

English Patriotism and the Implicit Nation: Homelands and Soldiers' National Identity during the Great War*

In the 24 July 1916 issue of the 'trench journal' *The Gasper*, one soldier described an imagined world that combined a portrait of England and his optimistic hopes for the future.¹ The bloodletting on the Somme had begun only three weeks before. In his vision, he had arrived home victorious and was sitting on a springy bench in a 'proper' train as it meandered its way through the English countryside. The carriage was luxurious, particularly after the cramped cattle trucks that had transported him across the Western Front. Outside the window beautiful women and ecstatic civilians, with English voices, waved and congratulated him as the locomotive passed through 'real railway stations'.² The scenes that he surveyed while staring at the countryside epitomised an archetypal England of the sort described in the poetry of A.E. Housman or Edward Thomas.³ It was a sustaining fantasy in which the universe seemed to have righted itself: 'the whole scheme of existence is more perfectly and satisfyingly ordered'. He was entranced by the 'Hills and valleys, streams and pools, fields and forests' that rushed 'by in one beautiful moving picture'. The culture of England was embedded in these landscapes:

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1. For nostalgia and First World War soldiers, see M. Roper, 'Nostalgia as an Emotional Experience in the Great War', *Historical Journal*, liv (2011), pp. 425–51. Trench journals were produced in large numbers during the conflict. For the British and Dominion Armies, see J.G. Fuller, *Troop Morale and Popular Culture in the British and Dominion Armies, 1914–1918* (Oxford, 1991). For the French military, S. Audoin-Rouzeau, *Men at War, 1914–1918: National Sentiment and Trench Journalism in France during the First World War*, tr. H. McPhail (Oxford, 1992). For the German military, R.L. Nelson, *German Soldier Newspapers of the First World War* (Cambridge, 2010). For the importance of time, see J. Horne, 'End of a Paradigm? The Cultural History of the Great War', *Past and Present*, no. 242 (2019), pp. 178–9, and N. Beaupré, 'La Guerre comme expérience du temps et le temps comme expérience de guerre: Hypothèses pour une histoire du rapport au temps des soldats français de la Grande Guerre', in *Historicités du 20^e siècle: Coexistence et concurrence des temps*, special issue of *Vingtième Siècle*, no. 117 (2013), pp. 166–81. For hope and optimism, A. Mayhew, 'Hoping for Victorious Peace: Morale and the Future on the Western Front', in A. Luptak, H. Smyth and L. Halewood, eds, *War Time: First World War Perspectives on Temporality* (Abingdon, 2018), pp. 194–219.

2. Strozzi, 'Hullo England!', *The Gasper: The Unofficial Organ of the 18th, 19th, 20th and 21st Royal Fusiliers*, no. 20, 24 July 1916, p. 1.

3. A.E. Housman, *A Shropshire Lad* (1896; London, 1908); E. Eastaway [Edward Thomas], *Six Poems* (Flansham, 1916); Edward Thomas, *Last Poems* (London, 1918). J. Moorcroft Wilson, *Edward Thomas: From Adlestrop to Arras. A Biography* (London, 2015).

the summer has come at last. The warm sun shines on us, and there is the joy of jumping into flannels for cricket, tennis, or (tell it not in Gath!) the river. The long daylight saving evenings are here, and we are not a bit tired of Old England yet, for we have learned her worth.

‘Strange,’ he mused, ‘but never before have we really appreciated what a fine place England is to live’. It was, he concluded, ‘superlatively better than any other land you have ever seen’.⁴

In the mind of this and many other soldiers, England and Englishness were built around a homeland in which physical environment and social world were interwoven. This vision of the nation contrasts with state-oriented ideas of citizenship, including those which drew on the ‘democratic, liberal, and civic values’ that were espoused by the intellectual elite of the Edwardian period.⁵ It does, however, mirror expressions of patriotism, which, as Julia Stapleton has indicated, tended to be culturally constructed and ‘rooted in a conception of the English people as a distinct spiritual or cultural whole’.⁶ Patriotism has been described as ‘a natural ... expression of attachment to the land where we are born and raised, and of gratitude we owe it for the benefits of life on its soil, among its people and under its laws’.⁷ It has been suggested that, while patriotism does not necessarily ‘invoke love of political institutions’, it does seek to promote a ‘way of life’ and, importantly, can mean different things to different groups, thus contrasting sharply with the ‘oneness’ often articulated by nationalists.⁸ Patriotism, George Orwell famously explained, means ‘devotion to a particular place and a particular way of life’.⁹ Vanda Wilcox, echoing Orwell, has pointed to the centrality of ‘defensive’ patriotism during the First World War.¹⁰ J.H. Grainger has highlighted how Britain’s patriotisms were indefinite and diffuse, focusing on a wide array of subjects: country and town, nation and locality.¹¹ The role of patriotism in the mobilisation of the British people and in propaganda during the First World War has been explained

4. Strozzi, ‘Hullo England!’, p. 1.

5. J. Stapleton, ‘Citizenship Versus Patriotism in Twentieth-Century England’, *Historical Journal*, xlviii (2005), p. 152.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 153.

7. I. Primoratz and A. Pavković, ‘Introduction’, in I. Primoratz and A. Pavković, eds, *Patriotism: Philosophical and Political Perspectives* (London, 2007), p. 1.

8. M. Viroli, *For Love of Country: An Essay on Patriotism and Nationalism* (1995; Oxford, 2003), pp. 1–2. For ways in which patriotism can become aligned with both ‘national or state’ ideology, see E.J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1870* (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 46, 75. For the distinction between patriotism and nationalism, J. Lukacs, ‘Nationalism and Patriotism’, *Freedom Review*, xxv (1994), pp. 78–9. For ways in which the ‘language of patriotism’ can be appropriated by different groups, H. Cunningham, ‘The Language of Patriotism, 1750–1914’, *History Workshop*, no. 12 (1981), pp. 8–33.

9. George Orwell, ‘Notes on Nationalism’, in *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell*, ed. S. Orwell and I. Angus (London, 1968), p. 362.

10. V. Wilcox, *Morale in the Italian Army during the First World War* (Cambridge, 2016), pp. 140–42; A. Gregory, *The Last Great War: British Society and the First World War* (Cambridge, 2008), p. 12.

11. J.H. Grainger, *Patriotisms: Britain, 1900–1939* (Abingdon, 1986).

elsewhere.¹² Certainly, men's patriotic impulses played an important part in their decision to enlist after the outbreak of the war.¹³ The sense that they were defending their homeland conditioned and informed participants' understanding of why they were fighting.¹⁴ However, less clear is what the patriotic sentiments of individual soldiers and units can reveal about English national identity in the early twentieth century.

This article, then, is a history of patriotism 'from below'. It provides new insights into English national identity by using an array of sources to explore what I describe as the 'implicit nation'.¹⁵ Fundamental to this idea of the implicit nation were emotive homelands composed of people and places; these related flexibly to the United Kingdom, the monarchy and the empire. The implicit nation was constructed and internalised by soldiers themselves and was evoked when individual combatants imagined their 'way of life'.¹⁶ National identity is regularly studied as a

12. I.F.W. Beckett, 'The Nation in Arms, 1914–18', in I.F.W. Beckett and K. Simpson, eds, *A Nation in Arms: A Social Study of the British Army in the First World War* (Manchester, 1985), p. 5; P. Parker, *The Old Lie: The Great War and the Public School Ethos* (London, 1987), p. 17; W.J. Reader, *'At Duty's Call': A Study in Obsolete Patriotism* (Manchester, 1988); K. Robert, 'Gender, Class, and Patriotism: Women's Paramilitary Units in First World War Britain', *International History Review*, xix (1997), pp. 52–65; S.R. Grayzel, "'The Outward Sign and Visible Sign of Her Patriotism": Women, Uniforms, and National Service During the First World War', *Twentieth Century British History*, viii (1997), pp. 145–64; P. Ward, "'Women of Britain Say Go": Women's Patriotism in the First World War', *Twentieth Century British History*, xii (2001), pp. 23–45; J. Winter, *The Great War and the British People* (1986; rev. edn, Basingstoke, 2003), p. 35; D. Silbey, *The British Working Class and Enthusiasm for War, 1914–1916* (London, 2005); Gregory, *Last Great War*, p. 78; D. Monger, *Patriotism and Propaganda in First World War Britain: The National War Aims Committee and Civilian Morale* (Liverpool, 2012).

13. G. Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars* (Oxford, 1990), p. 53.

14. A. Watson, *Enduring the Great War: Combat, Morale and Collapse in the German and British Armies, 1914–1918* (Cambridge, 2008), pp. 79–81. See also H. McCartney, *Citizen Soldiers: The Liverpool Territorials in the First World War* (Cambridge, 2005). For British soldiers' experiences on the Western Front and their relationship with its landscapes, see C. Ward, *Living on the Western Front: Annals and Stories, 1914–1918* (London, 2013), and R.J. Wilson, *Landscapes of the Western Front: Materiality during the Great War* (London, 2012). For the British Army in Belgium and France, C. Gibson, *Behind the Front: British Soldiers and French Civilians, 1914–1918* (Cambridge, 2014). For broader discussions of landscapes and national identity, T. Naim, *The Break-Up of Britain* (London, 1977), ch. 6; D. Matless, *Landscape and Englishness* (2nd edn, London, 2016). For Englishness, R. Colls, *The Identity of England* (Oxford, 2002); K. Kumar, *The Making of English National Identity* (Cambridge, 2003); P. Readman, *Storied Ground: Landscapes and the Shaping of English National Identity* (Cambridge, 2018).

15. The author would like to thank Professor John Horne for helping him to formulate this concept.

16. There has been more attention devoted to patriotism in the militaries of other combatants. For German soldiers, see Nelson, *German Soldier Newspapers*, pp. 55–87, and B. Ziemann, *War Experiences in Rural Germany, 1914–1923* (Oxford, 2007), esp. ch. 4. For minorities in the German army, C. Bundgård Christensen, 'National Identity and Veteran Culture in a Border Region: The Danish Minority in the German Army during the First World War', *War in History*, xxvii (2020), pp. 57–80; A. Watson, 'Fighting for Another Fatherland: The Polish Minority in the German Army, 1914–1918', *English Historical Review*, cxxv (2011), pp. 1137–66. For French soldiers, Audoin-Rouzeau, *Men at War*, esp. pp. 173–84, and L.V. Smith, *Between Mutiny and Obedience: The Case of the French Fifth Infantry Division during the First World War* (Princeton, NJ, 1994). For the Austro-Hungarian military, M. Cornwall, 'Morale and Patriotism in the Austro-Hungarian Army, 1914–1918', in J. Horne, ed., *State, Society and Mobilization in Europe during the First World War* (Cambridge, 1997), pp. 173–92. For the Italian Army, Wilcox, *Morale in the Italian Army*, pp. 141–5.

homogeneous entity, ignoring such individual differences. English national identity has thus commonly been characterised as rural, nostalgic and pastoral.¹⁷ Despite notable interventions, particularly by Peter Mandler and Paul Readman, these assumptions still persist.¹⁸ However, the First World War offers a wealth of personal testimony that can provide new perspectives on the normative constructions of Englishness during this period. This article shows that English soldiers' identity was structured around an implicit nation of meaningful, parochial and frequently local spaces that were both rural and urban, natural and human.

Patriotism drew its strength from men's emotional and subjective relationships with these homelands.¹⁹ It was local allegiances that supported national identity in twentieth-century Britain.²⁰ These survived the Great War and may have become even more powerful in subsequent decades. The implicit nation was neither self-consciously conservative nor liberal. Concepts such as liberty, while present, were not linked to political structures but embedded in physical and social spaces. What is more, Britishness occupied a secondary role and the empire played only a limited part. Yet, as Jan Rüger has already shown, the complex nexus of different identities in the British Isles was not necessarily a source of 'conflict or friction'.²¹ The strength of English and, more broadly, British patriotism came from the knitting together of a wealth of mutually supporting local or regional identities.

This patchwork disappears, though, when a particular region, place, or theme comes into focus.²² Cultural historians of the First World War

17. See, for example, Kumar, *English National Identity*. M.J. Wiener argued that this retarded Britain's 'industrial spirit': *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit, 1850–1980* (Cambridge, 1981).

18. Readman, *Storied Ground*, pp. 195–299, and P. Mandler, 'Against "Englishness": English Culture and the Limits to Rural Nostalgia, 1850–1940', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6th ser., vii (1997), pp. 155–75. For recent assertions that rurality trumped urban landscapes, see J. Bennett, 'Imagining Englishness through Contested Landscapes', *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, xxii (2019), pp. 835–48.

19. J. Horne, 'Patriotism and the Enemy: Political Identity as a Weapon', in N. Wouters and L. van Ypersele, eds, *Nations, Identities and the First World War: Shifting Loyalties to the Fatherland* (London, 2018), p. 17.

20. T. Hulme, "'A Nation of Town Criers": Civic Publicity and Historical Pageantry in Inter-War Britain', *Urban History*, xlv (2017), pp. 270–92; A. Bartie, L. Fleming, M. Freeman, T. Hulme, A. Hutton and P. Readman, 'Historical Pageants and the Medieval Past in Twentieth-Century England', *English Historical Review*, cxxxiii (2018), pp. 866–902.

21. J. Rüger, 'Nation, Empire and Navy: Identity Politics in the United Kingdom, 1887–1914', *Past and Present*, no. 185 (2004), p. 163.

22. For Englishness, see P. Readman, 'The Place of the Past in English Culture, c.1890–1914', *Past and Present*, no. 186 (2005), pp. 147–99; Colls, *Identity of England*, pp. 225–8; J. Winter, 'British National Identity and the First World War', in S. Green and C. Whiting, eds, *The Boundaries of the State in Modern Britain* (Cambridge, 1996); J. Winter, 'Popular Culture in Wartime Britain', in A. Roshwald and R. Stites, eds, *European Culture in the Great War: The Arts, Entertainment and Propaganda, 1914–1918* (Cambridge, 1999), p. 330. For a more general analysis, L. Kramer, *Nationalism in Europe and America: Politics, Cultures, and Identities since 1775* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2011); B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (1986; rev. edn, London, 2006).

have explored the variety of ways in which soldiers imagined home. Yet the historiographies of English national identity and soldiers' subjectivities have not been drawn together in a sustained manner. By concentrating on published material in the form of soldiers' newspapers, as well as under-used 'ego-documents' (such as diaries and letters), this article reveals the power of local and regional identity in the creation of Englishness in the era of the Great War. Parish identities, sometimes assumed to have reduced in significance by 1914, retained their influence and were given a new articulation by the war.²³ In addition, this piece will also counter Ernest Gellner's suggestion that elites belonged to a community that existed beyond the nation, while 'peasants' felt they belonged to smaller communities.²⁴ Officers might have drawn on more diverse homelands when imagining England, but smaller communities remained relevant to every combatant, no matter their background.

Soldiers' images of England offer an alternative picture to the broader visions of Britain, her empire and her cause that, according to many historians, had crystallised by this time and motivated soldiers to enlist in the military.²⁵ Linda Colley has famously maintained that a sense of Britishness had emerged a century earlier, founded on a shared Protestantism and directed against the French 'other'.²⁶ However, while combatants may well have acknowledged their membership of this wider entity, this article argues that, among the soldiers studied here, their sense of Englishness at least trumped and sometimes subsumed their Britishness. Their parochial visions of home were so vibrant and fundamental that their discussions of Britishness or empire are notably infrequent. The experience of the Great War—and the emergence of a new enemy—did help give voice to national identity. Yet men's 'felt' Englishness was tied to a pre-existing perception of the implicit nation; this underpinned English soldiers' perception of the war.

To explore the centrality of this felt Englishness, the sections below sketch what men saw when they imagined their 'way of life', focusing on the visions that emerged with the greatest clarity at a time when they faced their greatest traumas. Of course, the heterogeneity of patriotism

23. K.D.M. Snell has argued that these had become weaker by the First World War: *Parish and Belonging: Community, Identity and Welfare in England and Wales, 1750–1950* (Cambridge, 2006).

24. E. Gellner, *Nations and Nationalisms* (1983; 2nd edn, London, 2006). For the debates surrounding Gellner's work, see J.A. Hall, ed., *The State of the Nation: Ernest Gellner and the Theory of Nationalism* (Cambridge, 1998).

25. C. Pennell, *A Kingdom United: Popular Responses to the Outbreak of the First World War in Britain and Ireland* (Oxford, 2012), ch. 2; A. Marwick, *The Deluge: British Society and the First World War* (London, 1989), p. 309; D. Silbey, *The British Working Class and Enthusiasm for War, 1914–1916* (Abingdon, 2005).

26. L. Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707–1837* (1994; New Haven, CT, 2012), pp. 242–325, and 'Whose Nation? Class and National Consciousness in Britain, 1750–1830', *Past and Present*, no. 113 (1986), pp. 116–17. See also G. Newman, *The Rise of English Nationalism: A Cultural History, 1740–1830* (London, 1997); P. Ward, *Britishness since 1870* (Abingdon, 2004).

makes it hard to depict and define. Indeed, cultural historians now sometimes see patriotism as sentiment or as ‘a rhetoric, a language, or idiom’.²⁷ It is, therefore, ambiguous by its very nature and ‘requires flexible, sensitive and above all, imaginative reconstruction’.²⁸ With this in mind, the first part of this article explores the ways in which the British Army itself promoted and fostered allegiance to particular homelands. Part II then investigates the ways that the implicit nation revealed itself in soldiers’ letters, diaries and postcards. It will reveal how soldiers’ patriotism was fed primarily by visions of their homeland and how their sense of Englishness tended to draw its strength from parochial (though not necessarily pastoral) pictures of England, which were often stripped of politics, the state and the empire.²⁹

When viewed from below, it is clear that England and homeland were so interwoven that the nation became a very personal matter. Soldiers retreated into these imagined communities and landscapes amid the death and destruction on the Western Front. For example, during the early spring of 1918, an infantryman, H.T. Madders, was navigating the frontlines; he hauled himself through clinging mud as he resupplied isolated dugouts. Understandably, the experience left him deeply unhappy. As he shivered in his sodden uniform, he concentrated on ‘thoughts of Sunday night at home’ and ‘Blighty now that Aprils [*sic*] there’.³⁰ Madders’s image of ‘Blighty’ did not form around the nation’s institutions, nor the empire, nor the monarchy. These flickering daydreams focused on his parents, firesides, his hometown and his local church, ‘roast beef’ on Sundays, ‘the tea-pot’, as well as the country roads of Herefordshire.³¹

The national identity of the soldiers studied here tended to form around tangible images and memories rather than abstractions. It was lived experiences, familiar scenes and important social groups that were central—not, as is often assumed, conceptions of the state or theoretical political principles.³² Moreover, it was an English sense of the homeland that underlay identification with Britishness, the empire and the monarchy.

27. P.R. Campbell, ‘The Politics of Patriotism in France (1770–1788)’, *French History*, xxiv (2010), p. 551.

28. Colley, *Britons*, p. 372.

29. Mandler, ‘Rural Nostalgia’, esp. p. 170.

30. London, Imperial War Museum [hereafter IWM], Documents.11289, papers of H.T. Madders, diary entry for 8 Apr. 1918. Whether it was intentional or not, this phrase appears to reference the first lines of Robert Browning’s 1845 poem ‘Home Thoughts, From Abroad’, which read: ‘Oh, to be in England / Now that April’s there.’

31. *Ibid.*, diary entries for 28 and 31 Mar. and 3, 6, 7 and 8 Apr. 1918.

32. See, especially, J. Breuilly, ‘Approaches to Nationalism’, in G. Balakrishnan, ed., *Mapping the Nation* (London, 1996), p. 165. Also J. Breuilly, *The Formation of the First German Nation State* (London, 1997). Heather Jones suggests Britain’s lack of constitution made the state ‘abstract and problematic’: ‘The Nature of Kingship in First World War Britain’, in M. Glencross, J. Rowbotham and M. Kandiah, *The Windsor Dynasty, 1910 to the Present: ‘Long to Reign Over Us?’* (London, 2016), p. 198.

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In Continental Europe, conscription and service in the armed forces were vehicles for citizenship.³³ Yet Britons were not citizens (at least in a European sense) and the state lacked both a long-standing tradition of conscription and a military designed to mould men into active members of the body politic. Indeed, it is questionable whether Britain, which still had limited suffrage even among the male population, could accurately be classified as a liberal democracy until after 1918.³⁴ Certainly, serving soldiers were subjects of the Crown, not citizens, and members of a society that celebrated localism and embraced the diversity of identities in the British Isles (at least in England, Scotland and Wales).

The peculiarities of Britain's four-nation history have led scholars to attempt to unpick exactly how (and if) the English, Irish, Scottish and Welsh came to see themselves as part of a cohesive national unit.³⁵ Linda Colley suggested that the conflict against Revolutionary and Napoleonic France helped to broaden British soldiers' horizons. As they were deployed across the country and interacted with people of different backgrounds, they developed a sense of Britain and Britishness.³⁶ The overlapping processes of urbanisation and suburbanisation in the decades before 1914 could have played a similar role.³⁷ As previously mentioned, much of the scholarly literature on the 1914–18 period indicates that a sense of British national identity pushed men to volunteer or subscribe to the cause in the early months or years of the war. Catriona Pennell has convincingly argued that the sense that Germany posed an existential threat created a community of 'United Kingdomers'.³⁸ While historians (including Pennell) have accepted that there was a diversity of 'patriotisms', many still point to

33. R. Brubaker, *Citizenship and Nationhood in France and Germany* (1992; Cambridge, MA, 1994), pp. 104–5. Also U. Frevert, *A Nation in Barracks: Conscription, Military Service and Civil Society in Modern Germany* (London, 2004).

34. N. Blewett, 'The Franchise in the United Kingdom, 1885–1918', *Past and Present*, no. 32 (1965), pp. 27–57.

35. N. Lloyd-Jones and M. Scull, eds, *Four Nations Approaches to Modern 'British' History: A (Dis)united Kingdom?* (London, 2017); J. Pattinson and W. Ugolini, eds, *Fighting for Britain? Negotiating Identities in Britain during the Second World War* (Oxford, 2015). Also T. Bowman, *The Irish Regiments in the Great War: Discipline and Morale* (Manchester, 2004); E. Spiers, 'The Scottish Soldier in the Great War', in H. Cecil and P. Liddle, eds, *Facing Armageddon: The First World War Experienced* (1996; London, 2003), pp. 342–50; W. Ugolini, 'The "Welsh" Pimpernel: Richard Llewellyn and the Search for Authenticity in Second World War Britain', *Cultural and Social History*, xvi (2019), pp. 185–203.

36. Colley, *Britons*, pp. 242–325, and 'Whose Nation?', pp. 116–17. Also G. Newman, *The Rise of English Nationalism: A Cultural History, 1740–1830* (London, 1997); P. Ward, *Britishness since 1870* (Abingdon, 2004).

37. P. J. Waller, *Town, City and Nation: England, 1850–1914* (1983; Oxford, 1991), pp. 2–6.

38. C. Pennell, *A Kingdom United: Popular Responses to the Outbreak of the First World War in Britain and Ireland* (Oxford, 2012), ch. 2; Marwick, *Deluge*, p. 309; Silbey, *British Working Class*.

top-down ‘persuasion and coercion to a central, collective, “definition of patriotism”’.³⁹

Such a process was, at least to some extent, evidenced in the symbolic role of the Royal Navy. This service ‘ignored the subnationalisation of the islands it defended’ and celebrated both nation and empire, even if fleet reviews were frequently driven by local interests and civic pride.⁴⁰ In contrast to the navy, the British Army imposed no central or collective vision of Britain or England; it tended to avoid politically loaded questions of what it meant to be British. Its historic regimental system reflected a nation of multiple identities. *Esprit de corps* was as much about fostering and celebrating these as it was about small group loyalty. Units, often associated with a county or counties, ‘reflected regional variety’ and celebrated the military achievements of the English, Welsh, Scottish and Irish as both independent and co-dependent nations.⁴¹ Britain’s army encouraged allegiances to particular people, places and landscapes.

Recruitment embraced the power of the homeland and local patriotism. In London, one poster called on men to defend everything ‘an Englishman holds dear’, namely, ‘his King, Home, and Country’.⁴² A more famous poster included a map of Great Britain and Ireland, which were not depicted as a series of counties, but as a patchwork of regimental spheres of influence. It contained a very simple call to action: ‘Is Your Home Here? Defend It!’⁴³ While this was aimed primarily at prospective recruits for the Territorial Army, a collection of battalions with local ties, it reveals something important about the British Army as a whole.⁴⁴ Those regiments from England self-identified as English (as opposed to Irish, Scottish or Welsh), and rarely as British.⁴⁵ It is telling that more than one soldier described the British Expeditionary

39. J.M. Osborne, ‘Defining Their Own Patriotism: British Volunteer Training Corps in the First World War’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, xxiii (1988), p. 60.

40. Rüger, ‘Nation, Empire and Navy’, p. 170. Also J. Rüger, *The Great Naval Game: Britain and Germany in the Age of Empire* (Cambridge, 2007).

41. C. Matthew, ‘Introduction’, in C. Matthew, ed., *Short Oxford History of the British Isles: The Nineteenth Century. The British Isles, 1815–1901* (Oxford, 2000), p. 22.

42. University of Leeds, Liddle Collection [hereafter Liddle], WW1/GS/0505, papers of Cpl V. Edwards, 7th Bn Royal Fusiliers’ Recruitment Leaflet. For recruitment, see Gregory, *Last Great War*, esp. ch. 3, and Pennell, *A Kingdom United*, esp. ch. 5.

43. IWM, Art.IWM PST 5073, ‘Is Your Home Here? Defend It!’, Poster no. 126, published by the Parliamentary Recruiting Committee.

44. For the Territorial Army, see McCartney, *Citizen Soldiers*, pp. 17–22; also J. Kitchen, *The British Imperial Army in the Middle East: Morale and Military Identity in the Sinai and Palestine Campaigns, 1916–18* (London, 2014), ch. 4. For a general history of the British Army during the Great War, I.F.W. Beckett, T. Bowman and M. Connelly, *The British Army and the First World War* (Cambridge, 2017).

45. Kew, The National Archives [hereafter TNA], WO 95/2339/1, war diary of the 16th Bn Manchester Regiment, address by the CO to the officers, NCOs and men of the 19th Bn Manchester Regiment, Feb. 1918. Also *Memorial Record of the Seventh (Service) Battalion The Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry*, ed. C. Wheeler (Oxford, 1921), p. 5; G.K. Rose, *The Story of the 214th Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry* (Oxford, 1920), p. 74.

Force as the English Army.⁴⁶ In 1914 most infantry regiments continued to be affiliated with a city, county or counties and, at least in the early months of the war, ‘local patriotism ... played an important role in drawing men to join Territorial and New Army units’.⁴⁷ Mark Connelly has shown how, as the war dragged on, home communities continued to see the local regiment’s soldiers as ‘their boys’.⁴⁸ This was, in part, a product of the military’s restructuring in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. These initiatives had centred primarily on enlistment, training and organisation, but had also led to the localisation of units.⁴⁹ ‘At least’, Connelly claims, ‘part of Cardwell’s and Haldane’s army reforms had reached maturity: the army was imbedded in the community even though it tended to draw from a fairly small, and self-perpetuating, clique’.⁵⁰

The men serving in 1914–18 were not citizen soldiers. The military wanted to remain apolitical and, during the war, there were even debates about the admissibility of members of parliament serving in khaki commenting on politics or policy.⁵¹ Tellingly, in 1917, as war weariness took hold on the Home Front, soldiers who had returned to work in industry complained that they had ‘renounced most of their rights as citizens’ when they enlisted.⁵² These were *subject* soldiers. Officers’ commissions were personal contracts between them and the king, while the rank and file were commanded by the king to follow orders. On enlistment, the other ranks had to take an oath of allegiance to their monarch.⁵³ As well as the supposed focus of men’s loyalty, the sovereign occupied a quasi-parental role. When he returned from captivity in Germany in 1918, Private Stephen Young was greeted by a ‘personal’ message from his monarch ‘welcoming you on your release’, comforting him that he had ‘been uppermost in our thoughts’, and

46. IWM, Documents.8631, Diary of an Unidentified Soldier in the Border Regiment, diary entry for 25 Dec. 1914; Rose, *Story of the 24th*, p. 132.

47. D. Ussishkin, *Morale: A Modern British History* (Oxford, 2018), pp. 68–9; McCartney, *Citizen Soldiers*, p. 57.

48. M. Connelly, *Steady the Buffs! A Regiment, a Region, and the Great War* (Oxford, 2006), p. 224.

49. S. Jones, *From Boer War to World War: Tactical Reform in the British Army, 1902–1914* (Norman, OK, 2012), pp. 72, 195; T. Bowman and M. Connelly, *The Edwardian Army: Recruiting, Training, and Deploying the British Army, 1902–1914* (Oxford, 2012).

50. Connelly, *Steady the Buffs!*, p. 8. Also M. Spiers, ‘The Late Victorian Army’, in D. Chandler and I. Beckett, eds, *The Oxford History of the British Army* (Oxford, 2002), pp. 187–210.

51. TNA, WO 32/18555, Members of Parliament on Active Service: Expression of Political Views, ‘Admissibility of MPs on Military Duties in Expressing Political Views in Press’. This did not stop high-ranking officers influencing politics: H. Strachan, *The Politics of the British Army* (Oxford, 1997).

52. TNA, WO 32/5455, General (Code 67(A)): Enforcement of King’s Regulations concerning formation of soldiers’ and sailors’ committees and recall of serving soldiers released for munitions work in event of strikes, copies of two reports sent to Sir Reginald H. Brade at the War Office, ‘Soldiers’ Representatives’.

53. Woodstock, Soldiers of Oxfordshire Museum [hereafter SOFO], papers of Frederick Symonds, Box 29 Item 17, Form T.I.A. King’s Commission; IWM, Documents.12760, papers of Maj. S.R. Hudson, King’s Commission.

congratulating him on his return to ‘the old Country’ and ‘home’.⁵⁴ Elsewhere, the sovereign also offered a ‘lead for his people’. In April 1916, *The Broad Arrow* characterised the king’s ‘Royal gift’ of £100,000 for the war effort as a ‘call of practical patriotism’ and asserted that ‘it is our loyal duty to identify ourselves with him by taking our example by him’.⁵⁵ The reverence in which the monarch was held by the armed forces was evidenced in an earlier issue of the same journal. Embittered by the perceived failings of politicians, the editors noted that the king’s ‘latent power and influence’ would have been of ‘incalculable value to the State’ were it not for the ‘subordinating [of] the Crown to the executive in affairs’.⁵⁶ Clearly the monarchy had enormous symbolic power. Nonetheless, while the king provided a focus for patriotism, this was not necessarily a *British* patriotism.⁵⁷ One Scottish unit’s journal, *The Outpost*, published a short piece celebrating their successes in training prior to deployment. The king had commented positively on their progress, which they happily ‘accepted with all Scots’ loyalty and steadfastness’.⁵⁸ H.T. Madders was also excited when his battalion was ‘complimented by the King’ for their role in stemming the German spring offensives in 1918. Yet the patriotism kindled by his monarch encouraged ‘thoughts of the Home Fires’ that concentrated solely on Herefordshire.⁵⁹

The British Army both consciously and unconsciously nurtured men’s relationship with the implicit nation. Celebrations of Britain generally only occurred in ‘highbrow’ journals, such as *The Broad Arrow* (*The Naval and Military Gazette*), aimed at officers from across the armed forces.⁶⁰ Even here, though, England and Britain were used interchangeably. National institutions also offered clear statements of British patriotism. Boots, the chemist, published a magazine for its employees serving with the colours. It explained that the ‘sons of Britain’ were driven by ‘that devotion to the homeland’, and emphasised the

54. London, National Army Museum [hereafter NAM], 2004-08-76, papers of Pte Stephen Young, letter on return from captivity from King George V.

55. ‘Comments: The King’s Example’, *The Broad Arrow: The Naval and Military Gazette*, xcvi, 12 Apr. 1916, p. 405.

56. ‘Comments: The King in France’, *The Broad Arrow: The Naval and Military Gazette*, xcvi, 5 Nov. 1915, p. 505.

57. The royal family has more frequently been seen as a vehicle for Britishness: D. Cannadine, ‘The Context, Performance and Meaning of Ritual: The British Monarchy and the “Invention of Tradition”, c.1820–1977’, in E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger, eds, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 101–64; W.M. Kuhn, *Democratic Royalism: The Transformation of the British Monarchy, 1861–1914* (Basingstoke, 1996). For the complex and often conflicting relationship between the monarchy and Welsh/British identities, see J.S. Ellis, ‘Reconciling the Celt: British National Identity, Empire, and the 1911 Investiture of the Prince of Wales’, *Journal of British Studies*, xxxvii (1998), pp. 391–418, and *Investiture: Royal Ceremony and National Identity in Wales, 1911–1969* (Cardiff, 2008).

58. ‘Battalion Notes’, *The Outpost*, ii, Nov. 1915, p. 110. Italics added.

59. IWM, Documents.11289, papers of H.T. Madders, diary entry for 3 Apr. 1918.

60. ‘Comments’, *The Broad Arrow: The Naval and Military Gazette*, xciii, 13 Nov. 1914, p. 533; ‘Comments’, *The Broad Arrow: The Naval and Military Gazette*, xciii, 21 Aug. 1914, pp. 193–5.

‘British polity, British law, order and justice, British traditions of clean, wholesome life, of social union, of national worth built upon national honour and domestic happiness’.⁶¹ In contrast, Scottish units—whose patriotism was (‘like true auld Scots’) stirred by the scenery and features of ‘oor country’—sometimes complained that English officers teased them for their “local” patriotism’.⁶² Yet such grand evocations of the nation were rare even in English regiments. ‘True patriotism’, it was suggested elsewhere, ‘feels, but seldom reasons’.⁶³ *Boots’* periodical even hinted at this: some men ‘prefer[red] the Nottinghamshire Trent’, while one trooper was ‘stirred by a vista of exceptional charm ... [and] says feelingly that it reminds him of Devonshire’.⁶⁴ The Royal West Kent Regiment’s newspaper argued that, unlike the French, ‘the average Englishman probably does not give much thought to such subjects [as patriotism] ... although after the present war, it can never be said that we are lacking in those feelings’.⁶⁵

These ‘feelings’ were conjured by local homelands. The power of these more personal visions of the nation might also explain why it was rare to see imperialism filter into soldiers’ or regiments’ normative constructions of Englishness, despite the British Army’s role in policing the British Empire.⁶⁶ Unlike the Royal Navy, which had come to symbolise imperial defence, the British Army seems to have been less likely to self-identify as an imperial force.⁶⁷ Unsurprisingly, then, it was generally publications such as *The Broad Arrow* (aimed at both the army and navy) that dwelt on the ‘meaning’ of empire. One author explained that ‘a good Englishman cannot fail to be a good Imperialist’ and that ‘Nationalism and Imperialism stand together’. This author, though, admitted to being bemused by the ‘workmen who ... ask ... what use the Empire was to them’. They apparently felt little investment in the imperial project when they had ‘no stake even in England’.⁶⁸ As subjects, not citizens, neither the state nor the empire held much personal appeal for many rank and file soldiers and thus appeared infrequently in publications and soldiers’ ego-documents. An author in another journal, this time of the Royal Fusiliers, suggested that truthful expressions of imperial patriotism were mainly found among senior

61. ‘Dulce Domum’, *Boots: Comrades in Khaki*, i, no. 3, 1 July 1915, p. 79.

62. ‘Seeds of Patriotism’, *The Dud*, i, no. 1, 1 Nov. 1916, p. 20; ‘Shot and Shell’, *The Outpost*, vi, no. 5, 1 Mar. 1918, p. 145.

63. ‘True Patriotism’, *Signals*, ix, 10 Mar. 1917, p. 9.

64. ‘Dulce Domum’, *Boots: Comrades in Khaki*, i, no. 3, 1 July 1915, p. 79.

65. ‘Esprit de Corps’, *Chronicles of the White Horse: Queen’s Own Royal West Kent Regiment*, ii, 1 Apr. 1917, p. 4.

66. G. Sheffield, *Forgotten Victory. The First World War: Myths and Realities* (London, 2002), p. 117.

67. G. Kennedy, ‘Introduction: The Concept of Imperial Defence, 1856–1956’, in G. Kennedy, ed., *Imperial Defence: The Old World Order, 1856–1956* (Abingdon, 2007), p. 2.

68. ‘The Meaning of Empire’, *The Broad Arrow: The Naval and Military Gazette*, xcv, 26 Nov. 1915, p. 603.

officers.⁶⁹ This might go some way to confirming Bernard Porter's argument that Britain was a less consciously imperial country (at least among the working classes) than is often assumed.⁷⁰ Of course, there were artefacts of empire everywhere, but it is unclear that soldiers were cognisant of this. Much of the military language men adopted was composed of loan words from Hindi and Arabic. Products of empire, these were internalised, but their origin was forgotten. 'Blighty,' for instance, was a word used by H.T. Madders and many of his comrades to mean:

England, in the sense of home. In this one word was gathered much of the soldier's home-sickness and affection and war weariness ... *Blighty* to the soldier was a sort of *faerie*, a paradise which he could faintly remember, a never-never land.⁷¹

Yet, the term itself, at least according to one glossary of soldiers' slang, came from the Hindi *bilaik* or *Belait* for 'foreign country, especially England'.⁷² This distortion is revealing of an imperialism that might have been simultaneously arrogant and 'absent-minded'.

The Fifth Glo'ster Gazette contained a more effusive statement of loyalty to 'the Empire of ours', especially in the face of 'superior people who have sniffed at any outward observance of Empire day'. However, the author claimed to 'fly England's flag'.⁷³ Here, and elsewhere, there was an acknowledgement of shared culture and of overlapping identities. 'Courage, energy, and determination', one journal claimed, were 'three qualities that ... are the indefeasible birthright [*sic*] of every Englishman ... [.] Scotchman, Irishman (except the Sinn Feiners), Welshman, Anzac, Canadian, South African (except De Wett's following), &c., &c., &c.'. ⁷⁴ Those English soldiers who actually thought about the empire saw it, like Britain, as a composite of mutually supporting (white) communities; each group's patriotism was an Imperial 'asset'.⁷⁵ For the most part, though, the empire played a limited role in soldiers' everyday identities. Had Britain or its empire occupied a more central role in regimental culture both might have found a more prominent place in men's national identity.

The power of more specific homelands was sustained, in part, by regimental demographics. Of course, recruitment patterns and heavy casualties meant that units inevitably contained sizeable groups of soldiers from other parts of England and, sometimes, Scotland,

69. 'Half an-Hour with the C.O.', *The Gasp*, no. 15, 15 Mar. 1916, p. 6.

70. B. Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists: Empire, Society, and Culture in Britain* (Oxford, 2004).

71. J. Brophy and E. Partridge, *The Long Trail: Soldiers' Songs and Slang, 1914–1918* (1965; London, 1969), p. 73.

72. *Ibid.*

73. 'The Flag', *The Fifth Glo'ster Gazette*, no. 11, 1 Apr. 1916, p. 9.

74. 'Courage', *The Gasp*, no. 19, 26 June 1916, p. 1.

75. 'Shot and Shell', *The Outpost*, vi, no. 5, 1 Mar. 1918, p. 145.

Wales, Ireland or even the Dominions. Furthermore, logistical and specialist units, such as the Army Service Corps or the Royal Army Medical Corps, grew in number and recruited nationally.⁷⁶ Yet, rather than necessarily encouraging a broader understanding of their identity, this seems to have pushed men to recognise that a diversity of patriotisms existed. They were confronted by comrades who had led very different pre-war lives. Initial reservations, which stemmed from perceived differences, often gave way to tenderness. Many soldiers had rarely strayed far from home, while middle- and upper-class recruits and officers had seldomly rubbed shoulders with the working classes. However, military service provided them with a clearer perspective on the patchwork of interlocking cultures and peoples that made up England.⁷⁷ Soldiers talked constantly about events at home, while their letters and parcels were filled to the brim with stories and rumours about life on the Home Front.⁷⁸ Michael Roper suggests such stories provided a 'common topic' for discussion and helped to clarify images of home. They bolstered 'connections with lives they had left' and helped to foster relationships between soldiers as they 'started to know more about one another'.⁷⁹ Certainly, many officers became attached to the rank and file, astounded by their resilience and 'cheeriness'.⁸⁰ Lieutenant J.H. Johnson was brought up in the Brighton and Hove area but served in the Border Regiment. Fascinated by the Cumberland and Westmorland accents he encountered, he recorded their linguistic quirks in his diary. After being transferred to another unit he recorded his 'pleasure of seeing Border men again' upon encountering them.⁸¹ Charles Carrington explained that 'I shall never think of the "Lower Classes" again in the way I used to after seeing them just as obscenely noisy and cheerful in a seven days bombardment as in a football match'.⁸² Carrington felt an affinity with the men under his command and, it seems, began reconsidering his previous assumptions about social order. Importantly, even after being brought up in New Zealand,

76. For the ASC, see M. Young, *Army Service Corps, 1902–1918* (Leigh-on-Sea, 2012). For the RAMC, J. Meyer, *An Equal Burden: The Men of the Royal Army Medical Corps in the First World War* (Oxford, 2019).

77. This echoes Linda Colley's arguments. See *Britons*, pp. 242–325 and 'Whose Nation?', pp. 116–17.

78. IWM, Documents.16676, papers of C. Dwyer, diary entries for 27 Sept., 28 Oct. 1914; NAM, 2005-02-6, papers of Capt. M. Asprey, letters to mother and/or father, 17 and 22 Oct., 15, 19, 25 and 29 Nov., 19 and 22 Dec. 1914; SOFO, papers of J.E. Mawer, Box 16 Item 35, letters of 23 Sept., 1 and 19 Oct. and n.d. 1914 (Doc. 15); IWM, Documents.5092, papers of Pte W.M. Anderson, letter to wife 12 Oct. 1916; IWM, Documents.2554, papers of Pte W.J. Martin, letters to wife, 7 and n.d. (no. 5) Dec. 1916.

79. Roper, 'Nostalgia', p. 439.

80. IWM, Documents.11006, papers of Maj. G.H. Greenwell, letter to father, 4 Nov. 1916; IWM, Documents.12339, papers of Brig. Gen. G.A. Stevens, letter to mother and father, 28 Oct. 1916, and letter to mother, 13 Oct. 1917.

81. IWM, Documents.7035, papers of Lt J.H. Johnson, diary entries for 25 Nov. 1916 and 22 Oct. 1918.

82. Liddle, WW1/GS/0273, papers of Capt. C. Carrington, no. 83, letter of 25 Oct. 1916.

he never forgot his Birmingham roots and developed a bond with the Warwickshire Regiment that outlasted the war.⁸³

Specific traits continued to be seen as characteristic of local identities and patriotisms. The battalions of the Royal East Kent Regiment contained a large cohort of men from London. These Londoners were apparently more prone to bad language and, according to some, poor personal hygiene than men from more rural or refined backgrounds. However, after some initial shock at these differences, many came to enjoy Londoners' 'good humour'.⁸⁴ The Reverend M.A. Bere had been posted to a casualty clearing station and was similarly struck by the 'wonderfully entertaining' Londoners.⁸⁵ The city's massive population meant that drafts from the capital frequently supplemented regiments that otherwise struggled for numbers. As such, in September 1916 one author in the journal of the Gloucestershire Regiment posed the question: 'How long have we been Londoners?'⁸⁶ Many soldiers from the capital, particular those serving in the pre-war regular army, found themselves adopting their regiment's county as a surrogate home.⁸⁷ C. Dwyer served in the Devonshire Regiment and recorded, almost religiously, the local towns and villages from which each of his dead comrades came.⁸⁸ M.A. Bere was also drawn to the 'soft-hearted' Devonians he encountered and noted the stark contrast between them and the more ruthless 'Jocks' he met.⁸⁹

Specific homelands remained significant to units in part because, despite heavy casualties, many regiments retained surprisingly large cohorts of men from the unit's county or region of origin. Mark Connelly has revealed how a core of regional men remained within battalions of the Royal East Kent Regiment throughout the war.⁹⁰ Similar patterns can be found in other regiments. In 1914 only 10.5 per cent of Border Regiment soldiers serving in France and Belgium came from the unit's home counties of Cumberland and Westmorland. This was in contrast with the 27.9 per cent of the infantrymen from London. Nevertheless, there remained some broad regional cohesion and 32.9 per cent of the men were from the north of England. The Border Regiment's local and regional cohort expanded over the course of the war: between October 1917 and January 1918, 26.7 per cent of the men serving on the Western Front came from Cumberland, 7.4 per cent from Westmorland, and a

83. C.E. Carrington, *The War Record of the 15th Battalion The Royal Warwickshire Regiment* (Birmingham, 1922).

84. Connelly, *Steady the Buffs!*, p. 13.

85. IWM, Documents.12105, papers of the Rev. M.A. Bere, letters, esp. 29 June and 15 Aug. 1916.

86. 'Things We Want to Know', *The Fifth Glo'ster Gazette*, no. 14, 1 Sept. 1916, p. 17.

87. NAM, 1990-06-389, papers of C.S.M. Arthur Thomas Hollingsworth, soldier's pay book; NAM, 78-04-64, papers of Sgt Thomas Eldridge, letter to children, n.d.

88. IWM, Documents.16676, papers of C. Dwyer, diary, 1914.

89. IWM, Documents.12105, papers of the Rev. M.A. Bere, letter, 24 Oct. 1917.

90. Connelly, *Steady the Buffs!*, pp. 241-4.

further 40.3 per cent were from northern counties.⁹¹ Conversely, in the Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry the number of men from these two counties shrank from nearly 50 per cent in late 1914 of their total complement to a little over 35 per cent in late 1917 and early 1918. The number of recruits from the south-east also declined from 25.3 per cent to 11.4 per cent. In 1917/18, however, around 46.7 per cent still came from Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire or the south-east. In late 1917 and early 1918, 41.8 per cent of the men in the Devonshire Regiment were from that county and a further 17.6 per cent came from the West Country. Those regiments embedded in counties with large urban centres often maintained a stronger local or regional core. In the Royal Warwickshire Regiment, for example, 43.5 per cent of the men serving on the Western Front in 1914 were from Birmingham, while 24.6 per cent were from the rest of Warwickshire. By 1917/18 these numbers had decreased, but not dramatically; 28.2 per cent of the soldiers still hailed from Birmingham, 16.8 per cent came from the regiment's home county, while 6.8 per cent were from the wider West Midlands. In the Manchester Regiment, the proportion of Mancunians and recruits from Lancashire actually increased during the war—it is, however, worth noting that there were a large number of the regiment's Territorial battalions serving in the western theatre. Furthermore, the incorporation of 'Pals' battalions—those units comprising men who were promised the opportunity to serve alongside those they enlisted with—certainly helped to increase the representation of local men in urban regiments.⁹²

Rather than the pressures of recruitment and reinforcements significantly diluting demographic cohesion, many units retained a strong imprint of their place of origin. Helen McCartney, in her study of the Liverpool Territorials, has convincingly argued against existing historiographical assumptions regarding the increased 'nationalisation' of enlistment during the war.⁹³ Losses did necessitate a centralised recruitment process and the British developed a new system after the introduction of conscription in 1916. Yet this administrative structure, built around six command districts, allowed many units to maintain some regional homogeneity. Those regiments that recruited from large towns or cities could rely on a substantial pool of men, though smaller units were forced to incorporate drafts from other areas. Following further

91. The Commonwealth War Grave Commission's list of dead, available at <https://www.cwgc.org/find-records/find-war-dead/> (accessed 22 June 2022), has been filtered by unit and dates (1 Oct.–31 Dec. 1914, 1 Oct.–31 Dec. 1916 and 1 Oct. 1917–31 Jan. 1918). This excludes units serving outside the Western Front, but includes men who died in the United Kingdom if they were serving in units posted to Belgium and France. See A. Mayhew, *Making Sense of the Great War: Crisis, Englishness, and Morale on the Western Front* (Cambridge, 2024), pp. 297–308.

92. For 'Pals Battalions', see H. Strachan, *The First World War, I: To Arms* (Oxford, 2003), p. 161, and P. Simkins, *Kitchener's Army: The Raising of the New Armies, 1914–1916* (Barnsley, 2007), pp. 79–100.

93. McCartney, *Citizen Soldiers*, pp. 62–6.

changes in November 1917, recruiting powers were 'passed from the Army Council to the Ministry of National Service' and recruiting areas were 'redrawn, utilizing regional boundaries'.⁹⁴ This created county recruitment pools and helped to maintain reasonably large groups of local or regional men at the heart of many regiments. Soldiers, therefore, often served alongside men of similar backgrounds who had recognisable accents. A familiar brogue could conjure images of home and could create a sense of community.⁹⁵

The nature of regimental (and, more broadly, military) culture also ensured that soldiers remained aware of their unit's local allegiances and historical traditions.⁹⁶ In the British Army, *esprit de corps*, which focused on the peculiarities of the regimental system, helped to foster an allegiance to an imagined place of origin that stressed 'regimental and battalion history and traditions'. It bound 'men to a sense of a shared past'.⁹⁷ Most units that were raised during the war were eventually incorporated into pre-existing regiments and encouraged loyalty to these umbrella structures through training and drill, as well as publications aimed at new recruits.⁹⁸ J.W. Fortescue, the army's official historian, published *The British Soldier's Guide to Northern France and Flanders*, which explained the history of Britain's military interventions in the area and the past glories of individual regiments.⁹⁹ Lieutenant Colonel A.F. Mockler-Ferryman wrote a short book for men who enlisted in the Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry, which narrated the exploits of their forebears.¹⁰⁰ In both instances, specific regional identities were celebrated and this, according to some analyses, played an essential role in the maintenance of unit cohesion and morale.¹⁰¹

Rather than becoming less powerful once at war, a unit's connection to its heartland often became even more meaningful. After heavy losses on 1 July 1916, the 8th and 9th Devons dug a mass grave in the front lines at Mansel Copse. After levelling the shell-torn ground, they were 'anxious the grass seed should be sown this year and specially

94. Connelly, *Steady the Buffs!*, p. 233.

95. IWM, Documents.14710, papers of R.D. Sheffield, letter to father, 9 Nov. 1914; Watson, 'Fighting for Another Fatherland', p. 1143.

96. For the importance of *esprit de corps*, see J. Baynes, *Morale: A Study of Men and Courage. The Second Scottish Rifles at the Battle of Neuve Chapelle, 1915* (London, 1987).

97. Connelly, *Steady the Buffs!*, p. 7; A. Allport, *Browned Off and Bloody-Minded: The British Soldier Goes to War* (New Haven, CT, 2015), pp. 22–5.

98. H. Strachan, 'Training, Morale and Modern War', *Journal of Contemporary History*, xli (2006); S.P. MacKenzie, 'Morale and the Cause: The Campaign to Shape the Outlook of Soldiers in the British Expeditionary Force, 1914–1918', *Canadian Journal of History*, xxv (1990), p. 218.

99. J.W. Fortescue, *The British Soldiers Guide to Northern France and Flanders* (London, [1918]).

100. A.F.M. Ferryman, *Regimental War Tales, 1741–1914: Told for the Soldiers of the Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry, the Old 43rd and 52nd* (Oxford, 1915). See also H. Newbolt, *The Story of the Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry: The Old 43rd and 52nd* (London, 1915).

101. Bowman, *Irish Regiments in the Great War*, pp. 10–31.

Devonshire plants'.¹⁰² In doing so, they sought to wipe that battlefield from the landscape and replace it with a pastoral Devonshire scene; the embodiment, perhaps, of Rupert Brooke's 'corner of a foreign field / That is forever England'.¹⁰³ Indeed, the inscription at the permanent Imperial (now Commonwealth) War Graves Commission cemetery, which was consolidated and reconstructed after the Armistice, reads: 'The Devonshires held this trench, the Devonshires hold it still'. In this case, Devon was the unit's muse as they sought to create their own sacred site of memory.¹⁰⁴

Earlier in the war, and in another part of the line, Londoners named sections of the defences around Ploegsteert Wood after places in England's capital. The maze of trenches included locations such as Somerset House, Piccadilly Circus and Fleet Street.¹⁰⁵ Similarly, at Foncquevillers, a battalion of 'Brummies' christened two trenches 'Livery Street' and 'Hagley Road' after sites in Birmingham.¹⁰⁶ As the men attempted to 'control' the 'environment' and 'render it comprehensible' they made it 'familiar, homely and comfortable'.¹⁰⁷ Elsewhere, Arthur Paget, the colonel of the East Kent Regiment, described how 'through all of these trials the spirit of the regiment—of the Men of Kent—never faltered, its certain hope of victory never wavered'. Local traditions and loyalties were embedded in the name of regiments and were woven into their social fabric.¹⁰⁸

There was, however, an implicit (and sometimes explicit) understanding that these patriotisms fed into a broader collective identity. As one author explained, the nation formed around the acknowledgement of shared language, interests and common ties, and was 'conscious of their unity ... when that unity is threatened'.¹⁰⁹ The ties strengthened at a time of war. Yet, even in acknowledging shared nationhood, men celebrated the local as the building block of that nation. Regional stereotypes created a patchwork of mutually supporting patriotisms rather than a unified national identity. This remained true even after nearly four years of fighting. In the summer of 1918, an article in *The*

102. Maidenhead, Commonwealth War Graves Commission Archive, WG 549/1, Acquisition of Land—France—DGRE Files: 21–15, D.G.R. & E 'Somme' Report, 1 Aug. 1916.

103. Rupert Brooke, *1914 and Other Poems* (London, 1915), p. 15. This also reflects the Edwardian love of gardening: D. Ottewill, *The Edwardian Garden* (New Haven, CT, 1989), and J. Kay, "No Time for Recreations till the Vote is Won"? Suffrage Activists and Leisure in Edwardian Britain', *Women's History Review*, xvi (2007), pp. 540–42.

104. J. Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (1995; Cambridge, 2003). For memorials as 'sacred places', see K.S. Inglis, *Sacred Places: War Memorials in the Australian Landscape* (1998; Melbourne, 2008).

105. P. Chasseaud, *Rats Alley: Trench Names of the Western Front, 1914–1918* (Stroud, 2006), pp. 22–3.

106. Carrington, *War Record*, p. 16.

107. Chasseaud, *Rats Alley*, pp. 22–3.

108. Connelly, *Steady the Buffs!*, p. 1.

109. 'Esprit de Corps', *Chronicles of the White Horse: Queen's Own Royal West Kent Regiment*, no. 2, 1 Apr. 1917, p. 4.

Fifth Gloucester Gazette described the characteristics of men from a variety of regiments. It explained that the soldiers of the Gloucestershire Regiment ‘think of themselves as West countrymen’. The author was a member of this regiment and stated that ‘they are an exceptionally good lot, the pick of the physique and the intelligence of the city ... having the natural modesty’ of men from the area.¹¹⁰ The author then turned to the Worcestershire Regiment. Having seen these ‘Midland men in the fields of France’, he concluded that ‘there are none finer than those of the ancient cathedral cities and counties’. He had been particularly struck by their physical stature as well as by their resilience, positivity, and eagerness ‘to be at the enemy again’: ‘The enemy must have thought them supermen’.¹¹¹ The Warwickshire Regiment, whose volunteer battalions contained many men from Birmingham’s urban slums, were characterised as ‘stronger in patriotic instinct than body’. Nevertheless, they had experienced a ‘good deal of weeding out and re-shaping’ and they now had a ‘reputation [for being effective trench raiders] to maintain’.¹¹² Tellingly, there was a sense of shared and overlapping patriotic identity: an implicit acceptance that Englishness could take various forms and that these were complementary.

II

These overlapping varieties of patriotism rested on soldiers’ perception of the nation as a particular and personally resonant homeland. The strength and nature of their patriotism stemmed from their relationship with an England built around an ‘imagined community’ and a physical environment, both of which were overlaid with symbols embedded in the images men constructed within their minds.¹¹³ This implicit nation contained few of the grander trappings of British nationhood. Such nuances can be found in Michael Roper’s work on soldiers’ mentalities. He argues that ‘most veterans probably imagined ... [England as] a short-hand for loved ones, bricks and mortar, a garden or a neighbourhood, perhaps a local landscape’.¹¹⁴ Yet historians of the First World War have rarely interrogated this insight or dwelled on what this meant for national identity. Englishness was constructed around a variety of frames of reference. Paul Readman has shown that the symbolism of

110. ‘What We Think of Ourselves’, *The Fifth Gloucester Gazette*, no. 23, 1 July 1918, p. 1.

111. *Ibid.*

112. *Ibid.*

113. For imagined communities, see Anderson, *Imagined Communities*. For landscape and national identity, P. Readman, ‘“The Cliffs are not Cliffs”: The Cliffs of Dover and National Identities in Britain, c.1750–c.1950’, *History*, xcix (2014), esp. pp. 244–5. For ‘mindscapes’, V.G. Liulevicius, *War Land on the Eastern Front: Culture, National Identity and German Occupation in World War I* (Cambridge, 2009), p. 151.

114. M. Roper, *The Secret Battle: Emotional Survival in the Great War* (Manchester, 2009), p. 13.

a diversity of landscapes was integral to English identity: the cliffs of Dover; the moors in the northern borderlands; the picturesque topography of the Lake District; the arboreal splendour of the New Forest; the meandering, wealth-creating length of the River Thames; and the 'shock landscape' of Manchester.¹¹⁵ The myriad forms England could take were also evident in commercial postcard series, which included a wide variety of designs representing 'home' and the nation. These ranged from picturesque ivy-coated cottages and village lanes, through to the town and cityscapes of Birmingham, Leeds, or Manchester.¹¹⁶ While images of homelands were, in part, collectively constructed, they were also very intimate. They were often drawn from personal experience and memory of specific scenes; they could be rural or urban, domestic or public.

The war itself encouraged allegiances to particular homelands, and regional landscapes were celebrated in soldiers' newspapers.¹¹⁷ Written by soldiers for soldiers, trench journalism played an important role in nurturing and re-emphasising particular visions of England.¹¹⁸ One article, in the magazine of the Duke of Cambridge's Own (Middlesex) Regiment, described an archetypal Middlesex soldier's imagined homeland. Rural recruit John Biddicome disembarked in 'Lunnon' on his way home for seven days' leave. While he had heard of it, this was his first experience of the capital. On entering the 'great city' he found that 'everywhere there were houses and chimneys and smoke'. Although it was exciting, it certainly was not home. Biddicome's England was 'the old farm on Beacon Hill, and Parson Smirke and Squire Fowley and all the village folk'.¹¹⁹ Other journals took a more anonymised approach, but still drew on local and regional scenes. The Buffs' journal celebrated Kent as England's 'garden'. The hops, the corn and the orchards all contributed to a 'richness' that was unsurpassed.¹²⁰ *The Fifth Gloucester Gazette's* perspective shifted westwards. One issue contained a review of soldier-poet F.W. Harvey's recent publication. This volume, the reviewer claimed, captured Tommy's 'inarticulate longing for some little village garden in Gloucestershire or somewhere'. In this case, it was the Cotswolds, the Malvern Hills, and panoramas of the 'Severn plain' that

115. Readman, *Storied Ground*, esp. pp. 1–21.

116. Author's collection, anonymous postcards, 'Little Grey Home in the West [2]'; 'I Want to See the Dear Old Home Again [3]'; 'Take Me Back to Dear Old Blighty [2]'.

117. J.G. Fuller shows that there were at least 107 trench journals in the British and Dominion forces; see *Troop Morale*, pp. 7–10.

118. 'Signaller's Alphabet', *The Cherrybuff: The Magazine of a Battalion of the Cheshire Regiment*, 1 Sept. 1917, pp. 17–18; 'Editorial', 'Pelican Pie': *The Official Organ of the West Riding Division*, no. 1, 1 Dec. 1917, p. 20.

119. Pte B.J. Lamb, 'Private Biddicome Comes to London', *Fall In: The Duke of Cambridge's Own Middlesex Regiment*, 1, no. 11, 6 May 1916, p. 222.

120. M.A. Elmslie, 'Men of Kent', *War Dragon: Regimental Magazine of 'The Buffs' (East Kent Regiment)*, no. 4, 1 Sept. 1916, p. 23.

made the poet 'hear the heart within me cry'.¹²¹ A West Country regiment proclaimed its love for the sea, but also for the undulating hills of Dartmoor in which butterflies rested on the bracken, soft heather, ferns and foxgloves.¹²² *The Sussex Patrol* also focused on coastal landscapes, but this time those of England's southern shores. Important character traits were drawn from the natural world. The regiment's soldiers were compared to the terrain of the south coast. It had been these cliffs and beaches that had preserved 'Old England ... in all her bloody wars'. There were, it proclaimed, 'many, many watchers', whose 'constant vigil' kept the civilians 'safe'.¹²³

Even those publications aimed at officers and wider audiences tended to produce very particular depictions of England, though they drew more heavily on literary influences. It is here, for example, that one more readily finds those ideas of 'Old(e)' England which held immense cultural capital during the Edwardian period.¹²⁴ *The Bankers' Draft*, the journal of the 26th Royal Fusiliers, fused the historical, pastoral and social in its portrayal of 'Merrie England'. There were lakes and primroses; birdsong and blooming hedges; children playing joyfully; and abundant wheat fields. Men felt a devotion to this: 'the finest land on earth'.¹²⁵ The most exquisite visions were of a perfect spring or summer day. Foreign climates were a poor substitute for England during warmer months. The 'glory of sunshine, blue skies and cotton-wool clouds' were the perfect ceiling for 'the meadows and trees of old England ... dressed in their very best and most soothing greens'.¹²⁶ For some it was in the south-east that one could find the most desirable and typical English scenery. Surrey, for example, was a patchwork of 'wonderful sights' such as a 'cornfield blushing blood-red with a thousand poppies'. Aside from the allusion to blood (which was possibly the unconscious intervention of this soldier's present), these images were the very fabric of 'a picture of home'.¹²⁷ This was, however, more than men parroting a literary construct. Many soldiers returning on leave traversed these landscapes. The trains that took them from the coast navigated the countryside *en route* to London. It was 'always a most

121. 'A Soldier-Poet. *A Gloucestershire Lad at Home and Abroad*. By F.W. Harvey. Sidgwick & Jackson. Reviewed by Bishop Frodsham', *The Fifth Gloucester Gazette*, no. 16, 1 Dec. 1916, pp. 13–14. Harvey had contributed to this journal earlier in the war (but was a prisoner by this stage). See, also, F. Townsend, *The Laureate of Gloucestershire: The Life and Works of F.W. Harvey* (Bristol, 1988), and A. Boden, *F.W. Harvey: Soldier, Poet* (Cheltenham, 2016).

122. 'A Breath of the Homeland', *The F.S.R.: A Monthly Magazine*, 1 Oct. 1915, p. 11.

123. E.M., 'Old England's Shores', *The Sussex Patrol*, i, no. 7, 1 Dec. 1916, p. 7.

124. 'The Broken Mill', *The Dagger or 'London in the Line'*, no. 1, 1 Nov. 1918, p. 23; IWM, Documents.12521, papers of R.E.P. Stevens, diary entry for 13 Nov. 1916. Also Readman, 'Place of the Past', pp. 147–99.

125. T.F.T., 'Oh for June in Merrie England!', *The Bankers' Draft: Magazine of the 26th Battn. (Bankers') Royal Fusiliers*, i, no. 2, 1 July 1916, p. 3.

126. 'A Home Letter to Soldiers Overseas', *The Balkan News*, cclix (July 1918), p. 1.

127. *Ibid.*

wonderful experience' for the returning Tommy 'and they sit with their eyes glued to the fields and villages rushing past them and drink in old England'.¹²⁸ Descriptions of England were not always peculiar to the regiment's home region, but could also stem from the unit's collective memory. *The Royal Sussex Herald* referenced training during 'its cyclist days on the east coast' and an 'old friend Mrs. Waite, the landlady of the "Fisherman's Return" at Winterton, Norfolk'.¹²⁹ It had apparently been a 'bleak and unlovely place', but Mrs Waite had left them with an impression of an England that encompassed more than just their home county or counties.¹³⁰

Officers, and well-educated rank and file, were most likely to turn to the rural and pastoral idylls celebrated in popular culture.¹³¹ The countryside held a central place in contemporary discourse and it was a familiar reference point, even for men from urban areas.¹³² In fact, it informed many men's choice of illustrated diaries. Captain Aubrey I. Fellows Pryne's journal had pages adorned with illustrations of flowers.¹³³ Private W.C. Tully's was filled to the brim with descriptions and drawings of Britain's flora and fauna: 'flowering trees, Lilacs, Laburnums, [and] Guelder Roses' appeared alongside images of 'heather', 'noble Red Deer' and 'Hops'.¹³⁴ Officers, in particular, were drawn to the kind of archetypal English landscapes Caroline Dakers has explored in her work on the countryside.¹³⁵ For example, Captain G.B. Donaldson imagined England to be a patchwork of 'cottage gardens' as well as 'lanes and woodlands, or ... misty mountains and moors'.¹³⁶ Reginald Neville revered the 'thick woods' near Camberley, Surrey, while Alec Waugh's novel *The Loom of Youth* was used actively by Lieutenant J.H. Johnson to redirect his thoughts to coastal scenes of the south-west.¹³⁷ Generally, the rank and file were more likely to draw on their lived memories of home as the primary framework for their Englishness (possibly because they were less mobile). Still, many—such as W.C. Tully—had a wider lens. Day trips, both to the country and coast, were hugely popular and left soldiers with memories of more

128. Ibid.

129. 'A Mother of England', *The Royal Sussex Herald*, iv, no. 44, Sept. 1918, p. 154.

130. Ibid.

131. J. Lewis-Stempel, *Where Poppies Blow: The British Soldier, Nature, The Great War* (London, 2016), ch. 1; A. Fletcher, *Life, Death, and Growing Up on the Western Front* (New Haven, CT, 2013), p. 290.

132. Readman, *Land and Nation*, pp. 1–12.

133. Dorchester, The Keep Military Museum [hereafter TKM], papers of Capt. Aubrey I. Fellows Pryne, Item A/N 2000/230/6, Onoto Diary, 1918.

134. Liddle, WW1/GS/1634, papers of Pte C.L. Tully, diary.

135. C. Dakers, *Forever England: The Countryside at War, 1914–1918* (London, 2015), pp. 1–19.

136. IWM, Documents.10933, papers of Capt. G.B. Donaldson, letters to mother, 28 June and 9 July 1916.

137. IWM, Documents.7035, papers of Lt J.H. Johnson, diary entry for 18 Dec. 1917.

than just their home town or village.¹³⁸ Though Private John Peat was from Manchester, he kept a selection of postcards showing rural sights in Shropshire, Surrey and Wiltshire.¹³⁹ After Sergeant Harry Hopwood received a postcard from a friend who had visited Whitsand Bay, Cornwall, he recalled 'going there from Penzance once ... and having a bathe there'.¹⁴⁰ For men from rural backgrounds, though, it was often a personal rather than literary connection that meant the countryside resonated with them. H.T. Madders pictured very precise locations when he thought of 'dear old home': the small villages and towns populating the wooded Malvern Hills, particularly 'Putley and dear old quiet Ledbury'.¹⁴¹

For many men from the urban working classes, their homeland was based on city streets or the interior of a house. In truth, some found that bucolic scenes were of little relevance to them. Henry Lawson's platoon contained two farmers and gardener. The other men were 'town bred' and Lawson complained that they were 'not at all interested in the countryside'.¹⁴² Both A.P. Burke and Lance Corporal C. White thought almost exclusively of Manchester. They had internalised its warren of streets and the city's industrial landscape.¹⁴³ Private W.J. Martin was excited to see London buses on the Western Front since they provided a welcome reminder of the city he called home.¹⁴⁴ Some men found that London came to represent England in part because they spent their leave there and it became the location of their reintegration into civilian life.¹⁴⁵ For most, though, it was their homes that mattered most. England and Oxford were intertwined in the imagination of J.E. Mawer. The colleges and streets, and his own house, lay at the forefront of his mind.¹⁴⁶ Captain G.B. Donaldson focused on Cambridge. Memories of the university revolved around the 'red brick houses' that rose 'straight from the river' at Queens' College.¹⁴⁷ Despite such idealised recollections, many of Edwardian Britain's urban areas were dens of 'ill health, insecurity, grinding poverty, and resigned

138. P. Johnson, 'Conspicuous Consumption and Working-Class Culture in Late-Victorian and Edwardian Britain', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th ser., xxxviii (1988), pp. 27–42; J. Hannavy, *The English Seaside in Victorian and Edwardian Times* (London, 2011).

139. Ashton-under-Lyne, Tameside Local Studies and Archive Centre, Manchester Regiment Archive [hereafter MR], papers of Pte John Peat, 3/17/126, postcards of Stockton Church, Codford, Stonehenge and Witley.

140. NAM, 1974-03-29, papers of Sgt Harry Hopwood, letter to mother, 3 Nov. 1917.

141. IWM, Documents.11289, papers of H.T. Madders, diary entries for 1, 3 and 9 Apr. 1918.

142. Liddle, WW1/GS/0933, papers of H. Lawson, letter to mother, 7 Mar. 1918.

143. IWM, Documents.1665, papers of A.P. Burke, letters to Reg, 21 Nov. and 29 Dec. 1916; London, Royal Fusiliers Museum [hereafter RFM], RFM.ARC.3032, papers of L/Cpl C. White, diary entry for 4 Jan. 1918.

144. IWM, Documents.2554, papers of Pte W.J. Martin, letter, 25 Dec. 1916.

145. 'An Episode', *Cambridge Territorial Gazette*, no. 4 (October 1916), p. 88.

146. SOFO, papers of J.E. Mawer, Box 16 Item 35, doc. 14, letter, 23 Sept. 1914; doc. 15, letter, n.d. [1914]; doc. 20, letter to wife, w/c 19 Oct.; doc. 27, letter to wife, n.d. [mid-Dec. 1914].

147. IWM, Documents.10933, papers of Capt. G.B. Donaldson, letter to mother, 16 June 1916.

hopelessness'.¹⁴⁸ Yet, despite the horrors of peacetime poverty, once at war soldiers remembered home with remarkable fondness. This, perhaps, reflects Michael Roper's assertion that nostalgia was a central emotional experience during the war years.¹⁴⁹

No matter where they were from, these men tended to sanitise and romanticise their visions of their homeland, emphasising positive and meaningful images. It helped if they remembered places at specific moments in time. This was evident in the letters of Reginald Neville, an officer, and R.E.P. Stevens, a working-class man in the rank and file. Both found themselves thinking about Christmas at home. In Neville's case, gramophone music prompted him to recall festivities in his household.¹⁵⁰ Stevens, on the other hand, imagined the throngs of excited shoppers milling about the streets of his home town.¹⁵¹ At other times, his imagined England merged the dining-room fireside, the 'interior of houses I was want [*sic*] to visit,' and 'the parish of Godly [*sic*; Godley, Manchester] and [its] every street'.¹⁵² The rural poor regularly faced even harder lives than those in urban areas. Nevertheless, they too were able to focus on (or at least selectively remember) the more positive features of England. Many combatants imagined domestic interiors. Private William Anderson, for example, explained to his wife that 'I often picture our house in my mind, and many a time I fancy my spirit (if that is not too fanciful) wanders through the rooms'.¹⁵³ Even men from relatively affluent backgrounds could have myopic visions of England, such as Second Lieutenant D. Henrick Jones, who focused on his marital bedroom.¹⁵⁴ For other soldiers, community events epitomised England. Football, rugby and other popular pursuits took place in the British Army and helped to kindle memories that supplemented this territorial jigsaw.¹⁵⁵ For some men, such as Harry Hopwood, it was institutions such as their local 'Conservative Club' that occupied centre stage in their visions of England.¹⁵⁶

England could, in the minds of the soldiers studied here, encompass the natural and built environment. This was rarely informed by top-down rhetoric dictating what form the nation should take. These were personal imaginaries and reflect the ways in which patriotism could, at least in this case, be considered as a relationship between individual

148. Gregory, *Last Great War*, p. 278.

149. Roper, 'Nostalgia'.

150. SOFO, papers of Lt R.N. Neville, Box 16 Item 3, letter to sister, 26 June 1917.

151. IWM, Documents.12521, papers of R.E.P. Stevens, diary entry for 23 Dec. 1916.

152. *Ibid.*

153. IWM, Documents.5092, papers of Pte W.M. Anderson, letter, 14 Nov. 1916.

154. IWM, Documents.16345, papers of 2nd Lt D. Henrick Jones, letters to fiancée/wife, 16 Oct. and 25–6 Dec. 1916.

155. IWM, Documents.5092, papers of Pte W.M. Anderson, letter, 15 Nov. 1916; IWM, Documents.15743, papers of J.M. Nichols, diary entries for 17, 18 and 19 Dec. 1916.

156. NAM, 1974-03-29, papers of Sgt H. Hopwood, letter, 29 Dec. 1914.

soldier and country that largely excluded political emotions. Patriotism was fostered by soldiers' perceptions of important social groups. Men thought obsessively about their parents, wives, children, siblings, lovers and friends, and nurtured these relationships at a distance.¹⁵⁷ These were, after all, the people they sought to protect. England was simultaneously a physical and a social space. The landscapes, townscapes and buildings that gave form to the homeland were inhabited by people whom these men loved and to whom they felt they owed allegiance. Who and what they imagined was informed, in part, by the men's backgrounds and ages. Michael Roper has shown that many men's relationships with home often focused on their parents, particularly their mothers.¹⁵⁸ Younger men—and many combatants were very young—tended to be drawn to their childhood homes. In contrast, married men's responsibilities as husbands and fathers meant that England was, more often than not, a synonym for their wives and children.¹⁵⁹ Of course, broader communities continued to play an important role in infantrymen's visions of the homeland and their calls to 'remember me to all those at home' reflected a real desire to remain part of this wider social network.

An important component of soldiers' national identity was this belief that they belonged to particular communities. Their deep and sustaining relationship with their close relatives and friends has been well recorded. Yet men's relationship with England went beyond these immediate groups. Famously, Benedict Anderson argued that printing, in its broadest sense, reinforced the imagined national community.¹⁶⁰ Significantly, newspapers, postcards and letters helped soldiers to construct England by feeding their imaginations. They enabled soldiers to 'see' their friends and families.¹⁶¹ William Anderson explained that 'we are all interested in anything concerning home'.¹⁶² Many men turned to their local newspapers, which contained familiar names and reference points.¹⁶³ John Mawer used the *Oxford Times* as a window onto the world he had left behind.¹⁶⁴ Private C.E. Wild found that it was the *Manchester Evening News* that offered him the most meaningful picture of England. In March 1918, as the Germans advanced on the Western Front, he was heartened to read of a friend's marriage while making his way through

157. J. Bourke, *Dismembering the Male: Men's Bodies, Britain and the Great War* (Chicago, IL, 1999), p. 152; J. Meyer, *Men of War: Masculinity and the First World War* (London, 2009), p. 45; McCartney, *Citizen Soldiers*, esp. pp. 7–8, 89–118.

158. Roper, *Secret Battle*, p. 13.

159. Roper, 'Nostalgia', pp. 433–4, 438; Mayhew, 'A War Imagined', esp. pp. 11–12.

160. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, pp. 35, 64–5.

161. IWM, Documents.1665, papers of A.P. Burke, letter to Tot, 29 Dec. 1916; Mayhew, 'A War Imagined', pp. 11–12.

162. IWM, Documents.5092, papers of Pte W.M. Anderson, letter to wife, 12 Oct. 1916.

163. IWM, Documents.2554, papers of W.J. Martin, letters, 7 and n.d. [No. 5] Dec. 1916.

164. SOFO, papers of Pte J.E. Mawer, Box 16 Item 35, letters, 23 Sept., 1 and 19 Oct. and n.d. 1914 [doc. 15].

the personal advertisements.¹⁶⁵ Another man explained that his ‘mate’, a man called Sharp, ‘comes from Newcastle + get[s] the chronicle sent out about every other day’.¹⁶⁶ Parcels often contained tangible traces of English culture. Many held food, the sight and smell of which provided a multi-sensory reminder of England. Kippers, cakes, pork-pies, ‘Sausages and Mash’, ‘Fish and Chips’ and other foodstuffs were regularly sent to soldiers; but they often arrived ‘in an indescribable pulp’.¹⁶⁷ Other objects also helped to maintain and even strengthen men’s relationship with England as a social space: clippings of hair and photographic postcards of family and friends provided a tangible link to people and places far away from the war zone.¹⁶⁸ Men also sought out friends and contacts from their civilian lives, which provided them the opportunity to reminisce about and remain a part of communities at home.

This broader sense of community extended to soldiers’ wider family, friends, colleagues, employers and members of social or religious groups. These social ties played an important role in the structure of some units—particularly Territorial and ‘Pals’ battalions, as well as those that recruited men from similar professional backgrounds.¹⁶⁹ F. Hubard sent long letters to his family friends, Mr and Mrs Underhill and their children, asking them how they fared on the Home Front during food shortages and thanking them for their support during his time with the colours.¹⁷⁰ C. Pepys was in regular contact with Dr Butler, a friend from home, who provided him with updates on the partridge hunting season.¹⁷¹ As mentioned earlier, Sergeant Harry Hopwood maintained close contact with his local Conservative Club, which sent him Christmas gifts in return.¹⁷² A number of employees of A&C Black and Company, the London publishing house, kept up a regular correspondence with their employer: for example, E.P. Gilscott enquired about his wife’s allowance, his future with the company, food shortages and zeppelin raids.¹⁷³ Lance Corporal E. Lindsell thanked the company for their generosity while he was in khaki and also offered his condolences about recent zeppelin attacks.¹⁷⁴ Despite his ‘not being in

165. MR, 4/17/388/1, papers of Pte C.E. Wild, diary entries for 10 and 14 Mar. 1918.

166. Liddle, WW1/GS/1005, papers of 2nd Lt J.R. McDonald, letter to mother and father, n.d.

167. IWM, Documents.4041, papers of Capt. M. Hardie, 84/46/1, ‘3rd Section Report on Complaints, Moral, Etc.’, p. 2.

168. MR, 3/17/145, papers of S.B. Smith, letter, 29 Oct. 1917, and postcards: photograph of wife and children and photograph of children [Ethel and Stephen Smith]; SOFO, Papers of J.E. Mawer, Box 16 Item 35, letter, n.d. [c.Nov. 1914] to wife [doc. 24]. Also Mayhew, ‘A War Imagined’, pp. 9–12.

169. Gregory, *Last Great War*, p. 78.

170. IWM, Documents.20211, papers of F. Hubard, letters to Mr and Mrs Underhill, esp. 25 Oct. and 26 Dec. 1916 and 8 Dec. 1917.

171. TKM, 1997/413/1, papers of Col. C. Pepys, letter to mother and father, 20 Sept. 1917.

172. NAM, 1974-03-29, papers of Sgt H. Hopwood, letter, 29 Dec. 1914.

173. Liddle, WW1/GS/0144, papers of A&C Black and Company, E.P. Gilscott, letters, 11 Apr. 1917; 20 May 1917; 8 Aug. 1917; 21 Jan. 1918.

174. *Ibid.*, L/Cpl E. Lindsell, letters, 4 and 6 Dec. 1916; 21 Oct. 1917.

love with Army life', his continued relationship with his bosses pushed him to rationalise his service: 'I am happy in the thought that I am doing my bit and my share towards preventing the youngsters now growing up from being subjected to the horrors of war'.¹⁷⁵ In each of these cases, it was local events that proved to be most meaningful. Elsewhere, religious men felt a continued connection with faith-based communities in England. The act of prayer or reading the Bible allowed men to imagine that they were sharing an experience with those at home.¹⁷⁶ The extent to which religiosity percolated into the daily lives of Britons in the early twentieth century is a matter of some historical debate and, for the most part, soldiers only referenced 'God' as part of an exclamation rather than an expression of devotion.¹⁷⁷ Nonetheless, an internalised faith, if not quite an explicit religiosity, meant that for many these links to religious communities remained a significant feature of their vision of England.¹⁷⁸

Although combatants felt they were a part of a social world that extended beyond their family, there was comparatively little discussion of the state or politics in their letters and diaries, or in soldiers' newspapers. This may, of course, have been a symptom of the censorship of soldiers' letters. However, scholars have argued that soldiers came to perceive two Home Fronts: one that embraced those people close to them, and another focused on an alien world of politicians, uninformed journalists and 'scroungers'.¹⁷⁹ This is, perhaps, reflected in Frank Hardman's sarcastic allusions to 'the British Public'.¹⁸⁰ Of course, some men remained interested in political events on the Home Front. R.E.P. Stevens, for example, recorded important political news in his diary.¹⁸¹ In 1916 the collapse of Asquith's premiership, the end of the 'Wait and See' policy, and Lloyd George's ascent to the position of prime minister were met with curiosity by a number of men.¹⁸² Others were bitter that the war effort was being undermined by politicians,

175. Ibid., letter, 6 Dec. 1916. Also NAM, 2012-10-18, correspondence from employees of book auctioneers Hodgson and Company.

176. IWM, Documents.1708, papers of Lt W.B. Medlicott, letter, 6 Nov. 1916; IWM, Documents.8631, diary of an unidentified soldier in the 2nd Bn Border Regiment, Misc 30, Item 550, entry for 18 Dec. 1914; MR, 3/17/110, papers of Pte H. Oldfield, letter from HSS Class 10 CCS BEF to Mrs Oldfield, 20 Nov. 1917.

177. Gregory, *Last Great War*, pp. 152–86.

178. IWM, Documents.4041, papers of Capt. M. Hardie, notes from censorship, 30 July 1916; and '3rd section report on complaints, Moral, etc.' (Nov. 1916), p. 9. Also IWM, Documents.5092, papers of Pte W.M. Anderson, letter to wife, 5 Nov. 1916; IWM, Documents 16060, papers of the Rev. C.H. Bell, letter to Herbert, 21 Jan. 1918.

179. D. Englander, 'Soldiering and Identity: Reflections on the Great War', *War in History*, i (1994) pp. 313–15. For French soldiers, see Audoin-Rouzeau, *Men at War*, pp. 92–154.

180. IWM, Documents.7233, papers of Col. F. Hardman, letter, 10 Apr. 1918.

181. IWM, Documents.12521, papers of R.E.P. Stevens, diary for 1916, esp. 4 Dec. 1916.

182. IWM, Documents.11532, papers of Capt. R.E.M. Young, letter to Constance, 9 Dec. 1916. IWM, Documents.4041, papers of Capt. M. Hardie, 'Report on III Army Morale, Jan. 1917'.

conscientious objectors and striking workers.¹⁸³ However, those who commented on these topics were usually officers and such events were normally discussed with reference to the conduct of the war rather than as a feature of the homeland. More often than not, when seeking information about the Home Front, men craved local information, stories of personal meaning, and gloried in the apparently mundane details of family life and events in their hometowns. In fact, while disenchantment existed, men's perception of politics was largely characterised by apathy and silence. Illustratively, Private C.R. Smith, of the 7th Buffs, was not afraid to admonish and berate people for perceived injustices. After being hospitalised, he was kept awake by two orderlies, who he described as 'agitators'. These men were engaged in 'an incessant clatter all night arguing on the army, the government and colonies and France'. Smith was convinced they were 'two of the oddest individuals I have seen in France'.¹⁸⁴ Men rarely concerned themselves with an England beyond those landscapes or social groups that mattered most to them as individuals. These were the substance of their sense of identity and their units' normative constructions of Englishness. As the war dragged on—and men's faith in politicians dwindled—this was surely a positive force for their morale.

III

English soldiers' national identity was built around the implicit nation. Their felt Englishness formed around homelands composed of specific places and peoples. It was this that informed their patriotism. Geoffrey Moorhouse's study of the memory of 1914–18 in Bury shows how recollections of the conflict were filtered through a range of local traditions and beliefs.¹⁸⁵ Yet, as this article has revealed, the focus on their homeland—be it town, county or region—often directed and underwrote men's perceptions of the conflict while it was actually occurring. This was not simply the reaction of homesick soldiers, and such constructions of England were actively encouraged by the military. Soldiers' perceptions of the nation were, therefore, most often filtered through local scenes and personal experiences. Importantly, in many ways what soldiers did not write about is as revealing as their descriptions of home. In researching this article, I found little evidence

183. 'Letter from "One of the First Half Million", 'Between and Betwixt' and 'Get on with the War', *The Gasper: The Unofficial Organ of the 18th, 19th, 20th and 21st Royal Fusiliers*, no. 21, 30 Sept. 1916, pp. 2–4; 'Editorial', *The B.E.F. Times*, ii. no. 1 (1917), p. 1–2; SOFO, papers of Lt C.T. O'Neill, Box 16, Item 30, diary entry for 8 Feb. 1918; SOFO, papers of Lt Reginald N. Neville, Box 16, 3/4/N/2, letter to father, 23 Aug. 1917; IWM, Documents.7035, papers of Lt J.H. Johnson, diary entry for 28 Dec. 1917; IWM, Documents.17029, papers of Capt. A.J. Lord, letter to father, 26 Apr. 2018.

184. Connelly, *Steady the Buffs!*, p. 27.

185. G. Moorhouse, *Hell's Foundations: A Town, Its Myths and Gallipoli* (London, 1992).

of a patriotism that formed around political institutions. Local scenes were the building blocks of these soldiers' national identity. This is in striking contrast to the men who served in the British Army during the Second World War.¹⁸⁶ During the Great War, British soldiers' French and German contemporaries similarly fostered a strong sense of local identity (to the *Heimat* or the *petit pays*), but (particularly in France) this co-existed with their political consciousness, sense of citizenship and perception of a greater 'fatherland'.¹⁸⁷ Both the French and Germans (as well as the British Army of 1939–45) suffered crises of morale of a sort not found in the British Expeditionary Force during the earlier war. As such, one might ask if the absolute primacy of these idealised, malleable and mutually supporting imagined homelands made these men less vulnerable to war weariness or pessimism.

While the BEF might have been a civilian army, these were *not* citizen soldiers. In 1914–18, English infantrymen's patriotism was strong and sustaining; but it was a rhetorical frame that drew primarily on personal relationships with landscapes and peoples. These specific visions of England were not exclusionary but complementary; it was accepted that England (and Britain) had many faces and that no single picture was able perfectly to encapsulate the nation. John Horne suggests that 'political legitimacy and a sense of nationhood [is] derived ultimately from the founding acts and embodying mythologies of regime and nation'.¹⁸⁸ In this case, soldiers' mental mobilisation drew on an implicit nation of very specific English homelands. Indeed, the vibrancy of men's visions of these spaces verged on fantasy. They sustained morale *and* offered a clear picture of why victory was essential. These images of England were a powerful tonic and enabled soldiers to justify their suffering. It helped that the British Army embraced and mobilised the patchwork nature of national identity. It seems possible, though, that such parochialism might have contributed to a degree of incoherence in constructions of Britishness in the age of mass politics after 1918.

During the war itself, however, these visions of the homeland allowed men to acknowledge their interlocking patriotisms, which in turn informed their perceptions of their comrades and their duty. In this way, the implicit nation could still support a national war effort even if abstractions such as British democracy or the empire failed to

186. J. Fennell, *Fighting the People's War: The British and Commonwealth Armies and the Second World War* (Cambridge, 2019).

187. E. Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870–1914* (London, 1977). For the French Army, see L.V. Smith, 'War and "Politics": The French Army Mutinies of 1917', *War in History*, ii (1995), pp. 180–201, and *Between Mutiny and Obedience*. For Heimat culture in Germany, C. Applegate, *A Nation of Provincials: The German Idea of Heimat* (Berkeley, CA, 1992). For the German Army, B. Ulrich and B. Ziemann, eds, *German Soldiers in the Great War: Letters and Eyewitness Accounts*, tr. C. Brocks (Barnsley, 2010); S. Stephenson, *The Final Battles: Soldiers of the Western Front and the German Revolution of 1918* (Cambridge, 2009); Ziemann, *War Experiences*, p. 271.

188. J. Horne, 'Introduction', in id., ed., *State, Society and Mobilization*, p. 2.

gain much traction. Scholars have often pointed towards 'British society' (and cultural tropes such as stoicism or deference) as the source of the BEF's resilience in 1914–18.¹⁸⁹ English soldiers' perceptions of their homelands offered vivid pictures of an idealised (and personalised) physical and social world that they sought to protect.¹⁹⁰ The war itself did little to diminish this and F.S. Castle was not alone when he proclaimed the 'joys of real home letters' in a note to his niece.¹⁹¹ Yet historians of 1914–18 have rarely considered what this might reveal about the plurality of English national identity. Far from the 'essential England' being purely rural, or southern, these constructions of England reveal how a powerful array of pastoral and urban patriotisms existed.¹⁹² Rural England was by no means marginal, but nor were modern and urban England rejected. Soldiers' national identity was capable of embracing (or at least acknowledging) multiple 'versions' of the nation.

The war only cemented the power of the implicit nation. England (and Britain) was imagined as a series of overlapping homelands, unique but mutually supporting. Men fought to protect their poignant and personal visions of England. In 1917, *The Spectator* published an article written by a military censor (though it was probably also pro-conscription propaganda). The author explained that soldiers serving in Belgium and France were confronted by the sight of 'prosperous towns in ruins, old men and maidens lying cold in their own homes, [and] the countryside devastated'. They could not help but transplant 'the surroundings of Arras or Ypres to Kent and Cornwall ... It is borne upon him that he is fighting in very truth to guard his own home from the same destruction'. Their connection with these landscapes meant that the war became a 'personal matter'.¹⁹³ Such a conclusion can also be found in the private notes of another censor, who recorded soldiers' explanations of how 'the England we so love dearer still' had seen 'the security and peace of the country' become 'in a sense a part' of them. These were the things for which they 'fought and died'.¹⁹⁴

189. P. Simkins, 'Everyman at War: Recent Interpretations of the Front Line Experience', in B. Bond, ed., *The First World War and British Military History* (Oxford, 1991), p. 301; Fuller, *Troop Morale*, esp. pp. 175–8; J. Winter, *The Experience of World War I* (1988; London, 2000), p. 159; G. Sheffield, *Leadership in the Trenches: Officer–Man Relations, Morale and Discipline in the British Army in the Era of the First World War* (Basingstoke, 2000), pp. 72–3; Gregory, *Last Great War*, p. 278; P. Hodgkinson, *Glum Heroes: Hardship, Fear and Death. Resilience and Coping in the British Army on the Western Front, 1914–1918* (Solihull, 2016), pp. 93–105.

190. Roper, *Secret Battle*, pp. 51, 169.

191. IWM, Documents.20755, papers of F.S. Castle, letter to niece, 29 Oct. 1916.

192. For this argument and quotation, see Kumar, *English National Identity*, p. 211. For anti-modernity, Wiener, *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit*, or R. Colls and P. Dodd, eds, *Englishness: Politics and Culture, 1880–1920* (London, 1987). For a counter-argument, see Mandler, 'Rural Nostalgia', esp. pp. 169–70. For the balance of rural and urban, see, especially, Readman, *Storied Ground*, pp. 13–16.

193. 'On Censoring Letters', *The Spectator*, 14 July 1917, p. 33.

194. IWM, Documents.4041, papers of Capt. M. Hardie, notes from censorship, 15 Mar. 1916. Also IWM, Documents.18524, papers of Pte W. Tapp, diary, 1914, p. 5; IWM, Documents.1690, papers of P.R. Hall, memoir, p. 25.

The personal connection men felt with England as a patchwork of resonant spaces and faces reinforced their belief that the conflict was one of defence.¹⁹⁵ Indeed, the strength of these nostalgic and overwhelmingly positive visions may help to explain the pessimism, bitterness and pacifism of many veterans during the inter-war years.¹⁹⁶ The significance of these homelands also confirms the work of many cultural geographers, who have argued that spaces, particularly when they become reference points for national identity, are constructed or perceived in relation to wider entities, and fuse the past and present.¹⁹⁷ Landscapes are not naturally imbued with meaning, nor is society made cohesive without ties that bind the national community together. It is within the minds of human actors that these processes take place.¹⁹⁸ Soldiers' perceptions of their homelands show how national identity was often nurtured by individual experience and sense of place and, as this article has revealed, formed around the implicit nation.

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195. Watson, *Enduring the Great War*, p. 81; Ziemann, *War Experiences*, p. 271; Nelson, *German Soldier Newspapers*, pp. 50, 240.

196. For bitterness, though not pacifism, see R. Overy, *The Morbid Age: Britain Between the Wars* (London, 2005).

197. See, for example, D. Massey, 'Places and their Pasts', *History Workshop Journal*, no. 39 (1995), pp. 182–95. For the interrelationship between the past and modernity, see M. Daunton and B. Rieger, eds, *Meanings of Modernity: Britain from the Late Victorian Era to World War II* (Oxford, 2001), and G.K. Behlmer and F.M. Leventhal, eds, *Singular Continuities: Tradition, Nostalgia, and Identity in Modern British Culture* (Stanford, CA, 2000).

198. See, especially, Yi-Fu Tuan, *Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes and Values* (New York, 1990), pp. 93–4.