

## Britain's 1914-18 War Resisters

*Cyril Pearce*

*The author compiled the Pearce Register of British Conscientious Objectors, which is available free online through the Imperial War Museum's Lives of the First World War website. Comrades in Conscience, his acclaimed book about Huddersfield's opposition to the Great War, is published by Francis Boutle (£15, see Spokesman 128). A new book, Communities of Resistance: Patterns of dissent in Britain during the First World War, is forthcoming.*

For all historians of this last, most violent, century some concern with matters of war and peace has been unavoidable. However, a cursory glance at the shelves of any bookshop, whether on the High Street, the Imperial War Museum or the National Archive, and a flick through the pages of the *Pen and Sword* catalogue would leave the very strong impression that most writers' concerns, and their readers' too, have been about war rather than peace. It would appear that accounts of individual heroics, memorable war leaders, battles, regimental histories and the grim technology of killing in the twentieth century, are endlessly fascinating. Yet the antithesis of all this has not gone unexplored. Indeed, for a minority, frequently ignored or banished to the margin and, by some who ought to know better, dismissed as 'cranks', the men and women who made up Britain's 1914-18 anti-war movement have not wanted for historians. Since 1919, although in fits and starts, the historiography of war resisters and conscientious objectors has grown to a considerable body of work. Not all of it has been good, let alone innovative. There has been some re-working of old material here and there but that has been interspersed with genuinely new perspectives and some alternative insights. Nowhere has this been more true, if belated, than with new approaches drawn from the burgeoning field of women's history and feminist theory. As the changing emphases in historical scholarship have been reflected in work in this field, so have the broader political concerns with war and peace. The advent of computers, the internet, the

digitisation of documents and the expiry of closure orders on First World War sources have revolutionised what can be done, and, with family and local historians in mind, who can do it. Historical research is no longer the special preserve of the Academy. As the First World War Centenary commemoration process rolls on, the emphasis on community involvement in Heritage Lottery funded projects looks set to create a different account of the war, especially on the Home Front. Informed by Family and Local History that 'different' account will have challengingly different points of departure and, inevitably, different conclusions.

Writing the history of Britain's 1914-1918 war resisters, arguably, began as early as 1919. The No-Conscription Fellowship (NCF), the organisation which had campaigned against the war, against conscription and in support of Conscientious Objectors (COs), published its own history of Britain's war resisters with *The No-Conscription Fellowship: A Souvenir of its work during the years 1914-1919*. A collection of essays by key figures in the NCF, it established, at least in outline, the narrative which informed much of the history written about the anti-war movement for the next fifty years. Valuable as an early attempt to voice the anti-war story, but as much a polemic as it was a history, it was a somewhat limited beginning. The real starting point was the work of John W. Graham (1859-1932). A former Mathematics Tutor, from 1897 to 1924 he was Principal of Dalton Hall, a Quaker hall of residence at Owen's College, later Manchester University. He was a prominent member of the Society of Friends, a writer on Quaker Theology and a very public peace advocate and supporter of Conscientious Objectors during the First World War. It was 'Principal' Graham who built on the outline established by the NCF's *Souvenir* history with his more substantial work: *Conscription and Conscience: A History 1916-1919*, (first published in 1922 by George Allen and Unwin, reprinted in facsimile by Augustus Kelly in 1969 and more recently by Forgotten Books, 2012). It was dedicated 'with affectionate reverence to the young men who in the dark days of the war kept the faith and stood by their country and mankind with a courage that did not fail'. Despite the similarity between this and the words on War Memorials across the country these words were not meant for the young men who served in the armed forces, but for those who refused to fight. What follows the dedication is an authoritative work of history but it is also a polemic aimed at the heart of the post-war debate on the legacy of the war and plans for a future peace. Clifford Allen's Preface to the book clearly has that in mind along with an appeal for a sympathetic understanding of the war resisters' position.

The resister desires a new internationalism, by which States are conceived of less as embodiments of power and more as instruments of social administration. It should be the business of States to co-ordinate the free service of their citizens, and to compete in rivalry as to which can make the finest contribution to the stock of the world's happiness. In such a contest between nations, each would draw upon the special genius and wealth peculiar to its race and nationality.

(Graham, p.23)

While Graham's work outlines and details the story of Britain's war resisters, its sub-text is nonetheless concerned elsewhere and with that bigger theme of war and peace, pacifism and conscience. Indeed, it is probably true to say that for at least fifty years after the publication of *Conscription and Conscience*, every attempt at writing about the First World War's war resisters has also been set against that bigger theme. That is not to say that acknowledging broader issues makes for bad history, far from it, but the finer detail is often obscured by the broad brush strokes of debate.

In the inter-war years and into the 1950s some of that finer detail was provided by the numerous biographies and autobiographies of war resisters and COs. Some, probably most of them, continued to combine history with polemic. One such key work, often dismissed and frequently under-valued, is E. Sylvia Pankhurst's *The Home front: A mirror to life in England during the First World War*. She described it as '... the story of my life and time during the war years 1914, 1915 1916 ...' First published in 1932, and then again in 1987 by both Ebury and Century Hutchinson, it is, sadly, and surprisingly, no longer in print. If the first part of the book deals with her work with the poor in the East End of London, more than half of it deals with the anti-war movement and, unlike Graham, acknowledges the role of women war resisters.

Another essential book which complements Graham and combines history with polemic is *We did not fight: 1914-18 experiences of war resisters*. Published in 1935 by Cobden-Sanderson, it was edited by Julian Bell with a Foreword by Canon H. R. L. 'Dick' Shepherd. The year is not without significance. It was the year in which Shepherd founded the Peace Pledge Union, two years after the Oxford Union had voted that 'this House will not fight for King and Country', a time when the inherent militarism of German and Italian Fascism threatened Europe and a year before the Spanish Civil War reminded the world of the power of modern weaponry to kill and destroy soldiers and civilians alike. In this collection of essays along with those intentionally addressing the threats to peace are, as the

sub-title suggests, personal accounts of the experiences of individual war resisters. Among them were Clifford Allen, David Garnett, Stephen Hobhouse, Bernard Langdon-Davies, James Maxton, James Millar, Bertrand Russell and John Rodker. Subsequently most of these found their biographers, and, in the case of Russell, several – of which, more later. Arthur Marwick, son of William, a Scottish CO who served time in prison and in a number of work centres, no doubt exorcised some of his own ghosts with his *Clifford Allen: Open Conspirator* (Oliver and Boyd, 1964). David Garnett and his then partner, also a CO, Duncan Grant, appear in some way in many of the accounts of the Bloomsbury Set, most usefully, for this present purpose, in Jonathan Atkin's *A War of Individuals: Bloomsbury Attitudes to the Great War* (Manchester University Press, 2002). Maxton, a controversial figure in the history of the political 'Left' in inter-war Britain has not lacked for biographers nor for key roles in books with wider concerns. He has a part in Willie Gallacher's, *Revolt on the Clyde: An autobiography* (Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1936) and is one of a galaxy of Glaswegian working-class heroes in Robert K. Middlemas' *The Clydesiders: A left wing struggle for Parliamentary power* (Hutchinson, London, 1965). He also appears in his own right in several biographies among them ones by John McNair, (Allen and Unwin, 1955), Gordon Brown (Edinburgh, Mainstream, 1986) and William Knox (Manchester University Press, 1987). But of the other contributors to that 1935 collection, John Rodker's writing offers some of the more intriguing insights into the CO experience. His autobiography was published anonymously in 1932 as *Memoirs of other fronts* (Putnam, London). In it, he describes attitudes and actions very different from the expected. He speaks of weekends with his lover in a hotel in Princetown while at Dartmoor prison Work Centre and vents a withering disdain for the religious COs who were disappointed that their prediction of the end of the world had not come true. He went on the run twice and after his final escape from Dartmoor to London's literary scene he survived unchallenged to the end of the war because the well-to-do literary society in which he moved was seldom troubled by the police.

At least three autobiographical accounts of CO experiences were published during the war as contributions to the debate about the war and the treatment of COs. T. Corder Catchpool, *On Two Fronts* (Headley Brothers, 1918) was one of them. It was a collection of his letters edited by his sister. Catchpool, a Quaker CO, served in the Friends' Ambulance Unit (FAU) from September 1914 to May 1916 but left to take a stand against conscription. He was refused absolute exemption from combatant

service and found himself in the army. There, as an ‘Absolutist’ he refused to obey orders and refused all government schemes. Consequently having had four courts martial and four different sentences he spent two years in prison before his release in the spring of 1919. Unlike Rodker’s account, his is a story of grace in adversity and high moral principle. The same is true of *‘Handed Over’: The Prison Experiences of Mr J Scott Duckers, Solicitor of Chancery Lane, under the Military Service Act, written by himself* (C. W. Daniel, London, 1916). Catchpool and Scott Duckers were cited by the NCF as ‘Typical’ Conscientious Objectors; Rodker was not. Another wartime CO memoir, published in 1918, was E. W. Mason’s *Made free in Prison* (Allen and Unwin, London). Essentially an edited collection of Edward Williamson Mason’s letter to his friend ‘Harry’, it is a close description of his CO experiences from his arrest in July 1916 to his second court martial at Catterick in July 1917 and his transfer to Northallerton prison. At the same time, they are as much an account of a spiritual journey as they are a political testimony.

These wartime memoirs apart, the first CO memoir to be published, in the inter-war years was probably George Baker’s *The Soul of a Skunk: The autobiography of a Conscientious Objector* (Eric Partridge Ltd., the Scholartis Press, London, 1930). Dedicated to his son Paul, ‘... that he may know what his Daddy did in the war’, he describes it as ‘... the story of a man who, then not much more than a boy, during the Great War did his bit for England as a pacifist in prison’. As with Richard Fox, it contains some of the more affecting CO writing of its time. A young bank clerk when war broke out,

This book shows how one socialist, at least, was not born but made, It shows ... how and why its subject became, not arbitrarily but inevitably, a pacifist, a Skunk, an Ishmael (except that his hand was not against all men’s), who, before prison, wore the white feather; in prison the broad arrow, and, after prison (according to some) the badge of a matricide, the mark of Cain. It seeks to show how, as Rupert Brooke and Robert Graves would have sinned against the light that was in them had they gone to prison and not to France, so the Skunk would have sinned against the light that was in him, had he gone to France and not to prison.

(Foreword p.ix)

Numerous other CO autobiographies were published, from the 1930s onwards. It is not possible here to list them all but a short selection can give an impression of their range and variety. Few of them are entirely devoted to their author’s CO experiences, indeed, some are only too ready to skim over it. Most are records of busy lives actively engaged in political work.

One of the best written CO memoirs is R. M. Fox's *Smoky Crusade* (The Hogarth Press, London, 1938). Richard Morris Fox and his younger brother, Eric Lionel, lived in North London and were members of the North London Herald League. They were both Socialist COs and 'Absolutists'. Richard was an apprentice-trained engineer, a driller, who after the war went to Ruskin College, Oxford and became a writer and journalist. His account sets his experiences in the hectic context of social and industrial unrest, Ireland, revolutionary Russia and wartime Britain. His descriptions of Tribunal hearings, prison and hunger striking at Wandsworth rank among the best. If that is true for one of the generality of COs then it is equally true of the memoir of one of the anti-war movement's leaders, Archibald Fenner Brockway. His *Inside the Left: Thirty Years of Platform, Press Prison and Parliament* (Allen and Unwin, London, 1942, Spokesman, Nottingham, 2010) should probably be set alongside Graham's work as an authoritative version of the CO experience. While it is the personal account of a young man from a well-to-do family becoming a Socialist and a determined war resister and CO, it is also the story of a man who became the editor of the Independent Labour Party's (ILP) *Labour Leader*, founder of the NCF, and a post-war figure of some significance in the Labour Party and, eventually, in Parliament.

If some CO memoirs inadvertently verge on literature rather than autobiography there is other writing with more overt literary ambitions. This might be said of John Rodker's *Memoirs of other fronts* although the emphasis remains with the memoir. However, Edward Gaitens' *Dance of the Apprentices* (First published in 1948 by William McLellan & Co., reprinted in 2001 by Cannongate Books, Edinburgh), is intentionally fiction but based on personal experience. Gaitens, a CO from Glasgow, was imprisoned, rejected by the Home Office Scheme and sent back to Wormwood Scrubs until April 1919. The book, as with much of his other work, is more about Glasgow than it is a CO story. In that it is probably unique among CO memoirs.

Unique among CO memoirs is Max Plowman's *A Subaltern on the Somme in 1916* (E. P. Dutton & Co., New York, 1928). Unlike Siegfried Sassoon and Wilfred Owen whose revulsion at the war did not extend to their refusing to fight, Max Plowman was one of a handful of British army officers who resigned his commission after distinguished military service, became a CO and was court martialled. Another was the actor Miles Malleon. After brief service with the army in Malta he was invalided out in 1915 but, when he had recovered, he refused to serve as a conscript. Fortunately for him it was more convenient for the army to regard him as

still unfit for service rather than to insist on his joining up. Consequently, he continued to work in the theatre. Two of his one-act plays, written in 1916, *D Company* and *Black 'Ell* (Hendersons, London), critical portrayals of army life, were banned by the Lord Chamberlain. Malleson left no memoir of his time as a war resister but his wife did. Constance Malleson also an actor with the stage name Colette O'Niel [sic], published her autobiography in 1931, *After Ten Years: A Personal Record* (Jonathan Cape, London). She may be better known as having been one of Bertrand Russell's lovers, but she was also as committed as her husband and, indeed, as Russell himself, to the anti-war cause. She did voluntary work for the No-Conscription Fellowship at its London headquarters and offers insights into its operation not seen anywhere else – as well as being an occasional visitor at Ottoline and Philip Morrell's gatherings of anti-war activists at Garsington Manor.

One of the more unlikely memoirs but, nonetheless a useful one, is that of Michael Isaac Lipman, usually referred to as 'Mick'. His *Memoirs of a Socialist Business Man* (Lipman Trust, 1980) offer insights into the political world of Leeds' pre-war and wartime radical community which other histories of Leeds ignore. His parents, originally from Russia, were secular non-practising Jews, atheists and anarchists. Visitors to their house were as likely to be from the Leeds Socialist Sunday School as they were to be the anarchists Guy Aldred, Rudolph Rocker or 'Red Emma' Emma Goldman. He offers a vigorous description of his own and his family's involvement in the anti-war movement. Three of his sisters married COs and although a schoolboy, he was arrested for distributing anti-war leaflets. He worked for the local branch of the NCF and the family home was used as a safe house for COs on the run.

Other memoirs, especially of the retired MP or Trade Union leader variety tend to be much less colourful. *Herbert Morrison: an autobiography*, attributed to Lord Morrison of Lambeth (Odhams Press, London, 1960) is a case in point. It is, as might be expected, concerned primarily with the grand sweep of a very significant political life. Perhaps for that reason the time he spent as a CO doing farm work near Letchworth occupies no more than two pages out of its 300. In comparison the autobiography of James Clunie (1888-1974), a Scots CO and Labour MP for Dunfermline from 1950 to 1959 has more to say about his stance as a CO. A former house painter, Socialist and Christian, he served one prison term before accepting the Home Office Scheme for work at Warwick, Dartmoor and Wakefield. The first volume of his two-part autobiography, *Labour is my faith: the autobiography of a house painter* (Dunfermline,

1954) has his reflections on his CO experience. For a simple description of life and work in Warwick and other work centres it has few equals. Arthur Horner (1894-1968), not an MP, but arguably an even more important figure in the Labour Movement as a lifetime member of the Communist Party and General Secretary of the National Union of Mineworkers (1946-1959), chose to give his memoir the title, *Incorrigible Rebel* (MacGibbon & Kee, London, 1960). It was a self-conscious reference to the words used at his sentencing after his second court martial in January 1919, '... discharged in consequence of incorrigible conduct ...' (p.9) A militant miner in the Welsh coalfield, originally exempt from military service as being in an essential occupation, he had crossed to Ireland to join Connolly's Irish Citizen's Army. In the summer of 1918 he was arrested as an absentee having returned from Dublin to see his wife and daughter.

One of the last CO memoirs, published in 1967, for his 90<sup>th</sup> birthday, was by Robert Stewart under the title, *Breaking the Fetters: The Memoirs of Bob Stewart* (Lawrence and Wishart, London). A Scot from Dundee and originally a full-time Temperance campaigner, like Arthur Horner, he was a convinced Communist and remained so to the very end. He resisted the war and conscription on class grounds and was court martialled four times. His unequivocal stance is clearly set out in a language of which modern politicians seem especially ignorant.

By the 1960s and 1970s, fifty or more years after the First World War, the original war resisters and Conscientious Objectors were beginning to slip away. Some leading figures lived on into their nineties. Bertrand Russell was still campaigning when he died in 1970 at the age of 97 and Fenner Brockway was only a few months short of his hundredth birthday when he died in 1988. Nevertheless, for most, by the 1970s memoir and autobiography had begun to give way to biography. But by this time mortality was not the only agent changing the way in which the history of Britain's 1914-18 war resisters was being written. Concerns about war and anxieties about how best to argue for peace persisted in the context of the Cold War and the nuclear arms race. At the same time questions about the future of radical politics in Britain were behind the creation of the *New Left Review* and the Society for the Study of Labour History. Scholarly concern for the origins and 'Forward march of Labour' inevitably touched on the matter of the First World War. Connected to all of that was the beginning of the expansion of Higher Education. By the 1960s significant numbers of young men and women from backgrounds where they were the first to go to university began to transform undergraduate and post-graduate History and to encourage it to reach out for new insights into Sociology



and the broader Social Sciences. At the turn of the millennium, Labour and Social History had been broadened and enriched by Women's History and Gender Studies and this has been reflected in the work on the First World War's war resisters.

If the first fifty years of the historiography of the 1914-18 war resisters was dominated by a combination of John Graham's *Conscience and Politics* and the memoirs of its key figures, the last fifty years, leading up to the current centenary commemorations, have seen a great deal more research and writing across hitherto unexplored areas and with hitherto unexplored pre-occupations.

The passing of the men and women of the anti-war movement has prompted re-appraisal and tribute through biography. These might be divided into biographies of important or even 'celebrity' figures and those of the rest. Among those of the more modest or less well known are those of respected local figures. A case in point here is Wayne David's *Remaining True: A biography of Ness Edwards* (Caerphilly Local History Society, 2006). Edwards (1897-1968) was Labour MP for Caerphilly from 1939 until 1968. Although a miner who, like Arthur Horner, might have expected to be exempt from military service, he was called up but went on the run. He was not captured until the summer of 1918. After a prison sentence and some time at Dartmoor he went on the run again and didn't return home until 1919. The book is a homage by one Caerphilly Labour MP, Wayne David, to one of his predecessors.

That sense of 'homage' is never far from many CO biographies. In some it is a matter of a family history set in critical times. In *John Hoare: A Pacifist's progress – papers from the First World War* (Sessions Book Trust, York, 1998), Richard J. Hoare has edited his father letters and other writings to create a full and irresistible account of a Christian pacifist's CO story. It is true of *Philip W. Bagwell: Prison Cell to Council Chamber* (William Sessions, York, 1994), which was written by two of his children, Joan Lawley and her brother, the distinguished historian, Philip S. Bagwell. While Peggy Attlee wrote about her father in *With a quiet conscience: Thomas Simons Attlee 1880-1960* (Dove & Chough Press, London, 1995), and reminded us that Prime Minister and former Major Clement Attlee had a brother who took a rather different line. A similar labour of love combined with distinguished scholarship is to be found in John and Mary Postgate's celebration of their father in *A stomach for dissent: The life of Raymond Postgate, 1896-1971* (Keele University Press, 1994). This 'Writer, Radical Socialist and Founder of the Good Food Guide' defied his Tory father to take a stand as a CO. Alongside these, one

of the more intriguing acts of family homage is Donald McNair's *A Pacifist at war: Military Memoirs of a Conscientious Objector in Palestine 1917-1918* (Anastasia Press, Much Hadham, 2008). It is based on his father Donald's letters to his wife. Donald was a CO, a devout Christian, who found himself in the Hampshire Regiment in Palestine, '... going over the top with a loaded rifle and fixed bayonet, yet determined not to fight ...'. It is intriguing because it poses the question, if Donald McNair can be described as a CO although in the army and bearing arms, how many more were there like him?

The path from biography into broader historical themes is well trodden. The historiography of Britain's 1914-18 anti-war movement is no exception. Jo Vellacott remains the doyenne of this approach. Her *Bertrand Russell and the Pacifists in the First World War* (The Harvester Press, Brighton, 1980) now re-published with a 2015 Preface as *Conscientious Objection: Bertrand Russell and the Pacifists in the First World War* (Spokesman, Nottingham, 2015) sets Russell in context. It traces and describes his significant role in the anti-war movement at all its levels - his writings, his speeches to public meetings under the watchful eye of the secret services, his membership of the Executive Committee of the NCF and his six months imprisonment in 1918 for writings in the *Tribunal* which the authorities found dangerously subversive. Vellacott's work in this is a touchstone for the value of this approach. Nicholas Griffin's, *A Pacifist at War: Letters and Writings of Bertrand Russell 1914-1918* (Spokesman, Nottingham, 2014) takes a similar approach with a judicious and skilfully edited collection of Russell's writings set in a commentary on the history of the anti-war movement which is magisterially well-informed and written in a lucid and accessible way.

If Vellacott's work on Bertrand Russell and the anti-war movement has been seminal then so has her work on the women's movement and the war. Here her work on Catherine Marshall has contributed substantially to our revised understanding of the role of women in the anti-war movement. Marshall's work was acknowledged, if largely in passing by Graham, Fenner Brockway and others, but it has been Vellacott's work, directly from the original sources in Marshall's archive, which has enlarged and firmly substantiated her importance. Her *From Liberal to Labour with Women's Suffrage: The story of Catherine Marshall* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993) is essential to our understanding of the anti-war movement. Marshall is a substantial presence in *Bertrand Russell and the Pacifists* but it is in *From Liberal to Labour* that she is, and quite rightly, the central character. The logical and, at times, apparently organic

progression in Vellacott's work from Russell to Marshall and then to wider reflections on the women's movement in the First World War is very apparent in her most recent work, *Pacifists, Patriots and the Vote: The erosion of democratic Suffragism in Britain During the First World War* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2007). After reading this it is no longer possible to accept the earlier view that Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst's super-patriotism was echoed in the rest of the women's movement.

Elsewhere there are other examples with different central characters. One of these is John Shepherd's *George Lansbury: At the heart of Old Labour* (Oxford UP, 2002). It is a scholarly and passionate account of Lansbury's path from local politics in London's East End to the Labour Leadership. A path informed by his Socialism, Christianity and pacifism. As editor of the pre-war *Daily Herald*, reduced to the weekly *Herald* during the war, he exercised an influence comparable to that once exercised by *The Clarion's* Robert Blatchford. The local branches of the Herald League were particularly influential in anti-war communities, especially North London. Although only touching briefly on his wartime contribution, Shepherd's work is essential to an understanding of how the spirit of opposition to war continued to inform British Labour politics in the inter-war years.

Perhaps more marginal but with a broader sense of humour is Ray Challinor's *John S. Clarke: Parliamentarian, Poet and Lion-tamer* (Pluto Press, London, 1977). It is one of the slimmer volumes (85 pages) but essential reading for those trying to understand the intersection between the 'Revolt on the Clyde', revolutionary socialism and the underground elements of the anti-war movement. If modern politicians can be accused of lacking a hinterland this could never be said of John S. Clarke. Beyond the pages of Challinor's slim volume, Clarke's writings published by Glasgow's Scottish Labour Press in 1919 as *Satires, Lyrics and Poems (Chiefly Humorous)* remain just as powerful, and just as funny, as they were a hundred years ago. More substantial in terms of the number of pages (290) and its content is John Taylor Caldwell's *Come Dungeons Dark: The Life and Times of Guy Aldred, Glasgow Anarchist* (Luath Press, Barr, Ayrshire, 1988). An important figure in the history of Anarchism in Britain and, despite his being born in London, in the history of Glasgow politics too, Aldred was a prominent, if controversial, Absolutist CO.

One of the more dramatic personal stories here is that of Derby's Alice Wheeldon. In 1917 she was a fifty-year-old mother with grown up children. A dealer in second-hand clothes, she was a Socialist, suffragette and anti-war campaigner. For reasons that were never made particularly

clear, she and her daughters Winnie and Hettie and Winnie's husband Alf Mason were arrested on charges of planning to assassinate Lloyd George using poison. The case attracted national attention as, no doubt, was intended, and the accused found guilty. The fact that the prosecution's chief witness was a police spy who was not allowed to testify on the grounds of 'national security', was considered scandalous. Nevertheless, while Hettie was acquitted, Alice, Winnie and Alf were found guilty. Alice received the harsher sentence, ten years penal servitude while Alf and Winnie were given seven and five years respectively. Alice was an uncooperative prisoner and went on hunger strike. She was released in late December 1917, Winnie and Alf twelve months later.

The Wheeldon story is a paradigm of war resisters as victims of desperate, brutal and ultimately ruthless authorities and a supine and malleable legal process. It has been recognised as such in numerous general histories but it was Shelia Rowbotham in 1986 who saw its potential for illuminating a much bigger range of issues. Her *Friends of Alice Wheeldon* (Pluto Press, London) was originally a script for a play performed in 1980. But in its published form the script was accompanied by an innovative introductory essay dealing with 'Rebel Networks in the First World War'. Nicola Rippon's *The Plot to Kill Lloyd George: The story of Alice Wheeldon and the Pear Tree Conspiracy* (Wharncliffe Books, Barnsley, 2009) is more meticulous in its story telling but lacks Rowbotham's broader understanding.

The biographical route to an understanding of war resisters has, at times, produced work with ambiguous and not always sustainable pretensions. Will Ellsworth-Jones', *We will not fight ... the untold story of World War One's Conscientious Objectors* (Aurum, London, 2007) is not all its title claims. To begin with, the story of the World War COs is not 'untold' as much of what is written here would already suggest. Nor is Ellsworth-Jones' book the story of COs as a whole. It is, in fact, principally the story of one particular CO, 'Bert' Brocklesby, and of one specific set of circumstances in which he and 34 other COs found themselves. He was among those shipped out to France by the military authorities and sentenced to be shot for refusing to obey orders. The story is a good one, very well written and explained as never before but the story of the 35 'Frenchmen' is not the whole story of all those who said 'We will not fight'.

Rooted in the biographical approach but with more justifiable pretensions is Adam Hochschild's *To End All Wars: How the First World War divided Britain* (Macmillan, London, 2011). In a tour de force of

exceptional writing he weaves together the personal wartime stories of a huge cast of people inevitably headed by Bertrand Russell but including ‘... feminists, trade unionists, aristocrats, future Members of Parliament ...’ and a former editor, Fenner Brockway, ‘... who published a CO newspaper on toilet paper while he was in prison’. He follows a group of people, many connected by ties of family but who took different lines on the war including Sir John French and his sister Charlotte Despard and the Pankhursts. Beautifully written, it has a strong sense of the significance of the anti-war struggle and of the extent to which it divided British society at every level.

Those divisions remained very apparent at the mid-way point of the war’s centenary and were reflected in print. The catalyst for much of that was David Boulton’s *Objection Overruled: Conscription and Conscience in the First World War* (MacGibbon & Kee, London, 1967), now published with a revised Introduction by Dales Historical Monographs and the Friends’ Historical Society (2014). It was originally published as a contribution to the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary commemorations of the First World War 1964-1968. While drawing on what had gone before, especially on John Graham’s work, Boulton brought new material to bear on the familiar story by adding the reminiscences of the many COs and their families who came forward offering their contributions in response to an appeal by Bertrand Russell and Fenner Brockway. The book is a vindication of that approach. Well written and passionate, even fifty years later it ranks alongside Graham’s work as essential reading. A valuable companion volume to Boulton’s work is Thomas C. Kennedy’s *The Hound of Conscience: A History of the No-Conscription Fellowship, 1914-1919* (University of Arkansas Press, Fayetteville, 1981). While it lacks Boulton’s broader concerns it is a meticulous exploration of the ways in which the NCF was held together during the war and the ways in which it managed to retain the engagement of the many and diverse elements of the anti-war community. Kennedy’s essay on sources is particularly useful. Also useful as an adjunct to Boulton’s work is Marvin Swartz’s *The Union of Democratic Control in British Politics during the First World War* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1971). The UDC, along with the NCF was one of the organisations which the pro-war press loved to hate. It was essentially an elite national organisation with its own journal and an extensive network of local branches. Its aim was not to campaign against the war or even to support COs but, rather, to argue that decisions on war and peace should properly be taken by Parliament rather than government. That being the case the fact that many of its public meetings attracted

violent mobs determined to break them up is a little strange.

Boulton's work, however, was not universally well-received when it first appeared in the late 1960s. Its very direct attack on the motives of both government and state institutions did not meet with general approval. Carrying the standard for those who sought to deflect or even deny Boulton's claims, especially those of the finer points of army brutality in the treatment of COs, was John Rae. His *Conscience and Politics: The British Government and the Conscientious Objectors to military service 1916-1919* (Oxford UP, 1970), well written and mostly well researched, still stands as the foremost apologia for the way COs were treated. Keith Robbins' *The Abolition of War: The 'Peace Movement' in Britain, 1914-1918* (University of Wales Press, Cardiff, 1976) is in much the same vein and others have followed suit. More recently James McDermott's work, *British Military Service Tribunals 1916-1918: 'A very much abused body of men'* (Manchester UP, 2011) is a review of the work of the Tribunal system. Based principally on the chance survival of the Northamptonshire Tribunal records and others it makes a timely and incontrovertible case by saying that the Tribunals were about more than just COs. There can be few quarrels with his findings there. However, in defending the Tribunals from the anti-war movement's criticisms, like Rae, he protests too much. They did indeed have a difficult job to do and, at times, without much guidance from central government, but that does not excuse the frequent abandonment of all sense of judicial impartiality exhibited in so many Tribunals when faced with the genuine claims of COs or, indeed, of others. Their shortcomings in this regard were not repeated in the Second World War when appeals for exemption from military service had to be made before a judge.

The question of how a liberal democracy should respond to internal criticism when faced with external threats remains relevant and the subject of sharp division. Brock Millman's work has addressed this dilemma head-on. *His Managing Domestic Dissent in First World War Britain* (Frank Cass, London, 2000) has a chillingly un-democratic ring to it. He describes the development in Britain of a panoply of powers available to government which, rather than being applied to the letter and consistently, never became more repressive than a working consensus of the population was prepared to tolerate, particularly where the anti-war movement was concerned. There were, of course, mistakes – the Wheeldon affair, the Birkenhead and Cleethorpes barracks brutality cases and the 35 COs sentenced to be shot in France – but, he argues, the relatively light touch applied by the authorities ensured that public opinion was not alienated.

The ‘broader concerns’ so evident in Boulton, Hochschild and Vellacott’s work, characterise other approaches where the starting point is not so much the anti-war struggle as another theme. Dominant among these are the histories of political organisations, religious denominations and the women’s movement.

Some political histories are more concerned than others with responses to and the effects of the First World War. The Liberal Party’s crumbling as a national force under the impact of the war is described in most major texts on the political history of the time. Michael Howard’s *War and the Liberal Conscience* (Oxford UP, 1981) subjects it to rather closer analysis. However, it is in the histories of the parties and factions of the ‘Left’ where the matter of the war looms much larger. This is particularly true of the ILP. It was the major partner in the Labour Party’s coalition of partners before the adoption of its new constitution after 1918. Keith Laybourn’s *The Century of Labour: A History of the Labour Party 1900-2000* (Sutton Publishing, Stroud, 2000) describes that structure and its response to the war. However, when war broke out the ILP’s leaders, Philip Snowden, Ramsay MacDonald, Keir Hardie and others, unlike the Parliamentary Labour Party, opposed Britain’s involvement. ILP branches formed the core of most local anti-war organisations, especially the NCF and the National Council for Civil Liberties (NCCL), and ILP members were an important, if not the major, cohort in the ranks of COs. This is properly acknowledged in the appropriate histories – Robert E. Dowse, *Left in the Centre: The Independent Labour Party, 1893-1940* (Longmans, London, 1966) and David James et. al. (Eds.) *The Centennial History of the Independent Labour Party* (Ryburn Academic Publishing, Halifax, 1992). The difficulty with some of these accounts, however, is their mistaken tendency to project a particular reading of Bradford’s ILP, where the anti-war stance appears to have been contended, onto the ILP elsewhere. Other work suggests that there might be different interpretations and that Bradford, while undeniably important, was not representative of the ILP as a whole. Such an alternative view is set out in Cyril Pearce’s ‘Shaping a Radical Community: Labour in West Yorkshire, 1906-1918’ in Brendan Evans et.al. (Eds) *Sons and Daughters of Labour: A history and recollection of the Labour Party within the historic boundaries of the West Riding of Yorkshire* (University of Huddersfield Press, 2007).

The histories of Britain’s Marxist ‘Left’ have different emphases. As its title suggests, Chushichi Tsuzuki’s *H. M. Hyndman and British Socialism* (Oxford UP, 1961) takes the biographical route. Tsuzuki’s pioneering work on this always controversial, early Socialist and patriot, inevitably is

more concerned about his wartime stance than that of his opponents. In contrast Martin Crick's hugely authoritative *The History of the Social Democratic Federation* (Ryburn Publishing, Keele University Press, 1994), while acknowledging Hyndman's part, rightly stresses the importance of local membership in the British Socialist Party (BSP). It was the anti-war local members in 1916 who ousted Hyndman and the rest of the 'patriotic socialist' leadership and divided the party. Nevertheless, the role of those local members in leading their own war resister communities remains to be fully explored.

The emphasis in the work of Raymond Challinor and Walter Kendall is on the more overtly revolutionary Left. Kendall's *The Revolutionary Movement in Britain, 1900-1921: The Origins of British Communism* (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1969) is unequivocal in its intentions and makes a coherent story of the wartime and pre-war Left fragments which merged to form the Communist Party of Great Britain. Challinor's *The Origins of British Bolshevism* (Croom Helm, London, 1977) is also an original classic but owes more in its influences to the traditions of British Trotskyism and the divisions within the revolutionary Left than to anything else. Nevertheless, in their concerns to rescue the wartime stories of the war's more revolutionary opponents they do offer a contrasting picture to that offered by the NCF's 'Typical Conscientious Objectors'.

A sadly neglected approach, explored in detail only once to date, is that of the comparative study. We are lamentably ignorant of anti-war movements of Conscientious Objectors in the other European combatant countries. Francis L. Carsten (1911-1998) a German-born refugee from the Nazis, offered the first attempt at a comparative study with his *War against War: British and German Radical Movements in the First World War* (Batsford Academic, London, 1982). Something of that approach can be discerned in Peter Brock's *Against the Draft: Essays on Conscientious Objection from the Radical Reformation to the Second World War* (University of Toronto Press, 2006). This is a huge undertaking which explores the pacifist stance and the experience of Conscientious Objection at different times – from the 16<sup>th</sup> century to the 20<sup>th</sup> – and in very different countries and cultures. The mastery of detail in such a range of diverse and contrasting settings is excellent although, at times, it flags. The search for the broad general informing idea sometimes distracts from a proper understanding of the particular case. His essay on the British Non-Combatant Corps 1916-1918, for example, would have been stronger had it been rooted more closely in original sources.

Studies, such as Brock's, which look at pacifists and war resisters across



time, places and cultures, are often driven by the need to identify a unified theme or a common element. That is frequently provided by reference to religious beliefs. To do that while, at the same time, characterising other motives as ‘political’ is to fly in the face of its inherent ambiguity. For example, how do we prioritise the anti-war stance of someone who claims to be both Christian and Socialist? Which comes first? All that we can say with any confidence is that significant numbers of war resisters claimed ‘religious’ motives even if, at the same time, claiming others.

Of those ‘religious’ war resisters there is little doubt that the Society of Friends, the Quakers, were both the most numerous and the most prominent. The Society’s historic peace testimony remains an important part of its identity as does its members’ continuing involvement in peace campaigning. The part played by the Friends’ Ambulance Unit (FAU) in humanitarian work from 1914 onwards is well recorded. The Quaker commitment to truth and to record keeping has guaranteed that. Meaburn Tatham and James E. Miles produced its first history as early as 1919 in *The Friends’ Ambulance Unit, 1914-1919: A Record* (Swarthmore Press, London). Geoffrey Winthrop Young, one of its founders, added an autobiographical note in his *The Grace of Forgetting* (Country Life, London, 1953). Nor has the work of that other Quaker humanitarian effort, the Friends’ War Victims Relief Committee, gone unrecorded. Its General Secretary from 1914 to 1923, A. Ruth Fry, was its first historian, publishing in 1926 *A Quaker Adventure: The story of nine years’ relief and reconstruction* (Nisbet & Co., London). Added to that, a good number of Quaker COs and FAU personnel chose to set down their own accounts of their experiences. While the evidence for the Quaker role in the anti-war movement is incontrovertible, some reservations about its interpretation have begun to appear. Thomas C. Kennedy’s *British Quakerism, 1860-1920: The transformation of a Religious Community* (Oxford UP, 2001) firmly established what we now recognise as the Quaker role, not just in opposition to war, but at the forefront of many of the twentieth century’s progressive movements. However, while doing that, he raised the question of just how resilient the peace testimony might have been when challenged by the demands of patriotism in 1914. The Society’s own records show that almost a third of eligible Quaker men actually joined up and served with the rest. Kennedy’s work on the ‘War Quakers’, as they were known, has helped dispel the image of an unchallenged Quaker witness for peace. Indeed, in his 2014 Presidential Address to the Friends’ Historical Society, David Rubinstein, used this to counsel against complacency as the Society thought how it might best commemorate the centenary of the First World

War. Quakers may have been prominent war resisters, he argued, but a significant minority of them were not and their wartime experience ought not to be ignored.

Few other religious communities were defined as clearly by the war. Indeed most established denominations, with the exception of the Church of England, refused to draw that theological line. Individual churchmen, irrespective of their denomination, could be found on both sides of the argument. Even in the Church of England, officially the 'National' church and, therefore, nominally at least, committed to the war, there were deep divisions. A broad survey of the Church of England in wartime within which war resisters play hardly any part is to be found in Alan Wilkinson's *The Church of England and the First World War* (SPCK, London, 1978 and SCM Press, London 1996). Clive Barrett's more recent work, *Subversive Peacemakers: War resistance 1914-1918, an Anglican perspective* (Lutterworth Press, Cambridge, 2014) tells another story. Based on original research and using an impressive range of sources, he skilfully draws on poetry, memoirs, letters and personal testimony to describe an Anglican contribution to the pre-war peace movement previously only guessed at. It is a masterful and passionately told story of war resistance previously disregarded or undervalued in the unlikely setting of the Church of England.

For the individual Christians in denominations which refused to take a clear line on the war there was the Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR). It was founded in late 1914 as a committed Christian and determinedly non-political anti-war organisation which since then has expanded to become the International Fellowship of Reconciliation (IFOR) while retaining its national branches. Its members included the whole spectrum of Christian denominations. Probably the most comprehensive account of its contribution is Jill Wallis' *Valiant for Peace: A history of the Fellowship of reconciliation, 1914-1989* (FOR, London, 1991). In 2014 it published another, more concise version of its history as *Fellowship of Reconciliation, Non-violence in action: 100 Years of Peacemaking* (FOR, London).

Never one to miss the opportunity to take a pot shot at those who regarded the anti-war movement as dominated by Quakers and Socialists, John Rae gleefully drew attention to the fact that more than 2,000 COs, maybe 10% or more of the total, can be identified as coming from minority religious sects. Among them were Plymouth Brethren, Seventh Day Adventists, Peculiar People, Pentecostals, Spiritualists, Christian Israelites and a great many more. Most numerous were the

Christadelphians. Perhaps 1,700 or more were exempt from military service and allowed to do work of national importance in various sections of the economy, most controversially in munitions. The exemption was the result of a deal struck between the leaders of the Christadelphian community, in particular, Frank Jannaway, and the War Office. In return for exemption from military service Christadelphians of military service age were to be policed by their leaders and delivered to war essential work. The theological justification for this is to be found in the sect's firm belief that it is not of this world but of God's and that at the end of days its members would be among the elect. Jannaway's account of the deal with government is set out in his *Without the camp: Being the story of why and how the Christadelphians were exempted from military service* (Privately printed for Christadelphian subscribers, London, 1917).

Less is known of the other minority faiths with significant numbers among the ranks of COs. Mark Sorrell has written an excellent guide to *The Peculiar People* (Paternoster Press, Exeter, 1979) but, websites apart, the other sects have yet to find their historians. The histories which do exist and are posted on websites tend to be as much devotional and proselytising as they are history. The exception is probably Gary Perkins' account of the stance taken by the members of the International Bible Students, pre-cursors of the Jehovah's Witnesses and posted as [www.forthesakeofthekingdom](http://www.forthesakeofthekingdom). Also online is a brief account of the 7<sup>th</sup> Day Adventist COs at [www.adventist.org.uk/wwi/ww1](http://www.adventist.org.uk/wwi/ww1).

The use of language and concepts more often used in discussions of religious belief has been a common and much-published part of the historiography of war resisters. David A. Martin's *Pacifism: A Historical and Sociological Study* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1965) set the trend by approaching the study of war resisters within the intellectual framework set by the sociology of religion. In 1980 Martin Ceadel continued the theme with his *Pacifism in Britain 1914-45: The defining of a faith* (Oxford University at the Clarendon Press, 1980). Indeed, much of his very extensive and intellectually stimulating output since then has extended and explored further his engagement with pacifism in its many forms as well as with its organisation and practices: *Thinking about Peace and War* (Oxford UP, 1989); *Semi-detached idealists: The British Peace Movement and International Relations, 1845-1945* (Oxford UP, 2001) and his *Living the Great Illusion: Sir Norman Angell, 1872-1967* (Oxford UP, 2009).

Other studies of anti-war movements in the 20<sup>th</sup> century have set aspects of Britain's 1914-18 war resisters in a much broader worldwide process.

Caroline Moorhead's *Troublesome People: Enemies of war, 1916-1986* (Hamish Hamilton, London, 1987) begins with 'defining the faith' of 1916's COs, travels by way of the 1930s and the cold war to a reflection on the Greenham Common protest and the continuing importance of the peace movement as an assertion of individual freedom against the overwhelming power of the state. The collection of essays in *Campaigns for Peace: British Peace Movements in the twentieth century* (Manchester UP, 1987) edited by Richard Taylor and Nigel Young is in much the same vein. On the other hand, the diversity of its component essays, most of them by peace scholars, academics and activists, makes for a much richer and illuminating reading. James Hinton's *Protests and Visions: Peace Politics in 20<sup>th</sup> Century Britain* (Hutchinson Radius, London, 1989) covers similar ground but primarily as a way of describing the continuity of the peace movement and the roots of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND).

The worldwide importance of pacifism as a state of mind and a political statement has probably been best explored in the work of Peter Brock and Nigel Young. Their *Pacifism in the Twentieth Century* (University of Toronto Press, 1999) ranges from First World War COs via Gandhian non-violence to studies of 'New' Conscientious Objectors in a number of different countries from the 1960s onwards, and to the more recent development of a more clearly articulated religious pacifism. The ambition of that worldwide reach is to be commended as, indeed, is that of its successor, the *Oxford International Encyclopaedia of Peace* (Oxford UP, 2010). For its editor, Nigel Young, it is a monumental piece of work and a fitting tribute to a career spent in 'Peace Studies'.

Notwithstanding all that has been described above, the major change in our understanding of Britain's 1914-18 war resisters, as in so much else, has come from the new perspectives provided by Women's History and Gender Studies. The publication of Sheila Rowbotham's *Hidden from History* (Pluto Press, London) in 1973 and the broad advance of the women's movement in the intervening years have resulted in the undeniable insistence on the need to redress the imbalance in historical scholarship by addressing women's role. Jo Vellacott's work on Catherine Marshall and Sheila Rowbotham's *Friends of Alice Wheeldon* have already been mentioned. They have been major parts of this process. Along with them, and in some cases preceding them have been others. One of the earliest, Sylvia Pankhurst excepted, was Gertrude and Bussey and Margaret Tims' *Pioneers for Peace: Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, 1915-1965* (WILPF, British Section, London, 1965

and 1980). It was published originally to mark the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the creation of WILPF but stands rather more significantly than that, beginning with the International women's conference at the Hague in 1915, as the first account of the work of a women's organisation, eventually international, to campaign for peace and against war. If this has the feel of a slightly measured and dispassionate institutional history, then Anne Wiltshire's *Most Dangerous Women: Feminist peace campaigners of the Great War* (Pandora, London, 1985) is the opposite. Dedicated 'To Greenham women everywhere' it examines the 1915 Hague conference rather more closely and does not stint to describe the horrified abuse levelled at these 'Dangerous Women' by their male contemporaries. Similar accounts of men's abuse of the women who made a stand for their rights and for peace is not unknown in Jill Liddington's work. Since the publication in 1978, of her first book, *One Hand Tied Behind Us: The Rise of the Women's Suffrage Movement* (Virago) she has doggedly and with huge success pushed back the boundaries of our understanding of the nature and impact of women engaged in the social and political life of Britain in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Her contributions to understanding the women's role as 1914-18 war resisters have come in two forms. The first was her biography of one of Lancashire's 'political' women, suffragist and peace activists in *The Life and times of a Respectable radical: Selina Cooper, 1864-1946* (Virago, London, 1964). Although concerned mostly with the whole sweep of Selina Cooper's life, its brief account of her involvement with the Women's Peace Movement and of a near-disastrous anti-war meeting in Nelson, is telling. The second, wholly centred on women and the peace movement is her *The Long Road to Greenham: Feminism and anti-militarism in Britain since 1820* (Virago, London, 1989). The book's concern was to connect the women's Greenham protest for peace and against cruise missiles, with a much older peace movement. Hitherto, with some exceptions, the history of the British peace movement, it argues, had not credited women with a role. The *Long Road to Greenham* began the process towards a proper identification of women's contribution. Since then, it might be said, accounts of the contributions made by engaged and politically active women have become commonplace. They have even added something of that comparative dimension missing elsewhere. Alison Fell and Ingrid Sharp's *The Women's Movement in Wartime: International Perspectives, 1914-1919* (Palgrave MacMillan, Basingstoke, 2007) is an excellent example of this hitherto undeveloped perspective. Sybil Oldfield's collection of essays, *'Thinking Against the Current': Literature and Political Resistance* (Sussex Academic Press, Brighton, 2015) is

another stimulating case in point. In its twenty-one essays women or women's concerns are central whether in the late 17<sup>th</sup> or early 21<sup>st</sup> century. Inevitably it deals with women and war from the First World War to the present.

Women's History has not simply been about adding the women's story where it had previously been left out. It has been the major driver of work and thinking across the whole range of academic activity that has come to be called Gender Studies. The understanding of the ways in which society creates expectations of behaviour specific to gender has been of major significance to scholarship as much as it has been to everyday life and popular culture. Jessica Meyer's *Men of War: masculinity and the First World War* (Palgrave MacMillan, Basingstoke, 2009) has been important in applying that approach to the history of the First World War. Where the study of First World War COs is concerned one of the more original contributions has come from this source. With her *Telling Tales about Men: Conceptions of Conscientious Objectors to Military Service during the First World War* (Manchester UP, 2009), Lois Bibbings has taken the language and images used to describe COs whether in the press, in government propaganda or on public platforms and has examined the ways in which it was used to create a popular image. That the image was of 'unmen', cowards, shirkers even criminal deviants, made COs to be outsiders, 'other', much in the way that societies characterise other minorities the better to deny them their rights and liberty. It is a powerful argument and one which has resonance beyond the First World War.

The concerns of Women's History and Gender Studies may well be said to be drivers of a great deal of modern historical scholarship. However, there is still far too little activity where these two themes intersect with local and regional studies of Britain during the First World War. One notable exception to that is Alison Ronan's *'A Small Vital Flame': Anti-war women in North West England, 1914-1918* (Scholar Press, 2014). Based on a wide reading in the relevant literature, its strength is its use of a rich deposit of local source material for Manchester and its region. That material, seldom so thoroughly worked, demonstrates the strength of the women's movement beyond the narrow confines of London and the South East and away from the control of the women's movement's pro-war patriots. It also demonstrates the importance of the need for local counterbalances to the lazy historic assumptions of the existence of a uniform 'national mood'.

Possibly the first work to contradict the assertions that from 1914 to 1918 there had been a 'national' consensus in favour of war was Ken

Weller's '*Don't be a soldier!*' *The Radical anti-war movement in North London, 1914-1918* (Journeyman, London, 1985). It is an account of the anti-war movement in the North London boroughs of Islington, Hackney, Stoke Newington and parts of Middlesex. Its ideological centre was the North London Herald League and an eclectic combination of Socialists and trade unionists. Like David Boulton's *Objection Overruled* it is based on a mix of local sources, family papers and oral testimony. That mix produces a very different view from the one based on official and institutional sources. If it is to be criticised it is that it has little to say about the women's contribution.

Weller's work has been influential in encouraging others to look more closely at their local war resisters. Unfortunately this has not been reflected in the volume of other similar work. To date there is only one comparable local study, Cyril Pearce's *Comrades in Conscience: The story of an English community's opposition to the Great War* (Francis Boutle, London, 2001 and 2014). In this case the community is Huddersfield in West Yorkshire and, as with Weller's work, the study is based on a range of local sources informed by family papers and oral testimony. It describes a local anti-war community which united political elements from the Left with the women's movement and well-to-do Quakers to create a community which, although a minority, was influential in local attitudes to the war. It also describes an anti-war culture which persisted into the inter-war years. That this and Weller's work have challenged old assumptions about popular attitudes to the war has been recognised in more recent general histories such as Adrian Gregory's much-praised *The Last Great War: British Society and the First World War* (Cambridge UP, 2008) and even, perhaps surprisingly, given its title, in Catriona Pennell's *A United Kingdom: Popular Responses to the Outbreak of the First World War in Britain and Ireland* (Oxford UP, 2012).

After all this, what next? The First World War's centenary commemorative period, 2014 to 2018, has begun to create its own dynamic. Outside the 'official' acts of commemoration, organisations of all kinds are discovering ways of creating their own centenary histories. Inevitably these are dominated by the stories of soldiers and the communities from which they came. The battlefield honours of local regiments, local heroes and medals awarded are much to the fore. There is also an emphasis on the home front, the role of women and the contribution of local industry and agriculture. But within this activity there are groups and individuals, some representing organisations such as Quakers, branches of CND or even the Peace Pledge Union, who are

researching local war resisters.

That commemoration activity has already begun to produce its own work, and it continues. Watford's Quakers have produced their own DVD, *Watford's Quiet Heroes: Resisting the Great War*, based on the experiences of local COs. A story simply but tellingly told by Simon Colbeck with contributions from Jo Vellacott and David Boulton. The Oswestry Coalition for Peace has published a collection of extracts from CO writings with the title, *When Men Refuse to Fight: writings on peace and conscientious objection 1914-1919* (Oswestry Coalition for Peace, 2014). More substantially, and with the support of the Heritage Lottery Fund, Leicester Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) have produced an impressively researched and splendidly illustrated account of Leicester and Leicestershire COs. Written by the Leicester Memories in Conflict Collective, their *Uncovering Resistance: Leicester and Leicestershire in World War One* (Leicester CND, 2015) might usefully act as a model for other similar projects. If these are products of the combined efforts of groups of enthusiasts, the work of the independent researcher/writer is not unrepresented. Two books, by two very different writers and about two very different parts of Britain, have added their own contributions to this growing body of work. Philip Adams has followed the history of his home town, *A Most Industrious Town: Briton Ferry and its people 1814-2014* (Philip Adams, Ludlow, 2014) with an equally authoritative account of its anti-war movement in his *Not in Our Name: War and dissent in a Welsh Town* (Philip Adams, Ludlow, 2015).

Industrial South Wales is a world away from the small Leicestershire town of Lutterworth, the focus of Andy Ward's explicitly titled book *Conchies: The Uncomfortable story of the Payne Brothers: Conscientious Objectors in the First World War* (Matador, Kibworth Beauchamp, Leicestershire, 2015). It is a work of very clear obsession which, sadly, Andy did not live to see in print. In more than 450 pages with almost as many detailed footnotes as text, it explores and, it has to be said, struggles with, the question of conscientious objection, when set alongside the experience of military service and suffering. The focus of the work is the story of the two Payne brothers, religious COs from a moderately prosperous family of basket makers. Lutterworth's only COs, they and their family became the targets of sustained victimisation from their first appearance before the local Tribunal in 1916, culminating on the evening of the 28<sup>th</sup> May 1918 in an attack on their home and workshop by a mob which grew to almost a thousand. The task of preserving order was beyond the two policemen who found themselves at the scene. They helped the



family escape to safety in a neighbour's house but could not prevent the mob from smashing all the windows in the Paynes' house and shop or to prevent them from making a bonfire of the shop's contents and from setting fire to its warehouse and workshop. It is a story told in graphic details with the use of an enviable array of sources – Payne family papers amongst them – which struggles at length to explain why the people of Lutterworth might have descended to this frightening violence but stops well-short of passing judgement. Other writers may not have been so understanding.

Perhaps, when the commemoration period has run its course, the catalogue of work will be even more extensive. Some of it – exhibitions, lectures, conferences and discussions - will be more ephemeral. Nevertheless, the signs are promising. By the spring of 2015 the Heritage Lottery Fund had already supported more than fifteen First World War commemorative projects which were either wholly or in part concerned with COs. Others are coming forward. Independent researchers and local groups are pressing ahead without outside funding and a handful of Ph.D. students are already at work. The hope is that when all of this activity is completed we will have two important things: first a series of local studies which are made by local people and owned by them and second, perhaps a greater ambition, a history of the war and its war resisters, for the first time, written from below and with a concern for the experiences of people where they lived. If these can be achieved then the result may be a 'National Story' of Britain's war resisters informed by the full rich diversity of local histories which, again for the first time, properly balances the traditional received wisdom.

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*The Pearce Register can be accessed via*  
<http://blog.livesofthefirstworldwar.org/conscientious-objectors-in-the-first-world-war/>