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**Wartime Attachments: essays on  
pain, care, retreat and treatment in  
the First World War.**

**Series Editor: Barry Sheils**



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**IRISH RESEARCH COUNCIL**  
An Chomhairle um Thaighde in Éirinn

## **Contested Ground: Alcohol, Attachment, and the Hut Habit at War**

**Sara Haslam, The Open University**

Barclay Baron is probably best known by analysts of the First World War for his work with 'Toc H'. This Christian organization began in 1915 as Talbot House, a rest-home and club for soldiers, complete with library, 10 miles behind the front lines on the Ypres salient.<sup>1</sup> Michael Snape, a historian of Christianity and war, edited Baron's war-time memoir and letters in a book published in 2009. Snape claims that his collection of Baron's work 'tends to support an emerging revisionist consensus on the role of the churches in the First World War'.<sup>2</sup> Christian pacifists in the inter-war and Cold War periods had taken hold of the historiography, Snape argues. As a result, 'the conduct of the British Churches in the First World War has long been associated with the image of bellicose bishops, compromised clergy and ineffectual chaplains, an image popularised most of all by [...] [Siegfried] Sassoon and [...] [Robert] Graves.' Re-balancing the narrative, Baron's writing contributes to that emerging revisionist account what Snape calls an 'untold side of the story - one of unstinting and courageous service by thousands of church people, clergy and laity alike' (Snape, 16).

The accuracy, or not, of this revisionist historiography is not my direct concern in this talk. But Snape's ideological position is made clear in his introduction: Baron's 'untold story' is required to counter what Snape pejoratively terms a 'craze for so-called "war books", [the] memoirs and novels that were generally characterised by their lurid and negative descriptions of the war' (Snape, 15). This craze was 'deplored by its critics' - among whom one must presumably cast Snape himself.<sup>3</sup> These 'war books', by Graves and others, form part of countless studies of the First World War, and a number of them feature in this talk. However, Baron's 'untold side of the story' is unquestionably a significant part of the record, not least because of its literary characteristics - the part played by writing in that story. And, as I also argue here, the value of Baron's memoir and its encouragement to investigate the little-known war-time role played by the churches is especially clear when the subject is caregiving.

Commander-in-Chief Douglas Haig<sup>4</sup> knew why he wanted the ban on chaplains at the front for reasons other than burying the dead overturned: a caring and forthright chaplain meant a discernible boost for morale. This ban was in fact overturned in January 1916, and, as far as Haig was concerned, he therefore received something of far more use to the war effort than 'bellicose Bishops and ineffectual chaplains'. Haig told Archbishop Davidson during his visit to the front in May 1916 that 'visits like yours for quiet consultation with us and for giving stimulus to officers and chaplains, and speaking to the gatherings of men where you come across naturally, are of very real good' [Slide 2].<sup>5</sup> What was good for morale was good for Haig. But, as I hope to show, the churches' take on caregiving, and attachment, especially with regard to alcohol, also raises more questions than this equation implies.

Snape's edition of Baron's work does not focus on Toc H, but on an earlier part of his career, an important one for my approach to the subject of attachment. In 1915, Baron was asked by the Cavendish Association to become involved with a project for an Officers' club in Le Havre. If it came off, the club was to be managed by the Young Men's Christian Association, the YMCA. Baron knew that the YMCA was 'the largest voluntary body working for the welfare of the troops' (101). He agreed to join its ranks after gaining work experience in 'Cinder City', near Le Havre – a decision he records with striking pity for the plight of those British soldiers who, having committed various misdemeanors, were kept in what he says was effectively a 'prison camp'.<sup>6</sup> Baron's moral framework is to the fore as he identifies humiliation, poor morale, and lack of strong leadership plaguing the inmates. The YMCA helped organise his response personally, and then professionally: the YMCA hut was the 'only bright spot' in the camp he found (104), and a week later he was running it, expanding his role across a number of YMCA ventures in the region over the next two years.

Snape writes in his introduction to Baron's memoir that 'the enormous significance of the work of the YMCA for the British army of 1914-18 has been largely overlooked' (17). Jeffrey Reznick's book, *Healing the Nation: Soldiers and the Culture of Caregiving During the First World War* is the one exception Snape notes, though to his mind it is still only a partial picture.<sup>7</sup> Reznick discusses a variety of sites of caregiving in his book: regimental aid posts, advanced dressing stations, CCSs and general hospitals. He defines the 'culture of caregiving' as 'the product of medical knowledge and procedure, social relationships, matériel, institutions and physical environments that informed experiences of rest, recovery and rehabilitation in sites administered by military and voluntary-aid authorities'.<sup>8</sup>

Reznick provides an account of the secular tone of much of the YMCA's work; the controversy over its trading practices which affected many voluntary-aid organizations, and, like Baron, the importance to the resting and recovering soldier of the YMCA hut.

I am going to be talking about the hut a lot today, and I present it as an iconic *built* – as opposed to dug-out – feature of the landscape of the war. I take as my starting point the site of the YMCA hut and its generation and management of attachments in the resting and recovering soldier; to return to Reznick's working definition of the 'culture of caregiving', I will concentrate on the 'social relationships' and 'physical environments'. The story of the YMCA's war-time caregiving should be a more prominent part of the historical record, and my talk aims in part to correct that. But caregiving brought with it its own tensions, and the YMCA's particular intervention to the wartime experience of the fighting man meant confronting broader issues of attachment as well as care. So I will also focus here on what was the generally contested ground of alcohol at war, behaviours that we associate with alcohol, which were tied to various, sometimes-competing aspects of the performance of military, masculine identity. Investigating these behaviours, I explore the vital range and vibrancy in the accounts of attachment to alcohol, even as doctors, church leaders, politicians and the military command failed to agree on its efficacy and effects. The subject was politically charged in all combatant nations, but differently so, and it's the British context in the main that features here.<sup>9</sup> My evidence is drawn from the literature that combatant men produced, including: more or less autobiographical fiction, poetry, drama, memoir, as well as official war records, temperance literature, contemporary press and review material, and the YMCA archive at Birmingham University. As I hope to show, the site of the hut shares much of the contested ground surrounding the use of alcohol at war, framing how and why alcohol was consumed and dispensed, as well as determining when it was not. The hut also raises fascinating questions about the ideologically circumscribed ways in which spaces of attachment helped 'the [soldiers] to be men', as Reznick puts it (24) – as though they needed reminding, having forgotten how.

The YMCA was established in 1844 by its principal founder, George Williams [Slide 3]. It was an educational as well as a non-denominational evangelical Christian movement. By 1914, unlike the Salvation Army and the Church Army, the YMCA already had experience of working with soldiers in the field. The 'writing tents' for soldiers during the Boer War (1899-1902) were an early incarnation of the huts. Arthur Keysall Yapp, general secretary of the

National Council of Young Men's Christian Associations, and a leader keen to expand the role of the organization, drove a huge change in the scale and style of the YMCA during the war, which he saw as an opportunity to broaden its appeal. He explained in the first issue of the *YMCA Weekly*, as its wartime publication was initially called,<sup>10</sup> that the red triangle: 'Stands for Christianity, for unity, and seeks to cater for the all-round needs of men [so] on the sides of the triangle might be written the words 'Spirit, Mind, and Body' [Slide 4].<sup>11</sup> The YMCA sought to cater for these 'all-round needs' at first on home-ground, and it opened 250 centres in the UK within days of war being declared (Snape 36). By January 1915 the *YMCA Weekly* was running an article by Charles T. Bateman titled 'The YMCA within sound of the guns'.<sup>12</sup> Bateman recorded the construction-drive around him as an early hut neared completion in Boulogne. The original marquees had had to be abandoned because of the British weather, replaced by the prefabricated huts for which the YMCA would become famous. 'Every consideration has been exhibited' Bateman wrote. 'Materials were carted free of charge, and other important and valuable concessions made'.<sup>13</sup> The grandly-named Queen Mary Hut was almost completed by the time he left Boulogne, and the *YMCA Weekly* of 22<sup>nd</sup> January ran an account of the opening ceremony, led by Colonel Asser, the Base Commandant in the town. Asser spoke about how 'grateful and proud' the assembled company was to 'have the permission of her Majesty Queen Mary to call the hut by her name' (*YMCA Weekly*, Jan 22<sup>nd</sup>) [Slide 5].

The Queen Mary Hut was called 'the best of its kind in use abroad'; while London's Shakespeare Hut had that reputation at home [Slide 6].<sup>14</sup> The Queen Mary Hut featured on the cover of the third number of the *YMCA Weekly*. Its 'spaciousness, its tasteful decoration, its electric lighting, its kitchens and cubicle accommodation and its full equipment' (*YMCA Weekly* 22 Jan, 1915) were breathily detailed in the announcement. The royal seal of approval was an important part of its impact – and this received repeated attention in the opening ceremony. Queen Alexandra, the Queen mother, had paid for an entire hut in November 1914; while the king sent a cheque for £100 in the summer of 1915:<sup>15</sup> by investing in the YMCA's model, the royal family reinforced it too.<sup>16</sup> Both Bateman's article and the description at the ceremony help underline Reznick's assertion that those volunteers who staffed the church organisations' huts 'had one key purpose: to replicate whenever and wherever possible the meaning and social experience of the middle-class home away from home' – complete with royal watching (18).

Bateman wrote in his article about the YMCA Christmas party at Boulogne, with its fully-dressed tree: 'How the men enjoyed the songs and recitations'.

The senior chaplain of the 21<sup>st</sup> Division's account of the YMCA, printed in February 1915, puts further useful flesh on the bones of this replicated middle-class 'meaning and social experience':

the Division of which I am in charge marched into camp about 17,000 strong, and with the exception of the canteens there was not a single place for a man to spend his leisure. The nearest town [...] kindly offered all it had – a parish room and two Sunday schools. Things looked very ugly until about five days later, when Mr Johnson arrived with his big tents and corps of assistants. There was an immediate rush, and the first Sunday saw nearly 5,000 postcards, letters, and parcels dispatched, and from that day forward the huge tents [...] were filled to overflowing with Kitchener's men in their thousands. The little band of YMCA helpers wrestled with the multifarious needs of the British soldiers. Tobacco – piles of it – hundredweights of cake, buckets of coffee, lemon-squash and all sorts of popular eatable and drinkables at the counter; then the post office counter with its money order department, savings bank, library, postcard and general arrangements. At the other end of the tent a sing-song would be in progress; every square inch of space was alive with humanity'. (Feb 4<sup>th</sup> 1915)

The chaplain focuses on identified needs and the meeting of them. The image of piles of tobacco is impressive, as is his statistic for the sending of postcards. The significance of this opportunity to write home, provided by the caregiving organizations to the men, is well-illustrated by the uptake, and by the costs involved (and some of the most moving accounts of YMCA workers relate to their writing on behalf of wounded men, sometimes when they could hardly talk). Two YMCA lecturers reported in the *Birmingham Weekly Post* that in one hut they had visited in March 1917, 3,500 pieces of writing paper were used between 3pm and 8.15pm; the YMCA estimated in 1919 that more than a billion pieces of stationery had been used at a cost of £233,115 (Snape, 24). One private wrote to the *YMCA Weekly* in January 1915 expressing his gratitude: 'the best people over here are the YMCA and if you want to give anything to this war, give it to the YMCA [...]; the writing paper is supplied free'.<sup>17</sup> The level of industry involved in the writing

indicates the extent to which honouring the attachment to home meant some comfort. Many writers talk about the fragmented nature of existence at war, the worry about those far away. Ford Madox Ford used the phrases 'duplicate cerebration' and 'homo duplex' to describe the tormenting senses of division, repression and projection at war when thinking of home.<sup>18</sup> R. H. Miller tells a story of a 'typical case' for the YMCA in 'The Red Triangle in a Rest Camp': '[The soldier] is one of a family of nine, of whom seven are boys and all are in the Forces [...] He is one of our Sunday Schoolboys [...] He hates war with all his heart, hates soldiering in every conception of it. His heart is bleeding for the aged mother whom he has left at home.'<sup>19</sup>

Meeting the 'all-round needs of men' meant providing games, books, affordable food and drink, free paper to write home. Men could indulge in what might well have been familiar routines around food and games. The construct of the middle-class home also informed the gender politics of the hut; it was an important part of the organization's ethos that women volunteers played visible and active roles as surrogate 'mothers' or 'sisters': an aspect also notably reinforced by royalty. Queen Alexandra served tea in a hut in Grosvenor Gardens in January 1916; Princess Louise, Duchess of Argyle, in Wimbledon in March. The women volunteers needed to be powerful, at times even charged with being transformative. An anecdote from Yapp's postwar account, *The Romance of the Red Triangle*, evokes this demand humorously, though it's important not to lose sight of the construct beneath that humour:

We remember visiting a camp somewhere in France. It seemed to us the roughest camp we had ever seen. The leader told us of an encounter he had with one of the worst of the men on the occasion of his first visit to the place. He had just got his tent erected, and the man chancing to see it asked what it was. When told that it was the Y.M.C.A., he replied, 'You b— men are just what we d— men b— well want,' and that was the language of the camp. Eighteen months later we were there again and the camp was like another place, so great was the change for the better. The C.O. told us he attributed that change almost entirely to the ladies of the Red Triangle.<sup>20</sup>

Baron remembers a Mrs Stedman in his memoir, a 'most understanding and sensible mother to many a grown-up man here', who he watched talk a man distraught by the action of writing home 'back into the semblance of a soldier'

(105). Winston Churchill spoke rousing of the lady serving at the counter as the foundational link in the chain 'by which the tides of barbarism may be stayed'.<sup>21</sup> A man who would 'cry like a child', as Baron put it (105), could be restored to soldierly identity by the domestic familiarity of the mother in the hut.

By December, 1915, as a memorandum of an interview with senior YMCA figure Oliver McCowen records, it was known that the huts needed to be made bigger, to include baths, games rooms, quiet rooms and workers' rooms – and the organization responded.<sup>22</sup> The successes of the model are repeatedly stressed by the men. Miller's anecdote concludes with the line: 'he has just tried to tell me all that a YM Hut means to men such as himself'. 'I haven't been in a pub here', goes one letter printed in the *YMCA Weekly* in February 1915<sup>23</sup>, [and] 'it's the YMCA that ought to be thanked, as there are hundreds of chaps like myself to whom a place to read, write, hot decent tuck and fellowship is more than welcome'. Canon Walter Hicks wondered after a 3-week visit to France in February 1915 'how many hundreds of times' men had asked him to let them know 'in the old country' how surprised they were to find the YMCA ready to 'minister to their needs'.<sup>24</sup> The importance of tea and cake was a particular strain (Snape 93). Snape quotes from Brigadier-General J. E. Edmonds' official history of the Great War that between February and March 1918 5,000-6,000 gallons of hot drinks were given free to the men each week by YMCA workers in the Ypres salient (24). Dependency is expressed too. E. W. Hornung records one infantry man's view that 'were it not for the YMCA I believe I should have gone mad' (Snape 93). Baron describes how heavily soldiers relied on the YMCA in 'bad times', acquiring what he called the 'hut habit', which the organization tried to maintain post-war (Snape 91; 93).

But how responsive *was* the YMCA? What about those needs that could not be catered for by royal approval, by tea party food, by a games room or a library? While the importance of women as mothers and sisters is encoded in the YMCA's approach to caregiving, as seen especially in the construction of the 'home from home' atmosphere of the YMCA hut, the men's sexual identity is routinely referred to as 'temptation'. And the YMCA hut was an alcohol-free zone for ordinary soldiers for the war's duration, while the front line was not. How were these positions articulated, and how do they relate, in a discussion of wartime attachment, to Snape's opinion that 'the British soldier was remarkably well looked after', despite the 'popular mythology' that suggests otherwise (92)?

In a section of the *YMCA Weekly* titled 'Our Outlook', on February 26<sup>th</sup>, 1915, the organization's line on sex and alcohol runs thus: 'We must see that the



void spaces in the life of the man in the street are filled up. The Sabbath, the leisure evening hours, and Saturday afternoons are the times when temptation is rifest' (no. 7, vol. 1, p. 159). An earlier issue treats the question with regard to the forward areas: 'Sunday in camp is a difficult proposition, and it is well that our position should be made perfectly clear. It must be remembered that it is usually the day of greatest temptation of the whole week, for the troops have more time on their hands. The canteens and public-houses are open, and the men are subject to every form of temptation' (Jan 22<sup>nd</sup> 1915).

That notion of 'void spaces' is a troubling one. Geographical and temporal spaces are one thing; emotional and physical spaces quite another. To the writer of the editorial, they must all be 'filled up' in order to prevent temptation taking hold, suggesting that the 'whole man', which is what the YMCA said the triangle stood for, is to be catered for only when that wholeness can be understood and manufactured according to its own terms. When compared with the depth and range of the attachment to alcohol found in the literary record, however, this line sounds simplistic and ideologically inert.

An early chapter of John Dos Passos' novel, *Three Soldiers*, published in the US in 1921, includes a narrative arc with an extreme curve. The curve is based on Private Fuselli's performance of his masculine identity, and the rewards thereof. After parade in France he waits, close to tears, desperate to learn if he has been promoted. On learning he has, the scene shifts to a café full of singing soldiers, where 'wild Dan Cohen' regales the assembled company with a recent escapade.<sup>25</sup> His tale closes the bar down and the interest shifts again to a room next door, into which men have kept disappearing. Fuselli and his comrades, deciding to investigate, eventually all end up in that room. The room holds a prostitute who has somehow evaded a recent sweep by the M.P.s. Sexual transactions do not seem to be likely, but there is some abortive conversation about where in France she comes from. She is made angry by the men's talk, and punctuates the chapter with a scream of rage, echoed a few lines later when one of the men shouts at her in a 'voice full of hatred' (69). But the chapter closes with a different echo - the threat of Fuselli's tears. All the men, faced with this one woman, are reduced to an infantile state. Her role is that of a wretched and furious sex-worker in a quasi-school room setting, while they are clumsy, inarticulate and sullen. 'The men stared at her silently. There was no sound except that of feet scraping occasionally on the floor' (69). This narrative arc is only the shape it is because of an additional agent, as yet unmentioned: alcohol.

The men's bonding, story-telling, exultation and then deflation with the woman in the back room are all tied by Dos Passos to the amount they have drunk.

William Faulkner's later novel *Soldiers' Pay* (1926) begins on a train; the returning American and British soldiers are headed for Chicago. They are drunk, most of them, on 'bad whisky',<sup>26</sup> medicating themselves and one another in a microcosmic environment of care that invokes and simultaneously inverts the maternal bond. Yaphank attempts to persuade Cadet Lowe to swallow the strong, cheap drink he deems he needs despite its noxious qualities. In psychoanalytic terms, Faulkner might be said to be experimenting with a deep confusion as to the satisfying or punishing qualities of the symbolic breast: Yaphank feeding, encouraging, winding his comrade (4). Here in Faulkner's novel, alcohol signifies the performance of bonded identity, and it is the men's primary means of communication, care and economy. Lowe's body desperately tries to reject the booze Yaphank supplies, but its instinctive revulsion is not as quick or powerful as Yaphank's solicitude: "[h]is friend again thrust the bottle in his mouth. 'Drink, quick! You got to protect your investment'"(5).

These two novels speak in dramatic ways about the perceived and experienced necessity of alcohol at war at a formal and at a thematic level. They are American publications, and I focus on the British context here, but they serve both as effective examples of what was at stake, and as warnings against any conception of the 'whole man' at war that did not recognise the function or importance of alcohol. The literary record I am about to detail, produced almost entirely by men who saw action, is a nuanced and sophisticated one when it comes to the need for alcohol. Supported in many instances by non-fictional sources, it includes many positive and affirming functions – including the acknowledgment, allowance and indulgence of attachment. I have ranged these under 6 headings in the section that follows: Identity affirmation; Care; Ritual function, Celebration and reward, Cure and anaesthetic, Stimulant [Slide 7].<sup>27</sup>

#### i) Identity affirmation

The relationship between drink and identity in the UK has generated multiple books in its own right. John Nicholls, for example, notes the existence of 'a whole sub-genre of Royalist literature from the Interregnum which codifies the struggle between the two sides of the conflict as a battle between wine and ale'.<sup>28</sup> In First World War literature, the alliterative harmony of Britishness and beer is

frequently employed.<sup>29</sup> In Frederic Manning's novel, *The Middle Parts of Fortune* (1929), Bourne's heroism is indicated via alcohol: the tone set by the chapter epigraph of Iago's drinking song from *Othello* (II, iii). An Englishman can drink Danes, Germans and Dutchmen under the table.<sup>30</sup> Despite imbibing enormous quantities of brandy, champagne, and army-issue rum, Bourne outwits a couple of Sergeants, claims any female attention in the vicinity, and shoots straight (33-5). He manages this without alienating any of his comrades; the Sergeants state he is a 'bloody masterpiece' (32). If, in the nineteenth century, 'to stop drinking was to make oneself an outcast', as historian Brian Harrison has argued, then, similarly, at war one way of securing tribal belonging was to drink.<sup>31</sup>

#### ii) Care

Literature, fictional and non-fictional, testifies to the ways in which alcohol itself was experienced as part of caregiving. In Richard Aldington's *Death of a Hero* (1929), when Winterbourne returns, freezing cold, from keeping lookout in no man's land, his captain hands him his own rum; a few pages later Winterbourne describes it as 'profoundly' moving that Evans also shares his flask with his runner.<sup>32</sup> John Keegan has discussed the 'sense of intense responsibility for their soldiers as individuals' which characterised the British officer from the late nineteenth century (a welcome development from the sketch he gives of this relationship at the time of Waterloo, for example).<sup>33</sup> The need for officers to check and care for men's feet is one prominent example that Keegan gives (taken from Sassoon's account of how this activity changed him as a person in the war); but distributing rum counts too.<sup>34</sup> Herbert Read's speaker in the poem 'My Company' imagines a cold night 'When rum was mightily acceptable / And my doling gave birth to sensual gratitude'.<sup>35</sup> Paul Fussell chooses a different illustration of the way in which serving out the rum was, as he puts it, 'almost like a religious ceremonial', quoting from David Jones' *In Parenthesis*.<sup>36</sup>

#### iii) Ritual function

The jocular way in which Hardy, an early character in Sherriff's play *Journey's End* (1929), hands over control to his replacement Osborne before moving back from the line is echoed countless times in the literature of the war. 'Splendid! Have a drink', he says.<sup>37</sup> Alcohol formed a ritualised part of welcome and leave-taking, in particular between officers; and similar instances of social shorthand can be seen in Graves's *Goodbye To All That*, as well as on multiple occasions in Robert Keable's early war novel, *Simon Called Peter*.<sup>38</sup> Brian Harrison's notion of

the Victorian drinking place as 'a masculine republic' is re-vivified in the scene in the steamer saloon in *Simon Called Peter*, despite the fact that the men are on their way to the front.<sup>39</sup> In further examples of the literature, the drinking ritual produces common bonds and allows the men to rehearse them in more serious terms too. Emotional expression is often a part of this ritual: loss is ceremonialised in *The Middle Parts of Fortune*, for example, 'they all sat there for some time, drinking rum, and talking about dead men' (223).

(iv) Celebration and reward

Private Bourne, bored to distraction during a typing detail, needs a 'big drunk' somewhere to break the monotony (Manning, 56). The 'big drunk' could be a celebration, as it is in Patrick MacGill's *The Great Push* following the tales of daring exploits – and survival – in the encounter with sleeping Germans.<sup>40</sup> Arthur Graeme West's poem, 'The Night Patrol: France, 1916', concentrates the attention on rum as reward for a horrific task completed: 'We turned and crawled past the remembered dead / Past him and him, and them and him, until, / For he lay some way apart, we caught the scent / Of the Crusader and slid past his legs, / And through the wire and home, and got our rum!'<sup>41</sup> Sassoon's soldier in 'A Working Party' has a more prosaic detail, but the rum motivates him in his cold labour: 'He thought of getting back by half past twelve, / And tot of rum to send him warm to sleep'.<sup>42</sup>

v) Cure and anaesthetic

There is a persistent notion in the literature of war that alcohol itself was a curative. This idea has a long history in the British army too, as historian Martin Howard has explored. In the Iberian Peninsula, where Wellington's army campaigned between 1808 and 1814, apparently the peasants 'were astonished that the British troops drank so much alcohol and so little water'.<sup>43</sup> In MacGill's early war novel, champagne is said to produce 'renewed vitality' in a soldier's body (*The Great Push*, 27), and more than ten years after the war, medical opinion pronounced on alcohol's ability to create immediate energy. Spirits were also still thought to stimulate appetite, and cure indigestion.<sup>44</sup> The recorded experience of vital 'warmth' imparted by alcohol, like that poetically related in Sassoon's 'In the Pink', is very common: '[h]e'd had a drink / Of rum and tea; and, though the barn was chilly, / For once his blood ran warm'.<sup>45</sup>

More common still are accounts of alcohol's function as an anaesthetic, emotional as well as physical. According to Graves, self-medication among

officers helped to produce 'many cases' of dipsomania among officers who had served more than two years in the trenches.<sup>46</sup> Manning's *The Middle Parts of Fortune* shows men drinking as though their lives depend on it, able to eat only when the alcohol has acted on their bodies (85). In *A Man Could Stand Up* – Vol. 3 of Ford's *Parade's End* (1924-8) – Tietjens recognises an alcoholic craving in his C.O.<sup>47</sup> In R.C. Sherriff's *Journey's End* Stanhope's pre-war attitudes to bodily health and fitness have been eroded by precisely this need for self-medication. 'I couldn't bear being fully conscious all the time', he tells Osborne, and there were only two choices about what to do about it: drink enough to stupefy himself, or fake illness (32). MacGill and Mac (an R.A.M.C. officer) discuss alcohol just before MacGill is evacuated in *The Great Push*. Mac is incredulous when MacGill professes to know someone in Belgium who does not drink. 'We'll have no teetotallers after the war', he confidently predicts (136).

The attachment of men to alcohol was real and significant [Slide 8].<sup>48</sup> It evidenced a variety of needs, and was a core way of belonging to a tribe – men at war. The denial of this attachment by church organizations meant that they were not addressing themselves to the 'whole man', and that the caregiving that they proffered – devoted as it was to a particular construct of masculinity – while welcome in many ways, was partial. Just how interestingly partial becomes clear when the YMCA's internal debate across 1916 about serving alcohol to officers is examined. Oliver McCowen wrote, arguing that officers should be served wine, that '[w]e have to set up safeguards for Tommy because he has not got the social safeguard of the General, or the Officer' (Snape 67). While Leonard Pilkington, who employed Baron, argued that serving alcohol to young officers was beneficial because it prevented them going into town and succumbing to a worse threat: being 'caught by women' (65). Its organisational position regarding the class system and the threat of sexuality, meant, in the end, that the YMCA deemed it permissible for officers to drink on its premises. However, when that more general denial to other ranks is examined from a medical perspective, in addition to the ideological one, particularly in the light of alcohol's anaesthetic function, it throws valuable light on contrasting ideas of the whole man as conceived by the military. Were men more likely to be successful and healthy soldiers, but less likely to want to fight, if they didn't drink?

The decision by the army to re-introduce the rum ration in the winter of 1914 caused public and professional controversy, partly because it was taken at a time when the political parties had polarised on the drink question in the UK, and when a growing research base indicated that alcohol and war did not mix.

Sir Victor Horsley's article in the *British Medical Journal* in January 1915 summarised the medical case against alcohol at war, arguing that 'the rum ration has been specifically restored to the free ration dietary of the British soldier in opposition to both scientific and military experience'.<sup>49</sup> Alcohol made men worse soldiers, he argued, and led to an ill-disciplined body of men. Even half the basic ration could 'ruin the soldier's rifle shooting', according to this medic, while the full measure was enough to make exhausted men 'heady and excitable' (205). Publication of the judicial review into the sacking of Louvain, which took place in August 1914, provided the clearest possible indication of the crimes drunken troops might commit.<sup>50</sup> The YMCA argued similarly on discipline, health and effectiveness. Dr C. W. Saleeby's long article, 'The Fallacies of Alcohol', published on January 29<sup>th</sup> 1915 in the *YMCA Weekly*, began with a promise to expose 'the biggest fraud there is'. 'Vodka in Russia, absinthe in France, beer in Britain have held sway all too long' ran the editorial in Feb 1915. The typical view that rum was a medicine, a temporary restorative, as alluded to in the section above concerning alcohol as cure, had also been debunked, according to Dr Horsley. But it certainly was a psychological prop, a palliative against frayed nerves at war. As Edgar Jones and Nicola Fear state in their article in the *International Review of Psychiatry* on alcohol use and misuse in the military, 'the UK armed forces have traditionally used alcohol as a means of mediating stress, both in the theatre and the aftermath of battle'.<sup>51</sup>

In other words, overall the war effort depended, as some of the literature war produced also argued, on rum. The attachment to alcohol encouraged and enabled a performance of masculinity that the army needed, as illustrated by my final heading in this section: alcohol as stimulant.

vi) Stimulant

Paul Fussell's description of trench life in *The Great War and Modern Memory* contains references to alcohol's stimulating function, acknowledging that quantities exceeding the daily rum ration of 0.5 gill might be issued to galvanise troops for an assault' (47). He quotes the memory of one soldier as to the smell of the air during a British attack - 'rum and blood'. Historian Niall Ferguson points out that 'without alcohol, and perhaps also without tobacco, the First World War could not have been fought'.<sup>52</sup> He calls alcohol a 'carrot', emphasizing its value to the men as well as its ability to secure compliance, and elicit certain kinds of behaviour. Stanhope, in *Journey's End*, is certain that whisky is the only thing that gets him over the top. One of Victor Horsley's aims in his 1915 article was to

expose the contradictions he saw between the fact that the rum ration was being 'admittedly given the troops as an intoxicant', while much of the army regulation surrounding the matter was still couched in terms of rum's health-giving or curative properties (203). Such contradictions mirror and amplify those in the YMCA camp.

Certain properties of alcohol and its effects on the human subject were useful to the military in its propagation of war; those effects tended in part to reinforce a particular model of masculinity as instinctively aggressive. Indeed, it was sometimes hard not to drink – the army 'always over-estimates the number of beer-drinkers [...] those wishing to have minerals have to fight for what they can get', complained a lance-corporal from India (seemingly without irony).<sup>53</sup> It was also sometimes hard to feel like a man if one chose not to abstain; and in such cases the YMCA might have offered a natural home. On the other hand, the YMCA aimed its caregiving at an image of the 'whole man' that was ideologically-driven, devoted as it was to notions of 'temptation' preying on grown men who were risking life and limb, as well as on an idealised construction of what it meant to be safely middle-class.

Both the military and the YMCA had an interest in producing a particular construct of masculinity. The men's attachment to alcohol was understood and managed differently as a fundamental aspect of those constructs at war. Predictably, any genuinely responsive, holistic conversation as to the soldier's experience of attachment was over-ridden by the necessities of prosecuting the war effort. The clues to that experience and its psychological costs are there to be interpreted; the need for a place of rescue, a hut, perhaps, must be understood in this light. Ford Madox Ford's fictional version of the hut opens *No More Parades*, volume 2 of *Parade's End*: 'When you came in the space was desultory, rectangular, warm after the drip of a winter night, and transfused with a brown orange dust that was light. It was shaped like the house a child draws ...' [Slide 9]. Soon after this scene-setting, a bombardment comes and some of Tietjens' men die. One of those who survives asks him 'why isn't one a beastly girl, and privileged to shriek?'.<sup>54</sup> Tietjens tells him to go ahead. And he can, of course, also drink. Men cannot be safe at war; men cannot be whole when that most primary of attachments, to life itself, is in play.

<sup>1</sup> Talbot House was named for Gilbert Talbot by one of its founders, his brother Neville. Gilbert (son of the then Bishop of Winchester) was killed at Hooe in July, 1915. 'Toc H' was

how it became known in abbreviated form – in line with the radio signallers' alphabet. Men could borrow books if they left their caps as surety. Titles donated by one founder, Revd Philip (Tubby) Clayton, included *The First Prayer Book of King Edward VI* and *The Modern Warship* by Edward L. Attwood as well as, less predictably perhaps, Millicent Garrett Fawcett's *Women's Suffrage: A Short History of a Great Movement*. Other titles included Robert Browning's *The Ring and the Book*; *A History of Civilization in Palestine*, by R.A.S Macalister; Boswell's *Life of Johnson*; and Kipling's *Wee Willie Winkie and Other Stories*. In general, the books (of over 200 volumes in the library during the war) tended to be non-fiction. As well as religious texts, there were also a few works of history, and some on warfare – though not many on the First World War. (Acknowledgements are due to Vincent Trott for his report on the library, completed while he was a PhD student at the Open University.)

<sup>2</sup> Michael Snape, *The Back Parts of War: The YMCA Memoirs and Letters of Barclay Baron, 1915-19* (Suffolk, UK: Boydell Press, 2009), p. 17.

<sup>3</sup> In the implication of frenzied consumption one can sense the start of the wave of ideological debates about the 'Blackadder' version of war that broke over the nation in 2013. I give an overview of these debates in a piece for *The Conversation*. <http://theconversation.com/glory-farce-and-despair-the-many-stories-of-world-war-i-22201>

<sup>4</sup> He succeeded Sir John French to his post in December, 1915.

<sup>5</sup> Church of England Record Society, vol. 18 *From the Restoration to the Permissive Society*, ed. Melanie Barber and Stephen Taylor, 'Archbishop Davidson's Visit to the Western Front, May, 1916' (Suffolk, UK: The Boydell Press, 2010), p. 499. Davidson visited the Western Front from 16-24 May, 1916, during Verdun and the preparation for the Battle of the Somme.

<sup>6</sup> They were men – regular soldiers from the BEF plus an entire battalion of young Territorial soldiers who had been led early from the trenches by their officers – who had 'failed, deserted or committed crimes' during the retreat after Mons (23 August, 1914; p. 103).

<sup>7</sup> See also Edmund King, 'E. W. Hornung's Unpublished "Diary", the YMCA, and the Reading Solider in the First World war', *ELT*, Vol. 57, No. 3 (2014), 361-387; and Geoff Spurr's *British Masculinity and the YMCA, 1844-1914* (forthcoming from Routledge).

<sup>8</sup> Jeffrey S. Reznick, *Healing the Nation: Soldiers and the Culture of Caregiving During the Great War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), p. 1.

<sup>9</sup> One editorial in the *YMCA Weekly* (No 7, vol 1; February 26<sup>th</sup>, 1915) simplifies the situation: 'vodka in Russia, absinthe in France, beer in Britain have held sway all too long', p. 159.

<sup>10</sup> It became *The Red Triangle* in 1917.

<sup>11</sup> *YMCA Weekly* [or 'YM'] (No 1, vol 1, January, 1915), p. 19.

<sup>12</sup> And by July 1916, there were 1,500 YMCA centres in UK, France, Egypt, Malta, Palestine, Salonica, Mesopotamia, India and British East Africa (*YMCA Weekly* March 3, 1916).

<sup>13</sup> *YMCA Weekly* (No. 1, vol. 1 January, 1915), p. 9.

<sup>14</sup> The hut, on Gower Street, contained a canteen, billiard room, quiet room, verandah and sleeping and bath accommodation.

<sup>15</sup> *YMCA Weekly*, no. 30 vol 1.

<sup>16</sup> Only rarely does a volume of the *YMCA Weekly* not carry an account of a member of the royal family either opening or volunteering in a hut; a photograph of Princess Victoria opening a new London hut comes just after Bateman's article in Issue 1.



- <sup>17</sup> No. 3, vol. 1, January 29<sup>th</sup>, 1915, p. 67.
- <sup>18</sup> See Max Saunders, *Ford Madox Ford: A Dual Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), vol. 2, p. 197 and note 3. Ford wrote while at war that 'I used to think that being out in France would be like being in a magic ring that would cut me off from all private troubles: but nothing is further from the truth'. 'Arms and the Mind' in *Ford Madox Ford: War Prose*, ed. Max Saunders, (Manchester: Carcanet, 1999), p. 41.
- <sup>19</sup> YMCA/K/2/3 n.d.
- <sup>20</sup> Arthur Keysall Yapp, *The Romance of the Red Triangle: The Story of the Coming of the Red Triangle and the Service Rendered by the YMCA to the Sailors and Soldiers of the British Empire* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1918), p. 66.
- <sup>21</sup> YMCA Weekly, no. 37, vol. 1, p. 871.
- <sup>22</sup> YMCA/K/2/3. McCowen was in charge of all the YMCA's French work, and was known by Baron (p. 107).
- <sup>23</sup> YMCA Weekly, no. 7, vol. 1, 163.
- <sup>24</sup> YMCA Weekly, no. 8, vol. 1, p. 173.
- <sup>25</sup> John Dos Passos, *Three Soldiers* (New York: Penguin, 1997), p. 63.
- <sup>26</sup> William Faulkner, *Soldiers' Pay* (1926) (London: Chatto & Windus, 1930), p. 1. Faulkner served in the Canadian and British Air Forces during the First World War.
- <sup>27</sup> This taxonomy is derived from the more detailed version published in the *Journal of First World War Studies* as part of my article 'A literary intervention: writing alcohol in British literature 1915 - 1930', vol. 4, no. 2, Oct 2013, 219 - 240.
- <sup>28</sup> John Nicholls, *The Politics of Alcohol: A History of the Drink Question in England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), p. 25.
- <sup>29</sup> 'Stretcher Case' in *Collected Poems*, pp. 29-30, ll18-23.
- <sup>30</sup> Frederic Manning, *The Middle Parts of Fortune* (London: Penguin, 1990), p. 19.
- <sup>31</sup> Harrison, quoted in Nicholls, *The Politics of Alcohol*, p. 101.
- <sup>32</sup> Richard Aldington, *Death of a Hero* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1929), p. 329.
- <sup>33</sup> John Keegan, *The Face of Battle: A Study of Agincourt, Waterloo and the Somme* (London: Pimlico, 1991), p. 187.
- <sup>34</sup> Colonel N.C.Rutherford testifies to the 'constant worry' regarding men's feet, and the need to prevent frostbite, or trench feet (*Soldiering with A Stethoscope*, London: Stanley Paul and C. 1937,) p. 158.
- <sup>35</sup> In *Up the Line to Death: The War Poets 1914-1918*, ed. Brian Gardner (London: Eyre Methuen, 1964), pp. 87-90, ll. 1-17.
- <sup>36</sup> Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 46.
- <sup>37</sup> R. C. Sherriff, *Journey's End* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 2000), p. 10.
- <sup>38</sup> See Robert Keable, *Simon Called Peter* (London: Constable, 1921), p. 60, for example.
- <sup>39</sup> Brian Harrison, *Drink and the Victorians: The Temperance Question in England 1815-1872* (Keele University Press, 1994), p. 47.
- <sup>40</sup> Patrick MacGill, *The Great Push* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2000), p. 123.
- <sup>41</sup> In *Poetry of the Great War: An Anthology*, ed. Dominic Hibberd and John Onions (London: Macmillan, 1986), pp. 76-7, ll. 50-54.
- <sup>42</sup> Siegfried Sassoon, *Collected Poems*, pp. 19-20, ll 41-2.
- <sup>43</sup> Martin Howard quotes Lieutenant John Carss, writing in 1809, that he drank 'two quarts' of wine every day, though he could little afford it, 'to put flesh on his bones'; Captain Rees Howell Gronow was advised to drink brandy or rum every morning to 'prevent rheumatism, dysentery and other camp disorders' ('British Jackets and Red Noses: Alcohol and the Napoleonic Soldier', *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine* 93, January, 2000), 38-9.

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<sup>44</sup> See *An Examination of the Evidence Before the Royal Commission on Licensing (England and Wales), 1929-1930*, published by the Central Board of the Licensed Victuallers' Central Protection Society of London, Ltd, 1931, pp. 117, 132, 139.

<sup>45</sup> In *Collected Poems*, 18, ll. 3-5.

<sup>46</sup> Robert Graves, *Goodbye to All That* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1960), p. 144.

<sup>47</sup> Ford Madox Ford, *A Man Could Stand Up*, ed. Sara Haslam (Manchester: Carcanet, 2011), pp. 144-8.

<sup>48</sup> Although some soldiers did not drink, and would have been happy to find themselves assigned to one of the 'dry' battalions for example – some of their voices have been heard throughout this article in quotations from the *YMCA Weekly*.

<sup>49</sup> Victor Horsley, 'On the Alleged Responsibility of the Medical Profession for the Reintroduction of the Rum Ration into the British Army', *BMJ* 1, no. 2822 (30 Jan 1915), pp. 203-6 (203).

<sup>50</sup> The Belgian town of Louvain was sacked in August 1914. The published account of the atrocities mentioned excessive drunkenness among the troops, and the sanction of the violent and murderous behaviour by officers. See <http://www.firstworldwar.com/source/louvain-judicial-report.htm>

(accessed 12 July, 2012). See also John Horner and Alan Kramer, *German Atrocities: A History of Denial* (Yale University Press, 2001), pp. 240-1. Louvain featured prominently in the story of Ireland and the war that was curated at the National Library in Dublin in 2015, an exhibition running when I delivered this paper in June. Louvain knocked Home Rule off the front pages.

<sup>51</sup> Jones and Frear, 'Alcohol Use and Misuse Within the Military: A Review', *International Review of Psychiatry* 23 (April 2011): 166-172; 166.

<sup>52</sup> Niall Ferguson, *The Pity of War* (London: Allen Lane), p. 351.

<sup>53</sup> *YMCA Weekly*, no 9, vol 1, March 12<sup>th</sup>, 1915.

<sup>54</sup> Ford Madox Ford, *No More Parades*, ed. Joseph Wiesenfarth (Manchester: Carcanet, 2011), p. 23.