‘The darkest town in England’: Patriotism and anti-German Sentiment in Hull, 1914-19.

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This article is primarily concerned with contributing to the burgeoning movement within First World War cultural history to provide rich local case studies, in order to problematize traditional perspectives on the patriotic response to war. It argues that, in Hull, the overwhelming response of local people was a sort of 'defensive' or 'practical patriotism'. The safety of kith and kin, local culture and 'way of life' was foremost in the minds of those attesting to join the colours, rather than the more abstract notion of defending 'King and Country'. Though the latter certainly played its role in expressions of anti-German feeling and in attitudes to the war more broadly, it was more often combined with 'local specificities' taken from the experience of life in Hull. Even riotous and criminal attacks upon the homes and businesses of naturalised German Hullensians could be oblique expressions of concern for the defence of the city, especially pertinent in a port in close proximity to the North Sea.

Keywords: First World War; patriotism; anti-German sentiment; Hull; Yorkshire; port towns; community

Introduction

The outbreak of the First World War in August 1914, and the ensuing mass mobilisation of people on the fighting and home fronts, often conjures up images of flag-waving patriots valiantly heeding the call to the defend the nation in the face of an intractable enemy. In the British context, the general picture is of a united front of all citizens regardless of class, gender or regional differences and prejudices, where the experience of war seems to be applicable to all facets of the Kingdom. When the effects of war were felt closer to home, in the case of Zeppelin raids or bombardments by off-shore naval vessels, experience was not easy to generalise. Particular areas of the country were affected more severely than others. This uneven spread of sacrifice has not, until relatively recently, been treated with the correct degree of seriousness in the historiography. In this article, the histories of local communities affected by wartime atrocities are given centre-stage in order to refocus efforts at explaining the motivation of civilians to engage in combat or war work. Although always related to a broader ‘national picture’ of social mobilisation, this study instead focuses on the ‘local

specificities' of policy implementation and wartime experience that have been side-lined in the existing scholarship.[1] This is not to say that the study of the First World War is not moving in a more multi-dimensional direction, with a number of social and cultural historians - if not all utilising case studies of particular locales – recognising the variety and multitude of responses thrown up by the war. These perspectives tend to coalesce around selection of often intersecting themes: calls for more local studies; transnational and intranational comparison; a focus on smaller, under-researched groups; the need to revise the 'standard picture' of war, particularly the disruption/ disillusionment thesis, making way for studies of wartime resilience. This article contributes to this ongoing debate by grounding itself in a non-metropolitan case study, with a unique historical character capable of illuminating overlooked or seemingly ubiquitous elements of the 'British war story'.[2]

Part-and-parcel of the localised perspective is the work of a number of historians that has questioned an assumed 'war enthusiasm' across the United Kingdom on the outbreak of the First World War. This includes Catriona Pennell, Adrian Gregory and L.L. Farrar, whose work has challenged Arthur Marwick's conventional view of an almost unthinking 'rush to the colours'. As Marwick put it in *The Deluge*, 'by and large the country, on the surface at least, was united and enthusiastic'.[3] David Silbey follows a similar line, claiming that, after overcoming initially 'mixed feelings', 'most of the population had converted to a pro-war position'.[4] Silbey's reason for this is centred around the famous claim made by Bertrand Russell that 'the anticipation of carnage was delightful to something like ninety per cent of the population' and is too sweeping to give the more nuanced picture that recent work reassessing the popular view possesses.[5] For Pennell, this characterisation of the first fleeting weeks of war is 'monolithic' and must be tempered by analysis of a multiplicity of locales and contexts.[6] Pearce similarly refers to the efforts of some historians to capture a homogenous national picture of wartime experience as a 'nonsense', calling for more studies

anchored in local experiences firmly outside of London.[7] Adrian Gregory goes further in defining the forms of social solidarity developed during the nominally 'enthusiastic' period by suggesting that many people 'came round quite quickly to accepting the idea of war' but they did so for 'local and specific reasons'.[8] A 'defensive patriotism' made the locality the subject of a rallying cry, suggesting a creative interpretation of the national call for patriotic unity according to the needs of local people: the 'appropriation of the national narrative through local cultural codes'.[9] Farrar also uses the term 'defensive patriotism' to define a resignation to continue fighting to defend the community, as opposed to an 'expansive nationalism' reasserting Britain's imperial dominance.[10] Beaven's interpretation cites a 'practical patriotism' as the impetus behind the actions of civic elites in maintaining public morale and protecting local business against the stresses of a war economy.[11] As we shall see through an analysis of soldiers' correspondence, defensive patriotism also works across geographical place, as in the frequent articulation of experience through references to quotidian family drama, city landmarks and air raids 'back home'. While overtly nationalist rhetoric does play its part, even in local debates, it does not appear to be foremost in Hull's experience of bombardment and mobilisation.[12] As Heather Jones has stated, the historical narrative of British wartime experience is not clear-cut, as either 'patriotic and just or imperialist and coercive. It was all of these things simultaneously'.[13] Other contributions have already underlined the need to compare and contrast local histories of war, in order to eschew attempts to assume a 'unitary 'national experience''. For Jay Winter, this perspective has its roots in the traditional study of war within a national framework; an approach that 'tends to conflate into aggregates quite different and frequently contradictory experiences'. The task is to assess changes wrought upon 'collective life at the local level', the communities who set in motion the government actions that enabled war to unfold.[14]

The selection of a provincial northern town for a study of wartime experience is centrally important. With an historiography mainly focused on the exploits of metropolitan citizens, this study contributes to a growing array of works of local and regional history attempting to establish 'geographical nuances' across a range of topics.[15] The divide between north and south, both real and imagined, is palpable in the literature of First World War studies and, as a number of scholars including Purseigle and Smith have argued, a recognition of the specific differences in language, dialect, class, traditions and culture of northern populations is vital if we are to attain a balanced picture of wartime experience.[16] Even a cursory glance at government figures reveals that - despite the marginally more deadly aeroplane raids visited upon South East England – Hull and the wider region's share of sacrifice in the form of Zeppelin bombardments was considerable.[17] The relation of this sacrifice to anti-German sentiment and violence is explored below.

Hull was strategically and militarily important during the First World War, as a port with longstanding naval and commercial links across Eastern Europe and the Baltic. The declaration of war on 4 August 1914 would take Hull's world-renowned fishing industry by surprise, temporarily causing trade and fish supplies to stall. The Trawler Section of the Royal Naval Reserve was formed to mobilise, initially, more than 150 fishing vessels for work as minesweepers. By the end of the war, this number had swelled to around 3,000.[18] Despite this, Hull's role in the British and international fishing trade continued unabated and the city's status as the 'third port' was retained. For this reason, Hull was targeted by Zeppelin raids and off-shore attacks by German naval vessels, resulting in the deaths of more than fifty citizens, and many more casualties.[19] Hull's geographic placing made aerial attacks more likely and was seen by many in authority as a vulnerable access point from the North Sea. The Navy was, therefore, seen as the foremost mode of defence, leading the author of a

government report on Zeppelin raids to note that 'Hull people have an implicit and affectionate faith in the British Navy'.[20]

All in all, more than 7,000 Hull men and women were to perish and a further 14,000 injured during the prosecution of hostilities.[21] The first-hand experience by Hullensians of death and material destruction had a number of consequences, including an increased sympathy with the anti-German feeling that had been circulating in Britain since the late nineteenth century. Indeed, as Panayi notes, long-standing 'traditions of intolerance' and anti-alienism form the backdrop to the 'Germanophobia' that gripped many British communities throughout the war.[22] Perhaps more positively, locals were encouraged by external circumstances to unite to defend the city and safeguard its most important material, symbolic and personal aspects, foremost being the family. Rather than an overt patriotic fervour or abstract notions of a threatened Britannia, local people, on the whole, saw the war as a threat to their homes and loved ones. The 'dogged defence' of an idea of 'home' typifies the recorded responses to air raids and reports of German 'atrocities', even when shot through with an apparent prejudice against Germans *en masse*.[23] As Winter puts it, 'sense of place' within the urban setting – in our case a port city – was never 'eclipsed by or subsumed completely within national or imperial realities'. The city, as a blend of the 'experienced' (neighbourhood) and 'imagined' (nation) facets of place-centred identity, was the symbolic and actual battleground upon which, and for, many soldiers and war workers fought.[24]

The figure of Belgium loomed large in mass expressions of apparently pro-war fervour, as a growing tirade of atrocity stories brought home to many British people the importance of home defence. The fear of invasion permeates the correspondence and diaries of Hull citizens during the whole run of hostilities. The assault on neutral Belgium by Germany in August 1914 set the tone for local reaction to bombardment closer to home, as it 'marked a new phase in violence towards civilians'.[25] Liège was central to this narrative, as

the scene of one of the first ever aerial bombardments, drawing civilians into the experience of war like never before.[26] This disregard for the neutral status of 'that plucky little nation' set the tone for the Allied propaganda advance against Germany and helped define the conflict as a contest between the 'democracies of a continent against the tyranny of the sceptre and the sword'.[27]

Local groups responded to the news of civilian and military death in a variety of ways, including on the one hand anti-German rioting and on the other the expansion of forms of civil mobilisation, such as charity fundraising.[28] Arguably these are negative and positive counterpoints in an economy of voluntary action made possible within the context of total war. Even with flare-ups in anti-German violence, the common response of Hullensians was social solidarity and the further reinforcement of a sense of community already underway in the formation of locality-specific 'Pals' battalions from August 1914.[29] Charity volunteers, local politicians and other elite figures attempted to construct a unified sense of place within Hull, one that was committed to reinforcing the community's resilience to external threats. The most persistent adherents of a thoroughly anti-German line were local tabloid newspapers. Even purportedly 'liberal' organs such as the *Eastern Morning News* fell in line with the conservative press, and a virulent mood of 'spy fever', to call for the forcible expulsion of German citizens from Hull.[30] Couched in terms more evocative of traditional 'martial and patriotic values', the Northcliffe press (which owned a string of Hull titles) claimed in the *Hull Daily News* that the 'British Lion has had his tail trodden on once too often, and [his] jaws are going to get to work in real earnest'.[31] Following armistice, however, these martial, patriotic values and their associated language of honour, glory and sacrifice were adapted in order to memorialise the fallen and, as local newspapers from 1919 show, reinforced a sense of local identity, solidarity and pride in a city profoundly altered demographically and materially by war.[32]

This paper will begin by assessing strategies of mobilisation on the home and fighting fronts, taking into account expressions of local pride, honour and therefore *identity*, as examples of a widespread 'local patriotism' capable of organising people collectively outside of traditionally national-patriotic tropes. This includes an analysis of anti-German actions, atrocity narratives and civilian bombardment, and suggests that these aspects of wartime experience intersect to produce an overarching theme of home defence in Hull's historical record.

Local patriotism in the press, correspondence and voluntary action

As the introduction outlined, local communities during the First World War utilised patriotic codes in creative and locality-specific ways. Hull is no different in many ways to towns and cities explored by historians in recent years. Pierre Purseigle's comparative studies of Northampton and the French town of Beziers are ready examples of the 'local acculturation' of strategies of national mobilisation: the ways local populations and elites adapted national policies and discourses for use in the local context.[33] Where Hull differs is in its status as a port and the often striking instances of solidarity shown by local people, not only with disparate Hullensians, but the inhabitants of other stricken port-towns. In local newspapers, atrocity propaganda was often copied verbatim from national outlets, reflecting the ownership of many local tabloids by firms based in the capital. This included Lord Northcliffe's *Hull Daily Mail* and the independent *Eastern Morning News*, founded by Liberal politician William Saunders in 1864.[34] Despite apparent political differences, both titles pandered, alongside other more short-lived dailies, to anti-German rhetoric.[35] Built upon the foundations of a pre-war literature of anti-German hostility and 'spy fever', the press played the role of transmitter of 'witness stories', some nominally truthful and others invented, enabling the construction of a 'myth-complex' in which all references to Germany and

Germans were situated.[36] But, as Panayi has noted, *pre-war* Germanophobe narratives did not result in acts of violence in local communities.[37] As some historians have argued, until 1914, British views of Germany were not predominantly negative, with fluctuations in perspective according to political leanings and contemporary events. Indeed, there were longstanding 'entanglements' between the two European powers.[38]

Responses to what became known as German 'atrocities' differ according to the locality in focus and, in Hull, were overwhelmingly about defence of the locale in the face of an apparently zealous and unremitting enemy. Rather than discounting the influence of nationalistic and patriotic ideas on local people, the urge to defend reflects a perceived need to prevent further atrocities or destruction in the locale and is not necessarily devoid of xenophobic prejudice or reaction. However, as Gregory and Farrar convincingly argue, even seemingly vitriolic actions such as rioting were not always articulated in overtly patriotic or nationalistic terms.[39] Indeed, in the case of Hull's anti-German actions and riots, many locals not only sought revenge for Zeppelin attacks but acted in solidarity with other seafaring nations and maritime cities. This was certainly the case during the intense period of rioting that followed the sinking of the *Lusitania*, a civilian vessel, in May 1915. However, this perspective has been problematized by historians, including D.G. Woodhouse and Adrian Gregory, who instead stress the role of wartime economic decline and insecurity in encouraging anti-German sentiment and activity.[40]

The growth in the German naval threat during the first decade of the twentieth century eventually pushed Britain, as the foremost seafaring power, into a defensive position. Germany became the 'popular enemy' and was incorporated into a narrative of homeland defence, underwritten by the fear of spies and 'foreign' interlopers.[41] We can see this process at work in personal correspondence and news reports following the first Zeppelin raid on Hull on 6 June 1915. Local housewife Nell Hague co-opts the melodramatic terminology of the

press when she refers to the ‘dastardly acts of these arch-fiends’ before going on to recount a prevalent atrocity story, one more decidedly local than many of the most common:

> The shop actually next to Holy Trinity is absolutely razed to the ground while terraces of houses in certain parts have suffered a like fate. The saddest case of which I have heard is that of one family where the bomb (explosive) crashed through the house, killed one boy, blinded another, mangled the arm of another and badly injured the mother. Is it not the work of devils?[42]

Hague refers to a number of Hull deaths during the first raid, including those injured and killed by an incendiary bomb that fell on Mullin’s grocery shop on Blanket Row, comprising three boys and their father.[43] The rest of the story appears to be conflated with the raids on Scarborough, Hartlepool and Whitby on 16 December 1914, most notably the case of no.2 Wykeham Street, Scarborough, where nearly all its inhabitants, the Bennett family, were killed.[44] The phrase ‘Remember Scarborough’, accompanied by an image of the ruined house on Wykeham Street, went on to become a rallying cry for anti-German propagandists and military recruiters who called on those not yet in uniform to ‘Avenge the Baby Killers of Scarborough’.[45] This was, of course, reminiscent of the alleged outrages committed against civilians in Belgium, including tales related to the mutilation and beheading of children.[46] Less contentiously, the destroyed shop next to Holy Trinity was that of the Edwin Davis department store, later rebuilt on Bond Street.[47]

Local adaptation of atrocity narratives and the impact of anti-German violence

There are notable examples of local adaptation strategies, where Hull’s specific role was defined in relation to widely-disseminated atrocity narratives. Local newspapers were especially adept at this, tending to ‘filter imperial [and national] issues through a local perspective’.[48] The Hull press was rife with anti-German invective following the *Lusitania* incident and, while editorials largely comment upon national issues such as the actions of politicians, the locality is brought into play as a home to many Germans, both ‘naturalised’ and ‘foreign’, though these concepts would become increasingly blurred as hostilities

continued. This is particularly true in cases of Hull men of German lineage who were interned as 'British' when caught up in Germany during the initial tumult surrounding the declaration of war.[49] Prominent local pork butcher George Hohenrein and his son were both held at the Ruhleben camp near Berlin at the same time as Charles (brother of George) was targeted as an 'enemy alien' in Hull.[50] Ironically, both George and Charles had already represented the city and county militarily, as officers in the East Riding Yeomanry and, together with the considerable locally-derived wealth and influence of their family, could not have been further from the 'alien' label appended them.[51] The *Hull Daily News* contributed to the popular 'spy fever' motif circulated by many right-wing national and local tabloids during this period, within which citizens now considered to be non-British were cast as potential or actual foreign spies:[52]

> To the great regret of a large number of people, this country has displayed extraordinary tolerance towards those persons of Teutonic nationality who happen to be living amongst us. It has been a mistake. They are not to be trusted. Once a German, always a German. […]
>
> There must be no more freedom to go about our cities as we are told certain Germans go about our own streets at the dead of night. We know there is a strong feeling against the freedom which Germons (*sic*) enjoy in Hull. That freedom must come to an end. […]
>
> The Lusitania is the "finishing touch." [53]

A similar line is taken by the 'liberal' daily *Eastern Morning News*, whose editorial of 13 May 1915 declared: 'Many people we know deplore that there should be so many Germans amongst us who are serving no useful purpose – indeed, that so many of them should be secretly engaged, as we believe they are, in plotting against our interests'.[54] With its stirring title 'AWAY WITH THEM!' it also outlined a plan for dealing with 'alien encumbrances' by detaining them on merchant vessels, a process that had been underway in Hull since August 1914 when German residents of the city were compelled to register themselves with the authorities. If not, they faced a £100 fine or six months imprisonment.[55]

With the passing of the Aliens Restriction Act (1915), Hull policy-makers implemented the law in a specifically local manner. Half of the 170 men who reported to the Central Hall on Pryme Street were detained aboard the Wilson liner *Borodino*, whereas those

familiar in the local community were initially permitted to stay.[56] As we shall see, however, allowing those deemed respectable enough to stay in the city did not prevent violent anti-German disturbances from occurring later, with the *Lusitania* event acting as a spark to already simmering anxieties.[57] More than three hundred German residents were eventually interned aboard the *Borodino*, out of a population of around 900 at the outbreak of hostilities. A thriving community of German pork butchers was reduced from around twenty to five due to forced repatriation and voluntary emigration in the face of xenophobic threats.[58] This is shocking considering the long tradition of German (or German-speaking) residency in Britain, nearly always present since its earliest history.[59]

Post-war commemorative literature celebrated Hull's track record in expelling 'undesirable' elements, especially in the successful recruitment of special constables: 'Dealing with aliens alone in a port like Hull caused an enormous quantity of work… No other Voluntary Special Constabulary in the county can show anything like so fine a record as Hull'.[60] A raft of legislation throughout the period demonstrates the commitment of the British state to a sort of official xenophobia, used to justify the removal of Germans and British people of German descent from public life. In addition to the Aliens Restriction Act, the British Nationality and Status of Aliens Act (1918) gave the Home Office powers to revoke naturalisation licences.[61] More importantly for Hull's thriving German business community was a proclamation made by the Hull Master Butchers' Association, for the resignation of all members of German or Austrian descent, despite Charles Hohenrein occupying the post of Vice-President.[62] Anti-alien hostility was also expressed by members of the local Council and found form through motions intended to fundamentally affect the lives of local 'alien' residents. A motion of 1 June 1916, almost a year after the first Zeppelin raids, called upon the 'Government to at once intern, and keep interned during the continuance of the war, all enemy alien subjects… on account of their being a menace and

danger whilst at liberty'.[63] The motion was carried unanimously. A similar motion was carried on 10 October 1918 banning persons of 'enemy alien birth, whether naturalised or unnaturalised' from voting in parliamentary or local government elections or holding public office.[64] These official proclamations were products of and, to some extent, the site for the continuing justification of anti-German sentiment.

This hostility turned to violence and destruction of property on a number of occasions during 1914 and 1915. In August 1914, pork butcher Charles Hohenrein's shop in Waterworks Street had a number of windows smashed by a 'crowd of youths', with a similar incident reported in October 1914.[65] On 7 July 1915, the business of German pork butcher J.F. Ott (Holderness Road, East Hull) was also attacked, despite being off the premises, owing to his internment as an 'enemy alien'. On the same night in the west of the city, the shops of butchers Robert Brehm and John Hanneman were attacked and looted while the home of an internee in Spyvee Street was attacked by around 400 men and women.[66] The specific national flashpoint for such outbreaks of sporadic violence was the sinking of the RMS *Lusitania* on 7 May 1915, which garnered significant press attention and was added to a repertoire of 'German atrocities' used to justify the imprisonment and deportation of many hundreds of people of German descent across Britain. Incidents followed in ensuing weeks, including a small-scale attack on pork butcher George Lang, where a window of his shop was broken by the boot of a drunken woman, who was later arrested and charged at Hull Police Court.[67] These instances of rioting, with some involving up to a thousand people, could easily be seen as the direct result of 'German atrocities', in this case the sinking of the *Lusitania*. However, the geography of rioting in Hull seems to counter this, as the riots in May 1915 were primarily concentrated in areas associated with fishing, particularly the environs of Hessle Road.[68] Being close to the maritime and industrial heart of the city, many local residents, including trawlermen and their families, would have already felt deeply anxious

about potential bombardment and at the loss of life among servicemen and fellow trawlermen.[69] Other issues of central importance to Hull and district, such as the HMS E.13 incident on 18 August 1915 and the deaths of local men (for example, at the Battle of Oppy Wood on 3 May 1917), had a cumulative effect on the amount of 'atrocity stories' and anti-German propaganda circulated locally. Several of the disturbances, rather than an outpouring of spontaneous xenophobia were, in fact, premeditated. This was the case in a further series of attacks upon the Hohenrein family, who were warned via a succession of notes to be absent from business premises on a number of days in May 1915. One even remarked 'I belong to a secret gang but I want to be your friend. I wish to warn you that your shop's in danger', precipitating somewhat ominously the onset of organised anti-German feeling with the assembly of the local Anti-German Union in November 1915.[70] The press reported other instances of apparently pre-mediated action, including the throwing of bolts from the top of tramcars in the Hessle Road area while some police statements suggested a general murmur of discussion in the district regarding the prospect of 'raids' on alien premises.[71] The premeditation of some actions, coupled with their concentration in especially aggrieved areas, suggests that the *Lusitania* episode acted as the 'occasion rather than the cause of anti-German anger in Hull', especially as the fears and prejudices of the local population had been inflamed by atrocity narratives, even before the official declaration of war.[72] Such narratives worked in tandem with keenly-felt fears regarding personal and collective safety to spur on acts of revenge against those defined crudely as the enemy.

Flashpoints such as the *Lusitania* incident and the Hull Zeppelin raids were spaces in which wartime anxieties were played out, and an agenda of home defence crystallised amid increased military and civilian loss of life. The xenophobia that seems to have pushed many people to violence against Germans, both 'alien' and naturalised, appears to have been a 'mask for deeper concern', as people were ostensibly responding to the perceived threat of

foreign invasion.[73] This helps to explain why anti-German riots increased after the first Zeppelin raid on 6 June 1915, as a response to frustration, anxiety and danger, as well as an expression of the urge to defend the locality.[74] In this sense, it is inaccurate to simply define anti-German actions as knee-jerk responses to attack or potential attack, just as they are not simply the result of jingoistic propaganda. Rather, the 'local knowledge' gleaned from an analysis of the trends and placing of riots allows us to ground such actions in the context of those that experienced it.[75] The riot, as 'social drama', acts as a space in which concerns regarding safety, local identity and moral codes interact. In the context of actual and symbolic external threat, for those involved in riots, their activities were underpinned by a 'communal sense of legitimacy'.[76]

As the above examples have demonstrated, events closer to home had a deeper resonance with Hull residents, often serving to galvanise morale and strengthen anti-German sentiment. However, as we have seen, this was often a cover for more complex and deep-seated anxieties. Atrocities with a more direct connection to the locale, including the Zeppelin raids of 1915-18 and the HMS E.13 incident, were also used to great effect in recruitment advertisements and literature. Such material was tailored to the direct concerns of local people and played on prevalent fears of the German 'other'. A recruitment advertisement called on the 'Men of Hull', asking a question evocative of the more famous Parliamentary Recruiting Committee poster ('Daddy, what did YOU do in the Great War', 1915): 'What are you going to do for England's future?'[77] The same sentiment was utilised in the post-war period by the City of Hull Great War Trust, this time to compel citizens to give donations for wounded servicemen.[78] Other efforts more thoroughly involved local men and women in a revenge narrative, compelling them to defend their homes and families with less emphasis placed on the ubiquitous 'King and Country'. A recruiting leaflet of August 1915 was unequivocal in this regard:

> The noble heroes of E.13 call to YOU to take up the cause in which they have died.
> WOMEN OF HULL! If you have a son or a sweetheart not yet in Khaki – see to it at once!
> MEN OF HULL! Wake up to your debt of honour to these heroes and ENLIST To-day![79]

A similar call was made in response to the 'Lusitania Massacre' by Hull Central Recruiting Committee, whose posters encouraged 'Men of Hull & District' to 'crush the assassins' for their 'brutal and premeditated murders'.[80] The E.13 incident connected both the symbolic and material aspects of wartime solidarity, when the fourteen bodies of the victims of its running aground of the coast of Denmark were landed in Hull on 18 August 1915. More than the cooperative effort of allies, Hull was seen by commentators to owe a debt of gratitude to the Danish nation, in whose waters the seamen perished. This incident intimately involved Hull in a major historical event, as a *Hull Times* article put it: 'Hull, strangely enough in late years, has been as much associated with some of the leading events in history as it was in the old days of the Plantaganets, the Tudors, and the Stuarts'.[81] Hull's historic and ongoing connection with the Baltic region also connected the city with Denmark. This solidarity along the lines of maritime tradition, culture and cooperation, beginning originally along commercial lines, accounts for the well-attended, sombre funeral ceremony organised in Hull's Paragon Square for the fallen of E.13. It also reiterated the central role of naval defence in the prosecution of the war, with the British Royal Navy only one among other allied forces: 'The city to-day, determined to do great honour to the brave men who were borne through its midst, and, through them, to the Navy, to whose "sure shield" every man, woman, and child owes safety and even existence'.[82] Here we see again an allusion to the crucial defence of kith and kin, and, by reference to 'the city', the locale itself as a bastion of maritime fortitude across national borders and geographical space.

The idea of 'home': local patriotism and soldiers' correspondence

A palpable connection between Hull and the war front was maintained in examples of soldiers' correspondence. Many servicemen explained episodes of their trench life with

reference to streets, shops and sights from home.[83] As well as a language in which to strengthen a sense of 'home' to hopefully return to, the locality was for many a reliable reference point when making sense of the experience of war.[84] Private L.W. Gamble of the 4th East Yorkshires frequently referred to Hull in letters sent to his mother from his training barracks in Southampton and eventual station in Le Havre, France.

In early correspondence, the scale of Gamble's undertaking is described in terms of Southampton's relative maritime capabilities when compared to Hull: 'It is a very big place and the ships in the dock are the biggest I have ever seen. They would make two or three of the ones in Alexandra Dock'. Gamble makes a similar comparative point in December 1914, when commenting on marching conditions in Southampton: 'You see the roads their roads are so bad, loose cobbles all over, and their main road is like our Stoneferry [East Hull] all cobble sets'.[85] Such comments maintain a continuity between pre-war home life and Gamble's ongoing experiences of military culture. More importantly, the use of metaphors drawn from local knowledge and landmarks '[rendered] the strange familiar' and so acted as part of a repertoire of coping mechanisms within the disjunctive processes of modern war.[86] However, the existence of such continuity suggests that war was not as destructive to self-identity and civilian-soldier relations as many historians have argued. Leed's argument has it that 'the personality adapted to the vicissitudes of war seemed to be wholly incommensurate with that individual who had grown up in civilian society', therefore positing disjunction within the serviceman ('psychic problems') and between him and his civilian counterparts.[87] On the basis of the record left by Hull men and women, a contrary argument can be made. Rather than disjuncture, war facilitated a fascinating array of means of communication that effectively connected the home and war fronts, enabling the maintenance of pre-war civilian social mores and traditions in a combatant context.[88] Indeed, letters exchanged between soldiers and their family members were not merely descriptive. Anecdotes and snatches of

jocular ‘banter’ between siblings and their exploits back home display an unwillingness to sever ties with civilian life and are often steeped in domestic drama private to the participants and therefore largely evading censors. A vivid ‘mind picture’ could be conjured in the mind of the serviceman, at times blurring the boundaries between the real and the imaginary, if only during the act of writing a letter.[89]

Soldiers whose pre-war status was defined by occupation and the support network of family were able to assert their civilian identity by referencing local places in correspondence, poetry and trench journalism, thereby displaying a marked degree of autonomy in terms of psychological coping and military discipline.[90] The fundamentally alienated ‘liminal man’ outlined by Leed and Fussell here is nowhere to be seen.[91] In fact, Monger goes as far as to suggest a model of wartime society actually growing closer, through shared experience and sacrifice, across geographical space: the ‘concrescent community’.[92] Links with home and the centrality of local loyalties (recognised by authorities in recruitment practices) interlaced the networks of familial kinship and soldierly solidarity across space, ostensibly by filtering experience through the lens of ‘home’, its images and prominent memories. What Englander calls the ‘modernist myth’ of wartime discontinuity has its mirror on the home front, where civilians were not necessarily as ignorant of trench experience as is traditionally thought.[93] Daily correspondence from soldiers on the front provided family members at home with an alternative source of news which was not as heavily adulterated and propagandised – despite the efforts of military censors – as the popular press. As a result, civilians were not ‘mindless patriots’ but conscientious observers willing to temper official pronouncements with candid snapshots of trench life from combatant relatives.[94]

The overwhelming number of volunteers promoted the organisation of subsequent battalions along specific lines. In the case of both Liverpool and Hull, groups of friends from particular trades and backgrounds were allowed to enlist together. The 10th East Yorkshire

Regiment (raised 1 September 1914) became known as the 'Hull Commercials' due to its social basis in a milieu of middle-class clerks and professionals. Though most recruits of this 'black-coated battalion' were inexperienced in military discipline and traditions, such battalions were attractive as an antidote to the stuffy confines of office life.[95] Other sections of the male population were recruited to similarly demarcated battalions, based on the assumption that men of the same occupation and background would want to train and fight together. The Hull Tradesmen (11th East Yorkshire Regiment), Hull Sportsmen and Athletes (12th East Yorkshire Regiment) and a fourth battalion known as 'T'others' – those not so easily defined by occupational status – followed the auspicious raising of the Commercials.[96] Just as pre-war regiments had taken local affiliation and pride for granted, volunteering for the new armies could be promoted as an act of civic loyalty in itself, while building on pre-war traditions, including local rifle clubs.[97] While enlistment remained voluntary, the united action of local recruiters, press and propagandists called upon local men to defend the city and its inhabitants. An advertisement for the Territorial Army called on the 'MEN OF HULL' to 'defend your Country, Home, and Liberty' while articles and letters reproduced in the local press emphasised the bravery, good humour and stoicism of Hull recruits.[98] A published letter referring to 'Lord Nunburnholme's appeal for a further £3,000' to continue the raising of local battalions and finance local voluntary work again evoked the image of a city in need of defence: 'Our volunteers are proving a credit to the City, and their value has been tested and proved. They are the City's protection, and the City should pay'.[99]

A 'Cheering Letter from East Hull Lad' Sergeant W.L. Powell implored his fellows back home to join the fight by shaming those who had not yet signed up: 'What cowards those must feel that stand out. How can they breathe the same air as those whose loved ones have given their all for the sake of honour'. He then appeals to a sense of local pride and community in his request for a photograph of the battalion's first recruits, the 'many familiar

faces from the Homeland'.[100] In a similar vein, Corporal G.W. Green of the No. 4 Company, 3rd Coldstream Guards attested to the impressive number of 'Hull chaps in the Coldstreamers', indicating a considerable distribution of Hull men beyond the East Yorkshire Regiment, and a degree of local homogeneity and camaraderie even within non-local battalions.[101] Green then refers to beleaguered Belgium in order to spur defensive enlistment.[102] His allusion to a 'beautiful church blown to pieces' would have evoked in readers the near-miss on Hull's Holy Trinity Church on 6 June 1915, as well as the bombardment of Rheims in September 1914, whose cathedral was destroyed.[103] His closing remarks echo the cries of patriotic recruiters, with a direct appeal to defend the locality.

Another 'cheery letter' of July 1915 appeals to local pride and loyalty, whilst once again scolding those refusing to fight: 'If the young men of Hull and Yorkshire would come out and share these times it would help make the hard times pleasant, instead of sitting at home and reading the papers. There is plenty of room in Flanders for all Hull. Our regiment was chiefly composed of Hull men, but many of them have fallen, so it is up to the young men of Hull to keep up the good name'.[104] Emphasis is placed here on the importance of comradeship in the trenches, especially from men of the same city. In line with this, the traditions and gallant service of Hull men of the 1st East Yorkshires are best maintained by reinforcement by other Hull men, suggesting therefore the continued centrality of local identity in regimental mobilisation. Such press efforts point to the importance of locality and personal ties for many servicemen and the surprising extent to which those in authority were aware of this when producing material.[105]

Following the news of Zeppelin attacks in June 1915 (apparently reaching Southampton around September), Gamble makes frequent reference to 'the buzzers' - the steam-whistle warning system first tested in Hull in January 1915 - and enquires as to the safety of his family at home.[106] On 20 September 1915 he writes: 'Have you been bothered

with the Buzzers lately' and repeats the same refrain at regular intervals into mid-June 1916.[107] His experience on the frontline is also treated as parallel, though not necessarily equal, to military actions on the home front: 'Have you had the buzzers going lately, we see plenty of aeroplanes here, you take no notice of them'.[108] The sense that these experiences are not entirely identical is provided by an earlier letter of 1916, in a comment by Gamble on his younger brother's non-combatant lifestyle: 'Well I hope Lewis has enjoyed his 6 days holiday and I am glad his hat blew off. It aught (sic) to have blown in the Humber'.[109] Far from bitter, however, this comment has a jocular tone very much in line with his thoughts on the various facets of family drama in motion at home, including a quip regarding his sister's new boyfriend:

> Florrie has got a wounded soldier has she, well she wants to look after him. Has he been to our house yet and does he belong to the Yorks…. I wish I had been there to see your face when you found out what they looked like. I would have laughed at you if I had seen you walking along Spring Bank [city centre] arm in arm with her.[110]

Here, as well as continuing to preserve a connection with family matters at home, Gamble is also maintaining a relationship with the city of his birth. Even when stationed in France amid flying bombs and bullets, an imagined moment such as an encounter with his mother and sister in the street is articulated in local terms. He is also clearly reiterating his allegiance to his regiment and county by enquiring as to the regional identity of his prospective brother-in-law. The importance of correspondence cannot be understated for either fighting men or their family members. The mails were a palpable connection with home and, the more personal and oblique communications between the front and home were, the less likely they were to be censored.[111]

Local patriotism on the home front: volunteerism and charity fundraising

Letters, postcards and packages were vital for morale and helped supplement often meagre rations in the trenches. They could act as more than mere temporary succour amid the

privations of military life. Food and tobacco packages were often an expression of maternal or wider familial affection.[112] They could also maintain or reassert continuity with pre-war civilian life. Furthermore, the abundance of fundraising and advertising adapted to local war culture demonstrates the potential of wartime philanthropy to bolster local identity. Newspaper appeals drew upon popular patriotic ideals and images, connecting the home and fighting fronts, while incorporating the use of the cigarette in an 'economy of sacrifice' in which the non-combatant was seen to owe the soldier a debt for his efforts.[113] In this context, cigarettes or cakes were a 'token of appreciation for their sacrifice'.[114] The *Hull Daily News* and *Sports Express* 'Tobacco Fund for Hull & District Heroes' alluded to the stresses of trench life and the need to bridge the gap between soldiers and civilians:

> A pipe of tobacco or a cigarette in times like these indeed seems to be the solvent of all the British soldier's cares, and to deprive him of a smoke, for even a few days, would be unthinkable, if we only realised the debt we owe him.[115]

Even the act of smoking itself was utilised as a symbol of the break with civilian normality: 'Every man in the firing line is a man you would be proud to hand your cigarette case to. Such a pleasure is denied you, but you can still make friends by letting us send a parcel of smokes from you in your name'.[116] The inclusion of a collection card and a 'personal thank you' from the soldier in receipt of his 'favourite "weed"' intertwined fundraising and home-war front relations with the language of sacrifice. Those at home also had to 'do their bit'. Such appeals played their part in 'cementing a sense of involvement in the war effort', maintaining a line of continuity with pre-war social interactions and local community ties.[117] Appeals could also contribute to efforts for 'King and Country' by including stylised patriotic motifs, including the fictional 'Kitchener's Cigarettes' in the *Daily News* fund.[118]

An array of local fundraising efforts utilised similar mobilisation strategies. This included a number of community events and fairs raising money for the Red Cross Society, such as the 'military sports and horse show' held on Boulevard (West Hull) and Miss

Bethell's 'Garden Fete at Rise Park' in July 1915. Attendees were able to peruse stalls selling 'farm produce, Irish linen, scents, sweets, cake and teas' as they were regaled by the patriotic poetry of the 'Bard of the East Yorks. Regiment'.[119] Other events encouraged solidarity between the Allied nations. May and July 1915 saw flag days held on behalf of both French and Russian soldiers, the latter stressing the intimate relations fostered by trade and migration: 'As was to be expected, Hull, which has so many commercial ties with Russia, is taking up the celebration of Russian Flag Day with great enthusiasm'.[120] This, remarkably, included flying the Russian flag from the Guildhall and other central public buildings. The French counterpart to this event not only saw the distribution of miniature flags in return for donations, but the decoration of a car in the Tricolour, which proceeded to pass through the streets of the city centre with baskets appended for donations.[121] This array of events, particularly fetes and flag days, demonstrates the efforts of Hull's wartime community, both elite and grassroots, to support local men fighting abroad. This also extended to those imperilled or imprisoned by war, in addition to those in natural solidarity with Hull as a historic commercial maritime hub. While alluding to patriotic sentiment and imagery, the primary function of such events was community mobilisation for the material and social benefit of absent citizens. They also had the twin benefit of encouraging connections with the fighting front, while bringing local non-combatants together at a time of intense stress.[122] Thus, such voluntary efforts contributed to a markedly more positive 'local patriotism', one that did not draw upon anti-German discourses.

The physical distance between civilians and absent family members, be they soldiers or essential war workers, was felt vividly and acted as the clearest break with pre-war life apart from leaving one's occupation. Hence, the significance of the wartime postal service in attempting to overcome the 'existential gap' that stood between potential death in the trenches and the comfort of home.[123] Nell Hague remarked on the 'gulf' separating them that

seemed only longer in light of Zeppelin raids at home.[124] Darkness shows itself to be another enduring theme of wartime experience and contemporary comment, with periods of waiting for potential bombardment being the worst of all:

> Last night the alarm was blown again… the Civic Guard come round and order all lights out, cars are stopped and practically everything is in utter darkness…
>
> Another night sitting waiting for the hell hounds. In total darkness.[125]

The charge of the 'darkest town in England' was taken up by the popular press after hostilities had ended and censorship lifted, as a way of capturing the subdued mood palpable among local populations during periods of aerial bombardment.[126] It also captured symbolically the sense of a city under siege, attacked ostensibly to undermine civilian resolve. The post-war narrative saw Germany's attempt to subdue denizens of Hull and other eastern coastal locations as an utter failure, owing to the city and region's indefatigable determination. The precautions employed following the initial 'surprise' attack owing to a lack defensive measures meant that subsequent 'buzzers' across the region, including the similarly darkened Grimsby, did not necessarily lead to raids.[127]

Personal correspondence and home front voluntary action worked hand-in-hand to reinvigorate connections between the fighting and home fronts, especially in the case of events utilising the language of local identity and culture. These were instrumental in the construction of 'local patriotism', in their ability to mobilise local people *en masse* to support home defence via a discourse of shared sacrifice and solidarity. However, as Gregory notes, the idea of 'equal sacrifice as a social cement' was undermined by the popular discourse utilised by the press as to the moral failings of certain sections of the civilian population, i.e. those not yet involved in any sort of voluntary war work or fighting abroad.[128] The sacrifice of civilian volunteers, when contrasted with the moral self-sacrifice of the troops, paled in comparison, leading to the 'blanket condemnation of all civilians' by the foremost war poets and, in turn, some servicemen.[129] Nevertheless, local voluntary action, coupled with an

efficient postal service, fulfilled a vital function in maintaining pre-war social relations across space and in reiterating the central role of locality and its defence in mobilising for war.

The wartime correspondence and post-war memoirs of civilians and home front volunteers sheds light on the varied local experience of war, with Zeppelin raids again providing the most useful motif for the articulation of such experience. Albert Harvey, an apprentice draper, comments on the moment which compelled him fight:

> I was turning in on the Sunday night of the first Zeppelin raid on Hull on the 6th June 1915. We saw the Zeppelin from the top storey and later went on to the streets, where a number of people were wearing nightclothes. There were at least three big fires and much damage. I felt that I wanted to get at the Germans.[130]

Harvey joined the 4th East Yorkshires ten days later, though he maintained an ambivalent view of war and aspects of popular opposition to it, attesting that 'I have never become a pacifist, as I don't think it is effective against extremists. I recognise the futility and destructiveness of war, and seek peace, though not at any price'.[131] This kind of reluctant determination to carry on in the face of war, justified on some level by an image of a recalcitrant enemy and a sense of moral righteousness, is also evidenced in the recollections of a Hull resident who, at the outbreak of war, was only a child. Dorothy Turner, daughter of a 'master engineer', comments on the propensity among many Hull folk to '"have a go" at the hated Germans' by joining the fighting front. Indeed, for young Dorothy and the crowds around her, the outbreak of war was a period of, as she puts it, 'tremendous excitement with queues of males of all ages thronging the recruiting stations'.[132] What appears to be an overwhelmingly enthusiastic Hull public is given a transformative character here, alongside the introduction of aerial bombardment of residential neighbourhoods, in that local life changed irrevocably and led to a widespread defensive attitude: 'Air attack became a serious threat and defence against it changed the life of Hull still further'. The experience of the new regulations introduced in the face of Zeppelin attacks was curiously adapted into the everyday routines of normal people, no less in Dorothy's case. For her and her school friends,

the warning buzzer was welcome, as it promised the possibility of a day off school: 'To all the schools in the town the timing of the raids was a basic importance. If the Relief sounded at all before 11.59am "school" was as usual! If at 12.01am no morning school. How we watched those two minutes!'[133]

Other elements in the local community sought to capitalise on regulations, codified following the first raid on 6 June 1915, including insurance companies, who offered specially designed 'black-out' schemes to newspaper readers. All local tabloids offered unique special offers 'against street accidents' when traversing 'Hull's darkened streets'.[134] The scheme offered by the *Hull Daily News* went further in encouraging duty to defend the family: 'Your duty to your wife and family is obvious… insure yourself against the perils of the darkened streets and public thoroughfares'.[135] It seems that, within a besieged city, a small financial sacrifice was tantamount to patriotic duty. The Kings of Hull ironmongers, whose premises adjacent to the completely-levelled Edwin Davis department store were also damaged in the raid, proudly proclaimed their Milner's safes 'Zeppelin proof'.[136] These are examples of what Beaven has termed 'defensive patriotism'. The destructive pressures of the war economy being a focal concern of civic elites during this period, the above measures maintained sources of revenue and profit throughout the war and therefore contributed to a sense of normalcy and relative economic buoyancy amid the privations induced by international conflict.[137] Conversely, Hull Brewery Co. took advantage of fraught nerves and interrupted sleep patterns following air raids in its newspaper advertising, calling upon customers to 'always keep a few bottles in reserve' when waiting for the 'dismiss buzzer' to cease. In another example, the firm exhorted 'when up at unexpected hours you will be glad of a bottle'.[138]

Businesses that survived the war were blatant in their use of wartime language to sell their products. In 1919, local department store Hammonds requested customers to 'Wander

round in Peace. You will not be asked to buy' before claiming that 'this year of glorious Victory' would facilitate the further expansion of the business. Though this seems cynical at face value, it goes on to allude to the anxiety of wartime deprivation and scarcity, reassuring customers of a return to normality: 'as the restrictions on trade are being removed one by one, we can supply all your needs from a choice of the best materials on the market'.[139] Womenswear specialists Costello were less nuanced in their reference to war. An advertisement of July 1919 boasted:

> We are always at WAR; always FIGHTING to maintain the reputation that thirty years of strenuous effort has built up for us; always defending ourselves… and You… from the enemies of INSUFFICIENCY… BAD WORKMANSHIP… SLACKNESS OF DETAIL… INFERIOR MATERIAL, And… thanks to the splendid support of the Ladies… WE… ALWAYS… CONQUER.[140]

King & Co. Ltd. used advertisements to apologise for the interrupted service brought about by the war, alluding to a loss of staff to the prosecution of hostilities: with peace 'service will return to normal', thereby drawing parallels between business, wartime and post-war social life.[141] The carpet and linoleum firm Crafts Ltd. clearly underlined its debt to the war for business expansion. As an advertisement displays in photographic form, the business grew twofold during the war years, from just two shops in 1914 to four in 1919. Contrary to the other companies' constant reference to interruption, social and material sacrifice during the prosecution of hostilities, Crafts' steadfastness displays the firm's unparalleled 'capacity to serve the Hull Public'.[142] This, therefore, offers an alternative view of Hull people as phlegmatic war workers, or at least lays claim to elements of a narrative of British pluck in the face of overwhelming odds. To some extent, such efforts broaden conceptions of Englishness to include regional variations, in this case one that is defiantly local.[143]

Conclusion

This study has shown the multi-layered, often ambivalent nature of wartime experience in Hull during the First World War. The analysis of wartime events and social and cultural

phenomena, including riots and xenophobic propaganda, has enabled the explanation of anti-German sentiment and elements of patriotic discourse in the terms constructed in the context of total war. Rather than the product of spontaneous jingoism and reaction, we can see both riots and other actions as a response to collective unease and often outright despair following bombardment. They were also part-and-parcel of a widespread local patriotism, within which citizens saw themselves as responsible for home defence and in natural solidarity with other maritime communities. This discourse - through the frequent intonation of local landmarks and dialect, as well as personal ties with family – meant that frontline soldiers and those serving far from home were not entirely cut off from the rhythms of pre-war life. Indeed, this was made possible by an efficient military postal service. The frequent allusion in the local press and mobilisation literature to local defence and pride - in the context of a long history of maritime success and belief in freedom - also helped maintain the connection between the home and fighting fronts in Hull.

Fundamentally, this study has drawn upon an array of sources to explore the multi-textured local experience of war. Contributing to the efforts of Farrar, Gregory and McCartney, it has also questioned what was once considered a consensus among historians regarding enthusiasm for war, by not only explaining expressions of enthusiasm within a specific local context, but also positing that reactions to atrocity and bombardment commonly described as anti-German were a ‘mask for deeper concern’, a last ditch attempt to assert a degree of control over rapidly-changing events. They were also oblique attempts to defend the locale and those within it, using events like the sinking of the *Lusitania* as sites for the expression of collective anxiety.[144] Hull’s status as the Empire’s ‘third port’ during this period, including the opening of a state-of-the-art dock a mere month before the outbreak of war, must also be underlined as a central reason the city was targeted by enemy forces. It was a vital cog in the mechanisms of a global ‘imperial system’, often overlooked in studies of

Empire, with a local culture borne of its maritime-industrial importance and geographical placing, underpinned by shared community experiences.[145]

To conclude, patriotism and anti-German sentiment in Hull during the First World War was not as clear-cut as orthodox perspectives on war enthusiasm would have it. Indeed, traditional national concepts of patriotic fervour were not transplanted wholesale into the local community context. They were adapted for use in the locality, stressing the need to defend the city, its people and institutions. A widespread local, *defensive* patriotism connected civilian volunteers and non-combatants with those fighting in the trenches, enabling vital components of pre-war culture and identity to be maintained during the stresses and strains of warfare on a colossal scale. In the case of many Hull servicemen, home was still very real, the hope of return kept alive through personal correspondence. Crucially, the war enthusiasm and patriotism expressed by Hullensians was refocused in ways that reflected the 'local specificities' of wartime life in the city.[146] The focus in this article on the manifold techniques of mobilisation - from military recruitment to charity fundraising – has revealed a multi-layered history of wartime experience that underlines the importance of studying local communities in the north of England. This provides a way of rebalancing conventional national-metropolitan perspectives on First World War cultural history, while underlining the considerable contribution of a Northern English port city vital to the continuation of global Empire in the first decades of the twentieth century, particularly during the stresses of war.

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