



# Histories, Memories and Representations of being Young in the First World War

*Edited by* Maggie Andrews  
N. C. Fleming · Marcus Morris

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Maggie Andrews  
University of Worcester  
Worcester, UK

N. C. Fleming  
University of Worcester  
Worcester, UK

Marcus Morris  
Manchester Metropolitan University  
Manchester, UK

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## LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

**Maggie Andrews** School of Humanities, University of Worcester, Worcester, UK

**Rebecca Ball** School of Social, Historical and Political Studies, University of Wolverhampton, Wolverhampton, UK

**Hayley Carter** School of Humanities, University of Worcester, Worcester, UK

**Lisa Cox-Davies** School of Humanities, University of Worcester, Worcester, UK

**Sam Edwards** Department of History, Politics and Philosophy, Manchester Metropolitan University, Manchester, UK

**N. C. Fleming** School of Humanities, University of Worcester, Worcester, UK

**Marcus Morris** Department of History, Politics and Philosophy, Manchester Metropolitan University, Manchester, UK

**Anna Muggeridge** School of Humanities, University of Worcester, Worcester, UK

**Ruth Percy** St Hilda's College, University of Oxford, Oxford, UK

**Alison Ronan** Manchester Centre for Public History and Public Heritage, Manchester Metropolitan University, Manchester, UK

**Jane Rosen** Imperial War Museum, London, UK

**Melanie Tebbutt** Department of History, Politics and Philosophy, Manchester Metropolitan University, Manchester, UK

**Keith Vernon** School of Humanities, Language and Global Studies, University of Central Lancashire, Preston, UK

**Oliver Wilkinson** School of Social, Historical and Political Studies, University of Wolverhampton, Wolverhampton, UK

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## CHAPTER 1

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# Introduction

*Maggie Andrews, N. C. Fleming, and Marcus Morris*

A British army recruitment poster, produced in 1915, portrayed a respectable father, kitted out in a brown suit, comfortably seated in an armchair. His daughter sits on his lap and looks at him appearing to ask a question; his son plays with toy soldiers at his feet. The tagline across the bottom of the page asks, ‘Daddy, what did you do in the Great War?’<sup>1</sup> It is more than one hundred years since that poster was produced and despite the plethora of histories written on the First World War and the various projects undertaken to mark its centenary, few have focused on children’s experiences in the war. Though a child’s eye view of the war is starting to receive more attention, the lives of children in the United Kingdom during the conflict

<sup>1</sup> Parliamentary Recruiting Committee, London, Poster 79. Designed and printed by Johnson, Riddle and Co Ltd, London available at <https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/17053> [accessed 12 January 2020].

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M. Andrews (✉) • N. C. Fleming  
School of Humanities, University of Worcester, Worcester, UK  
e-mail: [maggie.andrews@worc.ac.uk](mailto:maggie.andrews@worc.ac.uk); [n.fleming@worc.ac.uk](mailto:n.fleming@worc.ac.uk)

M. Morris  
Department of History, Politics and Philosophy, Manchester Metropolitan University, Manchester, UK  
e-mail: [marcus.morris@mmu.ac.uk](mailto:marcus.morris@mmu.ac.uk)

have all too often been presented, as in this recruitment poster, as merely bit parts in the narratives of others or through an adult's lens. In the main, this reflects the broader cultural memory of the war, which privileges male military experience and a service-sacrifice discourse.<sup>2</sup> Youth here is a recurring theme in relation to service, in age and outlook, as is the 'lost generation' trope.<sup>3</sup> The focus on boy soldiers best epitomises this story of tragic sacrifice.<sup>4</sup>

Children and young people, then, are primarily discussed in relation to other histories. They are, for example, referenced in discussions about the growth of the infant welfare movement; concern for their health is seen as an indication of the growing involvement of government in civic life and welfare.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, histories of childhood tend to focus on the nineteenth century, ending with the outbreak of war.<sup>6</sup> What children did in the war has received very little attention, while children's experiences of war are equally limited. Too often, such experiences are understood in relation to the death—with around 350,000 children losing their fathers during the war—or injury of someone in their family or in the armed forces, even though many children's fathers were not in the forces.<sup>7</sup> Clearly, there is much about children's lives in the First World War that is still to be examined.

<sup>2</sup> George L. Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990); Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory: Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

<sup>3</sup> Jay Winter, 'Britain's "Lost Generation" of the First World War', *Population Studies*, 31, 3 (1977), pp. 449–466; Samuel Hynes, *The Soldier's Tale: Bearing Witness to Modern War* (New York: Penguin, 1997).

<sup>4</sup> Richard van Emden, *Boy Soldiers of the Great War* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012).

<sup>5</sup> See, Deborah Dwork, *War is Good for Babies and other Young Children: A History of the Infant and Child Welfare Movement in England, 1898–1918* (London: Taylor and Francis, 1987); Gerard J. De Groot, *Blighty: British Society in the Era of the Great War* (London: Longman, 1996); Jay Winter, *The Great War and the British People* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

<sup>6</sup> James Walvin, *A Child's World: A Social History of English Childhood 1800–1914* (London: Penguin, 1982); Harry Hendrick, *Children, Childhood and English Society 1880–1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

<sup>7</sup> Richard Van Emden, *The Quick and the Dead: Fallen Soldiers and their Families in the Great War* (London: Bloomsbury, 2011), p. 3; Adrian Gregory, *The Silence of Memory: Armistice Day 1919–1946* (Oxford: Berg, 1994), p. 51.

Children's lives and experiences during the First World War have started to see more attention, though often not in the British context.<sup>8</sup> That attention, moreover, tends to be focused on cultural experiences. Thus, in literary and cultural studies there has been some attention paid to children's literature of the First World War.<sup>9</sup> There has also been a number of studies that examine the literature and film aimed at young people and set in the First World War that has proliferated in recent years, especially with the popularity of the stage and film adaptation of Michael Morpurgo's 1982 novel *War Horse*.<sup>10</sup> Young people's lived experiences, therefore, have not seen much scholarly attention, neither has how those experiences have been represented nor how they have been remembered except in more general studies.<sup>11</sup> A rare exploration of how children were mobilised in support of the war in Britain can be found in the recent research undertaken by Rosie Kennedy. She has argued that the conflict dominated their schooling and suggested that through their participation in wartime activities they sought to maintain a connection to their siblings and fathers.<sup>12</sup>

Building on some of this recent work, *Histories, Memories and Representations of Being Young in the First World War* seeks to place children, young people and their experiences centrally within the study of the contemporary British home front and in the study of the cultural

<sup>8</sup> See Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau and Annette Becker, *14–18: Understanding the Great War* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2000); Susan Fisher, *Boys and Girls in No Man's Land: English-Canadian Children in the First World War* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011).

<sup>9</sup> See Lissa Paul, Rosemary R. Johnston and Emma Short (eds), *Children's Literature and Culture of the First World War* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016); David Budgen, *British Children's Literature and the First World War* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018).

<sup>10</sup> See, Emma Hanna, *The Great War on the Small Screen: Representing the First World War in Contemporary Britain* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009); Esther MacCallum-Stewart, 'If They Ask Us Why We Died: Children's Literature and the First World War 1970–2005', *Lion and the Unicorn*, 31, 2 (2007), pp. 176–188.

<sup>11</sup> See, James Marten (ed.), *Children and War: A Historical Anthology* (London: New York University Press, 2002); Berry Mayall, *Visionary Women and Visible Children, England 1900–1920: Childhood and the Women's Movement* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018); Angela K. Smith and Sandra Barkhof (eds), *War, Experience and Memory since 1914* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018).

<sup>12</sup> Rosie Kennedy, *The Children's War: Britain, 1914–1918* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014). See also, Mike Brown, *Children in the First World War* (Stroud: Amberley, 2017).

memories of the First World War. The chapters contain new research by emerging and established scholars in a series of tightly focussed case studies. These interrogate the multiple effects of war on children and young people, in education, in the workplace, during leisure time and also in the organisations and opportunities that they embraced. The chapters also examine the way in which children were represented by adult organisations, the ways in which they were scrutinised and how these tallied with and impacted on children's experiences, and the tropes and memories of the conflict which contemporary children and young people encounter and understand the war through. Taken together the chapters in this volume seek to shed light on the multiple ways in which the First World War shaped, disrupted and interrupted childhood in the United Kingdom and illuminate simultaneously the selectivity of the portrayal of the conflict within the more typical national narratives and cultural memories.

Just as childhood has received limited attention in histories of the First World War, so too the coverage of the conflict in histories of childhood has been partial.<sup>13</sup> In part, this reflects how childhood is a relatively recent, but growing, area for historical study. It also reflects the methodological issues of studying childhood.<sup>14</sup> Questions exist over how as historians we understand the perspectives of children in the past, and how or even whether, we can separate them from the influence of adults. Issues of agency abound then, when studying children and young people both in the past and in the present, while we also need to be conscious of the complex relationships between younger and older children as well as adults.<sup>15</sup> There are further complexities to understanding children's and young people's experiences, for instance the emotional experiences of war.<sup>16</sup> Mindful of

<sup>13</sup> Hugh Cunningham, *Children and Childhood in Western Society since 1500* (Harlow: Longman, 2005).

<sup>14</sup> See Peter N. Stearns, 'Challenges in the History of Childhood', *Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth*, 1, 1 (2018), pp. 35–42; Mary Jo Maynes, 'Age as a Category of Historical Analysis: History, Agency and Narratives of Childhood', *Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth*, 1, 1 (2018), pp. 114–124; Kristine Monzi, Nell Musgrave and Carly Leahy Pascoe (eds), *Children's Voices from the Past: New Historical and Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019).

<sup>15</sup> Mona Gleason, 'Avoiding the Agency Trap: Caveats for Historians of Children, Youth and Education', *History of Education*, 45, 4 (2016), pp. 446–459.

<sup>16</sup> Stephanie Olsen, 'The History of Childhood and the Emotional Turn', *History Compass*, 15 (2017), pp. 1–10.

such debates and challenges, and hoping to add to the discussion, this collection has taken a broad approach to understanding both childhood and youth, their experiences and what influenced them and how they have subsequently been represented and remembered. It also takes a broad approach when it comes to the question of age with conceptions changing over the chronology covered in the chapters, and thus considers young people to include those in their late teens and even early twenties.

The stimulus for this collection lies in the 2015 conference entitled 'Being Young in World War One' held at Manchester Metropolitan University. This international conference, with contributions from community groups and schools as well as academics from across the world—including Canada, France and New Zealand—sought to examine the effects of the First World War on children and young people, and its social and psychological legacies. The conference demonstrated that growing up in a period of conflict had an immense impact on the young. There were deep fears, anxieties and disruption, but also freedoms, opportunities and excitement. Papers also demonstrated how the image of the child became a potent figure during the war, and a contested one after its end. Moreover, other contributors reflected on the multiple ways and mediums—for example, education, film, television, literature and computer games—in and through which the cultural memory of the war has presented young people's wartime experiences. The international background of contributors to the conference was indicative of the very different approach taken to children and the First World War in some countries. Moreover, the sheer variety of papers emphasised the varied wartime experiences of young people, which went beyond the traditional tropes, narratives and memories. This diverse collection thus brings together some of those contributors in order to shed new light on the histories, memories and representations of young people in the First World War.

This collection has two distinct, but inter-related, aims. First, it explores the experiences of children and young people in the United Kingdom during the conflict. Second, it is a consideration of how the conflict is portrayed or communicated to children in contemporary Britain. As noted above, the voices of children, their experiences and emotions are often hidden and were so during the First World War. Research can be challenging, it is not always found in national archives, relying instead on traces and snippets of evidence gleaned from a range of sources. The three chapters in Part I, "Childhood in War", thus rely upon local studies. Rebecca Ball's chapter uses accounts of working-class childhood in Birmingham,

London and Greater Manchester, contained within unpublished autobiographies from the John Burnett collection, to illuminate how varied childhood experiences were during the war. Alternatively, in Alison Ronan's chapter, the activities of Manchester's suffrage, socialist and pacifist women illustrate how their attempts to address 'the special problems of child life accentuated by war' provide a window into children's wartime experiences. In the final chapter in this section, Maggie Andrews, Hayley Carter, Lisa Cox-Davies and Anna Muggeridge draw upon local newspapers, school logbooks and local archives to demonstrate that the demands of work in the home and fields disrupted the education of children in rural Worcestershire.

Part II of this volume, in examining Youth in War, explores the experiences of young people in the time that they had outside formal education or the workplace. It sheds light on concerns about Britain's youth, attempts to control them, the gender dynamics of youth and how young people were active agents shaping their own lives even in wartime. The first chapter, by Melanie Tebbutt, illuminates not only the centrality of the cinema in the lives of urban young people, but how wartime darkness intensified familiar adult fears and anxieties about children whilst also sanctioning children's autonomous communities. In the following chapter, N. C. Fleming demonstrates that the First World War was a significant turning point for the Navy League and its relationship with children. The next two chapters both serve as reminders that young people often eschewed societal expectations, while their experiences and outlook do not necessarily conform to popular understandings. Marcus Morris examines the stories of 'girls who would fight', demonstrating how many young women actively fought against gendered assumptions and limits placed on them. Likewise, Ruth Percy points out that it was the pleasures of consumerism and leisure that have dominated the memories of young girls who came of age in London during the conflict, rather than those that underpin popular memories of the war. The final chapter in the section is Keith Vernon and Oliver Wilkinson's study of young students at the Harris Institute in Preston during the First World War, which reveals some of the new opportunities that the conflict offered young people. Moreover, the chapter acts as a bridge to Part III as it also examines contemporary understandings of the war and the place of children and youth within those through the volunteers that took part in the 'Preston Remembers' project.

Young people's engagement with the First World War did not end in 1918 or when these young people entered adulthood. The conflict remains

central to children's education, it features in their leisure time—take the First World War computer game *Battlefield 1*, which sold fifteen million copies worldwide in 2017 alone—and has a cultural legacy in fiction, on television and in film.<sup>17</sup> Consequently, the final section considers the cultural memories and representations of young people's lives in the conflict and the portrayal of this war that has been presented to young people in recent years. The first chapter, by Jane Rosen, examines the anachronisms of the portrayal of women and class in the children's literature published in the last forty years. Sam Edwards then examines how the First World War has been watched and remembered through television productions aimed at children and young people, becoming a sight of memory. In the final chapter, Maggie Andrews, bringing together many of the themes covered in the other sections, discusses how multiple accommodations have had to be made in attempting to create a palatable past for consumption by young people in recent commemorative activities.

The chapters in this volume vary in both topic and approach. Perhaps inevitably for a collection that represents a snapshot of research being undertaken at a particular moment in time, there are far more omissions than inclusions. This is especially the case with an area of study that is very much in development. There was a serendipity in the material that came forward for potential inclusion, many geographical places, many areas of work or volunteering that children undertook, many memories and narratives of wartime childhood experience are thus unfortunately excluded. There are numerous areas of children's experience of the conflict that are yet to be uncovered, and many more that may be impossible to uncover. However, we hope that this volume will both stimulate academic debate and encourage interesting new directions for future research about children and young people's relationship with the First World War.

<sup>17</sup><https://venturebeat.com/2017/01/23/morgan-stanley-raises-battlefield-1-sales-estimate-to-15-million/> [accessed 18 February 2020].

PART I

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## Childhood in War



## CHAPTER 2

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# ‘Birmingham clapped her hands with the rest of the world, welcoming the signs of peace’: Working-Class Urban Childhoods in Birmingham, London and Greater Manchester During the First World War

*Rebecca Ball*

## INTRODUCTION

Ellsye Finnie was a young girl of eleven living in Birmingham when the First World War broke out. Her noting of the metaphorical clapping of the city’s hands at the end of the conflict suggests relief that the war was over. However, her autobiographical account of the war did not focus solely on the tragic or destructive nature of the conflict. Instead, Ellsye’s memories included a variety of experiences and changes to her everyday life, some of

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Ellsye Finnie, ‘*Touch-Down’ Or ‘Sing Toward Evening’: Autobiography 1903–1978* (London: unpublished, Burnett Archive of Working Class Autobiographies: uncatalogued [n.d.]), p. 46, hereafter Burnett Archive.

The author would like to thank Brunel University Special collections for allowing access to the archive, and Laura Ugolini, Elizabeth Ball, Simon Ball and Carol Henderson for their help, support and comments.

which she viewed with ‘childish excitement’.<sup>1</sup> Little attention has been awarded to such experiences: the everyday lives of children are almost totally absent from discussions about life on the British home front during the war.<sup>2</sup> This exclusion is not surprising, as academic discussion of childhood is itself a relatively new area of study. Harry Hendrick noted in 1997 just how few works were devoted solely to the history of childhood.<sup>3</sup> This limited, albeit growing, pool of academic work has an even smaller subsection dedicated to the experiences of children during the First World War.<sup>4</sup> Although the work of historians such as Rosie Kennedy and Richard van Emden provides an excellent starting point, their focus has tended to

<sup>1</sup> Finnie, ‘Touch-Down’, p. 40.

<sup>2</sup> Gerard De Groot, *Blighty: British Society in the Era of the Great War* (London: Pearson, 1996); George Robb, *British Culture and the First World War* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002); Ian Beckett, *Home Front 1914–1918: How Britain Survived the Great War* (Kew: The National Archives, 2006); Adrian Gregory, *The Last Great War: British Society and the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Tammy Proctor, *Civilians in a World War, 1914–1918* (London: New York University Press, 2010); Alan Simmonds, *Britain and World War One* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012); Gerard De Groot, *Back in Blighty: The British at Home in World War One* (London: Vintage, 2014); Terry Charman, *The First World War on the Home Front* (London: Imperial War Museums, 2014).

<sup>3</sup> Harry Hendrick, *Children, Childhood and English Society 1880–1990* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 1. Studies of childhood include, Stephen Humphries, *Hooligans or Rebels? An Oral History of Working-Class Childhood and Youth 1889–1939* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1981); John Burnett, *Destiny Obscure: Autobiographies of Childhood, Education and Family from the 1820s to the 1920s* (London: Penguin, 1984); Carolyn Steedman, *Childhood, Culture and Class in Britain: Margaret McMillan, 1860–1931* (London: Virago Press, 1990); Hugh Cunningham, *Children and Childhood in Western Society Since 1500* (London: Routledge, 2005); Anthony Fletcher, *Growing up in England: The Experience of Childhood 1600–1914* (London: Yale University Press, 2008); Jane Humphries, *Childhood and Child Labour in the British Industrial Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) and James Marten, *The History of Childhood: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

<sup>4</sup> For examples see James Marten (ed.), *Children and War: A Historical Anthology* (London: New York University Press, 2002); Richard van Emden, *The Quick and the Dead: Fallen Soldiers and their Families in the Great War* (London: Bloomsbury, 2011); Rosie Kennedy, *The Children’s War Britain, 1914–1918* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); Lissa Paul, Rosemary Ross Johnston and Emma Short (eds), *Children’s Literature and Culture of the First World War* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016) and Mike Brown, *Children in the First World War* (Stroud: Amberley, 2017).

be on the childhood memories of those with a serviceman family member who was absent or killed.<sup>5</sup> Again such focus is not surprising as academic work on the First World War understandably prioritises soldiers' experiences over the potentially more mundane memories of those on the home front. As Stephen Heathorn argues, it is the soldier's story that has 'dominated remembrance and commemoration of the Great War since the 1930s'.<sup>6</sup> However, this fixation on the soldier's story and by extension his family's story, in which absence or loss is the predominant experience of the war, marginalises other memories of life on the home front. This chapter aims to shift the focus away from this serviceman-centric narrative by drawing upon the memories of nine working-class autobiographers, from Birmingham, London and Greater Manchester, whose wartime childhoods were not characterised by loss or paternal absence.<sup>7</sup> The nine unpublished autobiographies are drawn from the *Burnett Archive of Working Class Autobiographies* which was collected in the 1980s by historians John Burnett, David Vincent and David Mayall. Reflecting on autobiographies as historical sources, Burnett argues that the 'outstanding merit of autobiography lies in the fact that it is the direct, personal record of the individual'.<sup>8</sup> Of course, using autobiographies as primary sources is not without its methodological considerations. As Penny Summerfield notes, 'scholarship on autobiography and memoir alerts us to a number of issues about the genre'.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, autobiographical memory is often criticised because 'autobiographers do not put everything about themselves

<sup>5</sup> Kennedy, *The Children's War*; van Emden, *The Quick and the Dead*.

<sup>6</sup> Stephen Heathorn, 'The Mnemonic turn in the Cultural Historiography of Britain's Great War', *Historical Journal*, 48, 4 (2006), pp. 1103–1124, at p.1109.

<sup>7</sup> Kathleen Betterton born in 1913, Henrietta Burkin born in 1904 and Stanley Rice born in 1905, all lived in London; see John Burnett, David Vincent and David Mayall, *An Annotated Critical Bibliography, Volume II: 1900–1945* (Hassocks: Harvester Press, 1987), pp. 29, 48, 262. Ellsye Finnie born in 1903, Gertrude Freeman born in 1901 and Samuel Mountford born in 1907, all lived in Birmingham; see Finnie, 'Touch-Down', p. 1; Gertrude Freeman, *Recollections of My Childhood and Later Days* (unpublished, Burnett Archive: uncatalogued, 1957, p. 1; Burnett, Vincent and Mayall, *Annotated Critical Bibliography, II*, p. 220. Edna Bold born in 1904, Ernest Martin born in 1907 and Thomas Waddicor born in 1906, all lived in Greater Manchester, including Salford; see Burnett, Vincent and Mayall, *Annotated Critical Bibliography, II*, pp. 33, 208; Thomas Waddicor, *Memories of Hightown and Beyond* (unpublished, Burnett Archive: uncatalogued, [n.d.]), p. 1.

<sup>8</sup> Burnett, *Destiny Obscure*, p. 11.

<sup>9</sup> Penny Summerfield, *Histories of the Self: Personal Narratives and Historical Practice* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019), p. 78.

down on paper, but choose the dimensions of their lives that they consider worth writing about'.<sup>10</sup> This selectiveness, however, is not necessarily unhelpful to the historian, particularly as the memories that the individuals studied in this chapter deemed important to their lives have thus far been excluded from the history of wartime childhood. Autobiographical sources are further challenged because they are 'coloured by the values and attitudes' at the point in time they are written.<sup>11</sup> This is inevitable, and the final section of this chapter will analyse how attitudes towards the First World War in the post-war years have influenced these autobiographers' narratives, arguing that the pervasiveness of the 'horrific slaughter' rhetoric of the conflict helped shape memories of the war.<sup>12</sup>

This chapter will use these autobiographies to counterbalance assumptions about life on the home front using their childhood perspective. It will begin by examining how unobtrusive the war could be to children's lives when there was no immediate family loss or paternal absence, and it will argue that these autobiographical memories contradict the belief that the home front was a predominantly female space.<sup>13</sup> This chapter will then delve into the autobiographers' other dominant wartime memories to offer an insight into how warfare directed predominantly at urban areas was experienced by these children. Common themes were the effect of food shortages and dietetic changes to their often already meagre working-class diets, as well as their inquisitive excitement, during and after air raids, suggestive of a desire to witness the war first-hand. After discussing how post-war attitudes shaped memory, this chapter will conclude with an analysis of the relationships which developed between these autobiographers and servicemen. It will challenge the assumption that all relationships between civilians and soldiers would have been defined by separation. Instead, it will illustrate how the mass movement of individuals during the conflict could create often temporary, but positive friendships. These nine accounts of British urban working-class wartime childhoods, this chapter argues, offer us a version of the war that has yet to be fully told.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 79.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 88.

<sup>12</sup> Mark Connelly, *The Great War, Memory and Ritual: Commemoration in the City and East London, 1916–1939* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2002), p. 2.

<sup>13</sup> Juliette Pattinson, "'Shirkers', 'Scrimjacks' and 'Scrimshanks'? British Civilian Masculinity and Reserved Occupations, 1914–45", *Gender and History*, 28, 3 (2016), pp. 709–727, at p. 710.

‘WITH OUR FATHER SAFE AND SECURE AT HOME, THE WAR  
CEASED TO EXIST FOR US’<sup>14</sup>

Jay Winter argues that ‘families were torn apart by war. Nothing could have reversed completely this tide of separation and loss’.<sup>15</sup> The autobiographical memories considered in this chapter offer an opposing view. These individuals’ childhoods were characterised by family togetherness with their father remaining at home. Unsurprisingly, as their families were not torn apart by war, these autobiographers did not have an entirely negative attitude towards the conflict. For Samuel Mountford and his family, the war was a happy, even, profitable time. Samuel was born into a large impoverished family, and his father’s weekly earnings as a tailor amounted to less than a pound per week.<sup>16</sup> As Samuel’s father remained on the home front during the war, he was able to seek employment in a munitions factory. His wartime job as a timekeeper brought home a much larger sum of £5 a week.<sup>17</sup> This sharp increase in their family income meant that they were able to pay off various debts and enjoy an improved standard of living, at least for the duration of the war.<sup>18</sup> Samuel’s experience counters the often bleak and tragic description of the conflict as he recalled: ‘through these stormy days and nights our family was a happy one’.<sup>19</sup> With family normality maintained, the war was so unobtrusive that it could fade into the background. Edna Bold felt that because her father was ‘safe and secure at home’, the war became less important than the everyday family issues she faced. She wrote that ‘the war ceased to exist for us [...] Everything about the war seemed fictional, spurious, compared with the reality of the “grind” at school and home’.<sup>20</sup> Thomas Waddicor’s wartime childhood memories further demonstrate how unobtrusive the war could be for children when their father remained at home.<sup>21</sup> His memories of the

<sup>14</sup> Edna Bold, *The Long and Short of It: Being the Recollections and Reminiscences [sic] of Edna Bold* (unpublished, Burnett Archive: Archival no. 2:85 [n.d.]), p. 35.

<sup>15</sup> Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 29.

<sup>16</sup> Samuel Mountford, *A Memoir* (unpublished, Burnett Archive: Archival no. 2:544, 1976), pp. 4–7.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> Bold, *The Long and Short of It*, p. 35.

<sup>21</sup> Notably, Waddicor was the only individual in this sample to have any siblings enlisted into service, but he barely references them. This suggests that because they survived the

conflict consist predominantly of part-time work, running errands and games; so seemingly inconspicuous is the war to his childhood that it is in fact very rarely mentioned.<sup>22</sup>

It is open to question how typical was the experience of having a father remain on the home front during the war. The famous ‘Daddy, what did you do in the Great War?’ propaganda poster produced in 1915 depicted a young girl questioning her father’s role in the conflict.<sup>23</sup> The audience was supposed to believe that if their fathers did not enlist, they would bring shame or embarrassment on themselves and their families.<sup>24</sup> However, it appears that many ‘daddies’ never did fight in the First World War. It has been estimated that in England and Wales only one in four men of eligible age volunteered for military service and that roughly only fifty-eight per cent of the English, Scottish and Welsh male population aged between fifteen and forty-nine served in the war.<sup>25</sup> It is frequently assumed that the men who did not serve claimed exemption as conscientious objectors.<sup>26</sup> In reality, there were a variety of reasons why fathers may have remained on the home front even after the introduction of conscription. The Military Service Act passed in January 1916, although later amended in May 1916 to include married men, stated that men over the age of forty-one years of age were automatically exempt from service.<sup>27</sup> Gertrude Freeman noted that ‘we were fortunate in our family, having no near relations of military age, Father was much too old, so we did not have to see

conflict, their absence did not alter his wartime experience significantly; see Waddicor, *Memories of Hightown*, p. 4.

<sup>22</sup> Despite the lack of references to the war itself, Waddicor is clearly discussing the period 1914–1918 as he wrote year markers by each memory; see *Ibid.*, pp. 1–13.

<sup>23</sup> Savile Lumley, *Daddy, What did you do in the Great War* (1915), poster, Imperial War Museum <https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/17053> [accessed 13 August 2018].

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> Jay Winter, ‘Britain’s “Lost Generation” of the First World War’, *Population Studies*, 31, 3 (1977), pp. 449–446, at p. 450.

<sup>26</sup> Dan Todman, ‘The Space Afterwards: 2014 and a Century of British Remembrance’, *Space Between: Literature and Culture, 1914–1945*, 10 (2014) [http://scalar.usc.edu/works/the-space-between-literature-and-culture-1914-1945/vol10\\_2014\\_todman](http://scalar.usc.edu/works/the-space-between-literature-and-culture-1914-1945/vol10_2014_todman) [accessed 13 August 2018].

<sup>27</sup> The upper age limit was later raised to fifty-one in April 1918, but this does not seem to have altered these fathers’ exemption status; see Andy Ward, *Conchies: The Uncomfortable Story of the Payne Brothers: Conscientious Objectors in the First World War* (Kibworth Beauchamp: Matador, 2015), p. 356.

any of the family go'.<sup>28</sup> Men were also frequently rejected as physically unfit. Winter argues that the 'appallingly low standards of health in many urban working-class districts [...] probably saved the lives of many industrial workers'.<sup>29</sup> Kathleen Betterton recalled her father's mortification when he was rejected by the army as medically unfit due to childhood rheumatic fever affecting his heart.<sup>30</sup> Samuel Mountford did not explicitly state that his father received exemption due to ill health, but his continued presence on the home front, combined with the description of his father as a 'cripple' who 'walked with crutch and stick', suggests medical exemption.<sup>31</sup>

Despite the historiographical emphasis on women's wartime work, plenty of men remained in civilian occupations on the home front. An ever-shifting range of occupations considered vital were listed as protected to ensure that the country continued to function.<sup>32</sup> Four of the nine fathers considered here are likely to have gained exemption based on employment, although in three cases this may have been combined with poor health. Henrietta Burkin's stepfather worked as a foreman for an electricity company: 'Dad was exempt as he knew where all the electric cables were laid in the West End'.<sup>33</sup> The other three fathers were in employment roles that were included in the lists of protected occupations in 1916 and 1917.<sup>34</sup> Edna Bold's father was a baker, an occupation that was protected unless engaged in baking 'fancies, small breads or confectionary'.<sup>35</sup> Edna recalled that her father's case was considered by the

<sup>28</sup> Freeman, *Recollections*, p. 23.

<sup>29</sup> Winter, 'Britain's "Lost Generation"', pp. 454–455.

<sup>30</sup> Kathleen Betterton, *White Pinnies, Black Aprons...* (unpublished, Burnett Archive: Archival no. 2:71 [n.d.]), pp. 22–23.

<sup>31</sup> Mountford, *A Memoir*, p. 5.

<sup>32</sup> Pattinson, 'Shirkers', pp. 711–715. For historiography on women's work, see Deborah Thom, *Nice Girls and Rude Girls: Women Workers in World War One* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1998); Selina Todd, *Young Women, Work, and Family in England, 1918–1950* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Maggie Andrews and Janis Lomas (eds), *The Home Front in Britain: Images, Myths and Forgotten Experiences since 1914* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); Deborah Thom, 'Gender and Work', in Susan Grayzel and Tammy Proctor (eds), *Gender and the Great War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 46–66.

<sup>33</sup> Henrietta Burkin, *Memoirs of Henrietta Burkin* (unpublished, Burnett Archive: Archival no. 2:118, [n.d.]), p. 22.

<sup>34</sup> *List of Certified Occupations: 1st February 1917* (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office (hereafter HMSO), 1917), TNA: MH 47/142/2, pp. 1–24; *List of Certified Occupations: 7th July 1916* (London: HMSO, 1916), TNA: MH 47/142/1, pp. 1–18.

<sup>35</sup> HMSO, *List of Certified Occupations: 1st February 1917*, p. 18.