

Eight Socialist Conscientious Objectors at the University of Oxford, 1914–1918

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SUMMARY

This article examines the experiences of eight socialist conscientious objectors from the University of Oxford during the Great War and how they were judged, supported and opposed by wider society and the authorities – including the university. All members of the Oxford University Socialist Society, the men openly challenged conscription and applied for exemption on political grounds. The sentences handed down to the men by the Oxford tribunal and their responses were to take them in widely divergent directions – political safety, Cowley barracks, the Friends' Ambulance Unit, work camps, prison – indicating that whilst conscientious objection could be a group act, it was ultimately an individual decision based on beliefs about politics, peace, duty, and conscience. The price paid for it was always high.

Between 1916 and 1918, at the height of World War I, an estimated 16,500 to 18,000 men of military age in Britain defied conscription to military service, invoking exemption on the grounds of conscience because of political, religious or moral beliefs. Although representing just 0.33 per cent of all men recruited or called up, conscientious objectors (COs) personally challenged the authorities at public tribunals and formed a visible focus for dissent, invoking a range of emotions, attitudes and actions in wider society.¹ Most conscientious objectors were denied exemption, but continued to resist, resulting in imprisonment, disenfranchisement, widespread social condemnation and ridicule.² Most remained proudly unrepentant.³

Amongst these unrepentant COs were eight men from the University of Oxford who resisted conscription on political/moral grounds: Raymond Postgate (1896–1971); Joseph Alan Kaye/Kaufmann (1895–1919); Rajani Palme Dutt (1896–1974); Herbert F. Runacres (1892–1969); Philip Taliesin Davies ('Tal') (1895–1937); David H. H. Belloch (1896–1985); G.D.H. Cole, Fellow of Magdalen College (1889–1959) and Vere Gordon Childe (1892–1957), an Australian studying on a Cooper graduate scholarship.⁴ They were not the only COs from the university and town, but were a group of friends, all highly intelligent, academically gifted and articulate, all committed guild socialists, dedicated internationalists and members of the Oxford University Socialist Society. The 'Pearce List', the most comprehensive list of World War I COs available, lists fifty-three COs from the University of Oxford out of a total

¹ T.C. Kennedy, *The Hound of Conscience. A History of the No-Conscription Fellowship 1914–1919* (1981), p. 88.

² A. Kramer, *Conscientious Objectors of the First World War. A Determined Resistance* (2013); K. Burnham, *The Courage of Cowards. The Untold Story of First World War Conscientious Objectors* (2014); L. Bibbings, *Telling Tales about Men. Conceptions of Conscientious Objectors during the First World War* (2009); D. Goldring, *The Nineteen Twenties. A General Survey and Some Personal Memories* (1945).

³ C. Pearce, 'Writing about Britain's 1914–1918 War Resisters – Literature Review', *Reviews in History* (review no. 1779, 2015): <http://www.history.ac.uk/reviews/review/1779>.

⁴ T. Champion, 'Childe and Oxford', *European Journal of Archaeology*, 12 (2009), p. 22; S. Green, *Prehistorian. A Biography of V. Gordon Childe* (1981), p. 14.

of 300–400 men from Oxford eligible for conscription in 1916 as estimated by *The Oxford Times*. Sixty COs in total are listed for the University of Cambridge.⁵ These eight men have been singled out for examination because owing to their prominence in later life, we are unusually well-furnished with information about them – archives, letters, diaries, newspapers, biographies, autobiographies, the House of Commons’ *Hansard*, online records and even KV2 (Security Services) files kept on Childe. Materials from college archives, although limited, have also been used where available. Official records held on conscientious objectors were destroyed by Ministry of Health in 1921 or 1922,⁶ but we can reconstruct the individual experiences and interactions of this group, their support from wider pacifist networks, and the military, governmental and university structures that opposed them. Pearce has commented that pacifism has long been seen as isolated, individual and private and emphasised the need for a broader consciousness, telling stories of community and place.⁷ Examination of this group of COs allows us to see how dissent against the war was expressed in a university and how wider local society engaged with it.

THE OUTBREAK OF WAR

On 4th August 1914, war was declared in Europe. Both the town and university of Oxford reacted with energy, excitement and enthusiasm.⁸ Oxford was also home to Cowley barracks, the regimental depot for the Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry, which became a recruiting centre, despatching 10,537 men to various units during 1914.⁹ War broke out during the long vacation, so most undergraduates and fellows were away during the initial ‘rush to enlist’; others in residence joined the Oxford University Officer Training Corps.¹⁰ Over the next three months, most current undergraduates joined up and the only colleges where half the resident undergraduates were civilians at the end of 1914 were Queen’s, Pembroke, Lincoln and Jesus. Recruiting offices were established at Balliol College and at 90 High Street.¹¹ Newly arrived Rhodes Scholar, J.B. Langstaff, recalled: ‘all day they drill and practice bugle calls down in the meadows’.¹²

Blelloch and Childe both tried to enlist at the outbreak of war, which was not unusual for future COs. Blelloch felt the cause was moral: he saw Germany as the aggressor and applied for a commission, but was declared unfit.¹³ Childe twice attempted to enlist, but was turned down, probably owing to restrictions on Foreign Enlistments. These attempts are remarkable given his recorded interest in peace issues, opposition to the war to Australia in 1917 and later anti-Fascist/pro-Communist war-resistance.¹⁴ But militarist nationalism and liberal pacifism had long warred in Childe’s native Australia and like many other Australians,

⁵ C. Pearce, *Conscientious Objectors Register 1914–1918*, <https://search.livesofthefirstworldwar.org/search/world-records/conscientious-objectors-register-1914-1918>; Anon, ‘Passing Notes’, *Oxford Times*, 12 Feb. 1916, p. 5.

⁶ J. Rae, *Conscience and Politics. The British Government and the Conscientious Objector to Military Service 1916–1919* (1970), p. 55.

⁷ Pearce, ‘Writing about Britain’s 1914–1918 War Resisters’, p. 143; C. Pearce, ‘Rethinking the British Anti-War Movement 1914–1918: Notes from a Local Study’, *Quaker Studies*, 7:1 (2002), pp. 30–55.

⁸ M. Graham, *Oxford in the Great War* (2014), p. 25.

⁹ *Ibid.* p. 32.

¹⁰ J.M. Winter, ‘Oxford and the First World War’, in B. Harrison (ed.) *The History of the University of Oxford: Volume VIII: The Twentieth Century* (2011), pp. 8–9.

¹¹ *Ibid.* p. 27.

¹² J.B. Langstaff, *Oxford 1914* (1965), p. 32.

¹³ Burnham, *Courage of Cowards*, pp. 7–8, 11.

¹⁴ Green, *Prehistorian*, p. 11; Champion, ‘Childe and Oxford’, p. 26; J. Mulvaney, ‘“Another University Man Gone Wrong.” V. Gordon Childe 1892–1922’, in D. Harris (ed.) *The Archaeology of V. Gordon Childe. Contemporary Perspectives* (1994), pp. 55–73; TNA: PRO, KV 2/2148.



Fig. 1. Australian scholar and archaeologist Vere Gordon Childe. After initial ambivalence at the beginning of World War I, Childe would be a lifelong pacifist. Image courtesy of the London School of Economics, Special Collections. Raymond Postgate Archive.

he may have been undecided about the war and his role within it.¹⁵ New to Oxford, Childe may have been keen to fit in or felt subject to peer pressure; Childe's form in the Queen's College entrance book for 1914 records that he 'is drilling with civilians'.¹⁶ Already a socialist, Childe joined the University Socialist Society – the minute book of the Balliol, Queen's and New College Group of the Oxford University Socialist Society records a lecture given by him on 4 June 1915 on 'Labour and Education in Australia'.¹⁷ But not all socialists were pacifists; Childe's friend from the University Socialist Society, Robert Chorley (later first Baron Chorley) served in the Cheshire Regiment, and Robin Page Arnot, a close associate of the Society, later recalled a rush to enlist amongst members in 1914.¹⁸ The war split socialists, pitting radical internationalists like the eight COs against those who embraced national war aims.¹⁹ Contact with radical socialist views within the dynamic University Socialist Society

¹⁵ B. Oliver, *Peacemongers. Conscientious Objectors to Military Service in Australia, 1911–1945* (1997).

¹⁶ TNA: PRO, KV 2/2148; Queen's College Archive, entry for V.G. Childe in entrance book, 1914.

¹⁷ Bodl. MS Top. Oxon. d 467 (minute book of the Balliol, Queen's and New College group of the Oxford University Socialist Society, 1913–15).

¹⁸ Green, *Prehistorian*, p. 19; ODNB ('Chorley, Robert Samuel Theodore, first Baron Chorley (1895–1978)'); A. Marwick, 'Working Class Attitudes to the First World War', *Bulletin of the Society for the Study of Labour History*, 13 (1966), p. 11.

¹⁹ J. Horne, 'Labor and Labor Movements in World War I', in J. Winter et al. (eds.), *The Great War and the Twentieth Century* (2000), pp. 190–2.

and watching his friends imprisoned for their views – whom he referred to as ‘some of the best men I have ever known’ – seems to have changed Childe from a theoretical socialist drilling in the meadows to a revolutionary activist and war-resister.²⁰ In 1918, hounded himself for opposition to conscription in Australia, he wrote defiantly to the Chancellor of St Andrew’s College, University of Sydney: ‘I have no wish to deny that I was reluctantly convinced in 1915 that for me orthodoxy was impossible.’²¹

The only visible opposition to the war in Oxford came from the Workers Education Association (WEA), linked to the university and the guild socialist movement: men at WEA classes claimed that they would not be any worse off under German rule and the WEA faced accusations of pacifism and pro-Germanism.²² The vice-principal of Ruskin College, P.J. Noel-Baker, became a CO.²³ Dutt claimed that his opposition to the war was shared by people he met in Oxfordshire villages whilst working for the WEA.²⁴ Only a public debate over conscription by the Banbury Co-operative Educational Debating Class in December 1915 supports this, but wider discontent could have gone unreported owing to press censorship. Few were as openly committed to pacifism as Davies, who had an argument about his views with Mr Street, Fellow of Queen’s College, in September 1914.²⁵ Davies’ family were well-known for their pacifist views.²⁶ Davies’ father, Michael Davies, was a Bradford Congregationalist minister who preached against the Boer War; his windows were smashed in retaliation and two of Davies’ five sisters, Eulalie and Kathleen, married COs, Tom Heron and Joseph Dalby.²⁷ Leila (1893–1973), studying at Somerville, Oxford attended a University Fabian Society meeting on Saturday 7 March 1914 and shared her brother’s views.²⁸ Davies was to ultimately object to conscription on moral/political grounds, but his initial recorded doubts reflect the strong influence of his family’s religious pacifism and the subtle pressures placed on new students: his form in the Queens College Entrance Book for 1914 states: ‘won’t join O.T.C. apparently on personal religious grounds but is thinking on it.’²⁹

1914–1916: A UNIVERSITY DIVIDED

Before the war, the university housed about 3,000 undergraduates and 100 postgraduates. By the beginning of 1915 approximately half the students of most colleges were away on military service; by 1918 only 12 per cent of students remained. Oxford became a military camp, as the colleges, facing financial crises, accommodated cadets, officers and hospitals.³⁰ The responses of fellows to the outbreak of hostilities with Germany, to the war, conscription and eventually conscientious objection were diverse, although there was a strong sense of overall commitment to the war and pride in the many students and alumni who had

²⁰ Bodl. Gilbert Murray MS 375, f. 154 (Childe to Murray, 10 May 1916).

²¹ UCL, Institute of Archaeology, Childe Archive 2/8/1 (Childe to Chancellor of St Andrew’s, Sydney University, 2 May 1918).

²² Graham, *Oxford in the Great War*, p. 38; L. Goldman, *Dons and Workers. Oxford and Adult Education since 1850* (1995), p. 196.

²³ ‘Philip John Noel-Baker’, *Lives of the First World War*: <https://search.livesofthefirstworldwar.org/record?id=gbm%2fconsobj%2f4195>.

²⁴ J. Callaghan, *Rajani Palme Dutt. A Study in British Stalinism* (1993), p. 18; *Banbury Advertiser*, 9 Dec. 1915, p. 5.

²⁵ Anon, ‘Out and About’, *Oxford Chronicle*, 10 March 1916, p. 6.

²⁶ TNA: PRO, KV 2/2148. Security Services reported on the pacifist views of the Davies family and Childe’s friendship with them – they were considered a bad influence on him.

²⁷ M. Gooding, *Patrick Heron* (1994), p. 260; J.S. Peart-Binns and G. Heron, *Rebel and Sage. A Biography of Tom Heron 1890–1983* (2001), p. 32.

²⁸ Bodl. MS Top. Oxon. d 466 (minute book of the Oxford University Fabian Society/Socialist Society 1913–15).

²⁹ Queen’s College Archive, entry for P.T. Davies in entrance book, 1914.

³⁰ Winter, ‘Oxford and the First World War’, pp. 9–10; Graham, *Oxford in the Great War*, pp. 48–9.

enlisted. Some academics lamented the severing of ties with German scholars and culture, including W.J. Ashley who wrote of his grief at the outbreak of hostilities.³¹ Some fellows undertook military service, including John L. Myres, professor of Ancient History and Childe's mentor, and offered their expertise, which particularly in the field of chemistry was to prove invaluable to the war effort.³² A number of academics, including Arnold Toynbee, a Balliol fellow, assisted in the preparation of propaganda, especially over German atrocities in Belgium.³³ Others took different paths, notably Gilbert Murray, regius professor of Greek, an influential internationalist, popular with parliamentary Liberals and committed to many left-wing radical causes.³⁴ He would become a powerful advocate for COs, although he did not agree with their stance. The artist Clive Bell referred to Murray as 'in some sort the public representative of patriotic intellectualism in England'.³⁵ Other dons refused to support pro-conscription crusades. An article entitled 'Oxford Dons and Conscription' in the *Oxford Chronicle* in 1915 featured letters written by Murray and the warden of New College, W.A. Spooner, advising that the decision on conscription should be left to the government and not to the pro-conscription right-wing press.³⁶ In 1916, when J. Wells, warden of Wadham, suggested that *The Oxford Magazine* publish a list of all those 'seeking to avoid service', the editor refused on the grounds that he would not hold men up for hatred, ridicule and contempt, pointing out that 'the genuine Conscientious Objector is sometimes a courageous though misguided man'.³⁷

The few remaining male undergraduates were mostly foreigners, young men below military age, men medically unfit for service, and those who refused to volunteer.³⁸ Gregory has commented that the majority of men of military age in Britain chose not to volunteer; communities where many volunteered, such as Oxford University, were the exception rather than the rule.³⁹ The Oxford COs' refusal to enlist was unusual for their class and educational background – the middle classes of the British Empire saw themselves as 'an aristocracy of virtue' – children were brought up to be responsible members of society, able to put aside their interests for the greater good.⁴⁰ They must have lived under continuous peer pressure; people saw it as their duty to challenge or insult any able-bodied young man not in uniform and political objectors, particularly militants, were widely despised and vilified.⁴¹ Maurice Reckitt, a guild socialist and friend of Cole, recalled that Oxford was 'intolerable' in the war.⁴² An exchange of letters in *The Oxford Magazine* gives a sense of these pressures. 'An Old M.A.', shocked by the number of young men not in uniform in Oxford, suggested that 'nobody should be allowed to enter for an examination who cannot produce a certificate that he has offered his services to his country and has been rejected on medical grounds'.⁴³ His letter was met with a furious response from three students, members of the 'pathetic band denied the privilege of answering the call', who pointed out the number of overseas students and the invisible nature of many medical conditions. G.T. Simpson wrote that it was 'possible

³¹ S. Wallace, *War and the Image of Germany. British Academics 1914–1918* (1988), pp. 29–38; Winter, 'Oxford and the First World War'.

³² Winter, 'Oxford and the First World War', pp. 9–10; Graham, *Oxford in the Great War*, pp. 48–9.

³³ Graham, *Oxford in the Great War*, p. 32.

³⁴ Ibid. p. 21; D. Wilson, *Gilbert Murray OM 1866–1957* (1987), pp. 217–23.

³⁵ Wilson, *Gilbert Murray*, p. 238.

³⁶ Anon, 'Oxford Dons and Conscription', *Oxford Chronicle*, 4 June 1916, p. 7.

³⁷ J. Wells, 'Letters to the Editor. Conscientious Objectors', *The Oxford Magazine* 34:15, 10 March, 1916, p. 256; *The Oxford Magazine* 34:16, 17 March 1916, p. 273.

³⁸ Graham, *Oxford in the Great War*, p. 56.

³⁹ A. Gregory, *The Last Great War. British Society and the First World War* (2008), p. 89.

⁴⁰ J. Beaumont, *Broken Nation. Australians in the Great War* (2013), p. 25; J. Brett, *Australian Liberals and the Moral Middle Class: From Alfred Deakin to John Howard* (2008), p. 11.

⁴¹ Bibbings, *Telling Tales*, pp. 69–70.

⁴² M.B. Reckitt, *As It Happened. An Autobiography* (1941), p. 42.

⁴³ 'An Old M.A.', 'Letters to the Editor', 'Able-Bodied Undergraduates', *The Oxford Magazine*, 33:19, 14 May 1915, p. 312.

that an immature girl, prompted by sickly sentiments of heroism, should distribute white feathers without appreciating her folly', but he was amazed the 'Old M.A.' had not grasped the situation.⁴⁴

As the war progressed, tensions over conscription mounted. A debate in the Union on Thursday, 11 February 1915 proposed: 'That This House considers Compulsory Military Service now Expedient'. This was not a straightforward debate about conscription and pacifism, it also included arguments about the benefits of the voluntary system, which some present considered a success. The motion was lost by nineteen votes.⁴⁵ In June 1915, tensions boiled over in an embarrassing public row. On 2 June 1915, *The Times* printed a letter signed by fifteen heads of Oxford colleges, led by Edward Armstrong, pro-provost of The Queen's College, calling for Britain to be put on a war footing and a date for the introduction of conscription set.⁴⁶ Eighty undergraduates and non-collegiate students signed a 'round robin' to the press in response to the letter, which they believed gave a false impression of Oxford opinion on conscription. The anonymous signatories stated:

the real opinion of Oxford men of military age, who after all, are chiefly concerned, would perhaps surprise elderly professors who claim to speak for University opinion. The evidence of public discussions and debates in Oxford since last October is quite decisive on this point.⁴⁷

This defiant opposition was bolstered by the emergence of key anti-conscription organisations in 1914 and 1915, which provided support, advice and community at both local and national level. The most broad-based socialist pacifist organization was the Independent Labour Party (ILP), which Postgate recalled joining in Liverpool in 1914: 'another of those middle-class pacifist buggers', growled the branch secretary.⁴⁸ Postgate and Childe were also members of the National Council Against Conscription (NCAC), which was later to become the National Council for Civil Liberties, established to support and protect those who did not wish to fight.⁴⁹ The No Conscription Fellowship (NCF), founded in November 1914, invited all men of military age who would resist conscription to join: by 1915, there were branches throughout the country.⁵⁰ All members of conscription age were promised legal assistance and provided with advice. Once arrests began, the NCF kept detailed records of the whereabouts of each CO and details were published in their magazine, *The Tribunal*. But the NCF also became a political pressure group and members distributed anti-conscription literature, illegal by 1916 and also, provocatively, membership forms at recruiting rallies. The authorities regarded such activities as unpatriotic, even subversive. Hostility towards the NCF became widespread and claims emerged that the organisation was financed by the Germans.⁵¹ Details of NCF activities in Oxford are limited, but William Chadwick, an Oriental Languages student from Wadham College studying for the Jewish ministry, was the main secretary for the Oxford branch.⁵²

⁴⁴ G.T. Simpson et al., 'In Reply to "An Old M.A."', *The Oxford Magazine*, 33:20, 21 May 1915, p. 328.

⁴⁵ Anon, 'The Union', *The Oxford Magazine*, 33:13, 19 Feb. 1915, p. 210.

⁴⁶ E. Armstrong et al., 'The Need of the Hour', *The Times*, 2 June 1915, p. 7; Wallace, 'War and the Image of Germany', p. 84.

⁴⁷ Anon, 'Out and About' and 'Conscription versus Voluntary Service', *Oxford Chronicle*, 11 June 1915, pp. 6–7.

⁴⁸ J. Postgate and M. Postgate, *A Stomach for Dissent. The Life of Raymond Postgate. Writer, Radical, Socialist and Founder of the Good Food Guide* (1994), p. 35; Pearce, 'Rethinking the British Anti-War Movement 1914–1918', p. 52.

⁴⁹ N. Blondel (ed.), *The Journals of Mary Butts* (2002), p. 12; V.G. Childe, 'Retrospect', *Antiquity*, 32 (1958), p. 69. Childe's TNA files reveal that he remained a loyal member of the Council for Civil Liberties all his life in both Britain and Australia.

⁵⁰ Kennedy, *The Hound of Conscience*, pp. 43–7.

⁵¹ Ibid. pp. 63–4; Rae, *Conscience and Politics*, p. 18; Bibbings, *Telling Tales*, p. 61; Kramer, *Conscientious Objectors of the First World War*, p. 96.

⁵² Kennedy, *The Hound of Conscience*, p. 296; Anon, 'Out and About', *Oxford Chronicle*, 10 March 1916, p. 9.

Runacres and Cole were members; Kaye and Blelloch became secretaries: they organised meetings, distributed leaflets and provided advice. After Kaye distributed an anti-conscription poster for the NCF, the authorities began to take an interest in his activities, with grave consequences when he applied for exemption.⁵³

Perhaps more influential and controversial was the Union of Democratic Control (UDC), founded in September/October 1914 as a cross-party alliance favouring international links between democracies and a negotiated end to the war. The Union desired democratic control of foreign policy and opposed any extension of 'Prussianism' in Britain, be it censorship or compulsion to military service.⁵⁴ The UDC attracted influential publicists, politicians and intellectuals, notably Bertrand Russell and by the end of the war, affiliated organisations had combined memberships of more than 650,000.⁵⁵ E.D. Morel, the UDC's secretary, gave a speech at Mansfield College in March 1915,⁵⁶ and university debates recorded from Oxford in 1914–1916 show the influence of the UDC on anti-war thought in the university; the letter sent by students to the press in June 1915, protesting against attempts to introduce 'Prussian methods of government in England', uses UDC terminology. The opening debate of the Oxford Union in October 1915 considered whether more democratic control of foreign policy was desirable, arguing that secret diplomacy had landed Europe in its current state – a key tenet of UDC argument.⁵⁷ These debates emphasise the high profile presence of socialist and pacifist activists amongst Oxford students at this time, although as the UDC and the Socialist Society were the only political bodies still active in the university, they faced little opposition or competition. Runacres, Dutt and Kaye were all members of the UDC and Postgate and Childe served successively as secretaries. It was popular, particularly as it was open to both sexes and unusually informal; Kathleen Gibberd of St Hilda's, an aggressive pacifist, recalled people would discuss democracy, socialism and the war while sitting around in college rooms 'in postures of abandonment and general forwardness', which she found shocking. Romance blossomed in the UDC; sometime in 1916–1917, Postgate became briefly engaged to Katharine Guthrie Wood of Somerville College.⁵⁸ In a university where previously female students needed a chaperon to socialise with men, war, progressive thought and new informal socialising were beginning to make profound changes to gender relations and the position of women in the university.⁵⁹

In Cambridge, membership of the UDC was shared between academics and students; thirteen fellows at Trinity College alone were members and a don was the secretary.⁶⁰ In Oxford, the organisation was predominately a student organisation and appears to have been regarded as a dangerous focus of dissent by members of the university and the public alike. The October debate created a major row in the university and H.C. Harwood of the Union was forced to defend it in *The Oxford Magazine*, stating that it did represent the majority of undergraduate opinion and denying that those who spoke were not patriotic.⁶¹ The editor refused this explanation and condemned the debate, stated that it did not represent the

⁵³ Burnham, *The Courage of Cowards*, pp. 24–5; Postgate and Postgate, *A Stomach for Dissent*, p. 45.

⁵⁴ Rae, *Conscience and Politics*, p. 13; *The Union of Democratic Control: Its Motives, Object and Policy* (1916), copy in University of Warwick Digital Archive: <http://contentdm.warwick.ac.uk/cdm/ref/collection/tav/id/3986>.

⁵⁵ A. Hochschild, *To End All Wars. How the First World War Divided Britain* (2011), p. 187; C. Barrett, *Subversive Peacemakers. War Resistance 1914–1918. An Anglican Perspective* (2014), p. 36; Kennedy, *The Hound of Conscience*, p. 42.

⁵⁶ M. Swartz, *The Union of Democratic Control in British Politics during the First World War* (1971), p. 59.

⁵⁷ *Oxford Chronicle*, 29 Oct. 1915, p. 12.

⁵⁸ Postgate and Postgate, *A Stomach for Dissent*, p. 39; LSE Special Collections, Postgate Archive, Postgate/3/1 (Arthur Ponsonby to Raymond Postgate, 24 March 1916); Childe, 'Retrospect', p. 69.

⁵⁹ J. Evans, *Prelude and Fugue. An Autobiography* (1964), p. 70.

⁶⁰ Wallace, 'War and the Image of Germany', pp. 90–5, 148.

⁶¹ Anon, 'The Union', *The Oxford Magazine*, 34:3, 5 Nov. 1915, pp. 43–4; H.C. Harwood, 'Letters to the Editor. Our Union', *The Oxford Magazine*, 34:4, 12 Nov. 1915, p. 65.

majority of student opinion and claimed that it was anti-war propaganda and an attack on foreign policy:

At the present time any public resolution given in favour of the policy of the UDC can only be regarded as support given to the enemies of this country. Oxford is perfectly sound, but she must also be above suspicion.⁶²

The Oxford Times was similarly scathing about the UDC's activities in the university during the tribunals in 1916:

In a great University one must expect to find a few dangerous men, proud of putting themselves in direct opposition to the patriotic sentiments of the country. Oxford and Cambridge have hatched a few of these vipers, propagandists of a peace that would destroy the work for which our men have given their lives before it is completed. These slaves to phases call themselves members of the UDC. Whether by design or sheer stupidity, they are pro-German and as such should be treated. We hope that every college in Oxford will purge itself of these men.⁶³

In the absence of any records relating to the UDC in Oxford, it is difficult to estimate not only its membership and its sympathisers, but also the nature of the perceived challenge it presented to the university. Although run by students, the Oxford branch seems to have been fully integrated and active within the larger organisation; Postgate exchanged letters with Arthur Ponsonby to ensure the central UDC knew he was resigning as secretary in favour of Childe in March 1916.⁶⁴ Certainly it was the only group in the university to express criticism of the war and may have been seen as both a political and social rebellion by some in the university, challenging more widespread views on the war and accepted polite behaviour.⁶⁵

On 11 February 1916, an extraordinary message appeared in the *Oxford Chronicle*: 'Public Notice. Military Service Act and Conscientious Objectors'. Placed by Dr H. T. Gillett, an eminent Oxford physician, it announced the readiness of the Society of Friends to assist all COs, not just Quakers. Although one third of Quakers of military age joined the armed forces, the Friends were widely respected for their traditional opposition to violence.⁶⁶ Quakers in Berkshire and Oxfordshire viewed compulsory military service as 'a violation of the liberty of conscience which lies at the foundation of a Christian social order' and they were to be of immeasurable support to the Oxford COs, offering advice, intervening with the authorities, visiting them in prison, arguing their case in Parliament and assisting them in finding alternative service.⁶⁷ Postgate stayed with the Gillett family while evading his call-up and Leila Davies reported that Dr Gillett worked with Gilbert Murray to arrange alternative service for her brother. These activities were to gain Gillett the animosity of the military authorities in Oxford.⁶⁸

In addition to support from the Oxford Quakers, the group also had close links with the Socialist Quaker Society through their shared commitment to guild socialism – many Quakers, notably the radical S. G. Hobson, found ethical guild socialism attractive.⁶⁹ Quaker

⁶² *The Oxford Magazine*, 34:4, 12 Nov. 1915, p. 65.

⁶³ Anon, 'Passing Notes', *The Oxford Times*, 11 March 1916, p. 5.

⁶⁴ LSE Special Collections, Postgate Archive, Postgate/3/1 (Arthur Ponsonby to Raymond Postgate, 24 March 1916).

⁶⁵ Wallace, 'War and the Image of Germany', p. 148.

⁶⁶ Kennedy, *The Hound of Conscience*, p. 42; Rae, *Conscience and Politics*, pp. 72–3; Pearce, 'Rethinking the British Anti-War Movement 1914–1918'; C. Pearce and H. Durham, 'Patterns of Dissent in Britain during the First World War', *War & Society*, 34:2 (2015), pp. 140–59.

⁶⁷ Society of Friends, 'To the Editor of the Oxford Times', *The Oxford Times*, 29 Jan. 1916, p. 3.

⁶⁸ Postgate and Postgate, *A Stomach for Dissent*, p. 74; B. Davies, 'A Conscientious Objector in Oxford', <http://europeana1914-1918.eu/pt/contributions/19473/>. Dr Gillett was to become mayor of Oxford, 1938–9. In a conversation between Postgate and the military representative, Captain Baldry in Cowley barracks, Baldry told Postgate how much he would like to 'get' Gillett under DORA.

⁶⁹ T. Adams, *A Far-Seeing Vision. The Socialist Quaker Society (1898–1924)* (c.1986), p. 35.

T.E. Harvey, Liberal MP for Leeds and warden of Toynbee Hall in Poplar raised the question of Dutt's treatment in the military hospital at Aldershot with the Secretary of War in parliament, resulting in his special discharge.⁷⁰ Close, supportive friendships were also formed. A letter written by Runacres to a Miss Sturge thanks her for visiting him in prison and writing to his mother for him. He adds: 'PS: yesterday I received from home (Monday) toilet soap and face cream', suggesting an easy intimacy between them. 'Miss Sturge' was probably Evelyn Sturge (1875–1961), daughter of a prominent Birmingham Quaker family. She was a guild socialist and well acquainted with the Oxford COs.⁷¹

Guild socialism, although now largely forgotten as a political movement, was extremely influential amongst liberal circles in the early twentieth century and linked the Oxford COs into a network of political and social organisations, including the revered Fabian Society and the pacifist *Daily Herald* newspaper and league. It had its own journal, its own constitution – the 'Storrington Document' – and its own parent organisation – the National Guilds League. It also spawned a youth movement known to its members – including the Oxford COs – as 'The Movement'. Broad-based, it embraced a confusing range of pluralist thought about liberty, democracy, anarchy, community and revolution that shared little in common beyond a general reaction against state-centrism. At the height of the conscription controversy, guild socialism's theoretical justification for pacifism – that the citizen's obligation to serve the state is dependent upon the extent to which the state fulfils the will of the citizens – was popular in radical circles.⁷² Inevitably, the movement became associated with pacifism and attracted hostility; a course of lectures to be held at Central Hall, Westminster in 1917, was abruptly cancelled when the hall received a letter threatening to break the meetings up.⁷³

The leading figure of the guild socialist movement was G.D.H. Cole. Cole converted to socialism while at school through the writings of William Morris. His first book *The World of Labour* was published in 1913 to great acclaim in radical circles. He was president of the Oxford University Socialist Society and became a prominent member of the Fabian Society, which he tried unsuccessfully to take over. He worked successfully to forge connections between guild socialist intellectuals and the trade union movement, resulting in the creation of the Labour Research Department. Cole was cold, opportunistic, humourless and ruthless. But he was also handsome and charismatic in the patrician 'Oxford manner'.⁷⁴ Naomi Mitchison recalled attending a Socialist Society meeting when Cole spoke:

I only noticed GDH, tall, proud, black-haired and grey-eyed, using his eloquent hands when he made points . . . I knew nothing at all of economics; I had no idea what Guild Socialism was about. I was simply carried away by the fire of the speaker . . . I expect I joined some society and perhaps only after I had joined wondered what it was all about.⁷⁵

Guild socialism's radical popularity and elite intellectual following made the Oxford University Socialist Society fashionable and influential. The society had around 125 members in 1914, though when well-known public figures such as G.K. Chesterton came to speak,

⁷⁰ *HC Debate*, 10th July 1916, 84 (5th series), col. 76; J. Callaghan, *Rajani Palme Dutt*, p. 16.

⁷¹ University of Leeds Special Collections, David H.H. Blleloch papers (Herbert F. Runacres to Miss Sturge, 26 July 1916).

⁷² J.M. Winter, *Socialism and the Challenge of War. Ideas and Politics in Britain 1912–1918* (1974); K. Morgan, *Labour Legends and Russian Gold. Bolshevism and the British Left Part 1* (2006), p. 48; D. Blazer, 'Guild Socialism and the Historians', *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 44:1 (1998), p. 1; M. Stears, 'Guild Socialism and Ideological Diversity on the British Left, 1914–1926', *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 3:3 (1998), pp. 289–305; M. Stears 'Guild Socialism', in M. Bevir (ed.) *Modern Pluralism. Anglo-American Debates since 1880* (2012), pp. 40–59.

⁷³ Nuffield College Library, Guild Socialism Archive, correspondence M/38a.

⁷⁴ Cole, *The Life of G.D.H. Cole*, p. 33; J.M. Winter, *Socialism and the Challenge of War*, p. 5; Morgan, *Labour Legends and Russian Gold*, p. 48; Stears, 'Guild Socialism and Ideological Diversity'.

⁷⁵ Cole, *The Life of G.D.H. Cole*, pp. 83–4.



Fig. 2. G.D.H. Cole. Charismatic leader of the guild socialist movement, economist, historian and political theorist. Later Chichele Professor of Social and Political Theory at Oxford. Image courtesy of Nuffield College, University of Oxford.

numbers could swell into hundreds. During the war, Runacres was the vice-president and Davies and Childe successively secretaries. Under Cole, the Society, now disaffiliated from the Fabian Society, established self-governing groups based either on colleges or on special subjects of study, including the Balliol, Queen's and New College group, the Political Science Group, Research Group, Women's Research Group, Fabian Group, Arts Group, Women's Group and two other college groups. Their combined programmes were large and diverse – from T.W. Earp on 'The Poetry of Group Consciousness' to Postgate on 'Capitalism in Ancient Rome'. After March 1916, many of these groups were forced to suspend their activities and declining membership encouraged the Society to enter into close relations with local Labour bodies. Meetings were held under the joint auspices of the Trades and Labour Council and relations were also formed with the local Socialist Labour Party, the Oxford and District United Labour Committee, with undergraduate representatives on its panel.⁷⁶

Members were politically organised, confident, aggressive and unruly. In July 1914, they caused a ruckus at the Fabian Summer School: drinking heavily, they hoisted the red flag and brought a police inspector to remonstrate for the uproarious singing of revolutionary songs in town, which coincided with the Keswick Evangelical Convention arriving for the week of Religious Experience.⁷⁷ These rowdy arguments and debates served a useful purpose; unlike many COs who came before tribunals, they were experienced at public speaking, practised at debate and confident in their political views.

⁷⁶ M.P. Ashley and C.T. Saunders, *Red Oxford. An Historical Essay on the Growth of Socialism in the University of Oxford, together with an Account of the First Ten Years of the Oxford University Labour Club* (1930), pp. 23–5.

⁷⁷ Cole, *The Life of G.D.H. Cole*, p. 86.

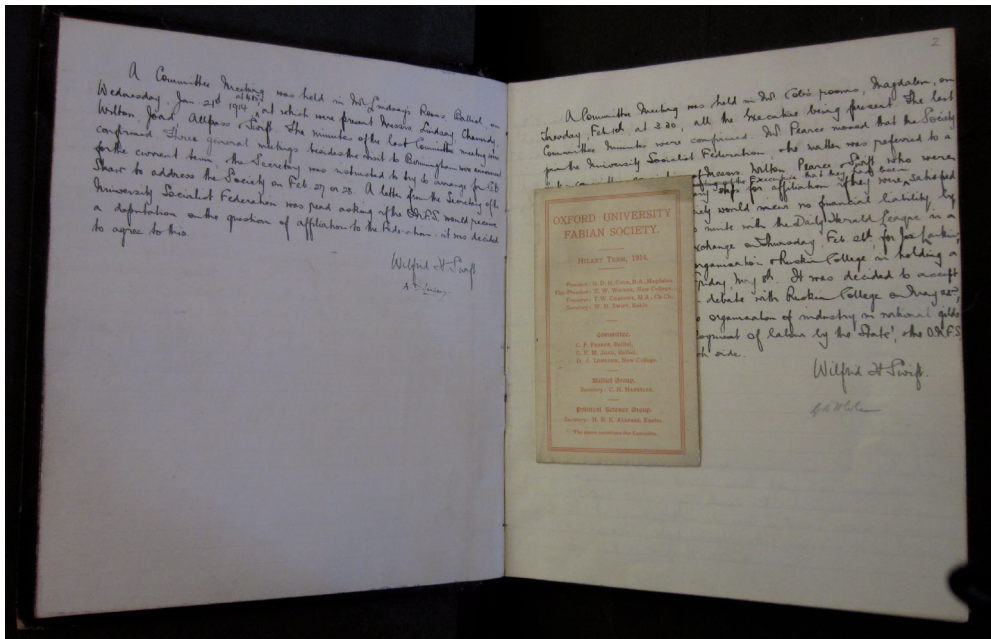


Fig. 3. Minute book of the Oxford University Fabian/Socialist Society 1914–1916. MS. Top. Oxon. d. 466. Image courtesy of Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford.

In 1918, under the apparent threat of action by the War Office against the Society, Cole publicly claimed that there had been ‘serious misrepresentations of the work of the Society disseminated throughout Oxford’ and got a motion passed disclaiming the charge that it had ever been ‘pacifist’ and forbidding future discussion of the war.⁷⁸ But this was not entirely accurate. Early in 1915 the Society decided ‘not to express an opinion on the war’, but on 2 March 1915, Bertrand Russell opened a debate at the Society ‘That Great Britain is largely responsible for the Present War’, and *The Manchester Guardian* held members of the Society responsible for the spread of ‘international Socialism’ amongst Oxford students.⁷⁹

THE 1916 TRIBUNALS

In January 1916, the Military Service Act was passed and in March, conscription for single men aged between 18 and 41 began. Seven of the eight Oxford students received their call-up papers. Only Childe, as an Australian, was spared. The men decided to apply for exemption on grounds of conscience at the Oxford tribunal, one of a number of local tribunals established to hear appeals for exemption on grounds of indispensable work, serious hardship, ill-health or infirmity and conscientious objection.⁸⁰ The Oxford tribunal met twice a week in the Council Chamber at Oxford town hall. Established by the local government board, it was an independent judicial body and consisted of the mayor, Cyril Mosson Vincent; the deputy mayor alderman the Revd W.E. Sherwood; alderman J.H. Salter; councillor Miss Merrivale; Guy

⁷⁸ Wallace, ‘War and the Image of Germany’, p. 148; G.D.H. Cole and Theodore Chaundy, ‘Letter to the Editor. Oxford University Socialist Society’, *The Oxford Magazine*, 34:16, 15 March 1918, pp. 231–2.

⁷⁹ *Red Oxford*, p. 24; Our University Correspondent, ‘Oxford University. The Conscientious Objector Cases’, *The Manchester Guardian*, 30 March 1916, p. 8.

⁸⁰ Graham, *Oxford in the Great War*, p. 39.

CITY OF OXFORD

Local Tribunal: Name _____
 Address TOWN HALL, OXFORD.

Certificate No. 42

This is to certify that:—

Name (in full) Raymond William Postgate
 Address (in full) St John's College, Oxford

Age 19
 Occupation, profession or business Undergraduate

is exempted from the provisions of
 the Military Service Act, 1916.

The exemption is*
conditional from combatant
 service only

The ground on which the exemption is granted is
under section 2(3) of the
 Military Service Act 1916.

Signature Eric Vincent
 Date 6 MAR 1916 for the Tribunal.

* State whether the exemption is absolute, conditional (in which case the conditions should be stated) or temporary (in which case the period of time should be stated).
 If the exemption is granted on conscientious grounds and is from combatant service only, this should also be stated.

Fig. 4. Raymond Postgate's exemption notice. Image courtesy of the London School of Economics, Special Collections. Raymond Postgate Archive.

Thomson; H. Cowley; A.H. Frimbley; the Town Clerk; Richard Bacon; and the assistant clerk, A.H. Montgomery: 'Mayor, Church, Finance, Oddfellowship and Labour' as it was described.⁸¹

Tribunals had a bad reputation. They were supposed to be independent, but they were also required to working closely with the military and were often criticised for inconsistent and unfair judgements.⁸² Although Vincent was to be awarded an O.B.E. for his work, the Oxford tribunal was no exception: Graham complained indignantly that the mayor – 'a tradesmen in the High Street' – was responsible for making decisions about undergraduates of a 'high spiritual type'.⁸³ Beatrice Webb claimed that the Oxford authorities were unduly influenced by the university in allowing Cole to have total exemption.⁸⁴ Oxfordshire MP Philip Morrell criticised it in Parliament for its ill-judged treatment of Runacres.⁸⁵ Local opinion was more favourable: the tribunal was pronounced firm and sympathetic,⁸⁶ and Smith was eloquent on the difficult nature of their task in judging men's consciences.⁸⁷ *The Oxford Magazine* wrote approvingly that they had been spared the 'fatuous dialogues' that had taken place elsewhere.⁸⁸ The tribunal was capable of making reasoned judgements: Frederick Couling, a coal-merchant's assistant, was granted exemption – he was so deaf that his mother had to appear on his behalf.⁸⁹

The War Office safeguarded its interests by appointing in each district a military advisory committee and a military representative who attended the tribunals. Military representatives were usually officers or retired officers and their remit was limited to questioning and presenting evidence, but there were still numerous allegations of bullying.⁹⁰ In the military representative appointed to the Oxford tribunal, Lieutenant (later Captain) Walter Burton Baldry (1888–1940), the Oxford COs met their match in wit, cunning and dedication to cause. Although Graham claimed that Baldry was out of his depth and sneered at him for reportedly thinking Tolstoy was a place,⁹¹ he was very able and extremely ruthless: by the end of the war, he had become secretary to the East Anglian region of the Ministry of National Service, supervising ten counties and was awarded an O.B.E. for services. Like the COs, Baldry was an 'Oxford man', a graduate of Queen's College. He had volunteered, but had been medically discharged in June 1915.⁹² Baldry's success in recruitment was matched by his dedication, for military representatives at local tribunals acted voluntarily without pay and Baldry continued to edit *C.B. Fry's Magazine* throughout the war.⁹³

Baldry's job was neither easy nor popular, but the 'Little Lieutenant' came to be viewed with respect and tribunal audiences enjoyed his 'strong taste for the dramatic effect' and his sparring with the appellants.⁹⁴ The *Oxford Chronicle* noted his ability to be sympathetic at times and remarked that his questions and observations were searching and to the point: 'the suspected shirker has no mercy from his tongue'. Baldry was certainly not the university's lackey: G.D.H. Cole, although arriving at the tribunal with impressive testimonials, was

⁸¹ N.H. Smith, 'The Tribunals and Conscription', *Oxford Chronicle*, 17 March 1916, p. 7; Anon, 'Out and About', *Oxford Chronicle*, 17 March 1916, pp. 6–7.

⁸² Rae, *Conscience and Politics*, p. 7.

⁸³ 'Oxford History: Mayors and Lord Mayors, Cyril Mosson Vincent (1846–1923). Mayor of Oxford 1915/16', http://www.oxfordhistory.org.uk/mayors/1836_1962/vincent_cyril_1915.html; J.W. Graham, *Conscription and Conscience. A History 1916–1919* (1922), p. 70.

⁸⁴ LSE online archive, diary of Beatrice Webb, 18 March 1916, p. 3402.

⁸⁵ *HC Debate*, 1 Aug. 1916, 85 (5th series), cols. 36–48.

⁸⁶ *Oxford Chronicle*, 17 March 1916, p. 11.

⁸⁷ Smith, 'The Tribunals and Conscription', p. 7.

⁸⁸ Anon, 'Notes and News', *The Oxford Magazine*, 34:15, 10 March, 1916, p. 242.

⁸⁹ *Oxford Chronicle*, 17 March 1916, p. 8.

⁹⁰ Rae, *Conscience and Politics*, pp. 101–103.

⁹¹ Graham, *Conscription and Conscience*, p. 70.

⁹² *Banbury Guardian*, 14 February 1918, p. 8; E.S. Craig and W.M. Gibson, *Oxford University Roll of Service* (1920).

⁹³ *Oxford Chronicle*, 17 March 1916, p. 6.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.* 10 March 1916, p. 7.



Fig. 5. 'The Little Lieutenant': Walter Burton Baldry. Newspaper cutting from the *Oxford Chronicle* pasted into Raymond Postgate's 'war/conscientious objection' scrap book. Image courtesy of the London School of Economics, Special Collections. Raymond Postgate Archive.

robustly challenged.⁹⁵ It was commonplace after the war to portray it as a conflict between the old and the young, but this is simplistic.⁹⁶ The students preferred their contemporary Baldry to Major A.K. Slessor (1863–1931), the district recruiting officer, whom Postgate and Kaye mocked unmercifully,⁹⁷ but Baldry, the same generation, same educational and social background as the COs, made radically different decisions about the war to them.

Baldry's impressive performances were in part due to the high-quality information provided by the military advisory committee. Most of it – both positive and negative – apparently came from the college authorities, although *The Oxford Magazine* indicates the contrary.⁹⁸ Information was also provided by the police and Security Services. In Britain, provisions of

⁹⁵ Ibid. 17 March 1916, p. 8.

⁹⁶ S. Hynes, *A War Imagined. The First World War and English Culture* (1990), p. 57; V. Brittain, *Testament of Youth. An Autobiographical Study of the Years 1900–1925* (1978), p. 105.

⁹⁷ LSE Special Collections, Postgate Archive, Postgate/3/1 (Raymond Postgate to Alan Kaye, 10 May 1916).

⁹⁸ Anon, 'Notes and News', *The Oxford Magazine*, 34:15, 10 March 1916, p. 242.

the Defence of the Realm Act (DORA) were implemented from the outbreak of war and Major Vernon Kell's military Security Services, newly entitled MI5, managed counter-espionage and security in Britain. By 1916, MI5 kept a record of every person deemed suspicious and more than 38,000 personal dossiers were established; postal censors stopped delivery of 356,000 suspected letters. MI5 were in close contact with the police, home office, labour, postmaster-general and other departments. In 1915, the secret 'Ministry of Munitions Labour Intelligence Division', later called PMS2, was formed amid fears of strikes, sabotage of munitions production and industrial unrest.⁹⁹

The Security Services were employed to investigate pacifist organizations from the earliest days of the war, partly because they opposed official policy and partly because Special Branch initially believed that German money lay behind them. With the introduction of conscription, pacifist organisations were viewed as areas of 'enemy influence' and from June 1916 to October 1917, MI5 investigated some 5,246 individuals, most of the British peace movement. Suspect organisations were infiltrated by spies and informers were widely used.¹⁰⁰ Hints of such scrutiny found their way into the disapproving *Oxford Chronicle*:

Spies and informers apparently stalk once more through Oxford streets and in at least two cases – covered so far as we could see by a special Army Order – claims were disallowed by word of mouth or in writing statements where honest men were denounced.¹⁰¹

Cole was spied on by PMS2 because of his work for the Amalgamated Society of Engineers, Kaye and Childe as pro-German subversive pacifists.¹⁰² Dutt came to the notice of MI5 in 1919 along with his brother Clemens because of their views on Indian independence.¹⁰³

THE APPEAL TRIBUNAL

The university COs' appeals were heard over a few intense weeks in March 1916,¹⁰⁴ although appeals in general continued to be heard in Oxford throughout the war. Tribunal hearings were public and hundreds of people turned up every night to watch.¹⁰⁵ Though brief – the Oxford tribunal heard up to twenty cases in two hours – hearings followed standard proceedings. Applicants were entitled to be represented by a friend or counsel, although the NCF usually advised COs to represent themselves to emphasise the personal nature of their convictions. Witnesses could be called and testimonials provided about the length of time the applicant held their views on military service – teachers, clergy, fellow church-goers, friends and family were recommended.¹⁰⁶

The Oxford COs appeared along with other COs from the university and town and there appears to have been a strong sense of unity, mutual sympathy and shared experience. Both *The Oxford Times* and *The Oxford Magazine* reported that the COs had sympathisers amongst

⁹⁹ B. Millman, *Managing Domestic Dissent in First World War Britain* (2000), pp. 42–4; N. Hiley, 'Counter-Espionage and Security in Great Britain during the First World War', *English Historical Review*, 101 (1986), pp. 635–70.

¹⁰⁰ L. Bibbings, 'State Reaction to Conscientious Objection', in I. Loveland (ed.), *Frontiers of Criminality* (1995), pp. 57–81.

¹⁰¹ Smith, 'The Tribunals and Conscription', p. 7.

¹⁰² S. Rowbotham, *The Friends of Alice Wheeldon. The Anti-War Activist Accused of Plotting to Kill Lloyd George*, 2nd edn (2015), p. 49; Burnham, *Courage of Cowards*, pp. 24–5; Champion, 'Childe and Oxford', pp. 27–8.

¹⁰³ S. Lahiri, *Indians in Britain. Anglo-Indian Encounters: Race and Identity, 1880–1930* (2000), p. 128.

¹⁰⁴ *The Oxford Times*, 4 March 1916, p. 10; 18 March 1916, p. 7.

¹⁰⁵ *Oxford Chronicle*, 17 March 1916, p. 11.

¹⁰⁶ Rae, *Conscience and Politics*, pp. 99–100.



Fig. 6. Raymond Postgate's 'war/conscientious objection' scrap book. Image courtesy of the London School of Economics, Special Collections. Raymond Postgate Archive.

the audience, who they disapprovingly reported 'indulged in hand-clapping' in 'disgraceful scenes' until the mayor threatened to clear the court.¹⁰⁷ Postgate began a scrapbook into which he pasted newspaper cuttings about COs, documenting the trials of his friends and those of other COs in Oxford and Cambridge – the latter may have been colleagues from the University Socialist Federation.¹⁰⁸ But the friends may also have attempted more organised group resistance. The *Cambridge Daily News* claimed that Kaye was 'the head of a vigorous agitation to resist the Military Service Act'¹⁰⁹ and there are indications of common action following NCF advice: all the Oxford COs came ready with high quality testimonials and carefully prepared emotive speeches; the *Manchester Guardian* commented that 'as elsewhere, the pleadings showed signs of organisation'.¹¹⁰ Kaye may not have been the leader of the group, but the civil proceedings taken against him as a result of the tribunal were to reflect negatively on the other COs.¹¹¹ Kaye was compromised: he had distributed NCF leaflets illegally, he was of German parentage and he was Jewish.

Kaye was described by Margaret Cole *née* Postgate as 'the ugliest little man I had ever set eyes on' and by Aldous Huxley, also a friend, as 'a practitioner of the Pure Intrigue'.¹¹² Beatrice Webb summed him up as 'a methodically-minded man with perfectly clear but microscopic

¹⁰⁷ Anon, 'City Local Tribunal', *The Oxford Times*, 4 March 1916, p. 10; Anon, 'Notes and News', *The Oxford Magazine*, 34:15, 10 March 1916, p. 242.

¹⁰⁸ LSE Special Collections, Postgate Archive, Postgate/3/2 (World War I scrapbook); Morgan, *Labour Legends and Russian Gold*, pp. 63–4.

¹⁰⁹ *The Cambridge Daily News*, 16 March 1916 (newspaper cutting pasted into Postgate's war-time scrapbook).

¹¹⁰ *The Manchester Guardian*, 30 March 1916, p. 8.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² M. Cole, *Growing Up into Revolution. Reminiscences of Margaret Cole* (1949), p. 71; Wallace, 'War and the Image of Germany', p. 149.



Fig. 7. Cartoon of a defiant J. Alan Kaye in the police court dock in April 1916. Newspaper cutting from the *Oxford Chronicle* pasted into Raymond Postgate's 'war/conscientious objection' scrap book. Image courtesy of the London School of Economics, Special Collections. Raymond Postgate Archive.

writing, a neurotic constitution and fanatic but uncertain faith'.¹¹³ Although lacking Cole's charisma, both Belloch and Postgate acknowledged Kaye's influence amongst Oxford socialists and on their own political thought and it was to Kaye that Postgate advised his sister Margaret to turn after his arrest.¹¹⁴ Kaye was one of four members instrumental in the Oxford University Socialist Society's disaffiliation from the Fabian Society and a leading member of the Fabian Research Group; regular trips to Germany before the war, used against him in the tribunal, may have been as an investigator for the Group, pursuing links with the German Social Democratic Party, which dominated International Socialism.¹¹⁵ He was significantly more radical than Cole – a 'wild Socialist' and member of the Marxist British Socialist Party (formerly Socialist Democratic Federation).¹¹⁶

¹¹³ LSE online archive, diary of Beatrice Webb, 3 June 1919, p. 3641.

¹¹⁴ Burnham, *Courage of Cowards*, pp. 24–5; Postgate and Postgate, p. 35; Cole, *Growing Up into Revolution*, p. 71.

¹¹⁵ Red Oxford, p. 21; R. Page Arnot, *History of the Labour Research Department* (1926), p. 8; Horne, 'Labor and Labor Movements in World War I', p. 188.

¹¹⁶ *Oxford Chronicle*, 10 March 1916, p. 11.

The Oxford tribunal was unimpressed. Kaye first appeared before the tribunal on 1st March 1916, demanding absolute exemption on the grounds that he objected to 'assisting in the organised murder of fellow men and fellow socialists of any nation'. But he had not received his notice to appear and his case was adjourned to widespread laughter – 'I shall be prepared for you, Mr. Kaye' promised Baldry. Indeed he was; when Kaye returned, Baldry revealed that he had a naturalised German father and had changed his name from 'Kaufman' in September 1914. He had been to Germany several times, the last time a month before the war began, was 'notoriously pro-German' and a 'rabid socialist'. Furthermore, he was a Jew who had distributed a now illegal NCF pamphlet – 'Shall Britons be conscripted?' – containing Christian text. Baldry demolished Kaye's appeal: 'A German cannot be enlisted in the British Army and he cannot appeal to be exempted from it'.¹¹⁷

Baldry passed the NCF pamphlet to the police and on 8 March 1916, Kaye was arrested and his rooms searched. Amid initial suspicions that Kaye was a German spy, he was charged with spreading 'by means of circulars reports likely to prejudice recruiting'.¹¹⁸ On 24 March, Kaye appeared before the mayor and city magistrates in the city court. Many members of the university and town came to see him sentenced to two months' imprisonment.¹¹⁹ Although Kaye had broken the law in distributing the leaflet, his imprisonment and initial fears that he was a German spy form part of wider hostility, discrimination and racism towards Germans in Britain during World War I. Germans had long formed a major immigrant community in Britain, but at the outbreak of war, the country was gripped by a violent hatred of them. German names were Anglicized; Germans were required to register themselves, usually at the local police station; freedom of movement was curtailed and all German men of military age living in Britain were interred. The climax of anti-German hatred came in May 1915, following the sinking of the *Lusitania* and air raids by Zeppelins, in widespread rioting, looting and violence. Some of the worst riots were in Liverpool – home of the Kaye family.¹²⁰ Anti-semitism had been widespread in Britain for far longer, but it is uncertain whether the war increased it. Some British-born Jews volunteered at the outset, but many were foreign-born migrants not liable for conscription and there were accusations that Jews were opposed to military service and taking advantage of the economic difficulties of the war.¹²¹

Despite anti-German feeling in the town and university, possibly exacerbated by the presence of 460 Belgian refugees,¹²² cooler heads prevailed, as they had with regard to other Germans in university and town, notably Georg Fieldler, Taylorian Professor of German.¹²³ By April 1916, when Kaye came before the same court to appeal, public interest had died down; the audience was described as 'official, select and cranky'. The local Oxford press had never been particularly hostile to Kaye, referring to him only as 'rather interesting and not quite English',¹²⁴ and both the *Oxford Chronicle* and *The Oxford Times* proved sympathetic towards his father, a naturalised, native-born German, portraying him primarily as a beleaguered and bewildered parent.¹²⁵ Kaye's defence read out a poignant letter from his father, a respected Liverpool merchant. He had burnt bundles of the circulars which had been readdressed from

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ *Manchester Evening News*, 11 March 1916; *Newcastle Journal*, 18 March 1916. Newspaper-cuttings pasted into Postgate's wartime scrapbook.

¹¹⁹ *Oxford Chronicle*, 21 April 1916 (newspaper cutting pasted into Postgate's wartime scrapbook).

¹²⁰ J. White, *Zeppelin Nights. London in the First World War* (2014), p. 72; P. Panayi, *The Enemy in Our Midst. Germans in Britain during the First World War* (1991).

¹²¹ White, *Zeppelin Nights*, p. 88; Gregory, *The Last Great War*, pp. 240–1.

¹²² Winter, 'Oxford and the First World War', pp. 7–8; Graham, *Oxford in the Great War*, p. 108.

¹²³ Wallace, 'War and the Image of Germany', p. 165.

¹²⁴ *Oxford Chronicle*, 10 March 1916, p. 6.

¹²⁵ *Oxford Times*, 21 April 1916, p. 10; *Oxford Chronicle*, 21 April 1916; *Cambridge Independent Press*, 21 April 1916 (a cutting from this last pasted into Postgate's wartime scrapbook). Kaye's father, Julius Kaufman, was born in Frankenthal, Bayern, Germany in 1855. His mother, Sophie Rosenheim, was born in Liverpool in 1871; her parents were German-Jewish immigrants.

Oxford and had tried to persuade his son to cut ties with the NCF. Kaye's father emphasised that he was a good and loyal citizen of his adopted country and that the suspicion that had fallen on Kaye was injurious to the whole family. Kaye's sentence was reduced to two weeks; imprisoning him was felt to serve no 'useful purpose'.¹²⁶

Some of the COs' Oxford colleagues were less temperate. The *Cambridge Daily News* reported that Oxford students resented the COs' actions and if the university were full, they would have dealt with 'these queer people' themselves.¹²⁷ Langstaff, who went to watch the proceedings, recorded:

Then there came a perky little Jew who spread reams of paper out on the railing of the witness stand and stood there with a white orchid in the his button hole, as irritating a sight as you can imagine.¹²⁸

Evidence about wider university attitudes to the COs is lacking. Although many students contributed to the war effort, others immersed themselves in the routines of the university to escape it. Overall, reports of active student hostility towards fellow socialists and pacifists date to later in the war (1917 and 1918), when general fears of socialist unrest, strikes and protest were growing – and Socialist Society numbers much lower. Dutt was sent down in 1917 after a private meeting of the Socialist Society denouncing the war was broken up by a group of 'super-patriotic hearties'.¹²⁹ George Lansbury, editor of the pacifist *Daily Herald* found himself on the receiving end of 'noise, disturbance and tomatoes' at a similar meeting.¹³⁰

After his sentence was completed, Kaye moved to London to work for the Labour Research Department as assistant secretary. Sidney Webb wrote to his wife Beatrice that Kaye had told him his fortnight's gaol was 'not at all bad'.¹³¹ But Kaye found London traumatic; both Beatrice Webb and Margaret Cole née Postgate recorded that he was terrified by air raids, much to the unsympathetic amusement of his friends.¹³² Amongst his complex motivations for seeking exemption may have been fear, a motivation that COs would not publically admit to.¹³³ But it is more likely that this nervous terror was a sign of the severe mental health problems that were to lead to his suicide in 1919,¹³⁴ problems that the stress of public attention, trial and imprisonment may have exacerbated.

Of the remaining COs, Cole was to be awarded total exemption, Runacres refused exemption and the other COs granted conditional exemption – they were expected to serve in a Non-Combatant Corps (NCC). In spite of attempts by Baldry to paint Cole as a radical socialist and a friend of Kaye's, he was conditionally discharged owing to testimonials from the Executive Council and General Secretary of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers (ASE) on the grounds that he was conducting work of 'national importance'.¹³⁵ Cole had been working with the ASE since 1915 and the ASE claimed he was needed to advise on wartime legislation, crucially the Munitions Act. As their co-operation was needed for the production of war munitions, his exemption was largely a foregone conclusion. Cole was called up again following his marriage to Margaret Postgate in August 1918, but again ASE officials secured his exemption.¹³⁶

¹²⁶ *The Cambridge Daily News*, 16 March 1916, newspaper cutting pasted into Postgate's wartime scrapbook.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

¹²⁸ Langstaff, *Oxford 1914*, p. 245.

¹²⁹ A. Rothstein, 'RPD – Memories and Reflections', *Labour Monthly*, 57:2 (1975), p. 1; Postgate and Postgate, *A Stomach for Dissent*, p. 79.

¹³⁰ G. Lansbury, *My Life* (1928), p. 92.

¹³¹ N. Mackenzie (ed.), *The Letters of Sidney and Beatrice Webb. Volume III. Pilgrimage 1912–1947* (1978), p. 75 (letter of Sidney to Beatrice Webb, 15 Nov. 1916).

¹³² Cole, *Growing Up into Revolution*, p. 71; LSE online archive, diary of Beatrice Webb, 3 June 1919, p. 3641.

¹³³ Gregory, *The Last Great War*, p. 81.

¹³⁴ Cole, *Growing Up into Revolution*.

¹³⁵ *Oxford Chronicle*, 17 March 1916, p. 11.

¹³⁶ Cole, *Growing Up into Revolution*.

Although Cole, according to his wife, 'could not help putting his tongue out' at Gilbert Murray,¹³⁷ he was careful to get his support for the tribunal, perhaps fearing that his academic enemies or fellows of his college, Magdalen, would appeal against his exemption.¹³⁸ Although this did not happen, a scathing letter from John Murray, a former fellow of Christ Church who worked at the Ministry of Munitions from 1915–18 (and who therefore may have clashed with Cole over trade union business) to Herbert Warren, president of Magdalen, in 1917 gives a sense of the opinion of some of Cole's colleagues about his avoidance of service. His cleverness is described as superficial, like a 'bad Frenchman's'; he is a 'precocious boy dealing in abstractions' and most damningly: 'I think he must be a coward too'.¹³⁹

Cole claimed to be a CO at the tribunal hearing on moral grounds, but his objection, in contrast to his friends, was low key. Beatrice Webb, like Murray, was suspicious:

We are watching with amusement the three young men who are the kernel of the Fabian Research Department struggling to escape the net of conscription. Cole, Mellor and Arnot are pleading 'conscientious objection', also work of National importance. Disapproval of violence is certainly no part of their creed – they were always preaching violent action on the part of the manual workers before the war. . . What they detest is being forced to do anything they don't like, especially being forced to do it by a Government they abhor. They are not conscientious objectors; they are professional rebels.¹⁴⁰

Cole was keen to avoid disturbing relations with the trade unions, which were increasingly receptive to his ideas and generally supportive of the war; he does not seem to have wanted to sacrifice his ambitions to his principles.¹⁴¹ He was already vulnerable: in 1915, in response to his attempts at influencing proceedings at the Trade Union Congress, there had been references to 'young men who refused to enlist and preferred to lecture working men from armchairs'.¹⁴² Cole was one of only around 350 men in Britain who had been granted total exemption by time war ended, but his exemption was to isolate him from his increasingly resentful peers and friends and contribute to the demise of guild socialism after the war.¹⁴³

Blelloch, Davies and Postgate were all granted conditional exemption from military service. Unlike most COs who had difficulty stating and defending their position, the Oxford COs were well educated, experienced public speakers. Their speeches were emotive, representing a fusion of moral and political ideas; their responses to Baldry robust and coherent; their attitude to the tribunal, particularly the mayor, scornful and insolent.¹⁴⁴ But it is likely that the impressive testimonials the men produced from respected figures in the university counted for more than their impassioned self-defence or insolence. Baldry's attempts to damn Postgate by association with Kaye foundered before the august testimonials of Gilbert Murray, his tutor and family friend. Blelloch received support from Sidney Ball, senior tutor at his college, St. John's, a fellow socialist, influential Fabian and educational reformer. The support of these senior figures emphasises that although the university authorities were publically supportive of the war, at an individual, personal level, individual academics were sympathetic and supportive in the liberal tradition of the university.¹⁴⁵

¹³⁷ Morgan, *Labour Legends and Russian Gold*, p. 53.

¹³⁸ Wallace, 'War and the Image of Germany', p. 149.

¹³⁹ Magdalen College Archives, MC: P414/C98/59 (J. Murray to H. Warren, 1917).

¹⁴⁰ LSE online archive, diary of Beatrice Webb, 9 March 1916, p. 3401.

¹⁴¹ Winter, *Socialism*, p. 131.

¹⁴² LSE online archive, diary of Beatrice Webb, 9 Sept. 1915, p. 3371.

¹⁴³ Burnham, *Courage of Cowards*, p. 35; Reckitt, *As It Happened*, p. 121.

¹⁴⁴ Anon, 'City Local Tribunal', *The Oxford Times*, 4 March, 1916, p. 10; Anon, 'Notes and News', *The Oxford Magazine*, 34, 10 March 1916, p. 242; LSE Special Collections, Postgate Archive, Postgate/3/1 (Postgate to Kaye 1916). Postgate rejoices in and agrees with his solicitor's description of the mayor as 'an Ass': Anon, 'Out and About', *Oxford Chronicle*, 10 March 1916, p. 6, reporting Dutt's denial that as an Indian, he has a 'Christian' name.

¹⁴⁵ Postgate and Postgate, *A Stomach for Dissent*, 37; University of Leeds Special Collections, David H.H. Blelloch Papers (Sidney Ball, Senior Tutor at St John's College, Oxford, testifying to sincerity of Blelloch's



Fig. 8. Raymond Postgate, a photo taken around the time of World War I. Image courtesy of the London School of Economics, Special Collections. Raymond Postgate Archive.

Other academics responded more negatively. Hearsay and opinion were admissible in tribunals and Baldry exploited this by the clever use of anonymous letters. At Davies' hearing, Baldry produced an anonymous letter from an academic in Queen's that contradicted his testimonials, stating 'in point of fact, drilling on the square would make a man of him'.¹⁴⁶ COs were frequently accused of 'unmanliness'; they were portrayed as the antithesis of the heroic, patriotic, manly soldier – selfish, cowardly, shirking, homosexual – an unfounded implication made against Davies and Childe by Edward Armstrong, pro-provost of Queen's and recorded in Childe's Security Services file. Political COs were also considered unpatriotic and pro-German.¹⁴⁷ These opinions followed them long after the war; as late as 1924, Childe was told by a friend that he was being rejected for positions of Oxford University because he was still seen by some as 'pro-German'.¹⁴⁸

Runacres, the son of a 'working man', a maltster's labourer from Ipswich, was undoubtedly a committed socialist; vice-president of the University Socialist Society, member of the University Socialist Federation and a regular contributor to Oxford Union debates, but he was also a theological student from Jesus College, at Pusey House preparing for the ministry, an exempt occupation.¹⁴⁹ In spite of this, to support his friends, Runacres registered as a political

conscientious objection, 3 March 1916; Maurice B. Redcott, St John's College, Oxford, ditto, n.d.); F.M. Turner, *The Greek Heritage in Victorian Britain* (1981).

¹⁴⁶ *Oxford Chronicle*, 10 March 1916, p. 6.

¹⁴⁷ Bibbings, *Telling Tales*, p. 25.

¹⁴⁸ Bodl. MS Myres 8, ff. 17–19 (Childe to Myres 26 Sept. 1924).

¹⁴⁹ C. Barrett, *Subversive Peacemakers. War Resistance 1914–1918. An Anglican Perspective* (2014), p. 124.

CO. He provided impressive testimonials from the principal of Pusey House, one of its college fellows, and from the Revd Simpson of Keble College, the examining chaplain to the bishop of Southwell, from whose diocese he had a grant. Barrett claims that problems arose when the town clerk failed to state the reasons for Runacres' exemption request, or his impending ordination and he was accordingly judged as a political CO, but reports in *The Oxford Times* contradict this, as they include a clear discussion about Runacres' ordination and details of a speech he gave on 'War and Socialism' to the Central Labour Club.¹⁵⁰ Baldry, cross-examining, read out an anonymous letter from a fellow of Jesus College, stating that Runacres was 'a conscientious objector of the most objectionable type' who until stopped by the college, had taken part in socialist and working-men's meetings to discourage recruiting. The letter writer added that Runacres should be given no quarter and if granted exemption, should be put to work 'of an unpleasant nature'. Although Runacres asked for the name of the individual, Baldry declined to give it, as the author had authorised him to give it only to the tribunal. The tribunal refused to grant Runacres exemption because discouraging recruiting was a serious offence – Kaye had been arrested for it.¹⁵¹

The Oxford tribunal found itself condemned on all sides. The case was raised in parliament in March and August 1916 by Fred Jowett, Labour MP for West Bradford, who himself had extensive anti-war record, and Liberal MP Philip Morrell, husband of anti-conscriptionist Lady Ottoline Morrell. Bishop Gore of Oxford, himself a radical activist and reformer, had a letter published in *The Times* asking tribunals to be more respectful of those seeking exemption.¹⁵² Morrell clearly felt that the Oxford tribunal had pre-judged Runacres on political grounds: he asked the president of the local government board to represent to tribunals that the supposed antagonism between politics and conscience ought not to be made a ground of refusing relief to a sincere and genuine applicant.¹⁵³ In light of Runacres' case, perhaps we should question whether any of the political COs had a fair hearing from the Oxford tribunal. The tribunal might not have deliberately and consciously set out to punish political COs, but its members may have pre-judged them. Their relationship to Oxford University should also be questioned. Although supposedly independent of the university, their willingness to accept negative testimonials from academics at face value suggests an unhealthy level of collusion. However, in their defence, close reading of *The Oxford Times'* evidence suggests that Runacres may not have been as innocent as he and his supporters made him out to be. *The Oxford Times*, in reporting on Runacres' case in the Oxford Appeal Tribunal, mentions testimony from a police inspector and two detectives who reported he had been stopped by the police from addressing an anti-recruiting rally. Baldry commented that Runacres had 'done a great deal of harm to recruiting in Oxford'.¹⁵⁴

IMPRISONMENT, SERVICE AND EXEMPTION

Applying for exemption before the Oxford tribunal had been a shared experience for the Oxford COs. But the different forms of exemption granted to them, their different responses and the events that followed would scatter them, in spite of attempts to remain in touch with each other, their families and wider CO support networks. Cole and Kaye spent the war working for the ASE and the Fabian/Labour Research Department, securely sheltered by the powerful trade unions and Sidney and Beatrice Webb, the leaders of the influential Fabian Society. The Fabian/Labour Research Department began in 1912, as an investigative

¹⁵⁰ Anon, 'City Local Tribunal. More COs – A German among the Applicants', *The Oxford Times*, 11 March 1916, p. 7.

¹⁵¹ Barrett, *Subversive Peacemakers*, p. 125; *HC Debate*, 1 Aug. 1916, 85 (5th series), cols. 36–48.

¹⁵² G. Studdert-Kennedy, *Dog-Collar Democracy. The Industrial Christian Fellowship, 1919–1929* (1982), p. 87.

¹⁵³ *HC Debate*, 15th March 1916, 80 (5th series), col. 83.

¹⁵⁴ Anon, 'Oxford Appeal Tribunal. Local Tribunal Decisions Upheld', *The Oxford Times*, 25 March 1916, p. 4.

bureau into social reform, but the complex new employment regulations and labour relations of the war were to transform it into a dynamic enquiry bureau that provided information to trade unions and labour organisations.¹⁵⁵ Paid staff never exceeded five, but there were many volunteers, including Postgate and Daisy Lansbury, the daughter of George Lansbury; Postgate and Daisy married in 1918.¹⁵⁶ Childe also appears to have been a volunteer and was close to members of the Department, visiting London regularly.¹⁵⁷ The Department provided shelter to a number of COs, including those on the run.¹⁵⁸

The workers of the Labour Research Department shared a powerful sense of political comradeship; all guild socialists, they referred to themselves as 'The Movement'.¹⁵⁹ Almost all of them were young, mostly in their early twenties, middle-class and highly intellectual. Along with their work, they enjoyed an active social life. They lived in cheap digs and had little money, drank and ate out together in louche Soho, visited the Café Royal, wrote poetry and closed meetings by singing satirical political chants and the Red Flag. They shared a happy, spontaneous intimacy and lived a recognisably modern, independent adult life, very different from the strictly controlled and family dominated lives of young middle class adults before the war.¹⁶⁰ Virginia Woolf saw them at the radical 1917 Club, which her husband Leonard had co-founded:

a large semi-circle of Cambridge youths, including a young man with a flop of hair who had written a play, which he had with him; the pipe-smoking girl [Margaret Postgate/Cole] and one or two others. I was amused by the repetition of certain old scenes from my own past – the obvious excitement and sense of being the latest and best (though outwardly not the most lovely) of God's works' of having things to say for the first time in history; there was all this and the young men so wonderful in the eyes of the young women and young women so desirable in the eyes of the young men.¹⁶¹

But 'The Movement' also rebelled; they were bad mannered, aggressive, arrogant, deliberately insulting to older Fabian colleagues and contemptuous – grooming and glamour were capitalist vices.¹⁶² In later life, Margaret Cole née Postgate acknowledged the naivety of their idealism and in it, their failure to recognise the sacrifices being made by others of their generation. They wanted a revolution; they rejoiced in any insurrectionary movement or strike, they were irresponsible in their attitude to national interests and dismissive of authority.¹⁶³ In June 1917, at Childe's farewell party in Soho, the group drank to the failure of the Allied armies on the German lines. This was the Battle of Messines, won by the British at the cost of 11,000 Anzac and 25,000 British casualties.¹⁶⁴ Amidst some of the toughest days of World War I, such attitudes won 'The Movement' powerful, vindictive enemies. Comments made by Childe to Davies at Dorchester prison in June 1917 – about his 'disappointment' that Germany's unrestricted submarine warfare had not yet caused food shortages and roused the workers to revolution – would bring him to the attention of MI5 and earn him the animosity of Major Frank Hall, a 'peppery Ulsterman' and devoted imperialist in charge of MI5's section covering the dominions, colonies and Ireland. Because Childe had 'expressed himself in favour of the

¹⁵⁵ Cole, *Growing Up*, p. 180; Page Arnot, *History of the Labour Research Department*.

¹⁵⁶ Postgate and Postgate, *A Stomach for Dissent*, pp. 102–4.

¹⁵⁷ Green, *Prehistorian*, p. 19.

¹⁵⁸ Cole, *Growing Up*, p. 70.

¹⁵⁹ Winter, *Socialism*, p. 260.

¹⁶⁰ Cole, *Growing Up*, pp. 71–2; Reckitt, *As It Happened*, p. 138; S. Bowen, *Drawn from Life* (1941), pp. 53–5. Stella Bowen, mistress of Ford Maddox Ford, although not part of 'The Movement' was a life-long friend of Margaret Cole and a number of portraits by her of the Cole and Postgate families survive.

¹⁶¹ A.O. Bell (ed.), *The Diary of Virginia Woolf. Volume I: 1915–1919* (1977), 9 Jan. 1918, p. 103.

¹⁶² Bowen, *Drawn from Life*, p. 55.

¹⁶³ Cole, *Growing Up*, p. 63.

¹⁶⁴ Green, *Prehistorian*, p. 141; C. Falls, *Military Operations France and Belgium, 1917: 7 June–10 November: Messines and Third Ypres (Passchendaele)* (1940–8).

justice of submarine warfare' Hall manipulated his passport permission so he had to take the longest and most dangerous sea route back to Australia. This involved real risk to Childe – 290 ships were sunk in June 1917 alone before naval convoys were introduced later in the year.¹⁶⁵

Postgate, Blleloch, Runacres, Davies and Dutt went to prison. This was a common experience for COs – over one third went to prison at least once and many were to spend the war incarcerated.¹⁶⁶ Postgate kept a diary, which reveals some of the experiences common to the Oxford COs. He was initially willing to do 'work of national importance', but when he discovered that this included digging trenches and fixing barbed wire, he refused, as this effectively supported the military machine.¹⁶⁷ Together with seven others, including Blleloch, Dutt and Runacres, he hired a solicitor, Frank Gray (of Andrew Walsh, Gray and Co) and began the process of appeal; the appeals failed. Postgate ignored his call-up papers to non-combatant service and was arrested. Refusing to pay the standard fine of 40s. for failing to report for military service, he was sentenced to a month in prison. His diary records his boredom, loneliness and sleeplessness and contains a vivid description of the hard-labour, sewing mail sacks, required of COs:

Did 3 sacks yesterday. One is given lengths of sacking, folded to make into mailbags. Each involves 10 feet of sewing – 8 stitches to the inch. My task is 90 feet a day. Given 2 needles, scissors, string and a ball of black wax. No thimble. Before I stopped my fingers were all black with wax and literally bleeding. Back aching. Wish I was in the infirmary.¹⁶⁸

Postgate, described by a colleague as, 'one of nature's dissenters, a man with a talent to annoy, fond of argument but immovable once he had taken up a position',¹⁶⁹ was similarly resistant at Cowley barracks, where he declined to put on his uniform, as advised by the NCF in their instruction book, *The Court-Martial Friend and Prison Guide*.¹⁷⁰ Postgate developed a curious relationship with Baldry at Cowley, the two men sparring with each other, Baldry offering him small kindnesses and confidences alternated with subtle threats and suggestions. They came to respect each other and on Postgate's dismissal in April 1916, they finished their battles with an equivocal exchange of letters.¹⁷¹ Murray, Gillett and MP T.E. Harvey worked assiduously for Postgate's release and it is perhaps not surprising that he was eventually found physically unfit for military service due to a weak heart. The standards and scruples of Army medical boards were widely questioned,¹⁷² and although Postgate did have a weak heart as a child, medical discharge of a stubborn Oxford CO championed by Gilbert Murray may have been convenient.¹⁷³ Postgate returned to Oxford, but it was no longer a safe haven for socialists and conscientious objectors; in January 1918, Postgate and his friend John Langdon Davies, another returned CO, were harassed and intimidated by drunken soldiers lodged in St John's. The two men moved out into lodgings, but Postgate's principles and courage were undaunted; he would remain a life-long socialist and pursue a successful career as a left-wing journalist.¹⁷⁴

David Blleloch, like Postgate, ignored his call-up notice, was imprisoned and on transportation to Cowley barracks, also refused service.¹⁷⁵ He was similarly discharged on

¹⁶⁵ Champion, 'Childe and Oxford', pp. 28–9; TNA: PRO, KV 2/2148; C. Andrew, *The Defence of the Realm. The Authorized History of MI5* (2009), p. 87; A.J. Marder, *From the Dreadnought to Scapa Flow. The Royal Navy in the Fisher Era, 1904–1919. Volume IV. 1917: Year of Crisis* (1969), p. 182.

¹⁶⁶ Kennedy, *The Hound of Conscience*, p. 95.

¹⁶⁷ Wilson, *Murray*, p. 238; LSE Special Collections, Postgate Archive, Postgate/3/1 (prison diary).

¹⁶⁸ Postgate and Postgate, *A Stomach for Dissent*, p. 55; LSE Special Collections, Postgate Archive, Postgate/3/1.

¹⁶⁹ Cole, *Growing Up*, p. 62.

¹⁷⁰ Kennedy, *The Hound of Conscience*, p. 135.

¹⁷¹ Postgate and Postgate, *A Stomach for Dissent*, pp. 49–57.

¹⁷² Rae, *Conscience*, p. 241.

¹⁷³ Postgate and Postgate, *A Stomach for Dissent*, p. 67.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.* p. 91.

¹⁷⁵ 'David H.H. Blleloch', 'The Pearce Register of British WW1 Conscientious Objectors'. *Lives of the First World War*: <https://livesofthefirstworldwar.org/lifestory/7648552>.


NAME.		ADDRESS.		NEW ADDRESS.
BLELLOCH, David Waterghom		St. John's College, Oxford.		
Brassard N° 11579	Date 8. 1. '17	Date of Birth 1. 1. '96	Nationality British	Nearest relative Father?
Cap Badge N° 7378	Unit N° 8621	Married or Single Single	Address: D. H. Belloch, 40 King's Rd. France, Springfield Station, Mobile Ala., U.S.A.	
Identity Disc N°	Passport N° 154128	Exemption Letter, Rec. Staff Officer's Grounds Medical Unfitness	Certificate 243, 100, 100, 100	
Vaccination Infancy 1. 1. '17	Religion { Member None Attender	Uniform supplied		
1st. Inoculation Has had typhoid	Previous occupation Student	Haufield May 1916		
2nd. Inoculation	QUALIFICATIONS.	191		
Re-Inoculation	Hospital King George V. R. Renart Castle	191		
Kit Expenses to: Self	Motors No experience	191		
	Languages V. little French	191		
Period of Service 25. April 1916	Special	191		
	Training Jordan's Camp 19. June 1916			

Fig. 10. LSF TMSS 881 FAU (Friends' Ambulance Unit) personnel card for David Belloch. Image Copyright Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain. With kind permission.

Stanley Spencer, who worked as a hospital orderly during the war at Beaufort hospital, Bristol, left a vivid visual record of their duties in his paintings in the beautiful chapel at Burghclere – transporting patients, preparing food, dealing with bedpans, washing and shaving patients and generally doing the dirty and mundane jobs vital for the running of the hospital.¹⁸⁰ Belloch was amongst those commended for their actions on the *Glenart Castle*.¹⁸¹ Although all hospital ships were protected by the Geneva Convention and easily identifiable, painted white with red crosses, even neutral hospital ships were targeted and frequently sunk, including the *Glenart Castle* which was torpedoed by a U-boat in March 1917 and sunk in February 1918.¹⁸² By that time Belloch was working on a hospital barge, used to transport the wounded from the front line along the Somme; one was immortalised by Wilfred Owen in his 1917 poem 'Hospital Barge'.

Belloch's decision to take alternative service with the Friends' Ambulance Unit was to take him in a markedly divergent direction from most of his Oxford friends and must have involved considerable compromises of conscience because it involved him directly in the war. But Belloch's choice allowed him to fulfil his strong sense of duty, retain his socialist principles and gain cultural approbation for his conscientious objection, which was otherwise condemned in wartime.¹⁸³ The practical idealist of the group, Belloch would devote the rest of his life to neutral international assistance; after the war he joined the International Labour Office and worked for the United Nations.¹⁸⁴

In 1916, the Home Office established the Committee on Employment of Conscientious Objectors, known as the Brace Committee, after its chairman, Labour MP William Brace.

¹⁸⁰ P. Gough, *Stanley Spencer. Journey to Burghclere* (2006).

¹⁸¹ University of Leeds Special Collections, David H.H. Belloch Papers (memorandum expressing appreciation of authorities with regard to work by the Friends' Ambulance Unit on the SS *Glenart Castle*, n.d.).

¹⁸² S. McGreal, *The War against Hospital Ships 1914–1918* (2008); Burnham, *Courage of Cowards*, pp. 53–4.

¹⁸³ J. Meyer, 'Neutral Caregivers or Military Support? The British Red Cross, the Friends' Ambulance Unit, and the Problems of Voluntary Medical Aid in Wartime', *War & Society*, 34:2 (2015), pp. 105–20.

¹⁸⁴ Postgate and Postgate, *A Stomach for Dissent*, p. 39.

The scheme was designed to find employment for COs willing to undertake Work of National Importance and organisations such as local road boards, district councils and the Home Grown Timber Committee were asked to find employment, such as repair of waterworks, timber-felling, road-building and quarrying. All men were to be paid for their labour and live on site, in work centres or in tents and huts for outdoor work.¹⁸⁵ One of the main groups accepting the scheme was religious objectors. Runacres, serving six months hard labour in Wandsworth prison for refusing to serve with the 3/4th Battalion, The Queen's (Royal West Surrey) Regiment,¹⁸⁶ was among the first to register under the Home Office Scheme; he maintained that:

The Pacifist supports principles which are only true if they can be practiced in the face of evil. He must therefore stretch to the uttermost his willingness as a citizen to serve an imperfect State. By this habit of mind he can best act as a corrective to the mind which is full of war and thinks only of humiliation, pride and power.¹⁸⁷

He was one of 250 men sent to Dyce, near Aberdeen, a work camp based at Dyce Quarries, breaking rocks for road-fill. Although the camp was to last only eight weeks, it was a disaster for the government and remains notorious in the history of conscientious objectors. Although a Scottish Local Government Board doctor concluded that the sanitary conditions of the camp were 'satisfactory', the COs were sent straight from prison to open-air life in a damp, severe climate. The tents provided were old army tents and leaked, forcing the men to sleep in barns, stables and dilapidated cottages. Some elements of the local press, notably the *Aberdeen Journal*, were hostile to the camp from the outset, referring to the men as 'Dyce Humbugs' and there was vehement opposition from local communities, which given the Scots' enthusiastic response to the war and strong tradition of military service was perhaps not unexpected.¹⁸⁸ There were claims that the COs had influenced younger members of the community with their political views. Within weeks, one of the COs, Walter Roberts of Stockport, was dead from pneumonia. The authorities denied the camp was unsuitable or the conditions responsible for Roberts' death. Labour MP Ramsay Macdonald visited the site and was horrified by conditions; the NCF demanded an enquiry. Although the inhabitants of the work camp were not prisoners, their protests and recommendations for improvements – made publically in the newsletter they produced in their spare time, 'The Granite Echo' – were ignored.¹⁸⁹

The COs at Dyce came from a wide range of backgrounds. Some were political COs, both Christian Socialists and Marxists, others were religious pacifists, and they began to fall out over politics and service. They became disillusioned by both the conditions and, as they saw it, the waste of their skills and experience. Runacres claimed that only four per cent of the men were accustomed to physical labour and decried the logic of trying to turn a theological student into a useful navvy. They set up a Men's Committee, of which Runacres was the treasurer and held regular meetings in the camp. Runacres, a Christian Socialist, fell out with the editor of the *Granite Echo*, the anarchist Guy Aldred and the two men aired their discord publically in letters to the local press. Runacres sowed discord by acknowledging the motivations of the absolutists whilst advocating the stance of the alternativist. Following an inquiry and a debate in parliament, the camp was closed in October 1916.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁵ Barrett, *Subversive Peacemakers*, pp. 49–150; J.A. Walker, *Dyce Work Camp, Conscientious Objectors and Public Opinion in North-East Scotland, 1916: A Documentary History* (2011).

¹⁸⁶ 'Herbert Frank Runacres,' 'The Pearce Register of British WW1 Conscientious Objectors.' *Lives of the First World War*: <https://livesofthefirstworldwar.org/lifestory/7646484>.

¹⁸⁷ Barrett, *Subversive Peacemakers*, p. 150.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid; Walker, *Dyce Work Camp*; T. Royle, *The Flowers of the Forest. Scotland and the First World War* (2006), p. 35.

¹⁸⁹ Walker, *Dyce Work Camp; The Granite Echo: Organ of the Dyce C.O.s[sic]*, 1(1), 1916, Warwick Digital Collections <http://contentdm.warwick.ac.uk/cdm/ref/collection/tav/id/3906>.

¹⁹⁰ Walker, *Dyce Work Camp*; Barrett, *Subversive Peacemakers*, p. 150.



Fig. 11. The Men's Committee, Dyce Work Camp. Aberdeen, Scotland. Runacres is one of the men pictured here, although he has not been identified. 000-000-463-617-R, www.scran.ac.uk, copyright: National Museums Scotland.

Runacres was transferred to the Wakefield Work Centre, where he remained until 1918.¹⁹¹ Attempts were made to make Wakefield less prisonlike – the locks were removed from the doors, the doctor was head of the establishment and wardens acted as instructors. Work stopped at 5.00 p.m. and the men allowed out into the town. Surviving records, including a poem 'A story of the Great War: told by a conscientious objector' recited at a performance given by 'The Shirkers' at Wakefield in 1917 suggests that there were improvements.¹⁹² But Wakefield, like all work camps, suffered from strikes and disruptions as political rifts and tensions increased, particularly after the Russian Revolution of 1917, when militant Marxists and anarchists became increasingly active, and the centre was closed in 1918 when there was a riot in the town against the COs.¹⁹³ Runacres, in spite of his politically turbulent opinions, was ordained after the war and became a vicar and Labour councillor in Leeds and later Southwark.

Tal Davies, perhaps the true pacifist of the group, was to take the most obdurate and difficult route. He was one of around 1,000 'absolutists', men unwilling to compromise their principles and take alternative service.¹⁹⁴ He was to spend the duration of the war in prison doing hard labour as the price for his conscience. In March 1916, Davies abandoned his exhibition – 'his only hope of an education'¹⁹⁵ – and went to work at Coldstone Farm, Ascott-under-Wychwood. The farm was the home of eminent agrarian/social reformer Joseph

¹⁹¹ 'Herbert Frank Runacres', 'The Pearce Register of British WW1 Conscientious Objectors'. *Lives of the First World War*: <https://livesofthefirstworldwar.org/lifestory/7646484>.

¹⁹² University of Warwick, Papers of Rowland Bennet, *A Story of the Great War: Told by a Conscientious Objector*: <http://contentdm.warwick.ac.uk/cdm/compoundobject/collection/tav/id/3702/rec/11>.

¹⁹³ Graham, *Conscription and Conscience*, pp. 233–4; Rae, *Conscience and Politics*, p. 176.

¹⁹⁴ Kramer, *Conscientious Objectors of the First World War*, p. 10.

¹⁹⁵ Bodl. Gilbert Murray MS 375, ff. 129–130 (Childe to Murray, 12 October 1916).

Ashby (1859–1919) – Ashby's daughter, Mabel Kathleen, was a friend of Davies' sister Eulalie from Birmingham University.¹⁹⁶ Desperate for labour, farmers were willing to take pacifists, prisoners of war, disabled soldiers, Belgian refugees, German prisoners of war and, with great reluctance, women.¹⁹⁷ Davies should have been able to continue as a farm labourer for the duration of the war, but he refused to apply to have his certificate changed to 'work of national importance' and inevitably, he was arrested on 5 May 1916 and handed over to the military.¹⁹⁸ Davies' sister, Oxford student Leila, found out he was at Cowley barracks. Two surviving letters reveal her fear and worry about her brother, as she wrote to Joseph Dalby, a fellow CO and her future brother-in-law for advice – she believed that Davies' letters were being censored. Cowley barracks treated Davies well; Leila was allowed to see him daily and Gilbert Murray and Gillett, the Oxford Quaker leader tried to find alternative service he could accept. Like Margaret Cole née Postgate, converted to life-long socialism by her brother's experiences, Leila was fiercely proud of her calm, thoughtful brother and confident in his strength of purpose, but her letters reveal the worry and fear that the families of COs experienced: 'The kid looks weary through lack of air, but as firm and calm as a rock of course. I knew they wouldn't be able to be brutal to a face like that; he's being sweet to them.'¹⁹⁹

Davies was initially sentenced to 112 third division hard labour days in Wandsworth detention barracks, the standard sentence handed out to imprisoned COs. Third division hard labour was the most severe level of prison sentence under English law at this time. It began with one month in solitary confinement on bread and water, performing arduous and boring manual jobs like breaking stone, hand-sewing mailbags and picking oakum. With good conduct remission, most COs served about three months.²⁰⁰ Davies was offered alternative work, but he refused, because he preferred 'any penalty to such a form of industrial compulsion'. He was sent to Wyke Regis camp, Weymouth to join the 3rd Dorset NCC, refused instructions, was again court-martialled and sentenced to one year's hard labour in Wormwood Scrubs civil prison. Childe wrote eloquently to Murray: 'I should think that to appeal to physical restraint to make a man untrue to his ideals (however wrong) is of the essence of persecution.'²⁰¹

Whilst COs could not be convicted for more than two years, as soon as they were released, they were arrested again as deserters, delivered back to their assigned regiment and the process repeated. This 'Cat and Mouse' treatment had been previously used on the Suffragettes.²⁰² In October 1916, Childe wrote to Murray again, asking him to use his influence to allow Davies more frequent communication with his family.²⁰³ It is unlikely that Murray could have helped, for until autumn 1917, COs were treated as ordinary prisoners. Concessions might 'encourage' them and the government, including the Prime Minister, Lloyd George, were determined to break absolutists. Hard labour had been designed to discipline the violent, criminal elements of society and COs, often unaccustomed to physical labour and hardship, suffered greatly; they were repelled by the isolating silence rule, the inadequate diet, lack of exercise and unhealthy cells. Although COs developed ingenious ways to communicate and resist the prison authorities, many developed mental and physical health problems that were to remain with them all their lives.²⁰⁴ Davies was released in 1919 and unable to return to Oxford,

¹⁹⁶ *Oxford Chronicle*, 5 May 1916; Bridget Davies (daughter of Tal Davies), personal communication, 2016; A. Howkins, 'Ashby, Joseph (1859–1919)', ODNB.

¹⁹⁷ C. Dakers, *Forever England. The Countryside at War 1914–1918* (2016), pp. 17, 136–7.

¹⁹⁸ Bodl. Gilbert Murray MS 375, ff. 129–30; *Oxford Chronicle*, 6 May 1916 (newspaper cutting pasted into Postgate's wartime scrapbook).

¹⁹⁹ Davies, *A Conscientious Objector in Oxford*.

²⁰⁰ Rae, *Conscience and Politics*, pp. 203–4; 'Philip Taliessin [sic] Davies', *Lives of the First World War*: <https://livesofthefirstworldwar.org/lifestory/7648639>.

²⁰¹ Bodl. Gilbert Murray MS 375, f. 154 (Childe to Murray, 10 May 1916).

²⁰² Kramer, *Conscientious Objectors of the First World War*, p. 185.

²⁰³ Bodl. Gilbert Murray MS 375, ff. 129–130 (Childe to Murray, 12 Oct. 1916).

²⁰⁴ Kennedy, *The Hound of Conscience*, pp. 180–1; Rae, *Conscience and Politics*, p. 204; Barrett, *Subversive Peacemakers*, p. 148.



Fig. 12. Tal Davies as a young man, around the time of World War I. With kind permission of Giles Heron.

transferred to the London School of Economics to study under Socialist R.H. Tawney. Like many COs, he found teaching closed to him and went to work with his brother-in-law, Tom Heron, in his silk factory and business.²⁰⁵

Like Kaye and Runacres, as an Anglo-Indian, Dutt could have avoided conscription, but chose to seek exemption as a political act. The Dutt family were ardent socialists – his parents belonged to the radical Marxist Social Democratic Federation (later British Socialist Party) – and were well-connected in Indian nationalist circles; Dutt had been politically aware from a young age.²⁰⁶ He was also, even amongst his peers, unusually adamant that he was a socialist objector and not a pacifist.²⁰⁷ Dutt's appeal was initially dismissed while Baldry consulted with the Secretary of State for India, but Dutt was determined to share his friends' experiences, to the consternation of his college and sympathisers. As Childe, his closest friend, was to write:

When the sympathisers with the C.O.s are always prepared to cry out at the illegalities of the Tribunal when it's against them, it's very rare that a man should protest against illegality even when it is in his favour.²⁰⁸

The other COs passing through Cowley barracks reported good treatment, but Dutt's experiences appear to have been different. Both he and Childe wrote to Gilbert Murray of the

²⁰⁵ *Rebel and Sage. A Biography of Tom Heron*, p. 32.

²⁰⁶ Callaghan, *Rajani Palme Dutt*, p. 12; G. Stevenson, *Dutt, Rajani Palme* http://www.grahamstevenson.me.uk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=174:rajani-palme-dutt-&catid=4:d&Itemid=19

²⁰⁷ Rothstein, 'RPD – Memories and Reflections', p. 1; LSE Special Collections, Postgate Archive, Postgate/3/2.

²⁰⁸ Bodl. Gilbert Murray MS 376, ff. 148–9 (Childe to Murray, 27 May 1916).



Fig. 13. Connaught Military Hospital, Aldershot. Image Copyright Hampshire Record Office: 115A08/2/22. With kind permission.

'vile' treatment he suffered: he had received no physical ill-treatment, but had been threatened with floggings and given lurid details of the 'develries' of a detention barracks and in response had gone on hunger strike.²⁰⁹ Dutt wrote to Murray that he was afraid that the 'assault and battery' of a military prison might so affect his head 'as to make it difficult to earn a living when I come out.'²¹⁰ Both men were terrified that Dutt would be sent to France, perhaps with good reason, given that other COs sent to France narrowly escaped death sentences.²¹¹

Dutt was sent to join the 401 Company of Royal Defence Corps at Farnborough, where ill-treatment seems to have continued and where he was 'forced into khaki'. While awaiting court-martial, he developed a feverish chill.²¹² Considered a soldier in spite of his resistance, he was sent to the Connaught military hospital, part of a complex of military hospitals at Aldershot, and placed in one of the temporary hospital huts, hut C7, a penal ward and also part of the venereal disease section dealing with syphilis or gonorrhoea. In his testimony, Dutt stated conditions were appalling; the orderly responsible for food and hygiene had a venereal sore; the 'language and smell of the place were appalling'; men spat and urinated freely; mugs were mixed up; the only precaution in the toilets was pencil-scrrawl on one stating 'the syphilitics' and he was robbed.²¹³ His case was raised in Parliament in July 1916 by T.E. Harvey, and on 12 August 1916 Dutt was discharged as a special case under a War Office letter as a brutality case. He returned to his studies at Oxford.²¹⁴

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

²¹⁰ Morgan, *Labour Legends and Russian Gold*, p. 48.

²¹¹ Rae, *Conscience and Politics*, p. 138.

²¹² Bodl. Gilbert Murray MS 376, ff. 152–6 (Childe to Murray, 29 May 1916); LSE Special Collections, Postgate/3/2 (typescript account by Dutt of his experiences at Aldershot).

²¹³ LSE Special Collections, Postgate/3/2.

²¹⁴ *HC Debate*, 10th July 1916, 84 (5th series), col. 76; Callaghan, *Rajani Palme Dutt*, p. 69; 'Rajani Palme Dutt', *Lives of the First World War*, <https://livesofthefirstworldwar.org/lifestory/7647072>.



Fig. 14. Rajani Palme Dutt in later life, as a leader of the Communist Party of Great Britain. Image copyright People's History Museum, Manchester. With kind permission.

Corporal punishment was formally forbidden by the army and this extended to COs. However, there was little control of behaviour at local level, which resulted in serious abuse of COs at some military bases.²¹⁵ The military authorities at Cowley barracks were generally careful in their treatment of the well-connected Oxford students. Baldry clearly felt that his behaviour towards the pugnacious Postgate had been nothing out of the ordinary:

May I be allowed to assure you that that treatment you have received at this Depot is not peculiar and personal. You have simply had an experience of the methods which prevail throughout the army, methods which are apparent even in the manners of such amateur soldiers as myself.²¹⁶

But to place an Oxford student, a CO, into a venereal disease penal ward at Aldershot was undoubtedly unacceptable. Venereal disease was a serious problem for the British army

²¹⁵ Rae, *Conscience and Politics*, pp. 151–7.

²¹⁶ LSE Special Collections, Postgate/3/1 (Baldry to Postgate, 28 April 1916).

during World War I; excluding readmissions for relapses, roughly five per cent of all men who enlisted became infected. Hospitalised soldiers had their pay stopped; treatment was painful; the standard of care at hospitals frequently poor.²¹⁷ Although some campaigners, including the Oxford COs' supporter, the Quaker doctor, H.T. Gillett, advocated sexual education from adolescence, there was still considerable uncertainty about the spread of venereal diseases and it was both a moral and a medical issue.²¹⁸ Once knowledge of Dutt's imprisonment emerged, his discharge was almost a foregone conclusion.

Dutt may have been more sensitive than his friends, or more alert to political opportunities afforded by abuse, but it is also possible that Dutt was singled out for ill-treatment at both Cowley and Aldershot on racial grounds – because he was Anglo-Indian. Indians in Britain in the early twentieth century were looked down on as 'blacks' – they were insulted, abused and discriminated against. Mixed marriages, like that of Dutt's parents, were regarded negatively and English-university-trained Indians like Dutt's father Upendra, a brilliant doctor, were resented for trying to break out of their assigned racial roles – Kipling used the term 'mule' to describe them.²¹⁹ But questions remain. This was not an exclusively venereal division and his treatment here may not have been exceptional – the Connaught had a total of 1,100 beds, of which 660 were used for a mixture of venereal cases/mental cases/prisoners. The other 440 beds were general medical beds, used for any non-surgical cases.²²⁰ Perhaps Dutt was not deliberately singled out for particular ill-treatment, but he and his supporters, knowing how contentious this issue was, exploited the potential for scandal to win his discharge.

CHILDE AND AUSTRALIA

Childe, as an Australian citizen, had for most of the conscription crisis been unable to fully share in his friends' ordeals. But he had been a loyal and faithful friend, writing to Gilbert Murray to plead for Dutt, Davies, Runacres and another friend, Henry Broadbent Stott. In 1917, his turn came. Childe knew that if he stayed in England after he finished his studies, he would be liable for conscription and in March 1917, he wrote to the Australian high commission to enquire about compulsory military service if he returned and was assured he would not have to serve. Although tempted to join his friends in their opposition, he decided to return to Australia, but not before his ill-judged conversation with Davies in Dorchester prison brought him to the malicious attention of the Security Services in both Britain and Australia.²²¹

Arriving back in Australia, already under observation as a CO, Childe was appointed Senior Resident Tutor at St Andrew's College, University of Sydney. But by Easter 1918, Childe's public pacifist and socialist activities had become an embarrassment to the college authorities.²²² Childe was asked to resign in June 1918; his allies raised the case in the state parliament as an issue of civil rights to no avail. Censor records reveal that he had swiftly become involved

²¹⁷ R. Marshall, *The British Army's Fight Against Venereal Disease in the 'Heroic Age of Prostitution'*: <http://www1centenary.oucs.ox.ac.uk/?p=2255>; M. Harrison, 'The British Army and the Problem of Venereal Disease in France and Egypt during the First World War', *Medical History*, 39 (1995), pp. 133–58.

²¹⁸ H.C. French, 'The Control of Venereal Diseases at the Source in Civil Communities', *British Medical Journal*, 2:2605 (1910), pp. 1766–68; H.T. Gillett, 'Majority Report on the Poor Law in Reference to Venereal Disease', *British Medical Journal*, 1:2557 (1910), p. 52.

²¹⁹ R. Visram, *Ayahs, Lascars and Princes. Indians in Britain 1700–1947* (1986), p. 183; Lahiri, *Indians in Britain*, pp. 51–2, 99, 121–3.

²²⁰ S. Light, 'Connaught Hospital' discussed in *Great War Forum* (2011): <http://1914-1918.invisionzone.com/forums/index.php?/topic/172154-connaught-hospital/>.

²²¹ R. Derricourt, 'The Changing Careers of Vere Gordon Childe', *Antiquity*, 88:340 (2014); Mulvaney, 'Another University Man Gone Wrong'; B. Oliver, *Peacemongers*.

²²² UCL Institute of Archaeology Childe Archive 2/8/1 (Childe to Chancellor of St Andrews, Sydney University, 2 May 1918).

with pacifist and socialist groups in Australia; he reportedly joined the Society of Friends – significant, but probably inaccurate considering his life-long atheism – the Australian Labour Party and other pacifist organisations, becoming secretary of the Australian UDC. Unlike in Oxford, where the COs were treated with circumspection by the local press, the Sydney press were unremittingly hostile to Childe and his own attempts to use newspapers to argue his case ended badly.²²³

In September 1918, he left for Brisbane, a Labour governed state more welcoming to opponents to the war. In November 1918, he was appointed classics master at Maryborough Grammar School. The appointment was essentially a political one, and plunged Childe into a maelstrom of hatred and prejudice. He was subjected to unmerciful treatment by his students, humiliated by the headmaster in the local newspaper, bullied by strangers in the press and actively intimidated by an undercover intelligence officer, who tried to stir up local opinion against him during a recruiting march in the town. Childe resigned, became a clerk in the Queensland public service and took a temporary tutorship in the WEA, teaching economic thought, including the theories of Karl Marx.²²⁴

Whilst it would be easy to see Childe as the victim of persecution, he and other pacifists in Australia saw themselves as rebels; certainly towards the end of the war, he came extremely close to being arrested for his activities. In 1924, journalist Vance Marshall, who had been imprisoned for his pacifist activities, described Childe as ‘a staunch rebel fighter during the stormy war-time period’.²²⁵ The left-wing writer, Jack Lindsay, who first met him in 1918, described him:

He preferred to slip in a sly and ruthless comment rather than expatiate; I remember him in those days solely as a bubble-pricker, a mildly-caustic iconoclast, whose glasses took on an unholy glitter as he demolished somebody’s illusions with sardonic kindness.²²⁶

The treatment Childe received, so different in its public animosity to that of his friends in England, reflects the conflicts tearing apart Australia. Australia was a country polarised by war and conscription, torn apart by strikes, civil unrest and increasingly tyrannised by its own government. Two conscription referenda were defeated and Australian society became divided: the volunteer against the ‘shirker’, the conscriptionist against the anti-conscriptionist, the Catholic against the Protestant. The resulting hatreds were to be violent and long-lasting.²²⁷ Childe left Australia in 1921 and returned to Britain, where he established a glittering career as one of the most influential archaeologists of the twentieth century.²²⁸ He continued his radical political activities on the side and maintained his friendship with Dutt, now a leading figure in the Communist Party of Great Britain.²²⁹

CONCLUSION

Examination of eight conscientious objectors from the University of Oxford during the Great War has reconstructed their objections to conscription and subsequent experiences

²²³ Derricourt, ‘The Changing Careers of Vere Gordon Childe’; Mulvaney, “‘Another University Man Gone Wrong’”; Oliver, *Peacemongers*.

²²⁴ Ibid; R. Evans, “‘Social Passion’: Vere Gordon Childe in Queensland, 1918–1919”, in P. Gathercole et al. (eds.) *Childe and Australia. Archaeology, Politics and Ideas* (1995), pp. 1–26.

²²⁵ R. Evans, “‘Social Passion’”; V. Marshall, ‘Gordon Childe “Cynical, Tired Philosopher”’, *Daily Standard*, Brisbane, 5 Jan. 1924.

²²⁶ J. Lindsay, *Life Rarely Tells. An Autobiographical Account Ending in the Year 1921 and Situated Mostly in Brisbane Queensland* (1958), p. 135.

²²⁷ J. Beaumont, *Broken Nation. Australians in the Great War* (2013); R. Bollard, *In the Shadow of Gallipoli. The Hidden History of Australia in World War I* (2013).

²²⁸ Green, *Prehistorian*.

²²⁹ TNA: PRO, KV 2/2148.

in detail. The wealth of source material available allows us to see their actions and decisions as both individuals and as a group, which as the men were self-conscious socialists, is vital. We can reconstruct how they were aided by pacifist groups and individuals, particularly the Quakers, and those sympathetic to their cause, notably Gilbert Murray, who supported them unstintingly. We can also see those did not share their views, particularly anonymous letter writers, who felt moved to take action against them and the military authorities and tribunal who were required to sit in judgement on their consciences. Compared to the violent opposition and angry letters of the Aberdeen press and public to the Dyce work camp, the response of the people and press of Oxfordshire is surprisingly balanced. The liberal *Oxford Chronicle* took more of a sympathetic attitude to the COs overall than *The Oxford Times*, but whilst *The Oxford Times* was violently disapproving towards the UDC and the bad behaviour of the students at the tribunal, it was restrained in its condemnations, expressing relief when the CO cases were near completion.²³⁰ The response of fellow students seems initially muted, but then increasingly violent as British fortunes began to deteriorate as the war progressed.

The men were of similar age, education, class and politics and involved in a shared university experience. Friendship bound them together and politics gave them a shared identity and purpose, which they expressed with confidence, if not arrogance. The popularity and broad-based support afforded to guild socialism gave them the surety to challenge the university authorities and wider society, which expected them to behave as dutiful middle-class men and enlist. It also provided them with political training and valuable allies, particularly in Parliament and made them unafraid to make public challenges in the press, both in Britain and in Australia, with mixed results. In spite of their advantages, only Cole escaped the tribunal with the total exemption all members of the groups wished for. Civil proceedings against Kaye damaged those associated with him and Baldry proved to be their equal if not superior in confidence, cunning and showmanship. The sentences handed down and the COs responses set them on individual courses for the rest of the war and in some cases, their lives. All the men remained dedicated, life-long socialists; their experiences during the war only served to strengthen their political beliefs.

The men saw themselves primarily as socialist and not pacifist objectors and only two – Runacres and more certainly Davies – showed evidence of strong pacifist convictions. Indeed, only two of them were to be lifelong peace campaigners: Herbert Runacres, who became a member of the Peace Pledge Union,²³¹ and Gordon Childe who became an enthusiastic Communist pacifist and anti-nuclear campaigner.²³² However, the strong influence of family pacifism and the example set by the men did continue into the next generation. Tal Davies died in 1937, before the anti-fascist peace movement had really begun, but his nephews, eminent British artist Patrick Heron and his brother Michael were to both become COs in World War II,²³³ as was Oliver Postgate, younger son of Postgate and grandson of pacifist George Lansbury.²³⁴

The men also demonstrate, on the whole, the futility of resistance to the military/government authorities in the Great War. In spite of all their high-level support and influence, considerably greater than that of many other COs, only three escaped punishment for their unorthodox choices: Cole, Postgate and Dutt, saved by circumstance and the intervention of powerful allies. All were to pay the price for political opposition and resistance, be it prison, work camps, resentment of friends and colleagues or public humiliation. But regardless, the courage and unity of these men, their defiance and passion, is to be admired.

²³⁰ *The Oxford Times*, 18 March, 1916, p. 7.

²³¹ Anon, 'War and Conscience', *Halifax Courier*, 27 May 1939, p. 2.

²³² TNA: PRO, KV 2/2148.

²³³ M. Gooding, *Patrick Heron*; personal communication from Bridget Davies, 2017.

²³⁴ O. Postgate, *Seeing Things: A Memoir* (2009).

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