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THE INVISIBLE WORKFORCE OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR

An Examination of Female Woollen Workers and Their Community in
Huddersfield and the Colne Valley

GAIL LEDGARD

A thesis submitted to the University of Huddersfield in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Abstract

This thesis examines the neglected wartime history of woollen textiles in Huddersfield and the Colne Valley, and women's crucial role in maintaining output. The historiography of female participation in the Great War has concentrated on women entering previously male-dominated work for the first time or women experiencing a brief freedom before returning to the cage of domesticity. These alternative interpretations ignore many aspects of the actuality of women's lives in industries which already had a large female workforce. Moreover, the historiography of textiles has tended to focus on cotton - the biggest textile industry - and the one most impacted by the war. Yet woollens formed an essential part of the wartime economy, providing uniforms and equipment for the British and Allied armed forces and was traditionally one of the largest areas of female employment. During the war the trade suffered a lack of official interest, public indifference and obstructive policies. Women in textiles were neglected as attention focused on munitions and the adherence to 'business as usual' which drained resources of labour and capital from the mills of the West Riding at a time of increased workload and worsening living conditions. In looking at trade unions, housing, leisure, work practices, pay and conditions, and the organization of the wider community, this thesis argues that women cannot be reduced to a single category and that textiles was a much more variegated picture than previously suggested: the view is much more nuanced than either historiography has allowed. Women in the woollen textile industry maintained output despite official policy rather than because of it. This thesis examines how this was achieved and investigates the impact of the influx of working women into the town on existing local gender, social and economic relations. Historians of women's work in the war have addressed the question of skill in industry (usually in industries where women had no previous role) and whether and how women took on new, more highly skilled roles. This thesis is attentive to the question of skill in the textile industry, and examines the intricate way in which this was culturally determined and highly gendered – and the complicated balancing act attempted by the unions who tried to recruit extra women whilst also maintaining the hierarchies of status in this sector. In the woollen industry of Huddersfield and the Colne Valley, women played a valuable part in wartime production and by examining how, despite their increased importance, their status within the industry changed little, this thesis provides a significant contribution to the picture of women's work during the Great War.

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Contents

Abstract.....	1
Copyright Statement.....	2
Glossary of Textile Terms.....	5
Abbreviations.....	7
Map.....	8
Chapter One – Introduction.....	9
Chapter Two – The Textile Industry.....	26
Chapter Three – Government Control.....	35
Wool Control.....	37
Manpower.....	41
State Control.....	46
Chapter Four – The Production of Cloth and the Question of Skill.....	51
The Demand For Khaki.....	54
Alternative Workers Needed.....	60
Reserved Occupations and Military Tribunals.....	69
Chapter Five – Wages and Bonuses.....	77
Rising Prices and Overtime Pay.....	79
War Bonus.....	81
Increased Unrest and Threats of Notice.....	85
Chapter Six – Hours and Conditions.....	91
Overtime.....	93
Nightwork.....	100
Holidays.....	102
Health Concerns.....	104
Chapter Seven – Charity and Welfare.....	111
Distress.....	112
Separation Allowance and Supervision.....	116
Welfare.....	120
Chapter Eight – Food and Housing.....	127
Demand for Food Control.....	129
Queue Crisis.....	131
Rationing.....	134

Housing Conditions in Huddersfield	142
Waves of Incomers.....	144
Accommodating Women Workers	148
Chapter Nine – Aftermath	155
Chapter Ten – Conclusion	163
Bibliography	171

Glossary of Textile Terms

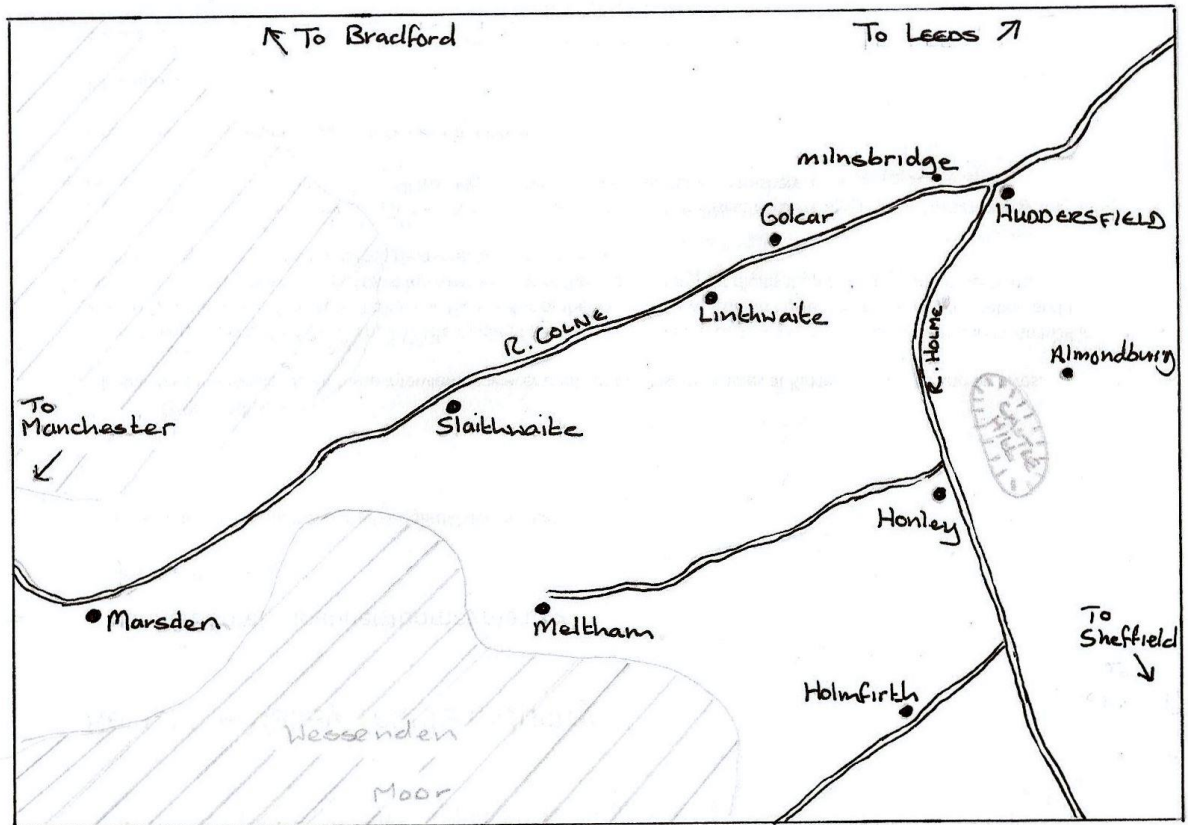
Burler -	Worker in the finishing department, responsible for removing any unwanted material from a woven piece.
Cut -	Each warp length was marked into sections or 'cuts' for which the weaver was paid as each was completed.
Doffer -	Worker in the spinning department responsible for removing the full bobbins. An entry level job with few prospects usually undertaken by boys or girls.
End -	An individual warp yarn.
Fettler -	Worker responsible for cleaning the machines and removing any material that may prevent them working.
Finishing -	Department within a mill responsible for preparing the woven goods for use. Includes any dyeing or mending necessary to bring the material to a suitable state for sale.
Flannel -	A soft, light-weight woollen fabric. Often used for shirts and blankets.
Khaki -	Originally a term for a specific colour used for military uniforms. Eventually used to refer to the uniforms themselves.
Knotter -	Worker in the finishing department responsible for removing any knots from the woven pieces.
Mender -	Worker in the finishing department responsible for examining the cloth and undertaking any replacement of broken or missing threads necessary. Considered the most skillful female job.
Overlooker -	Supervisor of a department within a mill. Responsible for the allocation of jobs and the day-to-day management.
Percher -	Supervisor of the finishing department. Usually a man.
Pick -	A single passage of the bobbin of weft thread through the 'shed' of warp threads. Loom speeds are measured by the number of times (or picks) a minute the weft threads pass backwards and forwards.
Piece -	A completed length of material.
Piecener/Piecer -	Worker in the spinning department, employed to connect any threads which broke. Often an entry level job undertaken by boys or girls.
Serge -	A strong, twilled cloth. Often used for military uniforms.
Shoddy -	Material recovered from wool rags - this can be spun with pure woollen fibres to form a yarn
Spinning -	The department within a mill responsible for the producing yarn by twisting short woollen fibres into a continuous thread.
Tuner -	Maintained the looms to keep them in working order.
Warp -	The threads that run lengthways on a loom or a piece of cloth.
Weaving -	The department within a mill responsible for producing material on a loom using interlaced threads.

- Weft - The threads that run from side to side on a loom or piece of cloth
- Woollen Cloth - Fabric made of carded wool in which shorter fibres overlap each other. This results in a rougher cloth suitable for hard wearing clothing. Most commonly used for enlisted uniforms.
- Worsted Cloth - Fabric made from combed wool in which longer fibres lie parallel. This results in a finer cloth suitable for high quality clothing. Often used for officers' uniforms.

Abbreviations

ASD -	Amalgamated Society of Dyers
ASE -	Amalgamated Society of Engineers
BSP -	British Socialist Party
CIC -	Chief Industrial Commissioner
COS -	Charity Organisation Society
CWAC -	Central Wool Advisory Committee
CWG -	Co-Operative Women's Guild
FWG -	Fabian Women's Group
DORA -	Defence of the Realm Act
GFS -	Girls' Friendly Society
GUTW -	General Union of Textile Workers
HWD -	Heavy Woollen District
ILP -	Independent Labour Party
NAUTT -	National Association of Unions in the Textile Trades
NFWW -	National Federation of Women Workers
NSD&F -	National Society of Dyers and Finishers
NUDBTW -	National Union of Dyers, Bleachers and Textile Workers (successor to GUTW)
NUWSS -	National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies
SSFA -	Soldiers' and Sailors' Families Association
T&L -	Trade and Labour Council
TUC -	Trades Union Congress
UDC -	Urban District Council
VAD -	Voluntary Aid Detachment
WEA -	Workers' Education Association
WTA -	Wool Textile Association
WEWNC -	War Emergency Workers National Committee
WVEC -	Women's War Employment Committee
YFT -	Yorkshire Factory Times
YWCA -	Young Women's Christian Association

Map



Sketch map of the Huddersfield district showing the townships of the Colne Valley

Chapter One – Introduction

The year 2014 marked the centenary of the outbreak of the First World War, and as such saw a huge upsurge of interest in the subject. Numerous films, books and television programmes were produced. School children were taken on tours of the battlefield sites and commemorative coins were minted for the occasion. Community groups produced lists of local casualties and fallen, and the general public were encouraged to explore their own personal connections to the ‘war-to-end-all-wars’. It was said at the Armistice that few families in the country had been untouched by the conflict and my own was no exception. Amongst the stories uncovered during the lead-up to the centennial was the tale of my grandmother’s husband. A 26-year old mill worker from the West Riding of Yorkshire, he enlisted in early 1915, was presumed missing on the Somme in 1916 and eventually declared dead in May 1917. He left behind a widow and three small children.¹ This was a not untypical story, one repeated in towns and villages throughout the land. Of equal interest, however, and hardly mentioned at all, was the story of his wife. She was also a textile worker, and despite having a young family, continued to work in the mill throughout the war. She, and thousands of women like her, helped to clothe and equip the soldiers and sailors who were fighting, and kept the mills and factories going when the men were removed through enlistment or conscription. They did this whilst clothing and feeding their families in the midst of housing shortages and food restrictions. Their story failed to attract the attention of writers and commentators at the time and has generated little attention amongst historians and authors since. This is because textile workers did not provide the dynamic changes that journalists like to cover, there was no great innovation in the work performed or the nature of employment and there was little of the social alteration necessary to accommodate a new industry or workforce.

The mill girls are not alone in this. A similar fate has befallen other groups of women who were involved in this period of total war but did not prove interesting or radical, despite performing vital service in social work or the charity sector. As the commemorations of the various aspects of the war have unfolded, through the different battles and aspects of the conflict, women have made occasional appearances, often as nurses, munitions workers or as the mothers and sweethearts left behind but little attention has been paid to those who worked prior to the war or continued in acts of social service or philanthropic organisation. 2018 has been marked as the point at which women will receive their due, being the anniversary of the attainment of the vote by some sections of the female population. Statues to Millicent Fawcett have been mooted and films and books on the life of Emmeline Pankhurst have been produced. Indeed, 1918 saw more than simply the expansion of the franchise under the Representation of the People Act. In the honours list of June that year two Huddersfield women were awarded M.B.E.s for their work in the charitable and philanthropic war movements.² The honoured Mrs Blamires and Miss Siddon were both well-known in the local area.

¹ *Halifax Courier*, 9 June 1917.

² *Huddersfield Worker*, 6 June 1918.

Mrs Blamires was the wife of a prominent Alderman and former mayor.³ Throughout the war she served in numerous roles, being President of the Huddersfield and District Women's Committee for Soldiers and Sailors, Treasurer of the Huddersfield Interned Prisoners of War Relief Committees, President of the Huddersfield Young Women's Christian Association and patron of the Cinderella Society, amongst other positions.⁴ Miss Siddon was equally as instrumental in the organisation of society throughout the war, being Chairwoman of the local Board of Guardians, President of the Huddersfield Soldiers' and Sailors' Families Association and a member of the local Women's War Employment (Industrial) Committee.⁵ Both women, and many more like them, were instrumental in organising the various charity appeals, relief efforts, fundraising, social organisation and myriad other acts that kept society functioning through the years of dislocation and disruption that the war brought. Although female charity workers and fundraisers on a national level excited the interest of article writers and journalists, at a local level there was no great change to stimulate attention. As the list of achievements of Mrs Blamires and Miss Siddon indicates, women were active in local philanthropy long before the war and continued in this field long after.⁶ Most historians have focused on the areas of change, the greatest being the gaining of the vote. The charity women, mostly older, were the ones who benefited from the expansion of the franchise, unlike their younger counterparts in the factories and mills. Even so, their experiences of local philanthropy and social work, has been overshadowed by the concentration on questions of suffrage and citizenship.

This thesis examines these 'invisible' women: the mill girls who continued to perform their work, to provide the khaki for the uniforms and keep the industry of the country going through the long years of war, and the organisers, like Miss Siddon, who supported them, the welfare workers and accommodation suppliers who, often of their own volition, worked to care for and look after these vital workers. The record of women's work during the war is an unclear picture, dominated by munitions and engineering, with the focus on the changes generated rather than the attempts to maintain the ordinary and everyday work already existing. The whole image is, however, much larger and more complicated, with so many more people and industries deeply involved. This thesis will address this gap in the study of women workers in the First World War, placing the contribution of the women in the woollen industry in the short-term war years into context, not losing sight of the fact that textiles, unlike munitions, existed over a longer timeframe and the issues thus engendered were of a more long-term nature. It aims to retrieve an overlooked group of women workers from the shadows of history and recognise the valuable role they played in the war effort of the nation and place the contribution of the overshadowed woollen textile industry, and the community that served it into the record of the First World War. It argues that the concentration on the more glamorous or noteworthy areas of women's participation in the war has overshadowed more significant trends of continuity that affected much more of the female population. This examination of an overlooked, but essential group of workers, throughout a period of intense pressure, will add a unique contribution to the

³ Joseph Blamires (1861-1918) served as Mayor of Huddersfield 1912-1916.

⁴ *Huddersfield Daily Examiner*, 24 January 1944.

⁵ *Huddersfield Daily Examiner*, 1 June 1923.

⁶ For a fictionalised account of the sort of women involved and the type of work typically undertaken see Winifred Holtby, *South Riding* (London: Collins, 1936).

understanding of the impact of the first total war on British society and what changes, if any, this brought.

The story of women during the First World War has largely concentrated on the innovative or unusual. The popular perception of the female war worker tends to be either a 'canary', a young girl who left domestic service to enter a munitions factory, or a VAD, a middle-class woman working for the first time as a nurse. In works like Mrs. Humphrey Ward's *Missing* (1917) or Hall Caine's non-fiction works such as *Our Girls: their Work For The War* (1916) women are portrayed as feminine creatures who have accepted the coarsening nature of war as a temporary, patriotic sacrifice.⁷ We have these images because these were the pictures of womanhood that the press and authorities presented; women working for patriotic reasons in acceptable, if novel, areas. But the more these ideas are scrutinised the more artificial they seem. These portrayals of feminine work tend to focus on either the acceptable face of female employment, the caring or welfare fields, or the extraordinary in the form of incursion into the male-dominated sphere. Both these ideals of women workers concentrate on the unusual, either work that had not been done by women before or women who had not done work before. The mill girls of the textile districts would not have recognised themselves in the narrative created during the war. The wartime writers in their desire to emphasise the unusual omitted one of the most important groups of women, namely those who were already working in industries considered essential to the war effort. The affirmative depictions of women during the first World War, as portrayed in popular contemporary literature, was also confined to a very narrow window of positive representation. At the beginning of the war, when victory was expected within months, women were not required for work and were barely referred to. During the period from mid-1915, when the 'shell crisis' was first revealed to the end of 1917, when American forces joined the war, women were extolled and venerated as vital to the war effort and the saviours of the economy.⁸ Once victory again seemed within grasping distance attitudes towards women shifted and writers, particularly in the press, campaigned for the return of female domesticity and the advancement of maternity and childcare as the ultimate form of feminine occupation. These women, the nurses and munitionettes were merely the visible and unusual tip of the iceberg. As Susan Grayzel comments 'the novelty lay not in the entrance of women to the world of waged work but in the types of work performed and the repercussions of these changes.'⁹ The paid female workforce increased by approximately 25 per cent during the war, from just under 5 million in 1914 to just over 6 million in 1918.¹⁰ This means that many women who were already present in the workforce continued to perform their work with little fanfare or even regard for the alterations the war brought to their working conditions and their lives outside the workplace. Textiles, in particular, as one of the most common occupations for women before the war, but a traditionally ill-regarded and poorly paid one, are one of the primary 'hidden' workforces during the First World War and thus an area that deserves attention.

⁷ Caine, H., *Our Girls: Their Work for The War* (London: Hutchinson, 1916). Ward, Humphry, Mrs., *Missing* (London: Collins, 1917). Gail Ledgard, *To what extent did the First World War impact the domestic lives of working class women in Huddersfield* (Unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Huddersfield, 2013) p.3.

⁸ George Robb, *British Culture and the First World War* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), p.43.

⁹ Susan Grayzel, 'Women and Men', in John Horne (ed.), *A Companion to World War I* (Oxford: Wiley, 2010), p.267.

¹⁰ Gerard DeGroot, *Back in Blighty* (London: Vintage, 2014).

By focusing on narrow, often artificial, portrayals of womanhood during the war, many of the underlying themes of women's history have been downplayed or disregarded. In addition, where women are acknowledged, they are often mentioned with relation to the male activity deemed more important. Thus, women entering industry are seen as temporary men, undertaking male work for the duration only, or as a threat, encroaching on jobs men should by rights be performing. In perhaps the most apposite explanation of the status of women workers during wartime, Margaret Higonnet uses the analogy of the 'double helix' to compare the relative fortunes and experiences of male and female workers.¹¹ Even though women appear on the face of it to gain from the absence of men in wartime, with the opening up of more, previously male-dominated areas of skilled and highly-paid work, in reality their position with regard to men remained static. As women ascended their strand of the helix, the male workers they replaced continued to move to areas of even greater regard, as soldiers. The gains made by women are only ever beneficial compared to their starting point and the nature of the hierarchy of work means that as soon as conflict ceases, the men who lose their prominent position as military participants revert back to their previous occupations, displacing the women who temporarily held them for the duration of the war. In these cases, the role women played was diminished by being compared to the role men were doing. Women, although not involved in combat, performed vital tasks that contributed to victory. It is also true that the analysis of women in the war has tended to divide participants into distinct groups as either workers or homemakers. In reality it is virtually impossible to separate the domestic and industrial life of many working women. The nature of the job she took outside the home impacted and informed the work she was responsible for within it. Many working women, therefore, performed this dual role throughout the period and this thesis will reflect the additional burden female textile workers endured through the war by also examining the wider community within which they lived and worked. It will also examine the nature of the work women performed and their status within an industry that similarly received little attention, being overshadowed by a larger, more economically significant area, namely cotton. Female textile workers are thus triply disregarded. Firstly, because war is considered a male undertaking and much of the existing documentation regards the removal of men into the army or the protection of male jobs in the face of female encroachment. Secondly because munitions were more glamorous and of greater interest to the press and of higher propaganda value to the authorities, and thirdly because cotton as the economically dominant textile receives much of the interest and support from the government. The experience of women, and especially female textile workers during the First World War is an area that deserves to be reassessed. Women did not merely undertake the limited jobs that contemporary accounts portray. They were not merely nurses for the wounded, makers of shells for the guns and providers of sons and husbands for the army. In addition, they were crucial to the maintenance of industrial output, and they organized and administered the various social and welfare requirements of an increasingly interventionist government. They endured the strictures of housing crises and accommodation shortages, food restrictions, migration and bereavement.

A large volume of the history of the war from a female perspective, therefore, concentrates on

¹¹ Margaret Higonnet and Patrice Higonnet, 'The Double Helix' in Margaret Higonnet, Jane Jenson, Sonya Michel & Margaret Collins Weitz (eds), *Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987).

the differences that the war made to the lives of women and the political, social or cultural consequences or lack thereof. This approach is summarised by Braybon who stated that 'The increasing interest over time in the 'woman worker' reflects a general shift towards those who did something different as a result of war, and in some way challenged the existing social order.'¹² The expansion of the workforce and the inclusion of more women in occupations they had previously been denied meant more women were actively employed. For some groups, middle-class women entering employment for the first time or young girls leaving domestic service, this probably represented a liberation of sorts. There were, however, class and gender issues to be faced. Although the government needed female workers to maintain the output necessary to wage war, they were not considered anything other than a short-term solution to an immediate problem. Women workers were seen as performing a special kind of war service, one that would end when the war ended. They were not, therefore, regarded as threatening the pre-war gender divisions of a male-centred workplace and a female dominated domestic sphere.¹³ The concentration on the novelty of women working has distorted the picture and overstated the impact of the war on female work.

For many of the working-class women of Huddersfield, in common with many other industrial areas, paid work was nothing new. They had long been included, for greater or lesser periods as circumstances dictated, in the ranks of the employed. The war, therefore, presented these women with different challenges and here the gender and class attitudes inherent in the term working class women are all too apparent. They were women and so the organisational responsibility of the home and family fell to them. Even though some worked in the new industries and, in Huddersfield, many worked in the old ones too, they also had other duties. They had to maintain their households to the standards required for respectability, do the shopping, look after the children and husband if he was still at home. They had to cope in his absence if he was not, depending on the intermittent government Separation Allowance in lieu of housekeeping. They were also working class and as such often viewed with a degree of condescension by their supposed social superiors. This meant they were frequently subject to the well-meaning, or otherwise, interventions of the various bodies the authorities initiated to care for them. From the newly minted factory welfare officers to the old established Poor Law Guardians administering distress funds, middle class do-gooders felt compelled to monitor and supervise all aspects of working class life.

An examination of how the working-class women of Huddersfield and the surrounding area coped with the impact of the First World War will show that although the war was a dramatic and powerful event, it was also an unusual interruption. 'War was tragic, in some ways catastrophic. But for most people it was an extraordinary event of limited duration which, much as it brought change also inspired a desire to reconstruct according to cherished patterns.'¹⁴ For the women of Huddersfield, it was not so much a desire to reconstruct as an acknowledgement that things had not really changed that much at all. The war certainly magnified and intensified problems, but these were

¹² Gail Braybon, *Winners and Losers: Women's Role in the War Story* in *Evidence, History and the Great War: Historians and the Impact of 1914-1918* (New York: Berghahn, 2008), p.88.

¹³ Ledger, *To what extent did the First World War impact the domestic lives of working class women in Huddersfield*, p.4.

¹⁴ Gerard DeGroot, *Blighty: British Society In The Era Of The Great War* (London: Longman, 1996), p.311.

existing conditions that working-class women had been experiencing for years preceding war and in many cases would continue to combat long after the guns fell silent. Bad housing, poverty, food shortages, overcrowding, family strife and reconciling home and work were issues that affected working-class women before and after the war.¹⁵ By investigating these areas during the war years this work will show how the conflict that supposedly dramatically affected the whole of British society, in reality caused little permanent change to the lives of large numbers of women. 'In fact there was more continuity than change in women's lives in this period.'¹⁶

The historiography surrounding the involvement of women in the First World War has largely centred on the issue of change. Attention has focused on whether the war was 'good' or 'bad' for women. Questions have been asked about women and work, or women and citizenship and if the war delivered any long-term benefits in these areas or not. Did women achieve any long-term advancements into previously restricted jobs? Did the granting of the vote represent total inclusion in political life? Did the war challenge gender relations or merely reinforce existing divisions? Did increased government intervention lead to improvements in health or working conditions? Each of these areas has been assessed with a view to determining the impact of the war on women. One of the first historians to argue that the demands of total war could lead to social change, from which previously disadvantaged groups such as women or the working class could benefit was Arthur Marwick. In his works, primarily *The Deluge* (1965) but followed up and expanded in other works notably *Women at War* (1977) and *Total War and Social Change* (1988), he put forward and examined the concept of war as history from below, that the lives of the people who were involved in the conflict were necessarily affected.¹⁷ Marwick assessed the impact that total war, utilising the input of all sections of the population, has on a society. He reached the conclusion that a massive event like a world war could not but help have a profound impact on the people and communities caught up in it. In terms of the First World War, he felt that this applied especially to the female population and the working class. He regarded the nature of women's participation, the undertaking of male jobs by female workers and the consequent rise in wages, and thus self-confidence, of the female workforce represented advancements in women's lives. He assumed that women welcomed the modernising improvements, the more visible role in paid work, politics and social life that they were witnessing. Marwick felt quite passionately that women's lives, indeed society itself, were improved as a result of their actions during the war.

Marwick's conclusions, seen as radical and provocative at the time, were attacked almost instantly from many directions. Amongst the first to take issue was the feminist movement, especially those of a socialist or Marxist bent. For writers like Gail Braybon, in her book *Women Workers of the First World War* (1981), questions arose about the identification of female experience with male patterns of recognition, particularly that it was the concept of paid work that should be the driving

¹⁵ Ledgard, *To what extent did the First World War impact the domestic lives of working class women in Huddersfield*, p.6.

¹⁶ Martin Pugh, *State and Society* (London: Arnold, 1994).

¹⁷ Arthur Marwick, *The Deluge: British Society And The First World War* (Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1991); Arthur Marwick, *Women At War 1914-1918* (London: Fontana, 1977); Arthur Marwick, *Total War and Social Change* (Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1988).

force in female advancement.¹⁸ She used a wide variety of sources to point out that women did not gain materially from their participation in the wartime economy. They were always subject to the manipulation of male-dominated organisations, the government, the unions, the press and so on. Any improvement in the lives of working women was given on the sufferance of these patriarchal figures and was usually only for the duration and subject to immediate revocation at the cessation of hostilities. The conclusion she reaches is far less optimistic than that of Marwick. Even though Braybon refined her work in subsequent articles, culminating in her collaboration with Penny Summerfield, *Out Of The Cage* (1987), which offers a slightly less bleak picture that acknowledges women did make some advancements as a results of the First World War, she nevertheless remained frustrated about the neglect and lack of permanent improvement working women received.¹⁹ In a similar vein Jill Liddington and Jill Norris in *One Hand Tied Behind Us* (1978) challenged the view that the limited granting of the franchise in 1918 represented the achievement of all the goals of the suffrage and wider women's movements of the period.²⁰ This book points out that even within the organisations dedicated to suffrage there was a diversity of positions and demands. The concentration on a narrow and unrepresentative section of the movement has overshadowed the wider interests of women's groups in issues like equal pay, housing, welfare and health.

A further challenge to Marwick's ideas was put forward in *Blighty* (1996), a work by a young American historian Gerard DeGroot, which rejected the notion that momentous events must necessarily have momentous consequences. DeGroot dismisses the objections of feminists and socialists that the lack of advancement for women and the working class after the war was the result of a patriarchal conspiracy to keep down undesirable sections of the community. He, instead, examines the power of tradition in British society and its ability to contain and neutralise radical social change quite organically. He points to the lack of desire on behalf of some sections of the female population to be emancipated, or the positive joy exhibited by some workers who could not wait to leave their wartime occupations and return to the quiet lives of service or domesticity they had left behind.²¹

The debate has thus divided into those who believe that war is good for the position of women and those who feel it is not, or what might effectively be termed the 'optimistic' and the 'pessimistic' interpretation of what the First World War meant for the female population. Such definitions are neatly encapsulated by two relatively recent works. Deborah Thom and Angela Woollacott seem, on the face of it, to divide quite neatly into one camp or the other. Woollacott in *On Her Their Lives Depend* (1994) is the writer with the more positive interpretation. Her work examines the experience of the female munitions workers during the war and concludes that the opportunities for financial independence, increased mobility and the challenge to both class and gender norms represented true improvements. She notes the war 'accelerated rather than originated changes in women's social

¹⁸ Gail Braybon, *Women Workers In The First World War* (London: Croom Helm, 1981), p.89.

¹⁹ Gail Braybon and Penny Summerfield, *Out of The Cage: Women's Experience in Two World Wars* (New York: Pandora, 1987).

²⁰ Jill Liddington and Jill Norris, *One Hand Tied Behind Us: The rise of the women's suffrage movement* (London, Virago Press 1978).

²¹ Gerard DeGroot, *Blighty: British Society In The Era Of The Great War* (London: Longman, 1996), p.265.

behaviour, but wartime changes occurred both rapidly and within the context of involvement in military action, the quintessentially male sphere.²² Woollacott feels that munitions work and the financial and health benefits directly resulting from social policies initiated in wartime all led to an increased awareness of women's sense of value both of themselves and their place in society. This resulted in a changed attitude on the part of women which while not meaning immediate changes nevertheless facilitated the advances of the 1920s and beyond. Thom, on the other hand, in her book *Nice Girls and Rude Girls* (1998), takes very much the same starting point of an examination of munitions workers but comes to a much more downbeat conclusion. She feels that wartime employment had only a limited impact on female experience and emphasises that what actually changed for women during the war was how the government organised them. Women workers were always viewed in respect to their relationship with the men they were replacing either as substitutes or dilutees. Thus women workers are reduced to units of labour within a framework of regulation and paternalism reinforced by strict supervision.²³

This good/bad dichotomy is, however, problematical as it assumes that there is one desired outcome that all women subscribe to and agree about. As Joan Scott has pointed out 'the elusive issue in this debate is the measure of improved status.'²⁴ She questions not only how such a concept can be defined and measured, but also how it can be applied to such a diverse and varied group as all women. Indeed, it is noticeable that much of the historiography of female involvement in the war assumes that women be assessed relative to male achievements. Munitions works are cited of examples whereby women gain position and experience, which is seen as a positive, then lose this at the end of the war, a negative. In reality, for most working women, the hierarchies within work remained unchallenged by the war and thus the assessments based on such areas are largely not applicable to their situation. For the textile workers of the West Riding such questions are, for the most part, irrelevant. Women worked before the war, they continued to work throughout it, and carried on working long afterwards. For these women, and the communities in which they lived, there were far more fundamental issues occupying their interest and providing topics for debate. Questions such as the nature of skilled work, equal pay, married women working, and union involvement formed part of an on-going discussion within the industry, and the war, although disruptive, was merely one more problem to be negotiated.

There has been a tendency in historical studies to regard the First World War as an isolated event, so vast and significant that it stands outside normal parameters. Thus works of history are written up to 1914 and then resume in 1918 with the war treated as a separate entity. The historian Susie Steinbach, for instance, justifying why her book stops in 1914 states 'the end of the 1800s did not mark the end of an era with anything like the decisiveness of the start of the First World War.'²⁵ In a similar fashion, many works, especially those dealing with women's involvement in political life start

²² Angela Woollacott, *On Her Their Lives Depend: Munitions Workers In The Great War* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), p.215.

²³ Deborah Thom, *Nice Girls And Rude Girls: Women Workers In World War One* (London: I.B.Taurus, 1998), p.90.

²⁴ Joan W. Scott, 'Rewriting History' in Margaret Higonnet, Jane Jenson, Sonya Michel & Margaret Collins Weitz (eds), *Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987).

²⁵ Susie Steinbach, *Women in England 1760-1914* (London: Wiedenfeld & Nicolson, 2004) p.5.

in 1918 when the extension of the franchise led to their inclusion in the official apparatus of national governance.²⁶ The war years in the middle have often been treated as an anomaly, where the focus of the nation was on the war to the exclusion of all other considerations. Although many recent works have moved away from this 'watershed moment' analysis to emphasise the continuities present as much as the radical transformations, there are still gaps in the historiography.²⁷ Women's work is one of the areas that has suffered due to the concentration on the role of munitions during the war. The entry of women into the world of work has been overshadowed by the needs of the military in a time of war and has come to be regarded as a temporary wartime expedient. This tendency serves to downplay the very crucial role existing women workers had played in the periods before and after the conflict. The more general trends of women's work and those areas that continued to employ women both before and after the conflict have, therefore, suffered from a lack of attention. In many respects the war merely served to highlight and emphasise issues that predated the war and that would continue to affect industry long after it. The textile industry is no exception to this. Women were employed in the woollen and worsted trade both before, during and after the First World War, but largely because of this, their contribution has not been acknowledged. Although this work will concentrate on the war years themselves, because of the continuity in the employment of women it is impossible to separate this period entirely from the broader trends. Many of the issues that the war enhanced were already concerns within the industry. Thus, for example, the debate about wage increases and equality of pay that so exercised the unions, employers and government negotiators during the war when women were working overtime to produce khaki for the army were not new topics, but reflected the arguments that had been unresolved since the 1880s.²⁸ Similarly the suspension of the Factory Acts to allow women to work the nightshift when the men who normally did this work were conscripted into the army reflected an ongoing campaign long predating the conflict.²⁹

Discussion over the suitability of women for responsible, and thus better-paid, roles within working environments were accelerated by the demands of the male labour shortage of the war but were not a direct consequence of it. The exclusion of women from certain work and the assumption that men were better at specific jobs had long been a trait since the industrial revolution.³⁰ Other issues, such as the employment of married women or children, welfare in factories and the unionisation of female workers were all magnified by the changes in the composition of the wartime workforce but none of them were new areas of interest. Although work has been done on these subjects as they related to the munitions workers who were new to industry as a result of the war, little attention has been given to the textile workers who were equally affected by the conflict and suffered similar pressures and problems. By concentrating on this overlooked group of workers during the

²⁶ Pamela Graves, *Labour Women: Women in British working-class politics 1918-39*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

²⁷ See, for example, Angela John, *Unequal Opportunities: Women's Employment in England 1800-1918* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), Jane Lewis, *Women in England 1870-1950: sexual divisions and social change* (London: Wheatsheaf, 1984).

²⁸ Jill Liddington and Jill Norris, *One Hand Tied Behind Us* (London: Virago, 1978), p.95.

²⁹ Barbara Drake, *Women in Trade Unions* (London, Labour Research Department, 1920), p.65.

³⁰ Deirdre Busfield, 'Skill and the sexual division of labour in the West Riding Textile Industry, 1850-1914' in J.A. Jowitt and A.J. McIvor (eds.), *Employers and Labour in the English Textile Industries 1850-1939* (London: Routledge, 1988).

wartime period it will be possible to assess if the war affected existing workers as much as it did those who entered the field for the duration. Women who entered the world of work or who changed their employment as a result of the war will have experienced the time differently from those who continued to perform the same work. In a similar fashion the lack of scrutiny of the textile industry meant that the challenges of production were of a different nature to those of the munitions industry with its close government control and oversight. Additionally, the post-war backlash against female workers with their removal from the jobs they had performed and their replacement with returning soldiers, as agreed under the various Treasury Agreements between the government and the unions did not apply in the same way to the textile workers.

Thus, because of the continuity of experience within the woollen industry it is impossible to entirely divorce the assessment of the impact of war from the surrounding landscape. The concentration on a brief period within a much longer history is an acknowledgement that although the war was a large and momentous event, it was ultimately a temporary incident within an industry that both pre-dated and followed it. Similarly, the historical examination of the textile industry has concentrated on the periods before and after the war, and the response of the industry to innovations in working relations embodied by the introduction of the Whitley Report and the formation of works councils.³¹ The period of the war itself has largely been disregarded. In part this is understandable as contemporary writers and recent historians deal largely with issues of social change. As the textile industry started the war in one form and ended it in roughly the same shape, there is little to attract the attention of writers trying to prove that social upheaval leads to dramatic change or those determined to claim new achievements or advances for different groups or sectors of the community. Although the textile industry was subject to the same pressures to contribute to total war as engineering or other industries, the presence beforehand of women within the workforce meant that such changes as were necessary to maintain output and production were by nature much smaller and more subtle. One of the main problems this generates is that such changes occurred in a more organic way: the sudden need for shells and guns led to the establishment of large factories and workshops and the rapid employment of vast numbers of new workers who needed accommodation and welfare provision; textiles, by contrast carried on in the same mills, with many of the same workers and management structures. Munitions as an industry was essential to the war effort and was almost from the outset subject to government control and direction. In textiles, the mantra was 'business as usual' and for a long period the government was disinclined to interfere directly in the day-to-day running of the trade. It was only as the war continued, and the situation became less sustainable, that textiles fell increasingly under official supervision. This means that whereas there are large archives of material relating to the munitions and engineering industries during the war, for textiles the information is much less abundant. As the general organisation was left in the hands of the mill owners and managers, each mill was largely responsible for their own administration and few records remain for this period. Official accounts also reflect the hands-off nature of much of the dealings between the authorities and the textile producers. It was only in the latter stages of the war

³¹ For example, see Chris Wrigley, *Cosy Co-operation Under Strain: Industrial Relations in the Yorkshire Woollen Industry 1919-1930* (York: Borthwick Institute, 1987).

that much direct involvement occurred and even then the concerns were largely connected with the provision of manpower to the army rather than the workaday supervision of the industry. In a similar fashion much of the union involvement in wartime campaigns, although topical, remained within the remit of normal trade union action. Wage agitation, overtime rows, applications for bonuses and drives to improve terms and conditions reflected industrial interests both before and after the conflict. Thus there is little of the everyday concerns of individual workers within the union records. Large-scale national campaigns against conscription and price rises dominate the pages, and the smaller scale, more intimate concerns are harder to trace. A further problem when examining the history of the textile trade during the war is the sheer diversity of the industry and the organisations contained within it. As an umbrella term, textiles covers a large number of materials, processes, geographical locations, occupations and organisations. During the war, although a number of attempts were made to try and promote unification by both the employers and the unions involved, the process was complex and protracted.

It is not merely the world of work that the conditions of war have tended to obscure and overshadow the underlying trends of history. The war also saw a large-scale dislocation of civil society. Men were removed from industrial work into the military and their places within industry were taken by others, often women, but also older men or children. This caused a shift in the responsibilities that society deemed 'suitable' and again emphasised the artificial nature of many of the divisions that the population, especially women were subjected to. Whilst the war brought new opportunities for some women to experience the novelty of wage-earning, for many working-class women such a notion was not an unusual event. What the war meant for them was a shift in the relationship they had with the authorities. The war saw a movement in the provision of services from the charitable and philanthropic organisations to an increased involvement of the state in social welfare. The introduction of Separation Allowances, the imposition of rent restrictions and the ultimate compulsory rationing of food meant the participation of the government in many aspects of domestic life. Although the war caused an increase in such involvement, the concentration on the dramatic, often *ad hoc*, responses to the particular conditions of war, has again downplayed the fact that such changes were already in motion before the conflict. The concentration on work as the ultimate expression of achievement or failure has also served to frame the question of female participation in a male-dominated field of reference. Thus, women are divided into workers or mothers and the debate becomes should women be working or is this inimical to their prime role as child-bearers. For many of the working women in the textile areas, such divisions were again contrary to their actual experience. It was impossible to separate the two functions and thus the historiography of the domestic consequences of the First World War also fail to adequately address much of the real-life experience. The emphasis on change, whether the war caused lasting and permanent difference to British society means that developments are interpreted as a response to the demands of war rather than organic or inevitable consequences. The debate is framed as whether war is good or bad for women, but again 'women' is not an easily definable, homogenous grouping, but rather a collection of disparate elements each with their own needs, desires and agendas. Works have been produced concentrating on the specific problems caused in a nation pursuing total war. The food supply, provision of housing,

health care, infant mortality and even drinking habits have all informed the debate about the impact of war. Jay Winter in his work *The Great War and the British People* (1985), argued that the lot of the civilian population improved through considerations like the increase in employment opportunities provided by the expansion of the wartime workforce, the improved health benefits afforded by more equitable distribution of food and the government interventions that resulted in rent control.³² Pat Thane has written about the development of state welfare and the status of women within the changing voluntary sector.³³ The war saw the emergence of a new relationship between the state and the charity sector regarding the administration and provision of benefits and allowances. The state also became increasingly involved in the food supply and the housing market through the instruments of food control and rent restriction legislation. The extent to which this affected the population has been discussed in a number of works.³⁴ In reality such concerns were not merely a product of war, but a continuation of policies and debates that both pre-dated and outlived the period of conflict. It is impossible to separate the war from the surrounding years as this would place an unwarranted significance on a time of upheaval that whilst undoubtedly traumatic in the short-term, nevertheless proved less concrete in the longer scheme of things.

It has been stated that people at the bottom of the social order rarely leave written records. They have neither the leisure or the occasion to produce diaries, personal letters or books.³⁵ This is certainly true of the female textile workers of the West Riding during the war. In many cases this is because the women involved were continuing with work they had performed before the war and so saw no difference worthy of note. Other women took on work merely for the duration of the war and did not see any great curiosity in their contribution, textile work as traditional 'women's work' did not excite the interest as the more glamorous and unusual munitions work did. There were few articles in the press lauding the textile workers, and no concerted effort to memorialise them in the same way. As Gail Braybon pointed out, the press was used during the war to run stories intended to boost morale and support the war effort.³⁶ Women continuing to perform their own jobs aroused little attention. The local trade newspapers were the most interested in the changes and adaptations necessary within the industry. The *Yorkshire Factory Times*, a newspaper closely associated with the textile unions, and the *Huddersfield Worker*, a socialist newspaper, were the most vocal in commenting on the various wage disputes, factory legislation changes and alterations to working hours and conditions that were introduced throughout the war. Other local newspapers, the *Huddersfield Examiner* or the *Colne Valley Guardian*, for example, covered the more social aspects of the introduction of new workers into the area, with the establishment of girls clubs and the various welfare and housing provisions. It has, therefore, been necessary to use all these sources to piece

³² Jay Winter, *The Great War And The British People* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1985). See also Ledgard, *To what extent did the First World War impact the domestic lives of working class women in Huddersfield*.

³³ See for example Pat Thane, *The Foundations of the Welfare State* (London: Longman, 1996), Pat Thane, 'The Working Class and State 'Welfare' in Britain, 1880-1914' in *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 27, No. 4 (Dec. 1984).

³⁴ For food control see Margaret Barnett, *British Food Policy during the First World War* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1985), for housing Mark Swenarton, *Homes fit for Heroes* (London: Heinemann, 1981).

³⁵ Sarah Eisenstein, *Give Us Bread But Give Us Roses* (London: Routledge, 1983) p.15.

³⁶ Braybon, *Women Workers*, pp. 154-161.

together the story of the women who continued to work in the mills and those who came to join them during the war.

This piecemeal nature reflects one of the significant problems of using this type of primary historical source. Newspapers are, by their very nature, written to reflect the attitudes and opinions of specific groups or members of society. Each has their own editorial position, political agenda and range of interests. Each newspaper is, in turn, read by and caters to a particular section of the community, whether it be people of similar political views, social opinions or even religious outlook. In wartime this is further exacerbated by the restrictions imposed by central authority. During the period in question the Defence of the Realm Act was used by the government to control and censor the press. In undertaking this study I have tried to utilise as wide a cross-section of this range of material as possible, taking in the various different positions adopted by the variety of newspapers available. This, however, has not always been easy and serves to highlight one of the perennial problems of historical research. Due to the ephemeral nature of newspapers many have not survived to the present day. Of those that have been preserved some are more difficult to access than others and not all are available for study. Although some newspapers have been digitised and are accessible online, others are only to be viewed in archive offices and libraries, in physical form or as microfilm. The type of research necessary to piece together the lives of the individuals I have tried to trace in this work has involved many hours of trawling through pages of material, much of it irrelevant or unhelpful, trying to winnow out the useful nuggets.

The individual voices of the women involved are difficult to locate. A number of brief references are found in various oral history projects, but for the most part it is the middle-class observers whose impressions dominate. The work of Florence Lockwood, wife of a local mill-owner and keen diarist, for example, notes several interactions with the workers in her vicinity.³⁷ For the most part, however, her impressions are filtered through her role as a prominent citizen, a member of the Board of Guardians and a suffrage activist. The day-to-day life of the workers in her husband's factory do not particularly concern her, save where they intersect with her interests and activities. The most valuable material about the lives of working women in the Colne Valley during the war are found in a series of interviews conducted by Joanna Bornat in the course of her doctoral research. Although her work concentrates on the union activities and experiences of her respondents, nevertheless, the interviews provide an insight into the attitudes and lives of workers both in the mills and at home throughout the period.³⁸

The use of oral history must always be tempered with the knowledge that such recollections are

³⁷ Florence Lockwood diary, KC909, West Yorkshire Archive Service.

³⁸ Such material has been deposited in the Kirklees Sound Archive and is referred to throughout this work as the Colne Valley Interviews. In addition the material cited can be found in Joanna Bornat, 'An Examination of the General Union of Textile Workers: 1883-1922' (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Essex), Joanna Bornat, 'What About That Lass of Yours Being in the Union?': Textile Workers and their Union in Yorkshire, 1888– 1922' in L. Davidoff & B. Westover (eds) (1986) *Our Work, Our Lives, Our Words: Women's History and Women's Work* (Basingstoke: Macmillan 1986) and Joanna Bornat, 'Lost Leaders: Women, Trade Unionism and the Case of the General Union of Textile Workers, 1875– 1914' in A. V. John (ed.) *Unequal Opportunities: Women's Employment in England 1800– 1918* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986).

filtered through personal experience, confusion of memory and the passage of time. Events can be misremembered, conflated or suppressed for a variety of reasons both innocent or deliberate, and people are prone to showing themselves or their friends in the best light without regard to historical accuracy. Human frailty is always a factor in the recording of oral reminiscences, both in the memory of the individual telling the anecdote and the attitude of the person chronicling it. Oral history, whilst a useful tool for accessing material deemed unworthy of recording in more formal, material ways, is not always the most reliable source for use in historical research. In this case in particular a number of problems are evident. The work available, being pre-recorded, was not directly connected with the subjects I would like to have asked about, the interviewer being interested in different areas and by her own admission relatively inexperienced at the time of the undertaking. The methodology used was also fairly rigid, the questions being formulated in advance and posed in a structured and consistent manner, allowing little room for discursive conversation. This means that certain follow up questions that may have been helpful to my research were not mentioned or recorded. In addition, the questioning took place over half a century after the events being recalled, meaning a certain haziness has inevitably crept in over the subsequent years. Nevertheless the immediacy of the personal connection and the value of the individual voices of people directly connected to the subject under discussion mean that such testimony is a precious resource from a group otherwise vastly underrepresented.

On the official side there are few records remaining from the management side of the local organisational effort. As the textile industry was never brought under full government control in the same way that munitions works were, most of the day-to-day running of the individual mills remained in private hands and continued to be under the personal supervision of the companies involved. This means that each separate mill maintained its own records of the period and very few have survived to the present day. The small amount that still exist give little information regarding the implementation of the various government directives or the negotiations over wages or conditions, often merely noting the end results. The records of the Woollen Manufacturers' Association and the Chamber of Commerce are equally as opaque, giving few details beyond generalities, as they tended to concentrate on the problems caused by the restriction of exports and the supply of raw materials.³⁹ It has, therefore, been necessary to rely upon second-hand reports in the various local newspapers as to the everyday policies and activities of many interested parties in the trade.

A more substantive body of material exists in the various trade union records. In particular, the records of the General Union of Textile Workers cover many of the problem areas, including the wage negotiations required in view of the rising prices, issues surrounding certifying occupations to retain male workers and the suspension of the Factory Acts necessary to enable women to work overtime and night shifts.⁴⁰ The Union also covered the establishment of a Women's Guild to look after the interests of female workers.⁴¹ A further source covered is the Huddersfield and District Trades and

³⁹Agreement between Representatives of Employers and Workpeople engaged in the Worsted and Woollen Industries of the West Riding of Yorkshire, LAB 83/1252, National Archives.

⁴⁰ General Union of Textile Workers Minutes, S/NUDBTW/1, West Yorkshire Archive Service.

⁴¹ General Union of Textile Workers Women's Guild Minutes, S/NUDBTW/61, West Yorkshire Archive Service.

Labour Council which was involved in the problems that occurred due to the movement of workers between jobs, when textile workers desiring higher wages sought work in munitions for example. They also organised many of the protest meetings in the town about rising prices, housing shortages and food rationing.⁴²

As far as the government records are concerned, due to the hands-off nature of their involvement in the textile industry, much of the material is of a generalised nature. There are reports on the increase in female employment issued throughout the war, but many of the figures are national and do not cover specific areas.⁴³ An additional consequence of war is that many of the official reports are truncated and lacking their normal in-depth studies. For example, the Factory Inspector reports drop from the pre-war standard of over 100 pages to summaries of less than 10 and whilst they may detail breaches of the regulations, they do not give particulars or name individual firms involved. The Manpower Board figures give details of the men required by the Army but do not go into details about where these men are to be drawn from.⁴⁴ The Local Authorities are also somewhat sketchy about the problems caused by the War. Although there are occasional references in the council minutes to the influx of workers into the town and the pressure this places on housing stock, for the most part local administration continues to function as normally as possible in the circumstances.⁴⁵ Beyond some debate about recruitment and fundraising and the inevitable wage increases for council workers there is little evidence in the records of the war at all.⁴⁶

The very unremarkable nature of the industry and the people working within it mean that for the most part the information gathered is in the form of small snippets from various sources pieced together to form a bigger picture. Because outwardly little appeared to change dramatically in the woollen textile trade throughout the war, there is no large-scale body of material to draw upon. Many of the references are circumstantial and tangential, significant because of what they do not say explicitly but rather what they imply indirectly. Thus, court cases mention women from various different towns around the country suggesting the movement of workers, or housing disputes cite cases where firms have evicted tenants to accommodate incomers. Using these little pieces of information, however, it is possible to build a picture of the woollen industry during the First World War and the people employed within it and so rescue them from the shadow of history.

A recent response to the tendency to treat women as an indistinguishable mass has been the rise of micro-history, where the examination of smaller groups and more localised investigations are used. Writers like June Hannam and Johanna Alberti have used biography whilst Krista Cowman also adds a geographical approach to move the discussion away from the assumptions and concerns of the dominant groups and focus instead on the less prominent activists.⁴⁷ Hannam argues that it is only by

⁴² Huddersfield Trade and Labour Council Minutes, S/HTC/1/.4, West Yorkshire Archive Service.

⁴³ Report into the Increased Employment of Women 1916, S/NUDBTW, West Yorkshire Archive Service.

⁴⁴ Report of the West Riding of Yorkshire (Northern Division) Committee for the Substitution and Reinforcement of Labour, NATS/1/1134, National Archives.

⁴⁵ Housing and Town Planning Committee Minutes, KMT18/12/2/34, West Yorkshire Archive Service.

⁴⁶ General Purpose Committee Minutes, KMT18/12/2/37, West Yorkshire Archive Service.

⁴⁷ Johanna Alberti, *Beyond Suffrage: Feminists in War and Peace, 1914 - 1928*, (London: Macmillan, 1989); June Hannam, *Isabella Ford*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989); Krista Cowman, *Mrs Brown is a Man and a Brother' Women in Merseyside's Political Organisations, 1890-1920*(Liverpool: Liverpool University Press 2004).

examining the small scale local picture that individual participation can be reconstructed.⁴⁸ Adrian Gregory has continued the movement away from the generalities of the national political viewpoint and increased concentration on the local and everyday experience of individuals and communities. In *The Last Great War* (2008) he argues that British society was much more fragmented than previous models had portrayed and that reactions to the various policies implemented depended on many factors including regional, financial, and social attitudes and differences. He concludes that, 'there is a thriving literature on women's history and the issue of change (or lack of change) in gender roles.'⁴⁹ This thesis will build on this theme, being a small-scale study of a particular group of workers within a defined geographical area and a specific industry, who were affected by the war but continued to perform work they had been doing beforehand. It will use the sketchy and disjointed archival material available to address the gap in the historiography caused by the concentration on the role of munitions or the employment of women new to the world of work. It will examine how the textile trade and the workers employed therein reacted to the pressures created by the war and how production was maintained for the duration and the British and allied armies were equipped throughout.

The thesis is divided into what might roughly be termed 'work' and 'domestic' halves. The first part, after outlining the nature of the existing textile industry of the West Riding at the outbreak of war, will address some of the issues raised by the conflict. The retention and expansion of the workforce, difficulties caused by the removal of male workers and their replacement by females and the reaction of the various authorities involved, government, employers and unions, as well as the workers themselves will be assessed. Subsequent chapters will consider the question of wages and bonuses and changes in the hours and conditions necessitated by the conflict. These issues will be placed into the context of existing and ongoing debate surrounding ideas of family wage, equal pay and protective legislation for women and children. It will argue that even though women played a vital role in maintaining the output of the textile mills by performing many of the jobs their male colleagues had vacated, they continued to be regarded as second-class when compared to men. In the terms of the 'double helix' for all the gains women appeared to make in the short-term by moving into the areas left behind by enlistment, men continued to be regarded as more valuable to the workforce. The temporary changes brought by the war merely served to reinforce the existing hierarchies of gender segregation. This thesis will argue that the concentration on the novel and unusual nature of the wartime expansion of the workforce has masked the underlying continuities within the textile industry. Wage demands of munitions workers and the emphasis on welfare within controlled establishments has meant little attention has been given to similar situations in existing mills and factories also involved in the war effort. Women in the textile trade never achieved parity with the men regarding the wages they received, and the rules supposed to protect female workers were easily relaxed when the needs of the employers and the demands of the army were deemed to be more important than the safety of the workers employed.

⁴⁸ June Hannam *Feminism* (Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2007).

⁴⁹ Adrian Gregory, *The Last Great War: British Society and the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p.6.

The domestic half will outline some of the social consequences of the war. The charity and welfare provision required for an expanded workforce and a mobile population, the difficulties faced in the provision of adequate food supplies and housing stock and the issues around industrial unrest will be explored as they pertain to Huddersfield and the surrounding district. Chapters will examine the work women undertook in organising the recruitment, transport, accommodation and supervision of workers and ask whether this reflected their increased involvement in the realms of professional administration or was merely a temporary wartime necessity for which they were confined to limited, socially acceptable roles. Did women continue to be confined to their 'natural' areas of perceived expertise or did the growing involvement of women change the political landscape with their continuing focus on the more female issues that had started to be addressed because of the exposure of the war namely housing, family allowances, child welfare and industrial health? This section will concentrate on the local administration of the various essential services within the woollen district of Huddersfield and the surrounding area and thus address the gap left by the historiographical concentration on national charitable movements and organisations. It will also argue that for many working-class women it was not the actuality of conditions during the war that was the most important aspect, but rather the perception of unfairness that caused the most problems. Policies imposed from above and administered by middle-class ladies with little knowledge of the realities of household budgets and economies caused more harm than the physical and mental conditions of long hours, limited food and bad housing, all of which were existing issues and well-known to the workers. This thesis will investigate a group of 'invisible' workers of the First World War and rescue the mill girls and society ladies, who performed vital work throughout the period to keep the country going and the army fighting, from the shadows of history. It will argue that the contribution of female workers during the First World War is far more nuanced and varied than the narrow concentration on VADs and munition workers has led us to believe.

Chapter Two – The Textile Industry

On the eve of the First World War the British textile trade stood at the peak of its historical significance. In terms of output, numbers employed and capacity, the industry had never been higher. In 1914 it was reckoned that almost a third of the income generated by all U.K. exports was derived from the textile sector and over 1.5 million people were employed.¹ For women the industry was the third largest area of employment, ranking only behind domestic service and garment making in the number of personnel involved.² It was also one of the few fields in which women worked alongside men, in some cases doing the same jobs. It remained the case, however, that most textile mills were organised in a strictly hierarchical and gender segregated manner. Even when women performed the same jobs as men, they were limited in the level of wages they could receive, the degree of skill and thus authority they were deemed to possess and the hours they could work when compared to their male colleagues.

With the outbreak of war and the removal of men from industry, many trades in Britain were forced to confront the role and status of women within their ranks. Munitions works, engineering and chemical factories all saw an increase in female workers and questions of equal pay, protective legislation and working conditions were all at the forefront of national debate. The textile industry was no different. The war years saw major changes to the composition of the workforce in many of the mills producing materials for the armed forces. Men were withdrawn, either through enlistment or conscription and were replaced, often by women, in a similar fashion to the munitions factories. Where textiles differed is that very often women were already present in the mill workforce and thus the questions generated are different. Rather than debate about whether women should be employed at all, as in the engineering field, textile districts rang with discussion of whether women should be paid equal bonuses to the men they were replacing and whether girls should be permitted to work the nightshift. These questions were not solely caused by the war but reflected the on-going arguments surrounding women's employment that had been in existence since the industrial revolution. The concentration on munitions and the newly-created wartime jobs in examinations of the impact of the war on women has overshadowed these debates about the work women already did. This chapter will outline the situation in the industry at the outset of war, from the geographical spread of the various component trades, through the status of women, their recruitment, training and prospects. It will argue that even in an industry with a large number of female participants before the war, women were still seen as second-class workers. They were subject to lower wages than men, even for performing the same jobs, they were considered to be less skilled, they were restricted in the hours they could work, married women were discouraged by convention from working and young girls had few prospects of

¹ Quoted in J.A. Jowitt and A.J. McIvor (eds.), *Employers and Labour in the English Textile Industries 1850-1939* (London: Routledge, 1988).

² Gail Braybon, *Women Workers In The First World War* (London: Croom Helm, 1981), p.26.

advancement.

The textile industry has long formed the backbone of the British economy.³ From the early medieval period, localities and regions had grown and fallen according to the vagaries of the market for wool and cloth. In times past East Anglia and the West Country had each prospered due to the production of textiles but as the Industrial Revolution took hold these areas declined, and new ones became more prominent. The many centuries during which cloth has been woven in Britain led to the development of a large variety of products, brought about by the many different types of raw material and the diversity and complexity of the processes required for working them up into finished articles.⁴ Textiles, however, is a large and varied term used to cover a number of diverse individual trades and industries. The largest and most significant was the cotton industry, but this category also covered wool, worsted, silk, lace, jute, hemp, linen and numerous other associated fields to a greater or lesser degree. These various items were produced in areas around the country, many with historical connections to a particular branch or trade. Thus, cotton was centred around the Lancashire and Manchester area, silk was predominant in Cheshire, especially Macclesfield and jute held sway in Dundee. The woollen and worsted industry was largely concentrated in the West Riding of Yorkshire.

Although textiles had always had some presence in the area, mostly on a relatively small-scale domestic level, the Victorian era saw the rise of the large, industrial woollen mills where all the stages of production could be incorporated into one site. Towns like Bradford, Huddersfield, Halifax and Dewsbury grew rapidly throughout the period. The population figures for the West Riding wool textiles belt show a more than fivefold increase in the years 1801 to 1901 from 292,356 persons enumerated to 1,549,904 in 1901.⁵ Some industry remained in the traditional regions, with scattered factories throughout Devon, Somerset and Gloucester, especially around Stroud, blanket production in Wiltshire and Oxfordshire and carpets from the Kidderminster area. Wales possessed a small number of flannel mills. Scotland represented the second largest woollen manufacturing region after Yorkshire as well as having large concentrations of jute works and hosiery companies. The Midlands was also well represented with hosiery firms stretching from Derby to Nottingham and on to Leicester.⁶ In the years before the First World War, however, the relatively small geographical area bounded by Wakefield in the west and Keighley in the east and from Guiseley as the most northerly point to Holmfirth at the south contained over two-thirds of the 95,531 males and 127,148 females enumerated in the 1911 census as being engaged in woollen and worsted manufacture.⁷

Even here, there was a marked geographical division and increased specialisation within this specific industry with some towns or regions becoming associated with certain types of cloth or defined processes within the manufacture of textiles. Thus Dewsbury, Batley and Morley were synonymous with the heavy woollen trade in mungo and shoddy, a process that used recycled

³ For a comprehensive examination of this history see David Seward, 'The Wool Textile Industry 1750-1960' in J. Geraint Jenkins (ed.), *The Wool Textile Industry in Great Britain* (London: Routledge, 1972), p34-48.

⁴ Dorothy M. Zimmern, 'The Wool Trade in War Time', *The Economic Journal*, Vol. 28, No. 109 (Mar 1918), pp.7-29.

⁵ M. T. Wild, 'The Yorkshire Wool Textile Industry' in J. Geraint Jenkins (ed.), *The Wool Textile Industry in Great Britain* (London: Routledge, 1972), p.221.

⁶ Zimmern, *Wool Trade in Wartime* p.9.

⁷ S. Brierley and G.R.Carter, 'Fluctuations in the Woollen and Worsted Industries of the West Riding' in *The Economic Journal*, Vol. 24, No. 95 (Sep 1914), pp. 377-384.

products to make heavier cloths for blankets and other goods. The more northerly towns of Bradford, Keighley and Halifax were associated with worsted production. Bradford was the centre for wool-combing, spinning and weaving of worsted yarns. There was a large trade in plain and fancy ladies dress goods and worsted cloths and the more exotic production of alpacas and mohairs. In Halifax the emphasis was more on plain coatings for men. Along the Calder Valley, Hebden Bridge specialised in the manufacture of fustians whilst in Brighouse silk predominated. The more southerly district around Huddersfield, although known for the fancy woollens it produced was one of the more diverse areas, embracing as it did both the Colne Valley and the Holme Valley each of which contained numerous mills with products ranging from high quality worsted to low and medium priced tweeds. The main area for the production of the woollen cloth necessary for the production of army grade khaki at the outbreak of the First World War was, therefore, the area around Huddersfield and the Colne Valley. Although this material was made in other areas, and khaki cloth was certainly not the only requirement of the armed forces, it was the largest and most significant, not merely for British forces but for other armies, for home use and for the export trade that continued to be in demand.

Indeed, the textile industry dominated the area. Although the area is known as the Huddersfield district, in reality, at the time it contained a number of small, self-contained, towns, villages and Urban District Councils. Thus the Colne Valley comprised four main townships, Golcar, Slaithwaite, Linthwaite and Marsden. The Holme valley centred around Holmfirth, Honley and Meltham. Scattered between these concentrations of workers and mills were smaller settlements, isolated workplaces and areas of industry. Each of the larger towns contained a number of mills and most of the workers had some connection to the textile trade. Even people who were not directly employed in the mill spent much of their working day in some capacity in the service of the industry. Thus many engineering firms produced or repaired looms and other machines for use in the mills, transport workers brought in raw materials and took away finished goods and coal miners and chemical workers provided vital ingredients that kept the textiles flowing out of the factories. Holidays were taken when the mill closed and family life for many of the inhabitants centred around the local mill. In many cases entire families worked in the same mill, with sons and daughters following their parents into work. Most children in the area grew up knowing that their future would involve the textile trade in some form or another. Even though it was accepted that such a situation was likely to occur this acceptance was not universal and without condition. For female workers especially, there were a number of issues preventing their unimpeded access to the same work experience that men received. Popular opinion at the time meant that the primary role of women was home making and child rearing. Although the domestic origins of the woollen trade and the association with women's work meant that textiles was one of the few areas of employment considered suitable for women during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century and economic necessity often dictated its inevitability, work outside the home was still seen as something less than ideal. Society also frowned on married women working and, although textiles was a relatively large employer of those who did work, they remained a minority. Out of the total female workers in woollen and worsted trades in Yorkshire according to the 1911 census

79.2 percent were single, 17.1 percent married, and 3.6 percent widowed.⁸ Women workers were, therefore, often seen as either young girls marking time until marriage or married ladies and widows undertaking short periods of work in moments of family need, to fulfil an unexpected bill or medical emergency. The realm of the female was the home and domestic duties, and any occupation that interrupted her devotion to her family threatened not only her husband's status, but that of society itself.⁹ In consequence of the view of women as short-term workers or temporary returnees, women's work tended to be seen as low-paid, dead-end and unskilled. In the textile industries this tendency is especially marked as it contrasts so obviously with the experiences of men, many of whom worked alongside women in the same mills.

Women's work has long been regarded as a poor relation to that done by men. Men could claim higher wages, often for doing similar jobs to women, on the grounds that they were physically stronger and so more productive, they could work longer hours and they were supposedly more skillful than women. Although social policy was enacted throughout the first decade of the twentieth century, much of the legislation depended on the concept of the family as a unit with a male breadwinner and female dependants. National insurance, unemployment and even education policy were predicated on the concept that men would undertake waged work outside the home and women, especially respectable married women, would not.¹⁰ Men were also prioritised in times of unemployment, it being seen that men needed work, whereas women did not. In the years before the war most employment concerns had centred around male workers. Where women were mentioned they were referred to in passing or as adjuncts to the men who form the primary focus of investigations or policies.¹¹ Where women did take centre stage in discussions of employment it was largely regarding what types of work were unsuitable for them to do.¹²

Although there were geographical and localised variations in the jobs performed by the different sexes, it is nevertheless true that the prospects and choices open to boys and girls were somewhat different. There are a number of reasons for this. In the first place boys had more opportunities for advancement to positions of responsibility and technical achievement. 'In general, there was a much greater concern about the future of factory boys than that of girls... There was considerable public debate about 'blind alley' occupations for boys.'¹³ Girls, on the other hand, received little consideration because they were not expected to have a future career. They continued to perform the same tasks until marriage. Once a woman was married she was generally expected to retire from the workforce and if she returned for any reason, she would resume work at the same point as before. There was only a little chance of advancement or promotion regardless of the experience or qualification she may have gained. A boy also had many more options for work outside the mill, in engineering or

⁸ B.L. Hutchins, 'Yorkshire' in C. Black (ed.), *Married Women's Work* (London: Virago, 1983).

⁹ Susan Pedersen, 'Welfare and Citizenship in Britain during the Great War', *The American Historical Review*, Vol.95, No.4 (Oct, 1990), pp.983-1006.

¹⁰ Pat Thane, *Foundations of the Welfare State* (London: Longman, 1982).

¹¹ Keith Laybourn, *Unemployment and Employment Policies Concerning Women in Britain, 1900-1951* (Lampeter: Edwin Mellen, 2002).

¹² Angela John, *Unequal Opportunities* (Blackwell: Oxford, 1986).

¹³ Deirdre Busfield, 'Skill and the sexual division of labour in the West Riding Textile Industry, 1850-1914' in J.A. Jowitt and A.J. McIvor (eds.), *Employers and Labour in the English Textile Industries 1850-1939* (London: Routledge, 1988), p.160.

building for example. Unless he was selected for specialised training in more technical aspects of mill work, most young men were encouraged to seek alternative employment once they reached a certain age. In Huddersfield boys had a better chance of obtaining a long term position than in many of the West Riding towns as the proportion of woollen weavers, which were primarily men, was higher than the number of worsted spinners in which women were the largest group.¹⁴ It was the case nevertheless that both boys and girls were certain of being able to find employment within the textile industry for the whole of their working life should they so desire even if the jobs thus obtained may well be of limited technical skill, prospects or remuneration. This is particularly true for those jobs considered as female roles.

Both boys and girls entered the mill around the age of thirteen. In previous decades this age would have been lower but by 1914 various legislative initiatives had led to the reduction both of juvenile workers and half-timers. Although Bradford and Halifax continued to employ half-timers, the practice in Huddersfield had largely been discontinued.¹⁵ The usual hours for day workers tended to be 55½ hours a week exclusive of meal times. This was usually comprised of a 6a.m. start working through to a 5.30p.m finish with 1½ hours for meals, generally breakfast and dinner. Some mills had different arrangements depending on the location and where the workers were living but in most cases the hours were similar. Saturdays were worked as half days finishing at 12 noon and there was no working on Sundays.¹⁶ In busy periods a night shift of 55 hours a week for men might be instituted, but this tended to be irregular as any slackening off in orders led to short time rather than unemployment for the day workers. Under the various Factory Acts enacted in the preceding decade women were totally excluded from night work in textile mills at the outbreak of war. In Huddersfield boys and girls of thirteen years of age generally started in the mill as either a piecener in woollen spinning or a doffer in worsteds. Pieceners started earning around 6 shillings a week. Boys who began as pieceners could go on to be spinners, however, there were not enough openings to absorb all boys so many were encouraged to leave textiles for other work or to become night shift workers where more jobs were undertaken by men than on the day shift. Girls either remained as pieceners, moved into twisting and winding or eventually became weavers. Doffing was also seen as a largely dead-end job for boys unless manufacturing as well as spinning was done in the same mill. For girls there were other avenues such as drawing or reeling.¹⁷

Whatever training a girl received, unless it was mending, would have been haphazard, unofficial and of limited value. She may have picked up a specific job from watching older workers, often relatives, or learned on-the-job by trial and error. It was also often true that girls had many more domestic responsibilities and so often received less formal education. 'Those who delayed their entry into mill work were in no sense idle at home. There were younger children to care for, domestic tasks

¹⁴ Huddersfield Textile Trades General Survey 1914, GHW/BB19, University of Huddersfield Archives.

¹⁵ S. Brierley and G.R.Carter, 'Fluctuations in the Woollen and Worsted Industries of the West Riding', p.378.

¹⁶ Adam Kirkaldy, *Industry and Finance* (London: Pitman, 1917), p.110.

¹⁷ Huddersfield Textile Trades General Survey 1914, GHW/BB19, University of Huddersfield Archives.

and occasionally work in a family shop.¹⁸ Thus girls, as a result of this, were considered to be less capable of learning more complex tasks even if they could be relied upon to justify the investment by remaining at work for the greater periods of time that men, with fewer home commitments, could manage. The largest opening for girls and the most sought after was mending. Because of the clean nature of the work, which was carried out in quiet and well-lit rooms, it attracted the better class of girl. Mending was considered by the women to be the most superior work they could do in a mill and is generally regarded as the most skilled work undertaken by women. It was not, however, the most lucrative, with an experienced mender earning between 18 and 22 shillings a week. A finished mender who looked over the cloth after it had passed through the process may have earned slightly more but a male percher or overlooker would earn between 32 and 35 shillings a week.¹⁹

Policy makers, trade unions, employers and even workers themselves believed in the concept of a family wage, which involved a male worker earning enough to maintain a family, but also assumed that a woman could be paid less as she would benefit from the family wage of her husband or father.²⁰ Even social feminists and women's advocates were divided on the issue, being unable to decide whether the emphasis should be on campaigns against the exclusion of married women working or for economic independence for women through allowances or better pay. Some activists wanted better pay for husbands, so women did not need to work whilst others sought a minimum wage for all workers so that women would not be dependent on men.²¹ This led to the division of jobs into men's work and women's work and the idea that women could easily be confined into an inferior labour market of low wages, poor job security and high turnover. Tasks were defined into strictly segregated areas and classified as a male or female role, often for no discernable reason. Thus, for example, although women worked as warpers in the woollen industry, the same job in a worsted mill would be performed by a man. The justification for this was that as the yarn was generally finer and there were therefore more threads for each piece the work was more elaborate. The tendency was to give finer, more elaborate work to men and consequently to pay them more. This can be seen in the comparison of wages, with a capable woman warper earning 18 to 22 shillings a week working in woollens and a male warper making 30 to 40 shillings in the worsted trade.²² The job, however, was essentially the same with the same level of physical effort required and a similar degree of technical expertise necessary. Indeed, Deirdre Busfield has argued that many of the claims of male workers to an increased wage on the grounds of the perceived skilled levels they possessed was also an artificial distinction. She has demonstrated that skill was often defined by the gender of the worker rather than any inherent talent or experience possessed. Thus jobs performed by men were defined as skilled work, whereas jobs performed by women, even though they were often of a more technical or intricate nature, were not. Skill levels, and the remuneration that went with them were defined by the nature of

¹⁸ ¹⁸ Joanna Bornat, 'What About That Lass Of Yours Being In The Union? Textile Workers And Their Union In Yorkshire, 1888-1922' in Leonore Davidoff and Belinda Westover (eds.), *Our Work, Our Lives, Our Words* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1986), p.79.

¹⁹ Huddersfield Textile Trades General Survey 1914, GHW/BB19, University of Huddersfield Archives.

²⁰ Jane Lewis, *Women in England 1870-1950: Sexual Division and Social Change* (London: Harvester/Wheatsheaf, 1984).

²¹ Gerry Holloway, *Women and Work in Britain since 1940* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005), p.125.

²² Huddersfield Textile Trades General Survey 1914, GHW/BB19, University of Huddersfield Archives.

the worker rather than the work.²³ In Huddersfield, therefore, men and women were employed in different processes within the different industries on an often arbitrary basis. In some mills men were in the majority, in others women were more numerous. It tended to be the case, however, that men were employed in the fine woollen or cloth trade with women confined to the lower class and thus less well remunerated end of the range. Thus a female weaver could earn between 19 and 22 shillings a week. The male equivalent earned between 27 and 29 shillings. The reasons given for the differentiation in rates for men and women were stated to be that a woman's wage would not attract a man and the manufacturers need men for overtime and night work, that men could carry their own cloth and could thus do more of the heavy work and that they could tune their own looms and therefore needed less help.²⁴

It is clear, therefore, that even in the textile industry with its large numbers of female operatives, the average rate of female pay amounted to just over half the rate of the male.²⁵ In most industries the levels were much lower. The concept of the family wage is also important in the notion of 'respectability' and morality tied up as it was with working-class aspiration. Throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth century it was believed to be more respectable for married women not to work. Single women too were often keen to work in respectable occupations. This created a hierarchy of jobs. Clean work in offices, shops or warehouses was preferable to dirtier tasks in mills or factories even though the wages of mill girls greatly exceeded that of shop assistants. Even within the mill, jobs were ranked and desired according to the relative ease with which they could be done but also the cleanliness and associated respectability of the task. Thus in Huddersfield, the cotton industry was particularly unpopular and struggled to attract the necessary female workforce. Despite the possibility of achieving a slightly higher wage than in either worsted or woollen mills, the conditions in cotton mills were considered worse. The higher temperatures and dislike of the fluff which tended to cling to hair and clothing meant that jobs in cotton works, especially the carding room, were seen as the least desirable occupations. Cotton winding, being a cleaner environment, was more popular and consequently did not suffer from the lack of personnel that the earlier processes did. These considerations also applied within the woollen industry with mending as the cleanest and, for a woman, most highly skilled work being the most well-liked and sought after position. A dirtier job like condenser minder or feeder was less well regarded and so tended to employ the less refined type of woman than other positions. There were other considerations that made mill work a relatively attractive proposition for young girls, for whom the alternative may well have been limited to domestic service. One woman, when asked if she would not rather have been in service as mill work was seen as 'common' remarked that, 'we're not servants, we can please ourselves when we come and go. Skivvies can't.'²⁶

²³ Deirdre Busfield, 'Skill and the sexual division of labour in the West Riding Textile Industry, 1850-1914' in J.A. Jowitt and A.J. McIvor (eds.), *Employers and Labour in the English Textile Industries 1850-1939* (London: Routledge, 1988).

²⁴ Barbara Drake, *Women in Trade Unions* (London: Labour Research Department, 1920) p127.

²⁵ Pat Thane, 'The social, political and economic status of women, 1900-1914' in Paul Johnson ed. *Twentieth Century Britain. Economic, Social and Cultural Change* (Harlow: Longman, 1994), p.98.

²⁶ Colne Valley Interview 17, deposited at Kirklees Sound Archive.

Various commissions and inquiries throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries provided rules that hemmed in and restricted work women could do. The Factory Acts passed throughout the period limited the number of hours, times of work and actions that women were permitted to perform. This led to a debate about women and work that was mostly centred on whether it was the women who were being protected or the jobs of the men with whom they were supposedly in competition.²⁷ If a woman was not allowed by law to work at night or to work overtime, she was less attractive to a prospective employer even though she received a lower wage than a man. It was also pointed out that such restriction applied only to women in factory work where there was direct competition. Domestic work, which was not considered a male area of employment was largely unaffected by the limits of hours and work provided by Government legislation. The issue was also complicated by the incredible fragmentation and lack of cohesion within the textile trade. Wages, conditions of employment, hours of work and even job distribution varied not merely from town to town, but also from mill to mill and could even change within the confines of a single mill with women working a job during the day shift and men doing the same job at night.²⁸ Thus even where men and women performed the same work, exceptions and allowances were made for men. Women were specifically excluded from the more lucrative aspects of work, nightshifts or overtime. It was claimed that men could lift their own pieces and tune their own machines and so were worth extra money. Even when this did not seem to be the case, many firms clung to the concept of the family wage, alleging that men needed higher wages due to their having dependants or maintaining households.

This lack of stability in female work also presented a problem with unionising women. They were seen as 'either a menace to be kept at bay or as allies with limited fighting potential' and were therefore often overlooked and disregarded even if not actively excluded from union ranks.²⁹ Before the war the unionisation of women was a complex and divisive issue. Issues of male resistance to women joining existing unions, the confinement of women to short-term jobs rather than long-term careers and leadership failures to give them an adequate voice in policy making all led to women, with the exception of Lancastrian cotton workers, being under-represented within the trade union movement.³⁰ Some unions especially those concerned with the supposed 'skilled' trades refused to admit women, even though as we have seen, the definition of what constituted skill remained questionable. Jobs that required apprenticeships were, nevertheless, off-limits to women and unions controlling access to these areas maintained the male domination of many fields of employment. Other unions did admit women but often specified that because female wages were lower, then their subscriptions, and ultimately benefits should likewise be reduced. This lack of funds combined with instability in the job market could also result in women not being unionised at all and in many areas of female employment this was the case. By 1914 only one-sixteenth of working women had been unionised as opposed to one-third of all working men, and 80 percent of all unionized women were in the textile trade.³¹

²⁷ Olive Banks, *Faces of Feminism* (Oxford: Martin Robertson, 1981) p.106.

²⁸ Huddersfield Textile Trades General Survey 1914, GHW/BB19, University of Huddersfield Archives.

²⁹ Bornat, 'What About That Lass Of Yours', p.91.

³⁰ Holloway, *Women and Work in Britain*, p.126.

³¹ Pyecroft, 'British Working Women and the First World War', p.701.

The coming of war, with its demands upon all the workers, would put unprecedented pressure on the customs and traditions of the textile areas. The division of work into male and female roles, the payment of different wages depending upon the sex of the worker involved and the restrictive practices and regulations that confined and limited the work women could do and the hours they could work were all challenged by the demands of war. The war brought the removal of men from the workforce and their replacement by women. It remained the case in many instances that even in the direst of circumstances male workers continued to enjoy the arbitrary gender distinctions that prevailed before the war. As Higonnet demonstrated with the metaphor of the 'double helix' even though women moved into positions previously considered unsuitable or impossible for them, men continued to receive higher wages and bonuses and maintained the largest share of the lucrative shifts and occupations.³² Ultimately even war could not dislodge most of the ingrained attitudes and opinions of the workers, the employers and the unions. Female textile workers gained little from their contribution to the First World War.

³² Margaret Higonnet and Patrice Higonnet, 'The Double Helix' in Margaret Higonnet, Jane Jenson, Sonya Michel & Margaret Collins Weitz (eds), *Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987).

Chapter Three – Government Control

In September 1918, as Britain limped into the fourth year of bitter conflict a wry joke appeared in the pages of a local newspaper. The *Huddersfield Worker* claimed, 'the war has exhausted the visible supply of everything save red tape.'¹ This comment reflected the mood of the population who had faced years of increasing government intervention into every aspect of their daily lives from the strength of the beer they could drink to the hours in which they could shop. Each development of the war seemed to lead to more laws and new regulations. It was not supposed to be this way. From the outset the British government was unprepared for the extent to which the war would impact on the nation and all policy was directed and influenced by the nature of the conflict rather than being planned by the authorities. In Britain, a country with a laissez-faire attitude and a liberal outlook, the war exposed the disorganised and reactive nature of the institutions of state in the face of external challenge and internal pressure. This chapter will examine some of the problems faced by the central authorities and how the difficulties of war in the textile regions of the West Riding were addressed. It will argue that the policies introduced did little to address the problems faced by the working women of the textile regions, but rather served to reinforce existing gender and class division inherent in both the industry and society. Recruitment was haphazard and ill-conceived leading to loss of valuable workers and their replacement with untrained and inefficient workers. The government was slow to realise that wool stocks, food and housing would need attention and when they did take action it was often ill-judged and badly directed. For many textile communities the actions of the authorities throughout the war served only to confirm their opinion that the ruling class had little knowledge of the workers and their interests.

The First World War has been described as the first total war.² It was the first to demand that the entire financial, industrial, social and political resources of the combatant nations be directed towards the single goal of military victory. In Britain, a country which was not prepared for a major land campaign and was reluctantly drawn into a conflict of unexpected proportions, the impact on society was dramatic. 'The duration, scale and cost of the war demanded the mobilization of national resources on a hitherto unprecedented scale.'³ Although the initial government policy was 'business as usual' it soon became apparent that this was inadequate in the face of increasing military requirements and gradually the entire nation was subjected to the demands of total war. Every aspect of British life came under increasing government control and influence and legislation was introduced that affected every individual and workforce.

¹ *Huddersfield Worker* 7 September 1914.

² Arthur Marwick, *The Deluge: British Society And The First World War* (Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1991), p.51.

³ John Stevenson, *British Society 1914-1945* (London: Penguin, 1984), p47.

As the scale of the war increased, additional strain, in the form of more men required for the army, more women needed in the factories and works to maintain output and more resources absorbed by the almost total concentration on munitions and the paraphernalia of war, was placed on the combatant states. In Britain enlistment and ultimately conscription meant that increasing numbers of men were removed from the workforce and their places taken by female workers, often as substitutes or dilutees, or older men not eligible for military service. The textile areas of the West Riding of Yorkshire were no exception to this and neither were the workers employed. These additional workers, especially the women, were often drawn from areas where there was no concentration of large-scale industrial employment and what work there was tended to be regarded as a masculine field. This meant that many of the regions where war production flourished experienced a rapid, and in many cases, chaotic turnover of population. This in turn placed an extra responsibility on the local organisations and infrastructure of the towns and cities. Incoming workers needed to be accommodated but the areas into which they poured were often ill-equipped for more people, being already overcrowded, poorly maintained and lacking in basic amenities. The textiles areas of the Huddersfield and the Colne Valley, which were already suffering from a shortage of adequate housing, were not immune from the problems caused by the war. Although many of the works producing weapons, shells and equipment came under the auspices of the Ministry of Munitions, textiles were never considered a controlled industry in the same way. Although a Woollen Control Board was created to deal with the government procurement of supplies and materials, the day to day organisation of the various mills and factories was left in the hands of the manufacturers and continued as before. This meant that when workers were required to maintain production of textiles for making the uniforms and other equipment needed by the army there was little or no official intervention. Any action necessary to recruit and accommodate extra workers was taken at a local level and was often ad-hoc and piece-meal, undertaken by committees created at short notice and with limited resources.

The outbreak of war in August 1914 and the all-consuming nature of the conflict appeared to catch both the British government and the general population unawares. Although preparations had long been in place for the eventuality of European war, these were to be prove wholly inadequate and outdated. The main concern of the British authorities in the years before the war had been to build up the navy to ensure that in the event of conflict the seas could be controlled, and Germany contained. The army, a somewhat secondary consideration, was to remain relatively small and voluntary and to provide assistance to the French forces.⁴ This belief that a strong navy and a volunteer army were sufficient influenced much of the thinking in the pre-war period and into the early days of the war itself. The government trusted that a light touch in industry and a robust economy were the best methods of dealing with the Continental difficulties. It soon became apparent that this war would not follow the pattern that the planners had anticipated, and their careful strategies soon faced significant challenges.

The approach outlined relied on a number of assumptions that proved to be unfounded. These

⁴ David French, 'The Rise and Fall of 'Business as Usual' in Kathleen Burk (ed.) *War and the State: the Transformation of British Government 1914-1919* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1982), p10.

included the ability of the navy to maintain the shipping lanes in the face of unlimited submarine warfare, the adequacy of the volunteer system in realising a force large enough to counteract the German army and the sturdiness of the economy in the face of the sheer disruption that a large-scale global conflict could wreak. Each of these areas caused a rethink in the initial stance of the government and a gradual undermining of 'business as usual', until by the end of the war the British authorities had achieved an unprecedented intervention into the economic, industrial and social lives of the people. Although largely ad-hoc solutions to unforeseen events, the eventual introduction of conscription, food rationing, controlled establishments for munitions and the provision of pensions and allowances for various sections of the community, meant that the government became increasingly involved in all aspects of social and industrial life.

Wool Control

At the beginning of the war a priority for the government was to maintain the wool supply. This was necessary, not only for the provision of clothing for the army and navy, but also for the production of civilian goods for sale at home and abroad. The nature of the German advance through Belgium and northern France, and the destruction and occupation of much of the textile producing areas of these countries added an urgency to the issue. Britain became responsible, not only for the equipping of her own armed forces, but also those of many of the Allied nations.⁵ This was not, however, initially apparent and the industry suffered something of a slow start. The immediate impact at the outbreak of war was uncertainty and confusion given that Germany was the largest continental export market for British goods and also a large-scale supplier of essential materials, like rags for the shoddy trade and chemicals and dyes necessary for the finishing of woollens. The inevitable trade disruption such a war would engender was, therefore, the primary concern of many of the businessmen involved in the textile industry.⁶ The result was a period of industrial paralysis. This, combined with the existing trade conditions which had been somewhat depressed, and the sudden loss of much of the Continental business, caused the postponement of the London wool sales in September 1914.⁷

Many of the woollen manufacturers, however, knew from past experience of the Boer War and other Victorian campaigns, that armies in the field need uniforms and countless other items of equipment to fight with. Indeed, the military orders soon increased in volume and within three months the demand for wool rose by 20 per cent.⁸ A British embargo on the export of certain cloth and woollen products, coupled with the reduction in the European trade and the generally healthy state of world stocks, meant that for the first year of the war, maintaining the supply of wool was not difficult. If the supply of wool was relatively steady at the beginning of the war, the means of getting it to the mills to be processed was anything but. The usual method of competitive tendering had worked well when the military demands were less than one per cent of the United Kingdom total consumption. As this

⁵ Dorothy M. Zimmern, 'The Wool Trade in War Time', *The Economic Journal*, Vol. 28, No. 109 (Mar 1918), p19.

⁶ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 6 August 1914.

⁷ G.R.Carter, Clothing the Allies Armies, *The Economic Journal*, Vol. 25, No. 97 (Mar., 1915), pp. 97-103.

⁸ Memorandum on War Office Contracts, Cd 8447, 1917.

figure rose, the system began to break down and the routine of centralised buying by the Army Contracts Department proved inflexible when dealing with a greater volume. Delays resulted due to the slow and cumbersome nature of the bureaucratic administration and so local army depots, desperate for equipment for the number of volunteers joining up, began buying at any price. This caused prices to increase making woollen goods an attractive proposition and speculators rapidly entered the market putting pressure on the existing stocks and resulting in further price rises.⁹

The normal system - of central government maintaining a list of a small number of companies in each sector who were eligible to tender for contracts - was thus soon exposed as totally inadequate for the new situation. Various suggestions were put forward to address the issue. A deputation of cloth manufacturers from the Huddersfield district submitted a memorandum to the War Office in mid-August stating that a large number of firms engaged in the ordinary trade were able to manufacture army cloths, and suggesting that the present method of giving out contracts should be considerably widened in view of existing circumstances. The response indicated that the Department of Army Contracts was amenable to the idea and sought samples and tenders from the various correspondents in order to be able to distribute work over a larger pool of suppliers.¹⁰ Despite attempts to share out the work more evenly it remained the case that some firms had an abundance of work whilst others struggled. The *Yorkshire Factory Times* commented on the consequences of the situation. 'This very likely therefore means that a considerable number of persons will get full time for the next two or three months, but some of the firms will remain unfortunately on the old two or three days in the week principle unless the trade routes open up before the war finishes or the end of this year.'¹¹ The textile unions were also concerned about the possible inequality of distribution and favoured a system whereby the government would commandeer the supply of raw materials on the same basis as they had taken over the railways. Ben Turner, President of the General Union of Textile Workers, in his annual report, called for this and also for more intervention to prevent profiteering, saying, 'The government should see that no cloth is made for duds and dandies until the soldiers and the workers generally are clad.'¹² Fred Jowett, the Bradford M.P., was also keen to see the government take possession of the wool stocks, especially those from the colonies, in order to prevent speculators holding back supplies and forcing up the prices.¹³

The government, however, still clung to 'business as usual' and was initially reluctant to become ever more involved in the day-to-day organisation of the woollen industry, trusting to the normal market forces to ensure sufficient supplies to outfit the expanding army. The provisions of the Defence of the Realm Act meant that the Admiralty and the Army Council had the power to take over factories involved in the manufacture of goods for military purposes, but in reality such powers were used sparingly and only with the full assistance of existing management and organisational structures. Throughout 1915 this approach worked reasonably well but by the beginning of 1916 further problems

⁹ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 8 October 1914.

¹⁰ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 20 August 1914.

¹¹ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 27 August 1914.

¹² *Huddersfield Worker*, 2 January 1915.

¹³ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 25 February 1915.

meant that a rethink was necessary. The stocks of wool held in Britain, which had seemed large enough, began to fall. A severe drought in Australia, the leading producer of wool, increased international competition and the restriction of trade routes due to the enemy action, all contributed to a world shortage of wool in 1916. Prices again began to rise, and the British government became concerned for supplies. The system of tendering, which had worked when the stock of raw materials was high, was no longer as efficient when volatile prices caused by shortages meant that firms were unable to predict costs well enough to make reasonable bids. In response to this the government's first plan was to requisition the output of mills. A War Office Order in February 1916 gave the authorities the power to acquire all production at cost price plus a reasonable profit for the manufacturers. Committees of experts from the various sections of the trade were duly appointed to advise the Army Contracts Department on the cost of the stages of production in order to establish fair rates of payment. The Wool Trade Advisory Panel was set up to advise on questions relating to wool and the Central Committee on British Wool to advise on the purchase of domestic wool. This first attempt to control the trade was not particularly successful. Prices and costs proved too volatile to enable accurate remuneration to be achieved. Continued competition, both internationally and between home companies regarding civilian and military suppliers meant that supplies were also inconsistent and under pressure. To maintain control of both the supply of raw material and to end speculation on prices of wool, the government, therefore, decided to take control of both aspects of the chain and to this end bought the entire wool clip of the United Kingdom in 1916. The price to be paid for such material was fixed at the 1914 price plus 35 per cent as an estimate of the increased cost of production.¹⁴

The British clip, however, represented only one-ninth of the national consumption of wool and the government proposed buying the production of wool from the various other parts of the Empire. The Australasian output amounted to half of the world supply, and with the agreement of the two colonial governments, this quantity was also brought under the control of the British authorities. Thus, by the end of 1916 approximately 70 per cent of the exportable supply of wool in the world came into state ownership. Although the supply of wool was now secure, the issue of distributing it to the manufacturers remained. The old system of selling wool through brokers on the open market was subject to the manipulation of speculators and the competition between the various sectors of the industry meant that the government could not rely on such a mechanism to ensure their needs would be catered for. Accordingly, in October 1916 the Army Council ordered that in all factories, the business of which was, wholly or partially, the making of woollen goods, priority should be given to government orders.¹⁵

At the end of 1916 it was announced that all woollen auction sales had been suspended and, henceforward, the government would deliver the wool for military purposes directly to the manufacturers. Any wool not needed for such work would be allocated to approved users at fixed prices, with preference being given to those making goods for the export market. By April 1917 a more detailed scheme had been devised outlining the hierarchy under which work should be

¹⁴ Zimmern, *Wool Trade in War Time*, p16.

¹⁵ Howard L. Gray, *Wartime Control of Industry* (New York, 1918), p103.

organised. Contracts were graded into categories A, B or C. Class A comprised all military orders for Great Britain or the Allied countries, Class B represented orders for goods destined for export or other areas approved by the Director of Army Contracts as being work of national importance and Class C were orders for the supply of civilian needs. In the Spring of 1917, however, the system was once again under some strain. Unlimited submarine warfare has resulted in the loss of many of the goods imported into Britain including many of the colonial wool shipments. The introduction of conscription meanwhile had vastly increased the size of the Army and the demands for goods continued to grow. There were also complaints amongst employers in the textile trade that the number of committees dealing with the problems of wool sales, deliveries and arrangements was far too large to enable efficient allocations. It was suggested that one organisation should be established to cover the textile trade throughout the country.¹⁶ On 19 April 1917 the Central Wool Advisory Board, which had been formed from the amalgamation of the several smaller committees previously constituted, suggested that some form of rationing be applied to the woollen and worsted industries. They further recommended that a reserve of wool should be built up by limiting the distribution of wool for home consumption. As precautionary measures no distribution of government wool should take place until after the end of May, manufacturers and spinners should be warned that their use of present stocks would affect future allocations; and drastic action should be threatened if traders attempted to exploit the curtailment by increasing prices of materials in stock. This scheme of limitation was put into practice but proved to be something of a failure. The wool allocated for civilian use was about 60 per cent of that requested and many companies, upon receiving their allocation for June, July and August found that in one month they consumed the entire three-month supply. As a further measure the hours at which mills could work was reduced from 55½ hours per week to 45 hours per week.

Such moves were not well received in the woollen areas and both the unions within the textile trade and the employers responded by creating their own larger and more united organisations to speak for their own interests. These bodies represented the authoritative and accredited medium of communication between the industry and the government. The employers felt that such restrictions were hampering their trade. Although large profits were being made through government contracts and military work, many manufacturers were aware that such large-scale orders would not last forever. They were concerned that neglecting the home trade would lead to future problems with customers finding alternative supplies from international competitors. As a response many bosses and owners came together to form the Wool Textile Association, and through this body demanded that the wool-control scheme be taken out of government hands and placed with a board of practical experts from within the trade. In a similar fashion, the various textile trade unions were not happy with the government system which they saw as limiting the hours people could work and thus reducing the earnings, removing the exemptions of various starved workers meaning they were liable for army service and failing to contain the potential for profiteering on the part of mill owners. The unions, nearly 40 excluding the cotton workers, from the various locations throughout Britain, also amalgamated into a combined body, the National Association of Unions in the Textile Trade, or

¹⁶ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 29 March 1917.

NUATT which represented over 110,000 workers from Yorkshire, Lancashire, Nottingham, Leicester and Cheshire.¹⁷ The resulting body also demanded more of a say in how the wool control scheme was managed and organised. The government reacted to these demands by establishing the Board of Control of the Woollen and Worsted Industries in September 1917. This body which contained equal numbers of representatives of the employers, the workers and the Government, would meet at Bradford and would oversee all matters relating to the civilian use and supply of wool. The Government retained for itself all issues relating to the military use of wool. Thus questions concerning the purchase and distribution of raw wool, issues of prices and reserve stocks and the allocation of army contracts still fell under the purview of the Central Wool Advisory Committee.

Manpower

If the government's handling of the issue of wool control appears incoherent and subject to arbitrary change, then their treatment of the workers, who were equally vital for the production of the required material was even more ill-thought out and chaotic. According to the initial plan of 'business as usual' no restrictions were placed on men enlisting into the army. With the idea still firmly in place, with a few notable exceptions, that the war would be of a short duration and the volunteer army sufficient for the purpose, the War Office placed no embargo on skilled men leaving their jobs to join the colours. Indeed in many respects the focus of the authorities at the beginning of the war was on the prevention of unemployment. The initial industrial hiatus resulting from the sudden changes in the markets caused some firms to slow production meaning short time or job losses for some workers. In addition some employers, for various reasons, welcomed and even encouraged their men to enlist. Inducements were offered and occasionally threats made if workers proved unresponsive to the blandishments of recruiters.

By the beginning of 1915 it was becoming apparent the effect this unrestricted flow of volunteers was having on the industries necessary for the execution of the war. The shortage of men, especially the skilled and experienced ones, meant that many industries were unable to run machinery to capacity and complete orders in a timely fashion. Accordingly, the War Office began to introduce some exemptions for the workers in essential industries to prevent them enlisting and threatening production. The Admiralty issued 400,000 badges for men employed in work deemed vital to naval requirements, and the War Office granted 'protection' to 80,000 men, mostly armaments workers. There was, at this stage, no exemptions on trade such as miners or steel workers.¹⁸ By May of that year the rush of volunteers had slowed considerably, and measures began to be taken to increase numbers. A census of labour was taken in several towns to obtain particulars of men of military age who could be spared from their jobs. Local Labour Exchanges, in conjunction with the Joint Political Recruiting Committee approached employers for details of the men not considered essential for the running of businesses. The Board of Trade also appealed for women to come forward in order to

¹⁷ *Huddersfield Worker*, 5 May 1917.

¹⁸ Llewellyn Woodward, *Great Britain and the Great War of 1914-1918* (London: Methuen, 1967), p.468.

release men for service in the army or for work of national importance.¹⁹ The appeals and voluntary approach was deemed inadequate and a more formal procedure was introduced. Production of the weapons of war had been sluggish throughout the summer of 1915, culminating in the 'Shell Crisis', when the government were accused of letting the men in the front line down by not providing adequate supplies to continue the fight. In an attempt to alleviate this problem a Ministry of Munitions had been formed in June 1915 to concentrate on the supply of the necessities for war. However, the army required more than merely guns and bombs and the shortage of labour was affecting many of the other industries essential to the production of military equipment. The woollen textile trade was no exception to this.

The National Registration Act of July 1915 required the registration of all people in the country, male and female, between the ages of 15 and 65. Forms were issued asking for details of ages and employment and whether individuals would be willing to volunteer for work of national importance. Certificates were to be issued showing people had registered and penalties would be imposed for non-fulfilment of the requirements.²⁰ This Bill also required that anyone changing lodgings or accommodation must notify the authorities of his new address. There were many objections to this move, with the press, trade unions, workers' associations and even employers seeing it as a precursor to conscription. The inclusion of women in the record was seen as evidence that dilution and substitution would be adopted in a widespread fashion to release the largest number of men for the forces. Harris Hoyle, Secretary of the Colne Valley branch of the General Union of Textile Workers was particularly vociferous in his objection claiming, 'the ostensible object of the Act is to give power to the Minister of Munitions to organise the various factories suitable for the manufacture of munitions of war, and, if necessary, the factories suitable for the manufacture of equipment for men, and, incidentally, to sweep away all the regulations and conditions (wages and otherwise) embodied in the agreements arrived at by the Trade Unions and employers and attained after long years of strenuous toil.'²¹ Towards the end of 1915 it was becoming clear that voluntary recruitment was no longer bringing in the required number of soldiers and conscription appeared to be inevitable. The Military Service Act of 1916 meant that men between the ages of 18 and 41 were now called up by the authorities for compulsory service in the armed forces unless there was a compelling reason for them to be excused. Such reasons included medical conditions, conscientious objection or a pressing business need for their services at home. A system of Military Tribunals was established around the country to examine each case and decide if such men should be granted exemptions from military enlistment. A balancing act, therefore, now existed between the needs of the military and the requirements of industry. Ben Turner, the textile union leader, summed up the situation by stating that the army could either have the men or the cloth, but not both.²²

¹⁹ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 20 May 1915.

²⁰ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 1 July 1915.

²¹ *Huddersfield Worker*, 17 July 1915.

²² Ben Turner was President of the GUTW from 1902 to 1933. He was active in local politics serving as Mayor of Batley between 1913 and 1916 and subsequently as M.P. for Batley in 1922. He also worked as a journalist, contributing to and editing the *Yorkshire Factory Times*. For more information see the autobiographical work, Ben Turner, *About Myself* (London, 1930).

The situation continued throughout the rest of the war as the need for men overwhelmed the other sources of labour. Women and young people were increasingly used as alternative labour in various industries, the military age was raised on a number of occasions and older men were called back into trades they had retired from, and sections of the community that had not worked before were entreated to join the workforce and help the nation in its hour of need.²³ The dilemma for the unions now became whether women should be paid less and thus constitute a threat of cheap labour or be paid the same rate and thus undermine the claims of male workers for a family wage. In addition, there was a debate about whether or not to agree to the break-down of a skilled man's work into many parts which different women could do. The concern was that while this ensured that the whole job remained the preserve of the skilled male and therefore attracted higher pay rates it nevertheless made it easier for employers to later de-skill or redefine aspects of such work. The General Textile Workers' Union tried to solve this dilemma in a number of ways. They called for certain jobs to be exempted from substitution and reserved as purely male domains. A conference in April 1916, for example, was particularly concerned about the reclassification of fettling. Ben Turner, the union president, expressed the opinion that it should be restored to the list of certified occupations under the Military Service Act as 'it was impossible for women to do fettling and the removal had taken place without the employers or the employed being consulted.'²⁴

The GUTW also tried to address the question of female workers more directly by recruiting them into the fold. To this end they appointed a specific female organiser to target the new entrants coming into the industry. Even here, however, the old prejudices remained. Mary Luty, who was selected for the post was paid 5 shillings less than a man in a similar position and the advertisement she responded to specifically excluded married women from applying.²⁵ Other unions, noticeably the Amalgamated Society of Dyers and Finishers, guarded their association even more assiduously, with their leader actively obstructing the introduction of women into his industry.²⁶ A report by the Central Committee for the Substitution and Reinforcement of Labour commented 'several were quite frank that their main object was to protect as many of their members as possible from being called up by the Recruiting Authorities. Hayhurst, for instance, openly boasts that he has retained more of his members in proportion than any other Textile Union.'²⁷

In times of national crisis, such as the First World War, women were employed in ever greater numbers as the economy was geared to a war footing and industry concentrated on providing the munitions of war necessary to ensure victory. As more men joined the forces, so more women were required to keep the factories, munitions works and mills going. However, work is not a homogeneous concept. Just as male work tends to be of higher status than female work, consisting as it does the more skilled and better paid areas of occupation, so some areas of women's work are more well

²³ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 20 May 1915.

²⁴ *Dewsbury Reporter*, 15 April 1916.

²⁵ Minutes of Huddersfield District Committee, 31 March 1915, S/NUDBTW, West Yorkshire Archive Service.

²⁶ J.H.Hayhurst represented the Amalgamated Society of Dyers and Finishers on the Bradford Manpower Board and at the various Woollen Trade Conferences convened by the Ministry of Labour.

²⁷ Report of the West Riding of Yorkshire (Northern Division) Committee for the Substitution and Reinforcement of Labour, 2 October 1917, NATS/1/1134, National Archives.

regarded than others. Of the work open to women at the outbreak of the war, textile work was one of the better paid and well regarded options available to the working-class woman.²⁸ With the coming of war other opportunities opened up. Munitions factories, especially after the shell crisis of 1915 were opened in large numbers and were staffed largely by young, unmarried women. For those girls leaving school or working in the lower levels of the textile mills, an opportunity to earn four or five times their normal wage was too good a chance to pass up. Similarly, women working as domestic servants or shop assistants could move into the jobs in engineering vacated by male workers joining the army and receive considerably more money.²⁹

This movement of women up the scale of work created a problem. Just as the loss of men meant women moving into male jobs, the women who left lower paid or unskilled work also needed replacing. The alteration to the workforce created by the war meant, not merely that women replaced men, but also that women who already worked or moved jobs also needed replacing. Thus the cycle of work continued throughout the war. Men left work to join the army, their places were taken by women, many of whom left jobs which then needed filling by lower skilled, younger or inexperienced workers. To assist in the deployment of these potential new workers the government established a Ministry of Labour. The remit of this organisation was to assess the man-power requisites of the country, to determine which jobs were essential and to fill those jobs whilst at the same time releasing non-essential workers for other work of national importance or military service. The work of the Ministry was, however, undermined by another body created by the government, the Ministry of National Service, whose responsibility was the distribution of man-power and the formulation of policy in the area.³⁰ Thus the two ministries were competing to achieve similar goals using identical methods and directing the same workforce into existing jobs.

If 1916 marks the beginning of state intervention in the organisation of the woollen textile industry, then the remaining two years of conflict only served to compound the problems. With the war continuing to drag on, the demands for men, material and money from all sides grew louder and more strident. The main problem was one of labour. The expansion of the army continued but the calls for more cloth to outfit the new recruits did not stop. All the excess in the industry had largely been pruned long before and many companies were allegedly running with skeleton staffs in some positions. This did not stop accusations that men still at home were 'shirkers' or somehow unpatriotic, but the Military Tribunals were finding it increasingly difficult to justify refusing exemption.³¹ The government, in an effort to comb out any remaining surplus of workers, created the Ministry of National Service, but this largely overlapped with existing bodies and so led to arguments about who had precedence when it came to the services of individuals under question. Unions, especially the more militant and well organised such as the Dyers and Finishers, increasingly refused to cooperate with the military demands to remove workers from what were seen as essential positions.³²

²⁸ Dorothy M. Zimmern, 'The Wool Trade in War Time', *The Economic Journal*, Vol. 28, No. 109 (Mar 1918), pp.7-29.

²⁹ Martin Pugh, *The Making of Modern British Politics 1867-1939* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1982), p.184.

³⁰ Rodney Lowe, 'The Ministry of Labour 1916-19: a Still Small Voice?' in Kathleen Burk (ed.), *War and the State: the Transformation of British Government 1914-1919* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1982).

³¹ Yorkshire Factory Times, 18 May 1916.

³² Report on Woollen and Worsted Trades, NATS 1/590, National Archives.

If the unions were unhappy with the requirements of the government, the manufacturers were equally concerned with official intervention in another aspect of trade. By buying up the wool clip, a process which continued into the post-war period, and distributing it as they saw fit, the government bypassed the normal process leaving the producers at the whim of the authorities. A deputation was dispatched to protest and attempt to get parliament to increase the price paid for woollen goods in consequence of the increase in the cost of materials and the recent wage awards. Sir William Raynor, the president of the Colonial Wool Buyers' Association summed up the feelings of the industry, 'We want to help the Government...but we want to be in a position to maintain our trade organisation in such a condition that we shall be ready to resume operation on normal lines when this terrible conflict has been brought to a successful conclusion.'³³

It was not only wool that caused supply problems. Once hostilities commenced it quickly became apparent that the British textile industry had a large problem. A majority of the dyestuffs and other associated products, so important to the output of cloth and materials, came from Germany and with the continent closed for business during the war, cloth manufacturers faced a shortfall. Even the khaki dyes necessary to provide the military uniforms required by the British Army were dependant upon the provision of German suppliers. Huddersfield, being a major producer of textiles, already had a small chemical sector but this would not be adequate for local needs, let alone the national demand. The government's solution to this dilemma was to authorise the formation of a new company, to be known as British Dyes, which would be responsible for countering the shortage of German products and producing the colours necessary for the textile industry. After some debate this enterprise was established in Huddersfield, on property purchased from the Ramsden estate, in 1915. It adjoined the company of Read Holliday Ltd. which was already a manufacturer of aniline dyes and other products. The placing of British Dyes in Huddersfield was carefully considered. Amongst other qualities, the site offered favourable labour conditions, railway communication, canal accommodation and the easy availability of coal, electricity and water. One other important consideration, however, and the factor which perhaps swung the decision away from Widnes, which was the second short-listed candidate site, was the tradition in Huddersfield of female work. Although it was estimated that over 90 per cent of the workers at the new dye works would be adult men, they would naturally bring with them wives and families. Many of the new jobs would be of the low-paid, labouring type, and so it was felt that should it be necessary for women to have to supplement the family income, there would be abundant employment for them in the local mills. At Widnes, by contrast, there was very little employment for female labour, consisting as it did of the wireworks and the chemical factories.³⁴

There remained many problems for the woollen industry in the face of continually changing government orders. One particular bone of contention was the Munitions Act of 1915. This legislation was brought in to control the workers within the Munitions industry, limiting their rights to strike or even to move jobs without permission. There was, however, some confusion as to whether or not textiles fell under the purview of this act. It remained the case that the Munitions Act caused

³³ *Huddersfield Worker*, 3 March 1917.

³⁴ *Huddersfield Daily Examiner*, 20 October 1915. See also Gail Ledgard, *To what extent did the First World War impact the domestic lives of working class women in Huddersfield* (Unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Huddersfield, 2013) p.8.

confusion. At a wage negotiation in January 1916, Mr Gee wrote to the authorities regarding the Act and received the reply from Mr Mosses that, 'textiles did not come under the Amending Bill.'³⁵ Nevertheless, all agreements for wage increases, bonus awards and changes to conditions had to be approved by officials from the government before being implemented. Although the full provisions of the Munitions Act were not in force in the textile industries, it was alleged that the employers had come to an informal agreement not to poach each other workers. In a report to the Colne Valley General Union of Textile Workers, the District Secretary stated that one local manufacturer had confirmed that since the war began the various employers in the area had agreed to check whether employees wishing to leave a position could be spared before offering them work. 'The gentleman concerned said that such an arrangement was in the interests of the trade to prevent firms with larger resources taking workers from firms who needed them merely by offering higher wages. The union, however, feel that such an arrangement smacked of bondage in confining workers to a lower paid or less pleasant job at the whim of their masters and as such was in some ways even worse than the Munitions Act.'³⁶ On 27 July 1916 the Minister of Munitions issued an order extending the Munitions Act to the woollen industry.³⁷

State Control

As the general rush of recruiting calmed down at the beginning of 1915 and the initial orders reached completion, the situation regarding employment continued to be strained. One of the main impacts of the war was on the rising prices of goods and commodities. Food prices in particular rose throughout the period as a result of the problems caused by shipping and transport difficulties. Wages were beginning to lag behind the rising cost of living and workers were becoming increasingly volatile by the discrepancy. Thus the final area in which government policy changed during the war as a direct consequence of the conflict was social intervention. The war required the state to become more involved in the everyday lives of the population than at any time previously. It became necessary for the provision of pensions for soldiers and sailors disabled in combat and of Separation Allowances for the wives and children of the fighting men. It also meant changes of position on housing, food, liquor control, franchise reform, health care and myriad other fields of social regulation that proved impossible to maintain in the face of total war.

Controls, however, were generally imposed slowly as the government reacted to crises as they occurred. There was little planning or coherent policy evident. The introduction of the Defence of the Realm Act in 1914 meant the suspension of many of the provisions of the Factory and Workshops Act. Women and young people could now be worked overtime and at nights if employers could show that his work was required in the national interest. The increasing number of munitions factories and controlled establishment employing women led to an increase in interest in the welfare of female

³⁵ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 13 January 1916.

³⁶ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 3 February 1916.

³⁷ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 17 August 1916.

workers. Investigations were carried out into the health of munitions' workers to determine if women were being affected by the extra work they were being asked to do. Some of this interest also trickled through into the textile sector, where women had long been subject to conditions that the munitions industry was bringing to light. Some manufacturers and employers' organisations within the textile centres began to copy the innovations in welfare that the munitions works were adopting, although there was never a concerted or sustained movement from most of the industry. The government even became involved in rows about holidays. Due to the pressure for increased output in munitions factories the Controlled Works were required to work through without a break. In June 1916 they requested that textile factories, who were at this point largely producing military goods, should do the same. The employers, who had only just agreed to pay extra for overtime, declined demands for holiday pay and so in most instances holidays were taken as normal. It was also pointed out that fresh and rested workers were more productive and efficient than fatigued and exhausted ones.³⁸ The huge movement of workers around the country, as people were drawn into the industries providing the equipment of war, created pressure on the already inadequate housing stock of the country. Rents were increased, and existing tenants evicted to make way for more lucrative armaments or munitions workers. In some areas protests against this led to civil unrest and to counteract such tensions the government introduced rent restriction legislation which laid down terms under which housing transactions must be conducted.

One of the main problems faced throughout the war was the provision of food. Britain had long been dependant on imported food and the submarine depredations on shipping bringing in supplies soon caused shortages of many needful commodities. The 'business as usual' approach meant that the government was initially reluctant to become overly involved in the food supply, but events rapidly made this position untenable. By the beginning of 1915 prices had risen by 18 per cent since the start of the war and were only getting higher. Public opinion was largely in favour of the authorities taking control of the entire food supply and fixing maximum prices. The government, and most of the business owners concerned with food, were against this. Such attitudes led to accusations of profiteering and helped to fuel much of the industrial unrest that occurred throughout the war. With neither the workers nor the employers satisfied with conditions, the government was forced to take notice. In response they established a Commission of Enquiry into Industrial Unrest. This committee examined the various problems facing the population and determined that most of the friction was a result of the increase in the cost of living, especially in view of the widespread belief that much of the rise was due to profiteering, concerns over the military service demands and rule changes and the general fatigue as a result of three years of war conditions and overwork.³⁹

The most significant outcome of this investigation was the removal of the last vestige of government resistance to intervention in the foodstuffs markets. There were small interventions made early in the war in the supply of sugar and wheat, but no major action was taken until the summer of 1916 when a number of official reports commented on the rising prices, distribution problems, increasing unrest and criticism of official inertia. A Ministry of Food under the supervision of a Food

³⁸ War Trade Advisory Committee - Draft Memorandum, November 1917, CAB 39/109, National Archives.

³⁹ Report of the Commission of Enquiry into Industrial Unrest, Cd8664, 1917.

Controller was established in December 1916 to help alleviate the problems and price rises caused by the restricted imports due to the lack of shipping. The First Controller, Lord Devonport, was ineffective, believing as he did, in preserving the established methods and retail channels. It was not until his replacement by Lord Rhondda in June 1917 that the system of rationing, price control, bulk buying and subsidies that had long been demanded was finally instituted. Official rationing of the most vital foods was sanctioned in the latter part of 1917. This meant that virtually all aspects of society were now subject to some degree of state control.

As well as the mushrooming government departments and ministries set up to organise and manage the increasingly complex initiatives required to execute total war, there was also a need for more intimate coordination. Each of the new measures introduced required a form of local administration and numerous committees and bodies sprang up peopled largely by local worthies and interested parties. Thus Food Control Committees, Separation Allowance supervision bodies, welfare panels, Pensions Committees and Military Tribunals all utilised the talents of the existing corporate and charitable infrastructure of the relevant locality. Women's groups like the Women's Cooperative Guild were co-opted to supervise the welfare of young girls imported to work in industry. Both the Huddersfield Trades and Labour Council and the Chamber of Commerce had representatives on the various Military Tribunals and the Huddersfield War Fund Committee, set up to relieve distress caused by the war, eventually contained over 80 members of various political and social persuasions.⁴⁰

On a national level, working-class interests were defended by the War Workers' Emergency National Committee, a body instigated by the Labour Party, but populated by representatives of most of the relevant social and industrial labour bodies. Thus the various unions, T.U.C members, Parliamentary Party and Co-operative Groups were all present. Women's interests were served by the co-option of Margaret Bondfield and Susan Lawrence. Although this committee was never anything but advisory, nevertheless, they produced some important research throughout the war and maintained the pressure on the government to acknowledge the problems and issues faced by the workers and soldiers. It remained the case that local organisation was largely dependant upon the existing institutions dispensing charitable and philanthropic largesse. Although the government became increasingly involved in the provision of funds, via the Separation Allowances given to the wives and dependants of serving soldiers and sailors, and the pensions allocated to both injured personnel and widows, there was no large-scale centralised body established to administer day-to-day matters. Local administration and distribution was in the hands of the existing structures and the prevailing attitudes these organisations embodied continued. The district newspapers, particularly those of a more socialist bent were scathing of some of the more patronising behaviours exhibited:

The Charity Organisation Society and Guild of Help element is predominant in several of the committees, and it has to be fought strenuously before anything like sympathy is shown...The dispensing of charity is a social function...and the people whose main concern in life is social prestige, are

⁴⁰ *Huddersfield Worker*, 22 August 1914.

anxious that their particular charity dispensation should be the chief in town.⁴¹

There was particular concern that many of the bodies, either the new ones being created or the existing ones being utilised by the authorities were largely concerned with monitoring or controlling the working class, especially women. In the *Yorkshire Factory Times*, one writer commented on the number and supposed purposes of some of these groups,

Of the making of leagues and organisations there seems to be no end, and the war has produced a multitude of organisations, many of them controlled by busybodies whose interference ought to be resented by many of the working people whose husbands, sons and fathers have gone to active service...Working women know how to spend their money and do spend it more economically under compulsion than the middle-class or upper-class women know how to do, and I resent them being lectured by people who will spend as much on a dress as these women get by a year's allowance from the State for having let the husbands go to war. For example, there is a league for mothers, the Girls' Friendly Society, the YWCA and the National Union of Women Workers and others who are fumbling around possibly with good intentions because they have nothing else to do, trying to interfere with the way working women shall live and spend the limited allowances they get from the state.⁴²

The government also tried to address accusations that some people and companies were profiting from the war by imposing an Excess Profits Tax on firms deemed to be making too much money as a result. Companies considered 'controlled' under the provisions of the Munitions Act were required to provide accounts, and the minister would agree to a standard amount of profit allowable under the circumstances.⁴³ Representatives of workers were particularly scathing about what they saw as paltry efforts to curb the extravagance of the industrialists and retailers. For example, a circular issued by the Trades Union Congress Parliamentary Committee claimed one cause of the industrial unrest was 'feelings of inequality in view of the perception that some individuals and companies are making money out of the war in the form of excessive profits or are not sharing in the hardships. Advertisements for servants are frequently cited as an indication that the upper-classes, whilst exhorting economy and frugality upon others are ignoring such strictures when it comes to their own comfort.'⁴⁴ 'Business as Usual' was also cited in many of the protests against profiteering, allegations that businessmen were taking advantage of the urgency and necessity of government orders to artificially inflate prices. 'There have been hundreds of tons of raw material for the textile trade sold at alarming increases that cost those who held the stocks nothing extra to obtain. But they have taken advantage of the terrific demand and made a profit over and above the ordinary profit which has helped to cause the price of garments, wholesale and retail, to considerably increase.'⁴⁵

It is apparent, therefore, that the British government was ill-prepared for the outbreak of war and

⁴¹ *Huddersfield Worker*, 26 September 1914.

⁴² *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 22 October 1914.

⁴³ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 7 October 1915.

⁴⁴ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 1 April 1915.

⁴⁵ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 8 October 1914.

reacted badly to the initial problems created. Most of the decisions made were reactive, in response to circumstances often beyond the control of authorities, but that could have been anticipated with better planning and awareness. Many of the issues stemmed from inadequate or outdated thinking, information or intelligence. Thus much of the pre-war planning had been based on the supposed dominance of the navy, a situation that was soon exposed as inaccurate. Nevertheless, the government continued to base decisions on this premise. Food control was not seen as essential as the Germans could never disrupt supply lines and so market forces were allowed to dominate in the setting of prices. That this policy was short-sighted and foolish was apparent to many of the outside observers who urged quicker and more decisive action on this point. Unions, Labour representatives, Co-operative societies and even many of the businessmen and Employers' Associations involved all demanded action in vain. It was not until the government had no room for manoeuvre left that any action was taken late in the war. In a similar vein manpower was not seen as an important issue. Anticipating a short land war, the authorities allowed unchecked enlistment early in the war creating the problems for industry that meant skilled personnel and ultimately all workers were in short supply for the essential war industries and the supply of munitions and equipment. Again, these matters were not tackled until the situation became untenable. In other areas the government response was criticised as over-efficient and intrusive. Thus, drinking was blamed for many of the problems created by shortages of labour and so beer was diluted and pubs closed. In other cases women were blamed, with little evidence or information, for the spread of venereal disease and subject to highly restrictive and gender specific legislation. For the women workers of Huddersfield and the surrounding areas, the actions of the government did little to alleviate the suspicions that they were of no interest to the authorities. Policies put in place prioritised male workers at the expense of female ones, even within industries dependant upon women's labour. Social strategies also merely serve to reinforce existing class norms maintaining the inherent stratification of society. Middle-class ladies continued to monitor and judge their working-class sisters. The supposed levelling of British society lauded in the newspapers of ladies working in munitions factories did not apply to the textile mills of the West Riding.

Chapter Four – The Production of Cloth and the Question of Skill

One of the most significant aspects of the First World War was the rapid expansion of the armed forces. From a standing army of less than a million men in 1914, within four years the number of men in uniform was nearly nine million. Each of these men, and the army they represented, needed equipment to fight, guns and shells, tanks and aeroplanes, all the myriad items that made the war such a scene of industrialised carnage. Yet, just as it is impossible to picture a soldier of the Great War without a gun, it is equally impossible to picture him without a uniform. There was more to munitions than merely the instruments of death. Susan Lawrence, the trade unionist, summed this up in an article in 1915:

Tents are munitions; boots are munitions; biscuits and jam are munitions, sacks and ropes are munitions; drugs and bandages are munitions; socks and shirts and uniforms are munitions; all the miscellaneous list of contracts which fill up three pages of the Board of Trade Gazette, all, all are munitions.¹

There was, therefore, far more to provisioning an army than the engineering and chemical occupations that so interested the newspapers and journals of the time and the subsequent debate this engendered. The amount of material required for even the most basic uniforms was considerable and much of it was made of wool. In 1914 the standard uniform of the British Tommy consisted of a woollen tunic and trousers. He also carried either a greatcoat or a blanket, a cap or headdress and underclothing and other items also often made of wool. It was not simply the initial outfitting that was necessary either. In December 1914, even *The Times* was moved to describe the quantity of khaki needed for the army.

Well over a million men have already to be clothed, another million men have to be provided for immediately. A soldier in the firing line requires a new outfit every month. No man's kit can be said to be complete without two uniforms, one for service, the other for 'walking out'. Each overcoat takes three yards of cloth, each uniform about the same. It is a case of khaki by the million yards, and always more millions in prospect.²

By the time of the Somme offensive in 1916 the average length of service of a uniform in a front-line position was reckoned to be no more than a fortnight. Indeed, it was calculated that the army required 36 times as much cloth, 46 times as much flannel and 76 times as many blankets as in peace time.³

But as the army was expanding, the men were being withdrawn from the very industries that were required to provide this equipment. The textile industry was no exception. Even as orders rolled

¹ A. Susan Lawrence, 'Women on War Work', *Labour Woman*, no. 3, August 1915.

² *The Times*, 5 December 1914.

³ Work of the Wool Control Board, RECO1/371, National Archives.

in for cloth to make uniforms, not merely for the British Army and Navy, but for the Dominions and many of the allied countries as well, male mill workers were being stripped from the mills and the onus to maintain production was falling on the women left behind.

This chapter will examine how the textile trade reacted to the pressures created by the war and how the recruitment policies of men into the army and women into industry impacted the trade. It will also show how production was maintained for the duration of the war and the British and Allied armies were equipped throughout. It will argue that the war did little to alter the perception of women in the textile trade. Despite national conversation about women entering male workplaces and performing jobs previously denied to them in the munitions works, this did not lead to any great alterations within the woollen mills. Although women were both present in the textile workforce at the outbreak of war and were in constant demand throughout the conflict, they were still subject to existing prejudices and assumptions. Much of the debate during the war centred around attempts to retain men in the mills on the pretext that women were incapable of performing work defined as 'male'. Although such distinctions were arbitrary and often a result of custom rather than any inherent ability, the war failed to breach the barrier of 'skill' that existed in the textile trade. Women may have been temporarily allowed access to the more lucrative and responsible jobs, but such freedoms were to be short-lived. The 'double helix' effect, whereby the gains women made were always judged relative to the experiences of their male colleagues and were subject to immediate reversal when the situation normalized, remained in place.⁴

The volume of material required throughout the war, combined with the removal of men from industry into the forces, inevitably meant that more women were needed in the factories and mills as well as in the munitions shops. As shown in the previous chapter, manpower policy in Britain was piecemeal and disorganised. Men were initially allowed to join up with little thought given to the consequences. Later policies were introduced to try and balance the demands of both army and industry, but the authorities concerned often failed to coordinate their efforts and, in many cases, seemed in competition with each other rather than working together in execution of a united war aim. The recruitment of women to take the place of the men entering the army was equally ill-thought out and incoherent. From the early denial that women were necessary to maintain production, through the limited acceptance that they be allowed to undertake partial, or diluted jobs, to the ultimate reliance on female labour to produce the majority of weapons of war, each step was debated, argued over and resisted by the government, the male-dominated trade unions, the various employers' federations and indeed much of the general public. The wartime expansion of the munitions industry was the prime example of the focus of much of this debate. Women were needed to produce the weapons to arm the men, but the unions wanted to protect the skilled men under their protection and the employers wanted to maintain the output required by the forces. In most of the munitions works this was a relatively straight-forward argument. In the engineering and chemical fields, women had not been present in any large numbers before the war and thus there was an established assumption that the work needed skilled men to complete. During the conflict jobs previously thought of as highly skilled,

⁴ Margaret Higonnet and Patrice Higonnet, 'The Double Helix' in Margaret Higonnet, Jane Jenson, Sonya Michel & Margaret Collins Weitz (eds), *Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987).

and therefore reserved for men, were redefined in order to be performed by women. In some cases this involved breaking complex procedures down into component tasks and allocating parts of the procedure to different workers. Introducing women was only possible by breaking down each job into a series of smaller tasks and letting unskilled workers perform a contributory part. This dilution was agreed reluctantly by the engineering unions, but only under the proviso that it was an emergency measure for the duration of the war. Similarly, for unskilled work, women could be substituted for men, but due to their perceived lack of strength or stamina, more girls were needed to replace a smaller number of men, thus three girls might take the place of two men. In this way the work that before the war was considered to be 'male' was protected, and women seen as a necessary expedient for wartime only. The historiography of women's work in the war has largely followed this debate. Most writers have concentrated on the munitions industry as that is where the largest and most obvious change took place during the period. Thus most examinations of the expansion of female work have concentrated on women undertaking engineering work in the various armament companies or National Filling Factories.

For textiles the situation was somewhat different to that in the engineering sector. Women had long been employed in many of the mill jobs and so there was no issue of substitution and dilution. In the textile trade the notion of 'male' and 'female' work was challenged by the needs of the First World War. As Busfield has shown, skilled work was not necessarily defined as the acquisition of technical achievement but was often merely the result of long practice and traditional considerations.⁵ Work was regarded as skilled if performed by a man and unskilled or semi-skilled if done by women regardless of its complexity or precision. In addition, the variation within the textile industry, where gender segregation varied not only from town to town but also from mill to mill, led to some jobs being considered women's work in one area but men's in another. Comparisons are therefore difficult to make and the impact of increased numbers of women during the war harder to assess. If a woman in Leeds was capable of being a mule spinner before the war, opening up this area of work in Huddersfield does not represent an advancement for women but merely an acknowledgement that existing gender divisions were arbitrary and artificial. The re-imposition of ideas of 'women's work' after the war was thus also subject to whim and quirk rather than any notion of actuality. Another issue raised was that the encroachment of women into the work normally reserved for men tended to undermine not only the wages men could claim, but also the whole notion of male work being somehow more skilled and valuable merely because it was performed by men.⁶ Thus the definitions of skill and the subsequent remuneration bear little scrutiny and the division of labour into male and female is a highly artificial one, with often little justification save the precept of tradition or custom. The munitions tribunals set up to examine men who sought exemption from conscription also highlighted this. Many companies claimed that men were indispensable to their business, often on the grounds that their job was traditionally seen as a male one and not on any consideration of the physical effort or skill needed to perform the task. Certified occupations also formed the subject of many arguments

⁵ Deirdre Busfield, 'Skill and the sexual division of labour in the West Riding Textile Industry, 1850-1914' in J.A. Jowitt and A.J. McIvor (eds.), *Employers and Labour in the English Textile Industries 1850-1939* (London: Routledge, 1988).

⁶ *Ibid.* p.165.

between the military authorities and the woollen manufacturers. There were even debates about whether objections to women being allowed into certain occupations was to be construed as interfering with recruitment under the Defence of the Realm Act. Arguments about skill and the role of women in the textile industry continued throughout the war.

The Demand for Khaki

The initial impact of the outbreak of war in August 1914 saw a dramatic decline in the amount of work for the mills which dominated the economy of Huddersfield and much of the surrounding district. The closing of the continental markets, the discontinuance of steamship sailings and the drive for economy on the part of the buying public, all led to a slowing in what was already a trying time. Almost immediately some manufacturers responded by closing mills or reducing the hours of work. Martin, Sons and Co. Ltd for example, one of the largest worsted manufacturers in Huddersfield closed their factory at Lindley for a week. A notice posted in the works informed the staff that, 'owing to the outbreak of war there is every likelihood of a great shortage of work and possibly a complete stoppage for an indefinite time. The directors think it advisable to make their workpeople acquainted with these facts before making arrangements for holidays.'⁷ Other companies were not quite as radical, merely closing for a number of days. The same article in the *Worker* newspaper outlines the elaborate schedule undertaken at the firm of Jonas Brook and Bros. of Meltham Mills.

In consequence of the serious international situation and the impossibility of shipping goods owing to the discontinuance of steamship sailings, the directors have decided to close the mills to-morrow (Wednesday), Thursday and Saturday. Next week the mill will be closed Monday, Wednesday and Friday; and the following week Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday; and so on until further notice. The directors think it right to warn the workers that the working of the mills may have to be still further curtailed.⁸

The uncertain nature of the period could lead to confusion for workers. In a case brought before the Huddersfield Police Court in October, a wool piecer summonsed for leaving work without notice referred to a sign placed in the works reading 'Owing to the slack trade on the Continent, weekly wage men are on hourly; other hands that are employed are working day by day until further notice.' He alleged this allowed him to leave at any moment. The company, and ultimately the Court, disagreed.⁹

Many local men, some of whom were subject to the reductions in work, but also others looking for adventure or out of patriotic fervour joined the colours. Several companies gave encouragement and incentives to their men to enlist in the Army. Some firms offered to keep open the jobs of men volunteering, rents were waived for the dependants of new recruits and two local manufacturers

⁷ *Huddersfield Worker*, 8 August 1914.

⁸ *Huddersfield Worker*, 8 August 1914.

⁹ *Huddersfield Worker*, 10 October 1914.

offered pay supplements to employees who enlisted.¹⁰ With these inducements and often the support and enthusiasm of their family and community urging them on, many men left their jobs in the mills and joined up.¹¹

Although the initial impact of the war on the textile trade was dramatic, it was also relatively short-lived. As many of the manufacturers in the West Riding knew from their experience of the Boer War, an expanding army meant opportunities for those who provided the uniforms and equipment the soldiers needed. Any increase in military activity would lead to an increased demand for uniform cloth and army blankets, both of which were supplied in large amounts by the firms of the Colne and Holme Valleys.¹² By the second week of August it was estimated that contracts were required for 500,000 yards of khaki cloth and 2,000,000 yards of silver grey flannel.¹³ Efforts were made to secure a share of this for the mills of Huddersfield and the Colne Valley and to that end a deputation of cloth manufacturers paid a visit to the War Office to urge the authorities to place orders as soon as possible.¹⁴ With Lord Kitchener calling for an immediate extra 500,000 new soldiers, the orders were indeed soon flowing into the area.

Moreover, it was not only the British Army that required equipment. Trade with the continent was not only affected by the loss of German markets, but the textile areas of France, Belgium and even Russia were occupied and disrupted by the German army. The nature of the German advance through Belgium and into Northern France also meant that much of the existing European textile industry was damaged and dislocated and so unable to provide much of the necessary material for the French and Belgian armies, the supply of which would fall to British manufacturers. There were also official moves to encourage British firms to try and capture the share of the trade in colonial and neutral markets that had hitherto been supplied by German or Austro-Hungarian competitors. The Board of Trade Advisory Committee on Commercial Intelligence held a number of meetings with the various merchants and manufacturers concerned in an effort to increase the British share of such trade.¹⁵

Thus, the optimism of the woollen manufacturers at the beginning of the war was soon fulfilled. It was said there was no more flourishing industry than the manufacture of khaki. Other commodities were also in demand and it was not only the British Army that was being supplied by the West Riding. Khaki may have dominated for the British and Dominion Forces, but blue-grey for the French and others for the Russian, Serbian and Greeks also flowed out of local mills.¹⁶ Florence Lockwood, the wife of a prominent local manufacturer, noted in her diary that cloth produced in the Colne Valley started to be measured in miles rather than yards.¹⁷ The increase in orders was so large that the *Board of Trade Labour Gazette*, which provided lists of local firms receiving government contracts

¹⁰ Cyril Pearce, *Comrades in Conscience* (London: Francis Boutle, 2001), p.81.

¹¹ Gail Ledgard, *To what extent did the First World War impact the domestic lives of working class women in Huddersfield* (Unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Huddersfield, 2013) p.10.

¹² *Ibid.* p.30.

¹³ G. R. Carter, 'Clothing the Allies' Armies', *The Economic Journal*, Vol. 25, No. 97 (Mar., 1915), pp.97-103.

¹⁴ *Huddersfield Daily Examiner*, 11 August 1914.

¹⁵ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 10 September 1914.

¹⁶ Dorothy M. Zimmern, 'The Wool Trade in War Time', *The Economic Journal*, Vol. 28, No. 109 (Mar., 1918), pp.7-29.

¹⁷ Florence Lockwood diary, January 1915, KC909, West Yorkshire Archive Service.

was obliged to produce a special twelve-page supplement to its normal publication in order to list them all.¹⁸

By November 1914 the Board of Trade was asking manufacturers about the possibilities for increasing production of khaki cloths. Lord Kitchener was said to be concerned about the supply of Army cloth and was even rumoured to be prepared to go to the length of placing under direct military control any mill capable of producing material where the whole of the machinery available was not devoted to that purpose.¹⁹ He also responded to suggestions that textile workers would be of more use in the forces, by issuing letters to employers on military work appealing for greater efforts to increase the output of army clothing and stated, 'In carrying out the government work for providing the Army with its equipment, employers and employees alike are doing their duty for their King and Country equally with those who have joined the Army for service in the field.'²⁰ Government officials visited mills in the area with a view to increasing the production of cloth needed for both the British army and those of the allies. The Board of Trade officers wanted to know the weekly output of the various firms, what proportion of this was under War Office contract, how much machinery was working day and night and what additional labour would be required to improve the amount of cloth being produced. Ben Turner, when interviewed, claimed 'there could not very well be much more cloth turned out than was being done for they would soon be up against the raw material problem and the spinning and finishing machinery were in many mills used to the utmost at the moment.'²¹ It was also the case that many woollen mills had more looms than they had workers for and they could not run them for extra hours because the provision of yarn could not keep up with the increased demand. Sir Algernon Firth, director of a large West Riding woollen firm, was rather more enthusiastic in his response to the same deputation from the Board of Trade, writing, 'looms must be turned on and kept at their maximum production. Spinning machinery, both woollen and worsted, should be placed unreservedly at the disposal of those manufacturers working on the government orders, and deliveries of other yarns should be refused so long as production is needed for those who are fighting our enemy.'²² He also urged any firms who were not currently receiving government contracts, but were able to make suitable cloth, to apply at once to the Director of Army Contracts offering their services, in order to speed up the production of khaki and other military necessities. Mr G. H. Wood, Secretary of the Master Spinners and Woollen Manufacturers Associations, discussing the situation in respect of the government's requirements reported that the greatest problem facing the trade at the current time was the lack of labour needed to make the already huge output even larger. There was especially a shortage of piecers and spinners: 'Spinning is the weak link in the whole chain. There are looms which are waiting for warps and weft.'²³ Mr Wood also questioned the idea that the government wished to commandeer the mills, and felt that the best solution to the problems being experienced would be to find the necessary labour and additional machinery needed to increase output.

¹⁸ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 28 January 1915.

¹⁹ *Huddersfield Worker*, 21 November 1914.

²⁰ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 10 December 1914.

²¹ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 10 December 1914.

²² *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 19 November 1914.

²³ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 19 November 1914.

The rapid expansion of the industry in response to the demands of the army also had other consequences. Complaints began to appear in the press and even as questions in the House of Commons regarding the quality of the khaki being produced. Fred Jowett, the Labour Member of Parliament for West Bradford, was particularly vocal in his defence of the local textile industry and 'wished to assure the House that the khaki cloth turned out by the West Riding of Yorkshire mills was fit for anybody to wear.'²⁴ It was increasingly noted that many of the textile firms of the West Riding who were engaged on army contracts were making large profits and accusations of companies profiteering by supplying inferior goods at inflated prices were made.²⁵ Some firms were undoubtedly guilty of 'trying it on'. In one case reported in the *Yorkshire Factory Times* a firm had several pieces returned by a foreign government because they had 'put in a thicker yarn, reduced the number of picks per inch and made a cloth apparently the proper weight.'²⁶ There were also complaints that the colour of the khaki produced was not consistent and varied from batch to batch.²⁷ Some local manufacturers were vocal about the problems. Florence Lockwood, records in her diary her husband's comments about the state of some soldiers in the area. 'Josiah not so pleased with their khaki tunics, trousers and overcoats in different shades.'²⁸ Before the war, almost all dyes were obtained from Germany and the restriction of trade because of the war meant that the home production of dyes increased dramatically. The establishment of British Dyes in Huddersfield meant that the quantity of dye needed was maintained but the quality was a rather more precarious proposition and it took some time until the experimentation of the chemists resulted in an acceptable uniformity of shade.

A further problem created by the hurried nature of the increase in army orders was that the demand soon outstripped the ability of firms to deliver the quantities required. The normal method of Army procurement, in place before the war, was that a small number of firms on an approved list, tendered for contracts through the War Office as and when required. The speed of expansion of the forces at the outbreak of war soon rendered this system increasingly unworkable. The list of contractors was too small to allow the quantities of material to be produced in the short time allowed. In response to this problem, many of the firms who received orders from the government but were unable to cope with the volumes required started to sub-contract the work out to firms who were not permitted to tender directly but were able to perform the work necessary. This ability did not always result in a fair exchange. Some firms used the power that the government's urgent orders gave them to their own advantage. It was reported that more than one mill in Huddersfield had put up notices stating that on sub-contracts of goods for the army and navy they would pay less than the standard list price operating between the unions and the employers' associations for the work, in some cases by as much as ten per cent.²⁹ The GUTW approached the government to stop such practices alleging that they broke the Fair Contracts clause included in War Office agreements and questioning the

²⁴ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 3 December 1914.

²⁵ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 29 October 1914.

²⁶ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 8 July 1915.

²⁷ *Huddersfield Worker*, 23 January 1915.

²⁸ Florence Lockwood diary, 14 March 1915.

²⁹ *Huddersfield Worker*, 12 September 1914.

patriotism of firms who would act in such a manner.³⁰ There were even strikes threatened if action was not taken to prevent such violations of the government's own rules for the behaviour of firms undertaking contracts and sub-contracts.³¹ At a conference of trade unionists held at the Huddersfield Friendly and Trades Society Club at the beginning of November a resolution was adopted protesting against the unfair rates paid on government contracts. Mr Ben Littlewood, representative of the textile workers, in seconding the motion stated that 'although it was government work, girls could not make a living wage on it.'³² Some firms were not above using the power that government contracts gave them against other companies and wanted to keep contracts for themselves despite the ability to sub-contract that the agreements allowed them. In some cases it was alleged that no suitable machinery could be found to take a share of the work despite the necessary adaptation being a relatively simple and inexpensive matter. Such firms wanted permission to work overtime and nightshifts for their own workers whilst neighbouring mills were reducing the hours of other workers.³³ The Admiralty was sufficiently concerned by this problem that a letter was issued to the Chambers of Commerce in the area complaining that some manufacturers were concentrating on their civilian trade rather than fulfilling military contracts in order that they did not lose regular customers.³⁴ The General Union of Textile Workers was also concerned and Mr Gee, the Secretary, reported that he had written to the various Employers' Associations urging them to share out work rather than run overtime at a few places and short time or no time at others.³⁵ Thus the rapidly expanding demand for cloth was not spread evenly, and while some mills were now working day and night, other continued on short time. The *Yorkshire Factory Times* reported on 'a manufacturer who has 130 looms and could do with some government work but didn't get a bit.'³⁶

The various textiles involved also added to the differences. Whilst the army required large volumes of woollen goods they were less in need of cotton and the geographical spread of employment soon started to reflect the industrial makeup of the different areas. So, while many Yorkshire firms in the Huddersfield, Colne Valley and Heavy Woollen District received large orders, the worsted areas of the West Riding around Halifax and Bradford had fewer and those of the Lancashire cotton regions had even less. This meant that areas unused to certain types of production were now being required to undertake work they were not familiar with and discrepancies over prices and conditions became increasingly evident. For instance, in one case Huddersfield weavers refused to weave warps from a mill at Halifax for Halifax prices, which were considerably lower than the ones prevailing in Huddersfield.³⁷ A report in the *Yorkshire Factory Times* encapsulates the situation.

The majority of Huddersfield manufacturers are engaged in meeting the demands of the home and Allied Governments for military cloth and blankets. These orders are causing considerable pressure on the factories, but

³⁰ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 3 September 1914.

³¹ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 24 September 1914.

³² *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 5 November 1914.

³³ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 15 October 1914.

³⁴ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 15 October 1914.

³⁵ Huddersfield Trade and Labour Council Minutes, 25 September 1914, S/HTC/1/4, West Yorkshire Archive Service.

³⁶ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 25 March 1915.

³⁷ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 6 April 1916.

production is rather seriously retarded by the extensive depletion of staffs and the consequent stoppage of machinery. It is in the spinning dept that the labour problem is most acute. A number of firms have accepted khaki contracts which will last for several months; one firm alone has an order for a quarter of a million yards of overcoating cloth. Further inquiries are being made, and quotations have been given for solid worsted khaki, but no orders for this cloth have yet been placed. More government work would be welcomed by some of the worsted firms, who unlike woollen makers, find that their ordinary trade is not at all pressing, while the demand for khaki for officers' wear has fallen off very considerably owing to the probability of this trade being taken out of private hands. The difficulty of obtaining deliveries of yarn is, however, very pronounced in the worsted department, and is causing a large number of looms to be idle.³⁸

The intermittent nature of the work had long been a feature of the textile industry, and was further exacerbated by the war. Many of the raw materials required for the production of textiles were imported and the conditions engendered by a global conflict rendered the supply vulnerable. Whilst the woollen industry did not suffer quite the same impact that cotton or silk did, sourcing materials from Australia, South Africa and South America led to delays and bottlenecks and affected the ability of the industry to maintain constant production. Employers complained about the inadequacies in the system of supply. Delays in unloading at ports with merchandise standing on the quays, ships waiting out in rivers to enter port following the governments requisition of berths for warships and their collier and provision boats. Sir Algernon Firth, a prominent Yorkshire mill owner, was particularly concerned by this, commenting on the situation at the London Docks and lamenting the state of the railways and the lack of storage space available. The *Halifax Courier* reported that

Firth says he is informed that a great deal of congestion at the port of London is caused by the fact that there are 200,000 bales of wool stored there filling up the available accommodation. There are also 70,000 bales arriving which it is difficult to find room to store. This accumulation of wool is affecting both inward and outward traffic.³⁹

The increase in traffic in northern ports due to the closing of Southampton and other southern ports, and the delays in transporting goods across the country due to restrictions in railway use, meant that although orders may have been outstanding, machines were standing idle. There were suggestions that the trade should be spread out into other ports in order to alleviate the pressure on London, with Manchester, Immingham and Hull being mooted as possible alternative sites for the centre of woollen imports and exports.⁴⁰ Other issues connected with the conditions created by the war also affected the textile industry. The supply of coal became a major problem. As the war progressed a large number of miners joined the army which reduced production, trains were commandeered and priority on railways was given to munitions traffic, industrial action in mining areas led to increased prices and the quality of coal available decreased.

³⁸ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 3 April 1916.

³⁹ *Halifax Courier*, 31 July 1915.

⁴⁰ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 9 September 1915.

Alternative Workers Needed

As the war progressed and more orders continued to pour into the textile mills, the labour force was stretched even further. Recruitment and calls for men to enlist in the army began to bite. Some firms added to the pressure on their male workers to join up by promising bonuses or supplementary pay to those workers taking the King's shilling. Other firms were not so patriotic, with some giving notice to male employees on the grounds of slackening trade but promising to re-employ those rejected for military service. The firm of Walter Sykes, Ltd of Zetland Mills issued notices to their workers who were of military age and stated that any weavers in that category should leave as soon as their current work was finished.⁴¹ The drive to send men into the army, and inevitably the desire on the part of some workers to escape their normal occupations, meant that the supply of workers was soon under strain. Other competing industries were also taking textile workers away from the mills. British Dyes required over 10,000 workers, primarily during its construction, but also when it was up and running. Munitions works also proliferated in Huddersfield and proved particularly tempting to female employees, promising, as they did, greater rates of pay than they could expect in the mill.

By November it was estimated that the output of khaki cloth in the Huddersfield district was 250 miles a week in the woollen mills alone, but this still was not sufficient for the huge number of men joining the armies of Britain and the allies who were being supplied from the area. Manufacturers were becoming increasingly pressured. On the one hand they were being pressed for ever-greater output and quicker delivery and on the other there was a serious shortage of workers in many departments. In an attempt to address the issue, Sir George Askwith, chairman of the Industrial Commission of the Board of Trade visited Huddersfield and held a series of meetings with the leading manufacturers. The main complaint of the businessmen was that it was impossible for them to produce more khaki, seeing that recruitment for the Army was reducing the productive power of the majority of the local mills, and that there was difficulty in filling the places vacated by experienced workers who had enlisted.⁴² At a Chamber of Commerce meeting in October 1914 the difficulties being experienced by the trade and the possible consequences of the recent heavy recruiting were discussed. Thousands of men were now serving as soldiers and the loss of so many men was becoming a serious matter to the contractors on whom the government relied for supplies. A letter had been received from the War Office expressing the hope that employees would appreciate the interests of the country in the present emergency and remain in their occupations. As a response to the shortage of male labour, one of the representatives Mr W Shires commented, 'I understand they can get a permit for the employment of female labour. Where women can take men's work they should be encouraged.'⁴³ The local socialists pointed out the irony of this position in an open-air meeting later in the same month. Mr A. Dawson remarking that, 'the class who were appealing for recruits when trade was slack were now, when they had khaki orders, suggesting that the government

⁴¹ *Huddersfield Worker*, 13 November 1915.

⁴² *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 26 November 1914.

⁴³ *Huddersfield Worker*, 3 October 1914.

should refuse to take their employees.⁴⁴

Manufacturers in the textile trades, therefore, began looking for alternative sources of labour. Various potential pools of workers were suggested, and some were tried with varying degrees of success. In the first instance it was mooted whether cotton weavers from Lancashire could be introduced into Yorkshire woollen mills. Due to the lack of demand for cotton products, which were not required in any great quantities by the army, and the difficulties of importing the requisite raw materials, and exporting the finished product, the Lancashire mill towns were suffering from a large degree of unemployment and short time. It was suggested that workers might be shipped from Lancashire to Yorkshire to fill the gaps created by the removal of woollen workers.⁴⁵ Some firms advertised in the cotton areas and a number of workers from Blackburn, Darwin and other cotton districts did come and try work in the woollen mills, but difficulties in obtaining lodgings due to the pressure of overcrowding and the disparity in wages between the two regions meant that the experiment was short-lived and relatively unsuccessful.⁴⁶

There were also attempts to recruit Belgian workers into the mills. Many of the Belgian refugees being offered shelter in the local area were from textile areas and so were accustomed to mill work. As Belgian mills operated under different methods and used different machinery to British ones, the work was not easily transferable, and most of the workers were only useful for relatively low-skilled jobs. This was particularly concerning to the unions involved, who worried that Belgians could be used to undercut local pay arrangements, as wages in Belgium were lower and in England would be supplemented by charitable donations.⁴⁷ Ultimately many Belgians did find work in the mills under British trade union rates and the numbers were never significant enough to damage relations. Schemes to recruit workers directly from Belgium, although mooted, never materialised. Similarly, a suggestion that French woollen workers thrown out of work by the war could be imported and found temporary work was dismissed as impracticable by Ben Turner. In response to the idea he stated, 'employment could be found for more hands, French or British, if there were factories for them to work in and machinery for them to manage. But as matters stand as present it is lack of buildings and machinery rather than lack of labour that is handicapping the manufacturers in their efforts to keep pace with the extraordinary demand.'⁴⁸

Some local businessmen deemed more drastic action was necessary. The Chairman of Marsden District Council, Mr Firth, who was also a prominent mill owner, saw it as his duty to institute a census of local residents with a view to getting older men and married women, where they could be spared, to volunteer to keep the places going. Those who had given up working were asked to give their names in at the various works to prevent closure of the mills due to lack of workers.⁴⁹ It was also announced that a survey of schoolchildren would be taken to see if any of them could help out.⁵⁰ One woman recalled years later, 'a lot of young lads that weren't old enough to go soldiering' were taken

⁴⁴ *Huddersfield Worker*, 17 October 1914.

⁴⁵ G. R. Carter, 'Clothing the Allies' Armies', *The Economic Journal*, Vol. 25, No. 97 (Mar., 1915), pp.97-103.

⁴⁶ *Huddersfield Worker*, 28 November 1914.

⁴⁷ *Huddersfield Worker*, 26 December 1914.

⁴⁸ *Yorkshire Factory Times* 14 January 1915.

⁴⁹ *Huddersfield Worker* 8 January 1916.

⁵⁰ *Yorkshire Factory Times* 13 January 1916.

on to perform many of the jobs that men had done previously.⁵¹ Requests were even made for the return of low grade or older men from the Army and for them to be replaced by younger men who were exempted but in occupations from which they could be spared.⁵²

Eventually, after all alternative suggestions had been found insufficient, it was realised that the only source of labour large enough to satisfy the increasing demands of the textile industry was women. One of the main issues with the unrestricted removal of men from the mills of the region was that the segregated nature of the work meant the problems caused at the beginning of production became multiplied as the process continued. Thus in Huddersfield, men tended to work jobs either at the start of the manufacturing journey, as wool sorters or in the spinning departments preparing the yarn, or they worked in the final stages as dyers or finishers. Women tended to predominate in the middle sections either as weavers or menders. The removal of men from the initial stages therefore caused a lack of wool for the women further down the line to work with. Although female labour was already common in the mills of the West Riding most jobs were strictly segregated into male and female occupations. This division, however could be quite arbitrary. In many towns spinning was a female task but for some reason in Huddersfield it had traditionally been a male one. As enlistment began to bite the *Yorkshire Factory Times*, the newspaper of the textile union, summed up the situation.⁵³

There are serious difficulties being experienced in Huddersfield. The majority of firms have well-filled order books, khaki and army blankets in many cases. The volume of output however, has been curtailed as owing to the scarcity of labour there are several departments in which machinery cannot be run at full pressure. The working of overtime is increasingly necessary and machinery is still being run day and night, but in not a few instances portions of plants are idle.⁵⁴

It was essential, therefore, to open up some of the male jobs to female labour. The President of the Board of Trade, Walter Runciman issued an appeal to employers.

We appeal...to every employer who is finding his business threatened with diminished productivity through the loss of men, not to accept such diminution as an inevitable consequence of the war, but to make every possible effort to maintain his production by using women, whether in direct substitution for the men who have been withdrawn or by some sub-division or rearrangement of his work.⁵⁵

Various schemes were suggested to fill the spaces left by men joining the army. Married women who had left the mills were urged to return, girls who had turned to munitions in the slower periods at the start of the war were urged back into the textile industry and appeals were made to allow younger children to leave school and undertake half-time work.⁵⁶ Some women working in different

⁵¹ Colne Valley Interview 18, deposited at Kirklees Sound Archive.

⁵² *Yorkshire Factory Times* 13 December 1917.

⁵³ Ledgard, *To what extent did the First World War impact the domestic lives of working class women in Huddersfield*, p.10

⁵⁴ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 16 March 1916.

⁵⁵ Women's War Employment Committee (WVEC), 31/5/1916, WYAS, Kirklees S/NUDBTW/34.

⁵⁶ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 6 May 1915.

departments were also approached directly. One woman working as a mender recalled that,

there were a lot of the men gone. That meant the looms were standing idle. It also meant that some of the work was khaki or hospital blue or blankets which didn't need a lot of mending. So that meant there was less work for the menders and they were needing someone to attend to the looms and they couldn't get people. So, the boss over the weaving shed, he tried to persuade several of us to go - leave mending and go and learn to weave, and in those days we had a table and a long form we sat on, and he'd come and sit on this form and talk and joke with us and try and persuade us to go.⁵⁷

The members of the Queen's Work for Women Committee, which at the start of the war was established to find work for women who had lost their jobs due to the outbreak, now faced the opposite problem. Instead of too few jobs for too many people, they had machinery standing idle for want of labour and orders piling up with no workers to fulfil them. A meeting was held in the Town Hall to appeal for women to take the place of men required to serve their country. Miss Thornton, the senior organising officer for women's employment, explained why the Board of Trade needed women. 'The textile mills were working day and night, and when they considered that the life of a suit for men in the trenches might only be a fortnight, the amount of extra work necessary could be imagined.' This produced some differences of opinion. Mrs Donkersley, a prominent member of the Women's Liberal Association who eventually became a leading light in the local U.D.C stated that wars were regrettable and, 'it should be the duty of women to see that no man should be forced into military service by reason of women coming into his industry.' She went on to acknowledge that if women were necessary they should be available, but they should receive the same wages in order not to undermine the men who would return or the women who needed work. In this position she was roundly opposed by a number of other women. Most prominently, Miss Lowenthal expressed the view that men should be pressed into military service commenting that, 'our existence as a nation is at stake...and it is incredible that any man should conscientiously object to fighting for his nationality.'⁵⁸

The rapid need for large number of additional workers also caused problems for the relatively recently established Labour Exchanges. Although it was acknowledged that they were the only national body capable of undertaking the work as they had the necessary personnel and resources, they were viewed with some suspicion in the textile areas.⁵⁹ The general practice before the First World War in areas dominated by mills was for workers to be introduced into the workforce by a parent or other relative. Many girls followed their mother or older sister into the mill as thirteen year olds. Recruitment was an informal affair with arrangements being made between a working woman and the overlooker to take on a young girl as soon as she reached the right age. There was a resistance to what was considered outside interference. A report to the Board of Trade on reaction to a registry set up by the Girls' Friendly Society, summed up workers' attitudes to such innovation, stating that, 'those considered competent found no difficulty in obtaining work through personal recommendation or word of mouth, whereas those who placed themselves on a register were those

⁵⁷ Colne Valley Interview 11, deposited at Kirklees Sound Archive.

⁵⁸ *Huddersfield Daily Examiner*, 20 April 1915.

⁵⁹ Rodney Lowe, 'The Ministry of Labour 1916-19: A Still Small Voice?' in Kathleen Burk (ed.) *War and the State: the Transformation of British Government 1914-1919* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1982), p.113.

who were inefficient and incapable of looking after themselves.⁶⁰ Thus workers were suspicious of any external form of recruitment and employers were similarly unwilling to embrace the new as the old system worked adequately for their purposes and their experience of registry recruits was far from ideal. The outbreak of war altered this. Because of the need for large numbers of additional workers, far beyond what was available locally, the war demanded the increased use of formal, officially sanctioned recruitment techniques. It presented an opportunity for the Labour Exchange system, previously regarded with suspicion by workers and as unnecessary by employers, to gain a foothold in the organisation of the workforce which persisted after the war had ended. Julia Thornton, the Senior Organising Officer for Women's Work for the Yorkshire and East Midlands Division of Labour Exchanges spelled out the changes in a letter written in February 1916. 'The old prejudice...against using the exchange is rapidly disappearing...It is more necessary now, that all labour should flow through some organised channel if we are to get the best use for the country out of the industrial and business capacity of the women.'⁶¹

Advertisements were placed in newspapers around the country, requesting girls to volunteer for textile work. Many of them stressed the supposed ease of the job in contrast to many of the munitions tasks. One particular advert stated, 'We are wanting hands. Previous experience not necessary. Work can be learned in a few days. We pay you for learning. It's an easy occupation, to which you sit. And for this we pay good wages.'⁶² Another claimed, 'men and women wanted for working in woollen factory; work easily learnt; good wages paid.'⁶³ Others emphasised the communal nature of the job. One advert wanting girls on the East Coast to learn work in a woollen mill, after mentioning the constant work available and the good wages offered, said 'some girls already working here from Hull.'⁶⁴ Some were even more direct about the family aspect of mill work, directly requesting 'families for a woollen mill, or widow with children, some of whom must be of working age.'⁶⁵

When these measures failed to produce the required numbers, the government, in the shape of the Home Office and the Board of Trade, established a number of Women's War Employment (Industrial) Committees in various towns to address the issue for particular industries within specific localities and facilitate the entry of women to industrial occupations where they were needed due to the shortage of men. Such committees were to be comprised of people, 'chosen for their interest in questions of women's employment.'⁶⁶ In Huddersfield a committee was duly instituted and 18 men and women with an involvement in the textile industry or women's welfare were invited to the first meeting on 7 April 1916 under the chairmanship of the Mayor, Joseph Blamires. The members of this committee soon began to implement the Board of Trade's favoured solution of recruiting female workers from areas where employment for them was scarce or had been affected by the wartime restrictions. Many women from East Coast towns like Hull, Scarborough, Bridlington and Grimsby who

⁶⁰ Report to the Board of Trade on Methods for Dealing with the Unemployed 1893, GHW/CC5 University of Huddersfield Archives.

⁶¹ Letter from Julia Thornton 15 February 1916, WWD1/Box 320/TB620, West Yorkshire Archive Service.

⁶² *Spensorborough Guardian*, 26 April 1916.

⁶³ *Hull Daily Mail*, 2 May 1916.

⁶⁴ *Hull Daily Mail*, 22 November 1915.

⁶⁵ *Hull Daily Mail*, 21 February 1916.

⁶⁶ Report into the Increased Employment of Women, LAB15/95, National Archives.

had previously been employed by the fishing trade, which had shrunk as a result of the war, were taken on to learn spinning.⁶⁷ Several of the Colne Valley interviewees remembered the women being imported during the First World War. One mentioned that a lot of girls came from Scarborough as a result of the bombing there.⁶⁸ Another recalled how the girls who came from the East Coast were referred to as 'fisher girls.'⁶⁹ Places like Harrogate and Mansfield where only a small proportion of women were used in the local workforce also provided trainees for the textile mills of the Colne Valley. They were to replace 600 men who were due to leave Huddersfield to join the army. It was estimated that at least a thousand women would need to be recruited to cover the shortfall and enable the mills to reach full capacity.⁷⁰ Within the structure of this committee, which was divided evenly between men and women, divisions in the concerns of the various groups soon became apparent. Amongst the male members the debates were largely about the functions of the imported women in the mills. The manufacturers' representatives wanted to know whether such workers could be used to fill the night-shifts and how long they would take to train.⁷¹ The union representatives, on the other hand, expressed doubts that the contracts offered to incoming girls would be honoured and feared that they could be used to undermine existing wage agreements. The female members of the committee, however, had different priorities. With backgrounds in health, education and shelter provision, the ladies of the committee were soon formed into a Lodging and Welfare Sub-Committee with a brief to concentrate on those aspects of assistance that the imported girls might require.

There were also concerns that the women being imported into the district should be assured that the work was 'suitable' for females. In contrast to the munitions and engineering sectors, which were also demanding increasing amounts of female labour, textiles had long been considered an appropriate occupation for women. Indeed, the *Huddersfield Daily Examiner* was moved to comment on the nature of the workers desired.

Responsible committees are taking charge of the work - at the places of origin to see that only suitable and deserving girls and women are sent, and at this end to arrange for their reception and 'billeting' if the term may properly be used, with a prospect of comfort and happiness whilst they are here. The work in which they will be engaged is quite a woman's form of service.⁷²

Local girls, long accustomed to mill work and the expectation that girls followed their mothers into jobs had no problem with the idea, but special emphasis on the clean and respectable nature of the industry was made in the recruiting meetings held in the areas unused to female work. The Women's War Employment committee in Hull, for example, held a series of meetings at the Employment Exchange for the purpose of appealing to women on the unemployment register to take up work in the textile districts. At these meetings, to which, 'each woman was invited to bring her mother or other relative,' the committee was only too happy to ensure that girls and their families were aware of the

⁶⁷ Ledgard, *To what extent did the First World War impact the domestic lives of working class women in Huddersfield*, p.11.

⁶⁸ Colne Valley Interview 16, deposited at Kirklees Sound Archive.

⁶⁹ Colne Valley Interview 15, deposited at Kirklees Sound Archive.

⁷⁰ *Manchester Guardian*, 8 April 1916.

⁷¹ *Huddersfield Worker*, 22 April 1916.

⁷² *Huddersfield Daily Examiner*, 12 April 1916.

acceptable nature of the work being provided. They encouraged girls to take up work in other areas, giving details of the work, conditions, wages and accommodation. The result was an increased willingness to migrate on the part of Hull women.⁷³ Similar meetings were held in other towns where the population held a surplus of females not required by the local industries.

Some mill owners also made special arrangements to induce workers to come. In some cases this resulted in more workers being drawn into the area. In one instance a representative of a firm went to Scarborough seeking workers, 'there was one woman and she was having a son and two daughters to come...she said as they were taking a livelihood away and she'd just be left.' So the company concerned, Joseph Hoyle's, rented a house to her 'and they fetched her. They made provision, transport and brought her, her husband and there was Doris, Ethel and Jack. And there were three neighbour girls came with them and she looked after them during the war and they paid her board.'⁷⁴ Thus a simple gesture to reassure a mother that she and her children would be taken care of resulted in six extra workers in the mill.

The first batch of women arrived in Huddersfield in April 1916 and were soon put to work. The local trade newspaper reported,

very substantial contracts for army cloth for the home Government and the allies are in process of execution at all the woollen mills in the Huddersfield area, but so scarce has the supply of labour become that the work is now being seriously delayed. Great difficulties have been experienced in the spinning department, and for some time the output of yarn has been insufficient to maintain the activity which is necessary in the weaving departments. It is estimated indeed that about 1000 looms in Huddersfield and the Colne Valley are now idle. The new operatives will be employed in spinning and piecing. This will be an innovation in the Huddersfield trade for hitherto women have steadfastly declined to work at the spinning mules. There is now no alternative to their employment, for an additional 600 men will shortly be withdrawn from the spinning departments either by military service or to undertake millwork which involves hard manual labour. It will take some time to absorb the new operatives in the trade but this will be done as quickly as circumstances permit.⁷⁵

These workers, brought from the East Coast or the mining areas of the Midlands, were employed for a probationary period of two weeks to be followed, if satisfactory, by a six-month engagement. Full wages of 18s 6d plus 1s 6d war bonus, were only to be paid after six weeks work. Termination could occur, at one week's notice, on the grounds of misconduct, inattention to work, sickness or other good cause. Extra payments were to be made to those employed as leading piecer and night time and overtime work was to be paid at the going rate for women. A bonus was payable to any woman at the end of her six month engagement provided she had satisfactorily fulfilled her work.⁷⁶

The importation of so many women into the area and the trade presented the General Union of Textile Workers with a dilemma. A number of meetings were arranged to discuss the situation. At one, held in Marsden, a report was issued, 'regarding the arrangements for the introduction of female

⁷³ Women's War Employment Committee (WWEC), 31 May 1916, S/NUDBTW/34 West Yorkshire Archive Service.

⁷⁴ Colne Valley Interview 16, deposited at Kirklees Sound Archive.

⁷⁵ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 13 April 1916.

⁷⁶ *Huddersfield Worker*, 16 April 1916.

labour into the textile factories and the safeguards provided in the interests of local operatives.⁷⁷ On the one hand the Union officials were alarmed at the increased threat to their male members from so many potential dilutees. Many of the new women, once trained up were to be placed into the spinning departments or were granted permits to perform night work, both previously male-dominated occupations. On the other hand, such women, if they could be brought into the union fold, would be a powerful source of influence in wage negotiations. The Union, therefore, initiated a number of schemes to try and increase memberships, both of newcomers to the industry and those existing female workers who had yet to join.

The first approach was to employ a Woman Organiser with a specific remit to canvass for new female members. To this end advertisements were circulated in March 1915 and a Lancastrian woman named Mary Luty was appointed to the post. Her responsibilities included addressing public meetings and conducting mill gate meetings to advocate union membership to the female workers.⁷⁸ Another tactic used by the GUTW to expand the interest of female workers in the activities of the union was to introduce a Women's Industrial Guild. The expressed aim of the new body was to provide an auxiliary force to strengthen the organisation, both from the standpoint of enrolling new members and retaining those already involved.⁷⁹ There was a feeling that since more and more women were joining the union and becoming involved in its operation, having their own structure would provide encouragement and help formulate the female point of view when joint action was required. Such a group, however, was to be subservient to the male-dominated parent union, having no executive function itself, and thus presenting no real challenge beyond the merely vocal. Some women were admitted to positions of influence within the Union. 1916 saw the election of three female delegates from the General Union of Textile Workers to the Huddersfield and District Trades and Labour Council. Mr Shaw, President of the Council, addressing the first meeting declared 'this was the first time during his long association with the Council that they had women delegates.'⁸⁰ It was not only the General Textile Union that saw the benefit of increasing their female membership during the war. The Dyers' and Bleachers' Union, a powerful body that catered to the more specialised, and primarily male-dominated trades associated with the latter stages of textile production, launched a number of drives to recruit the women who worked in those areas. This union, led by Joseph Hayhurst of Bradford, tended to concentrate on the more technical workers, but did allow female membership and during the war held several meetings to encourage menders, knotters and burlers to join.

There were also moves to extend the inclusion of women into the trade union movement beyond the confines of the textile trade. The Huddersfield and District Trades and Labour Council made a number of overtures designed to increase female membership in other unions. Mr Shaw, in the same address that welcomed the three textile union delegates, also stated that, 'he trusted that other societies who had women members would send, at the earliest moment, more of their women to join the 3 present delegates.'⁸¹ In March 1916 the Council sent delegates, including Mary Luty, to a

⁷⁷ General Union of Textile Workers Minutes 27 April 1917, S/NUDBTW/1, West Yorkshire Archive Service.

⁷⁸ GUTW Minutes, 24 April 1916.

⁷⁹ General Union of Textile Workers Women's Guild Minutes, 20 May 1916, S/NUDBTW/61, West Yorkshire Archive Service.

⁸⁰ Huddersfield Trade and Labour Council Minutes 23 February 1916, S/HTC/1/.4, West Yorkshire Archive Service.

⁸¹ Trade and Labour Minutes, 23 February 1916.

conference of the Women's War Interests Committee being held in Manchester. This committee had been convened to discuss the problems affecting women workers. The committee recommended a resolution stating that they were in favour of, 'the complete industrial equality of men and women, that is to say, when a woman is doing the same work as a man, she should receive the same rate of wages. We furthermore call upon the Trades Union movement to prevent the employers from using women to lower the standard obtained by organised workers.'⁸²

A series of meetings were also held in Huddersfield under the auspices of the Trades and Labour Council, with representatives of the various local unions catering for women workers besides the textile unions in an effort to organise both the war workers and permanent staff. This Women's Organising Committee, however, was short-lived and foundered almost as soon as the Unions involved discovered they were required to pay for the necessary propaganda and administrative work to be done. Mr Townend, a member of the committee, addressed the Council and appealed for more enthusiasm, as failing this the idea would probably collapse.⁸³ As no real interest could be generated in the other unions, the project did indeed fail, leaving the textile unions as the only organisations specifically concentrating on increasing their female memberships. There were also a number of general unions in the area who catered for female workers during the period. Both the Workers' Union and the National Union of Women Workers had female representatives canvassing for member, but both tended to concentrate on the munitions workers in the engineering and chemical fields.⁸⁴

This expansion of the workforce was not without controversy, and a number of meetings were held between the various interested parties to formulate the rules and conditions necessary to protect existing workers, especially those men joining the colours. An agreement made in February between representatives of 13 employers' organisations and 18 workers' unions engaged in the woollen and worsted industries of the area specified various conditions arising as a result of the exceptional circumstances of the War. Amongst the clauses agreed were that, 'substitutions by women are temporary, and that those men who have joined H.M. Forces shall be entitled to be reinstated in their former employments if and when they return fit for resuming them,' and further, 'that where women in consequence of this agreement are employed to take the place of men, such women shall not continue to be so employed after men become available. Secondly that where any workplace is not fully employed through shortage of work, the women who have taken the places of men shall be the first to be discharged or suspended provided qualified men can be found to do this work.'⁸⁵ It was also specified that women were to be paid not less than four-fifths the wage paid to a man for the same work.⁸⁶

⁸² Trade and Labour Minutes, 23 March 1916.

⁸³ Trade and Labour Minutes, 26 April 1916.

⁸⁴ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 21 October 1915.

⁸⁵ Agreement between Representatives of Employers and Workpeople engaged in the Worsted and Woollen Industries of the West Riding of Yorkshire, 4 February 1916, LAB 83/1252, National Archives.

⁸⁶ Report into the Increased Employment of Women 1916, S/NUDBTW, West Yorkshire Archive Service.

Reserved Occupations and Military Tribunals

By May of 1915 the rush of volunteers into the Army had slowed considerably, but the demand for soldiers had not, and measures began to be taken to increase the numbers of men available for military service. To this end a census of labour was taken in several towns to obtain particulars of men of military age who could be spared from their jobs. Local Labour Exchanges, in conjunction with the Joint Political Recruiting Committee approached employers for details of the men not considered essential for the running of businesses. In July a Parliamentary Bill was introduced requiring the registration of all people in the country, male and female, between the ages of 15 and 65. Forms were issued asking for details of ages and employment and whether individuals would be willing to volunteer for work of national importance. Certificates were to be issued showing people had registered and penalties would be imposed for non-fulfilment of the requirements.⁸⁷ This Bill also required that anyone changing lodgings or accommodation must notify the authorities of his new address.⁸⁸ There were many objections to this move, with the press, trade unions, workers' associations and even employers seeing it as a precursor to conscription. The inclusion of women in the record was seen as evidence that dilution and substitution would be adopted in a widespread fashion to release the largest number of men for the forces.⁸⁹

A series of conferences were held in Leeds between representatives of the trade unions within the textile trade, the various employers' associations and the factory inspectors, under the chairmanship of Mr Wright of the Home Office, to decide which men could be spared for the Army and for which jobs men were considered absolutely indispensable. The unions, for the most part argued for the protection of their male members, declaring that there were few trades that women were capable of doing that were not already being done by women, and that the decision had already been established that men were necessary in some instances. It was decided that in the preparatory departments, milning and scouring, men could not be replaced by women as the trades were already divided by sex by custom and practice.⁹⁰ The employers' associations were more willing to try women in the various different departments but faced accusations that,

there is some concern that the employment of women in some areas is not for the benefit of women, or even to release men for the Army but merely for the sake of getting cheap labour by whatever process will serve best. Cases were cited where men had been dismissed and women taken on at reduced wages regardless of the military needs or public benefit of such actions.⁹¹

In November 1915 it was decided that the lack of volunteers was proving a significant problem and a number of local tribunals were established in order to address the situation. These bodies were tasked with doing all in their power to assist with recruiting whilst at the same time causing as little disturbances to essential industry as possible. It was acknowledged that some men could be spared

⁸⁷ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 1 July 1915.

⁸⁸ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 28 October 1915.

⁸⁹ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 8 July 1915.

⁹⁰ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 28 October 1915.

⁹¹ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 9 September 1915.

from their work to join the army, but others had skill and knowledge that made them indispensable to their employers. Questions regarding the nature of such work and the intricacies of the 'starring' system were henceforward to be referred to the Tribunals for clarification.⁹² As the year drew to a close the threat of conscription grew ever nearer. Many of the worker's organisations were implacably opposed to such an idea and to that end a number of conferences were arranged to express the dissatisfaction felt. The Yorkshire Divisional Council of the Independent Labour Party held one in the Town Hall, Leeds and the Federation of Trades Councils met in Bradford. At both meetings it was emphatically declared that the representatives of labour were opposed to all forms of military and industrial conscription.⁹³

After a series of conferences between representatives of the manufacturers associations, the textile unions and the factory inspectors, a decision was made as to which men should be considered indispensable to the trade and therefore exempted from military service. In a letter from the Board of Trade in November 1915, the occupations to be regarded as 'reserved' were listed as overlookers, tacklers, tuners and foremen, wool sorters, fettlers, blanket raisers, mechanics and electricians, enginemen and stokers. There were immediate complaints, from unions and chambers of commerce alike, that the list was not comprehensive enough and neglected to mention many of the jobs that were deemed too heavy, dirty or difficult for women or young people to cover. The *Yorkshire Factory Times* was particularly vocal about this exclaiming that,

it would be wicked to try women in milning places, yet they are not mentioned in the list of reserved occupations. It would be indecent and cruel to put them to be rag grinders and packers, in fact, the only jobs that women ought to be encouraged to go to are such as mending, knotting, winding, burling and weaving. Even with the war we ought to retain that necessary love for the other sex.⁹⁴

Alternative lists of occupations deemed unsuitable for women were put forward by various organisations for inclusion in a revised agreement and a number of resolutions were suggested to restrict the work women were permitted to do.

By the beginning of 1916 it was becoming ever clearer that the only way of providing the number of men needed for the army was to introduce conscription. The General Union of Textile Workers, as well as many other unions and representatives of labour, both within the various textile trades and without, were vehemently opposed to this measure. Mr Ben Turner, the President, and Mr Allen Gee, the Secretary, were amongst the delegates attending a conference in London early in January, called by the Labour Party Executive, to consider the issue.⁹⁵ The Trades Union Congress held later the same month condemned the moves to compel men to serve. Turner addressed the conference claiming, 'they would get all the recruits they wanted voluntarily if the men who enlisted were treated fairly.'⁹⁶ A number of local meetings of trade unionists and other concerned bodies also expressed

⁹² *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 4 November 1915.

⁹³ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 11 November 1915.

⁹⁴ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 18 November 1915.

⁹⁵ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 6 January 1916.

⁹⁶ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 13 January 1916.

fears that the government action was not merely to gain men for the forces but was a prelude to the complete control of industry. The Prime Minister, Mr Asquith, in an interview with members of the Labour Party, emphatically rejected the idea that the government had any plans for industrial conscription.⁹⁷ His denials allayed the immediate fears, but the issue of the continual expansion of groups to which conscription applied remained a problem for workers throughout the war. In March the situation was becoming untenable.

Though the difficulty in regard to labour becomes more pronounced, the volume of output continues large. A number of firms have Government contracts which will last for some months. Manufacturers and spinners have received official circulars asking for particulars regarding what machines they have available and their capacity in the way of output. By this step it is thought that the authorities contemplate exercising a more stringent control over the trade. Some firms will be unable to take orders for delivery this year unless their private work is entirely suspended. So far as new business is concerned there is already something in the nature of a deadlock for both manufacturers and merchants are unwilling to enter into new obligations which in the circumstances now prevailing would bind them a long time ahead, the risk of conditions changing being too great.⁹⁸

Confusion was also still rife regarding which occupations were starred and therefore suitable for exemption and which should be. Mr G. H. Wood of the Yorkshire Federation of Employers and Mr Ben Turner of the General Union of Textile Workers were called to a conference to try and establish if woollen spinners in charge of a pair of mules should be exempted or not. There was also concern that some men were endeavouring to obtain jobs in reserved occupations in order to evade military service. In an effort to counter this the War Office announced a policy of only accepting a worker for exemption if they had been similarly employed at the time of the National Register in August.⁹⁹

The balancing act between removing men to be soldiers and maintaining the workforce to provide the cloth was in evidence again at the Golcar Military Tribunal when a firm of cotton spinners appealed for a number of workpeople and the following exchange took place. Major Tanner, the military representative, suggested that girl piecers should be employed. The firm's representative said they could not get girls for the work. They had had one from Lancashire, but the work was different in that district. A member of the tribunal asked if they could not teach women from the East Coast as the woollen people were doing but the representative said it would take a long time. They had seven pairs of mules standing out of twenty. Conditional exemption granted in three cases, three others were refused and two granted temporary exemption.¹⁰⁰ There were also complaints that some firms, short of men themselves, were poaching employees from other mills. A number of articles in the *Yorkshire Factory Times* lamented this as a short-sighted and selfish policy.¹⁰¹

By the end of May it was felt the impact of the removal of men from the mills was reaching a crisis point.

⁹⁷ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 20 January 1916.

⁹⁸ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 30 March 1916.

⁹⁹ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 16 March 1916.

¹⁰⁰ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 18 May 1916.

¹⁰¹ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 1 June 1916.

Both in spinning and manufacturing the depletions of staff caused by men being called to the colours are causing great inconvenience, and there is a growing feeling that the limit has been nearly, if not quite, reached in the demands of the Army authorities. The Reserved Occupations Committee have taken far too many spinners from the mule gate by their new regulations. They are taking too many fettlers and willeyers at the present moment, and too many warpers and members of the tribunals seem to be going on the lines contrary to the instructions of looking after the interests of the trade, by looking too much at the interests of the military.¹⁰²

Throughout the summer, more complaints were received about the Reserved Occupations list. Jobs continue to be added and taken off in a seemingly random fashion. Some came with age restrictions that did not seem to follow the demands of the job. The *Yorkshire Factory Times*, for example, listed some of the problems.

The married men are not to be taken over 30 years of age, but the single men under 40 and married men under 30 are called up. I cannot understand why they have put the age for beamers to 35 if married men, because beaming is a lifting job, and I think the married men of 30 ought to be exempt. The age limit of the woollen scribbling engineer has been reduced from 30 to 25...a responsible age for an assistant, but not for an engineer.¹⁰³

The report goes on to mention that the tribunals responsible for applying the rules were not being consistent in their decisions. Some companies were being allowed to keep more men than others. 'Weavers and others have actually been on short-time and slack-time at various mills, because of the taking away of a large number of mill employees. This is on account of the unfairness of tribunals.' There were also complaints that some tribunals were attaching conditions to the exemptions they granted, such as requiring men to drill with the volunteer forces or sign on as Special Constables. One particularly vocal opponent of this policy was Mr Joe Wagstaffe, the Secretary of the Huddersfield Cloth Pressers' Federation. The members of this society undertook some of the heaviest work in the textile trade which, 'no woman should try to do, it would mean physical wreckage and destruction of potential motherhood if they did.'¹⁰⁴ They were, therefore, valuable men to retain and Mr Wagstaffe made a number of appeals to tribunals to protect his members.

A deputation of persons connected with the textile trade of the West Riding, both representatives of employers and workers, attended a meeting with Mr U. F. Wintour of the War Office and officials from the Army Contracts Department and the Recruiting Department, in October 1916, in connection with the problems connected with the removal and exemption of men in the industry. The debate largely centred around the conflict between the demands of the military for more men and the demands of industry for workers, especially those men needed for complex or highly skilled work. The deputation claimed that dilution of labour and the removal of key men had taken place to such an extent that it threatened to jeopardise the supply of necessary cloth, blankets and other goods to the

¹⁰² *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 25 May 1916.

¹⁰³ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 29 June 1916.

¹⁰⁴ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 27 July 1916.

allied armies. It was decided that committees should be set up for the woollen and worsted industries for the purpose of formulating detailed proposals to maintain production whilst sparing every available man for the army and by employing women to the greatest extent possible.¹⁰⁵ This eventually resulted in the formation of the Advisory Committee of Man-Power and Productions in the Woollen Trade, with a similar body for the worsted trade.¹⁰⁶

The main problem was that no-one had an overall view of what was happening in the woollen areas. The military were demanding men, the Board of Trade were keen for goods to export and the various armies needed clothes and equipment. Due to the nature of the contracts issued and the shortages of men and materials, some mills were working overtime whilst others, often in the same district, were on short time. To try and establish the precise situation the government decided to take a survey of the industry and to that end requested that all firms report what work they were doing and who it was for, what machinery they had available and what it could make and what hours their workers were doing in the different departments.¹⁰⁷ Various schemes for the substitution of workers were drawn up by the numerous committees overseeing Wool Control, Manpower and National Service, but the very multitude of differing demands and priorities embodied in the different departments continued to cause confusion. The ambiguous nature of many of the government rules and regulations also added to the difficulty of interpreting exactly how such orders should be implemented. At the Marsden Tribunal on the 11 December 1916 a heated exchange took place between Captain Mallalieu, the military representative, and Harris Hoyle, the Secretary of the Colne Valley General Union of Textile Workers that encapsulated the problems. Hoyle insisted that no more textile workers were to be called up unless a substitute were found and that this applied to all men over 21. Mallalieu, however, understood the rule to mean that substitutes were being found and the calling up was temporarily halted until the final arrangements had been made by the Man-Power Board. He further claimed that the resolution passed by the Man-Power Board said that no man under 26 should be kept in a factory. The clerk of the tribunal decided that until definite instructions had been received from the Man-Power Board, all cases should be dealt with on their own merits.¹⁰⁸

The conflicting demands of the military and industry continued to cause some tension between the Man-Power Board which was administered from Bradford and the Substitution Committee which was largely based in Leeds. This overlapping of government bodies and the conflicting instructions continued to present problems for the tribunals tasked with implementing policy and created much confusion. At the beginning of March 1917, a delegation of concerned parties from the woollen and worsted trades met in London with the view to getting the National Service officials and the Man-Power Boards to cooperate.¹⁰⁹ The *Yorkshire Factory Times* summed up the situation:

...the business of the military is to get soldiers, whilst the Man-Power Board have been told time and again, whilst units are essential for continuing the war the continuation of the supplies of cloth is also essential, and that is proved by

¹⁰⁵ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 19 October 1916.

¹⁰⁶ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 16 November 1916.

¹⁰⁷ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 26 October 1916.

¹⁰⁸ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 14 December 1916.

¹⁰⁹ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 8 March 1917.

the fact that the woollen and worsted trade is not included in the list of non-essential trades...Instructions to local military service tribunals are currently confused as to who should be exempted, who is doing work of national importance, who is qualified for substitution and other issues. Some tribunals, such as the one at Golcar are adjourning cases to await clarification of what decisions to take.¹¹⁰

The problems rumbled on. With huge orders for khaki cloth still reaching the area, the military authorities persisted in fetching men away from the mills. The difficulty of keeping machinery running in the Colne Valley, as in other districts, was alluded to at the Marsden Tribunal, by the chairman, when a man in his employ appealed on domestic grounds. Mr Firth, the chairman and a prominent local mill owner, said he had machinery lying idle for the want of men and Mr Harris Hoyle drew attention to the fact that the military authorities ignored the knowledge of the tribunal. Mr Hoyle, the Union representative, emphasised that they had been urging for weeks the difficulty of keeping machinery running in Marsden, and they were told they were to have substitutes. Now they had been informed that no substitutes were available. The military representative (Capt. Mallalieu) said there was no reflection on the Tribunal in anything he did, but he was sorry there was not more co-operation between the military authorities and the contracts side of the War Office. Military representatives had never once had anything put to them about a shortage of cloth. What they were told was that men were wanted, and they got their information about the cloth from other sources. Mr Hoyle asked if the military authorities considered the enormous number of voluntary enlistment forms Marsden in relation to the available man-power of the locality. Marsden had been very seriously hit, and he wondered if the military authorities ever looked at it from that point of view. Capt. Mallalieu said he knew Marsden had a very good name for having supplied men. The man in question was granted temporary exemption on domestic grounds. There were some 20 cases of men under 31, and most of the exemptions were confirmed.¹¹¹

A meeting was held in Bradford of the Advisory Committee on Man-Power and production in the woollen and worsted industries concerning the substitution scheme now in operation. The concern was to release the maximum number of men for the army whilst still maintaining the necessary output of cloth and other essential materials required by the Director of Army Contracts and the Ministry of Munitions. A suggestion was made that if men currently in the army but of a low medical grade could be released by the military authorities they could be replaced by healthy men almost immediately. 'It was well known that there were a number of men in low categories doing no military work but barrack duties and these men would be much better employed in the national interest if they were returned to the industry from which they had been taken. Both the army and the industry would benefit from the exchange.'¹¹²

Arguments continued about who should be employed in mills. At the Huddersfield Military Tribunal in May 1917, Mr Hirst, the military representative asked for a review of certificates of exemption held by some weavers, claiming that men classed as C3 should not be weaving but rather doing more

¹¹⁰ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 22 March 1917.

¹¹¹ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 19 April 1917.

¹¹² *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 3 May 1917.

important work. He stated that it had been arranged that men of military age who were now weaving, should be moved to work of more significance within the same industry.¹¹³ A new Military Service Bill, introduced in early 1918, removed exemptions from men in certified occupations if they fell into certain age limits. The Ministry of National Service wanted to use this to 'comb out' men in the textile mills. A deputation from the Man-Power Board in connection with the textile trade met with the Reserved Occupations Department in order to put the case that there should be no further depletion of staff in the Yorkshire textile mills.¹¹⁴ The unions were particularly wary of this new intervention. At the usual meeting of the Colne Valley General Union of Textile Workers held at Slaithwaite, it was reported that certain managers and employers were taking advantage of the fact that certain of the operatives were liable to service under the Military Service Act, and, as a consequence, were attempting to enforce conditions of employment on these men outside their usual employment. Strong protest was entered against this action, and a resolution condemning it was passed. The Secretary, Mr Harris Hoyle, was instructed to take such action as might be deemed desirable to put a stop to what was described as 'Prussian methods' of this character.¹¹⁵ There were also accusations that some of the more unscrupulous employers were using the Reserved Occupations appeals system and the tribunals to punish or get rid of unwanted staff.¹¹⁶

The First World War was a period of turmoil for the woollen textile industry of Huddersfield and the surrounding area. The British army increased in size almost ten-fold. Nine million men joined the colours from Britain alone and virtually every one was equipped with a uniform containing material manufactured in the West Riding. In addition, the mills of the area also supplied the armies of the allied nation and the Dominion forces. For long periods throughout the war the mills were working day and night. The expansion of the army, however, also drew men away from textile work. Enlistment and conscription meant that many of the male workers left their looms and their places were taken by female workers, either existing mill girls or imported labour. For all that the industry was dependant upon these women to maintain production and equip the armies, much of the policy regarding recruitment continued to place precedence on the interests of male workers rather than addressing the concerns of female ones. Thus the government, despite needing soldiers continued to allow starved men to remain in the mills, employers resisted advancing women into many of the supervisory roles that had long been the domain of men and the unions fought to retain the more lucrative jobs for the men they represented rather than the women they also claimed to speak for. The war did not lead to any long-term reassessment of the capabilities of women. Despite performing admirably in the jobs they were required to do throughout the war, once men were again available most were returned to their previous occupations. Joanna Bornat has summed up this failure to gain any permanent change. 'Wartime production demanded the temporary promotion of women to indispensability. Peacetime saw a return to marginality, dependency and domesticity.'¹¹⁷ Women in the textile trade continued to

¹¹³ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 24 May 1917.

¹¹⁴ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 28 February 1918.

¹¹⁵ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 27 June 1918.

¹¹⁶ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 6 July 1916.

¹¹⁷ Joanna Bornat, 'Lost Leaders: Women, Trade Unionism and the Case of the General Union of Textile Workers, 1875–1914' in Angela V. John (ed.) *Unequal Opportunities: Women's Employment in England 1800–1918* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986).

be defined by their sex and confined to the jobs deemed less skilled and thus less well-rewarded because of this. Despite producing evidence to the contrary, the war did little to alter such ingrained perceptions.

Chapter Five – Wages and Bonuses

If the male workers within the textile industry were the primary concern of the unions, employers and authorities when it came to the question of recruitment, they enjoyed an even greater position of privilege when it came to questions of adequate remuneration for the work performed. The war, which saw the entry of women into more workplaces than ever before also saw increased debate about whether they should receive equal pay for such work. The munitions industry was the main area of discussion, but other industries also saw their share of debate. The government became involved in the concerns and eventually established a War Cabinet Committee on Women in Industry to investigate the issue.¹ For the women of the textile trade, such arguments were a long-standing issue. Although the GUTW advocated equal pay, indeed Ben Turner, the President, moved a TUC resolution in 1913 calling for a minimum wage for all adult workers especially women, they were not prepared to take any concrete action to make it a reality.² The war, which removed men from mills and saw their replacement with women, led to an increasing demand that the issues of pay be addressed. Increases in the cost of foodstuffs, fuel and rent added an urgency to these demands. Ultimately such questions remained unanswered at the end of the war. This chapter examines some of the wage negotiations that took place on behalf of the textile workers during the First World War. This will show that even though women played a vital role in maintaining the output of the textile mills by performing many of the jobs their male colleagues had vacated, they never achieved parity with them in regard to the wages they received. It will argue that the priority of the various negotiators, whether they be union representatives, employers or government commissioners, was to safeguard men's wages, rather than focus on any injustice felt by women. Although women may have gained increased wages and war bonuses, the low starting point of their initial pay and the insistence on maintaining existing differentials meant that by the end of the war the relative positions of men and women remained unchanged.

One of the foremost reasons that the woollen industry struggled with the concept of increased female labour during the war was the very rigid gender disparity endemic within the industry. In the years before the war, although large numbers of women and girls were employed in the textile trades, they were largely confined to the jobs that were considered to be of a lower skill level than those performed by men and were therefore of a lower pay scale. Although Busfield has shown that these skill levels were largely of a constructed nature to confine women, they were a fact of life in the industry.³ Even where men and women did the same job, men received a higher wage. In Huddersfield such difference was codified in the different pay scales in existence. Since 1883 piece-work rates in the town were paid from two scales, one for men and one for women, in which the same

¹ Report of the War Cabinet Committee on Women in Industry, Cmd 135, 1919.

² Angela John, *Unequal Opportunities* (Blackwell: Oxford, 1986), p.026.

³ Deirdre Busfield, 'Skill and the sexual division of labour in the West Riding Textile Industry, 1850-1914' in J.A. Jowitt and A.J. McIvor (eds.), *Employers and Labour in the English Textile Industries 1850-1939* (London: Routledge, 1988).

jobs were listed but the women's rate was 10 per cent lower than the men's.⁴ Men were alleged to be worth more to employers because they could work increased hours, not being subject to the same restrictions as women regarding overtime or night work. In addition, men's greater strength meant they were considered to be capable of higher productivity and they were regarded as more mechanically inclined and so capable of tuning their own machine thereby requiring less help from the tuners and less supervision than women.⁵ Of course many of the women who did similar or even the same jobs complained that such considerations were meaningless. In case after case in the Colne Valley interviews, the women mentioned men receiving more money for doing the same job. One woman commented, 'we were paid 3½d an hour when we were weaving patterns and the men were getting 5d.' When questioned what she thought about this the reply was, 'We didn't think it was right but we couldn't do anything about it.'⁶ Another mentioned that the only difference between her and the man working next to her was that he could lift his own beam out whereas she could not. 'Men used to get many a shilling a cut more than we did. The women grumbled about the men having more than them you see, for doing the same type of job. Because lifting the beam out was a hard, heavy job, but it was only a matter of two or three minutes.'⁷

With the outbreak of war and the removal of many of these men, such fictions were soon exposed. Women, despite the resistance shown, gradually moved into more and more of these supposedly higher skilled jobs. The essentially conservative nature of the industry, however, balked at paying them the same amount. The manufacturers complained that output would be affected as women could not produce the same amounts as men. The unions, although espousing the ideals of equal pay for equal work, instead prioritised the protection of their male members and their higher pay levels, and campaigned against women undercutting them. Such arguments were nothing new in the area of female employment. One of the most important concerns in the period before the war was the meagre wages paid to women especially compared to men doing similar jobs. Bodies such as the Fabian Women's Group, the Women's Industrial Council and the Women's Co-operative Guild conducted investigations into female wages and the effects on poverty. Much of the debate centred on the worth of men and women. Men were worth more to employers as shown above, but they were also considered to deserve more because they had families to support. The idea of a family wage with the male breadwinner supporting a wife and children was a common concept and valuable argument for those who insisted men be paid more. Notwithstanding the various investigations that showed many women were supporting families the notion stuck. Even reports such as the one carried out by Seebohm Rowntree in 1918 which found that some women were indeed supporting dependants, with often lack of a male wage earner due to death or illness, were cited as evidence that the majority of women were not so encumbered.⁸ There are many problems with the issue of a family wage: not all men were supporting families, not all women had male relatives to keep them, even the idea that women required less money to keep them than men did on the basis that women eat less, ignored the

⁴ Barbara Drake, *Women in Trade Unions* (London: Labour Research Department, 1920), p.127.

⁵ B.L. Hutchins, 'Yorkshire' in C. Black (ed.) *Married Women's Work* (London: Virago, 1983), p.131.

⁶ Colne Valley Interview 2, deposited at Kirklees Sound Archive.

⁷ Colne Valley Interview 11, deposited at Kirklees Sound Archive.

⁸ B. Seebohm Rowntree, *The Human Needs of Labour* (London: Thomas Nelson, 1918).

fact that they did not pay less rent or need less coal. Once the war broke out many of the single women and those whose husbands were removed into the army increasingly gave the lie to the arguments that men should be paid a family wage and women could manage with a lower amount. Women were increasingly responsible for their own households and as they gained employment in more responsible, previously male-dominated areas, this naturally had an effect on wages.

For many of the contemporary commentators, the wage issue centred around the payments being made to women who entered the munitions factories. The question was primarily about whether women doing part of a man's job due to dilution and substitution should be paid an equivalent rate or if a minimum wage should be introduced for all munitions workers. In the textile trade, the issue was slightly different. Many women were performing work for which female rates already existed, but such rates were inevitably lower than comparable male rates. For example, in Huddersfield as mentioned above there was a difference of ten per cent between the two prices. With the war offering alternative, relatively lucrative jobs for female workers, such differences were questioned, not only by the women workers themselves, but also the union and the wider community. In a 1916 report the General Union of Textile Workers stated that,

with regard to the weaving department, the differential rates between the two sexes cannot possibly be defended on any logical grounds, and the increasing number of female operatives in this department warrants immediate action being taken to bring them up to the level of the men. The greater the withdrawal of the male workers from civilian to military life, the greater the responsibility there will be upon the female section for the continued upkeep of the home and family, and there is no justifiable reason why the employers should obtain a preponderance of cheap labour at the expense of those who are left behind to carry on the industrial work of the district.⁹

Despite the lip service paid to the notion of equal pay, the union never made it a condition of settlement in any of the negotiations conducted throughout the war. In all the meetings held between the employers, government representatives and union officials, the all-male delegations accepted that male and female workers continue to be paid different rates.

Rising Prices and Overtime Pay

Almost from the very outbreak of war, it became apparent that this would be a different conflict to the one planned for. The expectation of the British authorities for a brief conflict in a far-off area with minimal disruption to the home trade and economy soon faltered in the face of a modern, industrialised total war. The economy, far from remaining relatively unaffected, was soon under a very great pressure and much of the war was spent trying to balance the demands of various groups in the face of the wildly fluctuating prices and costs that the war delivered. One of the first problems that resulted after the declaration of war was that prices began to rise sharply. The main aim of the

⁹ *Huddersfield Worker*, 22 January 1916.

government was 'business as usual' and so there was little inclination to step in as the panic buying and hoarding created by the uncertainty of war started to affect both the prices of goods in shops and the quantities available for purchase. This rise in the cost of foodstuffs and other commodities soon led to calls for increased wages for workers in order to keep pace with prices and a cycle of price rises and wage demands started that was to last throughout the war. The textile trade of the West Riding was no exception to this spiral of costs. After an initial period of high unemployment caused by the temporary slowdown as a result of the sudden loss of markets and general uncertainty caused by the outbreak of war, the textile trade soon picked up and, in many areas, virtually full employment was soon the norm.

The wages available in textiles had traditionally been low and although most people had work, the rising prices were soon causing pressure in many of the working-class households of the area. A further problem was that many firms had long refused to pay overtime rates, despite demanding that workers increased their hours.¹⁰ The rush of orders towards the end of 1914 meant that many workers were doing overtime, but still receiving the meagre wages they had been on before war was declared. Some firms were not above using the situation for their own benefit. In one firm, Kaye and Stewart of Lockwood, workers agreed to forego the bonus they would normally receive for working overtime. It was later revealed they did this under the false impression that if they declined, the order would go by.¹¹ Another case involved workers being asked to accept reduced rates and the firm sending a portion of the contract to another part of the country rather than pay for the whole order at the usual rates.¹²

In the face of the increased costs workers were facing for everyday foodstuffs, this situation was not sustainable. The GUTW was alarmed by such measures and soon began agitating for recognised overtime pay for all workers. Demands were soon being voiced from all sides for some alteration to the rate of pay. The first issue to be addressed was the overtime question and by October negotiations were taking place in Huddersfield and the Colne Valley regarding the rates paid. The Textile Union wanted time and a quarter or a minimum of 1½d. per hour for weavers and other piece rate workers. Some firms were already paying up to 3d. per hour, although some were paying nothing at all. A meeting of the General Union of Textile Workers was held at Milnsbridge to discuss the question of standardising overtime and the rates of pay throughout the district. A deputation had waited on the employers, and proposed that piece-workers should receive 1½d. per day. In addition it was urged that overtime should be limited to two hours each night, and that Saturday afternoon and Sunday labour should be abolished.¹³ It was stated that the employers had refused the request, citing government pressure to deliver contracts meant that limitation of overtime was impossible, and also that certain firms in the Huddersfield district were not paying according to the existing scale. The union was authorised to carry the matter further. At a consequent meeting of the Executive Committee a proposal for the abolition of overtime for weavers not receiving extra pay was discussed and further action debated.

¹⁰ General Union of Textile Workers Minutes, 11 October 1914, S/NUDBTW/1, West Yorkshire Archive Service.

¹¹ *Huddersfield Worker*, 12 September 1914.

¹² *Huddersfield Worker*, 29 August 1914.

¹³ GUTW Minutes, 25 November 1914.

Some firms continued to refuse to accept the demands for overtime pay. In some cases appeals were made to the War Office to settle disputes. Some employers also went on the attack, accusing those demanding extra payment of being unpatriotic. An editorial in the *Yorkshire Factory Times* responded, 'I would strongly advise every weaver at all mills to refuse to work overtime unless paid overtime for their labour. You can talk about it being unpatriotic re weaving cloth for soldiers, but I call it unpatriotic...to expect weavers to be sweated and half-killed by over-labour.'¹⁴ A deputation of union officials held a conference with Sir George Askwith, respecting the question of fair contracts in the cloth trade in Yorkshire. They reported several firms in Huddersfield, Calder Valley, Ossett and Wakefield on account of not paying the standard rate of wages.¹⁵ A series of meetings were held throughout the Colne Valley, as a result of the employers making an offer of one penny per hour over piece rates for overtime work. After some deliberation this was rejected by the workpeople, who were holding out for 1½d per hour.¹⁶ As a result of this impasse some workers refused to work overtime at all and by January 1915 it was estimated that 1,150 weavers in Slaithwaite and Marsden were involved in the dispute.¹⁷

The main problem as the war went on was not merely that the pay for overtime was insufficient to meet the rising costs, but that the ordinary wage was lagging behind. Weavers at several mills in Huddersfield therefore approached the General Union of Textile Workers and asked them to strive to get extra wages now to meet the very high cost of living. The Union consequently held a special conference to deal with the subject. The local newspapers reported that, 'It is a question of terms more than of principle. The county is aroused very deeply and there will be a troublous time ahead unless foodstuffs lower in price or wages go up materially.'¹⁸ At the meeting a resolution was passed instructing the Secretary, Mr Allen Gee, to communicate with the Employers' Associations in the West Riding asking for an immediate conference to consider the question.¹⁹

War Bonus

The three local Associations, the Huddersfield and District Fine Cloth Manufacturers, the Woollen Manufacturers and Spinners and the Yarn Spinners' Association responded by making an offer to pay a bonus to workers in consequence of the present difficulties, rather than amending the existing wage agreements. The offer was: 6d for employees earning less than 10s per week; 1s for men and boys earning between 10s and 20s; 2s for those between 20s and 30s; 2s for those between 30s and not more than 40s. All women earning over 10s would be paid a bonus of 1s. All advances were to be paid fortnightly. Mr Turner, the union president commented that they had not got what they wanted, but they had got as much as was possible. He went on to express his sorrow to the women that they

¹⁴ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 3 December 1914.

¹⁵ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 14 January 1915.

¹⁶ GUTW Minutes, 6 December 1914.

¹⁷ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 28 January 1915.

¹⁸ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 4 March 1915.

¹⁹ GUTW Minutes, 11 March 1915.

would only receive 1s but explained, 'most women were not the heads of households and they must give the most to heads of households.'²⁰

By December the situation had worsened. Prices continued to rise and the bonus, which had barely been adequate to start with, no longer made any impact on costs. The GUTW therefore made another approach to the manufacturers. A further offer of more wage to all sections was made and again the Union decided to accept the offer but expressed regret that the employers had not offered more so as to help meet the increased price of commodities. This time the female members of the union were vocal about their disappointment.²¹ At a meeting in the Town Hall to discuss the latest war wage advance many views were expressed by the delegates present, 'the women being properly strong against two prices of war bonus to men and women.'²² A proposal to reject the offer until the bonus was equal failed, and the offer was accepted. The terms were a war grant of 1s 6d per week for women and young persons and of 3s per week for men. This grant was subject to an increase for hours worked over the normal week and to a deduction if fewer hours were worked.²³ There were also grumbles of discontent at the delay in awarding the advances. The government policy that all disputes be referred to the Chief Industrial Commissioner considerably slowed down the implementation of any awards. Although the latest award had been agreed by both the Union representatives and the Manufacturers' Associations, a delay had occurred by the need for Sir George Askwith to be present to countersign the previously settled contract.²⁴ Ben Turner again expressed his priorities regarding women workers. Reporting to the annual meeting of the General Union of Textile Workers on the second war bonus he lamented that the, '1s 6d given to women was far too little to meet their increased cost in food, clothes and life's needfuls to keep them physically efficient for motherhood.'²⁵

In May, a further mass meeting was called by the General Union of Textile Workers to discuss the employers' associations' offer of arbitration on the wage increase proposed by the Union.²⁶ A demand for a 25 per cent war grant for all, and an additional farthing an hour on earnings for adult male workers, was made by the Union, but rejected by the employers' associations who claimed that as no material change in the cost of living had taken place since the last advance they saw no reason for a further one. The matter was ultimately referred to Sir George Askwith's department in London.²⁷ By the end of May, Askwith had reached a decision in the case and this was communicated to the workers for their consideration. The new offer was for all persons earning under 10s per week to receive a further grant of 1s, all males over 10s and under 20s to get 1s6d, all males over 20s get 2s and all females over 10s to get 1s6d per week. Although this was less than the 25 per cent the Union had originally wanted, nevertheless it worked out at a rise of between 15 and 20 per cent for most workers. Female workers would now be in receipt of an extra 3s per week with which to try and cover

²⁰ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 22 April 1915.

²¹ *Huddersfield Worker*, 1 January 1916.

²² *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 23 December 1915.

²³ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 30 December 1915.

²⁴ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 13 January 1916.

²⁵ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 2 March 1916.

²⁶ *Huddersfield Worker*, 6 May 1916.

²⁷ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 4 May 1916.

the extra cost of living and the rise in food prices.²⁸

August found the textile workers making a further application to the Employers' Association, asking for an immediate improvement in the war bonus.²⁹ Again matters were delayed and it was not until the end of September that a meeting between the two sides was arranged. The Union officials claimed that a very substantial addition to the war bonus was required to keep up with the continuing rise in prices, but again the employers declined to grant the request and offered to refer the matter to the government committee to deal with.³⁰ Sir George Askwith, the government official, was not available, however, and the negotiations were delayed until the middle of October.³¹ The deputation representing the General Union of Textile Workers finally met with Askwith to put the claim for an extra war grant, to bring the total amount to 10s per week for all adults. This meant an additional 5s for men and 7s for women. The Union also claimed that young persons should be entitled to a grant, but they did not specify an amount. Representatives of the three Huddersfield manufacturers associations were also present. The case for the workers was put by Mr Gee and Mr Turner, and Mr Williams and Mr Wood replied for the employers. After hearing both sides for over two hours, Askwith promised to announce his award in a few days.³² The final decision given by Askwith was an award of an extra 1s for all workers earning under 10s per week bringing their total bonus to 3s, an extra 1s 6d, making 4s 6d in total, to all other females and all males earning between 10s and 20s, and an extra 2s, or 7s total for men earning over 20s.³³

The Union was disappointed with the result as although 7s per week extra looked substantial, it did not come close to covering the ever-increasing cost of living. If the male members were disappointed with their award, the women were even more put out and a large meeting was held of women members of the General Union of Textile Workers, to consider problems of wages and war bonus affecting women in the textile trades. Mr Gee presided and supporting him were Messrs. Whitwam, Shaw, Littlewood, Hudson, and others who took part in the war bonus settlements. The women claimed they were entitled to the same war bonus as the men. After various speeches it was resolved that the Union should press for the same war bonus as the men. A letter to that effect was sent to the General Executive Committee of the Union, urging them to write to the Employers' Associations claiming the same amount of bonus as is paid to the men.³⁴ The message was sent forward to the two employers' associations accordingly.

As a result of the inadequacy of the award, the textile workers soon found it necessary to make a further request. In January a meeting was held at the Great Northern Hotel in Leeds, where Sir George Askwith met representatives of the various textile unions and employers' organisations, with a view to arbitrating on the war bonus question.³⁵ The Union officials again stated that they were asking

²⁸ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 25 May 1916.

²⁹ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 24 August 1916.

³⁰ GUTW Minutes, 22 September 1916.

³¹ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 12 October 1916.

³² *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 19 October 1916.

³³ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 2 November 1916.

³⁴ General Union of Textile Workers Women's Guild Minutes, 2 December 1916, S/NUDBTW/61, West Yorkshire Archive Service.

³⁵ Letter from George Askwith, 27 February 1917, WYB123/12/6, West Yorkshire Archive.

for more for the women of the Huddersfield district. The decision given, however, once again differentiated between male and female workers. Askwith's award being, 'in lieu of and in substitution for the existing war wage there shall be paid to the workpeople concerned a war wage of 10s per week to males earning over 20s per week, 6s 6d to males earning over 15s, 5s to males earning over 10s, 6s 6d to females earning over 15s per week, 5s to females over 10s and 3s 6d to all persons earning less than 10s per week.'³⁶ The Union were somewhat disappointed with this award, particularly Miss Luty, the female organiser, who had argued in favour of an enhanced payment for the women, who were already disadvantaged when it came to remuneration. The decision was accepted, but there were still rumblings that further advances may be necessary if food prices kept rising. There was also anger at the arbitrary lines differentiating the various awards. A letter received by 'Yarn-Spinner' of the *Yorkshire Factory Times* outlined the situation.³⁷ 'Is it right that a woman with 15s 6d per week should have 6s 6d bonus, while another with 15s should have only 5s bonus. Hope you will look into this matter.' The article takes up the query and calls for the abandonment of the demarcation of this award stating, 'it has caused more trouble in dyeing houses, textile mills and finishing plants than any other award made during the period of the war.'³⁸ This article and the debate engendered reflected a question raised by some women of why their labour was valued less than that of the men.

By May 1917 the continued rise in the price of food meant that another advance appeared desirable. There were concerns that the value of the wages awarded was failing to keep pace with the rising prices and purchasing power was falling. Consequently, a meeting of the various textile unions was held in the Trades Hall, Bradford, with the purpose of formulating a combined demand.³⁹ The final resolution decided stated, 'that an application for pre-war standard of wages should be sent in simultaneously by all unions this week; that the 21 days' notice under the Munitions Act of a wage trouble being imminent should be given at the same time, as the claim brooks no delay.' Allen Gee wrote to the Employers' Associations of the district and to Mr Wood at the West Riding Employers Federation, asking for an immediate 65 per cent advance of war wage to meet the rising cost of living. At the same time to avoid delay Sir George Askwith was written to advising him of the action taken.⁴⁰

The decision of Sir George Askwith given in June 1917 cancelled all previous bonus awards and instead instituted a percentage system. Thus all male time workers were to receive 50 per cent on the time rate to which the previous war grant applied, male piece workers were to receive 40 per cent and female piece workers got 42½ per cent. However, the main problem was that the increase did not make up for the reduction in wages caused by the short time currently in place in the majority of woollen mills in the district. The union, which had claimed a 65 per cent increase, felt the awards did not cover the continuing rise in the cost of living, but as they had agreed to abide by the arbitration decision, they were bound to accept it. They argued for either the firms, who had made vast profits

³⁶ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 1 February 1917.

³⁷ It is probable that 'Yarn-Spinner' was a pseudonym for Ben Turner. Articles under this name are often in his style and carry many of his opinions and attitudes.

³⁸ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 22 March 1917.

³⁹ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 3 May 1917.

⁴⁰ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 10 May 1917.

out of government contracts, or the government itself, which was responsible for the distribution of wool to the mills, should pay full wages or a percentage thereof, for the people forced onto short time. This should apply especially to the female workers, who had generally started from a position of low wages anyway, and any increase was all too easily swallowed up by rising prices.

For them to have this double event cast upon them is making it appalling to carry on and keep the home fires burning. If it was ordinary short time and a non-wage period I know they would have to do without any extra, but these are days when they cannot do without a half-penny taken from them...It is hard lines for the workers to have to live for seven days on five days wages.⁴¹

There were complaints that the vague wording of the award, with the reference to pre-war rates, was enabling some firms to pay reduced amounts. The Union was adamant that the award specified no worker should receive less money than before. At a meeting of the General Union of Textile Workers, held in Huddersfield Town Hall, it was decided to seek an interview with representatives of the Woollen and Worsted Trades Federation so that uniformity of interpretation might be secured. The meeting also passed a resolution protesting that the current award was not sufficient and urging an application be made at once for a further claim of not less than 72½ per cent. A further resolution called for a negotiation to begin for compensation for the loss of wages consequent upon enforced short time.⁴²

Increased Unrest and Threats of Notice

By the middle of July 1917, it was clear once again that the recent advance in war bonus was in no way sufficient to cover the ever-rising prices of food and other commodities, and a special Executive meeting of the General Union of Textile Workers was called in Huddersfield. Ben Turner, addressing the meeting explained the immediate need to ask for a revision of the present award, 'on the ground that the amount is not high enough, also that the percentages should be uniform, and the bonus should be on total earnings and not on the silly 45-55ths plan.'⁴³ It was decided that 21 days notice should be put to the Committee on Production to secure a further award. It was also agreed that the union should consider applying to the authorities for compensation for short time for government emergencies. A meeting held by Mr Forster, the Financial Secretary to the War Office, in the Mechanics Hall, Bradford, in late July, presented an opportunity for the workers to press their claim. After a speech by the Minister, he was, 'bombarded with questions, in which he would learn no doubt that the people must have more money to live upon and that Government short time must not mean Government short wages.' In a similar meeting held in Dewsbury, it was resolved that it would be better to have all round short time rather than for machinery and mills to be fully closed down and

⁴¹ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 14 June 1917.

⁴² GUTW Minutes, 18 June 1917.

⁴³ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 19 July 1917.

unemployment, especially amongst women, created.⁴⁴ A deputation of textile union representatives had a further meeting with Mr Forster in August. Mr Turner and Mr Gee spoke at length on the point of providing some method of compensating the workpeople for the loss of wages consequent upon government created short time. Mr Forster responded by promising that what had been laid before him should be thoroughly considered. The deputation, seen by a pressman afterwards, said they had been well received, but there was not much hope as yet of a change.⁴⁵

The failure of wages to keep track with prices continued and by September 1917, another request for an advance on the war bonus was made to the Employers' Association. No agreement was forthcoming, and the Union prepared to take further action. Meetings were held by the General Union of Textile Workers in various locations and the resolution adopted, 'that on account of the employers' refusal to grant an increased war bonus, we are prepared to hand in our notices on October 4th.'⁴⁶ At a meeting in Huddersfield Town Hall, Ben Turner stated that an advance of 85 per cent was needed to meet the increase in the cost of living since the last award. He also declared that he was hopeful a settlement could be reached as he had already received a communication, as had the Secretary of the Employers' Association, from the Ministry of Labour intimating that the matter had been referred to the Committee for Production for their decision.⁴⁷ As a result of the involvement of the Committee the notices to cease work were withdrawn.⁴⁸ A new decision by Sir George Askwith for an increase in the war bonus was duly received and stated that male and female time workers were now to receive 60 per cent, male piece workers got 48 per cent and female piece workers got 51 per cent, all awards were in lieu of the previous amount received. Those who worked overtime were entitled to the full bonus, and piece workers were not to suffer deductions for short time. Mr Turner again expressed his disappointment saying that whilst this was not what they had expected or hoped for, they must accept it with the best grace possible.⁴⁹ Other members of the Union also registered their disapproval. At a meeting of the Textile Union members, held in the Town Hall, Huddersfield, and chaired by Mr A. Shaw JP, two resolutions were adopted, one protesting against the continued increase in the price of foodstuffs and the other expressing regret that the Committee on Production had made such a wide difference of percentage between the piece workers and the day workers.⁵⁰

In January the half-yearly meeting of the Colne Valley General Union of Textile Workers called for either a substantial reduction in the cost of living, or a further addition to the war bonus.⁵¹ By February the lack of action was noticed. The *Yorkshire Factory Times* commented,

the Yorkshire textile workers are asking for a revision. The General Union of Textile Workers asked the NUATT to get to business a few weeks ago. They need to speed up for the workers are suffering hardships every day by lack of food, lack of wages to buy substitutes in place of meat they cannot get. The

⁴⁴ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 26 July 1917.

⁴⁵ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 2 August 1917.

⁴⁶ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 20 September 1917.

⁴⁷ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 4 October 1917.

⁴⁸ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 18 October 1917.

⁴⁹ *Huddersfield Worker*, 24 November 1917.

⁵⁰ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 22 November 1917.

⁵¹ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 17 January 1918.

cry is - Get Busy.⁵²

At the fortnightly Executive meeting held at Huddersfield, at which Ben Turner presided, it was reported that the claim for a 12½ per cent advance of wages had been sent to all the Employers' Associations in Yorkshire and that a conference was being asked for on the same. As to the bonus request Mr Gee was instructed to press that the NAUTT should push forward their claim for an increased bonus.⁵³ A similar meeting in the Colne Valley urged that drastic action be taken if the demands were not met. The Employers' Federation again refused to countenance the request and had declined to grant the advance of wages asked for on behalf of the lower-paid sections of the textile trade. It was stated that a large number of the textile women workers, including burlers, condenser minders and cotton employees, were paid wages ranging from 10s to 15s per week. In consequence of this refusal the union gave the Committee on Production the 21 days notice required by the Act to enable them to hand in their notices at the expiration of that period.⁵⁴

The Union hoped that the employers would reconsider the situation as affecting men whose wages were less than 30s per week and women whose earnings were less than £1 per week. The award for the advance in war bonus was finally agreed by the Committee on Production in April. The bonuses of time workers were increased by 12½ per cent from 60 to 72½ per cent, with a maximum of 21s 9d per week. Proportionate increases were made on the previous war bonus to piece workers. The increases were to be recognised as war advances being due to, and dependant on the existence of, the abnormal conditions prevailing in consequence of the war.⁵⁵ The statement issued by the Committee, with its vague wording and ambiguous meaning, however, led to a number of disputes between the Employers and the workers as to what constituted a 'proportionate' rise, The Union argued that the 12½ per cent should be added to all previous rates and the employers claiming only a part of the rise should apply. The *Yorkshire Factory Times* summed up the frustration felt. 'I wish the Committee on Production, when they draft their replies would draft them clearly so that they could be thoroughly and clearly understood.'⁵⁶

Once again the amount was deemed insufficient by the textile union. In this case it was felt that the new rules introduced by the Board of Trade for calculating the rise in prices had affected the figures used by the Committee on Production and resulted in a lower award than would otherwise have been the case. The new calculation stated that the price of commodities should not be based on a comparison with 1914 prices, which led to the perception of a smaller rise and so allowed a smaller wage advance to be suggested. The War Workers' Emergency Committee was especially concerned that the government seemed to be going out of their way to find methods of paying making lower wage awards, even accusing the Board of Trade of putting 'fallacious figures' into their returns.⁵⁷ The textile union even expressed the view that,

⁵² *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 7 February 1918.

⁵³ *Huddersfield Worker*, 2 March 1918.

⁵⁴ *Huddersfield Worker*, 23 March 1918.

⁵⁵ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 25 April 1918.

⁵⁶ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 2 May 1918.

⁵⁷ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 25 April 1918.

unless concessions were made without delay there would be great difficulty in keeping the operatives at some establishments at their work. At the same time it was agreed that a rupture as such a critical period of the war would be unthinkable, and it was resolved to appeal to the employers' associations to co-operate with the union in bringing about a settlement of all outstanding trade troubles.⁵⁸

In July the General Union of Textile Workers and the Woollen Trades Federation of Employers again appeared before the Committee on Production in London regarding the claim of the Union for a 12½ per cent advance in base rate wages. Mr Turner, for the Union, opened the case and pointed out the poor base rate wages paid to most women and many men. He asked that the rates should be lifted above the pre-war agreements of 1913. Mr G. H. Wood, of the Employers Association for Yorkshire, replied and urged that nothing should be granted.⁵⁹ The Committee took until the middle of August to respond with an offer. The new award regarding the claim for an advance in war bonus had been agreed by the Committee on Production. The new rates were given as; for all time workers 81¼ per cent in place of 72½ per cent, as previously: with a maximum of 24s6d, advance from 21s9d. Female piece workers, 69½ per cent, in place of 61½ and male piece workers, 65½ per cent in place of 58 as previously. In view of the somewhat odd percentage awarded the Union issued cards so workers could ensure they receive the correct amounts due.⁶⁰ Ben Turner, asked to clarify why the women's piece rate differed from the men's said that because the base rate of women's wages was too low, an extra percentage was secured for them on that account.⁶¹

At a meeting of the NAUTT in Bradford in October it was suggested that, in view of the continued increase in the cost of living, another application for an advance of bonus should be made. The *Yorkshire Factory Times* summed up the situation.

The workers in the textile trades are asking for more bonus. They are entitled to it on all the lines in the rise of prices. The wages and earnings of Yorkshire textile workers are in most cases for men under £3 a week, for women under 30s a week. This won't do. I notice that the requests for more base rate wages for textile workers still drags on. The employers are making trouble if they don't speed up in their reply.⁶²

The award was finally made in November and consisted of: men and women on weekly rates got 104¾ per cent. the maximum bonus was retained, and no man could receive more than 31s 5d. The piece rate for women was 89 per cent and for men 83¾ per cent. Although the difference between the piece rate and the time rate appeared large, it was pointed out that as there was no limit on the piece-workers' bonus, some of them would be able to earn more than the 31s 5d time workers were restricted to. The difference between men and women was also significant but as was pointed out by Ben Turner when the first difference was made it was due to the low wages paid to many of the women piece workers in many parts of Yorkshire. He stated that,

⁵⁸ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 4 April 1918.

⁵⁹ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 25 July 1918.

⁶⁰ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 15 August 1918.

⁶¹ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 15 August 1918.

⁶² *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 3 October 1918.

some men object to this difference, but I tell them that it would be fatal to object in so far as it would not be the men who would go up, but the women who would come down, and therefore it is better to have the women's rate kept up, although it may seem an anomaly. The women have been behind so long that anything which helps them up should be welcomed by the men.⁶³

The bonuses were to be regarded as war advances and dependant upon the existence of the abnormal conditions now prevailing in consequence of the war. Mr Turner was particularly wary of this clause in the agreement and remarked that the troubles of the workers might become keener when they had to fight to retain the bonuses after the war. He said, 'he did not wish any textile worker to receive in the future any amount below that which would be paid next Friday. The wages now awarded should be the minimum wages when the war was over.'⁶⁴

This concern over problems that may arise after the end of the war was not helped by the attitude of the government. A Bill was introduced into Parliament to stabilise wages during the period following the Armistice. The government proposed that the men and boys' wages should be stabilised and no reductions take place during the next six months, but they declined to give the same protection to women. Thus female textile workers, whose war wages had been increased in the woollen trade equally with men, should not have the same benefit their male counterparts would enjoy. A committee of union representatives had been formed to try and get equal treatment for women.⁶⁵

Although female textile workers constituted some of the highest paid women before the war, their differentials with men in the same industry never disappeared and munitions rules, with their stated minimum wages never extended to these essential workers. Whilst the war brought higher wages and bonuses, the relative positions on men and women remained unaltered. The male hierarchy of the textile unions, whilst paying lip service to the ideals of equal pay for equal work, were content to maintain the position and privileges of their male members at the expense of the females who came into the industry for the duration and those who worked throughout the war. Each delegation to the arbitration service, when it came to negotiating the rises required to keep pace with the increasing cost of living, may have started out with good intentions to do right by the women involved, but were never inclined to push for a settlement that would have resulted in men apparently being disadvantaged. The Women's Guild of the Textile Union, in particular, were incensed by this apparent betrayal in private of the ideals espoused in public and on a number of occasions voted to censure the General Executive Committee of the General Union of Textile Workers for not holding out for equal pay for men and women. In a resolution in November 1916, for example, the Women's Guild put on record that it was 'greatly dissatisfied with the new award and consider it an insult to the women workers and think the G.E.C. made a great mistake.'⁶⁶ The report continued by requesting that a meeting be held so the delegates who went to London to negotiate the award could explain why the women did not get the same bonus as the men.

⁶³ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 14 November 1918.

⁶⁴ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 21 November 1918.

⁶⁵ GUTW Women's Guild Minutes, 30 November 1918.

⁶⁶ GUTW Women's Guild Minutes, 2 November 1916.

It can be seen, therefore, that the First World War did little to address the issue of pay for the female textile workers of the West Riding. The concentration, both at the time, and subsequently on the munitions industry has overshadowed the more fundamental and long-standing issues within the textile trade. Arguments about the nature of dilution and substitution, and whether women performing parts of a man's job should be entitled to his wage have tended to draw attention away from an industry in which women already did the same jobs as the men they worked alongside. Although the years of full employment and the opportunities to work night shifts and overtime meant that the war years led to some of the highest earnings many of them had seen, it remained the case that the disparity in the pay between men and women was never tackled. Women were not valued as much as the men they were replacing or working alongside, and male workers remained the priority in the eyes of both the union and the employers. The issues outstanding from the 1883 agreement where men were entitled to increased pay merely on account of their alleged greater production or technical expertise remained. There was little appetite on the part of the male-dominated unions to press for the benefit of their female members despite ostensibly agreeing in principal. For employers the maintenance of the existing situation made economic sense. They were reluctant to pay women extra and risk upsetting the men. The wider world was also reluctant to become involved. The government had been involved in wage negotiations throughout the war in order to keep production going and equip the army. Once peace was declared the authorities were no longer interested in the issue, deeming it a purely commercial topic. The issue once more returned to the more rarefied and ephemeral fields of theoretical debate. For Gail Braybon the, 'demand for equal pay was designed to safeguard men's jobs and wages, not to offer justice to women.'⁶⁷

⁶⁷ Gail Braybon, *Women Workers In The First World War* (London: Croom Helm, 1981), p.98.

Chapter Six – Hours and Conditions

If the female textile workers were ill-served in the wage negotiations taking place during the war, they were perhaps even more badly done to in the arguments that ensued regarding working conditions and hours. The very nature of the First World War meant that all industrial effort was focused on the goal of ultimate victory and this meant that some of the hard won protections and concessions that unions and workers had gained in the years prior to the war had to be put aside for the duration. In textiles, the decades before the war had seen moves to limit the number of hours women and children could work in mills (they were specifically excluded from working at nights), and the use of married women, although not prohibited, was frowned upon, with many companies not employing them at all. The war, and the conditions it engendered, cut through and altered each of these measures. This chapter will examine the ways in which the demands of total war affected when and how female workers were used in the textile industry during the years of conflict. It will show how the rules were relaxed when the needs of the employers and the demands of the army were deemed to be more important than the safety of the workers employed and argue that this demonstrates the arbitrary nature of much of the protective legislation in place at the time.

At the outbreak of war, the primary concern was for unemployment within the textile industry. Immediately beforehand the industry had experienced a lull in production. This was initially compounded, once war was declared, by general attempts to 'economise' particularly in the areas of luxury goods including new outfits or household items. For the makers of luxury high-end products, especially those with a large percentage of continental trade, times became difficult and many companies reduced the hours of their workers. Some firms brought in a four or even three day week.¹ Consternation was also felt due to the loss of some extremely profitable markets. Germany and other nations designated as enemy states had accounted for much of the export orders of the wool textile industry in the years leading up to 1914. It was estimated that thirty five per cent of crossbred tops had gone to Germany before the outbreak of war and as much as sixty five per cent of yarn output was imported by enemy states. In the piece goods trade Germany had been the largest single European customer.²

The initial concern, therefore, revolved around the question of underemployment. In August 1914 it was estimated as many as 60 per cent were unemployed in the woollen trade and 65 per cent in worsted.³ In addition many of the people still in work were on reduced hours or were working short time. This situation did not last long and by October trade was described as very brisk with overtime being worked by more than a quarter of workers in woollen mills.⁴ By March 1915 — in the

¹ Gail Ledgard, *To what extent did the First World War impact the domestic lives of working class women in Huddersfield* (Unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Huddersfield, 2013) p.29.

² Report of the Departmental Committee appointed by the Board of Trade to Consider the Position of the Textile Trades after the War, CD9070, 1918.

³ *Board of Trade Labour Gazette*, vol. XXII, no. 9, p.322-333.

⁴ *Board of Trade Labour Gazette*, vol. XXII, no. 10, p.405.

Huddersfield, Colne Valley and Holme Valley areas — it was estimated that 250 miles of army cloth a week were coming off 5.000 looms.⁵ Such increases in production were not always sustainable. The extra consumption of wool led to shortages as the war went on and this meant that trade declined. Each additional push by the army led to extra demand and thus the woollen industry endured a volatile experience during the war with periods of high intensity and full employment interspersed with times of lower demand and shorter hours.

This had a dramatic affect on the hours that female workers were required to work. Legislation adopted before the war, in the form of various Factory Acts, meant that women were forbidden from working at night or on Sundays or for any period in excess of ten hours per day or fifty five hours a week. The demands of the army meant that these restrictions were increasingly unworkable and they were loosened throughout the course of the war. Gradually women and girls were permitted to work overtime and, if it could be proved to be in the national interest, they were reluctantly allowed to work at night. It also had an affect on the types of women working. As men were taken from the mills, their places were filled by women, but as many in the textile areas already worked, others were brought in. Married women, who had left mills on their marriage, returned, younger girls were recruited earlier to jobs they may not have been expected to do for many years and even older women, who had long retired, were taken on to help out. Each step was, however, subject to resistance and discussion from Unions, Employers, Factory Inspectors and other authorities. The problem was summarised in a letter printed in *Common Cause* of July 1915 from Margaret Llewellyn Davies, General Secretary of the Women's Co-operative Guild, who commented that:

the problem is two-fold: How to ensure, in the present dislocation of industry leading to the replacement of men by women, that the health and physique of the future mothers of the race should not be injured, and that men's wages should not be undermined, nor their future employment endangered. Already the effect of the extra pressure now being put on women workers is reported to be showing itself in the woollen and worsted districts of Yorkshire in largely increased sickness claims under the Insurance Act. It is essential to the productivity of labour that the efficiency of women should be maintained, and also that unrest among men should be prevented.⁶

These arguments were part of a wider debate about the safety of girls and women employed in the textile trades. The expansion of women into the munitions industry led to a national discussion about the dangers of women in industry. In 1915 the government established the Health of Munition Workers Committee to oversee issues involving the welfare of women. This body was tasked with investigating the situation and to, 'consider and advise on questions of industrial fatigue, hours of labour, and other matters affecting the personal health and physical efficiency of workers in munitions factories and workshops.'⁷ Although most textile works did not fall under the auspices of the Ministry of Munitions, as a result of many receiving and implementing government contracts, they were included in many of the inquiries undertaken. Much of the official record of the time, therefore, was

⁵ G.R.Carter, Clothing the Allies Armies, *The Economic Journal*, Vol. 25, No. 97 (Mar., 1915), pp. 97-103.

⁶ *Common Cause*, 6 August 1915.

⁷ Health of Munitions Workers Committee Memorandum, Cd8151, 1915.

generated by and largely concerned with, the munitions industry. Textiles was merely an adjunct, one which figured in the reports produced, but was not at the centre. The historiography has followed the source material in concentrating on the munitions workers, as this is where the major changes took place and is the central subject of the investigations undertaken. Textile workers were subject to many of the problems faced by munitions workers. The increased pace of work in the mills, the long hours, the lack of rest periods and other issues were all matters of concern. The resulting affect on the health and well-being of the workers also caused some anxiety. In many ways, however, the textile trade was overshadowed by the attention paid to munitions.

Overtime

The main problem, initially, was that the influx of government orders into the district was not adequately shared amongst the firms needing work. The existing protocol for Army procurement consisted of a small number of recognised firms who tendered for government contracts and undertook the work required. With the vast amounts of cloth now needed in a very small period of time this system was increasingly unworkable and led to a situation whereby some firms had more work than they could deal with in normal working hours and were having their men and women working overtime and on Saturday afternoons. Meanwhile the neighbouring mills, who were not on the list of approved contractors, had little work to do at all and were forced to reduce the hours of their employees. Thus whilst some workers were on short time, others, often from the same streets, were working extra hours.

As the war continued, the rules regarding the allocation of military orders was relaxed, meaning that more mills received opportunities for this type of work. The sheer demand of goods needed for the forces, and the rapid nature of the requirements, also meant that firms found it impossible to hold on to work exclusively. Many firms who received orders and were unable to undertake the full amount of work, started to sub-contract work out to smaller companies. In the mills so employed, the situation rapidly went from workers being laid off or on short time to more work than could be performed in normal hours. As the work was for the government, permission was sought to suspend the normal working of the Factory Act which prohibited overtime for women and young persons. Ben Turner, of the General Textile Workers' Union, explained the new rules at the half-yearly meeting. 'The Government had established that textile factories engaged on Crown work, but not ordinary work, could work their female and young employees overtime of two hours extra for the first five days and a further two hours on Saturday afternoons.'⁸ Fred Jowett M.P. also complained about the waste of material and labour being experienced in some mills who were still producing goods for the fashionable trade. He urged that, 'The Government ought to undertake the control of production, because in these factories many young persons were being worked for longer hours than they had any right to be.'⁹

⁸ *Huddersfield Worker*, 31 October 1914.

⁹ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 3 December 1914.

The *Yorkshire Factory Times* questioned the government's commitment, alleging that many firms applying for permits for overtime were still concentrating on their private work, and commenting that regulation to ensure that at least fifty per cent of trade should be for military purposes before allowing overtime would not be amiss. Cases were cited where companies with 80 looms on private work and 20 on army cloth or 40 looms on government work and 120 on private trade were applying to work their weavers for longer hours.

If they would twist these figures round it would be better than giving permits for needless overtime, and surely every manufacturer would agree that soldiers should be clothed first and the society people who want special makes and special suits and special cloths should wait a bit longer until the fighting 'Tommy' has had his chance.¹⁰

As time went on more mills were tasked with the urgent role of providing uniforms and equipment and it became more and more regular for overtime to be demanded of the workforce. In the woollen trade alone 748 firms requested that they be allowed to work emergency overtime in the period from 4 August 1914 to 19 February 1915.¹¹

The policy was not universally welcomed. The letters pages of the local newspapers were soon reflecting the fact that some firms appeared to be taking advantage of their workers rather than cooperating with their competitors. One letter complained that women were being worked until 7:45 at certain mills and threatened to inform the Factory Inspectors. In response 'Yarn Spinner' of the *Yorkshire Factory Times* replied that, 'unfortunately the Factory Acts have been altered, and when on government work women and young persons can be worked overtime two hours per day, including Saturday.' The article went on to lament this state of affairs which resulted in unfair distribution of work; 'all the work can be done if shared out scientifically...but they give the orders out and say they want completing by a given date, and firms successful in obtaining the orders have to do their best to get them out by such a date.'¹²

While the newspapers and the textile unions were concerned about the women and young children being required to work overtime, the manufacturers were largely in favour of less restrictions and petitioned the Home Office to relax the rules completely. In December 1914 a series of meetings were held between representatives of the woollen textile manufacturers of the West Riding and the Factory Inspectors Department in Leeds to try and settle the issue regarding their applications for permission to work women, young persons and children overtime during the six days of the week. Similar meetings were held with the Textile Union officials who, 'held most strongly that Saturday afternoon labour ought not to be insisted upon, and that one or two nights per week ought to be free from overtime in addition, and that the present pressure was leading to physical breakdown.'¹³ By the end of the same month some of the weavers in the Colne Valley had taken matters into their own hands and a number were refusing to work any overtime. The problems were largely concerned with

¹⁰ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 17 December 1914.

¹¹ Report of the Chief Inspector of Factories, Cd8051, 1914.

¹² *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 10 September 1914.

¹³ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 17 December 1914.

the refusal of many firms to pay adequate rates for the hours worked, but the strain of nearly five months relentless work also played a part. The *Yorkshire Factory Times* reported,

On Monday night all the weavers at all the mills in Marsden left work at 5-30, and refused to work overtime until 8pm as usual. The persons who took this course numbered about 1000 and consisted of both men and women. Some time ago meetings of weavers were held under the auspices of the General Union of Textile Workers in the endeavour to secure the payment of overtime rates. Correspondence and an interview between the union and the Woollen and Fine Cloth Manufacturers' Association took place, and eventually the Executive of the Union passed the following resolution:- "that we regret the employers' association refuse the request of the weavers and other piece-rate operatives, and also decline a further interview on the subject, and are of the opinion that as the weavers and other operatives are not receiving extra pay for overtime they are fully justified in refusing to work overtime. Members dismissed or penalised as a consequence will have the full support of the Union."¹⁴

By January the protest had spread to other areas within the district.¹⁵ By February the Board of Trade was becoming concerned about the refusal to work overtime and decided to take action.

Consequently, Sir George Askwith was asked to intervene, and the Conciliation Board invited deputations of representatives of both the employers and workers to meet to consider the question.¹⁶ The conference duly met in London, both separately and jointly, and discussed the issue for several hours. The sticking point appeared to be that the employers were perfectly happy to offer male weavers the full rate asked for but were only willing to pay females one penny per hour, a full 50 per cent distinction between the sexes.¹⁷ In March representatives of the Cloth Manufacturers of Huddersfield, including the Secretary Mr G.H.Wood and members of the General Union of Textile Workers, including Messrs. Gee, Turner, Hoyle and Littlewood met with Sir George to further discuss the question of overtime rates and limitation of hours in the cloth trade of Colne Valley, Huddersfield and district. The two sides could not come to terms but Sir George, as conciliator, expressed the opinion that the overtime price for both men and women should be 1½d per hour. On limitation of hours for men he passed no opinion. The Union recommend their members to start overtime, but not to work after 8 o'clock at night.¹⁸

A further problem that the woollen trade began to experience, was that the raw materials required for the production of cloth, became increasingly restricted. Although never as dependant on imported supplies as the cotton trade, woollen manufacturers were subject to the vagaries of the international situation. A British embargo on the export of tops and yarns, the uncertainty of the continental and world markets and the cessation of trade with Germany, previously a major supplier of both chemical dyes and rags for shoddy manufacture, meant that the trade became ever more volatile.¹⁹ This shortage of materials was reflected in some of the distress cases investigated by the Huddersfield Committee. It was noted that, 'fifty-six of the weavers in one firm had had to go home in a morning

¹⁴ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 31 December 1914.

¹⁵ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 7 January 1915.

¹⁶ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 4 February 1915.

¹⁷ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 11 February 1915.

¹⁸ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 29 October 1914.

¹⁹ *Huddersfield Worker*, 28 November 1914.

waiting for material.²⁰ The problems with the supply of wool continued through the summer of 1915. By June it was noted that the wool available was being used up at an extensive rate as orders for Army cloth continued to flood in to the area.²¹ Problems were also experienced in moving the supplies of wool around the country. The supply of raw materials especially rags became increasingly tight as Germany and Austria were closed.

A correspondent to the *Yorkshire Factory Times* advocated running, 'shorter hours now than this excessive speed - then possibly we may keep the mills going longer.'²² By the end of June and following representations by the textile unions the amount of overtime permissible for women and young persons was reduced. After a conference between the Union officials, the Factory Inspectors and the manufacturers it was decided that no overtime be allowed for weavers, other processes to be reduced to six hours a week and no overtime on a Saturday. The factories requesting overtime must be working on at least 75 per cent government orders to qualify. Additionally, no young person under 16, unless in spinning, was to be employed for excess hours and notices outlining the rules were to be displayed prominently in mills.²³ There were further conferences held in Bradford between the employers' associations and the factory inspectors and separately between the employees' associations and the Inspectors. The employers continued pressing for more children and young persons to be allowed to work overtime and at nights. The unions were against this, feeling that most government work could be completed in normal working hours and any excess work was being done for private gain by the manufacturers. The *Yorkshire Factory Times* commented that, 'because the authorities are lacking in business acumen and manufacturers have not their plant organised as well as they might have, the unfortunate factory workers are having to suffer and the Factory Acts are being turned down another time.'²⁴ In July 1915 the decision was taken by the Home Secretary, after consultation with the Army Contracts Department, to renew until 4 August the order allowing the overtime employment of women and young persons in woollen and worsted factories. The order fixed a maximum of six hours overtime per week, and did not allow it for weaving, on Saturdays or for girls under 16 years of age.²⁵

As the war continued into its second year and the demands of the Army continued to increase, the situation in the mills became increasingly difficult. Not only was cloth required in large amounts, but the shortages of labour were becoming ever more apparent. In a conference held in October which included representatives of the Board of Trade, the Admiralty and the War Office, there was a strong feeling expressed by the textile trade that the government were making a great mistake in taking such a large number of employees away from the mills and the officials were informed that they could either have the men or the material but not both. If they wanted a million yards of cloth it was necessary to leave enough men to work the machinery. As a result of this conference the Home Office issued an order clarifying the overtime situation in the woollen and worsted industries. This

²⁰ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 3 June 1915.

²¹ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 30 December 1915.

²² *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 24 June 1915.

²³ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 6 April 1916.

²⁴ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 13 July 1916.

²⁵ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 12 October 1916.

confirmed that in factories in which at least 75 per cent of the work being done was on behalf of the Crown, or for export to foreign countries, females over 16 and male young persons over 15 were permitted to work overtime not exceeding 6 hours per week. No overtime was allowed on Saturdays and no work on Sundays. This order was to be reviewed after three months.²⁶ Some firms were not above taking advantage of the situation. The *Yorkshire Factory Times* reported:

I notice that Factory Inspectors have been summoning a few employers of labour in the textile trade for breaking regulations agreed upon by the Factory Inspectors and the Employers' Association and Trade Unions. When certain people have privileges granted to them they seem to want to go a bit further. I am glad the Huddersfield magistrates did inflict a penalty, though not a heavy one, upon those who have broken the Home Office orders and regulations. I am told other firms have done a similar thing and I expect to hear of summonses in other police courts. I think the regulations agreed upon at the recent conference in Leeds are such as should be observed. Whilst weavers are playing for want of warp and weft there is no need for overtime, if firms would jointly act together, and show that co-operation and organisation which are so essential in these times of warfare.²⁷

After reviewing the situation in December, a conference held in Leeds between the inspectors of factories and representatives of the Yorkshire employees and workpeople decided unanimously to recommend the Home Secretary to renew the Order permitting the overtime employment of women, girls over 16 and boys of 15 upwards in the woollen and worsted industries. They did recommend that the Order should run from 2 January, thereby providing for a break from overtime of two weeks at Christmas. The Secretary of State approved the recommendation and renewed the Order until 30 March when a further conference would be called to review conditions again. The decision given did not cover arrangements which had been sanctioned in some mills, by Special Orders, for employing women and young persons in shifts. Such arrangements were to remain in place in each case as long as the individual Order authorising them remained in force. In accordance with the directive, therefore, a further meeting took place in Leeds on the 27 March 1916 between the representatives of the employers and the workpeople, under the direction of the Inspector of Factories. At this meeting it was decided that overtime should continue in processes other than weaving and the Secretary of State duly issued a General Order to this effect, to be reviewed after three months. After due consideration and consultation with the Director of Army Contracts it was not felt necessary to extend the Order to cover weaving. The Order also provided for the suspension of overtime throughout Whit-week.²⁸

By May the lack of raw material was affecting the amount of work available and an Order was issued by the Army Council reducing the number of hours at which looms could be run in any factory where wool was used from 55½ per week to 45. In spinning departments there was to be a reduction of 15 per cent in the hours worked. The reductions applied to all work, both government and private, unless excess hours were needed to meet urgent government requirements in which case a licence

²⁶ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 7 December 1916.

²⁷ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 19 April 1917.

²⁸ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 24 May 1917.

of exemption could be applied for.²⁹ A conference between representatives of the employers and workpeople in the woollen and worsted trade was held at Huddersfield to consider the manner in which the reduction of hours, in accordance with the recent Order, should be effected. After full discussion, it was unanimously resolved that the 45 hours per week should be made up by the mills running the full ordinary hours for the first four days, and stopping after the looms had run five hours on Fridays. The weaving departments would therefore be closed on Friday afternoons and all day on Saturdays. With regard to the spinning departments, the hours of which, under the Order, were reduced by 15 per cent to 47 hours and 20 minutes, the remaining two hours 20 minutes would be worked on the Friday afternoons where this might be found necessary.³⁰ Complaints were soon rife that many firms were not adhering to this new schedule and were instead making their own arrangements. One firm was mentioned as having worked one hour less per day and maintained their Friday and Saturday openings.³¹

At one fortnightly Executive meeting of the General Union of Textile Workers the question of short time was discussed. It was decided to strongly urge that what work there was should be shared out amongst the workers, as it would mean that if machinery stopped in the woollen trade and men displaced either by stopping sets or mules, that not only would these people be out of work, but hundreds of weavers would be on very much shorter time or out of work altogether and that the feeling was very keen that those who were proposing or suggesting full time and overtime for one section were doing a great injustice to the women weavers of the country.³² Ben Turner, President of the General Union of Textile Workers, explained the reason for which short time had been introduced in the woollen textile mills. He said it was necessary to have a large reserve of wool at the end of 1917. No matter what the cost, the soldiers must be clothed. Even if the war ended sooner than was expected, there would be wool required to ensure England would remain the wool centre of the world and to clothe the civilian populations and the demobilised men of the Army. He said questions had been asked why night work had not been abolished instead of all the workers being put on short time. The reply was that to stop night work would throw a large number of persons out of employment altogether and that the better plan was to share out the work as equally as possible.³³

By August the situation had eased, and a census of wool stocks revealed that the situation was not as bad as had been anticipated. It was decided, therefore, to amend the weekly hours mills were allowed to work to 50, with corresponding adjustments to the spinning departments. Accordingly, a number of permits were given out to woollen manufacturers to raise the hours, although some remained on 45. *The Yorkshire Factory Times* issued an editorial on the issue:

A good number of permits seem to have been given to woollen manufacturers who are making blankets for the Army and Navy. The Army require a tremendous number for the coming winter and whatever our views may be on the general situation, these blankets must be made and our soldiers kept as warm as possible. One hundred thousand extra more than are being turned out

²⁹ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 31 May 1917.

³⁰ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 14 June 1917.

³¹ *Huddersfield Worker*, 28 July 1917.

³² General Union of Textile Workers Minutes, 14 December 1917, S/NUDBTW/1, West Yorkshire Archive Service.

³³ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 16 August 1917.

are needed and as a consequence, although the new order for the increase of the hours of labour is not yet in operation, permits have been granted and the 50 hours are worked by a considerable number of firms. This is a strong reason why the 50 hours should be worked throughout the country, as it is very upsetting indeed if some firms are doing 50 and others only 45. Personally, I believe the 50 hours could be worked and our wool supplies preserved. I believe that the right thing is to have a Saturday stop, but a five days working week.³⁴

The amount of wool coming into the country remained volatile for the rest of the year, subject to the lack of shipping, German submarines, weather conditions in Australia and numerous other problems. By Christmas, stocks were again low and a proposal was made that in view of the ongoing shortage of raw materials, mills should shut down for the entire week over the Christmas period. There was a suggestion that employers should pay workers for this break out of their excess profits.³⁵ Some firms did make a gesture in this direction, either paying part wages or offering a Christmas gift, for example one mill gave all workers a blanket. Many companies did not pay anything, leaving their workers with no money for the period of the shutdown.³⁶ In their half-yearly report the Colne Valley General Union of Textile Workers were also opposed to the plan to shut down machinery in some mills rather than having short time in all.

the committee believe there is trouble ahead, as a further reduction in the consumption of raw material is demanded by the Government. The suggested stoppage of machinery is deprecated as it would mean the discharge of a number of operatives, who would have small chance of getting employment at other mills. Shorter hours and a portion of work for all is preferred. Men for the Army and women for munitions is probably as much responsible for this change as the shortage of raw material.³⁷

By May, the situation was almost back to normal and the Army Council Order placing restrictions on the running hours of mills in the woollen trade was rescinded.³⁸ Mills could now work 55½ hours per week as before the war. The Union was somewhat suspicious of this move, however, citing a clause in the new Military Service Act that specified no man could claim an exemption from being called up if short time was being worked in the industry he was concerned with. The Wool Control Board felt that if they were still on reduced hours, they could not have made a single claim for a single man to be exempted.³⁹

The Union backed a demand for shorter hours generally in the woollen industry. The General Union of Textile Workers and the NAUTT, of which it was a part, adopted a resolution calling for a permanent working week of not more than 48 hours to be included in any peacetime reorganisation of the industry. Such a reduction in hours should not result in any decrease in wages and Saturday working should be abandoned altogether. Ben Turner advocated shorter hours in order to

³⁴ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 16 August 1917.

³⁵ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 20 December 1917.

³⁶ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 1 January 1918.

³⁷ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 17 January 1918.

³⁸ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 16 May 1918.

³⁹ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 20 June 1918.

accommodate the many people who were coming home from the war.⁴⁰ The arguments for shorter hours were strong before the war. The experiences of wartime, particularly as shown in the Health of Munitions Workers Reports have reinforced the case; while the demobilisation crisis has still further strengthened it.⁴¹

One significant effect of the extension of hours being worked in the textile industry was the realisation that working longer hours does not necessarily lead to greater output. In a similar fashion to the munitions industry where differing shift patterns were discovered to affect workers in different ways and lead to varying degrees of productivity, the various increases and reductions in hours worked and days playing led to comparable results.⁴² An editorial article in the *Yorkshire Factory Times* outlined the findings.

It has been discovered as a result of the short time recently introduced into the woollen and worsted trades, that output does not fall dramatically if shorter hours are worked. In a confirmation of the findings in the munitions investigations, it has been proved that longer days do not result in higher production. When one day per week was stopped in compliance with the Wool Control Board Orders, production did not fall by the expected one-fifth or one-sixth but by less than half that amount. Similarly, now that hours worked are one-ninth, there is not one-ninth reduction in output. The shutting down of the textile mills on Saturdays certainly resulted in some slight reduction of output, but it is so small as to not be much and in some mills the daytime workers are turning out as much work as they did in six days.⁴³

Analogous findings were apparent in other cases. The Report of the Factory Inspector in 1916 commented,

It is fairly well recognised now that continuous and excessive overtime very soon produces lassitude and slackness among the workers, and injuriously affects efficiency and both quality and quantity of work. In one weaving factory special records were kept when normal hours of 55½ a week were increased for 16 weeks to 58, and for four weeks to 65½. The output did not increase in proportion, and the difference was more marked when working the 65½ hour weeks. On the other hand, a moderate amount of overtime judiciously arranged has given satisfactory results.⁴⁴

Nightwork

If the expansion of women into working overtime caused consternation it was as nothing compared to the arguments when night work was deemed necessary. Unions objected to women working nightshifts as this meant that men were no longer needed for this previously male-only time and were therefore now eligible for army service.⁴⁵ Other people saw the inclusion of women into the

⁴⁰ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 16 January 1919.

⁴¹ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 23 January 1919.

⁴² Adam Kirkaldy, *Industry and Finance* (London: Pitman, 1917), p.110.

⁴³ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 22 November 1917.

⁴⁴ Annual Report of the Chief Inspector of Factories and Workshops, Cd8570, 1916.

⁴⁵ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 27 April 1916.

male world of night work as immoral as some men remained and the workforce could be mixed. One of the Colne Valley interviewees remembered the time: 'Even women worked during the night in the First World War...I mean they had never worked nights. It wasn't considered proper like for women to work at nights but they just had to do.'⁴⁶ 'Yarn Spinner' in the *Yorkshire Factory Times* was particularly scathing. In an article towards the end of 1914 he examined the practice of employing women as night workers, and expressed doubts about the necessity of using women for this work when there were plenty of alternative sources of labour available. The article stated, 'I believe the Factory Inspectors are winking a good bit at many of the illegalities operating at the present time, and no doubt the plea is, the soldier must be clothed.' He went on to condemn the state of affairs whereby women and children are working at night whilst men were unemployed.⁴⁷

The issue continued to be debated throughout the war. A conference held at Leeds between the General Union of Textile Workers and the Factory Inspectors recommended that night work should not be undertaken by women on any account.⁴⁸ Mr Ben Turner addressing a meeting at the opening ceremony of a new Trades Hall in Sowerby Bridge again restated his position with regard to further dilution. A proposal had been made by the Government that a night shift for women should be organised in the textile factories. He strongly opposed such a step being taken. 'They already had girls 14 years of age working overtime for two hours each night, and that, to his mind, was like going back to the dark ages. There was not an abundance of labour, but more could be obtained if they would only offer more wages.'⁴⁹

In February 1916 the situation was becoming increasingly strained. Conscription was removing large numbers of men and it was untenable that exemptions could be given merely because men worked on the night shift. As the Army demanded these men, women were the only alternative and night work was again mooted. A joint conference between representatives of 14 trades unions and 7 employers' associations connected with the textile trade in Yorkshire failed to reach agreement on the employment of women on night work. Although the employers were in favour of the proposal and the Factory Inspectors were willing to authorise such work, the union objected on both moral and physical grounds. Citing cases of sexual misconduct that had occurred when such an experiment was tried in non-textile works, they were unwilling to consider such a move in the textile trade.⁵⁰ By March it was becoming obvious that some women would need to be employed on the nightshift. The Home Office sanctioned their use in a number of limited roles in woolcombing and other processes that women performed during the day. The General Union of Textile Workers was still vehemently opposed and vowed to continue fighting against such moves. It was still felt that, 'morally it is dangerous, physically it is cruel, financially it is of no benefit to the women or the trade, except it may be for a little bit of profit to the shareholders.'⁵¹ A report in the *Yorkshire Factory Times* condemned the move and stated that,

⁴⁶ Colne Valley Interview 16, deposited at Kirklees Sound Archive.

⁴⁷ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 12 November 1914.

⁴⁸ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 2 December 1915.

⁴⁹ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 27 January 1916.

⁵⁰ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 10 February 1916.

⁵¹ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 3 March 1916.

there are scores of mulegates standing idle during the day for the lack of employees, yet night work has been extended to women. If the night work was stopped, many of these women could be used to fully work all the machinery in the daytime. This would prevent women running unnecessary risks to both their physical and moral wellbeing.⁵²

Women were eventually allowed to work at night but only under stipulated agreements. Mothers were explicitly barred and working conditions were to be improved by the addition of meal intervals and the fixing of working temperatures. Factory inspectors were also wary of the increased hours women were now working and appointed people specifically to check on women's employment at night. They also conducted investigations into the changes to productivity that different shift patterns produced. By June several firms were employing on the night shift the women from East Coast towns who had been imported into the spinning departments.⁵³ By November 1917, it was estimated that 450 women were working nights in Yorkshire, most of them in Bradford.⁵⁴

Holidays

A further area where the impact of war meant that normal circumstances were affected was in the question of holidays. After the initial brief periods of low employment during August and September 1914, trade picked up to such a considerable extent that by December many firms were running both overtime and nightshifts to provide the cloth demanded by the expanding army. This led to considerable debate about whether holidays should be taken in light of the need for materials of war. Due to the need for continued production some firms proposed running their mills during the days that would normally be closed down for the Christmas holidays. Such a suggestion was not well received by the workers representatives and the matter was taken up by the executive committee of the Huddersfield and District Trades and Labour Council. The Secretary sent a letter to the War Office, the Mayor of Huddersfield and the secretaries of the various employers' associations explaining that,

In view of the fact that all the employees, men, women and children, have been working excessive hours for the past four months, this Executive is of the opinion that all employees should have a holiday from 24-28th and further urges that all citizens should use all their efforts to help obtain the holidays asked for. We draw your attention to the fact that the next holiday is not due until April 1915.⁵⁵

The *Huddersfield Worker* was also of the opinion that a break from work would be beneficial for the weavers and mill hands commenting that,

We hope the War Office authorities will settle the matter by declaring against holiday work. To do so will be economical from their point of view for, however

⁵² *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 9 March 1916.

⁵³ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 8 June 1916.

⁵⁴ Report on Employment in Bradford, Huddersfield and Halifax 1917-1918, RECO1/801, National Archives.

⁵⁵ Huddersfield Trade and Labour Council Minutes 23 December 1914, S/HTC/1/.4, West Yorkshire Archive Service.

great the need for khaki, it will not be most expeditiously satisfied by workers exhausted and worn out by incessant toil. Weaving is one of those few remaining occupations where the personal factor is regarded as of some importance; a fresh vigorous worker can do more than an exhausted one.⁵⁶

Although on this occasion the mill owners relented and allowed the holidays to proceed as normal, the debate about the demands of the authorities for cloth outweighing the possible strain for workers continued throughout the war. The case was not helped by the ambiguous position of the woollen industry with regard to inclusion within the Munitions Act.

By mid-1916 the situation was again reaching a crisis point. Conscription had been introduced meaning more soldiers needed equipping but also that a reduced workforce was now available to produce the arms and material needed. The government instructed munitions firms to continue working throughout Whitsuntide 1916, but the textile industry found itself in something of a dilemma. Huddersfield was not classified as a munitions area, although much of the industry, including the mills, were working on government contracts. The feeling of the industry, therefore, was that holidays should be taken as normal. The local authority felt differently and the mayor of Huddersfield, Mr Blamires, announced that the schools would be opened, and the Corporation employees would be required to work. The textile unions and the employers' associations both expressed their opposition to the proposal, citing the fact that machinery needed overhauling and the workers needed rest. The executive of the General Union of Textile Workers held a meeting at Huddersfield to discuss the question of suspending the Whitsuntide holiday. This was considered unnecessary, and a resolution was passed to the effect that the usual holiday be observed. 'In the textile trade of Huddersfield and the Colne and Holme Valleys, therefore, Monday and Tuesday next will be regarded as holidays.'⁵⁷ In the *Yorkshire Factory Times* it was pointed out that,

some textile workers were on short time before Whitsuntide, not at one mill but at several. There was a shortage of raw material in many departments in some mills in various parts of the West Riding and to ask these people to forego their holiday would mean they would be playing a day or two after Whitsun as they were a day or two before.⁵⁸

A conference was held in London with representatives of the major industries, to discuss the request of the Ministry of Munitions to postpone holidays and maintain production. 'All of us, I am certain will do all we possibly can to shorten the duration of the war by increasing the output of munitions, but the government seem to have some very slipshod methods in dealing with such subjects.' After further criticism of the Minister of Munitions, the article continued 'I wonder if he realised what the munitions workers and woollen workers had accomplished during the past 22 months, and if he thought they could go on forever without a substantial break for health recuperation.'⁵⁹

The debate continued to rumble on. In August 1916 the Ministry of Munitions published a poster urging the British nation to, 'forego any idea of a general holiday until our goal is reached.' The appeal

⁵⁶ *Huddersfield Worker*, 19 December 1914.

⁵⁷ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 8 June 1916.

⁵⁸ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 15 June 1916.

⁵⁹ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 27 July 1916.

was addressed not only to munitions workers, but to all members of the community. In Huddersfield, the employers responded to this request by suggesting the complete postponement of all holidays.⁶⁰ The textile unions were absolutely opposed to any such proposition, feeling there was no necessity to make any alterations in the normal holiday arrangements.⁶¹ The National Advisory Committee on War Output, a government body, issued a circular strongly urging the postponement of holidays and appealing to workers to continue production. Textile workers were asked to forego their holidays in order to remove the holiday atmosphere, so that munitions workers could be kept at work and would not feel they were missing out. A conference on the subject of holidays was held by representatives of the textile industry in the Huddersfield Trades and Labour Club. After a long discussion a resolution was passed protesting against the attempted interference with the existing arrangements and reiterating that there was no need to alter them.⁶² As a result of the opposition to the idea, the Huddersfield and District Manufacturers' Association issued a notice recommending their members close the mills as normal during the holiday period. The *Yorkshire Factory Times* summed up the situation: 'with the shortage of labour those who are left behind have had to do a tremendous amount of work, and a week's rest will do both the machinery and the people good.'⁶³

Such problems continued throughout the war. In 1917 similar statements were again appearing in the local press. 'Holidays will be taken this summer of a surety, especially by workers in the textile trades, many of whom at present are on shorter hours owing to the restrictions in wool. The heavy strain of the past months has had its affect on the vitality of factory employees and a short spell by the breezy ocean is necessary.'⁶⁴ A further article declared that,

the decision that holidays shall be held this year has given great satisfaction throughout the West Riding where, despite recent curtailment of hours, toil worn textile workers are in need of a respite from the daily drudge. Facilities for reaching holiday resorts have not been extended, however, and thus many will be denied the opportunity of visiting the coast. This will not matter greatly providing rest, quiet, and change can be taken nearer home, and probably a greater benefit will be gained in health by an absence of the many inside attractions with which one is so familiar at popular seaside places.⁶⁵

The workers' representatives on the Wool Advisory Committee insisted that textile workers needed a whole week's holiday. Their justification was that 'the machinery needed a rest and repairs. The workpeople needed it even more.'⁶⁶

Health Concerns

The expansion of hours and increased pressure to produce goods quickly, impacted on the health

⁶⁰ *Huddersfield Worker*, 5 August 1916.

⁶¹ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 3 August 1916.

⁶² Huddersfield Trade and Labour Council Minutes, 2 August 1916, S/HTC/1/.4, West Yorkshire Archive Service.

⁶³ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 10 August 1916.

⁶⁴ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 14 June 1917.

⁶⁵ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 12 July 1917.

⁶⁶ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 27 September 1917.

of the workers involved. As early as October 1914 there was a concern about the amount of overtime being worked and the possibility that the incessant rush to get work out was causing an increase in the number of accidents in the mills of the area. There were also allegations that the need to maintain output and keep the workers on meant that some of the incidents were not being reported to the factory inspectors as the rules required.⁶⁷ Ben Turner was concerned enough to write an article regarding the exhaustion that many textile workers were experiencing due to the amount of overtime being worked. In his guise as 'Yarn Spinner' he commented that, 'I do not see much use in killing off by overwork a prospective mother at the loom-gate for the purpose of clothing a soldier in the trenches.'⁶⁸ He went on to note that some workers were coming home from the mills unable to do housework or even to eat their meals due to exhaustion. In the mornings they were still tired because the hours of rest and recreation were not long enough.

In December 1914 the General Union of Textile Workers annual report stated that, 'The accident list in textile mills is terrible. Since overtime and night work it has been worse, and it is proof positive that speed and rush have some effect on the numbers of accidents in mills.'⁶⁹ It was even alleged that the strain was causing, or at least playing a part in illness and even death. At an inquest into the death of a female percher, the doctor reporting the post-mortem results stated that he believed overwork had contributed to the brain haemorrhage that the woman had suffered. He thought the deceased had been working harder than usual of late and the pieces she had been handling were heavier.⁷⁰ There were particular concerns about the effect of the mills on the imported girls. Discussing the issue at a tribunal, the Mayor of Huddersfield indicated that there were difficulties anticipated in connection with girls unused to the nature of mill work. 'These women had never seen a mill before, and would probably be frightened at first. They would not become accustomed to the noise for a month.'⁷¹ Indeed in a number of cases of imported girls leaving their work without permission, ill-health was cited as a reason. One girl from Wakefield said she left her job because it was too heavy for her, and because her board was too high. The mother of another girl stated that her daughter was unfit for the work, which had considerably weakened her.⁷²

In 1916, after two years of almost incessant work the situation was no better. In his annual report, Allen Gee, Secretary of the General Union of Textile Workers, drew attention to the number of accidents being reported.

Never has there been so many accidents in a year during the whole course of the Society's existence, and members are again urged to notify any accident, however slight. The amount of overtime which has been put in is bound, sooner or later, to tell on the physique of our members to the detriment of each individual workman. This overtime must necessarily tell with greater force upon women and young persons than upon men, and we regret to find that young children 14 and 15 years of age, are being permitted at the present moment,

⁶⁷ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 29 October 1914.

⁶⁸ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 12 November 1914.

⁶⁹ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 31 December 1914.

⁷⁰ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 11 March 1915.

⁷¹ *Huddersfield Worker*, 6 May 1916.

⁷² *Yorkshire Factory Times* 7 September 1916.

with the consent of the Home Office, to work until 7 or 8 o'clock at night.⁷³

The Factory Inspectors were also concerned about the effects of overwork. Miss Sadler, one of the local lady inspectors was moved to comment that, 'constant complaints were received...of excessive fatigue and cases of actual breakdown during the general overtime of 1916. The laws of "survival of the fittest" applies strongly in the woollen and worsted industries.'⁷⁴ The *Yorkshire Factory Times* was in no doubt about who to blame for the excessive hours being demanded of the workers.

Those manufacturers of the West Riding who are so anxious to work their machinery and workpeople at such a feverish rate and especially those who are at present making an effort to secure conditions whereby they can employ female labour overtime and at night time, would do well to read carefully the report of the committee which has been examining the health of munitions workers. Their findings are so palpably clear. Long hours they maintain is false economy, for 'speeding up' beyond reasonable limits leads only to bad workmanship. Well, of course, we have argued on these lines for years, but some employers think that by driving their workpeople they can make larger profits. If they can get a market for their goods, the health of the employee doesn't count for much.⁷⁵

As the war progressed and more men left for the forces, alternative sources of labour were increasingly used. As shown earlier some women and girls were imported from areas of low female participation or where normal female work had been disrupted. Other sources of labour were also called upon. A report by the General Union of Textile Workers in September 1915 stated that, 'consequent upon the drain of men from the mills suggestions were being made that the ages for half-time and for full-time should be reduced.'⁷⁶ Such an idea was particularly common in the cotton trade but was also prevalent in the worsted industry, especially in Bradford. Ben Turner, continuing his report stated; 'It was a wicked suggestion. There was no need for such a proposal, and he was sure the woollen and worsted textile unions would fight it strenuously.'⁷⁷ The cotton trade, suffering as it was from the additional pressure created by being more reliant on overseas trade for both its raw material and finished articles, and therefore needing cheaper workers, continued to press for children to be allowed to work at an earlier age. The woollen industry, not as dependant on the vagaries of international trade and much more in demand for military supplies continued to resist such calls. In a resolution passed following reports of cotton workers agreeing to accept younger workers the General Union of Textile Workers stated that, 'this union protests most strongly against the suggestions and proposals being made for lowering the age of leaving school, and for the relaxation of the arrangement for school attendance so as to enable boys and girls to commence work at an earlier age, and considers such suggestions retrogressive and dangerous to the physical and moral well-being of the future citizens of the empire.' The resolution further recorded the belief that in the

⁷³ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 10 February 1916.

⁷⁴ Draft Memorandum into the Hours of Employment of Women and Young Persons in Factories During the War, November 1917, Lab 5/4 National Archives.

⁷⁵ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 30 March 1916.

⁷⁶ *Huddersfield Worker*, 4 September 1915.

⁷⁷ *Huddersfield Worker*, 4 September 1915.

Yorkshire textile trade, 'no return to the old barbarous system of last century ought to be encouraged or allowed.'⁷⁸ Although the woollen industry managed to avoid employing underage workers, nevertheless, the ages of people entering jobs continued to fall. The General Union of Textile Workers half-yearly report in 1917 expressed the dismay this created.

The displacement of men of military age by juveniles in occupations hitherto looked upon as the preserves of men and women, is growing at an alarming rate. What will be the result of it all when the war ends and the lads return to take up their old positions, we can only guess.⁷⁹

There were also concerns that the lack of experienced operatives meant that children were being taken on to do jobs that would normally be done by much older workers. The Advisory Committee for Juvenile Employment reported that, 'the chief change in the Girls Department is that girls are employed as weavers at an earlier age than was done in previous years.'⁸⁰ The Women's Guild of the General Union of Textile Workers were especially concerned by this development claiming, 'the introduction of children into the weaving department is a growing evil and a menace to the trade' and issued a number of resolutions seeking an age limit for learning weaving. Eventually they resolved to refuse to teach weavers under 18 years of age in order to safeguard the jobs of the existing workers and those who would be returning from the army at the end of the war.⁸¹

It was not only young people working that caused consternation. One of the first sources of labour to be utilised by the textile trade in any period of high demand was that of married women. Unlike many industries of the time, there had long been a tradition within textiles of employing married women.⁸² This did not mean that everyone was happy with the situation. Many agreed with the writer in the *Yorkshire Factory Times* who opined that, 'married women's labour in mills is not necessary except in times of emergency.' He advocated that women should 'stay at home, mind the house, cook the meals, make the place tidy and look after the children.'⁸³ As the war dragged on it became more apparent that this was an emergency situation. Women were called back to the mills as the men left for the Forces. At a meeting of the Huddersfield Trades and Labour Council it was alleged that girls applying for work had been rejected as married women were being re-employed. It was further stated that children as young as 14 are working from 6 o'clock in the morning until 8 o'clock at night and in some cases on Saturday afternoons as well. Such cases, it was felt would 'inevitably lead to a breakdown in the general health of the community.'⁸⁴ Ben Turner, President of the General Union of Textile Workers was especially concerned about the dangers of expectant mothers working.

Mill-life and domestic duties are not to be compared, and an expectant mother should stop away from the mill for at least 6 weeks before the birth of her child.

⁷⁸ *Huddersfield Worker*, 25 September 1915.

⁷⁹ *Huddersfield Worker*, 13 January 1917.

⁸⁰ Report of the Advisory Committee for Juvenile Employment 1917.

⁸¹ General Union of Textile Workers Women's Guild Minutes, 5 March 1917, S/NUDBTW/61, West Yorkshire Archive Service.

⁸² B.L. Hutchins, 'Yorkshire' in C. Black (ed.) *Married Women's Work* (London: Virago, 1983), p.128.

⁸³ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 5 August 1915.

⁸⁴ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 5 November 1914.

Mill work may be less laborious than some occupations followed by women...but mill labour is very exhausting by reason of its continuity, together with the length of hours and the prolonged standing which it entails. A woman engaged at home can rest when weariness assails her.⁸⁵

The situation regarding women workers was discussed at a meeting of the Federated Trades Council of Yorkshire, held in Huddersfield Town Hall.

There has been a big call for women to enter munitions and other factories. Many who had ceased working have returned to the mill and workshop, and it is to be hoped it will not interfere with the upbringing of children at home. The point for working women, real working women to mind is that they get equal pay for filling men's places, and secondly, that they leave off work and resume house duties when the war heroes return home.⁸⁶

There were some rather lukewarm attempts to assist married women with young children to return to the mills. In October 1916 the first day nursery was opened in Huddersfield. It was heralded with great fanfare that there would be accommodation for 25 children.⁸⁷ By the time of the first annual report the following year this had risen to 49 places.⁸⁸ It is apparent that this was hardly sufficient for the number actually requiring the service and thus the stigma against married women working persisted despite the obvious need.

There were also many concerns about the type of work women were being required to do and the affect this may have on their health. In January 1916 a conference was held concerning the substitution of female labour for male during the war in the dyeing and bleaching trades. These industries had long been the almost exclusive domain of men owing to the strenuous physical demands and extreme conditions. Throughout the war it was also the area that was most vociferously defended as needing male personnel, especially by Joseph Hayhurst, the President of the Dyers and Bleachers Union. Nevertheless, as conscription began to bite, measures were taken to assess whether more women could be admitted to do the work. In the end agreement was reached that in the event of an absolute labour shortage, females may be employed to perform work previously done by men providing this did not entail undue physical strain or danger to health from either heat, fumes or dust. It was further stipulated that if women were employed near stoves, the temperature was not to exceed 80 degrees and no room in which females were to be employed should be below 50 degrees. Also, no woman was permitted to drag or push wagons from place to place upon which there was a weight exceeding 120lbs.⁸⁹

A further bone of contention was the introduction of Leaving Certificates and the refusal of employers to allow workers to change their situation. Although the textile industry had always been subject to a degree of famine and feast, the presence of alternate work during the war affected the position of female workers. Whereas before they had been restricted to textiles as one of the few

⁸⁵ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 5 August 1915.

⁸⁶ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 3 February 1916.

⁸⁷ *Huddersfield Worker*, 7 October 1916.

⁸⁸ *Huddersfield Worker*, 9 June 1917.

⁸⁹ Report on conference between employers, operatives and inspectors concerning substitution of female labour for male labour during the war in bleaching, dyeing and printing works. LAB15/94 National Archives.

avenues open to them, they now had other choices in munitions or chemicals or engineering. This led to even greater strain on the already reduced workforces available for the mills and ultimately required government intervention with the introduction of leaving certificates and various other procedures for the restriction of labour.⁹⁰ A meeting of the General Union of Textile Workers in March 1916 led to an agreement with employers that employees could leave their work 'in a proper manner, either by a week's notice or by finishing their contracts, and that the employers have no right to inquire to what other situation they are going.'⁹¹

Of course, not all women saw the existence of well-paid jobs in munitions as an altogether attractive proposition. Some regarded such work as dangerous or demeaning. Others were content to do their bit producing the cloth necessary for the Army uniforms that were constantly in demand. In many of the Colne Valley interviews this is apparent. One woman when asked if she had considered going onto munitions explained, 'ours would be as necessary as theirs because the soldiers wanted clothing. It was just as essential.'⁹² Another was adamant, 'we never asked to go to munitions because we were on khaki - weaving khaki for the army.'⁹³ This is not to say that all mill workers were happy with the situation. The constant focus on the production of khaki, a difficult and monotonous item to manufacture caused many girls hours of boredom at a time when distraction would have been beneficial. Manufacturing khaki left time to contemplate the missing family members and loved ones and the empty and idle machinery reinforced the fact that many workers were no longer in the mills. For one woman the memory of wartime meant, 'there were some looms stopped and it were all older people and women.'⁹⁴ The material was also quite rough in comparison with civilian cloth. 'It was poor stuff and it were very hard on your hands. Very rough were khaki.'⁹⁵

It is clear, therefore, that in a period of total war, the demands of the nation will outweigh the concerns for the individual. Most of the 'protective' legislation that had been introduced into the textile trade in the years before the conflict, was swept away when the need to maintain production was judged to override such concerns. Young girls, who before the war, had been denied to opportunity to work overtime on the grounds that such work was too tiring or strenuous for the future mothers of the country, were now permitted to work up to 14 hours a day on the grounds that the army needed clothing. Women who were considered too susceptible to the supposed immorality of night work to be allowed such lucrative work, were now encouraged to leave their homes and children overnight to keep the mills running 24 hours a day. Holidays and rest periods could be disregarded in the face of the incessant demands of an insatiable war machine and children, old men and married women were all grist to the mill. In reality many of the rules had been arbitrarily imposed to placate well-meaning middle-class ladies or social reformers who had little understanding of the workplaces or the lives such rules sought to control.⁹⁶ In many cases there were suspicions that what was being protected by the various Factory Acts and other restrictive legislation were men's jobs and the male right to take

⁹⁰ Gail Braybon, *Women Workers In The First World War* (London: Croom Helm, 1981), p.46.

⁹¹ GUTW Minutes, 1 March 1916.

⁹² Colne Valley Interview 4, deposited at Kirklees Sound Archive.

⁹³ Colne Valley Interview 9, deposited at Kirklees Sound Archive.

⁹⁴ Colne Valley Interview 19, deposited at Kirklees Sound Archive.

⁹⁵ Colne Valley Interview 18, deposited at Kirklees Sound Archive.

⁹⁶ Angela John, *Unequal Opportunities* (Blackwell: Oxford, 1986), p.16.

the most well-paying and well-regarded work. If the choice of an employer was between a man who could work any and all hours or a woman who was restricted to a certain number of daytime hours, the man with his increased flexibility was preferred and remunerated. In a similar fashion women were seen as more essential in the domestic realm. Their great attribute was the bearing of children and the care of the home. In many respects this too was for the benefit of the male worker. His home and family were a reflection of his achievements and having a wife to provide such comforts reflected on his abilities. The protective legislation codified this apparent division into the separate sphere of male work and female domesticity. With the outbreak of war such divisions were shown for the artificial constructions they were. Despite all the evidence to the contrary the return of the men from war and back into the mills meant that for the most part women were removed to the primarily domestic arena society deemed suitable. The restrictions on working hours were reinstated, married women were once again viewed with suspicion of 'stealing' male jobs and young girls were seen as marking time in the mill until marriage and childbirth caused their withdrawal. Although the war showed the misguided nature of many of the rules imposed on women workers, social convention and custom meant little actually changed in the long-term.

Chapter Seven – Charity and Welfare

It was not merely in the workplace that the demands of total war affected the women of Britain. With every aspect of life focused on the attainment of a single goal, women were called upon to make extra efforts to ensure that domestic problems did not distract attention from the execution of military goals. Dr. Marion Phillips, General Secretary of the Women's Labour League wrote that,

A war such as the one in which Europe is now engaged is really a war waged on two fronts. There are the actual military operations on the battlefield, with which as women we are concerned only in the sense that upon their success depends the security of our homes, the swift ending of the war and the safe return of our dear ones to us. There is also the fight that we must wage on behalf of the non-combatants at home. Their welfare is just as important as that of the soldiers and sailors. While the young, strong men face death in the trenches, we women especially have to make ourselves the guardians of the masses of our own people who have an enemy of a different kind; we have to fight on their behalf against the destitution, disease, and weakness which war brings in its train. Non-combatant women are the real guardians of the health of the nation.¹

The war brought the actions of women into the spotlight as never before since they were required to coordinate and manage the structures necessary to maintain the civilian population and keep the workers concentrated on the production of materials to supply the army.

A further area for consideration, therefore, and again one largely overlooked, is the involvement of women in the organisation and administration of the additional requirements engendered by the war. Although small numbers of women had long been involved in local government, often informally or on a voluntary basis, the increased administration necessary under wartime conditions meant additional opportunities for public service. From implementation of government separation allowances, to War Relief Committees and charitable organisations, women were increasingly involved in public works. Much of the work that has been done in this field has focused on large-scale national concerns, either the established campaigning groups whether suffrage or social welfare, or the newly created government workrooms. Less attention has been paid to the local bodies that undertook most of the responsibility for organising the everyday, hands-on response to the problems and challenges set by the unprecedented movement of people, the financial turmoil and personal upheaval of war and the difficulties of housing, feeding, entertaining and looking after a population engaged in a large scale, mechanised and all-consuming conflict. An examination of the role of women in the organisational and logistical fields at a local level will shed light onto a different aspect of female work. The historiographical framework here falls into two categories. Firstly, there is the view of female participation in public life as the voluntary, charitable extension of the domestic realm, a suitable

¹ *Huddersfield Worker*, 22 October 1914.

reflection of their supposed nurturing nature as described by Jose Harris and Jane Lewis.² Secondly there is a growing awareness of women as political entities with the rights and responsibilities of citizens detailed in works like Patricia Hollis's *Ladies Elect*.³ Thus a division exists between ideas of liberation and exploitation. This chapter will examine the work women undertook in organising the recruitment, transport, accommodation and supervision of workers and ask whether this reflected their increased involvement in the realms of professional administration or was merely a temporary wartime necessity for which they were confined to limited, socially acceptable roles. Did women continue to be confined to their 'natural' areas of perceived expertise or did the growing involvement of women change the political landscape with their continuing focus on the more female issues that had started to be addressed because of the exposure of the war namely housing, family allowances, child welfare and industrial health? It will argue that the war did little to challenge the existing structures and hierarchies within society. The same organisations continued to be used to administer charity and the same personnel continued to staff the various committees and groups. In the end the same small band of middle-class ladies were responsible for supervising and monitoring the behaviour and morals of a much larger groups of working-class girls.

Distress

With the outbreak of war women were called into action as never before. The First World War presented unique challenges to the local organisation of people, both workers and soldiers. Civilians became players in an economy gearing up for total war, medical services were stretched, lines of communication and supply were disrupted, personnel were moved around the country and industries either grew or withered depending on their importance to the war machine. Women, both workers in industry and those who looked after them, were essential to the execution of the conflict.

The most immediate effect of the outbreak of war on the local area was a downturn in trade. The uncertainty caused by the sudden loss of international markets and the disruption of transport and distribution networks, led to cancellation of orders and reduced work. Economy drives by well-to-do shoppers also affected the amount of trade undertaken by the mills of the West Riding. Many local companies responded to this pressure by introducing short time or even by laying off workers. The resulting rise in unemployment led to the formation of a number of relief schemes. In Huddersfield the Prince of Wales National Relief Fund Committee was established in August 1914 and was soon being urged by the Town council to consider what work could be set in place to combat the expected unemployment.⁴ Circulars to this effect were sent to all corporation departments.⁵

Amongst the textile operatives hardest hit by the down-turn in trade were the female workers in

² Jose Harris, 'Political Thought and the Welfare State 1870-1940: An Intellectual Framework for British Social', *Past & Present*, No. 135 (May, 1992) and Jane Lewis. 'The Boundary Between Voluntary and Statutory Social Service in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries' in *Historical Journal*, 39, 1 (1996).

³ Patricia Hollis, *Ladies Elect: Women in English Local Government 1865-1914* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987).

⁴ *Huddersfield Worker* 15 August 1914.

⁵ Gail Ledgard, *To what extent did the First World War impact the domestic lives of working class women in Huddersfield* (Unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Huddersfield, 2013) p.30.

the finishing departments; these were the menders, knotters and burlers, whose work constituted some of the most highly skilled and well-regarded jobs available for women in the textile industry. The war caused a significant impact on the luxury and high-class end of the market where the finest and most lucrative mending work was done. However, mending, as a female dominated trade was, by comparison with the male heavy sections of the industry, relatively low paid. Female menders, although the aristocracy of the mill, as women, were, compared to their male colleagues, still comparatively financially under-valued. It was rare to find a fully trained and experienced mender earning more than 20 shillings a week.⁶ Burlers and knotters as the less experienced mending room operatives earned commensurately less with typical wages in the region of 8 shillings rising to 13 shillings. Menders, unlike most other female mill workers were also, in some mills, required to serve an apprenticeship, working under a teacher for a period up to three years and being paid a learner rate starting at 5 shillings. This system, although tending to lower the wages of female worker in the finishing department, led to mending, with its cleaner, more genteel environment and appearance of skill and training being seen as the most desirable ambition for women textile workers. The air of refinement felt by girls who achieved this aim also held them back from full involvement in the organisation of mill workers. Although workers were free to join trade unions, the levels of participation by menders was the lowest in most of the areas covered by the textile unions. These factors meant that when the slow-down caused by the war hit, menders were the largest losers. Being low paid to start with, they suffered most from the restrictions in earning ability caused by short time, and the lack of involvement in union activity meant they had no cushion against the full force of the economic downturn. Unlike the men who were thrown into unemployment at the beginning of the war, the female workers had no alternative options in the form of enlistment. The local Relief Funds were also reluctant to become involved in cases of distress in the textile trade, arguing that such problems were not a direct cause of the war.⁷

By November the Huddersfield Trade and Labour Council were becoming increasingly concerned about the plight of this group. In a letter to the War Emergency Committee, the Secretary explained that,

We have over 1000 women and girls in the mending department of our woollen textile mills...who are only working about 15 or 20 hours weekly. Their wages being from 1/6 to 5 or 6 shillings. Their ages are from 15 to 45 and hundreds are self-supporting, that is paying for their board and lodgings...The local fund is of no or very little use to them, we have relieved the women with children according to our scale, but the single young women are in some distress...The question of under-employment has been debated several times yet no result. Still I think that if I could give some scheme sound, and a few concrete cases where under-employment is being dealt with, we might get the support and financial help of the local War Relief Committee.⁸

The reply indicated all queries were being directed to the Central Committee for Women's

⁶ Huddersfield Textile Trades General Survey 1914, GHW/BB19, University of Huddersfield Archives.

⁷ Huddersfield Trade and Labour Council Minutes, 23 September 1914, S/HTC/1/.4, West Yorkshire Archive Service.

⁸ Letter from Fred Wood, Secretary of Huddersfield Trade and Labour Council to War Emergency Committee, 3 November 1914, WNC 32/3/ 46-47, People's History Museum.

Employment under the care of Miss Macarthur and goes on to say, 'I am bound to say that I can see no reason why single young women in distress cannot be relieved by the local committee.'⁹

The War Relief Committee did have some suggestions. At a meeting in November Mr J. S. Armitage, one of the labour representatives asked what, 'provision could be made for teaching girls who were used to mending how to weave. Some girls who worked at big firms were only getting 1s 6d in a fortnight, and it was possible that an opportunity of learning to weave would be welcomed by them.'¹⁰ The response was lukewarm. It was pointed out that a number of local firms had more weavers than they had work for. The shortage of raw materials owing to shipping and transport problems meant that many weavers were also on short time. Some committee members were also sceptical about the attitude of the workers themselves. 'Menders thought themselves too skilled to go into the loom-gate to weave. That feeling prevailed amongst the majority of menders. A fair number of them hid their poverty in order to keep out of the loom-gate and the dirty work.'¹¹

In the event, just as the mill owners and business leaders had predicted, once the government orders for army uniforms and equipment started flooding in, the problem in Huddersfield soon shifted from not enough work to not enough workers. The Distress Committee dealt with 73 applications for relief at the end of August 1914. Of these 24 were referred to the Labour Exchange, 11 were recommended to enlist, 14 were found to have no case and 24 received the relief requested. By the second week in October the number of applications had slowed to a trickle. Of the 15 submissions 6 were sent to the Labour Exchange, 6 had already found work and 3 had no case. None received direct relief from the Committee.¹² By the middle of October, although a list of works in hand had been received from the corporation for the benefit of those applying for work, the low numbers meant it was left to the chairman whether to keep the office open. In the event no further meetings of the Distress Committee were minuted save for a yearly entry in November stating the committee was still in existence. It was not until after the war when demobilisation and economic slowdown again brought depression to the area that the Distress Committee again came into its own.¹³

In addition to the Distress Committees, a number of other issues soon tested the organisational and fundraising abilities of both the society ladies and concerned citizens of Huddersfield. In August 1914 a meeting was held to organise the efforts of women anxious to offer assistance to the sick and wounded soldiers that were beginning to appear in the town. The secretary of the committee was Mrs Demetriadi, wife of a local doctor.¹⁴ This Women's Committee for Soldiers and Sailors instituted over sixty working parties, some with over 300 helpers although some of their activities had to be curtailed as the War Office was concerned about overlapping efforts and put a limit on the amount of goods that could be provided directly to the troops. There was a reaction to the idea of middle-class ladies sewing and knitting for the forces as this aggravated the amount of employment available for women who worked in the textiles and clothing sectors, particularly those involved in the hosiery trade.

⁹ War Emergency Committee, WNC 32/3/ 46-47, People's History Museum.

¹⁰ Huddersfield Trade and Labour Council Minutes, 27 October 1914, S/HTC/1/.4, West Yorkshire Archive Service.

¹¹ *Huddersfield Worker*, 28 November 1914.

¹² Huddersfield Distress Committee Minutes, 9 October 1914, KMT/18/12/2/14/1, West Yorkshire Archive Service.

¹³ Distress Committee Minutes, 3 October 1914. See also Ledgard, *To what extent did the First World War impact the domestic lives of working class women in Huddersfield*, p.30.

¹⁴ *Huddersfield Worker*, 15 August 1914.

Complaints began to appear in local newspapers that society ladies were voluntarily making shirts and garments, 'that are often unwearable due to the inexperience of the maker, whilst girls normally employed at this work are unemployed.'¹⁵ The Women's Co-operative Guild, in particular were aware of the potential problems and issued a resolution against voluntary labour in respect of garments for sick and wounded soldiers as this was prejudicial to the interests of the community and they instead urged that such work be organised for the benefit of women workers thrown out of employment.¹⁶ Mary Blamires, as head of the Women's Committee for the Relief of Sick and Wounded Soldiers and Sailors, was compelled to write in defence of her organisation.

I have had various communications from different sources complaining that by our voluntary work we are taking the living of many working women in Huddersfield. I would like to point out that this is far from the case, as many firms have done the cutting out for us and paid their hands, who otherwise would have had no work, or some have made the garments up and paid the girls so as to keep them employed...In fact, we have paid for nearly all the work done, and that not paid for is done by the wives of working men who can give nothing but their time.¹⁷

As well as soldiers the committee also provided equipment to hospitals, both local and overseas. A report in November stated they had received appeals from Malta, Cairo, Lemnos and Serbia to supply sheets and bedding. The Huddersfield Military Hospital also made substantial demands. The same report showed that in two months over 24,000 articles had been supplied including uniforms for nurses.¹⁸ The Committee also undertook responsibility for ascertaining the number of Huddersfield men held as Prisoners of War and sent each man a parcel of food every week. The women helpers on the committee also visited the homes and families of such prisoners.¹⁹ Such frenetic activity and persistent demands were not without repercussions. There was soon a large degree of irritation with the constant appeals for money and the women who formed the large part of the fundraising effort became evermore creative in their methods as the war went on. There were charity appeals for Belgian refugees, soldiers' cigarettes, war horses, ambulances, Y.M.C.A huts and myriad other causes that would capture the public imagination for a greater or lesser period of time. There were, as a result, also repeated letters to the newspapers urging the public not to forget the charities that existed before the war and continued to need funds during it. For example, the Secretary of the Cinderella Fund lamented that the subscriptions received were lower than previous years due to so many people giving money to the War Relief Fund and the Belgians.²⁰

Regarding unemployment the committee faced something of a dilemma. Whilst they were proficient at fundraising and disbursing such monies raised, they had little scope for the practical work demanded by the unions and the Trade Council. By the end of November schemes were being

¹⁵ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 3 September 1914.

¹⁶ Huddersfield Women's Cooperative Guild Minutes, 26 August 1914, KC63/10, West Yorkshire Archive Service. See also Ledgard, *To what extent did the First World War impact the domestic lives of working class women in Huddersfield*, p.30.

¹⁷ *Huddersfield Worker*, 9 December 1914.

¹⁸ *Huddersfield Worker*, 28 November 1914.

¹⁹ *Huddersfield Daily Examiner*, 4 November 1915.

²⁰ *Huddersfield Worker*, 5 December 1914.

offered to provide free classes in cookery, hygiene and millinery for girls from 13 to 16 years old at the Technical College. For older women workshops were mooted to mend old clothes and make up maternity outfits, to be paid out of the War Fund at 3d per hour.²¹ There were objections to this as such low-paid work would inevitably undermine the women who were usually employed in this type of work and thereby create a knock-on problem in those industries, many of which were already suffering war related pressure. This then was the problem. To supply work would mean taking jobs from people who in turn would need support from the very committee undercutting them. To provide merely monetary relief, however, attracted accusations that the Committee was merely a glorified extension of the Charity Organisation Society or the Guild of Help, and that such payments were imbued with the taint of 'dole' that the charitable sector invariably aroused. There were additional problems in raising revenue for the payment of handouts. Whilst people, particularly the working class, were generous in providing for causes they found to be worthwhile, Belgian refugees or wounded soldiers for example, they were more reluctant to pay for funds that were perceived as perpetuating the worst traits of the Victorian poor relief models.²²

Separation Allowance and Supervision

In part, the lack of demand for financial assistance from the local authority, especially from women, was due to the increase in employment opportunities created by the war. It was also, to an extent, down to the government's decision to pay Separation Allowances to the wives and dependants of soldiers and sailors serving in the armed forces. Even though this allowance was not a large amount of money, for many families it represented a sea change in the way family income was generated. For the poorest workers who might have seasonal or intermittent labouring jobs, the government Separation Allowance paid directly to the woman was their first experience of regular and reliable income. It was also for many a novelty to receive an intact payment not the leftovers after the wage-earner had taken out his requirements.²³

One of the main complaints about Separation Allowances throughout the war was that they never kept pace with the constant rise in the cost of living. As food and coal prices increased, the Army authorities continued to dole out the few shillings a week with little thought for what the families actually needed. Even the Huddersfield Town Council recognised that such amounts were inadequate. In a strongly worded resolution they described how,

This council is of the opinion that the existing weekly payments made by the Government to the wives and dependants of soldiers are inadequate and do not afford a proper standard of living. The council considers a grave injustice is being inflicted upon the dependants of our men who are fighting at the front. Whilst various classes of citizen have had their incomes increased because of the high cost of living, the wives and dependants of those who are suffering, risking and

²¹ *Huddersfield Worker*, 5 December 1914.

²² *Huddersfield Worker*, 30 January 1915.

²³ Ledgard, *To what extent did the First World War impact the domestic lives of working class women in Huddersfield*, p.31.

losing life and limb have received no increase. This in addition to the mental suffering caused by the constant suspense due to the fact of their having husbands and sons fighting at the forefront of the Nation's battle the present payments condemn them to a position of poverty and injustice. In the opinion of the council these people should be the most honoured and not the worst treated and therefore calls upon the Government to consider substantially increasing Separation Allowances.²⁴

Separation Allowances came with their own problems and issues and if the caseload of the civilian section of the Distress Committee was relatively light, the military side faced a much heavier load. The allowances paid by the government came with moral strings attached and the women who received them were subjected to the authorities' paternalistic and at times overbearing attitudes. Women could be examined and interrogated by the police if it was suspected they were behaving 'immorally' and their allotted money could be stopped. Even if the allowance was not stopped the woman could be severely admonished. One woman fined for being drunk and disorderly found this out when the mayor, presiding over the case, commented: 'When your husband is fighting for the benefit of the country it is disgraceful for you to be spending your allowance on liquor this way.'²⁵ There were complaints about the intrusion of the authorities into the private lives of soldiers' families. An editorial article in the *Yorkshire Factory Times* criticised a Home Office circular giving the police the power to judge the actions of women with a view to restricting or withdrawing their Separation Allowance if misbehaviour was detected. The memo stated that, 'the allowances granted to the wives and dependants of soldiers are now on a more liberal scale than hitherto, and the result has been to put into the hands of many of them larger sums than they have ever previously enjoyed.' It was reported that the Workers' National Emergency Committee was working to get the circular withdrawn as they felt there was no necessity for such draconian measures and even if there were, 'neither the police nor ladies' committees are the bodies who ought to have the work to do.'²⁶

Many of the female members of the Relief Committee agreed with this point of view and raised protests about the perceived 'espionage' on women. The Women's Co-operative Guild sent a letter to the Home Office and the War Office complaining about the withholding of Separation Allowances to the 'unworthy' and the intrusion of police investigations into the private household circumstances of soldiers' wives. The letter commented, 'We consider such differentiation between the sexes and classes as is entailed in such an order utterly out of place in a democratic country, and that to place such power in the hands of the police is an intolerable interference with the freedom of individual action.' It went on to demand that the order be rescinded, and any measures taken to police behaviour should be of a general nature rather than targeting and victimising individuals. The letter concluded, 'a woman's right to her separation allowance should be no more connected with what the police may consider 'worthy conduct' than a man's right to his wages.'²⁷

It was not only the behaviour of the women at home that could cause disruption to the payment of

²⁴ Huddersfield Corporation General Purpose Committee Minutes 10 October 1916, KMT18/12/2/37, West Yorkshire Archive Service.

²⁵ *Huddersfield Daily Examiner*, 10 February 1916. See also Ledgard, *To what extent did the First World War impact the domestic lives of working class women in Huddersfield*, p.31.

²⁶ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 17 December 1914.

²⁷ Huddersfield Women's Co-operative Guild Minutes, 14 November 1914.

separation allowances. The conduct of the men on whose behalf it was issued was also relevant. As the *Daily Examiner* put it, 'sometimes a slight offence gets a young man into the detention room for a few days and then his wife suffers in her allotments.'²⁸ This was not unusual. As Pat Thane describes it,

A degree of policing accompanied all state benefits to men and women though. It had been more strict when the benefits were provided by charities, and the benefits at least removed such families from poor relief (and still stricter supervision) often giving them a more regular and even higher income than when the husband was at home.²⁹

There were also concerns that in many cases of military distress the work was handed over to the Soldiers' and Sailors' Families Association to investigate and administer. This led to further accusations of unjust treatment. In the first instance the committee largely followed the framework of the Guild of Help with a largely male executive governing body but a volunteer force of female workers and visitors. This seeming interference could also lead to resentment on the part of the women being inspected as they were judged in order to receive payments they felt entitled to. Another concern in organising relief this way was that many payments issued through the S.S.F.A. took the form of loans rather than donations with the proviso that they be paid back when the army issued the correct allotment. Again, this caused a certain amount of resentment as no such condition was laid on civil distress and indeed many cases were either wrongly classified or misapplied. Thus some women whose husbands were prisoners of war or were in hospital were paid as civil cases and some were deemed military cases. Additionally, some cases were chased up for repayment whilst in others matters were let slide.³⁰

In some respects, Separation Allowances, whilst a huge step forward in the governments' intervention in social welfare, could display a marked ignorance of the issues and make-up of the average working-class family. In many communities, particularly the industrial, urban ones of the North, extended families either lived together or in close proximity within the same or neighbouring streets. Parents could be dependant on their grown offspring to provide for their old age and young families would often live with relatives for long periods. Children in overcrowded and inadequate houses could be farmed out to nearby relations. The army was, however, not particularly concerned with the minutiae of individual soldier's family relationships and if the living conditions of the home were in any way unusual then payments could be delayed or even rejected. The large number of cases where soldiers were not married to the mothers of their children ultimately led to a revision of the rules as it became apparent that refusing claims on these grounds was causing hardship on a large scale. In the local area many problems were reported from parents who were reliant on their sons' wages, not being paid, as this was not seen as a priority by the army recruiters. As Sylvia Pankhurst commented, 'the First World War separation allowance controversies revealed many

²⁸ *Huddersfield Daily Examiner*, 4 February 1915.

²⁹ Pat Thane, *Foundations of the Welfare State* (London: Longman, 1996), p.121. See also Ledgard, *To what extent did the First World War impact the domestic lives of working class women in Huddersfield*, p.31.

³⁰ *Huddersfield Worker*, 15 May 1915.

thousands of young servicemen supporting their parents in whole or part.³¹

There were many cases reported where mothers were only receiving payment of allotment and not government Separation Allowance on account of their sons being misinformed and not completing the appropriate forms.³² In one case reported in the Huddersfield press the War Office was asked to look into the case of Rifleman Taylor who was apparently induced to sign a declaration that he made no claim on behalf of his parents for a Separation Allowance when he should have been.³³ There were even complaints that the treatment of dependants was hindering the recruitment of soldiers. 'A young man hesitates to enlist as an ordinary private unless he can feel some security, first about his mother and father, or if he is married about his wife and children, and other dependants.'³⁴ It was also felt that much of the paperwork necessary to allot payments to wives or mother was over complicated and many families complained that their loved one had been misled or misinformed by the recruiting officers. It was stated that the best way for the government to secure volunteers for active service would be to make adequate provision for their dependants.³⁵ This again led to many families suffering a degree of distress that the committee was reluctant or unable to relieve. At a meeting at the Market Cross in September 1914 this issue was examined in detail. The speaker explained that there could only be two adults in a family. Challenged as to whether a man and wife and the wife's mother constituted three in a family, he declared that in such a case the mother would be considered a 'child' and only entitled to an allowance of 2s as opposed to the 7s 6d she would receive as an adult.³⁶ Such anomalies in the payment of the government allotments meant that the military distress committee continued to face claims long after the civilian side wound down to almost nothing.

It was not only in matters relating to Separation Allowances that moral issues concerned the authorities. In one of the more iniquitous moves of the war, the government introduced Regulation 40D of the Defence of the Realm Act. Under this legislation any woman suspected of having Venereal Disease was prohibited from having sexual relations with a soldier or member of the armed forces. It also gave powers to the police to examine any woman so suspected. What made this ruling so contentious was that the word of the man was taken as proof positive that relations had taken place or that the woman was infected. Men were not prohibited from infecting women or even regulated in any way. Women, and especially young girls, were deemed all too susceptible to having their heads turned by the uniformed soldiers and steps were taken to prevent the inevitable consequences of such behaviour. Florence Lockwood noted in her diary some of the concerns expressed. As a member of the organising committee she attended a mass meeting in Huddersfield Town Hall about the necessity for combating venereal disease. A number of local meetings were also arranged to be addressed by doctors. The meetings were to be separate affairs for men and women. In Linthwaite, Mrs Lockwood noted,

Dr Douglas came at the breakfast hour to speak to the younger girls on V.D. but

³¹ Sylvia Pankhurst, *The Home Front* quoted in J. Lewis (ed.) *Labour and Love* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985).

³² Ledgard, *To what extent did the First World War impact the domestic lives of working class women in Huddersfield*, p.32.

³³ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 9 March 1916.

³⁴ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 7 October 1915.

³⁵ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 11 November 1915.

³⁶ *Huddersfield Worker*, 12 September 1914.

she weakened on her job. Said she disapproved of speaking on the subject to very young girls...She only said very little. Only twenty sweet looking young girls present then she had to catch the train to London.³⁷

Many of the women's groups of the area also objected to the heavy-handed nature of the legislation. The local branch of the Women's Social and Political Union issued a circular, 'protesting against compulsory medical examinations as a futile and abominable practice, and demanding the immediate withdrawal of the regulation.'³⁸

Welfare

As can be seen from the moral judgements levied with the payment of Separation Allowances and the increased concern about juvenile crime, many of those in power, both at a national and local level were worried about the effect the war was having on the standards of behaviour of society. Dorothea Proud, in her handbook on welfare work wrote:

By the agency of the State, men, women and boys and girls are being exported from their homes and imported into munitions area. On the state, therefore, the responsibility lies, not only for caring for workers inside the factory, but also for providing outside the factory the safeguards essential for their health and morals, the maintenance of which is essential to the nation.³⁹

A large number of committees were duly established to provide the moral and spiritual guidance deemed necessary. There is a distinct class aspect to the supervision and welfare provision of working women during the war. The committees were often composed of the wives of the civic worthies or prominent women in their own right. For example, the chair of the Women's War Employment Welfare Committee in Huddersfield was Mrs Blamires, the wife of the incumbent mayor. Other members included the daughter of a local doctor and female representatives from the Home Office, Miss Sadler and the Board of Trade, Miss Farmer. As Angela Woollacott puts it, 'Middle-class women could presume on the traditional assumption that class superiority meant authority.'⁴⁰

Although these ladies were initially the Lodging Sub-Committee they soon acquired additional responsibility for the welfare of the imported girls as well. It was this committee that was instrumental in getting the Y.W.C.A to establish the Girls' Social Rooms and so provide an alternative place of recreation for girls away from the picture houses and other such dubious attractions. They were also heavily involved in getting the Huddersfield Woollen Manufacturers and Spinners' Association to appoint a welfare officer. At the meeting of the Sub-Committee on 17 April 1916 a description was given of the welfare work that was being done by many large employers of labour and a resolution

³⁷ Florence Lockwood diary, 28 October 1918, KC909, West Yorkshire Archive Service.

³⁸ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, June 1918.

³⁹ Dorothea Proud, *Welfare Work* (London: G. Bell, 1916), p.119. See also Ledgard, p.32.

⁴⁰ Angela Woollacott (1994): 'Maternalism, professionalism and industrial welfare supervisors in World War I Britain', *Women's History Review*, 3:1, 29-56. See also Ledgard, *To what extent did the First World War impact the domestic lives of working class women in Huddersfield*, p.34.

was passed to secure the services of a welfare worker to, 'undertake the supervision of girls brought in from other districts.'⁴¹ The Manufacturers' Association agreed to the request, but the committee were somewhat disappointed by the rather meagre pay on offer for what would be a demanding job. Although the Secretary was instructed to send a letter expressing pleasure and gratitude at the action taken, it went on to, 'respectfully urge that in the opinion of this committee, the salary offered (£100p.a) will not attract the type of woman needed for this responsible and difficult work.'⁴²

Eventually, Miss King was appointed welfare worker with a responsibility to ensure that girls imported into the district were looked after. The work was not easy as she was responsible for a large area containing numerous different workplaces and conditions. By contrast many of the munitions factories had dedicated officers or teams of welfare workers covering individual works. The Karrier Kar engineering company, for instance, employed a welfare officer, Miss Wass, purely for their own workers. Miss King single-handedly had to cover the entire textile district of Huddersfield and both the Colne Valley and the Holme Valley. On one occasion Florence Lockwood records in her diary that Miss King had appendicitis and as there was no-one else to do her work she, Mrs Lockwood, had volunteered to cover it by visiting a house on Manchester Road where some recently imported girls were staying. Unfortunately, on arriving she found that they had only stayed two nights and then returned to Goole as they were unable to face either the work or the strange place.⁴³

Not everyone was convinced that the supervising committees were the best arbiters of behaviour. An editorial article in the *Yorkshire Factory Times* expressed some concern about the priorities of the committees:

...the moral welfare of the 'comers-in' is of as much importance as the spiritual welfare, because they have got to live here and unless attention is given to the material side, the spiritual side will be of no avail. It depends upon the class of people who take in hand the work of attending to their moral welfare as to whether they get good wages and good conditions of labour and are placed in good surroundings, or they drift into ways that are neither useful nor serviceable nor sensible. These committees ought to be formed of practical people and not of goody-goody people, who want to coddle them up with church and chapel and parsons, for if that is done then the whole business will be a fallacy and the Labour people are the people who must save such committees from becoming patronising establishments to those folk being brought into the trade.⁴⁴

The existing workforce were also not enamoured of the new arrangements. One woman interviewed years later remembered the welfare supervisor with a degree of resentment.

Now they had a woman in charge called Miss King...and she was supposed to come every morning, dressed up you know. Our lot as you might call it just ignored her, they didn't care anything about her. We'd been used to doing a good day's work for a day's pay and we didn't want anyone looking over our shoulder because we were on piece work. If we didn't work, we didn't get

⁴¹ Women's War Employment Committee 19 April 1916, Kirklees S/NUDBTW/34. West Yorkshire Archive Service.

⁴² WWEC 31 May 1916. See also Ledgard, *To what extent did the First World War impact the domestic lives of working class women in Huddersfield*, p.33.

⁴³ Florence Lockwood diary, 13 December 1916, KC909, West Yorkshire Archive Service.

⁴⁴ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 25 May 1916.

anything.⁴⁵

When asked if Miss King was supposed to be looking after local girls as well as the ones brought in the response was, 'No but she poked her nose in you know.'⁴⁶

The textile unions also expressed doubts about the necessity of having supervision and questioned who exactly was benefiting from such arrangements:

...the only objection the Trade Unions have to welfare work at all is when welfare work becomes patronising and petty-foggy. The unions welcome all welfare work of the real sort but when a welfare worker becomes a spy, and when a welfare worker acts as agent of the employer in the worst sense of the word, then unions will and should threaten reprisals. I know of no trade union that is not anxious to see real welfare work in all the mills and workshops of the kingdom. They are willing to co-operate with employers, but they are not willing to have welfare supervisors who are acting as police inspectors, police constables, police agents, and making favourites of some and encouraging tell-tales, as has been at several places in this county of Yorkshire.⁴⁷

As part of their brief these committees of respectable middle-class ladies were also charged with supervising the welfare of these women outside the factory. To this end the members also comprised of representatives of the various organisations involved in female care. These included the Women's Co-operative Guild, the Y.W.C.A and the Girls' Friendly Society amongst others. They were particularly conscious of the young women of the working classes. These girls, many of them barely out of school were enjoying unprecedented freedoms both of movement and money. Large numbers were being shipped around the country to areas where workers were needed, and wages were higher than the work school-leavers could normally be expected to receive. In a report published by the Committee on the Health of Munitions Workers it was stated that a system of supervision was necessary in works where women and girls were employed. It went on:

When it is impossible to appoint a whole-time woman supervisor who would investigate complaints and assist in keeping discipline, a woman on the factory staff should be given these duties...It is claimed that her work would reduce the cases brought to the munitions tribunal on grounds due to ill-health or physical strain.⁴⁸

The concern did not only apply to workers in munitions factories.⁴⁹ In Huddersfield there were concerns that the increase in wages offered to young people, coupled with the lack of parental supervision as a result both of fathers enlisting in the army and mothers returning to work in the mills was leading to a reduction of moral standards and a lack of good behaviour. The Town Council was sufficiently alarmed by some of the incidents being reported that they acted on the recommendation of the Watch Committee and in March 1915 appointed a Miss Hoyle of Blackpool as the first 'lady

⁴⁵ Colne Valley Interview 16, Deposited with Kirklees Sound Archive.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 9 May 1918.

⁴⁸ *Huddersfield Daily Examiner*, 5 January 1916.

⁴⁹ Ledgard, *To what extent did the First World War impact the domestic lives of working class women in Huddersfield*, p.33.

assistant inspector' to monitor the local girls and ensure that morals were kept up to the standards expected. Miss Hoyle was soon engaged in inspecting the local picture houses of the district although not everyone was convinced that this was the best use of her time. A report in *The Worker* in June stated that:

No-one will object to such inspection - indeed it is no new part of police work - but I suggest there is other work on which a woman might be more usefully employed. Let me hint at such work. Reports are common that unseemly incidents may frequently be seen in the evening on the streets adjoining the main street, and a tactful woman might be usefully employed in warning the girls not to allow themselves to be treated so cheaply as some are doing just now.⁵⁰

Other measures were also taken to protect the mill girls of the area. At a meeting of the Huddersfield branch of the National Union of Women Workers in October 1918 a report was given on the work of the Patrol Sub-Committee, a body of female citizens who, 'have gone about at night in the hope of being able to help girls in need.' The report went on to suggest that in, 'one or two cases they had been able to do so.'⁵¹ The committee was also interested in trying to get a better class of film than was currently available and popular. In reality, the extent of promiscuity was wildly exaggerated and the morality patrols, in most cases proved unnecessary. In Huddersfield, Miss Hoyle, the female police representative spent much of her time enforcing Weights and Measures rules and the Early Closing Orders to which shops were increasing subject, rather than being needed to ensure girls were behaving. The middle-class ladies of the various committees were largely redundant in their attempts to monitor the behaviour of the mill girls and munitions workers.

Other groups were also active in the policing and monitoring of female behaviour. In January 1915 at a meeting of the Women's Auxiliary of the Huddersfield Free Church Council it was decided to open a club for girls. It was suggested a central club would be useful and greatly appreciated. It should have a few bedrooms for girls who might by accident be stranded in the town for a night without lodgings or friends, together with a parlour or light refreshment lounge. After some discussion it was decided to obtain rooms for the purpose as soon as possible.⁵² This club was finally opened in March by the Mayoress, Mrs Blamires. At the opening the President of the Women's Auxiliary, Mrs Tincker, speaking of the origin of the rooms said that,

The need of social work among the girls of their town had been felt for a long time. Men had combined to help men by establishing institutes and clubs for the male members of the community, but she doubted if the women had combined to help the young women as little or nothing had been done so far.⁵³

She went on to outline the philosophy of the club, which would be to, 'raise the standard of purity, honour and temperance.' Although acknowledging that some girls had good influences at home, she felt that many who were living away were faced with temptation and the club would serve as a haven

⁵⁰ *Huddersfield Worker*, 5 June 1915.

⁵¹ *Huddersfield Worker*, 19 October 1918.

⁵² *Huddersfield Worker*, 9 January 1915.

⁵³ *Huddersfield Daily Examiner*, 2 March 1915.

for those who felt in need of such a place. It was also stated that a member of the committee would attend each day to act as a mentor for the girls. Other women's organisations were also drafted in to assist in this mission. Mrs Donkersley, the honorary secretary, approached the Women's Co-operative Guild who pledged to send a representative on the 5th of each month.⁵⁴

This was not the only attempt to provide an alternative place of leisure for the many female workers who were flooding into the town and the surrounding area. In Colne Valley, the situation of girls being brought in to perform mill work was repeated in each of the townships. In Linthwaite, Florence Lockwood, the wife of a local mill owner was instrumental in establishing a 'girls cottage' where young women could, 'foregather and spend a pleasant evening in social intercourse and congenial work.'⁵⁵ She further hoped that,

those who are lodging in the area and whose homes are elsewhere, the club should offer especial attraction in providing a temporary home for the long winter evenings...to draw these scattered units together, to introduce them to each other, to advise and care for their welfare, to give them a home away from home, to encourage them in healthy recreations, useful hobbies and pleasant pastimes is the ideal.⁵⁶

A similar club was also opened in Marsden under the supervision of Miss King, the area Welfare Supervisor. Mrs Lockwood attended the opening and wrote in her diary, 'the need for girls clubs is not felt, but the need and demand should be encouraged and created.'⁵⁷

The Y.W.C.A also provided a refuge for women in Huddersfield when they opened premises in New North Road in July 1916. Lady Barran, in opening the rooms stated that:

It was absolutely necessary that something should be done to help the working girls and women of our towns, and by means of such clubs they hoped that much in that way might be done. They would appeal to the religious, social, educational and physical sides of the girls for it was only by having many-sided appeals that they would be able to draw in the girls, to whom they had great help to give, and for whom they had great help to give.⁵⁸

She went on to express the hope that municipalities would recognise the work that the organisations were doing regarding the welfare of women and girls and would set aside money for this purpose, but she felt that such a proposition was many years away.⁵⁹

All these clubs proved very popular, many being crowded to the point that some people had to be turned away. They did not, however, co-operate with each other, and being private enterprises with no official funding, were forced to compete for attention in the very crowded wartime charitable sector. In August, shortly after the opening of the Y.W.C.A rooms, the Secretary of the Women's Auxiliary Rooms was forced to write to the newspapers to correct the impression that the recent

⁵⁴ Women's Cooperative Guild Minutes, 9 August 1916.

⁵⁵ *Colne Valley Guardian*, 3 November 1916.

⁵⁶ *Colne Valley Guardian*, 3 November 1916.

⁵⁷ Florence Lockwood diary, 6 May 1917.

⁵⁸ *Huddersfield Daily Examiner*, 13 July 1916.

⁵⁹ *Huddersfield Daily Examiner*, 13 July 1916.

development meant that the other club had closed. Her letter stated, 'this is to correct the misapprehension, and also to remind the public of the work and needs of the Girls' Social Rooms' and went on to appeal for subscriptions to keep the work going.⁶⁰

The guiding forces of the various social clubs were also often at odds with the girls who made use of them. For the organising committees they were places of refuge away from the temptations and dangers prevalent in the outside world. Each was opened with the express intent to provide spiritual and moral supports for their patrons. For the girls, however, they were places of fun and recreation, where for a few pence they could meet friends and enjoy their all too brief leisure time. Florence Lockwood discovered this when she recorded in her diary,

At the girls' club tonight they formed a committee. Tuesdays and Saturdays they will meet for music, games, suppers etc. When I suggested that some evenings might be a little educational there was a murmur of dissent. The young will not hear.⁶¹

In many ways, therefore, the war served merely to strengthen and reinforce the elements of control that had existed within British society before the conflict. Despite the movement of people, the increased government intervention and the supposed levelling of the classes with the introduction of middle-class workers into the munitions factories that the newspapers loved to trumpet, in reality very little changed as a result of the war. The underlying structures needed to administer the wartime society were remarkably similar to, and in many cases actually were, the same as the ones already in place. Thus, although the payment of Separation Allowances moved the onus for the provision for the wives and dependants of soldiers from local charity to central authority, such payments were still made through the mechanisms of the Charity Organisation Society or the Guild of Help, albeit masquerading under a different name. The personnel who manned the committees, made the visits and sat in judgement over the cases remained the same people who had done the same job under the auspices of the Board of Guardians or other interested parties. It was still the same largely middle-class ladies seeking to impose their version of morality and codes of behaviour onto working-class women.

The war did not lead to any great levelling of the social make-up of Britain. The supposed movement of the middle classes into factory work was largely an illusion created for propaganda and not a reality. Although small numbers of ladies did undertake some form of manual work for the duration, most confined their activities to the cleaner, more genteel clerical sectors or continued to man the charities and committees they had run before the war. The attitudes of the classes towards each other were also largely unchanged as a result of the war. Working-class girls were still regarded as flighty or susceptible creatures needing to be guided and supervised by their social betters. Working-class women were still seen as feckless for being unable to feed a family on the meagre pay of a private soldier, and in need of moral and economical direction from women in fur coats and pearls. The middle-class ladies in turn were seen as interfering busybodies or hypocritical meddlers

⁶⁰ *Huddersfield Worker*, 5 August 1916.

⁶¹ Florence Lockwood diary, 1 October 1917.

demanding economy and compliance from their victims whilst being unable or unwilling to apply the same standards to their own behaviour. The end of the war saw the same entrenched attitudes and well-defined social divisions as those existing at the start. It is the case that some of the women involved in the organisation of the charitable and administrative fields were able to translate their involvement into practical achievements. Thus Mrs Blamires eventually gained a seat on the local council and a number of women were appointed as magistrates in the town. This was largely a reflection of the alteration to the laws governing such positions and the removal of the ban on women attaining these posts. Most of the ladies had long been involved in civic works and the end of the war merely saw a formalisation of their interest, rather than a new awareness of their capabilities. Their new standing was not so much a change in women as a recognition of the value of their contribution to civic life.

Chapter Eight – Food and Housing

As the war continued and more men were removed into the army, conditions at home became more strained. The relentless demand for khaki meant that the mills of Huddersfield were working night and day to supply the uniforms needed to clothe the soldiers. This led to virtually full employment for the woollen workers of the district, but also created additional pressure for the population. Women were particularly hard hit as they were responsible, not merely for the maintenance of industrial output, but also for the management of domestic arrangements, often in the face of increased working hours, absent loved ones, rising prices, shortages and all the other inconveniences caused by the conflict. Much of the historiography of women in the First World War has concentrated either on their role as workers or as mothers and homemakers. Workers are seen mostly as young girls, leaving school or domestic service to work in the munitions factories, or society ladies entering the workforce for the first time. Housewives are the women left behind when their breadwinner husband joins the army, struggling to make ends meet on his meagre Separation Allowance. For the women of the textile district such a division into work and home is impossible to define, most being accustomed to performing both roles. Many women in the area worked as a result of financial necessity whilst at the same time being responsible for organising the home, cooking, cleaning and raising the children. The war did little to alleviate either situation. Newspapers concentrated on the young, unmarried female workers and the concerns that they were taking advantage of unwarranted freedoms, or questioned what the removal of men meant in terms of juvenile delinquency. For most working women, however, the war intensified existing problems rather than created new ones.

For many working-class households, the woman was the most significant figure. Although the husband may have earned more money, and appeared to have most responsibility, in reality it was the organisational ability of his wife that ensured a comfortable and stable household. Both Carl Chinn and Robert Roberts have written about the 'hidden matriarchies' that ruled the roost in many areas inhabited by the lower social orders.¹ If the home was the most important province of working-class women in the period of the Great War, she was judged by her peers, her community and society itself on how well she provided for her family in her role as household manager.

Their responsibility for the control of family consumption involved a wide range of skills and gave them a real level of authority in their household and the neighbourhood. It provided the basis of a close emotional bond, particularly between mothers and children. Despite the formal status of the husband and his privileged access to food, pocket money and other resources, most men deferred to their wife's decision-making in domestic matters. Women used a range of strategies to make ends meet and to cope

¹ Carl Chinn, *They Worked All Their Lives: Women Of The Urban Poor in England 1880-1939* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988) and Robert Roberts, *The Classic Slum: Salford Life in the First Quarter of the Century* (London: Penguin, 1990).

with the problems of scarce and fluctuating resources.²

Thus working-class women were well accustomed to living on the margins and making every penny count. The war, with its unprecedented movement of people and goods, its wild price rises, and material shortages and its spasmodic and ill-coordinated official responses taxed the organisational abilities of the public to an extraordinary degree. An examination of how these various pressures had an impact on the local community will show how working-class women coped with the additional problems created by the conflict and rose to the challenges presented.³ This chapter will argue that it was not the circumstances of war that caused the most difficulty for the working women of Huddersfield and the surrounding area, but rather the slow and unfeeling response of authority to their plight. The focus of the government concern was always directed away from these 'invisible women' onto other groups, whether it be soldiers, munitions workers, farmers, ship owners or society ladies. Policies were implemented seemingly to benefit others and not the working class. That this had ever been the case was accepted, but in a time of total war, their valuable contribution was overlooked and it was this injustice that rankled.

Patriotism and desire to help win the war in even the most enthusiastic individuals in British society was not an unlimited resource. The demands of total war meant that even the majority of the population who supported the war were tested to the limit. As the war continued, a number of factors began to chafe at the population. Dr. Marion Phillips noted,

exhaustion is due to lack of rest, impossibility of getting comfortable housing or sufficient food, frequently unhealthy conditions in the factories themselves, and all the consequences of low wages will play havoc with our women workers if left unchecked.⁴

The government became increasingly concerned at the unrest bubbling under in some places, and even bursting out in one or two instances. This concern culminated in the appointment of a Committee of Inquiry into Industrial Unrest. After taking statements from concerned bodies and groups, this committee reported on the causes of the unrest. Their results were largely that people were fed up with the lack of food and housing, and irritated by the government's apparent lack of action to address these problems. That this conclusion was reached came as no surprise to anyone outside government circles and the main issue was why the authorities had been so slow to recognise problems that had both been predicted before the war and continually highlighted during it. Indeed, Kirkaldy noted 'It is noticeable that the great outburst of industrial unrest in recent years has been coincident with the rise in the cost of living; and the revival of industrial strife after the truce of the early years of the war, followed upon a considerable and steady increase in prices, especially of

² Shani D'Cruze, 'Women and the Family' in J. Purvis (ed.) *Women's History: Britain, 1850-1945: An Introduction* (Bristol, Pa: UCL Press, 1995).

³ Gail Ledgard, *To what extent did the First World War impact the domestic lives of working class women in Huddersfield* (Unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Huddersfield, 2013) p.18.

⁴ Marion Phillips quoted in Marian Goronwy-Roberts, *A Woman of Vision, A Life of Marion Phillips M.P.* (Wrexham: Bridge, 2000), p.81.

food.⁵ The second response was to ask what, now that these issues had been acknowledged, was the government going to do about them.

Demand for Food Control

The highest priority, and without question the most significant domestic problem faced by the British public throughout the First World War, was food. Before the war Britain was almost uniquely dependant on imported food. Most of the other combatant nations had a higher degree of self-sufficiency as regards food supplies, but the British planners did not see this as a problem, and failed to recognise that food would be a major issue of the war. The vast extent of the British Empire, the superiority of the Royal Navy and the expected brief duration of any European war were supposed to mean that the food supply would never become a serious issue, and so few contingency plans were made to counteract a problem that was not meant to arise. In the event, as the war dragged on, and the German tactic of unlimited submarine warfare put a lie to the perceived pre-eminence of the Royal Navy, the British government's response, with adherence to 'business as usual' and reluctance to get involved in the everyday nitty-gritty of trade, was insufficient to deal with a growing crisis and an increasingly vocal population.

The first response of many at the declaration of war was to panic-buy and hoard items. In this respect Huddersfield was no different to the rest of the country, with the Industrial Stores being cleared of flour by 5 August.⁶ In response, the deputy mayor of Huddersfield Mr. George Thomson made, 'an earnest request of his fellow citizens not to give way to panic, and further add to the difficulties of the situation by any unreasonable demands in the purchase of provisions.'⁷ Circumstances soon settled down, largely as prices rose dramatically and the working class, who before the war bought things in small quantities as and when money allowed, did not have the resources to squander money on perishable or unnecessary goods. This rise in price of even the most basic items was a major worry to the organisations that looked after the interests of the working class, as the impact was disproportionately felt by those who had the least in terms of assets but the most need.⁸ By the end of September 1914, the Co-operative Movement was concerned enough to hold a special conference on Food Prices and Dividends.⁹ The General Union of Textile Workers in their meetings at Huddersfield and Dewsbury resolved on the motion of the General President:

that this meeting calls upon the Government to at once appoint an Advisory Committee of Control to deal with the food supplies of the kingdom, to take over the shipping and other forms of transport needful to bring food supplies from port to port and coal supplies from port to port in our own land to fix the prices above which needful commodities shall not be sold and to commandeer what is needful

⁵ Adam Kirkaldy, *Labour, Finance and the War* (Pitman: London, 1916), p.22.

⁶ *Huddersfield Daily Examiner*, 5 August 1914.

⁷ *Manchester Guardian*, 6 August 1914.

⁸ Ledgard, *To what extent did the First World War impact the domestic lives of working class women in Huddersfield*, p.18.

⁹ Huddersfield Women's Cooperative Guild Minutes, 23 September 1914, KC63/10, West Yorkshire Archive Service.

in the interests of the people physically, morally and financially.¹⁰

The government was disinclined to become involved in such matters. There were, however, some advantages to this cautious approach. As Margaret Barnett points out, ironically the laissez-faire traditions in Britain before the war were beneficial in ensuring that the state did not rush in with controls too soon, as in Germany, and in the process wreck both the supply flow and the chances of consumer co-operation. Certain measures, such as compulsory rationing, should have come earlier, but the gradual introduction of food controls to a public with no prior concept or experience of them was an essential element in the success of British food policy in the First World War. The state's reluctance to take over the duties of the normal traders in foodstuffs moreover produced the eminently workable arrangements whereby the existing business network was incorporated into the centrally administered control system rather than superseded.¹¹ The British public at the time could not see this benefit and calls continued for more government action.

In February 1915 a conference was held in Leeds under the auspices of the War Workers' Emergency National Committee to discuss the question of high prices.¹² The authorities still refused to move on the issue and the *Yorkshire Factory Times* was moved to comment,

What a pity the Government did not accept the suggestion made by the War Workers' Emergency Committee and the trade unions when the war broke out and controlled prices in the interests of the public, and stopped the machinations of the food privateers and the shipping pirates.¹³

By the middle of 1916, it was reported that the cost of living had increased considerably. When Ben Turner and Allen Gee appeared before Sir George Askwith at a conference regarding increased war bonuses in June, they produced figures to the end of April which showed the cost of food had risen 52 per cent since the outbreak of war.¹⁴

Meetings regarding food prices continued to be held by several interested groups. By August the cost of living was again the subject of debate at a meeting of the General Union of Textile Workers. Mr Ben Turner, addressing the meeting said, 'they must move forward on the wages question again for the prices of foodstuffs was still soaring upwards. The game of high prices was scandalous and the Government seemed helpless and hopeless.'¹⁵ The Co-operative Union held a special conference in Huddersfield Town Hall in November 1916 and the Trades and Labour Council organised a number of similar discussions.¹⁶ In December 1916 matters were reaching a crisis point and a mass meeting to protest against high prices of food was held in the Town Hall, Huddersfield. A resolution was moved viewing with grave concern the present inflated prices of foodstuffs, fuel and other commodities and offering a vigorous protest against further exploitation by shipping and trading

¹⁰ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 21 January 1915.

¹¹ Margaret Barnett, *British Food Policy during the First World War* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1985), p.213. See also Ledgard, *To what extent did the First World War impact the domestic lives of working class women in Huddersfield*, p.25.

¹² *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 25 February 1915.

¹³ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 15 June 1916.

¹⁴ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 15 June 1916.

¹⁵ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 10 August 1916.

¹⁶ WCG Minutes, 8 November 1916.

businesses. Mr J.R. Clynes MP, supporting the resolution said that,

the war could only be won by work in the workshop as well as on the battlefield, and the workers could not work as they ought to do unless they were well fed. The workers had a great burden to bear, and they had the right to look to the country to do the right thing by them as they had done by the country.¹⁷

As the war intensified and the shortages became more acute the government was increasingly involved in the food supply. Although initially resistant to taking full control, hoping the free market would regulate itself without undue interference, it soon became apparent that some outside intervention was necessary. The central authorities were reluctant to introduce rationing, fearing that it would prove unpopular with the public and lead to civil unrest and so they brought in less intrusive measures on a piecemeal and ad hoc basis.¹⁸ In reality, it was not the lack of food that was of most prominence for the working-class women of Huddersfield but the perception of inequality, the feeling that not everyone was suffering to the same extent. Price controls were eventually issued for various products in an attempt to stop the rising costs of living. Imports of non-essential goods were restricted, and shipping was subject to requisition. The wholesale meat trade was brought under government control, including the purchase and slaughter of farm animals. Little by little the political authorities were becoming involved in more aspects of the food supply chain. In December 1916 the policy was given an official face with the appointment of the first Food Controller, Lord Devonport.¹⁹ His priority was largely to try and influence public behaviour, without becoming too involved, Government policy still being firmly rooted in 'business as usual'. Florence Lockwood noted in her diary that, 'the Food Controller asks us to voluntarily limit ourselves.'²⁰ She also noted that prices were continuing to rise and that many commodities were increasingly difficult to get hold of. In November 1917 she wrote that, 'no butter, margarine, sugar or tea to be bought. Shops empty.'²¹ If the wife of a rich industrialist, who maintained a number of servants throughout the war, was struggling to purchase adequate supplies of foodstuffs, the chances of the mill workers obtaining sufficient was even less likely.

Queue Crisis

As the war continued and the unrestricted German submarine attacks took their toll on shipping, food became ever scarcer and the necessity to queue for it began to take increasing amounts of time. Time, however, was a commodity that the working-class women during the war had little of, with many of them working long shifts in either mill or factory. There was also a gender issue. Even though women were working they were still responsible for the management of the home and the majority of

¹⁷ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 21 December 1916.

¹⁸ Ledgard, *To what extent did the First World War impact the domestic lives of working class women in Huddersfield*, p.20.

¹⁹ John Stevenson, *British Society 1914-1945* (London: Penguin, 1984), p.72.

²⁰ Florence Lockwood Diary, 3 March 1917.

²¹ Florence Lockwood Diary, 8 November 1917.

the purchasing required. As one local newspaper summed up the situation:

Women workers, many of them wives of soldiers and with families to support, had difficulties in obtaining food. As they worked 12 hours a day most of the shops were closed before they left work, whilst even in the dinner hour, the only time they could do their shopping many shops were closed.²²

This demonstrates the swings and roundabouts nature of many of the decisions the authorities put into place. On the one hand they reduced the opening hours of shops and other public services but on the other they required longer shifts from workers. The ability to reconcile these two contradictory needs must have taxed the organisational abilities of many of the working-class women and led to greater use of family members or other solutions. One young boy recalled being sent by his mother to queue before school after it got around that a certain store had a delivery of margarine. He and many of his classmates queued until it was time for school when their mothers came down to relieve them and take their places. As he put it, 'I've queued all of 500 yards for margarine and then my mother's come down and taken my place at five to nine. I've been off to school and she's been there while half past ten waiting for a quarter pound of marge.'²³ Another woman, who worked long hours in the mills remembered all members of the family being involved, 'we all had to go, after work. And Saturday mornings, Saturday afternoons. Going and queuing. You had to go.'²⁴ Even Florence Lockwood commented on the length of queues that could form mentioning, 'queues a quarter of a mile long.'²⁵

The need to spend large amounts of time queuing could also have more distressing outcomes. As the queues started forming early in the mornings it was important to be there promptly to ensure you had a good place and thus more likelihood of being served while stocks lasted. In order to achieve this, it could mean a woman whose husband or older children were absent, leaving the younger ones unattended. In a number of cases nationally these children were injured, or worse, at home whilst the mother was out looking for food. In one particularly tragic case in Huddersfield a young girl died in a fire at home when her mother was out queuing for butter. A juryman at the resulting inquest made a point of commenting that, 'it is a wonder there are not more cases as the women have to be out now.'²⁶ The gender implications are again evident in this comment. The war distracted women from their main job of looking after the home and family and by taking them out of the domestic environment for extended periods put their children in danger.²⁷ For all the valuable service they were performing in the mills, their role as workers was overshadowed by their function as wives and mothers.

Whilst this case demonstrates the extent to which queues and food shortages in general had seeped into the public consciousness and become a tolerated if not particularly welcome aspect of

²² *Huddersfield Daily Examiner*, 28 December 1917.

²³ Kirklees Oral History Archive Ref.19. See also Ledgard, *To what extent did the First World War impact the domestic lives of working class women in Huddersfield*, p.21.

²⁴ Colne Valley Interview 18, deposited at Kirklees Sound Archive.

²⁵ Lockwood Diary, 19 November 1917.

²⁶ *Huddersfield Daily Examiner*, 31 December 1917.

²⁷ Ledgard, *To what extent did the First World War impact the domestic lives of working class women in Huddersfield*, p.21.

everyday life, not all instances were quite as dramatic. In one court case towards the end of 1917 when queuing was at its height, two women were charged with being drunk and disorderly. One of the women stated she had been to town for butter and had stood 3 or 4 hours 'in the ranks' and then went and got some whiskey. As this was in December she might perhaps have been trying to thaw out. Despite apologising to the court, however, both women were fined.²⁸ In another example of how the queue was now a part to daily life, jokes started making the rounds incorporating such experiences into humorous situations. One particular tale printed in the local newspaper told of a boy who arrived late home one evening. On being questioned by his mother as to where he had been the boy replied that he had joined the queue for the tram in Market Place but tram after tram went and he didn't seem to be getting much nearer the front and in the end found that instead of the queue for the tram he'd ended up in the butter queue.²⁹ Even though the responsibility was primarily placed on the woman of the household, children and other family members could also prove useful for errands and other tasks. One Huddersfield boy recalled how his mother made sure he always carried 2 shillings with him just in case he came across anything to eat for sale.³⁰ Another woman mentioned that, 'you had to queue and it would just come to your turn and the butter or margarine would be done, and you'd just have to go and queue the next day and my granny spent the whole of the First World War doing just that.'³¹

As the war dragged on the food situation worsened. Even in a town like Huddersfield, where the nature of the local economy ensured virtually full employment, there were scenes of disquiet and unrest. Although never as unstable as other parts of the country that experienced food riots or strikes over conditions, there were a number of meetings and rallies regarding the food situation. Women's groups, as representatives of the people most intimately affected by shortages, were particularly vocal in this regard. In Huddersfield, the Co-operative Women's Guild members were very active with delegates attending conferences and speaking at meetings about the situation.³² In one of the largest meetings, held in St George Square in December 1917 over 2000 people endured the winter conditions to protest about the continuance of the queue system to obtain food. This gathering was organised at the behest of the Huddersfield and District Trade and Labour Council but included speakers from many other concerned groups. Although the political overtones of this meeting are all too obvious it does nevertheless demonstrate the very real annoyance and irritation of the general public, primarily the working class, who did not have the available leisure time to waste in futile queues. What is most important about this meeting as well as many of the others is the exhortation for the government to go further than they had. For a long time, the authorities had been resisting any form of rationing on the basis that this would be unpopular and unwelcome to the general public. In reality, however, it was the perception of unfairness that most exercised the indignation of the working class. By appearing to favour those sections of the community who could afford to buy up limited

²⁸ *Huddersfield Daily Examiner*, 12 December 1917.

²⁹ *Huddersfield Daily Examiner*, 18 December 1917.

³⁰ Kirklees Oral History Archive Ref.254. See also Ledgard, *To what extent did the First World War impact the domestic lives of working class women in Huddersfield*, p.22.

³¹ Colne Valley Interview 16, deposited at Kirklees Sound Archive.

³² WCG Minutes, 8 November 1916.

supplies of non-perishable goods or who had servants they could detail to wait in queues on their behalf, the government policy was seen to be perpetuating an 'us and them' attitude between the classes. Speaker after speaker at the Huddersfield meeting emphasised this division between the haves and the have-nots. *The Huddersfield Examiner* summed up the situation stating that

Considering the hardship and positive danger to the health of the community entailed in the present system of food distribution it is not at all surprising that a serious agitation in favour of the abolition of the queue system and the substitution of a more equitable scheme for the distribution of available food supplies should arise. The wonder is, considering the many signs of dissatisfaction that have been observable that the authorities have not taken steps earlier in this matter.³³

Or as Mr Alfred Shaw, president of the Huddersfield Trades Council, put it rather more forcefully to the 2500 people at the St George Square gathering, 'the Government was warned what was going to happen but in this as in everything else it has been too late. In a time like the present they must share and share alike as far as food is concerned.'³⁴ The meeting culminated in a resolution to be passed to the local authority demanding that the council be given powers to take control of all foodstuffs coming into the town and organise its equal distribution. This concern was shared by the Town Council who invited a deputation of the organising committee to attend a meeting in order to hear any suggestions that could help them. The mayor was also personally involved in the investigation of the food situation and was seen inspecting the queues that formed to obtain firsthand information.³⁵

It was, of course, not just food that was subject to shortages. By the beginning of 1916 washing soda was in short supply due primarily to its alternate use in the manufacture of high explosives. The new lighting restrictions that had been introduced also saw matches becoming scarcer and it was reported that the stocks of several wholesale warehouses had been completely exhausted. Paper was also harder to get hold of. As the *Huddersfield Daily Examiner* reported, 'the public has responded well to the appeal to economise and many customers have started taking their own bags and wrappings when shopping with the result that a considerable saving in paper, now almost prohibitive in price had been affected.'³⁶ Not everyone was quite so public-spirited however and the same newspaper reported on a case later in the war of a baker fined for selling 2½d loaves for 3d who claimed as his defence in court that the extra ha'penny was for the bag.³⁷

Rationing

To assist with the conservation of fuel and light rendered necessary by the shortage of fuel in the

³³ *Huddersfield Daily Examiner*, 12 December 1917.

³⁴ *Huddersfield Daily Examiner*, 17 December 1917.

³⁵ *Huddersfield Daily Examiner*, 28 December 1917. See also Ledgard, *To what extent did the First World War impact the domestic lives of working class women in Huddersfield*, p.24.

³⁶ *Huddersfield Daily Examiner*, 10 May 1916.

³⁷ *Huddersfield Daily Examiner*, 4 December 1917. See also Ledgard, *To what extent did the First World War impact the domestic lives of working class women in Huddersfield*, p.26.

country, the Education Committee decided that the afternoon session of the Elementary schools from October to February would be from 1:30 - 3:30.³⁸ Shops were also subjected to reduced opening hours, and it was suggested the time was opportune to secure earlier closing hours for all shops in the central area of the borough. Strong complaints were made of Sunday trading by people who kept small shops and it was stated the practice was increasing.³⁹ This introduction led to complaints both from the small shopkeepers and women who had limited time to shop or queue. One shopkeeper argued that the grocers' association was trying to kill small shops by restricting Sunday opening. 'I don't trade on Sundays because I like it, but simply because I cannot make a living without it. They know if we are made to close it will mean ruin to us, which is of course what they are after.'⁴⁰ This disagreement between shops was also cited as another reason for the extent of the queue problems. Different types of shops had different policies on which customers they would or could serve, with some enforcing an unofficial rationing system and others compelled to serve every customer. As one onlooker summed up the dilemma facing shoppers before the imposition of ration cards.

There were food queues at some multiple shops. Margarine was the principal commodity sought, but at one shop sugar was available. This, said the man, illustrated the problem. They can get sugar at their own shops and yet they rush here for it. There seems no doubt that the people who are anxious to get someone else's share in addition to their own are responsible for largely increasing the evils of the queue system.⁴¹

Once rationing was introduced the queues began to reduce. Now that people were restricted to where they could buy goods one of the motivations for queuing had been removed. By removing the ability to gain more than a fair share, foodstuffs could be distributed on a more equitable basis and the queue largely became redundant.⁴²

Throughout 1918 more items came under the rationing system. By April, meat was included, and tea, butter and margarine were all restricted. Some items though were deemed to be too important to limit in this way. Bread and potatoes, the essential cornerstones of the working-class diet, were never rationed but were affected by price controls and government subsidies. The case of bread was a particular problem. Prior to the war the majority of wheat used in Britain had been imported and the losses to shipping seriously affected the amount of flour available to bakers. The solutions ranged from only partially milling the grain and thus leaving large parts of the husk on, to adulterating flour with other materials including bean or potato flour. The resulting 'Government Loaf' was often a grey shapeless mass that was hard to chew and so not popular. As time went on and imports of American flour increased, shipping was more protected by convoy and bakers became increasingly skilled using the new ingredients, the situation improved but even many years after the war memories are still strong. One interviewee recalled, 'home baked bread took a knock as they were leaving stuff in flour

³⁸ Huddersfield Corporation Education Committee Report 1918.

³⁹ *Huddersfield Daily Examiner*, 2 February 1916.

⁴⁰ *Huddersfield Daily Examiner*, 4 February 1916.

⁴¹ *Huddersfield Daily Examiner*, 28 December 1917.

⁴² Ledgard, *To what extent did the First World War impact the domestic lives of working class women in Huddersfield*, p.27.

that would normally be removed, husk or whatever and bread went grey instead of white.⁴³

The reluctance of the government to become involved in the food question was further reinforced by a new order placing the onus of enforcing the regulations into the hands of local Corporation, Urban District Councils and other public authorities. This move was derided as an example of timorous government as there was no compulsion behind it and councils were left to their own devices regarding what action, if any, to be taken.⁴⁴ Conferences and meeting continued to be held to discuss the problems of the supply and price of food. At one meeting held by the Huddersfield and District Trades and Labour Council, it was stated that there were 110 societies represented, including 31 cooperative societies, with a total membership of 57,319 persons.⁴⁵ These various protest groups would eventually find recognition for their concerns with the establishment in August 1917 of the Huddersfield Food Control Committee to oversee solutions to the food distribution problems. It initially consisted of twelve people, seven appointed from the local council, one from the Co-operative Union, one from the Trade and Labour council, one man and one woman from the Local Food and General Economy Sub-Committee and one from the Retail Grocers Association.⁴⁶ This body was later expanded by the addition of three more members, one each from the Trades and Labour Council and the Co-operative Society and an alderman.⁴⁷

A deputation of the War Workers' Emergency Committee met with Lord Rhondda, the new food controller, and urged that all Food Control Committees should include representatives of labour and at least one woman, preferably of the working class. They also pointed out that co-operative societies were institutions of prime importance with knowledge of the working class and their food consumption habits, who would prove valuable on any local committee. The main problem was that most local authorities had taken 'not less than one' woman to mean 'only one' and accordingly had limited their participation. Additionally, in many cases, the woman appointed was a middle-class woman with little knowledge or experience of the workers' diet or housekeeping.⁴⁸ In this the Huddersfield Committee conformed almost precisely having only one female member. The potential pool of knowledge, therefore, being somewhat restricted.

At a meeting of the Workers' War Emergency Committee in London the attention of the government was drawn to,

the very grave temper that is rising in many industrial districts at the failure to organise a proper distribution of supplies; at the long waiting of the women before the shops; and at the frequent failure to get tea, milk, sugar, bacon, butter or margarine, at a time when those who are better off are able to get uninterrupted supplies.⁴⁹

⁴³ Kirklees Oral History Archive Ref.254. See also Ledgard, *To what extent did the First World War impact the domestic lives of working class women in Huddersfield*, p.27.

⁴⁴ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 17 May 1917.

⁴⁵ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 24 May 1917.

⁴⁶ General Purpose Committee Minutes, 7 August 1917, KMT18/12/2/37, West Yorkshire Archive Service.

⁴⁷ General Purpose Committee, 9 April 1918. See also Ledgard, *To what extent did the First World War impact the domestic lives of working class women in Huddersfield*, p.19.

⁴⁸ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 13 September 1917.

⁴⁹ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 13 December 1917.

The committee urged the authorities to act promptly to alleviate the situation and ensure a more equitable distribution of goods. Eventually the government was forced to introduce compulsory rationing for some products. Sugar was rationed by January 1918, followed by meat, butter and margarine in April. Restrictions were also placed on jam, tea and bacon. Bread and potatoes, although not rationed, could be hard to get hold of.⁵⁰

Perhaps the main problem with food distribution throughout the First World War, was not the lack of food, the working class had long been used to deprivation, but rather the perception of inequality and unfairness. Long before the establishment of Food Control Committees the initial government response to the worsening food situation was an ineffective appeal to the public to exercise restraint and to limit their consumption particularly of luxury items. Various important personages and official bodies advocated initiatives like meatless days, completely missing the point that for many of the lower orders this was the natural course of events. In many working-class households meat was only bought once a week. As one man recalled, 'meat was bought as a joint for Sunday, eaten as leftovers on Monday, stew on Tuesday and boiled as a pudding on Wednesday.'⁵¹ Even though this may have been coloured by the passage of time, his memory reflects the fact that for large portions of the population their diet was limited not only by cost and availability but also by knowledge and ability.⁵² To ask people stretching one joint of meat over four days to economise further was rubbing salt into the wound. This was emphasised by the feeling that not everybody was suffering to the same extent. As DeGroot puts it, 'Food went where money was. The most strident complaints about rising prices came from the workers and the worst queues were in working class areas.'⁵³ The wealthier sections of society by contrast did not have the same problems. As they were well able to afford the extra costs of goods, shopkeepers were only too happy to continue supplying them.⁵⁴

Some women are saying that people are being served whilst they are waiting outside a shop. Orders are being taken by telephone or messenger and delivered by trap or other conveyance to the 'respectable houses' when the working-class women have to queue in the cold to get what they are due if it is even available. Often when reaching the front of the queue she is met with the words 'sold out' as goods have already been snapped up by those with the funds to bypass the system.⁵⁵

Many such customers saw no reason to alter their eating habits as they were unaware of any problems. This generated hostility on two counts. It perpetuated the 'them and us' feelings of many of the working class that the privations caused by the conflict were only applicable to them and the middle and upper classes were effectively cushioned from any undue discomfort. It also magnified the complaints of many people that shopkeepers and distributors were engaged in profiteering at the expense of the ordinary public. One of the most insistent complaints levelled about the wartime food

⁵⁰ John Burnett, *Plenty and Want* (Routledge: London, 1989), p.282.

⁵¹ Kirklees Oral History Archive Ref.244.

⁵² Elizabeth Roberts, *A Woman's Place: An Oral History of Working-Class Women 1890-1940* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1984), p.153.

⁵³ Gerard DeGroot, *Blighty: British Society In The Era Of The Great War* (London: Longman, 1996), p.89.

⁵⁴ Ledgard, *To what extent did the First World War impact the domestic lives of working class women in Huddersfield*, p.19.

⁵⁵ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 24 January 1918.

supply was the apparent prevalence of profiteering. Just as landlords were perceived to be taking advantage of the increased demand to raise rates before the government stepped in, so many shopkeepers and traders were accused of using the war as an excuse to boost their own profits. Again, this can be seen as a reaction to the divisions within society. 'Whenever the government fixes a maximum price for the public to pay, the dealer at once makes it the minimum at which he will sell.'⁵⁶ The public was prepared to tolerate difficult conditions as long as everybody appeared to be in it together, but if one group seemed to be profiting more than others then the cracks were all too apparent. Complaints about profiteering led the government to introduce an excess profits duty of 50 per cent in 1915, increased to 80 per cent in 1917 calculated on the basis of pre-war profits.⁵⁷

There were also complaints that the Food Controller did not understand working-class diets. In an article in the *Yorkshire Factory Times* there was a comparison of the amounts of bread and meat being recommended for consumption.

Take the case of a man and wife with three children. It is an absurdity to think that they can manage on the quantity of bread indicated, that is assuming the children have normal appetites, and it is equally absurd to think that such a working-man's family can afford to spend half-a-guinea per week on butcher's meat.⁵⁸

The Women's Trades Union League and other women's organisations were particularly concerned by this lack of knowledge and held a conference in London for the purpose of discussing the action of the Food Controller and his suggested rationing policy. There were three main areas to be debated. First that the proposed meat ration was greater than the majority of working-class families could afford, though not greater than their need. Secondly that there was an urgent necessity to improve the system of distributing sugar, since it was impossible for the majority of people to obtain anything like their proposed ration. and thirdly that the ration of 4lb of bread per person per week was far less than sufficient, and to provide substitutes for it would entail an expenditure of fuel and time, which working women could ill afford. A suggestion was put forward that the government should consider redistributing available supplies of bread and flour in order to give a larger share to working-class families where there were many children or workers were engaged in heavy physical toil. The conference also discussed other areas of concern regarding food supply including a more economical method of distributing milk, especially to nursing mothers, babies and young children.⁵⁹

The food situation continued to cause bemusement in the industrial areas of the country and served to highlight the disconnect between what the government saw as the problem and the reality of life as perceived by the workers.

The suggestions by the Food Controller as to the economy in food has created more amusement in working class districts than anything else, and a majority of housewives would be only too pleased to be able to allot 2½lbs of meat, for

⁵⁶ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 18 July 1918.

⁵⁷ John Stevenson, *British Society 1914-1945* (London: Penguin, 1984), p.92. See also Ledgard, *To what extent did the First World War impact the domestic lives of working class women in Huddersfield*, p.20.

⁵⁸ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 8 February 1917.

⁵⁹ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 22 February 1917.

instance, to each person and $\frac{3}{4}$ lb of sugar. We know households which have thought themselves particularly fortunate if able to obtain 1lb of sugar for the whole family per week, and some have been without sugar quite three weeks or a month at a stretch. The bread question, however, is different, and it is here where the pinch will be felt in the West Riding, that is, if not substituted for meat. Children require and eat a large portion daily of the staff of life, especially growing lads, and if Lord Devonport saw some of the juveniles shift plate after plate of jam and bread he would, we think, alter his allowances somewhat.⁶⁰

Eventually the War Workers' Emergency Committee was forced to issue a clarification of the Food Controller's request.

Those families which consume less than the week's allowance of meat - as all but very exceptional working class families do - are fully warranted in exceeding the allowance of bread. Moreover, Lord Devonport does not suggest that either meat or bread would be restricted without some other food being substituted. It is not pretended that $2\frac{1}{2}$ lbs of meat, 4lbs of bread and $\frac{3}{4}$ lb of sugar in themselves constitute a diet sufficient to support a manual worker in full strength and efficiency.⁶¹

Further evidence of the lack of understanding of the working-class diet was given in the 'teacake muddle' as outlined in the *Yorkshire Factory Times*. Teacakes were banned by the London based authorities on the grounds that they were cakes and thus would use too much sugar. As the northern paper pointed out, this assumption placed London at the centre of the universe, when even the most cursory of investigations would have revealed that teacake in Yorkshire and Lancashire referred to something entirely different. The bread-based staple of the mill workers' or miners' diet was not what was meant by the order, but the lack of consideration that things were not necessarily as Londoners perceived demonstrated how out of touch some government officials were.⁶² It was also pointed out that conditions in the North of England regarding the bread supply differed from those in the South. One member of the Food Control Committee wrote to the Ministry of Food reminding them that as nearly all the bread was baked in the homes in the North a more liberal allowance of lard should be given as compared with the ration in the South, where the bread was supplied from public bakeries. The reply was to the effect that the Ministry could not sanction a special ration for the North, and the opinion was expressed that the new allowance which was to be given should be sufficient for any household.⁶³

Perhaps the most egregious lack of understanding demonstrated by the Food Controller was encapsulated in the decision in May 1918 to exclude female textile workers from the increased ration awarded to industrial workers. Under this scheme workers were divided into categories based on the amount of effort their work required. Groups E and F which represented 'very heavy' and 'heavy agricultural' workers were limited to men only. Male textile workers came into Group D or 'heavy industrial workers' and were entitled to an extra coupon for rations on account of their work. Women, who may be performing exactly the same work, were not graded in the same way. Female workers

⁶⁰ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 22 February 1917.

⁶¹ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 8 March 1917.

⁶² *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 3 May 1917.

⁶³ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 3 October 1918.

were considered to be of lower grade, thus to qualify for extra rations, women had to prove they were doing either 'very heavy' or 'agricultural' work and even then, would receive only one extra coupon compared with the two or three given to their male equivalent. For women considered as 'heavy' workers there was no extra ration. In weaving, therefore, which was classified as 'heavy' work, men would receive rations to which their female colleagues, who may be working the machine next door and producing exactly the same amount of work, would not. The General Union of Textile Workers was particularly incensed by this differentiation and issued the following resolution to Lord Rhondda: 'That we think that women weavers, piecers, rag grinders, and other women doing heavy tasks of any form in the textile mills, should be in Clause D of the extra ration scheme.'⁶⁴ They went on to detail the reasons for this.

They have to stand by a loom from 6 in the morning to half-past five at night; that in itself is enough to claim the extra ration, but they are using the muscles of their bodies and their arms all the day through. There are jobs in carrying weft and dodging about that require great physical strength on the part of women. Men weavers are entitled to the ration, and why should not women weavers be.⁶⁵

The Huddersfield Food Control Committees agreed that women were being unfairly treated and also decided to approach the Ministry of Food upon the question. A resolution that, 'in the opinion of the Committee supplementary ration cards should be granted to all women engaged in trades where men similarly engaged are allowed supplementary ration cards' was duly forwarded to the Minister.⁶⁶

For one group of women, however, the circumstances of the war worked to their benefit. For the imported women brought from the East Coast to work in the mills of the Colne Valley the food situation was one of the advantages of hostel living. One woman interviewed about it recalled that,

there was a housekeeper and they were given a good breakfast before they came to work. And then in the kitchen were big plates full of sandwiches made and there were pieces of greaseproof paper laid out on the table and every morning when they'd had breakfast, the girls had to go into the kitchen and get what they wanted. And they took as many sandwiches, wrapped them in greaseproof paper. Came home from the mill at 6 o'clock and there was a warm meal waiting for them.⁶⁷

For the local women who were leaving work having to rush home to make their own or their families meals such a situation must have caused a number of envious looks.

The food situation was one of the most visible and defining issues of the First World War. The food control policy was arguably the greatest failure of the government, who were slow to act until forced to do so and were often overtaken by events on the ground and local initiatives. It has been suggested that food contributed to one of the most remarkable paradoxes of the period. John Burnett has argued that although not the primary reason for the rise in living standards observed during the war, which he largely attributes to the 'virtual disappearance of unemployment, coupled with the

⁶⁴ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 18 April 1918.

⁶⁵ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 13 June 1918.

⁶⁶ *Huddersfield Daily Examiner*, 18 May 1918.

⁶⁷ Colne Valley Interview 16, deposited at Kirklees Sound Archive.

extensive employment of married women at relatively well-paid work and the separation allowance system,' nevertheless it was the fact that there continued to be food to buy, that it was reasonably fairly distributed and never subject to extended scarcity the meant most of Britain never went hungry.⁶⁸

Indeed, for many of the working-class women of the textile regions, the war was a time of unprecedented opportunity to claim the lion's share of any food available. Full employment and paid overtime meant that women could earn larger amounts of wages than they were accustomed to, still less than their male colleagues, but adequate. The introduction of rationing meant that there was a more equitable spread of comestibles, rather than the wealthy creaming off the most select provisions, and the removal of men into the army meant that working-class women no longer had to devote the majority of the food available to feed the main breadwinner. For many of the textile workers in Huddersfield, long accustomed to going without during periods of slack work or family crisis, the main problem of the war was not the lack of food or the unreliability of the supply but rather the perception of unfairness apparent in the early years of the conflict. Women were quite prepared to endure any amount of unpleasant treatment, be it queuing, lack of supplies or reduced shopping hours. What caused the most consternation was the perception that the upper classes were not suffering to the same extent. Much of the correspondence received by the newspapers on the subject complained that businessmen were profiteering as a result of the wartime conditions. Food became a major topic of conversation for the women in the mills, not merely because of the difficulties caused trying to get hold of adequate supplies but also the reasons why such items were not readily available. In adhering so rigidly to 'business as usual' the government caused a situation whereby real shortages were deemed less important than the impression of exploitation that the lack of timely control generated. A further policy introduced by the government that caused irritation to the working-class women were the various economy drives advocated, often by members of the gentry. For a woman who spent her days working full time in the mills and her spare hours looking after her home and family to be told how to economise by a society lady with a houseful of servants caused a large degree of resentment.

Thus food, and its control throughout the war remains a contentious issue. Working-class women were disadvantaged by the measures introduced during the war to maintain the food supply. The British government was slow to react to the mounting crisis, it failed to curb the actions of profiteering farmers and suppliers and it demonstrated a lack of awareness of the realities of both the diet and the budget of working women. It can also be said that many female textile workers benefited as a result of the food control instituted through the war. The reduction in sugar and increase in wheatgerm improved the diet of the working-class. Such gains were short-lived. As soon as the war ended and the shipping lanes reopened, white bread and sugar were once more demanded by consumers. When the men returned women were once again more likely to devote the largest portions to the heavier workers. The war, therefore, had little long-term impact on the diet and consumption of the women in the textile mills. Unlike their sisters in the munitions factories, there were no organised canteens catering to them, instead they endured the difficulties of providing for their families in the

⁶⁸ Burnett, *Plenty and Want*, p.282.

face of queues, rationing, longer hours and increased regulations. Once the war ended things soon reverted back to the way they had been. The war proved a to be a temporary interruption albeit a time of great disruption and inconvenience.

Housing Conditions in Huddersfield

If the food question and the fluctuations in the cost of living were largely a result of the unusual conditions of wartime, the strain of the first mechanised and industrial conflict also exposed and highlighted a more fundamental issue that faced the British working-class, that of housing. The trouble with the provision of housing for the working classes long pre-dated the outbreak of war. The conflict, with the ensuing large-scale movement of people around the country and the concentration of large numbers of workers into the industrial areas, merely served to emphasise issues that had long existed and remained unaddressed. Thus the problems of housing and accommodation, which in munitions areas were addressed by the government, whether it be the provision of hostels or even the creation of new towns as at Gretna, were left very much to the local organisations to solve. Arthur Marwick described conditions nationally.

Essentially the problem remained one of an expanding and, more important, a moving population being crammed into houses whose condition was steadily deteriorating, of munitions workers crowding into small towns like Carlisle, workers of all types bumping up the already appalling density of large towns like Glasgow, and office workers for the new bureaucracy pouring into the centre of London.⁶⁹

Such a disorganised situation was also apparent in the mill towns of Yorkshire. The war with its attendant effects of limited resources, higher prices and additional demand meant that such inherent problems as existed beforehand were exacerbated even if they were not necessarily a direct result. Thus, of the many problems facing the working class in the period before the First World War, housing was one of the most serious. It was perhaps even more so for the women whose domain it was primarily seen as. As Elizabeth Roberts puts it,

Working-class women had learned when young that their place was in the home: they might work outside for greater or lesser period; they could leave it freely for social or charitable excursions; their husbands and children might well help with its care and maintenance; but it was accepted by all that the ultimate responsibility for the home was theirs.⁷⁰

In the decades leading up to 1914, although much debate was engendered about housing and town planning, little had been achieved in practice. The introduction of the Housing of the Working Classes Act (1890) and Housing and Town Planning Act (1909) allowed councils to create schemes

⁶⁹ Arthur Marwick, *The Deluge: British Society And The First World War* (Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1991), p.167.

⁷⁰ Roberts, *A Woman's Place*, p.125.

and build houses, but there was little compulsion and many local authorities were reluctant to take advantage of the powers granted. Political inertia, lack of funds and unwillingness to invest on the part of private landlords meant that the housing stock in working-class areas nationally at the outbreak of war was in short supply. What was available was often damp, unheated, vermin infested, with no running water and inadequate sanitation. It was also very overcrowded. The average pre-war family had 4.6 children; 71 per cent had four or more, 41 per cent seven or more.⁷¹ The war with its major dislocation of people and shortage of labour and materials put even more strain on an already overstretched and contentious sector. By examining conditions in the local area, the official response and the extent to which existing problems were exacerbated, it can be seen that although the conflict marked a low point, it was nevertheless merely a continuation of existing conditions rather than a new situation for most working-class women.

Huddersfield before the war was reputed to be one of the worst areas in the country for the provision of working-class housing, although it was by no means unique. Nationally the shortage of housing was put at between 100,000 and 120,000 in 1913.⁷² Locally there was a distinct lack of appetite for building working-class houses. As Alderman Wheatley put it in a council meeting in 1916, 'only 472 dwellings have been erected by the Corporation during the past 35 years.'⁷³ Various local bodies had been agitating for years about the lack of activity on the part of the local authorities since the introduction of the Housing and Town Planning Act. A deputation from the Huddersfield and District Trades and Labour Council contacted the Corporation in July 1913 about the necessity of building at least a thousand workmen's houses, but at the outbreak of war only six relatively minor corporation construction projects were under consideration.⁷⁴

There was widespread concern that not enough was being done and what was in progress was inadequate. By 1916 Alderman Beaumont stated that 2000 houses were necessary in Huddersfield.⁷⁵ The *Huddersfield Daily Examiner* berated the Town Council for, 'going for nasty back-to-back houses' as well as for the fact that for every house they were building an equally large or even greater number were being condemned as unfit for human habitation.⁷⁶ When the development of Moldgreen was proposed, the plans submitted for 38 2-storey tenements were discussed in the same committee meeting that mentioned there were 37 cellar dwellings near the site that would need to be removed.⁷⁷ The need, meanwhile, was only increasing. To try and satisfy this in May 1918 the council was instructed to prepare a scheme for the provision of 1200 homes and by November of the same year the Town Clerk was proposing that '1000 houses would be built within three months and 500 more three months thereafter.'⁷⁸ In reality by February 1919 the council was in the process of negotiating to

⁷¹ Gail Braybon and Penny Summerfield, *Out of The Cage: Women's Experience in Two World Wars* (New York: Pandora, 1987), p23.

⁷² Marwick, *The Deluge*, p.64.

⁷³ *Manchester Guardian*, 21 December 1916.

⁷⁴ General Purpose Committee Minutes, 5 July 1913, KMT18/12/2/37, West Yorkshire Archive Service.

⁷⁵ *Huddersfield Daily Examiner*, 21 December 1916.

⁷⁶ *Huddersfield Daily Examiner*, 28 January 1915.

⁷⁷ Housing and Town Planning Committee Minutes, 8 August 1911, KMT18/12/2/34, West Yorkshire Archive Service. See also Ledgard, *To what extent did the First World War impact the domestic lives of working class women in Huddersfield*, p.7.

⁷⁸ H&TP Committee, 26 November 1918.

build 354 properties in 4 developments around the town.⁷⁹

Waves of Incomers

It can be seen therefore that even before hostilities broke out, there was serious debate about housing provision for the working class in Huddersfield and the local area. The coming of war with its diversion of men and materials, its price rises and inflationary pressures and its concentration of workers in strategic sites served only to inflame an already contentious issue.

The first wave of these incomers were the Irish navvies used by the construction company MacAlpine to build the main site of the new British Dye works.⁸⁰ The Huddersfield Trades and Labour Council were concerned by this development. A Mr. Carter in an address stated, 'agents are scouring Ireland for labour and dumping people into Huddersfield and other towns indiscriminately.'⁸¹ The builders solved the problem of housing their key workers with the erection of 25 'cottages' and a hut colony centred on the White Horse Inn.⁸² As the work progressed, and the builders moved out, the men being employed at the chemical works moved in. The expected influx of people into the Huddersfield district with the establishment of British Dyes was considerable. Over 10,000 men were to be employed and many of those men would have families and dependants. The final estimation of the impact on the local area of bringing this company to the town was 25,000 people to be added to the population.⁸³ The number of huts was insufficient for the large quantity of dye workers coming into the town and British Dyes applied to construct another 36 wooden houses temporarily off Leeds Road North.⁸⁴ Such accommodation, whilst acceptable for building workers on short term contracts, was not considered suitable for wives and children.⁸⁵ Provision for women was a low priority for both the manufacturers and the authorities. In a council meeting in February 1916 it was noted that over 700 men employed by British Dyes were housed in huts.⁸⁶

The difficulty of housing the large number of new dye workers was compounded by the attitude of the directors of both British Dyes and Read Holliday Ltd. Both companies started buying up properties in the neighbouring streets and giving notice to the tenants in order to move their own workers in. These tenants lost no time in contacting their local Councillor, Mr Robson, who reported to the town council that:

17 houses in one street and eight in another had been purchased by a munitions firm, evidently for use by their own workpeople. The agent had informed them that they would shortly be receiving formal notice that they must look out for other houses. The case quoted was not an isolated one, and probably it was

⁷⁹ H&TP Committee, 7 February 1919.

⁸⁰ Ledgard, *To what extent did the First World War impact the domestic lives of working class women in Huddersfield*, p.8.

⁸¹ Huddersfield Trade and Labour Council Minutes, 25 April 1917, S/HTC/1/.4, West Yorkshire Archive Service.

⁸² *Huddersfield Daily Examiner*, 26 February 1912.

⁸³ *Huddersfield Daily Examiner*, 20 October 1915.

⁸⁴ General Purposes Committee, 4 November 1915.

⁸⁵ Ledgard, *To what extent did the First World War impact the domestic lives of working class women in Huddersfield*, p.9.

⁸⁶ *Huddersfield Daily Examiner*, 17 December 1916.

taking place in other districts in the town.⁸⁷

The council was sufficiently disturbed to send a delegation to both companies to discuss the problem, as neither the Corporation nor private contractors were building houses for the permanent workforce of either concern. Mr Holliday, the chairman of Read Holliday, stated that, 'he did not believe in temporary accommodation and he was not going to provide it. He had bought 50 houses for his workmen and if he could not get workmen to come without building houses for them he was prepared to build houses for his own purposes only.' It was pointed out that his buying 50 houses did not mean there would be 50 more houses in the borough but simply that someone would have to go out to fit his workmen in. The directors of British Dyes were equally unhelpful, merely indicating they were not opposed to building but that this was not the time.⁸⁸

The problem of housing in the area was so acute it even reached *The Times* newspaper, which was moved to comment that,

the initial efforts of the Huddersfield Corporation to provide working class dwellings have been almost entirely confined to the substitution of tenement dwellings to make up for the gradual condemnation of the many cellar dwellings...Recently newcomers to the town have been advertising in the local press offering money rewards to anyone who will discover an empty dwelling house...In the meantime thousands of labourers engaged in the construction of the new works have had to be provided with huts by the company and the lodging houses are full.⁸⁹

The shortage of housing was compounded further by other conditions generated by the war. It was not merely the supply of available housing that was affected but also the production of new properties. At the initial outbreak panic buying, hoarding and the anticipation of shortages to come sent the prices of various commodities soaring, including building materials.⁹⁰ As the war continued these shortages became a reality as the importation of goods was affected by submarine warfare, transportation costs rose, and the prices of raw materials grew. The contractors building the various development projects the Corporation had in hand before the war broke out, had submitted tenders based on the pre-war cost of materials but as the conditions worsened they began to struggle with the fluctuations created by the changing economy. By October at least two constructors had applied to the town council for an advance to cover the additional costs due to the rising price of materials.⁹¹

In addition to the change in prices many firms were also finding it difficult to retain their workforce. The initial rush to join the army had resulted in many of the casual or temporary labourers employed in the building industry leaving and the continued drain of workers put a further strain on the firms involved. In February 1915 the Borough Engineer was reporting a considerable delay on the part of some builders to complete the work they had been contracted to do. The council, however, had little

⁸⁷ *Manchester Guardian*, 22 February 1917.

⁸⁸ *Huddersfield Daily Examiner*, 17 February 1916. See also Ledgard, *To what extent did the First World War impact the domestic lives of working class women in Huddersfield*, p.9.

⁸⁹ *The Times*, 3 January 1916.

⁹⁰ Jay Winter, *The Great War And The British People* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1985), p.243.

⁹¹ H&TP Committee, 2 October 1914.

sympathy for the building companies and the Town Clerk was instructed to inform the defaulting contractors that unless the work was proceeded with the penalty clauses of their contracts would be put into operation.⁹² The problems for the builders got worse as the war continued. Prices continued to rise, more workers enlisted or were conscripted into the army, materials became harder to get hold of and bonuses were awarded to various groups of technicians. At least one building firm in Huddersfield was declared bankrupt as a result of the additional demands resulting from the war and many other struggled both to survive and to complete the jobs they were required to do.⁹³ Letters from contractors explaining the difficulty of retaining men and suggesting the corporation pay additional amounts to cover the extra costs continued to be received by the town council.⁹⁴ Equally as often the council responded by threatening to invoke their penalty clauses. The problems were reflected in the figures for completed houses given in the council minutes. Compared with 371 houses built in 1912, there were only 13 completed in 1918.⁹⁵

The issue of the availability of houses for those who needed them was also magnified by the actions of some of the local employers. As soon as the few houses that were being built were completed they were snapped up, often by manufacturers on behalf of their own employees. As the development at Salendine Nook was nearing completion the council received a letter from Joseph Sykes Bros. asking for tenancies for their workers. This request was accepted by the Housing and Town Planning Committee. This meant that the general public had no access to the new properties. Rumours quickly spread around town that all corporation houses were already let. One Councillor mentioned these rumours in a council meeting. He said, 'he knew of one man who had been requiring a house for six months in order to get married.' Alderman Wheatley also referred to two cases he knew of in which, 'women had tramped the town around and could not find a house.' He continued that, 'people were constantly asking can you tell us where there is a house to let and he hoped the committee would not stop until they had erected double the number of houses for which contracts were at present placed.' Councillor Smith confirmed that most houses being built were applied for, but a few were still available.⁹⁶ Such problems had a knock-on effect and continued to be felt long after the war ended. One woman, who married a Yorkshire soldier during the war and came to live with her sister-in-law, couldn't get a house even though her name was down. She had to return to her mother in Newcastle when she got pregnant in order to have the baby as the house in Huddersfield was overcrowded. She eventually returned but it was not until 1920 that she finally got a house in a new development just completed in Linthwaite.⁹⁷

It was not merely new housing that caused problems during the war. Much of the population lived in rented accommodation and older properties, and with the outbreak of war leading to a rise in the cost of building materials, as well as the increased demand caused by the migration of workers to industrial hotspots, many landlords used this excuse to raise rents. This was a national problem and

⁹² H&TP Committee, 26 February 1915.

⁹³ *Huddersfield Daily Examiner*, 22 July 1915.

⁹⁴ H&TP Committee, 31 March 1916.

⁹⁵ Ledgard, *To what extent did the First World War impact the domestic lives of working class women in Huddersfield*, p.14.

⁹⁶ *Huddersfield Daily Examiner*, 22 July 1915.

⁹⁷ Kirklees Oral History Archive Ref.261. See also Ledgard, *To what extent did the First World War impact the domestic lives of working class women in Huddersfield*, p.15.

the resulting furore from tenants ultimately led the government to take action with the introduction in 1915 of the Rent Restriction Act which pegged rents to their pre-war level. Englander has written of the importance of rent strikes against the profiteering from rent in the early years of the war.⁹⁸ This meant landlords could not raise rents unless some mitigating factors like a rise in the local rates. The response to this from some of the landlords involved was twofold. Some used the legislation and the difference between prices for materials and the income received from rent as justification for not carrying out repairs or necessary maintenance. They figured that if a property could no longer generate a profit it was not worthwhile to spend money on it. This attitude was deplored by the local authorities. The situation was summed up in the local newspaper:

War is seen as an excuse for not affecting improvements. The medical officer states that it is impractical to demolish unfit houses until satisfactory ones can be provided and that housing schemes must be deferred until a more opportune time. The war has made an excuse by owners of property, who never have and never will carry out improvements unless compelled, for resisting the requirements of the sanitary authority and when they get a measure of encouragement from the Local Government Board the outlook seems hopeless.⁹⁹

As an alternative response some of the more unscrupulous landlords merely ignored the Rent Restriction Act and carried on raising rents and threatening evictions as before. In a case brought before Huddersfield County Court in April 1916 a tenant alleged that the landlord had raised the rent on his house by a shilling a week since the war began. The judge condemned the actions of the property owners and told the tenant that if he brought an action against them he would receive a judgement in his favour and the landlord would be compelled to return every penny he had been over-charged.¹⁰⁰

The landlords themselves, as might be expected, saw things slightly differently as demonstrated by the letter sent by the Huddersfield Property Owners and Ratepayers' Association to the Local Authority urging them to discontinue as far as possible the service of sanitary and other notices and orders until the war was over.¹⁰¹ A report issued by the association summed up their position.

It was desired to point out the apparent absurdity of issuing closing orders during the present juncture. Building operations in the town were practically at a standstill owing to the increased cost of materials and labour, whilst it was well known that there were very few cottage dwellings empty, and in spite of this the Corporation appeared to be making a considerable number of closing orders in respect of cellar dwellings and small cottages.¹⁰²

Mr William Ramsden, Chairman of the Association, commenting upon the report, referred to the housing question and suggested that the Corporation ought to suspend the operation of closing

⁹⁸ David Englander, *Landlord and Tenant in Urban Britain 1838-1918* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), pp.140-61.

⁹⁹ *Huddersfield Daily Examiner*, 1 May 1916.

¹⁰⁰ *Manchester Guardian*, 11 April 1916. See also Ledgard, *To what extent did the First World War impact the domestic lives of working class women in Huddersfield*, p.16.

¹⁰¹ *Huddersfield Daily Examiner*, 21 May 1915.

¹⁰² *Huddersfield Daily Examiner*, 12 May 1915.

orders during the present crisis. He felt that as,

orders for ejection had been largely suspended, and the justices in this district particularly had endeavoured to soften the rigour of the law by asking landlords not to take any action. If that rule was applied against landlords, he thought the Corporation ought to give similar consideration for the benefit of landlords.¹⁰³

The various Colne Valley urban district councils involved had differing responses to this request. In Linthwaite,

There was a great lack of house in the district and serious overcrowding. Young couples were prevented from getting married through their inability to obtain houses and there were many cases of two families living in one house. Many houses were in an insanitary condition and closing orders had been made in four cases, but the council dare not put them into force because there were no houses for the people to remove to. There had been a large increase in the population since the war began, owing to the boom in the making of khaki cloth.¹⁰⁴

Whereas in Meltham, a similar situation during the discussion regarding the proposed demolition of property engendered the response that,

the Chairman said if they had a sanitary inspector and a medical officer who had reported this matter they ought to support them. If they did not attend to their representations they might as well dismiss these officers and save their salaries...As they were responsible they were determined that people should not live in insanitary dwellings and it was their duty to see that conditions under which people lived were the best possible.¹⁰⁵

Working-class housing had been in short supply before the war and despite the increased activity on the part of the local authorities afterwards, it remained so for years to come. Landlords who were unable to raise rents neglected older properties, many of which were condemned as unfit for human habitation. Despite this, however, the pressure of demand and the lack of supply meant people continued to live in insanitary and dilapidated houses.¹⁰⁶

Accommodating Women Workers

It was not only permanent dwellings that were in short supply either. The provision of lodging accommodation was also limited especially for women. Before the war women undertaking work, with the exception of those in domestic situations where lodging of some description was usually provided, rarely travelled far to perform their occupations. Girls working in mills were usually taken on straight from school, often with an introduction from a parent or other family member, into a local organisation.

¹⁰³ *Huddersfield Daily Examiner*, 12 May 1915.

¹⁰⁴ *Huddersfield Daily Examiner*, 1 June 1915.

¹⁰⁵ *Huddersfield Daily Examiner*, 12 August 1915.

¹⁰⁶ Ledgard, *To what extent did the First World War impact the domestic lives of working class women in Huddersfield*, p.17.

Whilst there could be some degree of movement within the neighbourhood, from mill to mill or between departments within one mill, a girl would generally stay in the familiar precincts until she left on marriage or for childbirth. There was no tradition of women uprooting a family to seek work in other areas as there was for men and so women were not catered for as transient workers in the same way men would be. There was also some disquiet expressed about girls in lodgings, such accommodation somehow deeming them disreputable or immoral.

Women and girls in lodgings were considered even more reprehensible than men. There was an expectation that girls should be living at home under the control of their parents, or in domestic service under the control of their employers. Part of the distaste for factory work for girls was that it often meant they had to go into lodgings to be near their work and thus, in Dr Barnado's words, developed that "precocious independence" so inimical to home life.¹⁰⁷

According to the annual report of the Medical Officer of Health, who was responsible for monitoring lodging houses in the County Borough of Huddersfield, of the 799 beds available in common lodging houses in 1912 only 12 were allocated for single women compared with 763 for single men and 25 for married couples. It was the same situation in the Municipal lodging house with 163 men housed and 11 women. By the end of 1914 the situation was even worse with the figures reduced to 8 out of 778 beds in common lodging houses for single women and 11 out of 185 places at the Municipal house.¹⁰⁸

The Women's Co-Operative Guild was especially concerned with this aspect and active in the area. As early as 1911 they were petitioning the Local Authority to provide suitable Lodging House accommodation for women. In this respect they were to be disappointed. Although a property was suggested, the Housing and Town Planning Committee could not, 'see their way to entertain the matter at present.'¹⁰⁹ By 1914 there was a privately-run Women's Hostel in Belmont Street, opened under the auspices of Rev. B Gregory and supported by a committee of local worthies. A meeting held in March 1915 demonstrated the problems and pressures caused by the war with its attendant movement of people, increased prices and military dislocations:

Since the hostel was opened three years ago 130 boarders had been received, 50 of whom had been in residence during 1914. For the first six months of 1914 the ordinary course of the work had been maintained. The outbreak of war threatened to affect them seriously. Several residents left owing to the shortness of employment. The difficulty had now adjusted itself and at the present time all the cubicles were taken. On the suggestion of his co-secretary they were able to provide hospitality for the wives of some of the wounded soldiers from the Huddersfield Infirmary, the cost being kindly defrayed by a few friends. The rising cost of living has meant the Executive Committee were reluctantly compelled to recommend that the terms for board and residence be altered accordingly.¹¹⁰

Thus, with the outbreak of war and the influx of female workers, soldiers' wives, munitions makers

¹⁰⁷ Leonore Davidoff, *The separation of home and Work?* in Sandra Burman (ed.) *Fit Work for Women*. (Croom Helm: London, 1979), p.74.

¹⁰⁸ Annual Report of the Medical Officer of Health, County Borough of Huddersfield.

¹⁰⁹ Women's Cooperative Guild Minutes, 19 April 1911: Housing and Town Planning Committee Minutes, 2 June 1911.

¹¹⁰ *Huddersfield Daily Examiner*, 1 March 1915.

families, replacement teachers, nurses and all the assorted personnel necessary to maintain the country on a war footing, the overall lack of provision especially that for women was emphasised all too clearly. The main problem with importing this many workers into a town that was already experiencing housing shortages was all too apparent. 'The difficulty in Huddersfield will be getting lodgings. There is a housing famine and thousands of comers into British Dyes is making it impossible to house the suggested number of women that can be brought in.'¹¹¹ The *Huddersfield Daily Examiner* had a rather brutal but efficient solution, 'It is likely that considerable difficulty will arise in finding lodging and housing for the new arrivals. On the other hand few families are now complete and the room which is available should be utilised.'¹¹²

To this end the Women's War Employment (Industrial) Committee, which had been established in March 1916 under the purview of the Board of Trade and the Home Office to consider the problem of extending the use of women in local industry, set up the provisional lodging sub-committee.¹¹³ This body was tasked with taking every measure necessary to provide suitable accommodation for the influx of women to the town and to this end the Huddersfield Women's Employment Committee, upon receiving such girls, devised a number of strategies to secure the necessary lodgings for them.¹¹⁴ These committees worked closely with the local labour exchanges which were considered the only national organisation capable of implementing manpower policy. They alone had the trained officials and the network of local offices that could survey the industrial capacity and manpower resources of the country, enrol volunteers under the various recruitment schemes and register, place and transfer labour. It was from their files that candidates for dilution and especially substitution were suggested; and throughout the war they placed daily an average of 4,000 people, including many of the 1.5 million women recruited into the labour force who needed special help to move and settle down in the new munitions centres.¹¹⁵ The Board of Trade issued a memo in March of 1916 stating,

The organisations of accommodation can best be undertaken by the local authority in co-operation with the Labour Exchange, the local committee and any voluntary bodies. The task will be to ascertain and register all suitable available accommodation and where that is found to be insufficient, to prepare and carry out schemes for providing additional accommodation in hostels or other means. In cases where it is anticipated that the local reserves of women's labour will be insufficient, and any considerable number will require to be brought in from outside, the local authority should be requested to prepare a register of accommodation, to consider measures for supplementing it if necessary and generally to exercise supervision over the housing accommodation for the workers. A copy of the register should be placed at the local labour exchange for the information of workers.¹¹⁶

In Leeds the Labour Exchange register was supplemented by a list kept by the Medical Officer of Health who undertook to keep a look-out for undesirable lodgings and to warn any girls found living

¹¹¹ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 13 April 1916.

¹¹² *Huddersfield Daily Examiner*, 8 April 1916.

¹¹³ Ledgard, *To what extent did the First World War impact the domestic lives of working class women in Huddersfield*, p.11.

¹¹⁴ Women's War Employment Committee, 28 June 1916, S/NUDBTW/34, West Yorkshire Archive Service.

¹¹⁵ Rodney Lowe, 'The Ministry of Labour 1916-19: a Still Small Voice?' in Kathleen Burk (ed.) *War and the State: the Transformation of British Government 1914-1919* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1982), p.113.

¹¹⁶ WWEC, March 1916.

there. In Huddersfield there were no available houses for purchase due to the activities of the various dye and munitions companies and so the committee concentrated much of their effort on maximising the number of places available for lodgers. They appealed to the patriotic feelings of the people of Huddersfield, comparing the incoming women workers to the refugees who had been welcomed in the town earlier in the war. Offering places was also deemed to be assisting the war effort. As one local paper pointed out:

Those who offer them a home, on terms which will cover the cost but without thought of margins which would give extortionate profits, will be adopting a form of war work which will assist in the common task of struggling through... We feel those people willing to accommodate Belgian refugees will be glad to help the daughters of their own fellow countrymen, especially as this can be done without pecuniary sacrifice.¹¹⁷

There were also entreaties to Christian duty in the search for suitable housing. It was agreed that the vicars of the various churches in both Huddersfield and the surrounding area, as well as the superintendent ministers of the local circuits and the free churches, should be asked to make an appeal to their congregations from the pulpit. In an effort to leave no stone unturned, and incorporate as much of the population as possible, the managers of all the local cinemas were asked to assist in making known the need for lodgings, and handbills were displayed in all branches of the Co-Operative Society.¹¹⁸

Some mill owners approached their staff directly. One woman recalled that,

the bosses kept putting out notices saying would anyone like to take two girls in as boarders for the remainder of the war. So that's how they got through it...they'd to depend on people like me. They might have said, well you've got a little spare bedroom, will you take a girl in as long as you know we'll find her some work and we'll see that she pays her board.¹¹⁹

There were also allegations that some employers who owned houses had threatened their tenants with notices to quit if they would not take in some of the imported women as lodgers, but the committee found no evidence of this.¹²⁰ The question of securing the active cooperation of the workpeople in making the girls comfortable was also discussed and a suggestion made that workers committees might be formed in the different mills. This matter, however, was perhaps a step too far and was left over for another meeting.¹²¹

By April 1916 50-60 replies had been received offering accommodation, and the ladies of the Provisional Lodging Sub-Committee were delegated to visit and inspect the various lodgings to make sure they were suitable for use. Those lodgings that did appear satisfactory and conformed to the standard of charges agreed to by the committee were placed on a register kept at the local Labour

¹¹⁷ *Huddersfield Daily Examiner*, 12 April 1916.

¹¹⁸ WWEC, 14 June 1916. See also Ledgard, *To what extent did the First World War impact the domestic lives of working class women in Huddersfield*, p.11.

¹¹⁹ Colne Valley Interview 16, deposited at Kirklees Sound Archive.

¹²⁰ *Huddersfield Worker*, 22 April 1916.

¹²¹ WWEC, 17 April 1916.

Exchange and recommended to women arriving in the town. The mayoress, Mrs Blamires, and other members also inspected a house in Milnsbridge to see whether it could be adapted as a hostel for young working women and approaches were made to the Huddersfield and District Woollen Manufacturers' Association on the need for provision of hostels.¹²² Eventually a house in Scar Lane was adapted as a hostel for imported girls, but this was a small-scale, private enterprise by the local mill owners. Some mill owners also took matters into their own hands. The firm of Joseph Hoyle commandeered a large house to provide hostel places for their workers. They also knocked two houses in Longwood into one bigger dwelling to accommodate workers being brought into the area to work in the mills.¹²³

The authorities, perhaps mindful that the women being imported were temporary workers and would not be required after the Armistice, were in no hurry to provide larger accommodation on a permanent basis, and so the reliance on public-spirited offers by people opening their homes to incomers continued. For many of the working class this was not such an unusual situation. In some communities there was a tradition of taking in lodgers, often relatives but also paying guests. Depending on the size of the house and the financial circumstances providing lodgings was an accepted way of earning extra money.¹²⁴ Despite being a common practice, it was not always a comfortable undertaking. In a survey carried out by the Leeds Women's Employment Committee questions were asked about the nature of the accommodation provided in similar circumstances. The responses are likely to be applicable to many of the workers and landladies in Huddersfield as well. It was found that most girls were paying for lodgings only as landladies were reluctant to provide food due to the rising prices. In addition, many of the girls who did pay for full board only got sandwiches for their mid-day meal. It was further revealed that when lodging only was paid for the girl was expected to keep to her room and was rarely welcomed into the family kitchen. Costs of lodging varied usually between 10s and 14s per week for full board and lodging and 5s to 6s per week lodging only however these prices were increasing due to the rising cost of living. It was also noted that munitions workers were paying up to 16s per week which added to the pressure on prices. Where the lower figure was paid it was expected that two girls would occupy one bed and assistance with light housekeeping was also often asked for.¹²⁵

There was also a perception in some quarters that the working class was being unfairly targeted by the authorities and their well-to-do representatives. The Women's Cooperative Guild was especially concerned about this and to this end sent delegates to sit on the Central Billeting Board convened by the council to oversee the allocation of accommodation. In correspondence from the Women's Cooperative Guild it was suggested that lodgings should be found in the houses of the gentry first as their large, often empty, houses made it appear that the burdens of war were not being equally distributed across all society.¹²⁶

¹²² WWEC, 18 July 1916. See also Ledgard, *To what extent did the First World War impact the domestic lives of working class women in Huddersfield*, p.12.

¹²³ Colne Valley Interview 18, deposited at Kirklees Sound Archive.

¹²⁴ Roberts, *A Woman's Place*, p.141. See also Ledgard, p.13.

¹²⁵ Leeds Women's War Employment Committee, WYL101/5/10, West Yorkshire Archive Service.

¹²⁶ WCG Minutes, 7 November 1917. See also Ledgard, *To what extent did the First World War impact the domestic lives of working class women in Huddersfield*, p.13.

The number and quality of houses continued to be a major issue for government, local authority and other interested parties. Workers' organisations including Trade and Labour Councils continued to agitate for increased investment. Women's groups were also keen to be involved in the new developments with the Women's Co-operative Guild amongst others organising conferences to try and influence the practical design of homes and the maintenance of communities in the face of slum clearances and urban regeneration. Thus whilst the war may have highlighted and intensified problems, it did not create them. Rent strikes and agitation for improved housing marked the decades leading to the outbreak of war and the housing question remained a vexatious issue in the years following. What the war did represent was the point at which the government was no longer able to remain remote and uninvolved. As housing historian David Englander stated,

The social and political impact of the war upon the working classes remains problematical. In regard to housing reform, however, it did not, denote a sharp discontinuity. What had altered was not the aspiration but, the intensity of the, demand for improved housing. It reflected a heightened consciousness of social injustice.¹²⁷

It can be seen, therefore, that the First World War placed an incredible burden on the women of Huddersfield. In common with everyone else they endured increased prices, food shortages, pressure on housing, the absence of loved ones and the uncertainty of four years of relentless conflict. For the female workers of the West Riding textile districts, there was also the added burden of maintaining industrial output in the face of labour shortages and lack of raw materials. Much of the historiography of women during this period has seen women as either workers or at home. The women of the woollen area would have seen no such division. They worked long hours in the mills, often because it was impossible to survive merely on the wages paid to their husband, and then went home and performed all the vital domestic functions necessary to maintain their household. The war may have created additional difficulties, extra shifts to cover, dark streets to walk home through, lodgers to accommodate and all the other adjustments for life in wartime, but the fundamental problems remained constant throughout. The war did not create the problems women had to face, but rather intensified and exaggerated existing issues. The actions of the authorities also served to reinforce the remote nature of the government and the lack of understanding of problems primarily faced by women. Measures introduced often seemed to disproportionately inconvenience female workers and facilities that had been lacking before the war remained scarce after it. Hostels for munition workers may have been provided in the short term, but no such provision was considered necessary for existing textile workers. Despite wages increasing they never managed to keep pace with the rising prices of goods and the influx of new and inexperienced workers added strain to the already overstretched accommodation of the area.

It had long been the case that working-class housing was inadequate and overcrowded. The increased movement of people needed for army production merely brought such issues to the fore. Similarly, the diet of many working households was meagre and monotonous. Rationing, when it was eventually instituted, led to improvements in the food consumption of many poorer families but rising

¹²⁷ Englander, *Landlord and Tenant*, p.310.

prices often cancelled out increased wages and so the overall situation remained similar to life before the war. For most working-class women in Huddersfield the war, whilst a major event in their lives causing disruption and disorder, was a temporary one. 'The vast majority of women during the war did what women always do: they raised children, fed families and maintained the home. Home fires were kept burning because British women dutifully kept furnaces stoked.'¹²⁸ To this may be added that the women of the textile areas continued to work in the mills, providing the material to clothe the soldiers as well as continuing to run their households. In the face of public indifference, official disinterest, inconvenience and discomfort they managed to combine the spheres of work and domesticity as they had always done.

¹²⁸ Gerard DeGroot, *Blighty: British Society In The Era Of The Great War* (London: Longman, 1996), p.223.

Chapter Nine – Aftermath

The First World War lasted for four years, from 1914 to 1918 and for most of this period the entire British economy was focused on the war effort. All political, social and industrial aims were concerned with fighting and ultimately winning the conflict. In the West Riding textile mills the sole output for this period was various shades of khaki or blue. Millions of yards of cloth were produced for British or Allied forces by a largely female workforce. And then came peace and the readjustment, after so much sustained effort, to the normality of life after war. The initial reaction was jubilation. It was said that the day in 1919 when the first piece of coloured cloth for four years came off a Colne Valley loom was a day of rejoicing.¹ Peace, however, brought new challenges, problems and opportunities for the industry, for the union and for the women who had worked during the war to maintain the output and keep the soldiers and sailors equipped and supplied.

As much of the historiographical work undertaken in the area of women's work during wartime has concentrated largely on the impact of female entry into male areas of work, specifically in engineering and munitions, consideration of the effects of the end of the war have centred on the efforts to remove them from these fields. Deborah Thom, for example, in examining the munitions workers of London looked at how the government and the trade unions colluded in their efforts to return to the pre-war state of employment, using legislation to eliminate women from their wartime jobs and replace them with returning servicemen.² Braybon and Summerfield found that women removed from such work found little alternatives outside of the traditional 'female' work of domestic service or dressmaking.³ Even the relatively upbeat Angela Woollacott, after outlining some of the options available for ex-munitions workers, is forced to acknowledge that the situation for many unskilled female workers in the immediate post-war period was grim.⁴ All these writers, however, have concentrated on the impact of workers who had spent the war in jobs that were not large areas of employment for women beforehand and were rapidly expanded during the war to many times their normal peacetime size. The jobs these women were doing were, therefore, artificially created within firms that were abnormally increased. By focusing on the fact that these unsustainable jobs ceased to exist with the coming of peace and the difficulties this caused for the women employed in them, historians have somewhat distorted the problems that occurred in industries where women were a regular and normal part of the workforce.

In a similar fashion, much of the concern of writers focusing on the social and political gains made by women as a result of the war, has been overshadowed by the perception that the award of the franchise to a limited number of women represents the achievement of a female goal. Writers like Anna Davin, Jill Liddington, Sheila Rowbotham and Patricia Hollis have concentrated on the political

¹ Phyllis Bentley, *The Pennine Weaver* (Bath: Firecrest Publishing Ltd, 1970), p.67.

² Deborah Thom, *Nice Girls And Rude Girls: Women Workers In World War One* (London: I.B.Taurus, 1998).

³ Gail Braybon and Penny Summerfield, *Out of The Cage: Women's Experience in Two World Wars* (New York: Pandora, 1987).

⁴ Angela Woollacott, *On Her Their Lives Depend: Munitions Workers In The Great War* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), p.111.

advancement of women, seeing this as central to the engagement and citizenship desired.⁵ For many women, however, the vote was not a major motivation for public service or community activism. The suffrage question and the involvement of women in the formal exercise of power has thus tended to detract from other areas of social concern for many of the women involved.

It was obvious, therefore, that despite the acclaim with which women workers were being viewed in the early part of the war, this regard was neither widespread, nor particularly long lasting. Well before the end of the conflict, many groups and organisations were already planning for the expected disruptions that peace would bring. Reconstruction discussions were underway by 1917 and for many women this would adversely impact upon their lives and careers. The first concern was the demobilisation of the men from the forces. Under an agreement made on 4 February 1916 between the representatives of the employers and workpeople engaged in the wool and worsted industries of the West Riding it was acknowledged that any substitutions of men by women were temporary and that all men who joined the army were entitled to be reinstated in their former employments as soon as they were released. It was further agreed that where women were employed to take the place of men, such women would not continue to be employed after men became available and the where any workpeople were not fully employed through shortage of work that women who have taken the place of men would be the first to be discharged or suspended provided that qualified men could be found to do the work.⁶

Many firms had also made more or less informal offers of reinstatement as an inducement to enlistment and so were obliged to honour their commitments. The immediate post-war boom rendered such considerations moot, although there were concerns that men would not want to return to jobs that had been undertaken by women as a wartime measure. This was particularly relevant in the cotton industry, especially in Lancashire, but also in the West Riding.⁷ It was felt that if women had been employed, the work was now downgraded and, therefore, would not pay enough to keep a man employed. In the woollen industry this was much less of a problem. Most of the work considered skilled, and thus well-paid, was protected by the GUTW and the men who performed it were regarded as essential workers and starred and exempted from military service as holders of certified occupations. Although the Manpower Board reclassified many of these jobs as the conscription figures fell in the latter stages of the war, appeals and demands by the union meant that by war's end most were still occupied by male operatives. Women did make some inroads in jobs such as fettling but the numbers involved were relatively small and easily removed back to their former work at the end of the conflict. Many firms also used younger boys or men over military age to perform some of these tasks and so avoided giving women the opportunity for more responsible and well-remunerated work. In the aftermath of the war, some of these male workers benefited from the desire to reinstate male workers and gained work that before the war they would not have been entitled to as

⁵ Anna Davin, "Redressing the Balance or Transforming the Art? The British Experience," in S. Jay Kleinberg, ed, *Retrieving Women's History: Changing Perceptions in the Role of Women in Politics and Society* (London: Berg/Unesco, 1988), Jill Liddington and Jill Norris, *One Hand Tied Behind Us: The rise of the women's suffrage movement* (London: Virago Press, 1978), Sheila Rowbotham, *Hidden from History*, (London: Pluto, 1973), Patricia Hollis, *Ladies Elect: Women in English Local Government 1865-1914* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987).

⁶ Woollen and Worsted Trade Federation Minutes, 4 February 1916, 20D81/1-2, West Yorkshire Archive Service.

⁷ Report of the Chief Inspector of Factories 1919, GWH/BC18, University of Huddersfield Archives.

unapprenticed and inexperienced operatives.

It was not only factory workers who were affected by the desire to reinstate the pre-war conditions. Many of the professional women who had made gains in the welfare and supervision fields were also now surplus to requirements. Edith Hoyle, who had been appointed as the first 'lady assistant inspector' to work with the Huddersfield Police in March 1915, was effectively forced to resign as she was unable to work with the new Chief Constable of the force. Despite valuable work in administering the various supervision requirements of soldiers' wives, juvenile well-being and the Shops Act, she was a victim of the incoming Chief's prejudice against women police and ultimately left to pursue a similar role, of checking female workers, in the security section of British Dyes.⁸ Other women taken on as wartime welfare officers also faced removal as the war ended. Florence Lockwood records in her diary in January 1919, 'Miss Wass, welfare supervisor at the Karrier Kar works came to tea to say goodbye. The firm is reverting to solely male labour.'⁹ Mrs Lockwood also detailed other aspects of the disassembling of the various initiatives put in place for the newly feminised workforce of the war. In April she mentions that the Girls Cottage, established in 1916 as a place of refuge for the imported women needed to keep the mills going, had been dismantled, with the furniture sold or put into storage.¹⁰

For some women, however, the end of the war brought new opportunities. The state intervention during the war had resulted in many initiatives. Separation Allowances were paid to the wives and dependants of soldiers and sailors, pensions were paid to widows and orphans, rent restrictions meant the housing supply was altered as tenants could no longer be as easily evicted and food controls resulted in rationing. Each of these measures required a form of local administration and many of the committees and bodies established to implement this employed the talents of various local worthies. Many local women had long been involved in a variety of charitable and philanthropic endeavours. Emily Siddon, for example, had been a member of the Board of Guardians since the 1880s, Mary Blamires was the President of the Huddersfield Soldiers' and Sailors' Families Association, other women served on school boards and the public health union. With the coming of the Armistice and the alterations to the franchise and the opening up of more civic bodies, some of the women who had been involved in the organising of the welfare supervision, fundraising, committee meetings and myriad other tasks necessary during the war now had a chance to put their public service of a more official footing. Although many had long been involved in the Poor Law and Education fields more avenues were now open to the woman with a desire to serve her community. Areas of concern for women including maternal and infant welfare and housing were now centre stage in the Reconstruction debate and women lost no time in making their interests clear.

By 1921 the Huddersfield Branch of the Women's Liberal Association was able to detail that, 'since the last report Mrs Thomas Shires has been created a JP. Mrs Shires and Mrs W. H. Haigh have been re-elected on the Housing Sub-Committee, where they have done useful work and several of our members have served on juries.'¹¹ Also appointed to the Huddersfield County Borough Bench

⁸ Vivien Teasdale, *Huddersfield in the Great War* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword, 2014), p.90.

⁹ Florence Lockwood diary, 12 January 1919, KC909, West Yorkshire Archive Service.

¹⁰ Lockwood Diary, April 1919.

¹¹ Huddersfield Women's Liberal Association, 1921, WYK1146, West Yorkshire Archive Service.

were Mrs Mary Blamires and Miss Emily Siddon, both of whom had received the M.B.E. in 1918 for their services during the war.¹² Miss Siddon already held the honorary title of J.P as a result of her position on the Board of Guardians but could now use the term in earnest. Mrs Blamires also went on to in 1923 to represent the Bradley ward on the Huddersfield Town Council, the first woman member in the district. She also served as the president of the Young Women's Christian Association, the Huddersfield branch of which she had inaugurated during her term as Mayoress in 1916.¹³ Other women who had been active during the war found themselves taking a different direction. Mrs Donkersley, who had been a leading light in the organisation of Social Clubs for imported girl workers, turned towards the pacifist cause as the war progressed and afterwards was active in the Women's International League. She also continued her interest in the Temperance movement and the Free Church Council as well as the Huddersfield Liberal Association.¹⁴ Other women continued to advocate for issues they were interested in and many were vocal in the post-war debate about Reconstruction. The Huddersfield Co-operative Women's Guild, for example, sent a resolution to the Town Council outlining 'Women's Ideas on Housing' and requesting that houses be built to 'meet the needs of all the working classes.'¹⁵ They also held discussions on Fisher's new Education Bill and the question of low pay and unemployment. It can be seen, therefore, that there was not one typical female experience of either the war, or the aftermath.

For the woollen textile industry the immediate post-war outlook was rosy. After four years of restricted trade and export difficulties, the sudden reopening of foreign markets and the desire of the population to restock wardrobes long overwhelmed with khaki led to increased demand for new goods. From 1918 to 1921 the industry experienced a period of boom, subject to the usual seasonal fluctuations, and profits were maintained largely at the high levels they had attained during the war. For the workers this high level of activity meant that demands for labour continued and most of the personnel released from the Army and local munitions factories were easily reabsorbed into their occupations. Indeed, the Factory Inspectors report of 1919 stated that, 'if a more systematic intensive training could have been undertaken in the textile factories at the beginning of 1919, of girls of 16 to 20 years, who had in many cases no trade other than munitions making, the industries as well as the women would have gained.'¹⁶ There were concerns that there was a shortage of women workers. The Factory Inspectors report goes on to note that obstacles to the adequate supply of women workers included those that had been apparent during the war but in peacetime were no longer tolerated. 'One or two large woollen manufacturers have attempted or considered the provision of hostels, but women do not take kindly to hostels life, except perhaps as a war emergency measure.'¹⁷

Lack of new machinery, raw materials and skilled workers all contributed to disruption in the textile industry and meant that the reversion to the old order was not undertaken on the same scale as in the more protected engineering fields. Demobilised men did not return to textiles in the same

¹² *Huddersfield Worker*, 15 June 1918.

¹³ Emma Raffan, *Joseph Blamires 1861-1918* (Huddersfield, 1967), p.36.

¹⁴ *Huddersfield Weekly Examiner*, 3 June 1939.

¹⁵ Huddersfield Women's Cooperative Guild Minutes, 18 January 1919, KC63/10, West Yorkshire Archive Service.

¹⁶ Report of the Chief Inspector of Factories 1919, GWH/BC18, University of Huddersfield Archives.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

numbers and women maintained their position in a larger proportion of areas for longer than in other industries. The Factory Inspectors report continued, 'In areas where women's employment predominated, such as in the textile centres, manufacturers cannot, even by advertising and offering all manner of inducements, secure a sufficiency of female workers. It would appear that an adequate number of women does not exist to staff the vacancies.'¹⁸

The woollen industry immediately after the war was also in the fortunate position of having a relatively harmonious relationship between the employers and the unions, being one of the few areas where the establishment of a Joint Industrial Council worked, however briefly, for the benefit of both sides.¹⁹ The good times were not to last. By 1922 boom turned to bust. A variety of factors, including the economic collapse of Central Europe, war debts, the emergence of new producing countries and the lack of investment in new machinery and even new fashion trends combined to severely curtail production. The export of cloth fell by approximately 150,000,000 square yards in the space of a year.²⁰ In the Huddersfield district, out of 54,000 registered workers, it was reported that 28,000 or nearly 52 per cent were unemployed. The reaction of the employers was to reduce wage rates for those remaining in work. This naturally impacted most on the women who received lower rates, especially piece-workers. The changes in work engendered by the war, however, meant that some women now had choices. Alternative jobs in retail, local government and engineering now existed for women and they began to leave the low paid, often unpleasant work in the mills. Although trade did pick up slightly in 1923 it continued to fluctuate throughout the subsequent years and the security that had seemed certain during the years of full employment during the war and the immediate aftermath never re-established itself. The decade 1910 to 1920 therefore marked the historic peak of the English woollen industry in terms of output, numbers employed and machine capacity. The 1920s represented the beginning of a slow decline. The number of looms fell by over one third between 1919 and 1939. Spinning capacity fell by 10 per cent. In the early 1930s the total volume of cloth being woven was less than half the pre-war level. Although some recovery was apparent later in the decade, output did not rise above two-thirds of the 1912 level.²¹ The downturn in the textile trade eventually reduced the overall workforce but it remains the case that the industry was one area that women gained some benefit from the circumstances of war. Work in general was increasingly concentrated in cleaner, production line factories and women, with their supposed greater ability for routine, tedious tasks and docility, not to mention their best selling point of cheapness, were at the forefront of the modern workforce. In textiles they had always been regarded as the cheaper option and this continued into the post-war era.

The General Union of Textile Workers also finished the war in a relatively strong position. The years of high demand for textile workers had resulted in the union increasing in size, both in terms of members and financial assets. Ben Turner, the President, summarised the position in 1917 writing that, 'The Textile Union is now the second biggest Union in the country. We have over 30,000 paying

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Chris Wrigley, *Cosy Co-Operation Under Strain* (York: Borthwick Institute, 1987).

²⁰ Bentley, *Pennine Weaver*, p.69.

²¹ Tony Jowitt and Arthur Mclvor, 'Introduction' in J.A. Jowitt and A.J. Mclvor (eds.), *Employers and Labour in the English Textile Industries 1850-1939* (London: Routledge, 1988), p.ix.

members of whom 14,000 are in our district. Of this number at least 16,000 are females.²² Union involvement in the wartime organisation of the industry also led to greater prestige. Union leaders sat on the Wool Advisory Committees and were heavily involved in the systems of arbitration introduced by the government for the resolution of wartime disputes.²³ Closer working relationships between the various Unions during the war and the recognition that aims were often shared also led to calls for greater co-operation and amalgamation of the various representative bodies within the textile industry.²⁴ As early as 1915 discussions were initiated between different unions with a view to this end and even though little progress was made while the war was ongoing, the period saw the eventual creation of the National Association of Unions in the Textile Trade, an umbrella organisation of affiliated bodies.²⁵

For the GUTW executive, therefore, the war years could be seen as a time of positive results. The union leaders were seen by the government as instrumental in maintaining the co-operation of the workpeople in keeping the mills running and by the workers as representatives in the arbitration process necessary to agree the wage rises and bonus awards vital to keep pace with the ever increasing cost of living. Not everyone, however, was as convinced that the executive was working for the interests of all the workers. Although the GUTW was nominally committed to the principle of equal pay for equal work, in reality the inequalities in pay and conditions experienced by the different sexes was barely addressed throughout the war.²⁶ All delegations appointed to the arbitration meetings, or the advisory committees were exclusively male, and most agreements contained reinforcement of the differentials existing within the industry. There were some tentative efforts to address the issues but most rapidly fell away and achieved little in the way of concrete progress.

One of the main complaints, both before the war and during, was the lack of engagement by female operatives in the work of the union.²⁷ Many women workers, especially the low paid and unskilled, were reluctant to join the union, seeing little advantage for themselves, or failing to recognise themselves in the male dominated organisation. With the increase in the number of female workers caused by enlistment and conscription during the war, measures were taken to address this problem. The Huddersfield branch of the GUTW advertised for and employed a female organiser to canvass mills and factories in the district and boost the numbers of women joining the union. A Lancashire woman, Mary Luty, was appointed in early 1915 to undertake this work.²⁸ When she resigned in 1917 her replacement, Edith Rhodes, was engaged on much less active terms and was largely in an administrative role. Already the consideration of women within the Union was being downgraded. In a similar vein, the Women's Guild was established by the GUTW to provide a forum for spreading information about the work of the Union and a focus for female members to express

²² Ben Turner, *Short History of the General Union of Textile Workers* (1917), p.122.

²³ Dorothy M. Zimmern, 'The Wool Trade in War Time', *The Economic Journal*, Vol. 28, No. 109 (Mar 1918,) pp.7-29.

²⁴ General Union of Textile Workers Minutes, 8 November 1917, S/NUDBTW/1, West Yorkshire Archive Service.

²⁵ *Huddersfield Worker*, 5 May 1917.

²⁶ Barbara Drake, *Women in Trade Unions* (1921), p.128.

²⁷ Joanna Bornat, 'What About That Lass Of Yours Being In The Union? Textile Workers And Their Union In Yorkshire, 1888-1922' in Leonore Davidoff and Belinda Westover (eds), *Our Work, Our Lives, Our Words* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1986), p.93.

²⁸ General Union of Textile Workers Minutes, 24 April 1915, S/NUDBTW/1, West Yorkshire Archive Service.

their views. Again, the opinions and concerns of the female members failed to coincide with those of the male executive. The Women's Guild campaigned for equal war bonuses for female workers, for representation on arbitration delegations, for the reduction of working hours and for the removal of children from employment. In each of these areas they failed to gain traction with the main, male dominated union. By 1919 the leadership of the Guild recognised that little progress was being made. At their Annual Meeting in January the President gave an address outlining that, 'now that there are signs of Peace, it is necessary that women should be alert. Peace conditions may be more trying for us than War conditions have been. Quite a large number of problems are waiting to be solved, and if improvement is to be made, it is necessary for the women to take an intelligent interest in those problems.'²⁹ As the Guild was only ever advisory and had no executive function, however, any interests women may have expressed were largely ignored by the GUTW and the Guild was eventually to peter out of existence in June 1919. Edith Rhodes, the women's' organiser, was also surplus to requirements after the war and she was back at mill work by 1920.

The aftermath of the war, therefore, meant different things to different groups and individuals. By focusing on munitions workers, the situation for many others has been overlooked and the picture distorted. For the textile workers of the West Riding, the immediate post-war period was not a time of grim unemployment as the returning soldiers retook their old jobs at the expense of the temporary female workforce. On the contrary, for most of the workers in the mills the situation of high employment continued for another two or three years. Those few women who had made some gains in terms of taking on a male job were removed but the majority were merely returned to the conditions they had been in before the war. Instead of working two looms they returned to one and instead of weaving and spinning they returned to mending and burling. Indeed, some girls had seen this as a condition of taking on male jobs for the duration. One woman recalled her boss persuading her to undertake a different job during the war by ensuring she could return, 'he promised us that when the war was over and the boys came back, we could come back to mending.'³⁰ The GUTW, with the male jobs protected and their male members largely back in position, returned to the more half-hearted attempts to unionise the women workers that had prevailed before the war. The industry enjoyed the brief respite that the mini-boom gave before succumbing to the general malaise that overtook most of the British economy through the rest of the 1920s and 30s and the decline that continued in textiles after the Second World War.

In a similar fashion the end of the war did not mark the start of a brand new era of female political engagement. Although some women found fresh openings for their activism, the overall situation was little changed. The alterations to the franchise, largely implemented to protect the interests of the male soldiers, did not cover many of the women who had performed war work and so they were excluded from the formal exercise of power, whilst many of the newly enfranchised women were already the committee members and co-opted organisers of the pre-war period. Even though the structures of social interaction may have altered as a result of the innovations and policies of the war, housing reform, infant care, industrial welfare and the various other measures introduced, the

²⁹ General Union of Textile Workers Women's Guild Minutes, S/NUDBTW/61, West Yorkshire Archive Service.

³⁰ Colne Valley Interview 11, Deposited at Kirklees Sound Archive.

personnel administering them, and the overall conservative nature of their governance meant that the immediate post-war world differed little from the one that had existed before.

Chapter Ten – Conclusion

In 1918, at the conclusion of the First World War, Millicent Fawcett, the leader of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, remarked that, 'the war revolutionised the industrial position of women - it found them serfs and left them free.'¹ The truth, or otherwise, of this statement has been argued over ever since. The debate about the extent to which women were affected by the war has ranged over a number of topics but the essential question has been framed as to whether women gained or lost as a result of their involvement in the wartime workforce and the associated expansion of female roles. In many ways, however, large sections of the female population who were employed before the war did not see such dramatic or enduring changes as those heralded by the popular press or government reports of the time and the subsequent examinations by historians. Fawcett's statement and much of the historiography that followed it suffers from two significant problems. In the first place it assumes a commonality of experience. That is that all women who worked, regardless of age, class, geographical location or perceived skill level, achieved, or indeed desired, the same outcome from their work. Secondly it suggests that any advances or gains made were of a long-lasting nature or would generate long-term consequences. Basing an assessment of the impact of the war on these assumptions is thus problematical as neither stand up to rigorous scrutiny. The very temporary nature of war work, by definition, refutes these postulations and the presence of the various agreements between unions, employers and the government reinforced the essentially ephemeral and artificial character of the jobs taken up by women during the conflict. The tendency to concentrate on the munitions industry as the most significant contribution to female employment merely reinforces the unbalanced nature of the debate and overshadows the input and involvement of other groups of female workers.

It is certainly true that more women than ever before were involved in paid work during the period, the vast majority employed in the various munitions factories. Women who had never worked entered the ranks of paid employment, and occupations that had long been male-dominated were opened up to female employees. To use this as an indication of a general freeing for female workers is, however, somewhat misleading. Most of the workers employed in the new plants were not new workers.² Although contemporary newspaper reports made much of the introduction of women who had not previously been employed into the various engineering and chemical industries, this was largely government propaganda. Most of the women so employed were already working women who left their traditionally female and therefore low-paying jobs in domestic service or garment making, for the more lucrative occupations on offer in the filling factories or aeroplane shops.

Almost by definition wartime jobs were of a temporary nature. The fact that once the war ended and the need for shells and guns no longer existed, neither would the job, was largely understood by many of the workers undertaking them. Contracts were often for short periods of six or twelve months,

¹ Millicent Fawcett., *The Women's Victory - And After: Personal Reminiscences* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1920), p.106.

² Gail Braybon , *Women Workers In The First World War* (London: Croom Helm, 1981).

or specified that the job was for the duration of the war only. The existence of various Treasury Agreements between engineering unions and government representatives, insisting on the restoration of pre-war conditions and the use of women merely as dilutees and therefore not responsible for the actual, complete job also precluded the long-term future for women in many of the engineering industries that wartime necessity opened up. In addition, women themselves often had different reasons for taking war work. For some, the extra money was important, whereas for others it was a matter of patriotism or a desire to help the war effort or myriad assorted motivations.³ The response to the ending of the jobs with the coming of peace were thus also many and varied. Whilst some women would have been happy to continue and resented having to give up their jobs to returning soldiers, or even to men who had not served but demanded precedence as male workers, other women were equally as glad to relinquish their work in favour of a return to their former occupations or a removal from the world of work altogether. Newspapers and the public opinion they shaped were also complicit in emphasising the changing nature of women workers. The very people who had been lauded in 1916 for helping to free a man to fight by taking his job, were now castigated as parasites, keeping a man from his rightful place in industry by refusing to move back to the domestic role that nature intended for women.

This, then, is the traditional view of women workers of the First World War. But many working women of the time would not have recognised their situation in the scenario outlined. The concentration of both contemporary sources and subsequent writers on the obvious changes in the area has served to show the perception of women workers, but the reality was a more complex and nuanced picture that has largely been ignored. Although more women than ever were employed during the war, it remains the case that even before the outbreak of conflict large numbers of women were already present in the working population. For the women of the textile districts the commencement of hostilities did not create work where none had existed before. Many of the women in Huddersfield and the Colne Valley were experienced workers long before the war brought new demands and challenges, and they continued to work long after the Armistice was declared. Their efforts during the war were largely unremarked on at the time and have continued to be overshadowed in the subsequent years as attention has centred on the more glamorous and volatile changes wrought in munitions and the associated war industries. This emphasis on munitions has concentrated on the changes to the detriment of industries where there were few or none at all. The woollen workers have remained the invisible workers, vital to the war effort, but outshone and ignored.

The events of the war did not start any significant changes in the woollen trade. What it did was serve to highlight and emphasise existing issues within the industry and the communities involved. Thus, before the war woollen workers, their unions, employers and other interested bodies were concerned about the state and lack of local housing, about hours and conditions in the mills, about wages and the representation of workers. The war, with its demands, aggravated, rather than addressed such issues. It also reinforced the gender divisions that existed, even within an industry with such a significant female presence. There are, therefore, a number of issues concerning the

³ Sue Bruley, *Women in Britain Since 1900* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 1999), p.43.

impact of the war on the textile trade, but the overriding conclusion has to be that the war didn't really change anything for the long-term. Despite women making some inroads into the pre-war conditions, these were largely of a temporary nature due solely to the demands and pressures of the wartime economy. The metaphor of the 'double helix' explains the nature of the situation.⁴ Although women did experience opportunities for different, more lucrative work throughout the war, this was merely because the men who would normally have been present had been removed to even greater achievements. The prospects for women were subservient to those for men. Gender remained the dominant aspect defining responsibility and remuneration. Therefore, women textile workers, although an essential part of the wartime economy did not see their achievements during the conflict translate into any meaningful, long-term changes within the industry.

Thus the main textile unions, whilst advocating increased female membership to ensure receipt of war bonuses, resisted the removal of men from the highest and most lucrative positions. Although a female organiser was employed when the influx of women to replace men was necessary during the middle of the war, by the end, when returning soldiers were available such a position was downgraded and deemed no longer helpful. Similarly, the Women's Guild of the union was promoted to encourage female participation, but it was never anything more than an advisory body with little influence in executive decision making. Measures to increase female participation and responsibility within the Union, such as employing a Woman Organiser and establishing the Women's Guild were thus largely of a cosmetic nature. The main Executive Committee remained largely composed of men and continued so after the war and the Female Organiser's job was downgraded to a largely clerical position. Despite the avowed support of the General Textile Workers Union to the principle of equal pay, all the awards negotiated contained some disparity between the amounts paid to men and women. All-male delegations agreed to reduced bonuses for female workers whilst paying lip-service to the concept of equal pay for equal work. Wages for women workers never matched those given to men doing similar jobs. The unions tended to work to defend the rights of their male members rather than addressing the concerns of their female ones. Employer's associations and other authorities also prioritised the male workers at the expense of their female counterparts. Girls employed on heavy work in mills were not entitled to extra food rations whereas youths engaged in similar work were. The relaxation of the Factory Acts to allow women to work on the night shift or to perform overtime were ringed around with strictures that ensured this only happened in cases where no male labour was available and would cease immediately the men returned. Certain jobs, that had long been the province of men, depending as they did on the assumption that skill or training were required to undertake them were of necessity opened up to a limited number of female workers due to the shortage of suitable males. Women worked as fettlers or perchers, but only under the agreement that the men they were replacing had precedence and would replace them as soon as hostilities ceased.

The provision of housing was also arranged on gender lines. Whereas imported male workers at British Dyes were provided with self-contained huts and numerous hostel places, the girls required for mill work had, for the most part, to rely on the charity and goodwill of the people amongst whom they

⁴ Margaret Higonnet and Patrice Higonnet, 'The Double Helix' in Margaret Higonnet, Jane Jenson, Sonya Michel & Margaret Collins Weitz (eds), *Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987).

were living. Married women were encouraged to return to their previous occupations within the mills, but little provision was given for the children who would be affected. These women were also the first to be displaced once the immediate necessity was passed. Social activities and entertainment for women was also bound by restrictions and conventions that did not apply to the male population. Clubs and meeting rooms were often organised by religious or moral groups who thus sought some degree of influence if not control over their charges and even health messages were structured differently for the different sexes, most obviously in the campaigns regarding venereal diseases. Women workers were therefore subject to restrictions that men were not even whilst their labour was in demand.

This is not to say that no women benefited from the changes engendered by the war. The expanded franchise and inclusion of women in the various national and local organising committees meant that women were increasingly brought into political life. Some of the middle-class women who had long been instrumental in the social and philanthropic organisation of the area, now had the political and economic background necessary to parlay their work onto a more formal footing. The immediate post-war period saw the first female magistrates and town councillors in the Huddersfield district. Working-class women, whilst less obviously present in the formal exercise of power, also found a place for their concerns in the political arena. 'Women's issues' were now part of the natural discourse and the input of groups such as the Women's Co-operative Guild into areas that had long interested them, like housing, factory welfare, health and maternity was now part of the national picture. Again, these movements were not created by the war, but were more reflections of long-standing currents present in society. The inclusion of women into the national political picture was still subjected to restrictions and caveats. The franchise, after all, was not granted to women on the same terms as it was granted to men. It has even been argued that the war in some instances delayed measures that would have occurred anyway.⁵

It is apparent that the wartime circumstances of women, just as for men, varied from person to person. There is no one defining experience just as there is no typical working-class woman. Women are not homogeneous, so it is difficult to say with certainty what impact the war had on this set or that. Even though the war affected every family, every street and every community, Huddersfield had a relatively good war. Whilst it certainly did not escape unscathed, losing many men, it also did not suffer the extreme conditions that other parts of the country did. There were no rent strikes as in Glasgow, no widespread childhood malnutrition as in the North East and no food riots as in Liverpool or London. Whilst queues and shortages took their toll it was mostly in the form of inconveniences and annoyances. Housing may have been bad and in short supply, but it had been that way before the war and the council could be seen to at least be attempting to address the problems. Poor housing, landlord neglect and lack of inclination, either civic or private to build suitable properties had long been a contentious point, not just in Huddersfield but nationally. The local economy, after a slow start, grew and expanded for the rest of the war, producing full employment for anyone who wanted it and if strikes and disputes over bonuses and conditions occasionally broke out, there were no major

⁵ Sandra Stanley Holton, *Feminism and Democracy: Women's Suffrage and Reform Politics in Britain, 1900-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

incidences of industrial unrest in the town. Whilst women may have lost from the absence of their husbands or sons, separation allowances and the presence and payments of lodgers in their place went some way towards alleviating the monetary loss, and pride and patriotism meant that they had often encouraged enlistment in the first place.⁶

The working-class women of Huddersfield and the Colne Valley, even though the First World War put additional pressures on them, nevertheless demonstrated the fortitude and strength to rise above their circumstances and maintain their families in the face of increased work, lack of housing, food shortages, family disruption, health dangers and childhood indiscipline. Despite all these problems life continued with a degree of normality. The Women's Co-operative Guild continued to hold their social evenings and whist drives albeit no longer able to provide refreshments. Some household chores became more difficult with the lack of certain necessary commodities. Washing without soda or lighting without matches became commonplace. Restricted opening hours for shops and Post Offices meant that children or other family members had to be utilised as queue minders or scouts sent out to locate any available food. One of the most noticeable points was the reinforcement of the them and us attitudes between the classes. Many of the issues of the day were inflamed by the sense that not everybody was suffering to the same extent. Wealthier people were seen as being able to avoid much of the everyday pressure. They had servants to stand in queues, even if they complained about girls leaving to work in munitions, and money to buy the luxury items that were available. Their large houses were often left empty in the face of accommodation shortages. Local firms and shops were suspected of profiteering on the backs of the ordinary workers who suffered price rises and restrictions on their purchasing ability. The war however did not seriously challenge the class divisions inherent in British society to any great extent. Such petty complaints had long been a feature of class relationships and if the circumstances generated by the war provided more material for discussion, the generally accepted rightness of the cause ameliorated any lingering doubts.⁷

In terms of the possibilities available to them, the war proved an illusory phenomenon for many working-class women. The removal of men from the workforce led to increased opportunities for employment in fields never before open to female workers. Employer doubt, union distrust, government reluctance and male workers suspicion conspired to ensure that most of the gains made in the war were swiftly reversed at its end. For most women this was an accepted consequence of the changing wartime economy. They took on new jobs for a variety of reasons, but most understood the better paid and regarded work was for the duration only. Once peace came and the men returned, women would again be confined to the lower status work that had been their lot before the war. That some women did manage to keep the higher grade work they were doing was despite the war rather than because of it. As well as working many women were also required to maintain the home. The domestic role was never relinquished. As the war continued and the casualties mounted, concerns about falling birth rates and the emphasis on 'Motherhood' as the female ideal became more prominent. This led to increased pressure on working women to conform to the narrow definitions of

⁶ Gail Ledgard, *To what extent did the First World War impact the domestic lives of working class women in Huddersfield* (Unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Huddersfield, 2013) p.38.

⁷ *Ibid.* p.39.

femininity that society desired and imposed.

Perhaps the area where the increased state intervention engendered by the First World War was most apparent and ultimately long lasting was in the area of the family, money and welfare. The treatment and perception of these matters was the biggest legacy of the wartime expansion of government action. Although many of the policies adopted during the war built on the existing frameworks of social policy improvements initiated in the period preceding the war, and many initiatives did not survive the immediate post-war Treasury inspired contractions, nevertheless the concept of the state being responsible to some extent for the provision of social services to needy groups had been established and despite political arguments for and against has never really gone away since. 'The experience had some long-term significance in that it convinced some feminists that payments made directly to mothers was a highly cost-effective means of relieving poverty.'⁸

The impact of such a major event as the Great War upon the course of British society is difficult to assess against its longer-term evolutions. In most respects it is clear, the war emphasised tendencies that were already evident. Greater state intervention, improvements, albeit uneven, in living standards, the growing emancipation of women, the strengthening of organised labour, the cultivation of a more collectivist and democratic polity and the disintegration of pre-war certainties were all pre-figured in Edwardian society. With the benefit of hind-sight it is possible to see more clearly than contemporaries that many of the features thought of as consequences of the war were part of a longer-term process.⁹

There is a perception in the mythos of the First World War that this enormous, cataclysmic event must, perforce, have had dire and long lasting consequences. The concept of a 'lost generation' has led to the assumption that the war represents a severance between life before the war and that after it. In many works focused on the period events are detailed up to 1914 and then resumed again in 1918, the war representing a hiatus in the normal flow. In reality, as this thesis shows, the war, for all its emotional devastation and temporary disturbance, had only a limited impact on the working lives of a vast proportion of British subjects. Just as the textile industry has been overshadowed by the concentration on munitions, the disproportionate emphasis on other sections of society has tended to obscure the consequences for many workers. The loss of significant members of the aristocracy, the economic impact on the middle class industrialists and the political ramifications of the extended franchise have all contributed to the idea that the change from the pre-war situation was more extensive than many workers experienced. The fact that the most affected groups wrote about and shaped the national narrative, both at the time and subsequently, has meant that their experiences became the default and their opinions accepted as the norm. This thesis has challenged the received view of the war as a moment of dramatic social transition: many experienced continuity in their everyday working lives, with no significant impact beyond that naturally occurring as a result of the lived experience.

The history of the Great War therefore is not just about the men who fought and the women who waited, it is also about those women, many of whom worked for the war effort in factories or mills, but

⁸ Martin Pugh, *State and Society* (London: Arnold, 1994), p.154.

⁹ John Stevenson, *British Society 1914-1945* (London: Penguin, 1984), p.73.

also provided another vital role. They kept their families together through the darkest hours. They made sure their children were fed and accepted strangers into their homes. They endured the bad housing and price rises and food shortages because that's what they had always done. The war may have highlighted and emphasized them but most of the problems were long-standing issues merely highlighted by the movement of people and intensified conditions engendered by the conflict. The domestic lives of working class women in Huddersfield and the surrounding district, for the most part continued much as before.

It can be seen, therefore, that working-class women faced many hardships and problems during the First World War, but they also gained in some areas. For some the uncertainties of living with irregular or spasmodic incomes were alleviated by the regular payment of army benefits. Better paying work opportunities also raised household incomes. Others were subject to increased vigilance and moral instruction on the part of middle-class do-gooders working on behalf of government committees for the welfare of workers which could lead to increased resentment and ill-feeling. Some women suffered from anxiety or stress caused by the loss of their husbands or sons, or merely of a lack of information about them. Others enjoyed better health as a result of the more equitable distribution of food as a result of rationing or the absence of male members of the household resulting in women and children receiving larger shares of the available food. Just as there is no one typical woman there is no one response to the privations or possibilities engendered by the war. Some women gained, some lost. For most working-class women in Huddersfield the war, whilst a major event in their lives causing disruption and disorder, was a temporary one. Life soon returned, if not to normal, at least to something similar to what women had experienced before the war. Most of the imported women workers were discharged as the men returned from the trenches, shops gradually refilled with goods and food rationing was eventually discontinued, the payment of separation allowance was stopped although pensions for widows continued and health provision was concentrated on infants.¹⁰

Thus for many women the war was not the catalyst for any great social or industrial change. Certainly for the female textile workers of the West Riding it did not, 'find them serfs and leave them free.' In many respects the war caused no lasting effects at all. Rather than being let out of the cage and then returned to the sphere of domesticity, most of the mill workers continued to work as they had before the war. Jobs continued to be defined by the gender of the worker with men being regarded as more skilled and thus worth more pay by virtue of their sex rather than through any inherent talent despite the performance of women during the war. Married women were still viewed with suspicion by fellow workers but were tolerated as a necessary evil in many cases. Wages for women continued to be less than for men in similar jobs, with the concept of the 'family wage' still holding sway in spite of the evidence brought out during the war of the differing structures and dependencies of many textile households. The textile unions continued to be run largely by men for men. Although in the short-term women had experienced some degree of promotion within the industry in the absence of male labour during the war, undertaking night work or some of the more technical roles, this was always on the understanding that this relaxation of the rules was a temporary measure for the period of the war only.

¹⁰ Ledgard, *To what extent did the First World War impact the domestic lives of working class women in Huddersfield*, p.37.

In the long-term all conditions would revert to their pre-war state and the world would return to normal.

This thesis, therefore, has sought to address an omission in the historiography of women's work and the impact of the First World War. It has used the examination of workers who were already present in the workforce prior to the war and who continued to perform their roles throughout to expose a different picture of what war work entailed for a large number of female workers. By continuing to do their jobs in the face of official disinterest, public indifference, union resistance and the temptation of higher wages in other industries, the women of the textile areas kept the armies of the allies supplied with the uniforms and equipment they needed to fight. In a similar fashion the middle-class organisers have largely been overlooked as they too continued to perform comparable jobs to their duties before the war. Both these groups of women did not fall into the conventional view of women war workers, they were not glamorous VADs or valiant munitionettes. The emphasis on women whose roles were defined by the war has overshadowed the experiences of others by limiting the view of 'war workers' to those who participated in or underwent radical changes either by entering new areas of work or of working for the first time. This thesis argues that the women who continued to perform existing work were equally important. They were a vital cog in the war machine and deserve to be recognised for what they achieved and the contribution they made to the war effort, even if little changed. Women's work is a varied and wide-ranging topic and there are as many female experiences as there are women to undertake them.

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