 September 1940, the eerie, ghost-like qualities of the Blitz took on distinctly sonic dimensions through silence:

At night, the searchlights are a blazing design of white streaks in the dark blue sky...The wonders of London at night under these conditions are fantastic...the whole place is lit up with myriads of searchlights crossing and re-crossing in ghostly silence.<sup>59</sup>

For Haslewood, the distortion of sight and sound created an unnatural space in which time seemed to momentarily stand still. This cinematic freezing of time in the run up to bombardment was not only noticed by Londoners, but used in filmic representations of the Blitz. Focusing on the exploits of a working-class Auxiliary Fire Service (AFS) crew in West Ham, Humphrey Jennings' *Fires Were Started* (1943) has often been explored as a cinematic reinforcement of the 'people's war'.<sup>60</sup> Backed by the Ministry of Information's (MoI) Crown Film Unit, Jennings' *Fires Were Started* encapsulated the heroism of home front masculinity through fictional, documentary-style film.<sup>61</sup> Visual depictions of civilian men close to danger bolstered recruitment propaganda designed to combat the emasculating notion of civil defence as 'women's work'.<sup>62</sup> Alongside its propaganda dimension, the film featured a more sinister undertone. Jennings chose to contrast the normality of day-time and the exhilarating tension of night-time by interrupting the two with brief scenes of ghostly twilight (see fig. 1.3, 1.4, 1.5). In figures 1.3 and 1.5 the audience is exposed to contrasting examples of daytime and night-time activity. Yet in figure 1.4, an uneasy, ghostly calm is evoked through the capture of a munitions ship moored nearby.<sup>63</sup> The effect is striking and, much like Haslewood's diary, creates the impression of an environment briefly caught between safety and imminent danger. Significantly, as a piece of official propaganda, *Fires Were Started* illustrates how the 'taking it' mentality could sit alongside more unsettling images of the capital under fire.

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<sup>59</sup> IWM, DoD, Papers of I. S. Haslewood (04/40/1), I. S. Haslewood, Diary, 3 September 1940. For more on silence and war, see Jay Winter, 'Thinking about Silence', in Efrat Ben-Ze'ev, Ruth Ginio, and Jay Winter (eds.), *Shadows of War: A Social History of Silence in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 3–31.

<sup>60</sup> Tony Aldgate and Jeffrey Richards, *Britain Can Take It: British Cinema in the Second World War* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2007), p. 219.

<sup>61</sup> For more on documentary film in the context of the Ministry of Information, see Jo Fox, 'John Grierson, His "Documentary Boys" and the British Ministry of Information, 1939–1942', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 25 (2005), pp. 345–69.

<sup>62</sup> Noakes, "Serve to Save"; Linsey Robb, *Men at Work*, ch. 4.

<sup>63</sup> Ships also hold a special place in Foucault's conception of heterotopias; Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces'.



Figures 1.3, 1.4, 1.5 Stills from Humphrey Jennings's *Fires Were Started* (1943), depicting the normality of daily life in the East End as two firemen meet (fig. 1.3); a twilight dockyard scene, depicting the munitions ship the AFS unit later successfully defend (fig. 1.4) and two firemen fighting against a blaze caused by incendiaries in the evening (fig. 1.5)

Source: *Fires Were Started* (1943), directed by Humphrey Jennings.

Photographs and paintings in particular made the ghostly aspects of the bomb's impact possible—both in terms of freezing and faking changes the eye could not catch. Figures 1.6 and 1.7 both present images of London streets caught at moments of heightened liminality. Taken as part of a series by Arthur Cross and Fred Tibbs—two London constables tasked with recording bomb damage in the City—‘23 Victoria Street’ depicts the facade of a commercial building hanging in uncanny suspense upon the impact of a bomb. The image unnaturally freezes the precise moment at which the building is neither structurally whole nor completely obliterated. Reminiscent of early twentieth century spirit photography, long exposure lends the photograph a sense of supernatural events being caught by chance.<sup>64</sup> Yet the image alludes to the deeper emotional and psychological complications of the Blitz. The sheer force of the bomb rips open the building's facade, exposing the hidden space within. The destruction of boundaries between the interior/hidden and what should be external was unsettling to contemporaries. Indeed, in his well known analysis of Daniel Paul Schreber's hallucinations (a German judge who suffered with a range of mental illnesses), Sigmund Freud argued ‘It was incorrect to say that the perception which [was] suppressed internally is projected outwards; the truth is...what was abolished internally returns from without’.<sup>65</sup> In this sense, the bombers' destruction of buildings mirrors the onset of psychosis as internal worlds are exposed from without.

Similar to the photograph of Victoria Street, Leonard H. Rosoman's *A House Collapsing on Two Firemen* also captures the uncanny suspension of falling debris (fig. 1.7). More so than ‘23 Victoria Street’, *A House Collapsing* emphasises the unnatural inversion of homes as safe spaces caused by bombardment. As Adrian Gregory notes in the First World War context, the destruction of homes proved more difficult for civilians to contemplate compared to other urban structures due to their significance as providers of comfort and stability.<sup>66</sup> Born in October 1915 in London, Rosoman trained as an artist in the late-1930s. A volunteer for the AFS from the start of the war, he began producing pieces based on his experiences during the Battle of Britain and the Blitz.<sup>67</sup> *A House Collapsing* depicts the night of the 29-30 December 1940, dubbed the ‘Second Great Fire of London’, during which the two firemen pictured

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<sup>64</sup> On spirit photography, see Winter, *Sites of Memory*, p. 73; Alex Owen, “‘Borderland Forms’: Arthur Conan Doyle, Albion's Daughters, and the Politics of the Cottingley Fairies”, *History Workshop Journal*, 38 (1994), pp. 48–85.

<sup>65</sup> Quoted in Deer, *Culture in Camouflage*, p. 190.

<sup>66</sup> Gregory, *The Last Great War*, p. 55.

<sup>67</sup> Stuart Sillars, *British Romantic Art and the Second World War* (London: Macmillan, 1991), p. 84.



**Figure 1.6** 23 Victoria Street, May 1941' (1941) The facade of Victoria Street hangs in ghostly suspense following the impact of a bomb

Source: Connelly, *We Can Take It!*, p. 137.

lost their lives.<sup>68</sup> Whilst Rosoman found the image to be 'sentimental and superficial' upon reflection, it was precisely his depiction of (and personal connection to) the heroic male subjects which explained its popular resonance.<sup>69</sup> *A House Collapsing* was praised for its depiction of real events witnessed by the artist—fulfilling the War Artists' Advisory Committee's (WAAC) aim of producing documentary records of the war.<sup>70</sup> Significantly, and similar to Jennings' depiction of the Blitz, Rosoman manages to freeze the tension between masculine notions of 'taking it' alongside the more dangerous and deadly aspects of life under fire on canvas. The two representations are inseparable, and in fact strengthen one-another. The 'taking it' spirit demands the ultimate self-sacrifice which the firemen fulfil—poignancy heightened given the subject's real-life fate.

Contemporaries were quick to frame the aftermath of bombardment in similar terms, particularly in relation to the haunting and pervasive aspects of death. Detailing her work with the AFS in November 1940, Ivy Haslewood turned to her diary to describe the 'hideous smell of death [which]

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<sup>68</sup> Sillars, *British Romantic Art*, p. 84.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 85–6.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 86.





**Figure 1.7** *A House Collapsing on Two Firemen, Shoe Lane, London, EC4* (1940), Leonard H. Rosoman

Source: IWM, Department of Art (hereafter DoA), Art.IWM LD 1353.

hangs heavily' over the streets.<sup>71</sup> War artists were adept at translating Haslewood's metaphor in paint. Best known for his surrealist paintings of the East End, Graham Sutherland's wartime work depicts the spectre of death looming over the gutted streets of the capital (fig. 1.8). Sutherland was born in 1903 and began his formal education as an artist in the 1920s after a brief spell as an

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<sup>71</sup> IWM, DoD, I. Haslewood, Diary, 20 November 1940.



**Figure 1.8** *Devastation 1941: An East End Street* (1941), Graham Sutherland

Source: Tate Gallery (hereafter TG), N05736.

engineering apprentice. With the help of Kenneth Clark, the then Chairman of the WAAC, Sutherland became an official war artist in the autumn of 1940.<sup>72</sup> By 1941 his attention turned to the East End. ‘I will never forget those extraordinary first encounters’, he noted on viewing first-hand the blitzed East End factories. For Sutherland, it was the ‘silence, the absolute dead silence’ which defined the gutted beauty of factories.

Sutherland’s most iconic depiction of the East End’s spectral beauty can be seen in *Devastation 1941: An East End Street* (fig. 1.8). Similar to the photograph of Victoria Street in 1941, the viewer’s gaze is drawn to the discrepancy between the building’s clearly defined facades and its gutted interiors. Describing the streets as if they were human subjects, Sutherland noted the terraces were like veterans with ‘sightless eyes’. ‘The shells of long terraces...perspectives of destruction [recede] into infinity, the windowless blocks...like sightless eyes’.<sup>73</sup> Bathed in an unnatural yellow-green glow, the painting creates the impression of a lingering stench of death hanging over the scene. Other artists achieved similar results. Taking the City as his subject in *St Bride’s and the City After the Fire*, Muirhead Bone depicted the gutted geography between the church of St Bride’s

<sup>72</sup> Peter Stansky and William Abrahams, *London’s Burning: Life, Death and Art in the Second World War* (London: Constable, 1994), p. 53.

<sup>73</sup> Stansky and William Abrahams, *London’s Burning*, p. 55.

and St Paul's following the Second Great Fire (fig. 1.9). An official artist of the Great War, Bone had developed a repertoire for gothic depictions of ruined architecture of the Western Front styled in pencil. Similar to his drawings of the gutted Ypres Cloth Hall, *St Bride's and the City* features gothic undertones, placing the destruction front and centre. Yet unlike Sutherland's fascination with the already alien territory of 'outcast London', Bone's sketch carries a more optimistic message.<sup>74</sup> Despite the devastation, St Bride's and St Paul's stand tall. The City would overcome the threat from the skies.<sup>75</sup>

For both Sutherland and Bone, lingering smoke defined London's post-Blitz geography. Unlike the pea-soupers of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Blitz smokes were born of death and destruction, symbolising the carnage wrought on both the civilian body and the urban environment. Contemporaries too noticed the supernatural connotations of smokes, mists, and murks. As Mr. B. Leton described preceding the night-time raids of 9 October 1940:

There was a full moon in the Heavens but we did not see it because clouds hung low...As the rain fell I saw the buildings around me enshrouded in a thin light grey mist for even through the clouds the moon beams penetrated and lit up everything on the ground with a pale, ghostlike light.<sup>76</sup>

The following day, a 'thick white mist' was seen 'hanging over everything'.<sup>77</sup> Perhaps the most iconic visual representation of these death smokes emerged in the aftermath of the Second Great Fire. Dubbed 'War's Greatest Picture', the *Daily Mail* ran a photograph taken of St Paul's cathedral by Herbert A. Mason (fig. 1.10).<sup>78</sup> Captured on the roof of the *Daily Mail* building in Fleet Street, the *Mail* allowed Mason to describe the context behind the image.<sup>79</sup> 'I focused at intervals as the great dome loomed up through the smoke', Mason explained. 'Then a wind sprang up. Suddenly, the shining cross, dome and towers stood out like a symbol in the inferno. The scene was unbelievable. In that moment or two I released my shutter'.<sup>80</sup> The photograph had been doctored, which readers

<sup>74</sup> Field, *Blood, Sweat, and Toil*, p. 59.

<sup>75</sup> Connelly, *We Can Take It!*, p. 134.

<sup>76</sup> IWM, DoD, Papers of B. Leton (14/8/1), B. Leton, Diary, 9 October 1940.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> 'War's Greatest Picture', *Daily Mail*, 29 December 1940, p. 1. For discussion on the photograph, see Malcolm Smith, *Britain and 1940: History, Myth and Popular Memory* (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 80–2; Connelly, *We Can Take It!*, p. 132; Süß, *Death from the Skies*, pp. 285–6. For a more recent interpretation, see Tom Allbeson, 'Visualizing Wartime Destruction and Postwar Reconstruction: Herbert Mason's Photograph of St. Paul's Reevaluated', *Journal of Modern History*, 87 (2015), pp. 532–78.

<sup>79</sup> Smith, *Britain and 1940*, p. 82.

<sup>80</sup> 'War's Greatest Picture', *Daily Mail*, 29 December 1940, p. 1





**Figure 1.9** *St Bride's and the City after the Fire, 29<sup>th</sup> December 1940* (1941), Muirhead Bone

*Source:* IWM, DoA, Art.IWM ART LD 1076.





**Figure 1.10** *Air Raid Damage in Britain during the Second World War (1940), Herbert Mason*

*Source:* IWM, DoA, HU 36220.

knew, but this did not detract from its deeply symbolic propaganda dimensions. As Dietmar Süß indicates, Mason's photograph captured a combination of historical, imperial, and religious narratives which resonated profoundly during the uncertainty of late 1940.<sup>81</sup> St Paul's symbolised endurance and fortitude in the face of danger, a similar scene to the one depicted by Leonard H. Rosoman only on a far larger scale. Here, the struggle between competing visions of culture under fire is portrayed at its most epic. The scale of the Blitz, as well as its historical significance, is distilled within a single photograph. Yet supernatural imagery and ghostly metaphors worked on a far more intimate and personal level too. As we now turn to the spectral intrusion of homes and in shelters, we begin to see how the distortion of smaller spaces affected the psychological worlds of wartime Londoners.

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<sup>81</sup> Süß, *Death from the Skies*, p. 286.

THE SPECTRAL INTRUSION OF HOMES AND SHELTERS

The wartime magnification of death and disaster had complex implications for Londoners' experience and negotiation of private and intimate spaces.<sup>82</sup> The sheer number of bomb-related deaths created an atmosphere where untimely fates lurked around street corners and encroached upon people's homes. In September 1940 alone, 6,968 deaths were recorded from across the country as a result of Blitz raids. Total deaths recorded between August 1940 and December 1941, excluding the 'Little Blitz' of 1944 and V-1/V-2 rocket attacks, stood at a staggering 44,307.<sup>83</sup> Londoners were not just exposed to the sight of death on a daily basis.<sup>84</sup> Threats from the air occurred on average once every thirty-six hours for more than five years, with sirens blaring on no less than 1,224 occasions.<sup>85</sup> The dead, their imagined presence, and the threat of death pervaded many contemporary cultural products. As Elizabeth Bowen put it in her 1948 novel *The Heat of the Day*, the 'presence' of death and its disorientating impact could be felt everywhere:

Most of all the dead, from mortuaries, from under cataracts of rubble, made their anonymous presence—not as today's dead but as yesterday's living—felt throughout London. Uncounted, they continued to move in shoals through the city day, pervading everything to be seen or heard or felt with their torn-off senses...Absent from the routine which had been life, they stamped upon that routine their absence—not knowing who the dead were you could not know which might be the staircase somebody for the first time was not mounting this morning, or at which street corner the news vendor missed a face, or which trains and buses in the homegoing rush were this evening lighter by at least one passenger.<sup>86</sup>

As Michael Roper indicates, works of fiction such as Bowen's highlight attempts to explore events and emotional states with long-lasting psychological implications (Bowen began writing the short story in 1944 before publication in 1948).<sup>87</sup> Yet the psychic ruptures of bombardment had

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<sup>82</sup> James Greenhalgh, 'The Threshold of the State: Civil Defence, The Blackout and The Home in Second World War Britain', *Twentieth Century British History*, 28 (2017), p. 201.

<sup>83</sup> Richard Overly, *The Bombing War: Europe 1939–1945* (London: Penguin, 2013), p. 187.

<sup>84</sup> Michal Shapira, *The War Inside: Psychoanalysis, Total War, and the Making of the Democratic Self in Postwar Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 26.

<sup>85</sup> Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, p. 324.

<sup>86</sup> Elizabeth Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* (London: Alfred A. Knopf, 1948), pp. 91–2. For more on literary refractions of the disorientating impact of bombardment, see Beryl Pong, *British Literature and Culture in Second World War: For the Duration* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020). Also see Lyndsey Stonebridge, *The Writing of Anxiety: Imagining Wartime in Mid-Century British Culture* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); Kristine A. Miller, *British Literature of the Blitz: Fighting the People's War* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); Leo Mellor, *Reading the Ruins: Modernism, Bombsites and British Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

<sup>87</sup> Roper, *The Secret Battle*, p. 34.

very real contemporary repercussions; frequently played out in psychoanalytical discourse on hallucinations and the unconscious.<sup>88</sup>

*Dreams and Hallucinations*

Even before the onset of war, medical consensus held that acute anxiety cases would increase as a result of aerial bombardment.<sup>89</sup> The impact of the First World War popularised public awareness of the traumatic impact of 'total war' on the body and mind, with the disturbing dreams of some shell-shock victims signalling the deeper wounds that combat experience left behind.<sup>90</sup> By 1939, official and public debate on the nature of mental combat casualties shifted from arguments explaining 'Shellshock' as 'organic' illness or cowardice.<sup>91</sup> 'Neuroses' cases were explained as psychological, rather than physical, in nature. Official policy remained 'somewhat stiff' here, but a new generation of doctors were careful to avoid the stigmatisation of anxiety as had been the case in 'Shellshock' diagnoses.<sup>92</sup>

Whilst fear, confusion, and disorientation were not uncommon in heavily bombed areas in wartime London, 'psycho-neurosis' cases were surprisingly low, according to official statistics.<sup>93</sup> Analysing data collected between September 1940 and May 1941 in suburban London, Aubrey Lewis (instrumental in the professionalisation of British psychiatry after the war) found no clear link between bombardment and increased psycho-neurosis.<sup>94</sup> 'After intensive raids there is a slight increase in the total amount of neurotic illness in the affected area', he concluded, 'occurring chiefly in those who have been neurotically ill before'.<sup>95</sup> Carlos Paton

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<sup>88</sup> Laura Feigel, "'The Only Diary I Ever Kept': Visionary Witnessing in the Second World War Short Story', *Textual Practice*, 29 (2015), pp. 1289–1309.

<sup>89</sup> Shapira, *The War Inside*, p. 38.

<sup>90</sup> Michael Roper, 'Between Manliness and Masculinity: The "War Generation" and the Psychology of Fear in Britain, 1914–1950', *Journal of British Studies*, 44 (2005), p. 348.

<sup>91</sup> Ted Bogacz, 'War Neurosis and Cultural Change in England 1914–1922: The Work of the War Office Committee of Enquiry into "Shell-Shock"', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 24 (1989), p. 250; Shapira, *The War Inside*, p. 31.

<sup>92</sup> Shapira, *The War Inside*, p. 36.

<sup>93</sup> Edgar Jones, Robin Woolven, Bill Durodié, and Simon Wessely, 'Civilian Morale During the Second World War: Responses to Air Raids Re-Examined', *Social History of Medicine*, 17 (2005), p. 474; Overy *The Bombing War*, p. 178. Also see Hazel Croft, 'Rethinking Civilian Neuroses in the Second World War', in Peter Leese and Jason Crouthamel (eds.), *Traumatic Memories of the Second World War and After* (Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), pp. 95–116; Jill Kirby, *Feeling the Strain: A Cultural History of Stress in Twentieth-Century Britain* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019), ch. 3.

<sup>94</sup> Aubrey Lewis, 'Incidence of Neurosis in England under War Conditions', *Lancet*, 2 (1942), pp. 175–83; The National Archives (hereafter TNA), FD 1 (Medical Research Committee and Medical Research Council: Files)/6580 (Research on Neurology: Report on the Incidence of Neurosis in Britain, during War Conditions, 1941–1942), A. Lewis, Report into the Incidence of Neurosis.

<sup>95</sup> Lewis, 'Incidence of Neurosis', p. 182.

Blacker, conducting the official national survey of wartime neurosis in 1946, arrived at a similar conclusion. ‘It was a source of almost universal surprise that...very few of these [psycho-neurosis] conditions materialised [between 1940 and 1941]’.<sup>96</sup> Yet psychoanalysts such as Edward Glover argued that many psycho-neurosis cases bypassed expert’s examination, whilst Tom Harrison (co-founder of Mass Observation) argued doctors had missed an epidemic of bomb-related neuroses in the spring of 1941.<sup>97</sup>

Despite the apparent resistance to psycho-neurosis cases amongst the civilian populous, for some the impact of bombardment—particularly at night-time whilst dreaming—became a traumatic, even hallucinogenic experience. This was fuelled by the popularisation of dream analysis and psychoanalytical vocabulary more broadly stemming from the interwar years.<sup>98</sup> In 1927, the Great War veteran J. W. Dunne published the commercially popular (but academically criticised) *An Experiment with Time*.<sup>99</sup> For Dunne, dreams infuse images of the past, present, and future. In this sense dreamers can receive precognitive visions of the future and images from the past. The extent of popular fascination with psychical activity in the prewar period was encapsulated by the *Daily News* in a satirical comment from 1922: ‘We are all psycho-analysts now, and know that apparently innocent dreams are the infallible signs of the most horrible neurosis’.<sup>100</sup> Popularisers such as Dunne tapped into a wider obsession with psychical activity which increased during the war years.

Connections between wartime dreaming and various ‘supernatural’ experiences were recorded by the social research organisation Mass Observation. Emerging as part of the documentary movement of the 1930s, MO was concerned with documenting an anthropology ‘of ourselves’ and, from April 1940 as part of its collaboration with Whitehall, understanding and gauging domestic ‘morale’.<sup>101</sup> Supplying qualitative findings in support of the quantitative data mined

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<sup>96</sup> C. P. Blacker, *Neurosis and the Mental Health Services* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1946), p. 22.

<sup>97</sup> Edward Glover, ‘Notes on the Psychological Effects of War Conditions on the Civilian Population’, *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, 23 (1942), pp. 17–37, quoted in Shapira, *The War Inside*, p. 56. Tom Harrison, ‘Obscure Nervous Effects of Air Raids’, *British Medical Journal*, 1 (1941), p. 832.

<sup>98</sup> On this popularisation, see Thomson, *Psychological Subjects*.

<sup>99</sup> J. W. Dunne, *An Experiment with Time* (London: A. & C. Black, 1927).

<sup>100</sup> Quoted in Shapira, *The War Inside*, p. 10.

<sup>101</sup> For more on the history and methodological complexities of Mass Observation, see Penny Summerfield, ‘Mass-Observation: Social Research or Social Movement?’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 20 (1985), pp. 439–53; Nick Hubble, *Mass Observation and Everyday Life: Culture, History, Theory* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); Hinton, *The Mass Observers*; Annebella Pollen, ‘Research Methodology in Mass Observation Past and Present: “Scientifically about as Valuable as a Chimpanzee’s Tea Party at the Zoo”?’, *History Workshop Journal*, 235 (2014), pp. 213–35; James Hinton, *Seven Lives from Mass Observation: Britain in the Late Twentieth-Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016). On morale, see McLaine, *Ministry of Morale*; McKay, *Half the Battle*; Paul Addison and

by the Wartime Social Survey (WWS) and Home Intelligence (HI), MO produced a number of reports on the nexus between bombing and civilian morale. Yet like the state, as will be explored more deeply in chapter 3, MO was unsure how to define 'morale' as its object of study. In the Phoney War period, the organisation presented a bleak picture of domestic resolve in which ordinary Britons were apathetic to the new demands of war. This was an overly critical reading, recent scholarship notes, designed to attract civil servants' attention to the pressing need for morale management and include MO within its paid network of researchers assessing it.<sup>102</sup> Tom Harrison was convinced it should be measured in terms of the knowledge of one's role in times of emergency, whilst the organisation more broadly linked 'good' morale with confidence/optimism within a group or community.<sup>103</sup> Given Harrison's suspicions on a hidden psychological epidemic within society, evidence on the 'presence' and 'visions' of ghosts would seem to point towards a possible collapse in domestic morale. As MO's own research indicated, however, ghostly visions were actually part of a network of tools civilians possessed in coping with violent death, holding as much positive function as negative and harmful.

One of Mass Observation's founding objectives was to uncover 'dominant images' which lay dormant beneath the surface of the British psyche.<sup>104</sup> MO's, and especially Humphrey Jennings', obsession with images made dreams an obvious focus for wartime investigation. Dreams were not merely entities to be interpreted as 'images', they already *were* images.<sup>105</sup> Similar to the earlier psycho-analytical work of Freud in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1899), MO believed that dream analysis could directly expose latent symbols and urges of the British.<sup>106</sup> As Tyrus Miller reminds us, dreams offer unique methodological problems to the historian wishing to probe wartime mentalities.<sup>107</sup> Lack of available recorded dreams poses problems when using them to extrapolate broader conclusions.<sup>108</sup> Only a handful of men and women sent anything meaningful

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Jeremy A. Crang (eds.), *The Spirit of the Blitz: Home Intelligence and British Morale September 1940–June 1941* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020).

<sup>102</sup> Todman, *Britain's War: Into Battle*, pp. 272–80; Morley, 'The Memory of the Great War', p. 445.

<sup>103</sup> Ussishkin, *Morale*, p. 100; Brad Beaven and John Griffiths, 'The Blitz, Civilian Morale and the City: Mass-Observation and Working-Class Culture in Britain', *Urban History*, 26 (1999), p. 74. For a detailed study on the impact of the Blitz by Harrison, see Tom Harrison, *Living Through the Blitz* (London: Penguin, 1976). For a broader history, see Mackay, *Half the Battle*.

<sup>104</sup> Charles Madge and Tom Harrison, *Mass-Observation* (London: F. Muller Ltd., 1937), p. 47.

<sup>105</sup> Tyrus Miller, 'In the Blitz of Dreams: Mass-Observation and the Historical Use of Dream Reports', *New Formations*, 44 (2001), pp. 345–6. Also see Helen Groth and Natalya Lusty, *Dreams and Modernity: A Cultural History* (New York: Routledge, 2013), ch. 7, 'The Dream Archive: Mass-Observation and Everyday Life'.

<sup>106</sup> Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, trans. James Strachey (London: Allen & Unwin, 1982 [1900]).

<sup>107</sup> Miller, 'In the Blitz of Dreams', pp. 36–42.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 48–51.

on the subject of dreams to MO during the early war years, when the impact of aerial bombardment was at its most distorting.<sup>109</sup> Yet as Claire Langhamer highlights, MO panel writings are by their very nature situated between the personal and the popular. Each account is richly imbued with both collective and individual memory.<sup>110</sup> Observer descriptions linking spectral forces with bedrooms and dreaming not only reveal the influence of psychoanalytical thinking on the panel. They also suggest something of the psychological tensions and trauma which life under fire fostered at a background level.

In April 1942, MO sent a directive to its panel on a range of heterodox belief systems.<sup>111</sup> ‘Priority A’ questions, explicitly stated, ‘for everyone’, asked: ‘What are your own beliefs about the “supernatural”; Have you had any personal experience of so-called supernatural occurrences? If so, describe them’, and ‘Describe any supernatural occurrences which you have heard of from friends or acquaintances’.<sup>112</sup> For James Greenhalgh, the Blackout embodied (or ‘hyper’-embodied) individuals in the darkness, undermining the primacy of vision as a way of negotiating space.<sup>113</sup> Contemporary views on how individuals would cope in the darkness were often distinctly gendered, reflective of a broader obsession with female emotional management under fire.<sup>114</sup> MO’s Tom Harrison had made the case as early as 1939 that women were shaped by their ‘emotive’ natures, and that the imposition of total darkness would affect them more deeply than men.<sup>115</sup> Female fear of the dark, he claimed, was born of a ‘powerful female neurosis very intimately linked with the strongest sexual fantasies’. Unlike men, women had no way to ‘work out’ the ‘frustration, repression, and irritation that war must inevitably bring’.<sup>116</sup> Harrison’s claims were not only chauvinistic but failed to appreciate how wartime fear cut across gender binaries. As one twenty-two-year-old male Cambridge student living in Battersea made clear, fear of the blackout (and

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<sup>109</sup> Miller, ‘In the Blitz of Dreams’, p. 37.

<sup>110</sup> Claire Langhamer, *The English in Love: The Intimate Story of an Emotional Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. xviii. On the relationship between popular cultural and personal memory, see Penny Summerfield, ‘Culture and Composition: Creating Narratives of the Gendered Self in Oral History Interviews’, *Cultural and Social History*, 1 (2004), pp. 65–93.

<sup>111</sup> For a synthesis of MO’s panel by statistics, see Hinton, *The Mass Observers*, pp. 267–78.

<sup>112</sup> MOA, Directive Questionnaire (hereafter DQ), April 1942.

<sup>113</sup> Greenhalgh, ‘The Threshold of the State’, p. 195.

<sup>114</sup> For more on the gendered expectations of wartime emotional management, see Joanna Bourke, ‘Disciplining the Emotions: Fear, Psychiatry and the Second World War’, in Roger Cooter, Mark Harrison, and Steve Sturdy (eds.), *War, Medicine and Modernity* (Stroud: Sutton, 1998), pp. 225–38; Noakes, ‘Gender, Grief, and Bereavement’.

<sup>115</sup> Noakes, *War and the British*, p. 87.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*

associated visions) produced uncanny visions. Whilst 'fear' and its management was still being gendered in this context, its experience clearly cut across masculine/feminine binaries:

I am often prone to fear of the supernatural—especially alone in the dark...a few evenings ago I went to bed and switched off the light. The black-outs were up and the door closed, so I was astonished to see a number of white shapes in the room, which was quite dark. I told myself it must be the sheets on the unoccupied bed next to mine.<sup>117</sup>

The imposition of darkness made contemporaries acutely aware that their homes were the targets of outside elements.<sup>118</sup> Living in Chelsea during the onset of the Blitz, Ivy Haslewood described the impact of bombardment on internal domestic space. Whilst the sound of bombs whistled down in the distance, the gaps in her blackened bedroom 'lit up' the room through the 'hideous orange glare and the ever-ghostly searchlights'.<sup>119</sup> For medical professionals, boarding up the home in this way had potentially worrying consequences. As a letter within the *British Medical Journal* (1939) argued, gloomy dwellings could create 'neurasthenic states', 'ample cause for melancholy ...which may intensify depression'.<sup>120</sup> More than illustrating 'neurasthenic states', examples such as Haslewood's diary entry reveal the extent to which the home had become an integral part of civil defence machinery. War's presence not only seeped through gaps in blacked-out windows, but could be felt by the very imposition of darkness. As Greenhalgh makes clear, the Blackout challenged assumptions about the home by making people aware how their most private spaces functioned at the whim of the state.<sup>121</sup> For some, at least, increasing wartime scrutiny of privatised worlds had complex and potentially frightening implications.<sup>122</sup>

MO's in-house research stressed the benign nature of wartime ghostly visions. 'Frequently, ghosts appear either at the moment of death or shortly after it', a 1942 report on 'Death and the Supernatural' stated.<sup>123</sup> 'This type of apparition, usually causing no fear and appearing in quite normal form is the sort of "ghost" in which people seem to place the most credence'.<sup>124</sup> At the same time, MO's focused study on belief patterns in contemporary London (published in 1947 under the title *Puzzled People* drawing on materials generated during the war years) indicated an increase

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<sup>117</sup> MOA, Directive Response (hereafter DR) 2237, April 1942, man born in 1920.

<sup>118</sup> Greenhalgh, 'The Threshold of the State', p. 201.

<sup>119</sup> IWM, DoD, I. S. Haslewood, Diary, 7 September 1940.

<sup>120</sup> V. J. Batteson, "'Black-out" Problems in Correspondence', *British Medical Journal*, 2 (21 October 1939), p. 831.

<sup>121</sup> Greenhalgh, 'The Threshold of the State', p. 205.

<sup>122</sup> For more on fear and anxiety in the blackout, see Marc Wiggam, *The Blackout in Britain and Germany, 1939–1945* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), ch. 4.

<sup>123</sup> MOA, File Report (hereafter FR) 1315, 'Death and the Supernatural', 18 June 1942, p. 28.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

of belief in reincarnation of various kinds.<sup>125</sup> Yet for others spectral intrusions took on a distinctly sinister character.<sup>126</sup> Recalling a story told by a friend at work, one Mass Observer noted the apparition of a spectre connected to Blitz raids in London. The ‘witnessing’ of the vision took place within the intimate space of the bedroom:

There are three girls who work at the same place as I, they share a flat. This story was told to me by one of the three. One of the three had returned from a weekend in London where there had been a very bad blitz. They were in bed, she (B) and the other girl (C) in one room, and the girl who told me the story (A) in a small room by herself. A had been sitting on the bottom of B’s bed and had talked with B of her experiences during the blitz. She had returned to her room and got into bed. Suddenly B screamed out and then again, and terrified screams ...A went to sleep. The next morning she enquired what it had all been about and learnt that B had been almost asleep and had felt someone sitting on the bottom of her bed...and then she saw a figure in [the] darkness, just a horrible face.<sup>127</sup>

Other examples illustrate how bombardment triggered traumatic memories channelled through dreams more widely across Britain. From September–November 1940 London was almost the exclusive target of the *Luftwaffe*. Following the Coventry Blitz from mid-November, however, London bombings became as much a provincial as metropolitan experience.<sup>128</sup> Into late-1940 Coventry, Birmingham, Merseyside, and Southampton were attacked and by early-1941 the list of targets extended to Cardiff, Bristol, Portsmouth, Clydebank, and Belfast.<sup>129</sup> As one fifty-year-old teacher from Cheshire noted, air raids distorted both time and space, connecting the Zeppelin raids of the Great War with the Blitz. In response to Mass Observation in April 1942, she recalled an uncanny dream experience—triggered by the directive question on ‘supernatural’ experiences and the more recent impact of aerial bombardment:

During the last war my home was near Birmingham, but I had a teaching post in Leamington Spa. One night a Zeppelin penetrated the B[irmingham]ham district and a bomb was dropped and exploded about 4 fields away from our house, making quite a large crater and causing damage to windows in many of the houses. But that night I was in Leamington & slept all night not knowing there was a raid on. Nethertheless, in my dream state I saw the members of my family going into the cellar: I knew of their fright: I knew something dreadful had happened and I saw my father particularly agitated - but when I woke up I thought it was just a dream.

But at that time a friend, who had experienced raids in London was staying with me. During the night she had dimly heard the Zepp[elin] - recognised the sound & knew there was a raid.

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<sup>125</sup> Mass Observation, *Puzzled People: A Study in Popular Attitudes to Religion, Ethics, Progress and Politics in a London Borough* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1947), p. 29.

<sup>126</sup> For a literary example, see Elizabeth Bowen, *The Demon Lover* (London: Cape, 1945).

<sup>127</sup> MOA, DR 2865, April 1942, woman born in 1902.

<sup>128</sup> Allport, *Britain at Bay*, p. 337, 342.

<sup>129</sup> Todman, *Britain’s War: Into Battle*, pp. 505–6.



In the morning, she told me there had been a raid. Immediately I knew my dream was true & said I must go home. I went...by train, then phoned up my home & found that what I had seen in my dream had really happened.<sup>130</sup>

Ghostly visions, either of the previous war or the more recent dead, were recorded in other parts of the nation too.<sup>131</sup> As Nigel Hunt highlights, traumatic memory is 'flexible, permeable, changeable and...affected by the social and cultural world in which people live'.<sup>132</sup> Life under fire, re-lived in dreams or re-counted through memory, had the potential to distort time and space with jarring consequences. Yet if Freud was correct in his argument that dreams are forms of wish fulfilment, such examples indicate the desire of contemporaries to connect with the dead and heal from the emotional trauma of both World Wars.<sup>133</sup> Like rising levels of spiritualism, which MO noted in the autumn of 1940, spontaneous spirit visions performed a deep-seated emotional function in coping with sudden (and often violent) death.<sup>134</sup> Little wonder that, in the aftermath of the Clydeside Blitz of March 1941, Naomi Mitchison (one of MO's most celebrated wartime respondents) re-cast the memory of her friend's son who died as a living part of the Highland landscape when soothing his heartbroken mother.<sup>135</sup>

### *Sites of Shelter*

Shelter spaces were another such 'site' of heightened liminality. Images of Londoners sheltering in church crypts, Tube stations, and Anderson shelters evoke the ideals of wartime patriotism at the core of the 'taking it' construction of the Blitz. They also featured a darker side, however, in which 'underground London' came to epitomise 'darkest London'.<sup>136</sup> The pressing desire for sleep, combined with being sardined in tomb-like spaces, deterred many from using shelters.<sup>137</sup> Ivy Price of West Ham, for example, equated sheltering with entombment in her descriptions of living in temporary accommodation:

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<sup>130</sup> MOA, DR 1052, April 1942, woman born in 1892.

<sup>131</sup> 'Ghosts in Hostel', *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, 27 October 1941, p. 3; 'Ghosts', *Daily Mirror*, 6 December 1940, p. 4; Noakes, *Dying for the Nation*, p. 114.

<sup>132</sup> Nigel C. Hunt, *Memory, War and Trauma* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 2–3.

<sup>133</sup> Roper, *The Secret Battle*, p. 85. For more on history, writing, and trauma, see Dominick LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2001). On writing as a cathartic exercise amongst traumatised veterans, see Nigel C. Hunt and Ian Robbins, 'Telling Stories of the War: Ageing Veterans Coping with Their Memories through Narrative', *Oral History*, 26 (1998), pp. 57–78.

<sup>134</sup> MOA, Topic Collection (TC), *Religion*, Box One, January 1941, p. 20.

<sup>135</sup> MO, D 5378 (March, 1941); Noakes, *Dying for the Nation*, pp. 212–15.

<sup>136</sup> Field, *Blood, Sweat, and Toil*, pp. 57–70.

<sup>137</sup> Overy, *The Bombing War*, p. 146.

We had to move over to 167 West End Lane as our flat was shored up as it was unsafe. It was a very long house being used as a storage place for furniture for folks evacuated or bombed out. We did not use the shelter shored up for us (in case of a near hit) as the shelter was down in a basement and each outlet had very heavy iron grills to prevent any intruders—so that rather defeated the purpose of being a shelter—more like a tomb.<sup>138</sup>

The prospect of entombment at any given moment provoked acute anxiety for many.<sup>139</sup> Mr B. Leton from Wembley, for example, feared falling debris due to its ability to encase individuals in private, coffin like spaces:

I shudder to think what these men [volunteer services] must find beneath that debris. There must be times when they lift pieces of brickwork, or timber, to find beneath it the almost unrecognisable fragments of people who only a few days ago were living men and women.<sup>140</sup>

Alongside its entombment of the living, the sheer force of aerial bombardment began to exhume the dead through the destruction of cemeteries.<sup>141</sup> As the *East London Advertiser* noted on the day-light raids of 12 October 1940:

One of the bombs demolished two houses, and the A.R.P. personnel were actively at work, whilst the thick haze of debris still overhung the scene. Another fell in a cemetery and pieces of tombstones of various sizes were flying over roofs for a considerable distance in the surrounding district.<sup>142</sup>

The destructive potential of bombardment blew open both imagined and real boundaries between living and dead.

The association of shelters as sites of death gained a wider reception across the metropolis through regional and local newspaper reports. In early October 1940, the *Evening Standard* ran a short piece entitled 'Refused to Shelter in Death Cellar' as part of its coverage of the recent bomb damage.<sup>143</sup> Following the drowning of eight people caused by a burst water main in a London cellar, Mr. J. Saunders insisted: 'I always said it was a death trap. My words have unfortunately proved true. My wife was one of the victims'.<sup>144</sup> Fears of entombment by aerial attack continued during the V-1 and V-2 rocket attacks between 1944 and 1945. In April 1945, just weeks before the declaration of VE day, the *East London Advertiser* reported that Mr. John Colverson lost seven

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<sup>138</sup> IWM, DoD, Papers of I. Price (87/42/1), I. Price, Diary, n.d. [most likely post-Christmas 1940].

<sup>139</sup> Todman, *Britain's War: Into Battle*, p. 475.

<sup>140</sup> IWM, Papers of B. Leton, Diary, 9 October 1940.

<sup>141</sup> 'Convent Repaired: Again Damaged', *Boroughs of Poplar and Stepney and East London Advertiser*, 7 December 1940, p. 1.

<sup>142</sup> 'Houses Demolished in Daylight Raid', *Boroughs of Poplar and Stepney and East London Advertiser*, 12 October 1940, p. 1.

<sup>143</sup> 'Refused to Shelter in Death Cellar', *Evening Standard*, 12 October 1940, p. 12.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

of his relatives during a V-Bomb attack.<sup>145</sup> 'Through long hours of rescue work relatives of people buried beneath the debris of a block of flats, wrecked by a V-Bomb, waited anxiously for news of loved ones, hoping that they might still be found alive'.<sup>146</sup>

Whilst mainstream tabloids exploited the popular appetite for sensationalism, such as the *Daily Express*' coverage of shelter ghost rumours, it was in the local press where particularly morbid stories were found.<sup>147</sup> A report from August 1944 in the *Hackney Gazette*, for example, detailed the work of a rescue team upon entering a partially demolished house in Islington.<sup>148</sup> The mummified bodies of two young children were discovered, and evidence given at the subsequent inquiry stated that the workmen found the bodies in a 'mummified condition' with their sex 'obscure[d]'.<sup>149</sup> More shockingly, it was revealed that 'when found they [the bodies] were in an advanced state of decay' having 'suffered from enemy action'.<sup>150</sup> As Dietmar Süß indicates, the impact of the bombs and rockets changed death's physical aspects. Many who were buried under rubble or struck by flying objects lost their physical integrity, turning death into something 'grotesque, ghastly, and horrific'.<sup>151</sup> The question of how civilian deaths should be administered and honoured in the total war context proved difficult for the authorities to answer from the early stages of the war.<sup>152</sup> The Ministry of Health—which oversaw all administrative issues relating to the civilian war dead—recognised that the retention of physical characteristics in death was essential.<sup>153</sup> The sight of mutilated and mangled bodies not only made coordinating civilian funerals more difficult, it also disrupted official attempts to cultivate a popular mentality of stoicism and steadfastness. By the onset of the V-1 and V-2 rocket attacks, however, popular and official focus had shifted from the creation of a 'Blitz spirit'. As war weariness began to take hold, the random nature of death caused by rocket attacks heightened popular levels of fear well above those experienced during the Blitz.<sup>154</sup> As the report on the mummified infants alludes to, death

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<sup>145</sup> 'Trapped Beneath Debris of V-Bombed Flats', *Boroughs of Poplar and Stepney and East London Advertiser*, 6 April 1945, p. 1.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

<sup>147</sup> 'Spook in the Shelter was a Spoof', *Daily Express*, 16 December 1940, p. 3.

<sup>148</sup> 'Mummified Children's Bodies', *Hackney Gazette and North London Advertiser*, 4 August 1944, p. 1.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

<sup>151</sup> Süß, *Death from the Skies*, p. 413.

<sup>152</sup> On administrative attempts to manage and honour the civilian dead, see Julie Rugg, 'Managing "Civilian Deaths due to War Operations": Yorkshire Experiences During World War II', *Twentieth Century British History*, 15 (2004), pp. 152–73; Süß, *Death from the Skies*, ch. 8; Noakes, 'Valuing the Dead'; idem, 'The "Worth" of Grief and the "Value" of Bodies'.

<sup>153</sup> Süß, *Death from the Skies*, p. 407.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid., p. 382.

from air attack by 1944 and 1945 carried little of the honour it once had between 1940 and 1941. Inconsistencies in the state's management of civilian burials, often viewed as subservient to military burials and similar in essence to nineteenth century pauper burials, exacerbated uncertainties in civilian sacrifice between 1940 and 1941. By 1944 and 1945, the veneer of individual sacrifice for the collective good had all but evaporated.<sup>155</sup>

Of the many *lieux de mémoire* of Britain's Second World War, Geoffrey Field reminds us, it was the mass shelters of 1940 which are the most resonant.<sup>156</sup> A number of sources portray the larger shelters as highly charged spectral environments. Although well known to scholars, Ritchie Calder's shelter narratives offer an obvious example. Born in the early twentieth century in Scotland, Calder first worked as a journalist in Dundee and Glasgow during the 1920s. Moving to London prior to war's outbreak, he accepted an appointment as the Director of Plans and Campaigns at the Political Warfare Executive (PWE) in 1941. Originally written for the *Daily Herald* and *New Statesman* from late 1940, his shelter narratives were designed to pressure the government into cleaning up the squalid conditions underground.<sup>157</sup> Calder's voice joined a chorus of critics whose protest over shelter conditions formed part of an intense debate over the broader state of the nation at war.<sup>158</sup> As increasing numbers took to shelters underground, public attention turned to the 'shelter crisis' in basic social welfare. The General Secretary of the Public Morality Council, George Tomlinson, noted in December 1940 that the issue of shelter morality deeply troubled the 'hearts of the whole of the community'.<sup>159</sup> Whilst the Council publicly attested to the limited number of shelter problems at several points between 1940 and 1941, internal reports reveal institutional fears over a growing 'deep shelter' mentality. It was feared that occupants in the Tube would refuse to leave and develop a psychological dependency on dark, enclosed spaces for protection.<sup>160</sup> Perhaps predictably, given the state's gendered fears over the civilian populous, the finger of blame was often pointed towards women. Juvenile delinquency and crime, but

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<sup>155</sup> Noakes, *Dying for the Nation*, pp. 174–76. On nineteenth century pauper burials, see Julie-Marie Strange, 'Only a Pauper Whom Nobody Owns: Reassessing the Pauper Grave c.1880–1914', *Past and Present*, 178 (2003), pp. 148–75.

<sup>156</sup> Field, *Blood, Sweat, and Toil*, p. 57. On *lieux de mémoire*, or 'sites of memory', see Pierre Nora, 'Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*', *Representations*, 26 (1989), pp. 7–24.

<sup>157</sup> Field, *Blood, Sweat, and Toil*, pp. 59–60.

<sup>158</sup> Süß, *Death from the Skies*, p. 304.

<sup>159</sup> London Metropolitan Archives (hereafter LMA), A/PMC (Public Morality Council)/071, Behaviour in Air Raid Shelters, 1940–1941, Letter from George Tomlinson to Public Morality Council Members, 31 December 1940.

<sup>160</sup> Geoffrey Field, 'Nights Underground in Darkest London: The Blitz, 1940–1941', *International Labor and Working-Class History*, 62 (2002), p. 15.

more often female prostitutes, were held responsible for the deterioration in shelters.<sup>161</sup> Middle-class, left-leaning intellectuals such as Calder not only protested against the squalor of life in the shelters, but pointed towards the laziness in official assumptions over a 'deep shelter' mentality. Emerging beneath the soil, it was stressed, was a radical new social organisation which could serve as a model for re-fashioning the postwar social order.<sup>162</sup> It was ironically in the darkness and strangeness of the shelters, Calder's accounts stress, that positivity and togetherness amongst the British emerged most profoundly.

Guided by 'Mickey, the midger', Calder takes the reader on a whistle-stop tour of Stepney's bizarre underground world. One man sleeps on a stone coffin, whilst a navy takes rest in a large sarcophagus. The navy snores blissfully, his 'deep breathing stirring up wafts of white dust...bone dust!' Readers gain a sense of the ethnic and racial diversity of the imperial capital through Calder's narrative, characterised by a cacophony of unfamiliar sounds and incomprehensible languages.<sup>163</sup> These images of sheltering would seem to sit comfortably within a work of fiction, yet for Calder life in the Spitalfields shelter made 'Dickens seem like a mannered novel by Thackeray'.<sup>164</sup> Photojournalists such as Bill Brandt brought Calder's written accounts to life.<sup>165</sup> Born in Germany, Brandt moved to England in 1933 and began documenting various aspects of London life through photographs.<sup>166</sup> A commission from the MoI saw him document life in the shelters soon after the Blitz began, but the project was cut short due to Brandt's ill health.<sup>167</sup> Whilst no evidence indicates that Brandt and Calder toured together at Spitalfields, the similarities in their depictions of shelter-life are striking.<sup>168</sup> Brandt's photograph of a navy asleep in a sarcophagus, for example, bears an uncanny resemblance to Calder's descriptions in *Carry on London* (see fig. 1.11). More than in the written accounts, Brandt's photograph dramatically illustrates shelters as

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<sup>161</sup> LMA, A/PMC/07, Letter from D. Thorpe, Secretary of Moral Welfare Work, to George Tomlinson, 11 November 1940.

<sup>162</sup> Süß, *Death from the Skies*, pp. 305–6.

<sup>163</sup> Field, *Blood, Sweat, and Toil*, p. 61. The literature on empire's influence on British metropolitan life and culture is vast. For an excellent introduction, see Catherine Hall and Sonya Rose (eds.), *At Home with the Empire: Metropolitan Culture and the Imperial World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). For a more recent contribution illustrating both resonances and tensions, see Webster, *Mixing It*.

<sup>164</sup> Ritchie Calder, *Carry on London* (London: English Universities Press, 1940), pp. 36–9.

<sup>165</sup> Field, *Blood, Sweat, and Toil*, p. 64.

<sup>166</sup> For more on Brandt, see Mark Haworth-Booth and David Mellor, *Bill Brandt Behind the Camera: Photographs 1928–1983* (New York: Aperture, 1985); Joanne Buggins, 'An Appreciation of the Shelter Photographs Taken by Bill Brandt in November 1940', *Imperial War Museum Review* (1989), pp. 32–42; Nigel Warburton, *Bill Brandt: Selected Texts and Photographs* (Oxford: Clío Press, 1993); Paul Delany, *Bill Brandt: A Life* (London: Cape, 2004); Peter James and Richard Sadler, *Homes Fit for Heroes: Photographs by Bill Brandt 1939–43* (Birmingham: Dewi Lewis, 2004).

<sup>167</sup> Field, *Blood, Sweat, and Toil*, p. 65.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid.



Figure 1.11 *Asleep in a sarcophagus in Christ Church, Spitalfields* (1940), Bill Brandt

Source: Field, *Blood, Sweat, and Toil*, p. 61.

spaces where the living become somewhat *less than* human. Wrapped in a shroud-esque blanket, the navy adopts a position symbolic of a corpse mid-way through embalmment.

Of all the mass shelters, the London Underground stations were the most important. Official policy was to deny access to the Underground during raids (fearing the deep shelter mentality), but this was quickly slackened during the second week of attacks.<sup>169</sup> Whilst references to ghostly

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<sup>169</sup> Todman, *Britain's War: Into Battle*, p. 478.

atmospheres and spectral presences can be seen in a variety of representations of Tube sheltering, the work of one artist in particular defined its inhabitants as wraith-like beings. Henry Moore's is perhaps one of, if not *the*, best known artists' stories of the war.<sup>170</sup> Initially specialising in abstract sculpture in the 1930s, Moore's work explored the 'psychological human element' through three-dimensions.<sup>171</sup> This fascination with abstract art, psychology, and the human form came to play a fundamental part of his iconic shelter drawings.

Moore was never convinced by Kenneth Clarke to become a full time, salaried war artist. It was arranged that the WAAC would purchase and subsequently issue contracts for works by Moore on a piece-by-piece basis.<sup>172</sup> The Tube shelter drawings themselves were the product of serendipity. Moore had been waiting in London in early autumn 1940, presuming to be called up for official service.<sup>173</sup> Instead of commencing a major new sculpture, he decided to stick with sketching. It was purely by chance that, when riding on the Northern Line in September 1940, he stumbled on a group sheltering.<sup>174</sup> A series of sketches quickly followed—representations which played on tensions between the individual and the mass, reality and distortion, as well as life and death.

Moore never completed full sketches in the Tube. This he believed would be inappropriate, given the intimacy of the scenes observed.<sup>175</sup> Quick impressions were made on paper, and returned to in completion of a full sketch (fig. 1.12). As Alan Wilkinson notes, Moore's Liverpool Street sketches were the 'most terrifying' of the shelter series, as 'the bodies, swathed like Egyptian mummies, seem to belong more to the dead than the living'.<sup>176</sup> In *Pink and Green Sleepers* (fig. 1.13), for example, two figures are depicted swaddled under a blanket emitting an unnatural green glow. The use of technique and colour—wax and graphite accompanied by green and blood pink—lend the piece an uncomfortable beauty. Like many of Moore's most moving and dramatic works, those sheltering are depicted sleeping. The frightening, nightmare worlds described in

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<sup>170</sup> On Moore, see Donald Hall, *Henry Moore: The Life and Work of a Great Sculptor* (London: Gollancz, 1966); John Russell, *Henry Moore* (London: Allen Lane, 1968); Alan G. Wilkinson, *The Drawings of Henry Moore* (London: Tate Gallery, 1977); Roger Berthoud, *The Life of Henry Moore* (London: Faber, 1987); Julian Andrews, *London at War: The Shelter Drawings of Henry Moore* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2002).

<sup>171</sup> Stansky and Abrahams, *London's Burning*, p. 13; Winter, 'Cultural Mobilization'.

<sup>172</sup> Foss, *War Paint*, p. 75.

<sup>173</sup> Stansky and Abrahams, *London's Burning*, pp. 15–16.

<sup>174</sup> Foss, *War Paint*, p. 75.

<sup>175</sup> Stansky and Abrahams, *London's Burning*, p. 36.

<sup>176</sup> Alan Wilkinson, 'The Drawings of Henry Moore', unpublished PhD thesis, Courtauld Institute of Art, University of London (1974), p. 305.





**Figure 1.12** Henry Moore sketching in the Holborn Underground station in 1943, from Jill Craigie's film *Out of Chaos*. Photography by Lee Miller

Source: Foss, *War Paint*, p. 74.

MO writings and wartime diaries are given visual definition.<sup>177</sup> In another example, *Women and Children in the Tube* (fig. 1.14), Moore uses perspective to tease out the ghostly murk of the Tube shelters. In the foreground, the viewer's gaze is drawn towards three mothers comforting infants. The figures become gradually less detailed and defined, blurring into a sea of wraith-like beings. Moore's preoccupation with the female form pre-dated his wartime work, and here we see a very

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<sup>177</sup> Stansky and Abrahams, *London's Burning*, p. 32.





**Figure 1.13** *Pink and Green Sleepers* (1941), Henry Moore

Source: TG, N05713.



**Figure 1.14** *Women and Children in the Tube* (1940), Henry Moore

Source: IWM, DoA, Art.IWM ART LD 759.

different depiction of women compared to authority concerns over ‘illicit’ prostitutes.<sup>178</sup> Whilst ghostlike and monumental, Moore’s maternal figures are nurturing and stoic.<sup>179</sup> They embody the wartime values expected (and demanded) of women by the state. The inherent ambivalence between Moore’s technique and the picture’s message further reinforce how the contemporary engagement with ‘ghosts’ brought together competing representations of life under fire.

Contemporary opinions on Moore’s shelter drawings were equally as ambivalent as the messages they transmitted. A well-known artist by the war years, Moore’s works received much attention in Britain as well as the United States.<sup>180</sup> The response from the British public when the works were shown at the National Gallery in 1941 was varied. Some visitors found them too disturbing, whilst others saw little resonance between their own experience of Tube sheltering and Moore’s illustrations.<sup>181</sup> In the postwar period the images took on a different meanings—both in terms of mythologizing the Blitz as well as alluding to the dark horrors of Bergen-Belsen and Buchenwald concentration camps depicted in the British media. Despite the chronological shifts in interpretation, Moore’s Tube sketches caught something of the universal suffering of war. Yet wartime Londoners were not defenceless. Alongside their physical protection through an extensive ARP network, a wide-ranging, state sponsored propaganda campaign was unleashed to steady the popular mood and engender a ‘Blitz spirit’. Frequently, visions of the ghostly past were deployed in linking the context of war with romanticised notions of national history. As we will see, wartime London was not just plagued by sinister spectres—attempts were made to engender an imagined landscape of protective spirits and collective spirit.

#### GHOSTS OF THE PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE

In 1935, as the prospect of a second war loomed large, *The Times* published a letter to the editor on the subject of aerial defence.<sup>182</sup> ‘Surely thick-diffused fog and smoke generators in the charge of voluntary organizations could, with half an hour’s warning, make and maintain an effective shroud over London’, H. B. Creswell argued. ‘In fact, the countless chimney pots of our cities could provide an artillery that no aircraft could face or overcome’.<sup>183</sup> Whilst climatic changes

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<sup>178</sup> Field, *Blood, Sweat, and Toil*, p. 68.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 68–9.

<sup>180</sup> Süß, *Death from the Skies*, p. 340.

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 342.

<sup>182</sup> ‘Air Defence’, *The Times*, 7 June 1935, p. 17.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*

played their part in deterring aerial attack, it was the ghosts of the cultural past which were deployed as defenders of the capital when war finally came. Unlike the more frightening spectral intrusion of homes and shelters, these ghosts played a distinctive protective function. For Jan Assmann, a society's 'cultural memory'—as distinct from 'communicative', everyday memory—relies on established rather than invented tradition stretching across centuries or millennia.<sup>184</sup> This involves a continual process of storing, retrieving, transmitting and interpreting memory through myths, rituals, and texts.<sup>185</sup> It is precisely this kind of memory work which a variety of cultural agents used in an effort to 'anchor the nation', as Jo Fox identifies, such as in Mason's photograph of St Paul's.<sup>186</sup> In using the triumphs and heroes of the past as a way of breaking down temporal boundaries, Londoners became part of an ongoing process of community construction based on shared cultural heritage. As Sonya Rose identifies, however, representations of the nation were rarely successful at creating a single, unproblematic frame of self-perception.<sup>187</sup> Attempts to conceal class, gender, and racial divisions provoked mixed responses at both the civic and national level.<sup>188</sup> Competing interpretations of the 'taking it' narrative pitted the resolve of London boroughs against one another—subtle implications that particular areas of the capital (chiefly The City) 'took it' more heroically than others. A metropolitan focus also pulls into relief differences of commemoration across the World Wars. Whilst the memory of death occupies an intermediate position between spontaneous communicative memory and elaborate cultural memory, Stefan Goebel signals, differences of dying between 1914–1918 and 1939–1945 were born out in differing commemorative practices. Cultural memory practices were centred more clearly during the Second World War, and 'existential memories' of the human toll of war took more privatised forms compared to their public dominance during and after

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<sup>184</sup> Jan Assmann and John Czaplicka, 'Collective Memory and Cultural Identity', *New German Critique*, 65 (1995), pp. 125–33; Jan Assmann, *Religion and Cultural Memory: Ten Studies*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), p. 8. Assman's conception of 'communicative memory' draws heavily on the foundational work of Maurice Halbwachs, *The Collective Memory* (New York: Harper & Row, 1980 [1925]). For a critique of cultural memory in relation to cultural history, see Alon Confino, 'Collective Memory and Cultural History: Problems of Method', *American Historical Review*, 102 (1997), pp. 1386–1403. On 'invented' traditions, see Eric J. Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

<sup>185</sup> Jan Assmann, *Das Kulturelle Gedächtnis: Schrift, Erinnerung Und Politische Identität in Frühen Hochkulturen* (München: C. H. Beck, 1992), p. 54. Also see Winter, *War Beyond Words*.

<sup>186</sup> Jo Fox, 'Propaganda, Art and War', in Joanna Bourke (ed.), *War and Art: A Visual History of Modern Conflict* (London: Reaktion Books, 2017), p. 202.

<sup>187</sup> Rose, *Which People's War?*, p. 8.

<sup>188</sup> Jo Fox, 'The Propaganda War', in Richard J. B. Bosworth and Joseph A. Maiolo (eds.), *The Cambridge History of the Second World War*, vol. II: *Politics and Ideology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 111.

the First World War.<sup>189</sup> This transformation was caused a combination of factors; including the nature and experience of death (now also in civilian context), the number of fatalities (tens of thousands compared to millions), and the psychological demands placed on domestic morale as a result of civilian bombardment.

The early months of the Blitz was a heightened and testing period, not only in London's wartime history but also in the history of the nation. Cultural representations naturally sought to frame it within a broader historical continuum. As Susan Grayzel highlights, propaganda initiatives designed to embolden civil identity with stoicism and steadfastness were distinctly gendered.<sup>190</sup> Total war's shattering of the 'home front' and 'battle front' meant that civilians (particularly women) were expected to practice emotional self-regulation associated with the idealised masculine fighter. Sidney Strube's 'Little Man' cartoons, appearing within Lord Beaverbrook's *Daily Express*, transmitted these ideals to a wide audience.<sup>191</sup> On 12 November 1940, readers learnt where the 'Little Man' gained his resolve (fig. 1.15).<sup>192</sup> The ghosts of the nation's past stand behind him and, given the context of November 1940, behind the nation more broadly (as by this phase aerial bombardment had extended to other parts of the country). Strube's 'Little Man' performed two key functions; to provide humour (fulfilling part of the *Express*' entertainment commodity) and to promote the paper's editorial policy as a propaganda piece.<sup>193</sup> As Rod Brookes points out, the importance of the Little Man's visual appearance was not his expression of lower-middle class status. Rather, it was his embodiment of a set of 'social, political, cultural and moral attitudes' which for the *Express* defined British—specifically English—national character.<sup>194</sup> Both the cartoon and the *Express* were making an obvious point to readers. Ordinary people across the nation could, and should continue to, perform extraordinary deeds by looking to the heroic, masculine past of their forebears.

Strube's visual propaganda was set alongside an article entitled 'Drink to Mr. Morris!'<sup>195</sup> Under

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<sup>189</sup> Goebel, *The Great War and Medieval Memory*, p. 16; Noakes, *Dying for the Nation*, pp. 238–49.

<sup>190</sup> Grayzel, *At Home and Under Fire*, p. 315.

<sup>191</sup> For more on the development of Strube's 'Little Man' from the 1930s, see Rod Brookes, "Everything in the Garden Is Lovely": The Representation of National Identity in Sidney Strube's *Daily Express* Cartoons in the 1930s', *Oxford Art Journal*, 13 (1990), pp. 31–43.

<sup>192</sup> 'The Little Man to the Reporter: "That's Where I Get It From"', *Daily Express*, 12 November 1940, p. 4.

<sup>193</sup> Brookes, "Everything in the Garden is Lovely", p. 32.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 35–6. For more on the evolution of English national character, see David Matless, *Landscape and Englishness* (London: Reaktion Books, 2001); Peter Mandler, *The English National Character: The History of an Idea from Edmund Burke to Tony Blair* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006).

<sup>195</sup> 'Drink to Mr. Morris!', *Daily Express*, 12 November 1940, p. 4.





Figure 1.15 'The Little Man to the Reporter: "That's Where I Get It From"', Sidney Strube

Source: *Daily Express*, 12 November 1940, p. 4.

the sub-heading 'Let us suppose that Sir Walter Raleigh writes for the *Daily Express* from beyond the grave', a fictional letter is penned by a hero of the past (Raleigh) to a hero of the present (an air-raid warden). The parallels and connections between the two individuals, and the worlds of Elizabethan and present-day England, were deliberately played on:

It's the same old Merry England still, my dear Leighton-Morris. She never changes, the dear old soul. Generous and chivalrous to her enemies, contemptuous of her own. I see she fines you £100 for carrying away a live bomb. That puts you right in the line of our best English traditions...It was the Spaniards that were against us then [during the Spanish Armada of 1588], but what matter who the enemy is if she is England? All these long years I spent writing history—wanted to be out and about singeing a Spanish beard. And you, my dear Leighton-Morris, I see you have said: "There was the bomb standing like a bear bottle. I picked it up. It slipped and crashed on my foot. But I got it to the street and there the police stopped me. And I said: All right, I will go quietly." Ha! Ha! How you make me laugh. Methinks Elizabeth is back on the throne and England's sons are back again and her lawyers are as crazy as ever.<sup>196</sup>

Numerous legends and myths stemming from England's Tudor age were re-mobilised in the wartime context. In August 1940 the BBC aired a programme entitled 'Drake's Drum'—the

<sup>196</sup> 'Drink to Mr. Morris!', p. 4.

sound of which, according to legend, signalled a national state of emergency.<sup>197</sup> A month later during the Battle of Britain, two army officers swore they heard the drum again, ringing on a Hampshire seashore.<sup>198</sup> Yet in the context of mid-November 1940, as the *Luftwaffe* turned its attention from London to the air factories in the midlands, Britain needed to show the resolve which Londoners had displayed since September.<sup>199</sup> Not unproblematically, 'London can take it' evolved into 'Britain can take it'. The wartime nation could, it was implied, rely on *English* national history as its guide.

The ghosts of past national heroes and of historic national character were not the only 'spirits' re-mobilised during the war. A distinct sense of 'civic spirit' was cultivated to bring Londoners emotionally closer to the capital. This occurred at a city-wide level, best exemplified by Noël Coward in the 1941 song 'London Pride'.<sup>200</sup> For Coward, London's 'living past' could be felt in its 'shadowed present'. The ghosts of the immediate and more distant past charged the lived experience of the capital with a haunting poignancy. Yet 'civic spirit' was also crafted into regional and local forms. In late October 1940, for example, the *Islington Gazette* ran a column entitled 'The Spirit of London'.<sup>201</sup> Penned by George Jewsbury, the Secretary of the Islington Liberal Association, the column attempted to praise the revolve of Islingtonians whilst acknowledging the hardships of the capital and nation collectively:

It may be said that a true test of a man is the spirit within him, and when collectively considered, it is the quality test of a community. London as a whole in this regard has gained the admiration of the world. What I know of Islington in this present crisis is to me evidence that its endurance is typical of London as a whole... The men of Devon who fought for us in the Armada [of 1588] were men of courage and purpose. The Puritans under Cromwell held the highest ideals. Each, on land and sea, respectively, had the spirit of daring and resolve... They were the pioneers of our rich heritage, and they contributed very largely to make us what we are to-day. *That ancient spirit is not dead: it lives in us still* [emphasis added]. It is the spirit of London, and it will carry us on to triumph and victory for the right.<sup>202</sup>

For Jewsbury, Islington was located within a broader civic and national landscape, representing a small but important cog within the national war effort. The 'spirit of London', mixing history,

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<sup>197</sup> John Sugden, *Sir Francis Drake* (London: Pimlico, 1990), p. 323.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid.

<sup>199</sup> Todman, *Britain's War: Into Battle*, p. 505.

<sup>200</sup> For more on Noël Coward, see Lesley Cole, Graham Payn and Sheridan Morley, *Noël Coward and His Friends* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1979); Graham Payn and Sheridan Morley, *The Noël Coward Diaries* (London: Macmillan, 2002); Barry Day, *Coward on Film: The Cinema of Noël Coward* (Lanham: Scarecrow, 2005); Sheridan Morley, *Noël Coward* (London: Haus, 2005); Barry Day (ed.), *The Letters of Noël Coward* (London: Methuen Drama, 2007).

<sup>201</sup> 'The Spirit of London', *Islington Gazette*, 29 October 1940, p. 7.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid.

culture, and Providentialism, would ultimately triumph over the tyranny of Nazism.<sup>203</sup> Yet other representations of local 'civic spirit' were less inclined to locate the resolve of local boroughs within a broader 'spirit of London'. In the aftermath of the Second Great Fire, the *City Press* was quick to point out the special significance of the raid for the City of London:

THE City of London still stands...The destruction wrought by the savage onslaught of the raiders on Sunday night has caused the destruction of some of the most historic parts of the City...Yet the City still stands; its spirit, its soul, remains undaunted.<sup>204</sup>

The *City Press*' coverage of the Second Great Fire points to subtle tensions within the representation and experience of the Blitz across London. Whilst the raids of the 29–30 December 1940 specifically targeted the City, the resolve and heroism of those within its boundaries is placed on a higher plane than that of Londoners more broadly. It is the *City's* spirit, rather than the spirit of *London*, which emerges triumphant from the ashes of late December 1940. Whilst various towns and cities competed with London as to which 'took' the raids the most heroically, this mentality was also at work, if more subtly, within the capital itself.<sup>205</sup>

The notion of civic spirit could be subverted to paint a darker picture of the capital at war, particularly into the latter phase of the war. For some the impact of bombardment drew parallels with impoverished London of earlier centuries. As one contemporary described, the issue of re-housing resurrected images of pauperism in Dickensian London:

This article could almost be called "It Happened to Me", Part 2, as it is a serial or continuation, describing, as it were, efforts to pick up again the threads of life so cruelly interrupted by the Buzz Bomb. In my library...I had a set of Dickens and this master of literature's criticisms of State handling of the down and out are ever fresh in memory. Don't imagine Bumble and his like are dead; to our shame I can say, their spirit lives today in some officials who are supposed to deal quickly with those who need re-housing...

Those, however, who administer these regulations [for re-housing], seem to have an idea in their heads they should deal with the homeless applications as **paupers looking for charity** [emphasis original], and like Bumble in *Oliver Twist* be horrified if one asks for more or something better. I can see the expression of our modern Bumbles when one asks to be placed in a house something of the same standard one has lost. They seem to forget or ignore the fact that there is a different standard even in houses...

The mind of the Bumble-like re-housing official seems to have been, "you have no house, you are homeless, therefore you must be down and out and be satisfied with what we dole out to you". You, yourself, are to have no ideas on the subject at all. We administer these affairs and it is not for the likes of you to question

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<sup>203</sup> For more on Providentialism and national character during the period, see Grimley, 'The Religion of Englishness'. For more on attempts to equate national character and history with the defence of Christian civilisation by a variety of agents, see Williamson, 'Christian Conservatives and the Totalitarian Challenge'.

<sup>204</sup> 'Still Standing', *City Press*, 3 January 1941, p. 4.

<sup>205</sup> Beaven and Griffiths, 'The Blitz, Civilian Morale and the City', pp. 71–88.

our rulings. How ridiculous for a “Pauper” (or so they think of the homeless) to wish for a small house for himself and family.<sup>206</sup>

Whilst too much can often be made of homelessness as a result of both the Blitz and the Buzzbombs, contemporary fears surrounding the integrity of the home provoked acute anxiety.<sup>207</sup> Certainly by 1944, when the veneer of the ‘Blitz spirit’ had all but worn-off, questions were raised around the demands the state continued to place on an increasingly war-weary public. Radical social re-organisation and plans for urban re-development still seemed a long way off as the war spilled into 1945.<sup>208</sup> The war needed to be won first. As the extract from the *City and East London Observer* suggests, notions of civic spirit were not just un-uniform across the geography of the capital, but subject to significant change across time.

Temporality played an important function in the way Londoner’s ‘brooded’ over the Blitz.<sup>209</sup> Past, present, and future fused together through the destruction of the built environment. Nowhere was the distortion of time more noticeable than in the devastation wrought on London’s Wren churches. As we have seen in the depiction of St Paul’s cathedral, churches played a significant role in connecting local/national heritage with the ghostly and supernatural. Churches graveyards were spaces where the dead were laid to rest. They also served as focal points of communal/local ‘spirit’ (in the sense of identity) and as symbols of continuity between past and present. By the onset of the raids, the Wren churches—originally designed by Sir Christopher Wren during the mid- to late- seventeenth-century—were viewed as dual symbols of both local community and national heritage.<sup>210</sup> In a discussion of T. S. Elliot’s ‘The Waste Land’, Humphrey Jennings described the Wren churches as ‘sort of ancestors’ of the past. Their survival from by-gone eras were fundamentally tied to local and metropolitan morale.<sup>211</sup> In her novel *London Pride*, Phyllis Bottome also emphasized the churches as markers of local community. ‘Every night there was a

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<sup>206</sup> ‘Rattle His Bones’, *City and East London Observer*, 4 November 1944, p. 1.

<sup>207</sup> Overy, *The Bombing War*, p. 162.

<sup>208</sup> For recent examples on postwar reconstruction, see Mark Clapson and Peter J. Larkham (eds.), *The Blitz and Its Legacy: Wartime Destruction to Post-War Reconstruction* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013); John Pendlebury, Erdem Eterm, and Peter J. Larkham (eds.), *Alternative Visions of Post-War Reconstruction: Creating the Modern Townscape* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015); Greenhalgh, *Reconstructing Modernity*. On wartime visions of postwar reconstruction in London, see Marco Amati and Robert Freestone, ‘All of London’s a Stage: The 1943 County of London Plan Exhibition’, *Urban History*, 43 (2016), pp. 539–56; Michael P. Collins, ‘The London County Council’s Approach to Town Planning: 1909–1945’, *London Journal*, 42 (2017), pp. 172–91; Stephen Murrar, ‘The Battle for Bankside: Electricity, Politics and the Plans for Post-War London’, *Urban History*, 45 (2018), pp. 616–34.

<sup>209</sup> Connelly, *We Can Take It!*, pp. 133–34.

<sup>210</sup> Michael McCluskey, ‘Humphrey Jennings in the East End: Fires Were Started and Local Geographies’, *London Journal*, 41 (2016), p. 179.

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid.*



raid on. They [the firemen] weren't told which part of London; but sometimes one of the Wren churches was mentioned [...] and Ben would know exactly how near the fires were likely to reach towards the Beulah Street shelter'.<sup>212</sup> A column in the *East London Advertiser* in early-November 1940 reinforced the extent to which local communities across London mourned the destruction of the churches:

The number of churches damaged has been considerable, a fact revealed in the newspapers recently when figures for the London area were given...Certainly no tyrant since the early Roman emperors has adopted the attitude to the churches of Hitler. Perhaps it is due to the fact that despite the criticisms thrown at the Church she has never preached her message more truly than in this age, and that message rightly told must make men see the peril of tyranny.<sup>213</sup>

The Second Great Fire posed the greatest threat to the Wren Churches—concentrated in and around the City. Thirteen Wren churches were either completely ruined or damaged as a result of the raid, alongside four other churches which survived the original Great Fire of 1666.<sup>214</sup> On 10 January 1941, the *City Press* evoked the memory of 1666 in its coverage of the destruction:

CITY CHURCHES INVOLVED...Although severely damaged, St. Mary's, Aldermanbury, was not demolished. The Rector writes:—"The tower, which survived the Great Fire of 1666, has splendidly survived the Great Fire of 1940; the roof of the lovely Wren church built in 1677 has disappeared...[yet] The link with the past is not broken and in all its desolation Aldermanbury still has its 'church in the village'[sic]."<sup>215</sup>

In January 1941 the Lord Mayor emphasised how the destruction of the built environment, particularly damage wrought on the City's churches and homes, would be overcome as it had been in 1666:

Speaking to the officers of the various departments of the Corporation, the Lord Mayor said that the events of the last few weeks had added to their responsibilities, and set them the greatest problem that had faced the City since the Great Fire of 1666. Nevertheless, they need not despair. In 1666, 273 acres of the City were affected; 87 churches destroyed; and 13,200 houses burnt down. The devastation experienced in the immediate past was greater than some of them expected and more would probably come: but they could face the situation with calmness.<sup>216</sup>

The architectural landscape of London, in particular the City, came to symbolise something more than mere bricks and mortar during and after the bombing. It was used symbolically by propagandists and cultural agents as a metaphor for an idealised 'people's war'. In 1666, a phoenix

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<sup>212</sup> Phyllis Bottome, *London Pride* (London: Faber & Faber, 1941), p. 205.

<sup>213</sup> 'In The East End Now', *Boroughs of Poplar and Stepney and East London Advertiser*, 9 November 1940, p. 2.

<sup>214</sup> Mark B. Pohl, 'The Appreciation of Ruins in Blitz-Era London', *London Journal*, 30 (2005), p. 3.

<sup>215</sup> 'Our Devastated City', *City Press*, 10 January 1941, p. 3.

<sup>216</sup> 'The City Carries On', *City Press*, 17 January 1941, p. 1.

had arisen from the ashes of disaster, and history, it was stressed, would repeat itself.<sup>217</sup> Past and present collided as the destruction of the built environment was charged with the civic spirit of the past.

As we have seen, the mythical image of St Paul's Cathedral withstanding German aerial attack was used frequently to evoke feelings of pride and virtue (fig. 1.9, 1.10).<sup>218</sup> Yet the significance of St Paul's evocation lay in its simultaneous representation of The City and as the tomb of Britain's greatest heroes. The work of cultural memory through ritual and myth, as Jan Assmann puts it, could be anchored in a distinctly physical form in the case of St Paul's; part of the reason why it worked so well as an image for the propagandist. Miraculously, St Paul's managed to escape the Second Great Fire with no more than minor damage to its exterior and a bomb breaking through the choir. This was no doubt due to the diligent forward planning of the emergency services, whose work ultimately saved the structure from destruction. As the Dean admitted in early-January 1941, the 'Providential escape' of the Cathedral was 'due, to an incalculable degree, to the foresight of the Cathedral surveyor in preparing for such an emergency, and to the devotion and skill of the Cathedral staff and volunteers who dealt with the incendiary bombs'.<sup>219</sup> The supernatural associations surrounding the Cathedral's survival were used by official bodies to highlight the distinctiveness of The City in a more obvious way than the photography of Herbert Mason or the fine art of Muirhead Bone.<sup>220</sup> In 1944, London Transport issued a series of posters as part of a series entitled 'The Proud City'.<sup>221</sup> In *The Proud City: A New View of St Paul's Cathedral, from Bread Street* (fig. 1.16), St Paul's is described as the 'Ornament' of the 'royal City', quoting the Great Seal of England dated 1675. In the poster, St Paul's stands tall amid the ruins and rubble which surround it. Hopes of resurrection are offered in the distant blue sky, as well as the wild flowers which poke out from cracks in the debris. Here, St Paul's is depicted as more than a cathedral; it is a monument and mausoleum of the nation, radiating strength and endurance in the present.

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<sup>217</sup> Connelly, *We Can Take It!*, p. 132.

<sup>218</sup> Vanessa Chambers, "'Defend Us from All Perils and Dangers Of This Night': Coping with Bombing in Britain during the Second World War", in Claudia Baldoli, Richard Overy, and Andrew Knapp (eds.), *Bombing, States, and Peoples in Western Europe, 1940–1945* (London: Continuum, 2011), pp. 158–9.

<sup>219</sup> 'Our Devastated City', p. 3.

<sup>220</sup> Fox, 'Propaganda, Art and War', p. 197.

<sup>221</sup> David Welch, *Persuading the People: British Propaganda in World War II* (London: The British Library, 2016), pp. 68–9, 72, 76.



**Figure 1.16** *The Proud City: A New View of St Paul's Cathedral, from Bread Street* (1944), Walter E. Spradbery. A London Underground poster of 1944 highlights the endurance of St Paul's in the face of disaster

*Source:* London Transport Museum (hereafter LTM), PP/BS51/29.

As Brian Ladd highlights in the context of Berlin, buildings are not the only repositories of memory within the urban landscape. Statues too are significant through their memorialisation and re-mobilisation of the past.<sup>222</sup> Masculine figures triumphant in times of war and conflict were called upon to embolden civil identity with steadfastness and a willingness to endure. In Humphrey Jennings' *Listen to Britain*, symbols and images of the nation were displayed in order to provide resolve during the dark months of 1942. The second of two short films made for the MoI—the first being *Heart of Britain* (1941)—*Listen to Britain* evoked the nation as a land of diversity and class structure, but one which was ultimately unified behind a national war effort.<sup>223</sup> Viewers are exposed to images of Nelson's column as part of the 'backdrop' of London's war. Jennings' nostalgic depiction of London at war, as Mark Connelly points out, longs for a world which never really existed. The turning of legend into 'fact' on screen performed a very specific propaganda function, supporting the broader attempts of official culture to foster a 'taking it' mentality.<sup>224</sup> This depiction of London goes beyond simply meshing past and present—it distorts time to create a fictional (if resonant and identifiable) vision of Britain in which capital and nation are synonymous. In the case of the Wren churches and statues of past national heroes, Londoners did not have to look far for extra-resolve. Symbols of past national glory were literally cemented within the built environment around them. Such visual and visceral depictions of architecture and monuments were so successful as propaganda tools because they seamlessly connected national heritage and cultural memory with Londoner's intimate geographical knowledge of the capital. Not all architectural symbols of the past remained intact, however. As we will see, Blitz-ruins took on their own political significance in the context of postwar reconstruction debates during the war. Between 1944 and 1945, these debates shattered the temporal boundaries which artificially separated the pre-war, wartime, and postwar histories of London.

The issue of what to do with London's Blitzed and rocket-bombed landscape became an area of debate where urban-geographical, historical, and cultural 'ghosts' fed into temporal deconstruction. Contemporaries questioned whether London's sites of heritage—such as its Wren churches—should be reconstructed to their former glory or be left as postwar reminders of the pain and suffering the capital had overcome. The place of ruined churches as symbols of Nazi defiance first arose in Plymouth in autumn 1941, when the city commissioned leading town planners

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<sup>222</sup> Brian Ladd, *The Ghosts of Berlin: Confronting German History in the Urban Landscape* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), p. 2.

<sup>223</sup> Connelly, *We Can Take It!*, p. 172.

<sup>224</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 173.

Patrick Abercrombie and Peter Watson to develop ideas for its reconstruction.<sup>225</sup> By 1944, similar debates over the symbolic function of church ruins were recognised in London. The *City and East London Observer* neatly summarised the debate in September 1944:

The controversy about the treatment of the City Churches which have been destroyed continues to be interesting. Diametrically opposite views are held. One school thinks few might be preserved intact, while other people would scrap the lot, sell the sites and devote the money to a memorial building worthy of the City of London. In the Great Fire 89 City Churches out of 125 were burnt and only 45 were rebuilt. Other people think that as public memory is so very short, one or two ruined churches should be left as useful reminders of [the] dark days and shining devotion to duty [displayed].<sup>226</sup>

The debate gained national traction in 1944 when Sir Kenneth Clark, T. S. Elliot, and John Maynard Keynes wrote to *The Times* in August proposing that a number of ruined churches be preserved as war memorials and open-air gardens.<sup>227</sup> An accompanying book was later published in 1945, which outlined the intended use of the memorials complete with artistic representations (fig. 1.17).<sup>228</sup> 'Technically it would be easy enough to rebuilt nearly all [churches]...just as they were', Hugh Casson explained. The question of what was meant by rebuilding them to 'just as they were' proved more vexing—'just as they were' before first built or 'just as they were' when bombed?<sup>229</sup> A more attractive solution, so the authors suggested, was to turn church ruins into open-air gardens. Preserving the *ruins* themselves was of vital importance, as it was in the ruins where the memorial-like qualities of open-air churches would resonate:

A ruin is more than a collection of débris. It is a place with its own individuality, charged with its own emotion and atmosphere, of drama, of grandeur, of nobility, or of charm. These qualities must be preserved as carefully as the broken stones which are their physical embodiment....Preservation is not wholly an archaeologist's job; it involves an understanding of the ruin *as* a ruin, and its creation as a work of art in its own right, keeping the essential form but enhancing them with an imaginative and appropriate background [sic].<sup>230</sup>

In order to function properly, the authors stressed, open-air ruins needed to embody something of the 'grandeur' that the lived experience of life under fire fostered. This would be demonstrated visually by the juxtaposition of the ruins alongside the healing presence of nature.

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<sup>225</sup> Süß, *Death from the Skies*, p. 297.

<sup>226</sup> 'City News & Notes. End Of The Lull', *City and East London Observer*, 1 September 1944, p. 1

<sup>227</sup> 'Ruined City Churches', *The Times*, 15 August 1944, p. 5.

<sup>228</sup> Hugh Casson, Brenda Colvin, and Jacques Groag, *Bombed Churches as War Memorials, with a Foreword by the Dean of St Paul's* (Cheam: Architectural Press, 1945).

<sup>229</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>230</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.



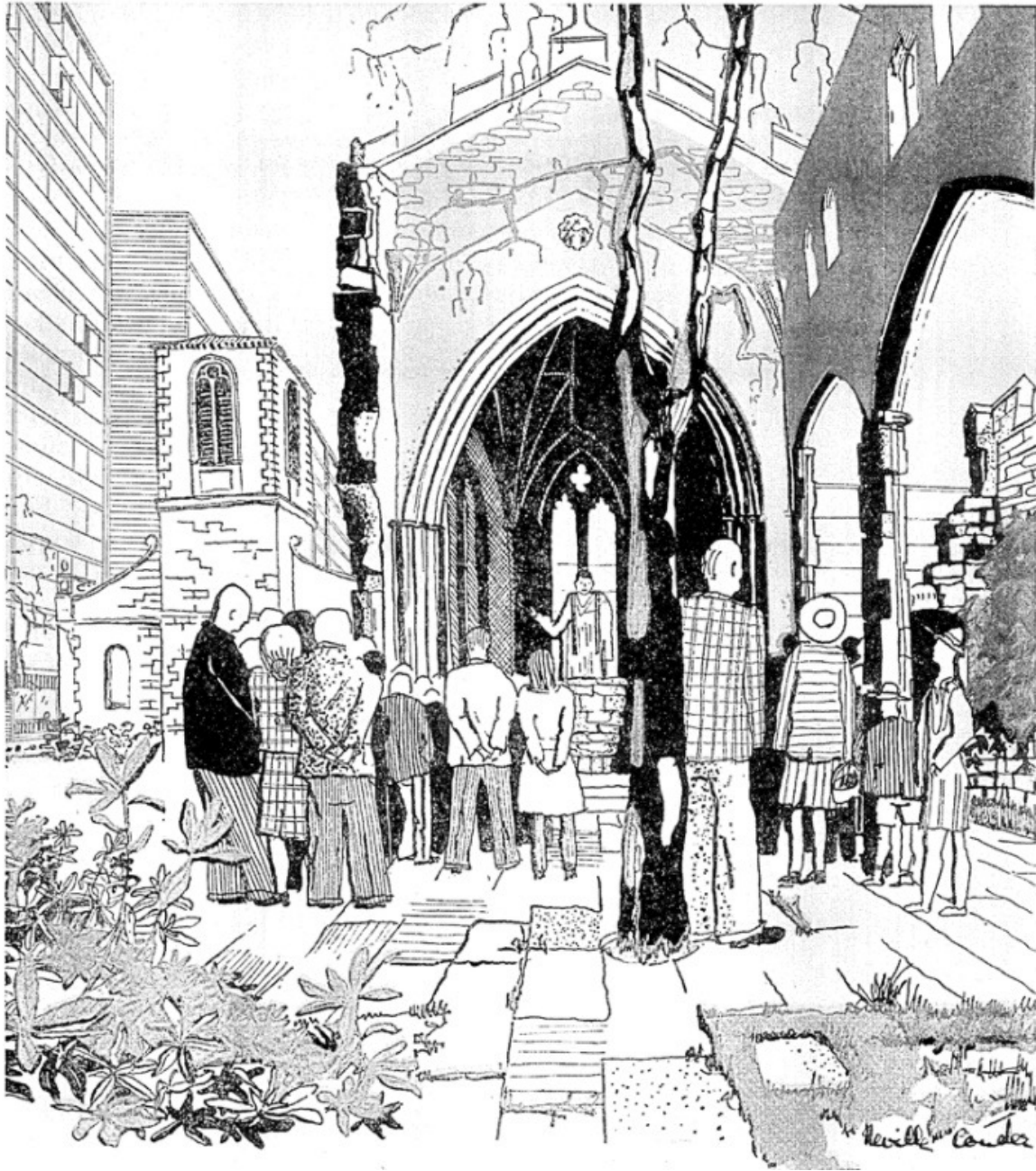


Figure 1.17 Illustration of St Alban's Church in Wood Street

Source: Casson, Colvin, and Groag, *Bombed Churches as War Memorials*, p. 12.

Similar debates ran within the local London press. In August 1944, the *City Press* issued a column on 'Ruined City Churches' which outlined the proposed preservation of City churches as sites of memory, to borrow Pierre Nora's phrase.<sup>231</sup> The theme was returned to in late August, this time on the front page and under the heading 'Ruined Churches: A Protest'. Disagreeing

<sup>231</sup> 'Ruined City Churches', *City Press*, 18 August 1944, p. 3; Pierre Nora, 'Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*', *Representations*, 26 (1989), pp. 7–24.

with the preservation of Blitzed ruins, Sir Herbert Baker—who, along with Edwin Lutyens, designed most of New Delhi's government structures argued:

An architect of living buildings should have a saddened feeling in dead ruins, and I found this feeling shared by Edwin Lutyens [best known for designing the Cenotaph in Whitehall] when we visited decayed cities together...Think of the state in a few years of such ruined walls in London, where the poisoned atmosphere will not allow kindly Nature to heal the wounds of war with her mosses and flowers...

Surely it would be possible to reanimate some parts of the old building as a war memorial shrine dedicated to the fallen of the parish, and a chapel for the continuity of religious service? There the old historic comments of the church would find shelter, or in some simple, modern building on the site, where rest and re-creation of the spirit might be found by City workers when driven by inclement weather from the gardens and open spaces on the old historic site.<sup>232</sup>

The complexity of the debate was overlaid by the sporadic yet destructive impact of the V-1 and V-2 rocket attacks. As the *City Press* highlighted in September 1944, contemporary discussions over imagined futures were compounded by the present experience of rocket attacks and past memories of bombing:

The damage recently done to Lincoln's Inn Chapel by a flying bomb recalls the fact that it is not the first time this quiet sanctuary of legal London has suffered from enemy action; for during the last war the great west window and one on the north side was shattered by a bomb. Consecrated in 1623, the Chapel, which was planned by Inigo Jones and later repaired by Sir Christopher Wren, has associations with many famous figures in the legal and political life of their day...<sup>233</sup>

The debate over the future of London's built environment proved a site for the mobilisation of ghosts as metaphor for reconstruction. At the heart of the debate lay tensions over the evocation of the capital as either 'living' or 'dead'. For individuals such as Sir Herbert Baker, the ruins of bombed buildings and churches needed to be repaired. The only way London could heal its war wounds was to remove their visible markers. Yet for others, including Kenneth Clark, T. S. Eliot, and John M. Keynes, liminal reminders of London's traumatic past through ruins served a specific purpose. They physicalised the 'people's war' by acting as constant reminders of the bravery and sacrifice made by ordinary people. In this sense, as Dietmar Süß notes, Christianity and the 'people's war' came together to form a particular religious narrative of destruction and reconstruction.<sup>234</sup> 'Rebuilding' London was therefore less about the *physical* reconstruction of the capital than capitalising on the extraordinary resolve its people had displayed. Through these debates, a more complex and temporally fluid brand of spirit emerged. Drawn from the immediate past and present,

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<sup>232</sup> 'Ruined Churches', *City Press*, 25 August 1944, p. 1.

<sup>233</sup> 'London Carried On', *City Press*, 8 September 1944, p. 1.

<sup>234</sup> Süß, *Death from the Skies*, p. 283.

they were deployed in a bid to help Londoners confront future challenges over rebuilding the postwar social order.

## CONCLUSION

Research on London's war has tended to emphasise contrasting pictures of culture under fire. Official agents and propagandists attempted to foster a 'taking it' mentality of stoicism, in which civilians were expected to prove themselves by enduring the devastation of bombardment. At the same time, darker landscapes of fear rendered the experience of air raids potentially traumatic. Considering the workings of 'ghosts' (and their multiple representative possibilities through links to national memory, the built environment, and psychology) highlights how cultural discourses around life under fire and its lived experience were by no means fundamental opposites. In some cases they overlapped significantly. In others, they jarred against one another uncomfortably.

Whilst Owen Davies is right to remind us that ghosts mean different things at different points in history, this chapter demonstrates the subtle differences between different *kinds* of ghosts.<sup>235</sup> 'Ghosts', 'spectres', 'wraiths', and 'spirit(s)' were not just conceptually different but served a multitude of purposes and functions. At times these were clearly defined and strategically adapted to the total war context, whereas in others they allude to tensions and divisions within the wartime city and nation. As Roger Chickering notes, both the justification of and preparation for life under fire required, in the eyes of state and cultural agents, an inversion of gendered wartime roles. Masculine notions of bravery including stoicism and steadfastness needed to be applied to the home front (traditionally seen as a feminine space) in order to prevent 'popular hysteria' caused by bombardment.<sup>236</sup> Centred on gendered expectations of civilian behaviour, official culture frequently sought the images, symbols, and nostalgia of the past in fashioning a 'civic spirit' strong enough to withstand the bombs. Yet the 'Blitz spirit' featured fundamentally divisive elements too. For one, its virtual abandonment by 1944 and 1945 meant that civilian sacrifice towards the tail-end of the war felt hollow compared to 1940–1941. Moreover, evocations of the illustrious past had complex implications for the local experience of life under fire within the capital. Depictions of the City in late December 1940, especially within the *City Press*, present

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<sup>235</sup> Davies, 'Ghosts', p. 343.

<sup>236</sup> Roger Chickering, 'Total War: The Use and Abuse of a Concept', in Manfred F. Boemeke, Roger Chickering, and Stig Förster (eds.), *Anticipating Total War: The German and American Experiences, 1871–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 28.



certain parts of London 'taking it' more proudly than others. Outside of grand narratives designed to bolster civilian resolve, metaphors of the 'ghostly' city became a powerful way for Londoners to process the changes in reality which unfolded around them. At the same time, however, the haunting aspects of sheltering and life in the blackout did much to divide civilians, entombing them in their own psychological 'landscapes of fear'.<sup>237</sup>

By considering how different 'ghosts' seeped into various aspects of the home front, a more complex picture of culture under fire begins to emerge. Wartime evocations of ghosts illustrate how representations, experiences, and memories of bombardment were born of a dialogue between state, culture, and people. At times these varied shapers of culture under fire chimed with one-another, whilst in others their differences proved jarring. Focusing on 'ghosts' as a metaphor for the disruption to civilian life (alongside its more obvious association with the war dead) highlights the multiplicity of historical realities in wartime London. Civilians who 'took it' lived alongside those who experienced a dark, distorted world. Both, as well as the grey spaces in-between them, are accurate depictions of life in the wartime capital.

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<sup>237</sup> Bell, 'Landscapes of Fear'.

*Total War? The Society for Psychical  
Research at mid-Century*

Metropolitan readings of the Second World War, most notably in the case of London, point towards the conflict's seemingly 'total' nature. Official, personal, and cultural narratives of the capital reveal war's presence within even the most intricate of spaces. The notion of 'total war' itself has a long and complex conceptual history,<sup>1</sup> often associated with Carl von Clausewitz's philosophical category of 'absolute' war.<sup>2</sup> Writing in the late-1960s Gordon Wright defined the 'ordeal' of the Second World War as 'paradigmatic', characterised by its unrivalled scope and scale.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, more recent reflections on the nature of total war make similar points. For Hew Strachan, what made the Second World War 'total' was its 'totality', its all-encompassing nature.<sup>4</sup> Yet another, equally significant aspect of total war illustrated in the previous chapter was its blurring of military and civilian targets. The home front became a legitimate, even preferential, space of war in this context in which men, women, and children were targeted in bids to shatter domestic resolve.<sup>5</sup> Describing

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<sup>1</sup> Debate on the nature of 'total' war in the First and Second World War contexts continues to attract considerable scholarly attention. For useful introductions to the concept, see John Horne, 'Introduction: Mobilizing for "Total War", 1914–1918', in John Horne (eds.), *State, Society and Mobilization in Europe during the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 1–18; Roger Chickering and Stig Förster (eds.), *Great War, Total War: Combat and Mobilization on the Western Front, 1914–1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Roger Chickering, Stig Förster, and Bernd Greiner (eds.), *A World at Total War: Global Conflict and the Politics of Deconstruction, 1937–1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Michael Geyer and Adam Tooze (eds.), *The Cambridge History of the Second World War*, vol. III: *Total War: Economy, Society and Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

<sup>2</sup> Michael Howard, 'Total War: Some Concluding Reflections', in Chickering, Förster, and Greiner (eds.), *A World at Total War*, p. 375.

<sup>3</sup> Gordon Wright, *The Ordeal of Total War, 1939–1945* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1986); Roger Chickering and Stig Förster, 'Are We There Yet? World War II and the Theory of Total War', in Chickering, Förster, and Greiner (eds.), *A World at Total War*, p. 1.

<sup>4</sup> Hew Strachan, 'Total War: The Conduct of War 1939–1945', in Chickering, Förster, and Greiner (eds.), *A World at Total War*, p. 33.

<sup>5</sup> Chickering and Förster, 'Are We There Yet?', p. 2.

the 1939–1945 conflict as a ‘total’ war carries methodological problems, however. As Strachan reminds us, different spheres of the war require different implementations of ‘totality’ as an organising concept.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, Roger Chickering and Stig Förster warn against its tendency to impose an unhelpful determinism onto secondary readings of the war. All too often, it implants a false sense of ‘full’ societal mobilisation (be it politically, culturally, economically, or militarily) which leaves little room for more sensitive arguments on the relationship between war and society. Whilst the category cannot and should not be fully rejected, it remains the work of historians to deploy its loaded meanings in more ‘cautious’ ways.<sup>7</sup>

The history of the Society for Psychical Research (hereafter SPR) represents an important site for thinking about the complex impact of war upon society. Concerned with investigating a range of phenomena ‘unrecognised by pre-existing theories’ through ‘scientific’ means, the relationship between the SPR and total war has tended to focus almost exclusively on the 1914–1918 period and its immediate aftermath.<sup>8</sup> Those that have mentioned the 1939–1945 conflict usually refer to the war as the beginning of the Society’s decline.<sup>9</sup> The silence of the Second World War within the SPR’s historiography is also reflected within its wartime research and operations. Located at the fringes of scientific and academic respectability, the SPR provided its members with something of an intellectual refuge from war.<sup>10</sup> It gave space to the discussion of ideas and theories largely outside the context of war and conflict; a continuation of its nineteenth century roots as a hobbyist Society funded and upheld by its members in their leisure time.<sup>11</sup>

Issues of class and gender remain integral to understanding the Society’s wartime workings. Examining the wartime workings of the SPR answers Juliette Pattinson’s, Arthur McIvor’s, and Linsey Robb’s call to recovering the diversity of civilian male experiences of the Second World War.<sup>12</sup> Although the SPR featured a number of high-ranking women throughout its history—most notably Eleanor Sidgwick, wife of the SPR’s co-founder Henry Sidgwick—its

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<sup>6</sup> Strachan, ‘Total War’, p. 34.

<sup>7</sup> Chickering and Förster, ‘Are We There Yet?’, p. 8.

<sup>8</sup> Brian Inglis, *Science and Parascience: A History of the Paranormal, 1914–1939* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1984); Elizabeth R. Valentine, ‘Spooks and Spoofs: Relations between Psychical Research and Academic Psychology in Britain in the Inter-War Period’, *History of the Human Sciences*, 25 (2011), pp. 67–90; Owen Davies, *A Supernatural War: Magic, Divination, and Faith during the First World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), ch. 3.

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, Valentine, ‘Spooks and Spoofs’, pp. 71–2.

<sup>10</sup> Seymour H. Mauskopf and Michael R. McVaugh, *Elusive Science: Origins of Experimental Psychical Research* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1980), p. 238.

<sup>11</sup> Renée Haynes, *The Society for Psychical Research, 1882–1982: A History* (London: Macdonald, 1982), p. 24.

<sup>12</sup> Pattinson, McIvor, and Robb, *Men in Reserve*; Robb and Pattinson (eds.), *Men, Masculinities, and Male Culture in the Second World War*.

internal function was principally male dominated. In the wartime context, many of its high-ranking scientist, mathematicians, and academics were exempt from military service through employment in leading British universities. Moreover, many professional scientists and mathematicians were hardly involved in the main technical operations of the war; as the state chose to draw on its internal resources in favour of outsourcing sensitive war work to external experts.<sup>13</sup> As Chris Smith usefully notes, the tropes of wartime masculinity rarely applied to the intellectual middle-classes. For the men of Bletchley Park stationed in culturally isolated war-work, for example, notions of gentlemanly scholarship took precedence over the ‘peripheral’ importance of the wartime context and formal rank.<sup>14</sup> The chapter argues that similar dynamics were at work within the SPR. Its male members were interested in psychical research as an aside to the pressing context of war. This interest had more in common with nineteenth century ideas on manly ‘character’ than any domesticating impulses underlying emergent ‘masculinity’.<sup>15</sup> The experience of the SPR’s male members therefore provides a very different picture of gender and class construction compared to more hegemonic notions of wartime patriotism and emotional selflessness demanded at the cultural level.<sup>16</sup> Focusing on the seemingly obscure interests of these academics and intellectuals allows us to better understand the open and contested nature of wartime masculinities across a broader range of classes and cultures.<sup>17</sup> At times these had little to do with the pressing context of war. In others, they overlapped with socio-political discourse on the nature of home front belief and its relationship to morale.

This chapter focuses on the history of the SPR broadly from the interwar period into the 1950s, centred around the crucial years between 1939 and 1945. Contextualising private letters and internal

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<sup>13</sup> David Edgerton, *Warfare State: Britain, 1920–1970* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 146, 161. For more on reserve occupations policy, see Juliette Pattinson, “‘Shirkers’, ‘Scrimjacks’ and ‘Scrimshanks’?: British Civilian Masculinity and Reserved Occupations, 1914–45”, *Gender & History*, 28 (2016), pp. 715–24.

<sup>14</sup> Chris Smith, “‘Bright Chaps for Hush-Hush Jobs’: Masculinity, Class and Civilians in Uniform at Bletchley Park”, in Robb and Pattinson, *Men, Masculinities, and Male Culture*, p. 147.

<sup>15</sup> On shifts from ‘manliness’ and ‘character’ to notions of ‘masculinity’ and ‘domestication’, see Alison Light, *Forever England: Femininity, Literature and Conservatism Between the Wars* (London: Routledge, 1991), pp. 8–10; Tosh, *Manliness and Masculinities*; idem, *A Man’s Place*. Also see Michael Roper and John Tosh (eds.), *Manful Assertions: Masculinities in Britain since 1800* (London: Routledge, 1991). On the need to consider multiple, overlapping notions of ‘masculinity’, see Francis, ‘The Domestication of the Male?’.

<sup>16</sup> Debate on working-class notions of civilian wartime masculinity typically stem from Sonya Rose’s concept of the ‘temperate’ hero. See Sonya O. Rose, ‘Temperate Heroes: Masculinity in Second World War Britain’, in Stephen Dudink, Karen Haggeman, and John Tosh (eds.), *Masculinity in Politics and War: Gendering Modern History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), pp. 177–95; Corinna Peniston-Bird, ‘Classifying the Body in the Second World War: British Men In and Out of Uniform’, *Body & Society*, 9 (2003), p. 45; Linsey Robb, *Men at Work*; Pattinson, McIvor, and Robb, *Men in Reserve*, p. 16.

<sup>17</sup> Pattinson, McIvor, and Robb, *Men in Reserve*, p. 4.

reports housed at the SPR archive and published outputs with wider cultural sources, it focuses attention on the limits of total war at the home front, and the implications this had for class and gender. It argues that the impact of war on and within the SPR was more ‘marbled’ than ‘total’. The presence and silence of war in this context are disruptive to standard notions of the relationship between war and society in the twentieth century. Alongside arguments on the impact of war, the chapter also makes more specific points on the mechanisms and tensions which drove the SPR in the mid-century. Instead of simply dismissing the SPR as ‘pseudo-science’,<sup>18</sup> it follows Foucauldian-inspired interrogations of the complex relationship between knowledge, power, and science.<sup>19</sup> In its quest for scientific respectability by accessing ‘subjugated knowledge’, a term Foucault uses to demark ‘disqualified’ or ‘inadequate’ knowledges beneath the required levels of ‘cognition and scientificity’, certain SPR members developed a devotional, and at times fanatical, belief in the scientism of psychical research.<sup>20</sup> Boundaries between belief and science within the Society’s wartime work were porous. This was an extension of the same trends which underpinned its formation in the 1880s, providing a very different form of belief during a specific period of ‘modernity’.<sup>21</sup> The chapter begins by tracking the origins of psychical research in Britain and the creation of the SPR. It continues to explore links between psychical research and spiritualism/‘witchcraft’. It then explores the relationship between the psychical and psychological within the wartime SPR—first considering its limited work on wartime hauntings before turning to its broader concern with extra-sensory perception and ‘parapsychology’.

#### THE ROOTS OF PSYCHICAL RESEARCH IN BRITAIN

The growth and interest in psychical research in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was closely connected with the rise of spiritualism and spiritualist societies. Arriving in England from America in the early 1850s, members and followers of spiritualism came from across the social spectrum—with the radically minded ‘plebeians’ of the North of England forming its largest

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<sup>18</sup> Trevor H. Hall, *The Strange Case of Edmund Gurney* (London: Duckworth, 1964), *passim*.

<sup>19</sup> In particular, see Roger Cooter, *The Cultural Meaning of Popular Science: Phrenology and the Organisation of Consent in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

<sup>20</sup> Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972–1977* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), pp. 81–2.

<sup>21</sup> Janet Oppenheim, *The Other World: Spiritualism and Psychical Research in England, 1850–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 59–204.

support base.<sup>22</sup> At the heart of the spiritualist turn lay questions surrounding survival after death.<sup>23</sup> ‘Proof’ of communication with the dead and discarnate spirits, so spiritualism suggested, offered a restoration of traditional Christian values weakened by the growth of modern science.<sup>24</sup> Yet many also viewed it as a lamentable part of Victorian cultural life.<sup>25</sup> Spiritualism’s popular perception as an elusive, and potentially dangerous and degenerative, new religion made it a rich source for scientific investigation in the late-1880s. Upholding it to the standards of modern science appealed to a number of interested parties for varied reasons. For many spiritualists, the chance of obtaining scientific validity for the existence of spirits proved a major incentive to go ‘under the microscope’. The motivations of psychical researchers were even more diverse. Many wanted to prove the fraudulence of professional and amateur mediums. Others were simply intellectually curious in the phenomenon, whilst a number of scientists believed investigating mediums could push the frontiers of scientific understanding.<sup>26</sup> Scientists only needed to look to phenomena within the séance room for inspiration. By the 1870s, the domestic séance had advanced to include clairvoyance, table rapping and code messaging, the professed spirits of the dead and the ‘levitation’ of objects by ‘spirits’.<sup>27</sup> Such psycho-psychical ‘phenomena’ appealed to psychologists (through telepathy, hallucinations, and automatism), physicists (telekinesis and various optical, acoustical, electrical and thermal effects) and physiologists (materialised spirits and ectoplasm).<sup>28</sup> Yet science was not the only contributing discipline to the newly emerging field of psychical research in the nineteenth century.<sup>29</sup> An eclectic mixture of historical criticism, jurisprudence, and philosophy merged with scientific theories. Whilst the issue of post-mortem survival dominated the early focus of psychical research, the question of how this should be approached methodologically remained contested.<sup>30</sup>

The SPR was neither the first nor only organised society concerned with the study of psychical phenomena in Britain. Founded in 1875 by the lawyer Edward Cox, the Psychological Society of Great Britain (PSGB) was concerned with emancipating psychical research from the grip of

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<sup>22</sup> See Barrow, *Independent Spirits*.

<sup>23</sup> Hazelgrove, *Spiritualism and British Society*, p. 23.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. On the overlaps between ‘secular’ and ‘religious’ spiritualism, see Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning*, ch. 3.

<sup>25</sup> Richard Noakes, ‘Spiritualism, Science and the Supernatural in Mid-Victorian Britain’, in Nicola Brown, Carolyn Burdett, and Pamela Thurschwell (eds.), *The Victorian Supernatural* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 27.

<sup>26</sup> Noakes, ‘Spiritualism, Science and the Supernatural’, p. 27.

<sup>27</sup> Valentine, ‘Spooks and Spoofs’, p. 70.

<sup>28</sup> Richard Noakes, ‘Haunted Thoughts of the Careful Experimentalist: Psychical Research and the Troubles of Experimental Physics’, *Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences*, 48 (2014), p. 46.

<sup>29</sup> Valentine, ‘Spooks and Spoofs’, p. 70.

<sup>30</sup> Noakes, ‘Haunted Thoughts of the Careful Experimentalist’, p. 46.

spiritualists and occultists by exposing psychic phenomena to scientific investigation.<sup>31</sup> Whilst the PSGB stalled, falling into obscurity by 1879, Cox's early efforts to professionalise the field stood as an important precursor to the SPR. The SPR was founded seven years later at a meeting held at the headquarters of the British National Spiritualist Alliance by a group of scientists and philosophers at Trinity College, Cambridge.<sup>32</sup> Concerned with phenomena 'unrecognised by pre-existing theories', it professed to approach 'these various [psychical] problems without prejudice or prepossession of any kind...which has enabled Science to solve so many problems'.<sup>33</sup> A committee was soon established under the chairmanship of Sir William Barrett, Professor of Experimental Physics at the Royal College of Science of Ireland and vocal advocate for organised psychical investigation. Edmund Gurney, Henry Sidgwick, and F. W. H. Myers whose friendship stemmed from undergraduate days at Cambridge sat on the committee.<sup>34</sup> As its first point of business, the committee firmly rejected a motion to include the word 'occult' within the title of the Society, agreeing that the SPR should not take an official position on explanations behind psychical phenomena.<sup>35</sup> Despite the Society's wide-ranging interest in thought-reading, mesmerism, Reichenbach experiments (investigations into an 'odic' force) and apparitions/haunted houses its initial purpose was to investigate (and for some of its members validate) the work of spiritualists.<sup>36</sup> From its inception, the SPR claimed an 'acceptable scientific methodology'.<sup>37</sup> Yet an agreed, central approach to this was never achieved. Early members meshed psychological and theological arguments, turning the SPR into a 'surrogate faith'.<sup>38</sup> Questions over what kind of evidence should be used, quantitative or qualitative, went unresolved at the heart of the Society's bid to challenge materialist dogma.

Whilst the SPR was able to maintain the perception of being an ostensible scientific society, the first twenty years of its operations were largely fruitless.<sup>39</sup> It was during and after the First

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<sup>31</sup> For more on the PSGB's history, see Egil Asprem, 'A Nice Arrangement of Heterodoxies: William McDougall and the Professionalisation of Psychical Research', *Journal of the History of the Behavioural Sciences*, 46 (2010), p. 127.

<sup>32</sup> Haynes, *The Society for Psychical Research*, p. xiii.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>36</sup> Oppenheim, *The Other World*, p. 141; Mauskopf and McVaugh, *The Illusive Science*, p. 112. Much has been written on the Society's early years, along with biographies of its founder members. On the broader activities of the Society during the period, see Alan Gauld, *The Founders of Psychical Research* (London: Routledge and Keegan Paul, 1968); Mauskopf and McVaugh, *The Elusive Science*; Oppenheim, *The Other World*; Owen, *The Darkened Room*.

<sup>37</sup> Oppenheim, *The Other World*, p. 131.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 152.

<sup>39</sup> Asprem, 'A Nice Arrangement of Heterodoxies', p. 128.

World War that the SPR, and psychical research more broadly, reached its zenith.<sup>40</sup> Leading members including the scientist Sir Oliver Lodge and the author Sir Arthur Conan Doyle both lost relatives in the trenches. The creation of various centres of psychical research in Britain and mainland Europe during the interwar years attest to the psychological dislocation created by 'total war'. In 1919, for example, the *Institut Métapsychique International* was established in Paris; the British College of Psychical Science in 1920; Harry Price's Laboratory of Psychical Research in 1926; and the International Institute for Psychical Research in 1934. Moreover, references to 'psychical research' within both scientific and mainstream publications also peaked in the 1920s and 1930s, highlighting a universal need for answers surrounding death and transcendence.<sup>41</sup> Although the SPR's membership reached a high in 1920, by 1930 its numbers had dropped by almost half.<sup>42</sup> At this stage the Society began facing a range of internal fractures over its direction and methodological approach in relation to the question of survival.<sup>43</sup> Leading into the Second World War period, and before the professionalisation of modern parapsychology, the SPR was still deeply divided on core issues relating to theory and method.<sup>44</sup>

## THE SOCIETY FOR PSYCHICAL RESEARCH AT MID-CENTURY

### *Internal Tensions and Contested Methods*

Tensions originating in the interwar period continued to underscore the SPR's wartime debates. Metaphysical and methodological issues on the question of survival created internal fractures, splitting the 'left wing' of the Society (spiritualists and those dedicated to exploring the potential for survival) and the more conservative 'right'.<sup>45</sup> By the early twentieth century the number of spiritualists once affiliated with the SPR had greatly reduced in size, owing to the growth of the Society's scientific membership.<sup>46</sup> Ever smaller numbers were committed to supporting survivalist theories, with heated attacks on those who did, highlighting the limits of the organisation's commitment to maintaining a non-partisan forum of debate. The pull towards dominant 'positions' was noted by B. Abdy Collins, a prominent spiritualist (editor of the spiritualist journal *Psychic*

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<sup>40</sup> See Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning*, ch 3.

<sup>41</sup> Valentine, 'Spooks and Spoofs', p. 71.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., pp. 71–2.

<sup>44</sup> Asprey, 'A Nice Arrangement of Heterodoxies', p. 125.

<sup>45</sup> Valentine, 'Spooks and Spoofs', p. 71.

<sup>46</sup> Malcolm Gaskill, *Hellish Nell: Last of Britain's Witches* (London: Fourth Estate, 2001), p. 115.



*News* between 1941 and 1945) and member of various psychical research councils including the SPR and the International Institute for Psychical Investigation. Raising the question of whether proof of survival was possible posed a necessary challenge to the dominant, anti-survivalist orthodoxy of members such as E. R. Dodds, Regius Professor of Greek at Oxford.<sup>47</sup> The Society, Collins stressed, should avoid taking 'dominant', fixed positions:

My main object in writing the paper was as a protest against the attitude adopted by Professor Dodds that the only evidence [for survival] worth discussion is that received through mediums, and his statement that physical phenomena "do not come much in question here, since the great majority of them do not afford even *prima facie* evidence of survival." Although the Society as such professes to have no views, this is the view that seems now to guide those with influence in it.<sup>48</sup>

Collins continued his critique of the Society more broadly in stating that the Journal's editorial team refused to circulate his paper, which he felt would allow members to 'judge [his argument] for themselves'.<sup>49</sup>

Collins' identification of a dominant pull away from exploring evidence for survival can be seen within the upper-echelons of the SPR. In line with emerging parapsychological studies, growing numbers were concerned with exploring telepathy between the living than evidence of survival.<sup>50</sup> Responses to H. F. Saltmarsh's 'Ambiguities in the Question of Survival', written in 1941, reveals the extent of internal hostility to its question being raised. A businessman by background, Saltmarsh joined the SPR in 1921 before quickly being elevated to its council as financial officer.<sup>51</sup> Several works on survival theories were penned during the 1930s before the 'Ambiguities' article.<sup>52</sup> After questioning the 'ambiguities' and 'tacit assumptions' of those who investigated survival, Saltmarsh concluded that: 'For myself...I hold provisionally that there is evidence enough to establish a moderate probability that physical death does not always entail complete destruction of the psychical element'.<sup>53</sup> Such tentative and 'provisional' conclusions received a mauling from

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<sup>47</sup> For more on Dodds' background, see Donald Russell, 'Eric Robertson Dodds, 1893–1979', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 67 (1981), pp. 357–70.

<sup>48</sup> B. Abdy Collins, 'Mr Collins' Pamphlet', *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research* (hereafter *JSPR*), 32 (March 1941), p. 46. Also see Collins' piece in *Proceedings*, 'Is Proof of Survival Possible?', *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research* (hereafter *PSPR*) 46 (165) (1940–1941), pp. 361–76. For Dodds' original piece, see E. R. Dodds, 'Why I do not Believe in Survival', *PSPR*, 42 (135) (1934), pp. 147–72.

<sup>49</sup> Collins, 'Mr Collins' Pamphlet', p. 48.

<sup>50</sup> On the invention of telepathy in the early-1880s, and its historical significance, see Roger Luckhurst, *The Invention of Telepathy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

<sup>51</sup> For more on Saltmarsh, see Mauskopf and McVaugh, *The Illusive Science*, pp. 118–20.

<sup>52</sup> See, for example, Herbert Francis Saltmarsh, *Evidence of Personal Survival from Cross Correspondences* (London: G. Bell & Sons, 1938).

<sup>53</sup> H. F. Saltmarsh, 'Ambiguities in the Question of Survival', *PSPR*, 46 (165) (1940–1941), p. 346, 360.

the more sceptical members of the Society. Donald J. West, future Research Officer and President of the SPR, queried the evidential basis of the theory:

SIR,—On reading in the latest issue of *Proceedings* the paper entitled “Ambiguity in the Question of Survival”, I could not help but remark how the conclusions drawn depended more upon the author’s opinions than upon the reasonings of the paper...Mr Saltmarsh contends that death must involve considerable changes in the personality undergoing that process...This contention appears to be merely a matter of personal opinion.<sup>54</sup>

Erik Palmstierna, Swedish Social Democratic politician and overseas member of the SPR, went a stage further by calling into question the impact of Saltmarsh’s unscrupulous work on psychical research as a discipline: ‘His [Saltmarsh’s] main argument seems to rest on an assumption of the relation between soul and body which is very doubtful, and which, so far as I can see, must in the end seriously handicap psychical research’.<sup>55</sup> For Abdy Collins Saltmarsh’s conclusions, based on mathematical probability, suggested ‘no logical proof of survival...at present’.<sup>56</sup> Yet Collins misunderstood the reason why Saltmarsh had asked the question in the first place. He hoped that psychical research would yield nothing metaphysical but establish a solid basis for a science of ethics.<sup>57</sup> The clash between Collins and Saltmarsh reveals something more than mere differences of opinion on the purpose of psychical research. It illustrates how personal egos were easily wounded over the most intricate of issues. Fractures within the wartime SPR ran deep; resulting in open and scathing attacks on personal character and professional competence.

The exchange between Collins and Saltmarsh exposes another fundamental point of contention within the mid-century SPR, pertaining to types and quality of evidence. For Saltmarsh, only ‘sufficiently perfect evidence’, quantifiable and reliable, could point to the existence of survival. Scientific and mathematical attempts to unlock psychical secrets underpinned the broader shift towards telepathy studies and mind-reading. The prestige of the laboratory pulled many towards the search for verifiable and repeatable data. ‘Thanks largely to the adoption of the methods of the psychological laboratory’, the mathematician and long-time SPR associate Samuel Soal stressed, ‘first-class experimental evidence for both telepathy and clairvoyance as well as evidence for precognition is steadily accumulating’.<sup>58</sup> Yet suggesting that the SPR’s mid-century activities split neatly between quantitative work on telepathy and qualitative research on survival over-

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<sup>54</sup> D. J. West, ‘Correspondence: The Question of Survival’, *JSPR*, 32 (November–December 1941), pp. 120–21.

<sup>55</sup> Erik Palmstierna, ‘Correspondence: The Question of Survival’, *JSPR*, 32 (January–February 1942), p. 144.

<sup>56</sup> Collins, ‘Is Proof of Survival Possible?’, p. 361.

<sup>57</sup> Mauskopf and McVaugh, *The Illusive Science*, p. 120.

<sup>58</sup> S. G. Soal, ‘Correspondence’, *JSPR*, 32 (March 1941), p. 42.

simplifies the complex and confused methodologies at work. Writing on 'The Position of Psychical Research' in 1939, the then President W. H. Salter noted its focus on telepathy was not deliberately designed to disprove arguments for survival (although this was probably said more in hope than confidence):

...many spiritualists suppose that the amount of attention that our Society has always devoted to the question of telepathy is indicative of a desire on the part of the leading members of the Society to put it up as a plausible defence against belief in spiritualism. As a plain matter of history this is of course absurd. Among the pioneers of the Society none did more to press the case for telepathy than Sir William Barrett and F. W. H. Myers, both convinced believers in survival and communication.<sup>59</sup>

It was the squaring of 'telepathy' as exclusively meaning telepathy 'between the living' which caused such internal friction, Salter urged.<sup>60</sup> Moreover, others believed that synergy between qualitative and quantitative data was vital. The mathematician G. M. N. Tyrrell, for example, argued that psychical research had a qualitative root. Elected as a member of the council in 1940 (after first joining in 1908), Tyrrell previously attended London University gaining degrees in physics and mathematics.<sup>61</sup> Initially specialising in the quantitative study of telepathy and precognition, Tyrrell's interests in 'psychical' activity broadened to include apparitions and their theoretical underpinnings by the mid-century. More than most within the SPR, he argued that attention should not be centred on accumulating large volumes of data but working through and understanding 'psychical phenomena' theoretically. 'Our difficulty in understanding...[psychical phenomena] is not that it is complex but that it is *qualitatively new to us*. The difficulty is one of unfamiliarity...It is a *qualitative* and not a *quantitative* difficulty [emphasis original]'.<sup>62</sup> If statistical data were to be included, it needed to support rather than overshadow the qualitative.<sup>63</sup> The act of introducing statistical evidence into psychical research does not '*ipso facto*' render it scientific, Tyrrell stressed, due to much qualitative work having strong scientific roots. The question for the psychical researcher, therefore, was to ask whether statistical analysis would help elucidate their position.<sup>64</sup>

Despite the promise of Tyrrell's call for a methodological balance, tensions within the Society continued to haunt its activities into the latter stages of the war. Debates over what constituted true 'scientific' psychical research, and what kinds of evidence psychical researchers should

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<sup>59</sup> W. H. Salter, 'The Position of Psychical Research', *JSPR*, 31 (October 1939), pp. 109–10.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 110.

<sup>61</sup> For more on Tyrrell's background, see Mauskopf and McVaugh, *The Illusive Science*, p. 220.

<sup>62</sup> G. M. N. Tyrrell, 'Quantitative and Qualitative Methods of Research', *JSPR*, 33 (May–June 1944), p. 61.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

concern themselves with, remained unresolved. In a letter of correspondence to the Editor of the SPR's *Journal*, two new members—Laurence and Phoebe Bendit—eloquently summarised the state of the SPR's intellectual climate and internal dynamics:

for some years we have felt that a time must soon come when it [the Society] would have to take stock of itself and its position in the scientific world...The crux of the matter seems to be whether we are allowed to consider new ways to approach the problems of the human psyche, which involve the subjective experience, or whether we are to be compelled to stick closer to...objective assessment.<sup>65</sup>

The 'highly vocal' scientific purists needed to acknowledge, so the Bendits claimed, that science itself had changed immeasurably with the growth of psychology. 'Here the scientific mind ("scientific" means knowledge making, let us remember) had [has] to adopt a new standpoint'.<sup>66</sup> Accepting that 'critical standards must be upheld', the couple deplored the 'narrow dogmatic channel' of those who shaped intellectually respectable opinions within the Society. A cursory glance at some of the key tensions within the wartime SPR would suggest internal discrepancies over theory, method, and evidence remained entrenched between 1939 and 1945. Despite irreconcilable schisms internally, many of the SPR's leading members remained highly active during the war years, pursuing individual research interests.

#### *Membership and Council in the mid-Century*

The 1938–1939 edition of the Society's *Proceedings* helps to paint a picture of its membership in the early months of the war, as well as its officers and council members. Excluding corresponding members and honorary associates, the SPR had a total membership of 666 in December 1939 from across the UK and overseas (see tab. 2.1).<sup>67</sup> Members were drawn from the professional middle-class and the upper working-class,<sup>68</sup> although by the mid twentieth century the number of working-class members connected to the SPR through spiritualism had diminished. The SPR attracted a diverse body of followers including academics, scientists, and engineers such as the zoologist Julian Huxley and the Leeds Professor of Philosophy John Wilfred Harvey; clergymen,

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<sup>65</sup> Laurence J. Bendit and Phoebe D. Bendit, 'Correspondence', *JSPR*, 33 (March–April 1945), pp. 122–23.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 123.

<sup>67</sup> 'Members and Associates, December 1939', *PSPR*, 45 (160) (1938–1939), pp. 351–69. In the early twentieth century, members were charged 'two guineas annually' (further bolstering the SPR's aristocratic perception) whilst associates were charged 'one guinea' annually). Both members and associates needed to be elected by majority of the SPR council, and recommended for election by two SPR members or associates. Members had additional privileges above associates, including borrowing rights from the SPR library, voting on Council elections, and attendance at Council meetings. See Michael Sage, *Mrs. Piper and the Society for Psychical Research* (London: R. Brimley Johnson, 1903), 'Objects of the Society'.

<sup>68</sup> Oppenheim, *The Other World*, p. 29.

most notably the Dean of St Paul's Cathedral Walter Matthews; and cultural figures such as the wartime naval intelligence officer and later creator of *James Bond*, Ian Fleming.<sup>69</sup> Statistics on the makeup of the Society point to its gender imbalance. In 1940, the number of male members and associates outnumbered their female counterparts 359 to 242.<sup>70</sup> By its own admission, the SPR struggled under 'great and increasing difficulties' during the early years of the war, although membership numbers remained relatively static until after the war (see tab. 2.2).<sup>71</sup> By early 1949, almost 1,000 members were connected with the SPR, signalling a modest increase in its popularity.

The SPR's wartime difficulties were inherently tied to its metropolitan base. Its headquarters were located at 31 Tavistock Square, Bloomsbury, whilst the majority of its membership were also situated in and around the capital. London's front-line position not only impacted on the running of the SPR's internal machinery (particularly in terms of paper shortage and publication speeds) but it also presented its small membership with a more pressing situational reality. Other concentrated areas of membership were located in Oxford and Cambridge—with the Cambridge links to the Society stretching into the twentieth century with the creation of the Perrot Warrwick Studentship in Psychical Research at Trinity College in 1940.<sup>72</sup> Despite the high concentration of members in southern England the SPR retained a highly international outlook, with corresponding members across Europe and the United States.<sup>73</sup>

Presidency of the Society changed hands three times between 1939 and 1945, although it retained a steady number of prominent council members which dominated internal debates. The philosopher H. H. Price (not to be confused with *Harry Price*) took the reins from 1939 to 1941, the Cambridge psychologist R. H. Thouless between 1942–1944, and the mathematician G. N. M. Tyrrell from 1945 to 1946.<sup>74</sup> By the mid-century, the upper echelons of the council were increasingly dominated by Cambridge based academics, including the philosopher C. D. Broad, R. H. Thouless, Walter Whately Carington and S. G. Soal (Soal moved to Cambridge

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<sup>69</sup> 'Annual Report of the Council for 1940', *JSPR*, 32 (January–February 1941), p. 2.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>72</sup> Haynes, *The Society for Psychical Research*, p. 231.

<sup>73</sup> 'Members and Associates, December 1939', *PSPR*, 45 (1938–1939), p. 352.

<sup>74</sup> Biographies of the Presidents can be found in Haynes, *The Society for Psychical Research*, pp. 211–14.

## *The Society for Psychical Research at mid-Century*

**Table 1.1** Table illustrating the number of members and associates of the SPR, December 1939

	Members	Associates	Members and Associates
Male	270	89	359
Female	173	69	242
Librarians/Other	27	38	65
Total	470	196	666

Source: 'Members and Associates, December 1939', *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research*, 45 (1938–1939), pp. 351–69.

**Table 1.2** Table illustrating the fluctuation in total members of the SPR, 1940–1949

Date/Report	Total Membership
early-1940 Annual Report of the Council (ARC) for 1939	654
early-1941 ARC for 1940	606
early-1942 ARC for 1941	576
early-1943 ARC for 1942	582
early-1944 ARC for 1943	588
early-1945 ARC for 1944	612
early-1946 ARC for 1945	673
early-1947 ARC for 1946	764
early-1948 ARC for 1947	869
early-1949 ARC for 1948*	947

\* Post-1949 SPR annual reports were sent privately to members and ceased to appear within the *Journal*.

Source: 'Annual Report of the Council for 1939', *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research* (hereafter *JSPR*), 31 (January–February 1940), p. 141; 'Annual Report of the Council for 1940', *JSPR*, 32 (January–February 1941), p. 10; 'Annual Report of the Council for 1941', *JSPR*, 32 (January–February 1942), p. 133; 'Annual Report of the Council for 1942', *JSPR*, 33 (January–February 1943), p. 7; 'Annual Report of the Council for 1943', *JSPR*, 33 (January–February 1944), pp. 47–8; 'Annual Report of the Council for 1944', *JSPR*, 33 (January–February 1945), p. 106; 'Annual Report of the Council for 1945', *JSPR*, 33 (January–February 1946), p. 189; 'Annual Report of the Council for 1946', *JSPR*, 34 (January–February 1947), p. 6; 'Annual Report of the Council for 1947', *JSPR*, 34 (January 1948), p. 152; 'Annual Report of the Council for 1948', *JSPR*, 34 (January–February 1949), p. 7.

from London at the outset of the war).<sup>75</sup> Some survivalists sat on the council—notably those connected with the Society's earlier phases including Sir Oliver Lodge—but by the war years its empirical tradition and scepticism of survival was firmly cemented. As the chapter explores a number of these individuals and their work in more depth, we see how the mid-century work

<sup>75</sup> 'Members and Associates, December 1939', p. 351.

of the SPR slotted into a broader, yet historically specific, story about the governance of knowledge and control of the human psyche.

### SPIRITUALISM AND PHYSICAL MEDIUMSHIP

The impact of total war has often been associated with spiritualism's 'high water mark' in the 1930s, to borrow Geoffrey Nelson's phrase.<sup>76</sup> The depth of engagement with spiritualism and mediumship in the interwar period led psychical researchers inside and outside the SPR to explore (and frequently expose) the physical manifestation of spirits. Yet the scholarly engagement with the movement tends to slip-off into the 1940s, supported by statistical evidence.<sup>77</sup> Between 1939 and 1941, for example, the number of registered members of the Spiritualist National Union (SNU) declined from around 14,000 to just over 10,000, with signs of a slight increase by the end of the war.<sup>78</sup> Despite the downward turn of organised spiritualism physical mediums were in demand 'as never before' between 1939 and 1945, during a war in which the scale of killing was smaller but popular anxieties mushroomed.<sup>79</sup> Within MO's wartime panel, moreover, the number of people who believed in life after death grew from 35 per cent in 1940 to 45 per cent in 1942, with the total number of disbelievers declining from 38 per cent to 23 per cent.<sup>80</sup> It was in this context which mediumship became a site of contention for psychical researchers inside and outside the SPR, as *perceptions* of death and dying were more significant than the total number of deaths. Attitudes towards death became more complex compared to the First World War, as death's impact was democratised. Increased belief in life after death between 1940–1942 can largely be attributed to the impact of aerial bombardment at the home front (coupled with growing military fatalities), whilst spiritualism's short-lived postwar revival appeared in response to civilian emotional anxieties over lost military personnel during demobilisation.

In March 1940, following a séance held in Torquay, the SPR received a letter from a 'Mrs Martin' who claimed to have been the subject of a hoax.<sup>81</sup> Action against a 'fraudulent' medium was requested on the part of the SPR, to which a less than sympathetic response was received.

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<sup>76</sup> Geoffrey K. Nelson, *Spiritualism and Society* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969), p. 167.

<sup>77</sup> Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning*, pp. 54–77; Hazelgrove, *Spiritualism and British Society*; Georgia Byrne, *Modern Spiritualism and the Church of England, 1850–1939* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2010). For a rare exception, see Chambers, 'Fighting Chance', ch. 4–6.

<sup>78</sup> Nelson, *Spiritualism and Society*, pp. 285–6.

<sup>79</sup> Gaskill, *Hellish Nell*, p. 176, 174.

<sup>80</sup> Field, 'Puzzled People Revisited', p. 455.

<sup>81</sup> Gaskill, *Hellish Nell*, p. 186.

The SPR, Martin was told, did not exist to identify frauds but to investigate ‘genuine [psychical] phenomena’.<sup>82</sup> Yet the reality was less clear-cut than the responding letter would suggest. Whilst investigations of physical mediumship had become less fashionable by the era of the Second World War compared to studies in telepathic communication, Society members who continued to explore its workings did so for varied reasons. For empiricists such as Donald West investigations of physical mediumship were precisely focused on exposing their fraudulence, and the pseudo-scientific methods of psychical researchers who concluded their work was bona fide. A more sympathetic, or at least less-hostile, treatment came from individuals such as B. Abdy Collins. West and Collins epitomise the diversity of opinion within the wartime SPR, representing its right and left-wings. Disparity in their approach towards physical mediumship can be seen in their focus on one individual in particular—Helen Duncan, the ‘last’ of Britain’s ‘witches’.

*The Rise and Fall of Helen Duncan*

Helen’s rise to prominence, and notoriety with the state, began long before the war. Dubbed the ‘child prophet’ of Perthshire, Helen was born to an upper-working class household in Callander, Scotland in the late nineteenth century.<sup>83</sup> Warnings by her mother to suppress early signs of what appeared to be clairvoyant abilities were ignored.<sup>84</sup> Ostracism at school led to the intensification of sudden outbursts of rage.<sup>85</sup> Although Helen was only seventeen at the coming of war in 1914 she predicted, to the disagreement of her father, that the conflict would continue for at least three to four more years.<sup>86</sup> By the 1920s Helen turned her proclivity to clairvoyance into a profession. Early seances involved psychometry (divining information from vibrations in inanimate objects), but by the end of the 1920s she had mastered the full production of ‘ectoplasm’ (the physical ‘trace’ of spirits).<sup>87</sup> Yet the creation of various Scottish spiritualist circles in Dundee, Glasgow, and Edinburgh (where Helen lived with her husband Henry) led to run-ins with the law by the 1930s. Accusations of fraudulence at a séance held in March 1932 resulted in a fine of £10 (or one month’s imprisonment) by the judge Sherriff Macdonald KC of the Sheriff Summary Court of the Lothians and Peebles, Edinburgh, in May.<sup>88</sup> Expert evidence was given against Helen by Harry

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<sup>82</sup> Gaskill, *Hellish Nell*, p. 186.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 74, 99.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 158–9.



Price, one of the most famous psychical researchers of the era, resulting in a popular backlash against her within the local Scottish press.<sup>89</sup>

It was not until the 1940s, however, that Helen's work became more widely recognised. Her hounding by the state was intimately tied to the context of heightened tensions over security and morale. Following the sinking of HMS *Barham* in late-November 1941, a series of séances within the Portsmouth Spiritualist circle (where Helen found additional work from the beginning of the war) resulted in the 'materialisation' of several of its deceased crew members.<sup>90</sup> Given *Barham's* connections to Portsmouth this was unsurprising, with the séance room providing a powerful site for the soothing of grief. Yet the authorities' decision to suppress all public information on the *Barham's* sinking, fearing its repercussions on domestic morale, posed a significant problem. If news travelled on the manifestation of *Barham's* 'spirits', a deep well of potentially aggressive rumour could inadvertently erupt.<sup>91</sup> Although the authorities were suspicious of other potential threats to public morale through rumour generation, it was female mediums who were directly targeted by the state. At the 'rock bottom' of every police action taken against them, a Home Office memorandum stated in late-1943, was the prevention of imposters 'exploiting credulous members of the public'.<sup>92</sup> Increased police surveillance on Helen coincided with an increase in mediumship prosecutions. As Jose Harris makes clear, the organs of political power in wartime Britain, notably the police force, still added up to the exclusively 'masculine state' of the early nineteenth century—masculine state power which continued to target the private worlds of women as it had done since the 1870s.<sup>93</sup> In May 1942, for example, Stella Hughes of Hampstead was fined £10 including costs under the 1824 Vagrancy Act; a charge condemned by B. Abdy Collins in light of loose laws on print astrology and fortune tellers. Moreover, in 1943 charges of fraud were brought against various mediums in Birmingham, Cardiff, and Yarmouth.<sup>94</sup> A dual chauvinism, it would seem, underscored both state and wider societal assumptions about women in wartime—frequently viewed as the most susceptible to, and one of the primary causes of, depressed domestic morale.

Helen's trial under the Witchcraft Act of 1735 in 1944 came in response to a steadily increasing push to flush out fraudulent pariahs and tighten domestic security by the police, state,

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<sup>89</sup> Gaskill, *Hellish Nell*, pp. 160–1.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 177, 183.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 183–6.

<sup>92</sup> TNA, Records of the Metropolitan Police Office (MEPO) 2/9158, memo dated 2 December 1943.

<sup>93</sup> Harris, *Private Lives, Public Spirit*, pp. 216–7.

<sup>94</sup> Gaskill, *Hellish Nell*, pp. 187–8.

and military.<sup>95</sup> The trial began at the Portsmouth Magistrates Court but was subsequently moved to the Old Bailey beginning on 23 March 1944. In its imposition of the Witchcraft Act, the prosecution's task was not to provide large volumes of evidence. Instead, it needed to establish that Helen had pretended to conjure the spirits of the dead.<sup>96</sup> Five days of proceedings subsequently unfolded, with a jury of six men and one woman finding her guilty of fraud on four charges.<sup>97</sup>

The outcome of Helen's trial received a good deal of published attention, within both the local and national press and spiritualist channels. The *Daily Mail*, for example, ran the headline 'Mrs Duncan, 'A Humbug: Disciples in Court Wave their Farewell to Medium'.<sup>98</sup> More eloquent protests came from Air Chief Marshal Sir Hugh Dowding.<sup>99</sup> By this stage Dowding was something of a household name, having played a critical role in the use of radar during the Battle of Britain.<sup>100</sup> Soon after the Battle of Britain 'Stuffy' Dowding was ousted from the RAF and, in 1943, caused controversy with the publication of letters from dead servicemen 'received' through automatic writing in the *Sunday Pictorial* and his book *Many Mansions*; a spiritualist manifesto written 'for ordinary men by an ordinary man'.<sup>101</sup> In a series of articles between May and June 1943, readers of the *Pictorial* were exposed to the psychical 'abilities' of 'Mrs. Hill', the daughter of a former Colonel.<sup>102</sup> 'Without any doubt', the report stressed, the words written by Hill's pencil were 'words of people beyond the grave'.<sup>103</sup> The 'messages' from members of all branches of the military typically described the moments immediately preceding death and, as Lucy Noakes suggests, performed important political work in extending the utility of those fighting the 'people's war' into the afterlife.<sup>104</sup> In 1943 Dowding led the SNU deputation (received at the Home Office by Under-Secretary Osbert Peake), protesting against the 'most lamentable'

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<sup>95</sup> Gaskill, *Hellish Nell*, p. 189. On Helen's trial, see TNA, Records of the Central Criminal Court (CRIM) 1/1518. For Charles Loseby's account, see CUL, MS SPR/36, Charles Loseby: Papers on the Trial of Helen Duncan. Also see TNA, CRIM 1/1617 for the trial of Rebecca Yorke for Witchcraft in September 1944.

<sup>96</sup> Gaskill, *Hellish Nell*, p. 203.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 215.

<sup>98</sup> 'Mrs Duncan, 'A Humbug: Disciples in Court Wave their Farewell to Medium', *Daily Mail*, April 1944, p. 7; cutting in TNA, Home Office and Ministry of Home Security Files (HO) 144/22172, Helen Duncan files.

<sup>99</sup> Gaskill, *Hellish Nell*, p. 282.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.* Also see Basil Collier, *Leader of the Few: The Authorised Biography of Air Chief Marshal the Lord Dowding of Bentley Priory* (London: Jarrolds, 1957).

<sup>101</sup> Lord Hugh Dowding, *Many Mansions* (London: Rider & Co, 1943), p. 1.

<sup>102</sup> 'Did they Really Die?', *Sunday Pictorial*, 30 May 1943, pp. 12–13; 'I'll Come Again', *Sunday Pictorial*, 6 June 1943, p. 9; 'Did they Really Die?', *Sunday Pictorial*, 13 June 1943, p. 10; 'Did they Really Die: Here Are the Answers?', *Sunday Pictorial*, 20 June 1943, p. 9.

<sup>103</sup> 'Did they Really Die?', *Sunday Pictorial*, 13 June 1943, p. 10.

<sup>104</sup> Noakes, *Dying for the Nation*, p. 112.

treatment of mediums by the state. Further attempts to exert political leverage were made by Dowding in the aftermath of Helen's trial through communications with the Lord Chancellor.<sup>105</sup>

The political fallout surrounding Helen's trial became more serious over time. Following her conviction, as Malcom Gaskill highlights, the Home Secretary Herbert Morrison received sacks of correspondence alluding to the 'mechanisations of a British Gestapo and the persecution of witches'.<sup>106</sup> By early April 1944 the significance of the trial began to reach the highest levels of government. On 3 April, Churchill requested an explanation on the Duncan trial from Morrison concerning its costs for the state.<sup>107</sup> In the Commons Morrison faced stern pressure over the conduct of 'Witchcraft' trials and, by the end of 1944, began looking for ways to weed out 'crazy nuisance laws' from the statute book.<sup>108</sup> Yet the political and legal debate over the Witchcraft Act lingered well into the postwar period. Clement Attlee's post-1945 Labour Government, distinctly modern in its self-perceived outlook, aimed to repeal all 'obsolete legislation'.<sup>109</sup> Whilst the Witchcraft Act seemed a prime candidate, it was not until 1948 that (through the SNU's political lobbying) Chuter Ede's Criminal Justice Act banned police from arresting mediums without fear of their absconding.<sup>110</sup> In the context of growing popular fascination in fraudulent mediums—with the release of films such as Sidney Gilliat's *London Belongs to Me* (1948) based on Norman Collins' book of the same, which centred on the deeds of a fraudulent medium—a change to the archaic Witchcraft Act seemed appropriate. Yet the Act itself was only repealed in 1951, replaced by the new Fraudulent Mediums Act. The State's political entanglement with mediums clearly had a more enduring legacy beyond the confinement of war. Here, in this distinctly modern period of growing consumer cultures and technology, society and politics were still engrossed by the handling of 'witches'. Magic and modernity proved remarkably compatible bedfellows, even if legal challenges sought to forcefully divorce their union.

*B. Abdy Collins, Donald West, and Helen Duncan*

The SPR had dealings with Helen dating back to the 1930s, yet internal interest in her story was rejuvenated in response to her growing public profile. In 1942, B. Abdy Collins penned a laudatory evaluation of Helen's mediumship in the pages of *Psychic Science*—the journal of the

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<sup>105</sup> Gaskill, *Hellish Nell*, p. 283, 284.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 282.

<sup>107</sup> TNA, HO 144/22172, Letter from Winston Churchill to Herbert Morrison, 3 April 1944.

<sup>108</sup> Gaskill, *Hellish*, p. 343.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 177.

International Institute of Psychic Investigation which he served as an executive council member and the journal's editor.<sup>111</sup> The real issue at the heart of the Duncan case, Collins stressed, was discerning whether the fraudulent aspects of her mediumship ruled out a genuine ability to summon fully developed materialisations.<sup>112</sup> Previous investigations of Helen's 'powers' by Harry Price at the National Laboratory of Psychical Research during the 1930s were too quick to rule out the co-existence of fraudulence with genuine power.<sup>113</sup> Price argued that the 'ectoplasm' Helen produced was fraudulently made of cheesecloth, to which Collins objected:<sup>114</sup>

I would like to refer again to the "ectoplasm" which formed the main ground of her [Helen's] condemnation in London...Only the other day I saw her produce...three yards of voluminous material under the conditions described previously, which made concealment about her person impossible and the only normal explanation of this so-called regurgitation. The material was beautifully white and dry. So far as I am concerned, whatever may be the truth, I entirely disbelieve in regurgitation...I am told that Mr. Harry Price who saw it poured scorn on it. If this is correct, all I can say is that he is not a good judge of the value of evidence.<sup>115</sup>

For Collins, Price's unwillingness to uncritically engage with the evidence led him to the wrong conclusion:

What are we to make of all this? I would start by saying that I have a sort of repugnance to accepting physical phenomena of this type [produced by Helen Duncan]. It is with the greatest difficulty that I can force myself to believe they are possible. In spite of this I am convinced against my will that Mrs. Duncan produces complete materialisations of identifiable deceased persons at least equal to those of any other medium ever known to the public and probably superior.<sup>116</sup>

This conclusion, despite running against his 'repugnance' for accepting physical 'phenomena', had profound implications. 'If this is correct, as I am sure it is...I attach little value to the conviction for fraud in the Edinburgh court...No medium can expect a fair trial in such cases'.<sup>117</sup> 'I am satisfied that, enigma though she [may] be,—and all physical mediums are,— Mrs. Helen Duncan is a genuine medium of great power'.<sup>118</sup> Collin's conviction in Duncan's plausibility led him to testify as a witness to the defence on the fifth day of her trial before the Old Bailey.<sup>119</sup> Mrs Duncan's séances offered 'compelling evidence' of survival through the manifestation of an unearthly phosphorescence, he stated, quite unlike deceptions he had previously exposed at Reading.<sup>120</sup> In

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<sup>111</sup> Gaskill, *Hellish*, p. 177; B. Abdy Collins, 'Mrs Duncan: Enigma', *Psychic Science*, 20 (1942), pp. 113–21.

<sup>112</sup> Collins, 'Mrs Duncan', p. 113.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 114–21.

<sup>114</sup> Gaskill, *Hellish Nell*, p. 89.

<sup>115</sup> Collins, 'Mrs Duncan', pp. 118–20.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 120.

<sup>117</sup> Collins, 'Mrs Duncan', p. 120.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 121.

<sup>119</sup> Gaskill, *Hellish Nell*, p. 210.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*

an unpublished review of the trial, Collins echoed similar points. 'The result from the point of view of the accused was fatally prejudiced by the proof...On the whole, on an impartial view of the trial, one is bound to feel that Mrs. Duncan never had a fair chance and should not have been convicted'.<sup>121</sup>

Several SPR members including Mr S. M. Gardiner and Leah Longman drew similar conclusions to Collins, remaining deeply suspicious of Helen but finding much of her mediumship convincing.<sup>122</sup> Others were a good deal more scathing. Following her release from Holloway prison and return to mediumship in the postwar years, internal gossip within the SPR often centred on the demise of 'hard drinking' Helen in classed terms.<sup>123</sup> It was in this context which Kathleen M. Goldney (by this period a senior figure within the SPR) suggested that her protégé Donald West write an article on Helen for publication within the Society's *Proceedings*.<sup>124</sup> West accepted the proposal and the final report materialised in the 1946 edition of *Proceedings*, compiled with the aid of Mercy Phillimore and E. J. Dingwall who observed séances by Helen in the 1930s.<sup>125</sup> It was suggested by Goldney that B. Abdy Collins should also be involved in the process, more for representing all wings of the Society than his expertise as a psychical researcher. 'He is, of course, a 'believer [in survival],' she noted to West in late-October 1945. 'Abdy C. is from an S.P.R. point of view very gullible'.<sup>126</sup>

The report plotted a brief history of previous investigations into Helen's mediumship in the early-1930s, which West ensured was supported by archival research at the LSA as well as up-to-date interviews of key eye witnesses.<sup>127</sup> Despite attempts to offer a value-neutral assessment personal prejudices seeped into the narrative. In West's view, bouts of 'hysteria' and 'hallucination' explained the eye-witness accounts of Helen's 'power'.<sup>128</sup> Helen's branding as hysterical formed a continuation of long-standing medical discourse linking mediumship and mania. 'Put on

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<sup>121</sup> CUL, MS SPR/Mediums, Helen Duncan File, Reports, 1931–1956: B. Abdy Collins, 'Mrs. Duncan's Trial Under the Witchcraft Act', p. 1, 7.

<sup>122</sup> Gaskill, *Hellish Nell*, pp. 332–3; CUL, MS SPR/Mediums, Helen Duncan File: Leah Longman, 'Report of a Sitting Held with Mrs. Helen Duncan, at Edinburgh', 19 January 1949.

<sup>123</sup> CUL, MS SPR/Mediums, Helen Duncan File: Letter from K. M. Goldney to Lady Ruth Balfour, 4 January 1946.

<sup>124</sup> Goldney rose to prominence through her association with the mathematician Samuel Soal, as will be explored in the following.

<sup>125</sup> Donald J. West, 'The Trial of Mrs Helen Duncan', *PSPR*, 48(172) (1946–1949), pp. 32–64.

<sup>126</sup> CUL, MS SPR/Mediums, Helen Duncan File: Letter from K. M. Goldney to Donald West, 28 October 1945.

<sup>127</sup> West, 'The Trial of Mrs Helen Duncan', pp. 33–51; CUL, MS SPR/Mediums, Helen Duncan File: Correspondence, 1945–1986.

<sup>128</sup> West, 'The Trial of Mrs Helen Duncan', p. 47.

the spot, she [Helen] is apt to seek refuge in the crudest forms of hysteria'.<sup>129</sup> More biting personal attacks were also made. 'Mrs Duncan has no glamour...being very fat and coarse-looking with a deep red face'.<sup>130</sup> The report's conclusion, that at least partial fraud but more likely full fraudulence explained the Duncan case, masked the real motivations of the author.<sup>131</sup> In a private letter to W. H. Salter in 1946, West wrote with jubilation: 'At long last I think we can safely say that Mrs. Duncan is finished with'.<sup>132</sup> From its inception the report was designed to discredit and personally humiliate, a 'witch-hunt' exposing the deep personal prejudices which underscored empirical approaches to 'scientific' readings of psychical research within the SPR.

*Walter R. Matthews, Anglicanism, and Psychical Research*

The SPR's investigations on physical mediumship and interest in spiritualism formed part of a broader constellation of agencies vying for power and control over the actions, influence, and bodies of women. Societal fascination with female spiritualists and mediums had a much broader history in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (particularly during the interwar period), but took on a renewed immediacy in the context of heightened domestic and state fears during the earlier part of the Second World War. Focusing on a disparate group of individuals connected to the Society—Donald West, B. Abdy Collins, and Walter R. Matthews—reveals the internal tensions within the mid-century SPR.

B. Abdy Collins and Donald West were not the only SPR members intrigued by spirit manifestation. The spiritual aspects of orthodox Christianity led many theologians and clergymen to explore the intersection between theology and psychical phenomena.<sup>133</sup> For Walter R. Matthews, Dean of St Paul's Cathedral (1934–1967) and SPR member, spiritualism and spirit 'manifestations' had deeper theological and philosophical roots (see fig. 2.1).<sup>134</sup> Questions surrounding theology and philosophy defined Matthew's early career inside and outside the Church; having been

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<sup>129</sup> West, 'The Trial of Mrs Helen Duncan', p. 50. On medical discourse linking mediums and hysteria, see Owen, *The Darkened Room*, ch. 6. For a contemporary interpretation, see R. W. Pickford, 'An Hysterical Medium', *British Journal of Medical Psychology*, 19 (1943), pp. 342–62. For more on the gendered aspects of modern sensational trials, see Lucy Bland, *Modern Women on Trial: Sexual Transgression in the Age of the Flapper* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013).

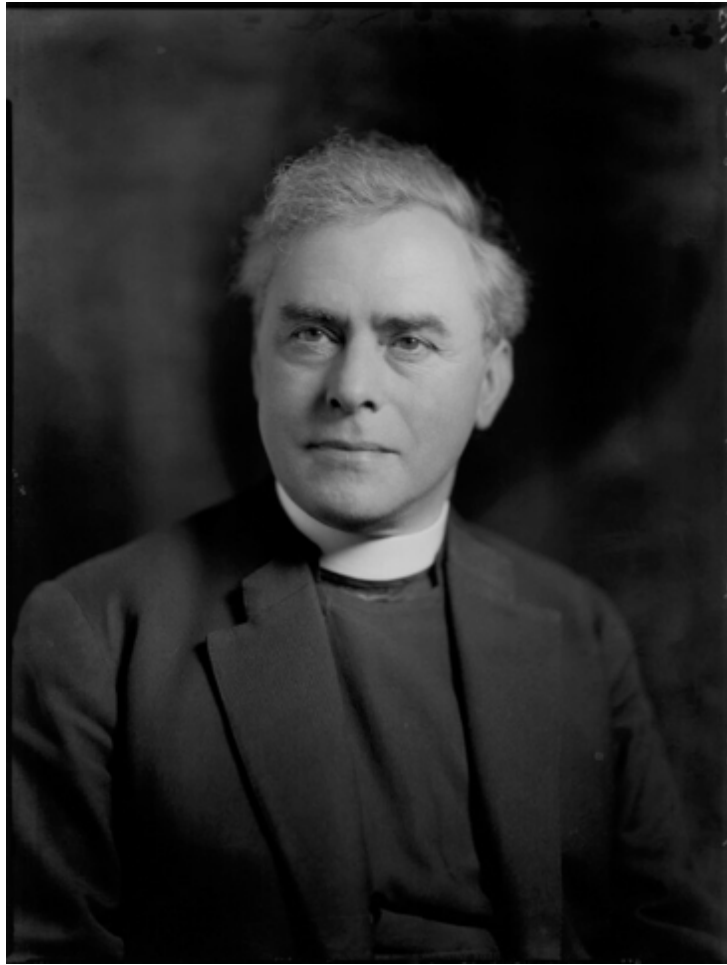
<sup>130</sup> West, 'The Trial of Mrs Helen Duncan', p. 50.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49.

<sup>132</sup> CUL, MS SPR/Mediums, Helen Duncan File, Letter from Donald J. West to W. H. Salter, 9 April 1946.

<sup>133</sup> For a discussion on Anglican and Catholic interest in spiritualism, see Hazelgrove, *Spiritualism and British Society*, ch. 2.

<sup>134</sup> For Matthews' autobiography, see Walter R. Matthews, *Memories and Meanings* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1969). Also see Huw P. Owen, *W. R. Matthews: Philosopher and Theologian* (London: Athlone, 1976); Alan P. F.



**Figure 2.1** Portrait of Walter R. Matthews, Dean of St Paul's [9 December 1935]

*Source:* The National Portrait Gallery, 151890.

ordained in 1907 and, between 1908 and 1918, lecturing in philosophy at King's College London. Although Matthews never expressed his enthusiasm for spiritualism in writing explicitly, his interest in the phenomenon was clearly present from a young age.<sup>135</sup> Matthews noted an early fascination with spiritualism and psychical 'activity' stemming from his school-days:

Quite early on in life, before I left school, I had read about psychical research and either at school or soon after I went into the Westminster Bank [working as a clerk] I read F. W. Myer's pioneer work *Human Personality and its Survival Beyond Bodily Death*. It happened too that, when I went into the Bank, one of the clerks in the head office named Podmore was the brother of a man who was among the group which pushed

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Sell, *Four Philosophical Anglicans: W.G. De Burgh, W.R. Matthews, O.C. Quick, H.A. Hodges* (London: Routledge, 2016).

<sup>135</sup> Byrne, *Modern Spiritualism and the Church of England*, p. 160.

ahead in [psychical] research. Strangely, I do not remember at this time meeting anyone who had been to a séance or claimed to be a medium. My knowledge was derived from books, but the evidence impressed me.<sup>136</sup>

In the early war years Matthews fleshed out his views on the relationship between theology and psychical research at SPR meetings, finding their way into the Society's *Proceedings*. Taking issue with the 'traditionally antagonistic' view of psychical research from within the Church, Matthews noted its potential to 'throw light on the development of religion and perhaps do something to remove the impression that, at least in its earlier stages, it consists entirely of illusions'.<sup>137</sup> 'It appears to me that the Society for Psychical Research is a standing refutation of Hume's famous argument against miracles'. Its research could, in theory, add scientific weight to theological explanations of miracles and provide fresh evidence for the supernatural life of Jesus.<sup>138</sup> Phenomena tied to the more specific context of war were also discussed, particularly in relation to the rise of demonic forces. 'Too many writers on religion assume', Matthews argued, 'that mysticism, as such, is good'.<sup>139</sup> 'Evil' and 'demonic' spirits existed along with the Godly and divine:

I am inclined to think that there are mystical states which are morally and spiritually either indifferent or evil. There are persons who have what we can only call "spiritual power", who are apparently in contact with some source of energy which reinforces their natural endowments and gives them a unification of purpose which makes them most formidable, but these persons are often evil and their mystical experience is a heightening of their will and their capacity for destruction. In other words, I believe that there is a meaning in the word "demonic". We should not have to look very far for an example of a mystic of this type or for the evidence of his power for evil.<sup>140</sup>

The Dean's nod to Hitler as the mystic of 'evil power' was confirmed by a report in the *Daily Mail* on 18 January 1940: 'The Dean of St. Paul's, Dr. W. R. Matthews, said yesterday that he was "inclined to think" that Hitler is an evil spirit in contact with a malignant power which reinforces his natural gifts and drives him to destroy'.<sup>141</sup>

Whilst Matthews stressed the importance of psychical research to aspects of theology inside and outside the context of war, other Anglicans were less enthusiastic. The place of psychical research and the broader impact of spiritualism had been a point of contention since the

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<sup>136</sup> Matthews, *Memories and Meanings*, p. 344.

<sup>137</sup> Walter R. Matthews, 'Psychical Research and Theology', *PSPR*, 46 (161–165) (1940–1941), p. 6.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>141</sup> 'Hitler an Evil Spirit-The Dean', *Daily Mail*, 18 January 1940, p. 7.



interwar years.<sup>142</sup> In a motion to the Church of England National Assembly in 1935 the Dean of Rochdale, Francis Underhill, proposed the appointment of a committee to 'investigate the matter' and report its findings back to the Assembly.<sup>143</sup> Investigations of séances began in November 1936 alongside more formal attempts to establish a committee of investigation by the then Archbishop Cosmo Lang.<sup>144</sup> Matthews, along with other representatives of the Church, were issued personal invitations to preside over the investigation. 'I have for some time past been aware of the influence of the phenomena with which Spiritualism is concerned', Lang stressed in his letter of November 1936:

It has seemed to me that the time has come when there might be a quiet investigation of these phenomena in their relation to the Christian Faith by some small committee of members of the Church [of England]. Of course the elaborate enquiries of such bodies as the Society for Psychical Research would be available...The Terms of Reference would be :-

To investigate the subject of communications with discarnate spirits and the claims of Spiritualism in relation to the Christian Faith.<sup>145</sup>

Anonymous expert witnesses were called to provide evidence for the committee, including members of the LSA, editors of prominent spiritualist publications, as well as psychical researchers.<sup>146</sup> Kenneth Richmond, representing the SPR, highlighted the psychological dimensions of psychical research, linking psychical activity with female mental instability:

Cases were known when the developing of such [psychic] power had a bad effect and had in fact caused insanity...He [Richmond] instanced the case of a married woman who had taken up automatic writing—not writing in a trance—and the material which she obtained had counteracted tendencies which led her to act on impulse and to jump too hastily to conclusions.<sup>147</sup>

Other SPR members stressed opposing conclusions. Dame Edith Lyttelton, a long-time member of the Society, stressed how spiritualism remained true to her experience of prayer.<sup>148</sup> The committee concluded that spiritualism was part belief, part practice. It contained elements similar to cults and incorporated philosophical interpretations of the universe and its creation.<sup>149</sup> A more

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<sup>142</sup> On Anglicanism and spiritualism during the interwar period, see Rene Kollar, *Searching for Raymond: Anglicanism, Spiritualism, and Bereavement between the Two World Wars* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2000).

<sup>143</sup> Byrne, *Modern Spiritualism and the Church of England*, p. 178.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

<sup>145</sup> Lambeth Palace Library (LPL), Cosmo Gordon Lang Papers (Lang) 70, Spiritualism: f. 61, Letter from Cosmo Gordon Lang, 20 November 1936.

<sup>146</sup> LPL, Lang 70, f. 167–69, Letter from W. S. Wigglesworth to Cosmo G. Lang, 16 January 1939.

<sup>147</sup> LPL, Lang 70, 'Archbishop's Committee on Spiritualism: Report of the Committee to the Archbishop of Canterbury', loose report, p. 14.

<sup>148</sup> Byrne, *Modern Spiritualism and the Church of England*, p. 179.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

cautious line was taken on the reasons behind spiritualism's popularity. It remained 'very difficult' to distinguish, so the report claimed, whether the 'obsessional' behaviour of some spiritualists was a *result* or a *cause* of their association with the movement.<sup>150</sup> Yet the report painted spiritualism in a more flattering light than the more conservative wings of the Church would have supported.<sup>151</sup> 'We think that it is probable that the hypothesis that they [spiritualists] proceed in some cases from discarnate spirits is the true one'.<sup>152</sup> Parallels between the miraculous events of the Gospel and modern phenomena associated with spiritualism were identified, resulting in a self-critical appraisal of present-day Anglicanism. In the aftermath of total war, it acknowledged, the Church needed to update its position on issues surrounding the afterlife in order to prevent further blood-letting of its membership.<sup>153</sup>

Points were also raised on the 'legitimacy' of psychical investigation. It was legitimate, so the report stated, for Christians who were 'scientifically qualified' to 'make...[psychical phenomena] a subject of scientific inquiry'.<sup>154</sup> Yet the rigour of such an approach was questioned. Most of the conclusions made in the report were based on no 'scientific proof' and nor, it was stressed, would the influence of science necessarily help when considering evidence of a personal or quotidian nature.<sup>155</sup> Other voices within the Church were more critical of psychical research, and had been for some time. In a series of private correspondences with Cosmo Lang's personal secretary the Archbishop of York, William Temple, lamented the SPR's involvement in the Church's spiritualism investigations. 'I know there have been some distinguished members of the Society for Psychical Research [but] as far as I know, their conclusions have been almost entirely non-committal...It seems to me that what we want is a group of scientists who will *really* study the alleged physical facts [emphasis added]'.<sup>156</sup> In a further letter dated 25 March, Temple stressed how much of the work of the 'Psychical Research people' was 'foolish' and 'all of it...dangerous'.<sup>157</sup>

The findings of the Archbishop's report were never made public, resulting in a sustained campaign within the national press as well as spiritualist channels to disclose its conclusions.<sup>158</sup> The popular appetite for the report's publication was wetted following the leak of its principal

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<sup>150</sup> LPL, Lang 70, 'Archbishop's Committee on Spiritualism', p. 23.

<sup>151</sup> See LPL, Bishop's Meetings (BM), 11, Bishop's Meetings Minutes, 28–29, Agenda, pp. 29–30.

<sup>152</sup> LPL, Lang 70, 'Archbishop's Committee on Spiritualism', p. 22.

<sup>153</sup> LPL, Lang 70, 'Archbishop's Committee on Spiritualism', p. 24.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20, 21–22.

<sup>156</sup> LPL, Lang 70, f. 42, Letter from William Temple to Cosmo G. Lang, 23 March 1936.

<sup>157</sup> LPL, Lang 70, f. 42, Letter from William Temple to Cosmo G. Lang, 25 March 1936.

<sup>158</sup> For a range of press clippings on the report's non-disclosure, see LPL, Lang 70, Spiritualism.

conclusions by Baron Palmistinera. Having worked with the committee as a consultant medium, Palmistinera was granted access to the report under the strict conditions that it remained confidential.<sup>159</sup> By early 1940, however, news of the report began to circulate. The *Daily Sketch* reported on the church's 'secret approval' of spiritualism in January, whilst the *Daily Herald* ran the headline 'Spiritualism is True'.<sup>160</sup> *Psychic News*, presided over by B. Abdy Collins, made the call for the report's public disclosure more forcefully. 'We challenge the Archbishop of Canterbury, Primate of All England, to [publish] the report, in full'.<sup>161</sup> The London Spiritualist Alliance's journal *Light* echoed the same point. The majority verdict of the report, it was stated, rendered the Church ban on psychical inquiry a farce and that the only reasonable explanation for it was the positive light in which it portrayed the movement.<sup>162</sup> Matthews paraphrased some of the report's key findings to the SPR, reluctantly acknowledging its resting place in 'archiepiscopal pigeon holes, if not the archiepiscopal mind'.<sup>163</sup> Whilst the report remained unpublished until the 1980s, Matthews' interpretation formed part of a more diverse and decidedly mixed chorus of clergy responses to spiritualism.<sup>164</sup>

As we have seen, the SPR's investigations on physical mediumship and interest in spiritualism formed part of a longer history of male investigators seeking control of women's actions and bodies. Why and how this should be achieved promoted different explanations. Indeed, arguments over method and approach were also characteristic of theories surrounding apparitions, poltergeists, and hauntings which also carried strongly gendered and classed framings.

## APPARITIONS, POLTERGEISTS, AND HAUNTINGS

### *Psychological Conflict*

Psycho-analytical theories were also deeply imbedded within ideas about apparitions, poltergeists, and hauntings. During the first decades of the twentieth century the Society's interest in apparitions and phantasms had diminished, but by the Second World War its appeal gained a modest revival

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<sup>159</sup> Byrne, *Modern Spiritualism and the Church of England*, p. 181.

<sup>160</sup> 'Secret Report to Bishops Approves Spiritualism', *Daily Sketch*, 15 January 1940; 'Bishops Suppress Report in Favour of Spiritualism', *Daily Dispatch*, 16 January 1940; 'Spiritualism is True', *Daily Herald*, 23 February 1940. Clippings found in LPL, Lang 70, Spiritualism.

<sup>161</sup> 'Spiritualism is Proved by the Church', *Psychic News*, 24 February 1940, p. 1.

<sup>162</sup> 'Church Report Suppressed', *Light*, 18 January 1940. Clipping found in LPA, Lang 70, Spiritualism.

<sup>163</sup> 'Psychical Research and Theology', p. 2.

<sup>164</sup> Byrne, *Modern Spiritualism and the Church of England*, p. 181.

following H. H. Price's takeover as SPR President.<sup>165</sup> In his Presidential Address of 1939, Price argued that 'supernormal experiences' were hallucinatory products of damaged minds. 'We must say that haunting is a kind of *deferred telepathy*, resulting in the production of a *post-dated telepathic phantasm [sic]*'.<sup>166</sup> For Price, it was essential that the psychical researcher experience such 'deferred telepathy' for themselves. 'We need to know what it is like to see an apparition in a haunted house, or to have a clairvoyant vision of an event happening at a distance'.<sup>167</sup> Class-based value judgements were imposed, with Price arguing individuals of 'low-education' were more likely to experience hallucinations in 'earlier, less civilized ages'.<sup>168</sup> In order to stimulate the necessary conditions for hallucinatory states to occur, Price suggested the inducement of 'chemical agents' or by 'prolonged *fasting [sic]*'.<sup>169</sup>

Links between various 'supernormal' activity and hallucinations were also made by other SPR members. In the 1943 edition of the society's *Journal*, G. N. M. Tyrrell investigated the case of a 'haunted' and 'unlucky' house in an undisclosed countryside location.<sup>170</sup> Accompanied by a second representative of the SPR, Tyrrell visited the house on 28 October 1943 at the request of the current tenant Mrs Knight.<sup>171</sup> Knight and her sister had noticed a series of unexplained events connected to the house, including the mysterious illnesses of maids who had worked there, strange knockings on the walls, and a foul smell of 'death and the grave'.<sup>172</sup> Tyrrell concluded that 'On the whole it seems probably that both sounds and smells [noted by the sisters] were hallucinatory or non-physical in character, as is most generally the case'.<sup>173</sup> Yet the inclusion of 'haunted house' cases (typically associated with ghost hunters) caused a good deal of controversy within the SPR internally.<sup>174</sup> E. N. Bennet protested against the 'low standards of evidence' such enquiries would legitimise:

I shall be obliged if you will allow me...[to protest] against the low standards of evidence which are now accepted by the *Proceedings* and *Journal*. In the *Journal* of Nov.-Dec. six pages are taken up by the story of a

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<sup>165</sup> Haynes, *The Society for Psychical Research*, p. 44.

<sup>166</sup> H. H. Price, 'Haunting and the "Psychic Ether" Hypothesis; with some Preliminary Reflections on the Present Condition and Possible Future of Psychical Research', *PSPR*, 45 (1939–1940), p. 339, 326.

<sup>167</sup> Price, 'Haunting and the "Psychic Ether" Hypothesis', p. 309.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 311.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 311.

<sup>170</sup> G. N. M. Tyrrell, 'Case: Haunted House', *JSPR*, 33 (November–December 1943), pp. 34–40.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 35–7.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 40.

<sup>174</sup> On distinctions between psychical research and popular ghost-hunting, see Joanna Timms, 'Ghost-Hunters and Psychical Research in Interwar England', *History Workshop Journal*, 74 (2012), pp. 89–104.

“haunted house”...The evidence of this “haunted house” case falls far below even the standards of Borley Rectory; further comment is needed.<sup>175</sup>

Psychological conflicts within the minds of individuals were raised by SPR members advocating physical explanations of supernormal activity. In the Society’s *Proceedings*, the anthropologist and psychologist John Layard argued that mysterious noises and unexplained movement of objects often attributed to poltergeists were connected to ‘psychokinetic energies’.<sup>176</sup> As a ‘practicing psychologist of the Jungian school’, Layard stressed how poltergeist phenomena were products of ‘psychological conflict’.<sup>177</sup> His argument that psychological conflicts caused the movement of physical objects, the ringing of bells, and the splitting of benches received harsh criticism from SPR empiricists. K. M. Goldney, for example, deplored Layard’s contribution to *Proceedings*:

SIR,—I am in favour of the informal wartime Discussion Meetings held during the last few months, in spite of the lowered standard involved in the impromptu nature of the occasions. I do not, however, think that I am alone in hoping that there is to be no lowering of the standard of publication in *Proceedings*, and in regretting the inclusion in the last issue of Dr John Layard’s “Psi Phenomena and Poltergeists.”<sup>178</sup>

‘It is a pity such happenings and descriptions found perpetuation in *Proceedings*’, she continued, as ‘They belong neither to our subject nor to our standard’.<sup>179</sup> Members with psychological backgrounds offered more sympathetic responses. Having chaired the psychology department at the University of Glasgow for some years, Robert H. Thouless noted how ‘Dr Layard’s contribution seemed to me to be a very valuable one’.<sup>180</sup> ‘It makes the suggestion that poltergeist phenomena are telekinetic expressions of an unconscious conflict in the mind of the agent. That seems to me a valuable and original idea’.<sup>181</sup>

Other psychical researchers, including Donald West and Nandor Fodor (International Institute for Psychical Research) regarded ‘ghosts’ and ‘poltergeists’ as unconscious manifestations of repressed emotion.<sup>182</sup> Born in Hungary in 1895, Fodor obtained a PhD in law and emigrated to the United States in 1921 to work as a journalist.<sup>183</sup> Interviews with the American psychical researcher Walter Franklin Price inspired Fodor’s fascination with psychical research, which he

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<sup>175</sup> E. N. Bennet, ‘Correspondence’, *JSPR*, 33 (November–December 1944), p. 95.

<sup>176</sup> John Layard, ‘PSI Phenomena and Poltergeists’, *PSPR*, 47 (168) (1942–1945), pp. 237–48.

<sup>177</sup> Layard, ‘PSI Phenomena and Poltergeists’, p. 237.

<sup>178</sup> K. M. Goldney, ‘Correspondence’, *JSPR*, 33 (September–October 1944), p. 80.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>180</sup> Robert H. Thouless, ‘Correspondence’, *JSPR*, 33 (September–October 1944), pp. 82–3.

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 83.

<sup>182</sup> Joann Timms, ‘Phantasm of Freud: Nandor Fodor and the Psychoanalytical Approach to the Supernatural in Interwar Britain’, *Psychoanalysis and History*, 14 (2012), p. 16.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

pursued more rigorously after a move to London in the 1930s.<sup>184</sup> Fodor's theories pushed chauvinistic assumptions to the extreme—ideas which were lamented by many within SPR circles. Drawing on Freudian concepts, Fodor argued that poltergeist encounters were the deeply buried traumata of sexually frustrated house-wives.<sup>185</sup> Psychotherapy sessions were offered by Fodor to 'root-out' the aggravating causes of the 'disorders' underpinning their visions.<sup>186</sup> Yet Fodor's instance on unifying psychoanalysis with psychical research found little traction, a point which he lamented in 1945:

For sixty years, psychical research has gone around in a vicious circle . . . it has failed to give due consideration to the essentially psychological nature of mediumistic phenomena. I am convinced that the exploration of the unconscious minds of mediums by the means provided in psychoanalysis would solve many mysteries and would lead to discoveries of considerable importance both to psychology and psychical research.<sup>187</sup>

By this stage, however, many of the most prominent theorists in 'New Psychology' had abandoned the psycho-sexual treatment of various psychological disturbances, rendering Fodor's theories (and his reliance on Freud) unfashionable.<sup>188</sup>

### *Psychology, Psychical Research, and War*

As we have seen, the context of war proved ripe for the implementation and experimentation of newly emerging psychological theories. Whereas the role of psychologists and psychoanalysts during the First World War had been limited to issues of combat and shell-shock, the Second saw their expansion into the realm of civilian—particularly child—psychologies.<sup>189</sup> The notion of total war's rupturing of the bonds between mothers and children was consistently recognised. Analysts made early-life dynamics crucial to understanding the behaviour of the wartime citizenry as well as the

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<sup>184</sup> Timms, 'Phantasm of Freud', p. 11.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid., p. 15.

<sup>187</sup> Extract from the *Journal of Clinical Psychopathology and Psychotherapy*, quoted in Timms, 'Phantasm of Freud', p. 12.

<sup>188</sup> Nikolas Rose, *The Psychological Complex: Psychology, Politics and Society in England 1869–1939* (London: Routledge and Keegan Paul, 1985), p. 182.

<sup>189</sup> Shapira, *The War Inside*, pp. 48–9; Amanda Jones, *Bringing Up War-Babies: The Wartime Child in Women's Writing and Psychoanalysis at Mid-Century* (London: Routledge, 2018). For more on the military utilisation of emergent psychological theories during the First World War, see Joanna Bourke, 'Psychology at War, 1914–1945', in G. C. Bunn, A. D. Lovie, and G. D. Richards (eds.), *Psychology in Britain: Historical Essays and Personal Reflections* (Leicester: British Psychological Society, 2001), pp. 133–49. For a broader discussion on psychoanalysis and the Second World War, see Pearl King, 'Activities of British Psychoanalysts during the Second World War and the Influence of their Inter-Disciplinary Collaboration on the Development of Psychoanalysis in Great Britain', *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, 16 (1989), pp. 15–32.

workings of democracy.<sup>190</sup> This had special significance during the process of evacuation, which was seen to contemporaries as largely a ‘family crisis’.<sup>191</sup> During the first wave of evacuation from September 1939, around 3.5 million civilians fled to safety in more rural parts of England and Wales (with an additional 2 million evacuating privately).<sup>192</sup> Expert opinion emphasised the need to keep mothers and their children together for the psychological stability of the latter. For Susan Isaacs, mastermind behind the *Cambridge Evacuation Survey*, maintaining this connection was essential.<sup>193</sup> The separation of child and parent, Isaacs claimed, stirred up early conflicts and anxieties in the mind of the child along with newer feelings of insecurity and abandonment.<sup>194</sup> Although fierce rivalries and points of contention existed within mid-century psychoanalysis, the primacy of maternal-child relations remained relatively central—featuring in the works of the refugee psychoanalyst Melanie Klein amongst others.<sup>195</sup>

The *Cambridge Evacuation Survey* was ultimately critical in its appraisal of the state’s approach to evacuation, given the large numbers of children who had returned home by 1940 as a result of the ‘Phoney War’.<sup>196</sup> As part of her investigatory team, Isaacs drew on the help of Sibyl Clement Brown and the psychologist Robert H. Thouless. A long-time member of the SPR and President of the Society between 1942 and 1944, Thouless tended to stick to ‘orthodox’ psychological issues and remained sceptical of the reality of psychical phenomena.<sup>197</sup> Thouless adopted a similar position to Isaacs on the need for psychologists to contribute to policy formation through their expertise. In ‘Mental Attitudes in Wartime’, for example, Thouless explored how civilian anxieties could be massaged through psychotherapeutic treatment imbedded within policy and wartime propaganda. Speaking at the general annual meeting of the British Psychological Society, held in Oxford in the summer of 1943, Thouless stressed war’s generation of ‘transitory pattern[s] of

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<sup>190</sup> Shapira, *The War Inside*, p. 49.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid., p. 58; Mathew Thomson, *Lost Freedom: The Landscape of the Child and the British Post-War Settlement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 59–66. For postwar and scholarly readings of wartime evacuation, see Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*; Calder, *The People’s War*, ch. 2; John Macnicol, ‘The Evacuation of Schoolchildren’, in H. L. Smith (ed.), *War and Social Change: British Society in the Second World War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986), pp. 3–31; John Welshman, ‘Evacuation and Social Policy during the Second World War: Myth and Reality’, *Twentieth Century British History*, 9 (1998), pp. 28–53; Sonya Rose, *Which People’s War?*, pp. 56–62; John Welshman, *Churchill’s Children: The Evacuation Experience in Wartime Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

<sup>192</sup> Shapira, *The War Inside*, p. 59.

<sup>193</sup> Susan Isaacs (ed.), *Cambridge Evacuation Survey: A Wartime Study in Social Welfare and Education*, with co-operation with Sibyl Clement Brown and Robert H. Thouless (London: Routledge, 1941).

<sup>194</sup> Quoted in Shapira, *The War Inside*, p. 61.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid., p. 55; Jacqueline Rose, *Why War? Psychoanalysis, Politics, and the Return of Melanie Klein* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

<sup>196</sup> Isaacs (ed.), *Cambridge Evacuation Survey*, p. 4, 11.

<sup>197</sup> Mauskopf and McVaugh, *The Illusive Science*, p. 123.

behaviour'.<sup>198</sup> Increasing the 'emotional' responses to popular depictions of the enemy, it remained the work of social psychologists to 'condemn hatred and try to devise a means of reducing its strength'.<sup>199</sup> Psychologists had an important role to play in the shaping of more nuanced, and less pathological, wartime propaganda.<sup>200</sup> Earlier pieces considered the psychological effects of air raids on domestic morale in the aftermath of the Blitz.<sup>201</sup> Reviewing the latest data available, Thouless emphasised the 'urgent practical importance' of psychological theories in the context of evacuation and in analysing shelter conditions. Stress was placed on their respective impact on children. Learning from the experience of the First World War, Thouless noted the importance of adult attitudes of mental calm as a means of protecting children against air raid anxiety and during evacuation.<sup>202</sup> Keeping families together where possible, especially mothers and children, was of paramount concern. 'Evacuation of the mother and young child together is the ideal solution', it was noted. 'Since circumstances might make this impracticable and even in some cases undesirable, psychologists should be prepared to advise alternative methods in particular cases'.<sup>203</sup>

Yet for all the psychological work conducted outside of the Society, internal voices were hesitant to explore the manifestation of ghostly 'visions' and 'apparitions' in connection with the rich context of war. Those who did generally came from the fringes of the SPR and contributed articles after the war had ended. In late-1949, for example, Edward Osborn explored the case of an 'apparition' connected to an undisclosed set of offices damaged by a flying bomb in 1944.<sup>204</sup> 'Hallucinations are one of the most interesting phenomena met with in psychical research or abnormal psychology', Osborn explained. The investigation aimed to reveal the 'genesis' of 'spontaneous apparition[s]'.<sup>205</sup> Osborn undertook a range of interviews with those connected to the case between 11–23 February 1949.<sup>206</sup> The 'Woman in Brown', known as 'Henrietta', was allegedly seen on no less than thirteen separate occasions by the female office workers within the building.<sup>207</sup> Of all the staff working within the building, it was noted that a 'Miss Benson' had

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<sup>198</sup> Robert H. Thouless, 'Mental Attitudes in Wartime', *Nature*, 3842 (151), 19 June 1943, p. 684.

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>201</sup> Robert H. Thouless, 'Psychological Effects of Air Raids', *Nature*, 3746 (148), 16 August 1941, pp. 183–85.

<sup>202</sup> Thouless, 'Psychological Effects of Air Raids', p. 183.

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 184.

<sup>204</sup> Edward Osborn, 'The Woman in Brown: An Investigation of an Apparition', *JSPR*, 35 (655) (November–December 1949), pp. 123–53.

<sup>205</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 123.

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 124.

<sup>207</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 129.



‘witnessed’ Henrietta most frequently.<sup>208</sup> In his conclusion, Osborn argued that nothing supernatural had taken place at the offices. Much of the ‘activity’ witnessed could be explained by Benson’s proclivity to ‘fantasies and hallucinations’, conclusions supported by the use of hypnotism:

If the apparition had some psychological origin of which Miss Benson herself was unaware, there was probably some common factor in her mental content at the moments when the apparition was seen. It might be possible to reveal this by hypnosis, in which case it might not only throw light on the entirety of the apparition but might provide a clue for any subsequent investigation of the case from a therapeutic standpoint. In her waking state [from hypnosis], Miss Benson was unable to recall what was in her mind the moment before she saw the apparition.<sup>209</sup>

Combining hypnosis with detailed family research, Osborn constructed a rough psychoanalytical history of Benson dating back to her prewar childhood. Memories of her mother’s sudden death in 1939, it was argued, fuelled the visions seen at the offices along with other unexplained ‘sightings’. The context of war, it was suggested, had little to do with the ‘witnessing’ of apparitions compared to Benson’s deeply buried emotional trauma.<sup>210</sup> Osborn regretted his inability to fully uproot the ‘profound and prolonged’ complications associated with Benson’s mental condition. Examples such as Osborn’s investigations would seem to validate Michal Shapira’s claim that psycho-analytical discourse bled more broadly into works by ‘analytical’ ‘doctors’ during the period.<sup>211</sup>

Other investigations stressed the genuine possibility of abnormal psychological activity. In mid-1952, for example, SPR investigators G. W. Lambert and Kathleen Gay explored a reported case of ‘collective auditory hallucination’ connected to the Allied raid on Dieppe in August 1942.<sup>212</sup> Holidaying near Dieppe, ‘two English ladies’ claimed to have heard ‘very intense’ sounds of ‘cries, guns, divebombing’ and ‘shell[fire]’ between 4 and 7am on 4 August 1951.<sup>213</sup> The ebb-and-flow of the noises seemed to mimic the sounds of the raid:

The noise [of the raid]...became very intense, it came in rolls of sound and the separate sounds of cries, guns and divebombing were very distinct. Many times we heard the sound of a shell at the same moment. The roaring became very loud. At 4.50[am] it suddenly stopped. At 5.5[0] a.m. it started again and once more became very intense, so much so that we stood on our balcony, we were amazed that it did not wake other people in the house.<sup>214</sup>

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<sup>208</sup> Osborn, ‘The Woman in Brown’, p. 128.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid., p. 153, 137.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid., p. 153.

<sup>211</sup> Shapira, *The War Inside*, p. 55.

<sup>212</sup> G. W. Lambert and Kathleen Gay, ‘The Dieppe Raid Case: A Collective Auditory Hallucination’, *JSPR*, 36 (670) (May-June 1952), pp. 607–18.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid., p. 607, 608.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid., p. 608.

The strengths and weaknesses of the two women's accounts were outlined by Lambert and Gay. Both recorded their initial reactions 'at once, on the day', yet these were unsupported by accounts of those in the house.<sup>215</sup> Adopting a process of elimination, the investigators concluded that 'both as regards form and content we think the experience [of the two women] must be rated as a genuine psi phenomenon, of which little or nothing was derived from previously normally acquired knowledge'.<sup>216</sup> Aside from examples such as the 'Dieppe raid' hallucinations and 'visions' of the 'woman in brown', few SPR investigations relied on the immediate context of war for their inspiration. War's silence surrounding the SPR's PSI experiments during the 1930s and 1940s, as we will see, seems deafening given preconceptions of the Second World War's totalising impact. Yet these experiments not only reveal the limits of war's reach: they also point towards the ironies within the psychical research community's search for scientific rigour and respectability at their most extreme. Based on botched research and falsified evidence, the experiments of Samuel Soal highlight how an unquenchable longing for, and crucially *belief in*, the scientism of psychical research led to fundamental failings within early parapsychological work.

#### EXTRA-SENSORY PERCEPTION AND EARLY PARAPSYCHOLOGY

By the mid-century, international psychical research drew heavily on emerging psychological theories. With questions of survival diminishing in importance, attention turned to uncovering the telepathic and clairvoyant possibilities of the mind. A shift in the focus of investigations was accompanied by a shift in methods. Since the 1920s, SPR members such as Theodore Besterman and Samuel Soal pushed for the scientific and mathematical experimentation of 'phenomena' related to the mind and telepathy. In 1929 Besterman was elected to succeed Helen Salter as the Society's editor of publications.<sup>217</sup> Through controlling its published outputs, he ensured work which did not conform to its 'standard' was suppressed.<sup>218</sup> Members interested in the investigation of physical mediumship were flushed out, including the Society's Honorary Research Officer V. J. Wooley in 1927 as well as Eric Dingwall.<sup>219</sup> The extent to which the Society had adopted an unofficial dominant approach to psychical phenomena (which was largely unconnected to the

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<sup>215</sup> Lambert and Gay, 'The Dieppe Raid Case', p. 618.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid.

<sup>217</sup> Inglis, *Science and Parascience*, p. 220.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid., p. 243.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid., p. 215, 220.

context of war) was confirmed by Samuel Soal's stark warning to K. M. Goldney in April 1944: 'I am sorry to hear that you are thinking of mixing yourself up in this vulgar [Helen] Duncan business...It's your affair of course but as a serious parapsychologist I should think it undignified even to mention such trash let alone write about it exposing it! [*sic*].'<sup>220</sup>

*J. B. Rhine, Samuel Soal, and PSI Experiments*

Whilst various members of the SPR explored overlaps between the psychical and psychological, it was the work of an American psychologist who first put 'parapsychology' on the map in the mid-1930s. In 1934 Joseph B. Rhine (a botanist by background) published *Extra-Sensory Perception*, which sought to investigate the possibility of telepathic or clairvoyant communication through card-guessing experiments.<sup>221</sup> Originally interested in physical mediumship, Rhine turned to the workings of the mind in 1927 following William McDougall's invitation to assist his experiments in psychical research at Duke University.<sup>222</sup> The partnership between McDougall, Rhine, and Joseph's wife Louisa led to the foundation of the first autonomous research institute for parapsychology at an American university and the creation of the *Journal of Parapsychology*.<sup>223</sup> Using 'Zener cards' (developed in conjunction with the psychologist Karl Zener), experiments underpinning *Extra-Sensory Perception* recorded the number of correct precognitive guesses in a pack of 25 cards (consisting of 5 different shapes) (see fig. 2.2). Rhine began recording results significantly *above* chance, both in 'pure clairvoyance' (when the agent did not know what the card was) and 'undifferentiated extra-sensory perception' (perception which might be attributed to either clairvoyance or telepathy).<sup>224</sup>

*Extra-Sensory Perception* was generally received warmly by the English psychical researchers. The traditionalist center of the SPR, including Mrs Sidgwick and W. H. Salter, welcomed it as a piece to inspire future work (no doubt hoping that the study of mental phenomena would lead back to survivalist arguments).<sup>225</sup> W. Whately Carrington and H. F. Saltmarsh, both experiment oriented researchers, gave the fullest and most appreciative comments.<sup>226</sup> Yet others were more sceptical. For Eric Dingwall, the book featured the same wishful thinking and flawed experimental

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<sup>220</sup> CUL, MS SPR 20/3/76, Letter from S. G. Soal to K. M. Goldney, 28 April 1944.

<sup>221</sup> Joseph B. Rhine, *Extra-Sensory Perception* (London: Faber & Faber, 1935).

<sup>222</sup> Inglis, *Science and Parascience*, p. 267.

<sup>223</sup> Asprem, 'A Nice Arrangement of Heterodoxies', p. 140.

<sup>224</sup> Inglis, *Science and Parascience*, p. 272.

<sup>225</sup> Mauskopf and McVaugh, *The Illusive Science*, p. 119.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid.



**Figure 2.2** Zener Cards

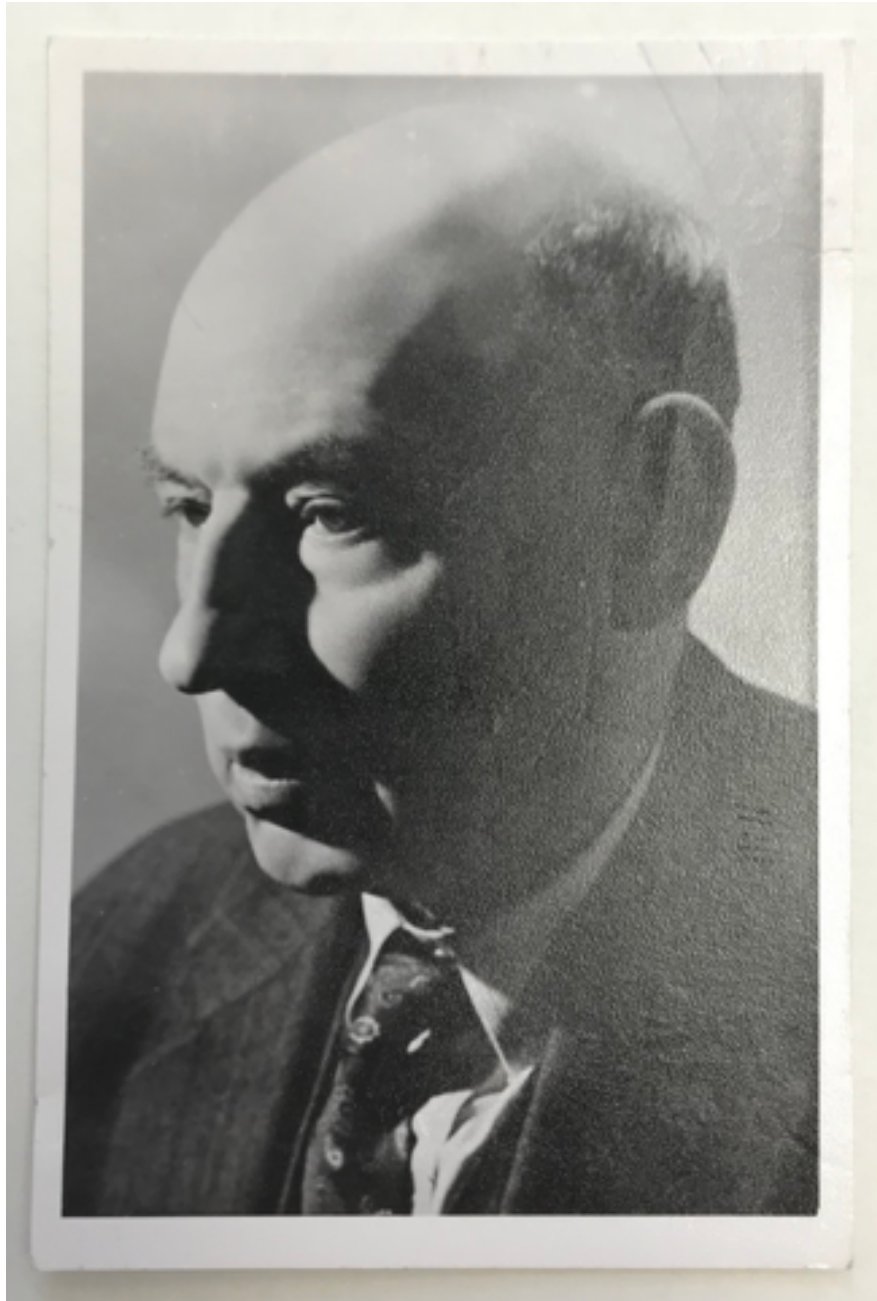
Source: Inglis, *Science and Parascience*, p. 272.

approach which characterised much of the recent work within the SPR.<sup>227</sup> Samuel Soal, senior lecturer in mathematics at Queen Mary college, University of London (fig. 2.3) remained intrigued but suspicious. Soal joined the Society in 1922 shortly after his appointment at Queen Mary, rising to its upper-echelons by the end of the decade. Tensions soon emerged around Soal's perception of the Society's imprecise experimental methods, leading to his estrangement in 1932. Both the SPR and Soal began parallel investigations emulating Rhine's in order to test the accuracy of his findings.<sup>228</sup> Between 1936 and 1941 Soal conducted somewhere in the region of 120,000 experiments with almost 160 participants, although no significant results were obtained. Upon re-examination of the data Whatley Carrington recognised a potential 'displacement effect' between two of the subjects, Basil Shackleton and Gloria Stewart, indicating the possibility of genuine telepathic abilities.<sup>229</sup> Shackleton and Stewart were brought back for a further series of investigations, this time with the aid of Kathleen M. Goldney. It was the Soal experiments rather

<sup>227</sup> Mauskopf and McVaugh, *The Illusive Science*, p. 121.

<sup>228</sup> Ibid., p. 126.

<sup>229</sup> S. G. Soal and K. M. Goldney, 'Experiments in Precognitive Telepathy', *PSPR*, 47 (167) (1942–1945), p. 30.



**Figure 2.3** Portrait photograph of Samuel Soal [c.1950–1951]

*Source:* CUL, MS SPR 20/3/456, Portrait Photograph of SGS

than those performed in-house by the SPR which were the most significant, due to the ‘positive’ results obtained and the impact this subsequently had upon the psychical research community.

Soal managed to track down Shackleton to his private studio in the West End of London in 1940, having recently been discharged from the army due to ill-health.<sup>230</sup> Shackleton spent his

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<sup>230</sup> Soal and Goldney, ‘Experiments in Precognitive Telepathy’, p. 33, 34.

childhood and early adolescence in South Africa, but it was not until his early twenties that he became aware of his unusual psychical ‘gifts’.<sup>231</sup> Owing to his ill-health, it was agreed that the bulk of the experiments should take place at his London studio.<sup>232</sup> Due in part to the volume of experiments conducted, but also owing to the need of a second SPR member to vouch for his work, Soal sought a co-investigator. Kathleen M. Goldney, or ‘Mollie’ as Soal referred to her, had been a member of the SPR since the mid 1920s (fig. 2.4). Based in London, Goldney split her time between the SPR and her work as the Assistant Regional Administrator for the Women’s Volunteer Service covering Cheshire, Cumberland, Lancashire, and Westmorland.<sup>233</sup> According to Soal, Goldney was selected for her ‘great experience’ in ‘many branches’ of psychical research, particularly physical mediumship, as well as her skills in the ‘detection of fraud’.<sup>234</sup> Yet these expertise were limited to identifying fraudulent physical mediums. By her own admission, Goldney did not have the mathematical qualifications necessary for the handling or criticizing of the data collated.<sup>235</sup>

The new experiments, focusing mainly on Shackleton and conducted predominantly between 1941 and 1943 at weekly intervals, involved five hundred sittings and twenty thousand guesses.<sup>236</sup> Opting for a variant on the Zener card with animal images rather than shapes, an ‘agent’ (the person ‘transmitting’ the image through psi function) and ‘percipient’ (Shackleton) were kept in separate rooms to eliminate the possibility of ‘leakage, fraud, and collusion’.<sup>237</sup> Over the duration of the experiments, Shackleton scored 2,890 ‘hits’ compared with the chance expectation of 2,308. It was noted that ‘B.S.’, unlike Rhine’s participants, was particularly successful at guessing the image of the *proceeding* card rather than the card currently drawn.<sup>238</sup>

Variations on standard card guessing were explored by Soal and Goldney in order to facilitate an increased likelihood of recording ESP phenomena. Methods combining drugs and hypnosis were debated throughout 1941. In a letter dated 10 April 1941, for example, Goldney wrote to Soal:

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<sup>231</sup> Soal and Goldney, ‘Experiments in Precognitive Telepathy’, p. 34.

<sup>232</sup> Ibid., p. 33.

<sup>233</sup> Ibid.

<sup>234</sup> Ibid.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid.

<sup>236</sup> Ibid., p. 35.

<sup>237</sup> Ibid., p. 33.

<sup>238</sup> Ibid., p. 25.



**Figure 2.4** Photograph of Kathleen Goldney outside the SPR's London Headquarters, Tavistock Square, Bloomsbury [nd]

*Source:* Mary Evans Picture Library Online, <<https://www.diomedia.com/stock-photo-mrs-k-m-mollie-goldney-psychical-researcher-image5908087.html>>, [accessed 13 April 2018].

As regards DRUG experiments. Naturally I never propose conducting these without a doctor present, who could enquire [into] his [Shackleton's] history to judge whether drugs could be used with safety or not. My idea was to get Dr. Nunan or Dr. Parkes (both hypnotists), as Shackleton himself seems keen on hypnotism, and let them come every now and then to try the effect of suggestion or hypnotism...then the same doctor could later administer benzedrine or other drugs to see their effect.<sup>239</sup>

Although drugs and hypnosis were never used, the investigators toyed with the idea of an 'unrecorded' side project employing both. This, they hoped, would allow for further work on Shackleton's 'abilities' and prevent other psychical researchers from initiating investigations.<sup>240</sup>

Initial results of Soal and Goldney's investigations appeared to offer proof that ESP phenomena did in fact exist. Ever the sceptic, Eric Dingwall noted problems with the experimental method. It was claimed that Soal's calculations of standard deviations were wrong, resulting in valueless mathematical findings.<sup>241</sup> The accusations were taken personally. 'He [Dingwall] made me feel very depressed about the experiments', Soal confessed to Goldney on 5 February 1941.<sup>242</sup> Other voices pointed towards the possibility of problems beyond lack of rigour. Gretl Albert, the 'agent' used in the Shackleton experiments, claimed to have witnessed Soal deliberately falsifying data during one of the sessions—changing 'ones' for 'fours' and 'fives' on the list of random numbers in order to maximize the probability of above average chance scores.<sup>243</sup> 'I still feel angry about the irresponsible and false statement made by this woman Mrs Albert', Soal wrote to Goldney on 11 June 1941. 'As a German her word would certainly carry no weight when supported by no evidence whatever...How can Germans possibly be trusted in wartime?'<sup>244</sup>

Despite initial skepticism the results of the experiments were favourably received when they finally came to print within *Proceedings*. Dingwall's early concerns were quickly reversed. 'I have been speaking to Eric Dingwall on [the] phone', Soal explained to Goldney in January 1944, 'and [he] said "I always did say it was a first-class piece of work"'.<sup>245</sup> J. B. Rhine was also impressed by the results, so much so that he wrote to the SPR suggesting an updated introduction to telepathy and clairvoyance (to be penned by himself) within the next issue of *Proceedings*.<sup>246</sup> Soal and Goldney's experiments were, according to Rhine, 'undoubtedly the most valuable research

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<sup>239</sup> CUL, MS SPR 20/3/5, Letter from K. M. Goldney to S. G. Soal, 10 April 1941.

<sup>240</sup> CUL, MS SPR 20/3/18, Letter from K. M. Goldney to S. Soal, 30 December 1941.

<sup>241</sup> CUL, MS SPR 20/3/1, Letter from S. G. Soal to K. M. Goldney, 18 January 1941.

<sup>242</sup> CUL, MS SPR 20/3/2, Letter from S. G. Soal to K. M. Goldney, 5 February 1941.

<sup>243</sup> Lawrie Reznick, *Delusions and the Madness of the Masses* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2010), p. 55.

<sup>244</sup> CUL, MS SPR 20/3/9, Letter from S. G. Soal to K. M. Goldney, 11 June 1941.

<sup>245</sup> CUL, MS SPR 20/3/57, Letter from S. G. Soal to K. M. Goldney, 5 January 1944.

<sup>246</sup> CUL, MS SPR 20/3/72, Letter from K. M. Goldney to J. B. Rhine, 26 March 1944. For Rhine's introduction, see 'Telepathy and Clairvoyance Reconsidered', *PSPR*, 48 (172) (1946–1949), pp. 1–7.



that has come out of this field of investigation in the sixty years of its scientific history'.<sup>247</sup> From as early as 1942 the impact of the experiments were marked. In his Presidential Address to the Society, R. H. Thouless positivistically coined the neutral term 'psi phenomena' to subsume ESP and other phenomena. 'Let us now give up the task of trying to prove again to the...sceptical that the psi effect really exists', he remarked, 'and try instead to devote ourselves to the task of finding out all we can about it'.<sup>248</sup> A watershed moment in the history of psychical research, and in the history of the SPR, was clearly unfolding.

The experiments gained broader publicity through reports within the mainstream national press. In December 1944, the *Daily Mail* ran the headline 'He Saw into the Future', outlining the main findings of the experiments.<sup>249</sup> Other media gave the investigations even greater public exposure. In July 1945, the BBC's Home Service provided Soal with a platform to outline the scientific approach to telepathy, with an evening slot at 9.15pm. The talk was applauded by several members of the SPR as well as many of the BBC staff. As Soal noted to Goldney:

Benzie of the BBC who organized the thing & went through the rehearsal with me etc [*sic*] has written to say that she enjoyed listening in and that most of the BBC staff stopped to listen both in the Home & Overseas Dep[ar]t[ment]s.<sup>250</sup>

News of the experiments continued to stoke popular interest into the postwar period. In 1949, the *Daily Mirror* questioned whether telepathy constituted a science of the future. 'Telepathy in twenty years may be a science as exact as dentistry or engineering is today', the report stated.<sup>251</sup> In a summary of the wartime experiments of Soal and Goldney, W. H. Salter (representing the SPR) claimed: 'I think its [telepathy's] existence has been quite adequately proved by controlled experiments'.<sup>252</sup> By the postwar period, the views of even the more traditional Society members had aligned in support of telepathy. Traditional psychical research had been swept away in favour of new style 'parascience'.<sup>253</sup>

The Soal and Goldney experiments were significant for two reasons. First, they reveal shifting internal dynamics within the upper-echelons of the Society and the primacy of gender within its structural composition. Private correspondences within the SPR archive reveal how Goldney's

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<sup>247</sup> CUL, MS SPR 20/3/75, Letter from J. B. Rhine to B. Shackleton, 21 April 1944.

<sup>248</sup> Quoted in Mauskopf and McVaugh, *The Illusive Science*, p. 299.

<sup>249</sup> 'He Saw into the Future', *Daily Mail*, 4 December 1944, p. 3.

<sup>250</sup> CUL, MS SPR 20/3/114, Letter from S. G. Soal to K. M. Goldney, 7 July 1945.

<sup>251</sup> 'Telepathy—Is It Possible?', *Daily Mirror*, 17 August 1949, p. 2.

<sup>252</sup> Ibid.

<sup>253</sup> Inglis, *Science and Parascience*, p. 302.

rise to membership of the council during the 1940s was achieved more by her association with high-ranking men than internal appreciation for her research. In a series of letters between Soal and Goldney in mid-1942 efforts were made to maneuver Goldney into the council. On 7 May 1942, Soal explained: 'On Sunday morning I saw Dingwall and he said we ought to get you on the Council at all costs [emphasis original]'.<sup>254</sup> Goldney confessed her desire to sit on the council in order to bring 'new blood' into a seemingly wilting organisation:

I admit I w[oul]d like to be on the Council, partly because you [Soal] are, partly because I have so long had psychical research as an interest...The Society needs new blood and is as we know somewhat morbid, and has too long been run by a close clique.<sup>255</sup>

It was anticipated that the 'Salter clique' of 'unprogressive fossils' (led by W. H. Salter and his wife) would potentially veto Goldney's place on the council.<sup>256</sup> Mitigating this possibility, Soal enlisted the support of the then SPR President R. H. Thouless who promised to speak on her behalf and propose a vote on her election at the next council meeting.<sup>257</sup> With Thouless' backing, Goldney was swiftly elected. Upward mobility within the Society was not only extremely difficult, given the various factions and cliques which defined it: for promising female psychical researchers such as Goldney it required knowing the right people, more specifically the right *men*, in order to lift them into the Council.

Yet Goldney's support of and by the 'right men' points to the broader irony of the experiments. The concerns of Gretl Albert were subsequently confirmed after close examination of Soal's experimental records. The list of 'random' numbers recorded displayed an excess of 'fours' and 'fives' and a paucity of 'ones'. Soal's participants quickly learnt that more successful results were likely to be obtained when guessing a four or five. The testimony of Gretl Albert, coupled with the evidence from the score-sheet, indicated that Soal was aware of this too and exploited the situation for the harvesting of fraudulent data.<sup>258</sup> The experiments which seemingly convinced the psychical research community that extra-sensory perception existed (and which propelled Goldney's rise within the SPR council) were falsified. Writing to Soal in 1940, an ageing Sir Oliver Lodge took comfort in the thought that psychical research seemed to be on the threshold of establishing itself amongst the professional sciences.<sup>259</sup> The fact that the SPR had finally began

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<sup>254</sup> CUL, MS SPR 20/3/28, Letter from S. G. Soal to K. M. Goldney, 7 May 1942.

<sup>255</sup> CUL, MS SPR 20/3/30, Letter from K. M. Goldney to S. G. Soal, 11 May 1942.

<sup>256</sup> Letter from S. G. Soal to K. M. Goldney, 7 May 1942.

<sup>257</sup> CUL, MS SPR 20/3/31, Letter from S. G. Soal to K. M. Goldney, 25 May 1942.

<sup>258</sup> Reznick, *Delusions and the Madness of the Masses*, p. 55.

<sup>259</sup> Mauskopf and McVaugh, *The Illusive Science*, p. 298.

to coalesce itself around Soal's ESP findings, unscrupulous in his deliberate manufacture of fraudulent data, had in fact pushed the discipline further away from objective research methods than contemporaries realised.

## CONCLUSION

At a private lunch between Eric Dingwall and K. M. Goldney in Gower Street, Bloomsbury in early 1945, Dingwall confessed that the SPR 'might not exist 20 years hence'.<sup>260</sup> Council members at the top of the society recognised that the productivity of its members had significantly declined as a result of the war. 'I have set myself to read the Presidential addresses in Proceedings, in order from the beginning', Goldney penned to Soal in July 1945:

It makes one very depressed to read through the early volumes, to see all those Committees covering, separately, all the main branches of psychical research, and to see the tremendous amount they accomplished six months to six months. And to compare it with the present position!! [*sic*]<sup>261</sup>

Yet consciously re-inserting the pressing context of war—or rather considering its absences and silences—presents quite different conclusions to familiar narratives of the Society's decline. It is precisely its relationship with war, so different to the impact of the First World War, which makes the mid-century history of the SPR so revealing. The 'spiritualist turn' during and after the First World War proved ripe for the investigation of psychical activity by SPR members. But due to the altered experience of mass death, and growing interest in parapsychological approaches, spiritualist investigations within the SPR of 1939 to 1945 were minimal. The evidence presented in this chapter therefore challenges dominant narratives of twentieth century 'total war', highlighting examples of the limits war had upon society and the multiple readings of 'modernity' within 'total war'.

The wartime history of the SPR points towards scientific problems in investigating psychical 'phenomena'. As we have seen, this was riddled with complications. Debates within the psychical research community at mid-century were inter-woven around a much broader discourse on heterodox belief involving a number of agencies including the state, military, and the Anglican Church. The power the Society exerted at this level was mixed due to divided opinions as to its

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<sup>260</sup> CUL, MS SPR 20/3/45, Letter from K. M. Goldney to S. Soal, 19 January 1945.

<sup>261</sup> CUL, MS SPR 20/3/113, Letter from K. M. Goldney to S. G. Soal, 7 July 1945.

respectability and professional standing, both academically and amongst the public. Yet more specific conclusions, attuned to cultural understandings of war, present themselves. Gender and class dynamics were at the heart of the SPR's wartime workings. Its male-dominated power structure made accessing its upper-echelons difficult for women without the necessary male contacts. It also reinforced the cultural acceptability of demonising female civilians at the home front—most acutely in the case of Helen Duncan. The dominant players within the SPR were male academics and intellectuals reserved from military service through their employment within British Universities. These individuals held their own, often conflicting, beliefs on what was deemed 'heterodox' in the mid-century; their sense of self-worth derived from their academic and professional standing rather than serving the wartime nation.

Issues of class and gender clearly ran through wartime discourse on heterodoxy. The question of how civilians would cope as demands on morale increased were at the fore-front of state concerns as the experience of war moved beyond the threat of bombardment. How did these concerns work themselves out in more specific forms, and what role did propaganda play in the shaping of heterodoxy? As the following examples from the wartime national press reveal, a far murkier and secretive battle to harness the minds and behaviours of citizens played itself out in the context of press astrology. Tensions between the Government, state, and media, centred on the grey-area between propaganda and entertainment: leading to an increasing obsession with the private and intimate spaces of war.

*Astrological Warfare: Propaganda and  
the Popular National Press*

‘Today’, a Mass Observation (hereafter MO) report of July 1941 stated, ‘more people follow their fate (or Britain’s) in the stars, as indicated by astrologers, than follow the day-to-day advice of God as outlined by his archbishops, preachers, [and in] parish magazines’.<sup>1</sup> The growth of mass astrology, the report went on to suggest, reflected the ‘underlying insecurity and worry of the post-1914 years’ offering its followers ‘immediate, temporary, but continually renewed and re-arranged antidotes and sedatives’.<sup>2</sup> As the MO report indicated, total war’s destabilisation of personal and collective stability lent astrological messages a newfound urgency. Prophetic advice was often sought in a bid to reclaim a sense of agency in uncertain times. In an era which saw emergent media forms cater to the appetite of the democratised mass, print journalism—in particular the popular national press—aimed to capitalise on the wartime demand for prescription through astrology sections. This growing focus on the mass citizenry, and in particular the popular press’ preoccupation with readers’ private worlds, had important political dimensions. Whilst various political parties and commercial enterprises recognised the need to measure and evaluate popular opinion in this context, concerns around the press’ potential to manipulate people’s attitudes and behaviours increased. As the then Prime Minister David Lloyd George recognised during the First World War, newspapermen were ‘well versed in techniques of news management and mass persuasion’. It was no coincidence therefore that the press tycoons Lords Beaverbrook and Northcliffe—owners of the highest circulating daily nationals of the period—were offered official positions to oversee propaganda targeted at the enemy citizenry

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<sup>1</sup> MOA, FR 769, ‘Mass Astrology’, 1 July 1941, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 1.

in early-1918.<sup>3</sup> Bringing Beaverbrook and Northcliffe into the orbit of government would allow for the simultaneous exploitation of their expertise as propagandists as well as the muzzling of any anti-government rhetoric.<sup>4</sup> These tensions between the wartime government, state, and press continued during the Second World War, and were often publicly expressed. Yet a more secretive battle over the tone and content of newspaper astrology existed, centred on competing political and commercial attempts to influence the mass citizenry.

How should we view the popular press' workings, and its astrological content more specifically, in the total war context? Mark Hampton has questioned contemporary perceptions of the popular press as either a solution to or problem for democratic wartime politics; as a propaganda arm of an increasingly interventionist state or a vehicle of mass persuasion serving its own ends.<sup>5</sup> Cultural products such as the wartime press clearly had strong propaganda dimensions. 'Propaganda', so David Welch suggests, should be viewed as the deliberate attempt to influence the 'opinions of an audience through the transmission of ideas and values for a specific persuasive purpose'.<sup>6</sup> Yet wartime newspaper propaganda was by no means neatly divided between the dichotomies which contemporaries perceived. Aware of its fight against totalitarian suppression of opinion, the democratic state implemented a policy of press censorship largely restricted to suppressing sensitive information.<sup>7</sup> Its direct ability to control published opinion was restricted to avoid 'anti-democratic' connotations. Despite this, the political climate of wartime dictated that newspaper opinion had to operate within a restricted field of orbit. Both the press and the state had an influence over the kinds of propaganda messages being transmitted in wartime—but neither did they have full control of them.

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<sup>3</sup> Philip M. Taylor, *British Propaganda in the Twentieth Century: Selling Democracy* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), p. 51.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52.

<sup>5</sup> Mark Hampton, *Visions of the Press in Britain, 1850-1950* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004), ch. 5, 'Persuasion or Propaganda? Thinking about the Press in Britain, 1914-50'. For a recent discussion on the relationship between propaganda and democracy in twentieth-century Britain, see Hugo García, 'Reluctant Liars? Public Debates on Propaganda and Democracy in Twentieth-Century Britain (ca. 1914-1950)', *Contemporary British History*, 33 (2019), pp. 383-404.

<sup>6</sup> David Welch, 'Propaganda', in Nicholas J. Cull, David Culbert, and David Welch (eds.), *Propaganda and Mass Persuasion: A Historical Encyclopaedia, 1500 to the Present* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2003), p. 322. On propaganda in the war-time press and on radio, see Stephen Badsey and Philip Taylor, 'The Experience of Manipulation: Propaganda in Press and Radio', in John Bourne, Peter Liddle, and Ian Whitehead (eds.), *The Great World War, 1914-45*, vol II: *The People's Experience* (London: Harper Collins, 2001), pp. 41-55. For the classic study of wartime propaganda, see Michael Balfour, *Propaganda in War 1939-1945: Organisations, Policies and Publics in Britain and Germany* (London: Routledge and Keegan Paul, 1979).

<sup>7</sup> For an overview of censorship in wartime Britain, see Philip M. Taylor, 'Censorship in Britain in the Second World War: An Overview', in A. C. Duke and C. A. Tamse (eds.), *Too Mighty to Be Free: Censorship and the Press in Britain and the Netherlands* (Zutphen: Walburg Pers, 1987), pp. 157-77.

It was precisely this tension which lay at the heart of popular newspaper astrology. As Vanessa Chambers illustrates, the wartime state argued for the subversive potential of astrology sections—demonstrating elements similar to ‘political’ or ‘psychological’ warfare used to undermine the morale of enemy citizens.<sup>8</sup> It was the propaganda’s hidden nature, sharpening pre-existing fears through provision of specific actions, which proved most alarming.<sup>9</sup> Yet this conclusion better reflects the state’s discomfort over the power of the popular press as rival agenda-setters, giving little agency to the internal dynamics of newspaper policy. Newspapers had their own agendas, as Adrian Bingham highlights. The final print represented decisions balancing the wishes of proprietors, editors, and writers and what was deemed to be commercially and critically successful.<sup>10</sup> In order to understand the varied functions of the astrology sections, political and commercial imperatives of the press (and the spaces of overlap or friction between them) must be considered alongside their propaganda messages. As with many forms of propaganda, the significance of the astrology sections for historians is tied to the context of reception. Whilst newspaper pieces contain a ‘preferred’ meaning, so Bingham reminds us, this meaning could be negotiated, resisted, or ignored by the reader.<sup>11</sup> Paying close attention to what Stuart Hall describes as the ‘moments’ all cultural forms take—production, content, and reception—remains a critical starting point for exploring the various dynamics and interests at work.<sup>12</sup>

This chapter explores the role of astrology as propaganda tool in the Second World War. After charting the rise of astrology during the First World War, and its adaptation to popular newspapers during the interwar period, it considers the function of astrological messages within cultural and state-engineered products. It then turns to analyse the astrology content and horoscopes within wartime Sunday newspapers the *News of the World*, *The People*, *Sunday Dispatch*, *Sunday Express*, and *Sunday Pictorial*. The *News of the World* boasted the highest circulation figures

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<sup>8</sup> Chambers, ‘Fighting Chance’, ch. 8; Chambers, “Defend Us From All Perils and Dangers of this Night”, pp. 160–2. For more on the history of ‘Psychological Warfare’, see Terence H. Qualter, *Propaganda and Psychological Warfare* (New York: Random House, 1962); Charles Cruickshank, *The Fourth Arm: Psychological Warfare 1938–1945* (London: Davis-Poynter, 1977); Michael Stenton, *Radio London and Resistance: British Political Warfare 1939–1943* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Philip M. Taylor, ‘The Fourth Arm and the Fourth Estate: Psychological Operations and the Media’, in Mark Connelly and David Welch (eds.), *War and the Media: Reportage and Propaganda* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2005), pp. 251–63.

<sup>9</sup> David Welch, ‘Opening Pandora’s Box: Propaganda, Power and Persuasion’, in David Welch (eds.), *Propaganda, Power and Persuasion: From World War I to WikiLeaks* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2014), p. 17.

<sup>10</sup> Adrian Bingham, *Gender, Modernity, and the Popular Press in Inter-War Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 11.

<sup>11</sup> Adrian Bingham, *Family Newspapers?: Sex, Private Life, and the British Popular Press 1918–1978* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 10.

<sup>12</sup> Stuart Hall, ‘Encoding/Decoding’, in Paul Marris and Sue Thornham (eds.), *Media Studies: A Reader* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), pp. 41–9.

of any newspaper by mid-century, selling 3.4 million copies in 1930 and 8.44 million by June 1950.<sup>13</sup> *The People*, along with the *Sunday Pictorial*, *Sunday Mirror*, and *Sunday Express* competed for second place.<sup>14</sup> Focusing on high circulating newspapers allows for tentative points to be made on their astrological sections' impact. Yet close attention must be paid to the sectional appeal of the content and the papers themselves, particularly in terms of gender and class. The chapter argues that newspaper astrology sat at the intersection between propaganda and entertainment, balancing various commercial and political interests. It emerged as a site where various wartime agencies vied for influence over the mass citizenry, particularly women. From 1928, full democracy was afforded to women at age 21, boosting the size of the electorate from 21.7 million voters to 28.8 million.<sup>15</sup> Transformations in women's democratic participation of the interwar period has attracted scholarly interest; particularly amongst non-political voluntary organizations, as female acceptance within the mainstream political parties was by no means immediate or smooth.<sup>16</sup> If these changes contributed to what James Hinton terms a growing 'female public sphere', they also strengthened the privatised beliefs women held (and, by implication, the *public* significance of privatised beliefs).<sup>17</sup> The private worlds of working- as well as middle-class women became of central significance in wartime, with growing fears (since the early 1900s) that a female dominated electorate would subvert military scrutiny and disrupt the established political economy.<sup>18</sup> Astrology sections formed a key battleground where women's privatised beliefs were vied for.

As this chapter illustrates, a broader analysis of wartime newspaper astrology sections and their popular reception contests Vanessa Chambers' argument that it solely alarmed the state. It shows

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<sup>13</sup> Colin Seymour-Ure, *The British Press and Broadcasting since 1945*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), pp. 30–1.

<sup>14</sup> Bingham, *Family Newspapers*, p. 19.

<sup>15</sup> Pat Thane, 'The Impact of Mass Democracy on British Political Culture', in Julie V. Gottlieb and Richard Toye (eds.), *The Aftermath of Suffrage: Women, Gender, and Politics in Britain, 1918–1945* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 54–69. More modest moves towards franchise expansion were made in 1918 with the Representation of the People Act; see Ross McKibbin, *Parties and Peoples: England 1914–1951* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 26–7.

<sup>16</sup> Caitriona Beaumont, 'The Women's Movement, Politics and Citizenship 1918–1950s', in Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska (ed.), *Women in Twentieth-Century Britain* (Harlow: Longman, 2001), pp. 262–77; Pat Thane, 'What Difference Did the Vote Make?', in Amanda Vickery (ed.), *Women, Privilege and Power: British Politics, 1750 to the Present* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), pp. 253–88; idem, 'The Impact of Mass Democracy'; McCarthy, 'Parties, Voluntary Associations, and Democratic Politics'. For an overview of British political culture between the wars, pulling away from Ross McKibbin's argument on its dominance by the anti-socialist middle-class, see Helen McCarthy, 'Whose Democracy? Histories of British Political Culture Between the Wars', *Historical Journal*, 55 (2012), pp. 221–38.

<sup>17</sup> Hinton, *Women, Social Leadership, and the Second World War*, p. 2.

<sup>18</sup> Harris, *Private Lives, Public Spirit*, p. 27; McKibbin, *Parties and Peoples*, p. 195; Allport, *Britain at Bay*, p. 44.



how various wartime astrology sections within the popular press transmitted a mixture of propaganda messages with varied tones and implications. These ranged from the everyday 'prescriptive' advice MO identified to the more overt backing of state-engineered propaganda narratives. Whilst the state began to recognise the more positive aspects of the astrologer's content (especially by early-1942), it adopted a muted policy of acceptance towards them. This was primarily due to its inability to directly control the narrative being created in the context of wartime censorship. Using Mass Observation life writings and directive responses, the chapter also points towards the content's diversity of reception, challenging chauvinistic assumptions on a 'passive' and 'suggestive' female readership whose opinions and beliefs in fact held significant political clout.

#### ASTROLOGY IN THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY

'Babylonian in origin, and spreading all over the world through Greece during the 4<sup>th</sup> Century B.C., astrology has exerted periodical rising and waning influence in the civilized communities throughout the last two thousand years', MO suggested in 1941.<sup>19</sup> Unlike other forms of divination, Owen Davies indicates, astrology is based on pseudo-scientific principles involving quite complex calculations.<sup>20</sup> Those who practised astrology in the early-modern period, for example, required a good understanding of mathematics in order to draw readings from astronomical shifts.<sup>21</sup> Astrology's close association with astronomy gave the more serious astrologers a perceived veneer of respectability and expertise.<sup>22</sup> Many took the title of 'Professor' or 'Doctor' in order to bolster the astrological 'prescription' they offered.<sup>23</sup> Not all practising astrologers took their craft to such lengths. A great number were charlatans with little actual knowledge or understanding of the subject.<sup>24</sup> Most published astrologers of the First World War, for example, were theosophists who practised astrology more as a branch of mystical occultism than as practical 'science'.<sup>25</sup>

The context of war, symptomatic of mass death and heightened violence, proved fertile ground for astrologers of all levels of professionalism to ply their trade. Prescription from the stars

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<sup>19</sup> MOA, FR 769, p. 5.

<sup>20</sup> Davies, *Witchcraft, Magic and Culture*, p. 230.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Chambers, 'Fighting Chance', p. 165.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Davies, *Witchcraft, Magic and Culture*, p. 231.

<sup>25</sup> Davies, *A Supernatural War*, p. 43.

emerged in a wide variety of forms, but the conditions of war gave their impact greater political significance. Astrology could be used as a potent weapon of war. Almanacs, the most popular being *Old Moore's*, regularly predicted glorious victory just around the corner.<sup>26</sup> More focused pieces plotted the fates of wartime leaders, particularly those of enemy nations. In September 1914, E. H. Bailey noted in *Old Moore's Almanac* how the Kaiser had 'Mars in square to the radical Sun'—'another evil ray'.<sup>27</sup> Stories and rumours of predictions abroad were regularly printed in both the national and regional press. In early September 1914, the modification of an existing French legend prophesising a 'great triumph' for Paris found its way into the pages of the *Daily Chronicle*—attesting to the power and potential scope of travel of predictions through oral and print cultures.<sup>28</sup> Yet despite the obvious significance of print media as a facilitator of astrological rumours, few indications exist that the authorities were engaged in producing or commissioning such literature.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, astrologers were forced to confine their work—for the time being—to dedicated almanacs, periodicals, and newspaper advertisements rather than in the main body of newspapers.

The experience of the First World War opened the flood-gates to the mass proliferation of astrology. This was greatly advanced by the growth of new technologies, mass markets, and the consumer cultures of modernity in the interwar period.<sup>30</sup> MO's investigations in Blackpool and Bolton in the late 1930s, for example, noted how the work of entrepreneurs successfully 're-enchanted' British society through the opening of new leisure spaces.<sup>31</sup> Symptomatic of the more covert aspects of MO's ethnographic 'observation' of British life, reports from the Worktown Collection reveal how one observer 'waited near...Horoscope machines' in order to gauge their popular reception in Bolton.<sup>32</sup> Although it proved 'next to impossible' for the observer to glean individual reactions, it was noted that several of the overheard conversations and comments reflected a playful scepticism of the horoscopes.<sup>33</sup> As Jennie Taylor points out, it was not only

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<sup>26</sup> Davies, *A Supernatural War*, p. 37.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 26.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., pp. 52–3.

<sup>30</sup> Thurschwell, *Literature, Technology and Magical Thinking*; Jennie Taylor, 'Pennies from Heaven and Earth in Mass Observation's Blackpool', *Journal of British Studies*, 51 (2012), pp. 132–54.

<sup>31</sup> Saler, "Clap If You Believe in Sherlock Holmes"; idem, 'Modernity and Enchantment'. For a recent discussion on historical and more recent approaches to interwar leisure, see Robert Snape and Helen Pussard, 'Theorisations of Leisure in Inter-War Britain', *Leisure Studies*, 32 (2013), pp. 1–18.

<sup>32</sup> MOA, Worktown Collection (hereafter WC), Box 58, 'Side Shows and Amusements', 58/C, Palmistry and Magic. On Bolton, known as the 'Worktown' project, see David Hall, *Worktown: The Astonishing Story of the Project That Launched Mass Observation* (London: Orion, 2015).

<sup>33</sup> MOA, WC, Box 58, 'Side Shows and Amusements', 58/C, Palmistry and Magic.

those being observed who approached the amusements with playful detachment. Many of the observers too found themselves engaging with, and enjoying, a culture they otherwise condemned.<sup>34</sup>

Shifts in interwar journalism also had a profound impact on the marketisation of astrology for the masses. As Adrian Bingham points out, the broader push towards populism and ‘human interest’ stories within the popular press helped dissolve the boundaries between private and public worlds.<sup>35</sup> This wave of ‘new journalism’, modelled after Lord Northcliffe’s revolution in tabloid and picture style journalism of the 1880s, was distinctly gendered.<sup>36</sup> ‘Personal journalism’, gossip columns, and tailored adverts increased as editors and advertisers attempted to cultivate (and capitalise on) a new female readership.<sup>37</sup> ‘Problem pages’, designed to engender a more ‘intimate relationship’ between reader and paper, offered prescriptive advice by ‘experts’ and ‘agony aunts’ on subjects ranging from lifestyle to romance and sex.<sup>38</sup> Creating this perceived reciprocity in women’s newspaper content laid the foundations for the future selling of prescriptive advice re-packaged in the form of horoscopes and astrological content. Previous scepticism expressed on the ‘superstition’ of astrology in the First World War press was soon abandoned as newspapers recognised the potential for a new stream of generating revenue in its creation and reflection of gender modernity.<sup>39</sup> The nineteenth century cult of motherhood was overlaid with new and at times competing notions of modern, self-reflexive femininity. In an emotionally restrained economy where women were expected to deal with feelings privately, targeting privatised beliefs through privatised leisure activities such as newspaper reading proved big business.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Taylor, ‘Pennies from Heaven and Earth’, p. 154.

<sup>35</sup> Bingham, *Gender, Modernity, and the Popular Press*, p. 22.

<sup>36</sup> Martin Conboy, *The Press and Popular Culture* (London: Sage, 2002), ch. 6; Bingham, *Gender, Modernity, and the Popular Press*, *passim*; Hampton, *Visions of the Press*, ch. 5.

<sup>37</sup> Bingham, *Gender, Modernity, and the Popular Press*, p. 38. Attempts had previously been made to achieve this, notably in Northcliffe’s creation of the *Daily Mirror*, but these did not bear fruit until after the First World War. See Rebecca Conway, ‘Making the Mill Girl Modern?: Beauty, Industry, and the Popular Newspaper in 1930s’ England’, *Twentieth Century British History*, 24 (2013), pp. 518–41.

<sup>38</sup> Adrian Bingham, ‘Newspaper Problem Pages and British Sexual Culture since 1918’, *Media History*, 18 (2012), p. 51. On women’s prescription in various print media across the twentieth-century, see Jane Lewis, ‘Public Institution and Private Relationship: Marriage and Marriage Guidance, 1920–1968’, *Twentieth Century British History*, 1 (1990), pp. 233–63; Claire Langhamer, ‘Everyday Advice on Everyday Love’, *L’HOMME: European Journal of Feminist History*, 24 (2013), pp. 1–16; Adrian Bingham and Martin Conboy, *Tabloid Century: The Popular Press in Britain, 1896 to the Present* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2015), pp. 138–44. For a broader discussion on the rise of the female consumer in the twentieth-century, and its political dimensions, see Matthew Hilton, ‘The Female Consumer and the Politics of Consumption in Twentieth-Century Britain’, *Historical Journal*, 45 (2002), pp. 103–28.

<sup>39</sup> Davies, *A Supernatural War*, p. 223.

<sup>40</sup> Noakes, *Dying for the Nation*, ch. 3.

In August 1930, commissioning editors at the *Sunday Express* approached the astrologer R. H. Naylor to produce a reading for the birth of Princess Margaret, daughter of the Duchess of York (fig. 3.1). Unlike the broader predictions of horary astrology (answering questions based on astrological movements) horoscopes feature more focused calculations based on the date or month of birth.<sup>41</sup> ‘Applying the age-old lore of astrological doctrine’ to the twelve zodiac sun signs, Naylor played on Margaret’s royal connection with the sun passing through her star sign Leo (the traditional ‘royal’ sign of the Celestial Zodiac). He predicted the Princess would be loyal, full of pride, intensely affectionate and strong willed.<sup>42</sup> The power of Naylor’s predictions went beyond simply tapping into the popular appetite for royal gossip. It stressed to readers born in August that they also shared the same characteristics as the soon-to-be born Princess. ‘The Princess will share certain basic characteristics common to all people born in the present month, hence in a sense she is an astrological cousin of all readers of the “*Sunday Express*” whose birth anniversaries fall about the same date’.<sup>43</sup> Naylor’s ability to imbue readers with a sense of royal glamour proved an over-night success, and soon after horoscope readings for all twelve sun signs became a weekly fixture. In response to Naylor’s astrology column, other leading daily nationals, particularly the more popular Sunday newspapers, began running their own columns. The astrologer Edward Lyndoe was contracted by *The People*, ‘Caractacus’ for *Empire News*, Adrienne Arden for *News of the World*, and ‘Old Moore’ for the *Sunday Dispatch*.<sup>44</sup> By the late 1930s, MO’s in-house research had already noticed the potential for astrologers to tap into and influence the private thoughts and actions of individuals.<sup>45</sup> As the Ministries of Intelligence (MoI) and Home Security (MoHS) mobilised its wartime apparatus in a wide-ranging effort to monitor and massage the popular mood, the work of newspaper astrologers quickly came to the attention of the state. Unlike the unambiguous treatment of suspected fraudulent mediums under the Witchcraft Act, the workings of newspaper astrology expose the more complex aspects of the state’s relationship with both society and culture in the total war context. As entertainment sections with thinly veiled political and propaganda dimensions, astrology sections proved a difficult medium for domestic surveillance and censorship to grapple with. It was precisely their situation between propaganda and entertainment which, as we will see, caused the MoI and MoHS such

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<sup>41</sup> Davies, *A Supernatural War*, p. 33.

<sup>42</sup> ‘What the Stars Foretell for the New Princess’, *Sunday Express*, 24 August 1930, p. 11.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> MOA, FR 769, pp. 9–10.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

### And A Few Hints On The Happenings Of This Week.

**WIN A BOX OF GOLF BALLS!**

one 6 and no higher figure.

(3) Any figure other than a handcup of 19 to 24, or in the case of a woman of 25, who has a card of 24 or 25, or a 6's and no higher figure on it, is a card that is based on a course no shorter than 5,500 yards. All puts must be held.

(4) A card is open to two players only. Cards must be signed by the player, or approved by the club secretary. The chairman's private secretary is the name of the club professional.

A player can only win once. Cards held by a player handed to The Golf Correspondent.

"Sunday Express,"  
A. S. Shaw-Len, E.C.A.

(Continued from Preceding Column)

your mentality and spiritual insight will develop enormously.

The luck of the week changes, as were, about August 28 (Thursday) was this a very lucky anniversary, particularly for all men who are connected with the golf course.

with heavy industry, transport, and engineering. The same applies to those born on an active temperamental day. These people are usually very energetic and have a great opportunity for making changes and alterations in their lives.

**August 29 (Friday next)** is, too, a fortunate and pleasant birthday. Undoubtedly it is a good day for any new enterprise, and for the beginning of such and such like, whatever your date of birth. Aided to matters which are calculated to bring benefit to the family, and to the more settled and happy events in the home.

**August 30 (Saturday next)** is a more difficult day, and is not so favorable to travel and make changes will increasingly manifest itself during the next few years. For those born on this day, near your twenty-first, twenty-eighth, or thirty-fifth year, the course of your career will undergo radical alterations.

## THE BE

## HOW TO BUY SEASIDE TO

**EASTCOE AVENUE** (off Eastcoe Lane  
Sherwood R.), SOUTH HAWROW, MIDD.  
Phone: HARROW 0051 & 2120

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**HULLERIDGE, CROUCH, TAYLOR & CO.**  
Established building plots from £5 to £55  
including main (main drainage) ideal building, gas  
and water supply, main water connections etc.  
Hawthorn & Letchford, South-east, Essex, service  
and main water supply, and drainage, gas  
on payment first instalment—Owens, Box 453,  
by Express, London, E.C.4.

*Source: Sunday Express, 24 August 1930, p. 11.*

ASTROLOGY, PROPAGANDA, AND THE BATTLE OF MORALE

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simultaneously. It was 'perfectly safe to launch the crude and the sophisticated together, for people capable of reacting to the latter will not be estranged by the former; they will merely remain indifferent and condescending'.<sup>46</sup> Whilst Laswell's reading of propaganda's popular reception may seem reductive by modern standards, his assessment that a wide range of prophecies should be launched simultaneously, and with different intended audiences, only came to the fore during the second 'total' war.

*Cultural and Official Astrology Propaganda*

As unofficial propagandists, newspaper cartoonists of the popular press drew on astrological imagery and Hitler's perceived obsession with the occult to prick the bubble of Axis unity and invincibility in the minds of the public.<sup>47</sup> In June 1943, for example, the *Daily Mail* cartoonist Neibour satirised Hitler's reliance on the 'vague' advice of astrologers (fig. 3.2). In this depiction, Hitler's image is tied to judgements on civilisation itself (comparing him to non-Western 'Oriental Despots'). Other *Mail* cartoonists such as 'Illingworth' used the motif of astrology to prophesise the Führer's 'misfortune' (fig. 3.3). A cowering Hitler listens to an astrologer who foresees 'four' fronts looming, alluding to the closer Allied-Turkish ties agreed by Churchill, Roosevelt, and Turkish President Inonu at the Second Cairo conference of early December 1943. A final example by David Low in the *Evening Standard*, 'Alarums Bells of Destiny', portrays Hitler at his most isolated and vulnerable (fig. 3.4). In a subtle nod to Nostradamus, Low represents Hitler's aggressive, imperialist expansionism as doomed to failure.

'Black propaganda' took on more subversive qualities compared to home front cartoons, designed as part of a broader weapon of sabotage. The Special Operations Executive (SOE), for example, developed a mixture of overt and covert propaganda centred on bogus astrological predictions. Created on 1 July 1940, the SOE was split into SO1 (dealing with political propaganda to Europe) and SO2 (which brought 'sabotage and subversion' against the enemy).<sup>48</sup> Fuelled by Churchill's memories of quasi-guerrilla fighting on the north-west frontier and in South Africa, the SOE became a strand of warfare deemed of 'the very highest importance'.<sup>49</sup> In early

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<sup>46</sup> Harold D. Laswell, *Propaganda Technique and the World War* (New York: Keegan Paul, 1927), p. 201.

<sup>47</sup> Mackay, *Half the Battle*, p. 157.

<sup>48</sup> Todman, *Britain's War: A New World*, p. 161.

<sup>49</sup> Juliette Pattinson, *Behind Enemy Lines: Gender, Passing and the Special Operations Executive in the Second World War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), p. 2. For more on the history of the SOE, see M. R. D. Foot, *SOE in France: An Account of the Special Operations Executive in France, 1940–1944* (London: H.M. Stationary Office, 1976); David Stafford, *Britain and European Resistance, 1940–1945: A Survey of the Special Operations Executive*





**Figure 3.2** 'But Surely It's No Fault of Mine if the Stars are a little Vague over the Actual Date of the Invasion', Ronald Niebour

*Source:* British Cartoon Archive (hereafter BCA), University of Kent Special Collections, NEB0169; *Daily Mail*, 10 June 1943, p. 4

1941 Sir Charles Hambro, the then deputy-director of SOE, requested the aid of the astrologer Louis de Wohl in spreading black astrological propaganda behind enemy lines.<sup>50</sup>

Hambro's initiative was given added persuasiveness within SOE circles by the belief that Rudolf Hess was an adherent of astrology.<sup>51</sup> Consequently, it was stressed that 'all astrological angles

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(London: Macmillan, 1980); M. R. D. Foot, *Special Operations Executive: Outline History of the SOE, 1940–1946* (London: Pimlico, 1990); Marcus Binney, *Secret War Heroes: The Story of Special Operations Executive* (London: Hodder and Staughton, 2005).

<sup>50</sup> Ellic Howe, *Astrology and Psychological Warfare during World War II* (London: Rider, 1972), p. 166; P. R. J. Winter, 'Libra Rising: Hitler, Astrology and British Intelligence, 1940–43', *Intelligence and National Security*, 21 (2006), p. 409. Also see the official security service records on de Wohl; TNA, Records of the Security Service (KV) 2/2821, Records on Louis de Wohl, 1939–1945. For a recent discussion on the dissemination of psychological propaganda behind enemy lines, see Richard Overy, 'Making and Breaking Morale: British Political Warfare and Bomber Command in the Second World War', *Twentieth Century British History*, 26 (2015), pp. 370–99.

<sup>51</sup> Winter, 'Libra Rising', pp. 409–10.

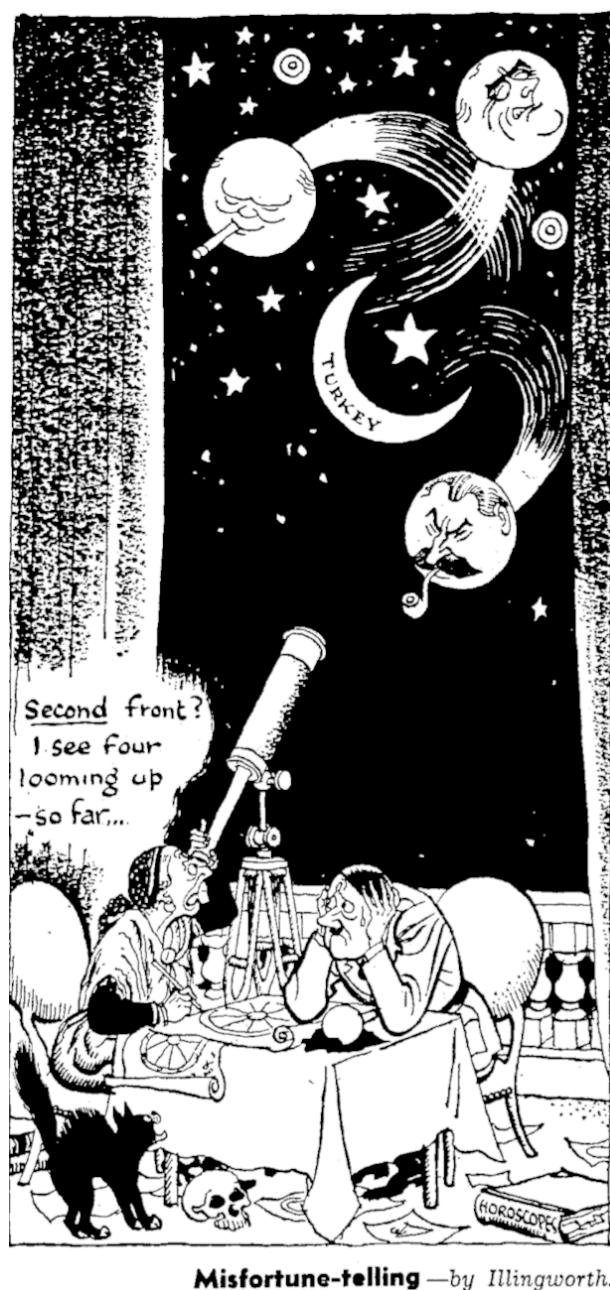


Figure 3.3 'Misfortune Telling', Illingworth

Source: BCA, ILW0653; *Daily Mail*, 8 December 1943, p. 2

were worth exploiting'.<sup>52</sup> Before joining the Psychological Warfare Executive (PWE) during the start of its 'black' activities, de Wohl worked within the clandestine 'Psychological Research Bureau' of the SOE, primarily due to the War Office and Admiralty's inability to employ a professional astrologer.<sup>53</sup> De Wohl's work for the PWE and SO2 spanned a variety of activities.

<sup>52</sup> Winter, 'Libra Rising', pp. 409–10.

<sup>53</sup> Howe, *Astrology and Psychological Warfare*, pp. 164–5.





Figure 3.4 'Alarmus of Destiny'

Source: DL2168; *Evening Standard*, 22 May 1944.

This typically involved using astrology as a means of 'uncovering' secretive information about German military tactics based on false rumours of Hitler's reliance on astrological prediction. As P. R. J. Winter highlights, the hiring of de Wohl by the PWE, and his more secretive associations with the Admiralty and War Office, reveals the extent of internal fears within Britain's intelligence community during the early part of the war.<sup>54</sup> Yet tensions also arose towards the war's latter stages. In the weeks preceding D-Day, for example, the code names of various landing beaches emerged as answers to a number of *Daily Telegraph* crosswords including 'Utah', 'Juno', 'Gold', as well as 'Overlord' and 'Mulberry'. Fifth-column fears, rampant during the invasion scare of spring 1940, were quickly re-activated. MI5 sent two officers to interview the creator of the crosswords, Leonard Davies, who was quickly absolved of suspicion. It was only after the war that the real explanation behind the incident was revealed—involving

<sup>54</sup> Winter, 'Libra Rising', p. 398.

‘overheard’ codenames from American and Canadian troops awaiting the D-Day landings.<sup>55</sup> The incident reinforced the potency and sensitivity of ‘prophetic’ wartime information, particularly when transmitted by word-of-mouth—tactics the SOE regularly deployed against the enemy.

SOE utilised more covert forms of propaganda as a means of de-stabilising German popular resolve. Just a month before the flight of Rudolf Hess to Scotland,<sup>56</sup> a series of internal memoranda circulated within the Colonial Office (CO) advocated the use of subversive astrological rumours in a bid to ‘penetrat[e]’ German morale.<sup>57</sup> On 12 April 1941, Charles Hambro wrote to the Assistant Secretary of the CO, Mr Thomas Lloyd, proposing a joint venture between the CO and SO2. An SO2 officer, Major Leslie Sheridan, was introduced to Lloyd as the CO’s point of contact for the duration of the operation.<sup>58</sup> The purpose of Major Sheridan’s work, Lloyd explained to colleagues at the CO, was to:

Ask whether we could assist in spreading through certain Colonial Governments, the idea that this, according to astrologers, is to be the year of Hitler’s down-fall...He told me that all S.O.2. missions overseas...had been given instructions to help in carrying out this scheme and that similar directives were now going to H.M.’s representatives in certain foreign countries...The idea behind this strikes me as fantastic. Major Sheridan (who has no personal belief in astrology) meets all such criticism by admitting it but asking why we should not make such use as we can of the credulity of others. He argues that even if the plan fails no harm will have been done, whereas if it should succeed to the extent of penetrating Germany it will have had a definite value...I am still sceptical and cannot believe that propaganda of this sort can carry any real weight in the face of present German successes.<sup>59</sup>

To satisfy some of the operation’s more vocal dissenters, Lloyd made it plain that Dr Hugh Dalton, Minister of Economic Warfare and de facto head of SOE, had assessed the feasibility of the scheme and had duly given it his blessing.<sup>60</sup> Once the approval of the more sceptical CO officials was gained, a telegram was sent to all colonial governors informing them that: ‘An attempt is being made to exploit astrological credulity to our advantage in view of the fact that

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<sup>55</sup> Jacob F. Field, *D-Day in Numbers: The Facts Behind Operation Overlord* (London: Michael O’Mara Books, 2014), pp. 77–8. For more on the fifth-column, see Richard Thurlow, ‘The Evolution of the Mythical British Fifth Column, 1939–46’, *Twentieth Century British History*, 10 (1999), pp. 477–98.

<sup>56</sup> For more on the propaganda dimensions of Rudolf Hess’ flight, see Jo Fox, ‘Propaganda and the Flight of Rudolf Hess, 1941–45’, *Journal of Modern History*, 83 (2011), pp. 78–110.

<sup>57</sup> TNA, Records of the Colonial Office and Related Bodies (CO) 875/9/10, memo from Mr Thomas Lloyd to Colonial Office Officials, 23 April 1941. For more on the subversive potential of rumour, see David Coast and Jo Fox, ‘Rumour and Politics’, *History Compass*, 13 (2015), pp. 222–34; Marc Argemi and Gary Alan Fine, ‘Faked News: The Politics of Rumour in British World War II Propaganda’, *Journal of War & Culture Studies*, 12 (2019), pp. 176–93.

<sup>58</sup> TNA, CO 875/9/10, Letter from Charles Hambro to Mr Thomas Lloyd, 12 April 1941.

<sup>59</sup> TNA, CO 875/9/10, Memo from Lloyd, 23 April 1941.

<sup>60</sup> Winter, ‘Libra Rising’, p. 411.

astrology is now a recognised science in Germany and that Hitler is himself understood to believe in it'.<sup>61</sup>

The SOE made it clear that the subversive predictions of indigenous 'soothsayers' regarding Hitler's downfall in 1941 should find their way into the local European press. This, it was believed, would stoke the flames of a worldwide conspiracy against Hitler.<sup>62</sup> By September 1941 the efforts of SOE, SO2 and the CO bore visible fruit. A variant on the rumour, originating from China prophesising Hitler's downfall in 1941 and subsequent death the following year, emerged within the pages of the *Sunday Chronicle*.<sup>63</sup> 'A planchette forecast in China discloses disaster for Hitler this year followed by his death', the report stated. 'Astrologers say that Hitler's fate is governed by Neptune, which connotes violence, mystery, and danger from trusted associates'.<sup>64</sup> A further series of state-engineered astrological rumours were masterminded by the SOE during the war, illustrating the utility of astrology in spreading subversive, clandestine propaganda internationally.<sup>65</sup>

By mid-1941, astrology had become an established part of the propaganda war for both cultural agents and state propagandists. The predictions of popular newspaper astrologers were also starting to come to the attention of the Ministry of Information's (MoI) Home Intelligence Division (HI) at this time, part of a wider effort by the state to assess and control popular morale. HI's wartime morale reports, along with a more focused investigation conducted by the MoHS in early-1942, consistently noted the potentially disruptive impact of popular newspaper astrology on domestic morale.

Digging beneath the surface of state attempts to understand the impact of newspaper astrology reveals something of the internal tensions characteristic of Britain's wartime surveillance machinery. Whilst suspicious of newspaper astrologers' power, their work was quietly tolerated. It was the perception of the MoI (rarely expressed in print) that they ultimately helped to keep people's spirits buoyant as they had during the depression.<sup>66</sup> As Ian McLaine notes, MoI sources (and reports produced by the MoHS) should be approached with sensitivity. They are often more useful in revealing the projection of internal state fears *onto* contemporary wartime society than

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<sup>61</sup> TNA, CO 875/9/10, Telegram from Colonial Office to all Colonial Governors, 1 May 1941; Winter, 'Libra Rising', p. 411.

<sup>62</sup> Winter, 'Libra Rising', p. 411.

<sup>63</sup> TNA, CO 875/9/10, Confidential Memorandum, 30 September 1941.

<sup>64</sup> TNA, CO 875/9/10, 'Hitler to Die in 1942', *Sunday Chronicle*, 28 September 1941 [loose cutting].

<sup>65</sup> TNA, Files of the Special Operations Executive (HS) 3/244, Propaganda and Press.

<sup>66</sup> Gaskill, *Hellish Nell*, p. 188.

the events and phenomena they describe.<sup>67</sup> The contradictory stance of the MoI and MoHS over the issue of newspaper astrology reveals the limits of the state's acceptance of unofficial propaganda which could not be controlled as either 'white' or 'grey' propaganda.<sup>68</sup> More than specific concerns about the astrology section's content, the episode exposes the state's discomfort over the power of the popular press as rival agenda-setters. As Henry Irving reminds us, the MoI never held a monopoly on wartime information.<sup>69</sup> Astrological predictions, dressed as entertainment but with significant political undertones, proved difficult for the state to handle.

*The State, Morale, and Newspaper Astrology*

Concerns over domestic morale and specific propaganda campaigns aimed at its control began to take shape within the first weeks of the war.<sup>70</sup> Whilst various governmental departments were engaged in the control of home security from late-summer 1939 it was the newly established MoI which was tasked with overseeing and steadying home front morale, with plans for its creation beginning in late-1935.<sup>71</sup> As well as its work on morale, the Ministry was given the interlocking objectives of releasing official information, censoring the press, films, and the BBC, conducting publicity campaigns for other government departments, and disseminating propaganda to various foreign countries.<sup>72</sup> One of the principal difficulties for those working in the MoI was how 'morale' should be defined. As Paul Addison highlights, morale represented one of the 'woolliest concepts of the war'.<sup>73</sup> For Dr Stephen Taylor, Director of the Ministry's Home Intelligence Division from April 1941, morale should be measured 'not by what a person thinks or says, but by what he does and how he does it'.<sup>74</sup> Whilst mentalities and attitudes were important, it was behaviour which would serve as the true litmus test of wartime morale.<sup>75</sup> Yet the Ministry's

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<sup>67</sup> McLaine, *Ministry of Morale*, p. 10.

<sup>68</sup> Badsey and Taylor, 'The Experience of Manipulation', p. 49.

<sup>69</sup> Henry Irving, 'The Ministry of Information on the British Home Front', in Simon Eliot and Marc Wiggam (eds.), *Allied Communication to the Public during the Second World War: National and Transnational Networks* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020), p. 22.

<sup>70</sup> Jo Fox, 'Careless Talk', p. 938.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid. Also see Temple Willcox, 'Projection or Publicity? Rival Concepts in the Pre-War Planning of the British Ministry of Information', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 18 (1983), pp. 97–116.

<sup>72</sup> TNA, Cabinet Office (CAB) 4/23, Report of a Sub-Committee on Plans for the Establishment of a Ministry of Information, 27 July 1936; McLaine, *Ministry of Morale*, p. 12.

<sup>73</sup> Addison, *The Road to 1945*, p. 121. For a discussion on contemporary definitions of 'morale' and problems with historicising the term, see Mackay, *Half the Battle*, pp. 1–4.

<sup>74</sup> TNA, Ministry of Information (INF) 1/292, 'Home Morale and Public Opinion', 1 October 1941.

<sup>75</sup> McLaine, *Ministry of Morale*, pp. 8–9.

internal position on the definition of morale remained ambiguous, shifting in line with the context of war.

The MoI drew on an elaborate range of sources in its measurement of domestic morale. In December 1939, a Home Intelligence department was established under the control of Mary Adams, a former producer for BBC television, to 'provide an assessment of home front morale'.<sup>76</sup> Looking for external bodies to complete Home Intelligence's picture of the landscape of morale, Adams turned to Tom Harrisson of MO.<sup>77</sup> Although MO had secured various government work since June 1939, Adam's recruitment of Harrisson marked a turning point in the organisation's associations with the state. Its main task was the everyday monitoring of morale, using direct interviews and open-ended questions to probe issues such as 'What do you think of the news today?' and 'What did you think of Churchill's broadcast last night?'.<sup>78</sup> Much of the so-called 'News Quota' which MO compiled was used in the HI Daily Morale Reports instigated by Adams between 18 May and 27 September 1940. These provided the authorities with a 'mass of suggestive information' about contemporary public attitudes.<sup>79</sup> The evidential basis of the HI reports, in their monthly (pre May 1940) daily (May to September 1940) and weekly (post September 1940) incarnations, relied on a network of Regional Information Officers (RIOs) drawn from thirteen regional centres.<sup>80</sup> Telephoning in reports daily, the RIOs acted as important local barometers of public opinion.<sup>81</sup> Home Intelligence also drew on other source material, including BBC *Listener Research* surveys, questionnaires organised by companies such as W. H. Smiths, the London Passenger Transport Board, the Citizens' Advice Bureaux alongside 'postal censors', and the Police.<sup>82</sup> The MoI's association with MO continued until late- September 1941 when, under pressure over criticisms of MO's qualitative approach, the new director of HI Stephen Taylor severed ties. By this stage, the government favoured the quantitative methods of its own Wartime Social Survey over MO's qualitative and seemingly impressionistic findings.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> TNA, INF 1/47, 'Note on the Functions of Home Intelligence', Mary Adams, 9 February 1940; Paul Addison and Jeremy A. Crang (eds.), *Listening to Britain: Home Intelligence Reports on Britain's Finest Hour—May to September 1940* (London: Bodley Head, 2010), pp. xi–xii.

<sup>77</sup> Addison and Crang, *Listening to Britain*, pp. xii–xiii; Hinton, *The Mass Observers*, pp. 166–67. For more on Adams, see Addison and Crang, *Listening to Britain*, pp. xi–xiii.

<sup>78</sup> Hinton, *The Mass Observers*, p. 167.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>80</sup> Fox, 'Careless Talk', p. 940. The thirteen centres were Edinburgh, Newcastle, Leeds, Manchester, Nottingham, Belfast, Cambridge, Birmingham, Cardiff, Bristol, Reading, Tunbridge Wells, and London.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>82</sup> TNA, INF 1/47, 'Home Intelligence Machinery', 16 July 1940; Addison and Crang, *Listening to Britain*, p. xiv.

<sup>83</sup> Fox, 'Careless Talk', p. 940. For more on the growth of social-scientific approaches to public opinion polling compared to MO's methods, see Laura Beers, 'Whose Opinion?: Changing Attitudes Towards Opinion Polling in

From early on in the war, the state had constructed an intricate web of sources in its efforts to measure domestic morale and root-out its potential aggravators. By mid 1941, following an increase in advice on how best to behave in air-raid shelters by astrologers such as R. H. Naylor,<sup>84</sup> HI picked up on a sharp rise in the popular subscription to astrological advice sections and their potentially subversive impact on morale.<sup>85</sup> 'A large number of people', a weekly report from late-August 1941 stated, 'not only show a high degree of interest in press predictions, but also place considerable reliance on them.' 'There is reason to assume that this interest is growing', the report continued, 'and may in time "have a very serious effect on morale"'.<sup>86</sup> Vocal critics against the growing interest in newspaper astrology could also be found outside of HI. In contrast to William Temple's socially conscious, moderately left-of-centre brand of Anglicanism (a reform-minded approach which came into its own in 1942 amid wider debate over postwar welfare reform and social reconstruction) more conservative Protestants, such as the Reverend C. F. Rogers called for a 'practical cure' against astrology in 1941, particularly against the more detailed predictions which 'invariably' turned out to be false.<sup>87</sup> Turning towards the reason of science and the 'right belief about God', Rogers urged, would dissuade people from popular astrology's sedative qualities.<sup>88</sup> For Rogers, the issue was not particularly complex nor one which implied wartime spiritual bankruptcy. Outlets like astrology were simply poaching the Church of potential believers; 'the masses of people who are taken in by Astrology do not "go to church"'.<sup>89</sup> More senior members of the Church of England, such as the then Bishop of Winchester Cyril Garbett, made their views on newspaper astrology known publicly. A broad-churchman whose conservatism did not prevent him from supporting the rise of welfare reform, Garbett ridiculed the 'sheer nonsense' of press astrology. 'I can think of no better guise for a fifth-columnist than that of the astrologer... He is using a powerful secret weapon to encourage and justify apathy and indolence in working for the national cause'.<sup>90</sup> In a Parliamentary debate of June 1942, the then Minister of Information

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British Politics, 1937–1964', *Twentieth Century British History*, 17 (2006), pp. 177–205; Mark Roodhouse, "Fish-and-Chip Intelligence": Henry Durant and the British Institute of Public Opinion, 1936–63', *Twentieth Century British History*, 24 (2013), pp. 224–48.

<sup>84</sup> Chambers, "Defend Us from All Perils and Dangers of This Night", p. 161

<sup>85</sup> See TNA, INF 1/292, Home Intelligence Weekly Reports, 1940–1944, 2–9 July 1941; 27 August 1941; 3 September 1941.

<sup>86</sup> TNA, INF 1/292, Weekly Report on Morale, 27 August 1941.

<sup>87</sup> Rogers, *Astrology*, p. 50; Todman, *Britain's War: A New World*, p. 74. On Temple's position of social reform and Christianity, see William Temple, *Christianity and the Social Order* (New York: Harmondsworth, 1944).

<sup>88</sup> Rogers, *Astrology*, p. 55, 59.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 60.

<sup>90</sup> 'A Bishop Condemns Astrology', *Church Times*, 28 November 1941, p. 703. For more on Garbett, see Charles Smyth, *Cyril Foster Garbett: Archbishop of York* (London: Hodder, 1959).

Brendan Bracken was asked by Sir Edward Keeling (MP for Twickenham since 1935) about the risks that ‘addicts’ of astrology placed on popular morale. ‘Astrologers seem to have the misfortune to be perpetually in conflict’, Bracken replied. ‘As no sensible person takes their predictions seriously, I cannot ask our overworked censors to meddle in their mysteries’.<sup>91</sup>

Recognising the targeting of female readers, both state and MO concerns about the impact of newspaper astrology were explicitly gendered. Yet these concerns were symptomatic of deeper chauvinistic anxieties over female ‘emotionality’ in the total war context. ‘Women especially’, a MoI Weekly Morale Report stressed, were the most susceptible to the pull of the astrologer.<sup>92</sup> It was feared that astrologers had the ability to influence women’s actions ‘contrary to Government policy’, placing them in positions and situations which could ‘jeopardize their own safety’.<sup>93</sup> Similar arguments, which formed part of the evidential basis used by the MoI in its conclusions, were made by MO. Astrological advice acted as a ‘temporary steadying influence on woma[e]n’, its July 1941 report on Astrology stressed, ‘whose morale tends to be worse in times of crisis’.<sup>94</sup> Given the organisation’s broader obsession with female morale this conclusion seems unsurprising. As early as December 1939, Tom Harrisson urged for government and state recognition of the ‘special needs’ of women in wartime which, as we have seen, revolved around descriptions of their ‘emotive’ nature.<sup>95</sup> It was only through closer co-operation between the state and MO, Harrisson believed, that this assessment would gain broader traction. Arriving at an accurate picture of the depths to which astrology was adhered to was recognised as a more difficult problem. ‘The quality of belief is complex...press astrology is itself so individualist, wide, and changeable’.<sup>96</sup> Depth of belief in astrology was noted as ‘slight’, but the ‘low level influence of astrology’ at a background level was ‘unmistakeable’.<sup>97</sup>

The MoI’s and MoHS’s work on press astrology in the summer of 1941 came to the attention of the War Cabinet Defence Committee in early-1942. The Financial Secretary to the Treasury expressed concerns over the ‘harmful effect’ of press astrology on ‘public morale’ at a meeting of the Defence Committee, calling for ‘strong action’ to be taken to ‘stop this form of journalism’.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Hansard, HC Debate 3 June 1942, vol. 380, c.663, ‘Astrological Predictions’.

<sup>92</sup> TNA, INF 1/292, Weekly Report on Morale, 27 August 1941.

<sup>93</sup> TNA, HO 199/454, Ministry of Home Security Intelligence Branch: *The Effect of Journalistic Astrology on the Public Mind (Morale)*, MoI HI Report No. 45, August 1941.

<sup>94</sup> MOA, FR 769, p. 3.

<sup>95</sup> Noakes, *War and the British*, p. 88.

<sup>96</sup> MOA, FR 769, p. 1.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>98</sup> TNA, HO 199/454, Extract from the Minutes of the War Cabinet Civil Defence Committee, 7 January 1942.

A Sub-Committee was tasked with illustrating the ‘effect’ that horoscopes had on the popular mind and possible methods of combatting them.<sup>99</sup> Radio broadcasting, a new and increasingly popular source of information, was chosen as a way of challenging the power of the press. By early 1941, BBC Listener Research discovered that ‘I heard it on the wireless’ tended to settle news disputes and that an increasing number of people valued and trusted information received on radio over the ‘newspaper talk’ of the press.<sup>100</sup> Various MoI collaborations with the BBC on special issues of its popular factual show *The Brain’s Trust* tackled the ‘problem’ of newspaper astrology. Originally titled *Any Questions*, *The Brain’s Trust* began in early- 1941 as something of a morale-boosting information show during the Blitz.<sup>101</sup> Featuring three regular panellists—philosopher C. E. M. Joad, the biologist Julian Huxley, and retired naval officer Archibald Campbell chaired by Donald McCullough—*The Brain’s Trust* posed listener and later viewer questions to its ‘expert’ panel. To the BBC, and the MoI, the wide-ranging appeal of *The Brain’s Trust* constituted its key strength. To the ‘educated’ it served as something of an entertainment piece, whilst to the ‘under-privileged’ it formed an important component in the improvement of ‘rudimentary education’.<sup>102</sup> A filmed episode of the panel at work in 1942 revealed its disapproval of press astrology. Joad described its aspirin-like function in the ‘cure’ of popular wish-fulfilment, whilst Huxley pointed towards its potentially ‘dangerous’ ramifications. Tellingly, comment on the gendered dimensions of newspaper astrology was saved until the end, with McCullough’s suggestion that ‘if you do want to dabble with the stars, it’s safer to stick to blondes’ (much to the embarrassment of Jennie Lee, the Labour politician and only female panellist on the show in the episode).<sup>103</sup> Other radio programmes dealt with the ‘worrying’ trend towards astrological reliance. In early June 1942, for example, the BBC broadcasted the play *Stardust* by George H. Grimaldi, a satirical take on the ‘private lives’ of ‘gullible’ astrology subscribers according to the *Radio Times*.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Extract from the Minutes of the War Cabinet Civil Defence Committee, 7 January 1942.

<sup>100</sup> Siân Nicholas, “‘All the News That’s Fit to Broadcast’: The Popular Press versus the BBC, 1922–1945”, in Peter Catterall, Adrian Smith, and Colin Seymour-Ure (eds.), *Northcliffe’s Legacy: Aspects of the British Popular Press 1896–1996* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), p. 140. Also see idem, *The Echo of War: Home Front Propaganda and the Wartime BBC, 1939–45* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996).

<sup>101</sup> TNA, HO 199/454, Extract from the Minutes of the Civil Defence Executive Sub-Committee, 28 December 1941.

<sup>102</sup> BBC Written Archives (hereafter BBC WA), Listener Research Department Reports (hereafter LR), 1393, *The Brain’s Trust*, 1942, p. 672.

<sup>103</sup> Patricia Hollis, *Jennie Lee: A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 97.

<sup>104</sup> ‘Both Sides of the Microphone’, *Radio Times*, 29 May 1942, p. 3.



More clandestine methods had been used prior to the public exhortations of the *Brain's Trust*. Exploiting its connections with MO, Gerald Stuart (a representative of the MoI) accompanied MO's Bob Willcock to an interview of R. H. Naylor in early-1940.<sup>105</sup> As Willcock's report on the meeting explained, Stuart 'pretended to be an Obs. [Mass Observer]' and asked Naylor various open-ended questions some of which were 'irrelevant' and deliberately 'antagonising'.<sup>106</sup> After some questions on Naylor's background, Stuart turned to probe the methods behind astrological prediction. Naylor described his work as a mixture of intuition and 'astrological deduction', and it was stressed firmly that this was completed entirely independently of the *Express*' editorial policy.<sup>107</sup> 'From my impression the things that concern the public are the bloody silly things that don't matter a fart to anybody', Naylor urged, claiming to have had little direct influence on public opinion.<sup>108</sup> The true purpose of the meeting (for both Stuart and Naylor) was largely concealed. Yet occasionally cracks emerged. Despite claims to having little influence on public opinion, Naylor attempted to 'get information' on public-opinion methods from Willcock over post-interview drinks.<sup>109</sup> In exchange for the interview, Naylor sought to gain detailed information on the results of MO's 'mass-snooping'. The irony of Naylor's wording was exposed a few months later following public hostility on the MoI's 'snooping' under Duff Cooper.<sup>110</sup>

In the context of wartime voluntary censorship of the media, however, little else could be done.<sup>111</sup> Aside from rare instances of direct intervention, notably the then Home Secretary Herbert Morrison's ban on the *Daily Worker* in January 1941 amid the Communist Party of Great Britain's call for a 'people's peace'—the MoI's censorship capabilities were restricted to information of military value to the enemy.<sup>112</sup> Churchill had his own distaste for the popular press, particularly the *Mirror* and its sister paper, the *Sunday Pictorial*.<sup>113</sup> The fact that the Mirror Group was not owned by a single press Baron, Daniel Todman suggests, made its content more difficult to bring on-side for the Government. Efforts by the Prime Minister to persuade the War Cabinet to suppress both papers in October 1941 were rejected, and tensions erupted again in the spring

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<sup>105</sup> MOA, TC 8/1/A, Report by Bob Willcock: Interview with R. H. Naylor, 13 February/March 1940.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., p. 1. For more on the 'Cooper's Snoopers' episode, see McLaine, *Ministry of Morale*, pp. 84–5.

<sup>111</sup> Badsey and Taylor, 'The Experience of Manipulation', p. 43; Todman, *Britain's War: Into Battle*, p. 258.

<sup>112</sup> Todman, *Britain's War: Into Battle*, p. 611.

<sup>113</sup> Todman, *Britain's War: A New World*, p. 181. Also see Richard Toye, *Winston Churchill: A Life in the News* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), ch. 7.

of 1942. Herbert Morrison instructed the *Mirror's* editor and managing director to limit government attacks in print (or risk being shut down under Defence Regulation 2D).<sup>114</sup> The attack on the *Mirror* provoked a robust defence by MPs and press editors of print media's freedom of speech; Editors were not to be held liable for publishing political opinion or for 'subversive' material which may have 'undermine[d] the people's morale or their will to continue the war'.<sup>115</sup> Unlike the *Worker's* explicit anti-war rhetoric, or the reporting of sensitive military information, newspaper astrology sat at the intersection between propaganda and entertainment. It was this dual function in the context of restrictive wartime censorship which made it so difficult for the state to grapple with, highlighting a reality more complex than Bracken was able to signify in his Parliamentary remarks on press astrology in June 1942.

State suspicions over the subversive impact of newspaper astrology began to wane by early-1942. In its summary of 19 January 1942, the Sub-Committee reiterated MO's conclusions that a minority of the population made astrology a 'major interest in their lives', 'at most one in ten and probably of a neurotic type'.<sup>116</sup> The most popular astrology columns, found within *The People*, the *Sunday Express*, *News of the World*, and the *Sunday Chronicle*, offered:

An optimistic attitude and this appears to satisfy their particular kind of audience. At the same time, astrological advice tends to urge excessive caution and this also suits the specific audience.<sup>117</sup>

Following the Sub-Committee's report, the MoI was instructed to continue monitoring newspaper astrology and to bring any material 'dangerous to the war effort' to the Sub-Committee's notice.<sup>118</sup> The perceived threat of the astrologers had diminished to the extent that no further reports, either by the MoI or the MoHS, were penned following the final Sub-Committee meeting on the 29 January. Despite offering 'pleasurable excitement' on par with 'gambling', both the wartime surveillance machinery and MO recognised that newspaper astrologers generally offered 'common sense advice'.<sup>119</sup> The MoI and MoHS' ambivalent position stemmed from its inability to control what was a highly complex cultural product. Officials were not blind to the positive aspects of

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<sup>114</sup> Todman, *Britain's War: A New World*, pp. 181–2.

<sup>115</sup> G. P. Thompson, *Blue Pencil Admiral* (London: Sampson Low, Marston & Co, 1947), pp. 32–3; McLaine, *Ministry of Morale*, p. 36.

<sup>116</sup> TNA, HO 199/454, War Cabinet Civil Defence Executive Sub-Committee, The Effect of Journalistic Astrology on the Public Mind, 19 January 1942.

<sup>117</sup> TNA, HO 199/454, The Effect of Journalistic Astrology on the Public Mind, 19 January 1942.

<sup>118</sup> TNA, HO 199/454, Extract from Minutes of a Meeting at the Civil Defence Executive Sub-Committee, 29 January 1942.

<sup>119</sup> TNA, HO 199/454, The Effect of Journalistic Astrology on the Public Mind, 19 January 1942; MOA, FR 769, p. 2.

astrological prescription but chose to emphasise its more subversive and disruptive potential. As we turn to consider the content of the columns themselves, a clearer picture of why the state adopted a muted policy of acceptance towards them comes to the fore.

#### PRESCRIPTION, PROPAGANDA, AND ASTROLOGY SECTIONS

The generation of astrological prescription was rather more complex than the picture painted within official documents. Newspaper astrologers did not enjoy unchecked freedom to mould the perceptions of readers through their prescriptive advice. Rather, their columns (like all other aspects of wartime journalism) were shaped by the varied commercial and political interests of the newspaper, its editors, and its owner(s). Following the mass marketisation of tabloid style news, astrology columns needed to keep pace with other entertainment sections, a task made all the more difficult in the context of dwindling wartime paper supplies.<sup>120</sup> Perhaps more importantly, editors needed to appease the wishes of advertising companies which provided much of the revenue newspapers depended on.<sup>121</sup> Due to their distinctly gendered focus, the relationship between astrological sections and advertisement became an integral part of ‘selling’ the newspaper to female readers. Alongside varied commercial and audience-based concerns, astrology columns needed to strike the correct political tone. Whilst media elites were eager to stress the need for an independent and free-thinking press in the total war context, straying too far from officially sanctioned narratives could lead to negative effects. Selling a down-cast vision of the war, as *The People’s* astrologer Lyndoe confessed to Tom Harrisson, had the potential to drive down sales and attract scorn from the state. At least from his experience at *The People*, this was driven home by the editorial staff.<sup>122</sup>

In order to tread the line between these varied and competing interests, the majority of astrological sections toed the propaganda vision of a ‘people’s war’ set by the state.<sup>123</sup> As Adrian Bingham and Martin Conboy stress, the popular press’ most significant contribution to the war was the articulation and entrenchment of the ‘people’s war’ myth, especially once Churchill

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<sup>120</sup> The weekly tonnage of newsprint produced in Britain dropped from 21,000–23,000 in 1938 to just 4,320 in 1942, with advertising revenue also falling; Noakes, *War and the British*, p. 61.

<sup>121</sup> For more on the ‘advertising incentive’ in the build-up to the Second World War, see Bingham, *Gender, Modernity, and the Popular Press*, pp. 29–34. For during the war, see David Clapton, *Advertising and Propaganda in World War II: Cultural Identity and the Blitz Spirit* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2014).

<sup>122</sup> MOA, TC 8/1/A, Astrology, Edward Lyndoe to Tom Harrisson, 16 August 1941.

<sup>123</sup> Calder, *The People’s War*, p. 501.

assumed the premiership in May 1940.<sup>124</sup> Attempts to offer a picture of national unity buttressing state rhetoric would, it would seem from the press' perspective, appease the politicians and the public whilst satisfying advertisers. As such, astrology columns frequently presented private matters on an equal plane to the wider trajectory of the war—integrating reader's private concerns into the public construction of an 'imagined' wartime community.<sup>125</sup> The degree to which editors and directors were personally involved in shaping astrological sections surprised even contemporary journalists. 'It interests me to find you control even the stars in their courses', J. L. Hodson, a wartime correspondent for the *Daily Mail* noted upon learning how one newspaper director instructed the paper's astrologer to promote Britain's 'ultimate victory'.<sup>126</sup> Yet in doing so they regurgitated many of the contradictions and miscommunications inherent within the state's vision of the nation, particularly in the case of the 'careless talk' and 'silent column' initiatives.<sup>127</sup> Ironically, the press' mirroring of official propaganda created even greater state suspicion of its activities.<sup>128</sup>

Following the commodification of 'new journalism', astrology columns were typically squeezed within the light entertainment or advertising sections of popular newspapers. These were placed within the middle-section or back of the newspaper, crafted as spaces for female readers. The escapist content of the papers' entertainment pieces, coupled with a range of gendered adverts, reveals the commodity that print capitalism expected women to enjoy and desire by the Second World War. Deliberate attempts to attract a wide female readership to the entertainment sections can be seen in the advertisements surrounding 'Constance Sharp[s]'' astrological sections within the *Sunday Pictorial* (see fig. 3.5). Traditional expectations of women as homemakers and mothers, in the case of the Kellogg's Cornflake advert, were placed alongside the more modern acceptance of cosmetic products in the example of adverts for 'Val Guitare' lipstick.<sup>129</sup> Despite accommodating more 'modern' images of women, both sets of representations featured thinly

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<sup>124</sup> Bingham and Conboy, *Tabloid Century*, p. 42. Also see Adrian Bingham and Martin Conboy, 'The *Daily Mirror* and the Creation of a Commercial Popular Language: A People's War, a People's Paper?', *Journalism Studies*, 10 (2009), pp. 639–54 for more on *Daily Mirror*'s contribution to commercial popular language prior to 1939.

<sup>125</sup> Rose, 'Sex, Citizenship, and the Nation', p. 1147. For more on the press and the 'imagination' of the nation, see Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.

<sup>126</sup> Calder, *The People's War*, p. 502.

<sup>127</sup> Fox, 'Careless Talk', *passim*.

<sup>128</sup> Hampton, *Visions of the Press in Britain*, p. 138.

<sup>129</sup> This attitude to cosmetics only began to shift from the late-1920s; Bingham, *Gender, Modernity and the Popular Press*, p. 173. Also see Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska, 'The Body and Consumer Culture', in Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska (eds.), *Women in Twentieth-Century Britain: Social, Cultural and Political Change* (London: Routledge, 2001), pp. 187–8.

### Birthdays

**SUNDAY**—Wish your wagon to a star, and go all out for the things you want from life. Pay attention to the personal advice of others, but don't let them wet blanket new schemes.

**MONDAY**—Lucky things will come your way. Several of your more modest ambitions will be fulfilled. Don't let younger people can your life.

**TUESDAY**—Happy times and little moments lie before you. You will surely yourself ever trifles. Take my advice—don't worry about their assistance. In your job handle superiors with tact.

**WEDNESDAY**—In the whole this will be a profitable year. Windfalls are indicated, and unexpected gifts will come. Lovers will be magnificently assisted by relatives.

**THURSDAY**—Try to understand the people with whom you work. Cooperation will be necessary and important in your job. Loved ones may be difficult about money matters. Be firm.

**FRIDAY**—Fortunate periods lie ahead! Make hay while the sun shines. Lovers will find great happiness and true understanding.

## WHAT THE STARS SAY

*By Constance Sharpe*

**JANUARY 12-February 18 (Aquarius)**—Watch your step. Illness in person or in household may cause financial affairs to be upset. Here life will expose you to a period you will think things out clearly in strengthening matters. Financial side may be disappointed in a successful new love interest.

**FEBRUARY 19-March 19 (Pisces)**—Burn the first few days you will feel yourself depressed and with a lot of discontent. But later, as a result of an unexpected incident, you will meet and discover deep contentment. Guard against accidents while making. Letters for which you are waiting will be delayed.

**MARCH 20-April 19 (Aries)**—Negotiate friends and relatives will be in the temperamental so will you. It does you keep a check upon yourself you will get into one spot of water after another. In some cases a weight will be lifted from you mind.

**APRIL 20-May 20 (Taurus)**—You will be tempted to take big financial risks; you will feel an urge to do everything, or nearly everything, on one card. I strongly advise you to do so, you would regret it if you will prove extremely helpful and may give you several valuable hints.

**MAY 21-June 20 (Gemini)**—Throughout the week and on Monday in particular you will feel full of energy—ready to tackle anything. I am afraid that you will find that your excessive zeal will cause a great deal of unnecessary trouble. The week-end will be a mean and disappointing way.

**JUNE 21-July 21 (Cancer)**—You will come up against one or two very considerable obstacles. You will find that enemies, try to avoid them will be lucky: things will come your way. Unattached folk will find themselves falling in love.

**JULY 22-August 22 (Leo)**—You will be probably feel rather tired and depressed at times during the next day or two. Money matters may worry you. A plan will be scrapped and a new one substituted; your ambitious objectives may have to be amended.

**AUGUST 23-September 22 (Virgo)**—Aim high—but not too high. Plans must be practical. On Monday you will be unusually assertive and much will be accomplished in your job as a result.

**SEPTEMBER 23-October 22 (Libra)**—Be broadminded; try to see other folk's points of view, and make allowances for their failings or limitations. Important events are fore-shadowed.

**OCTOBER 23-November 22 (Scorpio)**—A false friend will be unmasked. You may find that someone in whom you had every confidence is taking advantage of you in a mean and despicable way.

**NOVEMBER 23-December 22 (Sagittarius)**—If you have to travel on the water, or if your job is connected with rivers or seas, be cautious and don't take any unnecessary risks. Lovers will find the happiness, even though separated; they will see the partial fulfillment of some of their ambitions.

**DECEMBER 23-January 20 (Capricorn)**—Superiors will be discontent; they will expect too much and make no allowances. But I advise you not to let this worry you. You will do your best and keep quiet. You will find that you have the ammunition with care and don't fool about with potential disaster.

### Special Note MISS TAURUS

Venus is your ruling planet. You should never simply dress in faded clothes out on Sunday. Wear bright in all shades of blue. Your colour. Secure and ALWAYS plan your clothes to emphasize defects and accentuate good points. Don't do your hair in a hurry! If you are to look your best you must have a clear conscience for dressing.

### Busy people everywhere start the day with the 30-Second Breakfast

**It's crisp, delicious—it's packed with energy—and it saves time and trouble because it takes only 30 seconds to serve**

EVERY MORNING, in every part of Britain, millions of people start the day with Kellogg's 30-second breakfast.

And a grand start for the day it is. You see, those big golden flakes are just packed with energy—they get you off in grand style and keep you going full-time ahead right through to lunch time.

Then, too, the 30-second breakfast saves time and trouble. It's ready to serve straight from the packet—no cooking, no butter. Think what this means in a busy household.

What's more, Kellogg's are so delicious. Crisp, crunchy, corn-fresh—every spoonful is a sheer delight.

Buy Kellogg's from your grocer and give your family a treat for breakfast. They'll love Kellogg's and you'll be thrilled with the time and trouble you save. Kellogg's cost only 5d, and there are ten big breakfasts in every packet.

**UP WITH THE LARK.** Mr. J. Carter, poultry salesman of Dagenham, Essex. "I catch a trade at four o'clock every morning," says Mr. Carter. "I don't know what we'd do without Kellogg's. My wife says they are so quick and easy to serve and I find they keep me going all morning long. As I don't get up till 1.30 p.m. that's very important."

**SCIENTIFIC PROOF** of the great energizing power of the 30-second breakfast. An analysis made at a leading dietary laboratory shows that a bowl of Kellogg's with milk (three of Kellogg's 30-second cereals, a average cup of milk) contains 100 calories, 10 grams of protein, 10 grams of fat, 10 grams of carbohydrate and 10 grams of fibre. That's why they're the best breakfast in the world.

**FIRST FAVOURITE.** "My boys always insist on Kellogg's," says Mrs. Brockhurst of Lancaster, here seen at breakfast with Michael and David. "because they're so crisp—that's what boys like. Naturally, I'm only so pleased because I know that Kellogg's provide a splendid energy-giving meal."

**IMPORTANT TO WOMEN!**

Doctors say that the "make-up" of a woman's system is so highly intricate and so sensitive that the shock caused by taking strong laxative medicines may do serious harm. Even though you do not notice it at the time, you may be laying up serious trouble for yourself later. Those internal troubles which often afflict a woman in her middle years and later life are undoubtedly in many cases due to taking medicines which "wash-out" the delicate mechanism of her bowels gently by taking "California Syrup of Figs." It is a safe fruit laxative. It never purges, never interferes with the natural bodily functions and there are no depressing "washed-out" after-effects. It restores the bowels naturally, giving a complete internal cleansing in a few hours.

Women!—treat the delicate mechanism of your bowels gently by taking "California Syrup of Figs." It is a safe fruit laxative. It never purges, never interferes with the natural bodily functions and there are no depressing "washed-out" after-effects. It restores the bowels naturally, giving a complete internal cleansing in a few hours.

"California Syrup of Figs" has a tonic effect on the liver and kidneys that makes you "feel good." "California Syrup of Figs" is a healthy tonic and a spoonful the first time your bowels feel tight. You'll feel better everywhere. Doctors and nurses everywhere recommend "California Syrup of Figs" because it is so gentle in its action. Always take "California Syrup of Figs" and give your bowels natural aid.

"California Syrup of Figs" obtainable everywhere at 1/3 and 2/6. The larger size is the cheaper in the long run. For more facts get "California Syrup of Figs" today! (1940)

## Fish Pie

is delicious with

# Pan Van

*pickle*

What's a little more seasoning when you can have fish-pie... with Pan Van? The salty tang of fish and the spicy-sweet savour of Pan Van "go together" like Darcy and Jane. Little cost but big enjoyment! Try it tonight. Pan Van costs 2d, 1/- and 1/6d, from all good grocers.

### KEEP YOUR LIPS YOUTHFUL

VAL GUITARE

Figure 3.5 'What the Stars Say'

Source: 'What the Stars Say', *Sunday Pictorial*, 5 May 1940, p. 21.

disguised expectations on the part of the reader. The wearing of lipstick, so the 'Val Guitare' advert stressed, should be done so in the hopes of attracting a man. Val Guitare lipstick would give a 'natural, dewy freshness' and 'romantic charm that men can't resist'. Other newspapers situated their astrology sections similarly around the latest film releases, medical products, gardening tips, and fashion competitions (see fig. 3.6).<sup>130</sup> Editors were clearly targeting upper-working and lower-middle class women with surplus money to spend on entertainment, cosmetics, and fashion.

<sup>130</sup> 'Gardner's Club', *Sunday Dispatch*, 5 May 1940, p. 4; 'How Does she Keep so Slim and Healthy?', *Sunday Dispatch*, 2 June 1940, p. 4.





bottom of Constance Sharp's astrology section on 5 May 1940 for example, readers were advised to wear particular shades of clothing based on the ruling of Venus (traditionally associated with love and femininity):

Venus is your ruling planet. You should wear simple, dignified clothing cut on softly, flowing lines. BLUE IN ALL SHADES IS YOUR COLOUR. Always plan to minimise defects and accentuate good points. Don't do your shopping hurriedly; if you are to look your best, you must have a clear design for dressing [sic].<sup>131</sup>

Critics of the populist turn of the press had called attention to its tendency to manipulate the masses via hidden messages since the interwar years. It was stressed that partisan editorial comment smuggled into news sections, or in this example expectations around individual behaviour hidden in entertainment features, seriously threatened the ability of the masses to think and act freely.<sup>132</sup> Yet examples such as the 'Special Note' reveal more about the extent to which commercial culture had permeated the press by the early 1940s than any deliberate attempt to control female behaviour. Astrologers were simply re-packaging similar sorts of fashion advice women had become used to receiving, highlighting astrology's place as an important part of 'selling' both entertainment and goods to female readers.

As both MO and the MoHS Sub-Committee highlighted, more general astrological prescriptions were rarely excessively radical. Having failed to predict the onset of war in September 1939 many newspaper astrologers opted for predictions which were vague enough for readers to project their own interpretations and readings onto them. Generic, a political advice frequently emphasised caution and patience across the early war years. In the *News of the World*, for example, readers were told to 'err on the generous side' when making 'preparations', demonstrate 'extra patience and courtesy', and beware of 'doing things in a slipshod manner'.<sup>133</sup> Many of the astrology columns were effective at blending personal predictions around broader national and international events, thus presenting private concerns, opinions, and behaviours as important components of the public discourse of war. In May 1940, *News of the World* astrologer 'Seginus' made a point of providing personal predictions for the days, weeks, and year ahead (see fig 3.7):

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<sup>131</sup> 'Special Note MISS TAURUS', *Sunday Pictorial*, 5 May 1940, p. 21.

<sup>132</sup> Hampton, *Visions of the Press in Britain*, p. 152.

<sup>133</sup> 'Is This Your Lucky Week?', *News of the World*, 5 May 1940, p. 9; 'The Stars and You', *News of the World*, 11 January 1942, p. 6; 'The Stars and You', *News of the World*, 29 August 1943, p. 4.



# Is This Your Lucky Week? \*

By "SEGINUS" \*

## EACH DAY FOR ALL

**To-day.**—Whatever your preparations, you can afford to err on the generous side.

**To-morrow.**—Most misleading trend: if first attempts unsuccessful, don't continue.

**Tuesday.**—Surprises and hurried rearranging prove the order of the day.

**Wednesday.**—Fairly reliable, so sign, arrange and travel.

**Thursday.**—Don't trust appearances. Test arguments and machinery in advance.

**Friday.**—You will either be too slow or too precipitate, so follow middle course.

**Saturday.**—Stand by prearranged plans, but have alternatives ready.

## THIS WEEK AND YOU

Find your birth month and see what this week holds for you.

### CAPRICORN (Dec. 23—Jan. 19)

**Business.**—If faced with alternatives, choose least pretentious. Essential strictly to observe regulations regarding hours and methods. Hopeful employment news.

**Personal.**—Make allowances for others' weaknesses. Queer rumours concerning a relation; investigate them. Number is 4; colour, light grey; jewel, sapphire.

**This Week's Advice.**—Be absolutely certain of your facts.

**Highlight.**—If born Dec. 27-31, comforting news will make outlook much more settled.

### AQUARIUS (Jan. 21—Feb. 19)

**Business.**—Colleagues liable to provide stumbling-blocks. "Guesswork" very inadvisable, especially if negotiating. Write rather than call for jobs.

**Personal.**—Divided family opinions tax your patience, but don't commit yourself. Friend gives good advice regarding travel.

**This Week's Advice.**—Don't experiment or you will waste your time.

**Highlight.**—If born Jan. 24-27, numerous irritating obstacles to your desires: best to mark time.

### PISCES (Feb. 19—March 19)

**Business.**—Pending benefits may be countermanded, so don't accept verbal promises. Slight general improvement likely. Petty thefts threatened.

**Personal.**—Inability of others to make up their minds can impair your enjoyment; don't wait for them. Two disapproving relatives circumvented. Number is 3; colour, cream; jewel, moonstone.

**This Week's Advice.**—Don't give it—it will not be appreciated.

**Highlight.**—If born March 10-13, suspect apparent "bargains" and "good turns," they are not what they seem.

### ARIES (March 21—April 19)

**Business.**—Untruthfulness or attempted fraud around you—take precautions. Arguments over hours and remuneration.

**Personal.**—Expected repetition of recent "good time" liable to disappoint. Don't permit interference in, or criticism of, household rearranging. Number is 1; colour, crimson; jewel, Jasper.

**This Week's Advice.**—Decide and work alone.

**Highlight.**—If born April 10-13, you will feel even fitter for your job. Utilise extra self-confidence.

### TAURUS (April 21—May 21)

**Business.**—Countermanded instructions and promises mean imminent change of policy; but you will be all right. Altered premises or equipment probable.

**Personal.**—You will feel you have a grudge against best friends; but be tactful. Two acquaintances provide unexpected entertainment. Number is 6; colour, royal blue; jewel, turquoise matrix.

**This Week's Advice.**—Don't delay replying to correspondence.

**Highlight.**—If born May 19-21, little compliments and additional consideration come unexpectedly. Undertake journeys if possible.

### GEMINI (May 22—June 21)

**Business.**—Private jealousies threaten to trip you, but don't be vague or subtle. Make point-blank demands. Employment promise hangs fire.

**Personal.**—Family indisposition curtails your spare time. Past attractions recur and cause embarrassment. Guard against theft, or mislaying, of valuables. Number is 9; colour, scarlet; jewel, ruby.

**This Week's Advice.**—Don't permit coincidences to affect your decisions.

**Highlight.**—If born June 12-15, stormy atmosphere around you. Seize opportunity to argue out misunderstandings.

### CANCER (June 22—July 22)

**Business.**—You will be aware of covertly hostile acts, but bide your time. Allow for postal and transport delays. Don't lend anything.

**Personal.**—Place more reliance upon own convictions—particularly regarding friends. Visitors likely to extend their stay. Number is 6; colour, midnight blue; jewel, sapphire.

**This Week's Advice.**—Don't be rushed into making rash promises.

**Highlight.**—If born July 18-23, someone will attempt to discredit your achievements; don't stand for it.

## STARLIGHT ON WORLD AFFAIRS

The month now begun may well prove to be one of the most critical—if not the decisive month—of the war. Hitler will make another alarming posture before its end, but his real intentions become apparent during early June.

Although this month is Sweden's greatest danger period, there is every prospect that she will come through it safely. Similar remarks apply to Jugoslavia.

Our submarines will be unusually active this week-end.

### LEO (July 24—Aug. 23)

**Business.**—Don't permit sentiments to interfere or you will surely regret it. Recent project delayed but not dismissed. Longer hours necessary.

**Personal.**—Promising friendship probably interrupted by indisposition or adverse comment. Visiting friends may burden you with troubles. One or two outings cancelled. Number is 7; colour, azure; jewel, aquamarine.

**This Week's Advice.**—Get your word in first.

**Highlight.**—If born July 29-Aug. 1, counter possible disappointments by preparing additional plans. Journeys suffer delay.

### VIRGO (Aug. 24—Sept. 23)

**Business.**—Emergencies hold up your plans slightly. Superior's criticism to be expected. If applying, do so personally. Small financial extras.

**Personal.**—Advisable not to risk possible scandalous comment. Postal disappointment through oversight. Entertain at home and make necessary furnishing re-arrangements. Number is 5; colour, emerald green; jewel, emerald.

**This Week's Advice.**—Send invitations early.

**Highlight.**—If born Sept. 13-17, be very cautious about airing opinions; you may easily give offence.

### LIBRA (Sept. 24—Oct. 23)

**Business.**—Take additional precautions for goods in transit. Past faults prone to recur. Legal difficulties arise regarding claims.

**Personal.**—Friends may attempt to interfere. Domestic repairs deferred. Advisable not to alter appointments: once made. Number is 9; colour, rose; jewel, rose quartz.

**This Week's Advice.**—Don't leave jobs half finished.

**Highlight.**—If born Oct. 15-18, energetic efforts will mean improved earnings.

### SCORPIO (Oct. 24—Nov. 22)

**Business.**—Rather worrying experiences if handling others' money; take no risks. Consider chances of employment change. Legal quibbles favour you.

**Personal.**—Particular associate proves unresponsive. Altering sympathies probable. Disappointing exchange of letters with relative. Recreational schemes likely to go well. Number is 3; colour, lavender; jewel, amethyst.

**This Week's Advice.**—Better to choose and chance it than to delay.

**Highlight.**—If born Oct. 27-31, unfavourable remarks regarding you; take immediate steps to counteract them.

### SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 23—Dec. 22)

**Business.**—Responsibilities become a little heavier; ensure that remuneration question is understood. Temptation to venture or experiment with others unwise.

**Personal.**—Pay prompt attention to minor health troubles. Misleading actions and remarks threaten severe emotional differences. Don't disregard relatives' warning. Number is 8; colour, violet; jewel, onyx.

**This Week's Advice.**—Abide by letter of the law.

**Highlight.**—If born Dec. 19-22, successful tendencies for travelling, negotiating, or undergoing examinations.

## THIS YEAR AND YOU

Does your anniversary arrive this week? If so, you will find below the year's promise.

**To-day.**—General: Extremely satisfactory outlook for you; give optimism full rein. **Business:** Very promising for students and travellers, although small ventures succeed better. **Promotion** indicated. Improved income and speculative good fortune. **Personal:** Fresh residence as well as temporary alternative accommodation. Engagement or marriage in family. Legacy probable.

**To-morrow.**—General: You cannot be too practical this year, so start now. **Business:** Early change advisable, although individual venture unwise. Minimise your financial responsibilities. Threatened trade crisis brings compensation later. **Personal:** Don't permit heart to rule. Material needs demand first consideration. Residential change, but do not buy. Travel probable next spring.

**Tuesday.**—General: The year is filled with surprises, so don't be downhearted. **Business:** Fresh start probable, although monetary circumstances more changeable. Official posts preferable. Propitious if beginning professional career. Expect altered premises. **Personal:** Unwelcome estrangements, but unexpected compensations. Romance—although immediate fulfilment unlikely.

**Wednesday.**—General: Quite progressive, so do not relax ambitions. **Business:** National exigencies likely to improve prospects. Aim for promotion. Useful openings if unemployed. Minor individual ventures succeed. Some speculative promise. **Personal:** Residential alterations and improved family relationships. Legacy or bequest likely. Romance proceeds propitiously. Widened circles of friends.

**Thursday.**—General: Numerous stops and go's. Persistence very necessary. **Business:** Rather slow. Small ventures may fail. Changes not advisable unless enforced. Promotion probably deferred. Financial uncertainty periodically. **Personal:** Steer clear of older relations' responsibilities, but don't attempt removal. Past friend returns. Additional relaxation important. Marriage arrangements may suffer delays.

**Friday.**—General: Very opposing experiences require systematic effort to overcome them. **Business:** Avoid personal ventures and keep to one interest only. Financial crisis, later, successfully countered. **Personal:** Travel projects fail through, although removal occurs later. Avoid lengthy residential commitments. Sudden romance. Insure against home mishaps.

**Saturday.**—General: Make allowances for eventual unexpected changes of feeling and circumstances. **Business:** Make hay while you can, but don't incur extended commitments. Better to remain than change early. Financial saving important. **Personal:** Happier and less burdensome prospects, but eventually, sudden family upheaval and removal. Attachment promises well. Beware of accidents with appliances.

Figure 3.7 Prediction by Seginus, 'Is This Your Lucky Week?'

Source: 'Is This Your Lucky Week?', *News of the World*, 5 May 1940, p. 9.



**EACH DAY FOR ALL:** Tuesday.—Surprises and hurried rearranging prove the order of the day...**THIS WEEK AND YOU:** Leo (July 24–Aug. 23). Highlight...counter possible disappointments by preparing additional plans...**THIS YEAR AND YOU:** Wednesday.—Business: National exigencies likely to improve prospects. Aim for promotion [sic].<sup>134</sup>

The turbulence of war could be endured, so Seginus' predictions implied, through the stabilisation of civilian private life. Even arch critics of newspaper astrology such as C. F. Rogers conceded that such prescription offered 'safe council' in the absence of certainty, much of it being 'excellent advice'.<sup>135</sup> Much of the political work astrologers performed when targeting civilian private life was, in fact, designed to stabilise individual and collective morale.

Other leading Sunday newspapers presented a similar interlocking of individual and national destiny based on astrological prediction, both from a textual and visual perspective. In the *Sunday Dispatch*, 'Old Moore's' predictions were placed directly beside those 'for everyone'—symbolically aligning the importance of individual futures with that of the war more broadly (see fig. 3.8). A similar aesthetic was achieved in Naylor's astrological section in the *Sunday Express*, entitled 'What the Stars Foretell'.<sup>136</sup> In late August 1940, for example, predictions concerning the futures of Italy, Spain, the USA, and Japan were woven around the more personal sections 'For you this week' and 'GOOD DAYS FOR—' (see fig. 3.9). Similar to Seginus' call to unity during the 'critical' months of May 1940, Naylor also stressed that the stars foretold a 'critical phase of the war in the next three weeks'.<sup>137</sup> Vague predictions on upcoming 'critical' moments protected the astrologers from having their prophecies pinned to specific events. When these happened to co-inside with major wartime developments, such as Seginus' 'foretelling' of the beginning of the Blitz, they helped boost trust amongst more faithful readers.

Astrological pull to unity was more explicit on other occasions, exhibiting overt propaganda messages which hit harder than vague prescriptive advice. Popular Sunday newspapers such as *The People* and the *News of the World* frequently backed official propaganda narratives as part of a wider imagining of an egalitarian 'people's war'.<sup>138</sup> By 1939 *The People* boasted a popular reach of one-in-three of over three million families, whilst the *News of the World* branded itself as one

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<sup>134</sup> 'Is This Your Lucky Week?', *News of the World*, 5 May 1940, p. 9.

<sup>135</sup> Rogers, *Astrology*, p. 52, 55.

<sup>136</sup> 'What the Stars Foretell', *Sunday Express*, 18 August 1940, p. 3.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> Bingham and Conboy, *Tabloid Century*, p. 42.

*Foulsham's Original* **OLD MOORE'S** *Prophecies*

## FOR EVERYONE

Under Your Birthsign Below Are Old Moore's Predictions For You This Week

**MY** prediction on March 3 that the war was about to become intensified and extended proved true early in April, when Germany added one more to her long list of brutal crimes by attacking Denmark and Norway. I said that the Allies were about to be presented with a golden opportunity, and I propose to show that this has actually been the case.

Readers will recall that Astrology clearly indicated that the Nazi pact with Russia was a blunder of the very first magnitude. The same is true—to perhaps an even greater degree—of this latest wanton assault. This is manifest from the simple fact that at the time of its commission Saturn was in transit on Hitler's Sun.

Furthermore, the German warships entered Oslo Fjord just after midnight very early in the morning of April 9, when the Moon was hastening to a conjunction with the "Greater Infortune"—a sure sign of ultimate complete failure of the enterprise. The Scandinavian campaign will prove the death-knell of the Nazis.

### Hitler Was Flurried

THIS remarkable setting aside of elementary astrological precepts (as to choice of a suitable time to begin an undertaking) seems to indicate that, although the attack was planned in January and elaborated in March, when the final step was taken there must have been precipitate hurried action.

My reason for this opinion is that Hitler has on many important occasions been guided by astrological lore—as, for example, when he selected extraordinarily propitious times ("Elections") for crossing the Polish frontier and incorporating Austria.

IT is by no means improbable that the desperate need to reinforce his "Trojan horse" Army in Norway will cause Hitler to attack Sweden. Sweden is practically certain to refuse German troops a free passage, especially if King Gustav abdicates in favour of the Crown Prince.

Thus there is every probability that May will see a further extension of the conflict—as I have already predicted.

In any event I remain firmly of the opinion that Sweden's active participation cannot be long delayed. Study of the relevant maps shows that, although crushing defeat of the German invaders is certain, the struggle in Scandinavia will be long and extremely severe. The horoscope of noble King Haakon, in particular, clearly denotes complete triumph, but only after a bitter fight, enormous destruction of property and much loss of life.

### America May Act

A GERMAN onslaught on Sweden may well so rouse American public opinion as to enable President Roosevelt—who fully realises the tremendous issues involved and who has the courage of his convictions—to come out boldly with the announcement that he will run as candidate for a third term.

In which case Roosevelt will probably be successful, and U.S.A. will come in on the side of the Allies within a matter of months.

**Capricorn—The Goat (December 23—January 20)** Saturn.—A fairly good week (to-morrow and Tuesday are the best days) is foreseen for Capricornians, who will still find their expenses heavy. Those born on or about December 25 will prosper exceedingly in business and experience satisfaction at their children's progress.

Those celebrating on or near January 9 are much favoured and should now or shortly be presented with a fine opportunity.

**Aquarius—The Waterbearer (January 21—February 20)** Saturn and Uranus.—Apart from those born on or about February 16 (who meet with notable success—especially if serving with the Services) the outlook is less propitious than recently.

Domestic matters and young people occasion unexpected worry and expense.

This applies particularly to those born on or about January 26. Thursday and Friday are the best days.

**Pisces—The Fishes (February 20—March 20)** Jupiter and Neptune.—Although not quite so propitious as last week, prospects remain very good, especially for benefits through old and young people (particularly of the fair sex). This applies with special emphasis to those born on or about February 23. To-morrow is the best day.

Those celebrating on or near March 13 are strongly advised to exercise caution and watchfulness against sharp practice.

**Aries—The Ram (March 20—April 20)** Mars.—A most auspicious week for Arians who will be extremely active. To-day and Thursday are the best and important days.

Those born on or about April 15—especially those on War Service, and those celebrating April 17—prosper exceedingly and achieve distinction and promotion.

Those born on March 25 should now

Wednesday, Thursday and Friday are good days, especially in regard to art, music, literature and elderly members of the opposite sex, with whom there will be a tendency to romantic friendship.

Those born on or near October 15 will be stirred to successful activity and martial ardour. Partners of those born about October 22 do well.

**Scorpio—The Scorpion (October 21—November 21)** Mars.—Conditions are better at the end of the week than at the beginning, when there may be a little opposition (particularly in the case of those born on November 11, who should avoid changes).

Business difficulties through elders beset those born on or about October 20, but those celebrating October 25 prosper and are cheered by happy romance.

**Sagittarius—The Archer (November 22—December 22)** Jupiter.—To-day is the best day of another good week in which, however, there may be some sudden, sharp opposition on Friday. This applies particularly to those born on or very near December 15 and they should guard against hasty decisions.

The prospect generally, is not quite so propitious as just recently and those born on or near December 2 should now abstain from speculation.

These predictions, written exclusively for the Sunday Dispatch, are published by special arrangement with W. Foulsham and Co., Ltd., the proprietors of Foulsham's Original Old Moore's Almanack and are additional to anything appearing in the Almanack.

Figure 3.8 'Old Moore's Prophecies'

Source: 'Old Moore's Prophecies', *Sunday Dispatch*, 5 May 1940, p. 4.

of the 'most widely read newspapers' in the country.<sup>139</sup> In response to the 'lurking doubts in Nazi quarters' regarding the Russian and North African fronts of 1942, Lyndoe urged readers to *believe* in Britain's destined victory:

BELIEVE in Britain's destiny! Base your faith on what you will, but hold it in these coming weeks! For I tell you now, as always, that no other power will prevail over here. That, for me, is more than a mere prediction. It is a CERTAINTY. So is Germany's defeat, which has started already [sic]<sup>140</sup>

In an earlier column penned in the weeks after Singapore's fall to the Japanese, Lyndoe emphasised the importance of a united people, fighting a 'people's war':

<sup>139</sup> Tom O'Malley, 'Was There a National Press in the UK in the Second World War?', *Media History*, 23 (2017), p. 514.

<sup>140</sup> 'Lyndoe Tells You—', *The People*, 26 July 1942, p. 6.

# WHAT THE STARS FORETELL

By R. H. NAYLOR

THE Nazis, as per their announced schedule, were going to knock hell out of us (you remember) last week. The stars scheduled otherwise.

Nevertheless those same stars do foretell a critical phase of the war in the next three weeks: that phase may be divided into sub-periods. (1) Centring around the last days of this week; (2) around a period between September 5 and 16.

So we may, therefore, leave the brave lads of the R.A.F. to look after the skies while we make an astrological survey of Europe and the Near East. What do the stars foretell?

**ITALY.**—The man with the axe can always do a lot of damage before sane men overpower him. Mussolini's stars are not victory stars but they are stars of violence and mischief. Don't be discouraged, therefore, if you read of ephemeral Italian successes.

**SPAIN** will be "in the news"—and very much so—within the next fortnight. Critical dates (these go for Gibraltar too): next week-end; September 2. Franco is a soldier by profession; a big business man by instinct—he will get the worst end of his deal with Hitler.

**UNITED STATES.**—Unlikely that the U.S.A. will plunge into war before Roosevelt is elected for a third term (the stars decree that he certainly will be if his health permits), but anything might happen after that. When ruminating about American destiny, however, cast an eye upon—

**JAPAN,** who has bitten off more than she can chew in China. World opinion looks

## For you this week

**JANUARY** (Dec. 23-Jan. 20).—You will like this week if you are young and on pleasure bent. If you are older and keen on business, the business will be to your liking.

**FEBRUARY** (Jan. 21-Feb. 19).—The man or woman who is the chief factor in your life at the present will sway events. Excellent week for business and travel.

**MARCH** (Feb. 20-Mar. 21).—Give an eye to health. If an employer, staff changes likely. Good week for speculation, pleasure seeking, all that concerns the young—but don't travel.

**APRIL** (Mar. 22-Apr. 21).—Most important six days lie ahead. Family good fortune. If inclined you might risk a flutter on Turf or 'Change. Mid-week most eventful time.

**MAY** (Apr. 22-May 21).—Things will be happening in your home and family—with good results to everybody. Roughly about now important developments will arise in your career—be prepared for them.

**JUNE** (May 22-June 21).—Good for money, good for love, good for travel—what more could you have. But be prepared for family contention. Somebody connected with you has a minor accident or mishap.

**JULY** (June 22-July 23).—You are still under the best of influences. Good week financially, but a dispute with a neighbour or relative. Alternatively, a traveling mishap. Latter end of week good for business.

**AUGUST** (July 24-Aug. 23).—Thoroughly eventful week on business side of things, equally important events affecting you personally. Many calls upon your purse. Thrills.

**SEPTEMBER** (Aug. 24-Sept. 23).—The last two days especially notable. One particular individual butts into your affairs; be careful or you will be dominated or unduly influenced.

**OCTOBER** (Sept. 24-Oct. 23).—Venus, that benevolent planet, helps your worldly progress. Crash in and cash in on every opportunity that offers—don't waste time.

**NOVEMBER** (Oct. 24-Nov. 23).—Much activity, some settlement. More travel, much correspondence and argument. Something happens to a friend, especially if you are a spinster and have a male friend.

**DECEMBER** (Nov. 24-Dec. 23).—You will be in the limelight this week; important decisions here to be made. Successful but strenuous six days.

to the United States of America as the probable deciding factor in this war; as a matter of fact China and Russia could be of equal or greater importance. A closer link-up between Japan and the Axis Powers is indicated which will result in greater activity in—

**THE DUTCH EAST INDIES.**—Even romantic Sarawak will in the next few months be in the vortex of sea war, as will—

**ISLANDS EVERYWHERE.**—At the outbreak of war I predicted that coastal areas, harbours, islands, and the Near East would be key

sites: the scenes of decisive action. That prediction is reiterated here. Which of course turns our eyes to—

**THE MEDITERRANEAN.**—Naval clashes here before the moon next time reaches full. Naval war will boil over at both ends of the Mediterranean. On the west it may sweep past Cape Finisterre, the Scillies, up the Bristol Channel, and round the Galway coast. Simultaneously, German forays from the Baltic. Both east and west coastlines of Britain between 53rd and 56th parallels of latitude involved.

Don't get rattled because here and there things are dropping from the skies. Writer of this column has before him the Chart for Declaration of War:—that chart showed few conclusive signs of extensive war damage to the inland areas of this island. He sees lots of horoscopes of sturdy British citizens too, but he has not noticed any portents therein indicative of severe civilian casualties. Hitler has not nearly as many aircraft as there are pigeons in London. As somebody points out

## GOOD DAYS FOR—

**BUYING:** (Business deals) Friday, 23. (Personal shopping): Tomorrow, 19—Saturday, 24.  
**SELLING:** Tomorrow, 19—Thursday, 22—Saturday, 24.  
**ENTERTAINMENT:** Tomorrow 19—Saturday, 24.  
**SPORT:** Friday, 23.

this week, blitzkrieg or no blitzkrieg.  
**THIS WEEK'S STAR BIRTHDAYS FOR LOVE:** Tomorrow, 19.  
**FOR MONEY:** Saturday, 24.  
**FOR SUCCESS, DISTINCTION** (of interest to service folk this!)

Figure 3.9 'What the Stars Foretell'

Source: 'What the Stars Foretell', *Sunday Express*, 18 August 1940, p. 3.

I believe...by May [the Allies will produce] the greatest change-over known in war. Germany is past her zenith. Ours arrives during the next few weeks. I've said repeatedly that this is a *people's war* [emphasis added]. It's up to the people in the factories to make or mar this opportunity.<sup>141</sup>

Contrasting Lyndoe's radical call for a 'people's war' against the 'optimistic attitude' it provided in the eyes of the state reveals the extent to which officials downplayed the obvious emulation of

<sup>141</sup> 'Lyndoe Tells You—', *The People*, 8 March 1942, p. 6.

official propaganda messages within astrological sections. Other official propaganda narratives were backed by the newspaper astrologers. In June 1940, for example, 'Arden' advised her readers to 'grow more food!' in the context of the 'Dig for Victory' campaign. 'Sow, plant and transport root crops on Tuesday and Wednesday', so the advice went, as 'The moon's fruitful rays will bring you a bumper crop'.<sup>142</sup> A similar message was reiterated the following week, encouraging readers to practice greater levels of self-sufficiency.<sup>143</sup> In mirroring state propaganda drives so closely, however, astrology sections also had the tendency to project conflicting wartime messages. Just a month after encouraging readers to plant more vegetables, 'Arden' warned against 'uneasiness and alarm' as a result of fifth-columnists. The Government's emphasis on the existence on a 'fifth-column,' and the unease this fostered, trickled down to the level of astrology sections:

Uneasiness and alarm this week. Beware of the fifth columnist on Tuesday, a day when there will be an unprecedented amount of scare-talk. Don't let it unnerve you, for rumour will be as deceptive and unreliable as ever.<sup>144</sup>

If newspaper astrology sections were guilty of spreading 'subversive' and potentially morale-threatening content, this was largely caused by the muddled depiction of the nation in official propaganda it emulated. Close textual and contextual analysis of the columns reveals attempts to unify target female readers through vague personal advice and inclusive rhetoric. State suspicion of astrological prescription, it would seem, was chronologically tied to the period from mid 1941 to early 1942; offset by the Blitz and continuing up to the fall of Singapore to the Japanese in February 1942. For domestic morale this was a critical period of the war. Civilian resolve was tested by the cumulative impact of bombardment, economic/consumption squeezes due to the German naval blockade, and war's expansion into a new theatre in the Far East. Although some astrological messages were potentially harmful to morale, as we will see, state suspicion over their impact was amplified by pre-existing prejudices on 'mass' society and an inability to define 'morale' as an object of inquiry. Given the kinds of messages newspaper astrological sections transmitted, the fears and biases of the state at this heightened period of the war become clearer.

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<sup>142</sup> 'The Stars and You', *News of the World*, 16 June 1940, p. 9.

<sup>143</sup> 'The Stars and You', *News of the World*, 23 June 1940, p. 9.

<sup>144</sup> 'The Stars and You', *News of the World*, 14 July 1940, p. 9.

MASS OBSERVATION AND THE POPULAR RECEPTION OF  
ASTROLOGICAL PRESCRIPTION

Considering the contexts of production and content can only reveal part of newspaper astrology's wartime workings. As Peter Mandler urges, scholars engaged in cultural histories of texts need to pay attention to their dissemination and reception alongside close source analysis.<sup>145</sup> This remains especially true of propaganda. Propaganda operates through a series of intricate and flexible interactions between the propagandist and the recipient, Jo Fox reminds us. It is a process based on reciprocity, one which remains 'dynamic and responsive'.<sup>146</sup> Unravelling this dialogue can often prove methodologically challenging due to a lack of available sources.<sup>147</sup> Total war's turbulent and disruptive potential meant that few people had the time or inclination to record their views on newspaper astrology. Yet persisting with these challenges often reveals the alternate readings and unintended impact of propaganda.<sup>148</sup> Moreover, considering the context of reception has special relevance to our focus on newspaper astrology. It was Mass Observation, critical in supplementing the MoI with a 'bottom up' reading of astrology, which collected the broadest range of responses on its impact. Using MO diaries and directive responses to reveal something of newspaper astrology's 'throw', to borrow Peter Mandler's phrase, not only points towards the organisation's problematic methods. As Joe Moran usefully suggests, they also sharpen our thinking of the historical past as a place of 'still-to-be-decided tensions, possibilities, and contingent moments, instead of a story to which we already know the ending'.<sup>149</sup>

Much like the interwar critics of the popular press, Charles Madge noted the 'sinister' potential of modern cultural forces in swaying the popular mind.<sup>150</sup> 'The sinister symbiotic relationship' between technology and science, Madge noted in 1937, had led to an increasing popular tendency to ascribe meaning to 'occult and supernatural forces'.<sup>151</sup> Specialised research was conducted into the role of popular horoscope charts within this context, with Madge and Harrison concluding in 1939 that they pointed towards an 'each-for-his-own self, individualist pattern'—a strange use of gender pronoun given MO's later insistence on the primacy of female

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<sup>145</sup> Mandler, 'The Problem with Cultural History', p. 96.

<sup>146</sup> Fox, 'The Propaganda War', p. 91, 92.

<sup>147</sup> MacKay, *Half the Battle*, p. 176.

<sup>148</sup> Fox, 'Carless Talk', p. 965.

<sup>149</sup> Moran, 'Private Lives, Public Histories', pp. 160–1.

<sup>150</sup> Charles Madge, 'Magic and Materialism', *Left Review*, 3 (1937), pp. 33–4; Hinton, *The Mass Observers*, p. 13.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 33–4.

astrology followers.<sup>152</sup> The issue of newspaper astrology was returned to as part of a directive questionnaire in December 1946, in which respondents were asked for their views on astrology and newspaper reading habits.<sup>153</sup>

The opinions expressed by the panel on newspaper astrology, along with various MO diaries, reveal something of their diversity of reception. Yet responses need to be seen in context. As with the wider MO project, issues of representation make working with panel writings problematic.<sup>154</sup> MO collected disproportionately lower-middle and middle-class opinions from largely left-leaning, intellectually curious individuals.<sup>155</sup> Of those individuals, MO's sample drew disproportionately on male voices from the south/south-east of England.<sup>156</sup> In 1939, male panellists outnumbered their female counter-parts 2:1, but by 1946 this equation had reversed.<sup>157</sup> As James Hinton notes, aspirations of cultural, rather than simply class, distinction set the MO panel apart from the rest of society. Their identification and longing for 'high culture' reveals their self-categorisation of social position through cultural taste.<sup>158</sup> It was this pull towards 'high culture', and natural suspicion of perceived 'low culture', which explains many of the more critical responses on popular horoscopes and astrology. One response from a forty-nine-year-old woman was typical of many:

It [newspaper astrology] is absolute rubbish as far as I'm concerned. The forecasts in different newspapers never agree, and they are so vague as to apply...to everyone, & to any circumstance. I would not let astrology influence me in any way.<sup>159</sup>

One wartime diarist noted their frustrations at the volume of incorrect predictions made regarding the broader trajectory of the war. 'Old More says victory in 1942, and then cancels that out by saying that if we don't make peace now, we won't get it for years. Better make his mind up what he DOES mean.' The diarist went on to ask how 'anyone can buy that trash [newspaper astrology]'.<sup>160</sup> The more critical responses to newspaper astrology signal how wartime and postwar newspaper reading formed a crucial component of social stratification. For Tom O'Malley, the

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<sup>152</sup> Madge and Harrison, *Britain by Mass Observation*, p. 140.

<sup>153</sup> MOA, DQ September 1946.

<sup>154</sup> For a discussion on MO and issues of representation, see Pollen, 'Research Methodology in Mass Observation', pp. 218–22.

<sup>155</sup> Hinton, *The Mass Observers*, pp. 267–72.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

<sup>157</sup> Noakes, *War and the British*, p. 77.

<sup>158</sup> James Hinton, 'The "Class" Complex': Mass-Observation and Cultural Distinction in Pre-War Britain', *Past and Present*, 199 (2008), p. 207. On Bourdieu's notion of taste as a 'positioning' device within social hierarchy, see Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (London: Routledge and Keegan Paul, 1984), p. 243.

<sup>159</sup> MOA, DR 1048, September 1946, woman born in 1897.

<sup>160</sup> MOA, D 5447, December 1941, woman born in 1897.



extent to which the London daily newspapers differed in social and political outlook between 1939 and 1945 is reflected in the sectional readerships they attracted. ‘Quality’ papers such as *The Times* and the *Daily Telegraph* attracted middle- and upper-class readers, primarily from the south. The most representative papers such as the *Daily Express* and *Daily Mail* featured a strong middle-class following, whilst the *Daily Herald* and *Daily Mirror* were particularly popular with the lower classes.<sup>161</sup> Questions of whether a wartime ‘national press’ even existed given these class (and geographical) fault lines are given weight by the responses from the panel, as many were keen to distance themselves from the ‘low culture’ of working-class popular/Sunday papers perceived as synonymous with horoscopes and astrology.<sup>162</sup>

Aspirations of cultural distinction amongst the panel were highlighted by the kinds of newspapers and journalism they felt ‘represented’ them. Many of the observers, critical of astrology’s popular impact, made reference to an in-depth investigation of its failures by *Picture Post* in September 1941.<sup>163</sup> ‘Newspaper astrologers have a following of millions’, the article’s sub-heading stated. ‘Since the [start of the] war they have played an important role in our national life. The time has come to judge them—according to results’.<sup>164</sup> Launched in 1938 by the publisher Edward Hulton, *Picture Post* released vivid photo-journalistic content in a weekly magazine format.<sup>165</sup> The launch proved an overnight success, rapidly gaining a circulation of 1,350,000 and boasting as many as 5 million weekly readers.<sup>166</sup> Yet despite its popular appeal *Picture Post* featured a strong social democratic slant, developing into one of the most important forums for progressive political and intellectual debate.<sup>167</sup>

Drawing on MO’s own research, *Picture Posts*’ article emphasised how nearly two-thirds of the adult population took ‘some interest’ in astrology columns, providing readers with ‘peeps into the future which alternatively stimulate and console’.<sup>168</sup> Plotting predictions made within *The People*, the *Sunday Express*, the *Sunday Dispatch*, the *News of the World*, and the *Sunday Chronicle*, the report illustrated the failures of newspaper astrologers in predicting the major turning-points of the war so far, with the majority gaining accuracy scores of zero. Along with those who

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<sup>161</sup> O’Malley, ‘Was There a National Press’, p. 515.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid. Also see Seymour-Ure, *The British Press and Broadcasting*, pp. 18–21.

<sup>163</sup> ‘What Did the Stars Foretell?’, *Picture Post*, 6 September 1941, pp. 17–21.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>165</sup> Field, *Blood, Sweat and Toil*, p. 227. Also see Tom Hopkinson (eds.), *Picture Post 1938–50* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1970).

<sup>166</sup> Field, *Blood, Sweat and Toil*, p. 227.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid., p. 227, 305.

<sup>168</sup> ‘What Did the Stars Foretell?’, p. 17.

recognised the 'very misleading' potential of astrologers to disrupt 'nervous and depressed people', many observers were suitably impressed by the *Posts*' 'debunking' of harmful prediction:

Was very interested in the article in '*Picture Post*' on astrology. It shows up the newspaper astrologists for the worthless imposters they really are. Pseudo-scientific, they exploit the credulity of the uneducated masses. There should be more articles like this until these misleaders of public opinion are fired from the pages of the Press.<sup>169</sup>

Others expressed a more nuanced view, distinguishing between personal advice and international predictions. Whilst the 'personal angle' drew the majority of readers in, one observer noted, this was rarely effective at maintaining any significance:

Read a very interesting article in '*Picture Post*' which made an analysis of the various prophecies by Astrologers in the popular press. The article was confined to prophecies made during the past three years, and in nearly every case the forecasting was hopelessly out. I do find however, that lots of people are most interested in these newspaper astrologers, and carefully read every article. Their successes are remembered, their errors are consigned to the limbo of forgotten things. To be fair, more interest is taken in the personal angle of astrologers than in the wider world issues, and I do not think much importance is attached to their writings in this respect.<sup>170</sup>

Not all panellists were as critical, however. Some expressed a sincere, even devotional, reliance on predictions as a means of planning their daily wartime lives as the state and MO suggested. For one individual, subscription to Lyndoe became its own form of personal worship:

Astrologers are often right. Look at Lyndoe. I read him and study him regularly and find it a great help...I really have *great faith in him* [emphasis added]...I plan by him. If he said I'd get run over on a certain day if I went out, I would never leave the house to go into the garden.<sup>171</sup>

Others similarly used prescription from the stars in planning for the days and weeks ahead. One respondent to the 1946 directive found themselves 'turning to the "forecast" to find out which days are O.K. and which days require careful attention to detail'.<sup>172</sup> Much like MO's paid-investigators working in interwar 'Worktown', a larger number of the voluntary panel professed to an ironic engagement with the horoscopes.<sup>173</sup> Concerns around the astrologer's ability to manipulate an uncritical, unthinking 'mass' are problematised by such alternative readings of

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<sup>169</sup> MOA, D 5321, August 1941, woman born in 1896; DR 1668, September 1946, woman born in 1919; D 5205, 4 September 1941, man born in 1920.

<sup>170</sup> MOA, D 5004, 3 September 1941, man born in 1908.

<sup>171</sup> MOA, TC 8/1/A, June 1941, Mill Hill, woman of unknown age.

<sup>172</sup> MOA, DR 3642, September 1946, woman of unknown age.

<sup>173</sup> Taylor, 'Pennies from Heaven and Earth', p. 154.



their prescription; readings which accommodate for greater agency on the part of recipients in the dynamic shaping of propaganda. As one directive respondent noted in 1946:

My feeling for astrology [is]...more of tolerant amusement as I feel few people could really take it seriously. I quite often read my "prophecy of the week" in the paper, but more for amusement than any other reason.<sup>174</sup>

Emphasis was placed on the entertainment value of horoscopes, despite the active disbelief of many. As one respondent noted, 'I just take it as a joke...I confess to enjoying it, inspite of disbelief!'<sup>175</sup> Even incorrect predictions had worth, contrary to both MO and *Picture Post* concerns. Following the wartime news for proof of incorrect predictions proved highly entertaining for one diarist; yet they admitted how easy it could be even for critical readers to slip into believing the astrologers:

Some little time back I wrote that at a big conference of astrologists someone had given the precise minute in the early house of 11<sup>th</sup> May when Hitler was going to do something particularly dreadful, and I wrote it down to disprove the astrologers. The farcical point is that I am now watching the date as if it were really going to be so.<sup>176</sup>

Although MO attracted a somewhat niche sample of wartime and postwar panellists, the range of responses attest to newspaper astrology's diversity of reception. Whilst some were inclined to follow prescription from the stars in an uncritical bid to provide personal assurance, this was by no means the dominant mode of reception. This has important implications for the feedback loop which existed between MO, the press, and the state. Unlike the MoI and MoHS, which adopted a muted policy of acceptance towards the more positive aspects of newspaper astrology, Tom Harrisson remained deeply critical of the purveyors of the 'sway' towards superstition.<sup>177</sup> Ironically, given MO's *raison d'être*, Harrisson attempted to solve the problem from the top down using his extensive journalistic networks to warn the masses against astrology via print. A closer consideration of MO diaries, not intended to be systematically analysed until after the war, would have revealed their more varied impact. In the end Harrisson's own 'cognitive closure' towards press astrology's impact resulted in the recycling of his own biases; transmitted to the public via the press, and subsequently presented as illustrative of popular opinion.

In order to combat 'the sway of superstition in the midst of science', Harrisson utilised a mixture of public and private methods. Working privately with the 'semi-intellectual' and 'semi-

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<sup>174</sup> MOA, DR 3545, September 1946, woman born in 1917.

<sup>175</sup> MOA, DR 1635, September 1946, woman born in 1915.

<sup>176</sup> MOA, D 5390, 1 May 1941, woman born in 1903.

<sup>177</sup> Madge and Harrisson, *Mass Observation*, p. 10.

creative' persons engaged in producing escapism for the masses, he attempted to encourage them to offer responsible and realistic attitudes.<sup>178</sup> The application of public pressure often helped to facilitate private channels of discourse. By 1941, Harrison had established himself as a popular intellectual voice within the daily and weekly newspapers.<sup>179</sup> In August 1941 he published an article in the *New Statesman* attacking the power of popular astrologers.<sup>180</sup> Stressing his focus on popular astrology's 'social effects', Harrison concluded its impact was 'essentially conservative...sedative, private, unsocial' and affecting mostly women.<sup>181</sup> Women who followed the advice of Naylor and Lyndoe could not simply be described as fools. 'They are ordinary human beings, average civilised citizens'. Yet as Lucy Noakes makes clear, for Harrison women were essentially a separate and problematic group apart.<sup>182</sup> The real issue lay with the 'enterprising journalists' who manipulated the masses for financial gain.<sup>183</sup> In a private response to Harrison's piece, *The People's* astrologer Edward Lyndoe described himself as 'an enthusiastic disseminator of MO literature' rather than a journalistic pariah, and urged him not to 'alienate men like myself...We want to help you and all those who are trying to make the world a better place'.<sup>184</sup> Although Harrison's responses to the letter did not survive, it can be imagined from his writings a year later, as James Hinton suggests, of his likely positive stance. Astrologers wielded significant insight in the psychology of human nature, he stressed, making them valuable as potential allies in the reversal of mass-manipulation.<sup>185</sup>

Given his connections with Fleet Street, it would seem likely that *Picture Post's* exposé of newspaper astrology (published just a month after his 'Mass Astrology' article in the *New Statesman*) had a heavy influence by Harrison. Harrison was first introduced to *Picture Post's* editor, Tom Hopkinson, during his work on morale for the MoI. In April 1941, Mary Adams established a committee of outside experts to advise HI on its methods and conclusions, consisting of Harrison, Hopkinson, Julian Huxley, and Francis Williams (ex-editor of the *Daily Herald*) amongst others.<sup>186</sup> Concerns about the state of popular morale had been expressed privately to Hopkinson by Harrison in April 1941.<sup>187</sup> But by September, as MO's services were being turned away by

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<sup>178</sup> Hinton, *The Mass Observers*, pp. 256–7.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 259.

<sup>180</sup> Tom Harrison, 'Mass Astrology', *New Statesman*, 16 August 1941, pp. 152–3.

<sup>181</sup> MOA, FR 812, 'Mass Astrology [Article for the *New Statesman and Nation*]', 5 August 1941, p. 1, 6, 3.

<sup>182</sup> Noakes, *War and the British*, p. 88.

<sup>183</sup> FR 812, 'Mass Astrology', pp. 6–7.

<sup>184</sup> MOA, TC 8/1/A, Astrology, Edward Lyndoe to Tom Harrison, 16 August 1941.

<sup>185</sup> Hinton, *The Mass Observers*, p. 259.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 177.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 213.

the state, Harrisson had little reason to 'keep quiet'.<sup>188</sup> Freed from the constraints of official partnership with the MoI, a stream of articles were published in the *New Statesman* on various MO findings including its work on 'Mass Astrology'.

Unlike the MoI and MoHS, Harrisson sustained his criticisms of newspaper astrology past the early part of 1942. In a letter to the editor of *The Times* in early June, he appealed to the 'serious-minded' reader in recognising the 'dubious revival' of wartime astrology.<sup>189</sup> Time, it was stressed, was very much running out. 'Surely the symptoms [of mass astrology] need to be diagnosed and dealt with... They cannot much longer be ignored'.<sup>190</sup> Responding comments questioned the extent to which Harrisson understood the technical workings of astrology, with such ignorance and prejudice typical of its critics.<sup>191</sup> More sophisticated critiques came from the MO panel. Penned on the same day as the original letter in *The Times* was published, one diarist queried whether Harrisson had actually understood the true propaganda message of astrologers like Lyndoe. Criticising Lyndoe's work was 'bad psychology' because of his obvious contribution to the fighting spirit of the nation:

Infuriated by Harrisson's letter in *The Times* today naming himself against astrologers. Bad psychology. Hard work in a dismal frame of mind produced nothing like such good results as work allied with assurance of victory. Does he KNOW he has interviewed many thousands of workers who would go to the stake for their faith in astrology. I read Lyndoe in the '*People*' every week, and slog at the garden preparing for next winter's crops in a much more-light-hearted state than I should after a conversation such as I had with Mrs. A yesterday which made me feel "Damn it all, what's the use..." No, Mr H[arrisson]—if astrology is suppressed I'll chuck in my hand to Hitler at once.<sup>192</sup>

The diarist's criticisms expose the limits of Harrisson's approach to how 'public opinion' was formulated, and how it could be measured and controlled.<sup>193</sup> Since MO's inception, emphasis was placed on unravelling the specific roll of the press in influencing public opinion. For Harrisson, 'public' opinion (what people say to a stranger) was determined by the inter-play between 'private' opinion and 'published' opinion.<sup>194</sup> MO's assessment of private attitudes on newspaper astrology was conclusive proof of its corrosive impact for Harrisson. In his view, the state had clearly not gone far enough in dissuading the masses against its 'sedative' qualities. A radical shift in 'published'

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<sup>188</sup> Hinton, *The Mass Observers*, p. 213.

<sup>189</sup> Tom Harrisson, 'Astrology and War', *The Times*, 11 June 1942, p. 5.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid.

<sup>191</sup> Samuel T. Fripp, 'The Use of the Stars', *The Times*, 17 June 1942, p. 5.

<sup>192</sup> MOA, D 5372, 11 June 1942, woman born in 1892.

<sup>193</sup> Tom Harrisson, 'What Is Public Opinion?', *The Political Quarterly*, 11 (1940), pp. 368–83.

<sup>194</sup> Hinton, *The Mass Observers*, p. 185.

opinion was needed to reorder 'private' (and eventually public) opinion towards them.<sup>195</sup> This he attempted through connections in Fleet Street at the friendly *New Statesman* and *Picture Post*.

The fact that Harrison directly sought to massage, rather than simply record or observe, popular attitudes resulted in several panellists regurgitating many of the biases and misconceptions MO arrived at; particularly in the case of the *Picture Post* article which was heavily based on MO file reports. Yet the infuriated diarist articulated a set of broader, more fundamental criticisms of MO's method. Its narrow, dogmatic approach towards the relationship between private and published opinion left little room for conflicting readings of the press. As the diarist made clear, readers were capable of consuming and critically appreciating various kinds of published opinion, from *The People* to *The Times*. Harrison's and MO's reading of private opinion was therefore highly selective. It sought proof of the press' ability to manipulate the masses, thus robbing (particularly female readers) of any propensity to scrutinise published opinion, even Harrison's own. The diarist's interpretation therefore posed a broader challenge to MO's reading of public opinion. Public opinion itself, in the example of the hypothetical conversation with 'Mrs. A', could be disruptive and damaging *independent* of the press. Harrison's zeal in neutralising the forces of mass manipulation explains the misconceptions arrived at in MO's research on mass astrology. These were not only regurgitated by observers in the summer of 1941, but importantly formed the bedrock of its contribution to the MoI prior to this date.

## CONCLUSION

Between 1939 and 1945, newspaper astrology sat at the intersection between propaganda and entertainment. Its varied workings expose the complex relationship between the state, the media, and society in the total war context. Appeasing both political and commercial interests, the editorial policy of the popular and Sunday press ensured astrological predictions either mirrored official propaganda narratives or offered vague and generally, but not exclusively, soothing 'prescription'. Whilst official bodies began to recognise the attempts of newspaper astrology to imbue readers with more 'unifying' messages by 1942, they ultimately adopted a muted policy of acceptance towards them. This was largely due to the state's inability to directly control the narratives being transmitted in the context of wartime press censorship. Rivalries between

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<sup>195</sup> Hinton, *The Mass Observers*, p. 185.

the state, political powers, and the press for influence over the 'mass' explain this situation more effectively than contentions over the propaganda narratives the press deployed.

Gender and class lay at the heart of the secretive war over newspaper astrology. Chauvinistic and unfounded claims made by the Ministries of Home Security, Information, as well as MO stressed that female readers of the popular press were more susceptible to astrological persuasion than men. Whilst astrological content was distinctly gendered in its tone and visual presentation—drawing on emerging 'advice' columns and advertisements targeted towards women—the conclusions of the state and MO reveal more about elite masculine perceptions of female morale than they represent quantifiable evidence. These assumptions were mutually reinforcing, as MO arguments provided evidence for (and were officially sanctioned by) the MoI and later the MoHS. Yet this joint pre-occupation with the behaviours and mentalities of the individual, and specifically women, in the context of national unity were approached with different intentions. For the state, identifying and correcting 'weak links' within domestic morale was of chief importance. Its choice to single out women in this endeavour, based on questionable evidence, reveals the extent of internal state fears about the wartime direction of travel between 1941–1942. For Harrisson, heading the work of MO until May 1942, a democratising agenda lay behind efforts to expose the manipulation of the press—similar to what writers in the Marxist tradition describe as the press' contribution to a 'culture industry' of working-class 'deception'.<sup>196</sup> Although the state approached press astrology from the 'top-down' compared to MO's 'bottom-up' focus, they both fundamentally misunderstood its varied role as a complex hybrid of propaganda and entertainment.

Considering the astrology section's diversity of reception helps to correct the misunderstandings of both MO and the state. As Jo Fox makes clear, it was not necessarily propaganda that defined the 'people's war' narrative but responses to it.<sup>197</sup> The ways in which individual readers approached and absorbed the astrology sections were more varied than political and cultural elites assumed. Although evidence drawn from MO's panel of volunteer writers should not be seen as an unproblematic representation of wider society, they do point towards the virtually endless interpretative possibilities for those who consumed press astrology. Whilst some did follow the advice of astrologers uncritically, others were drawn to it simply as a form of light entertainment,

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<sup>196</sup> See Theodore W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, 'The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception', in Theodore W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *The Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004 [1944]), pp. 94–136.

<sup>197</sup> Fox, 'Careless Talk', p. 966.

to express scepticism in published opinion, or as a means of distinguishing themselves from those who did follow it. It had the ability to both bind the wartime collective as well as engender what Jose Harris terms a more insular form of ‘privatised...unstructured psychological individualism’.<sup>198</sup> MO panel responses reveal that such diversity of reception was evident for middle-class female readers of various ages. Given Jonathan Rose’s assertion that critical wartime reading was also practiced by a sizeable minority of the working-class, notions of a ‘suggestive’ and ‘passive’ popular female readership collapse.<sup>199</sup> Women had the ability to tailor levels of engagement with the astrology sections to fit personal circumstance, similar to what Carol Acton describes as the bereaved mother in wartime as ‘discourse user’.<sup>200</sup> A kaleidoscopic range of responses to the astrology sections emerges beyond uncritical, devotional belief—signalling women’s privatised political power over a politically charged issue linked to domestic morale debates.

As we turn from the context of the home fronts to wider military culture, a similar diversity of beliefs can be recognised in the case of combatant superstitions. Soldiers, flyers, and sailors subscribed to superstitious practices for many of the same reasons civilians did in astrology; in large part due to the civilian composition of the wartime military. Yet like astrological messages, superstitions had the ability to simultaneously bind and divide. Compared to the home front context, we will see, official and cultural judgments on the place of heterodoxy within the military was radically different—reinforcing the contemporary gendered construction of warfare as masculine preserve.

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<sup>198</sup> Harris, ‘War and Social History’, pp. 32–3.

<sup>199</sup> Jonathan Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Class* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), pp. 233–4.

<sup>200</sup> Acton, *Grief in Wartime*, p. 5. Also see Roper, ‘Slipping out of View’.

*War and Superstition: Belief, Modernity,  
and Military Culture*

Writing in the aftermath of the First World War (1918–1919), Max Weber reflected on the ‘disenchantment’ of the world. ‘The fate of our times’, he penned, ‘is characterized by rationalization and intellectualization and, above all, by the “disenchantment of the world”’.<sup>1</sup> For Weber, war’s mechanised slaughter led to a fundamental breaking with organised religion—placing the early twentieth century as a focal point in the trajectory of Western ‘secularisation’. Scholarship on the war’s cultural outpouring produced between 1970s and 1990s echoed Weber’s conclusions. The pre-war subscription to Christianity evaporated, or at least took a significant blow, as soldiers and veterans turned to irony rather than religion in making sense of human loss.<sup>2</sup> Such readings, however, depend on a very specific, singular framing of early twentieth century ‘modernity’ equivalent to avant-garde literary modernism.<sup>3</sup> In line with important re-assessments of modernity, scholars note the potential for ‘traditional’ motifs and religious beliefs to work both within and with aspects of ‘the modern’.<sup>4</sup> As Jose Harris rightly indicates, ‘modernity’ is essentially a mental

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (eds.), *Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (London: Routledge, 1970), p. 155. For an approach stressing that Weber did not advance a ‘secularising’ argument, see J. C. D. Clark, ‘The Re-Enchantment of the World? Religion and Monarchy in Eighteenth-Century Europe’, in Michael Schaich (ed.), *Monarchy and Religion: The Transformation of Royal Culture in Eighteenth-Century Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 41–75.

<sup>2</sup> Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*; Hynes, *A War Imagined*.

<sup>3</sup> ‘Modernist’ readings of First World War culture have expanded beyond Fussell’s preoccupation with male, privately educated officers’ writings. See Trudi Tate, *Modernism, History and the First World War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998); Vincent Sherry, *The Great War and the Language of Modernism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Ana Carden-Coyne, *Reconstructing the Body: Classicism, Modernism, and the First World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Alice Kelly, *Commemorative Modernisms: Women Writers, Death and the First World War* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020). For a warning against cultural modernism as illustrative of modernity, see Mandler, ‘The Problem with Cultural History’, pp. 103–9.

<sup>4</sup> Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning*; Saler, ‘Modernity and Enchantment’; Goebel, *The Great War and Medieval Memory*.

construct rather than an objective, external measuring rod—its multiplicity of meanings and experiences complicating the historian's task of assessing its workings.<sup>5</sup> Both Victorian and Edwardian understandings of 'modernity' and 'modern' were highly fluid. By the interwar years, the traditional elements within modernity grew so great as to represent a 'conservative modernity', so Alison Light claims.<sup>6</sup> Yet Weber's use of '*disenchantment*' also implies a loss of wonder, magic, and imagination. Magic, ritual, and superstition persisted after the war, albeit in modified forms, but limited attention has been given to considering their post-1918 lives, particularly during the second 'total war'.<sup>7</sup>

This chapter focuses on 'superstition' and its cohesive qualities during the Second World War. It pays particular attention to the community building aspects superstition performed at this distinct moment of 'modernity'. Superstitions, the chapter argues, were both positive and negative, and traversed the boundaries of home/fighting fronts. Perhaps more than any of the conceptual categories explored within this study, 'superstition' remains loaded with methodological and philosophical complexities. Definitions tend to centre on beliefs and behaviours with a distinctly 'irrational' focus—a hangover of Enlightenment approaches to modernity. As such, the category of 'superstition' is often deployed in description of persistent 'pre-modern' beliefs designed to unite the human and natural worlds through supernatural beings, forces, or relations.<sup>8</sup> Whilst scholars rightly note its power-related overtones as ascriptive category, a 'discourse of authority, order and constraint', superstitious practices often look remarkably similar across time and culture.<sup>9</sup> Underneath those practices lie complex interconnections, and tensions, between magic and ritual, function and religion.<sup>10</sup> Sensitive to its multiple connections and meanings, the chapter explores superstition as an intricate coping mechanism, means of community construction, and as reason to fight on a spiritual/psychological level for male combatants. Importantly, it exposes how the performance of masculinity through superstitions, even in temperate forms, was potentially exclusionary and harmful in the context of civil-military interconnection. 'Inclusion' within

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<sup>5</sup> Harris, *Private Lives, Public Spirit*, p. 32, 36; Martin Daunton and Bernhard Rieger (eds.), *Meanings of Modernity: Britain from the late-Victorian era to World War II* (Oxford: Berg, 2001).

<sup>6</sup> Light, *Forever England*, p. 10.

<sup>7</sup> On this fluctuating trajectory, see Thomas Waters, *Cursed Britain: A History of Witchcraft and Black Magic in Modern Times* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019), ch. 8–9.

<sup>8</sup> Stephen A. Smith, 'Introduction', in Stephen A. Smith and Allan Knight (eds.), *The Religion of Fools? Superstition Past and Present*, Past and Present Supplement N.S. 3. (Oxford, 2008), p. 38.

<sup>9</sup> Jean-Claude Schmitt, 'Les Superstitions', in Jacques le Goff (ed.), *Histoire de la France Religieuse*, vol. I: 1800–1880 (Paris: Seuil, 1988), p. 423; Smith, 'Introduction', p. 11.

<sup>10</sup> Smith, 'Introduction', pp. 38–55. On the classical opposition of magic and science, see Stanley J. Tambiah, *Magic, Science, Religion and the Scope of Rationality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).



various constructions of martial masculinity always resulted in the *exclusion* of others. Exploring the rich context superstition operated in brings us closer to the spaces ‘in which different masculinities were shaped and upheld’ in wartime military culture, and their relationship to ‘middle- and working-class civilian codes of respectable masculinity’.<sup>11</sup>

Existing work exploring the place of superstition in the martial sphere tends to focus on one of the three branches comprising the British military (army, Royal Navy, and RAF).<sup>12</sup> Limiting analysis in this way, whilst useful from a ‘case study’ perspective, misses the opportunity to connect individual and collective belief systems with a more expansive, and shifting, reading of contemporary ‘military culture’. This culture featured key commonalities—chiefly its aim to indoctrinate individuals within a hierarchy of command and discipline to maximise the fighting ability of military groups—but the three branches retained institutional and historical specificities.<sup>13</sup> The Royal Navy and army, Britain’s senior military branches, underwent significant reform as a result of the First World War. Yet the inherent conservatism of the rank-system persisted into the interwar and Second World War periods—particularly in the navy where units were bound together in confined spaces at sea.<sup>14</sup> The RAF, itself born of the army in March 1918, developed a distinct culture and ethos. Its self-conscious ‘aura of modernity’ was visualised in advancing aviation technology and through a perceived culture of meritocracy.<sup>15</sup> All three branches of the military sought to regulate the minutiae of combatant actions in order to bring the individual within wider collective synergy.<sup>16</sup> But individuals and groups had the ability to tailor their beliefs based on personal and collective experience.

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<sup>11</sup> Alison Twells, ‘Sex, Gender, and Romantic Intimacy in Servicemen’s Letters during the Second World War’, *Historical Journal*, 63 (2020), p. 753.

<sup>12</sup> More has been written on the army and RAF compared to the Royal Navy. See Parker and Snape, ‘Keeping Faith and Coping’; Snape, *God and the British Soldier*; Simon P. MacKenzie, ‘Beating the Odds: Superstition and Human Agency in RAF Bomber Command, 1942–1945’, *War in History*, 22 (2015), pp. 382–400; idem, *Flying Against Fate: Superstition and Allied Aircrews in World War II* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2017). For a short discussion on cross-branch superstitions, see Paul Fussell, *Wartime: Understanding and Behaviour in the Second World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 48–51.

<sup>13</sup> For comparisons between the institutional cultures of the Royal Navy, army, and RAF, see Corbin Williamson, ‘The Royal Navy, 1900–1945’, in Peter R. Mansoor and Williamson Murray (eds.), *The Culture of Military Organizations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), pp. 321–50; Williamson Murray, ‘The Culture of the British Army, 1914–1945’, in Mansoor and Williamson (eds.), *The Culture of Military Organizations*, pp. 185–207; David Stubbs, ‘The Culture of the Royal Air Force, 1918–1945’, in Mansoor and Williamson (eds.), *The Culture of Military Organizations*, pp. 403–25.

<sup>14</sup> This varied greatly within sub-branches, however. Officer/sailor relations on the ‘big ships’ (battleships, battle-cruisers, and cruisers) were more rigid compared to those on destroyers/escorts, whilst submarine crews viewed themselves as an elite within the elite. See Williamson, ‘The Royal Navy’, p. 322.

<sup>15</sup> Francis, *The Flyer*, p. 14.

<sup>16</sup> A common feature of all disciplinary systems, according to Foucault; Foucault, *Discipline and Punishment*, p. 178.

In order to capture the ambiguous place of superstition in Second World War military culture, a socio-cultural approach to military history is used to trace superstition's relationship to military discipline, cohesion, and morale across the three branches. Adopting a wide-ranging, thematic approach, the chapter considers the superstitious qualities of man-to-man relationships, men's emotions, materiel/materiality, and the home fronts. It argues that whilst superstitions of the Second World War retained a remarkable similarity to those of the First, the 'people's war' context expanded their use across classes and cultures and complicated military authorities' perceptions of them. Military theorists' and leaders' growing interest in combatants' interior worlds, propelled in part by mass conscription, meant they increasingly attended to individual and collective coping strategies. Yet ambiguous interpretations of 'morale' inadvertently led agents of authority to recognise the positive and negative implications of superstition on morale. This created a highly muddled discourse in which superstitions were championed by some and ridiculed by others. The role played by rank-and-file combatants in this discourse, whose beliefs were ascribed great significance by various authorities, reveals an important re-negotiation between fighting forces and institutional power in contemporary military culture. Whilst its primary focus remains on those engaged at the 'sharp end' of combat (excluding POWs) findings from support services and irregular military units are included where appropriate.<sup>17</sup> The chapter selects evidence from representative parts of the service branches in pointing towards wider thematic conclusions.

Due to the ephemeral nature of superstition, accessing contemporary perceptions of its workings relies on specific source sets. Attitudes 'from above' are found buried within morale reports, official papers, and official histories, whilst their wider representation can be seen in wartime and postwar film. Gauging their prevalence and significance amongst rank-and-file combatants, as well as officers, is more difficult. References are typically found within postwar 'narrative' based sources such as oral testimonies and memoirs—their inclusion contributing to what Graham Dawson terms the subjective 'composure' of martial masculinity.<sup>18</sup> Yet their divisive, atomising potential rubs against the wartime martial sphere's valorisation of 'hyper'

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<sup>17</sup> For more on the POW experience, see Simon P. MacKenzie, 'The Treatment of Prisoners in World War II', *Journal of Modern History*, 66 (1994), pp. 487–520; Juliette Pattinson, Lucy Noakes and Wendy Ugolini, 'Incarcerated Masculinities: Male POWs and the Second World War', *Journal of War and Culture Studies*, 7 (2014), pp. 179–90; Claire Makepeace, *Captives of War: British Prisoners of War in Europe in the Second World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

<sup>18</sup> Dawson, *Soldier Heroes*, pp. 34–43. For pioneering works exploring the 'composure' theory, see Alistair Thomson, *Anzac Memories: Living with the Legend* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994); Summerfield, *Reconstructing Women's Wartime Lives*.

masculinity, creating tensions and ‘discomposure’ within veteran accounts and memories.<sup>19</sup> For Francis McGovern, a merchant naval crewmember during the war, ‘superstitions’ were nothing more than ‘silly nonsense’ when ‘one sits back now in the cold light of day with reflection’.<sup>20</sup> Postwar interviews such as McGovern’s frequently indicate such discomposure, as veterans attempted to square the tensions within their wartime experience and selfhoods. Veteran testimonies and published memoirs feature characteristic differences as sources. Most obviously, the former depends on an active, real-time dynamic between interviewer and interviewee in ‘creating’ the source whilst the latter (given the input of editors and copy-writers) is a more solitary practice.<sup>21</sup> Commercial intentions complicate and colour the source material in memoirs. As written and audible repositories of memory, however, similar questions over the reliability/utility of the evidence, the narration of individual selfhoods and structural identities, and the influence of wider cultural codes persist.<sup>22</sup> As Jay Winter highlights, veteran stories reveal something of the lived experience of battle whilst unearthing patterns of identity formation, providing emotional catharsis.<sup>23</sup> Whether commented on organically, or, as in the range of veteran testimonies collected by the Imperial War Museum from the 1980s, directly raised as a topic of conversation, wartime superstitions reveal the multiplicity of masculinities of war working with and beyond ‘hyper’ and even ‘temperate’ masculinity. These pluralised gendered identities were either strengthened or challenged through postwar reflection, as part of a growing culture of psychological introspection.<sup>24</sup> In order to connect the role of superstition with shifting readings of martial masculinity, we need to cast our focus back to the belief cultures of the First World War. The following sections provide a summary of superstition within the first ‘total war’, chiefly the British army.

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<sup>19</sup> Penny Summerfield, ‘Dis/composing the Subject: Intersubjectivities in Oral History’, in Tess Cosslett, Celia Lury and Penny Summerfield (eds.), *Feminism and Autobiography: Texts, Theories, Methods* (New York: Routledge, 2000), pp. 91–106; idem, ‘Culture and Composure’, pp. 65–93.

<sup>20</sup> IWM, Department of Sound (hereafter DoS), Francis McGovern (17825/4/reel 4), 29 January 1998.

<sup>21</sup> For an overview of this dynamic, particularly from a gendered perspective, see Juliette Pattinson, ‘“The Thing that Made Me Hesitate ...”: Re-Examining Gendered Intersubjectivities in Interviews with British Secret War Veterans’, *Women’s History Review*, 20 (2011), pp. 245–63. On the genre of veteran life writing, compared to civilian life writing, see Francis Houlton, *The Veteran’s Tale: British Military Memoirs of the Second World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), introduction.

<sup>22</sup> See Michael Roper, ‘Re-Remembering the Soldier Hero: The Psychic and Social Construction of Memory in Personal Narratives of the Great War’, *History Workshop Journal*, 50 (2000), pp. 181–204. On the complexity of memory, see Winter and Sivan, ‘Setting the Framework’, pp. 6–39.

<sup>23</sup> Winter, *Remembering War*, p. 116; Ben Shephard, *A War of Nerves Soldiers and Psychiatrists: 1914–1994* (London: Cape, 2002), p. 35.

<sup>24</sup> Roper, ‘Between Manliness and Masculinity’, p. 356. Conducted between 1980s–2000s, all IWM interviews coincided with the ‘memory boom’ of the 1980s. See Winter, *Remembering War*, p. 1.

SUPERSTITION AND THE FIRST WORLD WAR

For contemporaries of the First World War, as Jay Winter suggests, the experience and fall-out of the conflict was nothing short of a ‘demographic disaster’.<sup>25</sup> As Stefan Goebel puts it, the war was ‘murderous without precedent’, whilst George Mosse notes that encounters with ‘mass organized death’ defined its lived experience.<sup>26</sup> Economic and technological advancements of the principal European powers by the turn of the century made the mechanised killing of combatants possible.<sup>27</sup> Recent estimates put the total number of military dead as a result of the war (amongst both European and World powers) at 9,408,615, although this is likely lower than the true figure. In the British case (including its Empire and Dominions), the number of combatants killed stood at upwards of 908,371—a lower figure compared to the 1,100,000 German losses; 1,375,800 French losses; and 1,800,000 Russian losses.<sup>28</sup> The war saw changes in the British army as a result; from ‘regular’ to ‘conscript’ force. The late- eighteenth- and nineteenth-century army was elitist and regimental, designed to engage in limited ‘small’ wars in its policing of colonial unrest.<sup>29</sup> Fighting a mechanised, transnational conflict against the German and Austro-Hungarian empires proved an entirely different task compared to the guerrilla tactics of the Boer Wars, demanding an expansive military body drawn from the reservoir of the citizenry.<sup>30</sup> Large numbers of

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<sup>25</sup> Jay Winter, ‘Demography’, in John Horne (ed.), *A Companion to World War I* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 248; idem, ‘Britain’s “Lost Generation” of the First World War’, *Population Studies*, 31 (1977), pp. 449–66.

<sup>26</sup> Goebel, *The Great War and Medieval Memory*, p. 28; George Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 3.

<sup>27</sup> On the economic and technological advances of the war, see Jay Winter (ed.), *The Cambridge History of the First World War*, vol. II: *The State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), ch. 10, 12, 16. On the technological transformation of the ‘front’ into a land of monsters and mythical beings, see Mary Habeck, ‘Technology in the First World War: The View from Below’, in Jay Winter, Geoffrey Parker, and Mary Habeck (eds.), *The Great War and the Twentieth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), pp. 105–6. On the firepower ‘revolution’ of the turn of the century, see Hew Strachan, *European Armies and the Conduct of War* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1983), ch. 8.

<sup>28</sup> Winter, ‘Demography’, p. 249.

<sup>29</sup> Hew Strachan, ‘The British Army and Society’, *Historical Journal*, 22 (1979), pp. 247–54; Spires, *The Late Victorian Army*. On the army and colonial policing, see John M. Mackenzie (ed.), *Popular Imperialism and the Military: 1850–1950* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992); Timothy R. Moreman, “‘Small War’ and ‘Imperial Policing’: The British Army and the Theory and Practice of Colonial Warfare in the British Empire, 1919–1939”, *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 19 (1996), pp. 105–31. Of course, the army was not without ‘citizen soldiers’ during the period. On the over 360,000 British citizens in the army, and those within the British empire more broadly, see Ian F. W. Beckett (ed.), *Citizen Soldiers and the British Empire, 1837–1902* (London: Routledge, 2015). On the amateur military tradition and Territorial forces, see idem, *The Amateur Military Tradition, 1558–1945* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991); William Butler, *The Irish Amateur Military Tradition in the British Army, 1854–1992* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016).

<sup>30</sup> Simkins, *Kitchener’s Army*, *passim*.

recruits joined in the early weeks of August 1914 (by 22<sup>nd</sup> August over 100,000 men had enlisted and on 31<sup>st</sup> daily enlistment topped 20,000). The strain placed on the new volunteer army created by Lord Kitchener (Secretary of State for War) was immense.<sup>31</sup> Prior to 1915, two and a half million men had volunteered for military service, but the need for manpower forced the introduction of military conscription for the first time in British history in 1916. The scale of the enduring challenge in waging war was reflected in the military authorities' compilation of morale reports during the *année terrible* of 1917; illustration of a growing recognition of the importance combatant morale and men's interior worlds held to eventual victory over more traditional notions of discipline and punishment.<sup>32</sup> As the regular British Expeditionary Force (BEF) of 1914 became a mass, civilian army, the ways in which the military perceived and treated its men were forced to change.

War's mechanised slaughter bled deeper than estimated fatalities. The nature of trench warfare on the Western Front—often characterised by monotonous, routine tasks behind the lines interspersed with irregular high-octane combat—created a context in which the threat of randomised, violent death diminished individual agency.<sup>33</sup> Offensive mentality was instilled in soldiers as, with the use of industrialised weaponry, the front became a distinctly 'psychological battlefield'.<sup>34</sup> Soldiers clung to an array of belief systems and traditions in order to make sense of the violence, including the secular and the sacred, the traditional and the modern, as well as aspects of orthodoxy and heterodoxy. As Annette Becker makes clear, the anguish of temporary separation from home and the visceral horrors of war fostered the revival of ancient devotional practices.<sup>35</sup> Existing interpretations stress that the surge towards 'irrationality' at the front

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<sup>31</sup> Gregory, *The Last Great War*, pp. 31–2. For a revisionist approach to 'war enthusiasm' in the early weeks of 1914, see Catriona Pennell, *A Kingdom United: Popular Responses to the Outbreak of the First World War in Britain and Ireland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012). Demographic analysis on individual unit enlistment figures, and the army as whole, remains lacking. Jay Winter contends that middle-classes volunteers were over-represented between August 1914–February 1916, Winter, *The Great War and the British People*, p. 34. Placing volunteer recruitment figures within specific context, Adrian Gregory argues overall army recruitment mirrored the social composition of poorer areas of metropolitan centres such as London (with its large body of domestic and uniformed workers) and its high number of white-collar workers. See Adrian Gregory, 'Lost Generations: The Impact of Military Casualties on Paris, London, and Berlin', in Winter and Robert (eds.), *Capital Cities at War*, pp. 66–7; Edward M. Spiers, 'The Regular Army in 1914', in Ian F. W. Beckett and Keith Simpson (ed.), *A Nation in Arms: The British Army in the First World War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985), p. 45.

<sup>32</sup> Ussishkin, *Morale*, pp. 76–7.

<sup>33</sup> On the mythologization of violence, and neglect of other wartime emotions such as boredom or exhilaration, see Brian Bond, *The Unquiet Western Front: Britain's Role in Literature and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Daniel Todman, *The Great War: Myth and Memory* (London: Hambledon Continuum, 2005), ch. 1.

<sup>34</sup> Tim Travers, *The Killing Ground. The British Army, the Western Front and the Emergence of Modern Warfare 1900–1918* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1987), pp. 43–51.

<sup>35</sup> Becker, 'Faith, Ideologies, and the "Cultures of War"', p. 241; idem, *War and Faith*, p. 103.

highlights a passive retreat inwards on the part of combatants, whilst more recent work emphasises how superstition was actively sought-after as a means of providing instruction in a desperately uncertain environment.<sup>36</sup>

It was here that superstition and other heterodox belief cultures collided with the military context of morale and discipline. As David French notes, instilling the military identity of leadership as ‘legitimate authority’ proved critical in the structuring of Britain’s nineteenth-century regular army; quashing individualism in favour of collective discipline.<sup>37</sup> Yet, as we will see, this proved more difficult in the context of Britain’s expanding army and its implications for military morale. As early as the late- nineteenth-century, military theorists recognised the need for new forms of command and discipline in future conflicts; anticipating greater civilian involvement and the critical place of the ‘interior’ world of combatants.<sup>38</sup> Whilst more draconian forms of discipline and deterrence continued (such as penal servitude, hard labour, or court martial) ‘morale’ became increasingly associated with character, self, and imaginary bonds between men.<sup>39</sup> The military framing of the conflict—illustrative of wider socio-cultural impulses towards psychology and psychological theories—began to fragment the nexus between ‘discipline’ and ‘morale’. Contemporary understandings of what constituted ‘good morale’ remained eclectic and variously dependent on numerous factors, including training, group/unit solidarity, regimental *esprit de corps*, good leadership, and propaganda.<sup>40</sup> Yet all these factors were increasingly viewed through a psychological lens in which the individual was seen as critical to collective victory. ‘Military

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<sup>36</sup> Eric Leed, *No Man’s Land: Combat and Identity in World War One* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979); Alexander Watson, *Enduring the Great War: Combat, Morale and Collapse in the German and British Armies, 1914–1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 99.

<sup>37</sup> David French, *Military Identities: The Regimental System, the British Army, and the British People* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 62; Peter Simkins, *Kitchener’s Army: The Raising of New Armies, 1914–1916* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), p. 296. Some scholars have argued that new army units and Territorials were successfully moulded by the characteristics of the pre-war regular army. See Dennis Winter, *Death’s Men: Soldiers of the Great War* (London: Penguin, 1978), pp. 227–9.

<sup>38</sup> Helen McCartney, *Citizen Soldiers: The Liverpool Territorials in the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 135; Ussishkin, *Morale*, p. 65.

<sup>39</sup> Ussishkin, *Morale*, p. 64.

<sup>40</sup> Watson, *Enduring the Great War*, p. 141. For a broader discussion on twentieth century theories of combat motivation (and the special place of the First World War to them), see Simon Wessely, ‘Twentieth-Century Theories of Combat Motivation’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 41 (2006), pp. 269–86; On morale more broadly, see J. G. Fuller, *Troop Morale and Popular Culture in the British and Dominion Armies 1914–1918* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990); Gary Sheffield, *Leadership in the Trenches: Officer-Man Relations, Morale and Discipline in the British Army in the Era of the First World War* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999). In the Irish context, see Timothy Bowman, *The Irish Regiments in the Great War: Discipline and Morale* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003). For a recent reconsideration of morale and the English experience, see Alex Mayhew, ‘Making Sense of the Western Front: English Infantrymen’s Morale and Perception of Crisis during the Great War’, unpublished PhD thesis, London School of Economics and Political Science (2018).

culture' underwent a radical transformation during the First World War, in which the relationship between individual and structure shifted.<sup>41</sup> As we will see, the place of superstition both strengthened and antagonised this evolution; at times promoting a more culturally harmonious fighting force whilst also causing tensions for those critical of the army's departure from its pre-war, regular origins.

Superstitious practices took a variety of forms at the front, intersecting with aspects of religious practice, the widespread turn to 'fatalism', and belief in 'luck'. Its roots came from an eclectic mixture of orthodox religion, folk practices, and behaviours specific to the immediate context of the front. Some were secular in nature, notably the association of bad luck occurring when lighting three matches or cigarettes.<sup>42</sup> Others were overtly Christian, particularly fatalistic attitudes surrounding the 'manifestation' of angels over the battlefields.<sup>43</sup> Yet despite the reliance on these beliefs as part of a wider supernatural turn at the front, and their various overlaps and points of intersection, this did not generate an entirely coherent system of alternative spirituality. As Owen Davies indicates, the prominence of fatalism and luck (which were commonly entwined through superstition) led to fundamental tensions between determinism and agency in war.<sup>44</sup> Whilst scholars stress that the nexus between superstition, luck, and fatalism did not create an 'appealing' 'alternative creed' to established Christianity, it did have significant implications in the shaping of wartime military culture, expressions of the war's emotional impact for combatants, and the place of authority in shaping wartime beliefs.

Many combatants approved of an interdenominational approach to religious instruction and worship at the front.<sup>45</sup> It was in this spirit which superstition flourished as a pan-denominational phenomenon, rooted in the performative and often mystical aspects of Catholicism. Evidence of Wesleyan hymns ritualistically sung by Protestant faithful or Catholic chaplains preaching to enthusiastic Anglicans attests to the more outward, collective expressions of the wartime breakdown of traditional denominational boundaries. But this also occurred at the private level.

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<sup>41</sup> For a complimentary discussion on innovation and change within the army in terms of doctrine and military strategy, see Aimée Fox, *Learning to Fight: Military Innovation and Change in the British Army, 1914–1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018). For an interpretation stressing greater similarity between the wartime and pre-war army, see Ian F. W. Beckett, 'The British Army, 1914–1918: The Illusion of Change', in John Turner (ed.), *Britain and the First World War* (London: Routledge, 1988), pp. 99–116.

<sup>42</sup> Davies, *A Supernatural War*, p. 137.

<sup>43</sup> David Clarke, *The Angel of Mons: Phantom Stories and Ghostly Guardians* (Chichester: Wiley, 2004).

<sup>44</sup> Davies, *A Supernatural War*, p. 135. Also see Watson, *Enduring the Great War*, p. 141.

<sup>45</sup> Richard Schweitzer, *The Cross and the Trenches: Religious Faith and Doubt among British and American Great War Soldiers* (Westport: Praeger, 2003), pp. 20–21.

The war saw a mass proliferation of Catholic material artefacts—notably the Sacred Heart (a representation for the resurrected heart of Christ), emblems of the Virgin Mary, and Rosaries—whose reach extended far beyond the pool of traditional Roman Catholics.<sup>46</sup> Some of the products soldiers fashioned themselves in the trenches from the bric-a-brac of war took the form of sacred objects.<sup>47</sup> Indeed, the superstitious use of such items was even championed by the non-religious and non-institutionally affiliated. Between 1914 and 1917 the London folklorist Edward Lovett frequently collected Catholic-based trinkets and mascots from various soldiers returning to the metropolis, whilst the Catholic cleric Charles Platter concluded in 1919 that the reach of such objects effectively nullified any Catholic distinctiveness they once had.<sup>48</sup> Porous boundaries clearly existed between the secular and sacred; abstract notions given physical form in materiality.<sup>49</sup>

Perhaps more than in religious-based artefacts, the superstitious use of secular objects expose important connections between combatant faith, the context of randomised death, and the broader need for emotional connection and expression. For Joanna Bourke, the ‘omnipresence of death’ characteristic of the First World War ‘enabled emotion’.<sup>50</sup> Carrying personal artefacts belonging to wounded, dying, or deceased comrades or more frequently mementos of loved-ones back home provided powerful sites where private emotions could be worked through, away from the martial sphere’s demand of stoicism.<sup>51</sup> Sensory stimulation was essential here, as the

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<sup>46</sup> For more on Christian symbolism and materiality at the front, see Nicholas J. Saunders, ‘Crucifix, Cavalry, and Cross: Materiality and Spirituality in Great War Landscapes’, *World Archaeology*, 35 (2003), pp. 7–21.

<sup>47</sup> Becker, ‘Faith, Ideologies, and the “Cultures of War”’, p. 239; Nicholas J. Saunders, *Trench Art: A Brief History and Guide, 1914–1939* (London: Leo Cooper, 2001).

<sup>48</sup> Snape, *God and the British Soldier*, p. 35; Charles D. Platter (ed.), *Catholic Soldiers: By Sixty Chaplains and Many Others* (London: Longmans & Co, 1919), p. 25. For more on Lovett’s life and work, see Davies, *A Supernatural War*, pp. 8–9.

<sup>49</sup> For a wide-ranging starting point on materiality and the Great War, see Nicholas J. Saunders and Paul Cornish (eds.), *Contested Objects: Material Memories of the Great War* (London: Routledge, 2009). On materiality in the context of transnational mourning and remembrance, see Hanna Smyth, ‘The Material Culture of Remembrance and Identity: South Africa, India, Canada and Australia’s Imperial War Grave Commission Sites on the First World War’s Western Front’, unpublished DPhil thesis, Oxford University (2019); idem, ‘Identity and Memory at First World War British Imperial Memorials on the Western Front’, in Frank Jacob and Kenneth Pearl (eds.), *War and Memorials: The Age of Nationalism and the Great War* (Paderborn: Brill, 2019), pp. 157–87.

<sup>50</sup> Bourke, *Dismembering the Male*, p. 137.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., pp. 151–2. For a discussion on the various spaces where combatants’ privatised and collective emotions cut through the dominant emotional economy of war, see Natasha Silk, ‘Witnesses to Death: Soldiers on the Western Front’, in Martin Kerby, Margaret Baguley, and Janet McDonald (eds.), *The Palgrave Handbook of Artistic and Cultural Responses to War Since 1914: The British Isles, the United States and Australasia* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2018), pp. 147–62. On objects connecting the home and fighting fronts, see Alex Mayhew, ‘“A War Imagined”: Postcards and the Maintenance of Long-Distance Relationships during the Great War’, *War in History* (2019), online access only, [https://doi/abs/10.1177/0968344519831039], pp. 1–32.



touching or smelling of objects had a grounding effect through visceral response.<sup>52</sup> Clinging to photographs of family members, or wearing items of clothing sent from home in parcels, often became ritualistic. As E. F. Chapman noted in a letter to his mother in early-1917:

with your leather jerkin under my tunic, and the thick grey cardigan Father used to wear as well, in addition to the Army jerkin worn outside the tunic, I keep perfectly warm.<sup>53</sup>

Relatives were also inclined to gift lucky mascots on men's departure and, in rarer cases, sewed them into their son's or husband's garments against their wishes.<sup>54</sup> Ritualistic carrying of lucky mascots by soldiers, whilst not universally popular, provided succour for both combatants and their loved ones at home. Touch and intimacy associated with material objects provided a focal point for ruptured psychic forces and complex emotions—particularly, as Michael Roper notes, between mothers and sons.<sup>55</sup> E. F. Chapman's wearing of domestic clothing as part of his military uniform (which would often turn superstitious) exposes symbolic sites where men at the front and women at home 'met', as well as how aspects of belief cut across the frontline demands of heroism and simultaneous domestic expectations of men as being good fathers and husbands.<sup>56</sup> Yet superstitious practices also developed around the materiel of modern war. Many were convinced of having bullets or shells 'with their name on them' or that carrying personal/issued items of deceased comrades could be used to wrest back control one's destiny through superstition. This was particularly true in the early years of the war when connections/friendships between combatants were critical for morale. The extent to which fatalism defined trench life was exemplified by Private Arthur Wrench in late 1917: 'I think we are all Fatalists here believing in the preordained order of things'.<sup>57</sup> Yet fatalism's co-existence with superstition and ritual created a problematic network of alternative spirituality at the front.

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<sup>52</sup> On the importance of sensory readings of war in this context, see Das, *Touch and Intimacy*, *passim*; Nicholas J. Saunders and Paul Cornish (eds.), *Modern Conflict and the Senses* (London: Routledge, 2017).

<sup>53</sup> IWM, DoD, Papers of E. F. Chapman (92/3/1), Letter to Mother, 5 February 1917. For more on the virtually endless link between the 'fronts', see McCartney, *Citizen Soldiers*, ch. 5.

<sup>54</sup> Davies, *A Supernatural War*, p. 147; Edward Lovett, *Magic in Modern London* (Bostcastle: Red Thread Books, 2014 [1925]), p. 72.

<sup>55</sup> Roper, *The Secret Battle*, especially ch. 2. For a discussion on the importance of the family connection for combatants in relation to materiality before and after the war, see Ann-Marie Foster, "'We Decided the Museum Would Be the Best Place for Them': Veterans, Families and Mementos of the First World War", *History and Memory*, 31 (2019), pp. 87–117.

<sup>56</sup> Jessica Meyer, *Men of War: Masculinity and the First World War in Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 167, 2; King, *Family Men*, *passim*.

<sup>57</sup> IWM, DoD, Papers of A. E. Wrench (85/51/1), A. E. Wrench diary, 25 October 1917. Also see Vanessa Chambers, "'A Shell with My Name on It': The Reliance on the Supernatural During the First World War", *Journal for the Academic Study of Magic*, 2 (2004), pp. 79–102.

Alongside the gendered implications of emotional expression, superstition also highlights the varied workings of class at the front. The rigid class structure of late-Edwardian society was brought into sharp relief and amplified in the trenches, often straining officer-man relations in the process.<sup>58</sup> Yet recourse to superstition was by no means the preserve of the rank-and-file. Oswin Creighton, an army chaplain who fought in the Gallipoli campaign and later in France, endorsed the superstitions prevalent within the officer corps:

The average officer absolutely refuses to have three candles alight in the room, or to light three cigarettes with one match. We nearly had thirteen for our Christmas dinner, and much trouble had been taken to find a fourteenth. The adjunct dropped the salt the other day. 'Damn', he said, and turned very pink and took two pinches of salt and threw them over his shoulder. 'Touch wood' is a daily injunction.<sup>59</sup>

Other examples, albeit outside the British context, attest to superstition's acceleration of sociability. As Tim Cook highlights in relation to Canadian soldiers, superstitions were passed mouth to mouth and shared with new men by company veterans. They also formed an important function in binding (pal's) battalions and regiments together through collective practices and mentalities.<sup>60</sup> Subscription to supernatural ways of thinking and behaving clearly formed an important component of men's indoctrination in the collective negotiation of death and its emotional ruptures—cutting across both private and more public spaces in complex ways. Yet it also had the potential to disrupt and divide.

Perceptions of superstition amongst British military command was no doubt coloured by the institutional conservatism of the army.<sup>61</sup> Major R. S. Cockburn, who served on the Western Front in the 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion King's Royal Rifle Corps, 1916–1918, exemplified the

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<sup>58</sup> For more on officer-man relations, see Sheffield, *Leadership in the Trenches*; Janet S. K. Watson, *Fighting Different Wars: Experience, Memory and the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004). On class in late-Edwardian society, see Paul Thompson, *The Edwardians: The Remaking of British Society* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1975) Geoffrey Crossick (ed.), *The Lower Middle Class in Britain, 1870–1914* (London: Croom Helm, 1977). For major shifts in the Edwardian army, see Timothy Bowman and Mark Connelly, *The Edwardian Army: Recruiting, Training, and Deploying the British Army, 1902–1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

<sup>59</sup> Oswin Creighton, *The Letters of Oswin Creighton: C. F., 1883–1918* (London: Longman, 1920), p. 218; James Covert, *A Victorian Marriage: Mandell and Louise Creighton* (London: Hambledon and London, 2000), p. 310; Madigan, *Faith Under Fire*, p. 187.

<sup>60</sup> Tim Cook, 'Grave Beliefs: Stories of the Supernatural and the Uncanny among Canada's Great War Trench Soldiers', *Journal of Military History*, 77 (2013), p. 539. On the significance of social homogeneity at the Battalion level (and maintaining civilian identities in the military context), see McCartney, *Citizen Soldiers*, *passim*. On the regiment in history, see Corelli Barnett, *Britain and Her Army, 1509–1970: A Military, Political, and Social Survey* (London: Allen Lane, 1970), pp. 176–77; French, *Military Identities*.

<sup>61</sup> For the key texts on the British Army and politics prior to the First World War, see W. S. Hamer, *The British Army: Civil–Military Relations, 1885–1905* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1970); Spiers, *The Late Victorian Army*; Hew Strachan, *The Politics of the British Army* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

shock of 'rational' Christians to the outpouring of 'old superstitions' fostered by war.<sup>62</sup> 'Some of us', he penned:

had cherished a hope that the war was perhaps having a chastening effect on our souls, and was likely to enable us to see a brighter daylight through our tears than we had ever seen before, so far our old superstitions far from fading into oblivion, that there has been now added to by the calling up of what we can only term a *new class*.<sup>63</sup>

Distinctions were drawn between soldiers' 'consent...to entrust [their] frail bodies' to Christ and the civilian indulgence in superstition (which Cockburn described as a 'moral weakness').<sup>64</sup> For Cockburn the prevalence of superstitious practices and mentalities within the British army of the First World War, which one historian describes as 'almost endemic', represented nothing less than a moral failure.<sup>65</sup> Yet others recognised their importance, if questionable, within the nexus between increasingly privatised piety and the broader dynamics of morale. Cockburn's concerns over superstition within the army reflected a combination of spiritual distaste and unease over the rapid transformation of the British army from 'regular' to 'conscript' force.

The return to superstition in wartime had significant consequences for institutional religion and the Established Church in particular—a threat, Stefan Goebel indicates, potentially more dangerous than the disestablishment question of the previous century.<sup>66</sup> The widespread adoption of superstitious practices posed important theological questions, so much so that the newly elected Dean of King's College, Cambridge suggested in 1918 that the nation was on the brink of 'a second Reformation'.<sup>67</sup> Yet the wartime intensification of more popular belief forms fostered a range of clerical responses. For some such as Geoffrey Gordon, a chaplain attached to the Deputy Chaplain-General's HQ at St Omer,<sup>68</sup> the superstitious associations attached to amulets and mascots at the front straddled the boundaries between the heretical and heterodox. 'The superstitious [fighting] man', he stressed, 'must be either a polytheist or a devil worshipper, or, more probably, just a fool'.<sup>69</sup> Others took a dim, but less theologically dogmatic, view over the 'obsessive'

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<sup>62</sup> Schweitzer, *The Cross and the Trenches*, p. 47.

<sup>63</sup> IWM, DoD, Papers of Major R. S. Cockburn (78/4/1), 'War and Superstition (after Hazlitt)', in 'First World War Diary and Recollections'; quoted in Schweitzer, *The Cross and the Trenches*, p. 48.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Michael Snape, 'British Catholicism and the British Army in the First World War', *British Catholic History*, 26 (2002), p. 339.

<sup>66</sup> Goebel, *The Great War and Medieval Memory*, p. 51.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Madigan, *Faith Under Fire*, p. 157.

<sup>69</sup> Thomas W. Pyne and Geoffrey Gordon, *Papers from Picardy, by Two Chaplains, the Rev. T. W. Pym and the Rev. Geoffrey Gordon* (London: Constable & Co, 1917), p. 201.

nature of soldierly prayers at the front and the superstitious carrying of the Bible as a means of personal protection.<sup>70</sup> Concerns over superstition were also raised at the home front in the context of memorialisation and public mourning. At a meeting in the local town hall of St Mary's Church in Ilford, 1916, one Baptist minister decried the 'misleading superstition' surrounding the planning and design of the Church's war shrine whilst other Nonconformists and Anglicans stressed its links to 'papal superstitions'. As in previous centuries, the place of superstition continued to aggravate latent tensions between the established churches well into 'modernity'.<sup>71</sup>

Of course, not all clergymen and army chaplains were as opposed to superstition, diverse as the tone and rhetoric of this opposition was. Sensitive to the spiritual pulse of the times, Chaplain David Railton and others like him recognised the need for wider Church reform as a result of the war. 'I think a new era of religion is coming', he penned, 'and I hope so. The old is very oppressive'.<sup>72</sup> Given the Church of England's nervous outlook on folk religion, it would seem logical to conclude, at first glance, that the plethora of superstition was more readily accepted by Catholic clerics and army chaplains. The war saw a continuation of the Catholic church's care for the urban poor stemming from the nineteenth-century; an initiative intensifying over time due to the overwhelmingly urban and working-class composition of the British army by 1916.<sup>73</sup> This would suggest that unlike their Anglican counterparts, Catholic chaplains were more sensitive to the spiritual needs of the rank-and-file. As Charles Platter put it in *Catholic Soldiers*, Catholicism's answer to the inter-denominational *Army and Religion* report, the turn towards luck, fatalism, and superstition were general synonyms of 'God's will'.<sup>74</sup> This view of the Catholic chaplain, spiritually and emotionally in sync with the men under his care, was bolstered in the interwar years by veteran authors such as Robert Graves. Unlike the Catholic chaplain, he argued in *Goodbye to All That*, Protestant padres were 'remarkably out of touch with the troops'. The strength of his cynicism had hardened by 1957, when he noted how Anglican chaplains enjoyed 'little respect' amongst the troops.<sup>75</sup> Whilst recent work complicates the view of Anglican chaplains as inept, cowardly, and principally concerned with middle-class officers, official

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<sup>70</sup> Snape, *God and the British Soldier*, p. 34.

<sup>71</sup> Connelly, *The Great War, Memory and Ritual*, p. 32.

<sup>72</sup> Quoted in Schweitzer, *The Cross and the Trenches*, pp. 68–9.

<sup>73</sup> Simkins, *Kitchener's Army*; Snape, 'British Catholicism and the British Army', p. 337; John Bourne, 'The British Working Man in Arms', in Hugh Cecil and Peter Liddle (eds.), *Facing Armageddon: The First World War Experienced* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword, 1996), pp. 336–52.

<sup>74</sup> Platter (ed.), *Catholic Soldiers*, p. 18. Produced in 1919, the *Army and Religion* report addressed the religious impact of army life and war on working-class combatants; Snape, *God and the British Soldier*, p. 2.

<sup>75</sup> Robert Graves, *Goodbye to All That* (London: Penguin, 1957 [1929]), p. 242, 243.

Catholic views of front-line superstition indicate the limits of the myth Graves contributed to from the opposing side.<sup>76</sup> The official line of the Catholic church was to condemn superstitions of all kinds, as the Archbishop of Dublin did in January 1917 in relation to the spread of ‘gross’, ‘superstitious’ chain letters. But evidence from the ground highlights a more complex picture in which clerics were frequently unable to disentangle ‘orthodox’ and ‘heterodox’ practices or make theological decisions on where the boundaries between them lay for themselves.<sup>77</sup>

The place and function of superstition in the First World War clearly had complex socio-cultural and socio-military implications. The context of the ‘front’ simultaneously adapted pre-existing aspects of folklore whilst generating new forms of belief. It encouraged a pan-institutional popular religion, helping contemporaries navigate the spatial, psychic, and emotional distance created between the ‘home’ and ‘fighting’ fronts. Yet at the same time its presence stoked tensions and fissures, both vertically and horizontally. It had the potential to aggravate gendered and classed divisions, driving wedges between combatants at the front as well as civilians at home. Given the interrelationship of both World Wars, how did superstitions of the 1914–1918 period adapt between 1939 and 1945 and what differences can be recognised? As the following sections argue, many of the same kinds of belief persisted into the Second World War and had similar socio-cultural and socio-political effects. Yet the context of the ‘people’s war’ expanded and intensified their impact across and within various wartime groups as the public/private dynamic and its connection to morale became central.

## SUPERSTITION AND COMBAT IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR

Marital superstitions of the First World War typically relate to the context of ‘the front’. This can, in part, be explained by obsessions over the ‘Western Front’ as both physical and imagined repository of British cultural memory.<sup>78</sup> Yet this memory, steeped in notions of ‘pity’ and ‘futility’, signals the central role of the BEF in the waging of largely static trench warfare.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Madigan, *Faith Under Fire*.

<sup>77</sup> Davies, *A Supernatural War*, p. 190, 202.

<sup>78</sup> Comparatively less has been written on the naval/air contexts. For recent contributions, see Laura Rowe, *Morale and Discipline in the Royal Navy during the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018). At this stage, the RFC was a wing of the army; James Pugh, *The Royal Flying Corps, the Western Front and the Control of the Air, 1914–1918* (London: Routledge, 2017).

<sup>79</sup> On the ‘pity’ of the war, see Niall Ferguson, *The Pity of War* (London: Allen Lane, 1998). For more on the war’s dominant cultural memory, see Gary Sheffield, *Forgotten Victory. The First World War: Myths and Realities* (London: Headline, 2001); Todman, *The Great War*.

The Second World War saw the expansion of conflict into the skies and seas on a far larger scale. In November 1917, 90 per-cent of all men serving were in the army, including the Royal Flying Corps, but by mid 1943 those serving across all military branches (including auxiliary/women's services and Volunteer Training Corps/Home Guard) were more evenly distributed.<sup>80</sup> This was anticipated during the interwar period in line with Britain's new strategic aims—with growing investment in the Royal Navy and newly created RAF at the expense of the army.<sup>81</sup> Throughout the years 1924 to 1938/39, naval expenditure remained the highest of all three military branches, only to be overtaken by the RAF immediately prior to the onset of the Second World War.<sup>82</sup> Heavy investment in the Royal Navy as Britain's principle military deterrent, and subsequent spikes in RAF funding from the mid 1930s, opened the gateways for expanded and technologically diverse forms of warfare. By implication, it also opened the possibility for the adaptation of pre-existing beliefs in the context of new forms of killing, dying, separation, and unity. The following sections explore this diversification of belief 'from below' in the context of expanding military operations and technologies—in relation to death, material and killing, military 'cohesion', and sexual/emotional dimensions. The majority of examples have been drawn from the naval and RAF contexts, with additional material from the British army.

*Death and Superstition*

Much like ghostly metaphors and spiritualist practices of the home front, military recourse to superstition was designed to fulfil a functional role in the face of modern, mechanised death. In his foundational anthropology of the Trobian Islanders in the early twentieth century, Polish born Bronislaw Malinowski recognised the functional role superstition plays. Although functional models of religion and belief are outdated compared to modern sociologies

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<sup>80</sup> See Todman, *Britain's War: A New World*, p. 407.

<sup>81</sup> Ussishkin, *Morale*, p. 97. It should be noted that in the immediate aftermath of the First World War, Lloyd George intended to dissolve the Air Ministry. The combined efforts of Hugh Trenchard (Chief of Air Staff) and Winston Churchill (then Minister of Air) expanded British air power through imperial policing. See David E. Omissi, *Air Power and Colonial Control: The Royal Air Force 1919–1939* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990); Richard Overy, *The Birth of the RAF, 1918: The World's First Air Force* (London: Penguin, 2018); Warren Dockter, *Churchill and the Islamic World: Orientalism, Empire and Diplomacy in the Middle East* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2019). On Trenchard, see Andrew Boyle, *Trenchard: Man of Vision* (London: Collins, 1962).

<sup>82</sup> For a detailed list of figures, see Fennell, *Fighting the People's War*, p. 29. For more on interwar military policy, see Robin Higham, *Armed Forces in Peacetime: Britain, 1918–1940, a Case Study* (London: G. T. Foulis & Co, 1962); G. C. Peden, *British Rearmament and the Treasury: 1932–1939* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1979); Brian Bond, *British Military Policy between the Two World Wars* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1980); Edgerton, *Warfare State*, ch. 1. For more on the militaristic associational culture of the interwar period, see Rowan Thompson, 'The Peculiarities of British Militarism: The Air and Navy Leagues in Interwar Britain', unpublished PhD thesis, Northumbria University (2020).

of religion, superstitions within the martial sphere were intended to perform some functional aspects as Malinowski suggested.<sup>83</sup>

Befitting the context of a 'people's war', death was more egalitarian between 1939 and 1945 compared to 1914 and 1918—with far higher civilian and far lower military fatalities recorded.<sup>84</sup> Total civilian deaths stood at approximately 60,595. Almost 65,000 deaths were recorded within the RAF. The total number of army deaths stretched in the hundreds of thousands, whilst Royal Navy/Merchant Navy deaths stood at around 80,000.<sup>85</sup> As Daniel Todman reminds us, however, the experience and relationship combatants had with death is not reflected within the figures. This is especially true when taken out of chronological context. Royal and Merchant naval fatalities were particularly high between mid 1940 and mid 1942, with Merchant Navy personnel suffering the highest losses per per-centage than any other service, whilst RAF fatalities increased from mid 1942 as the bombing war switched gears to mainland Europe. From mid 1942 the number of army deaths steadily rose until August 1945, as those men in reserved occupations were increasingly called upon for military service from late 1943 to provide new recruits required for the final offensive in Europe.<sup>86</sup> Regional differences were also significant. Welsh servicemen had a lower rate of deaths in the armed forces compared to those from England (largely due to high levels of Welsh conscientious objection) whilst pockets of Scotland (such as Moray, Perthshire, and Inverness) suffered roughly twice the average number of army deaths compared to the mainland UK.<sup>87</sup> Moreover, the *nature* of dying differed between military branches, particularly in relation to environmental conditions. Drowning provoked fears amongst seamen, with maritime superstitions such as collar touching or mascots acting as a 'buffer' against the hostility of life and war at sea.<sup>88</sup> Folklore abounded over the 'Khamseen' (hot, dry winds of the deserts) for soldiers serving in the middle-east and north Africa—typically thought to have blown for an odd number of days.<sup>89</sup> It was in the RAF however, specifically Bomber

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<sup>83</sup> Bronislaw Malinowski, 'Anthropology', *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, first supplementary volume (London and New York: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1926), p. 132.

<sup>84</sup> Noakes, *Dying for the Nation*, p. 126.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 141, 125; Todman, *Britain's War: A New World*, p. 643, 411.

<sup>86</sup> David Edgerton, *Britain's War Machine: Weapons, Resources and Experts in the Second World War* (London: Penguin, 2011), p. 163; Todman, *Britain's War: A New World*, p. 643.

<sup>87</sup> Todman, *Britain's War: A New World*, pp. 412–3.

<sup>88</sup> Houghton, *The Soldier's Tale*, p. 106.

<sup>89</sup> IWM, DoD, L. E. Tutt (85/35/1), 'Gentleman Soldier', pp. 73–4.

Command, where fears over random, sudden death were strongest as life expectancies were incredibly short.<sup>90</sup>

Much like the combatant experience of the First World War, the Second saw the emergence of an eclectic mixture of folk/semi-religious practices designed to prevent untimely deaths. Amongst front-line soldiers, for example, belief in the talismanic properties of the Bible was widespread, whilst intercessory prayers channelled through materially grounded abstract imaginaries in the physical world of violence.<sup>91</sup> At the more orthodox end of the spectrum, medals and symbols of religious figures and patron saints (notably St. Christopher, Patron Saint of Travellers) were carried or worn as offerings of safe passage during operations.<sup>92</sup> For some, having such objects physically sewn into their military uniforms was a vital part of their protective function; binding the spiritual and material spheres in opposition to death (see fig. 4.1 and 4.2). Sewing the medal into the uniform—an object designed to be worn on a chain—indicates the flyers' desire to connect with it in a highly privatised way. This 'hidden' and personal significance was much greater compared to other lucky mascots in circulation at the time such as rabbits' feet. As part of his major postwar anthropology of English national character and behaviour, Geoffrey Gorer estimated that as many as one third of all British servicemen and women carried some form of mascot during the war years, both regular and civilian conscript.<sup>93</sup>

Seen in this context, superstition and ritual formed a critical component of the emotional economy of the martial sphere; providing an alternative outlet in processing death-related anxieties in a cultural climate which valorised courage and bravery.<sup>94</sup> As Joanna Bourke notes, of all the emotions experienced in combat, fear was the most dominant.<sup>95</sup> It is of little surprise, therefore, that beliefs and behaviours designed to sooth fears over painful and traumatic deaths were present across all sections of the military. Yet the workings of superstition mirrored men's complex emotional responses to combat—particularly in relation to anxieties over diminished

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<sup>90</sup> MacKenzie, *Flying Against Fate*, ch. 1.

<sup>91</sup> Snape, *God and the British Soldier*, p. 33; Snape and Parker, 'Keeping Faith and Coping', p. 413.

<sup>92</sup> IWM, DoS, David George Samuel Cox (11510/4/reel 3), 30 August 1990.

<sup>93</sup> Geoffrey Gorer, *Exploring English Character: A Study of the Morals and Behaviour of the English People* (New York: Criterion Books, 1955), p. 265.

<sup>94</sup> Newlands, *Civilians into Soldiers*, p. 166. On pain and dying, see Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985).

<sup>95</sup> Bourke, *Fear*, p. 199; idem, 'The Emotions in War: Fear and the British and American Military, 1914–45', *Historical Research*, 74 (2001), p. 315.





**Figure 4.1 and 4.2** Photographs of RAF blouse and concealed medal of St. Christopher

*Source:* IWM, Department of Objects (DoO), Uniforms and Insignia, UNI 12565, Blouse used as lucky object

individual agency. Operational differences between RAF fighters and bombers forms a case in point. A strong sense of fatalism existed where unit ability to engage the enemy was limited (amongst RAF base groups or within bomber squads) compared to the prevalence of ‘luck’ amongst fighter pilots, particularly during the Battle of Britain, who were still able to ‘control’ their destiny through skill and operational performance. Here, belief constituted a powerful outlet for attitudes and emotions surrounding the *perceived* role of agency for combatants rather than actual death rates; as only one-quarter of crews in medium bombers were killed compared to one-half of all fighter pilots.<sup>96</sup> Similar conclusions can be drawn from the framing of combat in more irregular theatres. Commando/Special Operation teams were just as likely to become fatalistic about their chances of survival in the face of dangerous and clandestine missions—even if, in the case of the ‘Jedburghs’ (three-man, inter-allied teams of irregular combatants parachuted into occupied France after D-Day) the *perception* of death

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<sup>96</sup> Stanley J. Rachman, *Fear and Courage* (San Francisco: W. H. Freeman, 1978), pp. 71–2. For comparisons between Fighter and Bomber Commands, see Mark Connelly, *Reaching for the Stars: A New History of Bomber Command* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2001); Francis, *The Flyer*.

and danger was far greater than their actual experience.<sup>97</sup> Moreover, as men's physiological and emotional responses to death and dying shifted in real-time, from panic to resignation and vice-versa, so too did behaviours and practices connected with fatalism, luck, and superstition.<sup>98</sup>

*Men, Materiel, and Killing*

Superstitions also arose around the enactment of violence and the materiel developed to unleash mechanised, 'modern' forms of killing. Although intimate forms of killing persisted, particularly in the army, violence in the air, at sea, and on land became increasingly de-personalised and dependent upon modern technologies.<sup>99</sup> The very human need to apply meaning and significance to events rendered the technologies of modernity potent sites of ritual and superstition. As Owen Davies posits, emergent technologies during the early twentieth century generated 'novel hazards and environments that accused their own folklore and rituals'.<sup>100</sup>

Unlike the First World War, a war of 'men and shells', the Second constituted a struggle in which 'technical apparatus...science, mechanics, and morale' were central, as Churchill himself recognised.<sup>101</sup> Scientific and technological investment from the mid-1930s rapidly increased British arms production. The Royal Navy outbuilt all other navies in virtually all classes of war ship (including battleships, aircraft carriers, cruisers, and destroyers) whilst already high levels of aeroplane production increased from May 1940, initially focusing on fighter planes before switching to bombers by October. In September 1940, under the direction of Secretary of State for War Anthony Eden, plans for increased tank production were put in place to replace and extend the amount lost during the fall of France.<sup>102</sup> The extent to which machines were perceived as visualisations of the nation's economic health/ability to secure victory and as beacons of modernity was realised in 1942—when lax arms production landed Churchill in political hot water.<sup>103</sup> Yet the machines of modernity required men to operate them. As extensions of

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<sup>97</sup> Pattinson, 'Fantasies of the "Soldier Hero", Frustrations of the Jedburghs', p. 32, 36. The Jedburghs began recruiting for 'aggressive' 'adventure' seekers in the latter part of 1943; idem, 'Fantasies of the "Soldier Hero"', p. 36.

<sup>98</sup> Bourke, 'The Emotions in War', p. 325.

<sup>99</sup> Bourke, *An Intimate History of Killing*. For an opposing interpretation to Bourke's, arguing that First World War soldiers actually avoided the act of killing even after training, see Tony Ashworth, *Trench Warfare 1914–1918: The Live and Let Live System* (London: Macmillan, 1980).

<sup>100</sup> Davies, *A Supernatural War*, p. 139.

<sup>101</sup> Quoted in Edgerton, *Britain's War Machine*, p. 74.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., p. 34, 67, 74.

<sup>103</sup> Todman, *Britain's War: A New World*, pp. 247–83.

men's enactment of violence, various superstitions were transferred onto and through these distinctly 'modern' forms of materiel. As Frances Houghton observes, this was particularly true of sailors, whose postwar accounts refer to the (gendered) personification of their ships. Ships not only had personalities but souls—'energies' and 'feelings' which sailors superstitiously fed off.<sup>104</sup> RAF pilots also had the tendency to imbue planes with supernatural and superstitious qualities. Many, for example, were at pains to urinate on their plane's tailwheel before takeoff for good luck.<sup>105</sup> Tank operators had a different form of personal relationship with their machines. Working in dark, primitive conditions, one veteran recalled how tanks 'were death-traps when hit'.<sup>106</sup> Either imparting a sense of personality onto machines as sources of protection or fatalistic notions of future pain and death, combatants across all three military branches held supernatural relationships with the instruments of war. Similar associations were cast onto enemy machines. The German U-Boat—famously said to be the only thing to have frightened Churchill during the war—was perceived with an 'almost superstitious dread'.<sup>107</sup> They represented 'the devil', as one veteran described; machines with cunning spirit and ruthless killing abilities.<sup>108</sup> More intimate forms of killing in the army, compared to the Navy and RAF, were processed in reference to superstition. Similar to soldiers' beliefs of the First World War that bullets were destined to kill particular individuals, Second World War soldiers similarly feared their fatalistic end by being shot at close range or by sniper.<sup>109</sup>

### *Unity and Division*

The proximity of superstition to death—its ability to sooth death related anxieties and provide a sense of agency but also generate tensions and instabilities over individual and collective 'fates'—attests to its varied impact within the martial sphere. Viewing superstition as a potent means of 'community construction' within the context of a 'people's war' would suggest its broader

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<sup>104</sup> Houghton, *A Soldier's Tale*, pp. 109–10. For more on the citizen sailor's experience of the war, see Christopher McKee, *Sober Men and True: Sailor Lives in the Royal Navy, 1900–1945* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002); Glyn Pryor, *Citizen Sailors: The Royal Navy in the Second World War* (London: Penguin, 2011); Mike Farquharson-Roberts, *Royal Naval Officers from War to War, 1918–1939* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

<sup>105</sup> Snape and Parker, 'Keeping Faith and Coping', p. 414.

<sup>106</sup> Ray Ward, *The Mirror of Monte Cavallara: An Eight Army Story* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2006), pp. 167–8; Houghton, *A Soldier's Tale*, p. 125. Also see Noakes, *Dying for the Nation*, pp. 131–2.

<sup>107</sup> John Terraine, *Business in Great Waters: U-Boat Wars, 1916–45* (London: Cooper, 1989), p. 673.

<sup>108</sup> Graeme Ogden, *My Sea Lady: The Story of H.M.S. Lady Madeleine from February 1941 to February 1943* (London: Hutchinson, 1963), p. 101; Houghton, *A Soldier's Tale*, p. 143.

<sup>109</sup> Snape and Parker, 'Keeping Faith and Coping', p. 413.

ability to both bind and divide combatants. Contributing to the wider dynamics of military morale, superstition promoted collective unity and disharmony through three key areas; the psychology of male bonding; links to operational efficiency through unit 'cohesion'; and cross/inter-national dynamics.

The psychology of superstition remains an important, cross-disciplinary site of discussion. Whilst early functionalist and psycho-analytical treatments have fallen out of fashion (frequently referencing the 'irrational' and 'primitive' nature of superstition and its service to individual and collective emotional under-development), more recent work traces the social significance of superstition and its relationship to group mentalities.<sup>110</sup> The ritualistic performance of superstition in the semi-private setting of company sub-sections or amongst small groups of flyers in the tense moments before combat helped to generate trust and closeness.<sup>111</sup> For Fred Wilson, a Scottish Merchant sailor and later rear-gunner in the RAF, flyers' peeing on the tail wheel of planes for 'good luck' brightened spirits through humour. This provided a symbolic function as much as any technical purpose:

It's amazing what the good luck things were...Ground-staff, WAAF drivers...[were] always told '[you] must report anything that they saw about an airplane that was suspicious...If they saw any liquid oil or anything dripping from the [aircraft to] report it. And so, we arrived at the aircraft and I was at the rear behind the wing and the transport was driven by a WAAF girl, and Jimmy was up in the pilot's part and he's chatting at her out the window...And this girl happened to look back [and said], 'Coor, Jimmy, there's water coming out the back of your airplane! [laughs], and he said, 'Ahh, away with ya!'...'Yes there is!' [she said]. And so, Jimmy was very skeptical, he says 'Is it oil?', 'No it isn't oil', 'Go back and take a look' [laughs]. She came back...and I was just tying up my trouser.<sup>112</sup>

Of course, humour and laughter have much longer cultural histories within the military and within working-class groups broadly. But here, as Lucy Delap also recognises in relation to domestic service humour, it played an important role in the classed (and, when read in context,

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<sup>110</sup> Smith, 'The Religion of Fools?', pp. 42–3. See Malinowski, 'Anthropology'. For a discussion on Freud's theories on superstition, see Sigmund Freud, *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. VI: *Psychopathology of Everyday Life* (London: Vintage, 2001), p. 257; idem, *Totem and Taboo: Resemblances Between the Psychic Lives of Savages and Neurotics*, trans. by A. A. Brill (New York: Moffat, Yard & Co, 1919 [1913]). Also see Jean Piaget, *The Child's Conception of the World* (London: Routledge, 1929) and Gustav Jahoda, *The Psychology of Superstition* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969), linking superstition to traumatic ruptures in childhood. For a more recent overview of psychology and superstition, see Stuart A. Vyse, *Believing in Magic: The Psychology of Superstition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

<sup>111</sup> MacKenzie, *Flying Against Fate*, p. 98. On the predominance of 'primary group theory' (the idea that small unit/platoon size groups form the backbone of wider military morale), see Hew Strachan, 'The Soldier's Experience of Two World Wars: Some Historiographical Comparisons', in Paul Addison and Angus Calder (eds.), *Time to Kill: The Soldier's Experience of War in the West, 1939–45* (London: Pimlico, 1997), p. 371.

<sup>112</sup> IWM, DoS, Fred Watson (23198/13/reel 10), June 2002. On symbolic/technical readings of magic and ritual, see Hildred Geertz and Keith Thomas, 'An Anthropology of Religion and Magic: Two Views', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 6 (1975), pp. 71–110.

gendered) binding of joke-teller and joke-subject through shared emotional intimacy and amusement over superstitious behaviour.<sup>113</sup> As in the First World War, superstition played a critical role in binding men together in what Barbara Rosenwein terms 'emotional communities'.<sup>114</sup> Shared intimacy was also created in subscription to complementary alternate 'religions' to orthodox Christianity/Nonconformity. For Henry Samuel Barrett, a stoker in the Merchant Navy, superstitions recalled by a fellow merchant sailor stoked feelings of bravery and strong religious sentiment. 'On the watch [with fellow seaman telling stories]...the old seamen's story is, that if one is born in a veil they will not drown. And he's [fellow seaman] telling me while I'm on watch, and he's telling me that all people with him wouldn't drown either. So I was brave! I was convinced it's like believing in religion'.<sup>115</sup> Reliance on superstitions could, as Barrett made clear, bond men within the 'temperate hero' ideal.

Animal-human interactions played an important role in binding groups and units together as symbols of collective 'luck'. The use of animals as lucky mascots as badges of regimental identity and invented tradition has a long history in British military culture, but the significance of nonhuman animals, as Hilda Kean asserts, was transformed in the context of the 'people's war' (fig. 4.3–4.6).<sup>116</sup> Animals not only suffered, she notes in reference to the home fronts, but 'actively played a role' in the physical and emotional survival of humans. Seen throughout the war as symbols of 'fidelity, stability, and civilization', they provided both civilians and combatants with companionship, generating intense emotional bonds.<sup>117</sup> Cats and dogs were frequently used as lucky mascots across all three military branches; their smaller size ideal for transportation by land and sea (or remaining at RAF bases at home). More unusual mascots, such as goats and sheep, became symbols of regimental and unit identity, attracting curiosity and amusement. The place of animal mascots within the wartime military not only highlights emotional bonds between men of war; they point towards the infinite links between the 'home' and 'fighting' fronts, as well as home front emotional expression *through* nonhuman animal forms. Popular

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<sup>113</sup> Lucy Delap, 'Kitchen-Sink Laughter: Domestic Service Humour in Twentieth-Century Britain', *Journal of British Studies*, 49 (2010), p. 628. On humour as expression of national identity, see Andy Medhurst, *A National Joke: Popular Comedy and English Cultural Identities* (London: Routledge, 2007).

<sup>114</sup> Barbara H. Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages* (London: Cornell University Press, 2006).

<sup>115</sup> IWM, DoS, Henry Samuel Barrett (16733/3/reel 3), 2 July 1996.

<sup>116</sup> Hilda Kean, *The Great Dog and Cat Massacre: The Real Story of World War II's Unknown Tragedy* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2017), pp. 6–7. Also see Clare Campbell, *Bonzo's War: Animals Under Fire 1939–1945* (London: Constable, 2014); Philip Howell, 'The Dogs that didn't Bark in the Blitz: Transspecies and Transpersonal Emotional Geographies on the British Home Front', *Journal of Historical Geography*, 61 (2018), pp. 44–52.

<sup>117</sup> Kean, *The Great Dog and Cat Massacre*, p. 7.





Figures 4.3, 4.4, 4.5, and 4.6 (*top left*) Flight Sergeant George ‘Grumpy’ Unwin of No. 19 Squadron with ‘Flash’ the Squadron Mascot at Fowlmere, September 1940; (*top right*) HMS Scylla’s Black Cat captured during Winston Churchill’s visit aboard; (*bottom left*) Winston Churchill inspecting Billy, the regimental mascot goat of the Royal Welsh Fusiliers, during his visit to a garrison in South-East England, 17 July 1943; (*bottom right*) A bag-pipe serenade for the regimental mascot of the Black Watch, as the regiment prepares for the invasion of Sicily

Source: IWM, DoP, DoP, CH 1343; A 12223; HU 31391; NA 4178

national newspapers including the *Daily Mail* and *Daily Mirror* not only covered the prevalence of animal mascots within the wartime military but made direct appeals for public ‘donations’ of pets to the cause.<sup>118</sup> The extent to which wartime civilians believed it their duty to support combatants in this way can be seen in W. G. Harrison’s letter to the *Mirror* in April 1941, offering to donate his bulldog for any naval or RAF squadron in search of a mascot: ‘If you know [of] any ship of the Navy or squadron of the R.A.F. which requires a bulldog for a mascot I have one’.<sup>119</sup> Through their donation of pets as lucky mascots—and, it must be noted, for

<sup>118</sup> See, for example, ‘Tail-End Taffy Has Your Stockings’, *Daily Mail*, 3 May 1942, p. 2; ‘Mascot, Sea Dog, Will Miss a Trip’, *Daily Mirror*, 6 July 1942, p. 5; ‘The Ship’s Mascot is Always Spoilt’, *Daily Mirror*, 16 December 1941, p. 6.

<sup>119</sup> ‘Wants to be a Ship Mascot’, *Daily Mirror*, 1 April 1941, p. 8.

other kinds of more dangerous war work—civilians relinquished deep emotional bonds in order to make emotional contributions to the war.<sup>120</sup> Here, boundaries between the public and private, and home/fighting fronts, were fully dissolved as the emotional and personal were sacrificed for symbolic spiritual resolve of the ‘collective’.

Not all superstitions, magical practices, and fatalistic attitudes were as unifying, however. They had the potential to atomise individuals and fracture military discipline. When joining HMS *Sheffield* in 1940, for example, David L. Repard had his green pyjamas ‘thrown over the side [of the ship]’ as *Sheffield*’s company harboured superstitions over the sight of certain colours; adaptation of pre-existing civil superstition to the military context.<sup>121</sup> Other examples illustrate how superstition provoked more serious tensions. David G. Williams, a Welsh sailor who served aboard HMS *Spartan*, recalled how the seemingly innocent act of whistling in the wind ‘caused fights’ amongst Merchant Navy crews; as whistling in the wind was believed, in maritime folklore, to anger the winds at sea causing storms.<sup>122</sup> Tensions also arose between those subscribing to different belief forms. As Trevor Timperley (a gunner with 301 battalion and later flying instructor) recalled, recourse to superstition was irrational compared to acceptance of luck—an opinion seemingly hardened with time:

experience was valuable but...luck is overwhelming. Anybody who thinks that ability only would have got you through...doing the wrong thing could have an adverse effect but you had to have luck. If a bullet or a canon shell missed you by ten feet you were perfectly happy. It only had to be ten feet difference for you to be in the next world... I was anti-superstition because I believe that people had suspicious things like a...little teddy bear pinned on their lapel or something, or the girlfriend’s stockings tied around their necks with a scarf. If people believe this sort of thing, if by any chance they lose it, somehow their belief that they’re not gonna get by can have an effect...I’m opposed to this type of memento.<sup>123</sup>

Connections between superstition and operational efficiency were recognised more explicitly in some cases—overlapping significantly with the psychology of bonding and male closeness. The consistent performance of rituals helped units feel like ‘well-oiled’ machines; with man-to-man efficiency mimicking the modern, mechanised enactment of violence. For John D. Graham, a British officer in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders in North-West Europe between 1944 and 1945, corps had the ability to develop ‘lucky’ associations which could either improve or drastically impinge on unit ‘cohesion’ (the successful enactment of actions

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<sup>120</sup> Kean, *The Great Dog and Cat Massacre*, p. 141.

<sup>121</sup> IWM, DoS, David Latimer Repard (22161/34/reel 10), September 2001; MOA FR 975, ‘Superstition’, November 1941, p. 8.

<sup>122</sup> IWM, DoS, David Gweirdd Williams (17920/9/reel 4), 2 February 1998.

<sup>123</sup> IWM, DoS, Trevor Timperley (27493/8/reel 7), 2005.

on the battlefield) and operational efficiency. Superstition, in this sense, was often a vehicle for processing insecurities over 'untrustworthy' masculinities:

It's a very curious thing, how superstitious soldiers are...what we did find is if we were due to carry out an operation under a particular corps, or corps commander, we either knew it was going to be extremely successful or a bloody horlicks...There were certain corps we were delighted to actually perform for and under.<sup>124</sup>

Although the British army's demographic selection criteria for the officer corps did expand between the World Wars, it still drew disproportionately from the upper and upper-middle classes—particularly those with an elite public school education.<sup>125</sup> Graham's testimony points to the cross-class prevalence of superstition within the army and, more intriguingly, its myriad implications on perceived efficiency vertically and horizontally. It had the potential to not only bind/divide officers and men within the context of companies, but also during the movement of divisions between corps and wider field armies/army groups. Here, superstition's ability to atomise sub-sections of larger military groupings was potentially highly dangerous.

Finally, superstitious mentalities and behaviours also had the ability to sooth latent religious and national tensions beneath the surface of the 'people's war', although examples are rare. At times, it brought combatants from the four corners of Britain together in unexpected ways. For James Taylor, a Scottish engineer room artificer, the superstitions of Welsh shipmate Taffy Griffiths were 'highly amusing' if a 'bit odd' at first:

Taffy Griffiths, a Welsh ERA colleague who, after sprinkling salt on his main course, would take a pinch of salt and throw it over his left shoulder. We thought this highly amusing and a bit odd. After some time it was clear that many of us, including me, were indulging in this superstitious ritual.<sup>126</sup>

Humour was also important when navigating national difference. Corporal Arthur Freer, an English NCO with B Squadron, 3<sup>rd</sup> Carabiniers in India and Burma between 1943 and 1945, recalled in a postwar interview how superstitions and customs bonded men of shared nationality whilst warming them to those of different regional backgrounds. Two days after

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<sup>124</sup> IWM, DoS, John David Graham (33108/5/reel 2), 2010; Anthony King, *The Combat Soldier: Infantry Tactics and Cohesion in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 36. Like 'morale', military 'cohesion' features its own history and conflicting interpretations. See Jonathan Fennell, 'Reevaluating Combat Cohesion: The British Second Army in The Northwest Europe Campaign of the Second World War', in Anthony King (ed.), *Frontline: Combat and Cohesion in the Twenty-First Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 134–66.

<sup>125</sup> Crang, *The British Army*, p. 21.

<sup>126</sup> IWM, DoD, J. Fisher (08/59/1), 'My War at Sea: Recollections of Life in the Royal Navy during World War 2 by James Fisher', p. 60.



their squadron leader was killed, for example, 'we got a new squadron leader, Major E. S. P. Dorman. He was an Irishman. We had an Irish driver and they used to curse each other with Irish curses, nothing serious, just fun'.<sup>127</sup>

*Sexual, Emotional, and Gendered Dimensions*

Perhaps more than in any other area, it was the presence and absence of women which created both unity and division within the homo-social world of the military. Although the context of 'total war' created an environment in which the traditional gendered binaries of 'combat' were broken down—including, for example, the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps during the First World War and the increased significance of male, home front workers in the Second—the place of women in war continued to stoke tensions amongst male combatants. This was in part due to the gendered construction of violence and masculine associations with killing. It also related to the *presence* of women within and near sites of combat; perhaps in part, as Joanna Bourke argues, due to fears over the 'feminine' threat to a distinctly 'masculine' sphere but more widely because of women's mixed impact on military morale.<sup>128</sup> Caught between multiple, contradictory views of women in wartime, many male combatants regurgitated the competing demands placed on women at the political and cultural levels and the tensions they created. The power of these expectations were often displayed through subscription to, and associations with, superstition, highlighting the extent of war's 'gendering' through both the private and semi-public expression of belief.

For many combatants, especially airmen, reminders of wives and girlfriends at home were viewed as critical symbols and providers of luck. Objects owned or given by a loved one were commonly used in this way. Before take-off, Eric Harrison recalled, flyers 'would usually take something up that belonged to [their] girlfriend'.<sup>129</sup> For Harrison, clutching items owned by his girlfriend instilled a sense of calm and order during chaotic and unpredictable flights. A similar sense of ritual, sometimes involving whole crews, was described by John Taylor who recalled the significance of his girlfriend Joan's photograph:

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<sup>127</sup> IWM, DoS, Arthur Freer (19822/12), September 1999; Julian Thompson, *Forgotten Voices of Burma: The Second World War's Forgotten Conflict* (London: Ebury, 2009), p. 301.

<sup>128</sup> Bourke, *An Intimate History of Killing*, p. 338; Noakes, *Women in the British Army*, pp. 9–10.

<sup>129</sup> IWM, DoS, Eric Harrison (30002/10/reel 6), June 2006.

I had a picture of my girlfriend, Joan, who [I was] going steady with at the time. In fact, I think I was engaged...Her picture in a Perspex holder was hanging [in the plane]...all the crew, as they got in, would touch this for luck. Even the rear gunner would come up especially and then go back to his position.<sup>130</sup>

Photographs and keepsakes could only go so far in binding combatants with their romantic partners and loved ones at home. Items of clothing such as girlfriends' stockings, wives' blouses, or pieces knitted by mothers such as scarves were especially desired due to their sensory stimulation and tactility.<sup>131</sup> Cultural and medical historians have increasingly turned to war's impact on the body as a way of reinterpreting the socio-political and socio-cultural impact of conflict for combatants, but the superstitious use of clothes highlights how the body itself could be used in alternate ways to generate agency amidst uncertainty and romantic/emotional longing.<sup>132</sup> 'Total war' not only made reconciling the tension between man as fighter and man as lover/ father, son, brother, uncle, or nephew more difficult, as Joanna Bourke reminds us. It rendered familial and intimate relationships with those at the 'home' fronts more fragile and difficult due to physical distance and absence; underpinned as these were by fear, anxiety, and a pressing desire to live in the moment.<sup>133</sup> Here, superstitious expression through the illusive, intimate senses of touch and smell provided combatants with distinctly private spaces (and moments in time) in which geographical, emotional, and physical boundaries between the 'fronts' were traversed. One man from Greenock, for example, gave his younger brother a shilling coin he had carried throughout the First World War as a lucky token upon his brother's conscription in 1939.<sup>134</sup> Perhaps more than at the semi-private level of the platoon or squad, it was in the private moments where superstition soothed the emotional instabilities of men of war, bound them with their loved ones, and tied together the collective coping mechanisms of both World Wars.<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> IWM, DoS, John Taylor (30416/12/reel 7), November 2007.

<sup>131</sup> IWM, DoS, Timperley, reel 7; IWM, DoS, Cox, reel 3.

<sup>132</sup> See Stefan Goebel, 'Beyond Discourse? Bodies and Memories of Two World Wars', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 42 (2007), pp. 377–85. The field of war and disability studies remains an expanding area of inquiry. For critical texts in relation to the World Wars in Britain, see Bourke, *Dismembering the Male*; Cohen, *The War Come Home*; Julie Anderson, *War, Disability and Rehabilitation in Britain: 'Soul of a Nation'* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011); Ana Carden-Coyne, *The Politics of Wounds: Military Patients and Medical Power in the First World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

<sup>133</sup> Bourke, *Dismembering the Male*, p. 126; Langhamer, *The English in Love*, p. 116.

<sup>134</sup> Quoted in Noakes, *Dying for the Nation*, p. 106.

<sup>135</sup> For more on the familial and emotional connections between the wars, see Lucy Noakes, "'My Husband is Interested in War Generally': Gender, Family History and the Emotional Legacies of Total War", *Women's History Review*, 27 (2018), pp. 610–26.

The physical absence, or presence, of women within the martial sphere had just as much potential to divide as it did unite male combatants, however. For Jack Robinson, a flight engineer with 635 squadron RAF, carrying photographs of his sweetheart brought ‘bad luck’ whilst on operation; it was only after he stopped carrying the photograph that his crew experienced less ‘trouble’. Others were confident that deep, emotional connections with women—rather than cursory flings—were the root cause of accidents on operation. For Peter James, it was ironically the men who had ‘everything to live for [wives and families]’ who were deemed most likely to endanger missions and, as a result, were viewed as symbols of collective doom:

You never flew with a bloke who just got engaged. Just got married ‘[Is] he married?’, ‘Yeah, his wife’s just had a baby, don’t fly with him, he ain’t gonna live’. And all three squadrons, I was on, applied that...the blokes that had everything to live for bottled it. Seems incredible now...You never got too deeply involved with one woman.<sup>136</sup>

Women’s physical presence in auxiliary roles (within the ATS, WRNS, and WAAF) also saw the refraction of competing views of wartime womanhood through the prism of superstition; although in both positive and more disparaging examples women were equally objectified, visualised as subservient to the male combatant. Women performed important work in auxiliary roles. At their peak, the WAAF numbered 182,000, the ATS 213,000, and the WRNS 74,000.<sup>137</sup> Whilst docked in Londonderry, Northern Ireland (refuelling after escorting supply shipments around the Irish and Northern Seas during the summer of 1943), Lieutenant A. Allanson of the Royal Navy Reserve took his Wren bride Janet Somerset, a telephone operator from Essex, aboard HMS *Halcyon* for ‘good luck’ (see fig. 4.7 and 4.8). The couple were wed at St Columb’s Cathedral shortly before stepping aboard *Halcyon*; with maritime superstitions surrounding the ‘lucky’ influence of newly wedded brides aboard ships. The act was met with the ‘full approval of [*Halcyon*’s] company’, appreciative of the emotional and spiritual ‘service’ Somerset had performed. Yet in blessing *Halcyon* and its crew, Somerset’s place as a woman in wartime was framed through her utility to the wider military machine as an ‘object’ of ‘positive influence’ rather than her active role in the WRNS. Similar examples of female ‘lucky mascots’ can be found within RAF units—acknowledgement of women’s presence within military spaces by male combatants whilst simultaneously refusing to fully appreciate their varied and extensive work.

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<sup>136</sup> IWM, DoS, Peter James (13572/4/reel 3), 28 October 1993.

<sup>137</sup> Crang, *Sisters in Arms*, p. 3. Also see Gerard J. De Groot, “‘I Love the Scent of Cordite in Your Hair’: Gender Dynamics in Mixed Anti-Aircraft Batteries during the Second World War”, *History*, 82 (1997), pp. 73–92.



Figure 4.7 and 4.8 Lieutenant Allanson takes his Wren bride, Janet Somerset, aboard HMS Halcyon for good luck, June 1943.

Source: IWM, DoP, A 17788; A 178890

More overt attacks against the expanded roles women performed in wartime came through superstitious and fatalistic associations; assumptions often strengthened by time and retrospective memory. For Phil Reily, a sailor serving aboard HMS *Spartan*, the presence of a 'dockyard woman' on deck before *Spartan's* commission in summer 1943 served as a 'warning sign' for the ship's sinking during an air attack off western Italy in early 1944; a conviction, it must be assumed, which was strengthened with hindsight and one illustrative of the unease many veterans felt about the inclusion of women within the memory of Britain's 'good war'.<sup>138</sup> In other spheres associations with women as harbingers of 'bad luck' were explicitly rooted in the sexual politics of wartime. As Martin Francis notes, almost every RAF station had its 'chop girl'; a highly derogatory term for the WAAF members whose past boyfriends or lovers were killed in action. 'Chop girls' gained widespread notoriety amongst flyers, superstition which was fuelled by rumour and gossip (ironically perceived as a distinctly female problem in wartime) amongst male combatants. Here the limits of the 'temperate hero' model of wartime masculinity are exposed clearly. If military men were reliant on women for emotional resolve in wartime, this 'reliance' was expressed differently to different women. As Alison Twells shows, relationships and communications between mothers, sisters, and girlfriends by military men were often starkly different to the more flirtatious or sexually aggressive front presented to women and girls who were strangers.<sup>139</sup>

<sup>138</sup> IWM, DoS, Phil Reily (17922/6/reel 1), 2 October 1998.

<sup>139</sup> Twells, 'Sex, Gender and Romantic Intimacy'.

The tension between needing to appear attractive to flyers on the one hand, and potentially being labelled as tokens of untimely fates on the other, placed WAAFs in an uncomfortable position. Yet this did not stifle their ability to form superstitious beliefs of their own. Pip Beck, a WAAF in Bomber Command, experienced a premonition of her Scottish sergeant dance partner getting ‘the chop’ during a mixed flyer-WAAF dance function, for example. Here, premonition served as the vehicle through which superstition operated—highlighting the ability of women in auxiliary roles to resist and fight against dominant expectations over their agency and individuality.<sup>140</sup>

#### AUTHORITY, SUPERSTITION, AND MORALE

Superstition, as we have seen, had wide-ranging effects in the context of war. How did authority figures assess its impact, and what (if any) actions did they take to massage it? Compared to superstition and rituals at the home front, authority views on its place within the military were mixed and ambiguous, highlighting gendered disparities in morale’s governance between the ‘fronts’. In the context of aerial bombardment, superstitions impinging on individual and collective safety which contradicted official instructions on ‘correct’ behaviour in air-raids were closely monitored. For some, carrying gasmasks—potent symbols of the ‘domestication’ of civil defence and its representation as a female site of behavioural expectation—held greater ritualistic purpose than any functional protection from gas attack.<sup>141</sup> In an inner-London suburb, one Nigerian air raid warden was considered distinctly lucky in racialised terms (seeing his ‘dark face’ apparently instilled a sense of calm), whilst a plethora of beliefs on Germany’s bombing capabilities held that bombs were trained against ‘unlucky’ buildings and individuals, would never hit the same location twice, and could follow people around corners.<sup>142</sup> Rituals designed to provide agency and work through feelings of anxiety in the midst of bombardment were performed by men and women, young and old alike. Having experienced bombing in Kingston-Upon-Hull as a child, Charles Cane remembered a woman in his shelter ‘counting the rosary, and getting faster as the bombs dropped nearer’, whilst one AFS member linked polishing his

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<sup>140</sup> Francis, *The Flyer*, pp. 78–9.

<sup>141</sup> Chamber, “Defend us from All Perils and Dangers of this Night”, p. 162; Grayzel, *At Home and Under Fire*, ch. 9; idem, ‘Defence Against the Indefensible: The Gas Mask, the State and British Culture during and after the First World War’, *Twentieth Century British History*, 25 (2014), pp. 418–34; idem, ‘One British Thing: The Babies’ Anti-Gas Protective Helmet’, *Journal of British Studies*, 58 (2019), pp. 598–601.

<sup>142</sup> Calder, *The People’s War*, p. 177.

boots with particularly severe bombardments (resulting in uncontrollable fires).<sup>143</sup> As in the case of newspaper astrology, it was the potentially disruptive nature of privatised forms of fatalism and superstition, and their relationship to wider collective behaviours and mentalities, which caused the wartime state most concern.<sup>144</sup>

Whilst the increase and adaptation of various non-traditional beliefs was noted by military authorities, its place and atomising potential was viewed differently to the home front state. This was principally due to gendered perceptions of the 'martial sphere' and the more expansive range of factors seen as influencing men's morale and military discipline. Despite increased funding and focus on the Royal Navy and RAF during the interwar period, the army led the way on morale investigations, particularly from 1942 onwards. This was in part due to the increasing significance of the army in the European and Far Eastern theatres, but it also related to broader shifts in the democratisation of the army as institution and its impact on readings of 'morale'. Unlike the First World War, conscription was introduced in all parts of the nation (except Northern Ireland) from September 1939.<sup>145</sup> Social distribution amongst the branches was uneven. Amongst the 2,500,000 other ranks of Britain's 2,977,300 strong army (24 per cent were volunteers), 68.4 per cent came from the 'skilled' upper-working/lower-middle class group of shop assistants and clerks. This compared starkly to the high numbers of 'professionals' (doctors, dentists, and engineers) and 'intermediates' (teachers, chemists, and pharmacists) within the approximately 1,500,000 remaining men directed to the RAF and navy.<sup>146</sup> As General Ronald Adam (Adjunct-General of the British Army) recognised in February 1942, morale as 'psychological problem' within the overwhelming lower/lower-middle class army would determine the course of the war.<sup>147</sup> Periods of crisis, chiefly the Eighth Army's performance against Rommel's *Afrika Korps* in spring-1942 were overcome by the army's recognition of citizen-soldier psychology and military doctrine as separate factors which needed to work in synergy.<sup>148</sup> Yet as the army's morale expert, John Sparrow argued, 'morale' encompassed a wide range of factors including rates of desertion, quality of leadership and command, training, casualty rates, and quality/levels

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<sup>143</sup> Quoted in Noakes, *Dying for the Nation*, p. 103, 107.

<sup>144</sup> See, for example, TNA, INF 1/264, 'Public Opinion on the Present Crisis', 27 May 1940; INF 1/264, 'Public Opinion on the Present Crisis', 24 June 1940; INF 1/292, 'Weekly Reports', 25 March 1942.

<sup>145</sup> Fennell, *Fighting the People's War*, p. 63.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 64; Ussishkin, *Morale*, p. 96.

<sup>147</sup> TNA, WO 259/62, note by Adam to the Executive Committee of the Army Council, 27 February 1942.

<sup>148</sup> In particular, see Fennell, *Combat and Morale*, ch. 1.

of essential supplies.<sup>149</sup> Whether morale was considered through this matrix of factors or simply reduced to men's 'willingness to fight', different definitions were clearly in circulation.<sup>150</sup> It was for this reason that superstition was simultaneously accepted and challenged by military officials at various levels in wartime, because hazy approaches to morale captured both its positive and negative influences on military culture and doctrine.

*Military Authority*

Of all branches of the wartime military, it was ironically the RAF—modern, meritocratic, scientific, and distinctly middle-class—where superstitious modes were practiced across the ranks most frequently.<sup>151</sup> This was perceived as an essential ingredient upholding flyers' morale for many in leadership positions. Its effects were traced to noticeable benefits in discipline and operational efficiency. Sir Cyril Newall, Chief of Air Staff in the early years of the war, personally intervened on several occasions to make sure new air gunner brevets displayed twelve, rather than the proposed thirteen, feathers.<sup>152</sup> For Sir Frank Hopkins, appointed Commander of 830 Naval Air Squadron in 1941, luck and chance were real forces which governed the liminal margins between life, death, and operational mutilation for flyers:

Chance and, perhaps, luck played a major part in aerial warfare. Every time you came under heavy flak...it was only by chance that you got away with it. If you survived to fly operationally for two or more years, chance really was on your side...All aircrew who survived one or more operational flying tours in World War II have some extraordinary story of luck, fate, or chance to tell.<sup>153</sup>

Moreover, the station commander at Grimsby, as Simon MacKenzie notes, an RAF airfield serving two Lancaster bombers towards war's end, always 'peed' on one starboard main tire for 'good luck' and as a means of generating cross-rank synergy by mimicking the behaviours of flyer units.<sup>154</sup> By subverting command structures, the station commander encouraged masculine bonding through the exposure of male genitals.

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<sup>149</sup> For the full list of factors, see TNA, WO 277/16, Lieut.-Col J. H. A. Sparrow, 'The Second World War 1939–1945, Army Morale', p. 1. On contemporary research by the US War Department sparking the centrality of 'primary group theory', see Wessley, 'Twentieth Century Theories on Combat Motivation', pp. 275–6.

<sup>150</sup> Fennell, *Combat and Morale*, p. 8.

<sup>151</sup> Francis, *The Flyer*, pp. 124–5; Noakes, *Dying for the Nation*, p. 108.

<sup>152</sup> Chaz Bowyer, *Guns in the Sky: The Air Gunners of World War Two* (London: Dent, 1979), pp. 35–6.

<sup>153</sup> Laddie Lucas (ed.), *Out of the Blue: The Role of Luck in Air Warfare 1917–1966* (London: Grafton, 1985), p. 15.

<sup>154</sup> MacKenzie, *Flying Against Fate*, p. 99.

The extent to which the RAF recognised the significance of such beliefs for flyers was reflected in *Tee Emm*, a magazine published in monthly intervals from April 1941 to 1946 as training memoranda across flyer units. The brainchild of Air Marshal Guy Garrod, the Air Member for Training, *Tee Emm* was designed to reverse the alarming increase in operational accidents and improve in-flight safety across Bomber, Fighter, and Coastal Commands.<sup>155</sup> Convincing the Air Council of the scale of the problem with evidence collated during the first months of 1941 (the rate of accidents had jumped from 11 per-10,000 hours in 1938 to 34 per-10,000), the Air Ministry began publication of Garrod's magazine in order to transmit sound, digestible instruction to flyers on procedural best practice.<sup>156</sup> Depicting the ill-fortunes of 'Pilot Officer Prune'—a cartoon pilot whose humorous activities had much in common with David Low's 'Colonel Blimp', only from the more relatable perspective of Sidney Strube's 'Little Man'—Prune and characters like him guided readers through a range of operational and technical problems alongside strategies of coping with anxieties in the air.<sup>157</sup>

'Gremlins' and 'Marcolins (a 'type' of gnome within the 'gremlin family') were frequently blamed for mechanical and electrical faults as well as extreme flying conditions relating to altitude changes in both *Tee Emm* and, from 1942, the fortnightly *Royal Air Force Journal*.<sup>158</sup> 'Never forget your gloves, even if you *are* a wireless op[erator]', one article from mid-1943 urged. 'You never know when you've got to turn out [to] do a job...when the ice-gremlins are inclined to stow away'.<sup>159</sup> 'Marcolins' were similarly blamed for carrying 'soldering irons for shorting positives [connections] to negatives, or a monkey-wrench for the double purposes of shifting frequencies or bashing in the tops of valves'.<sup>160</sup> Through humour, the Air Ministry was able to

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<sup>155</sup> Jeff Jefford, 'Accidents—Investigations, Institutions and Attitudes', *Royal Air Force Historical Journal*, 37 (2006), p. 48. Little has been published on Garrod, who subsequently became Deputy Air Officer Commander-in-Chief, India (May 1943), Deputy Allied Air Commander-in-Chief of South East Asia Command (October 1943) and temporarily Allied Air Commander-in-Chief (November 1944). See M. J. Dean, 'Garrod, Sir (Alfred) Guy Roland', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2010), [<https://www.oxforddnb-com.chain.kent.ac.uk/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-33338?rskey=0yYBJl&-result=1>], accessed 2 February 2020.

<sup>156</sup> Jefford, 'Accidents', p. 48.

<sup>157</sup> On the history of 'Officer Prune', see Brian S. Gunderson, 'Pilot Officer Prune, Royal Air Force: "Dutiful but Dumb"', *Air Power History*, 37 (1990), pp. 23–9; Tim Hamilton, *The Life and Times of Pilot Officer Prune: The Official Story of Tee Emm* (London: H.M. Stationary Office, 1991). For more on 'Colonel Blimp', see David French, 'Colonel Blimp and the British Army: British Divisional Commanders in the War against Germany, 1939–1945', *English Historical Review*, 444 (1996), pp. 1182–1201.

<sup>158</sup> Chambers, 'Fighting Chance', p. 63. See 'Mind Your Marcolins!', *Tee Emm*, October 1943, pp. 173–4; 'Mind Your Marcolins!', *Tee Emm*, January 1944, pp. 221–22; 'Mind Your Marcolins!', *Tee Emm*, April 1944, pp. 18–9; 'Mind Your Marcolins!', *Tee Emm*, June 1944, pp. 76–7.

<sup>159</sup> 'Brass Monkeys, and How to Avoid Becoming One', *Tee Emm*, June 1943, pp. 74–5.

<sup>160</sup> 'Mind Your Marcolins!', *Tee Emm*, October 1943, p. 173.



simultaneously acknowledge and legitimise flyers' subscription to heterodox beliefs whilst marshalling them in a strategic effort to improve their safety, alleviate tension, and improve operational efficiency. It also points towards shaken faith in the technological reliability of the Ministry's most modern machines. Here, a far more sophisticated approach was taken compared to civil servant fears over the sway of astrological prescription and superstition at the home fronts. This was in part due to the different contexts of censorship and print restrictions between the national popular press and specific military instructional publications. But at the broader level, it was because flyers' beliefs were worked with, rather than treated with suspicion. Humour and belief were combined by the RAF in an effort to combat the more worrisome emotional reactions of panic and fear in the air. Masculine mentalities were perceived as a potential site of influence rather than one in need of concerned policing due to the middle-class composition of the service.

Whilst service magazines deployed subtle propaganda strategies to utilise superstition in order to improve operational efficiency, in others stark warnings were issued against its potentially corrosive potential. The prevalence of chain letters within the military context, 'that familiar peace-time pest', was condemned within the popular British army newspaper *Union Jack* in mid-1944 following a General Routine Order (GRO) banning their transmission:

Nearly five years of very realistic war seems to have had little effect on this curious piece of superstition. The conditions are the same as ever. The good-luck letter must be carefully copied out and sent to four other people within a certain time. The most dreadful misfortunes will fall upon the unhappy head of anyone daring to break the chain. *But Authority is not afraid to tempt Fate. A recent General Routine Order strictly forbids the initiating and transmitting of chain letters. What is more, unit censors are instructed to destroy any such letters found in unit mails* [emphasis original].<sup>161</sup>

As the experience of the First World War indicated, chain letters were capable of more than simply instilling unorthodox beliefs amongst soldiers. Military censors were aware of the potential damage they could cause when created by the enemy as propaganda devices—leading to objection of orders or, in more extreme cases, mutiny.<sup>162</sup> The censorship of mail was unpopular with many troops; not only because it delayed personal letters from being delivered to their recipients but due to the perceived moral transgression of authority in accessing soldiers' private information.<sup>163</sup> By issuing the GRO, and publicising the damage chain letters inflicted

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<sup>161</sup> '1939 Car will Still Be New', *Union Jack*, Eastern Italy edn., 3 July 1944, p. 3.

<sup>162</sup> See Ganjendra Singh, 'Throwing Snowballs in France: Muslim *Sipahis* of the Indian Army and Sheikh Ahmad's Dream, 1915–1918', *Modern Asian Studies*, 48 (2014), pp. 1024–67.

<sup>163</sup> Fennell, *Fighting the People's War*, pp. 10–11.

on military efficiency, the responsibility for eradicating their circulation was subtly placed on soldiers' shoulders. Continued subscription to chain letter superstitions would hamper the workings of the army's postal service and delay communications between the fronts—resolution of which would require a level of self-policing amongst the rank-and-file (as well as officers).<sup>164</sup>

The prevalence and impact of superstitious behaviours were indirectly linked with poor discipline and a general decline in operational standards within military morale reports. Unlike the Army Council—which turned its attention to the creation of a dedicated Morale Committee in 1942—RAF and Royal Navy morale and discipline reports were more sporadic, lacking centralised focus.<sup>165</sup> Drawing links between flyers' appearance and the 'poor' public image of the RAF, one internal letter lamented the 'marked deterioration' in RAF officers' 'general smartness'. 'Irregularities in uniform and in the method of wearing it not only give rise to unfavourable comments by members of the other Services and by the public', the letter stated, 'but detracts from the "good name" of the RAF mitigating against "good discipline"'. Examples of 'unauthorised insignia' and scarves 'worn incorrectly' were noted, with much of the fault attributed to 'C.Os. many of whom are indifferent to matters of dress and discipline and themselves set a poor example'.<sup>166</sup> Whilst a point of irritation for staff officers assessing flyers' morale within the Air Ministry, the ritualistic wearing of personal items of clothing and other 'lucky' objects formed an important component of morale recognised by commanding officers. The place of superstition clearly had the ability to divide official opinion based on different interpretations and definitions of 'military discipline' and 'morale'.

### *Medical and Psychological Expertise*

Medical officers and psychiatric experts were inclined to treat superstition and ritual with a degree of caution. In the context of the RAF, flight surgeons and psychiatric experts such as David Stafford-Clark recognised their place as integral to morale and overcoming prolonged periods of stress in the air.<sup>167</sup> Tied to Bomber Command at the Waterbeach hospital in Cambridge,

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<sup>164</sup> For more on letters in the Second World War military context, see Jenny Hartley, 'Letters Are Everything: Mothers and Letters in the Second World War', in Rebecca Earle (ed.), *Epistolary Selves: Letters and Letter-Writers, 1600–1945* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999), pp. 183–95.

<sup>165</sup> Ussishkin, *Morale*, pp. 90–1. Also see Fennell, *Fighting the People's War*, pp. 270–1.

<sup>166</sup> TNA, AIR 20, Air Historical Branch Papers 20/3082, RAF Discipline and Morale: August 1942–February 1945, untitled letter signed D. G. P. S., 13 January 1943.

<sup>167</sup> David Stafford-Clark, 'Morale and Flying Experience: Results of a Wartime Study', *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 95 (1949), p. 16.

Stafford-Clark specialised in cases of serious psychological breakdown related to 'LMF' [Lack of Moral Fibre].<sup>168</sup> 'Personal mascots, ranging from hare's feet to girls' stockings were taken very seriously', he noted, but they also had the potential to atomise combatants and W.A.A.F officers in harmful ways.<sup>169</sup> A more disparaging view was taken by the Admiralty. Although less medical and scientific research was conducted on men's psychiatric conditions at sea—in part due to the impersonal nature of naval combat—efforts were made to monitor the 'psychological problems' for those shipwrecked as a result of U-boat operations.<sup>170</sup> In September 1941, due to increased losses at sea, the Admiralty established a Committee on the Care of Shipwrecked Personnel under the auspices of the MRC. Drawing together expert medical and scientific opinion, the committee did much to erode 'many false and harmful superstitions' over dying at sea and debase ritualistic behaviours of sailors perceived as ensuring survival.<sup>171</sup> Rather than studying the roots of superstition in their own right, medical and psychological experts saw the rise of superstitious practices as evidence of the mental strain that mechanised war placed on combatants. Yet even within Stafford-Clark's assessment ambiguities were recognised. Superstition formed an important component within the combatant's survival armoury; a psychological defence against death which, for more senior staff officers and leaders sat uncomfortably within the modern military.

#### *Clerical Views*

The place of wartime superstition within both civil and military spheres created a range of tensions within organised religion at various levels. Much like debates within Anglicanism during the First World War, the re-emergence of supernatural modalities created internal and external conflict centred on spiritual/military, institutional/individual, and public/private readings of religion's place in war. Internal memoranda relating to the Church's organisation of military chaplains to the forces indicates a recognition of the expanded spiritual tastes of citizen combatants. From as early as 1915, chaplains were systematically harnessed by the

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<sup>168</sup> For more on 'LMF' and its connections with military psychiatry, see Edgar Jones, "'LMF': The Use of Psychiatric Stigma in the Royal Air Force during the Second World War', *Journal of Military History*, 70 (2006), pp. 439–58.

<sup>169</sup> Stafford-Clark, 'Morale and Flying Experience', p. 16.

<sup>170</sup> TNA, FD 13/28, Council Agenda, Minutes and Circulated Papers, Medical Research Council Minutes, September 1941, p. 2. Little has also been written on Royal Navy psychiatry during the period. See Edgar Jones and Neil Greenberg, 'Royal Navy Psychiatry: Organisation, Methods and Outcomes, 1900–1945', *The Mariners' Mirror*, 92 (2006), pp. 190–203.

<sup>171</sup> Jack Coulter, *The Royal Naval Medical Service* [RNMS], vol. I: *Administration* (London: H.M. Stationary Office, 1954), pp. 178–9.

Army Chaplain's Department (AChD, later the Royal Army Chaplain's Department) to the maintenance and promotion of men's morale.<sup>172</sup> Military chaplains were increasingly viewed not simply as providers of religious instruction. They performed a vital social and communal function; bonding men psychologically and emotionally before combat as critical promoters of 'fellowship' and 'team spirit'.<sup>173</sup> Furnishing the Royal Navy, army, and RAF with chaplains during the Second World War, and, significantly, acting as institutional lead on the provision of chaplains from different denominational bodies, the Church of England was cognisant of potential discontent amongst the rank-and-file given the lack of Nondenominational chaplains.<sup>174</sup> Yet a 1943 report entitled 'Religion and the Serviceman' signaled a growing expansion of flyers' and sailors' 'spiritual realities' compared to men within the army.<sup>175</sup> Conflict in the skies and at sea left men longing for 'something more' in spiritual terms. At 'many times during the present war', the report noted, 'men say, "I want to have something to hold on to, something...to which I can pin my faith but Religion does not give it to me"'.<sup>176</sup> Despite its recognition of the wartime return to heterodoxy, and with the memory of the First World War's effects ever-present, official Anglican policy on its place within the martial sphere remained hazy.

Ground-level military chaplains were, in this context, relatively free to make up their own minds on the impact of supernatural and superstitious beliefs—exposing what Stephen Loudon highlights as 'conflicting loyalties' in the minds of chaplains between church and military.<sup>177</sup> The use of Catholic symbols in ritual (and amongst non-Catholics) between 1914–1918 continued during the Second World War. John Scollen, a Roman Catholic artillery officer, noted in his wartime diary how 'Our Chaplain, a Lancashire man from Rochdale, said the Mass of Christmas 1941: Afterwards he distributed "Cardinal's crosses" to those who did not have them and rosaries to everyone, whether they already had them or not'.<sup>178</sup> Other chaplains relished their position as 'lucky mascots' for flyer units, smaller platoons, and even larger military groupings. One Anglican Padre, whose opinions were recorded within MO's 'The Chaplain to the Forces' report of 1943,

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<sup>172</sup> Snape, *God and the British Soldier*, p. 87. Also see Stephen Loudon, *Chaplain's in Conflict: The Role of the Army Chaplain since 1914* (London: Avon Books, 1996); Alan Robinson, *Chaplains at War: The Role of Clergymen During World War II* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2008).

<sup>173</sup> LPL, William Temple Papers, 52: Papers relating to the recruitment and supervision of chaplains to the Armed Services, Memorandum on the Work of the R.A.CH.D Reception Centre and Depot, 12 February 1943, f. 22.

<sup>174</sup> LPL, William Temple Papers, 18: Letter from Chaplain to the Forces, George Francis Dow criticising the lack of non-denominational religious teaching in the Army, 11 January 1943, ff. 169–71.

<sup>175</sup> LPL, William Temple Papers, 52: Report, 'Religion and the Serviceman', p. 5.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid.

<sup>177</sup> Loudon, *Chaplain's in Conflict*, *passim*.

<sup>178</sup> Quoted in Snape, *God and the British Soldier*, p. 35.

stated: 'the Army's chief interest in the R.A.Ch. [Royal Army Chaplain's] Department is an interest in morale; in my case I was practically told that this was so. I was useful to the Brigade, I became a sort of mascot, I was good for morale'.<sup>179</sup> Reverend Vernon Clarke, moreover, twice refused the role of Senior Army Chaplain to the Middle East out of devotion to his spiritual guidance of the Scots Guards—who perceived him as a 'talisman' adverting ill fortune.<sup>180</sup>

It was precisely this ambiguity which stoked tensions amongst those analysing military morale and factors which impinged upon it. As an investigation into the place of compulsory church parades in 1943 noted, the Army Council consistently valued the 'spiritual and moral' strength afforded by religion; facilitating as it did both 'public and private worship'.<sup>181</sup> Yet as one report on morale in the RAF context of mid-1945 emphasised, military chaplains had not adequately alleviated the myriad social problems amongst combatants through orthodox Christianity; a state of affairs which had existed since at least 1942. On 'family matters', the report noted, 'Chaplains, in many cases, fail to get to grips with the many social problems involved on a Station'.<sup>182</sup> The impact of men's emotional longing for home, and fears over wives' and girlfriends' sexual fidelity, was consistently addressed in morale reports across Royal Navy, army, and RAF from 1942/1943, as operations in mainland Europe and the Asia/Pacific theatre intensified. Acknowledging the need for a pan military/ecclesiastical response, however, chaplains were criticised for their lack of spiritual guidance over the complex matrix of men's morale and their emotional needs. The outpouring of heterodoxy in the martial sphere, implied as evidence of men's unresolved emotional instabilities, was blamed on the representatives of official religion.

For other clergymen and military chaplains, however, the return to the 'irrational' convictions of 'paganism' represented nothing less than a moral and theological crisis. For Clement F. Rogers, as we have seen, 'superstitions' were framed as a 'disease' affecting the minds of civilians and combatants alike. Rogers lamented the flourishing trade in mascots ('varying in price from 20S. to 1S. 6d') and their use in the martial sphere. 'During a submarine campaign...a [charm] to preserve you costs as much as fifteen pounds'.<sup>183</sup> Similar attacks were penned by Roger Lloyd, Canon of Westminster, in the pages of the *Expository Times* in 1943, a popular journal within

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<sup>179</sup> MOA, FR 1870A, 'The Chaplain to the Forces', July 1943, pp. 13–4.

<sup>180</sup> 'Padre Stayed On—“Earned Million V.C.s”', *Daily Mail*, 9 October 1942, p. 3.

<sup>181</sup> TNA, WO 163/161, Morale Committee, Compulsory Church Parade (note by the Joint Secretaries), 17 May 1943, p. 2.

<sup>182</sup> TNA, AIR 20/4583, Report on Morale in the Royal Air Force for the Quarter Ending 1st August 1945, Based on Reports from All Commands at Home, p. 4.

<sup>183</sup> Rogers, *Astrology*, p. 11.

Anglican circles dedicated to biblical discussion and current religious trends. Under the article heading 'Cults of Today', Lloyd described recourse to fatalism as 'heresy'. 'Both on its record and on its theory Fatalism must be declared a heresy and destroyed'.<sup>184</sup> Whilst Rogers and Lloyd wrote from the relative isolation of the home front, not having seen the workings of such beliefs amongst combatants first-hand, some Padres targeted their prevalence within the martial sphere irrespective of any morale boosting function. Writing in *Union Jack*, the Padre 'J. M.' presented fatalism as a heresy 'as old as the hills...most prevalent in times of war or stress'. Fatalism, he suggested, gave rise to an outcrop of superstitions, feminising combatants by robbing them of their 'dignity'.<sup>185</sup>

Other chaplains attempted to transmit similar kinds of messages to wider audiences. The 'Radio Padre', Reverend Ronald Selby-Wright, became something of a household name in the middle war years for his regular radio broadcasts covering a range of religious themes.<sup>186</sup> Born in Glasgow in 1890, Selby-Wright was educated at Edinburgh University before becoming a Church of Scotland minister in 1937. Commissioned as a Territorial Army Chaplain at the start of the war, he was persuaded by Melville Dinwiddie, the BBC Scottish Controller and James Welch, Director of Religious Broadcasting at the BBC, to become a regular broadcaster on the Home Service in June 1941. Initially broadcasting from Edinburgh, arrangements had to be made in 1942 following Wright's appointment as Senior Chaplain to the 52<sup>nd</sup> Lowland Division to transmit from make-shift studios in British transit camps in Italy.<sup>187</sup> The BBC's radio programming, as examples from the previous chapter confirm, formed an emergent site where heterodoxy was debated and challenged whilst pan-national Christianity was championed. Discussing the significance of the Bible in an address titled 'My Potable Library', Selby-Wright deplored the return of its 'superstitious' associations amongst contemporaries:

People look at the Bible to-day in various sorts of ways. Some treat it in a rather superstitious way, some are rather doubtful about it, some reverence it as we reverence our grandmother, some just don't understand it...I wonder what kind of reader you are? Are you one of these superstitious people, for example, who like

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<sup>184</sup> Roger Lloyd, 'Cults of Today: II. The Heresy of Fatalism', *Expository Times*, 9 (1943), p. 230.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid.

<sup>186</sup> See Ronald Selby-Wright, *Front Line Religion: The Padre Preaches* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1941); idem, *Let's Ask the Padre: Some Broadcast Talks* (London: Oliver & Boyd, 1943). On the popularity of 'padre hours' amongst the military, see TNA, WO 163/52, Morale Report, February 1943–April 1943, p. 7.

<sup>187</sup> For more on Wright's life, see his autobiography Ronald Selby Wright, *Another Home* (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1980). See also David G. Coulter, 'The Church of Scotland Army Chaplains in the Second World War', unpublished PhD thesis, University of Edinburgh (1997).

having a Bible with you for luck and hoping that the bullet will be deflected by the “Bible-next-your-heart” business?...There is nothing superstitious about the Bible. Indeed, the Bible is the answer to superstition.<sup>188</sup>

The broadcasts were not only significant because they traversed the geographical and international boundaries of Britain at war through radio-waves—challenging wartime ‘hierarchies of language’ and attempting to foster cross-regional cohesion within the private, yet public, context of radio listening.<sup>189</sup> They infused this appeal with a distinctly religious zeal; highlighting how the ‘duty’ of all British Christians (be they Scottish, English, (Northern) Irish, Welsh, civilian or combatant) was to resist the lure of theologically and collectively harmful beliefs.

Superstition’s place within the military context of the Second World War was both far-reaching and diverse. Whilst present and visible in some cases, its traces were difficult to record and analyse rigorously in relation to morale and discipline. Yet its significance in the martial context was not lost on civilians. As the following section demonstrates, its presence (including many of its more subtle characteristics) were presented to wartime and postwar film audiences through a number of highly popular cinematic productions. Although the medium of film presented an important site for cross-front fertilization of superstition, it was frequently visualized in highly stylised ways contributing to specific depictions of the ‘people’s war’ in the process.

## REPRESENTATIONS OF SUPERSTITION IN MILITARY CULTURE

### *Wartime and Postwar Film*

As we have seen in the case of Humphrey Jennings’s documentary-drama *Fires Were Started*, the filmic transmission of the ‘people’s war’ was not without complication. Wartime films with overt propaganda imperatives were not immune from illustrating the frightening, even sinister, dimensions of warfare disruptive to the memory of Britain’s ‘good war’.<sup>190</sup> By drawing attention to issues of class, gender, and nationality, wartime documentary and feature films had the tendency to widen the societal fractures they sought to harmonise. As Geoff Ely highlights, cinematic representations of the Second World War present their own history. They pull our attention to

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<sup>188</sup> Ronald Selby Wright, *The Average Man: Broadcast Addresses by the Radio Padre* (London: Longman, 1942), p. 79.

<sup>189</sup> Webster, *Mixing It*, p. 168. Also see Fox, ‘Millions Like Us’. For more on the ‘geographies’ of the nation in wartime, see Rose, *Which People’s War?*, ch. 6.

<sup>190</sup> Geoff Ely, ‘Finding the People’s War: Film, British Collective Memory, and World War II’, *American Historical Review*, 106 (2001), p. 828.

the 'intimacy, interiority, and everydayness' of conflict, with the potential to support and subvert key tenants of the 'people's war'.<sup>191</sup> The ways in which superstitions were represented and re-envisioned in the wartime and postwar periods through film reveals how the 'people's war' was by no means a static concept, featuring shifts in tone over time. Filmmakers' subtle nod to superstition within its transmission reinforced the boundaries between societal inclusion and exclusion, frequently tied to the image and representation of the nation. As Jo Fox makes clear, celluloid depictions of the Second World War allow us to 'understand societies through their self-image', in essence to 'understand them from within'.<sup>192</sup> They perform, in other words, a dual function; illustrating contemporary views of conflict as well as contemporary views of society at the moment of production.

Given the popularity of the cinema as a source of entertainment and leisure in the early to mid twentieth century, an analysis of film allows us to consider the reception of these shifts across a wide range of British society. Women of all ages, alongside all sections of the urban working-class, were the largest cinema-going groups in wartime.<sup>193</sup> The pull of the cinema as a cheap form of family entertainment was reflected in the spike of estimated average weekly attendees across the war, from 19 million in 1939 to a high of 30 million in 1945.<sup>194</sup> Although the film industry suffered at the start of the war—with the government requisitioning studios and closing cinemas—output recovered and increased in quality.<sup>195</sup> By 1946 annual cinema admissions reached a staggering 1,635,000,000.<sup>196</sup> As Jeffery Richard argues, cinema going cut across class, gender, and age divisions, a collective activity uniting various factions of the populous, although younger, working-class women were the most prolific film viewers.<sup>197</sup> Opinions on the latest films were divergent. Reviews within weekly trade publications such as *Kinematography Weekly* as well as life history and MO materials expose the variety of responses to filmic representations of

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<sup>191</sup> Eley, 'Finding the People's War', p. 828. For a sample of the literature on the Second World War and film, see Clive Coulthart, 'British Feature Films and the Second World War', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 19 (1984), pp. 7–22; Aldgate and Richards, *Britain Can Take It*; Philip M. Taylor (eds.), *Britain and the Cinema in the Second World War* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988); Robert Murphy, *British Cinema and the Second World War* (London: Continuum, 2001); Mark Glancy (eds.), 'British Cinema and The Second World War: Audiences, Cinema-Going and Popular Films', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 31 (2010), pp. 451–586.

<sup>192</sup> Jo Fox, *Film Propaganda in Britain and Nazi Germany: World War II Cinema* (Oxford: Berg, 2008), p. 5.

<sup>193</sup> Field, *Blood, Sweat, and Toil*, p. 232.

<sup>194</sup> James Chapman, 'British Cinema and the People's War', in Nick Hayes and Jeff Hill (eds.), *'Millions Like Us?': British Culture in the Second World War* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1999), p. 39.

<sup>195</sup> Todman, *Britain's War: A New World*, p. 440.

<sup>196</sup> Simon P. MacKenzie, *British War Films 1939–1945: The Cinema and the Services* (London: Hambledon and London, 2001), p. 129.

<sup>197</sup> Jeffery Richards, *The Age of the Dream Palace: Cinema and Society in Britain 1930–1939* (London: Routledge and Keegan Paul, 1984); Todman, *Britain's War: A New World*, p. 439.



war. This section focuses on three films released in the wartime and postwar periods—*In Which We Serve* (1942), *The Way to the Stars* (1945) and *The Cruel Sea* (1953)—chosen for both their commercial and popular success and their mixture of overt and subtle references to superstition in the military context. Analysis of films concerning the army at war has been omitted because of the comparative scarcity of wartime British Army feature films. It was only in the latter period of the war, and into the postwar years, that filmmakers and film studios gave space to the military branch with the least glamour and popular appeal.<sup>198</sup> The medium of film, serving as both propaganda and entertainment, played an important role in the cultural transmission of the ‘people’s war’ but it could also complicate and confuse the narrative. The representation of superstition in these films was often contested, pointing to broader wartime tensions—a subtlety which contemporary film critics and audiences did not always recognise.<sup>199</sup>

A number of war films produced between 1939–1945 made cursory references to superstition, luck, and fatalism. In *The Gentle Sex*, a 1943 feature film which exposed audiences to the gendered workings of the ‘people’s war’ through the voluntary and conscripted work of women in the ATS, the narrator describes the meeting of the film’s seven characters as ‘lucky’. Cross-class and cross-cultural synergy is not only fostered by hard work and determination; it requires luck from the start indicated by the ‘lucky’ number of characters driving the narrative. *We Dive at Dawn*, directed by Anthony Asquith and loosely based on the popular memoir of submarine captain Lieutenant-Commander Kenneth Edwards, exposes gendered tensions between home and fighting fronts.<sup>200</sup> On leave from HMS *Sea Tiger*, Chief Petty Officer Mike Corrigan’s reluctance to wed his bride is intensified on superstitious grounds by her wearing a green dress and his ‘bad luck’ for being called back to the ship during the ceremony. Yet the deeper connections between wartime identity, the ‘people’s war’, and superstition were depicted in David Lean and Noël Coward’s 1942 melodrama *In Which We Serve*.

Unlike the RAF, which had prioritised its involvement in war film production since 1939 due to the levels of popular anxiety over the anticipated air war, the Royal Navy remained a

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<sup>198</sup> MacKenzie, *British War Films 1939–1945*, p. 93.

<sup>199</sup> Fox, *Film Propaganda in Britain and Nazi Germany*, p. 1. For more on the relationship between the state and film/propaganda, see James Chapman, *The British at War: Cinema, State and Propaganda, 1939–45* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2000). For more on Hollywood films of the war, which proved hugely successful commercially but are not featured in the analysis, see Mark Glancy, *When Hollywood Loved Britain: The Hollywood ‘British’ Film 1939–1945* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999).

<sup>200</sup> MacKenzie, *British War Films 1939–1945*, p. 85.

‘silent service’ for the early war years.<sup>201</sup> Attempts to promote the Navy’s wartime roles resulted in films such as *Convoy* (1940); a joint collaboration between the Ministry of Information and the Admiralty (produced by Ealing Studios) which stressed the protective function of British naval strength. It was *In Which We Serve* which came to represent the defining wartime film of the Royal Navy, however. Born from the friendship between Noël Coward and Captain Lord Louis Mountbatten, *In Which We Serve* follows the wartime operations of the crew aboard HMS *Torrin*. Based on Mountbatten’s command of HMS *Kelly* during the Battle of Crete in 1941 (a point which prompted comparison with Mountbatten’s actual leadership which was far less successful) the film begins with documentary-style footage of *Torrin*’s construction. Shifts to the Battle of Crete show the crew members of *Torrin* coping advantageously in a night engagement before being shot down by German bombers. As the crew members cling to the binnacle, a series of flashbacks highlight their diverse backgrounds and different journeys towards military service. Despite these differences, centered on class distinction, both officers and men are bound by a love of the ship and their commitment to the cause.<sup>202</sup>

Temporal shifts between past and present, and contextual transitions between the home and fighting fronts, heighten the sacrifice of those who died in service to the ship and nation. In one transition, the film juxtaposes a foreboding warning by Captain Kinross’ wife Alix (played by Celia Johnson) with images of the surviving crew clinging to life rafts. In a speech given aboard *Torrin* during a Christmas Day celebration for the officers of the ship, she emphasises the place of naval wives as ‘secondary’ to their husband’s ships.<sup>203</sup> Contrasted with the images of the survivors, the speech provides the ship’s sinking with a fatalistic edge. Valorising masculine sacrifice, *In Which We Serve* emphasises how women, depicted in passive, non-combatant roles, were expected to make peace with the sacrifice of their husbands and loved ones in keeping with cultural expectations over women’s emotional restraint in wartime.<sup>204</sup> Yet the speech, and the film more broadly, makes an implicit statement about the relationship between officers, men, and the materiel of war. A superstitious love for *Torrin* binds the officer and rank classes together, a

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<sup>201</sup> MacKenzie, *British War Films 1939–1945*, p. 63. For more on the development of naval war films, see Jonathan Rayner, *The Naval War Film: Genre, History and National Cinema* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007).

<sup>202</sup> MacKenzie, *British War Films 1939–1945*, pp. 78–9.

<sup>203</sup> On servicemen’s wives in the wartime context, see Sally Sokoloff, “How Are They at Home?”, *Community, State and Servicemen’s Wives in England, 1939–45*, *Women’s History Review*, 8 (1999), pp. 27–52.

<sup>204</sup> For more on the representation of gender in wartime/postwar film, see Gledhill and Swanson (eds.), *Nationalising Femininity: Culture, Sexuality and British Cinema in the Second World War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002); Corinna Peniston-Bird, ‘Were Fires Started?: Exploring Gender in British Cinema of the Second World War’, in Sam Edwards, Michael Dolski, and Faye Sayer (eds.), *Histories on Screen: the Past and Present in Anglo-American Cinema and Television* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), pp. 81–102.

point recognised and accepted by Johnson's upper- middle-class character. As Captain Kinross himself admits, a 'happy' and 'efficient' ship was central to success at sea. The materiel of war (the ship through which the crew performs its service) serves as the physicalised focal point of superstitious mentalities. Inclusivity within this belief culture, as Alix also highlights, had well defined boundaries. It came largely at the exclusion of those who were not white, British men; a very specific depiction of the nation in which temperate masculinity was championed.

The film received near-universal praise on its release. Film critics, as well as the Admiralty, were impressed by Lean and Coward's picture; one which ran over budget and caused a fair degree of strain between its directors, the Admiralty, and Ealing Studios. For Edgar Anstey, writing in the *Spectator*, *In Which We Serve* presented an exemplar of the 'people's war' in action. True to life, it featured 'no extravagant heroism, no glossing-over of weakness, no rhetorical hatred of the enemy', informed by 'native humour and a sense of professional competence which will tell the world more about the British Navy than they ever knew before'.<sup>205</sup> Popular reactions were equally as exuberant. In November 1943, Mass Observation issued a Directive to its panel of volunteers asking: 'What films have you liked best during the last year?'<sup>206</sup> Respondents were advised to list six films in order of preference. 104 women and 116 men replied, with *In Which We Serve* ranking as the second most popular amongst the women (26 responses) and as the most popular amongst the men (28 responses).<sup>207</sup> Respondents were impressed by the overlaps between home and fighting fronts and the 'deep emotional impact' it displayed between sailors and their loved ones.<sup>208</sup> Depictions of class unity were praised as exemplars of British wartime spirit (with one respondent noting its more focused references to 'English' national character). One fifty-two year-old female Civil Servant from Morecambe noted the 'novel and brilliant idea of making the *ship* the focus of the whole story'; yet this was the closest any of the respondents came to identifying the superstitious aspects of naval warfare touched on in the film. Much like the presence of superstition on the ground, its depiction was subtly interwoven within the broader fabric of Britain's naval war—a representation sanctioned by both the Admiralty and Mountbatten.<sup>209</sup>

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<sup>205</sup> Edgar Anstey, 'The Cinema', *Spectator*, 2 October 1942, p. 311.

<sup>206</sup> MOA, DQ November 1943.

<sup>207</sup> Jeffrey Richards and Dorothy Sheridan (eds.), *Mass-Observation at the Movies* (London: Routledge and Keegan Paul, 1987), p. 220.

<sup>208</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 239.

<sup>209</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 284.

Connections between superstition, gender, and the home/fighting fronts was explored in more detail in the Two Cities Film's standout success *The Way to the Stars*, released just after the end of hostilities in Europe in June 1945. Throughout the war years the relationship between the RAF and British film studios remained close; far closer in comparison to the army and Navy. In 1939, for example, full support from the RAF and Air Ministry was given for a film to reassure the public of RAF air power and its capabilities of repelling a German aerial attack. The result, *The Lion Has Wings* (1939) presented images of all military branches in a familiar documentary style. Other wartime films such as *The First of the Few* (1942) celebrated the sacrifice of pilots during the Battle of Britain, whilst *Target For Tonight* (1942) drew attention to the work of Bomber Crews as the RAF and Air Ministry's focus shifted towards the bombing war against Germany. With the creation of its own film unit in 1941, the RAF was clearly comfortable and experienced in the making of war films with a deliberate propaganda imperative. Yet *The Way to the Stars*, directed by Anthony Asquith, marked a radical departure from its typical wartime filmography. Originally commissioned by the MoI, the film focused more on the social and emotional impact of the air war than depicting the work of Fighter and Bomber crews. Based on Terence Rattigan's highly successful play *Flare Path* (1942), its narrative charts the emotional strain of life for No. 720 Squadron, Lincolnshire. The picture was originally picked up by the MoI as a propaganda piece to promote Anglo-American relations; although it chose to outsource production to the film company Two Cities Films whilst retaining control over casting, script production, and the film's final cut.<sup>210</sup> It was the MoI's direct involvement in *The Way to the Stars*, and its sanction of an overarching narrative in which superstition and fate dominate life around the base, which makes the film so revealing.

References to the immediate visibility of superstition are peppered throughout the film. After establishing the wartime context of 1940, a new middle-class pilot Peter Penrose (played by John Mills) is quickly shown the risks of life in Bomber Command by upper-class Flight-Lieutenant David Archdale (played by Michael Redgrave). In their first scene, Archdale blames failing air tests on the absence on his 'lucky' lighter, and questions whether Penrose holds superstitious beliefs after issuing him the flying jacket of recently deceased pilot Bill Thompson. Archdale's neglect of the lighter a second time leads to his death—its re-appearance throughout the film serving as a physical reminder to audiences of the extremely high death rates pilots faced during the period. Yet *The Way to the Stars* goes beyond overt and simplistic references to

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<sup>210</sup> Aldgate and Richards, *Britain Can Take It*, p. 280.

superstition. Its narrative successfully captured the interrelation between war's emotional economy and belief cultures traversing the 'fronts' of war, with heightened proximity to sudden death destabilising wartime lives.

The death of Flight-Lieutenant David Archdale serves as the primary driver of superstition's entanglements throughout the film. Following Archdale's death Penrose visits widowed Toddy (played by Rosamunde John), owner of the local pub 'The Golden Lion' which members of the RAF base frequently visit. An emotional exchange follows, in which Penrose returns Archdale's remaining possessions from the base including the 'lucky' lighter. Archdale's death so soon after his marriage to Toddy leaves Penrose questioning whether to peruse his own love interest Iris Winterton (played by Renée Asherson), a young woman repressed by her domineering Aunt. In conversation with 'Tiny' Williams, the base Commander, Penrose asks: 'Do you think any of us have the right to get tangled up [in marriage] until it's all over?', reflecting contemporary pilots' superstitions around the influence of romantic love on military duty. Penrose does propose to Winterton later on in the film, yet this was set after the pressing context of the Battle of Britain.

Although *The Way to the Stars* did not replicate the love triangle seen in Rattigan's *Flare Path*, it did reassert familiar wartime tensions over the presence of American GIs, underscored by its reference to superstition. Jumping to 1942, widowed Toddy meets USAAF captain Johnny Hollis as a group of American flyers disrupt the more socially conservative dynamics of The Golden Lion. Whilst the majority of the Americans are presented as arrogant and brash, Toddy takes a liking to the kind, polite mannerisms of Hollis. A friendship blossoms between them, serving as the primary driver of the film's portrayal of positive Anglo-American wartime relations. The film deliberately sets the characters apart from the culturally villainised 'good time girl' and images of the seductive American in uniform—the filmmakers were careful to present Toddy's relationship with Hollis within the strict parameters of women's 'sexual patriotism' to British men in uniform.<sup>211</sup> Yet their emotional intimacy, at times bordering on the romantic, pushes the limits of 'acceptable', 'friendly but brief' interactions between British women and American GIs.<sup>212</sup> In its effort to present a more wholesome picture of Anglo-American relations, *The Way to the Stars* risked enflaming lingering romantic tensions which, as Alan Allport highlights, persisted well beyond mid-1945.<sup>213</sup> As the demobilisation process began, resentment over perceptions

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<sup>211</sup> Webster, *Mixing It*, ch. 6.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid., p. 199.

<sup>213</sup> Alan Allport, *Demobbed: Coming Home after the Second World War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), p. 85.

of women's 'treacher[ous]' wartime liaisons were levelled against them at the cultural level and, all too frequently, by abusive husbands and partners returning from active service.<sup>214</sup>

From the MoI's perspective, the key to stabilising anti-American sentiment was to elevate Hollis' character to the self-sacrificing 'soldier hero'. Crucially, the way in which the narrative achieved this revolved around the role of fatalism and superstition. Prior to a bombing raid over Germany, Toddy presents Hollis with Archdale's 'lucky' lighter as an *aide mémoire* in the sky. On return from the mission Hollis experiences a blown engine—electing to land the plane manually and sacrifice himself, rather than bail-out and risk the destruction of the neighbouring village. The undercurrent of superstition peppers the narrative with alternate meanings. Once again, Archdale's 'lucky' lighter physicalises the high number of sudden, unpreventable fatalities amongst wartime flyers. Although Toddy did not give Hollis the lighter for 'superstitious reasons', the film skillfully encapsulated contemporary wartime fears around sudden death in the skies and the intense emotional trauma this brought to loved ones and communities. Although the film illustrated the prevalence of cross-national superstitious modalities, it made a more overt point about the classed and gendered dynamics of contemporary belief cultures. Illustrative of 'authentic [RAF] experience', *The Way to the Stars* visualized middle/upper-class subscription to alternative belief cultures within the martial sphere as well as their centrality to emotional and romantic connection between men and women temporarily or permanently separated by war. Unlike *In Which We Serve*, in which fatalism and superstition between the fronts was visualized through flashbacks due to the physical distance between sailors and their loved ones, *The Way to the Stars* successfully transmitted the close proximity of flyer and civilian worlds; a proximity which encouraged the cross-front pollination of various beliefs as coping mechanisms for processing sudden death.

*The Way to the Stars* (released as *Johnny in the Clouds* in the US) proved a major commercial success. In 1946, the *Daily Mail* found the film to be the most popular war film amongst its readers, whilst Ernest Betts (writing in the *Daily Express*) described the film as a 'British picture of high quality and excitement'.<sup>215</sup> Similar findings were noted by MO, highlighting the results of the Bernstein Film Questionnaire. Ranked top of a list of 35 other war films, 73 per-cent thought the film was 'Outstanding', 23 per-cent 'good', with just 4 per-cent judging it as 'fair'.<sup>216</sup>

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<sup>214</sup> Allport, *Demobbed*, p. 95.

<sup>215</sup> '500,000 Votes', *Daily Mail*, 25 April 1946, p. 1; 'Films by Ernest Betts', *Daily Express*, 9 June 1945, p. 2.

<sup>216</sup> MOA, FR 2464, 'The Bernstein Film Questionnaire', April 1947, p. 17.

Gauging more specific reactions to the film remains difficult. By the mid-1940s, following Tom Harrisson's departure, the original democratising zeal of MO waned as the organisation's energies were directed towards market research in order to inject much needed funds.<sup>217</sup> Despite restrictions on assessing the popular reaction to the film, audiences were clearly not opposed to its focus on the middle and upper-class war effort. Superstitions bound the men and women who lived within or surrounding the Lincolnshire air base in a more direct way than in *In Which We Serve*. But it also served as a cinematic tool through which to channel the more restrictive depictions of British fighters in terms of ethnicity and class background, frustrating the egalitarian aspects of the 'people's war'.

As war films shifted focus from depictions of 'ordinary' people to reinserting the contribution of the middle-classes in the 1950s, connections between superstition and the military middle-classes highlighted in *The Way to the Stars* were strengthened.<sup>218</sup> Charles Frend's 1953 naval epic *The Cruel Sea* for example (based on Nicholas Monsarrat's 1951 book of the same name) charts the turbulent wartime story of the crew aboard HMS *Compass Rose*. Focusing on Commander Ericson (played by Jack Hawkins) and his number one Lockhart (played by Donald Sinden), viewers are exposed to the traumatic sinking of *Compass Rose* and the impact this had on its surviving crew members and Ericson. At the end of the film, Lockhart confesses to Ericson his reluctance to tally the number of miles sailed aboard HMS *Saltmarsh Castle* (Ericson's new ship) as he had done for *Compass Rose* given the 'unlucky' associations with *Rose's* sinking. The reference here to superstition is subtle, but it reinforces the dominant trend within 1950s war films away from depictions of 'ordinary' people to addressing the social and emotional sacrifice of the middle-classes in wartime, whilst soothing middle-class anxieties over its position within the postwar social standing.<sup>219</sup> Critics were clearly pleased with the results, with the

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<sup>217</sup> Joe Moran, 'Mass-Observation, Market Research, and the Birth of the Focus Group, 1937–1997', *Journal of British Studies*, 47 (2008), pp. 827–51; Hinton, *The Mass Observers*, ch. 15.

<sup>218</sup> For more on war films of the 1950s, see Andy Medhurst, '1950s War Films', in Geoffrey Hurd (ed.), *National Fictions: World War Two in British Films and Television* (London: BFI Publishing, 1984), pp. 35–8; Nicholas Pronay, 'The British Post-Bellum Cinema: A Survey of Films relating to World War II in Britain between 1945 and 1960', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 8 (1988), pp. 39–54; Neil Rattigan, 'The Last Gasp of the Middle-Class: British War Films of the 1950s', in Wheeler Winston Dixon (ed.), *Re-Viewing British Cinema, 1900–1992: Essays and Interviews* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1994), pp. 143–52; John Ramsden, 'Refocusing "The People's War": British War Films of the 1950s', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 33 (1998), pp. 35–63; Sue Harper and Vincent Porter, *British Cinema of the 1950s: The Decline of Deference* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Penny Summerfield, 'Public Memory or Public Amnesia? British Women of the Second World War in Popular Films of the 1950s and 1960s', *Journal of British Studies*, 48 (2009), pp. 935–57.

<sup>219</sup> Penny Summerfield, 'Divisions at Sea: Class, Gender, Race, and the Nation in Maritime Films of the Second World War', *Twentieth Century British History*, 22 (2011), p. 346; Rattigan, 'The Last Gasp of the Middle-Class'.

*Spectator* applauding the film's gritty realism as a 'tribute to the Senior Service' in war.<sup>220</sup> Crucially the beliefs, as well as the leadership qualities and resilience, of those who fought were consciously given classed associations. Egalitarian fighting spirit synonymous with the 'people's war' was stripped of its democratic associations.

As Penny Summerfield makes clear, film can be a powerful interpreter of past, present, and their intersection.<sup>221</sup> Holding cultural products as representative of contemporary belief cultures and religious cultures remains problematic, however—as we have seen in the case of First World War literary modernism—because of their tendency to transmit highly stylised depictions of the contemporary spiritual landscape. Whilst films such as *The Way to the Stars* and *The Cruel Sea* highlighted the wider emotional significance of superstitions of the wartime martial sphere, their inclusion forming part of a broader claim to authority over the 'people's war' and its evolving representation during and immediately after the Second World War. The ways in which wartime and postwar cinema depicted superstition was tightly linked with shifting representations of which 'people' should be valorized, at times more obviously than others. Yet increasingly attributing the white, middle/upper-class English naval officer or flyer as superstitious subtly reinforced tailored interpretations of the conflict in which particular classes 'took it' more heroically than others. Crucially, these beliefs were not depicted as heterodox but as important coping strategies in the face of modern, total war—viewpoints sanctioned by the Admiralty and Air Ministry after the end of hostilities which were frequently lamented during the war itself.

## CONCLUSION

Existing work on the belief cultures of 'total war' tends to emphasise the functional aspects of superstition as a not altogether coherent 'coping' mechanism.<sup>222</sup> Whilst true, such readings downplay the more expansive significance of superstitious practices and mentalities within the martial sphere between 1914 and 1918, 1939 and 1945, and more broadly across the twentieth century. Traversing the psychic/material divide, these practices and mentalities constituted spaces where complex emotions and personal/military identities were worked through—before,

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<sup>220</sup> Quoted in Summerfield, 'Divisions at Sea', p. 346.

<sup>221</sup> Penny Summerfield, 'Film and the Popular Memory of the Second World War in Britain 1950–1959', in Levine and Grayzel (eds.), *Gender, Labour, War and Empire*, p. 157.

<sup>222</sup> Snape and Parker, 'Keeping Faith and Coping', p. 410; Becker, 'Faith, Ideologies, and the "Cultures of War"', p. 242; Madigan, *Faith Under Fire*, p. 188; MacKenzie, *Flying Against Fate*, p. 1.



during, and after combat. Superstitions adapted to expanding and emerging forms of war between 1939 and 1945, but this was largely a reflection on the changing relationship between combatants and the physical/imagined environments of war in the context of mass conscription. As large numbers of citizens were drawn into wartime military service, pre-existing beliefs within civil society with a magical or folk dimension were re-deployed and, in some cases, seen in a new light as an additional aid to 'survival'. Of course, not all combatants were themselves superstitious—some lamented the 'irrational' outlook of fellow servicemen—and subtle variations in their use existed across the army, Royal Navy, and RAF. Yet examples from RAF fighter and bomber units in particular illustrate the baselessness of treating 'modernity' and 'superstition' as separate dichotomies. Supposedly 'pre-modern' beliefs weaved their way into 'modernity' in surprising ways; at times binding men of war whilst in others dividing them.

It was for this reason that authority views on their place within 'military culture' were so diverse. Compared to the largely career-focused military of the nineteenth century, the World Wars forced military institutions to draw deeply from the civilian reservoir—leading to significant socio-political change for combatants and shifts within military institutional culture. The increase in psychological readings of 'morale'—epitomised in the advent of 'primary group' theory—led to interest in combatants' inner-worlds and belief structures. Ambiguous approaches to 'morale', however, allowed superstitions' positive and divisive qualities to be simultaneously captured. Officers and commanders close to the 'sharp end' were more likely to advocate recourse to superstition compared to staff officers because, invariably, they saw for themselves the positive psychological function it could provide. Class tensions, systemic within the rank system of the senior military services, were amplified as were conflicts on the theological, medical, and psycho-analytical implications of 'heterodox' beliefs. More than this, superstitions of the martial sphere highlight the centrality of gender to contemporary framings of combat and a growing acceptance of pluralised martial masculinities.<sup>223</sup> Morale reports across the Royal Navy, army, and RAF noted the emotional need for combatants to retain something of their domestic civilian identities in conflict—frequently reflected in superstitious practices and mentalities. In lieu of fulfilment as husbands, fathers, sons, and brothers, men engaged in fraternal 'emotional communities' as well as spiritual communities—especially within the army and

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<sup>223</sup> Francis, *The Flyer*, pp. 78–9.

navy which, compared to the RAF, suspended physical ties with the home front to a greater extent.<sup>224</sup> Yet despite the recognition of men's need to retain their civilian identities and beliefs, accommodation of multiple masculinities and the influence of the 'domestic' and 'feminine' had limits. The 'fragile' and 'contingent' nature of homosociability meant that the martial sphere needed to be preserved as a principally male environment as not to threaten masculine unity and the gendered associations of violence.<sup>225</sup> When women came too close to the military operation, exclusionary and sometimes harmful beliefs were utilised in order to process men's insecurities and confusion over the false illusion of separate, gendered spheres of conflict. Even the 'temperate' hero, as Alison Twells recently argues, had limits over the boundaries of what wartime masculinity constituted.<sup>226</sup>

Citizen-combatant desires to retain home front connections rubbed against cultural and militaristic images of combat as a distinctly 'masculine' environment. It was this emotional and psychological tension which authorities had to grapple with, and which audiences came to recognise through films such as *The Way to the Stars*. How far the relationship between belief, behaviour, and mentality positively or negatively affected 'morale' depended on how 'morale' was understood and contextualised (alongside how far the 'psychological turn' in approaches to morale was engaged with). This dynamic has led scholars to note the decreasing significance of ideology and moral cause as reason to fight within the British context.<sup>227</sup> Yet, as we turn our attention to the south/southeast Asian theatres, issues of racial difference played a significant role in the framing of combat and raised problems in the context of Britain's 'empire' army.

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<sup>224</sup> Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities*.

<sup>225</sup> Francis, *The Flyer*, p. 62.

<sup>226</sup> Twells, 'Sex, Gender and Romantic Intimacy'.

<sup>227</sup> Hew Strachan, 'Training, Morale and Modern War', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 41 (2006), p. 214.

*Enemy and Empire: The British Soldier,  
Cultures of Religion and Belief, and Service in South/Southeast Asia*

In *The Road Past Mandalay*, an autobiographical account of his experience in Asia as Brigade Major of 114<sup>th</sup> and 111<sup>th</sup> Indian Infantry Brigade, John Masters noted with relish the opportunities for cultural enrichment military service provided. Whilst training in the jungles of India, Masters recalled having ‘swam in rivers and lakes’ and having ‘slept among ruined temples’.<sup>1</sup> More specific forms of indigenous religious custom were mentioned in relation to the Kachin hill shrines in Burma, used to ‘guard...[against] evil spirits’ and decorated with hibiscus blossom and animal bones.<sup>2</sup> Knowing something of Masters’ background indicates why he framed his encounters with Eastern cultures of religion and belief in this way. Born in India to a family of long-serving imperial officers, Masters trained at the Royal Military College, Sandhurst in the 1930s and wrote an extensive catalogue of fictional and non-fictional material on his time spent in India.<sup>3</sup> His writing smacks of popular literary depictions of empire and ‘the Orient’ of the nineteenth century—signifying its place as a kind of mystic motherland to the Western gaze.<sup>4</sup> In other accounts, and without contradiction, Indian religious customs were described as ‘strange’ and ‘fantastic’.<sup>5</sup> Through literary depictions of service in the British Imperial Army, Masters captured popular notions of Asian beliefs as simultaneously fantastic and at odds with Britain’s Protestant tradition.

Masters’ memories were no doubt coloured by the passage of time, but they reveal the multiple influences on understandings and images of Eastern religion from the mid nineteenth

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<sup>1</sup> John Masters, *The Road Past Mandalay: A Personal Narrative* (London: Orion, 2002 [1961]), p. 141.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 224.

<sup>3</sup> For more on Masters’ background, see John Clay, *John Masters: A Regimented Life* (London: Michael Joseph, 1992).

<sup>4</sup> Edward W. Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* (London: Routledge and Keegan Paul, 1978).

<sup>5</sup> John Masters, *Bungles and a Tiger: My Life with the Gurkhas* (London: Orion, 2002 [1956]), p. 313.

century to the 1940s in the British mind—Orientalism, imperialism, fantasy, and masculinity. If the realities of imperial service did not live up to its cultural imaginary, service within the British army in locations such as Burma, Ceylon, Malaya, and Singapore shattered any lingering romanticism of the East.<sup>6</sup> What makes this theatre so revealing in the context of heterodoxy's construction relates to the strain it placed on perceptions of empire and its Judeo-Christian underpinnings. Soldiers simultaneously fought with and against the 'Other'. As we will see, this took a variety of forms, pertaining to places, spaces, cultures, and peoples. Moreover, ideas on what constituted the 'Other' were also inherently ambiguous.

Contemporary framings of Eastern and world religions were both rudimentary and parochial. As Kate Imy highlights, the application of European, monotheistic frameworks to the diverse beliefs and practices of South Asia, including 'Hinduism', 'Sikhism' and Islam as 'religions', was designed to make them 'legible to imperial bureaucracy'. Rooted in the politics of difference, contemporary framings drew on a rich tradition of Eastern spirituality as 'irrational', 'mystical', and 'superstitious'.<sup>7</sup> Official narratives on south Asian cultures of religion and belief, as we will see, shifted in the context of imperial, total war to become more inclusive through challenges to categories such as the 'martial' races—those prized bodies accepted for imperial service by the British.<sup>8</sup> Because this was more of a gradual than revolutionary process, conflicting messages and attitudes, simultaneously promoting inclusivity and exclusion, existed. Drawing

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<sup>6</sup> Scholars have turned to placing the war in global perspective for several decades. See Gerhard L. Weinberg, *A World at Wars: A Global History of World War II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); John Ferris et al., *Cambridge History of the Second World War*, 3 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Craig Symonds, *World War II at Sea: A Global History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018); Andrew Buchanan, *World War II in Global Perspective, 1931-1953* (Hoboken: Wiley, 2019). For broader histories of Britain's empire at war, see Ashley Jackson, *The British Empire and the Second World War* (London: Hambledon Continuum, 2006); Ashley Jackson, Yasmin Khan, and Gajendra Singh (eds.), *An Imperial World at War: Aspects of the British Empire's War Experience, 1939-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017). For a broader call towards the expansion of history beyond Eurocentric readings, see Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

<sup>7</sup> Kate Imy, *Faithful Fighters: Identity and Power in the British Indian Army* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2019), pp. 10-11. For critical works on Western treatments of Eastern 'religion', see Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1993); Richard King, *Orientalism and Religion: Postcolonial Theory, India and "the Mystic East"* (London: Routledge, 1999); Peter van der Veer, *Imperial Encounters: Religion and Modernity in India and Britain* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); Brian K. Pennington, *Was Hinduism Invented?: Britons, Indians, and Colonial Construction of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Arvind-Pal S. Mandair, *Religion and the Spectre of the West: Sikhism, India, Postcoloniality, and the Politics of Translation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009). On empire, see David Chidester, *Empire of Religion: Imperialism and Comparative Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013).

<sup>8</sup> 'Martial' bodies were signified as being tall, strong, and loyal; Heather Streets, *Martial Races: The Military, Race and Masculinity in British Imperial Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004).

on postcolonial theory and critical readings of empire, existing work explores the political and cultural significance of religion and belief in the Asian-Pacific war for multi-national and multi-ethnic armies.<sup>9</sup> In contrast to the previous chapters, we know more about the role religiosity played in the context of morale and military indoctrination, or at least its *perceived* significance within British army administration, than the potential opportunities this particular theatre of war afforded British soldiers and officers in expanding their beliefs. For Tarak Barkawi, the cultural-political significance of religion and belief as a means of bonding men of war diminished, whilst still used in racialised depictions of the enemy, as British and colonial soldiers were moulded to the 'ritual' of battle and drill.<sup>10</sup> Placing the social and subjective aspects of belief alongside structural/functional treatments, however, holds importance for the broader framing and construction of heterodoxy. It points towards areas of belief transfer between metropolitan and colonial soldiers as well as instances where differing beliefs and religions caused tension. In doing so, the chapter complicates well-trodden arguments on the making of Britain's self-image through cultural difference.<sup>11</sup> By considering the multiple opportunities for belief transfer in this theatre of war, a complex picture of the militaristic workings of empire emerges in which antagonism and discrimination existed alongside cooperation and negotiation.<sup>12</sup>

Ethnicity and race played a significant role in the conduct and framing of war in Asia—with race understood here, as Laura Tabili signals, as a 'relationship' rather than a 'thing'—pulling the tensions between imperialism and nationalism into focus.<sup>13</sup> Beliefs and believing

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<sup>9</sup> Military sociologies have proved particularly informative. See Tarak Barkawi, 'Peoples, Homelands, and Wars? Ethnicity, the Military, and Battle among British Imperial Forces in the War against Japan', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 46 (2004), pp. 134–63; idem, 'Culture and Combat in the Colonies: The Indian Army in the Second World War', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 41 (2006), pp. 325–55; idem, *Soldiers of Empire: Indian and British Armies in World War II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017). Whilst religion frames much of the historiography on colonial armies, more focused attention can be found in Kaushik Roy, 'Religion in the Sepoy Army of British India', in Torkel Brekke and Vladimir Tikhonov (eds.), *Military Chaplaincy in an Era of Religious Pluralism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 185–201; Nile Green, *Islam and the Army in Colonial India: Sepoy Religion and the Service of Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Imy, *Faithful Fighters*.

<sup>10</sup> Barkawi, *Soldiers of Empire*. On the racial dynamics of war in Asia, see John Dower, *War Without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War* (New York: Pathenon Books, 1986).

<sup>11</sup> See, for example, Linda Colley, 'Britishness and Otherness: An Argument', *Journal of British Studies*, 31 (1992), pp. 309–29; idem, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1770–1937* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992). On the need to move beyond arguments highlighting difference between Britain and the world, see Mandler, 'The Problem with Cultural History', pp. 109–13.

<sup>12</sup> On the need to consider the multifarious workings, interactions, and representations of imperialism, see Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1993), p. 40.

<sup>13</sup> Laura Tabili, *"We Ask for British Justice": Workers and Racial Difference in Late Imperial Britain* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), p. 4. For a discussion on nationalism after the 'imperial turn', see Antionette

were important tools in the framing of empire and nation, but they also played a critical role in conceptions of warrior masculinity. As we have seen, wartime cultural discourse championed a 'temperate hero' model in contrast to the hyper-masculinity of Nazism and the effeminacy of conscientious objectors.<sup>14</sup> Yet soldiers were expected to commit brutal acts of violence towards the enemy—dynamics which became self-perpetuating in the Asian war's racialised context and which were fundamentally at odds with the temperate masculine ideal.<sup>15</sup> Questions over how and why soldiers fought in this context, rooted in the histories of morale and of masculinities, have moved beyond classical debates between ideological/structural, societal/institutional factors to consider overlap between the two and fluctuation over time.<sup>16</sup> Socio-cultural military histories have alluded to the broader significance of beliefs and religion within the context of doctrine, battle strategy, and organisation.<sup>17</sup> The use of belief to mobilise or bind soldiers in Asia by the War Office was not passively accepted, however. The military context, recent work confirms, constituted a key site where the 'people' of the 'people's war' found personal, political, and collective power.<sup>18</sup> Importantly, as the chapter aims to highlight, it was also one where the contours of heterodoxy's construction were defined; as the personal, subjective experience of war helped to re-frame, challenge, and determine structural forces over the acceptability of belief and how those beliefs were framed.

This chapter focuses specifically on British soldiers in South and Southeast Asia from 1942/43–1945. It encompasses their engagement with the Imperial Japanese Army (IJA) in Burma, their collaboration with colonial forces, as well as interactions with local populations in colonies such as India, Burma, and Ceylon. Whilst naval and air power was critical to victory in

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Burton (ed.), *After the Imperial Turn: Thinking With and Through the Nation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).

<sup>14</sup> Twells, 'Sex, Gender and Romantic Intimacy', p. 737.

<sup>15</sup> Barkawi, 'Peoples, Homelands, and Wars?', p. 153. Combatants were expected to be violent but still display the idealised traits of 'temperate' masculinity. On this contradiction, and the limits of the 'temperate' model, see Alison Twells, 'Sex, Gender and Romantic Intimacy'.

<sup>16</sup> For ideological approaches to the question of why men fight, see Omer Bartov, 'Indoctrination and Motivation in the *Wehrmacht*: The Importance of the Unquantifiable', *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 9 (1986), pp. 16–34; Bourke, *An Intimate History of Killing*. On military institutional factors, see Strachan, 'Training, Morale, and Modern War'. On ideology in the specific context of the Asian theatre, see Dower, *War Without Mercy*. On military institutional factors, see Daniel P. Marston, *Phoenix from the Ashes: The Indian Army in the Burma Campaign* (Westport: Praeger, 2001); Timothy R. Moreman, *The Jungle, the Japanese and the British Commonwealth Armies at War, 1941–1945: Fighting Methods, Doctrine and Training for Jungle Warfare* (London: Frank Cass, 2005). For fusion approaches, see Kaushik Roy, 'Military Loyalty in the Colonial Context: A Case Study of the Indian Army during World War II', *Journal of Military History*, 73 (2009), pp. 497–529; idem, 'Discipline and Morale of the African, British and Indian Army units in Burma and India during World War II: July 1943 to August 1945', *Modern Asian Studies*, 44 (2010), pp. 1255–82; Barkawi, *Soldiers of Empire*.

<sup>17</sup> See Barkawi, 'Peoples, Homelands, and Wars?', *passim*; Roy, 'Discipline and Morale', p. 1279.

<sup>18</sup> Fennell, *Fighting the People's War*, ch. 16.

the Pacific, it was within the context of the army—specifically General William Slim’s reformed 14<sup>th</sup> Army—where the politics of belief came to the fore in the waging and organisation of jungle warfare. Extending points made in the previous chapters on the nexus between religion and belief in heterodoxy’s construction, the chapter explores how perceptions of Eastern religions/cultures of belief and interactions with colonial/local populations influenced debates on the acceptability of specific kinds of believing. How were pan-imperial armies affected by associations between Asian ‘mysticism’, ‘irrationality’, and ‘superstition’ to the British mind? Crucially, how far were official narratives on Eastern cultures of religion and belief accepted or challenged by British soldiers based on their service experience?

Adopting a socio-cultural approach to military history and exploring the dynamic relationship between army and society in the ‘total war’ context, the chapter explores the tensions between fighting with and against the ‘Other’. Recognising the ambiguities in official narratives on Asian spirituality in wartime, it argues that soldiers’ responses to these narratives formed a crucial, and neglected, strand of the ‘people’s war’ dynamic in which age was central. As we will see, official army handling of wartime beliefs and their representation through propaganda, always attuned to their impact on morale and men’s fighting ability, were at times in sync with soldiers’ opinions and beliefs. In others, they were at odds. What made the difference here was the introduction of a much younger battle-fresh generation of other ranks (ORs) and officers, particularly to the British Indian Army, who had either first-hand memories of the First World War as children or who grew up in its shadow during the interwar period.<sup>19</sup> Their responses reveal the limits of official attacks against Japanese religious militarism and an army fixation with exploiting psychological weaknesses in IJA doctrine by attacking Japan’s ‘superstitious’ national character. Whilst tensions with colonial soldiers persisted, they also played an important role in challenging long-term categories of imperial religious organisation in a specific historical moment. Here, the democratising potential of total war can be seen clearly, as private and collective opinions and beliefs sought to question long-term structural forces. In order to reveal this, a range of official, cultural, and ethnographic sources are brought into dialogue

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<sup>19</sup> Works by Jay Winter and Michael Roper initially placed the issue of First World War martial memory on the scholarly agenda, but more recent works have expanded their focus chronologically and thematically. See, for example, Joel Morley, ‘An Examination of the Influence of the First World War on Attitudes to Service in the Second World War’, unpublished PhD thesis, Queen Mary, University of London (2013); Jessica Hammett, “‘It’s in the Blood, isn’t it?’ The Contested Status of First World War Veterans in Second World War Civil Defence’, *Cultural and Social History*, 14 (2017), pp. 344–6; Noakes, “‘My Husband is Interested in War Generally’”; Joel Morley, “‘Dad Never Said Much But...’ Young Men and Great War Veterans in Day-to-Day Life in Inter-war Britain’, *Twentieth Century British History*, 29 (2018), pp. 199–224.

including morale reports, censorship summaries, service newspapers, propaganda pieces, military diaries, and memoirs. Whilst the focus remains principally on British soldiers, it also considers the viewpoints of colonial soldiers. In order to understand the complex relationship between belief, war, and empire in Britain's Asian conflict, we need to begin by looking at the colonial and gendered shaping of religion and belief from the nineteenth century—principally through Britain's relationship with its chief colonial holding in Asia; India.

## EMPIRE, RELIGION, AND BELIEF FROM THE NINETEENTH CENTURY TO THE INTERWAR PERIOD

Spiritual and religious shifts in the metropole complicated Britain's imperial project in the Nineteenth century.<sup>20</sup> Whilst Providential arguments for the moral justification of empire of previous centuries continued into the nineteenth, frequently framed within notions of empire as a 'civilising' initiative popularised by the likes of Thomas B. Macaulay and James Mill, disestablishment and the rise of evangelicalism diluted its English Protestant base.<sup>21</sup> Darwin's evolutionary biology of the late 1850s dealt a further challenge to the Christian underpinnings of empire, supplanting religion with race and heredity as the hallmarks of shifting British nationalism.<sup>22</sup> The extent to which biological arguments of racial superiority dominated imperial thinking from the mid nineteenth century has led some scholars to question the significance of religion as organising tool for contemporary imperialists. A. P. Thornton, for example, stressed the 'indirect' influence of religion on the mechanics of British imperial bureaucracy in an age of secularism and rationality.<sup>23</sup> Yet Thornton's arguments were formulated

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<sup>20</sup> On the broader literature of Britain's eighteenth and nineteenth century empire, see C. A. Bayly, *Imperial Meridian: The British Empire and the World 1780-1830* (London: Longman, 1989); John Darwin, *The Empire Project: The Rise and Fall of the British World-System, 1830-1970* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

<sup>21</sup> John Gascoigne, 'Introduction: Religion and Empire, an Historiographical Perspective', *Journal of Religious History*, 32 (2008), p. 165. On the continued power of Providence into the nineteenth century, see Stewart J. Brown, *Providence and Empire: Religion, Politics and Society in the United Kingdom, 1815-1914* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2008). For a critical reading of Providential rhetoric, and its varied meanings and uses, see Jeffrey Cox, *Imperial Fault Lines: Christianity and Colonial Power in India, 1818-1940* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), pp. 31-8. On the continued importance of 'ordered liberty' and notions of character informing late nineteenth century framings of empire, see Peter J. Cain, 'Character, "Ordered Liberty", and the Mission to Civilise: British Moral Justification of Empire, 1870-1914', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 40 (2012), pp. 557-78.

<sup>22</sup> Van der Veer, *Imperial Encounters*, p. 116.

<sup>23</sup> Archibald P. Thornton, *The Imperial Idea and Its Enemies: A Study in British Power* (London: Macmillan, 1959), p. 15. On missionary agents as critics of imperialism, see Andrew N. Porter, *Religion Versus Empire?: British*



before the rise of post-colonial theory and ‘subaltern’ studies.<sup>24</sup> Christianity ‘completed’ framings of the Near Orient and Far Orient in imperialist thinking, so Edward Said argued, granting the West cultural and intellectual domination over colonised populations.<sup>25</sup> Christianity, in this vein, was the only ‘rational’ religion able to ‘withstand’ the nineteenth century climate of Western scientific rationalism, providing the ideological underpinnings of Britain’s imperial project. Yet as Hilary Carey shows more recently, localised control of religion/belief in specific colonial context, rather than the wider dynamics of imperial mentalities Said referred to, was multifaceted, mirroring the complexity of the religious landscape of the metropole.<sup>26</sup>

Debate on the relationship between religion and empire, questioning the extent to which religion and religious institutions were implicit in imperial governance and as carriers of imperial mentalities, highlights their contested interaction when seen in context. In India, for example, Christian missions were ‘weak’ transmitters of cultural imperialism, signifying how colonial discourse was not monolithic.<sup>27</sup> Missions to the northeast of India, gaining pace from the 1870s and reaching their apogee in the early twentieth century, were as much about bureaucratic control as spiritual control; but this was often at odds with the ambitions of secular imperialists.<sup>28</sup> Evangelical volunteer missionaries, faster to export Christianity to the colonies compared to the Church of England, ‘muddled’ the imperial vision—aiming as they did to establish an indigenous, pan-Christian church which would outlast the governance of empire.<sup>29</sup> This was even more so the case at the grassroots. Colonial mission work, a powerful site for women to take a leading role in transmitting the Gospel and build civic functions associated with ‘diffusive Christianity’, often led to ‘unique’ and ‘genuine’ piety amongst

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*Protestant Missionaries and Overseas Expansion, 1700–1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), pp. 316–30.

<sup>24</sup> ‘Subaltern’, a term coined by Antonio Gramsci, refers to any individual or group subject to the hegemonic power of another.

<sup>25</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, p. 58.

<sup>26</sup> Hilary M. Carey, ‘Introduction: Empires of Religion’, in Hilary M. Carey (ed.), *Empires of Religion* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p. 8; Norman Etherington (ed.), *Missions and Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Hilary M. Carey, *God’s Empire: Religion and Colonialism in the British World, c. 1801–1908* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011). See Carey, *God’s Empire*, p. 15, for critical distinctions between ‘imperialism’ and ‘colonialism’. On ‘imperialism’ and ‘culture’, see Andrew N. Porter, *European Imperialism, 1860–1914* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1994). For a broader history of Christianity in India, see Robert Eric Frykenberg, *Christianity in India: From Beginnings to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

<sup>27</sup> Andrew Porter, ‘“Cultural Imperialism” and Protestant Missionary Enterprise, 1780–1914’, *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 25 (1997), p. 388, 375.

<sup>28</sup> Carey, *God’s Empire*, p. 75. On the broader missionary movement, see Susan Thorne, *Congregational Missions and the Making of an Imperial Culture in Nineteenth-Century England* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999); Jeffrey Cox, *The British Missionary Enterprise since 1700* (London: Routledge, 2008).

<sup>29</sup> Cox, *Imperial Fault Lines*, pp. 12–13.

convert communities blurring indigenous religion and folklore with aspects of Christianity.<sup>30</sup> For example, by the end of the nineteenth century 60 per-cent of the missionary contingent of Punjab alone was female.<sup>31</sup> Christian missions also targeted indigenous populations of other imperial holdings in Southeast Asia—including the Karen tribes in Burma and high caste Brahmins and Vellalars in Ceylon and Malaya.<sup>32</sup>

Secular state handling of religion continued to impose strict categorisations, however.<sup>33</sup> The 1931 census of India's population by community, for example, imposed religious divisions in 'tyrannical' fashion.<sup>34</sup> The same was true of the military where, it was believed, locating Indian religious 'traditions' within military duty would ensure loyalty and obedience. Recruiting handbooks of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries imposed racial, gendered, and sexual difference through the official recording of the 'characteristics, customs, prejudices, history and religion' of martial classes.<sup>35</sup> It was the rebellion of 1857—a failed mutiny by sepoys in the garrison town of Meerut—which convinced officials a greater understanding of Indian culture and religion was required. Religious bigotry was marshalled as a means of imposing colonial control through communalism; ordering which continued into the new century.<sup>36</sup> A pre-First World War pamphlet issued to British soldiers, *Our Indian Empire*, stressed the 'fanatical' nature of Muslim men from India's northwestern borderlands, whilst in 1912 officers of the 127<sup>th</sup>, 129<sup>th</sup>, and 130<sup>th</sup> Indian infantry believed their soldiers to be 'ignorant' and 'superstitious'.<sup>37</sup> It was in secular martial culture, more so than the work of (largely) volunteer missionaries, where imperial dogma on colonial religion was expressed most sharply. As Erik Linstrum makes clear, such categorisations of 'superstitious' colonial subjects (as well as the framing of 'martial races') constituted psychological forms of control and 'knowing' steeped in the conventions of late Victorian anthropology. Despite a growing strand of interwar opinion

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<sup>30</sup> Cox, *Imperial Fault Lines*, p. 152.

<sup>31</sup> Brittany Vosler, "Making His Way to the Heart of India": British Missionaries, Indian Nationalism, and Religious Belonging in Post-World War I India', *British Scholar*, 3 (2010), p. 69; Cox, *Imperial Fault Lines*, p. 5.

<sup>32</sup> Jörg Schendel, 'Christian Missionaries in Upper Burma, 1853–85', *South East Asia Research*, 7 (1999), pp. 61–91; Kristina Hodelin-ter Wal, "The Worldly Advantage It Gives..." Missionary Education, Migration and Intergenerational Mobility in the Long Nineteenth Century, Ceylon and Malaya 1816–1916', *Journal of Interdisciplinary Economics*, 31 (2019), p. 9.

<sup>33</sup> Vosler, "Making His Way to the Heart of India", p. 69; Cox, *Imperial Fault Lines*, p. 5.

<sup>34</sup> Cox, *Imperial Fault Lines*, pp. 267–8.

<sup>35</sup> Gajendra Singh, *The Testimonies of Indian Soldiers and the Two World Wars: Between Self and Sepoy* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), p. 17.

<sup>36</sup> Gyanendra Pandey, *The Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 10.

<sup>37</sup> Imy, *Faithful Fighters*, p. 55, 153.

critical of the unique rationality of the West, martial framings of colonial religious difference persisted.<sup>38</sup>

Gender and sexuality were critical determinants in the religious framing of racial difference in British India.<sup>39</sup> Dominant cultural discourses were imported into colonial society from the metropole, impacting both civil and military institutions as well as British and Indian nationals alike. Yet the moral workings of the state were not reductively imposed on colonial societies—highlighting the extent to which cultural codes could be abandoned and refashioned by different ethnic groups including the British. ‘Muscular Christianity’ of late nineteenth century Victorian society, emphasising the physical and racial superiority of the nation, strengthened existing ideas on the ‘separateness’ of Indian Hinduism whilst simultaneously pulling colonial and imperial populations closer together through its forced cultural transmission. Schools, sports (chiefly cricket), and boys’ organisations created in India were designed to impart a martial religiosity and ‘improve’ the moral character of Hindu men and ‘effeminate’ Muslims.<sup>40</sup> Despite attempts to pull colonial masculine religiosity in line with trends in British society, the influence of muscular Christianity did little to dent the longstanding religious ‘othering’ of the ‘martial races’ and even promoted rival nationalist challenges in the form of ‘muscular Hinduism’.<sup>41</sup> Tensions over the cultural treatment of Indian women continued to rage, notably the Hindu practice of *Sati* (widow burning) which became illegal from 1829 in various parts of British-controlled India.<sup>42</sup> Efforts were made to police the sexual lure of ‘the Orient’ as more concrete distinctions between ‘wives’, ‘concubines’, and ‘prostitutes’ crystalised in an age of moral liberalism and contempt for disease.<sup>43</sup> Yet despite these efforts, Asian cultures

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<sup>38</sup> Erik Linstrum, ‘The Politics of Psychology in the British Empire, 1898–1960’, *Past and Present*, 215 (2012), p. 206. Bernard S. Cohn, *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996). For a broader history of psychology and its use within the British imperial context (including its religious and missionary aspects), see Erik Linstrum, *Ruling Minds: Psychology in the British Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016).

<sup>39</sup> On the broader gendering of ‘Orientalism’, see Reina Lewis, *Gendering Orientalism: Race, Representation, and Femininity* (London: Routledge, 1996).

<sup>40</sup> Van der Veer, *Imperial Encounters*, ch. 4.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 46; Mrinalini Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity: the “Manly Englishman” and the “Effeminate Bengali” in the late Nineteenth Century* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995).

<sup>42</sup> On eighteenth and nineteenth century *Sati* debates, see Anand Yang, ‘Whose Sati? Widow Burning in Early 19th Century India’, *Journal of Women's History*, 1 (1989), pp. 8–33; Lata Mani, *Contentious Traditions: The Debate on Sati in Colonial India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); Norbert Schürer, ‘The Impartial Spectator of Sati, 1757–84’ *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 42 (2008), pp. 19–44; Daniel Grey, ‘Creating the “Problem Hindu”: Sati, Thuggee and Female Infanticide in India, 1800–60’ in Joanna de Groot and Sue Morgan (eds.) *Sex, Gender, and the Sacred: Reconfiguring Religion in Gender History*, (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2014), pp. 104–116.

<sup>43</sup> Erica Wald, ‘Defining Prostitution and Redefining Women's Roles: The Colonial State and Society in Early Nineteenth Century India’, *History Compass*, 7 (2009), p. 1470. For more on Oriental/British constructions of

continued to prove potent sites of heterosexual and homosexual desire and exploration well into the twentieth century for British civilians and soldiers.<sup>44</sup>

Gender and class were remarkably persistent framers of 'spirituality' in the British mind, a concept which traversed metropole and colony. 'Spirituality'—a notion long associated with the 'East'—was increasingly linked with the 'inner', private domain in the nineteenth century.<sup>45</sup> Accessing this realm was seen, in both British and Indian society, as dependant on women's 'innate' and 'natural capacity for the spiritual. This was often exploited by men; in Indian society, the leaders of national spiritual/spiritualist movements were chiefly men despite Hindu discursive traditions which championed the spiritual power of femininity.<sup>46</sup> Class distinctions were important here too. Whilst the influx of esoteric beliefs and astrology of the turn of the twentieth century in Britain held cross-class appeal, it was the professional middle-classes which Theosophists viewed as the new 'spiritual aristocracy'.<sup>47</sup> The Theosophical Society itself featured a bohemian/upper middle-class membership, many of whom were interested in the 'powers' of ancient India. As we have seen in the introduction, the Society's commitment to doing-away with gender difference in favour of spiritual androgyny did little to counter the widespread notion of esoteric religion as a 'paradigmatically female experience', or challenge notions of Eastern women as racially inferior to their English counterparts.<sup>48</sup> Despite calls to a levelling of difference through spirituality at this time, framings of religion and belief always featured strong classed, gendered, and racial underpinnings. Imperial differences were often channelled through discourse on belief in the metropole.

Rhetoric on the coming of a 'New Age' reached new heights during the First World War in Britain.<sup>49</sup> The war experience was not only critical in unleashing a torrent of alternative

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colonial sexuality, see Ronald Hyams, 'Empire and Sexual Opportunity', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 14 (1986), pp. 34–90; Philippa Levine, 'Orientalist Sociology and the Creation of Colonial Sexualities', *Feminist Review*, 65 (2000), pp. 5–21. On aversions to British/Indian relationships and marriages, see Sudipta Sen, 'Colonial Aversions and Domestic Desires: Blood, Race, Sex and the Decline of Intimacy in early British India', *Journal of South Asian Studies*, 24 (2001), pp. 25–45. For a broad overview of public health initiatives in British India, see Mark Harrison, *Public Health in British India: Anglo-Indian Preventive Medicine 1859–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994). On the military, see Erica Wald, *Vice in the Barracks: Medicine, the Military and the Making of Colonial India, 1780–1868* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

<sup>44</sup> See, for example, Kate Imy, 'Fascist Yogis: Martial Bodies and Imperial Impotence', *Journal of British Studies*, 55 (2016), pp. 320–43. On attempts to control soldierly desire in the nineteenth century, see Erica Wald, 'Health, Discipline and Appropriate Behaviour: The Body of the Soldier and Space of the Cantonment', *Journal of South Asian Studies*, 46 (2012), pp. 815–56.

<sup>45</sup> Van der Veer, *Imperial Encounters*, p. 69.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 81.

<sup>47</sup> Dixon, *Divine Feminine*, p. 145.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 168, 67, 155–6.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 142.

beliefs but proved an important site for starting to challenge longer-term discourses of religious and spiritual difference within the imperial context. The military campaign, as Santanu Das reminds us, remained the backbone for cultural encounters and, given the uncertainty of Christianity within the BEF and the nature of the war, hardened points of difference showed signs of loosening.<sup>50</sup> India provided approximately 677,206 combatants from August 1914 to November 1918 as part of the Indian Army (the peak occurring in the last year of the war), the result of which foreshadowed debate on the classic imperial categorisation of the 'martial races' during the interwar period.<sup>51</sup> Some Anglican chaplains felt that the growing interdenominational Christian brotherhood should include South Asians, whilst certain YMCA members pushed for a 'race-brotherhood' between British and South Asian troops.<sup>52</sup> For officers such as James Willcocks, George Morton-Jack highlights, personal command of Indian troops, and building solid relationships with them, was vital at the front. The 'religion, habits, castes and languages', Willcocks noted in his postwar memoir, were as 'familiar to me as my own religion and language'.<sup>53</sup> One need only look at figures such as T. E. Lawrence to recognise the wider cultural impact war service had for some in mimicking non-Western dress and culture. Although dominant prejudices persisted—expressed chiefly through insecurities over Muslim Indians fighting Ottoman forces in Mesopotamia and deterring them from joining a pan-Islamic revolution—the experience of the war forced officials to begin the Indianisation of the officer corps at the demands of Indian nationalists.<sup>54</sup> As Mrinalini Sinha makes clear, the experience of the First World War (in particular pan-imperial military experience) made discourse on British colonial subjects as 'other' more problematic.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Das, *India, Empire, and First World War Culture*, p. 242.

<sup>51</sup> Kaushik Roy, *Indian Army and the First World War: 1914–18* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2018), p. 56. On the broader context of the First World War and colonial soldiery, see Philippa Levine, 'Battle Colours: Race, Sex, and Colonial Soldiery in World War I', *Journal of Women's History*, 9 (1998), pp. 104–30.

<sup>52</sup> Imy, *Faithful Fighters*, p. 171.

<sup>53</sup> Quoted in George Morton-Jack, *The Indian Army on the Western Front: India's Expeditionary Force to France and Belgium in the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 262. Also see Gordon Corrigan, *Sepoys in the Trenches: the Indian Corps on the Western Front, 1914–1915* (Stroud: Spellmount, 1999).

<sup>54</sup> On the 'Indianisation' of the officer corps, see Partha Sarathi Gupta, 'The Debate on Indianization 1918–39', in Partha Sarathi Gupta and Anirudh Deshpande (eds.), *The British Raj and its Indian Armed Forces 1857–1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 228–69; Pradeep Barua, *Gentlemen of the Raj: The Indian Army Officer Corps, 1817–1949* (Westport: Praeger, 2003); Chandar S. Sundaram, *Indianization, the Officer Corps, and the Indian Army: The Forgotten Debate, 1817–1917* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2019). For a recent overview of British Islamophobia and its impact on official policy post-war, see Johan Matthew, 'Spectres of Pan-Islam: Methodological Nationalism and British Imperial Policy after the First World War', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 45 (2017), pp. 942–68.

<sup>55</sup> Sinha, *Spectres of Mother India*, *passim*.

Indian soldiers who played the system and bowed to the Christian military codes of the army were inevitably promoted ahead of those who resisted, but it was increasingly clear that calls to a 'peaceable' image of the United Kingdom did not sit comfortably with the continued violence and brutality of empire (notably the Amritsar Massacre in 1919).<sup>56</sup> As the end of the war gave way to the economic and political insecurities of the interwar period, however, resurgent nationalism and fears over the physical and moral strength of the British nation exposed the limits of racial integration within imperial armies.<sup>57</sup> 'Muscular Christianity' was tempered by the brutality of war, as well as impulses towards male domesticity. Spiritual and physical movements of the East such as yoga not only influenced the anticolonial left and esoteric/sexual subcultures, as Kate Imy notes, but also provided a gateway for fascist militants to shore-up brutalised masculinity. For some British men, the physical and emotional pain experienced at the hands of empire in the late nineteenth/early twentieth centuries drove them to alternate vehicles of expressing their masculinity such as Eastern spirituality and fascism. This pulling together of the ancient and the modern, the spiritual and secular, indicates the extent to which dominant imperial codes of masculinity continued to lacerate those already embittered by imperial service.<sup>58</sup>

Images of empire, and their connection to perceptions of masculinity, were clearly in a different place by the 'morbid age' of the interwar years compared to the mid to late nineteenth century.<sup>59</sup> Britain's handling of colonial religion was also starting to change. Grand notions of muscular Christianity and competitive imperialism of the Edwardian period shifted to more subtle articulations of Commonwealth, trusteeship, and internationalism following the First World War and in response to rising Indian nationalism.<sup>60</sup> Pacifist arguments had clear connections to the politics and rule of empire. Whilst some scholars note the rise of domestic, insular forms of masculinity post-1918, these were not incompatible with more traditional framings of heroic masculinity and popular imperialism.<sup>61</sup> Boyhood tropes of imperial and cultural conquest within the cultural imaginary, as Graham Dawson indicates, represented an

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<sup>56</sup> Lawrence, 'Forging a Peaceable Kingdom'.

<sup>57</sup> On the broader landscape, see Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska, 'Building a British Superman: Physical Culture in Interwar Britain', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 41 (2006), pp. 595–610. On the persistence and adaptation of martial race theory, see Singh, *The Testimonies of Indian Soldiers*, ch. 1.

<sup>58</sup> Imy, 'Fascist Yogis', p. 321.

<sup>59</sup> Richard Overy, *The Morbid Age: Britain and the Crisis of Civilisation, 1919–1939* (London: Allen Lane, 2009). Also see Susan Kent, *Aftershocks: The Politics of Trauma in Britain, 1918–1939* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

<sup>60</sup> Vosler, "Making His Way to the Heart of India", p. 61.

<sup>61</sup> Light, *Forever England*, pp. 8–10; Tosh, *Manliness and Masculinities*; idem, *A Man's Place*.

important counterpoint to visions of the domestic man. In some instances, racialised imagery of the colonial 'other' became more aggressive in this period; with a string of films, novels, and examples of pre-war children's literature emphasising the 'primitive', 'childlike', or 'savage' nature of non-white peoples.<sup>62</sup> As Alan Allport notes, many soldiers became increasingly 'empire minded' during the Second World War, as service in the exotic reaches of British rule (such as Egypt or the Middle East) provided men an opportunity to connect visions of empire with lived experience.<sup>63</sup> This romantic view of imperial service and travel, as we will see, had its limits. War in Asia, consisting of time spent in either existing imperial colonies or those within its orbit from 1942 onwards, was not a desired theatre of service by the younger generation called to arms across the military branches particularly the army (see fig. 5.1).<sup>64</sup> Moreover, the democratisation of the British (and Indian) army extended beyond the level of ORs. After defeat in France in 1940, it became increasingly clear to the War Office that enlistment of officers along elitist lines of the First World War was not sufficient to meet supply with demand. As a result, a vast influx of emergency commissioned officers (ECOs) were ushered into the army—54,000 by early 1941 and 210,500 by war's end.<sup>65</sup> Young civilians taking the reigns as junior officers constituted a regrettable scenario for some. For General Claude Auchinleck (previously commander of Anglo-French forces in Norway, 1940), the failures of the Norwegian campaign lay, at least in part, on the 'young' officers inexperienced in leadership. Similar criticisms were levied against younger officers after the fall of Singapore in early-1942 by both Churchill and other senior war staff, criticising the 'lazy' character of a 'leisure' generation who bore no resemblance to the unflinching heroes of the First World War.<sup>66</sup> The generations of civilian men who fought in the Second World War, born from around the turn of the century to the early interwar period, held multiple and sometimes conflicting views of empire, masculinity, and religion/belief. As we will see, army administration was forced to cater to these pluralised views in its handling of cross-imperial forces and its depiction of the enemy.

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<sup>62</sup> Dawson, *Soldier Heroes*, p. 66; Kelly Boyd, *Manliness and the Boys' Story Paper in Britain: A Cultural History, 1855–1940* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), ch. 7; Webster, *Mixing It*, pp. 127–8. Also see Michael Paris, *Warrior Nation: Images of War in British Popular Culture, 1850–2000* (London: Reaktion Books, 2000).

<sup>63</sup> Allport, *Browned Off and Bloody Minded*, p. 135.

<sup>64</sup> The 5.5 million men who served in the British armed forces represented roughly 45 per-cent of all men aged 15 to 49 in 1939; Fennell, *Fighting the People's War*, p. 64.

<sup>65</sup> Allport, *Browned Off and Bloody Minded*, p. 95.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 102–3.



**Figure 5.1** *Burma: 14<sup>th</sup> Army* (1945), Leslie Cole. Cole served as an official war artist for the WAAC from 1943. His first commission saw him depict the German seizure of Malta, and later the liberation of Bergen-Belsen concentration camp in Germany (*Death Pits at Bergen-Belsen*, 1945). From May 1945 Cole followed the Queen's Own Royal West Kent Regiment (part of 14<sup>th</sup> Army) in the Burma theatre (depicted above), illustrating the visceral world of jungle warfare.

Source: IWM, DoA, LD 5617

## FRAMING THE ENEMY

Compared to the ideological imperative of confronting Nazism and fascism more broadly in Europe, both the wartime state and British army needed a tangible justification for war in Asia.<sup>67</sup> Jungle warfare against Imperial Japan was waged thousands of miles away from home in a climate and environment unused to by the British, and, to the popular mind, made little difference to the primary outcome of the war (particularly from 1943).<sup>68</sup> Within official circles debate raged as to how far the public should be indoctrinated towards war against Japan.

<sup>67</sup> For more on the justification of war in the age of media and propaganda, see Jo Fox and David Welch, 'Justifying War: Propaganda, Politics and The Modern Age' in Jo Fox and David Welch (eds.), *Justifying War: Propaganda, Politics and The Modern Age* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp. 1–20.

<sup>68</sup> See MO FR 1887, 'People's Attitudes with regard to Fighting the Japanese when the European War is Over', 31 August 1943. The war stands forgotten even within contemporary cultural memory; Christopher Bayly and Tim Harper, *Forgotten Armies: Britain's Asian Empire and the War with Japan* (London: Penguin, 2004); Connelly, *We Can Take It!*, ch. 8.



When official propaganda initiatives were launched a range of racialised images were deployed, notably depictions of the Japanese as 'savage monkeys'.<sup>69</sup> More subtle attempts to present the war in Asia as a crucible of religious conflict slotted into wider imperial, and English nationalist, mentalities within the 'Just War' framework in which Christianity was framed as the orthodox antidote to Eastern heterodoxy.<sup>70</sup> MoI pamphlets produced by the Religious Division on the 'Japanese people' and 'Japanese psychology' (1943 and 1945 respectively) emphasised the pseudo-religious tribalism of Japan's negation of God as well as the 'cult' style worship of historical ancestors—mirroring MoI attempts to debase the fundamentally anti-Christian nature of Nazism and highlight the 'Christian contribution to our civilisation'.<sup>71</sup> The call for the defence of 'Christian civilisation' amongst Christian Conservatives, notably Stanley Baldwin and Lord Halifax during the interwar period and more famously Winston Churchill during the Battle of Britain, switched from the European nationalist challenge to the threat of Japanese imperialism from 1942 onwards as the war turned global.<sup>72</sup> Although Asian mysticism had increasingly gripped the attention of Theosophists and other spiritually inquisitive individuals from the turn of the century, its framing as heterodox opened the gateway for further comment on the 'irrationality', 'barbarity', and 'under-development' of the 'Orient'. More than for civilians at the home fronts, however, it was British, Commonwealth, and Allied soldiers who required ideological conviction in fighting, and continuing to fight, the Japanese from the War Office's perspective.

Engagement with the Imperial Japanese Army (IJA) required a different doctrine to British forces facing the Germans and Italians in North Africa and the Mediterranean. The lack of training for jungle warfare, particularly amongst Indian divisions, left British and Commonwealth troops unable to cope with the environmental and climatic conditions which intensified the IJA's 'driving

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<sup>69</sup> MacLaine, *Ministry of Morale*, pp. 273–4, 158–9.

<sup>70</sup> For a recent introduction to 'Just War' theory and Christian ethics, see Joseph E. Capizzi, *Politics, Justice, and War: Christian Governance and the Ethics of Warfare* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

<sup>71</sup> *The Japanese People* (London: Ministry of Information, 1943); *A Diagnosis of the Japanese Psychology* (London: Ministry of Information, 1945); MacLaine, *Ministry of Morale*, p. 159, 151. On the ethnic dimensions of war and the evocation of 'civilisation', see Victor Davis Hanson, *Carnage and Culture. Landmark Battles in the Rise of Western Power* (New York: Doubleday, 2002).

<sup>72</sup> Williamson, 'Christian Conservatives and the Totalitarian Challenge'; Grimley, *Citizenship, Community, and the Church of England*, ch. 5. For Churchill's speech, see Robert Rhodes James (ed.), *W. S. Churchill: Complete Speeches, 1897–1963* (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1974), p. 6238; Keith Robbins, *History, Religion, and Identity in Modern Britain* (London: Hambledon, 1993), ch. 14. Also see Richard Toye, *The Roar of the Lion: The Untold Story of Churchill's World War II Speeches* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

charge' of small unit, guerrilla warfare.<sup>73</sup> Between late 1941 and mid 1942, the IJA swept through Malaya and Burma, forcing a British-led retreat to India via Imphal. Counter offensives to re-take Burma were withheld for much of 1942—owing to the need for resources in North Africa and the Anglo-American invasion of Tunisia and Morocco—but by November, and into 1943, the First Arakan offensive provided an opportunity to engage the IJA by moving south and east through the Burmese jungle.<sup>74</sup> The result almost shattered troop morale. The 14<sup>th</sup> Indian Division, on its return from the Arakan, was effectively a 'psychiatric casualty' of the perceived 'fanaticism' of IJA engagement.<sup>75</sup> Morale improved slowly from late 1943 across British-led forces as a result of new jungle training methods inspired by the Australians in New Guinea, but for much of 1943 and beyond fear gripped both the rank-and-file as well as more senior British soldiers (even if belief in eventual victory persisted).<sup>76</sup> As Lieutenant-General Arthur E. Percival, appointed General Commanding Officer of Malaya in May 1941, noted in early-January 1942, the IJA's success relied more on 'weakening the morale of the troops than on any particular skill with his weapon'.<sup>77</sup> It was in this context that staff officers in the War Office and medical experts not only recognised the psychological roots of fear hampering morale, but sought to use psychological profiling as a way to deconstruct the perception of Japanese soldiers as invincible opponents and exploit any psychological weakness within IJA morale. At the core of such profiling lay racialised stereotypes of Japanese society and culture, crucially the 'indoctrinating' dynamics of state religion harnessed by the IJA. Whilst well-meaning from a research perspective, many of the analyses tended to stereotype and transmit insecurities over British and Allied ability to overcome the challenges of jungle warfare.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> British Library (hereafter BL), Archives and Manuscripts (hereafter AaM), India Office: Records of the Military Department (IOR/L/Mil), 17/20/28, Characteristics of Japanese Operations: compiled by Headquarters SWPA and forwarded by Wavell in March 1942; Fennell, *Fighting the People's War*, p. 191, 197. On the classic history of soldiers at the 'sharp end', see Ellis, *The Sharp End*.

<sup>74</sup> On the First Arakan offensive, see Major General S. Woodburn Kirby et al., *The War Against Japan: India's Most Dangerous Hour*, vol. II, (London: H.M. Stationary Office, 1957), ch. 15, 19, 20; Moreman, *The Jungle, the Japanese and the British Commonwealth Armies at War*, pp. 64–76; Fennell, *Fighting the People's War*, pp. 329–36.

<sup>75</sup> Mark Harrison, *Medicine & Victory: British Military Medicine in the Second World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 200. Also see Shephard, *A War of Nerves*, p. 221; Marston, *Phoenix from the Ashes*, ch. 3–4. This perception of the 14<sup>th</sup> Indian Division was, at least in part, a racialised view of South Asian soldiers' fighting ability.

<sup>76</sup> Douglas Ford, '“A Conquerable Yet Resilient Foe”: British Perceptions of the Imperial Japanese Army's Tactics on the India-Burma Front, September 1942 to Summer 1944', *Intelligence and National Security*, 18 (2003), pp. 65–90; Moreman, *The Jungle, the Japanese and the British Commonwealth Armies at War*, pp. 14–15.

<sup>77</sup> Quoted in Moreman, *The Jungle, the Japanese and the British Commonwealth Armies at War*, p. 31. For more on Percival, see Fennell, *Fighting the People's War*, p. 187.

<sup>78</sup> On this notion of 'military Orientalism' across time, see Patrick Porter, *Military Orientalism: Eastern War through Western Eyes* (London: Hurst, 2009).

As we have seen, psychiatrists and psychologists played a significant role across the three military branches, but the army's engagement with such medical and academic experts began after the evacuation of BEF forces from Dunkirk in May–June 1940. Drawing on psychiatrists from the Tavistock Clinic in Bloomsbury, London—founded by a former shell-shock doctor, Hugh Crichton-Miller, in 1920 in an effort to apply the lessons of psychiatric injury of the First World War to everyday civilian problems—the War Office made use of 'psychological consultants' in relation to 'personnel selection' and the treatment of soldiers in North Africa.<sup>79</sup> Whilst medical and psychological experts continued to assess and treat mental breakdown within British units in Asia as an integral aspect of morale, a separate, complimentary strand opened in which the new 'mental sciences' could be used to understand enemy psychology and exploit its weaknesses.<sup>80</sup> In late 1942, a report by the Royal Army Medical Corps (RAMC) concluded that the Japanese were essentially fatalistic; a position which could be exploited when the IJA command would 'inevitably' overstretch its troops due to an elevated sense of invincibility.<sup>81</sup> A further undated and unsigned War Office report, presumably written post-July 1943, connected rising Japanese militarism and national character with a fanatical sense of religious devotion. The IJA's ideological indoctrination was used upon its largely poor, agrarian base of fighters through *kokutai*; meaning the divine and racial superiority of certain nations and races over others.<sup>82</sup> From the Meiji Era (1868–1912), the architects of modern Japanese politics constructed a problematic vision of the nation in which sacred monarchical absolutism was bound with secular, representative democracy.<sup>83</sup> Separating Shinto (Japan's principle religion, translated literally as 'Way of *Kami*'/'Way of the Gods') into 'State Shinto' and 'Shrine Shinto' provided an ideological arm for the forced transmission of pseudo-religious nationalism.<sup>84</sup> Japan's

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<sup>79</sup> Shephard, *A War of Nerves*, p. 188, 162, 189; Fennell, *Combat and Morale*, pp. 97–103.

<sup>80</sup> Shephard, *A War of Nerves*, p. 230.

<sup>81</sup> Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine Library (WL), Royal Army Medical Corps Muniment Collection (RAMC), 1127/1, 'Periodical Notes on the Japanese Army, No. 1—Characteristics, Morale and Tactics, 1942'; Harrison, *Medicine & Victory*, p. 200. For more on Imperial Japan and religion, see Sheldon M. Garon, 'State and Religion in Imperial Japan, 1912–1945', *Journal of Japanese Studies*, 12 (1986), pp. 273–302.

<sup>82</sup> TNA, WO 208/1447, 'Characteristics and Morale of the Japanese Soldier', report on 'The Japanese Army', [nd]; Michael Snape, 'Front Line I: Armed Forces at War', in Richard Overy (ed.), *The Oxford Illustrated History of World War II* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 285. On the IJA's social makeup, see Meirion Harries and Susie Harries, *Soldiers of the Sun: The Rise and Fall of the Imperial Japanese Army* (London: Heinemann, 1991). David Hunter-Chester, 'Imperial Japanese Army Culture, 1918–1945: Duty Heavier than a Mountain, Death Lighter than a Feather', in Mansoor and Murray (eds.), *The Culture of Military Organizations*, pp. 208–25.

<sup>83</sup> Walter Skya, *Japan's Holy War: The Ideology of Radical Shinto Ultrnationalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), pp. 131–2.

<sup>84</sup> Skya, *Japan's Holy War*, p. 1; Susumu Shimazono, 'State Shinto and the Religious Structure of Modern Japan', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 73 (2005), pp. 1077–98.

expanding military capability, shocking the West with its defeat of imperial Russian forces during the Russo-Japanese war of 1904-5, did much to stabilise domestic political fears over the lack of cohesive nationalism, as did the use of Shinto to 'surround a doctrine of political absolutism [in the form of the emperor] with the final sanctions of religious belief.'<sup>85</sup> It was the army's use of religious nationalism that played a 'major part' in its 'governing [of] the nation'. 'On every occasion and in every ceremony', he indicated, the Japanese army and Government emphasised 'the divine origin of the Japanese race'. Stress was placed on the hero-worship of the Japanese Emperor as a 'living God' directly descended from the Sun Goddess:

All Japanese [people] regard the Emperor as a living God. It is an article of faith not to be questioned. They also believe that the Japanese are therefore superior to other races. Japanese children learn all this at an early age and are told - "You, yourself are nothing, you must give all to your Emperor".<sup>86</sup>

Indoctrinating children within the 'powerful and effective propaganda' of ultra-religious nationalism, it was suggested, formed the basis of strict regimentation and passivity amongst Japanese soldiers.<sup>87</sup> 'Japanese youths are also bound by many strict rules of conduct and official regulations and have already begun to think along fixed and regimented lines by the time they reach conscription age'.<sup>88</sup>

In providing useful analysis of Japanese society and culture, military officials, psychiatrists, clinical psychologists, and anthropologists attempted to profile the enemy in psychological, rather than overtly racial, terms. This was part of a broader shift in the history of the British Empire where race could no longer be used as a justifying tool.<sup>89</sup> It was also more difficult to discuss 'race' in this period given challenges to British imperial racism from America and Japan.<sup>90</sup> Yet the use of modern social-scientific techniques in creating detailed 'national character' studies led to a number of contradictions in which implicit racialised thinking formed the bedrock of stereotyping on Japanese culture and society.<sup>91</sup> Neo-Freudian in his approach, the

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<sup>85</sup> Daniel C. Holtom, *The National Faith of Japan: A Study in Modern Shinto* (London: Keegan Paul, 1965 [1938]), p. 138.

<sup>86</sup> 'The Japanese Army', p. 2.

<sup>87</sup> TNA, WO 208/1446, 'Characteristics and Morale of the Japanese Soldier', report on 'What the Japanese Equivalent of ABCA Teaches the Japanese Soldier', Major G. S., 3 May 1943, p. 1.

<sup>88</sup> 'The Japanese Army', p. 11.

<sup>89</sup> See Mrinalini Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity*, ch. 1; idem, *Spectres of Mother India: The Global Restructuring of an Empire* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

<sup>90</sup> Bayly and Harper, *Forgotten Armies*, p. 364.

<sup>91</sup> Peter Mandler, *Return from the Natives: How Margaret Mead Won the Second World War and Lost the Cold War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), p. 132. Also see Dower, *War Without Mercy*, ch. 6. For an approach stressing that 'ethnocentrism' and ideas around 'national character' were unsubstantial errors within War Office thinking distinct from overt racism, see John Ferris, "'Worthy of Some Better Enemy?": The

English anthropologist Geoffrey Gorer—influential in the creation of national character studies for propaganda purposes from late 1942 within the US Office of War Information (OWI)—captured the tension between racialised framings of the enemy with a desire to understand the functioning of hitherto obscure cultures.<sup>92</sup> Similar tensions were presented by Major John Kelnar to the RAMC.<sup>93</sup> Born in Russia before emigrating to Britain in 1914, Kelnar qualified from St Bartholomew's Hospital, London in 1936 before becoming a member of the British Psychoanalytical Society. Along with other army psychiatrists, Kelnar played a central role in the postwar creation of the Institute for Human Relations, Tavistock Institute. Joining the RAMC in 1942, Kelnar specialised in the psychological analysis of Japanese soldiers and their childhood upbringing as well as the rehabilitation of British POWs subjected to Japanese brutality.<sup>94</sup> Bolstering existing War Office assumptions about the corrosive qualities of Japanese military indoctrination from a psycho-analytical perspective, Kelnar argued that, from at least the seventeenth century, 'Japan remained isolated from external influences and continued to crystallise into a civilisation essentially feudal in nature'.<sup>95</sup> The intimate relationship between religion, myth, and history profoundly affected the Japanese attitude to war; 'Thus, for a Japanese the past flows into the present, he, as an individual, is merely a drop in the living stream of the Japanese race'.<sup>96</sup> Unquestioning devotion to the Emperor was achieved, so Kelnar urged, because of the efforts of Shinto revivalists in instilling a belief that Shinto Gods were the ancestors of the Japanese race and its emperors.<sup>97</sup> Authoritarian state religion formed the back-bone of the IJA's system of discipline and its ideological base.<sup>98</sup>

Whilst correctly identifying some aspects of Japanese religious culture, such as the sacred position of the Emperor, other observations were more difficult to support based as they were on crude reductionism. For Kelnar, the military instillment of regressive religious nationalism led to susceptibility to other harmful beliefs and deep-seated psycho-sexual conflicts. Existing discourse on the sexual mores of the 'Orient', underpinned by Christian notions of sexual

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British Estimate of the Imperial Japanese Army 1919-41, and the Fall of Singapore', *Canadian Journal of History*, 28 (2016), pp. 233-56.

<sup>92</sup> Mandler, *Return from the Natives*, p. 136.

<sup>93</sup> For more on the Freudian approaches to contemporary analysis of Japanese psychology, see Dower, *War Without Mercy*, pp. 123-33.

<sup>94</sup> 'Obituary: J. Kelnar, MRCS, LRPC', *British Medical Journal*, 10 March 1979, p. 693.

<sup>95</sup> TNA, WO 208/1447, Major John Kelnar, 'Report to the War Office on the Psychological Effect of Upbringing and Education on Japanese Morale', August 1944, , p. 8; Harrison, *Medicine & Victory*, p. 200.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

morality, found support in the expertise of psychoanalysis and psychiatry.<sup>99</sup> All Japanese soldiers, Kelnar urged, were sadomasochists.<sup>100</sup> By giving up their independence and individuality, an external power was needed to provide the Japanese soldier with a sense of purpose 'in order to acquire the strength that he needs as a compensation for his sense of individual insignificance'.<sup>101</sup> 'Eastern' susceptibility to fatalism and superstition was framed negatively, stripped of any positive connotations as coping mechanism identified in relation to the British combatant. Feelings of inferiority and 'fatalism' were characteristic of the machoistic aspects of the Japanese character, with attitudes towards life and death resigned to a higher power.<sup>102</sup> Descriptions of IJA soldiers' propensity towards fatalism were couched in language designed to effeminise. 'Deep emotional impulses of submission' towards authority rendered men subservient in combat, but such 'submission' had the potential to create volatility when men were located in positions of power—particularly with reference to violent outbursts towards women.<sup>103</sup> Kelnar concluded that the sadomasochist strain within Japanese national character, itself a product of intense spiritual manipulation, was born of the fundamental psychological conflict between insecurity and frustration, constituting an 'unconscious irrational escape'.<sup>104</sup>

In order to offer utility to the War Office and army in waging jungle warfare, Kelnar's report needed to provide operational and doctrinal solutions against the IJA. By August 1944, at the time of Kelnar's writing, British and Allied effectiveness in the Far East had dramatically improved. From mid to late 1943 the Allies began implementing devastating cross-branch operations; using the USSAF to secure air superiority before commencing amphibious landings, paratrooper descents, and deploying infantry.<sup>105</sup> The appointment of lieutenant general William Slim as commander of the newly named 14th Army (previously the Eastern Army) in August 1943 played a significant role in devolving much needed autonomy to officers at the ground level. Yet despite these transformations, IJA troops continued to perform 'jitter' raids, night-time

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<sup>99</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, pp. 166–7; John Maynard, *Victorian Discourses on Sexuality and Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993). On gender and sex in the context of empire and colonialism, see Linda Bryder, 'Sex, Race, and Colonialism: An Historiographical Review', *The International History Review*, 20 (1998), pp. 806–22; Phillipa Levine, 'Sexuality, Gender, and Empire', in Phillipa Levine (ed.), *Gender and Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 134–55. On medico-moral panics in Britain from the nineteenth century, see Frank Mort, *Dangerous Sexualities: Medico-Moral Politics in England since 1830* (London: Routledge, 1987).

<sup>100</sup> Harrison, *Medicine & Victory*, p. 200.

<sup>101</sup> 'Report to the War Office', pp. 21–2.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>105</sup> Todman, *Britain's War: A New World*, p. 518.

raids, and mass infantry charges to overwhelm and disorientate the enemy.<sup>106</sup> Perceptions of the Japanese soldier, infused with the 'occult' powers of the 'Orient', persisted alongside views of the jungle as a nightmare world of supernatural quality.<sup>107</sup> The fact that Kelnar's report made no attempt to offer solutions to continued Japanese resistance, in some cases praising IJA morale against the transformed Allied opposition, explains why the report had a limited general circulation below the level of regimental officers.<sup>108</sup> Due to his fatalistic beliefs, Kelnar urged, the typical Japanese soldier had an 'enormous capacity for suffering'. 'The Japanese is taught to accept the call to war in a fatalistic spirit, to go off, to fight, to be wounded or to die'.<sup>109</sup> Moreover, the primacy of the collective need trumping those of the individual meant that attitudes towards death were often framed in utilitarian terms. 'For a Japanese officer', Kelnar argued, 'the sacrifice of the lives of his men in the interests of loyalty would be condoned'.<sup>110</sup> Japanese troops were unlikely to panic due to the strong emphasis on collective strength. Although this morale was underscored by 'primitive emotional underlying forces' of a 'neurotic' kind, it was stressed that at least in appearance it fulfilled the characteristics of 'perfect morale'.<sup>111</sup> Ever concerned by the implications for military strategy, a senior member within the War Office, J. F. Leys, scribbled on the front of the report in pencil: 'Where is there a definitive statement of one or more traits of which we can take advantage of in war[?]' The report supposedly added little to the 'present literature' on how best to use the psychological make-up of the enemy as a weapon of war and, if anything, likely strengthened the disillusionment of senior officers engaged in a protracted and challenging style of combat.<sup>112</sup> Yet Kelnar's report dismantled the fundamental differences in the treatment of psychology (and the psychology of religion and belief) for those operating in democratic and authoritarian military institutions. Couched in racialised language, it captured British understandings of the limits to which religious/ belief cultures could be marshalled as a weapon to police the 'people's army'. Achieving 'perfect morale' meant stripping military institutions of their psychological, and fundamentally human, qualities.

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<sup>106</sup> Fennell, *Fighting the People's War*, p. 462; Todman, *Britain's War: A New World*, p. 527.

<sup>107</sup> Dower, *War Without Mercy*, p. 163.

<sup>108</sup> Harrison, *Medicine & Victory*, p. 201.

<sup>109</sup> 'Report to the War Office', p. 22, 24.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid. Kelnar's views here represent a reworking to historically racist assumptions that particular racial groups could 'endure' more pain than others. See Joanna Bourke, 'Pain Sensitivity: An Unnatural History', *Journal of Medical Humanities*, 35 (2014), pp. 301–19.

<sup>111</sup> 'Report to the War Office', p. 26, 28.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., title page.

The use of psycho-racial language in smearing Japanese religion and spiritual culture cut across Allied intelligence sharing, echoing attacks on German *Kultur* of the First World War.<sup>113</sup> The propaganda campaign against Japan intensified in 1943 as Lord Louis Mountbatten was given responsibility of the war in Burma and the creation of a new South-East Asia Command (SEAC). The British PWE, which combined responsibility for black and white propaganda, decided to expand its Washington Mission and augment the OWI broadcasts across the Pacific.<sup>114</sup> By late 1943 it was proposed that a central, cross-Allied department should exist through which British, Canadian, Australian, and American military psychologists could transfer information in constructing a psychological profile of the enemy.<sup>115</sup> Representing the MoI, 'Mr Redman' suggested the creation of a periodical review of the latest information for the Army Staff and its wealth of 'practical experience' in the area. It was agreed as a final point of order by the meeting's Chairman Lieutenant-Colonel N. M. Balchin to involve the US Department of Psychological Warfare. In view of the manpower shortage, it was suggested such work 'could be better undertaken by the Americans' and by March 1944 a new Foreign Morale Analysis Unit was created within the OWI.<sup>116</sup> Balchin agreed to contact Colonel Blakeney of the US Army to establish what level of research had already been completed—which in the context of December 1943 was already significant. In June 1943, for example, the Director of Military Intelligence filed a report with the Allied Translator and Interpreter Section (ATIS) of the South West Pacific Area (SWPA) for information on the psychology and habits of the Japanese. Particular emphasis was placed on obtaining information of direct military and operational value:

The British Military Mission in Australia requires the following information.

PSYCHOLOGY. Are there any indications of possible weaknesses in Japanese psychology of which advantage might be taken in future operations? e.g. Is he [the Japanese soldier] reluctant in night fighting, unhappy when isolated or affected by horrific noises in battle?

HABITS. Are Japanese soldiers stereotyped in their daily routine in forward areas, or do they continually adjust their habits to circumstances. If stereotyped, examples would be welcome [sic].<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Dower, *War Without Mercy*, *passim*.

<sup>114</sup> F. S. V. Donnison, *British Military Administration in the Far East, 1943-46* (London: H.M. Stationary Office, 1956), pp. 323–7; Christopher Thorne, *Allies of a Kind: The United States, Britain and the War against Japan, 1941-1945* (London: Hamilton, 1978), p. 162, 454, 591; Charles Cruickshank, *SOE in the Far East* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp. 222–3; Richard J. Aldrich, *Intelligence and the War against Japan: Britain, America and the Politics of Secret Service* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 177–8.

<sup>115</sup> TNA, WO 208/1446, 'Meeting on Japanese Morale', 21 December 1943.

<sup>116</sup> 'Meeting on Japanese Morale', 21 December 1943, p. 2.

<sup>117</sup> TNA, WO 208/1446, 'Allied Translator and Interpreter Section, South West Pacific Region: Information about the Japanese', 11 June 1943, p. 1.



Interrogation reports and captured documents from Japanese POWs formed the bulk of the evidence. Alongside the recommendation of continued night-time offensives, the report noted the utility of exploiting the Japanese propensity towards superstition. 'Beneath their impassivity, the Japanese are intensely superstitious', the report claimed.<sup>118</sup> It noted how a 'carefully planned assault on their superstitions', particularly in terms of launching Allied offensives on 'unlucky' days, could soften Japanese morale.<sup>119</sup>

Further reports concentrated on the psycho-religious underpinnings of Japanese soldiers' self-sacrifice through self-immolation. In April 1944, US Colonel Sidney F. Mashbir compiled a report on 'Self-Immolation as a Factor in Japanese Military Psychology', a copy of which was received in London the following month.<sup>120</sup> The Japanese 'compulsion' to self-immolation, Mashbir's report urged, had direct significance for Allied forces both in the immediate and longer terms:

The tendency towards self-immolation by the Japanese is of both immediate and long-range importance to our forces. Immediately, we seek clues to the probable behaviour of the enemy on the battlefield. It is important that we know why he so recklessly destroys himself, and how his decision may be influenced by us for military purposes. As the war goes on, knowledge of the deep-rooted Japanese attitude towards self-immolation to expiate failure under responsibility may be powerfully exploited in propaganda to affect morale, and possibly cause the suicide of many leaders.<sup>121</sup>

Explanations similarly blended points on Japanese history, culture, and religion. Japanese tradition featured a 'timeless quality of suicide', Mashbir suggested, as Shintoism actively encouraged death on the battlefield as a 'privilege'.<sup>122</sup> Similar to characterisations within British War Office reports, Mashbir's conclusions emphasised the 'emotional' and 'hysterical' nature of the Japanese soldier. 'The Japanese are a highly emotional people whose emotionalism is severely restrained'.<sup>123</sup> The deaths of leaders and comrades could often result in rank-and-file soldiers feeling 'rudderless', open to excessive displays of emotion, and prone to questioning the divine qualities of *kokutai*. Excerpts from translated Japanese POW diaries 'illustrate[d] this reaction clearly':

Isn't God protecting the Imperial Army? Ah, how tragic is this battlefield! Fellow comrades—are you going to let us die? Even the spirits of invincible Jap[anese] soldiers are despondent now. Please God...

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<sup>118</sup> 'Information about the Japanese', p. 6.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> TNA, WO 208/1447, 'Allied Translator Interpreter Section, South West Pacific Region Information Bulletin: Self-Immolation as a Factor in Japanese Military Psychology', 4 April 1944.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., p. 10, 13.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

(ATIS Current Translations No. 14, p. 21).<sup>124</sup>

War Office and RAMC reports on IJA psychology fused military intelligence and racial stereotyping in which operational, medical, and cultural treatments of the enemy were aligned.<sup>125</sup> Japanese religious culture formed a clear ideological gateway towards exploiting the IJA tactically for more senior members of the British army—cultural analysis which not only arose from the experience of battle but also worked to shape it.<sup>126</sup>

Was this mixture of ideology and military doctrine transmitted to the rank-and-file? Some form of ideological justification for jungle warfare was needed. As one morale report of mid to late 1943 indicated, British troops held a ‘complete lack of real enthusiasm’ for ‘beating the Japanese’, wishing instead to fight the German forces closer to home.<sup>127</sup> For William Slim, recalled from the Middle East to take charge of operations in Burma in August 1941, war in Asia constituted a higher ‘moral purpose’, but ideological notions needed to be made palatable to the real-world concerns of cross-Allied forces (an increasingly small proportion of which were British).<sup>128</sup> Racial hatred was instilled through Army Education and the more direct use of propaganda focusing on Japanese brutality towards British POWs, designed to unleash an aggression which would erase combatant apathy through ‘smash[ing]’ the ‘evil’ Japanese.<sup>129</sup> According to one historian, ‘hatred for the enemy...strengthened the will to war and kept British soldiers going in Burma’.<sup>130</sup> Whilst several army lectures on the characteristics of Japanese religious ‘fanaticism’ mimicked the arguments in the psychological reports almost verbatim, a significant strand within the War Office (and, as we have seen, within senior levels of Churchill’s wartime coalition) viewed and transmitted the view of the war as a broader ideological clash of religions.<sup>131</sup> This approach, in the context of Asia most notably, fed into wider racialised treatments of the

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<sup>124</sup> ‘Self-Immolation as a Factor in Japanese Military Psychology’, p. 7.

<sup>125</sup> Douglas Ford, ‘British Intelligence on Japanese Army Morale During the Pacific War: Logical Analysis or Racial Stereotyping?’, *Journal of Military History*, 69 (2005), pp. 439–74; Todman, *Britain’s War: A New World*, p. 98.

<sup>126</sup> On racialised and reductionist frameworks ‘stabilising battle’ through a feedback loop between battle experience, violence, and perceptions of the Japanese, see Barkawi, *Soldiers of Empire*, p. 230, 243.

<sup>127</sup> BL, AaM, Indian Office: War Staff Papers (IOR/L/WS) 1/939, Morale Report Aug.–Oct. 1943, Pt. I, British Troops, p. 9.

<sup>128</sup> Todman, *Britain’s War: A New World*, pp. 512–3.

<sup>129</sup> William Slim, *Defeat into Victory* (London: Landsborough Publications, 1956), pp. 209–10. See, for example, The National Army Museum (NAM), ‘Why Fight Japan?’, pamphlet produced by the Directorate of Army Education, 1945 (59). By this stage, the use of bloodlust tactics and the psychological use of ‘hate training’ had ceased, ending in May 1942; Shephard, *A War of Nerves*, pp. 232–33. For more on hate in the context of war, see Bourke, *An Intimate History of Killing*, pp. 151–68; idem, ‘Psychiatry, Hate Training, and the Second World War’, *Journal of Social History*, 52 (2018), pp. 101–20.

<sup>130</sup> Roy, ‘Discipline and Morale’, p. 1278.

<sup>131</sup> See, for example, NAM, 7304–1–2 ‘The Jap’, Lecture, Jungle Warfare School, Shimoga.

conflict—with the framing of Japanese religious ‘heterodoxy’ squared against ‘democratic’ Christianity. As we will see, this exposed a number of tensions in the context of an expanded ‘people’s war’ and through Britain’s position as imperial power. It also represented a site of conflict where officials sanctioned and encouraged deviation from the ‘temperate hero’ model of prized masculinity. For the War Office, hatred and aggression was needed to fuel the fires of combat in Asia.

Although the army paid ‘lip service’ to organised religion, Army Education initiatives impressed the religious significance of conflict in the context of Nazi and Japanese imperial expansion; threatening religious freedom of choice at a global scale and challenging underlying British assumptions over the image of Anglicanism as extension of democracy.<sup>132</sup> Unsatisfied with the existing work of the Army Bureau of Current Affairs (ABCA), the Directorate of Army Education Corps (AEC) began producing a series of monthly booklets entitled *The British Way and Purpose*, designed to ease War Office and Conservative Party fears over the left-leaning educational instruction of British troops.<sup>133</sup> Shipped to army instructors monthly, the first edition of *The British Way and Purpose*, titled *Citizens of Britain* and published in November 1942, focused on the democratic purposes of war and the need to preserve religious liberty.<sup>134</sup> Even before the onset of war against Japan, British soldiers were aware of the spiritual consequences of the fight against fascism and authoritarianism more broadly. The PWE also produced ‘pocket guides’ to foreign cultures for ordinary soldiers and more elaborate civil-affairs handbooks for military government, covering the religious traditions and cultures of the east.<sup>135</sup> Efforts to frame the conflict in Asia in such a way had their limits. As the compiler of one morale report for South-East Asian Command noted in late 1944/early 1945, any ‘widespread appreciation of a higher purpose in the war there is at present little sign’.<sup>136</sup>

Alongside army education, military chaplains played a significant role in framing the war in Asia as an ideological struggle between Christianity and heterodoxy. Whilst a number of Anglicans viewed Japanese civilisation favourably from the early twentieth century,<sup>137</sup> the

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<sup>132</sup> Allport, *Browned Off and Bloody Minded*, p. 257.

<sup>133</sup> MacKenzie, *Politics and Military Morale*, ch. 7.

<sup>134</sup> *The British Way and Purpose* (hereafter BWP) 1, ‘Citizens of Britain’, (London: Directorate of Army Education, November, 1942), p. 14; MacKenzie, *Politics and Military Morale*, p. 121.

<sup>135</sup> Cruickshank, *SOE in the Far East*, p. 223; TNA FO 898/483, Pocket Guide for Invasion Forces—Various Other Countries.

<sup>136</sup> TNA, WO 203/2355, Morale Reports, November, December 1944 and January 1945, p. 1.

<sup>137</sup> Mark Chapman, ‘Anglicanism, Japan, and the Perception of a Higher Civilization in the Early Twentieth Century’, *Anglican and Episcopal History*, 84 (2015), pp. 298–320.

experience of IJA POW camps tested newfound religious tolerance. Levels of brutality in Japanese POW camps were markedly higher compared to their European counterparts. Death rates, for example, stood at 27 per-cent in the former compared to 4 per-cent in the latter.<sup>138</sup> For the Anglican chaplain G. M. R. Bennett, held as a POW in a Hong Kong camp, captivity brought a deeper connection with God and understanding of the Bible.<sup>139</sup> Bible discussions, often instigated by chaplains for the benefit of prisoners, had the dual effect of bringing men closer together (and helping them process complex emotions surrounding death and loss) as well as strengthening divisions between East and West. For Ernest Gordon, captured Scottish captain of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, building the infamous Burma Railway through forced labour exposed differences between ‘Christian’ and ‘Oriental’ ethics:

We are seeing for ourselves the sharp contrast between the forces that made for life and those that are made for death. On occasions when we marched into the countryside on labour detail we saw [the former] in the actions of Christian natives, in the differences between the Christian way of life and the Oriental one.<sup>140</sup>

Framing the war in Asia as a struggle of competing cultures seemed to fit more naturally when targeted towards Indian soldiers for propagandists, given the significance of religion and religious difference within the eruption of nationalist politics at the Indian home front. In the context of poor training and insufficient pre-war funding, the Indian Army—which by the end of 1943 comprised almost two million men from an expanded social base beyond the ‘martial races’—was forced to rely on more visceral, deep-seated ideological convictions to support troop morale.<sup>141</sup> Before the war, Indian officers saw the Japanese military model as one to emulate.<sup>142</sup> By focusing Indian religio-nationalist tensions against Japanese disrespect for spiritual freedom, army propagandists hoped to simultaneously instill ideological justification for Indian willingness to fight and cloud anti-colonial nationalism against the British within the Indian Army. ‘Josh groups’, small discussions supported by print material designed to explain the war in Japan, spread atrocity propaganda with a religious edge (notably rape stories of Indian

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<sup>138</sup> Fennell, *Fighting the People's War*, p. 243; Simon P. MacKenzie, ‘The Treatment of Prisoners in World War II’, *Journal of Modern History*, 66 (1994), pp. 487–520. For a recent discussion on the experiences of POWs in the European context, see Clare Makepeace, *Captives of War: British Prisoners of War in Europe in the Second World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

<sup>139</sup> G. M. R. Bennett, ‘The Value of Faith to Prisoners of War’, *Royal Army Chaplains Department Journal*, 20 (1967), pp. 26–31.

<sup>140</sup> Ernest Gordon, *Miracle on the River Kwai* (London: Collins, 1972), p. 121.

<sup>141</sup> Todman, *Britain's War: A New World*, p. 505; Fennell, *Fighting the People's War*, p. 244.

<sup>142</sup> Cemil Aydin, *The Politics of Anti-Westernism in Asia: Visions of World Order in Pan-Islamic and Pan-Asian Thought* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), ch. 4, 7; Khan, *Raj at War*, pp. 112–13.

women in places of worship by IJA soldiers) as well as generating ‘invented conflicts’ between Indian cultural/religious practices and the Japanese.<sup>143</sup> Hindus, whose anti-imperialist zeal at the home front had been kept distant from the Indian Army due to its recruitment of largely rural, Muslim soldiers, were instructed that the Japanese were cruel to cattle and that they desecrated temples.<sup>144</sup> Other aspects of Asian religious culture were targeted—including stories of Sikh POWs being forced to shave their beards or Hindu and Muslim troops being made to handle or eat beef or pork.<sup>145</sup> The impact of such propaganda clearly had its limits, as face-to-face combat often taught soldiers to distrust what they were told.<sup>146</sup> But for those such as one Indian NCO who pleaded with ‘God’ to ‘bring destruction to this oppressor nation [Japan]’ British emphasis on the Asian theatre as a site of seismic religious conflict struck a chord.<sup>147</sup> Moreover, the religious ideologies of different ethnic regiments (Sikhism in Sikh regiments, Islam in the case of Muslims, and *parbartia* Hinduism in the case of Gurkha units) enabled the Indian other-ranks (IORs) to withstand the face of battle.<sup>148</sup> Battle cries of ‘*Saat Sri Akal*’ and ‘*Maro Nara Haidari ya Ali*’ were performed by Sikh and Muslim soldiers respectively in order to imbue combat with a spiritual edge.<sup>149</sup>

#### RELIGION, BELIEF, AND IMPERIAL WARFARE

Whilst the framing of war in Asia as an ideological and religious clash between heterodoxy and orthodoxy may have appealed to military authorities cognisant of the multi-national, multi-ethnic Commonwealth armies, it also raises deeper tensions in the context of imperialism. If ethnic difference and ‘othering’ created the dynamics of intensified combat in Asia as much as constituting its product, as Tarak Barkawi rightly highlights, this left the problem of how to handle the religious and spiritual convictions of the various Asian and African nationals who fought for the British as imperial soldiers.<sup>150</sup> Old colonial systems of knowledge clashed

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<sup>143</sup> Barkawi, *Soldiers of Empire*, p. 235.

<sup>144</sup> Barkawi, ‘Culture and Combat in the Colonies’, p. 328; idem, ‘Peoples, Homelands, and Wars?’, p. 158.

<sup>145</sup> Barkawi, ‘Peoples, Homelands, and Wars?’, p. 158.

<sup>146</sup> Bourke, *An Intimate History of Killing*, p. 165.

<sup>147</sup> NAM, Oriental and Indian Office (OICI), WS/2/71, Morale Reports, Nov. 1944–Jan. 1945. On the limits of the propaganda’s impact, see NAM, OICI, WS/1/1506, India Command Weekly Intelligence Summaries, 22 June 1945.

<sup>148</sup> Roy, ‘Discipline and Morale’, p. 1279.

<sup>149</sup> Lieutenant-General S.P.P. Thorat, *From Reveille to Retreat* (New Delhi: Allied Publishers, 1986), p. 72.

<sup>150</sup> Barkawi, ‘Peoples, Homelands, and Wars?’, p. 135.

against the new demands of jungle warfare. It also rubbed against the dynamics and projection of a cross-imperial *peoples'* war, a reality which stretched messages of imperial togetherness to the extreme.<sup>151</sup> Efforts to project the empire—in particular the Dominions and 'Commonwealth'—and its martial capabilities were of acute importance in bolstering images of British 'inclusivity' and 'diversity' to those 'absent minded' imperialists at home, and in light of growing US unease over British imperialism (see figure 5.2).<sup>152</sup> Language on the 'partnership' between Britain and its Empire was favoured.<sup>153</sup> Broader shifts in the battle for propaganda were also significant here. Conflict with Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan brought further challenges to the repressive, racist underpinnings of British imperialism. By drawing attention to the role of colonial forces fighting at Britain's behest in Southeast Asia, British propagandists tempered their depiction and description of imperial and colonial peoples and soldiers. This had knock-on effects in the military context. Army leaders were responsible for maintaining soldiers' cohesion, morale, and fighting ability—factors complicated by the presence of combatants' religions and beliefs in pan-imperial armies. But more so than perceptions of the Japanese, ideas about colonial peoples were inherently ambivalent. This was especially true of Indian subjects, whose presence was felt in both the metropole and military. Interactions with colonial soldiers constituted a very different experience of the 'Other' for British soldiers; one which resulted in various opinions on colonial religion and belief.

### *Imperial Armies and Cultures of Religion and Belief*

Concerted efforts were made to both preserve and encourage religious pluralism within the British Indian Army. Mirroring the British army's image as a religiously 'democratic' institution, the Indian army was designed to cater to the multi-culturalism of its rank-and-file. Techniques intended to achieve this, and engender loyalty to British authority by segregating regiments by ethnicity, class, and religion, were couched in colonial systems of knowledge and power.<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>151</sup> Wendy Webster, *Englishness and Empire 1939–1965* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 25.

<sup>152</sup> Toby Haggith, 'Citizenship, Nationhood, and Empire in British Official Film Propaganda', in Richard Weight and Abigail Beach (eds.), *The Right to Belong: Citizenship and National Identity in Britain, 1930–1960* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1998), pp. 59–88; Thomas Hajkowski, 'The BBC, Empire, and the Second World War, 1939–1945', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 22 (2002), pp. 135–55; Siân Nicholas, "'Brushing Up Your Empire": Dominion and Colonial Propaganda on the BBC's Home Services, 1939–45', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 31 (2003), pp. 207–30. Also see Bernard Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists: Empire, Society, and Culture in Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

<sup>153</sup> Webster, *Englishness and Empire*, p. 26.

<sup>154</sup> Barkawi, *Soldiers of Empire*, *passim*. For more on India's war, see Yasmin Khan, *India at War: The Subcontinent and the Second World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).



Figure 5.2 *The British Commonwealth of Nations—Together*

Source: IWM, DoA, PST 8457

Restructuring the Indian Army in the aftermath of the 1857–58 rebellion, British officials were anxious to recruit on ethnic and religious lines (typically the favoured ‘martial races’ such as Sikhs), and ensure ethnic groups retained their ‘traditional’ religious customs within the modern army structure. This process of shaping colonial masculine religion continued during the First World War but became more problematic in the Second, in part due to over-recruitment of ‘martial’/northern Indian troops but also because of the structural changes war in the Burmese jungle unleashed, demanding as it did more manpower. By the summer of 1942, over-recruitment of ‘martial races’ in the Punjab forced recruiters to widen their criteria for manpower and include intake from areas such as Madras, Bengal, and Bihar.<sup>155</sup> At its height, the Indian Army in Asia, (inclusive of both officers and men) boasted roughly 700,000 Indian and 56,000 African soldiers. In terms of divisions, the British only had two, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 36<sup>th</sup>.<sup>156</sup>

<sup>155</sup> Fennell, *Fighting the People’s War*, pp. 67–8.

<sup>156</sup> Kaushik Roy, ‘Expansion and Deployment of the Indian Army during World War II: 1939–1945’, *Society for Army Historical Research*, 88 (2010), p. 263; idem, ‘Discipline and Morale’, p. 1261. Also see Alan Jeffreys, *Approach to Battle: Training the Indian Army During the Second World War* (Solihull: Helion & Company, 2017); Kaushik Roy, *Battle for Malaya: The Indian Army in Defeat, 1941–1942* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press,

As part of a major, centralised bid to democratise and expand imperial armed service, Claude Auchinleck's appointment as Commander-in-Chief India (June 1943) did much to widen Indian recruitment and blend martial, non-martial, and British forces within regiments. Yet, as we will see, the imperial tensions undercutting the religious separation and facilitation of the 'martial races' jarred against Auchinleck's democratic model. Expanded recruitment of colonial forces in the 'people's war' context highlighted the heterodox underpinnings of out-dated religious separation at the heart of martial race theory. 'Orthodoxy', or rather the forced *imposition* of orthodox religious instruction, could be used to define acceptability of belief—an ideal which crumpled in the face of small unit, hand-to-hand combat.<sup>157</sup>

Official acceptance of Indian religious pluralism bound British and Indian soldiers as well as aggravating tensions between them. Officers were responsible for the personal care of the rank-and-file within the Indian Army, extending to their religious and cultural sensibilities.<sup>158</sup> Age and class were significant factors here. As Kaushik Roy notes, British Emergency Commissioned Officers (ECOs) who joined the Indian Army towards the end of the war were often less racially and culturally prejudiced towards their Indian troops compared to the pre-war, regular officer corps more resistance to institutional change.<sup>159</sup> Yet officers with greater first-hand experience of managing Indian regiments were more accustomed to accommodating the spiritual 'needs' of particular ethnic groupings as well as using the knowledge of VCOs (Viceroy's Commissioned Officers) (see figure 5.3). For John Randle, a Pathan company commander in 7/10 Baluch in his early twenties in 1942, inexperience and lack of instruction on Muslim religious customs on his arrival in India in mid 1941 caused tension with his Pathan VCO. Unaware of the taboo status of dogs within Muslim religion, Randle angered his VCO when allowing his pet pi-dog to drink milk from his tea-cup saucer (leading to Randle's acceptance of fault but annoyance at the VCO for not fully informing him about the potential discord the dog could cause).<sup>160</sup> The more time British officers spent leading Indian troops, the more they came to rely on their VCOs for guidance on maintaining officer-man relations through religion. For

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2019). Over the course of the war, the number of Indian men who joined the Indian Armed Forces stood at over two million; Indivar Kamtekar, 'A Different War Dance: State and Class in India 1939–1945', *Past and Present*, 176 (2002), p. 190. For more on Indian service outside the Asian theatre, see Ghee Bowman, *The Indian Contingent: The Forgotten Muslim Soldiers of Dunkirk* (Cheltenham: The History Press, 2020).

<sup>157</sup> For more on Auchinleck, Slim, and Wavell, see John Keegan (ed.), *Churchill's Generals* (London: Cassell Military, 2005).

<sup>158</sup> Roy, 'Military Loyalty in the Colonial Context', p. 527.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 522.

<sup>160</sup> Quoted in Barkawi, *Soldiers of Empire*, pp. 59–60.





Figure 5.3 British major, two Indian other ranks, and a VCO (11<sup>th</sup> Sikh regiment somewhere in Burma)

Source: IWM, DoP, IND 3647

Francis Ingall, commander of the 6<sup>th</sup> Bengal Lancers (8<sup>th</sup> Indian Division), fighting in north Italy in April 1945 in his mid thirties, balancing the needs of both high-caste Hindus and Muslims required the knowledge of the Regimental Resaldar-Major: 'In the Indian Army all religious beliefs are sacrosanct...I wanted to be sure I did the right thing'.<sup>161</sup> Some officers, including more senior commanders, adopted the religious and cultural practices of their Indian troops in order to facilitate officer-man relations, physically embodying strengthened ties between them. Major P. H. Gadsdon of the 14<sup>th</sup> Punjab Regiment (7<sup>th</sup> Indian Division), born in 1883, was commended by his Sikh troops for growing a full dark beard rolled under the chin.<sup>162</sup> In Muslims companies British officers often fasted for Ramadan with troops.<sup>163</sup>

Alongside Indian, Nepalese, and Burmese troops, British soldiers of the 14<sup>th</sup> Army fought with men enlisted from West and East Africa. Unlike the dominion status afforded to South Africa, colonial holdings in the sub-Saharan—including the Gold Coast, Gambia, Sierra Leone

<sup>161</sup> Francis Ingall, *The Last of the Bengal Lancers* (London: Cooper, 1988), pp. 97–8.

<sup>162</sup> IWM, DoD, Major P. H. Gadsdon (78/6/1), untitled memoir, p. 37.

<sup>163</sup> Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, Private Papers (hereafter PP), Lt. Col. S. P. Fearon; Barkawi, *Soldiers of Empire*, p. 46.

and Nigeria to the West and Kenya, Uganda, Tanganyika, Zanzibar, and Pemba to the East—were milked of material and economic resources by the metropole.<sup>164</sup> Plans for drawing upon African manpower were outlined between the War Office, Colonial Office, and the various colonial governments from mid October 1939.<sup>165</sup> Whilst African divisions played an important role in the early years of the war—guarding France’s western frontier in September 1939 and providing essential aid to Waygand’s army during the fall of France in 1940—recruits became essential into late 1941 as Britain’s war turned global.<sup>166</sup> Supporting Slim’s 14<sup>th</sup> Army, engagement with the IJA in Burma represented the first operation undertaken by the Royal West African Frontier Force (RWAFF) outside of Africa.<sup>167</sup> Within 14<sup>th</sup> Army, West and East African forces were divided into separate regiments, the 81<sup>st</sup> West African Infantry Division and 82<sup>nd</sup> East African Infantry Division. Best estimates suggest around 56,000 African troops served in Burma with 14<sup>th</sup> Army, the number extending to 100,000 when accounting for troops stationed in India and Ceylon.<sup>168</sup>

Owing to the need for English literate, mission-educated men, expansion in African recruitment greatly increased the number of African Christians, especially within the RWAFF.<sup>169</sup> African Muslims represented another large religious grouping, whilst official sources noted the small minority of soldiers practising indigenous customs and rituals. In response to a lecture given by General Sir William Platt (Commandant of the Sudan Defence Force) on the history of East African military forces, General Sir George James Giffard noted that roughly 25 per-cent of the men were ‘pagans’ compared to 2 per-cent who were Christian. By 1945, the numbers had switched to 20 per-cent and 47 per-cent respectively.<sup>170</sup> Condemnation of traditional beliefs in superstition and the supernatural within Indigenous African culture—alongside notions that potions, charms, and talismans could protect men in battle from death—lent Giffards’ assumptions a distinctly Orientalist zeal.<sup>171</sup> Yet given the prevalence of magical and

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<sup>164</sup> Jackson, *The British Empire*, p. 173. For more on the passing of the 1939 Emergency Powers (Defence) Act, see Chima J. Korieh, *Nigeria and World War II: Colonialism, Empire, and Global Conflict* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), pp. 46–8.

<sup>165</sup> Korieh, *Nigeria and World War II*, p. 118.

<sup>166</sup> David Killingray, ‘African Voices from Two World Wars’, *Historical Research*, 74 (2001), p. 425.

<sup>167</sup> Korieh, *Nigeria and World War II*, p. 125.

<sup>168</sup> Bernard Waites, ‘Black Men in White Men’s Wars’ in Bourne, Liddle and Whitehead (eds.), *The Great World War*, vol. II, p. 258; Roy, ‘Discipline and Morale’, p. 1261; Korieh, *Nigeria and World War II*, p. 126.

<sup>169</sup> David Killingray, *Fighting for Britain: African Soldiers in the Second World War* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2010), p. 111.

<sup>170</sup> William Platt, ‘The East African Force: The War and the Future’, *Journal of the Royal United Services Institute*, 93 (1948), p. 413

<sup>171</sup> Killingray, *Fighting for Britain*, p. 111.

ritualistic practices within the British army they also reveal something of the age and generational differences between the spiritual biases of certain pre-war officers and ECOs/rank-and-file willing to adopt a more holistic view of beliefs and religions.

*Navigating the Politics of Belief*

In the facilitation of multiple religious cultures, British officers were forced to engage with a range of religious rites, rituals, and customs—ranging from burial practices to food preparation and extending to issues over military uniform. A mix of instructional information and propaganda was deployed to impress the potential consequences of a widespread perception of cross-ethnic imperial beliefs as heterodox amongst both the British officer corps and the rank-and-file; facilitating a level of spiritual tolerance. Controlling attitudes were largely focused on Indian troops and their ‘religions’. In March 1944, for example, the *British Way and Purpose* noted how ‘care’ must be taken not to offend cultural and spiritual sensibilities due to the ‘sensitive’ nature of religious tensions in India. Similar advice was given to those interacting with Indian soldiers and civilians; making a ‘point of learning a few simple facts about *their* customs [emphasis added]...may save you giving offence when you do not mean to do so’.<sup>172</sup> In other places more comprehensive sources of information on India’s religious and cultural history alongside sizeable lists of recommended reading were provided, the vast majority of which were unsurprisingly written solely by British authors.<sup>173</sup> Ambiguities frequently came to the surface however, alongside tensions in the continued transmission of ‘martial race’ discourse. Service magazines such as *Victory* attempted to facilitate pro-Indian sentiment through explanation of Indian religious cultures. In August 1944, for example, a piece on the centrality of Ganesh (the Hindu elephant God) was printed to coincide with the Ganesh-Chautarthi festival.<sup>174</sup> Noting the ‘particular importance’ of the festival to Hindus, the article briefly explained the mythology behind it and the significance of the ‘clay models’ sculpted in the image of Ganesh. ‘Clay images of the god are brought home on the day of the festival, installed ceremonially and worshiped’. ‘No Hindu will ever forget to worship him [Ganesh] on this day of the festival. According to them... Ganesh has the power to grant that much sought-

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<sup>172</sup> BWP 16, ‘You and the Empire’, March 1944, p. 473.

<sup>173</sup> ‘Some Books about India’, Cyril J. Davey, *Victory*, 8 December 1944, p. 27.

<sup>174</sup> ‘The Worship of Ganesh: Hindu’s God of Good Beginnings’, *Victory*, 21 August 1944, pp. 9–10. For more on service magazines broadly, see Simon P. MacKenzie, ‘*Vox Populi*: British Army Newspapers in the Second World War’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 24 (1989), pp. 665–81.

after goal'.<sup>175</sup> In others, traditional colonial mentalities were advanced. 'Under the influence of Western education', the 1944 *BWP* instructional pamphlet on empire argued, 'many Hindus tend to break away from the more narrow restrictions [of caste]', whilst Indian Muslims were described as 'backward' in educational ability and 'fanatical' in defence of the Islamic faith.<sup>176</sup> Educational instruction materials and service magazines provided information in different forms to British soldiers—the former a set of 'notes' designed to be adapted and embellished through oral communication compared to the more privatised reading of print-information. Yet the public and private discourse on the 'acceptability' of Indian religious pluralism was inconsistent because of the need to sanction Eastern belief forms, for centuries defined as heterodox. Occidental visions of the 'irrational', 'fanatical' East cut across framings of the enemy and the empire—exposing tensions in the official/cultural perception of the contemporary imperial armed project and narratives of a democratic 'people's war'.

The tensions within army attempts to promote cross-ethnic religious harmony, notably between British and Indian soldiers, can be seen in other examples and at the highest levels of political power. Churchill's volatility towards Asiatic and world religions from the late nineteenth century is well documented. In *The River War*, an account of the reconquest of Sudan by British/Egyptian forces of which Churchill was a part, Islam, or 'Mohammedanism', was described as imparting a 'fanatical', 'fatalistic...sensualism'.<sup>177</sup> In later writings Churchill's more focused distain for the 'atrocious' aspects of Hinduism were compounded by the rising nationalist challenge at the Indian home front.<sup>178</sup> In the aftermath of the Quit India movement, launched by the Hindu dominated All-India Congress Committee, Leo Amery (then Secretary of State for India and Burma) recalled Churchill's outbursts on hating 'beastly' India and its 'beastly religion', here meaning Hinduism rather than the more favourable monotheistic religion of Islam.<sup>179</sup> Churchill's volatility towards Hindus found more focused poignancy for the Indian Army in 1943, calling as he did for a dramatic reduction in its size following major defeats at the hands of the IJA—again perceived as a failure of non-martial soldiers of non-Muslim and non-Sikh stock. As Warren Dockter indicates, Churchill's more dramatic views

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<sup>175</sup> 'The Worship of Ganesh', p. 9.

<sup>176</sup> *BWP* 16, 'You and the Empire', March 1944, pp. 479–80.

<sup>177</sup> Winston S. Churchill, *The River War: An Historical Account of the Reconquest of Soudan*: vol. II (London: Longmans & Co, 1899), pp. 248–50.

<sup>178</sup> Churchill Archives Centre (hereafter CAC), Chartwell Papers (hereafter CHAR) 2/153/30, Letter from Winston S. Churchill to Josiah Wedgwood, 18 August 1927.

<sup>179</sup> John Barnes and David Nicholson (eds.), *The Empire at Bay: The Leo Amery Diaries: 1929–1945* (London: Hutchinson, 1988), p. 832.

of the Islamic and Asian worlds, and by extension world religions, must be placed in proper historical context. Just as his views on India's 'beastly religion' were tied to the specific context of the Quit India movement, his comments in *The River War* were directed specifically towards the fundamentalist Islamic Dervish population of Africa than all Muslims as a collective.<sup>180</sup> Yet Churchill's appreciation of the British Empire's 'civilising' mission was fundamentally rooted in the Judeo-Christian tradition.<sup>181</sup> As we have seen, overtly racist and more subtly racist attitudes towards colonised peoples continued within the military context of the war. Tied to long-term imperialist categories of ascription, judgements that cast Indian and African soldiers as 'fanatical' and 'superstitious' were difficult to dislodge. As Wendy Webster argues of the postwar period, any democratisation brought about by the war was fleeting. Despite efforts to present Empire in more inclusive terms during the war, the postwar period saw an increase in the language of racial and national difference.<sup>182</sup> Any analysis of the wartime pull towards ethnic cohesion in the context of empire and imperial conflict—significant as this might have been—must be cognisant of short-term impact this had post-1945.

Narratives of spiritual and cultural 'togetherness' within the armed context were also flawed because of their tendency to plaster over the complexity of lived experience. Tensions exposed themselves in subtle as well as aggressively racialised forms. When insubordination or, in more extreme cases, defection to the Indian National Army occurred (a nationalist army under the command of the Japanese and opposed to British imperialism) was often initially squared in religious terms. In March 1943, for example, an investigation into the large numbers of INA defections found it was Sikh soldiers, the archetypal 'martial race', which were to blame.<sup>183</sup> Officials identified the forced wearing of steel helmets (instead of traditional turbans) as the root of the problem alongside extensive communication networks between low-level Sikh rebels and Sikh NCOs known for orchestrating mass desertions. In future reports, however, religious factors were quickly dropped in favour of blaming Communist *agents provocateurs*.<sup>184</sup> Moreover, it became increasingly clear to army administration that attempts to artificially foster religious harmony between British and Indian soldiers along

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<sup>180</sup> Dockter, *Churchill and the Islamic World*, p. 8.

<sup>181</sup> Richard Toye, *Churchill's Empire: The World That Made Him and the World He Made* (London: Macmillan, 2011).

<sup>182</sup> Webster, *Imagining Home*; idem, *Englishness and Empire*.

<sup>183</sup> BL, Aam, IOR/L/WS/1/1576, 'Extracts from "Security" History of "X" Battalion', March 1943, *Indian National Army and Free Burma Army*, vol. 1.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid; Singh, *The Testimonies of Indian Soldiers*, p. 165.

colonial lines not only rubbed against the dynamics of multi-ethnic, multi-cultural armies. It also detracted from the growing interest of Indian troops in unit tradition and military identity. As one military censorship summary from June 1943 indicated, 'unit tradition' and 'identity' were more significant factors in generating cross-ethnic cohesion than upholding caste divisions rooted in religious difference.<sup>185</sup> Both ethnicity and religious belonging were malleable within the context of imperial armies—a fact of colonial martial organisation relied on by the British from at least the mid nineteenth century.<sup>186</sup>

Ultimately, the colonial ordering of religion could not with-stand the demands placed upon it by the dynamics of total war, a process began between 1914–1918 and finalised from 1942 onwards. This was driven partly by the dynamics of warfare and battle, as Tarak Barkwai argues, but also because of transformations in British army doctrine and the army's social composition.<sup>187</sup> How far were the newly trained civilian officers and infantry, largely drawn from the middle-class and lower-working class respectively, influenced spiritually by their exposure to the religious plurality of the Indian Army and India more broadly? Much has been written on British imperial efforts to massage and manipulate native religious traditions through the eye of the colonist (particularly in the Indian case), rightly incorporating post-colonial perspectives on the governance of sepoy culture. But what of the impact of Asian religions on British soldiers sent to Asia? Did close proximity to fellow Indian, African, Nepalese, and Burmese soldiers, and time spent in the Pacific, alter perceptions on the acceptability of non-Christian religious/folk tradition and wider cultures of belief? Part of the problem in answering the question lies in the types of available source material. Contemporary diaries and letters, and even more so postwar memoirs, were disproportionately penned by middle-class officers/officer veterans. As the following examples suggest, however, a good deal of variation existed on perceptions of Asian religions and cultures of belief within wartime martial masculinity. Whilst familiar narratives of intolerance and stigmatisation continued during the war, so too did sentiments of tolerance and, in many examples, desires to convert to Hinduism and Islam.

Examples of Asian cultural beliefs impressing on British soldiers in the interwar period continued during service in the Asian theatre. In many cases, hostility towards them was

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<sup>185</sup> BL, Aam, IOR/PJ/12/655, Middle East Military Censorship Fortnightly Summary covering Indian Troops, No. CL, 16 June–29 June, 1943.

<sup>186</sup> Tarak Barkawi, 'Army, Ethnicity, and Society in British India', in Kaushik Roy (ed.), *The Indian Army in the Two World Wars* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), p. 423.

<sup>187</sup> Barkawi, *Soldiers of Empire*, *passim*.

common. Recognition of the similarities between European and Asian belief cultures were evident in N. P. Smith's records of time spent in India as a young clerk in the Royal Army Service Corps (RASC). Smith's journey to India was arduous. Sailing from Gourock through the Suez Canal aboard *SS Ranchi* (a P&O liner) to Bombay in September 1944, Smith (in his late twenties at the time) was clearly critical of Indian society and culture. Colonial and classed attitudes were never far from the nib of his pen when documenting his experiences. In a moment of relief trekking through rural India, Smith described the 'hideous', 'plentiful' presence of wayside shrines—a different landscape to the industrial Leeds he was used to as an adolescent:

I had a walk during the morning sunshine around some ruined mosques... Could not get inside, as they are all bricked up. Incidentally the nights here are filled with the howling of jackals and hyenas, mostly I imagine in these wayside shrines which are so plentiful in India. Just a very crudely built affair, quite small, and containing a small, hideous idol, painted in all kinds of bright colours and with offerings of fruit and glowers in its feet, along with jars of water.<sup>188</sup>

Religious festivals such as the 'Jaganath Festival', described by Smith as similar to those in Britain but a 'really most ridiculous' affair, smacked of Occidental perceptions of eastern 'heterodoxy'.<sup>189</sup> Parading idols of Jaganath for ritual cleaning in rivers, with all its 'shreik[ing]' and 'jump[ing]' was one thing, but other aspects of cultural belief went beyond an amused disapproval. His understanding of practices in what he termed the 'Temple of Fertility' crossed sexual and moral mores, exposing gendered tensions:

One of the horrible practices I came across, about 8 miles from Delhi, in a temple there, the nearest English translation to which one can get is the Temple of Fertility. It is only a very small place, containing an idol, upon which girls of around 12 years old are taken for certain purposes which must be most revolting. Parts of the idol are covered with layers of blood, which is evidently removed. The practice is supposed to ensure that the girls taken there will be capable of having families, which appears to be the main task of women in India.<sup>190</sup>

Other examples reveal the pull towards alternative belief forms for reasons of genuine interest and understanding beyond morale management and combat cohesion. For J. F. R. Jackson, a young member of the Royal Signals stationed in Bombay in the 1940s, ignorance of Indian beliefs amongst British officers was rooted in wider indifference towards intellectual and spiritual growth.<sup>191</sup> Engaging held the possibility of cross-cultural synergy as well as genuinely life-changing experiences. For individuals like Jackson, born in the 1920s into a

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<sup>188</sup> IWM, DoD, Papers of N. P. Smith (07/20/1), diary, n.d., p. 18.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid., p. 63

<sup>190</sup> Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>191</sup> IWM, DoD, Papers of J. F. R. Jackson (15/20/1), diary, n.d., pp. 28–9.

working-class family and aware of the social/economic hardship of the depression, military service provided an opportunity to experience global cultures and religions. His opinions here, particularly in reference to the way interactions with Sikh soldiers enhanced his everyday life in-between active service, warrants quoting at length:

Even on active service after a hard day[s] work...they always find time to erect a tent which is known as their Ghudwara (church). Every available man gets to work on it and inside it is decorated most lavishly with silks...They have a book similar to the Bible, the outside cover being of gold. No European is allowed to even see this book and whenever their unit is on the move, a truck is always allocated with [a] Sikh driver and one man to act as guard over the book. Also, nobody other than their own caste is allowed in this church. Whenever they go in they remove their boots or shoes. For music, they have a sort of miniature harmonium complete with stops...I have lain in bed many Sunday mornings listening to their service which starts about five o'clock in the morning and goes on till about nine. It is conducted in a language distinct from the language they normally speak in, and the music is typically Eastern, sometimes you think you are going to break into a dance tune of the Unfinished Symphony or to find it is just one of those tunes that remind you of something...To anyone who does not understand music is must be some unholy row. But I found after listening to it for three years that there was in its own class, a certain melody and rhythm about it that is hard to define but which can be understood. Living as I did with these people for so long and getting on so well with them, there came a time when, under great secrecy and ceremony, I was allowed to enter their church and look at the Golden Book which is written in Punjabi. There are, I believe, few European people indeed who have ever been allowed this privilege.<sup>192</sup>

Such examples, it must be noted, were not isolated to the context of service in Asia and time spent in the sub-continent. Examples from across the war, and in different contexts, point to the enduring impact of various beliefs on mid twentieth century martial masculinity. Many soldiers were comfortable with South Asians, having fought or trained with them prior to the onset of war. One British major of Shirley Common, Derbyshire, delighted in being sent a copy of the 'beautiful' Quran by 'Imam Sahib' of Woking. 'It was kind of you to send me such a beautiful copy of the Qur-án. I shall treasure it greatly and will ensure that it accompanies me wherever I go during this war. My intention is to read and digest a small portion each night'.<sup>193</sup>

Letters of correspondence within the *Islamic Review*, a magazine founded in 1913 covering Islamic theology and other points of interest which gained a wide circulation within European circles, attest to noticeable undercurrents of interest in Islam within the wartime army. This experience of the 'Other' often had the potential to foster cultural cohesion, challenging imbalances of power at the heart of Edward Said's reading of imperial/colonial interactions.<sup>194</sup> Some were interested in learning more about the faith by requesting English copies of the

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<sup>192</sup> Papers of J. F. R. Jackson, diary, n.d, p. 27.

<sup>193</sup> 'Correspondence', Major J. G. W., *Islamic Review*, April 1941, p. 157 [letter dated 1 July 1940].

<sup>194</sup> Said, *Orientalism*.



Quran, whilst others (such as the Librarian of Souther Hospital, Dartford) sent thanks to the Imam of Woking for sending a parcel of literature for the 'wounded soldiers'.<sup>195</sup> Others were clear in their sincerity on converting. For G. E. Smith, a rank-and-file soldier whose service location and regiment are unknown, revealing his intention to convert to Islam to his Sergeant-Major proved a transformative moment. 'He of course showed some slight concern but said he had known Muslims while serving in Egypt and India'.<sup>196</sup> Service with English and Asian Muslims alike fuelled interest in Islam amongst fellow soldiers. As one soldier of the BEF (unknown rank) stated: 'For some years now I have been deeply interested in Islam...I had the great fortune to meet an English Muslim...who has been more than patient in instructing me where I have been at all uncertain'.<sup>197</sup> Private Anthony B. Pawle, serving in the Indian Cavalry and the British Army in India from May 1940, professed in September 1944 to the Woking Muslim Mission (publishers of the *Islamic Review*):

May the peace of Allāh be on you!

I have the pleasure of enclosing a declaration for your information. I changed from Roman Catholic to a member of the only True Faith Peshawar City on August 4. 1942.

Recently Akhtar Nawaz Khan Sahib of Peshawar, Parachinar and Calcutta, gave me several copies of the *Islamic Review*, which I read with great interest and appreciation...

I have served in the Indian Cavalry and the British Army in India since 1940; and after the war I intend taking up residence in a Muslim country.<sup>198</sup>

The frequency of such letters, including those by officers,<sup>199</sup> indicate the spiritual possibilities active service provided for some male combatants. For these men, the globalised dimensions of war broke down geographical and imagined boundaries, making religious conversion a more realistic prospect. Alongside ambiguity and active hostility towards non-European religions and beliefs cultures, such examples indicate the profound impact of spirituality at the private level; this led to new bonds of fellowship and altered relationships within the martial sphere.

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<sup>195</sup> 'Correspondence', R. G. K., *Islamic Review*, October 1940, p. 398 [letter dated 26 April 1940]; 'Correspondence', M. Miller, *Islamic Review*, November 1940, p. 439 [letter dated 24 June 1940].

<sup>196</sup> 'Correspondence', G. E. Smith, *Islamic Review*, May 1942, p. 167 [letter dated 11 May 1941].

<sup>197</sup> 'Correspondence', R. G. K., *Islamic Review*, October 1940, p. 398 [letter dated 26 April 1940].

<sup>198</sup> 'Correspondence', Anthony B. Pawle, *Islamic Review*, November 1944, p. 326 [letter dated 11 September 1944].

<sup>199</sup> 'Correspondence', Lieutenant C. N., *Islamic Review*, January 1944, p. 38 [letter dated 23 July 1943].

## CONCLUSION

The context of war in Asia proved fertile ground for religious and racial framings of conflict. This was a site where large numbers of British men fought with and against the 'Other'; although, as we have seen, ideas about what this meant were ambiguous. Although imperial service provided some with the opportunity for travel in the interwar period, very few young men had ever set foot outside the United Kingdom by 1939.<sup>200</sup> War in Asia created a dynamic where colonial politics enforced difference but demanded unity, fuelling an atmosphere of contradiction and muddled official messages. Martial race discourse was very much alive during the Second World War and, like persistent Oriental mentalities, adapted rather than evaporating entirely. Close interaction between British and colonial subjects in the martial context led to heightened tensions and racist outbursts. Yet at the same time a more dynamic atmosphere also existed where eastern beliefs and religions were viewed with genuine interest, unfiltered by the politics of imperial ordering.

Existing work rightly attributes organisational and structural influences such as battle and drill within the breakdown of religious ordering characteristic of imperial control. Here, the demands of jungle warfare simply did not accommodate outdated and unhelpful colonial policy. The fighting efficiency and morale of pan-imperial soldiers was more important, fostering as this did a revision in the army's institutional and cultural workings.<sup>201</sup> Whilst undoubtedly true, this assessment misses important national variations and negates the continued significance of religion and belief as a force for cross-cultural cohesion and tension. Martial race discourse was not simply challenged from 'above'—as we have seen, a number of senior commanding officers and pre-war regular soldiers continued to hold onto these mentalities. Rather, it was the context of battle—and the dynamics of a people's war of cross-imperial and cross allied men—that made the difference. Recognition that simplistic ordering of religion did little to aid fighting effectiveness on the ground, and in relation to real-time shifts in strategy, was itself as much product of a more democratic war of peoples as that of official army policy. If anything, these two factors went hand-in-hand. Alongside this operational, and public, significance, it is also possible to see the personal and private impact that sharing cultural beliefs had for some British soldiers, fostering unique bonds of fellowship

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<sup>200</sup> Allport, *Browned Off and Bloody Minded*, p. 135.

<sup>201</sup> Barkawi, *Soldiers of Empire*.

and, in the process, reframing the army (and Britain's) relationship with the world. As other scholars indicate, the adoption or mimicking of non-Western practices formed an important site where colonial differences were challenged (but, at their core, remain examples of racial power imbalance).<sup>202</sup> They also constituted a site where alternate forms of imperial masculinity were 'performed'.<sup>203</sup>

Arguably the main conclusion here—and a critical theme running throughout the thesis—is the extent to which soldiers (and civilians) scoped the boundaries of 'heterodoxy' for themselves. At times this process was influenced by propaganda, official messages, and more specific institutional policies and practices, but it was never dominated by them. If, as recent scholars show, mid century masculinity was shifting and becoming more complex, the same was true of perceptions of belief and willingness to engage with non-standard/non-Western traditions. Elite and upper- middle-class notions of masculinity, and, in particular, fighting masculinity, were shifting in line with the strategy of battle. By engulfing a wider range of working- and middle-class men into the army, the props of upper-class imperial masculinity such as martial race discourse were tempered. The generation of British men fighting the war, in Asia and other theatres, were not only open to a wider range of spiritual influences but held different views on masculinity compared to the generation of 1914–1918. By focusing on their histories, opinions, and beliefs, a broader and deeper sense of their cultural and personal convictions comes to the fore. Views on what constituted the 'heterodox' were multiple and moving, meaning different things to individuals at different times.

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<sup>202</sup> Ashis Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983); Homi Bhabha, *Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1995); Kate Imy, 'Queering the Martial Races: Masculinity, Sex and Circumcision in the Twentieth-Century British Army', *Gender & History*, 27 (2015), p. 376.

<sup>203</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and Subversion of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1990).

## *Conclusion*

This study demonstrates how private beliefs, alongside private opinions, emotions, and mentalities, were an important area of wartime focus. As Michal Shapira argues, the ‘internal dynamics’ of citizens became critical during the Second World War. As the collective pull to unity took precedent over individual lives, the intimate and personal took on renewed social and political significance.<sup>1</sup> Yet debates on ‘heterodoxy’—the social, cultural, and political space where ‘acceptable’ and ‘unacceptable’ beliefs were categorised and negotiated—were neither born of, or stopped after, the Second World War.<sup>2</sup> Previous work on nineteenth- and twentieth-century British religion and belief consistently reaffirms the notion of continuity and change within the nation’s spiritual fabric. Beliefs and belief systems adapted to meet the shifting context of the present, rarely disposed by modern technologies, conflicts, and secularising cultures. Evidence presented in the thesis confirms this view, but also expands and complicates it. Debates on heterodox belief were strongly influenced by the specific context of war as well as longer term spiritual shifts; yet other powerful historical currents played their part. The rise of psychology and psychoanalysis turned attention to mentalities as the frontier of new, secular discovery. Emergent and existing technologies transmitted and capitalised on popular tastes for

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<sup>1</sup> Shapira, *The War Inside*, p. 86; Lucy Noakes, ‘Brief Encounters: Grieving and Remembering the Dead in Postwar Britain’, Centre for the History of War, Media and Society Annual Lecture, University of Kent, 29 January 2020.

<sup>2</sup> For postwar examples, see Hinton, *Seven Lives from Mass Observation*; MOA FR 2461A, ‘Superstition’, February 1947; FR 3008, ‘Who Are the Astrologers?’, June 1948; FR 3122, ‘Belief in Telepathy’, May 1949.

the esoteric and supernatural. Franchise extension rubbed against Victorian notions of gender ideology and moral fears over social 'degeneracy', creating greater public opportunities and impact for the working-class and women whilst simultaneously generating increased scrutiny of their privatised worlds. Whilst a growing, cross-gender constituency of working- and lower- middle-class voters were absorbed into British democratic life, the growing place of the citizenry within the armed forces turned the attention of military authorities to the place of the individual and the interior in combat.<sup>3</sup> This provided space for a growing 'self-reflexivity' across gendered and classed lines; a process, Michael Roper rightly highlights, which began long before its traditional association with the 1950s.<sup>4</sup>

In adopting a socio-cultural approach, the thesis has sought to blend medium- and longer-term historical trajectories with the specific context of the 'people's war'. It was in this moment, it argues, where numerous forces concerned and interested in the beliefs of mass society converged. It has revealed the multiplicity of agents engaged in the debate, moving discussions on wartime belief beyond the confinements of 'popular religion', 'diffusive Christianity', and 'alternative belief'. At the same time it exposes the cross-class and cross-gender density of spiritual subscription in various sites of war. The war years were by no means unique in this sense, as various contexts within and before 'modernity' saw the manipulation and control of belief by ecclesiastical, state, and cultural agents. But the Second World War did represent a culmination of such patterns stemming from the ruptures of the nineteenth century. Rather than viewing the 1939–1945 period as an after-thought in longer term spiritual trajectories, or the work of religion and belief as secondary to wider wartime themes, the thesis highlights its place as a vibrant, and contested, site of belief and debates on believing. The political and cultural context of war gave pre-war and pre- twentieth-century developments a renewed and pressing significance; one in which 'the people' were central. By way of conclusion, the following summarises several key themes discussed in the thesis—highlighting their importance to scholarly understandings of the 'people's war' and the nation's religious and spiritual history.

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<sup>3</sup> Harris, *Private Lives, Public Spirit*, p. 15.

<sup>4</sup> Roper, 'Between Manliness and Masculinity', p. 360. On the 1950s as the onset of 'self-reflexivity', see Martin Francis, 'Tears, Tantrums and Bared Teeth: The Emotional Economy of Three Conservative Prime Ministers', 1951–1963', *Journal of British Studies*, 41 (2002), pp. 354–87.

*Total War, Modernity, and Belief's Cyclicalities*

Questions over the relationship between 'total war' and 'modernity/modernism' have defined scholarly treatments of twentieth-century conflict and its reverberations since the 1970s. The complexity of such categories, and their monolithic implications, sit uneasily with the observable impact of the First World War on British and continental European society. Jay Winter was surely right to question the temporal and cultural 'rupture(s)' of the war.<sup>5</sup> Yet reluctance to consider its manifold implications beyond the interwar period risks inadvertently reinforcing its association as a 'rupture' moment in history. The avalanche of spiritualist, astrological, superstitious, and fatalistic beliefs transformed during the First World War laid the foundations for their reappearance in the Second; but neither did they spread and increase neatly in a 'totalising' fashion. In some instances, such as wartime superstition, practices looked strikingly similar across both wars. In others, significant change occurred—notably the downturn of organised spiritualism as a result of shifting dynamics between the 'home' and 'fighting' fronts and the commemoration of death. Belief cultures adopting the technologies of 'modernity' for their transmission during the First World War mushroomed and expanded during the Second, including astrological print media and religious programming through new radio sets. Moreover, the *personal* dimensions of belief tied the wars together in surprising and complex ways. Ghostly visions of deceased loved ones brought back painful memories of death during the First World War. The re-deployment of family trinkets and artefacts of the First World War as lucky talismans during the Second 'bound' generations and the generational experience of conflict through materiality.

The 'totalising' dynamics of the First World War, to borrow John Horne's phrase, set the scene for debates on heterodoxy during the Second for several reasons.<sup>6</sup> It introduced the context of mass, mechanised death, strengthened the hold of privatised religion and belief, and placed the citizenry close to the war's centre. Many of the key aspects contributing to heterodoxy's discourse between 1939 and 1945 were rooted in the First World War, as were attempts to police and control the spiritual diet of certain sub-sections of the populous. Concerns over morale in relation to psychological warfare and the psychological turbulence of war came to the attention of the state and military. Yet it was during the Second World War where these concerns reached fever-pitch, and, critically, coalesced with rising interest in public opinion research, psychology, and changing attitudes towards 'mass' society in a new era of democracy. In many ways the

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<sup>5</sup> Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning*.

<sup>6</sup> Horne, 'Introduction', in Horne (eds.), *State, Society and Mobilization*, pp. 1–18.

## Conclusion

World Wars were similar; but their 'totalising effects', rather than 'total' nature, were also different as were the specific historical contexts in which they operated.

### *The Public/Private Dynamic and Morale*

Whilst the origins of 'privatised' belief can be traced to at least the nineteenth century, and more focused concerns over its impact in relation to the 'totalising' dynamics of war post-1914, it was during the Second World War that the 'privatised and unstructured' nature of belief was amplified.<sup>7</sup> This was especially true at the 'home' fronts. It was precisely belief's privatised nature which concerned wider political and cultural agents, although attempts to structure and order spiritual practices and mentalities were provoked by different agendas. Underneath debates lay competing tensions. For the Church of England, and many of its higher-ranking figures, the return of unorthodox modalities created a disturbing sense of *déjà vu* in light of the avalanche of supernatural and esoteric beliefs emergent post-1914. Learning from its reluctance to engage with social attempts to grieve through alternative spiritual methods of the First World War, the Church took a less publicly dogmatic view of unorthodox wartime beliefs. Many clerics and Bishops advocated a mixed spiritual diet, although others clung to the conviction that anything close to deviation from orthodoxy promoted instability and a threat to the nation's spiritual fabric. For left wing intellectuals such as Tom Harrisson, 'democratising' knowledge of alternative beliefs was designed to educate the masses over their corrosive potential and bring awareness to the manipulation of popular mentalities and behaviours by the media. Whilst 'manipulation' of belief might be too strong a term to describe this process, press-barons as well as filmmakers and novelists were eager to capitalise on the wartime and postwar demand for supernatural stories and astrological prescription, attempting to normalise interest in and even subscription to such beliefs through the tenants of 'modernity'.

Competing agendas, which had the potential to create points of tension when aligned as chapter 3 shows, were dominated by the overarching context of morale. Given the war was ultimately a conflict of people this seems unsurprising. Civilians were the target of bombardment. They were drawn into military service, hampered by rationing and disruption to British food supplies, subjected to various forms of psychological warfare, and forced to make greater sacrifices for the nation and state than at any time previously. Yet civilians were not the only

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<sup>7</sup> Harris, 'War and Social History', p. 32.

group expected to make personal sacrifices for the good of the collective. Existing work on 'morale' as a subject of historical enquiry tends to split between state-civilian and military-combatant treatments despite significant overlaps between the two. Pulling these contexts together, and eroding the sharp boundaries between 'civilian' and 'combatant', allows for a more expansive reading of the 'people's war' in which the place of morale is redefined.<sup>8</sup>

Both the state and military demanded the endurance of the people, with individual liberties surrendered and the 'structures' of war obeyed. But perceptions of how belief affected individual and wider group mentalities, and its connection with the public and private, differed. State fears over morale at home were fuelled by recognition of the fractured, atomised nature of society; fears which were amplified in the testing period between 1940 and 1941. Here, liberal notions of autonomous individualism creating separateness rather than unity defined the wartime state's understanding of society—recognising as it did the delicate place of propaganda and culture in gluing the fissures between wartime collective mentalities together. As Patrick Deer notes the representative power of the 'people's war', particularly outside the boundaries of official war culture, had its dark side.<sup>9</sup> Even within official/state sponsored work sinister imaginaries of death, destruction, and the spectral were depicted. Yet the reason why the Tube sketches of Henry Moore were tolerated compared to the prescriptive advice of astrologers relates to their impact, or more accurately the *state's view* of their impact, on the individual/collective dynamic. Images of Tube 'sleepers', whilst eerie, visualise the collective 'pull' to unity in public through shared sacrifice. Wartime astrology sections, however, were perceived as reinforcing the atomised nature of society through subversive, private appeals to mentality. For the military, however, beliefs and mentalities were seen as one part of a broader set of factors influencing combatant morale. Compared with the instability of domestic wartime society, combatants were seen to be grounded in the homo-social world of military culture, providing strict discipline and cohesion at the wider cultural level as well as within the semi-private context of units and groups.<sup>10</sup> The dynamic between belief and morale worked differently in different sites of conflict, placing different demands and expectations on the 'people' waging war at different times. At a broader level, however, the 'people's war' (an exercise in the mass, democratic waging of warfare) forced both military and state agents to recognise the affective impact of feelings, attitudes, and beliefs

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<sup>8</sup> A point urged by Daniel Todman; Todman, 'People's War/Total War'.

<sup>9</sup> Deer, *Culture and Camouflage*, p. 242.

<sup>10</sup> Ussishkin, *Morale*, p. 96.



of the ‘people’ engaged in it, even if their measurement and treatment of morale, and perceptions of those it influenced, differed.<sup>11</sup> More than during or after the First World War, the Second sparked major shifts in military approaches to morale in which issues around democratic citizenship and the ‘social contract’ were central, highlighting morale’s significance in shaping what philosopher Charles Taylor terms ‘social imaginaries’.<sup>12</sup>

These distinctions carried classed and gendered connotations. Notions of the ‘home’ and ‘fighting’ fronts as respective ‘feminine’ and ‘masculine’ spaces were frequently reinforced by state/military readings of morale despite the war’s ‘significant blurring’ of gendered work.<sup>13</sup> Wartime and long-term religious binaries converged in which the feminine, domestic, and private were held up against the masculine, political, and public. Yet as the thesis shows, such notions were constructed through discourse rather than representing ‘natural’ phenomena. Examples throughout reveal slippages between these binaries. In many ways wartime military superstition featured commonalities with communal aspects of working-class female spirituality identified by Sarah Williams in nineteenth- and early- twentieth-century Lambeth—performing important semi-private functions for group morale.<sup>14</sup> Women’s beliefs, and influence on beliefs, however, triggered a backlash of state/cultural suspicion because of their perceived threat to public stability and morale. Importantly, as women’s beliefs were increasingly expressed in and associated with the public sphere, and the military man’s the private, it was *female* spirituality which received strenuous criticism. At the home fronts this stemmed from a more generalised, and unsupported, fear from above over female ‘hysteria’ in relation to aerial bombardment and psychological warfare—creating a ‘suggestable’, ‘unpredictable’ majority of the population swayed by astrology and occultism. Here, a range of factors came into direct tension: notably instabilities between universal female suffrage and persistent claims to the masculine control of wider public life.<sup>15</sup>

Within the thematic case-studies explored, a strong sense of heterodoxy’s ‘layers’—or the varying acceptability of unorthodox beliefs—emerges. The primary reason some beliefs were tolerated more readily than others relates to their proximity to morale, and the varying biases towards and methods of ‘reading’ morale within military and state bodies. Contrary to notions of the modern, ‘rational-bureaucratic’ state doing away with enchantment, it was largely the

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<sup>11</sup> Ussishkin, *Morale*, pp. 96–7.

<sup>12</sup> Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), p. 23; Ussishkin, *Morale*, *passim*.

<sup>13</sup> Rose, *Which People’s War?*, p. 109.

<sup>14</sup> Williams, *Religious Belief*.

<sup>15</sup> Harris, *Private Lives, Public Spirit*, p. 16.

structural core of ‘modern’ society—the state (supported by the law, police, and its wider powers of coercion) and military—which moulded, or at least attempted to mould, this process through scientific ‘readings’ of ‘morale’.<sup>16</sup> Language was of course important here, but contemporaries’ use of the term ‘heterodoxy’ was primarily descriptive—deployed in its opposition to (and definition of) ‘orthodoxy’. Its close association with ‘heresy’ imbued it with a distinctly religious meaning at times. Yet through its collective use, or contemporaries’ reference to it without using the actual word, a background discourse on belief’s ‘acceptability’ was created. Viewing the term as integral to, rather than distinct from, religion pulls together ecclesiastical and popular religious traditions, and illustrates the wide-ranging debate on what kinds of wartime belief were ‘acceptable’ and why.

*Agency and Belief, the Individual and Collective*

How far could contemporaries fashion their own spiritual subscription and tastes in the face of such powerful, if often hidden, discourse on belief’s acceptability? Findings consistently point towards the high levels of autonomy ‘the people’ of the ‘people’s war’ had in shaping their spiritual lives. This was certainly aided by aspects of class and gender. The upper-middle class male members of the SPR, for example, whose beliefs were by no uncertain terms ‘unorthodox’, were not targeted by the state like working-class female mediums, principally due to their social position, gender, and lower ‘influence’ on morale. Although the language of class was used by various agents, including the state, to categorise ‘heterodoxy’, it was through gender and classed notions of gender where this emerged most visibly. Women were the target of a sustained effort to ‘police’ belief in wartime—a point which becomes amplified when considering the comparative lack of institutional effort to govern the beliefs of male combatants and civilians. Yet, as the thesis demonstrates, lower- middle-class and working-class women had manoeuvrability to form beliefs outside or against wider attempts to police and control them in wartime. Unlike other expectations of women’s war roles, well versed in the existing historiography, the realm of belief proved far harder to govern, particularly in the democratic context. This was recognised, at least on the surface, by state agents themselves highlighting differences between the control of actions and behaviours compared to inner thoughts and opinions in connection to morale. Wartime authorities were not only dealing with the inner, perhaps *inner-most*, aspects of the human experience. The realm of belief had transformed significantly since the mid-

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<sup>16</sup> Harris, *Private Lives, Public Spirit*, p. 217.

nineteenth century; bound as it was to modernising notions of selfhood and greater spiritual choice for individuals through the explosion of alternative outlets and pluralised religious bodies. In many ways the state had caught itself in a web of its own making—encouraging the development of the ‘self’ and ‘self-governance’ in some areas of women’s wartime life (particularly emotional regulation) but using techniques boarding on repression in others to clamp-down on the ‘harmful’ dimensions of individualism. Despite attempts to police and control belief in wartime, success was ultimately limited.

Where does this leave the dynamic between the individual and collective in wartime—a relationship at the heart of the ‘people’s war’? What does the study reveal about the unity of wartime society? The place of belief, and debates over ‘heterodoxy’, in the context of the ‘people’s war’ can be described as having a dual push and pull effect, simultaneously binding and dividing. Previous work notes the ‘coping’ power of belief in times of conflict. Whilst true, the study reveals the cross-class and cross-gender complexity of belief’s psychological, social, and cultural workings within this operative term. Beliefs were essential in processing and negotiating sudden, violent death. They provided psychological space outside the context of war in some cases and helped entertain and amuse in others. They bound groups together physically, emotionally, and psychologically. They helped contemporaries confront and understand racial difference and the rapid evolution of Britain’s place as an imperial power. They gave women agency in a cultural climate of gendered behavioural expectations, providing critical tools in challenging, interrogating, and questioning the lived experience of war.<sup>17</sup> At the same time, however, they also drove significant wedges between sectional groups horizontally and vertically—creating racial, classed, and gendered divisions. Ironically, it was largely the fears of the wartime state which did the most damage here. Its suspicion of the working-class, and particularly its demonisation of women as the suggestable ‘mass’ prone to spiritual persuasion in contemporary sources, jars against the fundamental tenants of the ‘people’s war’ narrative it sought to transmit.

The resulting picture may look familiar to scholars of the war. The relationship between the individual and collective in wartime was both strengthened and strained—a dynamic tension which belief formed a core, if previously neglected, aspect. As Jo Fox makes clear, appeals to wartime unity brought the concept of the ‘individual’, a well-established British political

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<sup>17</sup> On the centrality of the ‘lived experience’ of religion as a way of disrupting existing understandings of religion and belief, see Morris, ‘Secularisation and Religious Experience’, p. 217.

tradition, into sharp relief as ‘behaviors and mentalities were central to the popular sense of national identity’.<sup>18</sup> Whilst the ‘collective’ took on a renewed significance in wartime, state and cultural agents recognised the delicate place of ‘psychological individualism’ in society; even though this was not always reflected in its construction and representation of national community. Various sectional diversities within wartime ‘national identity’ have been analysed in the thesis, critically gender and class, but further work might explore the *inter*-national dynamics of heterodoxy within and between the four nations touched on in chapter 4—sensitive to their political, religious, and historical contexts. Principally the thesis has pursued alternative lines of inquiry to arrive at a broader, admittedly incomplete, conclusion. Although existing work on the ‘people’s war’ locates its tensions, ruptures, and outcomes to the context of ‘war’ (including the First World War), this study highlights how wartime debates on heterodoxy and the belief systems it encompassed arose from the culmination of multiple, interlinking long-term factors and historical currents. It not only reveals the density of spiritual subscription during the war, and the critical place of spiritual rhetoric in framing war’s experience, representation, and memory. It also challenges the notion of rapid twentieth-century ‘secularisation’ by signalling the extent to which beliefs entwined with and adapted to numerous tenants of ‘modernity’. It was ultimately the dynamics of the ‘people’s war’, concerned with the psychological and behavioural implications of opinions, emotions, and beliefs of the ‘mass’, which brought these historical factors into dialogue.

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<sup>18</sup> Fox, ‘Careless Talk’, p. 965.

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