



The Spire Sentinel



**The Newsletter
of The
Branch of The
Front**



**& Magazine
Chesterfield
Western
Association**

ISSUE 123 - May 2026

Our aims are 'Remembrance and Sharing the History of the Great War'.



Western Front Association Chesterfield Branch – Meetings 2026

Meetings start at 7.30pm and take place at the Labour Club, Unity House, Saltergate, Chesterfield S40 1NF

January	6th	. AGM + Tim Lynch - “Huns on the Run” Tim explores the often overlooked experiences of German POWs held in Britain during and immediately after the First World War
February	3rd	Ross Beadle - Sarajevo 1914 This talk examines the sequence of chance events of the preceding 36 years and, even, on the day of the killing.
March	3rd	Andy Rawson - Malta...Nurse of the Mediterranean against the Germans and Italians during WWII. However, over 125,000 casualties from the 1915 Gallipoli and 1916 Salonika campaigns were cared for on the island during WWI.
April	7th	Mick Byrne - Shot at Dawn Between 1914 and 1920, more than 3,000 British soldiers were sentenced to death by courts martial arms, However, only 346 were executed with 37 of these having committed capital crimes such as murder. The remainder become the centrepiece of our talk.
May	5th	Christina Holstein - - Verdun. What was the plan behind the German offensive of February 1916? A thundering opening bombardment brought early success but the German advance soon slowed and the French refused to give up.
June	2nd	Scott Lindgren The Admiralty dispatched two dreadnought battlecruisers to the South Atlantic to eliminate the threat of the German East Asia cruiser squadron. This talk explains the events and consequences of the Falklands battle, along with some of the strategic and tactical lessons.
July	7th	John Wilson The action at Sheikh Sa'id November 1914. The opposed landing that nobody has ever heard about! .
August	4th	Ian Castle - Gotha Raids. The talk traces the sequence of raids made by the deadly Gotha and massive 'Giant' bombers, and the development of the world's first in depth, integrated aerial defence system. Based on his book London 1917-18: The Bomber Blitz
September	1st	Roy Larkin - Where the Money Went. Following the success of the original 'Where the Money Went', the Sequel explores the financial costs of the Great War. Fully illustrated
October	6th	Peter Hart Welsh Warrior at Ypres, 1914: The thrilling memories of Captain Hubert Rees who ended up in command of the 2nd Welsh Regiment during the fighting at Gheluvelt.
November	3rd	John Horner 'In the care of St Dunstons : Private Richard Horners story'
December	1st	Neil Taylor....”Winston`s Little Army...Aspects of the Royal Naval Division”

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Chairman`s Ramblings



Another month has passed by and its branch meeting time again, last month`s talk “Shot at Dawn” was very interesting well put together and to hear about some of the stories of men who were executed made for a fantastic evening and it was great to see it so very well attended. It was an honor to have the Mayor and Mayoress of Chesterfield attend one of our branch meetings so I would like to thank them for joining us.

This month`s presentation is on the battle of Verdun which I am sure will go down well it will be an especially interesting for myself John Sutton and Craig Dudley as we will be going out to the Verdun Battlefields the day after the talk so it will be a good start to the visit.

I thank everyone who attends the meetings for supporting the committee and the branch. It`s your branch so hopefully it may long continue.

Jon-Paul Harding

Branch Chair



May Meeting - Christina Holstein

Christina Holstein studied Law at University but her main interest was always military history and while living in Luxembourg she developed a particular interest in the nearby Argonne-Verdun areas, which are relatively unknown in the UK. Christina was the founding Chairman of the Luxembourg WFA - now longer active - and has published seven books in Pen & Sword's Battleground Europe series.

Presentation - The Battle of Verdun

What was the thinking behind the German offensive of February 1916 and why was Verdun chosen? A thundering opening bombardment brought early success but French determination and sheer dogged refusal to give up meant that the German advance was soon measured in metres. By midsummer the offensive was a lost cause but the French hit back and fighting went on to the end of the year. It was the longest battle of WWI but did it matter and could the German plan ever have worked?



Secretary`s Scribbles

Dear Members and Friends,

Welcome to the May edition of the Branch Newsletter and magazine - number 123!

Been a busy month again.....we had our Branch meeting - see notes about this elsewhere. Then another visit to Leicester where I gave a talk on Leicester`s Industry in WW1 to the local Industrial History Group. It was a topic I didn`t know much about until I started researching...again thanks to Andy Rawson for advice including pointing me towards some interesting internet links. Then on Royal British Legion business there was our monthly branch meeting with the annual Poppy Appeal Thank You Event on April 25th.

This coming Tuesday we are in for a treat with one of the most respected presenters on the WFA talks circuit - Christina Holstein,

making her first visit to Chesterfield Branch. Having heard Christine at a WFA President`s Conference I know we are in for a treat.

On May 22nd I`m off to Gretna to the Devil`s Porridge Museum to deliver - on the 111th Anniversary - my talk on the Quintinshill Disaster, 22nd May 1915. The museum commemorates the huge (9 square miles) munitions factory built during WW1 to produce cordite. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle visited the factory and after watching the production of the cordite exclaimed that the operatives were making "Devil`s Porridge" hence the reason for the name of the museum. Before that I`ll be at Retford U3A History Group talking about Verdun and the Somme. Thanks to John Sutton who loaned me some postcards from his extensive collection of pictures from the Verdun area, also our own Branch Chair, Jon-Paul, for letting me have some of his pictures from a previous visit. My wife and I were scheduled to go on a trip several years ago to Verdun but covid put the kybosh on that that and we haven`t been able to go since then.

Next month we have another visit from naval warfare expert Scott Lindgren who is coming to talk about the sea battles in 1914 in and around the Falkland Islands.

Although we are not yet at the half way point in 2026 my thoughts are already turning to speakers for next year - suggestions gratefully accepted - I need to know about what you - our loyal, supportive members, want to see, hear and experience at our monthly meetings. Please let me know your thoughts

Best wishes, Grant grantcullen@hotmail.com / 07824628638

April Meeting.

It was a pleasure to see our Branch chair Jon-Paul Harding welcome Chesterfield`s Mayor and Mayoress, Barry and Marie Dyke to our meeting. J-P has been working hard to build relationships with the Chesterfield community and inviting these civic dignitaries was some of the fruits of his labours.

Here we have a picture taken at the end of last month`s meeting with Barry and Marie, speakers, Mick and David and some of our members....nice picture!



Introductions over we were entertained and educated by Mick Byrne and David Bardell who gave quite a moving account - entitled "Shot at Dawn" of some of the British servicemen executed by the British Army for offences under military law.



It was quite unusual to have two speakers making a presentation together but their format worked well and I have asked David and Mick back next year - subject "Crimson Fields"

David Bardell and Mick Byrne became friends in 2015. Having discovered we shared a passion for military history, particularly WW1, we have enthusiastically pursued our common interest.

We have visited the Battlefields around Ypres and The Somme each year and broadened our knowledge of the subject. We have recently started to deliver our own Battlefield Tours around Ypres and the Somme.

We launched our first Talk, Shot at Dawn, which we have delivered to a number of Groups and received complimentary feedback.

Crimson Fields was our second Talk and we have continued to develop a portfolio of Talks that we hope will be of interest to you.

We'd like to share our stories with Groups. We explore the background to, and the stories behind, the events bringing them to life.

Please visit their website bbhistoryrevisited.uk

WFA Branded Goods Shop

Report by Mark Macartney (Branded Goods Trustee)



Royal Mail Postage Charges have increased from 7th April 2026, and unfortunately we have had to put a small increase in our prices as Postage is included in our Branded Goods Items, so these are the amended prices (under) this does not affect Branded Clothing as these are organised by a third Party (West Coast Workwear)

BRANDED GOODS AVAILABILITY

BRANDED ITEMS BRANDED CLOTHING

BRANDED GOODS SHOP Availability

Branded Goods are split into two areas, "Branded Items" which WFA supply direct, and "Branded Clothing", which is supplied by a Third Party "West Coast Workwear. Please check the Shop for both areas or use this single URL for purchasing

<https://www.westernfrontassociation.com/about-the-wfa/branded-goods-shop/> Prices quoted for Branded Items are inclusive of Vat and Postage, prices quoted for Branded Clothing is inclusive of Vat but Postage will be added during checkout.,

Branded Items

1	Fridge Magnet	(£5.55)
2	Fridge Tile Magnet	(£3.55)
3	Mousemats	(£7)
4	Bookmarks	(£2.95)
5	Baseball Caps	(£8.55)
6	Ties	(£14.55)
7	Lapel Badges	(£4..55)
8	Mug	(£10.65)
9	Messenger Bag	(£28.35)
10	Despatch Bag	(£36.35)
11	Shoulder Bag	(£28.35)
12	Record Bag	(£28.35)

Branded Clothing

13	Unisex Polo Shirt	£21.46
14	Ladies Polo Shirt	£21.46
15	Unisex Oxford Shirt	£35.88
16	Ladies Oxford Shirt	£35.88
17	Unisex Sweatshirt	£25.66
18	Ladies Sweatshirt	£26.34
19	Unisex T-Shirt	£13.20
20	Ladies T-Shirt	£14.40
21	Unisex Rugby Shirt	£33.48
22	Ladies Rugby Shirt	£35.95
23	Unisex Breathgable Jacket	£108.96
24	Ladies Waterproof Jacket	£96.00
25	Unisex Fleece	£27.48



Despatch Bag



Record Bag



Shoulder Bag



Messenger Bag



Cap



Coffee Mug



Mousemat



Classic Tie



Fridge Tile Magnet



WFA Fridge Magnet



WFA Bookmark



Lapel Badge

August Experience: Popular Reactions to the Outbreak of World War I in

Sheffield by Ryosuke Yokoe

(Department of History)

One of the more exciting debates within the recent historiography of the First World War has been over the myth of 'war enthusiasm'.¹ The ubiquitous narrative concerns the European public's reaction to the outbreak of war in the summer of 1914, which has often been accompanied by images of war-hungry multitudes gathering in public squares and excited soldiers rushing to battle. In both France and Germany, the 'truce' established between political and confessional divisions in the face of national crises have been exaggerated in the public memory.² In Britain the reactions to the declaration of war against Germany on 4 August have been constructed largely from personal accounts. David Lloyd George, serving then as the Chancellor of the Exchequer of the Asquith ministry, recalls excited young men pouring into Downing Street on the night of the declaration.³ Bertrand Russell, a later critic of the war, remembered 'that average men and women were delighted at the prospect of war'.⁴ Across the continent, the 'myth of 1914' was constructed by both those in power and by those who deplored it for their respective political motivations.

Throughout the past few decades new historiographical interpretations contested this narrative by revealing a much more complex picture of European society. In 1977, Jean-Jacques Becker became the first historian to directly challenge the myth of 'war enthusiasm' in his comprehensive account of French society at the start of World War I, drawing conclusions from his work at municipal school archives.⁵ Jeffrey Verhey later contested the existence of the 'spirit of 1914'

upon Germany's entrance in the war through the analysis of crowd behaviour.⁶ Benjamin Ziemann expanded on this by taking a look at rural Bavaria, demonstrating how the event caused a great deal of emotional stress on the local population.⁷ The situation in Britain was examined by Adrian Gregory, who countered Arthur Marwick's narrative that 'British society in 1914 was strongly jingoistic and showed marked enthusiasm for the outbreak of the war.'⁸ It was not until 2012, however, that a comprehensive monograph was published dedicated to studying the United Kingdom's public attitudes during the summer of 1914, when Catriona Pennell published her doctoral research involving the examination of over sixty national and local newspapers, as well as hundreds of personal diaries and letters.⁹ Pennell concluded that 'war enthusiasm' failed to represent the mood of the period because of the diversity and complexity of British society in 1914.¹⁰ To varying degrees, all of these works agree that the war was received with a mixture of curiosity, confusion, anxiety, and even resistance towards the government.

In this paper, I intend to contribute to this historiography by examining the popular reactions to Britain's declaration of war in "Sheffield, with the purpose of considering the role of the local press in variously empowering and disempowering its readership through its representation of war enthusiasm and patriotism. I examine three local newspapers, the *Sheffield Daily Independent (SDI)*, the *Sheffield Daily Telegraph (SDT)*, and the *Yorkshire Telegraph and Star (YTS)*, studying their coverage from the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria on 28 June to the end of August. In order to study public attitudes during a period when opinion polls did not exist, Verhey identified newspapers to be the most appropriate source for 1914, especially because private letters and diaries were mostly reflective of the middle and the upper classes, ignoring the voices of the vast majority of the population.¹¹

Methodologically, it is important to understand that the press not only reported the events and reflected the sentiments of their readers, but also functioned to construct their perceptions of reality.¹² Innovations in the mass media during the late-nineteenth century gave a voice to the unrepresented masses in the public arena, while simultaneously reframing them within its political economy. In this way, the press served both to empower those whose voices would not otherwise have been heard, whilst exercising power over its readership through the various ways in which it chose to represent public opinion. The various contexts of a newspaper, such as its ideological leanings or its visual content, are important considerations in understanding the nature of their reporting. Based purely on the selected titles, it is understandable that the *Sheffield Daily Independent* had a wider coverage of the activities of organised labour than the more business-friendly *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*.

The establishment of the two rival papers stemmed from a bitter conflict during the 1890s between two Members of Parliament representing the city: Howard Vincent from the Conservative party, and A. J. Mundella, a Gladstonian Liberal. The *SDT* became the spokesperson of the manufacturing industries of the city that, through Vincent's representation, spoke out against the Britain's policy of free trade, which was fiercely upheld by Mundella and what was then called the *Sheffield Independent*.¹³ By the twentieth century, the *SDT* readership was among conservative skilled labourers, while the *SDI* appealed to both Liberal and Labour supporters.¹⁴ Meanwhile, the *Yorkshire Telegraph and Star* was more entertaining than informative and seemingly lacked any political allegiance, constantly describing its own politics as 'neutral'.¹⁵ The abundant supply of local newspaper articles made up for the relative shortage of personal letters, photographs, and other primary sources in the city archives that relate to this particular theme.

While Pennell's ambitious nation-wide study accounted for virtually every major city in Britain, Sheffield was curiously left unattended, despite its size and economic significance.

Located in the south of the West Riding of Yorkshire (now in the county of South Yorkshire), Sheffield was globally renowned for its innovations in steel production, while simultaneously manufacturing 98 percent of the nation's shares of cutlery. This would prove to be crucial in the coming years when the city became a producer of armaments and munitions. A rapid growth in industry resulted in problems of overcrowding and pollution that created a monotonous factory town, receiving the title of 'the ugliest town in the Old World' by George Orwell.¹⁶ Nonetheless, by 1914 it had a population of 454,000 and was one of the leading centres of the industrial North. Sheffield possessed the status of a major urban settlement while maintaining a strong provincial identity that grew from its remoteness within the surrounding countryside.¹⁷

Pennell's conclusion on British and Irish attitudes reflects how "heffield experienced the outbreak of war. During the weeks surrounding 4 August the city did not experience any significant cases of enthusiasm for war. While there were no sizable anti-war protests, such as those seen in Trafalgar Square on 2 August, various political and religious groups were outspoken in their resistance to the government's move to participate in the conflict.¹⁸ After "ir Edward Grey's speech in the House of Commons the day before the declaration which argued that Britain must honour its 'legal obligation' to defend Belgium's neutrality against a foreign aggressor, public opinion swayed in favour of an active British role in the European conflict. But even throughout August, the residents of Sheffield did not volunteer for service with a thirst for battle or express outright hostility towards Germany. Instead, they

accepted government policy by turning to solidarity, helping one another to adjust to the crisis as a community. This paper uses the example of Sheffield to not only reaffirm the recent historiography on 'war enthusiasm' in 1914, but also to reveal the potential for popular power and opinion in the midst of a wider political crisis.

The Impending Crisis

The anticipation of war, contrary to another popular myth that it would be 'over by Christmas', was received with dread and fear by a people fully aware of the destructive capacities of a wider European conflict.¹⁹ Sheffield newspapers, conforming to the national trend, did not write about the events of the Continent as a serious diplomatic crisis until Austria-Hungary's ultimatum to "Serbia on 23 July, almost a month after the assassination of Austrian heir in Sarajevo."²⁰ In fact, Britain was already preoccupied by several domestic crises that dominated the news, most notably with the Irish Home Rule Crisis. An opinion piece in the *SDT* from two days after the ultimatum suspected that armed conflict between the two states would no doubt lead to a catastrophic conflict that would involve the entirety of the Balkans.²¹ After hostilities commenced on 28 July, the *SDT* called for the war to be localised so that 'the disaster of a European war may be prevented'.²² The *SDI* published demands by numerous liberal organisations in Yorkshire under the headline 'War would mean Chaos' that called for Britain's neutrality, warning that economic disarray would result from a prolonged conflict.²³

In the midst of the near universal fear that surrounded the threat of war, 'letters to the editor' reveal elements of the popular discourse of the period. These exchanges often involved an interesting response by the editor himself, or even by other readers, demonstrating a lively arena of discussion. For instance, a reader named J. B. Wallis critiqued the media for their supposed tendencies towards excitement for war:

How is it that whenever there is a rumour of war, certain press scribblers erect their long cars and proceed to write as if the prospect were one of gleeful anticipation? Is it lack of imagination, love of people's pence, or sheer devilishness? Whatever it is, there can be no doubt of its harmful effect upon many readers of such sham-heroic stuff. [...] On the lowest

ground, surely no one really wishes to see European civilization (such as it is) turned upside down, trade disorganised, and famine and disease rampant among us.²⁴

After establishing a serious point on the role of the press and its impact on public opinion, Wallis states that a continental war would be detrimental not just for the masses, but also for the 'fine military heroes of the armchair'. Compelled, the editor responded to Wallis thus:

We believe that there is not a single newspaper in the Kingdom which has regarded the danger of European war with "gleeful anticipation" - or with anything but intense anxiety and foreboding. Before our correspondent attacks the newspaper again, he might take the precaution of reading them.²⁵

Wallis wrote back days later, admitting that he had exaggerated the enthusiasm that he witnessed in several titles, while still insisting that 'certain papers treat it much as if it were a glorified prize fight'.²⁶ The editor again replied that they had not read any such articles in the office, and proceeded to publish a letter from an anonymous reader under the exchange. It attacked Wallis for not providing any evidence for his assertion, while questioning the conscience of the press if they indeed did call for war because 'the world invariably hates the blood-spilling... with human lives falling like snowflakes.'²⁷

This exchange discloses an element of the collective reaction towards the unexpected dilemma that faced the nation. It is unclear whether Wallis actually read some articles that 'glorified' the war or if he deliberately exaggerated his account for political reasons. Indeed, a letter sent to the liberal *SDI* published on 3 August

warned of the 'war-fomenters of the Tory Press', pointing to conservative papers like *The Times* or *The Daily Mail* that, though not explicitly calling for war, were hostile to Germany from early on.²⁸ What individuals like Wallis demonstrate is that some were driven by their consciences to counteract any instances of 'gleeful anticipation' that made it easier for the government to follow through on its policies. The editor, who clearly selected Wallis's accusation to make a point, was correct that there was no evidence of anyone wishing for war, demonstrating the lack of evidence for war fervour in the local press.

There was also extensive coverage of the activities and voices of the various social milieus of the city that were the most outspoken critics of the government. The early twentieth century witnessed the rise of a more militant labour movement across Europe, expanding its political influence alongside the progressive extension of the franchise.²⁹ During the days leading up to 4 August, the *SDI* received several letters from members of international labour organisations making a transnational appeal for coordinated support for peace, one even arguing that all wars between states were essentially a product of class conflict that pitted working people against other working people.³⁰ Once war seemed inevitable, another reader warned that 'the masses of the people make the greatest sacrifice, by privation, suffering, blood, and human life.'³¹ Associations such as the Sheffield British Socialist Party, the Sheffield branch of the International Metal Trades Federation and the Yorkshire Miners' Association, all condemned the Asquith ministry's path to the declaration and professed their commitment to continue their petition for peace.³²

Similarly, the diverse group of Christian denominations across the city advocated peace over war. Three days before Britain's declaration of war, a column in the *SDI* argued that individual churches had 'the plain duty' to exercise their

social influence among the communities of Sheffield by mobilising public opinion for peace.³³ In a sermon titled 'stop the war', 'everend Matthews of the Glossop 'oad Baptist Church condemned the conflict as 'an objection against the teachings of Jesus'.³⁴ Calls for 'prayers for peace' were virtually universal among all articles concerning churches and their reactions during the days that surrounded the declaration, and the same sentiments were voiced across all denominations, from the Sheffield Catholic Church to the Society of Friends.³⁵ Evidently, the core social foundations of the city, trade unions and churches resisted Westminster's move to bring Britain into the war.

The Immediate Impact

Britain's declaration of war on Germany on 4 August immediately led to the mobilisation of reservists and volunteers.³⁶ The press reported possible evidence of enthusiasm, with the *SDI* describing 'scenes of great excitement' as 500 men from Derbyshire arrived at the Hillsborough barracks in Sheffield.³⁷ The square located next to the "t. George's church was set up as a recruitment area, characterised by a 'wave of enthusiasm' as volunteers were 'anxious to enlist'.³⁸ In the midst of events several men in their 40s anxiously lamented not being able to go to war because of their age, receiving a congratulatory remark from the *YTS* as the expression of 'the true British spirit'.³⁹ One could hardly deny the crucial role that nationalism played in enhancing the drive of many men to enlist within days after the declaration, indicating a sense of responsibility towards their own 'imagined community'.⁴⁰

The question arises whether these displays of patriotism qualify as actual instances of 'war enthusiasm'. It is perfectly natural that a community would wholeheartedly welcome a group of servicemen and send them off with a delightful

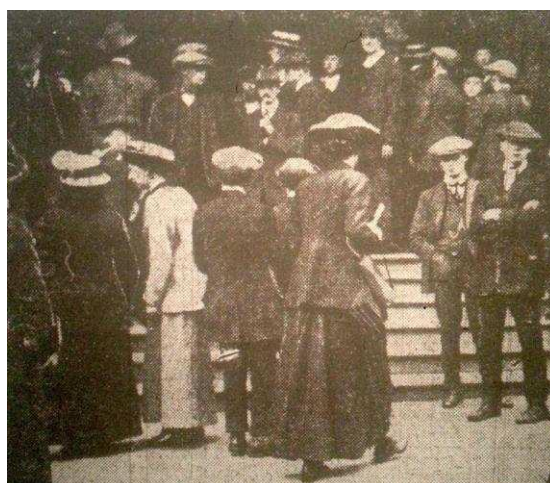
spectacle, considering the national significance of the sacrifice that the young men would endure on the battlefield. In addition, just as Ziemann described the positive mood behind the mobilisation of Bavarian soldiers, the role that patriotic duty played must be taken into account in order to determine why crowds were described as 'enthusiastic' by the recruitment stations.⁴¹ Young men were most likely 'rushing to the colours' out of obligation to their country, added to the motivation of gaining prestige that came with volunteering.

Ever since Vienna commenced hostilities on 28 July, the economic impacts of war were felt immediately in Sheffield. As the home of a number of manufacturing businesses, articles foreseeing the problematic effects on trade, industry, and finance were widely discussed in the local press.⁴² Within two days of the declaration several stores situated in Fargate, the commercial centre of the city, had no choice but to close their doors due to the sudden disruption of supplies.⁴³ Yet the food panic that resulted from the 'unprecedented' rush on groceries after 4 August seems to have died down quickly within a couple of days.⁴⁴ Within the coming weeks, the war acted as a stimulus for the local economy. The manufacturers of Sheffield won government contracts for the production of munitions, while the cutlery trade was kept busy supplying departing Territorials and Reservists.⁴⁵ Some were even hopeful that Britain would recapture large swaths of its domestic market that had been overtaken by cheaper German manufactures, a process that was one of the primary causes of Britain's competitive decline in their share of exports since the end of the nineteenth century.⁴⁶ In a provincial city dependent on industry, the business community was elated by the sudden upsurge in demand for manufacturing.

Nevertheless, this optimism was not shared by the whole community. Some striking perspectives on the city's mood during the days surrounding the outbreak

can be examined through the study of crowd behaviour, as demonstrated by Verhey's work on the supposed prevalence of enthusiastic crowds in Imperial Germany.⁴⁷ Groups of people spontaneously gathered in locations where they could access the latest news, like local government buildings, newspaper offices, and railway stations. In the case of Britain, however, Pennell was confident that there were no significant cases of 'enthusiastic' multitudes anywhere on 4 August, many congregations being misinterpreted as celebrations or being predominantly made up of the upper and middle classes.⁴⁸ Coincidentally, the weekend before Tuesday 4 August happened to be a Bank Holiday. What was expected to be a festive occasion with Britons taking daytrips to neighbouring cities was somewhat hampered by the events across the Channel. In an article titled 'A "hadowed Holiday', the *SDT* described 'the strangest Bank Holiday our nation has ever had'. Despite the usual festive atmosphere, 'men and women in their leisure and in their gaiety were conscious of the shadow. [...] There is no dread in the public mind, but a quiet and sombre foreboding made itself felt everywhere.'⁴⁹

On the day of the declaration, the *SDI* reported 'a scene of animation' as a crowd of people gathered to anticipate the latest national proclamations in the public square by the Sheffield Town Hall.⁵⁰



The above picture captures the event, depicting men and women of both the middle and working classes (notice the existence of a diverse set of headgear, including the berets and cloth caps associated with working class men, and the derbies and boaters with bourgeois men and women) loitering by the steps of the building.⁵¹ According to Verhey's typology of crowds, the mass gathered by the Town Hall could be categorised as a 'curious crowd' due to their genuine interest in the latest updates on Britain and the war.⁵² At the end of the text, the author sees 'indications of a rising war fever' in the coming days, evidence of a possible occurrence of enthusiasm.⁵³ However, an article published a day later commented on a positive atmosphere as 'curious' people continuously visited the town hall for the latest updates:

There was no disorderly conduct, there was no bitterness expressed in reference to our foes. If this spirit can be maintained it will serve to reduce the horrors of the war. The attitude of the man in the street seems to be, we are in it, and the sooner we can win through it, the better will it be for us and our foes.⁵⁴

This column indicates the author's conscious effort to dispel any evidence of 'war enthusiasm', contrary to prior reports of 'war fever'. The hopefulness displayed by this passage is an indicator of the general atmosphere of civility that prevailed among the crowds of Sheffield.

Acknowledging the War

The *SDI* posted the following note in introducing the 'letters to the editor' section on 6

August:

accordance with the principles we advocate, are declined. [...] Our duty today is to do all that is possible in presenting a united front and in seeking to bring about the earliest possible and most lasting termination of hostilities. Now is the day of newer duties.⁵⁵

This acknowledgement of self-censorship on the part of the left-leaning publication is emblematic of how public opinion shifted following 4 August. Anti-war sentiments certainly did not disappear, but a virtual consensus was established over the belief that the public had no choice but to conform to government policy to settle the conflict.⁵⁶ It is widely believed that public opinion moved towards supporting intervention following Grey's spirited appeal in the House of Commons, a notion supported by the Sheffield Peace Committee declaring its support for the Asquith ministry.⁵⁷ However, instead of turning to outright endorsement of the war, the process of the city adjusting to the present situation was done through calmness and cooperation.

The relative absence of hostility towards the German people, and even clear evidence of sympathy during the immediate aftermath of the outbreak demonstrates how Sheffield, while acknowledging the conflict, still resisted militarist sentiments. Major disturbances did not occur until May 1915, when the city followed the rest of the country by reacting to the sinking of the *Lusitania* by a German U-boat with anti-German riots.⁵⁸ Before 4 August a handful of columns and letters were published that sympathised with Germany, primarily for its intellectual and technological aspects that resembled Britain much more than the ubiquitously reviled 'despotism' of Tsarist 'ussia.⁵⁹ Particular attention ought to be paid to the treatment of German expatriates and German-born British citizens residing in Sheffield. It was reported on 8 August that around 400 German nationals were detained in the Hillsborough barracks, located just outside the centre of the city, as a result of the enforcement

of the Alien Registration Act of 1914.⁶⁰ By 10 August, they were released after supposedly being 'treated humanely', with one German even expressing 'appreciation of the kindness' shown during the internment.⁶¹

Conversely, a series of letters to the *SDI* revealed an alleged string of violent attacks carried out against a German-born pork butcher named Mr Gebhardt. J. W. Bell and Richard Fisher, two acquaintances of Gebhardt, witnessed an angry crowd converging on his business at the Sheffield Moore and later saw the store set on fire at night.⁶² Edwin J. Unwin, another acquaintance, sought to dispel the rumour about Gebhardt and 'a remark he made in connection with the present crisis'.⁶³ All three of the readers expressed sympathy for the butcher and condemned the attacks, stating that he 'has been among us for over 40 years, law abiding', and that he was a 'great advocate of peace, no matter what the nationality may be'.⁶⁴ This is only one example of the solidarity that existed in the city with its small German community, in spite of the rioters that harassed Gebhardt's store. The *SDI* posted the following after war was declared, concerning the city's foreign expatriates:

War is in all its aspects very horrible, but when it leads to a breach of good manners between non-combatants it is foolish as well as horrible. And we hope everyone in Sheffield will be as courteous to the German or Austrian located here as we should expect their countrymen to be to ours who chance to be in their countries.⁶⁵

The *SDT* similarly declared their support for the fair treatment of the Germans that 'dwell amongst us in perfect good faith, and are quite harmless'.⁶⁶ Considering how Britain was in a state of war with Germany, the level of courtesy and respect shown towards the local German community is remarkable.

The sense of solidarity was evidentially widespread in Sheffield, where people cooperated with one another, perhaps even on an altruistic basis, to collectively cope with the national crisis and its effects. Women volunteered immediately in the war effort by joining clubs for knitting helmets, while some received basic training as nurses for the local Yorkshire region.⁶⁷ The private sector also contributed by providing welfare for servicemen and their dependents. Several business owners promised their volunteering employees that they would be guaranteed the same job once they returned from the war, while some even agreed to financially take care of their families.⁶⁸ The Sheffield Medical Association announced that free medical care would be provided to wives and children, primarily because the National Insurance Act of 1911 only granted healthcare to workmen and not their dependents.⁶⁹ The sense of duty was reflected in these acts of solidarity, as the spirit of collective participation and responsibility was powerful enough for the community to sacrifice their interests for one another. The city's conformity with the national decision to go to war was perhaps an indication of how it had no choice but to accept the authority of Whitehall, rather than serving as evidence for its blind endorsement of government policy. The temperament certainly was not based on an enthusiasm for war, seeing that most wanted an end to the conflict as soon as possible. The residents of Sheffield ultimately decided that mutual respect and cooperation were the most appropriate attitudes in confronting the crisis.

Conclusion

A survey of the local newspapers of Sheffield in the two months that surrounded Britain's declaration of war on Germany on 4 August 1914 reveals an assortment of feelings among the people of the city. Judging by how the various political and

religious groups reacted to Britain's possible intervention in the European conflict, one can discern a significant amount of fear, uncertainty, and resistance towards the government's dealings with the July Crisis. The war was received by Sheffield with a sense of panic and curiosity over the impact that it would have on the daily lives of the people. While the city did not experience widespread anti-war activism, as seen in London and Manchester, the newspapers were crowded with voices of dissent and opposition towards the government. Once the war began, a sense of patriotic duty overtook the city, but the mood was still characterised by calmness and civility rather than an outburst of desire to go to war. There were clear signs of cooperation across Sheffield as the city collectively strove for a quick end to hostilities.

Catriona Pennell concluded that 'the idea of collective "war enthusiasm" was a simplification of popular feelings and attitudes in a time of grave danger.'⁷⁰ This passage is perfectly applicable to Sheffield's experience. Because the city was virtually untouched in her investigation of the British Isles this paper has sought to provide more evidence for the proposition by focusing on what happened in such an important city. Certain attitudes stood out among the mixture of reactions, such as the early resistance towards the Liberal government's move to participate in the war, as well as the collective safeguards against anti-German attitudes, but the city's experiences nonetheless coincided with the overall national trend. While there were several instances that could be arguably understood as a positive anticipation of Britain's participation, the voices of Sheffield expose a diverse assortment of activities and emotions that cannot simply be placed under the banner of 'war enthusiasm'.