Stepney:
Profile of a London Borough from the Outbreak of the First World War to the Festival of Britain, 1914-1951

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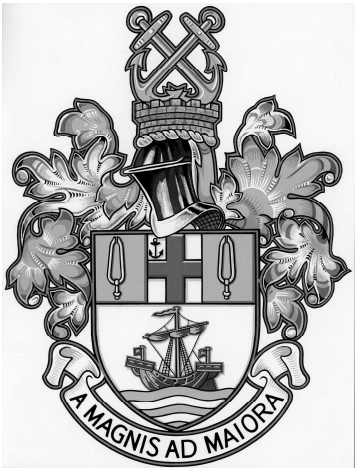

The motto for Stepney was *a magnis ad maiora* (from great things to greater) and this book attempts to assess how far the area achieved such improvements, and against what odds, during the first half of the 20th Century.

The First World War is the starting point of this book as it was to have long-term implications for Stepney. Arthur Foley Winnington-Ingram, Bishop of London, in his Easter sermon of 1918 first used the slogan "They Shall Not Pass". For Stepney, this was to become a significant slogan during the Battle of Cable Street, eighteen years later, in 1936. Another event in the First World War, which was to have an affect on the country's preparations for the Second World War, was the death of 18 schoolchildren when Upper North Street School was directly struck during a zeppelin raid. This event was one of the main reasons, according to Philip Ziegler, for the later evacuation of schoolchildren from cities across the country.

The overall theme for this book is the politics of the broader labour movement as represented by both the Labour and Communist parties and the Trade Union during the first half of the 20th Century. What makes Stepney distinctive during this period is its political diversity with the rise of the Labour, Communist and Fascist parties. The politics of the labour movement are addressed through relevant local issues such as housing and ethnicity. Stepney also had a diverse community. During the First and Second World War tensions were heightened within the area due to the internment of military aged "alien" males. However in the inter-war years there was the significance of the integration of the Jewish community, in particular, into the politics of the labour movement. For Stepney, housing was also an ever-present issue. Poor quality housing characterised Stepney.

Throughout the period covered by this book, housing was a persistent issue on the borough council. Both the First and Second World War saw a halt to building work, and the subsequent post-war periods saw election campaigns promising that the housing issue would be effectively addressed. A test of the promises in the 1945 election campaign was the Live Architectural Exhibition for the Festival of Britain, which saw the Lansbury estate presented as a pioneering example of modern architecture.

This book aims to address two further issues which have generally been overlooked by other historians. The first is the tendency of historians to try and encompass the entire East End, which is often undefined, or vague, in their work. This book is focused on a specific study of the Stepney area. Secondly historians have often concentrated on the late 19th Century up to the outbreak of the First World War. This research begins with the First World War and climaxes with the Festival of Britain thus aiming to add to our collective knowledge.

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ABBREVIATIONS

ARP	Air Raid Precautions
BBL	British Brothers League
BSP	British Socialist Party
BUF	British Union of Fascists
CPGB	Communist Party of Great Britain
ELFS	East London Federation of the Suffragettes
ILD	International Labour Defence
ILP	Independent Labour Party
LCC	London County Council
MP	Member of Parliament
MFGB	Miners' Federation of Great Britain
NAFTA	National Amalgamated Furnishing Trades Association
NDP	National Democratic Party
NIA	Non-Intervention Agreement
NIC	Non-Intervention Committee
NSS	National Shop Stewards
NTWF	National Transport Workers' Federation
NUR	National Union of Railwaymen
NUTGW	National Union of Tailors and Garment Workers
NUWM	National Union of Workers Movement
RA	Ratepayers Association
SLP	Social Liberal Party
STDL	Stepney Tenants' Defence League
TGWU	Transport and General Workers Union
TUC	Trades Union Congress
USR	Union of Stepney Ratepayers
WC	Water Closet
WCM	Workers' Committee Movement
WSF	Workers' Suffrage Federation
WSPU	Women's Social and Political Union
WVS	Women's Voluntary Service
YCL	Young Communist League

INTRODUCTION

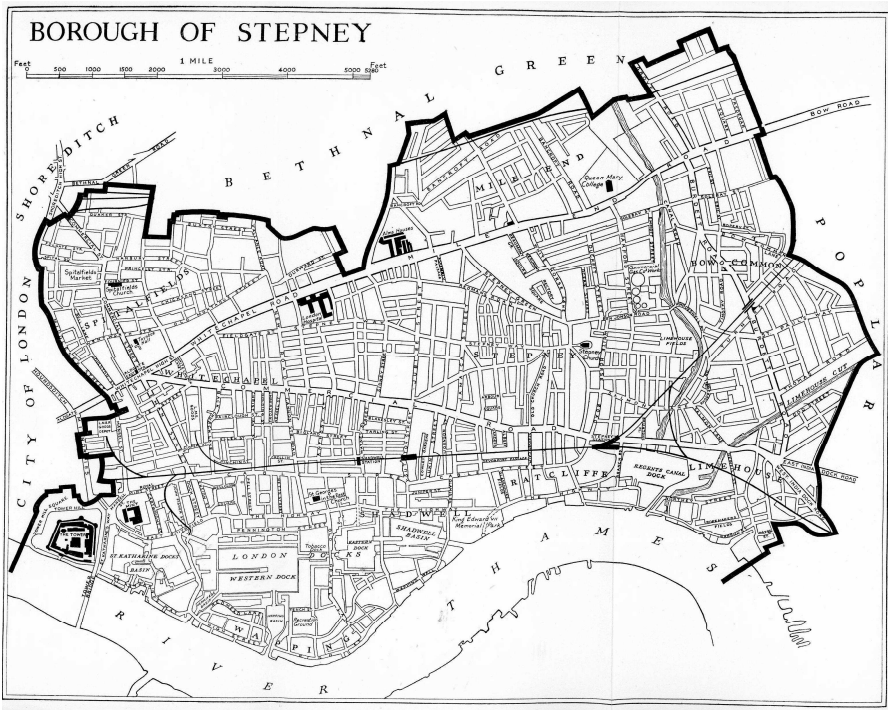

Fig. 0-1 Map of the Borough of Stepney based on 1899 London Government Act (Tower Hamlets Local History Library and Archives)

Stepney, as shown in the map above, was bordered to the west by the City. To the north it was bordered by Bethnal Green, to the east by Poplar and to the south by the River Thames. According to the terms of the London Government Act of 1899 the borough of Stepney comprised "the area including the parishes of Mile End Old Town and St George's-in-the-East and the districts of the Limehouse and the Whitechapel Boards of

Works, including the Tower of London and the Liberties thereof".[1] The new Stepney which was created in 1899 consisted of 20 wards with 60 councillors and 10 Aldermen. The borough was divided into three Parliamentary constituencies: Limehouse, Mile End and Whitechapel & St George's. A number of wards made up each of these constituencies, as shown in the breakdown of Borough election results in the appendix.

As an area Stepney had developed without much planning or control, and its growth had brought much overcrowding, disease and misery. Toynbee Hall classified Stepney as the heart of the East End because it was "where many races mix and life is colourful and varied".[2] Since medieval times the east side of the City had been regarded by many as London's backyard, with workshops and shipyards, bakeries and mills, breweries and distilleries interspersed with allotments and market gardens. According to the Tax records from the time of Samuel Pepys, half the residents of the East of London were classified as poor.[3] Therefore, one can gather that the East End had had a long tradition of poverty. According to the Stepney Reconstruction Group, the East End of 1945 had come "into being when the docks were built in the early 19th century". The group stated that "by 1870 the whole of Stepney was built up".[4]

The haphazard growth of the area is well illustrated by the example of the laying of the Fenchurch Street to Tilbury railway line in 1854. No consideration was shown for the East End people living nearby. The tracks ran so close to many of their houses that they had to keep their windows closed when trains passed lest their bedding catch fire from the sparks. Between 1780 and 1830, prior to the arrival of the railways, the population had more than doubled to over a quarter of a million. During this time, houses had shot up for the new arrivals, with very little thought given to planning.[5] By the time of the 1911 Census the population stood at 279,804. Stepney comprised 1,766 acres, so the density of the population was 158 persons per acre. Throughout the period of this book this was to decline, and by 1951 the density was at a record low of 56 persons per acre.[6] This book will establish the reasons behind such a decline, particularly the destruction of the area during the Blitz. Also, the turbulent

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[1] Stepney Borough Council, *The Metropolitan Borough of Stepney, Official Guide, 10th Edition* (1962)
[2] Toynbee Hall, *Living in Stepney: Past, Present and Future* (1943) p2
[3] Cox, Jane, *London's East End: Life and Traditions* (1994) p9
[4] Stepney Reconstruction Group, *Living in Stepney: Past, present and future* (1945) p11
[5] Wyld, Peter, *Stepney Story: A thousand years of St Dunstans* (1952) p510
[6] *Census of England & Wales 1921 & 1951*

politics of Stepney will be considered by looking at the rise of both the Communist and Fascist Parties and examining the consequences of their influence, and their rivalry, upon the area.

In the popular imagination, the notoriety of the East End is well established. Such notoriety was created by events like the Houndsditch Murders, and the subsequent Siege of Sidney Street, which according to the television programme *Scenes of Crime*, was "a great event of the 20th Century for the East End".[7] Depictions of shocking crimes have become part of the folk-law of the nation's perspective of the East End and Stepney. The Houndsditch Murders of December 1910 centred on the murder of three policemen by East European immigrants. For the police these murders served to highlight the fact that the community in the Stepney area had a large and potentially turbulent foreign element. Having no Russian or Lettish, and virtually no Yiddish language skills, the detectives could make little progress in their investigations. Another problem for them was the disconcerting number of vagabond people who seemed able to appear or disappear at will. The murders at Houndsditch had occurred after a group of Lettish men attempted to rob H. S. Harris the Jewellers. The robbers made so much noise drilling a tunnel through from a neighbouring property, that neighbours notified the authorities. The police then made a forceful entrance, which was to have disastrous consequences. Along with the three policemen who were killed, one of the robbers also died. The nation mourned the deaths of the three policemen and was also shocked by the evidence that anarchists from Europe appeared to be invading England. On 3 January 1911, it was reported that two of the suspects from the Hounsditch Murders had besieged 100 Sidney Street. Winston Churchill, the Home Secretary, went to Sidney Street to observe. The police and army were called in and a gun battle ensued. The affair drew to a close when the house caught fire and began to burn down, with the suspects still in it. In the aftermath of this dramatic incident, Churchill was criticized for not bringing out the men alive. These events have been described as "London's biggest hue-and-cry since the 'Jack the Ripper' murders in 1888".[8]

The East End therefore, can appear to be a mini-world of its own or even "a complete city in itself",[9] with so many different cultures all living on top of each other and a sense of potential drama, that has made the area

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[7] Television Programme, *Scenes of Crime* broadcast on 15 November 2001 ITV1 Carlton

[8] Rogers, Colin, *The Battle of Stepney. The Sidney Street Siege: Its causes and consequences* (1989) p66

[9] Keating, P. J., *The Working Class in Victorian Fiction* (1971) p124

distinctive from the rest of London. It developed as a controversial nucleus, which the rest of London strives to know and understand.

There have been a number of general studies by historians which have included an investigation into Stepney's history. For example, Charles Booth's *Survey of London* looks at all aspects of London life in the late 19th Century. Research on Stepney has often been a part of broader surveys of London's history. Examples of such work include Jerry White's *London in the 20th Century*, Stephen Inwood's *A History of London* and the novelist Peter Ackroyd's *London: The Biography*.[10] In *London in the 20th Century*, White chooses to divide his book into themes and more or less adheres to a chronological approach to each thematic section.[11] In this book, the overall theme is the development and influence of the labour movement, through relevant local issues, such as housing and ethnicity which are considered throughout the book.

Several historians have studied the "East End": William Fishman with *East End Jewish Radicals 1875-1914* and Julia Bush in her PhD "Labour Politics and Society in East London during the First World War". One difficulty in studying the "East End", however, is that it can be a very loose term, covering any part of the east of London. This book is inevitably constrained by the boundaries of the borough of Stepney, which are clearly defined in the map at the beginning of this introduction. It appears that little research has been done on this area during the 1914 to 1951 period. There have been only specific studies such as Jerry White's *Rothschild buildings: Life in an East End Tenement Block 1887-1920*. Other works on parts of the area have been produced to mark anniversaries. For instance, with the 50th anniversary of the Battle of Cable Street, much work was done to commemorate the event, and the Cable Street Group published a pamphlet called *The Battle of Cable Street 1936*.[12] Perhaps more significantly a permanent reminder was commissioned, by the Tower Hamlets Arts Project, in the area. This was a mural, painted in the 1980s to mark the 50th anniversary of the event, on the west wall of St George's town hall, Cable Street, which still exists today (see illustration below). But, these are studies of one particular event rather than a profile of the area.

The objective of this book is to assess the development of Stepney in the first half of the 20th Century, in particular, through a study of the labour

[10] White, Jerry, *London in the 20th Century* (2001); Inwood, Stephen, *A History of London* (1998); Ackroyd, Peter, *London: The Biography* (2001)
[11] White, op. cit. pxiii
[12] Cable Street Group, *The Battle of Cable Street* (1995)

Fig. 0-2 Mural of the Battle of Cable Street (Tower Hamlets Local History Library and Archive)

movement. This has been carried out through addressing relevant local issues such as housing and ethnicity. Many different sources have been used, such as the papers of the Bishops of Stepney and the LCC Government Evacuation Scheme's Directory of London Schools in Reception Areas, alongside MEPO 3/2501 Evacuation of Schoolchildren on the first day of evacuation. In using such sources, the aim has been to write about apparently well covered events and yet bring fresh and important additions to our knowledge.

By focusing on specific studies of the Stepney area between 1914 and 1951 similarities and links can be made. For example, during the First World War, the destruction of Upper North Street School caused the death of 18 schoolchildren. The death of so many schoolchildren became one of the main reasons (according to Philip Ziegler) for the carefully planned evacuation of children during the Second World War.[13] Another significant event during the First World War was a much earlier reference to the slogan "they shall not pass". This was first uttered by Arthur Foley Winnington-Ingram, the Bishop of London, in his Easter sermon of

[13] Ziegler, Philip, *London at War 1939-1945* (Great Britain, 1995) p9

1918.[14] This was a slogan used nearly 20 years later in Stepney at the Battle of Cable Street in 1936. Also, after the First World War and the surrender of Germany in the Second World War, the election campaigns focused upon the issue of housing, promising major improvements. Throughout the inter-war years and again after the Second World War, poor housing was a serious issue with improvements being demanded and striven for. However, during the late 1930s, the Stepney Tenants Defence League (STDL) took direct action for improvements through rent strikes, which were specific to Stepney. This was a community based group, actively seeking improvements, and with a Communist core. The STDL worked tirelessly on housing issues until the outbreak of the Second World War. After this, the group transferred its work to that of wartime issues and predominantly the use of deep-shelters. Without the demonstrations of the STDL the use of the underground stations, which typify the London experience of the Second World War, would have remained prohibited. Again activities in Stepney had a direct impact upon many other areas and upon government policy.

It was partly due to these campaigns that in the 1945 General Election Stepney saw its first (and only) Communist Member of Parliament elected, Phil Piratin. This was due to the personal campaigning of Piratin alongside the intensely community-based work that the party had done over the past twenty-five year. This election also saw long standing Stepney MP, Clement Attlee, become the Prime Minister of Labour's first majority government.

Since the Stepney Labour Party's foundation in 1918 the party had helped to unify the community and to a considerable extent brought together the Jewish and Irish population, the two dominant groups in Stepney. From 1918 onwards, many of the people of the area realised that they could have a direct impact upon their surroundings, through working together in politics. The Labour party became established as the most powerful party in the elections, as can be seen from the election results in the appendix. However, this period also saw the rise of the Communist and Fascist parties. Although generally weak, these parties were influential in the area. For Stepney, the Fascists were an invasive force as the party had a stronghold in neighbouring Bethnal Green. Fascism, according to the majority of the people of Stepney, had to be stopped, and thus the slogan "they shall not pass" was adopted. The Battle of Cable Street is one

[14] "They Shall Not Pass" A Sermon preached by Rev Arthur Foley Winnington-Ingram DD Bishop of London, St Paul's Cathedral, Easter Day 1918 (1918) p15

significant incident for an area that experienced many dramatic scenes between 1914 and 1951.

Above all, by examining the themes described, and by scrutinising such incidents and events, this book attempts to provide a fresh and important addition to our knowledge of the Borough of Stepney.

CHAPTER ONE

ASPECTS OF THE IMPACT OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR UPON STEPNEY: WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO THE ROLE OF THE BISHOPS OF STEPNEY AND LONDON

Old Lady. "AH, IT'LL TAKE MORE THAN *PREACHING* TO MAKE THEM ZEPPELINS REPENT!"

Fig. 1-1 Old Lady *Punch*, 23 Feb 1916 p142. (Reproduced with permission of Punch Ltd)

The First World War saw the dawning of a new era in warfare: attack from the air. This new warfare "threatened to blur the traditional distinction between soldier and civilian, front and home. Air raids made clear that the Front was wherever the enemy chose to strike".[1] For Stepney, possessing a prime target within its boundaries: the docks, the war had a direct impact on the civilian population. This chapter will assess the impact of air raids upon Stepney, which was to have future implications for Stepney and Britain in the planning for civilian safety during the Second World War. Another important issue for Stepney during the war was the Jewish population. Many Jewish people were still not British citizens and therefore classified as "aliens". During the war "alien" men of military age were interned. For the remaining men of military age the aim was to encourage them to be recruited into the forces. Arthur Foley Winnington-Ingram was a significant figure in encouraging recruits, but also as a Bishop of Stepney, his writings have provided a valuable and different source in understanding the war, especially its impact upon Stepney.

The wealth of material written on the domestic impact of the First World War, the majority of which is concerned with its political, strategic or economic aspects, has paid little attention to the war's larger social and cultural context. Amongst these works two schools of thought have come to the foreground. Some historians, like Arthur Marwick, whose work *The Deluge* "initiated a wave of pioneering work on the social history of the war",[2] saw war as a catalyst for change. "The very title, *The Deluge*, imagines the war as a catalytic flood which swept away much of Victorian culture and inaugurated a more modern world".[3] Modris Eksteins emphasises this by asserting that:

> For our preoccupation with speed, newness, transience, and inwardness – with life lived, as the jargon puts it, 'in the fast lane' – to have taken hold, an entire scale of values and beliefs had to yield pride of place, and the Great War was … the single most significant event in that development.[4]

On the other hand, revisionist historians have emphasised the conservatism of British culture which acted as a constraint or an absorber of change. For example, Gerard J. DeGroot concludes:

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[1] Robb, George, *British Culture and the First World War* (Hampshire, 2002) p200
[2] Ibid. p1
[3] Ibid. pp2–3
[4] Eksteins, Modris, *Rites of Spring: The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age* (1989) pxiv

> War was tragic, in some cases catastrophic. But for most people it was an extraordinary event of limited duration which as much as it brought change, also inspired a desire to reconstruct according to cherished patterns. If war is the locomotive of history, the rolling stock in this case, was typically British: slow, outmoded and prone to delay and cancellation.[5]

But the debate over whether the war promoted "tradition" or "modernity" is rather sterile according to Susan Kingsley-Kent who has claimed it does not help one to a "deeper understanding of the conflict".[6] What is called for is an understanding of what it meant for an entire society to undergo total war. This chapter will engage in a debate along the line of Marwick. The effects of total war upon Stepney will be discussed partly through the role of the Bishop of Stepney. By looking at such ephemeral material as sermons, pamphlets and newspapers, which have rarely been studied by historians, "an invaluable means of enlarging and broadening our view of British society and culture during the war"[7] can be achieved.

Through this book, the discourse on the impact of the air raids on Stepney during the First and Second World War, illustrates how people's views of air raids as a type of warfare changed between the wars. During the First World War, church crypts along with other public buildings were opened for people to use as shelters if they so desired, although many preferred to stay at home and be like one stout-hearted lady of Stepney who said she would "rather die among me own pots and pans".[8] By the Second World War there were many more designated, and supposedly bomb-proofed, places to shelter from the Blitz**.** And for those who chose to remain at home, protection was provided by the government in the form of Anderson or Morrison shelters. For Stepney, during both wars, there were a few notorious shelters: in the First World War it was the Bishopsgate Goods Station and in the Second World War it was the Tilbury Shelter.

The church played an active role in the war, both at home and at the front. At home the church provided vital support for significant numbers of Stepney people. Church crypts were used as shelters during the air raids. The East End churches were amongst the first to have "children's

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[5] DeGroot, Gerard J., *Blighty: British Society in the Era of the Great War* (1996) p311

[6] See Kingsley-Kent, Susan, review "Remembering the Great War" *Journal of British Studies* 37 (January 1998) pp105–10

[7] Robb, op. cit. p1

[8] Paget, The Right Rev Henry Luke DD Bishop of Stepney (ed.) *Records of the Raids* (1918) p6

corners", for the children to be able to remember men at the Front. It was not uncommon to see 70 or 80 children there every day praying for fathers, brothers or friends.[9] Also, war shrines appeared in the back streets of Stepney. They sprang up spontaneously as Elma K. Paget remarks: "no one seems to have planned them: they were entirely of the people, imagined, carried out and paid for by them".[10] They were, she writes, simple shrines "recording the names of all who had gone out from the street to serve the Colours".[11] These memorials go some way in showing "how far the traditional bonds of community in the East London area were applied to the scale of human loss".[12]

In the 1880s practiced religion in the East of London according to Bishop Walsham How belonged "to a wholly different class from themselves"[13] and was therefore associated with prosperity and luxury - which was resented. According to Paul Thompson, in the East End boroughs less than fifteen per cent of the population attended any place of worship.[14] This religious indifference was inevitable due to a long period of neglect by the Anglican Church, which had failed to adapt to the changing structure of London after 1600. The nonconformists were even weaker in London than the Church of England. For example, the Salvation Army, begun in Whitechapel, had an attendance in 1886 of only 53,000 out of 367,000 non conformists or 14 per cent.[15] As we shall discover in this book political clubs tended to be more influential than religion. This was particularly the case in the inter-war years for the Jewish population. However, missionaries did have an influence, as Arthur Foley Winnington-Ingram did in his mission to gain recruits. The clergy also had a role in social work in slum areas such as Stepney. For example, Henry Luke Paget was to open his crypts to the people of Stepney during air raids.

In Stepney, there was also the influence of other religions: Judaism and Roman Catholicism. The main influx of Irish into London was from the 1830s to the 1870s. Many crowded into the slum areas by the riverside such as St George's-in-the-East but as the census returns give no

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[9] *The Times* 1 July 1916
[10] Paget, Elma K., *Henry Luke Paget: Portrait and Frame* (1939) p197
[11] Ibid. p197
[12] Connelly, M. L., *The Commemoration of the Great War in the City and East London 1916–1939* PhD thesis (1995) p2
[13] *Church Congress Report* (1880) pp94-95
[14] Thompson, Paul, *Socialists, Liberals and Labour: The Struggle for London 1885-1914* (1967) p17
[15] Ibid. pp18-19

indication of the growth of the Irish presence and the religious surveys do not distinguish Irish from other Catholics it is impossible to give a precise number of Irish residents. However, religious surveys estimate that in Stepney, Catholics accounted for between 11 and 15 per cent of total church attendance.[16]

The Jewish settlement in the East End had begun with the arrival of the Spanish and Portuguese Jews in the 17th century. They were followed in the mid 19th century by German Jews and finally in 1881-2 and the early 1900s by large numbers of Russian and Polish Jews. In the 1870's the Jewish area had been between Houndsditch and Whitechapel High Street, but by 1900 had spread southwards to Cable Street. This formed a frontier with the Irish in St George's.[17] The area was compact, with most streets having over 75 per cent Jewish population.[18] In such circumstances, a strong community formed and consequently the Jewish Board of Guardians was set up in 1859 to aid poor Jews in London. Additionally, the community ran various clubs and provided Jewish education through private schools. However, during the depressions of the 1890s and 1900s there was a growing hostility to immigrants, which was compounded by the launch of the British Brothers League in 1901. During the First World War anti-Semitism was an issue, culminating with the internment of "aliens".

However, the clergy during the First World War continued their social work and provided an important role as listeners, comforters and confidantes in a war that involved more of the civilian population than ever before. For the men at the Front the church was also important. Sir Douglas Haig "remarked to the assistant chaplain general to the British First Army 'Tell your chaplains that a good chaplain is as valuable as a good General', presuming that the value of a good general was self-evident".[19] The Anglican philosopher C. C. J. Webb "supposed that all through history hitherto, God had used war as a main instrument in the moulding of mankind".[20] Ernest Barker, the political philosopher, said that England's strength lay in her belonging to Christ's Church Militant.[21] There was no difficulty in finding priests and pastors for chaplaincy work.

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[16] Ibid, p25
[17] Russell, C. and Lewis, H. S., *The Jew in London* (1900)
[18] See Map of Jewish East London. Reproduced by the Museum of the Jewish East End and Research Census from "The Jew in London 1901" (Guildhall Library, City of London)
[19] Robbins, Keith, *The First World War* (Oxford, 1984) p157
[20] Ibid. p157
[21] Ibid. p157

At the beginning of the war 113 served the British forces, but by armistice day there were 3,480.[22]

The Recruitment of Men

The Bishops played an important part in the recruitment of men to go to the Front. The Bishop of Stepney, the Reverend Henry Luke Paget, whose son Sam, was already at the Front, "obtained 56 recruits as the result of an appeal at the Clapton Orient football ground on Saturday for the 10th Middlesex (Hackney Battalion)".[23] But, it was Arthur Foley Winnington-Ingram, who had been Bishop of Stepney between 1897 and 1901 and by the war years was Bishop of London, who more successfully called the men to arms. There was a great need for men to recruit, he said, as:

> A regiment is like some great river – always the same but always changing, as draft after draft flows out from England to take the place of those who fall out of the ranks, having done, as the soldier put it 'their little bit for their country'.[24]

Winnington-Ingram travelled all over the country recruiting and at "one large gathering he addressed early in the war [he] was instrumental in securing 10,000 additional troops for the Front".[25]

One worry faced by the recruited men was how best to take care of the wives they were leaving behind. Winnington-Ingram was often a confidante for the men and he recalled that his "old motor was a sort of sanctuary". One man said, "What am I to do, Bishop? My wife says she will poison herself and the two children if I go".[26] Winnington-Ingram wrote to the local clergyman who managed to persuade the woman "to take a more reasonable view".[27] However, in Winnington-Ingram's authorised biography, his extraordinary persuasiveness with women is extolled. "Mothers who had been trying to induce their boys to stop at

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[22] Ibid. p157
[23] *The Times* 11 October 1915
[24] Smith, Rev. G. Vernon, *The Bishop of London's Visit to the Front (A. F. Winnington-Ingram Bishop of London)* (1915) p60
[25] Colson, Percy, *The Life of the Bishop of London: An Authorised Biography* (1935) p172
[26] Winnington-Ingram, Arthur Foley, *Fifty Years' Work in London 1889–1939* (1940) p110
[27] Ibid. p110

home went straight back after hearing him speak to pack them off to the nearest recruiting office".[28] Winnington-Ingram told the women that their first duty was "to stir … to encourage – the perfectly noble instinct which makes your boy or your brother want to go out and stand up for his country at the great second Battle of Waterloo which is coming".[29] As an example, he referred to one mother who said: "Well, my boy, I don't want you to go, but if I were you I should go".[30] Thus, women were encouraged to say "Go, with my love and blessing".[31]

From the declaration of war on 4 August 1914, the Stepney Battalion London National Reserve was ready to receive orders. With a large number of recruits presenting themselves at Stepney Battalion headquarters, 66 Tredegar Road, Bow, it was announced in the *East End News* that recruits should go to the headquarters on Tuesday and Thursday evenings between 8.30 and 10pm.[32] As an initial incentive to potential recruits, it was reported that jobs at Messrs Pearce's Chemical Works, Bow Common, were being kept open for those who had enlisted and that they were receiving half pay during their absence. There were also "crowds clamouring to join up outside the Whitechapel recruiting station"[33] which contained several hundred young Jews, who were "more English than the English in their expression of loyalty and desire for service".[34] In September 1914, the Jewish Recruiting Committee held a meeting at Camperdown House (Aldgate headquarters of the Jewish Lads Brigade) which produced 150 enlistments.[35] The Committee was to embark on a campaign of enlistment which by December 1914 saw nearly 300 old boys of the Jews Free School enlisted and a further 107 from the Stepney Jewish Lads Club.[36] However, such a picture of patriotic harmony is misleading, according to Julia Bush, as "many thousands of East London Jews turned a deaf ear to the recruiters",[37] due to either foreign nationality or foreign inclinations and attitudes.

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[28] Colson, op. cit. p172
[29] Winnington-Ingram, Right Rev. Arthur Foley DD, Lord Bishop of London, *A Day of God Five Addresses on the subject of the Present War* (1914) p49
[30] Ibid. p51
[31] Ibid. p51
[32] *East End News* 11 August 1914
[33] *Jewish Chronicle* 7 August 1914
[34] Ibid. 7 August 1914
[35] Ibid. 11 September 1914
[36] Bush, Julia, "East London Jews and the First World War" *London Journal 6* (1980) p149
[37] Ibid. p150

After the Mayor of Stepney, Hugh Chidgey, attended one particular recruitment meeting in September 1915, 150 men volunteered of which only 15 of them were accepted after medical inspection. This was a very poor figure when compared to the average yield of London of nearly 1,200 men per day.[38] This highlights one of the major factors in the argument of a "Lost Generation". J. M. Winter, for example, suggests that many of the men who volunteered to go to war came predominantly from a higher social status. The working-class men were generally physically unfit for combat duty and were therefore shunted into clerical and support jobs. Those recruited were placed into four categories:

> Grade I men without any disability who were 'capable of enduring physical exertion'; Grade II men with a partial disability, but who nevertheless could 'endure considerable physical exertion not involving real strain'; Grade III, 'men with marked physical disabilities' who were fit for clerical work, but not able to undergo physical exertion; and Grade IV men 'totally and permanently unfit for any military service'.[39]

Winter suggests that of all the men examined, 36 per cent were placed in Grade I, 22.5 per cent in Grade II, and 41.4 per cent in Grades III and IV.[40] In industrial areas, the proportion of recruits placed within Grades III and IV was considerably higher than in the total population.

In October 1914, with recruitment slowing down, the height restriction was lowered to men of 5 ft 4 in, in height, with a chest measurement of 34½ in and aged between 19 and 38 years, an increase of three years.[41] By, 10 November 1914, the height restriction was lowered again to 5 ft 3 in, making the qualifications to enlist the same as they had been at the outbreak of war. They had been altered because "the great rush to the colours was then more than the military authorities could cope with".[42] It was hoped that such alterations would bring brisker recruiting as more men were desperately needed but, the *East End News* remarked at the time, "if the voluntary system fails to yield that number required the Government may be driven to 'take other steps'".[43]

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[38] *East End News* 29 September 1914
[39] Ministry of National Service 1917–19 *Report upon the Physical Examination of Men of Military Age by National Service Medical Boars from November 1 1917 – October 31 1918*, Vol. I CMD 504 (1919) XXVI
[40] Ibid. CMD 504 November 1 1917 – October 31 1918
[41] *East End News* 27 October 1914
[42] Ibid. 10 November 1914
[43] Ibid. 10 November 1914

When Winnington-Ingram visited the Front after the first winter of war he said, "the thoughts of everyone at home had been with the men in the trenches".[44] The Bishop knew that he would be welcomed at the Front "not only as a messenger of the church, but as one going out from home who would be able, as he passed along the lines, to bring a word of love and greeting from friends in England".[45] Rev G. Vernon Smith cites an example of Winnington-Ingram himself being regarded as a greeting from home:

> One young man, little more than a boy, just carried in from the trenches, shot through the shoulder, at a Clearing Hospital at the Front, held out his arms towards me with a radiant smile. I thought for the moment he was in delirium, but he was an East End lad, a communicant at an East End church, who saw the Bishop he knew so well passing his bed.[46]

In 1916 Winnington-Ingram toured the Grand Fleet. When he visited the *Iron Duke* and the other ships with her, he looked "into the faces of the Lower Deck" and said "I suppose some of you have heard of Bethnal Green, Whitechapel and Stepney", and "they all beamed back with pleasure, as many of them (as I knew) came from there".[47]

But at home the need to maintain recruitment was a constant issue. It was reported in April 1915 that "recruits have come along well during the past week".[48] As to figures relating to recruitment, in "seven days 160 were enrolled, which constitutes a record for London";[49] with Captain Stableford, a recruiting officer, being "delighted with the quality of the men coming forward"[50] and also suggesting that joining the 17th London Regiment was "… the quickest way to the Front, for the men now being trained will be in the firing line within three months of enlistment".[51] By October 1915 with volunteers unable to keep pace with the number of recruits needed, Lord Derby, Director General of Recruiting, promoted a semi-voluntary recruiting scheme in which "unenlisted men were invited to 'attest' their willingness to serve, on the understanding that single men would be called up first".[52] With the Derby scheme failing in Stepney,

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[44] Smith, op. cit. p10
[45] Ibid. p10
[46] Ibid. p76
[47] Winnington-Ingram, *Fifty Years'* op. cit. p121
[48] *East London Observer* 24 April 1915
[49] Ibid. 24 April 1915
[50] Ibid. 24 April 1915
[51] Ibid. 24 April 1915
[52] Davis, John, *A History of Britain 1885–1939* (1999) p125

more attention was being focused upon the Jewish community, as they were being accused of "shirking" military service. This was linked to fears that aliens and their offspring were replacing British soldiers in jobs and businesses, which were in turn fuelled by the growing prosperity of the Jewish Community.[53]

It was clear, by December, that Derby's scheme was not working and 1916 saw the introduction of the Military Service Act, "under which first all single men aged 18–41 and later all single and married men in that age group were deemed to have enlisted".[54] In the Stepney area, Mr A. W. Yeo, former Mayor and current Liberal MP for Poplar, was reported to have said at a meeting at the tunnel entrance, Poplar, "the country was at stake, and no man who had any love for his country would hang back now. They were to combine whole-heartedly and thus prevent a German invasion".[55]

The 17th London Regiment (Poplar and Stepney Rifles) was mobilised and brought up to strength, through intensive training at St Albans and Hatfield, and on 9 March 1915 the 1st Battalion proceeded to France, where they fought throughout the war. A 2nd Battalion was formed on the 31 August 1914, and in June 1916 they also moved to France as part of the 180th Brigade, 60th Division. After intensive warfare the 2nd Battalion was drafted to Salonika, from where in June 1917, it was drafted to Egypt "where it gained the name 'second to none' for its great work in the Palestine campaign".[56] In June 1918, the Battalion returned to France and became part of the 30th Division. A 3rd Battalion was formed shortly after the 2nd in 1914; however, this battalion was to remain in England to help with the training and supply of men to the two other battalions. Those who were rejected by the recruiting officials as unfit or too old to join the army were encouraged to prepare themselves for Home Defence and joined the Borough Volunteer Training Corps. By March 1915, the drill times for the Home Defence were announced in the papers with: "Thursday afternoon drill for shopkeepers. Shooting practice on a miniature range is being provided".[57] Despite these improvements in recruiting there continued to be a significant number of men who would not or could not be recruited. Many of these men seemed to belong to the social group often termed as "Aliens".

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[53] Bush, "East London Jews" op. cit. p151
[54] Winter, J. M., *The Great War and the British People* (1985) p39
[55] *East End News* 20 April 1915
[56] *East London Observer* 29 March 1924
[57] Ibid. 13 March 1915

"We just missed being blown to pieces!"

German bombers mounted their first air raid against Britain on 16 December 1914, with an attack on three east coast towns: Hartlepool, Whitby and Scarborough.[58] It was not until 31 May 1915 that London was attacked with a Zeppelin raid, killing seven and injuring 35.[59] The first London raid directly affected Stepney, as we shall discover. Between June and October 1915 nine more raids occurred, killing 127 and injuring 352.[60] The raids did "little to damage morale, but rather confirmed the popular image of Germans as ruthless killers of civilians".[61] Trevor Wilson states: "Churchill epitomised the national indignation when he dubbed the raiders 'baby-killers'",[62] an expression often used by the press.

For the purpose of identification, Air Raid Precautions issued posters depicting both British and German airships and aeroplanes. If German air craft were spotted then shelter was to be sought "… in the nearest available house".[63] German aeroplanes were characterised by wings that sloped backwards, while Zeppelins had a distinctive arrangement for their passenger cars. By 1916 British air defences had improved and the Zeppelins' weakness revealed. The Zeppelins "were slow moving, difficult to fly in high winds, and vulnerable to incendiary bullets since they were filled with highly explosive hydrogen gas".[64]

The Germans replaced in September 1917, the vulnerable Zeppelins with the new twin-engined Gotha bomber plane. This resulted in serious damage to British targets. The map below depicts the raids on London and shows the concentration of bombing in the City. For Stepney, the majority of bombs struck the west side of the area which bordered the City.

During June 1917, 20 Gothas dropped 10 tons of bombs on London in broad daylight. The Zeppelins, in contrast, usually struck at night. The worst zeppelin raid, on 13 June 1917, saw 162 people killed and 432 injured. Eighteen of those killed were school children from Poplar. Between September 1917 and May 1918, regular night raids on Britain occurred and "some 300,000 Londoners nightly took refuge in Underground stations".[65]

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[58] Reported in the *Weekly Times* 18 December 1914
[59] Robb, op. cit. p199
[60] Ibid. p199
[61] Ibid. p199
[62] Wilson, Trevor, *The Myriad Faces of War: Britain and the Great War 1914–1918* (Cambridge, 1986) p157
[63] MEPO 2/1621 Public Warning Poster by Air Raid Precautions
[64] Robb, op. cit. p200
[65] Robb, op. cit. p200