

The ‘Local Bigwigs’ and the ‘Cold-Footed Brigade’: Conscientious Objectors and the Oxfordshire Military Service Tribunals in 1916

Dissertation Submitted for the Master of Studies Degree in Historical
Studies

Department of Continuing Education, University of Oxford

Susan Smith

Manchester College 25 May 2017

Word count: 16,659 (excluding footnotes and Bibliography)



**Figure 1: Conscientious objectors on the Home Office scheme at Dartmoor
Camp, 1918.**

William Henry Waddle, Oxford conscientious objector (see Case Study p. 48), seated
in the middle of the second row, immediately above the two lying figures.

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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the following people for their time, information and support –

Bill Hetherington, Peace Pledge Union
Mark Levene, University of Southampton
Ken Marsland and Ruth Waddle, relatives of William Henry Waddle
Cyril Pearce, University of Leeds
David Seymour, Independent Researcher

Oxford College Archivists -
Judith Curthoys, Christchurch College
David Roberts, Magdalen College
Emma Goodrun, Worcester College
Julian Reid, Merton College
Michael Riordan, the Queens College and St John's College
Robin Darwall-Smith, University College and Jesus College
Jennifer Thorp, New College
Lucy Rutherford, Hertford College
Jeffrey Hackney, Wadham College
Georgina Edwards, Brasenose College
Rob Petrie, Oriel College
Diana Hackett, Nuffield College
Oliver Mahony, St. Hilda's College

Abbreviations

In the text:

MSA: Military Service Act

NCF: No-Conscription Fellowship

UDC: Union of Democratic Control

In the footnotes:

OC: *Oxford Chronicle* and Berks. and Bucks. Gazette.

OC TR: *Oxford Chronicle* Tribunal Report

OT: The Oxford Times

OT TR: The Oxford Times Tribunal Report

* All dates given in footnotes are from the year 1916 unless otherwise stated.

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Abstract

**The ‘Local Bigwigs’ and the ‘Cold-Footed Brigade’: Conscientious Objectors
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This dissertation examines the conflict in 1916 caused by conscientious objection to military service in the First World War. Local Military Service Tribunals set up to hear appeals for exemption from military service were the location for power struggles. The objectors claimed moral authority, the Tribunals and the Army required patriotic duty. The Church was divided between respect for individual religious belief, and the demands of the state.

The study seeks to establish how powerful figures from Oxford, an ancient university town, exercised national influence to achieve fair treatment for the conscientious objectors. . It suggests that the Oxford objectors had influence on national policy.

It analyses if and how the objectors influenced public opinion. It assesses the different ways in which the Oxfordshire Tribunals treated the conscientious objectors differently according to religion, political views, social class and education, discriminating in favour of the 'gown' (the university) and against the 'town'.

The study suggests that the history of conscientious objection should be viewed in a wider narrative, as part of a discourse about the development and the exercise of twentieth century individual human rights and what the state can legitimately demand of its citizens. There have so far been few local studies examining the connections between government policy and the treatment of conscientious objectors as it developed, and this study provides a contribution.

Susan Smith, Master of Studies in Historical Studies, Department of Continuing Education, University of Oxford

Introduction

This dissertation will examine the conflict in 1916 between different kinds and levels of authority within the arena of the British Military Service Tribunals, around the issue of conscientious objection; between the Local Tribunal members, described by John Hoare as ‘local bigwigs’¹, and the conscientious objectors, described by one Tribunal member as ‘the cold-footed brigade’² (believed to be too frightened to join the army). This was the first time compulsory military conscription had been introduced in Britain, and the Tribunals were set up in 1916 to hear appeals for exemption from the armed services. This was a struggle to recruit men to the Armed Forces to win the War, but also to establish the moral right of individuals to refuse to fight in a war they believed was fundamentally wrong. The underlying struggle was to establish the right to objection to military conscription as one that a modern state should respect and observe, with a wartime government, which viewed them as ‘the enemy within our gates’³.

The history and definition of conscientious objection to war is outlined in the Background section. Chapter 3 describes the social and political scene in Oxfordshire in which tensions between city and university, and church and state were played out in the arena of the Tribunal. Details about who the Oxfordshire objectors were and the evidence for differential treatment by the Tribunals are examined in chapter 4. The

¹ Richard J. Hoare, *John Hoare, A Pacifist's Progress – Papers from the First World War* (York: Sessions Book Trust, 1994), p.7

² Oxford, Bodleian Libraries, N.G.A. Oxon a. 2, no. 4193, *Oxford Chronicle and Berks. and Bucks. Gazette*, Tribunal Report 14 April 1916 p.9.

³ Bodleian Libraries, M00.L00058, Neil MacMahon, *The Conscientious Objector Problem from a War Office Perspective* (London: War Office, 1921), Preface.

influence of significant local and national figures in support of the objectors' right to fair treatment, and the effect on Oxfordshire public opinion, are analysed in chapter 5.

The struggle had several levels and dimensions. The most visible conflict was of conscientious objectors denying the authority of the Tribunal to dictate their consciences. It appears in the Tribunal reports in the local papers. Other conflicts were operating under the surface. The army, desperate for recruits, clashed with the Tribunals, whose remit was hearing requests for exemption rather than recruiting. The institutions of the Church swung behind the War with less or more enthusiasm, but religious belief was being tested personally and in practice. Many Christians and some church leaders believed the conscientious objectors had moral and Biblical legitimacy and authority.

Oxford was a highly significant arena, and my dissertation traces why it was significant. Two thirds of the objectors did so on religious grounds, and what happened to them sent shock waves through local, particularly Nonconformist, churches, whose Ministers supported the Biblical basis for their pacifism. Oxford as a seat of learning and preparation for Government, had very particular and special connections with power-holders, and this worked to the advantage of some student conscientious objectors, with the help of powerful Oxford individuals in the university and the church. For those without connections, or those objecting on political grounds the experience was often much more difficult. In that struggle to establish moral authority, Oxford played a significant part.

CHAPTER 1: BACKGROUND

1a. Conscientious objection to war: ‘we utterly deny all outward wars and strife’⁴

Outlining the history of conscientious objection to war, this chapter will examine conscientious objection to military service in 1916 and its religious and political origins. It will examine how Government suppressed activities seen as subversive through censorship and propaganda. Briefly, it will touch on the national organisation of the conscientious objectors.

Conscientious objection to war has a long history, in different countries and at different periods. At its heart is an individual refusal to fight because war is perceived as morally wrong, because war goes against a respect for the sanctity of life or because it is perceived as an illegitimate demand by government. During the Radical Reformation in Europe in the 17th century, Protestant sects refused to acknowledge any authority other than God and their own consciences, splitting off into self-governing communities⁵ or resisting secular authorities. In Britain, radical Protestant beliefs were a component of the English revolution of the 1640s. Emigration meant the spread of such Protestant beliefs to North America. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the writer Tolstoy and the Indian independence activist Gandhi were influential in building up a philosophy of nonviolence and its effectiveness in tackling oppression and creating peace. The rise of socialism during the nineteenth

⁴ From ‘A Declaration from the harmless and innocent people of God, called Quakers’, given to Charles II of England and Scotland, 1661, <http://www.quaker.org/peaceweb/pdecla07.html> [accessed 16 May 2016].

⁵ Peter Brock, *Against the Draft: Essays on Conscientious Objection from the Radical Reformation to the Second World War* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006).

century in Europe and Russia prompted the belief that solidarity with working class comrades in other nations was a stronger bond than national identity.

In Britain, Nonconformist Protestant churches believing that war was contrary to the will of God, and that a man's conscience was the supreme authority, have existed since the civil war of the 17th century. The Society of Friends' peace testimony is one example. The Independent Labour Party, the British Socialist Party and the Trade Unions, combined with Nonconformist churches towards the end of the nineteenth century in creating a strong tradition of Christian socialism, one of the wellsprings of Liberal Nonconformity in North of England civic life. There were many war resisters at the time of the First World War in other countries in Europe (Germany, France, Switzerland) and the Empire (US, Canada, Australia, New Zealand).

Conscientious objection to war rose to public view with the introduction of conscription in Britain in the First World War. Some opposed it on political grounds (labour or socialist politics). Some objected because their individual conscience prohibited it, or their religion prohibited it, or simply on the basis of what they read in the Bible. Socialists, held that workers had no reason to join the fight between ruling classes controlled by the interests of capitalists. For others their loyalty to the British state was compromised by conflicting national identity or ethnicity (Jewish, Irish⁶). While some resisters escaped conscription by going underground, 18,000⁷ objectors appealed against conscription on grounds of conscience between 1916 and 1918.

⁶ Mark Levene, 'Going against the grain: two Jewish memoirs of war and anti-war, 1914-18', *Jewish Culture and History* 2:2, (Winter 1999) pp. 65-69.

⁷ <https://search.livesofthefirstworldwar.org/search/world-records/conscientious-objectors-register-1914-1918> [accessed 2nd May 2017].

The government's primary concern was of course, recruitment. Parliament approved laws and mechanisms to control dissent. The Defence of the Realm Act 1914 introduced social control mechanisms, including censorship of all publications⁸. After 1914 opposition to war became confined to very few organisations, mainly the International Labour Party, the Union of Democratic Control (UDC)⁹, and the No-Conscription Fellowship.

1b. The Military Service Tribunals: 'A scandalous example of lay prejudice.'

By 1916 the initial flush of enthusiasm for joining the Armed Forces had waned, and the Derby Scheme in autumn 1915, set up to register those able to fight, had revealed that many were unwilling or unable to do so. Under the Military Service Act, it was assumed that all single men between 18 and 40 years old would join the Armed Forces. To administer requests for exemption from military service, two thousand Local Tribunals were set up to hear requests for exemption from military service. They were not governed by traditional legal procedure, but were often viewed as law courts. . It was unclear whether they were judicial bodies, or recruiting agencies. This laid them open to accusations of 'lay prejudice', Beatrice Webb's judgment.¹⁰ The military representative at Tribunals was present at all its proceedings. He was not an official Tribunal member, but he carried the authority of the Military Service Act and had the right of appeal against all decisions. His constant presence meant that Tribunalists might assume that their underlying role was to support conscription.

⁸ Brock Millman, *Managing Dissent in the First World War* (London: F.Cass, 2000), p.38-9.

⁹ The UDC was set up in 1914 to promote wider democratic control over government.

¹⁰ *Beatrice Webb Diaries*, 1912-1924 ed. by Margaret Cole (London: Longmans 1952), p.55.

When large numbers of men began to ask for exemption in Spring 1916, it became obvious why recruiting was more difficult. Social problems and poverty became visible in the flood of requests on grounds of disability, illness, family difficulty, financial hardship, and employers' needs. The large number of exemption requests led to frustration among Army planners that the Tribunal system seemed to make recruiting more difficult rather than releasing the needed personnel to fight the War.

The Tribunals' workload was high. Nationally, three-quarters of a million applications were made between January and July 1916. The business of Local Tribunals was under the spotlight. Hearings were almost always held in public and reported in the local press. They were crowded, particularly in the early months. After the Tribunal had made its judgement, what if men were unhappy with the Tribunal's judgment? To whom could they appeal? The next steps were unclear.

When the Tribunals started work in March, no mechanisms had been set up for a local Appeal Tribunal, or a national Appeal Tribunal. No definitions were available of what constituted 'work of national importance' as an alternative to Army service, nor was a body set up to consider its definition, and at what date men might have been expected to take it up. The system for dealing with claims for absolute exemption had not been established, and its definition was the victim of multiple misunderstandings. In an attempt to clear up these ambiguities, the Local Government Board, set up to administer the Local Tribunal system, sent frequent clarifications and additions to the Tribunals, but, they may or may not have reached or been accepted by the Tribunal members. The objections on grounds of conscience to any participation in war added an additional layer of moral challenge to the existing burden of work for the Tribunal.

1c. Opposition to conscription: ‘We will not fight’

The No-Conscription Fellowship was set up to support individual conscientious objectors, and to lobby for their fair treatment in prison. Two thousand men had joined by 1915. Its newspaper *The Tribunal* kept objectors and their supporters informed and continued publishing throughout the War, despite the efforts of the police to close it down by seizing its equipment and arresting No-Conscription Fellowship (NCF) leaders. The NCF was financially supported by the Quakers, and maintained by a structure of sophisticated and effective committees and networks at national and local level with representatives from the NCF, the International Labour Party, Quakers, and the Fellowship of Reconciliation (a Christian pacifist organisation). The NCF local Joint Maintenance Committees collected subscriptions from local Trade Unionists and wealthy local sympathisers. Each army camp, barrack and military prison where conscientious objectors were held had an assigned group of volunteer visitors, ‘*to glean information about the prisoners welfare, the conditions of imprisonment, and about possible irregularities committed by the authorities.*’¹¹ This information was passed on to sympathetic members of Government. In the House of Commons, a ‘roll of champions’¹² of around 20 active MPs asked frequent questions.

‘In the House of Commons, guerrilla warfare was pursued in the form of sniping at Ministers almost daily... Questions were frequently put...with the

¹¹ Thomas C. Kennedy, *The Hound of Conscience: A history of the No-Conscription Fellowship, 1914-1919*, (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1937)

¹² Neil MacMahon, *The conscientious objector problem from a War Office perspective* (pp. 102-4).

apparent purpose of creating an atmosphere e.g. a question would be asked suggesting some atrocity to have been perpetrated by the military authorities on a CO.’¹³

In this chapter I have placed conscientious objection to war in 1916 in its longer history. I have explored the ambiguities of the Tribunal system, setting the scene for an examination of the Oxfordshire Tribunals in Chapter 3. I have briefly outlined the role and activities of the No-Conscription Fellowship, significant for many of the Oxfordshire conscientious objectors.

¹³ Neil MacMahon, *The conscientious objector problem from a War Office perspective* p.103.

CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY AND APPROACH

2a. Methodology

This dissertation was inspired by other local history studies of conscientious objection. My aim was to explore whether there was any underlying opposition to war in Oxfordshire using the evidence of the Tribunal response to the conscientious objectors' appeals, and the extent to which the Oxfordshire public was sympathetic. I will outline my research questions, and what documents were available to test them. I will situate this study in the local and national histories of conscientious objection, and the memorialisation of the First World War.

My research questions follow from an examination of data on the social and educational status, and motivation of the conscientious objectors who appeared before the Oxfordshire Tribunals in 1916. I analysed whether there was evidence of differential treatment of different classes of objectors by the Tribunals, and the influence of the conscientious objectors on local and national opinion, given Oxford's unique position as training ground for Government and the Church.

Given the relatively small number of objectors in relation to the numbers requesting exemption for all reasons, I am using qualitative methods. There is no one with living memories of their experience, so I have been using both primary sources and secondary literature to illuminate the issues around conscientious objection in other

places and at national level. To explore motivation more fully I have interviewed relatives of some conscientious objectors from the Second World War.

I have focused on the 12 months of 1916 because this is when the Tribunal system was introduced and most requests for exemption were heard. I have restricted my focus to the discrete group of men who appeared before the Oxford and Oxfordshire Tribunals. I could have examined a wider group of students who were enrolled at Oxford University in 1916 but who appeared before the Tribunal in their home or other towns. For example, several Ruskin College student objectors were from working class backgrounds in the North of England.¹⁴ There would have been others whose family or employment situation meant their absence from Oxford at the start of the War, or had been arrested and put in the Army elsewhere. However, to include them would have meant a much wider field of research than is possible in a Masters' dissertation. Also, given the greater population churn during wartime, it would have made them methodologically more difficult to define.

The weekly reports of Tribunal hearings in *The Oxford Times*, and *The Oxford Chronicle* have been my primary source. The government ordered the destruction of all Tribunal records after the War, because of their sensitivity¹⁵. There would have been official concern about the future consequences of local people sitting in judgement over others personally known to them. While there is no guarantee of their accuracy or completeness, the two newspapers report more or less the same information. The

¹⁴ Alan Shepherd, Ruskin College Archives (The College and the Fellowship during World War One: a brief history)

<https://www.ruskin.ac.uk/perch/resources/the-ruskin-college-fellowship-and-the-first-world-war.pdf> [accessed 23 January 2017].

¹⁵ <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/conscription-appeals/> [accessed 23 January 2017].

Chronicle goes into a little more detail, and sometimes carries special reports. I have used the *Chronicle* more than the Times, because it reveals the debate around conscientious objection among local Liberals and in Nonconformist churches.

The press reports of the Tribunal contain enough detail to permit the construction of a table of baseline data about the objectors. The press reports give the names of appellants, their employment or education status details of the grounds for their appeal, and a selection of questions and comments from the Tribunal. They also include details of who vouched for the sincerity of the objectors, enabling a study of local support. They give details of the Tribunal decision. No digital versions of the local newspapers are available, so I have used the bound paper version in the Bodleian Library Special Collections.

The *Oxford Times* and the *Oxford Chronicle* have also been useful to get a sense of public concerns at the time. To examine the local civic arena, I have consulted the minutes of Oxford Wartime Committees and how they involved citizens, and also the records of the Wartime Committee's seven sub-committees that dealt with the consequences of the war on unemployment, poverty, and financial hardship. These records are in the Bodleian Library, Oxfordshire History Centre, and some Oxford Colleges. To understand more of the social and political make up of the Tribunal, and the gap in understanding and attitudes between them and the conscientious objectors, I have used online records of past Mayors, Councillors and Aldermen.¹⁶

¹⁶ <https://www.oxfordhistory.org.uk/mayors/> [accessed 23 January 2017].

One useful organisational source for details of local peace-related and anti-war activities would have been the local Society of Friends (Quakers), but there are none available for Oxford in this period. I have also examined the records of some local Nonconformist churches for their response to the conscientious objector controversy. However, they revealed little about individuals or about whether the issue of conscientious objector members was discussed. Church opinions were sharply divided about the War, and the presence of conscientious objectors in a congregation would have created embarrassment and difficulty, judging from the individual stories of some Ministers trained in Oxford¹⁷. The letters to the local press also reveal something of this difficulty.

To find out more about individual support the objectors received, and how local political associations were viewed, I used at the minutes of local associations and societies that that would be likely to have lacked sympathy for the War. These include the minutes of the Oxford University Fabian Society, the Oxford University Socialist Society, and the Oxford Trades Council. There are no Oxford Labour Party minutes or reports for this period, nor of the local branch of the Union of Democratic Control although some of the objectors were members, from the evidence of their answers to Tribunal questions. In Oxford, membership of the NCF or the UDC was seen by the Tribunal as evidence of organising against Army recruitment, and its members were labelled as ‘viper propagandists’ to be rooted out by the Colleges.¹⁸

The papers of the national No-Conscription Fellowship and its committees have been useful in tracing general patterns of support for the conscientious objectors. Evidence

¹⁷ Edith Ryley Pearson, *Private view of a public man: the life of Leyton Richards*, (London: Allen and Unwin, 1950).

¹⁸ Oxford, Bodleian Libraries, *The Oxford Times* 1916 N.G.A Oxon a.5. 1916, *Passing Notes*, 11 March p.5.

from other cities suggests that these networks were often strong and widespread ¹⁹.

There is information about an Oxford branch of the NCF Local Maintenance Committee and its membership, but no minutes of their activities. To fill this gap, I have used the papers of Henry Gillett,²⁰ and Cecil Cadoux, Fellow and Lecturer at Mansfield College²¹, as they both had national connections, were active in lobbying locally for the interests of the objectors, and were in frequent communication. The papers of sympathetic MPs such as Arnold Rowntree, and T. Edmund Harvey have helped trace Oxford individuals who wrote letters to MPs and may have had influence in Parliament.

To find out more about the individuals, I have used secondary literature and some manuscript sources. For students (such as John Hoare of University College) this has been easier than for 'town' objectors.²² The archives of several Oxford Colleges have helped to put the students' Tribunal experiences into a picture of the longer-term advantage and disadvantage of being a conscientious objector. I have had access to one set of papers from a 'town' conscientious objector, William Henry Waddle.

While I cannot assume he is representative of others, I have found no other manuscript sources about individuals from the 'town'. Other local studies have helped me understand the difference that social class and educational advantage made to the wartime experience of the objectors.

¹⁹ Alison Ronan, 'The Manchester No-Conscription Fellowship Maintenance Committees 1916-18' *North West Labour History Journal* 39 (2016).

²⁰ London, Library of the Society of Friends, TEMP MSS 126, Papers of Henry Gillett.

²¹ Bodleian Libraries MS Cadoux 18 correspondence Jan-May 1916, MS Cadoux 19 correspondence June-Dec 1916, MS Cadoux 94 personal papers 1916-1945).

²² Richard J. Hoare, *John Hoare, A Pacifist's Progress* - Papers from the First World War (York: Sessions Book Trust, 1994)

2b. Approach

Having described my aim for this dissertation, and my methods in researching it, I now consider the approaches of other historians to this topic. In this section I look at local and national studies of conscientious objection in the First World War, and I place this topic within the literature of the War's Home Front. Finally, I survey how the memorialisation of the War has provided a framework for the study of conscientious objection.

My dissertation sits within a growing body of local studies of conscientious objection in the First World War. I have made extensive use of Cyril Pearce's study of Huddersfield, *Comrades in Conscience*. It examines how the socialist, labour and women's movements together with Nonconformist individuals in civic positions created a bedrock of anti-war support for local conscientious objectors in Huddersfield. In his introduction²³, Pearce disputes the assumption that the experience of conscientious objectors in local areas across the country was homogenous. Local studies are starting to break this down, and his study of Huddersfield is by far the most detailed and authoritative. His construction of a database of conscientious objectors, now part of the Imperial War Museum's record of war service, ties this into

²³ Cyril Pearce, *Comrades in Conscience: The story of an English community's Opposition to the Great War* (London: Francis Boutle, 2014).

quantitative data.²⁴ This book is an example of what can be done with scholarly in-depth study of a locality. Pearce maintains that there is much still to be done in finding out what really happened at local level and creating a new national picture assembled from below. He says

We have yet to see a study of conscientious objectors, which sets them properly in their social contexts and attempts to understand them not just as heroic/misguided individuals but also as groups and individuals expressing a broader community consciousness. This is only possible through more careful attention to the detail on the ground and in local communities.²⁵

Other local studies are varied in scope and depth. Some emphasise the influence of national identities, in Nonconformist Wales²⁶ and industrial parts of Scotland²⁷.

Others have researched conscientious objection in specific towns and cities,²⁸ such as London, Manchester and Leicester.

There are a few references to conscientious objectors in general local histories of Oxfordshire. Malcolm Graham describes the most well publicised Oxford Tribunal cases²⁹, as does J. M. Winter in his chapter on Oxford University in the First World

²⁴ <https://search.livesofthefirstworldwar.org/search/world-records/conscientious-objectors-register-1914-1918>, [accessed 2nd May 2017]

²⁵ Pearce, *Comrades in Conscience*, Introduction, p.21.

²⁶ Kenneth Owen Morgan, 'Peace Movements in Wales 1899-1945', *Welsh History Review*, 10 (1981) pp. 398-430.

²⁷ Robert Duncan, *Opposition to Conscription and War in Scotland 1914-18* (Berwick-on-Tweed, Common Print, 2015).

²⁸ Christine Clayton, 'Pacifism and Socialism in Hyde during the Great War', *North West Labour History* 35 (2010) pp. 5-11, and Malcolm Elliott, 'Opposition to the First World War: The Fate of Conscientious Objectors in Leicester', *Transactions of the Leicestershire Archaeological and Historical Society*, 77, pp. 82-92.

²⁹ Malcolm Graham, *Oxford in the Great War* (Yorkshire: Pen and Sword Military, 2014) pp. 39-40.

War³⁰. Some Nonconformist academics objecting on religious grounds have been studied³¹, and there is a forthcoming study of Magdalen College conscientious objectors³². There are some contemporary eyewitness accounts of the Oxford Tribunal, including J.B. Langstaff³³ a visiting American academic, and Margaret Cole³⁴, sister of Raymond Postgate and wife of G.D.H Cole, economist, both Oxford objectors. But there has so far been no historical analysis of the extent and nature of conscientious objection in a Southern England university town such as Oxford or Cambridge.

The national historiography of conscientious objection in Britain starts in the immediate aftermath of the First World War, written by objectors themselves or those involved with them, to record the treatment they received³⁵. These books describe the struggles of conscience, experience of court martial and conditions in gaol.³⁶ Then there is family biography of the objectors.³⁷ Some include conscientious objection as part of a broader analysis of the successes and failures of the anti-war movement³⁸. While often lacking a historical perspective, these books carry the weight of first hand experience and authenticity. The most authoritative and comprehensive analysis is

³⁰ J. M. Winter, 'Oxford and the First World War', in *The History of the University of Oxford*, 8 vols, viii, The Twentieth Century, ed. Brian Harrison (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994).
< DOI:10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198229742.003.0001 >.

³¹ Elaine Kaye, *Mansfield College: its Origin, History and Significance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

³² David Roberts, 'Magdalen College: Oxford's Conscientious Objectors during the Great War', working title of unpublished monograph, to be published November 2018.

³³ J. B. Langstaff, *Oxford – 1914* (New York: Vantage Press, 1965).

³⁴ Margaret Cole, *Growing up into Revolution* (London: Longmans, 1949), p.59.

³⁵ Scott Duckers, *"Handed-over": the prison experiences of Mr. J. Scott Duckers Solicitor of Chancery Lane, under the Military Service Act* (London: C.W. Daniel, 1917).

³⁶ T. Corder Catchpool, *On Two Fronts* (London: Headley, 1918).

³⁷ Hoare, *John Hoare, A Pacifist's Progress*

³⁸ Fenner Brockway, *Inside the Left, Thirty years of Platform, Press, Prison and Parliament* (London, Allen & Unwin, 1942).

John William Graham's *Conscription and Conscience: a History*.³⁹ It creates a body of statistics about the objectors around the country, places Britain in a global anti-war context, and summarises of the operation of local Tribunals.

This descriptive and personal history can be seen within the body of anti-war creative literature of novels and poetry in the post-First World War period. Examples include the poetry of Siegfried Sassoon and Edmund Blunden, and the novels of Robert Graves and Eric Maria Remarque.⁴⁰ They describe the terrible consequences of the War on the lives of soldiers and their families and communities, and express widespread pity and revulsion against the futility of 'the war to end all wars'. Collectively this literature influenced attitudes to war and helped to create a public desire to avoid another one, and helped to give rise to the British peace movement of the 1920s and 1930s.

The Second World War prompted significant historical assessment of the First World War. The reputation of the peace movement of the 1920s and 1930s and the politicians who responded to it, have never recovered from the post-war judgement of historians that it prevented early re-armament and put national security at serious risk as a result. Martin Ceadel provides a philosophical background to the peace movements of the inter-war and Second World War in which pacifism and conscientious objection played a significant part.⁴¹ The literature of conscientious

³⁹ John William Graham, *Conscription and Conscience* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1919, reprinted by Forgotten Books, no date given)

⁴⁰ Robert Graves, *Goodbye to all that* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1929) and Erich Maria Remarque, *Im Westen nichts Neues* (*All Quiet on the Western Front*) (Berlin : Propyläen Verlag, 1929)

⁴¹ Martin Ceadel, *Pacifism in Britain 1914-1945: the Defining of a Faith* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980).

objection was updated with the experiences of objectors in this new war⁴² and changes in the Tribunal system were examined.⁴³ Wartime pacifism expressed in humanitarian action during and after the Second World War was one of the inspirations for the post-war reform movements. One example is the Friends' Service Councils of London and Philadelphia, awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1947 for its humanitarian work in Europe during the First and Second World War periods.⁴⁴ The threat of nuclear war became a new focus for the literature of the peace movement in the 1960s, coinciding with the rise of 'history from below'. David Boulton's re-telling of the First World War objectors' story was commissioned at a time when many of the First World War objectors were dying, and there was felt to be a need to update and place them in the longer history of the peace movement.⁴⁵

The publication of John Rae's *Conscience and Politics* marked the beginning of significant revision in the literature. Rae filled the gap left by previous historians in revealing the politics behind the conscience clause, the Tribunals, and the complex interactions it caused between War Office, Home Office and Cabinet. I have drawn on Rae's scholarly research into the detail of government policy and how it developed during 1916. This revision was continued in other assessments of the Military Service Tribunals. James McDermott's *British Military Service Tribunals*⁴⁶ agrees with Rae that the local Tribunals were being asked to manage the manpower of the War before the government knew what it wanted. His view is that although treatment

⁴² Lyn Smith, *Voices against War: a Century of Protest* (London: Imperial War Museum, 2009), pp.95-171.

⁴³ Rachel Barker, *Conscience, Government and War: conscientious objection in Great Britain 1939-45* (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982), p.12.

⁴⁴ <http://quakernobel.org/history> [accessed 19 May 2017].

⁴⁵ David Boulton, *Objection Overruled* (London: MacGibbon & Kee, 1967).

⁴⁶ James McDermott, *British Military Service Tribunals, 1916-1918: 'a very much abused body of men'*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011).

of objectors in the early months of 1916 was harsh, Tribunal judgments were more nuanced as time went on. Spinks' account of the Stratford Tribunal agrees that the Tribunals made the best of a bad brief.⁴⁷ Adrian Gregory draws on an impressive range of local sources, placing the Tribunals within the context of civil society and the growth in local committees managing the Home Front. He refers to the 'martyrology' of the conscientious objector.⁴⁸

I will now describe other historiographical approaches I have drawn on for this study. They sit within studies of the Home Front in the War. The role of propaganda and the struggles for influence over public opinion is an important focus in the Home Front literature, from press attacks of on anti-war activities, and conscientious objection in particular, to the needling of government propaganda machine by continued production of *The Tribunal*, the NCF's weekly newspaper. Millman focuses on the changing position of high-profile politicians, constantly managing dissent as it developed.⁴⁹ Kennedy's article covers national press reporting of the national No-Conscription Fellowship.⁵⁰ There is relatively little about local reporting of the War in local studies. I have found no major study of the attitudes of local newspapers and how they reported or wrote about conscientious objectors, or their role in influencing public opinion.

Gender studies have been important in rounding the picture of the Home Front, and

⁴⁷ Philip Spinks, '"The war courts": the Stratford-upon-Avon Borough Tribunal 1916-1918', *Local Historian*, 32:4 (2002) pp. 210-17.

⁴⁸ Adrian Gregory, 'Military Service Tribunals: Civil Society in Action', in *Civil Society in Action in British History: Ideas, Identities, Institutions*, Oxford: 2003), pp. 177-191, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003 <DOI:10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199260201.003.0010>[accessed 19 May 2016].

⁴⁹ Brock Millman, *Managing Domestic Dissent in the First World War* (London: Cass, 2000).

⁵⁰ Thomas C. Kennedy, 'Public Opinion and the Conscientious Objector 1915-1919', *Journal of British Studies*, 12: 2 (1973), pp. 105-119

there have been significant contributions on women's contribution to war resistance. Sylvia Pankhurst's account of the anti-war movement gave the metropolitan and national picture.⁵¹ The interface between feminism, socialism and pacifism in the context of wartime Manchester, and the way in which these strands created public space for unpopular resistance is expertly examined in Alison Ronan's *A small vital flame*.⁵² I have not found evidence of anti-war feeling among women in Oxford. There were indignant women relatives, as in Margaret Cole's account of the Oxford Tribunal and Leila Davies, sister of Philip Taliesin Davies (one of the Oxford objectors)⁵³ but nothing on an organisational level such as the Cooperative Women's Guild, or Suffragette organisation in the Colleges.

Finally, a major stream within the historiography of the First World War has been its memorialisation. Historians have looked at which aspects of the First World War have been remembered, for what reason, and how, in different periods. Dan Todman has written on how commemorations of the War 'meant privileging some versions of the War and discounting others.'⁵⁴ The memorialisation the conscientious objectors, and its place in the wider literature of the peace movement, can be seen in this context. Adrian Gregory's account of memorialisation of the period between the World Wars includes an account of how in the 1930s the white poppy was adopted by the peace movement as a symbol to remember the conscientious objectors.⁵⁵

⁵¹ Sylvia Pankhurst, *The Home Front: A Mirror to life in the First World War*, (London: Hutchinson, 1932)

⁵² Alison Ronan, 'A small vital flame'. *Anti-war women in north-west England 1914-1918* (Saarbrücken: Scholar's Press, 2014).

⁵³ <http://www.europeana1914-1918.eu/en/contributions/19473> [accessed 19 May 2017]

⁵⁴ <https://www.bl.uk/world-war-one/articles/remembrance-and-memorials> [accessed 2nd May 2017]

⁵⁵ Adrian Gregory, *The Silence of Memory: Armistice Day 1919-1946* (Oxford: Berg, 1994) pp. 152-158.

The 2014-18 Commemoration of the First World War has provided an opportunity for wider community participation in creating the memory of the War, previously confined to the writings of historians and media coverage. The Imperial War Museum *First World War Centenary* Project⁵⁶ and the Heritage Lottery Fund's project '*First World War, Then and Now*'⁵⁷ have facilitated a wider set of connections to the First World War than permitted by the previous historiography. Family history and communities of place and interest have contributed to a more diverse historiography now reaching into 'forgotten' areas in gender, race and culture. The Imperial War Museum and English Heritage have contributed to the memorialisation of conscientious objection within the wider picture of anti-war movements through recent exhibitions⁵⁸ and restoration projects⁵⁹. This creates a space for others to do the same, and the local studies of conscientious objectors are going some way to occupy it.

⁵⁶ <http://www.1914.org> (accessed 30 April 2016)

⁵⁷ <https://www.hlf.org.uk/looking-funding/our-grant-programmes/first-world-war-then-and-now> (accessed 30 April 2016)

⁵⁸ <http://www.iwm.org.uk/exhibitions/iwm-london/fighting-for-peace>

⁵⁹ <http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/places/richmond-castle/richmond-graffiti/>

CHAPTER 3: OXFORD AND ITS TRIBUNALS

3a. Oxford in 1916: ‘Nothing but parsons and sausages’⁶⁰

I complete the background section of this study with an examination of the particular context of Oxford. I will describe the city’s social and political nature at the time of the First World War, emphasising its unusual position as a county town and the seat of education for Parliament and government, as well as religious ministry. Having described the purpose and function of the Military Service Tribunals in Chapter 1, the membership of the Oxford and Oxfordshire Tribunals and their relationship to the town, the University and the wider county will now be examined. I will conclude this chapter with an examination of the attitudes of the Tribunal and its members towards the conscientious objectors. Thus I will be laying the ground for a description and analysis of the appeals of the conscientious objectors and how this precipitated conflict between the local and national actors.

In Oxford an ancient university with national, if not global, influence and a traditional role in preparing students for public life and the church coexisted with a medium-sized town. Oxford’s major employers were the printers, the railways, the brewers, the clothing industry, the building trade, and domestic service. The Colleges were major employers of men such as College servants, gardeners, and porters. The Colleges also created term-time work for men and women in a range of trades such as tailors, shoemakers, cabinet-makers, and laundresses. A survey of Oxford social conditions in 1912 drew attention to under-employment and poverty in the University vacations⁶¹. The local newspapers do not report any evidence in Oxford itself of the

⁶⁰ Malcolm Graham, *Oxford in the Great War*, p.9.

⁶¹ Violet Butler, *Social conditions in Oxford* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1912).

poor industrial relations and strikes in the pre-war period in other parts of the country, but North Oxfordshire is different. There was a women's strike at the Bliss Mill in Chipping Norton in 1913-14.⁶² A public meeting was held in Chipping Norton to complain that working men were not represented on the local Tribunal, following a protest to the Mayor by the local branch of the National Union of Railwaymen and the Banbury and District Trades Council.⁶³

While there had been conflict between them in the past, 'town and gown'⁶⁴ had achieved a more comfortable coexistence by the beginning of the twentieth century. The town and University both elected their own MPs, and Oxford Council was in the first flush of civic pride, with a new Town Hall opening in the 1890s. In terms of local political power and influence, Oxford had a Liberal majority of Councillors, whereas Oxfordshire was the home of landed gentry, mostly Tories. The Liberals were dominant on the Council and the Board of Guardians.⁶⁵ As late as the 1870s it was reckoned to be impossible for outsiders to get a foot in Oxford University society.⁶⁶ The dominance of the University in the town, and the University in the government of the country was still strong in 1916. Many Oxford graduates went on to high Government and the civil service. Between 1902 and 1915, two thirds of Cabinet Ministers had attended Oxford or Cambridge⁶⁷ The *Oxford Chronicle* reports 'one distinguished Oxford man succeeds another – after Sir John Simon of Wadham (Home Secretary), Mr Herbert Samuel of Balliol, who twice contested South

⁶² Robert Sephton, 'The Striking Women', *Oxfordshire Local History* 10:1, Winter 2015-16.

⁶³ *OC Out and About*, 7 January p.6.

⁶⁴ 'Town and Gown' has been an ancient conflict in university towns between townsfolk and students. An Oxford example is such the Battle of St. Scholastica's Day, 1355.

⁶⁵ *The Victoria History of the County of Oxford*, ed. Alan Crossley, 16 vols. IV: The City of Oxford, (London: Published for the Institute of Historical Research by Oxford University Press, 1979) p.185.

⁶⁶ E.M Arnold, 'Social Life in Oxford', *Harpers Monthly Magazine*, July 1980, 248, cited in *The Victoria History of the County of Oxford*, Ed. Alan Crossley, volume IV: Oxford, p.186.

⁶⁷ Thomas Weber, *Our Friend 'the Enemy': Elite Education in Britain and Germany before World War I* (Stanford: Stanford University Press 2008) p.29.

Oxfordshire in 1895 and 1900.’⁶⁸ Oxford’s connections with the Church were also still strong. In the period leading up to the First World War, Oxford undergraduates still had to pass an examination in Holy Scripture after their first year to go on to an Honours school, ⁶⁹ and 19 per cent of Oxford undergraduates were ordained as Ministers of religion.⁷⁰

The size and significance of the University meant that Oxford was seriously affected by the War. Large numbers of students signed up to the Armed Forces from their Officer Training Corps, without starting at or returning to the University after the summer vacation in 1914, leaving a gap in the population of the town. The *Oxford Chronicle* reports that before the University’s pre-war population was 3,000 and by 1916 the numbers had dropped to 457⁷¹. The shrinkage in student number created financial problems for the Colleges. These were partially solved by making many of them available for the Third Southern General Hospital and for the quartering of regiments. Civic buildings such as the Town Hall were drawn into war service, turning Oxford into a city transformed by war. Pictures of troop inspections, ‘wounded Tommies’ at local fetes, officers’ cadet champion sports days, ‘*Oxford cripples*’ outings, and page upon page of Oxfordshire heroes fallen in the War, and a multiplicity of flag days⁷² joined the usual events in the local newspapers.

Because the Colleges employed so many townspeople, the War prompted civic concern about a rise in unemployment and destitution among the population. Oxford City Council organised War Committees to deal with these possible problems and the

⁶⁸ *OC Out and About*, 14 January 1916 p.6.

⁶⁹ Thomas Weber, *Our Friend ‘the Enemy’* p.20.

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, p.20.

⁷¹ *OC Out and About*, 19 May p.6.

⁷² For example Alexandra Day (June 28th), Russian Jews Flag Day (July 5th) Empire Day (May 21st).

wider war effort. Mayor Sherwood called a meeting in August 1914, attended by 52 eminent townspeople and members of the University (36 men and 16 women) to consider the relief of distress caused by the War, which resulted in the formation of a Citizens Emergency Fund⁷³, to channel money to the Oxford branches of the Soldiers and Sailors Families Association, the Soldiers and Sailors Help Society, and the Red Cross.

The list of suggested members of the Executive War Committee⁷⁴ demonstrates the need to represent the power bases of Oxford – the Council, the University, the Church, the professions, and local wealth. It includes the Master of Balliol College, five church leaders, two doctors, the Chief Constable, and local figures of wealth such as Mrs Herbert Morrell (from the local brewing family) and Sir William Osler (a prominent physician). The Council was clearly in charge: fifteen places were allocated for Councillors and Aldermen. The Trades Unions were invited, and the Secretary of the local Trades Council, Mr Frimbley, was a member. Other local professionals were represented, including Dr Gillett from the King Edward Street medical practice.

There were stipulations about what kind of people should be chosen to be representatives on the Tribunal. Walter Long, President of the Local Government Board, whose job it was to supervise the exemption procedure, advised the Tribunals in their role. ‘Persons should be appointed who will consider the cases impartially. Local authorities should be careful not to appoint on the Tribunals persons who have

⁷³ Bodleian Libraries, G.A. Oxon 8 °84, City of Oxford Emergency Committee, Reports of Sub-Committees, August 1914 - June 1916.

⁷⁴ Oxfordshire History Centre OCA/HH/4/21, Oxford City War Executive Minutes 1914-15.

publicly expressed sentiments which would appear to make them unfair judges in cases which will come before Tribunals.’⁷⁵

3b. The Military Service Tribunals: ‘They have not of course achieved the impossible task of pleasing everybody’⁷⁶

I now turn to the political and social make-up of the Oxfordshire Tribunals and how their work was a catalyst for local conflict on the issue of conscientious objection. In Oxfordshire, local Military Service Tribunals were set up in a mix of rural (Headington, Henley, Witney, Charlbury and Bicester) and urban locations (Oxford, Banbury, Chipping Norton and Abingdon). The County Appeals Tribunal usually met in Oxford or Banbury. Membership was announced in the local papers, and in the case of the Appeal Tribunal, in the London Gazette. Sitting on the Tribunals was an additional and time-consuming civic duty. The Tribunals met more than once a week in the months between spring and autumn 1916, and heard over 1,000 cases, on average 150 a week.⁷⁷

The membership of the Oxfordshire Tribunals was driven by local politics, and groups with little influence were seldom represented on Tribunals. A letter was sent from ‘Free Churchmen’ (the local Nonconformist ministers) protesting that none of them had been chosen for the Oxford Tribunal, despite having been invited to join the Oxford Wartime Committees.⁷⁸ The political membership of the Tribunals was a

⁷⁵ Public Record Office Circulars 1914-1919, Vols. 79-84, Ministry of Health, Class 10, R.36, Circular to Local Registration Authorities, cited in Rae, *Conscience and Politics*, Sources p.262.

⁷⁶ *OC Out and About*, 26 May p.6.

⁷⁷ *OC Out and About*, 2 June, p.6.

⁷⁸ *OC TC*, 17 March p. 7.

sensitive issue and the choice of members caused a few problems. The ‘*Out and About*’ column in the *Oxford Chronicle* complained about the political make up of the Appeal Tribunal, which was supposed to be a non-partisan body.

On the Oxfordshire Local Tribunals, political honours were well represented by ex-Mayors and Sheriffs. The Oxfordshire Appeal Tribunal consisted of professionals and self-made men such as Sir Walter Gray who had made a fortune in property development, and well-known shire figures representing the County Council, the magistrates bench, and the landed gentry and businessmen. Announced in the *London Gazette* on 29 February 1916, the panel included the Recorder of Newbury an ex-Navy Lieutenant, a dental surgeon at the Radcliffe Infirmary, an academic commanding the Oxford Volunteer Rifle Force, a barrister, a flour manufacturer, and a farmer.

Compared to the County Tribunal, the Oxford Local Tribunal was more in line with Walter Long’s recommendations that it should include men from public service, legal experience, and organized labour. It was made up of successful local businessmen and Councillors, including the Mayor, Raymond Vincent (manager of a local printing works). The Deputy Mayor and the Town Clerk also sat on the Tribunal, as did Dr Salter (manager of a boat building business) and A.D. Godley, academic honorary fellow of Magdalen College, and public orator, represented the University. Other members were Councillor Sherwood, an Oxford University-educated teacher, and Mr H. Frimbley, Secretary of the Trades Council. Long had suggested women should be included, and Miss Judith A. Merivale, daughter of a retired colonial railway engineer, and interested in social work, was chosen. The military representative, William Burton Baldry was from a different social class. Educated at Kings College

London, and the Queens College, Oxford, he was a member of the Stock Exchange, and the director and editor of *Fry's Magazine of Action and Outdoor Life*.

What can we learn from the local press about the likely attitude of members of the Oxfordshire Tribunals towards the conscientious objectors? As local figures of importance, they would have been doing their duty by their country in sitting on the Tribunal. As employers of local labour and public figures, some would have understood what kind of a place Oxford/shire was, and have some knowledge of some of the reasons for requesting exemption on financial or employment grounds. However, it is hard to imagine that many would have had any understanding of the moral dilemmas precipitated by the compulsory call up among the trainee Ministers, the University students, and the radicals of the University Socialist Society, especially as there were no church leaders on the Tribunal.

They would have been aware of and influenced by the condemnation of objectors as 'slackers' and 'shirkers' in the national press, echoed to some limited degree in the local newspapers. The *Oxford Chronicle*, representative of local Liberal and Nonconformist views, was the locus of ongoing pro- and anti-conscientious objection debates. It took the issue very seriously, quoting several of the religious objectors' statements, saying 'these young men are very much in earnest, there is no doubt about that'.⁷⁹ It printed frequent editorials keeping a balance between the supporters and the denigrators of conscientious objection. On the other hand, the conservative *Oxford Times*, largely ignored the objectors and everything they represented. It printed one or two angry editorials and letters early in 1916, but other than reporting the Tribunals, it

⁷⁹ *OC TR*, 10 March p.6.

was silent on the whole issue of conscientious objection, probably regarding it as an unpatriotic diversion from the business of wartime.

The Tribunal members were public servants, but their personal opinions are hard to discern because what they said as individuals at the Tribunal was not reported, except for the occasional comments of the Town Clerk, seen as a kind of legal counsel. The University representative on the Oxford Tribunal, A. D Godley, was a supporter of military training and organized a volunteer force during the War and would have been sympathetic to the military representative. Alderman Salter came from a Nonconformist Church background, so he was likely to be aware that many of the objectors were church members.

However, some conflicts are very clear. The most visible friction at the Oxfordshire Tribunal proceedings was between the military representative and the objectors.

Walter Burton Baldry's arrogant manner and bullying of appellants was raised by MPs in Parliament. He insinuates of Percy Hawkrige, part-time Minister to Cowley Road Congregationalist Church that his mother had said she would prevent him going into the Army⁸⁰. Hawkrige asks for Baldry for the source of his information, and Baldry refuses to give it. Noel Whitfield, the Minister of Cowley Road Congregational Church, wrote to the newspaper demanding fair treatment and supporting his character.⁸¹

'Town' and 'gown' tensions can be seen in the differential treatment of University students and townspeople, described in a later chapter. The Tribunal allows Frank

⁸⁰ *OC TR*, 3 March p.8.

⁸¹ *OC Correspondence*, 10 March 1916 p.7.

Leslie Eccleshall, Brasenose College undergraduate, to continue studying for “Greats”, although the military representative challenges this. The Mayor acknowledges Oxford University interest by saying ‘where a man has been reading for “Greats” for an Honour School in the University it meant a great many years of reading, and the Tribunal thought he should be allowed to finish.’⁸² “Greats” was a mixture of Greek, Latin, Ancient History and Political Theory, and the Mayor would have known its status as ‘the ideal preparation for any job inside or outside of politics⁸³ and been anxious not to offend the Colleges by intervening.

In this chapter I have described the unusual social and political character of Oxford, the particular characteristics of the Oxford Tribunal and the sources of conflict over its work. In the next chapter I will go on to describe the other dimension of the conflict: the conscientious objectors and their supporters.

⁸² *OC TR*, 10 March p.8.

⁸³ Thomas Weber, *Our Friend ‘the Enemy’*, p.30.

CHAPTER 4: THE OXFORDSHIRE CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTORS

4a. The Oxfordshire conscientious objectors: ‘What would become of England if all men were like you?’⁸⁴

I will summarise in this chapter what my research has uncovered about the conscientious objectors of Oxfordshire in 1916. I will analyse the data about their occupations, ages, reasons for requesting exemption, and evidence given for their sincerity and character, to ascertain their degree of influence in the Tribunal and wider. Where possible I will compare this information with what is available in other local studies in other towns and cities in First World War Britain. I will conclude by examining the evidence of differential treatment by the Tribunals.

There are significant difficulties in of assessing any kind of quantitative data about conscientious objectors in Britain in the First World War. The Army kept records of soldiers but it was not in the Army’s or the Government’s interests to collect information separately about the numbers of conscientious objectors, as they were perceived as a minor problem that would soon disappear. This means that while the Central Appeal Tribunal⁸⁵ collected statistics of its work,⁸⁶ no official records of the Local Tribunals’ work were kept. Evidence of this was provided to Prime Minister Asquith in July 1916 when he outlined the new Home Office Scheme, demonstrating

⁸⁴ *OC TR*, 2 June p.10. The Town Clerk asks this question of George Wright, undergraduate of Brasenose College.

⁸⁵ The Central Tribunal was the final court of appeal; it largely dealt with difficult cases that would stand as precedent for local tribunals.

⁸⁶ See for example data collected and analysed by the Central Tribunal Appendices E, F and G in Rae, *Conscience and Politics*.

that no centralised information existed to administer it.⁸⁷ With reference to conscientious objectors, some local historians have collected statistics for their research locality (see Bibliography) but they are so different that comparison between them is not useful. This means that robust comparison and analysis is difficult in the absence of official Local Tribunal records. I have used reports in the *Oxford Chronicle* and the *Oxford Times* as a proxy.

I will start with an examination of the numbers of requests for exemption in Oxfordshire, including conscientious objectors. On 2 June 1916, the *Oxford Chronicle* estimates that the City Tribunal had already heard over 1,000 cases, meaning an average of 150 a week. From the *Oxford Chronicle* press reports I counted a total number of 1,835 requests for exemption on all grounds in Oxfordshire between January and December 1916. For Oxfordshire, 105 requested exemptions on grounds of conscience. I have removed cases at the Oxfordshire Appeal Tribunal from this figure, because the men would have already appeared at one of the Local Tribunals. Therefore the percentage of objectors in Oxfordshire as a percentage of total requests for exemption was around six per cent. In comparison, Adrian Gregory estimates the number of Banbury conscientious objectors as 10 per cent of the total number of requests for exemption on all grounds.⁸⁸ In comparison with similar towns, the *Oxford Chronicle* in April 1916 reports 300 claims from members of Cambridge University, many more than in Oxfordshire at this or any other time that year.⁸⁹ Examples from other towns include 117 conscientious objectors appearing before

⁸⁷ London, Library of the Society of Friends, Box L 2/1 – 30, Robert O. Mennell and others, ‘The Prime Minister and Conscientious Objectors: a Reply from the Joint Advisory Council of the Friends’ Service Committee, the No-Conscription Fellowship and the Fellowship of Reconciliation’, 29 June, 1916.

⁸⁸ Adrian Gregory, ‘Military Service Tribunals: civil society in action 1916-1919’, in Jose Harris, *Civil Society in British History* (Oxford: 2003), pp. 177-191, p.2.

⁸⁹ *OC, Out and About*, 17 March p.7.

Tribunals in Huddersfield County Borough between 1916 and 1918⁹⁰. Buckell counts 58 in Northampton.⁹¹

I have compared my figure for the total number of Oxfordshire conscientious objectors with those from data collections of Oxfordshire objectors from other sources. The Peace Pledge Union database (ongoing work in progress) contains 88 men from Oxford, and 58 from Cambridge (W. Hetherington, 2016, personal communication, 25 October 1916). A trawl of the Pearce database, which forms part of the Imperial War Museum *Lives of the First World War* records, uncovered 84 Oxford conscientious objectors, 43 of whom were students of one kind or another, and a further 22 from an Oxford College but listed according to their home address (C. Pearce, 2015, personal communication, 23 August 2015).

So what is the profile of the conscientious objectors? In terms of social status, the majority (75 per cent) were students at the University. Of these, 40 per cent were students of theology, or studying for the religious ministry, or both. As students, they were older than one would expect, many in their late 20s or 30s, making their conscientious objection a mature and considered action. The students and lecturers came from across the University, including 14 from the Nonconformist Colleges, Mansfield and Manchester. Six were in other religious training institutions such as St Stephens House, Ripon College Cuddesdon, and Pusey House. The remaining 25 per cent of objectors were employed in one way or another – half were skilled tradesmen (51 per cent) in crafts such as tailoring, carpentry, and printing, plus a scattering of professionals, and agricultural or clerical workers. Most of the employee objectors

⁹⁰ Pearce, *Comrades in Conscience*, p146.

⁹¹ John Buckell, 'The Conscientious Objectors of Northampton during the First World War', *The Local Historian*, 46:3 (2016), p.183.

would have had an elementary school education and an apprenticeship, but no more. Horace Pratley, who keeps pigs, said he got his views ‘by reading and thinking for himself.’⁹²

Seventy per cent of the men appealed on religious grounds, and around 15 per cent on the grounds of socialism (although sometimes men did not distinguish between the two). The remaining 15 per cent objected for moral reasons, or personal difficulties, or because of unwillingness to cooperate with the system. In comparison, Pearce’s classification of Huddersfield objectors produces a significantly higher proportion of socialist objectors, about one-third. This is because a higher number of the working population was engaged in industry, and the labour, socialist and trade union movement was stronger in Huddersfield, to judge by the broad membership of the Huddersfield and District No-Conscription Council, an alliance of socialist organisations, trade unions, and churches.⁹³

The religious beliefs of the conscientious objectors are clear and consistent. War is seen as contrary to Christian beliefs, and Christian ministry. War is against Bible teaching, in particular the Biblical commandment ‘thou shalt not kill’. War denies the sanctity of human life. Christ’s teaching is to love our enemies, and do good to those that hate us. Killing another man is believed to be sinful and immoral. War is murder and participation in it would betray Christian duty. Religious objectors say that to participate in war is contrary to the spirit and teaching of Christ, and military service is inconsistent with the priesthood. They felt unable to accept army discipline as

⁹² *OC TR*, 14 April p.9.

⁹³ Pearce, *Comrades in Conscience*, Table 14, p 273.

legitimate. For example, Percy Bernard Hawkrigde states that having enlisted in the army of Christ, enlisting under another leader is impossible.⁹⁴

Most are from Nonconformist churches. This is in line with evidence from other studies⁹⁵ and in line with the evidence of the Pelham Committee.⁹⁶ There were 12 objectors from the Church of England. This seems a surprisingly high number considering that the Established Church was formally supportive of the War, but there was a lively debate at other levels of the Anglican Church.⁹⁷ A small number of religious objectors were not students but self-employed, employed, or rural preachers.

The socialists refused to take part in 'the war machine' for example Edward Bowron.⁹⁸ Joseph Kaye, imprisoned as a potential German spy following his appeal, has a 'strong conscientious objection to assisting in the murder of his fellow men and fellow socialists of any nation.'⁹⁹ David Blelloch says that 'socialism implies a love and reverence of all humanity which participation in the war would violate.'

About half the Oxfordshire appellants were 'alternativists' (willing to accept some form of national service other than fighting). For example, if men have suggested they would join the Non Combatant Corps, the Royal Army Medical Corps, the St John's Ambulance, the Red Cross, the Friends Ambulance Unit or do other work of national importance such as religious Ministry or working on the land, I have assumed they

⁹⁴ *OC TR*, March p.3.

⁹⁵ Philip Adams, *Not in our Name: War Dissent in a Welsh town*, (Briton Ferry: Briton Ferry Books, 2015) and John Buckell, 'The Conscientious Objectors of Northampton during the First World War'.

⁹⁶ Pearce, *Comrades in Conscience*, Table 13, p. 272.

⁹⁷ Clive Barrett, *Subversive Peacemakers: War Resistance 1914-1918, an Anglican Perspective* (Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 2014) Chapter 3, pp.42-44.

⁹⁸ *OC TR*, 3 March p.9.

⁹⁹ *OC TR*, 3 March p.8.

were willing to do alternative service. 'Absolutists' refused to participate in the War effort in any way. Frank Howard says he does not see how you can distinguish between the man who kills, and the man who hands him the weapon.¹⁰⁰ Many were sent to prison and stayed there for the duration of the War, or eventually accepted work in Government hard labour schemes. Around one third of the Oxfordshire objectors were absolutists at this stage of the War.

There is evidence that the Tribunal responded to the objectors differently according to their social class and education. The student objectors were socially on the same level as the Tribunal members, members of the middle or upper class. They were sometimes prepared to challenge the Tribunal procedure. Joseph Kaye at his first Tribunal appearance complained that he has not been given the statutory three days notice.¹⁰¹ The students were articulate and sometimes lengthy in their explanations of their beliefs, and were mostly heard in a respectful manner. They were able and willing to respond to questions about their beliefs. For example the Town Clerk pointed out that as trainee Ministers, Claud Coltman and the other Mansfield College students could be exempt under the Military Service Act. Coltman spoke on behalf of them, explaining that their objections were based on long standing religious conviction, rather than as theological students.¹⁰²

By comparison, many of the employed objectors were intimidated by the experience of appearing in public in front of their social superiors and senior respected figures of authority. They expressed themselves in shorter and often more bald statements than

¹⁰⁰ *OC TR*, 25 March p.6.

¹⁰¹ *OC TR*, 3 March, p.9

¹⁰² *OC TR* 17 March, p.9.

the students. The Tribunal members felt able to frequently mock and make jokes about members of a lower social class with unpopular views. Captain Fox, military representative said to William Hine, tailor and outfitter, ‘if everyone did what you do, we would not have clothes.’¹⁰³ There is laughter when Reginald Frank Wells, solicitor’s clerk explained the origin of Christadelphian beliefs, and the Town Clerk responded ‘never mind what would happen to England then, England will be all right. We study our Bible and we know what the end will be.’¹⁰⁴

In Oxfordshire, as elsewhere in the country, Tribunal members were more likely to be tolerant of religious objectors in theory, but in practice they were often suspicious or ignorant of the various branches of Protestant churches. David Ward, Bampton Minister, was questioned about the Plymouth Brethren. He was asked ‘can anyone jump up and be a minister, or must a body sanction it? Where do you get your salary from?’¹⁰⁵ Several Tribunals questioned different objectors (Walter Griffin, Robert Godley and Alfred Knight) about the International Bible Students Association. The Oxford Local Tribunal was suspicious of Christadelphians before the message finally reached them in June 1916 that the War Office was allowing them to appeal to the Central Tribunal¹⁰⁶ Cyril Charles Forty explained that this church had a register of bona fide members, and a Tribunal member asked ‘does it occur to you that they may be shirkers?’¹⁰⁷

¹⁰³ *OC TR*, 7 July, p.9.

¹⁰⁴ *OC TR*, 10 March p.9.

¹⁰⁵ *OC TR*, 21 July p.10.

¹⁰⁶ Rae, *Conscience and Politics*, p.114.

¹⁰⁷ *OC TR*, 25 March, p.9.

This suspicion was particularly obvious when the conscientious objector was working class. Despite his membership of the Church of Christ, Bicester Urban Tribunal was not satisfied about Zaccheus Radford's conscience¹⁰⁸. He was a carpenter. The same Tribunal dismissed the claim of Ralph Smith, a gardener as insincere, although he had preached among the Baptists and Congregationalists for 15 years.¹⁰⁹ The Tribunal members questioned men closely about where they attended church and if they were not clear, or not attached to one place of worship, this was seen as evidence of insincerity. Captain Waller said, in reply to Horace Pratley who comes from a Wesleyan family but cannot name his regular place of worship, 'I go to chapel and church too sometimes, you give them all a chance.'¹¹⁰

The Tribunals vilified the socialist conscientious objectors. Christian Socialists like Herbert Blelloch (quoted previously) who expressed idealism about the brotherhood of man, or the need for solidarity among workers, were judged in the same way as socialists without religious belief. For instance, Herbert Runacres, trainee Anglican Minister, objected on both moral and religious grounds but was disbelieved and his claim was disallowed. An anonymous letter was read out describing him as a conscientious objector of an objectionable type¹¹¹. Alfred John Bishop, member of a local Wesleyan Church, was greeted with laughter when he said 'it makes one's blood creep to hear professing Christians rejoice in the slaughter of innocent German soldiers.'¹¹²

¹⁰⁸ *OC TR*, 12 May, p.10.

¹⁰⁹ *OC TR*, 12 May p.10.

¹¹⁰ *OC TR*, 14 April p.9.

¹¹¹ *OC TR*, 10 March p.7.

¹¹² *OC TR*, 10 March p.8.

In the early months of 1916, the Tribunals were unwilling to consider treating those who offered to cooperate with the Army system any differently than those who refused to have anything to do with it. The ‘alternativists’ made many practical suggestions about what they were willing to do, but the Tribunal ignored their suggestions and sent them to the Army, which in turn sent them to prison. Later, from May onwards, the Oxfordshire Tribunals were sometimes trying to find other solutions, in response to publicity about the difficulties caused to both Army and Government by many men refusing to accept Army discipline. The Quakers’ long-held peace testimony meant they were regarded as exceptional, and the Society of Friends had a written agreement with the War Office that their members would serve in this Unit if they accepted alternative service.¹¹³ Several of Oxfordshire objectors avoided prison by joining the FAU.

Beatrice Webb’s comment on the Tribunals that ‘class bias and local jobbery are rampant, and the decisions are often ludicrous in their shameless inequity’ is too dismissive. However, there were many occasions among the reports of the Oxfordshire Tribunals’ treatment of conscientious objectors when they seem to fall short of the impartiality and fairness required by the Local Government Board.¹¹⁴

4b. The supporters of the conscientious objectors: ‘Letter read from the Prime Minister’s Secretary’¹¹⁵

¹¹³ Rae, *Conscience and Politics*, p.130.

¹¹⁴ *Beatrice Webb Diaries*, p.56.

¹¹⁵ *OC TR*, 21 July p.10. Letter in support of objector David Ward, Minister of Plymouth Brethren, Bampton for 4 years.

I now assess the objectors' degree of public influence. Appellants for exemption on all grounds were required to provide evidence to support their claim, of whatever nature – for example of their employers need to retain them, or from a doctor of the nature of their disability or illness. The conscientious objectors were expected to provide evidence of their sincerity and the long-standing nature of their views against war. The Tribunals gave this evidence great weight, and if none was offered, the case was usually adjourned. Two-thirds of the Oxfordshire objectors were supported by evidence of the sincerity of their convictions, and often the integrity of their character. Support was given by letter or testimonial, and sometimes by personal appearance.¹¹⁶ Their families, usually the father, wrote letters (in twelve cases) or letters came from personal connections, especially professionals, often of the church in their home towns. There were a total of 74 letters or testimonials produced at the Tribunals for the 105 objectors.

The professionals sending these testimonies of character included tutors, College Heads or Presidents, School Heads or teachers, and/or Ministers in their local churches. Eight men provided supportive evidence from more than one person. Dr Selbie, Principal of Mansfield College, wrote on behalf of the 11 Mansfield and 4 Manchester College students confirming their conscientious objection. Henry Gillett wrote four times to give evidence, and wrote letters on behalf of those who were connected with Quakers, or students known to him personally. Also a member of the local No-Conscription Fellowship Maintenance Committee (see Background) he was

¹¹⁶ *OC TR* 3 March, p.9, reports the presence of Dr Jacks, Principal of Manchester College in support of Vigo Auguste Demant.

present to record the proceedings and report back. Gillett paid for a solicitor to appear 16 times on behalf of individual objectors or groups of objectors.

Having evidence of sincerity was critical to any degree of the applicant's success. About one third of the appellants did not give, could not get, or did not choose to call for, personal support in the form of a letter or appearance in tribunal to back their claim of personal conviction and sincerity¹¹⁷. Several were the student socialists, while others were agricultural workers. There are a number of possible explanations. Sometimes the people closest to them disagreed with their views.¹¹⁸ Some Colleges were unaware their students were appealing to the Tribunal.¹¹⁹ In less than ten of the cases, the appellants did not appear themselves, and their employer or father did so on their behalf. The father of Philip Henry Herring, grocer, appeared for him but is told he has no jurisdiction.¹²⁰ In every case, this meant their evidence was treated less seriously and a number were dismissed. This was not the case for exemption claims on other grounds, where employers frequently appeared for numbers of their employees. For instance, the Oxford Cooperative Society, George Street, Oxford, requests exemption for six of their bakers.¹²¹

I now draw some conclusions. So far as I can judge from other local studies, Oxfordshire is unusual in the predominance of religious objections over any other form. What also makes it unusual is the large number of objectors whose testimony

¹¹⁷ *OC TR*, 31 March p.3. William Henry Waddle, printer's machine minder, says his father will tell them his views.

¹¹⁸ *OC TR*, 31 March p.3. Henry Broadbent Stott's father said he had no encouragement from home.

¹¹⁹ For example, the views of Richard Colenutt Wright, were not known to Worcester College. Evidence from Worcester College archivist.

¹²⁰ *OC TR*, 12 May p.3.

¹²¹ *OC TR*, 31 March, p.9.

was highly articulate and who were both connected with the University and supported by eminent and well-respected figures. This represented a significant and serious challenge to the moral authority of the Tribunals. The next chapter will examine this challenge in more detail by looking at the national reach of the objectors' influence.

I now consider the judgements given to the appellants, and look for what they reveal about differential treatment. I will compare the treatment of the religious with the socialist objectors, and look at two case study examples to illustrate the difference of outcome according to the nature of their conscientious claim.

If they gave exemptions to conscientious objectors at all (and many were dismissed) the Tribunal usually gave them for non-combatant service only. As the months went on, this were sometimes tied to some sort of work of national importance (although the Tribunalists had many queries about what this was). This judgement satisfied none (or very few) of the objectors. The Tribunal gave little time to considering what kind of non-combatant service would be suitable for any objector. Therefore from one point of view, the Tribunal judgements were the same, whoever was appealing, and the objectors' different pleas made little difference to the Tribunal judgments. No absolute exemptions were made for conscientious objectors in Oxfordshire. By and large this was what happened at local Tribunals across all British locations. No more than 350 absolute exemptions were given over the whole country, based on Central Tribunal reports.¹²² However, the effect of this judgment on the objector's subsequent experience of the War is mitigated by other factors.

¹²² See Rae, *Conscience and Politics*, p130.

Privilege protected some from the harsh impact of the Tribunal judgements. Social class, education and connections played a big part in mitigating the effects of taking such an unpopular stand. The Oxford University 'old boy' network helped. An Oxford University education was a fast track into Government, and many MPs, Cabinet members, and powerful figures in the Church, had been to Oxford University. The intervention of powerful figures with a national profile could ensure good treatment for them, even if the motivation was simply to keep the objectors out of the press. Raymond Postgate, an undergraduate at St Johns, was one of those.

When the Oxfordshire Appeal Tribunal dismissed his case in early April, Postgate was arrested and imprisoned. Just before his release from Oxford Prison, he was asked by the Governor if he would like a taxi ordered to take him up to the Cowley Barracks, as "he thought I wouldn't want to be marched through the streets."¹²³ There were no such worries about more lowly born objectors. Harry, printers' machine minder, said 'there was an attempt to form us up into a squad to march to the Barracks. I refused again and walked up with the sergeant.'¹²⁴ We might suspect that Postgate received special treatment, as the military escort asks if he is a Member of Parliament's son.¹²⁵ The Governor of Oxford prison received a letter from the Secretary of State ordering his release.¹²⁶ This was probably due to the intervention of Gilbert Murray, whose 'representations convinced the authorities that Ray was a nuisance, best of out the way.'¹²⁷

¹²³ John Raymond and Mary Postgate, *A stomach for dissent: the life of Raymond Postgate: 1896-1971* (Keele: Keele University Press, 1994) Postgate, *A stomach for dissent* p.58.

¹²⁴ London: Library of the Society of Friends, Papers of William Henry Waddle, acc. no. 11265. Waddle's account of his experiences at the hands of the military authorities, May 1916

¹²⁵ Postgate, *A stomach for dissent* p.59.

¹²⁶ Ibid p.60.

¹²⁷ Ibid p.65.

The military and the police were considerate towards the students in a way that could only be explained by social class. A boy in a prison cell next to Postgate whispers 'E's a toff! St. Jawn's College!¹²⁸ When he was detained in Cowley Barracks, Lieutenant Baldry the military representative seeks out Postgate and offers to help, lending him £1 and some notepaper and envelopes.¹²⁹ John Hoare, student objector, describes his arrest from University College.

'The CID man [...] very courteously withdrew for a time, for an hour or more because I was having tea with my mother, which was the kind of experience which so far as the lower ranked soldiers and police were concerned, very often occurred, you found them extremely friendly and human and obliging when they could be.'¹³⁰

From whatever social class, those seen as political objectors were treated badly by the Tribunals. They were assumed to be planning revolution. Herbert Frank Runacres is accused of persuading working men to avoid recruitment.¹³¹ Joseph Alan Kaye was put on trial for allegedly distributing anti-recruitment leaflets in a case that attracted national attention.¹³² Harold Stephen Claydon, car repairer, declaring he appeals as an international socialist, is asked sharply if he is an Englishman.¹³³ The socialists' requests for exemption were dismissed at Oxfordshire Appeal Tribunal level, and most were subsequently arrested and court-martialled. Members of the University

¹²⁸ Ibid p.57.

¹²⁹ Ibid p.59.

¹³⁰ *John Hoare: a Pacifist's Progress*, ed. Richard J. Hoare) p.9.

¹³¹ *OC TR*, 10 March p.9.

¹³² *OC TR*, 10 March, p.8.

¹³³ *OC TR*, 24 March p.10.

Socialist Society were singled out for particularly harsh treatment, including David Blelloch, Henry Broadbent Stott, Herbert Runacres and Aubrey Thomas Barguss. Raymond Postgate was also a socialist, but had influential friends, and seemed to achieve preferential treatment of a kind that throws further light on the unwillingness of the authorities to publicly humiliate the students.

The student religious objectors received better treatment and were viewed more favourably by Tribunalists and the public. To demonstrate this, I will compare the Tribunal's treatment of Richard Brockbank Graham, Magdalen College student, Quaker and religious objector, with that of William Henry Waddle, moral objector and working class printer's machine minder.

Graham makes a long statement about his beliefs on March 3rd at the Oxford Local Tribunal. Knowing his rights does not seem to have meant he was regarded as a problem - he and his father who also appears, remind the Tribunal of the wording of the Military Service Act and how it allows absolute exemption for conscientious objectors. The usually combative Baldry seems subdued when questioning his Quaker background, saying *'this is no catch, you agree with them (the Quakers) and their actions?'*¹³⁴ The Appeal Tribunal is keen to place him in the Friends Ambulance Unit, and although he does not enter it until 28th May, the army does not pursue him in April and May. His treatment compared favourably with that of Blelloch and Postgate who also expressed a willingness to join the FAU but as socialists are arrested, court martialled and imprisoned. There is no doubt Graham was well informed about his rights, but the presence and support of his father at the Tribunal, and the letter of

¹³⁴ OT TR, 4 March p.7.

support from Sir Herbert Warren, Principal of Magdalen College and contemporary of Asquith the Prime Minister and Viscount Alfred Milner, a key member of the War Cabinet, no doubt helped to prevent his arrest by the Army.¹³⁵ Warren wrote 'I have no doubt that to the best of my belief Mr Graham holds his views with thorough and conscientious conviction'. His letter was read out at the Tribunal hearing. Thus the Tribunal's acceptance of Quaker belief as proof of sincerity, and the old boy network, made his path an easier one. He took a teaching post in September 1916 and went on to be a headmaster.

I compare his favourable treatment at the Tribunal with that of William Henry Waddle. Brought up in Oxford, he was an apprentice at Colegroves the printers at the start of the War. At his first Tribunal appearance he says that if he is not given absolute exemption, he is willing to be shot.¹³⁶ He objected to going into the Royal Army Medical Corps because by doing so he would be assisting the War, and also objects to taking the military oath. His appeal was refused, and he was drafted into the army. He was court martialled, charged as a deserter and sentenced to 112 days hard labour. In October 1916 he was in Dyce hard labour camp, which was closed after a month because of the death of a conscientious objector there. He was sent to Dartmoor work camp in June 1917, and in 1918, finally prepared to cooperate with the Home Office scheme, he was released to work for the Church Army Press. As an objector with no connection to the influential men in Oxford, his experience is a great contrast with that of Graham and illustrates the Tribunals' different treatment of town and gown.

¹³⁵ *OT TR*, 4 March p.7.

¹³⁶ *OC TR*, 3 March 1916 p.9.

The Tribunal was hardest on those appellants without support, or who are employees, tradesmen or agricultural workers. Lieutenant Baldry, the military representative, mocked Alfred John Bishop, employee of the Clarendon Press, who he accuses of shooting, gambling and drinking. His character reference, the Rev Brash of the Wesley Memorial Church, was present in the room and had vouched for his honesty and trustworthiness as a long-term member of the Church.¹³⁷ Baldry's insinuation denigrates both appellant and Minister of the Church. Baldry told the Tribunal that the Great Western Railway did not want objector Hugh Roberts as an employee, and Roberts demanded an apology for in court for this insinuation.¹³⁸ A number of County Appeals (by Zaccheus Lawrence Radford, Ralph Ernest Smith, and William Lee) were either dismissed as insincere, or their testimonials were ignored. Headington Tribunal did not consider the testimony of Herbert Reginald Smith's father, much to his indignation.¹³⁹ Bicester Rural Tribunal made fun of William Wilkins, egg and poultry dealer, when the Chair of the Tribunal compares conscientious objectors to chickens. Wilkins' request for his case to go to the Pelham Committee was dismissed, and the Chair told him the Committee '*is not for the likes of you*'.¹⁴⁰ The path of the objector to a higher authority was regarded as not suitable for ordinary people.

I suggest on the basis of the evidence that the 'gown' (students, lecturers and trainee Ministers), with the exception of the socialists, received a better hearing and more favourable treatment than 'the town' (employees, unconnected workers, and small traders). Those objecting on religious reasons, unless they are suspected of socialism

¹³⁷ OC TR, 17 March p.8.

¹³⁸ OC TR, 11 March p.10.

¹³⁹ OC TR, 12 May p.10.

¹⁴⁰ OC TR, 12 May p.10.

as well, are questioned but not regarded with such suspicion as the political objectors. The students were more articulate in making their case and were more often given a respectful hearing (with the exception of the political objectors). The lack of a university education means the townspeople make shorter and balder statements, and find it harder to answer the Tribunal's questions in a way regarded as acceptable. The employed objectors were more likely to be mocked, and their sincerity questioned, in part because they did not express themselves so well. These differences in treatment are particularly marked in Oxford where University and town co-exist, and Tribunalists (almost all townspeople) were anxious to give the University full dignity and respect.

CHAPTER 5: INFLUENCE AND PUBLIC OPINION IN OXFORDSHIRE

5a. Influence in high places: ‘Release by favouritism’

For a few short months, as reported in the local press, Oxford was electrified by the appearances of the conscientious objectors at the Tribunal. Their consciences would not let them cooperate, with the Army, which was frustrated by not being able to recruit them into the Armed Forces. The Tribunal was uncomfortably situated between them. The appearances of the conscientious objectors and how they were reported represented a struggle for the sympathy and support of the public. The Tribunal was the location of set-piece battles for moral authority, in which the panel members questioned the objectors’ sincerity, bravery, and patriotism. The objectors quoted church teachings and the spoke of the principles of socialist brotherhood to prove that in their own terms, they were sincere and patriotic.

In the first part of this chapter I will outline the how powerful people supported the conscientious objectors, and how influential that support was. I examine the public space in which conscientious objectors made their requests, and the response at local and national level. I will argue that although support for the objectors came from individuals rather than institutions, it had an impact at the highest national levels, because of the good social and family connections of Oxford students. Stephen Hobhouse, well connected Balliol graduate and absolutist conscientious objector caused Joseph King MP to comment in Parliament that ‘others without Oxford connections were unable to secure ‘release by favouritism.’¹⁴¹ However, while it may

¹⁴¹ Rae, *Conscience and Politics* p.225 note 3.

have had an impact on the decisions of government, it was only partially visible to the public. The second part of this chapter deals with the local press coverage noting the strength of calls for fairness and respect for the Oxford objectors, and the struggle this represented for moral authority.

In the previous chapter I gave details of the statements of support from Oxford men of substance in religious and academic life. Many well-respected local clergymen and Bishops provided that testimony.¹⁴² Sometimes they only vouched for the sincerity of their students' beliefs, but often they knew the objectors personally and offered advice and support. Some also spoke up about the unfair and cruel treatment the objectors received. For example, the Bishop of Oxford supported Albert Victor Murray, Secretary of the Student Christian Union in all these ways. The leaders of the religious Colleges wrote in support of the sincerity of their students, in particular Dr Selbie of Mansfield and Dr Jacks of Manchester College, both Nonconformist Colleges. The Principals of Wycliffe Hall, St Stephens House, and Pusey House did the same. The Rev J. Dann, Pastor of New Road Baptist Chapel, supported John Gilbert Wiblin, an archivist at the Bodleian Library. Rev Brash of Wesley Memorial Church writes into the Chronicle pleading for 'fair play' for the objectors.¹⁴³ The following week Noel Whitfield, Minister of Cowley Road Congregational Church, writes in to thank Brash for his letter and complains of Lieutenant Baldry's 'cruel gibe' at the expense of his friend Percy Hawkridge, Minister at a neighbouring church, who has had to take time off from college to look after his mother.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴² In the First World War, Bishops still sat in the House of Lords, giving them government as well as Church power.

¹⁴³ *OC Correspondence*, 3 March p.8.

¹⁴⁴ *OC Correspondence*, 10 March p.7.

Student conscientious objectors got individual help from eminent academics and their tutors. The letter of Sir Herbert Warren, President of Magdalen College, in support of Richard Graham has already been mentioned. Gilbert Murray, Professor of Greek, had a lengthy correspondence with Raymond Postgate, student at St Johns College. Murray was also protector to Postgate's sister Margaret, who said of him, 'when I walked away from the Oxford court room, he [was] solicitously holding an umbrella over my head, although it was not raining.'¹⁴⁵ As a leading public intellectual he frequently appears in the 'Personal and Social' column of the *Oxford Chronicle*. Well-known in Government circles as a prominent academic supportive of the War, he intervened at the highest levels on behalf of objectors. Also supportive of their students were the Master of Pembroke, and Fellows from New College, St Johns College, and the Queens College. The Head of Repton public school, Mr D. F. Fisher, and The Rev William Temple (later Archbishop of Canterbury), wrote warmly of John student at University College. Cecil Cadoux, Fellow of Mansfield College, and Henry Gillett, local medical doctor represented on the Oxford Wartime Committees, attended Tribunal appearances around the county in support of objectors Robert Godley, John Gilbert Wiblin, and Stanley Webb Davies. They also supported Aubrey Thomas Barguss, camp leader of the YMCA. Gillett and Cadoux did not confine their support to students, vouching for the sincerity of Caleb Harwood, his sons Eric and Joseph, and the brothers Harold Stephen Claydon and Edward Willis Claydon. All were agricultural workers or tradesmen from the Oxfordshire village of Charlbury.

These interventions influenced national level events and all eyes were on the Oxfordshire Tribunals. In its account of the Kaye case, the *Oxford Chronicle*

¹⁴⁵ Margaret Cole, *Growing up into Revolution* (London: Longmans 1949) p.59.

commented on how the gallery ‘was not local, or even national, it was international in its aspects [...] the honoured spectators in the well of the court were not less interesting. It went on to point out the preferential treatment for Oxford academics, saying ‘the President of the Prisoners’ College was honoured with a seat upon the (Tribunal) bench. One wondered why he was there.’ It also pointed out the presence of General Morton, commander of the 24th infantry brigade’¹⁴⁶ in the audience. While it is difficult to quantify the impact of testimony from high profile figures in the Church and the University, the Tribunal and its audiences would have noted it, as would the Oxford reading public. These were not a minority of cases: as shown in an earlier chapter, seventy per cent of the objectors were religious in motivation, and two thirds had letters of support from figures of authority.

There were powerful people in Oxford who did not hesitate to use their influence at Cabinet and Prime Ministerial level, and national figures who had been students at Oxford paid attention to them and to what was happening in the city. Cabinet member Sir John Simon is reported in the papers as taking a personal interest in the objectors¹⁴⁷. Both he and Prime Minister H. H. Asquith had local connections, both were Balliol College graduates with continuing local connections. Asquith had a home in Sutton Courtenay near Oxford, and Simon had lived in Oxford for some years before his wife’s death.

At a lunch with Asquith, Gilbert Murray advocated more humane treatment for the objectors, using Quaker statistics collected about the Tribunals¹⁴⁸. Lord Hugh Cecil,

¹⁴⁶ *OC Out and About*, 24 March p. 6.

¹⁴⁷ *OC Out and About*, 3 March 1916, p.6.

¹⁴⁸ Rae, *Conscience and Politics*, p. 128.

MP for Oxford University was quoted several times in Hansard for his proposal to solve the national conscientious objector problem by using civil rather than military courts. The importance of this issue to the general public is reinforced by Josiah Wedgwood MP, who said in Parliament ‘I think a straightforward choice ought to be put to them instead of this absurd system of courts-martial, sentencing and resentencing and all that nonsense, which is seriously upsetting public opinion in the country.’¹⁴⁹ Gilbert Murray played an important part in persuading Asquith the Prime Minister to use his influence to remove the death sentence from the 30 conscientious objectors sent to France to be shot in May 1916.¹⁵⁰ The Bishop of Oxford led a House of Lords debate on 4 May 1916 protesting the unfair treatment of conscientious objectors in military detention and calling for their transfer to civil prisons. He uses as evidence the unjust treatment of an ‘estimable’ Oxford undergraduate.¹⁵¹ I will return in the conclusion to these well-known figures in the post-War period.

The high proportion of Nonconformist Liberal Members of Parliament (200 were elected in 1906) and the nature of Oxford as a predominantly Liberal town, would have added to the objectors’ potential for influence. Many of these MPs would have felt the importance of supporting their fellow Nonconformists in support for the right of an individual to follow their religious conscience even against government compulsion. Arnold Rowntree the Quaker MP illustrates this in a speech in the House of Commons in early May, emphasising the furore in the Church.

¹⁴⁹ *Hansard* HC Deb vol 86 col 839-864 (9 Oct 1916) [Electronic version].

¹⁵⁰ Margaret Cole, *Growing up into Revolution* (London: Longmans 1949) p.58.

¹⁵¹ *Hansard* HL Deb vol 21 col 901-944 (4 May 1916) [Electronic version].

I am perfectly certain that we cannot allow this to go on, it is the leaders of Nonconformity in this country, aye, and some of the leaders of the Church - Bishops and others - who are troubling us, and saying that some way must be found to prevent this stain coming upon England during a war when almost every man is fighting for his most cherished liberties and possessions.¹⁵²

About 20-30 Liberal Nonconformist MPs were concerned about the fate of conscientious objectors, including Arnold Rowntree, and Edmund Harvey, Quakers. They raised almost weekly Parliamentary questions in the first half of 1916. Most active of all in Parliament was Philip Snowden, receiving 30,000 letters from conscientious objectors in 1916. Philip Morrell, local Oxford Liberal MP, asked several Parliamentary Questions about the 30 objectors sent to France to be shot in May 1916.¹⁵³ As a supporter of conscientious objectors, he set up a farm at Garsington Manor, Oxford to provide them with employment ‘in the national interest.’

Pressure from Members of the House of Commons and the House of Lords led eventually to changes in policy to solve the ‘problem’ of conscientious objectors. The deluge of letters and complaints from supporters, the coverage of their ill treatment on the Liberal newspapers, and the questions in Parliament, were gradually seen to be a liability for the public’s opinion of the Government.

The examples I have given here illustrate that there were a number of powerful and influential people based in Oxford putting pressure on the Prime Minister and the

¹⁵² *Hansard* HC Deb vol 82 col 1103-1324 (15 May) [Electronic version].

¹⁵³ HC Deb 23 May 1916 vol 82 cc1967-8.

Cabinet to resolve the most burning issues posed by the conscientious objector problem. The experiences of unfairness experienced by some of the Oxford objectors at the hands of the local Tribunal were used as examples. These examples were in official reports like Hansard, and in the local papers, and as a result, gave national publicity to confusion in the system and to the victimisation of some.

5b. The Local Tribunal's response

However, this national level response to the Oxfordshire Tribunal's work was not well received locally. The already-troubled arena was stirred up by the public objections of the Tribunal to interference from professionals and eminent people in Government. The Chairman was annoyed by high-level intervention. In the case of Postgate, he said to the Tribunal -

‘with regard to letters handed in to the Tribunal especially...from such eminent men as Professor Murray, I should like it understood that the Tribunal cannot accept as evidence merely an effect created on the writer's mind by a conversation with the applicant.’¹⁵⁴

Thanks to Henry Gillett, local Quaker, for his willingness to pay for legal advice, points of law with national implications were raised in Oxford. John Hoare's diary refers to Gillett's action as ‘a kind of standing order to cover everybody which of course didn't suit me or most people I think, and he had a bit of controversy with the

¹⁵⁴ *OC TR*, 24 March p.9.

Tribunal.¹⁵⁵ Frank Gray, the solicitor Gillett hired, took up the questions raised by MPs. He pressed for a review of certificates of exemption on ‘work of national importance’. At first, the Tribunals insisted men had to be doing this work at the time of their application for exemption. Gray urged the Tribunal to permit applicants to seek that work in the future, and assured them that the Pelham Committee had made it perfectly legal to do so.¹⁵⁶ Gray requested leave to appeal to the higher Central Tribunal for some of the cases, as there was now a mechanism to allow this. He also asked to query whether the objectors were allowed to return to the local Tribunal to ask for a certificate of absolute exemption, if the Appeal Tribunal had refused their request.¹⁵⁷

The Oxford Tribunal reacted with irritation. They objected to the presence of a solicitor representing others in the Tribunal proceedings, particularly the objectors. The Tribunal set its face against adopting the advice of the Local Government Board, as it was not clear to them who was in charge, and refused permission to review the certificates. There was disagreement between the Mayor and Gray over the status of the Local vis-a-vis the Appeal Tribunal. The Mayor replied ‘Can Mr Gray say if we are above the Appeal Tribunal? It seems to put us in a ridiculous position.’¹⁵⁸ The military representative objects to the solicitor acting as ‘champion for such people with enlarged consciences’ and accused him of being a sympathiser.¹⁵⁹

This would have been an embarrassment to Frank Gray’s father, Sir William Gray, well-respected local figure and many times Mayor of Oxford. The Town Clerk and

¹⁵⁵ Ed. Richard J. Hoare, *John Hoare: a Pacifist’s Progress: papers from the First World War*, p.7.

¹⁵⁶ *OC TR*, 14 April p.9.

¹⁵⁷ *OC TR*, 15 April p.9.

¹⁵⁸ *OC TR*, 15 April p.8.

¹⁵⁹ *OC TR*, May 5 p.8.

the military representative combined forces to dismiss Herbert Blelloch on the grounds that he was already under military orders, and beyond the remit of the Tribunal. Gray protested that this is immaterial, as even if he had been in France he could still be represented at the Tribunal. None of the other Tribunalists intervened, and Blelloch was subsequently arrested.¹⁶⁰

It is very clear that although legal advice took forward the business of sorting out ambiguities about procedure in conscientious objector cases, ultimately leading to changes in government policy, it led to local unpleasantness and conflict. The lack of clarity about the role of the Tribunals could be said to be a contributory factor to the confusion, but it exposed the Oxfordshire Tribunals as acting on some occasions against legal advice and contrary to the advice of the Local Government Board. In Parliament, Philip Snowden MP reported a local Oxford journalist saying of his own Local Tribunal - ‘during a long and varied experience as a journalist I have visited many Courts of Justice, but I have never before witnessed such a travesty’.¹⁶¹

While the Oxfordshire objectors and their experience helped to shape national policy, it was undoubtedly the subject of public conflict in the local arena: conflict between the army and the objectors, the local Councillors and the national MPs, and between the Tribunal’s notions of duty and patriotism compared with the individual rights of objectors to receive fair treatment despite unpopular views.

¹⁶⁰ *OC Report from City Magistrates Court*, May 6 1916.

¹⁶¹ *Hansard* HC Deb vol 81 col 1443-1460 (6 April 1916) [Electronic version].

5c. Oxfordshire public opinion: ‘If a man says I hold it a sin to kill my fellow man, that is an end of it.’¹⁶²

So to what extent was this struggle for hearts and minds visible to wartime Oxfordshire residents? These struggles were sometimes raised nationally. I examine the press reports and what they tell us about the how the Oxford public received the news about the conscientious objector cases. From them we learn about the excitement and interest the Tribunals generated. The *Oxford Chronicle* reported that the cases of the conscientious objectors excited the most interest at the Local Oxford Tribunal, observing that ‘the Council Chamber held a crowd such as it had certainly never before seen in its history – soldiers (wounded or otherwise) Red Cross nurses, dons, undergraduates, citizens, including many ladies’¹⁶³. This is echoed by the *Oxford Times*, which adds that ‘many were unable to gain admission’.¹⁶⁴ It was not clear if it was a theatre or a law court: ‘once or twice there was applause, which [...] was instantly suppressed.’¹⁶⁵ The first meeting of the Appeals Tribunal on 25 March was again reported with ‘a large attendance of the public, chiefly supporters of the conscientious objectors’. The case of Joseph Kaye, imprisoned as a possible German spy, excited the most interest of all the cases reported in the press, telling us a great deal about the Tribunalists’ concerns about sedition, and people’s appetite for spy stories and drama. But either way, they were firmly in the public eye.

Apart from the Tribunal reports, the struggle over the significance and value of conscientious objection to the public took place on the letters page and in the

¹⁶² *OC Correspondence* from ‘LIBERAL’, 14 January p.9.

¹⁶³ *OC Out and About*, 3 March, p.6.

¹⁶⁴ *OT Passing Notes*, 11 March, p.10.

¹⁶⁵ *OC Out and About*, 3 March p.6.

editorials. As the local voice of Conservatism, The *Oxford Times* was unsympathetic to conscientious objection. A leader on 15th January 1916 describes socialism as compulsion, and on 4th March another one refers to ‘the absurd dogma of human rights’. Its letters on this topic are few, but always hostile. ‘Cymro’ illustrates the tone and content of the *Oxford Times*, on 11 March comparing ‘Tommy in the trenches fighting for his king and country while these slackers stay at home and enjoy every luxury’.¹⁶⁶

There was an explosion of debate about conscientious objectors in the *Oxford Chronicle*, because of its Liberal and Church sympathies. The Bishop of Oxford wrote to the *Oxford Times* and *Chronicle* on 3rd March expressing his concern about the disrespect shown to the conscientious objectors by the Oxford Tribunal. He also wrote to *the Times* newspaper on 16 March, to say that conscientious objectors ‘have not been treated by the tribunals with sufficient respect.’¹⁶⁷ This seems an unusual and daring step for a person of such authority in the Church of England. It was prompted by examples of unfair treatment in Oxford, with which he was personally connected. A ‘Manifesto on Freedom of Conscience’ was published in the *Oxford Chronicle* and signed by eleven religious leaders of the Churches. It complained of ‘browbeating’ by the Tribunal and called for fairness and respect for sincerely held opinions, and ‘the preservation of freedom of conscience as a vital religious principle. Conscience, however mistaken, ought not to be the subject of public ridicule.’¹⁶⁸

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¹⁶⁷ Clive Barrett, *Subversive Peacemakers: War Resistance 1914-1918, an Anglican Perspective* (Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 2014) p.126

¹⁶⁸ *OC TR* 31 March p.7.

Many of these Churchmen also wrote personal letters to the press, and there was a lively correspondence about pacifism and Christianity, with frequent reference to Biblical texts. Editorials feature it too: the *Oxford Chronicle* editorial of 3 March entitled 'Compulsion and Good Faith' states that 'conscientious objectors are not shirkers and they should not be treated as such'. The theme of unfairness led to the conclusion that would breed resentment and future conflict. Norman Smith, another of the Nonconformist Churchmen, writes to say -

another fight, grim and fierce, will have to be waged in this land against universal and permanent conscription. The present proceedings before the Oxford Tribunal should prove an instructive lesson. Twice a week the tribunal meets and twice a week the representative of the War Office gratuitously provides powder and shot for that coming fight.¹⁶⁹

Apart from letters in the press, and personal support, the case for moral authority found little public outlet. Apart from the Quakers, both national and in Oxford and Banbury, who wrote to the local newspapers with details of their statements of their anti-war position,¹⁷⁰ there was no local institutional support for conscientious objection expressed in public. Sermons, frequently reported in the local papers, did not refer to the religious controversy, or if they did, it was in such veiled terms that it is hard to identify them. Few public meetings were held, in comparison with towns identified in other local studies of resistance to war. In Briton Ferry, South Wales, there were twenty-four anti-war and anti-conscription meetings in 1916. These were held in in public halls, the English Congregational Church, and the Jerusalem Church.

¹⁶⁹ *OC Correspondence*, 10 March, p.7.

¹⁷⁰ *OC Correspondence*, 25 February 1916, p.2 from Edmund New, Clerk of Oxford Quaker Meeting.

They were often large: one held on 3 December lists an attendance of 1,000. They attracted high profile speakers well known for their support of conscientious objection and/or anti-war stance ¹⁷¹. Pearce describes a large anti-war public meeting in Huddersfield addressed by Philip Snowden MP, which men in uniform attempted unsuccessfully to break up. Pearce adds that ‘the anti-war groups continued to hold their meetings throughout the town, in the open air and indoors, without significant interference.’¹⁷²

The comparison with Oxford is stark. Only one meeting that could have been interpreted as against the established order is advertised in the press in 1916. The Oxford University Socialist Society (OUSS) held meetings, but they were in the privacy of their rooms. They invited national-level speakers such as Ramsay Macdonald and George Lansbury, but none of their plans for more high profile public events reached the light of day. They approached the Oxford Trades Council with ideas for joint public meetings. The minutes of the Trades Council propose ‘a joint labour committee for the purposes of education and propaganda’, but later in the meeting its remit is changed to the ‘joint labour educational and social committee’. This gives an indication of their nervousness about any anti-war propaganda, given that their Secretary was on the City Wartime Emergency Committees. ¹⁷³ It minuted that ‘it was thought advisable that we do not at present entertain peace circulars’¹⁷⁴. The Trades Council and the OUSS organised just one joint public meeting on the subject of ‘the organisation of industry and its post-war future’,¹⁷⁵ held at Ruskin

¹⁷¹ Philip Adams, *Not in our Name: War Dissent in a Welsh town*, Appendix 13.

¹⁷² Pearce, *Comrades in Conscience*, p.176.

¹⁷³ Oxfordshire History Centre, 044/1/A2/4, Oxford Trades Council Minute Book 1914-18. The Joint Committee is approved at their December meeting, 1915.

¹⁷⁴ Oxford Trades Council Minute Book 1914-18, November 1916.

¹⁷⁵ Oxford Trades Council Minute Book 1914-18, Ruskin Conference held 21-23 July 1916.

College, after months of discussion about its title, subject, and speakers, but it was not advertised in the local papers. Even Henry Gillett, able to hold a position on the Oxford Wartime Committee and yet publicly support conscientious objectors, organised only private gatherings. A meeting he organised on 16-17 December of the Christian Fellowship with speakers ‘at which conscientious objectors and supporters will share information about CO experiences and discuss the issues’ was attended by personal invitation only.¹⁷⁶

While the correspondence columns of the press do not indicate widespread public support for the conscientious objectors stand, they do indicate that although public meetings were not possible in the climate of wartime Oxford, editorials and letters to the press were an important conduit not only to the Oxford public, but given the interest of Government Ministers and MPs, offered access to a national arena. Nevertheless, the majority of press coverage was of local and national events, even in the *Chronicle*, and flowed on with news of flag and flower days, news of fallen heroes and troop inspections, with little reference to the Tribunals and their conduct. One indicator of the unpopularity of conscientious objection can be seen in the letter from Mr R. Bishop of 72 Kingston Road, who wrote ‘I should be greatly obliged if you would kindly insert that Mr A.B Bishop of 177 Kingston Road is in no way connected with my family. All my four sons are at present serving with His Majesty’ Forces.’ Alfred Bishop, employee of the Clarendon Press, was one of the Oxford conscientious objectors and his namesake wished to dissociate himself from any possible connection.

¹⁷⁶ Bodleian Libraries, Cadoux Papers, 18, General Correspondence from January to June 1916, and letter from Gillett to Cadoux, dated 3rd December 2016.

To conclude, the evidence of the influence of the conscientious objectors at local level is mixed. The debates around the moral authority of conscientious objection and the reports of the Tribunals influenced the church-going public, but do not seem to have had wider influence in Oxfordshire. From organisational records there seems little evidence of support for a wider anti-war movement as there was in Briton Ferry or Huddersfield. Given the hostility towards conscientious objection in much of the national press, and the government view of the CO as the enemy within, it is interesting that a number of Oxford public figures with national status were willing to be personally vocal in favour of fair treatment, and make a disproportionate impact on Government policy towards the conscientious objectors.

There are several conclusions to be drawn from this chapter. The failings of the Oxfordshire Tribunals helped to trigger later changes and amendments to national policy. These included the creation of the Pelham Committee and its extension of the types of 'work of national importance', allowing some objectors non-combatant service in line with their beliefs. The Oxford examples were also used to advocate the use of civil courts and civil prisons rather than military detention and military court martial. All of this gave Oxford objectors an influence far more than their numbers would lead us to expect.

Policy change included a gradual acceptance that an individual's refusal to fight was now a right under British law and alternative work for them outside Armed Forces control had to be provided. It came to be acknowledged that putting conscientious objectors into the Army system was unnecessary, unjust and likely to lead to cruel treatment. Government gradually came to accept that the objectors should be kept in

civil prisons not military detention, and that their stand was not the equivalent of mutiny and the death sentence was completely inappropriate.

CONCLUSION

The ‘Fetters and Roses’ dinner and beyond

By the end of the First World War the necessity of fair treatment for objectors was accepted at the highest levels of government. This story does not end in with the Armistice in 1918. In fact, the way in which it continued demonstrates the continuing influence of the objectors and the wider peace movement of which it is part. Even though they were denied the right to vote until 1926, many of the objectors, in Oxfordshire and elsewhere, went on to hold public positions in the post-war period. A dinner was held the House of Commons for Members of Parliament who had been imprisoned for political or religious reasons on 9th January 1924. The picture shows forty six people, many of them conscientious objectors or suffragettes. There would have been some that were invited but not able to attend, and others not invited but who went on to be MPs in the future. The archives of Ruskin and other Colleges give us a taste of how many more who went on to be public figures in their own towns, Mayors, Councillors, Aldermen and Justices of the Peace.

The well-known figures in Oxford who supported the conscientious objectors continued to use their influence for peace and human rights in the inter-war period and beyond. Gilbert Murray, Professor of Greek at Oxford and Robert Cecil, Viscount Chelwood and son of Prime Minister Lord Salisbury, were leading figures in the League of Nations Union, set up to promote peace, collective security and international justice in the 1920s. At its height in the early 1930s it had half a million members. Gilbert Murray and Oxford Quaker Henry Gillett were founder members of the humanitarian organisation Oxfam, set up in 1942. Charles Gore, Bishop of

Oxford, known in earlier life for his social justice campaigning, supported women's equality by licensing 21 women lay readers, possibly the first in the Church of England.¹⁷⁷

I do not make large claims for the influence of Oxfordshire, but the work of its objectors in 1916 fed into the creation of a different public climate after the First World War.

What happened in Oxford continued to make waves. At the 1933 debate in the Oxford Union a large majority agreed that 'this house will in no circumstances fight for its King and Country'. Students who had seen their fathers, brothers, uncles, cousins, killed in the Great War voted not to see it again. This was a straw in the wind, but being Oxford, it made national headlines. It was part of a huge peace movement in the inter-war period. 10 million people voted to prohibit private armaments production in the 1935 League of Nations Union's Peace Ballot.¹⁷⁸

The objectors' plea for a different world was first made by Clifford Allen, Chair of the NCF, in his preface to Graham's *Conscription and Conscience: A History 1916-1919*. It expresses the conscientious objectors' vision of a different kind of government, which has the welfare of the population as a central concern, rather than compulsion preventing individual refusal of military service. This vision gradually gained clarity and focus in the development of British government social policy, culminating in the post Second-World War welfare state. It also put conscientious objection at the heart of an internationalist movement behind the massive

¹⁷⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_Gore [accessed 3rd May 2017].

¹⁷⁸ http://armingallsides.on-the-record.org.uk/case_studies/a-vote-for-peace/ [accessed 3rd May 2017].

humanitarian reconstruction of Europe in the post-Second World War period, the codification of universal human rights¹⁷⁹, and the revival of the idea of international government promoting peace.

The resister desires a new internationalism, by which States are conceived of less as embodiments of power and more as instruments of social administration. It should be the business of States to co-ordinate the free service of their citizens, and to compete in rivalry as to which can make the finest contribution to the stock of the world's happiness¹⁸⁰.

I suggest that this offers scope for the history of conscientious objection to be viewed in a wider narrative. The numbers of conscientious objectors were tiny, but their impact on public discourse and government policy in the longer term was significant. Government policy towards objectors was significantly different in the Second World War as a result of the kind of struggles illustrated in this Oxfordshire research. Tribunals specific to conscientious objection were set up, there was no Armed Forces involvement, the Ministry of Labour managed their work and the majority of objectors were given wartime civilian roles.¹⁸¹ The First World War debates in the local Tribunals that appeared in the press, and Parliamentary debates made a major contribution to this change. There is a discourse here about the development and exercise of twentieth century individual human rights to which this study makes a contribution.

¹⁷⁹ Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and Geneva Conventions (1949).

¹⁸⁰ Graham, *Conscription and Conscience*, p.23.

¹⁸¹ Rachel Barker, *Conscience, Government and War* 093, Conclusion, p. 117.

This study takes its place in a longer-term analysis of the wider significance of conscientious objection, not just in the peace movements of the 1920s and 1930s, but also in the formation of public and government opinion about what the state can legitimately demand of its citizens with legitimacy and respect. The history of conscientious objection fits into a wider narrative examining the power of governments to coerce their peoples, and the formalisation of legally defined individual rights, which reached a peak in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights after the Second World War. This study forms part of a growing body of local studies building a new history from below, piece by piece, about the contribution of Oxford conscientious objectors to making that change happen.



Figure 2: The ‘Fetters and Roses’ dinner

A dinner was held the House of Commons for Members of Parliament who had been imprisoned for political or religious reasons on 9th January 1924.

(House of Lords archives)

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