

# RESEARCHING THE GREAT WAR

*Next year will be the centenary of the outbreak of the Great War. The media will be saturated with coverage and public interest will be at an all-time high. What better time to research an aspect of that conflict and make a contribution to our knowledge of it.*

## **HISTORY IS ABOUT PEOPLE**

Never lose sight of this rather trite truism/aphorism. People are attracted to history because it is about themselves - the great and the good, the powerful, the wicked, as well as the noble, ordinary, courageous, self-sacrificing, pioneering elements of human society. Your research and eventual writing should reflect this.

## **WHAT WILL YOUR FOCUS BE?**

Focus your research – are you aiming to identify and research historical knowledge which you feel has been neglected? Or will you try to study a historical problem? Above all choose something that grabs you and that will sustain your interest.

## **LIMIT YOUR RESEARCH**

Limit your research – don't make it too wide. This saves time looking into too many places. It's easier to widen your research than to scale it down if you find you've spread yourself too thin, especially if you are working to a time limit.

## **PRELIMINARY WORK – CONSULT SECONDARY MATERIAL**

Examine what (if anything) has already been written about what you're interested in. Why re-invent the wheel? That doesn't mean to say that what's already been written can be relied. You may find that your research shows that it's not. You may need to read books on the national aspect of your chosen theme to be able to appreciate the wider picture.

## **STRUCTURE WITH QUESTIONS**

Once you've decided on your topic, compile a list of questions that you would like to be able to answer. You might not find out all you hope for, but it gives you guidelines for your research. Other questions will undoubtedly be thrown up as you find out more and more in your work.

## **IGNORE NOTHING OF POTENTIAL VALUE**

As you use your materials, note down anything which you think might come in handy if you do decide you need more to produce a wider or more detailed piece of work. Just thinking, 'That'll be useful later' is no good if you can't recall exactly where you saw it.

### **PRECISE ANNOTATION**

When using newspapers – if you find that you need to look back at a particular note it helps if you've been thorough when you first wrote/typed it. Note page/column of the issue used. This can save ages of scanning time! The same applies to any document which has several or large numbers of pages, regardless of whether it's handwritten or typescript, and regardless of whether the original document has page numbers. Use your own (but don't write them on the document!)

### **SENSIBLE AND CONSISTENT NOTE-MAKING**

However, when you make your notes you must do so in a way which makes sense. Ask yourself – will I be able to understand what I'm writing if I don't look at these notes again for a week, fortnight, several weeks. For instance - most people use abbreviations when making notes because it saves time. Above all be consistent in their usage to avoid confusion. I use Pt or Parl for 'Parliament. Pty for 'parliamentary.' I also use pt for 'part' and pty for 'party.' But I've done it for so many years that I know instinctively from the context of my notes which is which. Use headlines, underlinings, coloured lettering, capitals (anything that helps you to make notes that stand out) – without breaking any record office regulations in the process! Leave plenty of space between separate parts of the notes (there's nothing worse than trying to re-read notes that are crammed together on one side of A4.) This advice applies whether you're using pencil and paper or a laptop.

### **GET THE BIG PICTURE**

When you want to get through something there's always a temptation to rush. Avoid this. Try to read all or part of a document/newspaper article/Sound Archive recording etc. through in full (depending on its length) and paraphrase it. That way you get the sense of the whole. On the whole avoid writing it down word for word – this is very time consuming, although this rule may vary depending on what you're looking at. Copy word for word any key parts which you think you may use as quotations to illustrate your argument.

### **REFERENCES**

Be sure to write down the exact reference for every source you study, as well as its location. That applies to every source. If it's a book – which library, Dewey Class number. Note the full title of the book (or any document), author (full name), year of publication, publisher, place of publication (if not London). Writing down the class number will make it easier to relocate it if you want a second look.

### **CONTEXT**

Whatever topic you're researching, it is vital that you have an understanding of what was occurring at the time which might have affected it. This will need to be local and national background. In this case it's the Great War, but it's a very complex period, and you may

need to know more about one particular aspect of the war than any other. You cannot write the history of any event, person, or theme in the war in isolation from part or the whole of the war.

## **HOW DID MY BOOK ON ESSEX AND WW1 DEVELOP?**

1. Firstly as a study of Colchester's war memorial
2. Then into a wider study of Colchester & WW1
3. Finally into a county-wide study of the war.

## **WHAT QUESTIONS DID I ASK MYSELF?**

- 1 How did people in Essex react to the start of the war?
- 2 What was the political, social and economic impact of the war?
- 3 How did people cope with the huge losses of the war?
- 4 How did the war affect religious faith?
- 5 Did the war produce a change in the status and role of women in work and society?
- 6 How significant was the issue of conscientious objection?
- 7 In what ways can we view the experience of Essex people in the light of the concept of total war?
- 8 How did people react to the fact that Essex was a front-line county in this new type of warfare?
- 9 How did people interpret the war at the beginning, during the conflict, and at its conclusion?

10 How did this contemporary interpretation match the views that have developed about the war in the later 20<sup>th</sup> century?

11 What was the long-term impact of the war?

12 How did those who lived through the war commemorate their victory and the sacrifice of so many?

13 Why has the war been commemorated for a whole century?

### **So what did I find out that surprised me, (but sometimes only moderately so)?**

- A The extent to which the idea of 'we're all in this together' was not practised by everyone
- B Resistance to the campaign to get women employed in men's jobs
- C The extent of hostility to organised sport, especially football
- D The extent of wartime tolerance
- E The existence of intolerance
- F The controversies which bedevilled the war memorial movement after the war

#### **C The Extent of Hostility to Organised Sport**

Quotations pp. 254-60 (football), p. 262 hunting,

#### **D The Extent of Wartime Tolerance**

Quotations p. 58 (friendly Germans), p.59 German music & language,

## **E Tolerance Strained**

Quotations pp. 76-83, 88, (conscription), p. 79-80 (Tending Guardians), p. 97, 100, (conchies), p. 54, Walthamstow, Southend, p. 55, name changes, pp. 55-58 Lusitania, p. 238 Maldon pigeon, pp. 240-1, police instructions, pp. 242-47 informants,

## **F War Memorial Controversies**

Quotations, pp. 293-5 (loss), p. 301 (purpose),

# **HOSTILITY TO ORGANISED SPORT**

Clash between competing views. In 1914 the ECT notes support for football

‘with the hope of producing a distraction for the people, and replenishing the ranks of trained men, who shall be physically fit and ready when their time comes.’

RB Colvin, Chairman Essex Terr. Force Assoc. and former Master of Hounds:

‘It is of no interest to anyone now if Essex beats Hampshire at cricket, or if Tottenham Hotspur beats Aston Villa at football. What we want to know is if these athletes can tackle the Germans.’

Hon. Charles Strutt:

‘When their children asked them in years to come what they did during the great war, could they say:- I went to watch some football matches?’

Percy Shaw Jeffrey, CRGS,

‘There is only one way to get recruits. Stop this pestilential League football, which many of us older footballers think is a disgrace to the nation. While the boys in every decent public school are cutting their matches and learning to drill and shoot, hordes of stalwart young fellows, who ought to be with the colours spend the weekly half-holidays ...in emitting discordant yells, punctuated with blasphemy and shrouded in the rank smoke of the emasculating cigarette.’

## **WARTIME TOLERANCE**

Earl of Warwick, 1914

‘They had in their midst friendly Germans, and in their relations towards the Germans in this country he thought they would always preserve towards them the position of honourable gentlemen. (applause). We did not want methods of barbarity in this country (applause).’

Letter in Stratford Express re disappearance of German music,

‘Surely art is international, if it is anything at all, and recognises no local, racial, or more fundamental boundary marks.’

Columnist in ECT re banning German language,

The present war will end some time, and to prohibit the children of the present day from studying the German language is to deprive them in the future of an acquaintance with much that is notable in German literature and science.

## **TOLERANCE SNAPS**

Clacton & East Essex Advertiser re CO's,

'9 out of 10 of whom, we venture to assert, never had a conscientious objection to warfare at all until they observed...a loophole by which they might possibly escape doing their duty like men...To listen to their canting humbug is sickening, and one is prompted to from them in disgust...When the war is over their newly acquired consciences will be shed as quickly as one discards a work out jacket.'

Tribunal of CF Barrett, Colchester ironmonger,

'Do you say it is contrary to your views to fight?

Decidedly.

Then what do you say to that passage in the Scriptures which says 'He that hath no sword, sell his garment and buy one?'

I think Jesus said that in irony.

Why? Don't you think Christ told them to do that for nothing?

I base my whole objection on the principles Christ laid down –  
To love God and Man.

Then what is your remedy for Belgium, as you find it today?

Of course I believe in defending the weak, but I believe in  
Moral force.

What is your remedy? Is to stay in England and do nothing  
Try and help?

I believe the Gov. would be wise to collect all the CO's and  
Send them over to France to settle the business (laughter).

I suggest they make a start with you. (laughter).

Do you mean you would stop and argue with the Germans?

I should use moral force.

How would you apply it? Would you stand and argue?

I am sure there would have to be talking.

There would if you were there. (laughter)

Southend TC urges reprisals,

‘and to give an assurance that the scheme of reprisal will  
have little doubt that German civilians shall suffer to as  
great an extent as the civilians have suffered.’

Walthamstow meeting,

‘institute immediately a policy of ceaseless air attacks on  
German towns and cities in order that their population may

experience the effects of such methods of warfare...'

Surnames changed,

AM Schloss to AM Castle, A Langemann to A Langham,

D Oppenheim to D Openshaw.

Lusitania Riots, May 12-13 1915

Sunk 7 May. 22 April poison gas at Ypres. 12 May Bryce Commission. 10 May Zeppelin attack on Southend.

May 12-13 riots at Southend & metropolitan Essex – East & West Ham & Stratford, Leyton.

Evelyn Potter, eyewitness,

Girls coming from Silvertown area brought news of German owned shops being stoned and entered. They also said mobs were out. (they were locked in school by caretaker). On leaving school about 10 pm we were cautioned to form ourselves into parties and keep out of the mob's way, and in the middle of the road. ...When we reached Schuarmroffels shop all the windows were smashed to atoms. Glass everywhere. Blinds torn...and all the bread and cakes gone.'

Stratford Express,

'At last however, the stolid Britisher appears to have been put off his usual imperturbability. The last straw has been

added by the sinking of the Lusitania, and this latest phase of their barbarity has loosened the restraining influences, and even the self-control of a certain section of the public, who have to take the question of reprisals into their own hands.'

Maldon pigeon,

'Considerable suspicion was roused among the residents of Maldon on 13<sup>th</sup> July 1915 by a pigeon which had settled on the roof of Harmer's house, causing a crowd of 2-300 to assemble. The police endeavoured to catch the pigeon but on being disturbed it flew away in the direction of Purleigh and was lost sight of. Harmer's house was subsequently searched but nothing was found there to incriminate him. PC Bolden made further enquiries and ascertained that 2 pigeons had escaped from the premises of John Ewers, Maldon, one had returned but the other had not.'

Police instructions.

'To take notice of all passers-by and stop and question all who look like foreigners or suspicious persons...'

'In times such as the present the Police will be well advised to look upon everything with suspicion until their loyalty is

proved and not start by assuming that everyone is loyal until something occurs to show they are otherwise.'

Police informants, ('The War: Suspects' ERO J/P 12/6)

Dovercourt, Sarah Macdonald, suspicious behaviour. 'a very Eccentric person.'

Mrs Campbell Ogilvie, Manningtree, a German & violently anti-English. 'an interfering woman.'

F.Farr, Little Oakley. Sir Henry Earle – 'is said to have consorted In an odd way with sailors and talked to them.'

CB Norman, Brentwood, 'a black sheep.' Allegations, cashiered from Army 1877, in prison, Turkish spy. Associated with Germans abroad. Report – his former history cannot be ignored at this juncture and That he is a potential danger to national interests who should not be Lost sight of.'

Scheme for Dangerous Persons in an Emergency – names of those seen as a potential security risk though not serious.

Archibald Triggs, Great Oakley, 'foreign appearance'

'He has been under observation and while absent at work his Belongings at Robert Ollis's house with whom he lodged were searched but nothing of a suspicious nature could be found.'