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Popular emotions and the spy peril, 1914-1915

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Abstract

Following Britain's entry into the First World War, the foreign spy became a particularly poignant image in popular culture as well as broader political discourse. Although espionage had featured regularly across British society during the preceding decade, with the outbreak of war the depiction of the spy took on a new significance. This thesis analyses British fears of German espionage between August 1914 and December 1915, in order to assess how popular spy phobias shaped wartime experiences. This recrudescence of spy fever, as these fears are commonly known, was facilitated by national policies and encouraged by local authorities. Pre-war strategic planning had determined that agents of the Kaiser were likely to target vulnerable infrastructure essential to Britain's mobilisation. With this in mind, authorities responded to the declaration of war by conducting an erratic search for potential spies within their respective communities. These ostensibly official measures combined with scaremongering in the press to establish the danger of foreign espionage. Early rhetoric defined the appropriate response; popular suspicion and enhanced vigilance became essential to the national war effort.

Defence panics had been an intermittent feature of Victorian and Edwardian discourse, and spy scares reflected a continuation of this tradition. Fears of espionage were far more prolific as collective anxieties rather than individual qualms. While some elements of society were caught up in this spy fever, others appeared unaffected by such concerns. As this thesis will show, emotional responses to spies appeared most pervasive in staunchly conservative communities that believed liberalism was ill-equipped to deal with national security and imperial defence. As a result, liberal

ideals created a conflicting set of emotions that opposed radicalism and the feelings that it promoted. Spy fever was thus not a ubiquitous panic, nor was it particularly irrational, despite the fallacy of the espionage threat. Although anti-alienism has often been identified as the cause of such trepidation, spy phobias were multifaceted, and individuals who developed such fears did so for a variety of reasons.

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Introduction

This thesis is concerned with the ways in which British society experienced fears of German espionage between August 1914 and December 1915. Following the outbreak of hostilities, recurrent warnings prophesising future conflict that had previously dominated Edwardian discourse were ostensibly confirmed by German belligerence. As a result, the discrimination aimed at a perceived enemy within took on a new significance within xenophobic narratives and radical politics. The image of the foreign spy provided a catalyst for this early discrimination. Yet the ways in which people responded to this imagery remains underexplored. Whereas ‘spy fever’ has been used heuristically to frame wider social and political developments, this is the first study to document how espionage phobias occurred, when and where they became pervasive, and why people appeared to be so susceptible to such anxieties. Especially during the early stages of the First World War, the spy became a particularly poignant image. However, society’s interaction with contemporary depictions of espionage was not necessarily consistent. This thesis seeks to assess the extent of emotional reactions to the spy threat in order to explain its prominence, as well as examine the impact of fear upon wartime attitudes and experiences.

To comprehend the nature and degree of espionage anxieties, I shall draw upon the history of emotions. Since it remains in its infancy, any conclusions are subject to future developments in the way historians approach emotions. But the assumption that spy fever represented a psychological ailment has led to a propensity to employ emotional words such as anxiety, hysteria, and paranoia to describe the phenomenon without the appropriate degree of scrutiny. Yet the application of

emotional concepts and language to otherwise unexplainable human actions is misguided and anachronistic without first recognising how historical feelings can be identified and interpreted.¹ By historicising emotions such as fear, and appreciating how feelings interacted with different communities, I hope to explain this seemingly irrational fear of an enemy within.

In a highly influential article in the *American Historical Review*, Peter and Carol Stearns distinguished between emotions and emotionology. Whereas the former represents a complex set of interactions that are mediated through neural and hormonal functions, the latter refers to the attitudes or standards that a society maintains towards basic feelings and their appropriate expression. By ignoring the distinctions between emotion and emotionology, the Stearns argued that historians lacked the appropriate terminology. As a consequence, historians attempting to analyse the history of emotions typically described emotional standards rather than individual feelings without necessarily acknowledging the difference, which often obscured the significance of their research.² Although my work briefly investigates individual feelings, it is primarily concerned with the emotional standards that developed in Britain during the first eighteen months of the war. Since historians no longer assume that these standards remain constant across time or space, identifying them provides an important way of measuring sociohistorical change.³ Ascertaining the emotional standards relating to fear and anxiety can allow historians to better

¹ Jan Plamper, *The History of Emotions: An Introduction* (Oxford, 2015) pp. 41, 277. By carefully examining the use of 'emotives', the effort to interpret and describe feelings that have no physical existence beyond the individual experiencing the emotion (i.e. the expression of those feelings through the use of language), the historian can observe the process through which emotions are managed and shaped, both collectively as well as individually. William M. Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions* (Cambridge, 2001).

² Peter N. Stearns and Carol Z. Stearns, 'Emotionology: Clarifying the History of Emotions and Emotional Standards', *American Historical Review* 90/4 (1985) pp. 813-4.

³ Stearns and Stearns, 'Emotionology: Clarifying the History of Emotions', p. 820.

understand the social context in which xenophobia developed during the first eighteen months of the War.

GERMANOPHOBIA DURING THE FIRST WORLD WAR

In his landmark history of British society during the First World War, Arthur Marwick declared that despite the difficulty in reconstructing the attitudes of the inarticulate public, their intense hatred of the German people was palpably clear.⁴ Given the scale of the conflict and the stakes that were involved, the war undoubtedly renegotiated perceptions of belonging through an intensified sensitivity to national and racial identities.⁵ Owing to the increased importance of 'Britishness', which was invariably defined against a bellicose 'other', the outbreak of hostilities exposed previously latent resentments that broke down existing notions of kinship amongst friends, neighbours, and families.⁶ The following historiographical review highlights some of the inconsistencies between historical approaches examining wartime Germanophobia, and by extension spy fever, and wider studies of anti-alienism and intolerance during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. By contextualising the study of spy fever within these historiographies, it identifies the areas in need of further historical research, as well as the methodological benefits of examining a single image through which discriminatory attitudes were both conveyed and extrapolated.

⁴ Arthur Marwick, *The Deluge: British Society and the First World War* (London, 1965) p. 89.

⁵ George Robb, *British Culture and the First World War* (Basingstoke, 2002) p. 5.

⁶ Linda Colley, 'Britishness and Otherness: An Argument', *Journal of British Studies* 31/4 (1992) p. 311; David Cesarani, 'An Embattled Minority: The Jews in Britain during the First World War', *Immigrants and Minorities* 8/1 (1989) p. 63; Nicoletta F. Gullace, 'Friends, Aliens and Enemies: Fictive Communities and the Lusitania Riots of 1915', *Journal of Social History* 39/2 (2005) p. 345.

Like all historical scholarship, examinations of wartime anti-alienism are shaped by contemporary historiographical trends and approaches. As a result, Arthur Marwick's highly influential theory of total war and social change was implicit within many early studies of First World War Germanophobia. Marwick's thesis broadly posited that the conflict ushered in a deluge of transformations that had a momentous and lasting effect on nearly all aspects of social and political life in Britain.⁷ Consistent with his notion of widespread social change, Marwick argued that the degree of racial hatred that emerged during the conflict surpassed anything the Government could have anticipated.⁸ In a similar vein, Trevor Wilson claimed that chauvinism became an appropriate response, despite being formerly unacceptable, because the pressures of war compelled behaviour that was 'purposeless and cruel'.⁹ Building on this interpretation, Panikos Panayi has argued that the expansion of racist bigotry was essential in sustaining national cohesion and popular enthusiasm for the war.¹⁰ Although these observations are not necessarily erroneous, the resulting implications for the history of spy fever are problematic. Most significantly, historians of wartime Germanophobia tend to view it as an aberration that disrupted longstanding British attitudes. In *The Enemy in Our Midst*, for example, Panayi professed that the manifestation of anti-German antagonism had little precedent in Edwardian history:

The hostility of the war years had only a few roots specifically in this sort of economic-inspired animosity... Although the pre-War peaks did provide a foundation

⁷ Marwick, *The Deluge*. For nearly thirty years Marwick's *The Deluge* remained an unrivalled source on British society during this period. For early revisionist accounts see Trevor Wilson, *The Myriad Faces of War: Britain and the Great War, 1914-1918* (Cambridge, 1986); Gerard De Groot, *Blighty: British Society in the Era of the Great War* (London, 1996). However, neither Wilson nor De Groot significantly altered our understanding of anti-German hostility.

⁸ Marwick, *The Deluge*, p. 90.

⁹ Wilson, *Myriad Faces of War*, p. 161.

¹⁰ Panikos Panayi, 'The Hidden Hand': British Myths about German Control of Britain during the First World War', *Immigrants and Minorities* 7/3 (1988) p. 270.

for the hostility during the years of armed conflict, we should not see hatred of Germans within Britain as a steadily growing plant which bore fruit in 1914. Instead, we should compare it with a smouldering fire which occasionally came alight prior to the war, but, with the outbreak of hostilities, exploded.¹¹

In demonstrating the cataclysmic impact of the war, Panayi fails to effectively situate wartime Germanophobia in the appropriate context of wider British intolerances. Consequently, the rise in anti-German sentiment, and spy fever in particular, remain misunderstood and misrepresented.

Marwick maintained that ‘the war meted out heavy punishment to that broad humane liberalism which for two centuries had been one of the most vital elements in British politics’.¹² Owing to this inclination to emphasise the dramatic effect of the war, many historians of wartime Germanophobia tend to view it as a radical departure from Britain’s supposedly traditional liberal political culture.¹³ In order to accentuate the depravity of anti-Germanism between 1914 and 1918, Gerard De Groot juxtaposed the treatment of pacifists and anti-conscriptions with that of enemy aliens and suspected spies. While he suggested the former represented an endurance of former liberal values, the latter certainly did not.¹⁴ Likewise, Nicoletta Gullace highlights the resurgence of Britain’s ‘island race’ mentality during the First World War following a lengthy liberal hiatus, which culminated in legislation imposed

¹¹ Panikos Panayi, *The Enemy in Our Midst: Germans in Britain during the First World War* (Oxford, 1991) p. 41.

¹² Arthur Marwick, *Britain in the Century of Total War: War Peace and Social Change 1900-1967* (London, 1968) p. 113. George Dangerfield also famously catalogued the difficulties incurred by the Liberal Party itself: *The Strange Death of Liberal England* (London, 2012).

¹³ David Caesarani, ‘An Alien Concept? The Continuity of Anti-Alienism in British Society Before 1940’, *Immigrants and Minorities* 11/3 (1992) p. 25. For an example, see: Panikos Panayi, ‘Anti-German Riots in London during the First World War’, *German History* 7/2 (1989) p. 203. . This is equally applicable to other forms of anti-alienism, not just Germanophobia: Bryan Cheyette, ‘Jewish Stereotyping and English Literature 1875-1920: Towards a Political Analysis’, in Tony Kushner and Kenneth Lunn (eds.), *Traditions of Intolerance: Historical Perspectives on Fascism in Britain* (Manchester, 1989) p. 12.

¹⁴ De Groot, *British Society in the Era of the Great War*, p. 157.

against groups considered ‘outsiders’.¹⁵ Envisaging popular hostility as an instantaneous reaction fits the narrative that the war was a watershed moment in the history of British xenophobia, but it also implies that it was generated by a spontaneous reaction among the general public.¹⁶ As such, Panayi echoes Marwick’s contention that the British public were primarily responsible for perpetuating anti-German sentiment, which eventually destroyed the thriving German communities in Britain. In keeping with this bottom-up approach, Panayi claims that the legislation and measures adopted against aliens in Britain were primarily informed and directed by popular antipathy.¹⁷ Alluding to the spontaneity of espionage phobias while also stressing the lack of coercion from above has been a constant theme in historical examinations of spy fever.¹⁸

But the assumption that xenophobia rapidly overcame conventional liberalism also lends itself to the idea that discriminatory attitudes became extensive. Trevor Wilson and Stella Yarrow both argue that all sections of society became transfixed by an anti-immigrant mentality, while De Groot surmises that ‘every alien was assumed to be a potential or actual spy’.¹⁹ Panayi’s early contributions to the subject repeatedly emphasise the scale of Germanophobia during the war, but there are limitations in his approach. Firstly, he claims that the ‘best evidence’ for establishing the acute level of hatred towards Germany was the rate at which British men volunteered for the armed

¹⁵ The ‘island race’ is how Kathleen Wilson describes eighteenth century notions of nationalism. Gullace, ‘Friends, Aliens, and Enemies’, p. 362.

¹⁶ Marwick argued that the popular press merely followed contemporary attitudes rather than led them, while the government played almost no part in early propaganda efforts. Marwick, *The Deluge*, p. 91; Gary S. Messinger, *British Propaganda and the State in the First World War* (Manchester, 1992) p.2. Adrian Gregory has also recently returned to this idea, *The Last Great War: British Society and the First World War* (Cambridge, 2008) p. 6.

¹⁷ Panayi, *The Enemy in Our Midst*, p. 283-91

¹⁸ Cate Haste, *Keep the Home Fires Burning: Propaganda in the First World War* (London, 1977) p.108; Panayi, *The Enemy in Our Midst*, p. 153; Catriona Pennell, *A Kingdom United: Popular Responses to the Outbreak of the First World War* (Oxford, 2012), pp. 102-5.

¹⁹ Wilson, *Myriad Faces of War*, p. 160; Stella Yarrow, ‘The Impact of Hostility on Germans in Britain, 1914-1918’, *Immigrants and Minorities* 8/1-2 (1989) p. 97; De Groot, *British Society in the Era of the Great War*, p. 159.

forces.²⁰ Even if we ignore the fact that this statement completely neglects the majority of British society, including an entire gender, recruitment was driven by a number of complex political, social, and economic factors, and not simply encouraged by patriotism and idealism in isolation.²¹ The rate of enlistment was therefore enormously varied, and was heavily influenced by the economic situation of the individual.²² Secondly, Panayi considers widespread rioting in 1915 as further proof of a popular growth in anti-German resentment, which has been disputed.²³ Finally, he portrays the success of the British Empire Union (BEU) during the war as a product of widespread xenophobia. Yet despite the eventual popularity of the BEU in 1918, he actually documents a series of failures between 1915 and 1917 that testify to their continued insignificance until the final year of the war when their membership expanded significantly.²⁴ The issue with Panayi's work stems from what he regards as 'public opinion'. Panayi differentiates between what he can objectively assess and the thoughts of every member of British society, but classifies 'public opinion' based on

²⁰ Panayi, *Enemy in Our Midst*, p. 4.

²¹ Peter Simkins, *Kitchener's Army: The Raising of the New Armies, 1914-1916* (Manchester, 1988) pp. 167-75; Gregory, *Last Great War*, pp. 73-81; Pennell, *A Kingdom United*, pp. 156-62.

²² For example, men employed in commercial or distribution trades volunteered in far greater numbers than industrial workers, transport operatives, or agricultural labourers. Textile workers were the most reluctant to enlist, given the increased prosperity in the clothing trade caused by the war. The superior wages received by dockworkers, railwaymen, and miners all discouraged enlistment, while unemployment in the building trade resulted in a higher than average rate of enlistment: Ian Beckett, 'The Nation in Arms, 1914-1918', in Ian F.W. Beckett and Keith Simpson (eds.), *A Nation in Arms: A Social Study of the British Army in the First World War* (Barnsley, 2004) pp. 7-11.

²³ Panayi, 'Anti-German Riots in London', pp. 184-203. Adrian Gregory's critique is unpacked at length below.

²⁴ Panikos Panayi, 'The British Empire Union in the First World War', *Immigrants and Minorities* 8/1 (1989) pp. 113-28. Panayi notes how, in June 1915, the BEU attempted to remove Sir Edgar Speyer and Sir Ernest Cassel from the Privy Council, but failed. In May 1917, they suggested no German should be naturalised for a period of twenty-one years, and demanded that all naturalisation papers taken out during the previous twenty-one years be voided, but again, they failed. One local London branch also attempted to close all German restaurants in London, but only managed to shut down two of them. Following the death of Kitchener in 1916, Panayi claims that around 1,000 people attended their rallies. However, Catriona Pennell conservatively estimates that between 1,000 and 10,000 people made up the crowds on 4 August 1914, which she shows is hardly significant given the size of the local population: *A Kingdom United*, p. 40. Moreover, Gregory highlights the inconsistency of popular support for the BEU across various socio-economic regions, which seriously challenges the impact of the BEU across the political spectrum: *Last Great War*, p. 234.

the ‘politically active and powerful sections of the population’.²⁵ This then becomes further problematic because of his primary source base. Although he points out that the right wing Unionist press were most active in formulating anti-alienism and Germanophobia, his focus on these sources, as well as political figures from the radical right, precludes any wider perspective. Without contextualising the extent of ideological support for the ideas espoused by radical elements in British politics, Panayi cannot sufficiently measure the impact of their rhetoric more broadly. Only by analysing how liberal, left wing, and local newspapers discussed similar issues can the importance of wartime Germanophobia in popular discourse be ascertained.

By uncritically adhering to Marwick’s framework, historians have failed to establish a methodology for assessing the extent of spy fever and have consequently struggled to identify the mechanisms through which espionage phobias permeated society.²⁶ In attempting to explain this sudden and incomprehensible fascination with spies, historians have overlooked wider histories of British xenophobia in favour of simplistic assessments that disregard the complexity and ambiguity of collective experiences and emotions. As a result, it is commonly accepted that society naively misconstrued the fictional serialisation of the German spy as a factual representation of German immigrants, which fashioned perceptions of the alien danger more

²⁵ Panayi, *Enemy in Our Midst*, p. 3.

²⁶ Whereas David French’s pioneering work on Edwardian spy phobias only attempted measured assessments regarding the scale of social anxieties, most subsequent accounts perceive British society as a single coherent entity that developed widespread paranoia: David French, ‘Spy Fever in Britain, 1900-1915’, *The Historical Journal* 21/2 (1978) pp. 355-70. He does resort to emotional words such as ‘hysteria’ without qualification, however. While Panayi’s research attempts to elaborate on the social implications of popular spy fever, the historiographical restrictions of the 1980s meant that he was overly reliant on top down sources. Consequently, the variation and ambiguity that often characterises such a diverse community proved difficult to measure. Although Catriona Pennell provided additional quotidian experience to our understanding of spy fears, and despite the premise of *A Kingdom United*, her interpretation of spy fever similarly reflects an embedded assumption that society was unanimously disturbed by surreptitious subversion.

substantially.²⁷ David French, in his pioneering work on spy fever, attributes the growth of anxiety to the gullibility of the British public, who naively mistook fictional serialisations of German espionage as evidence of their transgressions.²⁸ Subsequent historians have echoed this conclusion and focused their analyses on the irrationality of the phobia, based on retrospective accounts regarding the reality of German espionage. As a result, they employ language evoking various emotional ailments such as hysteria and delusion to describe such responses.²⁹ The appropriation of emotional concepts implies that spy fever had a tremendous impact on British society, which conveniently aligns spy fever with Marwick's theory of social change.

TRADITIONS OF XENOPHOBIA IN BRITAIN

Since the historiography of spy fever arose as a derivative of wartime Germanophobia, it remains wedded to the same constraints imposed by Marwick's framework. The portrayal of spy fever afforded by this approach stipulates that espionage phobias arose as a spontaneous, irrational, and ubiquitous hysteria. But these claims are inconsistent with broader studies of British anti-alienism as well as transnational histories of the First World War. Both of these historiographies suggest that spy fever developed as a continuation of longer historical trends. Firstly, while a tradition of xenophobia disputes the spontaneity of spy fever in 1914, a growing anti-

²⁷ French, 'Spy Fever in Britain', p. 356; Christopher Andrew, *Secret Service: The Making of the British Intelligence Community* (London, 1986) p. 267; James Hampshire, 'Spy Fever in Britain, 1900 to 1914', *The Historian* 72 (2001) p. 24; James Fox, 'Traitor Painters': Artists and Espionage in the First World War', *The British Art Journal* 9/3 (2009) p. 62.

²⁸ French, 'Spy Fever in Britain', p. 356. See also, Andrew, *Secret Service*, p. 267; Hampshire, 'Spy Fever in Britain, 1900 to 1914', p. 24.

²⁹ Panayi, 'Hidden Hand', p. 267; Groot, *Blighty: British Society in the era of the Great War*, pp. 159-60; Brett Holman, 'Constructing the Enemy Within: Rumours of Secret Gun Platforms and Zeppelin Bases in Britain, August-October 1914', *British Journal for Military History* 3/2 (2017); pp. 22-42; Jules J.S. Gaspard, 'A Lesson Lived is a Lesson Learned: A Critical Re-Examination of the Origins of Preventative Counter-Espionage in Britain', *Journal of Intelligence History* (Published online, 2017) pp. 8-15.

German antagonism from as early as 1850 provides further evidence of this historical trend. But the way in which historians have approached earlier forms of Germanophobia is also significant. Rather than presume that pre-war anti-German sentiment was monolithic, historians recognise the contradictions and ambiguity in popular perceptions of Germany during this period, which have been entirely ignored in the context of the First World War. Contextualising wartime spy fever in a broader progression of British xenophobia raises questions about its emergence and scale following the outbreak of war. Secondly, a global history of popular reactions further disputes the notion that espionage phobias were an irrational phenomenon. The international context of spy fever, across various belligerent nations, shows that espionage anxieties masked relevant concerns that should not be dismissed as hysterical delusions. Instead, historians should analyse why the figure of the spy provided such an expedient image with which to convey contemporary fears. These historiographies reveal the shortcomings in current literature examining wartime Germanophobia in Britain, and challenge the presumed spontaneity, ubiquity, and irrationality of espionage phobias during the First World War.

Colin Holmes' magisterial volumes on the history of immigration in Britain question the belief that Britain customarily displayed lenience towards refugees and immigrants. Despite the implied absurdity of spy fever, Holmes identifies a number of images and stereotypes that were used to convey prejudicial beliefs relating to immigrants during the course of the nineteenth century.³⁰ Although hostility was by no means consistent across Britain, a multitude of migrants and ethnicities faced popular discrimination. The long-standing Protestant antipathy towards Catholicism ensured that Irish immigrants were repeatedly derided as racially inferior to the

³⁰ Colin Holmes, *John Bull's Island: Immigration and British Society* (London, 1992) p. 57.

Anglo-Saxon, for example.³¹ But the tensions generated by the 1905 Aliens Act were predominantly directed against the arrival of Jews from Russian Poland whose numbers had been continuously rising since the 1880s. Social aversions to Russian Jews originated from the economic competition they provided in the labour market, but were exacerbated by the widely held belief that, unlike most other immigrant groups, Russian Jews refused to assimilate themselves with the majority.³² Nevertheless, hostility was not always correlated to the size of the vilified group. Romani people received a torrent of abuse despite their relatively small presence. Although the Traveller community arrived legally and were self-sustaining, they found themselves legislated against by the government, driven away or rounded up by local police constabularies, and discriminated against by society for their nomadic lifestyle.³³ Additionally, fears of Lithuanians, Italians, and Chinese workers providing cheap labour equally contributed to anti-alien tensions.³⁴ Holmes posits that during the period 1871-1914, there was little evidence of the ‘much-vaunted tradition of tolerance in Britain, let alone acceptance’, and conversely argues that Britain was a fundamentally intolerant nation.³⁵ Since the British public had repeatedly demonstrated a receptiveness towards anti-immigration discourse throughout the nineteenth century, it can be no surprise that following the onset of what many expected to be a cataclysmic conflict, comparable fears found greater expression.

³¹ Holmes, *John Bull's Island*, pp. 57-61. Mervyn Busteed, ‘Resistance and Respectability: Dilemmas of Irish Migrant Politics in Victorian Britain’, *Immigrants and Minorities* 27/2-3 (2009) pp.181-3.

³² Holmes, *John Bull's Island*, pp. 65-70. See also, William Rubinstein, *A History of the Jews in the English Speaking World: Great Britain* (Basingstoke, 1996). But conversely, the possibility of Jewish assimilation was equally as threatening to British national characteristics: Cheyette, ‘Jewish Stereotyping and English Literature’, pp. 16-17.

³³ Holmes, *John Bull's Island*, pp. 64.

³⁴ *Ibid.* pp. 74-81.

³⁵ But, at the same time, there was little indication of an extensive hostility towards immigrants: Holmes, *John Bull's Island*, p. 84. See also: Colin Holmes, *A Tolerant Country? Immigrants, Refugees and Minorities in Britain* (London, 1991) p. 14.

David Caesarani attributes this expansion of anti-alienism during the Victorian period to the growing importance attached to national and racial identity. He argues that the development of social Darwinism and a mounting interest in the eugenics movement closely entwined national characteristics with ethnicity.³⁶ Although the British public had been relatively tolerant of immigrants up until 1880, the alien population remained relatively small and was dwarfed by the volume of economic migrants relocating within Britain. But the early 1880s reversed positive opinions towards immigrants as an influx of Eastern European immigrants coincided with economic decline. Aliens became the focal point of aggression, as expanding theories of eugenics amplified the division between alien and British. Caesarani suggests that between 1906 and 1914, anti-alienism ‘developed a momentum, dynamic, and logic of its own’ that was fuelled by the Home Office and prominent anti-alienists. As a consequence, he maintains that:

The roots of wartime and post-war anti-alienism are to be found in the construction of the alien in British political culture and society in the late Victorian and Edwardian eras. Policies and practices post-1914 were merely an extension of those which were tried and trusted or which had previously been mooted and experimented with.³⁷

Viewing wartime Germanophobia as an aberration, therefore, is problematic. This thesis attempts to understand how and why it took the form that it did during the First World War, rather than simply accept that suspicion and alarm represented an irrational paranoia.

Besides a growing propensity to display xenophobic tendencies towards a host of undesirable immigrants, Britain was also involved in an escalating diplomatic, economic, naval, and imperial rivalry with Germany throughout the decade preceding

³⁶ See also Robb, *British Culture*, p. 7.

³⁷ Caesarani, ‘An Alien Concept?’, p. 26-34.

1914.³⁸ Inquiries into pre-war Germanophobia display much greater sophistication in their assessments of popular hostility than those attempting to analyse wartime anti-Germanism. One of the earliest explorations was Paul Kennedy's work that distinguished between 'idealists' and 'realists'. Rather than identify a universal anti-German sentiment, Kennedy suggests that idealists sought the continuance of peace and closer ties with Germany. The realists, on the other hand, either genuinely believed in the German peril or used the threat to advance a political agenda.³⁹ While Kennedy provides a useful distinction between Germanophobes and Germanophiles in Britain, which to some extent qualifies the degree of anti-Germanism, Jan Rüger suggests that the explanatory power of these categories is limited. Rüger highlights the problem of using a simple opposition between two views because in reality there was an assortment of contradictory attitudes and opinions that varied according to personal and political circumstances.⁴⁰ He argues that certain Germanophobes had the most realistic outlook on Germany, while some Anglophiles in Germany could turn out to be the most vociferous critics of Britain, for instance.⁴¹ Historians of Edwardian anti-alienism, therefore, do not accept that Germanophobia was ubiquitous in the way that historians of wartime anti-German hostility do.⁴²

³⁸ Holmes, *John Bull's Island*, p. 62; Paul Kennedy, *The Rise of the Anglo-German Antagonism 1860-1914* (London, 1980); Matthew Seligmann, *The Royal Navy and the German Threat 1901-1914: Admiralty Plans to Protect British Trade in a War Against Germany* (Oxford, 2012); Patrick Longson, 'The Rise of the German Menace: Imperial Anxiety and British Popular Culture, 1896-1903', PhD Thesis (University of Birmingham, 2014).

³⁹ Paul Kennedy, 'Idealists and Realists: British Views of Germany, 1864-1939', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 25 (1975) pp. 137-46.

⁴⁰ Jan Rüger, 'Revisiting the Anglo-German Antagonism', *The Journal of Modern History* 83/3 (2011) p. 587.

⁴¹ Patrick Major, 'Britain and Germany: A Love Hate Relationship?', *German History* 26/4 (2008) p. 458; Thomas Weber, *Our Friend the Enemy: Elite Education in Britain and Germany before the First World War* (Stanford, 2008) p. 93.

⁴² It is even recognised that the yellow press were equally as ambiguous in their depictions of the German Kaiser and the German nation. While the Kaiser was routinely vilified during moments of perceived crisis, this hostility was contrasted with admiration and respect during less threatening periods. Lothar Reinermann, 'Fleet Street and the Kaiser: British Public Opinion and Wilhelm II', *German History* 26/4 (2008) pp. 469-70. See also, Martin Schramm, *Das Deutschland in der Britischen Presse 1912-1919* (Berlin, 2007).

Although British perceptions of Germany and the German people were far less belligerent during the pre-war period, the existence of this rudimentary Germanophobia suggests that its expansion during the autumn of 1914 was not spontaneous, and including the image of the ‘spy’ was far from inevitable.⁴³ Rather than attribute social concerns to abstract notions of irrationality, Holmes argues that the enmity produced against various immigrants resulted from a complex phenomenon that involved a multitude of factors, none of which are necessarily determinative: stereotypes, numbers, wartime phobias, economic conditions, and the perception of a group as unassailable or as competition.⁴⁴ In attempting to grapple with this complexity, Keir Waddington’s contribution to the debate connects increasingly hostile opinions of Germany with foodstuffs identified as intrinsically German. This challenges the idea that Germanophobia was a rapid departure from the epoch of *laissez-faire* social relations in Britain. Waddington disputes the idea that Anglo-German friendship was easily replaced by Anglo-German antagonism after 1900, especially given the longevity of Anglo-German cultural and intellectual interaction. Waddington’s research highlights the importance of symbolism, in this instance the German sausage, in breaking down former affiliations and conveying discriminatory ideas. Although the war fanned the flames of Germanophobia, he argues that habitual wartime attacks on German butchers reflected a much longer chronology of popular anti-German sentiments. Since a burgeoning knowledge of contagious diseases had exposed the risks of foreign interference during the nineteenth century, meat became particularly symbolic of national identity. German sausages, he argues, were repeatedly used to stimulate popular hostility between 1850

⁴³ Stella Yarrow, for example, conversely suggested that wartime Germanophobia was evidence of a much wider and deep rooted xenophobia that was exacerbated following reports of German atrocities: ‘The Impact of Hostility on Germans’, pp. 98, 109; Gullace, ‘Friends, Aliens, and Enemies’, p. 347.

⁴⁴ Holmes, *John Bull’s Island*, pp. 299-301.

and the First World War. Waddington therefore disputes the notion that the two decades before 1914 were especially transformative in shaping Anglo-German perceptions, as is customarily believed. Instead, he suggests that the establishment of popular antagonisms required a far lengthier process.⁴⁵

Since the early historiography was largely constructed by top-down sources and prominent conservative figures, the complexity of social reactions was often lost. But there has been a growing attentiveness to the variations in individual experiences and attitudes.⁴⁶ As a result, historians have moved away from the powerful notion of ‘imagined community’ towards a closer examination of human relations.⁴⁷ Not only have recent historians challenged the originality of wartime Germanophobia, but Adrian Gregory has also contested the assumed ubiquity of anti-German sentiment during the early stages of the war. Despite Panayi’s contention that the 1915 riots occurred due to widespread anger and frustration aimed at the German community in Britain, Gregory questions the accuracy of this analysis. Whereas contemporaries typically identified three causes prompting the riots: an atmosphere of jingoism and xenophobia, personal hatreds and rivalries, and economic depravity, Panayi firmly dismisses the latter two.⁴⁸ Gregory, on the other hand, contends that positing an either/or scenario ignores the interaction between these various viewpoints, and maintains that Panayi overstates the influence of nationalistic ideology in fomenting this particular outburst of aggression. Although they were certainly not ‘hunger riots’, as Sylvia Pankhurst referred to them, financial and racial motivations were not necessary incompatible. Whereas Panayi firmly dismisses economic factors, since he points out that living standards were improving, these improvements were far from universal.

⁴⁵ Keir Waddington, ‘“We Don’t Need any German Sausages Here!” Food, Fear, and the German Nation in Victorian and Edwardian Britain’, *Journal of British Studies* 52/4 (2013) pp. 18-20.

⁴⁶ Pennell, *A Kingdom United*, p. 1; Robb, *British Culture*, p. 9.

⁴⁷ Gullace, ‘Friends, Aliens, and Enemies’, p. 346.

⁴⁸ Panayi, ‘Anti-German Riots in London’, pp. 184-203.

Crucially, though, food riots are typically caused by actual food prices rather than the relationship of prices to real wages. Moreover, the occupations of those prosecuted overwhelmingly came from groups hardest hit by the war economy, while the victims were mostly food retailers.⁴⁹ Panayi is therefore mistaken to assume that riots were automatically connected to Germanophobia. Notwithstanding the vigour of anti-German rhetoric, the distinction between being patriotically anti-German and chauvinistically hostile to individual Germans has been continuously overlooked. By drawing attention to the shortcomings in the way in which historians have measured wartime Germanophobia, Gregory has highlighted the need to appreciate the impact of anti-German sentiment on specific communities and individuals to gauge the extent of this antagonism.

This dichotomy between studies of wartime Germanophobia and broader histories of British anti-alienism raises various challenges to the conventional understanding of spy fever. The long chronology of growing intolerance towards immigrants suggests that the manifestation of anti-German sentiment during the First World War was a culmination of animosity that had been developing during the previous half century. As a consequence, Germanophobia should be viewed as one component within a growing tradition of xenophobia, and not as a phenomenon specific to wartime conditions that occurred spontaneously in August 1914. Moreover, broad inquiries into British intolerance and analyses of pre-war Germanophobia associate this discrimination to specific elements within society, which raises questions over the supposed ubiquity of wartime anti-German sentiment. Both of these points, however, require historians to examine why the image of the spy

⁴⁹ This is further compounded by the fact that the majority of rioting occurred in working-class districts. Although Panayi emphasises the sporadic outbursts in middle-class areas, the few examples he illustrates hardly support the contention that it was a truly nationwide phenomenon: Gregory, *Last Great War*, pp. 236-7.

became so potent during the early stages of First World War. David Lederer contends that fears play an important social function in total war, and anxieties both real and imagined represent a productive and reasonable response. The established political, social, and economic tensions that served as a pretext to war inevitably engender popular anxieties. To overcome these fears, the image of the spy provided a sense of community and purpose for individuals to focus their imaginations on.⁵⁰ Like Waddington's work analysing perceptions of the German sausage, the depiction of spies in contemporary discourse needs to be viewed not as an irrational aberration fuelled by an inability to distinguish between fiction and reality, but as a way of analysing the concerns of British society and their perceptions of the alien menace.

A GLOBAL PHENOMENON

Marc Bloch's highly influential article on false news in wartime asserted that misperception was born out of 'imprecise individual observations or imperfect eyewitness accounts', and arises from what he referred to as 'group psychology'. During periods of crises, such as the outbreak of war, Bloch maintained that the collective psyche suffers from a degree of anxiety and expectation. This combined with an absence of up-to-date and well-informed news, caused either by censorship or the availability of correspondents in a warzone, creates a dearth of information and leads to an overreliance upon the most far-fetched or loosely related reports. Bloch suggested that the propagation of false news then flourishes because people find a medium with which to express 'all their prejudices, hatreds, fears, [and] all their strong emotions'. For Bloch, rumours of German espionage, however exaggerated

⁵⁰ 'Fear of the Thirty Years War', in Michael Laffan and Max Weiss (eds.), *Facing Fear: The History of an Emotion in Global Perspective* (Oxford, 2012) pp. 10-30.

they may have been, were not an exceptional or irrational phenomenon.⁵¹ It is therefore entirely rational, according to Bloch's notion of false news, that spy fears resurfaced in 1914. That spy fears were in fact rational responses is further attested to by the emergence of comparable fears of subversion during various periods of British history, as well as in nearly every belligerent nation during the First World War.

During the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, for instance, an anticipated invasion was coupled with the threat of domestic radicalism. In response to this multifaceted challenge, a new public energy was engendered to harness popular patriotism against war and subversion.⁵² Thus, it was commonly articulated that French led conspiracies were transpiring across the continent, and the British government repeatedly provided official credence to these stories. A host of stringent security measures were justified by reports that France, in conjunction with internal revolutionaries, was attempting to destabilise Britain.⁵³ Widespread rumours of invasion and saboteurs inevitably accompanied this rhetoric. It was suggested Napoleon was himself disguised as a fisherman spying out British ports, while another alleged he was reconnoitring the Welsh mountains.⁵⁴ But foreigners more generally became especially suspect, leading to fears in Hartlepool that a monkey wearing a French military uniform was acting as a secret agent for the Republic.⁵⁵ Victory against France's *Levée en masse* required national mobilisation; for Britain,

⁵¹ Marc Bloch, 'Reflections of a Historian on the False News of the War', trans. James P. Holoka, *Michigan War Studies Review* (2013)

⁵² David Eastwood, 'Patriotism and the English State in the 1790s', in Mark Philp (ed.), *The French Revolution and British Popular Politics* (Cambridge, 1991) p. 150.

⁵³ Marianne Elliot, 'French Subversion in Britain in the French Revolution', in Colin Jones (ed.), *Britain and Revolutionary France: Conflict, Subversion and Propaganda* (Exeter, 1983) p. 40.

⁵⁴ Jenny Uglow, *In These Times: Living in Britain Through Napoleon's Wars, 1793-1815* (London, 2014)

⁵⁵ Although this story has most likely been the subject of much embellishment, this in of itself reflects the climate of paranoia that existed: Paul Chrystal and Simon Crossley, *Hartlepool Through Time* (Stroud, 2009)

which maintained a radically anti-democratic stance, the struggle against subversion provided a compelling mechanism with which to unify and mobilise the nation.⁵⁶

Similarly, during the crisis of 1940, when Britain felt isolated and alone after the fall of France, a virulent conspiracy theory transpired that centred on a secret Nazi fifth column believed to be operating in Britain. Especially after Germany's invasion of Denmark and Norway, it was erroneously believed that a pro-German faction had facilitated Nazi success. The resulting popular hostility, owing to resurgent invasion fears, was thus initially aimed at members of the British Union of Fascists, but later assimilated with attacks on Jehovah's Witnesses and the Communist Party of Great Britain owing to their anti-war positions. In an attempt to fashion a scapegoat for Nazi victories across Europe, both the *Daily Mail* and *Daily Express* inflamed animosity towards foreigners through association with a purported German fifth column. Bowing to popular clamour, the Home Office initiated increasingly drastic action against Communists, Fascists, and Pacifists, and began interning enemy aliens as potential dissidents. Although there was no truth in the fifth column rhetoric, Richard Thurlow considers this outburst of aggression as an 'understandable security myth'. He argues that the conspiracy theory was not engendered by a collective naivety, but instead it sought to unite the British public behind the banner of 'national security'.⁵⁷ Given the historical precedence of the enemy within, it is irresponsible to attribute First World War espionage phobias to naive beliefs, and historians should instead

⁵⁶ Eastwood, 'Patriotism and the English State in the 1790s', p. 150.

⁵⁷ F.H Hinsley and C.A.G. Simkins, *British Intelligence in the Second World War, Vol. Four: Security and Counter-Intelligence* (London, 1990) pp. 47-62; Richard Thurlow, 'The Evolution of the Mythical British Fifth Column, 1939-46', *Twentieth Century British History* 10/4 (1999) pp. 477-498; Brian Simpson, *In the Highest Degree Odious: Detention in Wartime Britain* (Oxford, 1992) pp. 147-171. Fears of a German fifth column were equally prevalent throughout the British Expeditionary Force during the defence of France and Belgium in 1940: Glyn Pryor, 'The 'Fifth Column', and the British Experience of Retreat, 1940', *War in History* 12/4 (2005) pp. 418-447.

attempt to understand why the spy provided such an expedient image to express similar fears during 1914 and 1915.

During the First World War specifically, Britain was also not unique in its fear of foreign espionage.⁵⁸ Perhaps unsurprisingly, the spy featured prominently in much of the nationalistic rhetoric across the British Empire.⁵⁹ Coinciding with the outburst of jingoism in Canada was an attempt to recast Canadians of Teutonic origin as savage and devious in nature, and ‘ready to do criminal work for their masters’. As the public grew increasingly anxious about invasion, countless reports of German sabotage emerged and various measures aimed at combatting spies were implemented. Following several minor incidents, all of which received front-page newspaper coverage, public accusations of suspected spies supposedly became akin to a ‘witch hunt’.⁶⁰ In Australia, a prominent anti-alien campaign similarly portrayed Germans as an astute race predisposed to spying, which hastened discriminatory measures.⁶¹ German immigrants living in South Africa were likewise depicted as

⁵⁸ John Horne, ‘Public Opinion and Politics’, in John Horne (ed.), *A Companion to World War I* (Oxford, 2012) p. 281. Spy fevers also occurred in both World Wars: Panikos Panayi, ‘Dominant Societies and Minorities in the Two World Wars’, in Panikos Panayi (ed.) *Minorities in Wartime: National and Racial Groupings in Europe, North America and Australia during the Two World Wars* (Oxford, 1993) p. 13. Equally significant, is the historical context of anarchic terrorism. For decades previously European society had been afraid, owing to genuine cases of attempted subversion as well as moral panics, of the chaos wrought through assassinations, sabotage, and bombings. Within this environment, it was perfectly plausible that an enemy might also adopt similar tactics. Richard Bach Jensen, *The Battle Against Anarchic Terrorism: An International History, 1878-1934* (Cambridge, 2014) pp. 37-61.

⁵⁹ Kay Saunders has demonstrated that although the Dominions often followed the precedent set in London regarding matters of defence, their internal ethnic exigencies were localised affairs, which in some cases fashioned more extreme policies towards ethnic minorities than those introduced in Britain: ‘The Stranger in Our Gates’: Internment Policies in the United Kingdom and Australia during the Two World Wars, 1914-39’, *Immigrants and Minorities* 22/1 (2003) pp. 23-4.

⁶⁰ Martin Kitchen, ‘The German Invasion of Canada in the First World War’, *The International History Review* 7/2 (1985) pp. 245-60; Gerhard P. Bassler, ‘The Enemy Alien Experience in Newfoundland 1914-1918’, *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 20/3 (1988) pp.45-6; Jeffrey A. Keshen, *Propaganda and Censorship during Canada’s Great War* (Alberta, 1996) pp. 5-11.

⁶¹ R.J.W. Selleck, ‘The Trouble with my Looking Glass’: A study of the attitudes of Australians to Germans during the Great War’, *Journal of Australian Studies* 4/6 (1980) pp. 5-6, 21; Gerhard Fischer, ‘Fighting the War at Home: The Campaign against Enemy Aliens in Australia during the First World War’, in Panayi (ed.), *Minorities in Wartime*, pp. 263-286.

‘mean-spirited spies’.⁶² Although the imagery of the spy was far less conspicuous in New Zealand, the nationalist press attempted to portray the remaining aliens as a network of clandestine, subversive agents. As a result, those who challenged a renewed sense of ‘Britishness’ became suspected of foreign collusion as anti-German sentiment swept the nation through a wave of attacks and riots targeting enemy aliens.⁶³

But spy phobias were equally widespread beyond the British Empire. In France, spy mania had supposedly gripped the entire country within weeks. Germans were attacked, even killed, in the street and any remaining representations of Germany were considered abhorrent. Accusations of espionage became rife, as did legislation and measures imposed against foreigners. Denouncing spies was considered to reinforce the duties of ordinary citizens as well as strengthen national cohesion against both external and internal dangers. Like in many warring nations, nervousness among soldiers tasked with preventing foreign sabotage, flourished. Several civilians were inadvertently shot as a result of this anxiety.⁶⁴ Prominent ethnic tensions in Russia heightened the relative intensity of social anxieties compared with other nations, but German and Jewish civilians received the brunt of hostility. Since Russia suffered a swift military defeat at the Battle of Tannenberg in August 1914, rumours quickly claimed that Jewish saboteurs had poisoned wells, supplied provisions to the invading army, harboured enemy soldiers, and reported Russian troop movements to German HQ. Because much of the fighting took place in close proximity to Jewish communities, they provided a convenient scapegoat. Owing to

⁶² Tilman Dederling, ‘“Avenge the Lusitania”: the Anti-German Riots in South Africa in 1915’, *Immigrants and Minorities* 31/3 (2013) p. 279.

⁶³ Andrew Francis, ‘Anti-Alienism in New Zealand during the Great War: The von Zedlitz Affair, 1915’, *Immigrants and Minorities* 24/3 (2006) pp. 252-60.

⁶⁴ Gundula Bavendamm, *Spionage und Verrat: Konspirative Kriegserzählungen und Französische Innenpolitik, 1914-1917* (Essen, 2003) pp. 52-70; Bruno Cabanes, *August 1914: France, the Great War, and a Month That Changed the World Forever* (Yale, 2016) pp. 133-8.

the desperation and fracturing of Russian society caused by early military defeats, soldiers and civilians alike blamed spies for every strange occurrence and military setback. Accusations of suspected German agents became widespread and soldiers began rounding up hostages as a punishment for locals supposedly detected of spying. But even away from the front line, there was a popular spy fever expressed in the press and an officially sanctioned search for enemy spies throughout the Russian Empire.⁶⁵

Even before joining the war on the side of the Entente, espionage became a central component of popular discourse in both Italy and America. In Italy, where immigrants comprised less than one percent of the population, concerns about spying prompted the government to address the issue of enemy aliens, and legislation combating the threat of espionage was passed under the guise of military defence and economic security. Notwithstanding the scarcity of immigrants in Italy, nationalists frequently used the spy to convey threats and insults that were intended to spread suspicion and fear throughout the nation. The resulting discourse equated foreigners with spies and saboteurs, and gave rise to the belief that aliens were responsible for constructing an extensive espionage network.⁶⁶ Before the declaration of war in America, ambiguity often characterised the perceptions of Germany owing to the significant German presence there. Yet wartime anxiety, anti-radicalism, xenophobia, and anti-German hostility were all galvanised by nationalist propaganda emphasising

⁶⁵ Eric Lohr, *Nationalizing the Russian Empire: The Campaign against Enemy Aliens during World War I* (London, 2003) esp. pp. 17-20; Peter Gatrell, *Russia's First World War: A Social and Economic History* (Harlow, 2005) pp. 22-9, 178-82; William C. Fuller, *The Foe Within: Fantasies of Treason and the End of Imperial Russia* (London, 2006) pp. 172-6; Alan Kramer, 'Combatants and Noncombatants: Atrocities, Massacres, and War Crimes', in Horne (ed.), *A Companion to World War I*, p. 193; Christopher Read, *War and Revolution in Russia, 1914-22* (Basingstoke, 2013) pp. 27-8; Joshua Sanborn, *Imperial Apocalypse: The Great War and the Destruction of the Russian Empire* (Oxford, 2014) p. 54.

⁶⁶ Daniela L. Caglioti, 'Why and How Italy Invented an Enemy Aliens Problem in the First World War', *War in History* 21/2 (2014) pp. 144-9; John Gooch, 'Italy Before 1915: The Quandary of the Vulnerable', in Ernest R. May (ed.), *Knowing One's Enemies: Intelligence Assessment Before the Two World Wars* (Princeton, 2014) pp. 213-5.

the importance of ‘Americanism’, which created a volatile, repressive atmosphere. Immigrants soon found themselves targeted, and German Americans received the bulk this aggression. Fundamental to this was the belief ‘that every German soldier was a violent beast; that spies and saboteurs lurked behind every bush ... and that Russian Bolsheviks were merely German agents’. Testimony to the role of spies in accelerating the growth of anti-Germanism was the expansion of the American Protection League. As a group of 250,000 ‘quasi-vigilantes’, they encouraged and facilitated widespread suspicion of immigrants. But they specifically portrayed themselves as amateur spy catchers, and publicly aided the Justice Bureau by investigating allegations of espionage.⁶⁷

More so than in any other belligerent nation, with the exception of Russia, anxiety and suspicion were far more pervasive and influential within the Central Powers. As one of the most ethnically diverse nations, the Austro-Hungarian Empire experienced a particularly acute paranoia. Local authorities were inundated with reports of deceitful individuals, and the police began arresting anyone deemed suspicious. Newspapers, regardless of the political affiliation, alleged that a network of spies controlled from Belgrade had infiltrated Habsburg society. In the western corner of the monarchy, Habsburg Italians were denounced as traitors and were thought to be carrying out illicit activities. In the northern region of Galicia, all civilians became suspected Russian agents. While in the east, in Hungary, the Romanian minority could ‘hardly move for gendarmes and police spies ... all rumours flourished ... everyman spied on his neighbour, no matter how placid and peace-

⁶⁷ David Kennedy, *Over Here: The First World War and American Society* (Oxford, 1980) pp. 53-6, 81; Jörg Nagler, ‘Victims of the Home Front: Enemy Aliens in the United States during the First World War’, in Panayi (ed.), *Minorities in Wartime*, pp. 191-215; Nancy Gentile Ford, *The Great War and America: Civil-military Relations during World War I* (London, 2008) pp. 57-60; Jennifer D. Keene, *The United States and the First World War* (Abingdon, 2014) pp. 34-6.

loving’.⁶⁸ However, the most severe reactions to the spy threat arguably transpired in Germany, where long held fears of encirclement had amplified collective fears and convinced the nation that they were victims of expansionist aggression. The dearth of war news during the early weeks only exacerbated this concern. Every facet of the war became the subject of wild rumours that both reflected contemporary concerns and accentuated them further. Stories alleged that enemy agents were poisoning the water supply, attacking railway and telegraph lines, using lights to direct incoming aircraft with flash lights, and employing carrier pigeons to communicate with an invading force. Government notices publicising the presence of Russian spies only inflamed society’s sense of terror. On 2 August 1914, the public was encouraged to assist the authorities in the detection of foreign agents and in response civilians armed themselves and began administering their own forms of social justice. By the following day, sixty-four ‘spies’ had been purportedly sighted in Berlin railway stations alone, all of whom were found to be perfectly innocent. Nevertheless, in a single state, over a hundred people were likely to be detained on suspicion of spying at any one time, while anxious sentries were responsible for the death of at least twenty-eight German civilians.⁶⁹

The global significance and influence of the spy challenges the notion that espionage phobias in Britain were irrational. In many nations, the spy threat was used as a pretext to isolate ethnic minorities. In all cases, ultra nationalistic elements had a

⁶⁸ Mark Cornwall, ‘Austria-Hungary and ‘Yugoslavia’’, in Horne (ed.), *A Companion to World War I*, p. 375; Alexander Watson, *Ring of Steel: Germany and Austria-Hungary at War, 1914-1918* (London, 2014) pp. 58-9; Holger H. Herwig, *The First World War: Germany and Austria-Hungary 1914-1918* (London, 2014) p. 132.

⁶⁹ Belinda Davis, *Home Fires Burning: Food, Politics, and Everyday Life in World War I Berlin* (Chapel Hill, 2000) p. 40; Huw Strachan, *The First World War, Volume I: To Arms* (Oxford, 2003) p. 106; Roger Chickering, *The Great War and Urban Life in Germany* (Cambridge, 2007) pp. 65-9, 312-7; Watson, *Ring of Steel*, pp. 75-8. The Germany army in Alsace-Lorraine was equally predisposed to believe that the civilian population was engaged in armed resistance, and rumours of spies flourished. Alan Kramer, ‘*Wackes* at War: Alsace-Lorraine and the failure of German National Mobilization, 1914-1918’, in John Horne (ed.), *State, Society and Mobilization in Europe during the First World War* (Cambridge, 1997) p. 108.

hand in stimulating spy fevers. Thus, the close relationship between the spy and ethnocentric propaganda, and the expediency that this imagery offered national homogeneity, contests the exceptionality and spontaneity of the British example. Although historians have typically attributed a fear of spies to the popularity of espionage novels, this assumes a relationship between circulation and literary impact, which cannot be substantiated. Moreover, Britain exhibited a far greater interest with espionage in literature, according to the number of novels and plays in circulation, than any other European country.⁷⁰ If there were a connection between encountering spies in popular culture and developing a widespread fear of espionage, Britain would have experienced a far more potent strand of spy fever than any other belligerent. Clearly, however, it did not. Understanding how and why spy phobias occurred in Britain, therefore, demands a reassessment of the ways in which Germanophobia, and spy fever in particular, were created, perpetuated, accepted, and experienced.

METHODOLOGY

Owing to the inconsistencies between wider scholarship on British anti-alienism and wartime Germanophobia, a number of historiographical issues arise. This thesis addresses those deficiencies. It analyses spy fever as a particular facet that transpired within a wider climate of xenophobia and discrimination, to better understand the spread and influence of such attitudes during the first eighteen months of the war. Although the image of the spy continued to play an important role in popular culture throughout the war, I shall focus specifically on the period between August 1914 and December 1915 because the inclusion of spies in popular discourse quickly dissipated

⁷⁰ I.F. Clarke, 'Forecasts of Warfare in Fiction 1803–1914', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 10/1 (1967) pp. 1-25.

towards the end of 1915. After this initial period, the figure of the ‘Hun’ became a much more influential characterisation of the enemy, and the spy became far less poignant.

Its four chapters are therefore concerned with the creation of spy fever, the experience of emotional responses to espionage, the scale of popular paranoia, and two hitherto overlooked explanations regarding the prominence of the spy peril. While the final three chapters are thematic and deal with the experience of spy fever throughout the first eighteen months of the war, the first chapter looks exclusively at collective reactions to the spy peril in August 1914 to ascertain how and why espionage phobias vividly re-emerged following the outbreak of war. By demonstrating the continuity of Edwardian security panics, it underlines the importance of popular discourse in manufacturing objects of anxiety and in shaping popular responses. Specifically, it highlights the role of the press and local authorities in stimulating paranoia in certain communities, which disputes the alleged spontaneity of such emotions. It then charts reports of spy scares in the press to determine where these reactions were ostensibly taking place, who was responsible, and why they occurred. A second chapter contrasts the various emotional experiences of spy fever in order to appreciate the distinctions between individual and collective feelings. While ‘hysteria’ and ‘fever’ have often been used uncritically to describe the phenomenon, situating spy fears in a wider context of anxiety evaluates the suitability of such language. It draws attention to the transient nature of individual spy fears and explores the way in which contemporary depictions of the spy transcended fears of espionage. While the former indicates that espionage phobias were not as influential or extreme as conventional descriptions imply, the latter demonstrates the expediency of this particular image to xenophobic narratives. Both of these conclusions suggest

that people were rarely hysterical about the spy peril, and historians should move away from simplistic understandings of espionage fears.

The third chapter offers a methodology for determining the scale of spy fever based on the level of discrimination featured in the press. By comparing various journals with the rhetoric espoused by radical politicians and right wing newspapers, this chapter locates spy fever within extremist communities and moves away from generalised assertions when discussing espionage fears. It examines the way in which different members of society opposed the spread of fear and anxiety. The first three chapters all support the contention that despite the prominence of espionage phobias across British society, their creation, experience, and extent all suggest that spy fever was far less pervasive as an emotional standard than the prevalence of the spy in popular discourse suggests. The final chapter, therefore, attempts to explain the importance of the spy in British culture during this period. Having observed the manifestation of espionage phobias, this chapter examines the cultural representations of the spy to see how the two compare. Consequently, it re-evaluates the notion that espionage literature convinced an entire nation that a secret, ubiquitous enemy was intent on their annihilation. Rather, it posits that espionage literature shaped experiences based on a combination of patriotism and idealised masculine identities, while their familiar fictive models also promoted a way of comprehending the unprecedented crisis that faced British society in 1914.

The purpose of each of these chapters is to uncover the complex, and often ambivalent, emotional experiences of a society at war. As such, it reflects many of the innovations developed in the cultural history of the First World War aimed at disentangling myth and memory from the reality of contemporary experience. It combines a history of the intimate with the customs and conventions discerned

through public discourse to understand how individuals interpreted their feelings.⁷¹ In particular, my work mirrors the approach adopted by Adrian Gregory and Catriona Pennell. In *The Last Great War: British Society and the First World War* and *A Kingdom United: Popular Responses to the Outbreak of the First World War*, Gregory and Pennell both seek to reconstruct how people ‘made sense’ of the war with an emphasis on the inherent diversities and complexities among a society comprised of over 40 million people. To address the vast history of the British Home Front, Gregory and Pennell combine micro and macro analyses. Through amalgamating national history with local case studies and individual voices, they capture the multifaceted nature of human experience, without losing sight of the wider implications.⁷² Building on their work, this thesis also features individual and collective interpretations of the spy peril from across England, Scotland, and Wales to reconstruct the feelings cultivated in response to the espionage danger.

To identify contemporary emotional standards, my research employs provincial journals to map the spread of spy fever in a way not previously attempted. Whereas historians have tended to focus on national periodicals, especially the *Daily Mail*, to examine the development and significance of espionage phobias, local newspapers better reflect the variety of perspectives from across the country. They were also more popular among the working class, which helps offset the inherent bias toward middle class sources.⁷³ While the content of the articles is used to form qualitative research, identifying the frequency and appearance of espionage in the press through quantitative analysis is a useful tool that gives an indication of the

⁷¹ Jay Winter and Antoine Prost, *The Great War in History: Debates and Controversies, 1914 to the Present* (Cambridge, 2005) p. 172.

⁷² Gregory, *Last Great War*; Pennell, *A Kingdom United*.

⁷³ Adrian Gregory, ‘A Clash of Cultures: The British Press and the Opening of the Great War’, in Troy R.E. Paddock (ed.), *A Call to Arms: Propaganda, Public Opinion, and Newspapers in the Great War* (London, 2004) p. 15.

impact and spread of spy fever more generally.⁷⁴ To add individual voices to this cultural representation of the spy, it uses letters, diaries, and memoirs found in over forty archives. Although this thesis is not a comprehensive account of British reactions to the spy threat, during my research I have consulted numerous county record offices to analyse a diverse range of individual perspectives. In an attempt to include as much of the country as possible, I have used archives from both coastal and inland areas, as well as rural and urban environments. The archives that I have consulted were chosen in part because of their geographic location, but also because of the availability of personal papers left by local residents, which have been essential for this study. These sources reveal the influence of popular discourse on the interpretation of feeling, but crucially, they also reflect the restrictions of this narrative on pre-existing emotional standards. Combined, these two methods provide a glimpse into the national implications of spy fever and emphasise the diverse emotional reactions to the alleged espionage threat.

This thesis shows the limitations of depicting spy fever as a single, coherent experience. It disputes the notion that spy fever consistently manifested as ubiquitous, hysterical delusions. Instead, it argues that there were different reasons for the frequency of the spy in popular discourse, and that this prominence did not simply reflect a widespread psychological condition. It posits that the image of the spy encouraged various reactions and that the resulting fears were not irrational. The rhetoric promoting the typical emotional temperament associated with spy fever was open to reproach, as is customary with political ideals. Moreover, the influence of this emotional standard was not proportional to the success of espionage in popular culture. Thus, although xenophobia and Germanophobia became widespread during

⁷⁴ This method is discussed at length in the chapters that directly refer to the statistical analysis of spies in the press.

the First World War, this was not a simple process. Looking at the development of spy fever during the first eighteen months of the conflict reveals the mechanisms through which these attitudes were promoted, while also highlighting the continual presence of conflicting attitudes and emotions that sought to constrain the influence of popular animosity.

1. Creating Panic

Throughout the Edwardian era, popular discourses that had previously focused on imperial defence became increasingly fixated over the issue of national security. As society began to perceive colonial, technological, and economic adversaries as a direct challenge to the dominance of Britain and the Empire, the threat of invasion along with the expected dangers of a foreign spy network became central facets of this security discourse. Popular culture was equally significant. The publication of George Chesney's *Battle of Dorking* in 1871 shaped much of the subsequent preoccupation with invasion scares in both literature and the press.¹ Although the 'dastardly French', occasionally in alliance with Russia, was the initial antagonist in this genre, Germany soon emerged as the greatest colonial and industrial rival and supplanted the old enemy as the more ominous threat.² While diplomatic historians have emphasised the influence of this growing rivalry, public sentiment towards Germany remained far more ambiguous.³ Notwithstanding the sporadic outbursts of anti-German sentiment during this period, aversion towards Germany often coincided with admiration for the country.⁴ While German immigrants occasionally experienced discrimination, they seldom faced hostility and individuals were generally allowed to prosper.⁵

Yet during the First World War British society supposedly witnessed a dramatic expansion of xenophobic attitudes linked to the dangers posed by the 'enemy

¹ I.F. Clarke, *The Tale of the Next Great War, 1871-1914: Fictions of Future Warfare and Battles Still-to-Come* (Liverpool, 1995) p. 14.

² Longson, 'The Rise of the German Menace', p. 10.

³ Kennedy, *The Rise of Anglo-German Antagonism*; Seligmann, *The Royal Navy and the German Threat*.

⁴ Major, 'Love-Hate Relationship', pp. 457-68; Reinermann, 'Fleet Street and the Kaiser', pp. 469-85.

⁵ Panikos Panayi, 'German Immigrants in Britain, 1815-1914', in Panikos Panayi (ed.), *Germans in Britain since 1500* (London, 1996) pp. 73-94.

within'.⁶ While anti-German feeling was the primary feature of wartime xenophobia, various minorities also became the object of hatred and suspicion.⁷ Immediately following the outbreak of war, measures were taken to provide the government with the authority to 'exclude and expel aliens, without any rights of appeal or even the right to make representations'.⁸ Historians frequently contend that a potent form of xenophobia became socially and cultural dominant during the conflict, and that as a consequence, people customarily developed a passionate hatred of all things German.⁹ Cate Haste argues that this anti-alien feeling emerged as a 'spontaneous' reaction, and propaganda merely exploited these 'instinctive and essentially racist emotions'.¹⁰ In his examination of German immigrants living in Britain during the war, Panikos Panayi attributes the intense anti-German sentiment to a spy fever that emerged following the outbreak of war, which he describes as a severe recrudescence of Edwardian spy fever, itself also a 'spontaneous' response among the general population.¹¹

Catriona Pennell's analysis of British attitudes during the war likewise argues that espionage phobias formed as a spontaneous eruption of public hostility. She maintains that large sections of society became convinced of the omnipotence of the German spy system, and emphasises the level of self-vigilance that resulted from the extreme paranoia evident throughout society. According to Pennell, neither the police nor the government inspired or coerced this reaction, though she concedes that their

⁶ Marwick, *The Deluge*, pp. 89, 171-2; Holmes, *John Bull's Island*, pp. 86-114.

⁷ Gregory, *The Last Great War*, pp. 238-41; Gerard De Groot, *Back in Blighty: The British at Home in World War I* (London, 2014) pp. 246-52.

⁸ K.D. Ewing and C.A. Gearty, *The Struggle for Civil Liberties: Political Freedom and the Rule of Law in Britain 1914-1945* (Oxford, 2000) p. 43.

⁹ Panayi, *The Enemy in Our Midst*, p. 184; Gullace, 'Friends, Aliens, and Enemies', pp. 345-6; Waddington, 'Food, Fear, and the German Nation', pp. 1017-21.

¹⁰ Haste, *Keep the Home Fires Burning*, p. 108.

¹¹ Panayi, *The Enemy in Our Midst*, p. 153.

actions undoubtedly legitimised such behaviour.¹² Pennell uses a letter written in November 1914 to demonstrate her claims of independent self-imposed vigilance that characterised the early months of the war. The message was addressed to the Lord-Lieutenant of Devon, whom she notes received various letters from concerned residents regarding spies in their midst. The letter conveyed scepticism at a family in Exmouth after they had vacated a rented property. According to the landlord, a hole had been discovered in the garden, and a saucepan had been used for reasons ‘other than domestic purposes’. Before leaving the house, the family had also bought some stuffed birds that were believed to have hidden an assortment of incriminating documents.¹³

While the author was displaying anxieties consistent with spy fever, the existence of coercion is more apparent than Pennell concedes. Four days after the outbreak of war, the Lord-Lieutenant had addressed the people of Devon in a speech reported in the *Exeter and Plymouth Gazette*:

There were, continued his lordship, unquestionably a certain number of German spies in the country, and among them were secret agents who would do anything they could to delay and hinder our mobilisation by blowing up bridges, breaking down communications, and so forth ... If certain bridges and communications were destroyed it would cause a great deal of delay in connection with movements of troops which would take place in the next few days.

This speech, like many others across Britain, emphasised the prevalence of the German spy network and outlined the specific threats that it posed to the British war effort. It not only defined the physical response but the emotional reactions that were deemed appropriate according to wartime conditions. Maintaining self-vigilance and

¹² Pennell, *A Kingdom United*, pp. 102-5.

¹³ *Ibid*, p. 107.

suspicion were thus the correct retort to the anticipated danger; the extreme measures that were advocated as a suitable response further illustrate the degree of apprehension:

He, therefore, asked anybody, of any class and any age, who lived within reach of places he would mention to specially look after property day and night, take a shot gun with him, and a dog who disliked strangers, it would be no harm, and take any steps up to shooting to keep at a distance people who would destroy these vulnerable points.¹⁴

Given the nature of his public response to the outbreak of war, it is unsurprising that the Lord-Lieutenant received a plethora of correspondence disclosing anxieties towards German espionage.¹⁵ In his speech Devonshire society was being called upon, not to volunteer their services abroad, but to fight an enemy that had allegedly infiltrated all elements of British society.¹⁶

Not unlike Pennell, Panayi uses Winifred Tower's diary to demonstrate the spontaneity of spy fever. Although Tower referred to the speculation regarding multiple German plots supposedly transpiring on the Isle of Wight in August 1914, Panayi ignores the wider context in which these concerns originated. In Tower's diary, the day after she had described the apparent German plots, she claimed to have seen posters across the island warning 'against hanging about near the fortifications and also against giving any information to strangers which might be of use to the

¹⁴ 'Appeal to Devonshire. Patriotic Fund Inaugurated. Lord-Lieutenant's Speech. Mayor of Exeter's strong comments.' *Exeter and Plymouth Gazette*, 8 August 1914, p. 4; 'Spies in Devon.' *Western Times*, 11 August 1914, p. 2.

¹⁵ Pierre Purseigle shows how local authorities took a particularly important role in mediating between the state and the British public: 'Beyond and Below the Nations: Towards a Comparative History of Local Communities at War', in Jenny Macleod and Pierre Purseigle (eds.), *Uncovered Fields: Perspectives in First World War Studies*, History of Warfare, 20 (Leiden, 2004) pp. 98, 101; and 'Introduction', in Pierre Puseigle (ed.), *Warfare and Belligerence: Perspectives in First World War Studies*, History of Warfare, 30 (Leiden, 2005) p. 26.

¹⁶ This was not merely specific to Devon, however. A letter written to Bonar Law about a purported spy explicitly stated that it was a response to a previous debate held in the Commons about espionage: Parliamentary Archives, Bonar Law papers, BL/36/5/13: Letter dated 4 March.

enemy'.¹⁷ Although a connection between official warnings and widespread popular panic remains speculative, it is misguided to assume that, despite the actions conducted by local authorities, paranoia manifested organically. This chapter thus challenges the portrayal of spy fever as a spontaneous reaction. Using recent additions in the history of emotion, it argues that spy fever needed to be socially constructed to become a prominent emotional standard. By contextualising spy fever in the wider phenomenon of Victorian and Edwardian invasion scares, this chapter illustrates the significance of political rhetoric in forming widespread anxieties. While the former argues that emotional experiences are both limited to and determined by the individual's understanding of conventional practice, thus requiring a previously acquired framework in which to interpret emotions; the latter suggests that political discourse circulated by the press provided this framework.

The assertion that spy fever emerged spontaneously not only appears to contradict the wider trend of anti-German sentiment in Britain, it also presumes that this type of emotional response was a natural or inevitable consequence following the declaration of war. Presuming that war with Germany inevitably and immediately engendered widespread hostility, however, is too simple to account for the emotional responses of over 40 million people.¹⁸ While there is no denying that warfare regularly increases group homogeneity, this is achieved through a multifaceted process that requires systematic work.¹⁹ Any association between the alien and the spy, therefore, necessitated a degree of cultural and institutional interference to

¹⁷ Imperial War Museum (IWM) docs: 6322, Papers of W.L.B. Tower MBE, Diary entry 1 August 1914.

¹⁸ Pennell, *A Kingdom United*, p. 1.

¹⁹ Anthony D. Smith, 'War and Ethnicity: The Role of Warfare in the Formation, Self-images and Cohesion of Ethnic Communities', *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 4/4 (1981) pp. 375-97; Sinisa Malešević, *The Sociology of War and Violence* (Cambridge, 2010) p. 180; Andreas Wimmer, *Waves of War: Nationalism, State Formation, and Ethnic Exclusion in the Modern World* (Cambridge, 2014) pp. 11-3.

outline the anticipated threat.²⁰ Only through the consumption of this narrative could society share a common definition of what constituted the spy, and recognise the circumstances in which those characteristics became threatening. Through this framework, society learnt when to focus their emotions on the threat of espionage and comprehend their feelings in a way that was consistent with what has become known as 'spy fever'.

Historians posit that emotions are merely the embodiment of an individual's psychological capacity to understand the surrounding environment. But the ability to interpret feelings is limited to linguistic resources and awareness of social custom. The conception of one's emotional state, therefore, reflects implied assumptions towards culturally determined feelings that appear desirable or appropriate to the situation in which the emotion is experienced.²¹ Yet theorists attempting to assert the universality of emotion argue that feelings are constant through time and have no history of their own. They maintain that emotions possess a continuous, transhistorical, and culturally generalised foundation. Fear, for instance, appears as a routine emotional experience for soldiers on the eve of battle. According to this interpretation, British Tommies would have felt the same fears and accompanying physical responses as the Roman legionaries who had fought two millennia previously.²² But such emotions are rarely comprehended in a vacuum. John Keegan contends that culture and warfare are mutually reinforcing. While combat and jingoism routinely impinge upon culture, the nature of conflict is unavoidably shaped

²⁰ Joanna Bourke, 'Fear and Anxiety: Writing about Emotion in Modern History', *History Workshop Journal* 55/1 (2003) pp. 119-20.

²¹ Barbara H. Rosenwien, 'Worrying about the Emotions in History', *The American Historical Review* 107/3 (2002) p. 837; Rom Harré, 'An Outline of the Social Constructionist Viewpoint', in Rom Harré (ed.), *The Social Construction of Emotions* (Oxford, 1986) p. 4; Claire Armon-Jones, 'The Thesis of Constructionism', in Harré, *The Social Construction of Emotions*, p. 33.

²² Plamper, *The History of Emotions*, p.32; Anne Summers argues that aspects of militarism can even develop in otherwise non-militaristic societies and facilitate a willingness to fight: 'Militarism in Britain before the Great War', *History Workshop Journal* 2/1 (1976) pp. 104-122.

by the cultures that conduct it. For individuals or societies perpetuating a culture built on or reliant upon war, fighting can provide meaning or purpose to the individual, rather than merely stimulate fear. How historical actors dealt with their emotional response is thus established by society's relationship to warfare. By providing a militaristic framework in which to interpret conflict, culture can determine the emotional experiences of soldiers in order to maximise their fighting proficiency to suit the collective interest.²³

Although culture provides the framework for societies to perceive their emotional states, individuals possess the capacity to apply judgment in their assessment of feelings. In one of the earliest and most enduring definitions of emotion, Aristotle recognised the impact of judgement and calculation in experiencing emotion. For the soldier about to partake in battle, therefore, earlier experiences of combat or learned knowledge can provide the ability to control emotional responses.²⁴ In a more recent interpretation, William Reddy sets out to provide a theory explaining individual and collective emotional experience, and in so doing, demonstrates the degree of emotional freedom that exists within any particular society. He claims that if emotional change and difference, central to the constructionist argument, is 'something other than random drift, it must result from the interaction between our emotional capacities and the unfolding of historical circumstances'.²⁵ What historians require, claims Reddy, is a theory that explains how individuals became conditioned by emotional directives exclusive to the time and

²³ John Keegan, *A History of Warfare* (London, 2004); Michael Howard, *War in European History* (Oxford, 2009) pp. 109-15. Although historians have largely refuted Keegan's opposition to Carl von Clausewitz's conception of war as a continuation of policy, his insistence that culture is fundamental to military history is nevertheless essential. Michael Neiburg, 'Review of John Keegan, *A History of Warfare*', *Journal of Social History* 29/2 (1995) pp. 466-7.

²⁴ Simo Knuuttila, *Emotions in Ancient and Medieval Philosophy* (Oxford, 2004) p. 37-40; Harré, 'An Outline of the Social Constructionist Viewpoint', p. 2.

²⁵ William M. Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions* (Cambridge, 2001) p. 45.

place in which they exist. But at the same time, this theory needs to show how individuals were able to influence their own emotional course to find refuge, solace, or alternative fulfilment.²⁶ Reddy adopts the term ‘emotional regimes’ to describe the standards determining how societies think, write, and speak about emotions.²⁷ He contends that emotional regimes, often linked to political counterparts, can administer dominant emotional standards or promote fewer restrictions. Whereas lenient emotional regimes allow people to manage their feelings free from the constraints dictated by social convention, strict regimes enforce and sustain defined emotional responses. Even in the most oppressive regimes, however, individuals maintain their ability to moderate their feelings through self-denial and delusion.²⁸

Depicting spy fever as a spontaneous reaction is thus inconsistent with the nature of human emotions. As a result, this chapter is concerned with the creation of an emotional regime that promoted fears and anxieties towards a potential spy threat in August 1914. Whereas the history of British xenophobia and intolerance questions the validity of envisaging spy fever as a spontaneous development, the historiography of invasion scares further dispute the idea that spy phobias formed organically. The first section of this chapter, therefore, outlines the Victorian and Edwardian context in which these fears emerged. Crucially, historians have almost always perceived outbreaks of panic during this period as products of scaremongering conducted by prominent conservative figures and advanced by the right wing press. To assess the implications of this consensus to the history of spy fever, the second section examines the discourse surrounding the espionage peril in August 1914 to see whether a

²⁶ Robert A. Nye, ‘Review of William M. Reddy *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions*’, *The Journal of Modern History* 75/4 (2003) pp. 921-3.

²⁷ Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling*, pp. 124-9; Barbara H. Rosenwein, ‘Review of William M. Reddy *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions*’, *The American Historical Review* 107/4 (2002) p. 1182; William M. Reddy, ‘Sentimentalism and its Erasure: The Role of Emotions in the Era of the French Revolution’, *Journal of Modern History* 72/1 (2000) pp. 109-52.

²⁸ Nye, ‘*The Navigation of Feeling*’, pp. 921-3.

comparable emotional regime stimulated concern towards German spies. Having identified the mechanisms through which this emotional regime became a familiar standard, the chapter moves on to analyse individual spy scares to ascertain how and why they occurred. Both of these investigations draw attention to the authorities and the press in stimulating espionage phobias. To explain this preoccupation with espionage, the final section looks at the correspondence between central government and local authorities to understand why they reacted in the way that they did. Thus, the contention of this chapter is twofold. Firstly, it suggests that spy fever was not spontaneous. Like previous invasion scares, espionage phobias were generated through a discourse that promoted specific emotions in response to an enemy within. This was done through the press and the local authorities responsible for ensuring the continued safety of the nation. Secondly, these concerns were themselves not spontaneous. Instead, they resulted predominantly from vague instructions given to local authorities, which could result in exaggerated responses that fashioned similar anxieties in the wider community.

INVASION SCARES, 1860-1914

Since the first Roman invaders landed in Britain, successive generations of Britons developed fears over the prospect of invasion.²⁹ Between the Battle of Waterloo and the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand on 28 June 1914, the British public experienced intermittent periods of acute paranoia and anxiety.³⁰ The increasing nervousness with regard to espionage after the 1870s took place within this context of

²⁹ Norman Longmate, *Defending the Island: from Caesar to the Armada* (London, 1990) and Norman Longmate, *Island Fortress: The Defence of Great Britain 1603-1945* (London, 1991).

³⁰ Harry Wood, 'External Threats Mask Internal Fears: Edwardian Invasion Literature 1899-1914', PhD Thesis (University of Liverpool, 2014) p. 5.

invasion phobias. In August 1914, one concerned journalist surmised that the ‘detection of spies all over Great Britain ... disclose the intention to invade us when the opportunity for such a blow arises ... the blow would fall upon us like a bolt from the blue, at a moment when Britain was isolated, friendless and unprepared’.³¹ Analysing First World War spy fever as a unique occurrence ignores this historical context. Since historians have commonly portrayed Victorian and Edwardian invasion scares as top-down phenomena, the wider scholarship examining similar anxieties contradicts the spontaneity of spy fever. Suggesting that these panics could have occurred without external influences firstly fails to account for why particular conditions triggered a panic whereas similar circumstances materialising at another time did not, and secondly, why the objects of fear were transformative rather than stationary.

Feelings of anxiety or nervousness had become a typical emotional ailment in Britain since the Enlightenment, and it became conventional to view modernity as the cause of this mental instability. Just as Ancient Greece had first developed medicine to alleviate the sickness caused by their sedentary urban lifestyles, Britain’s prosperity caused by industrialisation and expanding commerce was considered equally responsible for increasing levels of mental illness.³² Around the turn of the twentieth century, this condition was referred to as ‘neurasthenia’, but the belief that civilisation produced nervousness existed in Britain long before this particular diagnosis.³³ References to antiquity similarly fostered prominent imperial anxieties. The over-extension and grandeur of the Roman Empire that preceded its demise stood, for

³¹ ‘Why are we at war?’ *Derbyshire Courier*, 15 August 1914, p. 4.

³² Roy Porter, ‘Nervousness, Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Style: From Luxury to Labour’, in Marijke Gijswijt-Hofstra and Roy Porter (eds.), *Cultures of Neurasthenia from Beard to the First World War* (New York, 2001) p. 33.

³³ Mathew Thompson, ‘Neurasthenia in Britain: An Overview’, in Gijswijt-Hofstra and Porter, *Cultures of Neurasthenia*, p. 77.

many Britons, as a stark reminder of the dangers associated with the overindulgences of their burgeoning Empire.³⁴ There can be little doubt that British society became increasingly susceptible to panic during the Victorian and Edwardian periods, especially regarding imperial defence and national security, but these anxieties were neither automatic nor inevitable.

The principal advocate of this approach was A.J.A. Morris in *The Scaremongers: The Advocacy of War and Rearmament 1896-1914*. Morris argued that as contemporaries began questioning how and why their societies fell aimlessly into war, the responsibility was shared between politicians, diplomats, admirals, generals, and armament manufacturers. More significantly, he contended that ‘before the war the nation’s wits had been stolen, its nerves enfeebled, [and] a ‘national neurasthenia’ induced’. He attributed this form of neurasthenia to the ‘patriotic press’, who had broadcast lies and half-truths encouraging militarism and an unreasonable hatred of Germany.³⁵ Keith Robbins similarly suggests that ‘it was through the press that both men’s minds and emotions were reached’, and he particularly identifies Lord Northcliffe and the *Daily Mail* for extending the influence of print journalism.³⁶ This link to neurasthenia implied that discourse broadcast by the press directly provoked a collective emotional reaction. The degree of influence Morris attributed to this narrative encourages a re-examination of the early spy rhetoric. Instead of assuming that spy fever was a spontaneous development, Morris’ work suggests that the

³⁴ Raymond F. Betts, ‘The Allusion to Rome in British Imperialist Thought of the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries’, *Victorian Studies* 15/2 (1971); Linda Dowling, ‘Roman Decadence and Victorian Historiography’, *Victorian Studies* 28/4 (1985); Norman Vance, ‘Anxieties of Empire and the Moral Tradition: Rome and Britain’, *International Journal of the Classical Tradition* 18/2 (2011). Britain’s leaders, however, refused to acknowledge any erosion in their national position and remained confident that measures could be devised to meet the emerging challenges: Aaron Friedberg, *The Weary Titan: Britain and the Experience of Relative Decline, 1895-1905* (Princeton, 1988) pp. 292-3.

³⁵ A.J.A. Morris, *The Scaremongers: The Advocacy of War and Rearmament, 1896-1914* (London, 1984) pp. 3-4. In a more recent interpretation, Adrian Gregory particularly highlights the *Daily Mail* for being synonymous with Germanophobia: *The Last Great War*, p. 47.

³⁶ Keith Robbins, *Politicians, Diplomacy and War in Modern British History* (London, 1994) p. 133.

portrayal of espionage in the press was highly influential. This impact has not been sufficiently explored in the context of wartime spy fever.

Within this environment of nervousness, or ‘national neurasthenia’, British society experienced intricate anxieties over the threat of foreign invasion, but they were by no means universally accepted.³⁷ Howard Moon’s work documents a series of invasion panics that he also considered as the products of alarmist narratives suited to conservative political interests. The first panic Moon addresses in detail occurred in 1888 as increasing Franco-German antagonism threatened further European conflict and generated widespread concern within Britain. Moon argues that Lieutenant General Sir Edward Bruce Hamley was pivotal in forming social anxieties in response to the deteriorating diplomatic situation. Hamley, a widely admired army veteran, Conservative MP, and prolific writer, had been pressing for home defence reforms for several years and used this opportunity to discuss fortifying London against attack from the Thames.³⁸ His efforts were bolstered by remarks published in the *Daily Telegraph* made by Viscount Garnet Wolseley, the Adjutant-General of the Army, second only to the Duke of Cambridge in the War Office, and the pre-eminent military hero of his time.³⁹ Although the Prime Minister, Robert Cecil, launched a scathing attack against Wolseley and his ‘panic producing speeches’ in the House of Lords, the impact of this scaremongering was supposedly felt across Britain.⁴⁰ Writing for the Royal United Service Institute, Colonel Sir Charles Nugent argued that propaganda ‘frightening the country into the idea that it is to suffer all kinds of

³⁷ Rhodri Williams demonstrates that the frontbenchers of both the Conservatives and Liberals were often united over defence issues, which were only opposed by radicals elements within either party: *Defending the Empire: The Conservative Party and British Defence Policy 1899-1915* (Yale, 1991). For a further explanation, see Chapter 3.

³⁸ Howard Moon, ‘The Invasion of the United Kingdom: Public Controversy and Official Planning, 1888-1918’, PhD Thesis (University of London, 1968) p. 20; Moon’s findings were briefly foretold by I. F. Clarke, ‘Forecasts of Warfare in Fiction 1803-1914’, *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 10/1 (1967) pp. 11-24.

³⁹ Moon, H., ‘The Invasion of the United Kingdom’, pp. 19-24.

⁴⁰ *Hansard*, House of Lords, 11 May 1888, cols 6-7.

attacks' was gaining currency throughout the British Isles.⁴¹ Although the Conservative party were by no means united on these issues, historians often agree that such panics were 'all but exclusively products of Conservative political interest'.⁴²

Although Theodore Ropp argued that the 1900 invasion scare was the first of its type not to originate from alarmist statements produced by figures of authority, Moon identifies several individuals that dispute this claim.⁴³ The most prominent and persistent of the invasion 'scaremongers' was the liberal journalist, William T. Stead. Along with John Strachey of the *Spectator*, Leo Maxse of the *National Review*, and James Knowles of the *Nineteenth Century*, they presented a powerful body of opinion.⁴⁴ While Ropp stressed the spontaneity of the 1900 invasion scare, Moon notes how the Government attributed the 1900 Army estimates to the anxieties voiced in the War Office and broadcast by what they referred to as 'scaremongers'.⁴⁵ While Moon's thesis often assumes the extent of panic across society, his work highlights the influence of key individuals and the press in generating invasion scares. He shows how attempts to manipulate social attitudes stemmed from the perception that wider society was ignorant of the perceived threat and consequently required a more

⁴¹ C.H. Nugent, 'Thoughts Upon Invasion and Upon the Means available, or which may be Made Available at a Few Weeks Notice, for Securing our Coast Line Generally Against Sudden Attack' *Royal United Services Institution Journal* 32/143 (1888) p. 165.

⁴² A.M. Matin, 'Securing Britain: Figures of Invasion in Late-Victorian and Edwardian Fiction', PhD Thesis (Columbia University, 1997) p. v; Samuel Hynes, *The Edwardian Turn of Mind* (Princeton, 1968) p. 43; Wood, 'External Threats Mask Internal Fears', p. 65.

⁴³ Theodore Ropp, 'The Development of a Modern Navy: French Naval Policy. 1871-1904', PhD Thesis (Harvard University, 1937) p. 536.

⁴⁴ Moon, 'The Invasion of the United Kingdom', pp. 140-2; Morris, *The Scaremongers: The Advocacy of War and Rearmament*, p. 98. By at least 1906, however, Alfred Harmsworth (later Baron and then Lord Northcliffe), proprietor of the largest collection of periodicals in Britain, most notably the *Daily Mail* and *The Times*, became the principal influence in generating fears regarding Britain's military readiness. He particularly dedicated his efforts to the German menace and his liberal critics accused him of exaggerating the threat and spreading fear to sell newspapers. The *Daily Mail's* efforts in particular were routinely denounced as banal scaremongering. J. Lee Thompson, *Politicians, the Press, and Propaganda: Lord Northcliffe and the Great War, 1914-1919* (London, 1999) p. 13; J. Lee Thompson, *Northcliffe: Press Baron in Politics, 1865-1922* (London, 2000) p. 206.

⁴⁵ Moon, 'The Invasion of the United Kingdom', p. 144.

‘informed’ understanding.⁴⁶ By illustrating the impact and extent of alarmist rhetoric, Moon demonstrates the shortcomings in perceiving late nineteenth-century invasion anxieties as primarily social developments.

Public concerns about the possibility of espionage had reached heightened proportions by the end of 1908 and focused intently on Germany’s perceived colonial and European ambitions.⁴⁷ Additionally, fears of a German invasion, continually associated with a German spy network, equally dominated British strategic planning throughout the pre-war period.⁴⁸ Reports that Germany was accelerating her shipbuilding programme, as a direct challenge to the supremacy of the Royal Navy, exacerbated the public’s already growing fear of a German invasion.⁴⁹ As the Liberal government debated whether Britain should build four Dreadnoughts or comply with the Admiralty’s demand of six to counter German expansion, the press frequently printed warnings of the ‘bolt from the blue’ preceded by an army of spies.⁵⁰ Public pressure eventually compelled a more resolute response and parliament ‘compromised’ by building eight Dreadnoughts.⁵¹ Speaking in the Commons in 1902 as a Conservative MP, Lord Charles Beresford, previously in command of the Channel Fleet, remarked that ‘every increase and improvement of the Fleet had been brought about by public agitation, by the press and outside pressure of public opinion’. The last ‘agitation’ he referred to occurred in 1889, but his observation

⁴⁶ Gregory, *The Last Great War*, pp. 40-69; David Monger, *Patriotism and Propaganda in First World War Britain: The National War Aims Committee and Civilian Morale* (Liverpool, 2012) p. 11.

⁴⁷ Moon, ‘The Invasion of the United Kingdom’, p. 379-86; Longmate, *Island Fortress: The Defence of Great Britain*, p. 407.

⁴⁸ David Morgan-Owen, *Fears of Invasion: Strategy, Politics, and British War Planning, 1880-1914* (Oxford, 2017).

⁴⁹ Matthew Seligmann, ‘Intelligence Information and the 1909 Naval Scare: The Secret Foundations of Public Panic’, *War in History* 17/1 (2010) p. 38.

⁵⁰ French, ‘Spy Fever in Britain, 1900-1915’, p. 88.

⁵¹ Arthur Marder, *From the Dreadnought to Scapa Flow, vol. I: The Road to War 1904-1914* (London, 1961) pp. 160-71

remained relevant seven years later.⁵² Historians have also tended to assume that the Admiralty generated the 1909 naval scare using contractor's gossip and false accusation to frighten the public and secure enthusiasm for British naval expansion.⁵³ Yet Matthew Seligmann has shown that the information facilitating this panic was accurate and that the Admiralty was not disingenuous when it advocated a more resilient response. Instead, Seligmann argues that 'the 1909 naval panic was thus arguably the first British military-political crisis of the twentieth century to be started, driven, and also finally decided largely by intelligence assessments of a foreign threat'.⁵⁴

Intelligence historians have likewise highlighted the significant role of individuals in encouraging and in some cases coercing espionage anxieties. They point to the creation of the Secret Service Bureau in 1909, as being a product of a spy fever that was cultivated by James Edmonds, head of MO5 (the 'Special Section' of the Directorate of Military Operations), and publicised by William Le Queux, the popular spy novelist. From the outset, and with almost no supportive evidence, Edmonds was convinced of the ubiquity of German spies in Britain. Rather than conduct a systematic investigation of Germany's spy network, however, Edmonds relied solely on alarmist reports and supposedly accepted them at face value as evidence of Germany's transgressions. Nevertheless, Edmonds' ambition to establish a dedicated counter-espionage bureau was initially frustrated by the scepticism of the Secretary of State for War, Richard Haldane. With the help of Le Queux promoting the dangers of German espionage and collecting further 'evidence' of its existence,

⁵² *Hansard*, House of Commons, June 20 1902, vol. 109 col. 1258.

⁵³ Morris, *The Scaremongers: The Advocacy of War and Rearmament*, p. 179; Paul M. Kennedy, 'Great Britain before 1914', in Ernest R. May (ed.), *Knowing One's Enemies: Intelligence Assessment before the Two World Wars* (Princeton, 1984) p. 182; Nicholas A. Lambert, 'Review of Spies in Uniform', *International Journal of Maritime History* XVIII (2006) p. 609.

⁵⁴ Seligmann, 'Intelligence Information and the 1909 Naval Scare', pp. 37-40.

Haldane could no longer maintain his opposition and allowed the question to go before the Committee of Imperial Defence. At first, the inadequacy of Edmonds' evidence was received with disbelief and regarded as the 'aberration of minds suffering under hallucinations', which was further attested to by Edmonds' own admission that he possessed no unequivocal confirmation of its existence. Nevertheless, Edmonds' persistence finally convinced the committee that the danger, even if fictional, was potentially too great to ignore, which led to the establishment of a small, secret department in the War Office to examine the threat of German espionage in Britain.⁵⁵

Brett Holman takes a somewhat less conspiratorial approach when evaluating the creation of panics related to Britain's aerial defences. In his analysis of the phantom airship panic of 1913, he recognises that the anticipation of war in itself provided the conditions for rumour and fear to flourish. Rather than align himself with any theory of spontaneity, Holman illustrates how an ostensibly minor threat generated widespread anxiety. Following the supposed sighting of a German Zeppelin over Sheerness in 1912, MPs debated the potential danger in Parliament, which led to sensationalist reports in the press.⁵⁶ He maintains that the panic represented a widespread concern that Germany's innovative aerial capabilities nullified the supremacy of the Royal Navy, the very foundation of Britain's security. Thus,

⁵⁵ French, 'Spy Fever in Britain', pp. 356-8; Nicholas Hiley, 'The Failure of British Counter-Espionage against Germany, 1907-1914', *The Historical Journal* 28/4 (1985) pp. 835-46; Andrew, *Secret Service*, pp. 90-4; Richard Thurlow, *The Secret State: British Internal Security in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford, 1995) p. 40. Special Branch had existed since 1883 as a professional intelligence organisation but it was principally concerned with political threats, whereas the War Office considered this a military issue. Bernard Porter, *Plots and Paranoia: A History of Political Espionage in Britain 1790-1988* (London, 1992) pp. 101-3.

⁵⁶ Military intelligence had also reiterated the growing potential of the German Zeppelins, and reported that the German public seemed convinced that this new technology would enhance Germany's prestige and dominance. It was also stipulated that the development of Zeppelins was directly linked to an invasion of the British Isles. Matthew Seligmann, *Spies in Uniform: British Military and Naval Intelligence on the Eve of the First World War* (Oxford, 2006) pp. 119-132; Matthew Seligmann, *Military Intelligence from Germany 1906-1914* (Stroud, 2014) pp. 79-81, 141-6.

although Holman does not identify an individual or group explicitly responsible for coordinating this panic, as Moon and Morris did with earlier scares, public discourse nevertheless provided society with an object with which they could focus their anxiety, and a framework in which to interpret their concern.⁵⁷

By the outbreak of the First World War, therefore, public opinion had been repeatedly shaped by strategies designed to promote an exaggerated fear or anxiety. Through this emotional regime any technical innovation, military expansion, or minor colonial extension became inherently dangerous and opposed to Britain's continued security and status as a world power. Accordingly, such international developments were to be feared as a threat to the survival of the nation. Outspoken scaremongers in the press sought to dictate social concerns as well as demand a vocal and public response; the expression of which often resulted in a heightened suspicion of anything foreign. This regime purposefully and intentionally manipulated the public psyche to gain political expediency. It was through the employment of this fear that the appropriate response, an increase in conservative and repressive measures, could receive the necessary degree of support and popular acceptance.

Late Victorian and Edwardian invasion scares were not spontaneous eruptions of social anxiety. They were generated, either deliberately or unwittingly, by the paranoia or agenda of particular individuals and then disseminated through sensationalist journalism. Without this, the public lacked an object to focus their concern. The manner in which the objects of anxiety transformed from the channel tunnel, to Dreadnought construction, and finally to spies and airships, demonstrate that society was not simply re-invoking a natural response with a historical precedent. Rather, the transfer of concern related to the shifting focus of security-driven

⁵⁷ Brett Holman, *The Next War in the Air: Britain's Fear of the Bomber, 1908–1941* (Farnham, 2014) pp. 28-35, 177-80; Brett Holman, 'The Phantom Airship Panic of 1913: Imagining Aerial Warfare in Britain before the Great War', *Journal of British Studies* 55/1 (2016) pp. 99-119.

discourse. Regarding the latter two threats, which resulted more from imagination than tangible evidence, some form of propaganda was required to expose the ‘reality’ of such dangers.⁵⁸ Given the emphasis on scaremongers in relation to Edwardian panics, the next section investigates how the dangers of espionage were conveyed and extrapolated by society.

AUGUST 1914: THE PROVOCATION

Although Panayi identified the prominence of spy fever in the right wing press, which suggests that earlier forms of scaremongering continued after the outbreak of war, the implications and extent of this rhetoric has so far escaped historical analysis.⁵⁹ Whereas historians looking at British responses to German atrocities committed during the same period recognise the mutually reinforcing relationship between collective emotions and scaremongering in the press, the belief that spy fever occurred organically has overshadowed the importance of the press in creating the conditions for spy phobias to develop.⁶⁰ Moreover, while historians examining the relationship between fear and counter-espionage have highlighted the influence of particular personalities in stimulating espionage phobias, they have not yet connected those anxieties with collective alarm.⁶¹ By examining the inclusion of the spy in political rhetoric, it becomes apparent that cases of spy fever often represented the culmination of reports and messages that articulated both the scale and significance of

⁵⁸ David L. Altheide, *Creating Fear: News and the Construction of Crisis* (New York, 2002) pp. 1-28

⁵⁹ Panayi, *The Enemy in our Midst*, pp. 153-5.

⁶⁰ John Horne and Alan Kramer similarly argue that the mass consumption of atrocity reporting following Germany’s advance through Belgium in 1914 was equally reliant upon the deep mentalities and traditions through which they were expressed. This familiarity, according to Horne and Kramer, explains why the language of ‘atrociousness’ emerged so successfully within a few days of the outbreak of war. *German Atrocities, 1914: A History of Denial* (London, 2001) p. 212.

⁶¹ Hiley, ‘The Failure of British Counter-Espionage Against Germany’, pp. 835-62; Yigal Sheffy, ‘The Spy that Never Was: An Intelligence Myth in Palestine, 1914-18’, *Intelligence and National Security* 14/3 (1999) pp. 123-42.

the threat. While this narrative provided the problem, it simultaneously offered the solution; increased levels of suspicion and self-vigilance would ensure the continued security of Britain. By examining how society first encountered the apparent dangers posed by foreign espionage, this section identifies the construction of an emotional regime in August 1914 designed to persuade society of the validity of the spy peril. During the first few weeks of the war, local newspapers were instrumental in publicising concerns, but it was adopted and broadcast by figures of authority within particular communities.

While historians have arguably misrepresented the wider British public by implying that events and attitudes in London were demonstrative of the entire nation, such occurrences did nonetheless resonate across Britain.⁶² The arrest of twenty-one ‘known’ German spies following the declaration of the Precautionary Period, for instance, was one of the earliest reports to emerge as Britain declared war.⁶³ These arrests marked the first opportunity for society to extrapolate the magnitude of the supposed threat and rumours of German subversion in London soon began circulating throughout Britain. Following a police raid on an eminently respectable hotel near London’s King’s Cross, the *Aberdeen Evening Express* reported that the occasion necessitated a detachment of Territorials to deal with the offenders. It was suggested that the apprehended spies possessed ‘enough ammunition in their baggage to kill a regiment’, and that ‘surely enough, when this baggage was removed to the police station it required a large truck to convey it’.⁶⁴ It was further alleged that an additional

⁶² Spies in the capital featured far more prominently in diaries and personal accounts, even amongst individuals living in provincial areas. See, for example, Bodleian Library Special Collections, MS. Eng. Hist. e. 89, Diary of Andrew Clark vol. II, 26 September 1914, p. 123.

⁶³ Nicholas Hiley, ‘Re-Entering the Lists: MI5’s Authorized History and the August 1914 Arrests’, *Intelligence and National Security* 25/4 (2010) pp. 415-52; ‘German Spies. Important Arrests.’ *Exeter and Plymouth Gazette*, August 6 1914, p. 6

⁶⁴ ‘German Spies in London.’ *Aberdeen Evening Express*, August 7 1914, p. 2; ‘Sensational Raid. Rifles and Ammunition Seized in London.’ *Manchester Evening News*, August 7 1914, p. 2.

twenty spies were found in another famous West End hotel.⁶⁵ Besides reporting the capture of saboteurs, however, the importance of individuals remaining vigilant was reiterated. A commissioner of the Metropolitan police commended the vigour with which the public was reporting spies:

The met police continue to receive information about Germans against whom there is a suspicion of espionage or of acts inimical to this country. All these cases are investigated. In some case the persons are detained until the investigation is completed.⁶⁶

Following the declaration of war, therefore, and before any spontaneous outbreak of panic could have materialised, the British public were inundated with reports appearing to corroborate the existence of a German spy network in an attempt to convince society of the nefarious practices being committed by enemy aliens residing in Britain.⁶⁷

Although events in London were watched with keen interest and provided both the rationale and impetus that was necessary for any wider panic, exaggerated reports of German espionage across Europe provided far more alarming evidence that preceded any manifestation of anxieties focused on foreign spies.⁶⁸ Belgium, in particular, had allegedly become saturated with German spies. Since the government had imposed tighter restrictions on Fleet Street following the outbreak of war, and given that the British were not directly involved in the defence of Belgium, there were no references to the atrocities committed on innocent Belgians until the third week of the war.⁶⁹ Reports appearing in the first week of the war, therefore, focused on the espionage peril. This narrative repeatedly stressed that two thousand spies had already

⁶⁵ 'Twenty Arrests. Scene at a Famous London Hotel.' *Liverpool Echo*, August 7 1914, p. 4.

⁶⁶ 'German Spies. London Police Commissioner's Statement.' *Birmingham Mail*, 13 August 1914, p. 3.

⁶⁷ Thompson, *Politicians, the Press, and Propaganda*, p. 37.

⁶⁸ 'Work at a Standstill at Antwerp.' *Manchester Evening News*, 8 August 1914, p. 2; 'Arrest of Spies in France.' *Manchester Evening News*, 10 August 1914, p. 2.

⁶⁹ Horne and Kramer, *German Atrocities, 1914: A History of Denial*, p. 177.

been caught and arrested in Belgium, with one hundred of them executed. Vital strategic points of Belgium's infrastructure had also been secretly marked for destruction.⁷⁰ Spies had been discovered wearing military uniforms, driving motorcars, and armed with bombs and revolvers. Numerous covert wireless stations across the country had been uncovered along with 3,500 German rifles hidden in cases labelled 'bacon'.⁷¹ This alleged network had supposedly infiltrated Belgian society over a lengthy period, which made it all the more dangerous. German commercial firms had purportedly cultivated 'intimate relations with all classes of the population, subscribed handsomely to local charities, wielded great influence in municipal affairs, and were conversant with everything which the German government was concerned to know'.⁷² As the arrests of German spies on the continent continued daily, and the depths of their treachery were increasingly exposed, one journalist surmised that the Belgian public 'had been betrayed by every stranger within their gates'.⁷³

Depictions of Germany's Belgian spy network in the British press provided the public with a stark reminder of the risks of neglecting internal security and the direct threat they faced from the enemy within. Following the 'detection' of German espionage in Belgium, reports began to associate the situation in Belgium with developments in Britain. Since spies were being captured in every theatre of war, one concerned journalist wrote that the growth of 'spy-mania' across Europe suggested that a similarly hidden enemy had almost certainly infiltrated every aspect of British

⁷⁰ 'Wholesale Espionage. 100 Germans Shot.' *Portsmouth Evening News*, 11 August 1914, p. 6; '2,000 Spies Arrested in Belgium.' *Hull Daily Mail*, 12 August 1914, p. 5.

⁷¹ 'Network of spies in Belgium. Hundreds Arrested: Rifles, Bombs, and Wireless Found.' *Birmingham Mail*, 11 August 1914, p. 3; '100 Spies Shot in Belgium.' *Aberdeen Journal*, 12 August 1914, p. 6.

⁷² 'German Spies in Belgium.' *Chester Chronicle*, 15 August 1914, p. 7.

⁷³ 'Catching Spies in Belgium. Remarkable Incidents.' *Western Daily Press*, 15 August 1914, p. 8

society.⁷⁴ Given the international situation, the *Birmingham Mail* calculated that the German General Staff had stockpiled arms inside every potential adversary under the supervision of a covert network of agents. It was therefore probable that ‘considerable numbers of German military desperadoes have been let loose in England to work as much destruction as possible at vital points’.⁷⁵ In Devon, it was felt that:

There are Germans in all parts of Great Britain. They have lived among us for years, and some of them, no doubt, have been active in forwarding information to Berlin for use in case of war... Why some busy body should take the trouble to come to the gazette office yesterday morning and complain that the publication of such an obvious fact that there are Germans in Devonshire is likely to cause unnecessary alarm I am at a loss to understand... The unknown censor is evidently a person of super sensitive feelings... Perhaps he would prefer to read fiction. The Gazette does its best to prevent so far as possible, this latter class of news appearing in its war columns; it offers its readers the most reliable information it can obtain.⁷⁶

Invoking the image of ‘Poor little Belgium’, through the portrayal of the increasingly turbulent situation developing in Europe, provided the justification to construct the threat of the spy within Britain.⁷⁷ By demonstrating the ‘existence’ of covert operations elsewhere, the press invented the potential for comparable problems at home.⁷⁸

The rhetoric that emerged in the early weeks of the war, however, was not limited to merely defining the threat. Numerous papers reported that the police were

⁷⁴ ‘War Notes.’ *Derby Daily Telegraph*, 12 August 1914, p. 2; ‘I Spy.’ How They Played It On Wee Wullie.’ *Motherwell Times*, 21 August 1914, p. 5.

⁷⁵ ‘Emissaries of Destruction.’ *Birmingham Mail*, 8 August 1914, p. 3.

⁷⁶ ‘Notes of the Day.’ *Exeter and Plymouth Gazette*, 11 August 1914, p. 5.

⁷⁷ DeGroot, *Back in Blighty*, pp. 15-6; Gregory, *The Last Great War*, p. 68; Catriona Pennell, ‘The Germans Have Landed!’ Invasion Fears in the South-East of England. August to December 1914’, in Heather Jones, Jennifer O’Brian, Christoph Schmidt-Supprian (eds.), *Untold War: New Perspectives in First World War Studies* (Boston, 2008) p. 96; Brett Holman, ‘Constructing the Enemy Within: Rumours of Secret Gun Platforms and Zeppelin Bases in Britain, August-October 1914’, *British Journal for Military History* 3/2 (2017) p. 29.

⁷⁸ Radical politicians attempting to stimulate anti-alien sentiment equally relied upon presumed events transpiring elsewhere: Joynson-Hicks, *Hansard*, 12 November 1914.

pursuing an active campaign against secret agents who sought to ‘strike at England’s vital points’. This narrative emphasised the threat against strategic vulnerabilities and recommended that they be diligently monitored across Britain. The nationalistic magazine, *John Bull*, characteristically reminded its readers to ‘keep their eyes and eyes wide open, and if they find any of the above orders being contravened, they should immediately inform the police or military authorities’.⁷⁹ But even outside of the radical press, it was considered essential that the public inform the authorities of any suspicious aliens that come to their notice.⁸⁰ While there were occasional doubts as to the credibility of reports disclosing German clandestine activities, the prospective threat was commonly felt to be too great to ignore. The *Derby Daily Telegraph*, for instance, considered that:

While there is happily good reason for believing that many of the alarms as to the alleged German spies are due to suspicion and misunderstanding, the duty upon citizens all over the United Kingdom of maintaining observation wherever there are circumstances of suspicion should not be neglected.

Notwithstanding the occasional concern in discriminating against innocent Germans, dutiful citizens were reassured that:

Scotland Yard takes rather a serious view of the possible recklessness of some of the undesirables, and that is why the authorities are placing a number under detention. If the public are reasonable in their vigilance they can render service in the protection of themselves without doing material injustice.⁸¹

Anxiety, rumour, and suspicion were all familiar expressions promoted by the press within this discourse. When people felt anxious in response to the growing

⁷⁹ ‘Points for Patriots.’ *John Bull* Vol. XVII No. 429, 22 August 1914, p. 10.

⁸⁰ ‘Precautions.’ *Buckingham Advertiser and Free Press*, 15 August 1914, p. 8; ‘Martial Law. Protection Against Spies.’ *Portsmouth Evening News*, 14 August 1914, p. 5.

⁸¹ ‘Our London Letter. The Spy Danger.’ *Derby Daily Telegraph*, 12 August 1914, p. 4.

international crisis, and the insecurity that it provoked, they were familiar with the object of danger and how to react appropriately in support of the national war effort.

Although the press may have broadcast warnings of espionage, caution and vigilance was also strongly encouraged by local figures of authority. Their assumed position of importance provided an equally alarming message that compelled communities to contemplate the proximity of danger. While concern was often fostered from the central government, the desire to publicly express those anxieties varied among authoritative figures. Following the outbreak of war, for instance, the Chief Constable of Aberdeenshire received a request from the army's Scottish Command, inquiring into vulnerable places in the county. Though his response contained a rather extensive list, which suggests he took the threat seriously, there is no evidence that he became alarmed, or that he expressed these concerns publicly.⁸² In neighbouring Elginshire, however, the Chief Constable proved more than willing to broadcast personal trepidations. The first of only eleven general orders given during the War was directly concerned with the threat of espionage. He instructed his constabulary to watch all aliens in the area more diligently and intimated that police officers were not displaying enough vigilance. He demanded that every alien, friendly or otherwise, be monitored – and ordered that Constables instruct members of the community to remain judicious and actively search for any potential culprits. Any new arrival to the area was to be watched, and any persons conducting nocturnal activity were to be stopped and forced to surrender their particulars.⁸³ In Norfolk, the civil population were also encouraged to participate in defensive precautions. The Chief Constable directed officers to 'arrange for persons who have guns to shoot any

⁸² Aberdeenshire and Aberdeen City Archives, POL/B/4/5: Banffshire Constabulary, Ballindalloch, General Order Book, 3 November 1914.

⁸³ Aberdeenshire and Aberdeen City Archives, POL/E/2/1: Elginshire Constabulary, General Order Book, Order no. 52, 22 August 1914. It was not unusual for constabularies to entrust this type of surveillance to the local population. *Diary of Andrew Clark* vol. II, 14 September 1914, p. 53.

pigeons flying seawards' to prevent spies from communicating with Germany. He also ordered that constables take special steps to ensure local haystacks were protected against spies, because he was convinced the Germans would attempt to set them on fire. As a result, he armed local farmers and grounds keepers so that they could conduct nightly patrols alongside the police.⁸⁴ Although these were extraordinary reactions, attempts to provoke concern could also be as subtle as advertising the Defence of the Realm Acts and Aliens Restriction Bills.⁸⁵

The Chief Constable of East Sussex was even more explicit in how his force was to respond to the threat of espionage. He reported to the Watch Committee that the declaration of war had imposed a considerable amount of responsibility on the police owing to the dangers generated by undesirable aliens and the threat of foreign espionage. In response to these growing difficulties, officers were given revolvers and instructed to use them if necessary. Territorial soldiers were also ready to provide military support to combat dangerous or armed aliens. Aliens were supposedly most dangerous at night, and he advised that a 'special watch should be kept to prevent aliens travelling by night by motor car or cycle for the purpose of committing outrages'.⁸⁶ The general order further stated that:

Any police constable officers of customs or any other person authorised for the purpose by the competent naval or military authority may arrest without warrant any person whose behaviour is of such a nature as to give reasonable grounds for

⁸⁴ Norfolk Record Office: C/PO 1/11, Books of Memorandum Issued by Chief Constable, 10-31 August 1914, pp. 71, 85. A similar order was apparently given in Lincolnshire: Lincolnshire Archives, Fane Fulbeck Papers, Diary of Helen Beatrice Fane vol. 1, 22 August 1914.

⁸⁵ Aberdeenshire and Aberdeen City Archives, POL/B/9/1/24: Elginshire Constabulary, Dufftown, Junior Constable's Daily Occurrence Book, 24 September 1914 to 21 January 1917.

⁸⁶ East Sussex Record Office, SPA 5/6/8, Records of the Sussex Police Authority, Headquarters and Constabulary Records, Hastings Constabulary, 'Extracts from the Watch Committee Minutes, dated 8 August 1914, p. 29. The Norwich and Buckinghamshire Constabularies received the same telegram from the Home Office: Norfolk Record Office: C/PO 1/48, General Order Book (Norwich Police), 5 August 1914, p. 324; Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies, BC/1/5 Buckinghamshire Constabulary Memoranda Book, memo for Superintendents, 6-8 August 1914.

suspecting that he has acted or is acting or is about to act in a manner prejudicial to the public safety of the safety of the realm, or upon whom may be found any article book, letter, or other document the possession of which gives grounds for such suspicion or who is suspected of having committed an offence against these regulations.⁸⁷

While there is no suggestion that the Chief Constable sought to directly incite a public panic towards the threat of espionage, the manner in which he conveyed his personal concerns is nonetheless significant. The report presented to the Watch Committee portrays a police mobilisation, simultaneous to the military one, against a foreign presence within Britain, which resulted from official concerns rather than popular outbursts. The immediate presence of police activity against foreign spies in August 1914, therefore, did not legitimise earlier forms of popular xenophobia; in many cases, it preceded them.

In neighbouring West Sussex, the Chief Constable deliberately galvanised public anxieties as early as August 1914. By establishing a volunteer civil guard, members of the public were specifically called upon to assist the police in protecting the local community from spies. Their duties included:

1. To undergo drill and musketry so as to become a fit and competent body to assist and support the police and thus to relieve the military.
2. To guard bridges and other important points, i.e., water works, post offices, electric light stations, and gas works, etc.
3. No German or Austrian should be allowed to loiter near a bridge, culvert, or interfere in any way with telegraph poles and wires, etc...
5. The civil guard should report all Germans and Austrians if they know that they have in their possession any of the following articles: - FIREARMS, AMMUNITION,

⁸⁷ East Sussex Record Office, SPS 13/1/2, Records of the Sussex Police Authority, Newhaven Station Records, Chief Constable's Orders, Order dated 17 August 1914.

EXPLOSIVES; or material intended to be used for the manufacture of explosives; any inflammable liquids; any signalling apparatus; any carrier pigeons; any motor cars, motor cycles; motor-boat, yacht; or aircraft; any cipher code; any telephone installation; any camera or other photographic apparatus; any military or naval map, chart, or handbook; they should detain such persons if necessary.⁸⁸

In a letter to the Lord-Lieutenant, the Chief Constable conceded that several of the original duties were removed because they were technically illegal, but affirmed that others, despite their illegality, were essential. He advocated their inclusion and suggested that ‘every action against an enemy of our Sovereign is legal, by common law’.⁸⁹ Although these measures reflected national restrictions placed on civil liberties, they nonetheless illustrate the degree of apprehension experienced by certain local authorities following the outbreak of war.⁹⁰ By inaugurating a civil guard, the Chief Constable mirrored the rhetoric in the media; it manufactured an object of fear by providing official recommendations that could shape popular vigilance and concern.

Following the outbreak of war, the British public was frequently exposed to a rhetoric that repeatedly delineated the dangers of an unopposed system of German espionage. Britain’s declaration of war sent shockwaves across the nation and in the absence of reliable news ‘fear, anticipation, imagination, and rumour’ filled the void. As part of that society local authorities shared similar apprehensions, but within that collective, they possessed the most prominent voice, and the object of their anxiety often became the dominant, if not necessarily the most pervasive, concern across

⁸⁸ West Sussex Record Office, GOODWOOD MSS 1274, Letters about, and instructions to the West Sussex Volunteer Civil Guard, and Special Constables 1914 – 1918, ‘West Sussex Civil Guard’, dated 17 August 1914.

⁸⁹ West Sussex Record Office, GOODWOOD MSS 1274, Letter from Chief Constable to the Duke of Richmond, dated 25 August 1914

⁹⁰ Ewing and Gearty, *The Struggle for Civil Liberties*, pp.36-7.

society more generally.⁹¹ Although historians have often interpreted these concerns as evidence of a social obsession with spies, they should refrain from presuming that these institutional perspectives represented organic attitudes and anxieties.⁹² When the messages constructing this rhetoric are analysed, it becomes apparent that they were more informative and instructive than reflective of wider emotions. As the war was declared, therefore, various authorities quickly fashioned a framework in which society could interpret their feelings that promoted both an emotional and physical response to the alleged spy peril. Despite the prominence of this narrative in some areas of Britain, however, it was by no means universally adopted, and ambiguity and variation characterised much of the local perceptions of internal security.

In a post-war lecture, Vernon Kell, the head of MO5(g), the organisation responsible for counter-espionage and monitoring aliens, considered local police forces vital to such work. He claimed that such assistance required coaxing over ‘250 separate and independent Chief Constables, each of whom has to be wooed and won separately before his cooperation can be assured for any purpose in peace and war’. While Kell believed he had secured the unwavering assistance of police chiefs throughout Britain, this statement implies that they maintained a degree of agency in how they interpreted directives received from the War Office.⁹³ An example of this discretion can be found in Leicestershire. Early in the war, the Chief Constable received instructions from the War Office ordering the internment of all German reservists as prisoners of war and instructed police forces to discover if such men were residing in their county. A few days later, it was stressed that ‘as much attention

⁹¹ Pennell, *A Kingdom United*, pp. 55-6.

⁹² French, ‘Spy Fever in Britain’; Panayi, *The Enemy in our Midst*.

⁹³ IWM, PP/MCR/120 reel no.1, The Papers of Major General Sir Vernon Kell, ‘The Control of Civil Populations in War’ (1930), p. 17; Stoke City Archives, C/PC/14/3/1, ‘File marked ‘Secret’, containing correspondence with Special Branch and Sir Vernon Kell, head of MI5 re intelligence gathering’: demonstrates that this practice occurred both before and after the war.

as possible shall be given to the guarding of bridges, power stations, waterworks... the destructions of which by evil disposed persons would retard mobilisation or inconvenience the general community'.⁹⁴ But such instructions caused far less alarm in Leicestershire than in Elginshire or Sussex, for example. While the Chief Constable stressed the importance of monitoring aliens and guarding key areas, he clearly regarded such duties as the responsibility of the military authorities. Although he accepted the need to assist the War Office, he intimated that ordinary policing remained paramount. More significantly, however, was the need for secrecy. Rather than allow anxieties to escalate, he instructed superintendents to 'deal with all things at present as confidential and impress upon men to keep matters to themselves'.⁹⁵

The Derbyshire Chief Constable received similar directives from the Home Office. It was advised that 'special attention must also be paid to any foreigners acting in a suspicious manner, and they must be carefully watched and, if necessary, detained until they can account for themselves'.⁹⁶ Despite the imposition of xenophobic measures from above, the Chief Constable remained immune to wider anxieties. In his correspondence with Superintendents, there is a noticeable indifference afforded to espionage or aliens more generally. When the problem did appear, he maintained that constables merely uphold their duty rather than implement extreme security measures. He only appeared to react to the spy danger after interference from another Chief Constable in an adjacent county.⁹⁷ Likewise in Monmouthshire, there is almost no trace of spy fever. While the Chief Constable in Leicestershire received circulars from the Home Office that led to a rational response,

⁹⁴ Leicestershire Record Office, DE 3831-37, Leicestershire Constabulary Records, General Order Book, 7-10 August 1914.

⁹⁵ Leicestershire Record Office, DE 5491-104-1, Leicestershire Constabulary Records, Superintendents Meetings Minutes, 6 August 1914, p. 1.

⁹⁶ Derbyshire Record Office, D3376/Box 6/1, County General Order Books, no. 284/313, 5 August 1914.

⁹⁷ Derbyshire Record Office, D3376/Box 1/3, County Copy Correspondence Book 1914-1920.

the Chief Constable at Newport seemingly gave no instructions regarding foreign espionage, suspicious people, or restrictions on aliens. Thus, not only is there no evidence of alarm, there is a complete absence of any form of response to the spy peril. Where there was a recorded concern, it was instead focused on the potential threat of German Zeppelins.⁹⁸ Similarly, the correspondence between local police forces collected by the nearby Griffithstown constabulary further demonstrates a lack of official fears in this particular region. While the Admiralty had instructed the police there to remain suspicious of a woman posing as a representative of the Navy League, local issues continued to dominate police agendas.⁹⁹ Theft remained the predominant issue, but circulars also drew attention to missing persons, escaped psychiatric patients, dangerous dogs, bigamy, assault, and desertion.¹⁰⁰

Just as police responses varied, not all provincial newspapers perpetuated the anxiety focused on invented German spies. Within the pages of the *Leicester Chronicle*, the *Bedfordshire Times and Independent*, and the *Northampton Mercury*, for example, the only considerable attention given to spies was after residents had become victims in spy scares elsewhere. The *Bedfordshire Times*, for example, reported that a member of the coast watch had approached two men from Bedford while they were on holiday in the Whitley Bay area. As they admired the harbour, the coast watcher allegedly threatened to shoot them if they could not explain their presence there.¹⁰¹ The *Leicester Chronicle* similarly reported an ‘astounding’ incident, for it ‘did not occur in Switzerland, Germany, or Belgium, but in the peaceful

⁹⁸ Gwent Archives, D709/47, Newport Constabulary Records, Police Order Book, 21 August 1914, pp. 161-4.

⁹⁹ Gwent Archives, D2113/23, Griffithstown Police Records, General Order Book, 15 August 1914.

¹⁰⁰ The correspondence can be found in Gwent Archives, D2113/19, Griffithstown Police Records, Information Book May 1914-December 1916. This is supported by instructions given to constables and the activities recorded in Sergeant’s journals: Gwent Archives, D2113/130, Griffithstown Police Records: Constable’s Information Book June 1914 – July 1915; and D2113/136, Constable’s Information Book July 1914 – September 1921; and D2113/57, Sergeant’s Journals: Charles Nurdern, January 1914 – March 1915.

¹⁰¹ ‘The Spy Scare.’ *Bedfordshire Times and Independent*, 28 August 1914, p. 5.

neighbourhood of Studley Bay, near Swanage'. Using surprise to portray the actions of local authorities insinuates that these communities remained unacquainted with the constraints imposed in certain areas of Britain. The man suspected of espionage found the experience to be extremely pleasing, however, 'for as an Englishman I was very proud of the steps the authorities had taken to ensure the safety of our little island home'.¹⁰² While these stories mostly displayed a level of surprise and indignation at the events, some took a more directly confrontational approach and attempted to denounce the threat of espionage entirely. Readers were assured that despite the arrests of spies in London, 'spy mania' had already dissipated and that adopting 'Prussian' methods of regulation should be avoided.¹⁰³ Moreover, the *Northampton Mercury* condemned those who continued to spread spy scares across the county following their own experience of similar hyperbole:

Once more I remind readers against believing the loose gossip that flies round in these times. We in newspaper offices have learned from painful experiences how even testimony said to be based on actual personal observation is often utterly unreliable. One of the latest yarns was that a German spy had been arrested at Teeton with enough poison in his possession to kill all the inhabitants of Northampton. I need not say there was no foundation for that report than for many other lying tales that have been in circulation.¹⁰⁴

The existence of this type of response suggests that while certain areas of Britain assimilated their anxieties with familiar depictions of the spy, others refrained from exacerbating the concern.

Notwithstanding this variation, there was nevertheless a clear and deliberate attempt to introduce the British public to the dangers they faced in August 1914.

¹⁰² 'Taken For a Spy.' *Leicestershire Chronicle*, 29 August 1914, p. 7.

¹⁰³ 'A Survey at Home.' *Bedfordshire Times and Independent*, 21 August 1914, p. 8; 'Spies and Spies.' *Bucks Herald*, 15 August 1914, p. 6.

¹⁰⁴ 'Lying Tales.' *Northampton Mercury*, 21 August 1914, p. 4.

Although the foundations for popular alarm had already been established through numerous invasion scares, this particular emotional regime manipulated comparable feelings and identified the ‘spy’ as the cause for concern. More specifically, this regime defined the parameters of the espionage threat and prioritised a particular emotional response, which fundamentally challenges the implied spontaneity of spy fever following the outbreak of the First World War. Examining the language of fear permeating society during this period reveals an official intention to encourage anxieties designed to mobilise local populations against a widely anticipated peril. But the disparity evident within the various reactions demonstrates the degree of flexibility within this particular emotional regime, which begins to contest the supposed universality of spy fever. In so doing, it highlights the influence of regional perceptions in establishing collective fears and concerns. However, these regional concerns were equally not impulsive. They were driven by, and in some cases constructed in direct opposition to, national attitudes and directives. Since the existence of a rhetoric promoting the dangers of espionage challenges the validity of understanding spy fever as a purely spontaneous phenomenon, it demands a reassessment of how and when spy scares occurred in relation to this alarmist discourse.

THE MANIFESTATION OF THE ‘SPY THREAT’

The discourse that emerged in August 1914 appeared alongside reports that ‘spies’ were being captured across Britain. Without this ‘evidence’ of German espionage, the narrative emerging in August 1914 could have easily been ignored. But what transpired during the first few weeks appeared to some to confirm the belief that

secret agents had become an immediate threat to British society. Importantly, though, reports of espionage suggest that spy scares resulted from the apprehensions of local authorities, which in turn could prompt further concerns among the wider public. Yet given the varying presence of espionage in the media, emotional temperaments in response to spy scares were similarly multifaceted. Although historians have previously presumed that the construction of an emotional regime in the national, right wing press is evidence of the widespread acceptance of spy fever, conformity within regimes is far more ambiguous. Whereas spy scares have typically been considered as the physical manifestation of widespread panic, examining the suspicions emerging in 1914 shows that the British public was not helplessly overcome by fear and anxiety and that it was the local authorities that were predominantly apprehensive and responsible for encouraging further spy panics.¹⁰⁵

This section has collected reports of spy scares from thirty-two newspapers to assess the types of reaction to the spy, where they occurred, who instigated them, and their significance. Given that local newspapers regularly reported events from across Britain they offer the most reliable method for determining the national impact of the spy ‘threat’. Although this approach cannot possibly account for every incident and report, employing newspapers shows how suspicion was portrayed as well as how society responded to it. Moreover, constabulary records only include cases taken up by the police, while personal accounts prohibit a systematic research method.¹⁰⁶ The selection only contains events outside of London for two important reasons. Firstly, historians of spy fever have typically focused on London, so there is no need to repeat this. Secondly, with so much hearsay generated from proceedings in the capital,

¹⁰⁵ Whereas De Groot has argued that anxieties regarding the potential spy threat were predominantly confined to civil authorities and the intelligence services, I suggest that these concerns filtered down and were most visible within the responses of the local authorities: *Back in Blighty*, pp. 221, 234.

¹⁰⁶ Police records are also mostly incomplete so neither allow for a methodical analysis.

collecting reports of actual events becomes increasingly challenging.¹⁰⁷ What this section attempts to do, therefore, is compile a statistical analysis of episodes where the term ‘spy’ was invoked, to ascertain the place and time in which suspicion emerged and who was responsible for issuing it. It has deliberately overlooked vague reports inflating the presence of spies in a particular region because rumours reflected anxiety towards a general, abstract threat, whereas this section aims to analyse the appearance of immediate and palpable concerns within a particular community or situation. Thus, only reports with either a specified location, names of either the suspect or victim, or the evidence that instigated the claim have been included.

According to an analysis of 222 news articles referring to spy scares, there were 134 cases of suspected espionage in August involving 145 suspects.¹⁰⁸ The frequency of duplicated stories indicates that this is an extensive, if not an entirely comprehensive, selection of publicised scares.¹⁰⁹ A careful assessment of the reports emerging in August 1914, therefore, challenges the traditional depiction of the impact that spy fever had during the early weeks of the First World War. Historians have often relied on an argument presented to Parliament claiming that the Metropolitan Police had received 9,000 reports of espionage by mid-September, to substantiate their claims that spy fever was a widespread and popular anxiety.¹¹⁰ Yet this figure has never been confirmed and is merely based on a reply to Joynson-Hick’s speech made in the Commons criticising the response of the Home Office.¹¹¹ While this exaggeration presented to Parliament is hardly indicative of tangible concerns, it does

¹⁰⁷ See above for the way espionage in London was perceived.

¹⁰⁸ Reports were not confined to the geographical region in which they were produced. All newspapers were more likely to report about espionage in areas beyond their immediate locale. In the *Hull Daily Mail*, the newspaper most frequently publishing incidents about spies in their local area, only thirteen out of twenty-three cases occurred within close proximity.

¹⁰⁹ Of the 222 cases discovered around fifty-five percent were also reported in newspapers elsewhere.

¹¹⁰ French, ‘Spy Fever in Britain’, p. 365; Panayi, *Enemy in Our Midst*, pp. 154-5; Pennell, *A Kingdom United*, p. 106.

¹¹¹ McKenna, *Hansard*, 9 September 1914.

reflect the level of attentiveness contemporaries attached to rumour and hearsay. A more systematic analysis of alleged espionage, however, implies that the number of cases arising in England, Scotland, and Wales combined was most likely in the hundreds, not thousands. While this conservative estimate regarding the frequency of spy scares maintains that it was a phenomenon that undoubtedly had national implications, it also suggests that it was far from a universal phenomenon, and that fear and anxiety were less common among the general public than previously assumed.

Table 1.1 Location of Spy Scares in the press and by origin

	No. of Articles Published	No. of Cases Occurring
Coastal City/Town	86	78
Coastal Area*	15	13
Naval Dockyard	35	7
Total	136	98
Inland City	59	9
Inland Town/Village	27	27
Total	86	36
TOTAL	222	134

*Refers to articles published in a region that borders the coast and cases reported within ten miles of the coast.

This becomes further apparent when considering the geography of spy fever. Table 1.1 highlights some of the more nuanced characteristics of the collective response. Spy fever was more conspicuous and pervasive in particular regions, and the expression of concern more noticeable. The most obvious distinction is the

significance of spy fever along the British coastline, with sixty-one percent of all reports appearing in print on or near to the coast, while seventy-three percent of all suspicions arose in the vicinity of the sea. Concern towards the spy threat was thus more extensive in areas exposed to a potential German invasion, which perhaps explains why locations with substantial naval protection experienced far less actual alarm than their interest in spy scares suggests.¹¹² This analysis, therefore, undermines one of the dominant themes within the historiography of spy fever. Whereas historians often equate the appearance of spy fever in the press with collective fears, the two are not inexorably linked. The prominence of espionage in local newspapers did not always correspond to a wider emotional reaction, and thus the physical responses of spy fever were not always observable in areas despite their prior contact with alarmist rhetoric. Moving away from the coast, for example, demonstrates that the number of incidents reported inland were twelve percent lower than the number of stories appearing in the press, which suggests that despite being exposed to the ‘threat’ these communities were not as susceptible to this particular anxiety. While local discourses varied in how they construed the spy threat, local reactions and precautions in the wake of the suspected danger were equally ambiguous, and historians should be wary of subscribing to singular, dominant emotional experiences.

Within specific geographic locations, however, the landscapes in which spies were ‘discovered’ are likewise revealing. While twenty six percent of articles were published in metropolitan newspapers, only seven percent of cases supposedly transpired in urban areas. There is thus an eight percent rise in the number of incidents compared with the number of articles in provincial newspapers. Although it is often overlooked, pre-existing rural racism and local xenophobia were central in expressing

¹¹² Coastal communities were acutely aware of their vulnerability to invasion during the opening months of the First World War: Pennell, ‘The Germans have Landed’, p. 101.

suspicion. Constructions of idealised whiteness, itself derived from conceptions of the English countryside, portray pastoral landscapes as the quintessential location of the English national identity. Strangers, either urban or alien, were therefore particularly noticeable in these contexts and represent an encroaching threat upon notions of ‘Englishness’.¹¹³ Keith Snell argues that ‘an affiliation to parish, township, hamlet, or estate’ and these ‘extremely local units of belonging often eclipsed any larger rallying point for loyalty’, which exacerbated the presence of outsiders within those communities.¹¹⁴ In Cambridgeshire, for example, two Englishmen were out walking when one over-zealous local reported them simply because they were outsiders.¹¹⁵ In Long Itchington, Warwickshire, villagers refused to accommodate two British travellers because of a rumour that they were German spies in disguise. Eventually, the two men were identified as innocent artists, but not before they had found lodgings in nearby Stockton.¹¹⁶ But this notion of Englishness could be expanded to include a British national identity, one that was similarly juxtaposed with an apparent foreign influence. In rural Aberdeenshire, suspicion became fixated on another individual because he was unfamiliar to local residents. Since he appeared ‘foreign’, he was believed to be dangerous simply for purchasing a loaf of bread.¹¹⁷ While spies typically inhabit urban landscapes, to both maintain anonymity and provide valuable intelligence, espionage phobias were often most striking in rural settings. This irony

¹¹³ C.S. Peel, *How We Lived Then, 1914-1918: A Sketch of Social and Domestic Life in England during the War* (London, 1929) p. 39; Sarah Neal, ‘Rural Landscapes, Representations and Racism: Examining Multicultural Citizenship and Policy-Making in the English Countryside’, *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 25/3 (2002) pp. 447-8; Employers in rural areas were extremely wary of recruiting aliens because they feared they were spies. The alien workforce was only grudgingly accepted when labour shortages became most profound towards the latter stages of the war. Pamala Horn, *Rural Life in England in the First World War* (Dublin, 1984) pp. 140-3.

¹¹⁴ Keith D.M. Snell, ‘The Culture of Local Xenophobia’, *Social History* 28/1 (2003) p. 4.

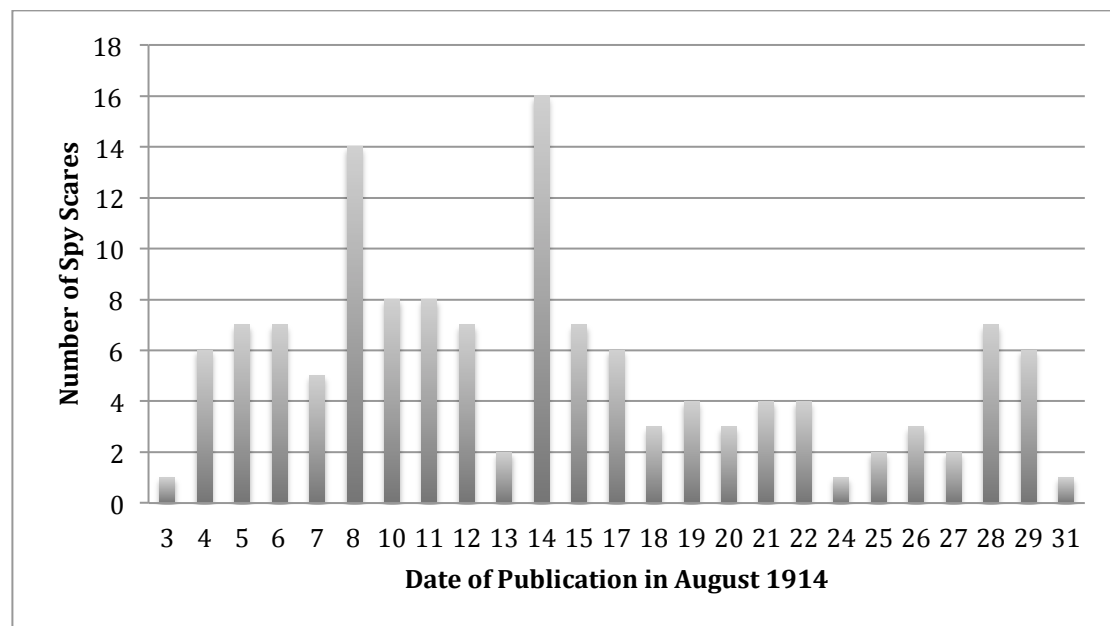
¹¹⁵ ‘Local Spy Rumours.’ *Cambridge Independent Press*, 14 August 1914, p. 7.

¹¹⁶ ‘The European War. This Week’s Events.’ *Leamington Spa Courier*, 14 August 1914, p. 2; similar cases include: ‘Spies at the Forth Bridge.’ *Edinburgh Evening News*, 5 August 1914, p. 3; ‘Police and Alleged Spies.’ *Birmingham Daily Post*, 8 August 1914, p. 3; ‘Britain and Austria: Effect of War Declaration.’ *Exeter and Plymouth Gazette*, 14 August 1914, p. 7.

¹¹⁷ ‘Bon-Accord Gossip.’ *Aberdeen Evening Express*, 15 August 1914, p. 4.

reflects a popular enthusiasm to control and police space during the war. While the authorities created borders and prohibited zones, the readiness to denounce intruders within certain communities suggests that society accepted, and occasionally perpetuated, the degree of social regulation during this period.¹¹⁸

Table 1.2 The Number of Spy Cases Reported by their Date of Publication



*Cases that are reported in various locations are only included once.

Understanding the mechanisms that scaremongering adopted in August 1914 insinuates that spy rhetoric could be deemed appropriate or unnecessary and therefore accepted or rejected by the British public. In other words, it was external to society, not organic, and not a spontaneous collective response. It seems unlikely that the rate of spy scares was determined by rhetoric in the press since scaremongering remained relatively constant during the early months of the war. If they were indeed a response to alarmist reports, the frequency of scares would most likely continue in proportion

¹¹⁸ This idea has developed out of a conference paper and a subsequent discussion with Claire Hubbard-Hall: 'Landscapes of Nazi Intelligence: Spies and Spy Catchers in New York, 1933-45' presented to the Social History Conference, University of Lancaster, 23 March 2016.

to the increasingly virulent rhetoric. Instead, spy scares were an immediate reaction to the outbreak of war that eventually declined despite continued efforts to maintain the initial momentum. Table 1.2 illustrates that two-thirds of the reports emerged in the first two weeks of the war, which suggests that they cannot be explained entirely as a reaction to the alarmist reports appearing in the press. Their decline following the initial fortnight of war instead challenges the connection between publicity and popular acceptance. To understand this knee-jerk reaction, however, it is necessary to understand how these specific cases occurred and who was responsible.

Table 1.3 The Number of Spy Scares by the Instigators of Concern

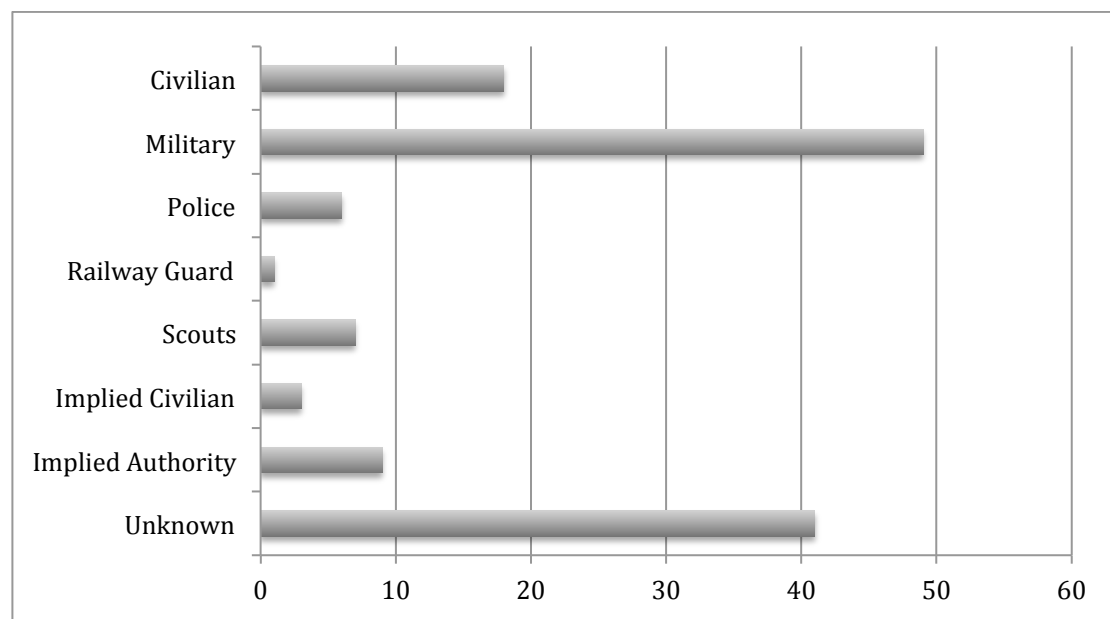


Table 1.3 further challenges the idea that spy scares were a ubiquitous social phenomenon. Of the eighty-one articles explicitly stating the source of inquiry or alarm, only twenty-two percent of the reports originated from concerned members of the public. During the first two weeks of the war, when spy scares were most prolific, that figure drops to only eighteen percent. Even if all the cases with unknown origins

were attributable to concerned individuals, they would still fail to constitute half of the total number of cases. Since the majority of spy scares occurred during the initial two weeks of the war, when expressions of social concern were lowest both proportionally and numerically, the impact of official apprehensions on generating wider anxieties is indisputable. Not only had society been confronted with a deluge of warnings and descriptions of the supposed threat, but they were also confronted by a frantic search for a hidden enemy within their local communities. Given their greater propensity to act on their suspicions, local authorities undoubtedly experienced a more severe form of anxiety toward the spy danger, which strongly disputes the notion that there was a spontaneous eruption of fear among the wider British public.

The most noticeable group susceptible to spy fever were Territorials scattered across Britain. Civilians in uniform, often unacquainted with military practices and exposed to warnings and alarms about German invasions and hidden enemies, appear to have confused the home and fighting fronts in the early weeks of the war.¹¹⁹ Consequently, they were responsible for the majority of spy scares with known origins. Since the introduction of irregular soldiers, they had been designed to repel a hostile landing force, and during the opening months of the war a preoccupation with invasion often determined their attitudes and behaviour.¹²⁰ Despite the impact of the Haldane reforms between 1906 and 1912, by 1913 the effectiveness of the Territorials remained doubtful. In the commons, Territorial MPs often criticised their own force, while the press and military commentators publicly ridiculed the state of Britain's part-time army. Much was made of the inexperience of the Territorial officer corps and their inability to spend sufficient time studying the conduct of war or the military

¹¹⁹ Liddle GS 1027: Jock Dunning Macleod, Diary entry 10 August 1914; Tammy Proctor, *Civilians in a World at War, 1914-1918* (London, 2010) pp. 14-15.

¹²⁰ Ian Beckett, *Britain's Part-Time Soldiers: The Amateur Military Tradition 1558-1945* (Barnsley, 2011) pp. 2-6, 226-44.

profession in general. The primary criticism, however, was aimed at the ineptitude of its soldiers. Weekly drills, an occasional weekend's training, and fifteen days annual camp, failed to convince many of the strength and utility of such a force.¹²¹ More significantly, the intended role of auxiliary forces remained uncertain even by 1914. Whether they would be principally used for home defence, imperial security, or in a European conflict remained unclear to the general public as well as to the units themselves.¹²²

Mobilising the Territorials following the outbreak of war, therefore, proved particularly problematic. But once mobilised, troops were kept in an abiding state of trepidation. Following an invasion warning issued by a nervous War Office official, they were required to remain on appointed accommodation and were forced to sleep wearing their boots and puttees, to be ready at a moment's notice.¹²³ Moreover, few of these early units received the necessary equipment, which encumbered a battalion's readiness and morale. At least initially, the army referred to these soldiers as 'watchmen', and conceded that providing them with 'any old equipment... would suffice'.¹²⁴ For most Territorials, therefore, the early months of the war were especially frantic. All Territorial formations had expected a further six months training following mobilisation, but wartime requirements precluded the provision of more detailed instruction and preparation. Even the Chief of the Imperial General Staff supposedly questioned the fighting value of such a force. Many of the men classed as 'trained', in his opinion, had only received a few weeks training and were

¹²¹ Peter Denis, *The Territorial Army 1097-1940* (Royal Historical Society: Studies in History 51, 1987) pp. 16-29; Ian Beckett, 'The Territorial Force' in Beckett and Simpson, *A Nation in Arms*, p.130.

¹²² Timothy Bowman and Mark Connelly, *The Edwardian Army: Recruiting, Training, and Deploying the British Army 1902-1914* (Oxford, 2012) p. 146.

¹²³ Mitchinson, *Defending Albion: Britain's Home Army*, p. 54.

¹²⁴ Mitchinson, *Defending Albion: Britain's Home Army*, pp. 56, 78; TNA WO 32/5266: Memorandum by CIGS on Home Defence Forces necessary to resist invasion, Appendix I.

led by inexperienced officers.¹²⁵ Many battalions were even unable to practise rifle shooting, and because of their dispersal across Britain protecting vulnerable points, effective coordination and company training became practically impossible.¹²⁶ Amid the confusion generated by the outbreak of war, the morale issues caused by inadequate equipment, and the concerns owing to a dearth of training and preparation, nervousness among Territorial soldiers flourished.

It is unsurprising that Territorial soldiers displayed signs of anxiety towards the spy threat in August 1914 and their degree of nervousness is clearly visible in the press. One town councillor condemned the ‘trigger happy Territorials’ after he was fired upon by the 6/Manchesters while taking a walk around a local reservoir. On another occasion, Territorials allegedly thought that they had spotted a German submarine attempting to penetrate the boom defences at the Forth Bridge and instructed the nearby forts to open fire. The suspected ‘U-boat’ turned out to be nothing more than a discarded whisky bottle.¹²⁷ One Englishman holidaying in Dover witnessed similar consternation when he was enjoying a peaceful walk along the coast. As he admired the view, he claimed six soldiers displaying fixed bayonets surrounded him, detained him, and interrogated him repeatedly because they suspected him of espionage.¹²⁸ Other reports suggest that relations were even less amicable between military guards and civilians. Upon discovering what was perceived to be a German spy, Territorial soldiers at Dunfermline shot at a telegraph linesman working on the overhead cable at the local Post Office.¹²⁹ One unfortunate

¹²⁵ TNA WO 32/5266: Letter dated September 29 1914; Liddle Hart Centre for Military Archives, King’s College London: James Edmonds’ Papers, 3/7, Memoirs, Chapter XXII, ‘The Forth Division in Peace Time 1911-14’, p. 29; Denis, *The Territorial Army*, p. 33.

¹²⁶ Mitchinson, *Defending Albion: Britain’s Home Army*, pp. 59-60.

¹²⁷ Ibid. p. 60.

¹²⁸ ‘Mistaken for a Spy. Ashford Shop Assistant’s Experience.’ *Dover Express*, 14 August 1914, p. 5.

¹²⁹ ‘Midnight ‘Spy’ Incident. Excitement Caused at Dunfermline.’ *Edinburgh Evening News*, 11 August 1914, p. 2.

motorcyclist also found himself shot by a sentry because he unwittingly ignored a challenge.¹³⁰ In Newcastle, another man who had attracted the attention of a military patrol was shot and killed after he attempted to flee.¹³¹ Territorials had undoubtedly been made aware of the severity of the spy peril and instructed to respond accordingly. Although public notices had warned that persons were at risk of being shot if they ventured near military posts at night, the frequent resort to violence without any investigation or demonstration of hostile intentions suggests that certain authorities were especially apprehensive about the threat and extremely nervous about encountering the objects of danger.¹³²

While this often led to violence inflicted on defenceless civilians, spy alarms also resulted in soldiers getting injured in the midst of the confusion and panic. After Private Robinson thought he had discovered a spy whilst guarding an aircraft hanger in Surrey, he fired upon the suspect but, to his surprise, he immediately received returning fire that wounded him in the arm.¹³³ When a detachment of soldiers defending the wireless station at Waltham noticed two men acting suspiciously, they raised the alarm and chased the suspects. But during the pursuit, Private Filbert somehow received a bayonet wound to his leg and was taken to Grimsby hospital.¹³⁴ During one anxious sentry's attempt to defend his barracks from a suspected spy, he accidentally shot a member of the Army Medical Corps.¹³⁵ Two soldiers were even killed amidst the confusion during a spy scare. Both soldiers were inadvertently shot after alarms were raised 'that a spy was knocking about', and search parties were sent out to catch the offender. Stories differ as to how Louis Morice was killed at Bidston

¹³⁰ 'Cyclist Wounded by Sentry.' *Liverpool Echo*, 11 August 1914, p. 4.

¹³¹ 'A Newcastle Chase.' *Portsmouth Evening News*, 8 August 1914, p. 7.

¹³² 'A Warning to the Public.' *Birmingham Daily Post*, 6 August 1914, p. 8.

¹³³ 'Soldier Shot by Supposed Spy.' *Hull Daily Mail*, 17 August 1914, p. 1.

¹³⁴ 'Capture of Supposed Spy on the Humber. Defending Soldier Wounded.' *Hull Daily Mail*, 3 August 1914, p. 6.

¹³⁵ 'Was he a Spy? Magazine Guards Fire on Intruder.' *Sheffield Independent*, 11 August 1914, p. 5.

Hill near Birkenhead. Morice had only been serving with the Territorials for less than a week when he was placed on garrison duty, which most likely amplified his anxieties.¹³⁶ Some accounts suggest a rifle went off inadvertently, while others report that several shots were fired and he was killed in the crossfire.¹³⁷ Similarly, at the inquest of Private Walter Henry Smith's death, killed near Chatham waterworks, witnesses attributed his death to a collective nervousness after being told spies were in their vicinity.¹³⁸

The presence of spy scares in the press conformed to and legitimised two longstanding and widely held concerns. Attempts to establish the spy threat thus drew upon popular xenophobia and invasion anxieties to make the danger appear both plausible and palatable to the British public. Looking at the portrayal of spy scares in this press, however, reveals some of the shortcomings in the current historiography. The nature of this paranoia shows that there was nothing new in this type of apprehension and that popular forms of spy fever resulted from a manipulation of pre-existing emotions and attitudes, rather than a spontaneous outbreak of fear and anxiety. Moreover, historians have often mistaken prominence for pervasiveness, which has led to assumptions about its prevalence. The contrast between the frequency of reports appearing inland and the rate of scares allegedly occurring within those areas, however, shows the discord between media attention and public alarm. Within this regime, individual feelings were far more likely to imitate the advocated emotional response had there been a personal reason to do so. While that could

¹³⁶ On 5 August, the twenty-year-old Morice enlisted at Sefton Park barracks, and was serving as a gunner with 1st Lancashire Brigade RGA on Bidston Hill garrison duty. Stephen McGreal, *Liverpool in the Great War* (Barnsley, 2014) p. 32.

¹³⁷ 'War Items.' *Exeter and Plymouth Gazette*, 12 August 1914, p. 3; 'Sentry Shot Dead. Sensational Affair Near Birkenhead.' *Manchester Evening News*, 11 August 1914, p. 2.

¹³⁸ 'Sentry Death at Chatham.' *Birmingham Daily Post*, 21 August 1914, p. 7. Smith had enlisted at Mill Hill in Middlesex in July 1913 and was serving in 6th Battalion, Duke of Cambridge's Own (Middlesex) Regiment. Stephen Wynn, *Chatham in the Great War* (Barnsley, 2017) p. 14.

involve one's proximity to a possible German landing place, the responsibility of having to defend against a supposedly imminent and considerable threat commonly prompted individual outbursts of fear. Those at the forefront of home defence were thus most susceptible to embracing and perpetuating this regime, and as a consequence, the frequency of spy scares in August 1914 should not be presumed to reflect a widespread and popular anxiety. It does reveal, however, that during August 1914, while local authorities publicly encouraged a specific emotional and physical response to the enemy within, the object of that fear was both constructed through their apprehension and then corroborated and sustained by their own activities after the outbreak of war.

LOCAL SECURITY AND THE SPY PERIL

Given the role of local authorities in establishing the threat of espionage, as well as their very public attempt at counter-espionage in August 1914, this section examines why certain authorities suffered an intense fear of German spies. Although the diversity of regional responses to the espionage danger suggests that these developments occurred in isolation from one another, they were not themselves impulsive or spontaneous. Such acute apprehensions and uncertainties were a product of centrally driven concerns regarding the vulnerability and insecurity of the British Isles. Prior to the outbreak of war, local authorities had been alerted to the threat and advised to neutralise the anticipated spy peril. This private correspondence both determined local threat perceptions and exacerbated provincial concerns. Although panic was never the intended outcome, the imprecision throughout the directives given before and during the war generated an over-zealous response and allowed local

phobias to influence security measures. While historians have pointed to the Home Office's attempt to subdue popular alarm to show that panic was external to the administration and thus caused by social impulses, the government's role was nevertheless fundamental. Notwithstanding the démenti released in early August, official responses were more inconsistent than this argument allows for, since further announcements appeared to confirm the significance of the threat.¹³⁹ Through examining the instructions given to local authorities by the Home Office and War Office, this section contextualises their role in precipitating spy scares, and attributes their anxiety to insufficient instruction.

Official concerns about hostile incursions and acts of sabotage had become a frequent component of home defence planning during the pre-war years. The Committee of Imperial Defence (CID) had been debating the issue of invasion throughout the preceding decade, and by 1914 this issue had not yet subsided.¹⁴⁰ In April 1914, the Committee received the fourth inquiry in ten years looking at attacks against the British Isles from an overseas power. It reaffirmed that a potential invasion could involve either a full-scale landing designed to inflict a crippling blow at the heart of the Empire or a less ambitious raid intended to distract and damage rather than subdue. The latter was considered the most threatening given the ability of a raiding party to conduct operations without first alerting the Royal Navy. It was concluded that this form of attack was most likely, and thereby the most ominous, following the despatch of the Expeditionary Force to the continent and before the

¹³⁹ 'Special Constables. Home Secretary's Advice to Authorities.' *Huddersfield Daily Examiner*, 20 August 1914, p. 2; 'Call for Volunteers.' *Birmingham Daily Post*, 20 August 1914, p. 7; 'Special Constables.' *Western Mail*, 21 August 1914, p. 6; 'Protection of Vulnerable Points.' *Western Daily Press*, 21 August 1914, p. 6 'Voluntary Service.' *Daily Gazette for Middlesbrough*, 21 August 1914, p. 4; 'The Civil Force to Join.' *Evening Dispatch*, 21 August 1914, p. 3; 'Formation of the Local Volunteer Civil Guard in West Sussex.' *Bexhill-on-Sea Observer*, 22 August 1914, p. 3.

¹⁴⁰ TNA CAB 3/2/62: Attack on the British Isles from Oversea, 15 April 1914; TNA CAB 3/2/72: Attack of the British Isles from Oversea, May 9 1914; TNA CAB 3/2/73: Attack of the British Isles from Oversea, 14 September 1914.

mobilisation of the Territorial Force had been completed.¹⁴¹ While this assessment reflected official opinion in 1914, it merely endorsed a series of previous reports, memorandum, and directives that had been considering home defence for five years. Thus, policy makers and those responsible for coordinating civil defence had not only been concerned with the prospect of foreign espionage during a future conflict, but they also regarded vulnerable points most liable to attack immediately following the outbreak of war. These perspectives undoubtedly filtered down and influenced local threat perceptions, and demonstrate how official concerns stimulated local outbreaks of spy fever.

In July 1909, Asquith approved the formation of a standing joint Naval and Military Committee to consider the defence of Britain's home ports.¹⁴² Little less than a month after its inception, though, the committee was tasked with the safeguarding of vulnerable points across the British Isles, and not simply coastal defences. This expanded mandate included assigning responsibility for the security of such locations and outlining the measures to be adopted in peacetime, before the outbreak of war, as well as during future conflict.¹⁴³ It specified two types of threat to be considered by the committee: 'attacks by an enemy's organised armed forces', and 'attacks by ill-disposed persons'.¹⁴⁴ But by 1910, home defence planning had become predicated on the assumption that attempts to cause damage would most likely be perpetrated by individuals rather than by raiding forces, and this official concern found expression

¹⁴¹ TNA CAB 3/2/62: Attack on the British Isles from Oversea, 15 April 1914, p. 5-7.

¹⁴² TNA CAB 38/15/13: Home Ports Defence Committee, It's Constitution, Functions, and Procedure, 1 July 1909.

¹⁴³ TNA CAB 17/28: Safeguarding of Vulnerable Point, 1909-1911. 'Home Ports Defence Committee. Note by the Secretary.' Vulnerable points included 'magazines, dockyards, large oil-stores, cable landing stations, wireless stations, private shipbuilding yards, railway bridges, tunnels, and other vulnerable points', p. 2.

¹⁴⁴ TNA CAB 17/28: 'Home Ports Defence Committee, Notes for 2nd Meeting. Protection of Vulnerable Points.' p. 55.

beyond the CID.¹⁴⁵ Against these threats, the committee recommended that the naval authorities should share responsibility with the police for the protection of dockyards, while the military authorities and the police would defend vulnerable points inland. Although general terms were agreed, the committee considered it unnecessary to outline specifics and advised that local police Commissioners be charged with outlining the details of their initiatives.¹⁴⁶ Thus, although espionage concerns originated from the government's strategic planning, the responsibility for dealing with spies was transferred to local authorities. It was through this interchange that central concerns connected with popular sentiment.

The War Office had similarly defined both espionage and attacks from ill-disposed persons as a realistic threat facing Britain. A memorandum produced in 1911 outlining preparations for a future conflict, stipulated that the early days of war would necessitate extreme vigilance. Although it refrained from hyperbolic assessments, it maintained that small bands of men armed with explosives would likely attempt to subvert mobilisations plans and military operations. As a result, it was instructed that upon the commencement of hostilities efforts to curtail espionage should be doubled and a careful watch kept on all undesirable aliens, friendly or otherwise.¹⁴⁷ The War Book of 1914 further emphasised that there were two principal objectives concerning the military forces in Britain during the Precautionary Period. The first involved the defence of British ports, while the second was to ensure that vulnerable points such as magazines, factories, wireless stations, cable landing places, the railways, and lines of communications were safeguarded.¹⁴⁸ It repeatedly emphasised the possibility of surprise attack and instructed Territorials to remain cautious, especially in proximity

¹⁴⁵ TNA CAB 17/107: Memorandum on the Principles Concerning the Defence of the United Kingdom, November 1910, p. 19; TNA CAB 17/29: Arming of the Police, 1910.

¹⁴⁶ TNA CAB 17/28: 'The Protection of Magazines', p. 122.

¹⁴⁷ TNA WO 32/9098: Memorandum on Duties of the Police in the Event of War, pp. 2-3.

¹⁴⁸ TNA WO 33/688: A War Book for the War Office, August 1914, p. 16.

to vulnerable points.¹⁴⁹ Additionally, Territorials were ordered to shoot suspected agitators to prevent civil disturbances if necessary.¹⁵⁰ Given the existence of prior directives emphasising the importance of vigilance to the defence of Britain, it is not surprising many Territorial soldiers reacted in the way that they did.

Within the conventional historiographical narrative, one of the principal proponents of the spy myth in Britain was Vernon Kell at the War Office. Owing to his centrality in British counter-espionage, Kell was well placed to discredit exaggerated threat assessments. Through intercepting the correspondence of known German agents, Kell was able to uncover the entire covert network operating in Britain before 1914. This provided the means to refute the existence of hidden saboteurs, and show that the extensive network thought to be planning an invasion was nothing more than a small, ill-equipped system concerned with Britain's naval and political affairs.¹⁵¹ But Kell's concerns persevered. He continued to believe that a vast military network remained undetected and repeatedly warned the Government that these highly trained covert agents were to be responsible for conducting subversive operations following the declaration of war.¹⁵² It is quite probable that Kell's fears filtered down in some form, given his contact with county constabularies, and analysing the correspondence between the government and local authorities suggest that similar concerns were highly influential in determining local security apprehensions.

¹⁴⁹ TNA WO 33/694: Home Defence. Central Force Scheme., pp. 8-9.

¹⁵⁰ TNA WO 33/651: Principal Questions Connected with Home Defence, and the Action which it is Still Necessary to Take, p. 18. When a sentry defending the Humber from ill-disposed persons shot a civilian for failing to halt after three challenges, the Commanding Officer displayed no alarm or remorse. His indifference towards the action of the sentry suggested that it was routine and expected, and not abnormal in anyway. TNA WO 95/5453: Commander Royal Artillery (Humber Defences), War Diary, 16 August 1914.

¹⁵¹ Hiley, 'The Failure of British Counter-Espionage Against Germany', p. 855.

¹⁵² WO 33/693: Intelligence Series. Home Defence (Germany), pp. 7-8.

With the declaration of the Precautionary Period on Wednesday 29 July, the Government rapidly sought to mobilise the nation against the potential of a sudden ‘bolt from the blue’. Local authorities were thus notified of the possibility that foreign agents could cripple the country’s readiness for war.¹⁵³ To ensure the cooperation of county constabularies, the Home Office re-issued a memorandum in July outlining the duties of the police in the event of war. Chief Constables were implored to adopt desperate measures to strengthen their force, and if sufficient numbers were not found in the police reserve, it was recommended that anyone accustomed to discipline and familiar with police work should be employed to guard vulnerable points.¹⁵⁴ The guidance issued by the Home Office undoubtedly prompted a degree of urgency that could easily be confused with severity by its recipients. Chief Constables were made aware of the importance of protecting locations liable to attack because it was anticipated that covert enemies intended to delay Britain’s immediate military capabilities by sabotaging vital strategic points.¹⁵⁵ More importantly, however, local initiative became imperative. It was stressed that ‘the Chief Constable will himself take any special precautions which he may have reason to believe are immediately necessary’.¹⁵⁶ Home Office circulars reiterated that particular attention was to be given to any location that may be of naval or military importance, and as war was declared existing measures were to be strengthened as far as possible.¹⁵⁷ Rather than adopting a national strategy against covert threats, therefore, untrained local police

¹⁵³ WO 33/688: A War Book for the War Office, pp. 16-9.

¹⁵⁴ TNA HO 144/10128: Memorandum: The Duties of the Police in the Event of War, 1914, Section 1: ‘Strengthening the Police Force’, p. 1.

¹⁵⁵ TNA CAB 38/15/16: Report of a sub-committee appointed to consider the question of foreign espionage in the UK, 1909, p. 6; Basil Thomson, *Queer People* (London, 2015) p. 35.

¹⁵⁶ TNA HO 144/10128: Section 5: ‘Protection of Vulnerable Points’, pp. 2-3.

¹⁵⁷ TNA HO 158/16: Home Office Circulars, Jan 1914 – June 1915, Circulars dated 30 July and 3 August 1914, pp. 93, 95.

officers were left to coordinate an almost military response to an unknown and potentially hostile force.¹⁵⁸

Notwithstanding the novelty of this task to police forces across Britain, and despite the significance attached to protecting vulnerable points, the Home Office never explicitly specified what constituted suspicious circumstances or how constables should react when confronted with a precarious situation. Moreover, protecting vulnerable points from espionage was only one of several additional duties assigned to the police in August 1914.¹⁵⁹ But because the Home Secretary lacked jurisdiction over provincial forces, circulars regarding police duties were not given as orders or instructions.¹⁶⁰ As a consequence, they merely amounted to recommended actions to proceed with, and precise details and measures were not forthcoming.¹⁶¹ Since the interpretation of suspicion remained reliant upon the disposition of individuals responsible for observing such activity it was inherently subjective. Consequently, the police faced a danger that was reportedly ubiquitous and imminent without the necessary experience or detailed instruction of how to locate or respond to the hidden enemy within their community. More significantly, Chief Constables never received a credible threat assessment, which left them oblivious to the scale of the threat and vulnerable to the exaggerations featured in the press. Aside from the Home Office's attempt to publicly suppress panic, the vagueness of much of their recommendations to County Constabularies stimulated unnecessary concern, which

¹⁵⁸ The Marquess of Londonderry condemned the negligence displayed by the Home Secretary in which 'he placed the responsibility on every single department except his own'. In response to McKenna delegating the entire responsibility of counter-espionage to Chief Constables, Londonderry highlighted the ambiguity and vagueness of the Home Office's policing strategy. *Hansard* 18 November 1914.

¹⁵⁹ Clive Emsley, *The English Police: A Social and Cultural History* (Harlow, 1996) p. 124.

¹⁶⁰ The Home Secretary's approval was required before the appointment of a Chief Constable, but this was his only influence over provincial policing. Clive Emsley, *The Great British Bobby: A History of British Policing from the 18th Century to the Present* (London, 2010) p. 87.

¹⁶¹ WO 32/9098: Duties of the Police in the Event of War, Letter dated 22 February 1913.

could dictate local measures, but more importantly, determine wider anxieties within their respective areas.

The information delivered to both Territorial soldiers and Police officers, therefore, merely introduced them to the dangers associated with the spy peril, but by only presenting them with the potential of this threat they allowed irrational suspicions to go unchallenged and eventually permeate the social consciousness. The death of James Edwards Carroll demonstrates how commands given to local authorities inadvertently caused unnecessary apprehension in the minds of those responsible for maintaining security. At five minutes to midnight, on 20 August, James Carroll died at the Cambridge Military Hospital in Aldershot after being shot by a Territorial soldier earlier that day. His death was not included in the earlier analysis of spy scares because he was never posthumously considered a spy. But it nonetheless highlights the heightened degree of suspicion overwhelming certain sections of society, most obviously the Territorial soldiers guarding vulnerable points. Although instructions given to Territorial forces across Britain never explicitly sought to provoke paranoia or panic, the inquest into Carroll's death used previous directives to legitimise the response of the soldiers responsible, which illustrates how official policies could stimulate extreme anxieties within local communities.

In the afternoon of 20 August, James Carroll, 27, who was both partially blind and hard of hearing, engaged in conversation with soldiers guarding a railway bridge close to his home in Farnham. He approached Private Maurice Wagner of the London Territorials and inquired into how many men were guarding the railway bridge and if all the bridges in the area were also guarded. Wagner quickly told him to move on,

and Carroll did as he was ordered.¹⁶² Although Bugler Hardy was off duty at the time, he witnessed the conversation and suggested that Wagner ought to have arrested him, as he ‘was a very suspicious man’, given the nature of his enquiry.¹⁶³ After Carroll ignored their challenges as he walked away, owing to his limited hearing, Hardy and Bugler Ireland ran along the train line to instruct Private Calfe to confront and arrest Carroll at the next post. During the inquest into Carroll’s death, Calfe testified that:

Hardy and Ireland came running towards me yelling at me. I saw the man. I waited till he came round the road towards my bridge. I challenged him, shouting out ‘halt’. He looked up and made no reply. I challenged him again. The same thing happened, Then 5 of us challenged him. He looked up and passed under the bridge. We all crossed to the other side to meet him coming out. We challenged him once more. He began to move off at a sharp trot. He was then about 30 yards away, I thought for a few seconds what I had better do. I thought better not run down to him because he might have firearms. I fired one shot and he fell in the roadway.¹⁶⁴

There was some form of deliberation in Calfe’s thought process, and his response was not conditioned by a personal, uncontrollable fear. Although he hesitated, he felt assured that the only conceivable response to this situation was to fire on the suspect, owing to Carroll’s suspicious nature and Calfe’s inability to leave his post. The degree of calculation within Calfe’s testimony intimates that he had previously acquired an understanding of the precariousness of allowing a ‘suspicious’ person to continue unimpeded, as well as instruction on how to react when faced with the object of danger.

During the inquiry into Carroll’s death, held less than two weeks after incident occurred, the War Office showed little remorse and sought to support the reaction of

¹⁶² TNA WO 32/13745: Legal Authority for Military and Police Guarding Railways to Challenge and Fire on People, Report of Inquest: Testimony of Private Wagner.

¹⁶³ Ibid. Report of Inquest: Testimony of Bugler Hardy.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid. Report of Inquest: Testimony of Private Calfe.

the Territorials at Farnham. The defence rested on recently ratified wartime legislation. It was suggested that ‘what was done was done under the powers conferred by the proclamation regarding the defence of the Realm’.¹⁶⁵ While there was some initial doubt as to whether Carroll should have been arrested because the incident occurred in broad daylight, a notice issued by Lord Lucan, in command of the Territorial Brigade in question, was used to justify the shooting as it ‘seems to amount to instructions’.¹⁶⁶ The notice, dated 6 August 1914, read:

1. All unauthorised persons are forbidden to trespass on or loiter in the neighbourhood of Railways, Railway Bridges, or Tunnel Shafts.
2. Any person found disobeying these orders will be arrested and handed over to the civil police.
3. Any persons refusing to halt when repeatedly ordered to do so by a Sentry or Patrol, or resisting Sentries or Patrols in the execution of their duty may be fired on.¹⁶⁷

To substantiate their case further, the War Office suggested that:

There is no question of shooting or killing a civilian on the high road; any person of normal intelligence must know that in time of war sentries are armed with ball ammunition and that challenges must be obeyed.

While there were no written documents to support this view, Lord Lucan’s notice provided appropriate warning and sufficient validation for the behaviour that resulted in the death of James Carroll.¹⁶⁸ The War Office also pointed to previous events that occurred on an earlier night in an attempt to exonerate the soldiers’ conduct. They surmised that because of earlier alleged incidents the men involved had ‘reasonable grounds for supposing that attacks might be made’.¹⁶⁹ Within this argument, fear and

¹⁶⁵ Ibid. Section 2, Lt. McAnally to Treasury Solicitor, Letter dated 21 August 1914.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid. Section 3, ‘Inquest on Civilian named Carroll at Aldershot.’

¹⁶⁷ Ibid. Report of Inquest: ‘Notice’.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid. Section 5, Letter dated 25 August 1914.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid. Section 3, ‘Inquest on Civilian named Carroll at Aldershot’.

anxiety had become an acceptable emotional response among Territorial soldiers defending vulnerable points across Britain. Since these emotions had evidently become the dominant and appropriate responses in this context, it illustrates the degree of influence that notices issued by authorities had on soldiers following the outbreak of war. It was also concluded that ‘when dealing with the defences of communications in time of war the safety of the state is the supreme law’.¹⁷⁰ The language invoked by the War Office in light of this episode shows the importance of securing the safety of the realm, something that had become more important than any individual’s life.

The jury at the inquest deemed the sentry innocent of any wrongdoing and agreed with the War Office that the defence of the British Isles exempted violence against British civilians if necessary.¹⁷¹ Although this suggests the war had already encouraged an acceptance of increased state powers, it also demonstrates that it was reasonable for soldiers to react with extreme vigilance and suspicion since they had been instructed to do so. There is therefore a direct connection between central government policies, the provincial authorities tasked with the implementation of official directives, and the individuals responsible for conducting them. Thus, the responses of local officials in August 1914 to the alleged spy threat were far from spontaneous. They had been cultivated during a decade of inquiries and policies that had considered and determined the threat of espionage, and were not products of an organic social anxiety.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid. Report of Inquest, A.H. Dennis to W.H. Foster, Letter dated 25 August 1914.

¹⁷¹ TNA WO 32/13745: Section 7, Letter dated 29 August 1914.



On his way to the War Office to volunteer his services in August 1914, Professor Gardiner recorded a ‘strange spectacle’. As he was walking along one of London’s busy streets, he noticed a crowd of people gathering in angst. He discovered that the source of panic was a crack opening in the road and he found people screaming, ‘Germans! Germans!’ ‘Would you believe it’, he wrote, ‘the crowd, or some of them, were picturing the bulge suddenly opening and armed Germans emerging to start the dreaded invasion of England?’ Fortunately for Gardiner, it proved to be nothing more than a burst water pipe.¹⁷² Like many similar anecdotes, this represents a flourishing anxiety across Britain. Such delusional accounts supposedly illustrating the size and significance of the phobia inevitably echoed the culturally established assessments of German espionage, which themselves reflected conventional understanding of apparent dangers. The validity of individual delusions, therefore, is inconsequential. Outlandish claims such as Germans soldiers tunnelling all the way to London required extensive and regular contact with alarmist rhetoric assimilating invasion narratives with images of spies conquering Britain.

This chapter has thus determined the process through which the feelings consistent with spy fever developed in August 1914. By exploring how emotions are formed and experienced, and situating spy fever within the context of Victorian and Edwardian scaremongering, it has highlighted the problems in understanding spy phobias as an impulsive, popular panic. Since emotional responses merely represent the acceptance of cultural constructs, how society became aware of the object of danger, how they became accustomed to the promoted feelings, and finally, how the

¹⁷² Liddle DF 148/1/54: Professor A.D. Gardiner, Memoir, p. 96.

two became affiliated, need to be taken into consideration instead of ignoring the complexity of their origin. This emotional regime, like other regimes centred on fear and anxiety, emerged through the creation and application of a particular object of danger that demanded vigilance and suspicion. Consequently, spy fever was not purely a social phenomenon, but neither was it a conscious attempt to incite panic. While it was facilitated by central government concerns, it was conveyed by local authorities, and galvanised by the press.

Within the pages of popular periodicals, there was a virulent attempt to construct an emotional regime centred on suspicion, which challenges previous arguments that the British public became apprehensive towards the spy peril without any form of coercion or manipulation. This rhetoric undoubtedly represented an attempt to install a particular emotional regime designed to encourage concern, anxiety, and fear, feelings that were intended to mobilise the civil population against a potential enemy within. While it offered a precedent and a framework for society to develop their emotional reaction, it postulated that the rationale for such emotions was the continued safety of the realm, and provided language to interpret said emotion that centred around the desired feelings. Analysing the reports describing outbreaks of panic reveal that local authorities were most often responsible for creating alarm, and thus arguably most susceptible to the advocated emotional response. Although connecting the rhetoric emerging in August 1914 with emotions remains subjective, panic was more likely to manifest in areas with a significant presence of security measures. Moreover, the direct correlation between locations of official concern and popular alarm demonstrates the impact of official perspectives on wider, social developments. Rather than evidence of widespread social anxieties, spy scares should be considered as products of an intense nervousness that was experienced by various

local authorities during August 1914. Official principles governing home defence explicitly directed concerns against the spy threat and sanctioned hostile reactions. Since the resulting spy scares materialised immediately following the declaration of war, reported alarms should be seen as further coercive measures. While they legitimised the rhetoric promoting the object of concern, they publicly displayed the effectiveness of the emotional disposition necessary for the British public to engage the enemy within.

A close analysis of spy fever in August 1914 also highlights some of its more nuanced characteristics. The disparity evident across various locations implies that there was a degree of agency in an individual's willingness to accept, or at least in their readiness to perpetuate, spy fever. Although spy fever was an undeniably prominent reaction in August 1914, the geographic dispersion of panic questions its pervasiveness following the initial outbreak. The association of espionage phobias with invasion fears suggest it was a manipulation of pre-existing attitudes that were themselves not comprehensively accepted. By drawing attention to the receptiveness of local authorities to spy fever in comparison with the general public, as well as the inconsistencies within official measures and media narratives across Britain, this chapter has illustrated the importance of examining the extent of spy fever across Britain throughout a much broader period. How this emotional regime was engaged with and experienced by individuals is the subject of the following chapter.

Chapter 2. Understanding Spy Fever

Historians have often had difficulty understanding spy fever because of its appearance as an irrational or unfathomable phobia. Historiographical accounts often focus on the severity of the paranoia while highlighting the fallacy of the actual threat. Christopher Andrew's pioneering work on the origins of the British intelligence community claims that:

The outbreak of war provoked an unprecedented wave of spy mania. Though the twenty-one real German spies were arrested immediately, many thousands of imaginary agents remained at liberty plotting imaginary acts of sabotage and communicating with the enemy... Even more remarkable than the scale of Le Queux's own fabrications and delusions was the readiness with which others believed them.¹

This repeated distinction between the real and imaginary has dominated historical analyses.² Panayi, for example, concludes his examination of social reactions to Germans living in Britain with a summary of the physical presence of German espionage in Britain to accentuate the outlandishness of the hysteria, while James Hampshire is eager to point out that it 'was based on fallacy and fantasy'.³ Portraying spy phobias as delusions has fixed the historiography on society's unfounded suspicion and emphasised the peculiarity of the phenomenon. This comparison has created the impression that an increased concern reflected a foolish and futile emotional state. But the reality of German espionage in Britain is irrelevant to

¹ Andrew, *Secret Service*, pp. 264-7.

² De Groot, *Blighty: British Society in the era of the Great War*, pp. 159-60; Holman, 'Constructing the Enemy Within', pp. 22-42; Gaspard, 'A Lesson Lived is a Lesson Learned', pp. 8-15.

³ Panayi, *Enemy Within*, p. 181-3; Hampshire, 'Spy Fever in Britain', p. 24.

historical analyses regarding spy phobias. Situating spy fever in a broader historical context demonstrates the prevalence of similar terrors, while stressing the importance of understanding how society comprehended these fears and how they shaped wartime experience. The intention of this chapter is thus concerned with interpreting espionage fears as a legitimate form of wartime anxiety and move away from attempts to contrast emotional reactions against the validity of such feelings.

In spite of the purported irrationality of spy fever, a growing body of scholarship declares that fear and anxiety have been central components of past and contemporary life.⁴ Jean Delumeau has illustrated the role of fear throughout Europe between the Middle Ages and the eighteenth-century, and argues that fears of death and damnation were powerful ideas that regulated and disciplined societies. Anxieties were intensified by intermittent famine and frequent military conflict, and were both further exacerbated by pervasive beliefs regarding the dangers of witchcraft.⁵ Corey Robin and Frank Furedi similarly contend that the absence of any inspiring alternative or political purpose within modern politics has elicited the continuous employment of fear in Western political theory. They argue that fear and anxiety have been increasingly manipulated to motivate political discussion from as early as Hobbes onwards.⁶ Marla Stone likewise demonstrates the significance of similar fears to modern politics. She adds that conceptions of the enemy, whether the ‘Arab’ of contemporary politics or the ‘Hun’ of the First World War illustrate substantial

⁴ Peter N. Stearns, ‘Fear and Contemporary History: A Review Essay’, *Journal of Social History* 40/2 (2006) p. 477; Joanna Bourke, *Fear: A Cultural History* (London, 2014) p. ix; Haynes Johnson, *The Age of Anxiety: McCarthyism to Terrorism* (Orlando, 2005) pp. 459-93.

⁵ Jean Delumeau, *Sin and Fear: The Emergence of a Western Guilt Culture, 13th-18th Centuries* (Basingstoke, 1990).

⁶ Robin, C., *Fear: The History of a Political Idea* (Oxford, 2004) pp. 1-3, 23-5, 31; Furedi, F., *Politics of Fear* (London, 2005) p. 8.

commonalities.⁷ While contextualising spy fever challenges the uniqueness of the phenomenon, by looking at the historical specificity, both collectively and individually, we can reach new understandings about the politics of fear on the British home front.

To analysing fear, Joanna Bourke, separates individual phobias from collective apprehension. Whereas the former affects human beings regardless of their personal or social circumstances, such as the fear of death, pain, and disease; the latter reflect moments of heightened social anxiety, either in the form of what she terms ‘moral panics’ or in response to natural or unforeseen disasters, such as an earthquake or nuclear fallout. Accordingly, these various fears represent entirely different experiences and stimulate their own set of feelings.⁸ Although Robin contends that private phobias are merely aspects of our own physiology and typically have limited impact beyond the individual, Bourke suggests that social hysteria commonly forms shared identities separate from former definitions previously forged through gender or class.⁹ In the presence of danger, therefore, a mass of frightened individuals can become unified through mutual fear. Although collective anxiety can be manufactured without sudden catastrophe, this process was rarely benign. Fundamental to it was the establishment of an evil ‘other’, as through a shared hatred society collaborates to dispel the object of terror.¹⁰

Bourke concludes ‘that there is nothing inherently wrong about fear’, and in many circumstances, fear is an appropriate emotion. Not only can fear be beneficial to encourage people to behave in safer ways, but it also acts as a ‘civilising’ incentive.

⁷ Marla Stone, ‘Italian Fascism’s Wartime Enemy and the Politics of Fear’ and Max Weiss, ‘Introduction: Fear and its Opposites in the History of Emotions’, in Michael Laffan and Max Weiss, *Facing Fear*, pp. 6-9, 114-5.

⁸ David Runciman, ‘Review of Joanna Bourke, *Fear: A Cultural History*’, *American Historical Review* 112/4 (2007) p. 1147.

⁹ Robin, *Fear: The History of a Political Idea*, p. 2.

¹⁰ Bourke, *Fear: A Cultural History*, pp. 326, 66-70.

Building on the work of sociologists, Bourke uses the term ‘moral panics’, to describe how fear is manipulated and sustained by powerful interest groups seeking to capitalise on its proliferation.¹¹ While scared observers attempt to express their emotion, the media often convey the emotion through familiar fictive models enabling society to cope with and understand their terror.¹² Daniel Kapust demonstrates that, even in antiquity, writers such as Plato, Aristotle, and Thucydides recognised that this type of fear provided moral energy and political unity.¹³ Robin makes similar observations about modern liberal political philosophies and claims that fears play an essential role. Fear brought stability and security for authors such as Hobbes, Montesquieu, and Tocqueville, providing both moral sustenance and political harmony.¹⁴ In other words, fear of the other within a particular society can have a regulating and controlling effect on collective behaviour. Through the creation of an enemy, society can define itself by what it is not. Especially under stress, unifying national identities employing racial, religious, and patriotic symbols are defended against a suggested foreign influence.¹⁵

Analysing the historiographical treatment of fear provides a useful framework to interpret the phenomenon of spy fever. As a central component of political engagement, the way in which fears were constructed around the spy threat and disseminated between August 1914 and December 1915 needs to be considered without applying concepts such as irrationality or futility. This chapter, therefore, focuses on the wider development of espionage phobias following the construction of

¹¹ For the concept of moral panic see, Stanley Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics: The Creation of the Mods and Rockers* (London, 2011).

¹² Bourke, *Fear: A Cultural History*, pp. 58, 385, 389-90.

¹³ Daniel J. Kapust, ‘On the Ancient Uses of Political Fear and its Modern Implications’, *Journal of the History of Ideas* 69/3 (2008) p. 356, 372.

¹⁴ Robin, *Fear: The History of a Political Idea*, p. 11-2.

¹⁵ Robert S. Robins, *Political Paranoia: The Psychopolitics of Hatred* (London, 1997) pp. 89-94; Paul Newman, *A History of Terror: Fear and Dread Through the Ages* (Stroud, 2000) pp. 196-7.

the spy threat in August 1914. It first analyses contemporary notions of what ‘spy fever’ entailed, drawing upon a range of first-hand accounts that discussed the nature of spy fever. Not only will this definition provide a much greater insight into how contemporaries understood this psychological condition, but it will also offer a useful tool for interpreting and comparing the way in which spy fears were constructed in popular discourse. Owing to the availability of primary source material, the analysis inevitably favours upper middle class perspectives. Every effort has been made to uncover evidence of lower class responses to the spy threat, and these can be gleaned from several sources, but how they individually articulated their fears and experience is difficult to reconstruct.

The remainder of the chapter is then concerned with how spy phobias were experienced and understood based on Bourke’s distinction between collective and individual fears. The second section analyses the processes through which spy phobias developed publicly during the opening months of the war. It demonstrates that the rhetoric conveying the significance of the threat was subject to change, which reflects a transformation within the composition of the emotional regime that had been developing since August 1914. Whereas the early weeks of war witnessed numerous outbursts of intense fear, inferring that many individuals perceived themselves to be in immediate danger, by mid-September spy fears had become a prominent collective concern that rarely produced individual physical reactions. While this still represented a state of fear, the nature of this fear had evolved. Anxiety remained pivotal in forming shared national identities, and as a result, a collective fear of spies remained highly visible beyond August 1914. Although it is necessary to establish the emotional norms that were consistent with spy phobias, personal reactions to the spy threat cannot be discerned through analysing mere discourse. The

final section thus examines individual cases of terror to understand how spy phobias were articulated. More importantly, it will measure the impact of spy fever to understand the relationship between individual fears and collective emotions. Determining the influence of the emotional regime upon the formation of individual fears is fundamental in establishing the pervasiveness of spy fever more generally. Comparisons between these two dimensions of the spy threat – the individual and the collective – demonstrate that the routine portrayal of spy fever as a malady that ‘defied treatment’ was generated by the continual presence of espionage within popular discourse, rather than the hegemony of individual fears, which were often momentary and ineffectual. As the examination of personal concerns demonstrates, the shared acceptance and perpetuation of spy fever within public discourse should not be mistaken for individual pervasiveness, and consequently, the extremity of the spy rhetoric should not be confused with evidence of a delusional paranoia or irrational phobia.

DEFINING ‘SPY FEVER’

When Lucien Febvre initially called for a history of emotions in 1941, he criticised scholars for unconsciously and anachronistically including emotions in their work. Without regard to how emotional terms were comprehended by former cultures and societies, he argued that historians had unwittingly imposed their ideas of emotion onto the past.¹⁶ As a concept with a historical relevance and meaning, historians must first comprehend the way in which ‘spy fever’ was used during the First World War and then consider whether it is a helpful analytical tool. Since contemporaries used

¹⁶ Plamper, *History of Emotions*, p. 41.

‘fever’ and ‘mania’ synonymously, I make no distinction between the two, and simply use fever to avoid confusion. Although the current historiographical narrative of spy fever is entirely consistent with earlier interpretations of the First World War, as these explanations have given way to more nuanced analyses, our understanding of spy fever should also be subject to certain revisions. Consequently, this section examines how its users understood the concept of ‘spy fever’, to ascertain a contemporary definition that will allow evidence of spy phobias to be interpreted and used appropriately.

Where historians have attempted to define spy fever they have often reproduced a definition coined in 1922 by Basil Thomson, formerly Assistant Commissioner at Scotland Yard, who wrote that:

In August 1914 the malady assumed a virulent epidemic form accompanied by delusions which defied treatment. It attacked all classes indiscriminately and seemed even to find its most fruitful soil in sober, stolid, and otherwise truthful people.¹⁷

Historians should perhaps be excused for inferring a degree of irrationality to the symptoms of spy fever. Many contemporary accounts often equated spy fever with a degree lunacy. In October 1914, for instance, *The Nation* wrote that:

The spy-mania is the subtlest and most contagious of epidemics. Its bacillus arises by spontaneous generation out of fear. It finds its nidus among the suspicions latent in every brain. It feeds on the universal love of mysteries, and on the general antipathy towards every stranger. It propagates itself in the close atmosphere of inactive apprehension, and sweeps through cities like bubonic plague or financial panic on the Stock Exchange. Some minds are so prone to the disease that they gibber of spies

¹⁷ Thomson, *Queer People*, p. 37; Andrew, *Secret Service*, p. 264; Pennell, *A Kingdom United*, p. 102. Although French and Panayi do not explicitly define what it is they mean by the term spy fever, their examination of it suggests something not too distant from this particular characterisation.

even in times of profound tranquillity. To suppose oneself haunted by spies is a symptom of approaching dementia recognised in all asylums.¹⁸

Building upon Thomson's work, Catriona Pennell claims that 'fever' is an appropriate description for this atmosphere because it not only describes the hysteria or delirium similar to that felt by an intensification of temperature, but it also suggests a malady within the body'.¹⁹ By referring to it as a bodily condition, akin to a mental disorder, historians reflect the common assumptions made by prominent contemporaries. But employing language such as 'epidemic', 'atmosphere', and 'hysteria', presumes that a culture of inescapable and infectious anxiety existed, while speculating that the effects mirrored 'deliriums' that allegedly 'defied treatment'.²⁰ Since this definition explicitly requires a physical reaction, in this case equated with a rise in temperature that typically accompanies a fever, the severity and duration of the effects represents a considerable disorder. Using this definition, therefore, creates the impression that spy fever was extensive, both through its pervasiveness and longevity.

Despite the common practice of employing the term spy fever to describe Edwardian anxieties, one of the earliest contemporaneous associations of espionage phobias with mental conditions came in 1870, during the Franco-Prussian War.²¹ Although the beginning of an anti-German sentiment in Britain is also often considered to have originated in the 1870s, this particular notion of spy fever did not relate to British xenophobia; instead, it was used to describe French attitudes believed

¹⁸ 'I-SPY-I.' *The Nation*, 16/4 (October, 1914) p. 113.

¹⁹ Pennell, *A Kingdom United*, p. 102. This has become a prevalent analogy within the historiography. For examples, see: Hampshire, 'Spy Fever in Britain', p. 24; Gaspard, 'A Lesson Lived is a Lesson Learned', p. 12.

²⁰ Marthe McKenna, a British spy in Belgium during the war, made similar observations about the 'spy mania' affecting the invading German soldiers: *I Was A Spy!* (London, 1932) p. 27.

²¹ The accepted belief that German espionage was widespread prior to the Franco-Prussian War was also assumed to be evidence of its contemporary prevalence in 1914: Lionel James, *The German Spy System From Within by Ex-Intelligence Officer* (London, 1914) p. 41.

to be materialising in Paris.²² Although the subsequent interpretation and portrayal of such phobias appeared over forty years before the outbreak of the First World War, it nevertheless provides an insight into the way in which British society perceived this ‘malady’ and what they understood to have constituted it, before it had any considerable effect in Britain. From its earliest conception, the idea contained an array of medical connotations. The panic and suspicion caused by foreign aggression, for instance, was commonly associated with the impact of a medieval plague:

In the middle ages, when plague invaded a town and the inhabitants were thrown into a panic in consequence, an extremely common result was to suspect each stranger of being in some way or other concerned in the introduction of the cause of death The condition into which Paris has just been thrown closely resembles, in its unreasoning terror of strangers, the state of a middle age town in which the plague had broken out. Every unfamiliar face is denounced as that of a Prussian spy, and both the ordinary inhabitants and strangers live, move, and have their being in an atmosphere of distrust and alarm that reminds one of nothing so much as a small company of birds feeding, every crumb pecked at giving occasion for swift and shy glances in all directions to make sure that danger will not descend when in the act of appropriating the needful sustenance. The ordinary inhabitants keep looking out for spies, and the strangers to see if they are suspected of being spies.²³

While this undoubtedly reinforces Thomson’s contention that anxiety and suspicion were the primary characteristics of spy fever, it also suggests that concern could appear more prominent than it actually was, chiefly because the object of danger was only loosely defined. Although concern was theoretically aimed at a small demographic group, which should have restrained the degree of anxiety, the inability to distinguish distinct physical characteristics of the individuals believed to be

²² Holmes, *John Bull’s Island*, pp. 62-3; David Stafford, *The Silent Game: The Real World of Imaginary Spies* (Athens, 1991) p. 8

²³ ‘The Prussian Spy Fever’, *Western Daily Press*, 17 August 1870, p. 2

dangerous, owing to ambiguous representations of what constituted the threat, made the 'spy' difficult to recognise.²⁴ As mass immigration had intermittently increased during the latter half of the Nineteenth Century, the nation was no longer understood as a single coherent ethnicity. Especially as neighbouring populations had few obvious distinctions, identifying a potential adversary became increasingly problematic, which exacerbated the situation for both suspect and victim, making a relatively reasonable anxiety seem irrational and absurd.

Early comparisons with the medieval plague, however, also contradict elements within the conventional description.²⁵ Whereas post-war commentators and historians both emphasise the national significance of spy fever as well as its extensiveness, medieval plagues were often localised affairs. While they could become widespread, simultaneously infecting an entire country was rare.²⁶ Except, in this case, if newspapers were the carrier by which the disease was metaphorically spread, then theoretically at least, it could have immediate national implications.²⁷ But this account identifies an individual location, Paris, as the affected zone, which appears as a common theme in many of the reports.²⁸ Like the plague, this outbreak of spy fever was recognised to be an intermittent condition that could repeatedly resurface as well as spread through interaction with adjacent areas.²⁹ Referring to it as

²⁴ Horatio Bottomley, for example, highlighted the difficulty in identifying a possible spy to contend that all German born people and not just men of military age should be interned: 'Spies, Bombs and Butchery.' *John Bull* Vol. XVII No. 439, 31 October 1914, p. 4.

²⁵ H.C. Bywater and H.C Ferraby, *Strange Intelligence: Memoirs of a Naval Secret Service* (London, 1931) pp.165-6.

²⁶ John Theilman and Frances Cate, 'A Plague of Plagues: The Problem of Plague Diagnosis in Medieval England', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 37/3 (2007) p. 373.

²⁷ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London, 1983) pp. 38-45; Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics*, p. 11; Erich Good and Nachman Ben-Yehuda, 'Grounding and Defending the Sociology of Moral Panic', in Sean P. Heir (ed.), *Moral Panic and the Politics of Anxiety* (Abingdon, 2011) p. 21.

²⁸ 'Paris Transformed.' *London Daily News*, 9 September 1870, p. 5; 'The French Revolution.' *Exeter and Plymouth Gazette*, 10 September 1870, p. 4; 'Spy-Catching in Paris.' *Glasgow Evening Post*, 6 October 1870, p. 2; 'The Spy-Fever.' *The Cornish Telegraph*, 19 October 1870, p. 4.

²⁹ 'Spy Fever in France.' *Cork Constitution*, 21 October 1870, p. 4; 'Notes from Boulogne.' *London Daily News*, 6 December 1870, p. 6.

an epidemic, therefore, requires some form of geographic qualification. Moreover, symptoms were commonly associated with a discernible group rather than society as a whole, as sufferers were often depicted as a ‘mob’ with a bad temper and an intolerance of strangers.³⁰ By portraying sufferers as a distinctive group, it conforms to the criteria of an epidemic, while also challenging the assumed ubiquity and comprehensiveness of spy fever. By distinguishing between victims of spy fever and society more generally, individuals were seemingly able to remain immune from the contagion, which needs further exploration within the context of the First World War.

Spy fever continued to be likened to a bodily condition throughout the conflict.³¹ It was commonly associated with an ‘attack of nerves’, but as a transient condition ‘this neurasthenia’ could disappear almost as quickly as it emerged.³² In spite of the rapidity with which spy fever could infect and dissipate, the application of ‘spy fever’ to a particular incident required a visibly intense outburst of emotion.³³ In parallel to the anxiety caused by medieval epidemics, only acute panic and suspicion could signify the presence of spy fever.³⁴ In London, for instance, it was felt that ‘the metropolis is behaving very sensibly and humanely’, and despite the multitude of arrests ‘there has been nothing remotely approaching a spy fever’.³⁵ Within this interpretation, the term was used to refer to a severe upsurge in popular emotion,

³⁰ ‘Western Times Daily.’ *Western Times*, 18 August 1870, p. 2; ‘The Paris Mob.’ *The Canterbury Journal and Farmers’ Gazette*, 27 August 1870, p. 2; ‘The Spy Fever.’ *Bradford Daily Telegraph*, 6 October 1870, p. 4; ‘The Spy Fever in France.’ *Cork Constitution*, 21 October 1870, p. 4.

³¹ Haig’s Chief of Intelligence, for instance, felt that ‘spy-fever’ was the ‘prevailing ailment’ facing soldiers on the Western Front in 1914: John Charteris, *At GHQ* (London, 1931) p. 43.

³² ‘Behaviour of the People.’ *Rochdale Observer*, 6 February 1915, p. 4; ‘Spies in Society.’ *Edinburgh Evening News*, 25 August 1914, p. 2. Vera Brittain described the periods of agitation as ‘intermittent’: *Testament of Youth: An Autobiographical Study of the Years 1900-1925* (London, 1933) p. 52.

³³ William Le Queux, *The German Spy System from Within* (London, 1915) p. 22.

³⁴ Peel, *How We Lived Then*, p. 39; Thomas Coulson, *The Queen of Spies: Louise De Bettignies* (London, 1935) p. 21.

³⁵ ‘Germans in London. Treated with sympathy and respect.’ *Nantwich Guardian*, 14 August 1914, p.2; ‘Our London Letter.’ *Lichfield Mercury*, 14 August 1914, p. 3.

which was entirely separate from official security measures.³⁶ Consequently, popular discourses often distinguished between sanctioned measures designed to combat the threat and ‘over-zealous’ individuals succumbing to the effects of spy fever:

More incidents are to hand of the hardship and annoyance to which various persons have been subjected through the unthinking and over-zealous action of persons who have become infected with what may be termed ‘the spy fever.’ No doubt it is highly desirable, in view of the large number of Germans and Austrians that there are in this country, that the authorities should keep a vigilant eye upon residents of these nationalities, and take prompt action in case of reasonable grounds for suspicion.³⁷

Contemporaries, therefore, separated spy fever from appropriate levels of concern and vigilance; measures adopted by the authorities hardly amounted to a spy fever. Instead, the term was predominantly reserved for extreme social anxieties.³⁸ Historians, then, should be wary of interpreting such measures as evidence of a spy fever.

Besides referring to spy fever as a form of neurasthenia, it also supposedly operated in a manner comparable to an infectious disease that could break out in numerous epidemics.³⁹ As a result, it was believed that ‘anyone could get the spy mania’, and that the contagion ‘grew and grew and grew’.⁴⁰ Just as the Black Death allegedly gained access to Britain through the south coast ports, early evidence of the contagion was reported to have appeared in Portsmouth and Southampton by 3 August 1914.⁴¹ Nevertheless, at this early stage, it was merely notable by its appearance and had yet to gain endemic proportions. By its very nature, however, an

³⁶ Sidney Theodore Felstead, *German Spies at Bay: Being an Actual Record of the German Espionage in Great Britain during the years 1914-1918, compiled from Official Sources* (London, 1920) pp.41-4.

³⁷ ‘More spy myths.’ *Middlesex Chronicle*, 22 August 1914, p. 3.

³⁸ ‘War Notes.’ *Derby Daily Telegraph*, 29 September 1914, p. 2.

³⁹ Sir George Aston, *Secret Service* (London, 1930) p. 79.

⁴⁰ Parliamentary Archives, John St Loe Strachey Papers, STR/10/3/5: Letter dated 19 October 1914; J.M.N. Jeffries, *Front Everywhere* (London, 1935) p. 103.

⁴¹ ‘Spy Mania.’ *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser*, 3 August 1914, p. 10.

epidemic typically only related to a specific locality, and so varying reactions to the spy threat could occur.⁴² It was not uncommon for commentators to refer to specific locations in regards to bouts of spy fever.⁴³ The *Walsall Advertiser*, for instance, claimed that ‘Walsall does not appear to have suffered so severely from ‘spy mania’ as some other parts of the country,’ but regardless of this supposed immunity, the level of infection was inevitably subject to change.⁴⁴ As a result, the language used to describe these panics suggests that they were typically considered temporary conditions that abated after suspicions proved unjustifiable.⁴⁵ Outbreaks of fear could therefore defuse as quickly as they emerged:

Spies we have caught in our midst. But there has been no panic and the spy mania quickly died down when it was obvious that the civil authorities had all undesirable aliens well under observation.⁴⁶

In light of a historical notion of spy fever, analyses that appear to presume the extent of its pervasiveness ignore local discrepancies as well as the sporadic and transient nature of its effects. Contemporary opinions supposed that spy fever viciously ‘attacked’ a certain location, ‘infecting’ civil society with acute forms of suspicion and anxiety, which resulted in an intense panic. Contrary to retrospective accounts of spy fever, however, these attacks were inexorably short-lived and geographically restricted, each of which suggests that spy fever had very little sustained national implications over a prolonged period of time.

Furthermore, even within locations ostensibly experiencing a spy fever, it was rare for the entire community to be affected. The *Thanet Advertiser* referred to spy

⁴² ‘Panic in Cologne.’ *Birmingham Mail*, 2 October 1914, p. 2.

⁴³ Russell Stannard, *With the Dictators of Fleet Street: The Autobiography of an Ignorant Journalist* (London, 1934) p. 56.

⁴⁴ ‘Spy Mania.’ *Walsall Advertiser*, 22 August 1914, p. 4.

⁴⁵ ‘Spies’ at Brentwood.’ *Chelmsford Chronicle*, 14 August 1914, p. 5.

⁴⁶ ‘Changing Their Names.’ *Kirkintilloch Herald*, 19 August 1914, p. 2.

fever as ‘a disease which is said to afflict a small portion of the community’.⁴⁷ Even in areas with a particularly conspicuous spy fever, the degree of ‘contamination’ was seldom comprehensive, and individuals could remain unaffected depending on their proximity, both geographically and demographically, to those advocating a spy phobia.⁴⁸ In *Thoughts and Adventures* (1932), Winston Churchill’s description of spy fever clearly differed from Thomson’s. Rather than an indiscriminate paranoia, Churchill thought that ‘there is a well-defined class of people prone to ‘spy-mania’ and whose minds are peculiarly affected by anything in the nature of espionage’.⁴⁹ Edward Glover, a wartime psychologist examining the relationship between war, fear, and morale, echoed Churchill’s observation. He found that ‘the spy-maniac is usually a ‘nosey’ type of person who is secretly alarmed by the war. He is also a rather aggressive person. Consequently he is unsure of himself, secretly doubtful of the integrity of his own patriotism’.⁵⁰ Discourse also alluded to the exclusivity of spy fever, which suggests that the effects were more noticeable among certain individuals. Even in metropolitan areas, only particular districts were considered to have witnessed heightened levels of paranoia.⁵¹ As a result, spy fever was commonly associated with a disorder particularly prolific among the lower classes of society.⁵² Although the panic had become fairly extensive, when the *Walsall Advertiser* depicted the effects of a local spy fever for example, it was not considered universal:

Spy mania appears to have affected some people in Walsall to such an extent as to have temporarily relieved them of their common sense ... A local tradesman was

⁴⁷ *Thanet Advertiser*, 2 January 1915, p. 4.

⁴⁸ ‘Jottings of the Week.’ *Falkirk Herald*, 15 August 1914, p. 4; ‘More Spy Myths.’ *Middlesex Chronicle*, 22 August 1914, p. 3.

⁴⁹ James W. Muller (ed.), Winston Spencer Churchill, *Thoughts and Adventures: Churchill Reflects on Spies, Cartoons, Flying, and the Future* (Delaware, 2009) p. 89.

⁵⁰ Edward Glover, *The Psychology of Fear and Courage* (Harmondsworth, 1940) p. 54.

⁵¹ ‘Bon-Accord Gossip.’ *Aberdeen Evening Express*, 15 August 1914, p. 4; ‘Hunting out the Spies.’ *Daily Herald*, 24 October 1914, p. 7.

⁵² ‘The Enemy in our Midst.’ *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser*, 21 October 1914, p. 4.

subjected to scandalous treatment by a mob whose conduct was about as un-British as it possibly could be ... people began to congregate in groups outside the shop, and it was not long before there was a big crowd, including a large number of roughs. The situation rapidly developed; there were cries of 'Fetch the German out,' coloured with a liberal use of adjectives, threats were made to smash the window and to ransack the shop, and the mob, which numbered about a thousand, generally displayed a very ugly temper.⁵³

The association of spy fever with a 'mob' comprised of 'roughs', provides some indication of how society perceived the individuals prone to spy phobias. In any case, it demonstrates that spy fever was typically contemplated as an epidemic associated with a particular element within society, and not as a general emotional disposition.

Thomson's post-war reminiscence of the effects of spy fever, therefore, seems rather overstated. In June 1913, Thomson was appointed Assistant Commissioner in the Metropolitan Police, responsible for the Criminal Investigation Department and the Special Branch, which placed him in charge of investigating suspicious looking Germans.⁵⁴ Given his proximity to the phenomenon and his role in protecting against spies and saboteurs, he has arguably exaggerated the effects of spy fever to romanticise his wartime experience, which has led to subsequent misinterpretations about the wider pervasiveness of spy fever in Britain.⁵⁵ While it was undoubtedly understood as a malady within the body and was believed to reach epidemic proportions, its limitations have often been overlooked. As a pacifist and historian writing in 1930s Britain, Caroline Playne sought to understand how many of her contemporaries succumbed to what she termed 'war fever' and 'fighting mania'. Within this analysis, she held a rather different interpretation of spy fever than that

⁵³ 'Spy Mania.' *Walsall Advertiser*, 15 August 1914, p. 5.

⁵⁴ Andrew, *Secret Service*, p. 103.

⁵⁵ In the preface to *Queer People* Thomson references the adventure, high endeavor, and splendid achievement that constituted his wartime experience.

advocated by Thomson. Firstly, she made an important distinction between ‘spy mania’ and ‘persecution mania’. The former, she suggested, referred to individuals who had ‘let fear and suspicion overwhelm their reason’, whereas the latter enforced resentment and anger.⁵⁶ ‘Persecution mania’ consisted of vociferous discrimination and the attempted subjugation of aliens. Though she conceded that spy mania was fairly extensive, and that ‘absurd stories of espionage were everywhere freely circulated and firmly believed’, she acknowledged certain restrictions regarding its prevalence. Unlike Thomson’s sweeping generalisations, she contended that English spy mania was far less intense than its European counterparts for instance, and crucially, that it was restricted to ‘certain newspapers [that] specialized in wonderful stories of the most unlikely people turning out to be spies in the pay of Germany’.⁵⁷ Similarly, a more nuanced conceptual history of spy fever suggests that it should be used to denote a brief period of intense emotions that cultivated extreme panic and suspicion within a specific group or individual. But it should also be recognised that it was most pervading and influential within particular locations and certain demographics, and that it was not indiscriminate or universal.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF COLLECTIVE SPY PHOBIAS

The contemporary understanding of spy fever discussed above principally characterises certain outbreaks of alarm that pervaded various communities in August 1914. During the early weeks, numerous individuals and localities witnessed brief periods of intense suspicion and officially sanctioned efforts to restrict or apprehend the objects of mistrust and paranoia. But there was little uniformity in the way in

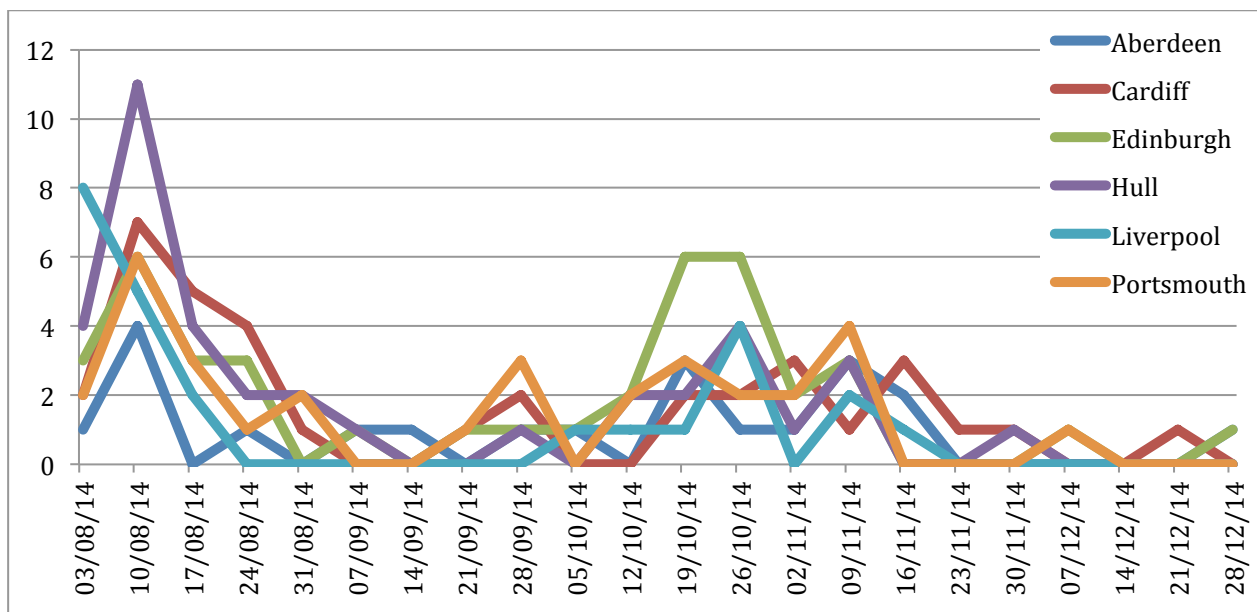
⁵⁶ Caroline E. Playne, *Society at War, 1914-1916* (London, 1931) p. 269.

⁵⁷ Playne, *Society at War*, p. 265

which society reacted towards the spy threat. Nor was it especially enduring. However, the assumption that spy fever was replaced by an intensified anti-alienism overlooks the continued dominance of the spy within social discourses throughout 1914-1915. Whereas the rhetoric in August reflected an inherent desire to mobilise society through the creation of an enemy, after having successfully galvanised society, sustaining the war effort replaced it as the primary objective.⁵⁸ In an attempt to understand why the ‘spy’ continued to feature so heavily, this section analyses the narratives emerging beyond August 1914. It first demonstrates that the number of spy scares dramatically declined and that, although the prominence of the ‘spy’ in the press remained, the nature of its inclusion changed as the war progressed. In attempting to understand the continued presence of espionage, especially in relation to the rise in anti-alienism during the war, it argues that the image of the spy was essential in forming popular xenophobia. More specifically, it posits that depicting individuals as spies associated them with the enemy, which exacerbated and legitimised further hostility towards traditionally marginalised groups.

⁵⁸ Culture was fundamental in national mobilisation: Horne, J., ‘Introduction: Mobilizing for ‘Total war’’, in Horne (ed.), *State, Society and Mobilization in Europe during the First World War*, p. 1. Jay Winter likewise argued that essential to the development of total war was the mobilisation of the imagination: ‘Under Cover of War: The Armenian Genocide in the Context of Total war’, in Robert Gellately and Ben Kiernan (eds.), *The Specter of Genocide: Mass Murder in Historical Perspective* (Cambridge, 2003) pp. 189-213.

Table 2.1 Number of espionage cases in the press by week, August-December 1914.⁵⁹

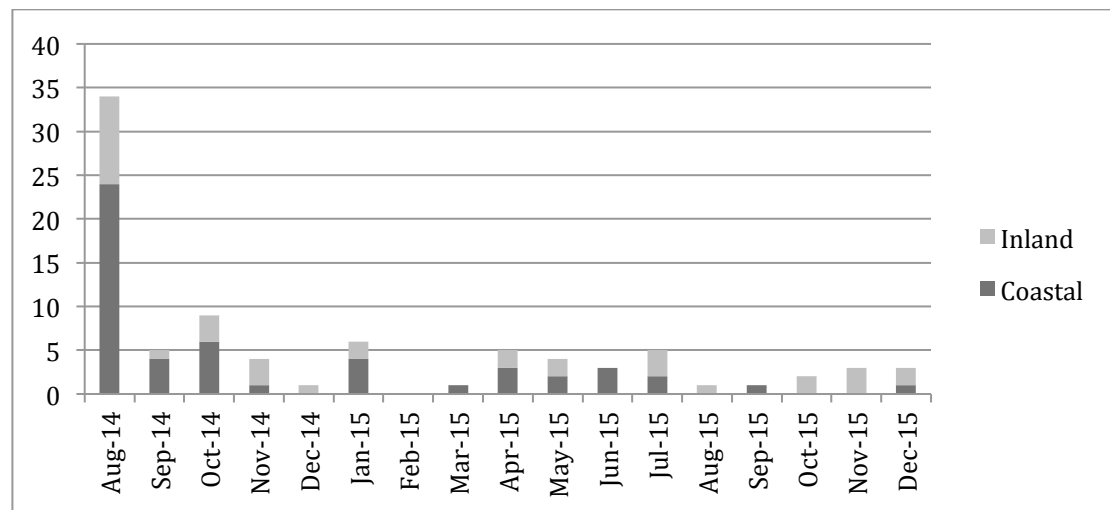


Despite the endurance of the spy within British discourses, and in spite of the increasing number of communities in which potential spies existed, Table 2.1 demonstrates that even in coastal cities, spy scares either ceased or received substantially less public interest. Although the peak of spy scares came in August, it was immediately followed by a sharp decline. Despite reporting eighty-seven incidents involving one or more persons being arrested or questioned during the initial four weeks of the war, only twelve cases appeared in the subsequent four-week period. There was thus an immediate eighty-six percent decline in the number of reports appearing in the press, which strongly suggests that the perception of spies constituting an imminent threat to British society had subsided. Although the number of suspicious cases rose towards the end of October, between 12 October and 15 November fifty-seven percent of reported incidents involved only two suspects, Karl

⁵⁹ Taken from reports in the *Aberdeen Evening Express*, *Edinburgh Evening News*, *Western Times*, *Hull Daily Mail*, *Liverpool Echo*, and the *Portsmouth Evening News*. Here I employed the same technique to record reports of spy scares as I did for my earlier analysis of incidents occurring in August 1914. It focused on newspapers published in coastal cities because they featured more spy scares than any other location, and therefore highlight the demise of suspicion in the press most clearly.

Gustav Ernst and Carl Hans Lody. Neither was targeted by local outbreaks of spy fever but were instead apprehended following investigations conducted by MO5(g), the precursor to the Security Service.⁶⁰ If we remove the reports pertaining to these two cases, which reflect systematic counter-espionage rather than popular fears, the number of incidents alluded to in the four-week period drops to only twenty-nine.⁶¹ Thus, despite the superficial increase in October, the nature of spy phobias during this period remained unlike the manifestation of alarm that transpired in August. Fascination with suspected spies no longer incited outbursts of panic, and instead became fixated on cases of national importance. This discontinuity suggests that the nature of fears about foreign espionage were dynamic, and challenges the extent to which suspicion shaped emotional experiences during this period.

Table 2.2 Number of local spy scares reported in the press, Aug 1914-Dec 1915.



*From a selection based on twelve coastal locations and twelve inland locations.⁶²

⁶⁰ Nicolas Hiley, 'Counter-Espionage and Security in Great Britain during the First World War', *The English Historical Review*, 101/400 (1986) pp. 638-9; Nicolas Hiley, 'Entering the Lists: MI5's Great Spy Round-up of August 1914', *Intelligence and National Security* 21/1 (2006) p. 48.

⁶¹ Although people often recorded the details of important spy trials, there is little evidence that they experienced emotional reactions to them: Lincolnshire Archives, 9-FANE/1/1/4/12, Diary of Helen Beatrice Fane vol. 8, 5 June 1915.

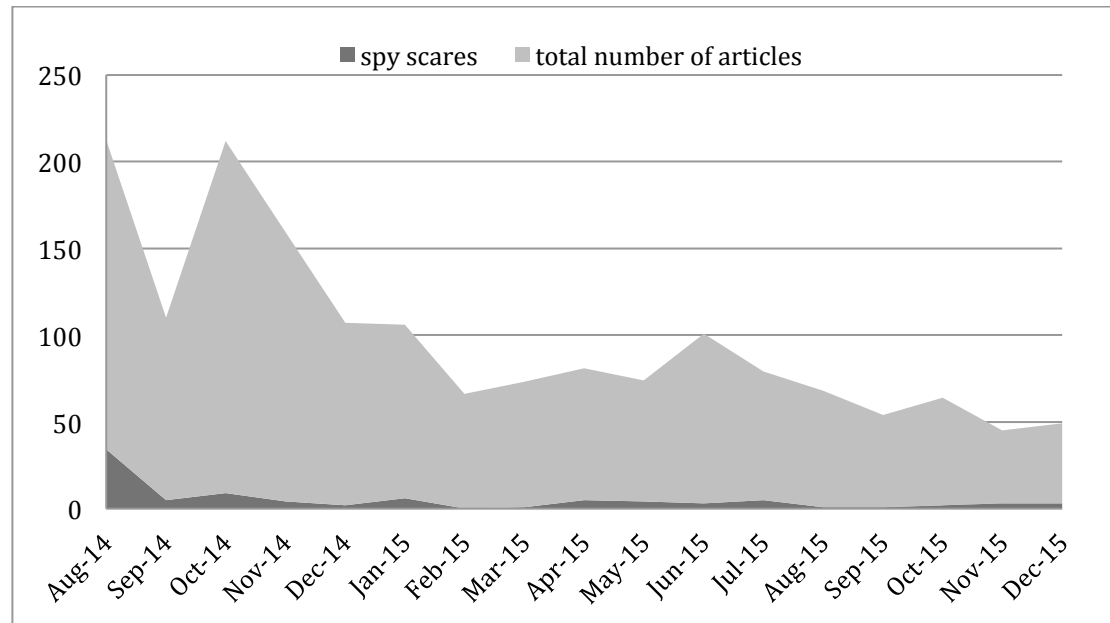
⁶² Coastal: *Arbroath Herald and Advertiser for the Montrose Burghs*, *Berwickshire News and General Advertiser*, *Bexhill-on-Sea Observer*, *Chelmsford Chronicle*, *Cheshire Observer*, *Cornishman*,

The decline of provincial spy scares was both a national and lasting development. From an analysis of twenty-four weekly periodicals between August 1914 and December 1915, shown in Table 2.2, 208 articles reported the questioning or detention of a suspected spy. Given the greater interest toward cases of national significance, though, fifty-eight percent of these reports referred to Carl Hans Lody, Karl Gustav Ernst, John Hahn, Karl Friedrich Müller, Anton Küpferle, Robert Rosenthal, Trebitsch Lincoln, or other unidentified spies shot in the Tower of London.⁶³ Thus, although spy scares continued to generate considerable public interest, outbursts of suspicion were principally characteristic of early responses to the outbreak of war. Ignoring national cases prosecuted in London, table 2.2 highlights the exceptionality of spy scares to August 1914. The first month of the war witnessed nearly forty percent of all local spy scares that were to feature in print between August 1914 and December 1915. Although further reports remained consistently low after the first month, peaks of suspicion after August 1914 coincided with the press coverage of Ernst's trial in October of 1914, and the attention given to Kahn, Muller, Küpferle, and Rosenthal between April and June 1915. This suggests that provincial concerns became intrinsically connected to the security measures adopted by the central state apparatus. Whereas early panics most often resulted from activities conducted by local authorities, after September, state investigations sanctioned against a handful of genuine spies appear to have generated wider interest within certain communities, albeit in a very limited and restricted manner.

Dumfries and Galloway Standard, Fife Free Press and Kirkcaldy Guardian, Monmouthshire Beacon, Thanet Advertiser, Whitby Gazette, Whitstable Times and Herne Bay Herald. Inland: Belper News, Diss Express, Dorking and Leatherhead Advertiser, Faringdon Advertiser, Hawick News, Kilsyth Chronicle, Nantwich Guardian, Shepton Mallet Journal, Shipley Times and Express, Southern Reporter, Tamworth Herald, Warwick and Warwickshire Advertiser.

⁶³ All of whom, apart from Lincoln, were apprehended following MO5 surveillance: Thomas Boghardt, *Spies of the Kaiser: German Covert Operations in Great Britain during the First World War Era* (Basingstoke, 2004).

Table 2.3 Number of local spy scares compared with the total number of articles mentioning the spy



To place the declining influence of paranoia and suspicion into further context, table 2.3 illustrates the proportion of reported spy scares compared with the total number of articles referring to the spy within the same selection. Notwithstanding the interest attached to the state's prosecution of foreign spies, reporting incidents of local suspicion became an increasingly insignificant aspect of discourses involving the spy, which continued throughout the same period. Excluding August 1914, there were only around three spy scares publicised each month, based on an average of twenty-eight issues produced each week. During August, when the press most commonly reported spy scares, they accounted for around nineteen percent of all articles referring to spies. But by September, the number of cases had declined in both absolute terms and proportionally. As a consequence, reports of spy scares dropped to only five percent in September 1914 and never amounted to more than seven percent of this interest in

espionage. Both the rhetoric and the physical manifestation of fear had ostensibly changed by September 1914. Identifying variations in the rhetoric and analysing the lack of subsequent alarm after initial anxieties had evaporated, suggests that this emotional regime no longer advocated suspicion as the principal emotional response. Beyond August 1914, spy fever neither amounted to the 'indiscriminate' panic that Thomson identified, nor did the collective fears surrounding the spy peril resemble the implicit definition of 'spy fever' that was understood by contemporaries.

Whereas early rhetoric promoted anxiety, later versions prioritised a heightened xenophobic nationalism as the appropriate emotional response to the alleged spy threat.⁶⁴ As a result, the emotional regime incorporated a broader range of feelings; fear and suspicion were supplemented by anger and hatred. Rather than encourage feelings of mistrust against a single individual or group within a community, it sought to provoke hostility against entire sections of British society. The alien became the enemy within and was portrayed as a threat not only to the idealised British identity but also, the very survival of the British nation itself.⁶⁵ Although chauvinistic nationalism was not absent from the initial wave of alarmist discourses involving the spy, by October, it had become one of the dominant themes. Central to this rhetoric was the assertion that Germany was inherently malicious and predisposed to treachery and deceit, which was predominantly engendered by prominent beliefs regarding their espionage exploits.⁶⁶ By the end of September, the centrality of spying to German military strategy had been widely established and was

⁶⁴ Anthony D. Smith notes that total war provoked contradictory trends. A desire to enhance national solidarity was juxtaposed by simultaneous efforts to solidify individual group homogeneity through reinforcing, even exacerbating, class structure and ethnic division: 'War and Ethnicity: The Role of Warfare in the Formation, Self-Images and Cohesion of Ethnic Communities', p. 387.

⁶⁵ F. Harrison, *The German Peril: Forecasts 1864-1914, Realities 1915, Hopes 191-* (London, 1915) pp. 233-5.

⁶⁶ 'War News.' *Berwickshire News and General Advertiser*, 15 September 1914, p. 3; 'When Victory is Won.' *Portsmouth Evening News*, 22 October 1914, p. 3; 'The Venomous Reptiles.' *Edinburgh Evening Express*, 22 January 1915, p. 3; Harrison, *The German Peril*, p. 17.

popularly reiterated by references to Frederick the Great's infamous saying: 'when Marshal Soubise goes to war he is followed by a hundred cooks. When I take the field I am preceded by a hundred spies'.⁶⁷ Within this narrative, the British also considered themselves naturally averse to such transgressions, which amplified the degree of German depravity.⁶⁸

Aliens had already become a contentious issue before the outbreak war. Aside from the German threat, Britain's domestic policies and international economic standing had been transforming the way it had treated aliens long before August 1914.⁶⁹ Keir Waddington argues that between 1850 and 1914 the sausage provided an enormously popular characterisation of German culture that distinguished it from British identities and associated Germany with disease and adulteration. He contends that the success and longevity of Anglo-German cultural and intellectual interaction mean that it is overly simplistic to imply that this affiliation was easily and suddenly supplanted by diplomatic rivalry. Rather, his research demonstrates that the portrayal of culturally symbolic attributes of Germany both informed British anxieties and inflamed xenophobia.⁷⁰ Even during the pre-war period, hostility towards Germans was frequently encouraged through the association with the spy. Before the summer of 1914, both James Pratt, a soldier serving in the Gordon Highlanders from 1908 to 1916, and F.H. Hunt, working as a bakery assistant prior to enlisting in October 1914, recalled similar conspiracy theories containing secret German plots. Hunt surmised that 'the general belief [was that] they were spies... any foreign visitor...

⁶⁷ 'The German Spy System.' *Hawick News and Border Chronicle*, 2 October 1914, p. 4; 'The War.' *Shepton Mallet Journal*, 2 October 1914, p. 2; 'German Espionage.' *Faringdon Advertiser and Vale of the White Horse Gazette*, 3 October 1914, p. 3.

⁶⁸ 'The Duty of the Churches.' *Western Mail*, 5 November 1914, p. 3; 'Behind the Scenes in Berlin.' *Berwickshire News and General Advertiser*, 10 November 1914, p. 4; 'Baden-Powell as Spy.' *Bexhill-on-Sea Observer*, 20 February 1915, p. 11; Harrison, *The German Peril*, pp. 247-8, 258-9.

⁶⁹ David Saunders, 'Aliens in Britain and the Empire during the First World War', *Immigrants and Minorities* 4/1 (1985) p. 5; David Cesarani, 'An Alien Concept?' pp. 25-34

⁷⁰ Waddington, 'Food, Fear, and the German Nation', pp. 1017-1042.

automatically came under suspicion of spying for Imperial Germany'.⁷¹ Likewise, Pratt recalled how they 'were really spies in disguise ... busy collecting information... about what was happening; fortifications; everything of that sort'.⁷² Although a series of imperial contests shaped the construction of the German menace within British discourses, it fails to explain how society accepted a diplomatic antagonism and then projected the resulting anxiety onto individual Germans.⁷³ Besides a purely symbolic significance, the spy coalesced cultural representations with physical manifestations of Germany's aggression, which unlike the sausage, connected fears of Germany aggression and attached them to individual Germans because they were physical representations of that belligerence.

The persistent inclusion of the spy within alarmist discourse illustrates the continued importance of this image. But the relevance of the spy to the expansion of anti-alienism during the First World War has been misunderstood. Panikos Panayi considers spy fever as a precursor to more sinister forms of anti-alienism that culminated with complex theories of a German 'hidden-hand' that had supposedly been controlling Britain since the Middle Ages.⁷⁴ He portrays the transformation of spy fever into successive forms of nationalism as a straightforward, linear progression fuelled by an intensifying hatred caused by repeated German atrocities. But this advancement from what he termed 'unsophisticated' spy fever insinuates that it was a distinct entity that was insignificant compared with the later, more extreme Germanophobia. Moreover, this interpretation also ignores the complexity of emotional experience, since it presumes fear and suspicion were merely replaced by hatred and anger, and that these emotions were either on or off. As an emotional

⁷¹ Liddle GS 0818: Frederick H. Hunt, 'And Truly Serve: Memoirs' (1980) p. 13-4.

⁷² IWM sound: 495, James Davidson Pratt (1974) reel 2.

⁷³ Longson, 'The Rise of the German Menace', pp. 98-122.

⁷⁴ Panayi, *Enemy in Our Midst*, pp. 153-83.

experience, spy fever did not simply transform into anti-alienism. The espionage threat was not merely a prelude to anti-alienism as the image of the spy was fundamental in promoting wartime discriminatory narratives and measures beyond the initial period of panic and paranoia. Early attempts to manipulate public opinion and manufacture popular hatred towards Germany continually relied upon the apparent existence of an extensive and nefarious system of German espionage, suggesting that although they were not necessarily separate phenomenon, one was not simply a more extreme form of the other.

Figure 2.1 ‘The Spy’s Sanctuary’. *John Bull*, 28 November 1914, p. 15.



During the opening stages of the First World War, rhetoric aimed at generating animosity towards aliens built upon this tradition and continually

employed the spy to incite xenophobia. Initially, connecting German espionage with Biblical passages emphasised the immorality of the German people.⁷⁵ As a consequence, Germans in Britain became the modern equivalent of the anti-Christ, and a legitimate, even obligatory, target of aggression:

The real anti-Christ will be one of the monarchs of his time, a son of Luther, he will invoke God and proclaim himself as his messenger. That prince of lies will swear by the bible. He will represent himself as the instrument of the Most High chastising the corrupt nations. He will not only claim omniscient power, but his innumerable armies will adopt the device 'God with us' and will appear like legions of the devil.

For a long time he will act by deceit and stealth and his spies will overrun all the earth and he will be master of the secrets of the highest.⁷⁶

Owing to Germany's deception, recruitment campaigns stressed that every Englishman should 'like to stick a bayonet into all of those German Spies,' and frequently drew upon the spy peril to stimulate further violence.⁷⁷ Early proposals for wholesale deportation were equally reliant upon the belief that an unopposed system of German espionage operated in Britain.⁷⁸ But the image of the German spy was most frequently used to undermine British naturalisation laws and those who had already benefited from them.⁷⁹ The cartoon in figure 2.1, for example, reflects the

⁷⁵ 'Baptist Pastor as a Pelican in the Wilderness.' *Chelmsford Chronicle*, 6 November 1914, p. 2; 'The Society Papers.' *Faringdon Advertiser and Vale of the White Horse Gazette*, 7 November 1914, p. 2. David Cesarani, 'Anti-Alienism in England After the First World War', *Immigrants and Minorities* 6/1 (1987) p. 5; Yarrow, 'The Impact of Hostility on Germans in Britain', p. 98.

⁷⁶ 'Monk's Startling Prophecy.' *Belper News*, 23 October 1914, p. 2; 'The Anti-Christ.' *Shepton Mallet Journal*, 30 October 1914, p. 3; 'A Prophecy of the War.' *Dumfries and Galloway Standard*, 25 November 1914, p. 7.

⁷⁷ 'Romford's Call For Men.' *Chelmsford Chronicle*, 18 September 1914, p. 2; 'Great Recruitment Meeting at Kirkcaldy.' *Fife Free Press and Kirkcaldy Guardian*, 24 October 1914, p. 3; 'Recruitment Meeting at Lockerbie.' *Dumfries and Galloway Standard*, 25 November 1914, p. 6;

⁷⁸ 'Spy Peril.' *Diss Express*, 25 September 1914, p. 7

⁷⁹ Peel, *How We Lived Then*, p. 42. *John Bull* commenced a particularly vociferous campaign against naturalised Germans in Britain: 'Spies, Bombs and Butchery.' *John Bull* Vol. XVII No. 439, 31 October 1914, p. 4; 'Kent Police, Note.' *John Bull* Vol. XVII No. 440, 7 November 1914, p. 3; 'The Rich Enemy Within our Gates.' *John Bull* Vol. XVII No. 440, 7 November 1914, p. 10; 'The Spy Peril.' *John Bull* Vol. XVII No. 441, 14 November 1914, p. 1; 'Spot those Spies.' *John Bull* Vol. XVII No. 442, p. 7; 'Those Spies.' *John Bull* Vol. XVII No. 443, 28 November 1914, p. 1.

opinion that Britain's naturalisation laws were a subterfuge employed by German agents. Published in the right wing pamphlet, *John Bull*, the unscrupulous German stands emblazoned in the Union Jack holding his naturalisation papers. Despite being ostensibly loyal to Britain, a portrait of the Kaiser along with his military uniform hang in the background and secret British plans lay on the floor beside him, the caption reads, 'they can't touch me now'. But as the most visible object of German influence within a community, German businesses came under repeated attack and were routinely considered as fronts for covert intrigues attempting to subvert the British war effort:

Many Germans get naturalised as Englishmen for business reasons; that is, shortly stated, for purposes of spying ... According to strict German law, a German cannot divest himself of his nationality merely by adopting a foreign nationality... Once a German, always a German ... The police ought to print a set of rules for the guidance of the public as to precautions necessary to be observed in the dealing with and treatment of alien enemies and spies.⁸⁰

By the winter of 1914, Lord Charles Beresford's divisive and xenophobic campaign likewise rested on the assumption that countless numbers of aliens had been caught spying, but subsequently released owing to a lack of evidence. According to Beresford, the only way to effectively neutralise the anticipated spy threat required legislating against the internal alien population. The conception of a virulent anti-alien campaign, therefore, required the construction of an inexplicable enemy within, as this was vital in justifying the abandonment of Britain's traditional liberal policies.⁸¹

⁸⁰ 'Notes on the War.' *Chelmsford Chronicle*, 13 November 1914, p. 2; 'Spies in Business.' *Whitby Gazette*, 27 November 1914, p. 10. Rumours were also generated locally that the managers of German businesses were obviously spies: IWM docs: 29/522, Anonymous Home Front Diary, 13 August 1914.

⁸¹ *Hull Daily Mail*, 13 October 1914, p. 1; Tony Kushner and Katherine Know, *Refugees in an Age of Genocide: Global, National and Local Perspectives during the Twentieth Century* (London, 2001) p. 46.

Nicoletta Gullace demonstrates the significance of the spy to the increase in discrimination through an analysis of a wartime play entitled, *The Female Hun*. Although the play was first performed in 1918, and therefore reflected a later, more intense context of anti-alien hostility, it nevertheless highlighted the importance of the spy in facilitating this animosity. The performance depicted the rise of nationalism at the expense of marital harmony following the Nationality and Status of Aliens Act. Upon realising that his German wife was a secret agent conspiring against Britain, the protagonist felt compelled to kill his spouse and redeem his national loyalty, since personal bonds had been made subordinate to abstract notions of ethnic solidarity. Gullace argues that ‘notions of fictive kinship, based on an imagined community of blood ties and racial stock, began to undercut the living bonds of neighbourliness, familial affection, and – though far less successfully – marriage’. The premise of the play, she contends, drew upon the prevailing assumption that illicit activity confirmed the belief that Germany was instinctively barbaric, and as a result, Germans had no place in Britain, even if bound by familial ties.⁸² Although atrocity reporting symbolised Germany as uncivilised and ruthless, it was through the portrayal of the spy that the threat of German brutality presented an immediate danger to the nation. Depictions of this intangible enemy not only facilitated a panic without the need for conclusive evidence, but the implied secrecy allowed the image to be adapted to a range of undesirable elements within society.

While historians have been quick to point out that alleged German atrocities in Belgium were used to exonerate an intensified Germanophobia, the xenophobia directed at Belgian refugees demonstrates how the spy provided a license for the

⁸² Gullace, ‘Friends, Aliens, and Enemies’, pp. 345-6.

broader development of anti-alienism more generally.⁸³ Despite the sympathy that most often characterised public sentiment towards Belgian refugees, in practice, ambivalence often marked both state responses and social relations with the displaced population.⁸⁴ Though the Home Secretary, Reginald McKenna, implored society to treat refugees kindly and ordered that no difficulty should be placed in their way, the subsequent growth of anti-alienism during the first months of war led to extensive areas of exclusion for aliens, friendly or otherwise.⁸⁵ The inherent difficulty of classifying an immigrant as either ‘friendly’ or ‘unfriendly’ according to their citizenship meant that aliens in general became a target.⁸⁶ Although refugees were initially welcomed into Britain, and ‘Belgian relief in those early months was a universally popular cause’, refugees faced growing hostility because of their inescapable status as aliens, even if they were considered ‘friendly’.⁸⁷ Although the construction of ‘brave little Belgium’ protected refugees at the beginning of the war, and typically provided the antithesis to the ‘evil Hun’, as the war progressed and frustrations intensified a popular anti-Belgian sentiment surfaced. But resentment was continually juxtaposed by a public concern for the plight of Belgium, which was combined with material assistance for refugees.⁸⁸ At its peak, there were around 2,000 officially recognised local committees designed to assist Belgians in the UK. But for

⁸³ For historians connecting anti-alienism with alleged German atrocities see: John Stevenson, *British Society 1914-45* (Harmondsworth, 1984) pp. 55-6; Holmes, *John Bull's Island*, pp. 97-8; Horne and Kramer, *German Atrocities*, pp. 212-25.

⁸⁴ Peter Cahalan, *Belgian Refugee Relief in England during the Great War* (New York, 1982) p. 259; Holmes, *John Bull's Island*, pp. 100-2; Kushner and Knox, *Refugees in an Age of Genocide*, p. 52. IWM docs: 77/156/1, Papers of G.M. West, Diary entries 20-30 November 1914, 1 February 1915.

⁸⁵ Cahalan, *Belgian Refugee Relief*, pp. 11, 58-9; Saunders, ‘Aliens in Britain and the Empire’, p.9; Tony Kushner, ‘Local Heroes: Belgian Refugees in Britain during the First World War’, *Immigrants and Minorities* 18/1 (2010) p. 11.

⁸⁶ Saunders, ‘Aliens in Britain and the Empire’, pp. 10-1.

⁸⁷ Kushner and Knox, *Refugees in an Age of Genocide*, p. 61.

⁸⁸ Liddle DF 040: Hilda W. Davison, ‘Memories of the Great War’ (1981) p. 5.

some, anxieties were continually heightened owing to an inability to distinguish between a Belgian and a German.⁸⁹

Owing to the ambiguity within society's acceptance of refugees, opposition to Britain's humanitarian response to the plight of Belgians required a device to frame their objections. Given the inherent difficulty in discriminating between Germans and Belgians, the spy offered a way to integrate anxieties constructed against German aliens with a broader demographic.⁹⁰ This was facilitated by the very tenuous description of the spy. Besides vague accusations that all German waiters and barbers were secret agents, there was very little to distinguish the appearance, behaviour, or even nationality of potential agents.⁹¹ Consequently, stories began to associate refugees with espionage. Initially, 'two German spies' were supposedly discovered in a refugee boat landing at Folkstone, but as anxieties amplified, reports alleged that thirty-three spies had been caught attempting to pass as refugees there.⁹² One reporter claimed to have witnessed first-hand the illicit activity of German spies impersonating Belgians:

To show how dangerous the influx of Belgian refugees must be for England, I want to tell you the following: In Folkstone two men came on board who did not look to me like Belgians or Frenchmen, although they spoke very good French and were provided with Belgian passports. I could see this, as they were right in front of me when leaving the train and boarding the steamer. On board the ship I managed to sit next to them, and their conversation was kept up in French. It was nearly all on

⁸⁹ 'German or Belgian.' *The Globe*, 26 October 1914, p. 6; 'Swiss or German?' *The Globe*, 28 December 1914, p. 3; Kushner, 'Local Heroes', pp. 3, 7.

⁹⁰ 'Spy Precautions.' *Cornishman*, 29 October 1914, p. 6.

⁹¹ 'Waiter, etc., as Spies.' *Aberdeen Evening Express*, 14 September 1914, p. 4; 'Knights of the Napkin.' *John Bull*, Vol. XVII No. 434, 26 September 1914, p. 3; IWM docs: 11335a, Papers of Frederick Arthur Robinson, Diary entry 22 October 1914; 'The Work Not Ended.' *John Bull*, Vol. XVII No. 441, 14 November 1914, p. 2; Sidney Theodore Felstead (ed.) G. Steinhauer, *Steinhauer: The Kaiser's Master Spy* (London, 1930) p. 51.

⁹² 'Supposed Spies Arrested.' *Portsmouth Evening News*, 14 October 1914, p. 8; 'Refugee Spies.' *Faringdon Advertiser and Vale of the White Horse Gazette*, 17 October 1914, p. 6.

military matters. All of a sudden, when we were close to the Dutch coast, one of the two broke out with ‘Gott se[sic] dank wir sind bald da,’ and from that moment on they talked the purest German imaginable.⁹³

Rumours were given official endorsement when it was claimed that the Home Office’s plans to prevent Belgians from entering certain prohibited zones were a direct response to their fear that German spies were masquerading as refugees.⁹⁴ In reply to the Home Office’s scheme, the *Hull Daily Mail* argued that ‘it seems cruelly inhospitable to drive away people who have suffered little less than martyrdom, but we are engaged in a very serious game, and we cannot afford to take risks’. They prefaced their report by claiming that a further forty German spies had arrived in Britain as refugees this time at Dover, which implied that drastic measures were in fact necessary:

There can be no doubt, however, that Britain has been ‘spied out’, and that spies are still at work ... Sleepy, easy-going Hull must lose its fatal bonhomie, its habit of giving its hand and heart to every glib foreigner of the International gang.⁹⁵

The *Chelmsford Chronicle* displayed a similar sentiment. It suggested that adopting such steps was undoubtedly prudent since ‘spies are practically without soul or conscience, and will assume for their purpose, if need be, the garb of angels’.⁹⁶ In Bexhill-on-Sea, concerned locals even formed a ‘Vigilance Committee’ to produce a list of refugees because of the ‘possibility of danger from spies in the town’.⁹⁷ Following an influx of friendly aliens, therefore, the ‘spy’ offered a means expressing xenophobic anxieties through associating it with patriotism.

⁹³ Which translates to ‘thank god we will be there soon’. ‘German Spy Peril.’ *Western Mail*, 27 October 1914, p. 5

⁹⁴ ‘Belgian Refugees to Leave Hull.’ *Hull Daily Mail*, 19 October 1914, p. 6; ‘East Coast Closed to Refugees.’ *Faringdon Advertiser and Vale of the White Horse Gazette*, 24 October 1914, p. 7; ‘Belgian Refugees and the Protection Against Spies.’ *Thanet Advertiser*, 24 October 1914, p. 3.

⁹⁵ ‘A Hard Necessity: The Refugees.’ *Hull Daily Mail*, 20 October 1914, p. 4.

⁹⁶ ‘A Wise Precaution.’ *Chelmsford Chronicle*, 23 October 1914, p. 4.

⁹⁷ ‘No Additional Refugees should be received’. *Bexhill-on-Sea Observer*, 31 October 1914, p. 5.

Because of the applicability of the spy, it was used to represent an assortment of perceived threats between August 1914 and December 1915. It became such a successful tool to convey animosity and fears of ‘the other’ that it became a generic insult and the cause of several libel suits.⁹⁸ David Cesarani argues that wartime chauvinism and xenophobia became so intense that it could no longer be contained against enemy aliens and incorporated everything that was ‘other’ to Britain and Englishness.⁹⁹ But particularly angry individuals also used the image of the spy to enact personal vengeance. One such instance saw the dismissal of the unpopular Chief Engineer of the SS *Santaren*. To justify his removal, one of his colleagues accused him of being a German spy while docked at Cardiff in November 1914, and he was promptly removed from his post.¹⁰⁰ Incensed by the possibility of his sister absconding with a German man, one angry brother similarly denounced her lover as a spy.¹⁰¹ But at the national level, any undesirable group thought to be opposing fantasised notions of Britishness, either by challenging deep-rooted traditions or through forming separate identities, was construed as a threat to the war effort, making them complicit in subversion and sedition and therefore akin to the ‘spy’. Homosexuality, for instance, was frequently compared with Prussian pomposity, so much so that sexual decadence became synonymous with German culture and

⁹⁸ ‘Battle at Lambhill Tongues used as Missiles.’ *Kilsyth Chronicle*, 16 October 1914, p. 6; ‘Col. George Cornwallis West.’ *Cheshire Observer*, 16 January 1915, p. 3; ‘Police Courts.’ *Warwick and Warwickshire Advertiser*, 21 August 1915, p. 3; ‘Sandbach Petty Sessions.’ *Nantwich Guardian*, 10 September 1915, p. 3; ‘Woman’s Allegation.’ *Thanet Advertiser*, 18 September 1915, p. 5; ‘Plausible Young Man.’ *Western Mail*, 24 September 1915, p. 7; ‘Temper of an Audience.’ *Shepton Mallet Journal*, 5 November 1915, p. 6. ‘Unfounded Espionage Charge.’ *Edinburgh Evening News*, 13 January 1915, p. 2; ‘Libel Based on Mistake.’ *Hull Daily Mail*, 13 January 1915, p. 2; ‘The German Spy Allegations.’ *Edinburgh Evening News*, 31 March 1915, p. 6; ‘Libel Reflecting on his Good Name.’ *Liverpool Echo*, 30 July 1915, p. 5.

⁹⁹ Cesarani, ‘An Alien Concept?’, p. 36.

¹⁰⁰ Liddle RNMN 316: Albert Robert Williamson, Diary entry 14 November 1914.

¹⁰¹ ‘A Prussian Spy’s Pernicious Schemes.’ *John Bull*, Vol. XVII No. 442, 21 November 1914, p. 18.

militarism, which was itself fundamentally generated by fears of ‘the other’.¹⁰² Men caught wearing women’s clothing, even if only in jest, were commonly perceived as a threat to orthodox gender identities that were maintaining the provision of men in the British Expeditionary Force, and were repeatedly considered agents of the Kaiser.¹⁰³ Even certain dog breeds were susceptible to anti-alien attack.¹⁰⁴

Although historians have argued that British anti-Semitism was far less pronounced than in other belligerent nations, the growing significance of anti-immigration discourses meant that latent resentments were also enabled through anti-German rhetoric.¹⁰⁵ While anti-Semitism rarely featured in this, associating Jews with the alien spy often framed hatred and even occasionally precipitated violence, especially when victims were foreign as well Jewish.¹⁰⁶ One rabbi was even attacked in Hull after it was claimed he was secretly operating as a German spy.¹⁰⁷ But displaying different characteristics was not the only stimulus for provoking espionage claims. The ‘spy’ was equally effective in spreading class-based hostility. While the elite were condemned for harbouring secret agents, the middle classes became increasingly suspicious of vagrants and gipsies for polluting the nation.¹⁰⁸ Echoing the

¹⁰² Homosexuals from across Europe, especially those in positions of influence, were regularly seen as weak-willed men vulnerable to blackmail, which encouraged notions of conspiracy: Philip Hoare, *Wilde’s Last Stand: Decadence, Conspiracy and the First World War* (London, 1997) pp. 25, 43.

¹⁰³ ‘Spies’ on Brighton Pier.’ *Portsmouth Evening News*, 26 August 1914, p. 5; ‘In Female Garb.’ *Liverpool Echo*, 12 December 1914, p. 3; ‘Spy Alarm at Leith.’ *Edinburgh Evening News*, 7 September 1915, p. 4. See also, Diary of Andrew Clark vol. II, 28 September 1914, p. 131.

¹⁰⁴ Especially dachshunds, given their symbolic representation of Germany: Liddle DF 043: Barbara Duguid, ‘The Unforgivable Years 1914-1918’ (1984) p. 10.

¹⁰⁵ Colin Holmes, *Anti-Semitism in British Society, 1876-1939* (Abingdon, 1979) pp. 137-40; Shmuel Almog, ‘Antisemitism as a Dynamic Phenomenon; ‘The Jewish Question’ in England at the End of the First World War’, *Patterns of Prejudice* 21/4 (1987) pp. 3-18; Cesarani. ‘An Embattled Minority’, pp. 61-76.

¹⁰⁶ National Maritime Museum (NMM), WHI/185, Papers of Arnold White, Letter dated 6 October 1914; NMM, WHI/186, Papers of Arnold White, Letter dated 16 October 1914. Cesarani, ‘Anti-Alienism in England after the First World War’, p. 7; Cesarani. ‘An Embattled Minority’, pp. 64-5; Pennell, *A Kingdom United*, p. 98.

¹⁰⁷ ‘Hull Minister’s Ordeal.’ *Hull Daily Mail*, 5 November 1915, p. 5.

¹⁰⁸ ‘Spies in High Places.’ *Birmingham Mail*, 2 September 1914, p. 3; ‘The Great Spy Peril. Pro-German Sympathy in High Places.’ *John Bull* Vol. XVII No. 438, 24 October 1914, p. 4; Liddle GS 0861: Papers of Major General Dudley Graham Johnson, Letter dated 27 October 1914. See also the claims of Armgaard Karl Graves in his popular book, *The Secrets of the German War Office* (New

vitriol espoused by his newspapers, Lord Northcliffe wrote to Bonar Law outraged that ‘it is beyond question that, for some reason, the Government are protecting spies – and spies in high places’.¹⁰⁹ The belief that spies occupied high office became widespread.¹¹⁰ Henry Morris Upcher, an ornithologist living in Norfolk, became convinced that German spies had infiltrated every level of the British government.¹¹¹ Affluent members of fashionable London clubs were especially targeted.¹¹² At the other end of the social spectrum, Frederick Charles Kench, a volunteer coast watcher, witnessed one man ‘of the tramping persuasion’ suspected of espionage in the nearby town of Wisbech. He claimed that his accuser became so aggressive that he must have ‘thought it was Kaiser Bill himself’.¹¹³

Naturally, the traditional enemies of the social order, trade unionists, socialists, and anarchists, were regularly likened to spies.¹¹⁴ But the war also engendered a new social adversary, the pacifist. Although Cyril Pearce has overturned the conventional belief that the war was a resoundingly popular cause, and demonstrated that popular opposition was far more prevalent than previously assumed, the pro-war press routinely connected pacifists to German conspiracies.¹¹⁵

York, 1914) p. 32. For tramps and vagabonds suspected of espionage, see: ‘Derby Vagrant’s Amazing Hallucination.’ *Nottingham Journal*, 23 March 1915, p. 4; ‘Spies in Cornwall?’ *Cornishman*, 25 March 1915, p. 3.

¹⁰⁹ Bonar Law Papers, BL/35/2/10: Letter dated 6 November 1914.

¹¹⁰ ‘Highly Placed Germans.’ *The Globe*, 31 October 1914, p. 10.

¹¹¹ Norfolk Record Office, OLL 3330/1-9, 759X7, Letter from H.M. Upcher regarding fears of German spies at Cromer, 8 February 1915.

¹¹² ‘Danger at Clubs.’ *The Globe*, 31 August 1914, p. 7.

¹¹³ Northamptonshire Record Office, N23/1, Personal Papers of Frederick Charles Kench, Diary Entry 13 March 1915.

¹¹⁴ ‘By the Way.’ *Globe*, 25 August 1914, p. 4; ‘Two Traitors within our Gates.’ *John Bull*, Vol. XVII No. 437, 17 October 1914, p.5; ‘London Socialists and German Spies.’ *Edinburgh Evening News*, 16 November 1914, p. 4; ‘Strong Speaking by Members.’ *Fire Free Press and Kirkcaldy Guardian*, 13 March 1915, p. 3. ‘Workers’ Defence.’ *Birmingham Mail*, 15 June 1915, p. 6; ‘Men and Matters.’ *Globe*, 26 June 1915, p. 9.

¹¹⁵ Cyril Pearce, *Comrades in Conscience: The Story of an English Community’s Opposition to the Great War* (London, 2001); Thurlow, *The Secret State*, p. 60. Paul Laity similarly shows that the British peace movement was the strongest and most active in Europe. More importantly, it resolutely opposed every British war and military intervention right up until 1914: *The British Peace Movement 1870-1914* (Oxford, 2001) p. 214.

Men who were failing to match the sacrifices of others, commonly referred to as ‘shirkers’ or ‘skulkers’, were singled out and condemned for subverting the war effort through inappropriate behaviour.¹¹⁶ Whereas the ‘spy’ often provided an analogy for objects of concern, the association between espionage and pacifism was less direct. It was most often used as a comparative device. Those who resisted military service were thought to be the greatest danger to Britain’s success and were invariably considered worse than spies:

No man is worthy of British citizenship who at this time is eating and drinking and sleeping with great zest and self-satisfaction, and is not caring ‘one twopenny damn’ for the Nation and the brave fellows who are, like heroes, doing, by day and by night, the awful task which enables these callous, selfish beings to eat, drink and sleep in sanctimonious comfort. Shame on us, if there be any bogus British citizens. Such are worse than the enemy’s spies for the latter, after all, are doing something for their country.¹¹⁷

Wartime discrimination, whether focused on anti-alienism, homophobia, or class-based antagonism, often incorporated the imagery of the foreign spy. By framing particular aversions in this way, the illusion of a ‘Kingdom United’ was maintained by associating the object of disrepute with external influences, while also advancing xenophobia by effectively combining discrimination with popular patriotism.

Consequently, it is not only important to recognise the continuation of spy phobias beyond August 1914, but also to concede that the nature and expression of this fear within public discourse were subject to change. In August, it reflected a systematic attempt to warn society of dangers posed by saboteurs because they could disrupt mobilisation, or worse, facilitate an invasion of the British Isles. By

¹¹⁶ Pennell, *A Kingdom United*, p. 78.

¹¹⁷ ‘Workers and Shirkers.’ *Berwickshire News and General Advertiser*, 13 October 1914, p. 3

September, aliens epitomised the primary evil because they could become spies. But this subtle transformation was accompanied by a significant change in how the manifestation of alarm was depicted within public discourse. By mid-September, rudimentary spy scares appear to have almost disappeared despite continual attempts to amplify the importance and danger of the spy peril. This reflects a shifting perception of the threat, which was consistent with an evolving collective fear. Attempts to inspire immediate and volatile reactions towards a ubiquitous foe had become detrimental to maintaining the cohesion and productivity necessary for the war effort. Despite the frequency and prominence of spy scares during the early weeks of the war, individual espionage phobias became more restrained and less conspicuous beyond August 1914. As a consequence, they were far less likely to encourage the physical assaults that had epitomised the initial reactions following the declaration of war.

Analysing discourse depicting the spy in greater detail has significant implications for how historians understand both wartime anti-alienism and spy fever in Britain. Firstly, spy fever did not simply transform into anti-alienism. Warfare does not inevitably provide national homogenisation, nor does widespread anti-alienism occur organically. Just as the formation of the spy as a realistic danger required extensive institutional and cultural devices to frame the threat of espionage in August 1914, the wider development of anti-alienism necessitated a familiar image to convey its importance and relevance.¹¹⁸ People were not instinctively xenophobic during the First World War and the use of the spy in disseminating such ideology questions the

¹¹⁸ David Monger asserts that British propaganda drew upon a quadripartite of contextual sub-patriotic devices, but that there was essentially nothing fundamentally original about the patriotic imagery itself, and familiar elements and characters were intrinsic to the maintenance of morale. Although he is referring to the later work of the National War Aims Committee, the spy clearly provided an expedient and familiar patriotic image early on in the war: *Patriotism and Propaganda in First World War Britain*, pp. 86, 91-3.

assumed degree of popularity and pervasiveness of such attitudes during 1914 and 1915. Secondly, despite the endurance of the spy concept during the opening eighteen months of the First World War, the intentions of alarmist rhetoric appeared to change. Popular responses were equally subject to transformation, which illustrates the importance of circumstance to the experience of emotion. During August 1914, the anxiety inevitably caused by a war widely predicted to be unprecedented easily facilitated extreme outbursts of emotion. By mid-September, however, the nature of the conflict was becoming clearer and more defined. The inertia of the German fleet was beginning to alleviate concerns regarding a potential invasion and the emerging military stalemate on the Western Front had offset fears that the nation was helpless to avoid a swift and complete destruction. What manifested in response to the alleged spy threat beyond August, therefore, resembled what Caroline Playne termed ‘persecution mania’, rather than what was widely understood to constitute a ‘spy fever’.

THE NATURE OF INDIVIDUAL FEARS

The development of a spy obsession in contemporary discourse marks a continual attempt to preserve an emotional regime that prioritised fear, anxiety, suspicion, hatred, and anger. But transformations in the political, social, and military contexts inevitably led to a shifting emphasis on one or more of those identified emotions. Understanding spy fever purely as a manifestation of fear, though, has dominated historiographical descriptions. As a result, how the emotional response to spies was experienced and the degree of influence that it had on the individual has seldom been contemplated. Since Joanna Bourke has identified two types of fear, predominantly

characterised by the proximity or the perception of the threat in relation to the individual, how far spy fever represented anything beyond a collective moral panic, rather than a particular individual affliction, is impossible to gauge through an analysis of mere discourse. Given that the historiographical consensus suggests that spy fever embodied a serious medical condition, it implies that it was experienced as an individual fear, such as a fear of death or disease. Analysing this assessment requires an examination of the experiences and attitudes that were engendered through a perceived encounter with the object of danger, and ideas ostensibly shaped by spy rhetoric. This section is specifically concerned with personal recollections of experiencing spy fever and incidents where fear became a common emotional response. As a consequence, it analyses the personal interpretations and expressions of spy fever, as well as how they were articulated and comprehended within the broader context of wartime fears.

Notwithstanding the evidence of spy fever within popular discourse, at the personal level, the most influential object of fear created by wartime conditions was not the alien or the spy; it was the Zeppelin and the prospect of an attack from the air.¹¹⁹ In January 1915, the first two Zeppelins appeared over Britain dropping its bombs over King's Lynn, Sheringham, and Great Yarmouth, killing four and injuring a further sixteen. In May 1915, following several aborted attempts due to poor weather conditions, the first air raid on London killed 35 people. Raids over Hull and Newcastle quickly followed in June. These early raids were both a symbolic and tangible representation of future possibilities, and fostered a growing sense of

¹¹⁹ The moral effect of dropping explosives from the air had been intensely anticipated for centuries previously: Tami Davis Biddle, *Rhetoric and Reality in Air Warfare: The Evolution of British and American Ideas about Strategic Bombing, 1914-1945* (Oxford, 2002) p. 12.

defencelessness, especially in industrial centres.¹²⁰ Whereas the government publicly declared early on in the war that the spy threat had been neutralised, the threat of aerial bombardment continued throughout the war and resulted in the deaths of around 1,200 people in Britain. Fifty-one Zeppelin raids dropped 196 tons of bombs over Britain, killing 556 people in the process.¹²¹ As a result, there is an implicit disparity in how contemporaries reflected on spy phobias and zeppelin fears in retrospective accounts.

Memoirists rarely recalled a personal fear when describing their experiences of wartime spies, which is decidedly dissimilar to how Zeppelins attacks were portrayed. Despite the apparent prominence of the spy peril, in retrospect, it was often reduced to a minor anecdote. Barbara Duguid, a school girl during the war, merely mentioned how ‘there was considerable spy fever at the time’, while Dr G.H. Bickmore, who went on to serve in the Royal Navy at Jutland, noted how ‘spy scares [were] everywhere’. Neither author chose to elaborate on the phenomenon or disclose any affiliation with the phobia, which implies that they had subsequently trivialised the existence of wartime spy fever.¹²² Dr T.H. Kirk, a fifteen year old at the Rugeley Officers Training Camp in August 1914, likewise described the outbreak of war as ‘a time of hysteria - spy stories’, but there was no indication of any personal implications or emotions as a result.¹²³ The tangential inclusion of the spy threat and the indifference towards it within retrospective recollections suggest that these were largely superficial memories. Vague depictions of spy fever, without any specificity

¹²⁰ Captain Joseph Morris, *The German Air Raids on Great Britain 1914-1918* (London, 1969) pp. 30-53; Jerry White, *Zeppelin Nights: London in the First World War* (London, 2014) pp. 124-30.

¹²¹ Jeremy Black, *Air Power: A Global History* (London, 2016) p. 24. Although Zeppelin attacks stopped after the Germans began suffering heavy losses, they were replaced by the more effective Gotha bombers in May 1917, which went on to kill around 700 civilians: Frank Ledwidge, *Aerial Warfare: The Battle for the Skies* (Oxford, 2018) p. 35.

¹²² Liddle DF 043: Barbara Duguid, ‘The Unforgivable Years 1914-18’ (1984) p. 10; Liddle RNMN 025: G.H. Bickmore, Manuscript recollections (1984) p. 5.

¹²³ Liddle RNMN/REC 060: T.H. Kirk, Typescript Recollections (1980) p. 1.

in the narrative, suggest that these memories primarily recalled the prominence of the rhetoric and the collective anxiety, rather than the panic felt by the individual.

Zeppelins, on the other hand, were commonly credited with inspiring terror, and given the scale and longevity of the threat, air raids often dominated post-war reminiscences.¹²⁴ Owing to the unequivocal and unprecedented destruction that they visibly caused, they were often assumed to be the most prominent objects of danger and were commonly depicted as the source of former fears.¹²⁵ Despite the obscure references to spies in memoir literature, air raids were frequently recorded with meticulous detail.¹²⁶ As a ten-year-old living in Norfolk, Jennie McDonagh witnessed first hand the fears that Zeppelins engendered. She recounted how her family were ‘all very frightened’, and could easily recall the tremble of her mother’s voice during a raid.¹²⁷ Moreover, Elizabeth Bracher, living alone in Surrey after her husband had departed to France, could recount her every encounter with a German Zeppelin. On the second occasion, a Zeppelin dropped its bombs over Surrey and destroyed a bungalow with her friends inside. The same Zeppelin then supposedly continued to Croydon and inflicted further damage. Notwithstanding the threat to the nation posed by spies, the individual’s proximity to the devastation and the indiscriminate damage caused by aerial bombardment, even in provincial settings, created a much clearer memory that preserved fear within one’s psyche.¹²⁸ Even without the loss of loved ones, the devastation was always intimately felt. Hilda Davison, who lived with her

¹²⁴ IWM docs: 276/3728, Letters Describing Zeppelin Raids; Liddle ZEP 31: M. Burton, ‘A Coward Goes to War’; Liddle DF/GA/ZEP 37: Recollections of J. Southall.

¹²⁵ Glover, *The Psychology of Fear and Courage*, p. 26; Liddle DF Zeppelins: Papers of R. Herring, Letter dated 5 September 1979; Liddle DF 16: Papers of Dorothy Bowes, ‘Looking Back to 1914-18’ (1991) p. 3.

¹²⁶ Liddle DF Zeppelins: A.S. Hare, ‘1st World War’ (n. d.).

¹²⁷ Frank Meeres, *Norfolk’s War* (Stroud, 2016) p. 53.

¹²⁸ Liddle DF 018: Elizabeth Bracher, ‘Memories of War I’ (No Date).

parents in Sunderland, vividly recalled the state of terror that she was reduced to on account of such destruction:

One night shortly afterwards we heard a lot of shouting in the street. I was too nervous to go outside with the others, and so I missed the sight of a Zeppelin being brought down in flames. I had several frights after this. Once I got everybody up in the middle of the night, thinking I had heard a bomb, and it turned out to be thunder. On another occasion, at about six in the morning, I heard a double crash in the house, and lay paralysed with fright. Mother got up, and discovered that a heavy picture in the front hall had fallen first on to a table.¹²⁹

Recounting her experience of training as a nurse in a Sheffield hospital, Elizabeth Cockayne, similarly recollected how her patients became terrified during a raid on the nearby steel works. 'As the bombs dropped shaking the block, I stood by the centre table with my knees knocking but the next morning the patients said how brave I was. If only they knew!'¹³⁰ Both Davison and Cockayne easily recalled the fear that had dominated their emotional states. Unlike trivial references to the spy threat, the intensity and power of this particular fear supposedly created an inability to control bodily functions. Of course, fear was not the only the emotion preserved by memory. Norah Bristow fondly recalled the excitement of watching burning Zeppelins fall over London. But her delight was itself inherently generated by the displacement of former anxieties. Observing the Zeppelin's destruction removed the imminence of danger and inevitably alleviated any lingering concern.¹³¹

Equipped with the advantage of hindsight, however, the interpretation of one's emotion can become distorted by the duration of time. Following post-war revelations

¹²⁹ Papers of Hilda W. Davison, 'Memories of the Great War' (1981) p. 5. She was 21 in 1914.

¹³⁰ Liddle 032: Dame Elizabeth Cockayne, 'Recollections of the First World of Elizabeth Cockayne' (No Date) Cockayne later became the Chief Nursing Officer from the inception of the National Health Service in 1948 until 1958, and from 1954 she chaired the World Health Organisation's Expert Committee on Nursing.

¹³¹ Liddle DF 020: Norah S. Bristow, Manuscript recollections (1981).

that the grandiose threat of German espionage was overstated and unjustified, it is perhaps unsurprising that individuals sought to detach themselves from the resulting paranoia. But even for those who recorded contemporaneous experience, spy fears, where observable, were mostly momentary and largely ineffectual.¹³² For Helen Fane, who noted the arrest of a German in Leadenham accused of espionage and producing maps, the incident was significant enough to warrant inclusion, but there is no suggestion that this episode stimulated an extreme or enduring emotional reaction. She even wrote, somewhat facetiously, that ‘he certainly went out very early each morning’, suggesting that, in her opinion, the evidence against him was rather unconvincing, which negated the sense of fear. The alleged spy was also released the very next day.¹³³ But the interpretation of espionage phobias was often multifaceted and reflected an internal struggle between individual agency and collective security. Owing to the prominence of public warnings about the espionage threat, people felt obliged to fear spies to ensure the continued safety of the nation. In October 1914, for example, Beatrice Trefusis claimed to have reported a suspected spy:

We were rather suspicious about a man who sang some amusing patter songs in broken English and Yiddish over at Calshot Camp the other night. German spies have already been caught in the new army. So I wrote a note to the chaplain, and stated our fears – [which were] probably quite unfounded.¹³⁴

The creation of fear, therefore, was attributed to a story disclosing a previous tactic employed by foreign spies. The acknowledgement that German espionage had formerly penetrated the British army prompted Fane’s concern. But the immediate realisation that these suspicions contradicted her reasoning suggests that she had felt

¹³² IWM docs: 12152, Papers of E.R. Cooper, ‘Nineteen Hundred and War Time by Ernest Read Cooper’, p. 2.

¹³³ Diary of Helen Beatrice Fane vol. 1, 8-9 August 1914.

¹³⁴ Liddle DF 129: Papers of Beatrice Morwenna Trefusis, Diary entry 26 October 1914.

compelled to accept the conventional standard and report what was widely considered to have been suspicious in order to adhere to the national war effort.

Similarly, while Florence Schuster appeared to accept the plausibility of a widespread system of German espionage and the legitimacy of the counter measures adopted by the British state, she claimed that ‘people in Manchester have lost their heads’. She considered it outrageous that ‘a tremendous amount of Germans are confined in various depots... some of who have been a long time in England, and who are doing English work’. But although her proximity to anti-alien discord generated disdain for such measures, this response was paralleled by a conviction that supported the national cause. Immediately after criticising the imposed restrictions, she concluded that ‘it seems ridiculous that some people... should be so restricted, but it’s got to be done’.¹³⁵ The implicit contradiction within Schuster’s account suggests that fears of German espionage were often ‘performed’ to resemble a perceived cultural convention, as through conformity, individuals were afforded a greater reassurance that the nation remained secure. This has fundamental implications for understanding espionage phobias. Although historians often distinguish between expressed feelings and ‘real’ emotions, Barbara Rosenwein argues that ‘performed emotions’ are also felt. While people can feign emotions, emotional experience is conditioned by an acceptance or internalisation of emotional norms that dictate feeling.¹³⁶ Being compelled to fear spies, therefore, does not necessarily invalidate the reality of the feeling because we can only understand our true emotions through a process of appraisal, which requires an interpretation of cultural values. But it does contradict the assumption that people were nominally in a perpetual state of terror, at least outside of the circumstances in which fear became a prioritised response since it was more

¹³⁵ Liddle DF 114: Papers of Florence Schuster, Diary entry 12 September 1914.

¹³⁶ Barbara Rosenwein, *Generations of Feeling: A History of Emotions, 600-1700* (Cambridge, 2016) pp. 5-6.

significant as a collective rather than individual fear. As a consequence, the creation of fear was not necessarily extensive or particularly poignant, but mostly confined to specific situations.

Joanna Bourke contends that historians should proceed cautiously when ascribing emotion to people and societies in the past. When presented with an object of danger, emotion words such as fear merely represent the situation in which it is encountered. In one circumstance the experience may be referred to as fear, but the actual emotion may vary. The same threat of danger may also evoke anger, rather than fear because the way the feeling is perceived varies according to the environment in which it becomes apparent. Certain features may be emphasised that condition the emotional state of the victim, and the way the situation is perceived, rather than the actual state of feeling, defines the experience and awareness of emotion.¹³⁷ The importance of circumstance in formulating spy scares was evident in most accusations.¹³⁸ In many cases, it was the situation that fostered suspicion, which was then subsequently attached to an innocent bystander. Various scenarios had repeatedly been branded suspicious; flashing lights, individuals loitering near military instalments, artists sketching local infrastructure, and motorists all became duplicitous. Being 'secretly' German, however, was the most common pretext for the application of the spy.¹³⁹ Anyone caught concealing a German background or failing to register their foreign origins was considered treacherous, and their behaviour likened to perfidious activity.¹⁴⁰ Private Hill, for example, had been recruited into the

¹³⁷ Bourke, *Fear: A Cultural History*, p.74.

¹³⁸ Aston, *Secret Service*, p. 82.

¹³⁹ 'Spy Peril.' *Shepton Mallet Journal*, 25 September 1914, p. 5; 'German with a Cut-down Name.' *Portsmouth Evening News*, 8 May 1915, p. 3; 'A Friendly German.' *Thanet Advertiser*, 19 June 1915, p. 7; 'No Register but Anxious to Catch Spies.' *Warwick and Warwickshire Advertiser*, 16 October 1915, p. 3.

¹⁴⁰ Bodleian Library Special Collections, MS. Eng. Hist. e. 91, Diary of Andrew Clark vol. IV, 15 November 1914, p. 214.

Lincolnshire Regiment and had been working as a cook in the Officers' Mess for three months before he was 'discovered' to be a German named Carl Bfaff. Although he was raised in America by his mother and was only German on his father's side, he had never been naturalised in Britain. When his heritage was uncovered, he was labelled a spy and quickly arrested. Claims of espionage, however, were short-lived and Bfaff was released, but only to be later interned as a law abiding German citizen.¹⁴¹

The close association between the anti-alien campaign and the spy threat meant that anybody with an unknown nationality was liable to attract suspicion. The ambiguity of the spy peril meant anybody that appeared separate from the nation was fundamentally opposed to it.¹⁴² Florence Mower declared that, 'If your saw somebody in the street that was a bit strange... someone you hadn't seen near your terrace before, who just happened to be looking around, was automatically a spy'.¹⁴³ After making various inquiries with local residents in Little Waltham, a member of the Ordnance Survey received a somewhat hostile reception and was considered dangerously suspicious.¹⁴⁴ He was later arrested as a spy.¹⁴⁵ But being of German origin was believed to be especially incriminating.¹⁴⁶ In October 1914, Frank Polz was accused of being a German working in the torpedo depot at Devonport. He became suspected of dishonest intentions despite having served in the Royal Navy for

¹⁴¹ Lincolnshire Archives, REGI/5/798, Records of the Lincolnshire Regiment, 19 December 1914.

¹⁴² A similar paranoia emerged among the IRA in respect to spies and informers during the Irish Civil War: Peter Hart, *The IRA and its Enemies: Violence and Community in Cork 1916-1923* (Oxford, 1999) pp. 293-302.

¹⁴³ Tim Lynch, *Yorkshire's War: Voices of the First World War* (Stroud, 2014) p. 35. See also, 'The Man Who Loitered.' *Portsmouth Evening News*, 14 August 1914, p. 7; 'Amusing Spy Hunting Incident.' *Edinburgh Evening News*, 18 August 1914, p. 3; 'Coroner as a 'Spy'', *Western Mail*, 25 August 1914, p. 6; 'Dutchman to be Deported.' *Chelmsford Chronicle*, 7 May 1915, p. 3.

¹⁴⁴ Bodleian Library Special Collections, MS. Eng. Hist. e. 90, Diary of Andrew Clark vol. III, 24 October 1914, p. 125.

¹⁴⁵ Diary of Andrew Clark vol. III, 26 October 1914, p. 143.

¹⁴⁶ Papers of W.L.B. Tower, Diary entry 20 August 1914. Diary of Andrew Clark vol. III, 26 October 1914, p. 143.

twenty-two years and in the dockyard for fourteen. The authorities kept him under observation, but nothing implicating him in espionage or any suspicious activity was found. Nevertheless, the matter was passed to Winston Churchill, First Lord of the Admiralty at the time, who instructed the Dockyard police to swiftly ‘round him up’ because of his German origins.¹⁴⁷ Similarly, a Polish woman working as a German and music teacher had her employment terminated because the headmistress feared she could be mistaken for a German. Former acquaintances became convinced that she was a secret agent, and people refused to be associated with a ‘German spy’.¹⁴⁸ Despite of the horrors faced on the Western Front, Lieutenant Donald Weir’s grew incredibly concerned with his mother’s safety owing to her association with an unfamiliar lady:

By the by, you need not tell her so, but in my opinion this friend of yours is not to be trusted a yard from you. All spies lie, the rumours are awful as the war, and I don’t suppose she is any more Swiss than my old aunt so just [treat her] with a good deal of suspicion. She may make socks for British soldiers and at the same time by playing a double part. You cannot imagine what a wonderful service this German spy system is ... Anything that appears in my letters is not to be known by her.

While Weir’s fear was engendered by the possibility that she was German, he also framed his aversion by contending that spies typically dress as either old women or in British officer’s uniforms, again illustrating the influence that the construction of the spy had had on individual fears.¹⁴⁹

The circumstances in which spies were allegedly apparent often reflected deep-rooted fears. Illicit signalling not only symbolised surreptitious activity, it was

¹⁴⁷ TNA ADM 131/120: Plymouth Station Correspondence, ‘Suspected Enemy Agents – Plymouth’, pp. 4-8.

¹⁴⁸ Papers of G.M. West, Diary entry 30 December 1914.

¹⁴⁹ Leicestershire Record Office, 2913/3/5/3, Papers of Donald L. Weir, Letter to his mother, 19 November 1914.

also associated with something far more ominous, invasion.¹⁵⁰ Within nationalistic rhetoric, signalling from the coast had been recognised as a principal danger, but also, more crucially, the military had repeatedly warned of the security issues posed by flashing lights.¹⁵¹ As a result people became particularly concerned with preventing German communications from inside Britain.¹⁵² In a letter to his wife, Reverend Monteith described a spy scare he participated in while on sentry duty at Scarborough in December 1914, which further demonstrates the internal confliction within individual espionage phobias. After the man responsible for issuing the accusation was found in 'great excitement' and alleged that mysterious lights had originated from a nearby house, the sentries decided to investigate. In the letter describing the incident, Monteith claimed that he 'didn't really feel in the least afraid' while approaching the suspected property, but that the 'other men got a bit jumpy'. Monteith's alleged bravery and the reaction of his fellow soldiers both imply that fear had become an accepted response to this type of confrontation. The soldiers then supposedly established a system of surveillance to monitor the accused house, and Monteith claimed to be on duty throughout the remainder of the night and following day. But his involvement felt rather distasteful. 'How would you like to do that', he asked his wife, 'it seems a beastly thing to do, to spy on a man like that, but I suppose if a man spies, he must be spied on, so I lay outside and watched'. Although Monteith had some reservations, his concerns were mitigated through his fixation with the 'evidence' of unlawful signalling. After entering the house 'some equipment' was

¹⁵⁰ The use of homing pigeons was equally as ominous to some: Papers of Arnold White WHI/185, An exposition of foreign espionage in Britain entitled 'German Spies.' Dated 26 August 1914. See also, 'The Risks we Run.' *Globe*, 2 October 1914, p. 6; 'Spy Peril.' *Birmingham Mail*, 9 October 1914, p. 5; 'Pigeon with German Message.' *Manchester Evening News*, 26 October 1914, p. 2; 'Homing Pigeons in War.' *The Scotsman*, 27 October 1914, p. 9.

¹⁵¹ TNA ADM 131/119: Plymouth Station Correspondence, Spies and anti-espionage measures 1914-1918, pp. 180-416.

¹⁵² Parliamentary Archives, Lloyd George Papers, LG/D/20/2/55: Letter dated 1 November 1915.

found that was believed to be suitable for communication, and as a result, the suspect could be positively labelled a spy, which placated Monteith's concerns.¹⁵³

The importance of circumstance often overcame reason and judiciousness. Shortly after enlisting as Second Lieutenant in the Liverpool Territorials, John Mallalieu recalled partaking in a spy scare while also on duty. After his friend had received a range finder, the two soldiers observed 'flashing lights' in nearby trees and went out to investigate on the assumption that there was a potential spy in their district. When measuring the range, however, it soon began showing that the distance was reaching infinity. Puzzled at the reading, they inspected the phenomenon more closely only to discover that the source of their flashing lights was actually a low moon. Although the wooded area had obscured it, the branches gently swayed in the wind allowing an occasional beam of light to escape, mimicking the effects of a light signal.¹⁵⁴ In Devon and Cornwall, police and naval officers began a far more intrusive search for enemy agents following suspected signalling activity. The authorities there supposedly received numerous reports alleging that flashing lights had been repeatedly observed along the coast. Morse code was even allegedly heard on one occasion. In response, the authorities diligently surveyed the area. Fuelled by reports of illegal lighting and enemies residing close to the sea, the men of the coast watch frantically searched for spies in their district. Equipped with the full extent of the powers conveyed under the Defence of the Realm legislation, naval officers habitually trampled on traditional civil liberties and remarked that claims of illicit signalling were the only pretext necessary for such behaviour.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵³ Fife Archives, Monteith Family Papers, A/ABG/1/11, Rev. W.N. Monteith to his wife, letter dated 4 December 1914, pp. 6-10.

¹⁵⁴ IWM sound: 9417, John Raymond Mallalieu (1986) reel 1.

¹⁵⁵ ADM 131/120: Plymouth Station: Correspondence: 'Suspected Enemy Agents - Aliens Regulations Censorship', pp. 115-132.

Since sketching and painting could potentially betray Britain's military secrets, it was prohibited under the Defence of the Realm act and was widely considered illustrative of unscrupulous activity.¹⁵⁶ Consequently, Major Innes and John Grant both reported a man to the police whom they discovered sketching in Dufftown and suspected him of spying. Given that Dufftown lies twenty miles inland and the market square, the object of his drawing, held little military significance, the suspicion was generated by his unfamiliarity with the area and because he was seen drawing in public. Even when it was ascertained that he was a clergyman from Sunderland, thereby mitigating the speculation surrounding his identity, the police continued to consider it necessary to observe his subsequent activity.¹⁵⁷ As early as 6 August 1914, George Rose also became entangled in a local spy scare for sketching. While on holiday, he began drawing the night sky with a nearby church tower in the foreground:

We were then inconvenienced and much annoyed by being locked in the churchyard and accused of being German spies, and we had to give our identity to the police and show all our works and our rooms at the 'Swan Hotel' to them. After this performance we stood drinks to the officers and went to bed.¹⁵⁸

In contrast to the former example, Rose's experience suggests that although sketching was taken seriously, especially when strangers were seen to be responsible, spy scares were not necessarily volatile reactions and they often occurred because of the mandate set by official government policy. Even in Dufftown, the suspect was never formerly

¹⁵⁶ 'Suspected Spy Arrested.' *Dumfries and Galloway Standard*, 8 August 1914, p. 5; 'Sketching the Fort.' *Western Mail*, 8 August 1914, p. 3; 'Spy's Unfinished Love Letter.' *Liverpool Echo*, 15 August 1914, p. 2; 'A Military Sketch.' *Portsmouth Evening News*, 17 October 1914, p. 5; 'Spy Scare at Kirkcaldy.' *Edinburgh Evening News*, 19 October 1914, p. 3; 'Amusing Incident at Newlyn.' *Cornishman*, 14 January 1915, p. 4. Photography became equally indicative of spying, see: 'Funny Us.' *John Bull*, Vol. XVII No. 435, 3 October 1914, p. 2; Papers of Arnold White, WHI/185, Letter dated 5 October 1914; IWM docs: 6996, Papers of Miss M. Coules, Journal June 1914-November 1915, p. 22.

¹⁵⁷ Aberdeenshire Archives, Records of Banffshire Constabulary, B82 Daily Occurrence Book of the Junior Constable 1914-1917, 7 August 1914.

¹⁵⁸ Essex Record Office, D/DU 418/15, Papers of George H. Rose, Diary entry 6 August 1914.

arrested because he could prove his identity. For Rose, as soon as the minor inquiries had been completed, normality was restored, and he even socialised with the arresting officers.

Motorcars were also considered particularly incriminating and widely featured within official notices regarding the spy peril.¹⁵⁹ Following their conception, motorcars symbolised a growing incursion of outsiders, especially in the British countryside. Provincial communities ‘grew to hate cars for their noise, smell, danger and the unconcerned bearing of the drivers’, all of which encroached upon traditional rural society. More specifically, though, cars brought with them affluent city dwellers who were often seen as unwelcome intruders.¹⁶⁰ Since 338,000 cars were bought in Britain in 1913, the car increased the likelihood of encountering a stranger on an unprecedented scale.¹⁶¹ But unlike the railway, personal forms of transport meant that strangers could disappear as quickly as they appeared, which heightened the sense of danger. As a result, people became especially conscious of secret agents speedily reconnoitring the British countryside using motorised transport.¹⁶² Bonar Law, for instance, received a letter from a concerned member of the public describing a man suspected of espionage because, despite his modest earnings, he often journeyed throughout the countryside in the luxury of a motorcar.¹⁶³ Arthur Read, a Territorial soldier in the London Irish regiment, recounted how an unidentified individual had been observed signalling from a motorcar, and as a result, detachments of Territorials were sent out to guard the roads. Armed with fixed bayonets and loaded rifles, they

¹⁵⁹ ‘Mistaken for Spies.’ *Birmingham Mail*, 7 October 1914, p. 3; Liddle DF Zeppelins 45: Papers of A.E. Bumpuss, Letter dated 19 October 1915.

¹⁶⁰ Sean O’Connell, *The Car and British Society: Class, Gender and Motoring, 1896-1939* (Manchester, 1998) pp. 150-70.

¹⁶¹ Helen Long, *The Edwardian House: The Middle-Class Home in Britain 1880-1914* (Manchester, 1993) p. 5.

¹⁶² Bodleian Library Special Collections, MS. Eng. Hist. e. 92, Diary of Andrew Clark vol. V, 21 November 1914, p. 81; Norfolk Record Office, MC 1631/4, 847X7, Papers of Walter Rye, Letter to his sister, 19 April 1915; Liddle DF Zeppelins 21: Papers of William Foster, Letter dated 19 April 1915.

¹⁶³ Bonar Law Papers, BL/36/4/63: Letter dated 23 February 1915.

were instructed to stop and search every oncoming vehicle and if it failed to comply they were to fire on the suspects.¹⁶⁴ The anticipation that spies would be using vehicles to support their covert activity grew widespread. One man was assumed to be a spy for appearing to direct an incoming Zeppelin with his car. In reality, after noticing the airship, the suspect had frantically driven home to warn people of the approaching danger.¹⁶⁵ Even entire families came under police suspicion simply for travelling in a car.¹⁶⁶ Although this type of alarm was connected to wider concerns regarding advancing technology and the effect on social cohesion and security, they were remarkably tenuous and evanescent.¹⁶⁷ During a Zeppelin attack on Hull, Margaret Constable and her friend were accused of spying for the enemy after a crowd had surrounded their car. Despite the crowd's initial hostility, they were pacified after being informed that the car belonged to Colonel Constable of the local regiment. 'One of the women [in the crowd] said her husband was in the 3rd East Yorks, and that she had seen Colonel Constable, so then they were satisfied'. She later found out that they had been reported to the police, but that they had also not taken the threat seriously.¹⁶⁸ The cessation of suspicion after learning of the car's ownership demonstrates the importance of circumstance in issuing concern, as the car itself was central in forming the crowd's suspicion and without doubts over its ownership, accusations of covert activity quickly subsided.

¹⁶⁴ IWM docs: 15227, Papers of Arthur Reginald Read, 'The Great War – 1914'.

¹⁶⁵ East Ridings Record Office, Papers of Margaret Elizabeth Strickland-Constable, Diary entry 11 June 1915. Spies in vehicles directing Zeppelins to their target became a widespread rumour. One man wrote to Arnold White, an extremely right-wing xenophobe, claiming to have seen a man and a woman travelling at great speed on a motorcycle many times. The suspects allegedly carried a flashing light that faced upwards, which was supposedly conclusive proof of their illicit activity: Papers of Arnold White, WHI/186, Letter dated 7 June 1915.

¹⁶⁶ Liddle GS 0569: Lord Cecil Forester Papers, Diary entry 28 August 1914; *Punch*, 26 August 1914, p. 179.

¹⁶⁷ Biddle, *Rhetoric and Reality in Air Warfare*, pp. 13-5.

¹⁶⁸ Papers of Margaret Elizabeth Strickland-Constable, Diary entry 10 June 1915.

The reticence of accusations made against suspicious activity suggests that fear was often momentary and rather ineffectual. Mary Anderson, enjoying retirement in the Cotswolds in 1914, recalled the excitement generated by encountering a potential spy, but more significantly, the ease with which anxieties were allayed:

One day, talking to a friend in the road, I saw a man, looking to my mind like a typical German spy ... I told my friend I was sure the suspicious-looking individual was a spy. 'I will speak to him, and if his accent is German, ring up the police.' My friend begged me not to do so saying: 'He is a spy, I am sure, and he will shoot you as soon as you approach him.' With my heart in my feet I walked up to him and said, smiling: 'My watch has stopped, will you please tell me the time?' With an undoubted Western American accent he pulled out his watch: 'I guess my watch has gone a bit crazy in this damp country; it says half-twelve.' I thanked him, feeling very foolish... That little episode cured me of the spy-fever.¹⁶⁹

Conversely, Zeppelins fears were often conveyed with an intensity and endurance completely absent from the expression of spy phobias. Despite the intangible existence of enemy agents, Zeppelins presented a clear and ever-present danger. Even before Zeppelins had begun to target Britain, the prospect of aerial attack was widely anticipated.¹⁷⁰ After recurrent bombardments, numerous letters and diaries began assiduously recording local casualties and the physical destruction that was caused by German bombing raids.¹⁷¹ But a feeling of helplessness compounded an individual's sense of fear. Jeanne Berman's recorded how a Zeppelin raid over Grimsby in June 1915 caused her to 'feel faint' at the thought of it, while her teeth began to chatter

¹⁶⁹ Mary Anderson, *A Few More Memories* (London, 1936) pp. 145-6.

¹⁷⁰ Diary of Helen Beatrice Fane vol. 8, 7 June 1915. Although the theory of the knock-out blow remained primitive prior to the First World, the possibility of airships being used to destroy key arsenals and dockyards, and thereby disrupt Britain's mobilisation, was widely expected: Holman, *The Next War in the Air*, pp. 191-2.

¹⁷¹ Liddle DF 036: Dame Margery Irene Corbett-Ashby, Letter to her mother, 29 November 1916

uncontrollably.¹⁷² Dame Margery Corbett-Ashby surmised that, during a Zeppelin raid, ‘you imagine all sorts of poor folk must be blown to blazes in hundreds – the most awful great thuds – detonation that shook the whole place, with fearful flashes right on top of each other’.¹⁷³ Upon hearing that a Zeppelin had bombed a nearby town for the first time, Ada McGuire expressed grave concern that she was now directly within the Zeppelin’s ‘line of sight’.¹⁷⁴ Rather than abstract dangers threatening national security, the physical destruction caused by aerial bombardment easily constituted an immediate threat to the body, which conditioned individual fears far easier than rhetorical depictions of spies.

While a fear for one’s safety was occasionally articulated in private correspondence, air raids symbolised a profound change in the way war affected civilians, and concerns for family and friends abounded.¹⁷⁵ Olive Armstrong, lecturer in history and economics at Trinity College Dublin, grew frightfully afraid for her mother’s safety during a visit to London, and throughout their correspondence, the location of recent raids and the likeliness of future encounters were discussed at length.¹⁷⁶ For Territorial soldiers, whose responsibility it was to defend against Zeppelins, their fear was entwined with amorous and familial relationships. Having witnessed wanton destruction, soldiers emphatically sought to keep loved ones away from the danger: ‘I mustn’t wish you here – the London area is not a healthy place to be in, at nights just now, and I sincerely hope the Zepps never reach Birmingham and the Midlands,’ wrote Private Stanley.¹⁷⁷ But soldiers often felt powerless to assuage the fear experienced by loved ones and tirelessly endeavoured to provide emotional

¹⁷² IWM docs: 12358, Papers of H Miller, Diary of Jeanne Berman, 8 June 1915.

¹⁷³ Papers of Dame Margery Irene Corbett-Ashby, Letter from Capt. Ashby, Dated 3 September 1916.

¹⁷⁴ IWM docs: 5593/H, Papers of Ada McGuire, Letter dated 31 May 1915.

¹⁷⁵ Susan R. Grayzel, *At Home and Under Fire: Air Raids and Culture in Britain from the Great War to the Blitz* (Cambridge, 2012) p. 20.

¹⁷⁶ Liddle DF 004: Diary of Olive Armstrong, 2 November 1915.

¹⁷⁷ Liddle DF Zeppelins 24: Papers of L.B. Stanley, Letter dated 10 September 1915.

assistance.¹⁷⁸ After encountering her first Zeppelin raid, Nell Hague wrote to her husband in France about her experience:

The Zeps! are here! and from mother's bedroom window the whole town seems on fire... Last night was the second time since our arrival here that the alarm whistles have blown... however, last night (Sunday) they were blown again about 10p.m and about 11 we all went to bed. I did not feel afraid, but of course I longed to have you here, for you always bring such a sense of security to me.¹⁷⁹

Although she did not admit to being frightened, she clearly sought emotional comfort to alleviate her angst. Although individuals seldom confessed to being afraid, the degree of concern felt for the safety of others testifies to the level of fear engendered by the prospect and experience of aerial bombardment.

Whereas spy phobias were relatively inconsequential, fears of aerial bombardment reflected a pragmatic desire for security.¹⁸⁰ As a consequence, the effects of Zeppelin fears were rarely benign, particularly in vulnerable areas.¹⁸¹ During a night raid on Lowestoft in April 1915, residents in nearby Southwold grew particularly apprehensive upon hearing explosions. Many people gathered in the street to provide protection by association and alleviate anxieties through observation.¹⁸² But during raids, sleep became particularly evasive:

At 12 o'clock my maids came to my room, and said they heard gunfire and so did I. We went downstairs and after the firing ceased so we went back again [to bed]. Half an hour afterwards they again roused me. Another half hour downstairs and then to bed.

¹⁷⁸ Liddle DF Zeppelins 27: Papers of Harry Innes, Letter dated 29 September 1916.

¹⁷⁹ Liddle DF 060: Papers of Nell Hague, Letter to her husband, 7 June 1915.

¹⁸⁰ Papers of W.L.B. Tower, 'Some Diary Notes 1914'.

¹⁸¹ This was particularly acute in East Anglia, given that it was directly under the flight path. Zeppelins would often unleash their bombardment there because they mistook it for their actual target, or they released the remaining explosives before making the return journey. See, Liddle DF Zeppelins 20: 'Zeppelins Over East Anglia'; Liddle DF Zeppelins 29: Extracts from an East Anglian Magistrate's Diary.

¹⁸² Papers of E.R. Cooper, 'Nineteen Hundred and War Time by Ernest Read Cooper', p. 4.

Another half hour and another alarm. After this we felt that we might rest in peace, but it was not to be.¹⁸³

While some people felt compelled to sleep fully clothed next to emergency rations, others resorted to sleeping in the relative safety of the open countryside.¹⁸⁴ Hague, for instance, wrote to her husband saying that:

The most pitiable part of all was the sight of the families coming away – they were all ordered out of the congested areas into the open – parks were thrown open, and they came into the fields. It is no exaggeration to say that there were thousands of people in and around the fields and lanes at the back of mothers’ – the dear little children – the cripples, the aged – oh, my dear it must be seen to be realised.¹⁸⁵

The terror inflicted through the prospect of aerial bombardment had a noticeable impact on people’s lives. Unlike spy fever, which required a specific set of circumstances to generate a sense of fear, the perpetuation of the war itself was the only pretence needed to sustain fears of aerial bombardment. The possibility of death and destruction at any moment combined with the unprecedented scale of devastation to create the conditions necessary for a lasting sense of terror to dominate emotional responses.

Of course, certain individuals inevitably learnt to cope with their emotions. As bombardments became more routine and increasingly familiar, the fear that had characterised earlier reactions became easier to suppress, which hardened collective resolve.¹⁸⁶ For some, the adrenalin caused by the prospect of annihilation generated intense excitement, while for others, acclimatisation merely generated indifference in

¹⁸³ Liddle DF Zeppelins 40: Recollections of W. Pritchett (No Date). For a similar experience see, Papers of Dame Margery Irene Corbett-Ashby, Letter to her mother, 29 November 1916.

¹⁸⁴ Papers of Dame Margery Irene Corbett-Ashby, Letter to her mother, 29 December 1915; Liddle DF Zeppelins 27: Papers of Harry Innes, Letter dated 24 June 1916.

¹⁸⁵ Papers of Nell Hague, Letter to her husband, 9 June 1915.

¹⁸⁶ Grayzel, *At Home and Under Fire*, pp. 30-1.

the face of adversity and derision at ‘the awful fuss over these air raids’.¹⁸⁷ Testimony to the increased doggedness of society was its ability to overcome a fear of bombardment. During one West End production, the audience was able to remain calm, even as the building started crumbling around them:

Carmen Hill was singing when we heard the first disturbing sounds above us, but we tried to ignore them. The next item was a bassoon solo by Wilfred James, in the middle of which there was a crash, followed by a cracking sound, and a shower of plaster began to fall from the roof over the Promenade itself, which was packed. There was a moment of panic when people in the centre of the hall tried to disperse... The soloist however, kept merrily on, and we soon realised it could only be shrapnel which had dislodged some plaster. The soloist got a rousing encore, and returned to play ‘we shan’t get home till morning’ among cheers and laughter.¹⁸⁸

Even among people who had never experienced an air raid first hand, a degree of collective determination had strengthened their ability to suppress their fears:

This was my first experience of a raid except for one Zeppelin raid in 1914... I was quite prepared to feel windy, but honestly did not feel in the least excited or nervous. I was most surprised that I did not have a funny feeling in my inside. I can understand it getting rather boring, having to spend half the night in a cellar which was very draughty and cold with only one small gas jet and not enough to read by.¹⁸⁹

The frequency with which Zeppelin raids appeared in personal correspondence is a testament to how intense and influential those fears became.¹⁹⁰ In highlighting the complexity and variety of responses to Zeppelin raids, Susan Grayzel’s work provides a useful framework for understanding spy phobias. In *At Home and Under Fire*,

¹⁸⁷ Liddle CO 066: Papers of Albert Murray, Letter from ‘Winifred’, 7 July 1917; Papers of William Foster, Letter dated 20 July 1917.

¹⁸⁸ Liddle DF Zeppelins: Memoirs of Margaret Ulph Currie (1984).

¹⁸⁹ Florence Schuster, Diary entry 31 October 1914.

¹⁹⁰ Papers of Nell Hague, Letter to her husband, 7 June 1915; Liddle DF Zeppelins 42: Papers of G.H. Elliot, Letter dated 19 May 1981.

Grayzel shows that Zeppelin fears almost never caused widespread panic, and that written experiences of air raids convey a multitude of reactions, including fear, defiance, pride, and excitement.¹⁹¹ In a similar vein, histories of spy fever should equally consider the relationship between fear and panic, as well as the complexity and variety of emotional responses.

Although spies posed a threat to the safety and coherency of the nation, wartime conditions created physical dangers that posed a direct risk to the individual. A comparison between spy phobias and Zeppelin fears suggests that the former was more influential as a collective rather than individual fear.¹⁹² This has several implications for understanding spy fever. Firstly, it has often been presumed to 'infect' entire areas, which has led contemporaries and historians to believe that spy fever represented a particularly endemic fear. Despite the continual presence of the spy in alarmist discourse, giving the impression of a sustained paranoia or fever, individual espionage phobias were generally short lived, since the ability to overcome concern was often directly related to the context in which the threat was perceived. Whereas foreign espionage was intangible and required institutional interference, Zeppelins provided a clear and observable danger. The framework constructing the spy threat, therefore, emphasised the inherent danger within certain scenarios so that the spy could be perceived. But as those circumstances changed or were discovered to be misleading, the fear that formerly constituted the appropriate response quickly dissipated. Thus, although local panics could appear feverish owing to the number of cases, the influence upon the individual was significantly restricted, and historians should dispense with the idea that spy fever was a sustained hysteria that supposedly 'defied treatment'. As a consequence, spy phobias should be disassociated from

¹⁹¹ Grayzel, *At Home and Under Fire*, pp. 39-41, 61-2.

¹⁹² IWM docs: 79/15/1, Papers of Robert Saunders, Letter dated 1 November 1914.

medical terminology with which they are typically depicted. By demonstrating the inconsequential effects, and debasing assumptions regarding the delusions said to accompany espionage fears, this analysis has challenged the longevity of individual spy scares as well as their implied irrationality. Not only did they echo former emotions in previous conflicts in which an increased nationalism characterised public reactions, but the collective conformity also provided an illusion of unity against the backdrop of crisis and uncertainty. Rather than an irrational phobia, spy fever was, in essence, an understandable and in many ways, a typical reaction for a society at war.



Despite the assumed feverishness of British spy phobias during the First World War, Caroline Playne's distinction between 'spy mania' and 'persecution mania' is an important distinction in understanding the nature of fear. The use of the spy in extremist narratives was not simply directing emotional reactions exclusively against the threat of espionage. As a consequence, fears of espionage often framed more pressing concerns, such as immigration, homosexuality, or class antagonism, and what resulted scarcely amounted to aggressive outbreaks of volatile suspicions regarding surreptitious German intrigues, characteristic of spy fever, since individuals appeared more disturbed by apparent British weaknesses rather than Germany's covert capability. Testimony to this pretence, were the numerous reports disregarding the threat of the spy following the disclosure of effective counter-espionage efforts. After announcing that the Home Office had captured twenty-one spies in August, allegedly the entire German network operating in Britain, McKenna declared that the 'public may rest assured that the great majority of Germans remaining in this country

are peaceful and innocent persons from whom no danger is to be feared'.¹⁹³ Although this revelation seemingly satisfied many individual's concerns, it failed to have an instant impact on the spy rhetoric, given the applicability of the spy to various issues of concern, but relief rather than fear soon became an emerging theme.¹⁹⁴ Owing to a further Home Office statement, one journalist wrote that:

It is a relief to learn from the Home Secretary that Scotland Yard has no evidence of malpractices by spies. Most of the stories that have been published in the newspapers of threatened damage to railway lines and of attacks upon sentries have been subject to reasonable explanation, and in others the cases have not been proven, and the public certainly ought to get reassurance from that fact.¹⁹⁵

By October, society was becoming increasingly confident in the reactions of the authorities.¹⁹⁶ Despite the fallacy of the original threat, McKenna was even praised for his handling of the 'danger':

We have never been included among the admirers of Mr McKenna's methods at the Home Office. We have regarded him somewhat as a fish out of water, recognising that his real place is at the Treasury. But, as the Suffrage agitation proved, the detective force has lost nothing in efficiency during his tenure of office. The spy question can be left in its hands, and journalists with any real information concerning suspicious actions of alien enemies will find it better to give it to Scotland Yard, rather than publish silly twaddle in the columns of newspapers. If newspaper syndicate owners have lost their poor heads, the majority of Englishmen have not.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹³ 'Germans in Britain.' *Daily Herald*, 10 August 1914, p. 1; 'Germans in England. Reassuring the Public.' *Birmingham Mail*, 10 August 1914, p. 3.

¹⁹⁴ Anonymous Home Front Diary, 8 August 1914; Lincolnshire Archives, 9-FANE/1/1/4/6, Diary of Helen Beatrice Fane vol. 2, 9 October 1914.

¹⁹⁵ 'War Notes.' *Derby Daily Telegraph*, 29 August 1914, p. 2.

¹⁹⁶ Arnold White received numerous letters from readers thankful that the authorities were finally awake to the peril: Papers of Arnold White, WHI/186, Letters dated 11 and 21 October 1914. See also, 'The German Spy.' *Aberdeen Evening Express*, 10 October 1914, p. 2; 'The Spy Danger.' *Dumfries and Galloway Standard*, 10 October 1914, p. 2; 'Two Traitors within our Gates.' *John Bull*, Vol. XVII No. 437, 17 October 1914, p. 4.

¹⁹⁷ *Daily Herald*, 24 October 1914, p. 1.

Following further arrests, the competency of the secret services seemed widely assured.¹⁹⁸ Even Basil Thomson, seemingly contradicting his own description of spy fever, claimed that individuals quickly recovered from spy phobias after receiving news that the authorities were taking adequate precautions.¹⁹⁹ Owing to the appearance of successful counter-espionage measures, spy panics were no longer tenable as a specific form of political engagement, and inciting them came to be likened to Prussian oppression.²⁰⁰ Thereafter, the former spy peril merely constituted an additional barbarity that promoted the construction of the ‘Hun’.²⁰¹

The historiographical importance of contrasting the real and imaginary spy threat and the assumption that, as a consequence, a fear of German spies was the product of delusional paranoia has forced historians to rely on retrospective and sensationalised accounts of what spy fever amounted to. As a result, it has been perceived as an individual fear so virulent it became widespread. But spy fever was far more pervasive and influential as a collective anxiety, rather than an individual concern, meaning that they were rational and understandable concerns. Despite the commonality of portraying spy fever as a mental disorder akin to a fever, it was not a senseless phenomenon, and the majority of society maintained their sensibility. Historians who apply the term hysteria without sufficient scrutiny, and who carelessly argue that ‘every alien was assumed to be a potential or actual spy’, ignore the complexity of fear and simplistically accept radical hyperbole as emblematic of public

¹⁹⁸ ‘Lord Chief Justice’s View’. *Edinburgh Evening News*, 20 May 1915, p. 5.

¹⁹⁹ Although Thomson described it as a malady that ‘defied treatment’, he mentions one public official who relentlessly reported the sightings of suspicious people from across the country. All of them were German spies, but the authorities remained idle in the face of such a threat. In response, Thomson invented the character of ‘von Burstopph’, who was responsible for all of the alleged sightings. Claiming that the authorities were vigorously attempting to apprehend von Burstopph, this one official went ‘away quite happy since he knew that the authorities were doing something.’ *Queer People*, p. 45.

²⁰⁰ ‘The Aliens’ Portion.’ *Dublin Daily Express*, 17 August 1914, p. 4; ‘Spies in England’ *Liverpool Echo*, 15 October 1914, p. 5.

²⁰¹ For propaganda exposing German war crimes and the creation of the ‘Hun’, see Horne and Kramer, *German Atrocities*, and Gregory, *Last Great War*, especially chap. 2.

attitudes.²⁰² Although in some cases an individual may have suffered an exaggerated sense of fear, it seldom went unmitigated. Espionage anxieties were therefore not irrational phobias; collectively, they advanced a degree of unity through a process of alienation, while for the individual, fears were predominantly dictated by social convention and, as a consequence, were momentary and ineffectual. Despite the perpetuation of spy fever within the public domain, individual spy fears were not as extensive as the collective prominence that was attached to them. Thus, people rarely became hysterical about the spy threat, although at times, they participated in a public discourse that suggested that they were.

²⁰² Just because the right wing press repeatedly argued that every alien was a potential spy, does not mean that every Briton assumed that they were. De Groot, *Blighty: British Society in the era of the Great War*, p. 159.

Chapter 3. Locating Fear

Since historical analyses have principally incorporated spy fever into histories of intelligence or of xenophobia, rather than the history of emotions, they have often assumed the prevalence of the phenomenon across British society without fully considering the social and cultural mechanisms that created and sustained it, as well as those that hindered and displaced it. Moreover, interpretations of spy fever are often reliant on limited evidence, which has led to generalised and overstated claims. Based on opinions gleaned from Northcliffe's papers, *The Times* and the *Daily Mail*, Cate Haste presumed that 'spy mania engulfed the nation'.¹ To substantiate his discussion of a supposedly widespread Germanophobia, Panikos Panayi refers to two middle-class women exhibiting signs of spy fever. The first, written by Winifred Tower while holidaying on the Isle of Wight, supposed that 'there were a good many spies captured in the Island, which is always overrun by Germans during the summer months, and there were one or two scares that the water had been poisoned'. The second similarly thought that 'there are a series of armed plots among Germans in London, but there is a general confidence that the police have... the situation well in hand'. Although these sources reveal the personal trepidations of the writers, they cannot be used to objectively and comprehensibly describe wider social anxieties. The latter even contradicts the assumption that spy fever became ubiquitous since it claimed panic had largely abated owing to the effectiveness of the police. Nevertheless, Panayi asserts that 'the extent of public concern with enemy aliens during the opening months of the war can be further illustrated by the fact that the

¹ Haste, *Keep the Home Fires Burning*, p. 110.

Metropolitan Police had received between 8,000 and 9,000 reports of suspected espionage by the beginning of September'.² In light of the aforementioned analysis of spy scares, the distinct lack of evidence to support the scale of denunciation, and the inherent London bias within this statement, these two sources hardly account for the responses of 40 million people. Consequently, this chapter sets out a methodology for interpreting evidence of spy fever across Britain during the First World War to evaluate the extent of this anxiety.

While previous chapters have shown the evanescence of spy phobias, this chapter aims to establish where these fears appeared to prevail during the opening eighteen months of war. Only through examining the contradictions in various responses to both the suggestion of espionage and the subsequent presence of spy fever can historians begin to understand the phenomenon beyond simplistic assertions based on its prominence within popular discourse. Rather than presume the comprehensiveness of a dominant attitude, the history of political emotions suggests that ideologies and emotions are inexorably linked, and are therefore continuously opposed by conflicting political philosophies accompanied by a corresponding family of emotions. Since spy fever was assumed to have political implications, evaluating it as a distinct set of political feelings allows historians to make sense of the phenomenon and appreciate the varying degree of adherence to this emotional standard.³ By charting the appearance of spy fever in the press across a range of publications and locations, this chapter can attribute the associated feelings to a particular community and begin to appreciate when and why espionage phobias were accepted or rejected by society.

² Panayi, *Enemy in Our Midst*, pp. 154-5.

³ 'Attack of Spy Mania.' *Daily Gazette for Middleborough*, 3 April 1914, p. 8.

Whereas historians have often asserted the ubiquity of spy fever, historians of emotion contend that researchers should not view a single emotional code governing society and should instead be more attentive to the multiple sets of feelings that coexist at any given time.⁴ Reddy argues that there is no omnipotent power dictating emotional meaning and no single cultural repository to access standardised feelings. Consequently, historians should analyse the inherent ambiguities within collective emotions.⁵ To accommodate the variety of emotional norms, Reddy's model contrasts strict regimes with those that rarely enforce emotional discipline. These regimes, he argues, seldom impose limits on 'emotional navigation' outside of specified restricted domains.⁶ Since Reddy perceives feelings as goal-orientated, he uses the term 'emotional navigation' to describe an individual's capacity to manoeuvre between different and conflicting emotional objectives.⁷ Even within the strictest of regimes, Reddy maintains that 'emotional refuges' continue to provide safe release from prevailing emotional norms. Within this framework, 'refuges' provide greater 'emotional liberty', which subsequently diminishes the 'emotional suffering' of the subject. Individuals, therefore, possess the ability to determine their emotional course, while adhering to a culturally defined pattern.⁸ Since regimes spread and enforce dominant feelings, Reddy's concept of refuge stipulates that regimes are either accepted or rejected in their entirety.⁹

⁴ Matt and Stearns, 'Introduction', p. 8;

⁵ William Reddy, 'Against Constructionism: The Historical Ethnography of Emotion', *Current Anthropology* 38/4 (1997) pp. 327-51; Nicole Eustace, 'Emotion and Political Change', in Matt and Stearns, *Doing Emotions History*, p. 170.

⁶ 'Specified domains' refers to certain types of institutions – armies, schools, priesthoods, for example.

⁷ Plamper, *History of Emotions*, p. 258.

⁸ Reddy, *Navigation of Feeling*, pp. 125-9.

⁹ Critics have also argued that the relationship he forms between emotional regimes and their political counterparts presumes the existence of modern nation states, in which individuals can associate themselves with a coherent and accessible national identity. In response to this, Rosenwein contends that, especially in pre-modern societies, historical actors belonged to several distinct communities each with varying emotives that were interacted with simultaneously. Jan Plamper, 'The History of Emotions: An Interview with William Reddy, Barbara Rosenwein, and Peter Stearns', *History and*

To incorporate plurality into the understanding of standardised emotions, Rosenwein introduced ‘emotional communities’ to account for the diversities in any given society.¹⁰ Rosenwein’s principal interest in developing her conceptualisation of emotional communities was to counter what she termed ‘the grand narrative of the history of emotions’. She supposed that all previous historical theories of emotion, including historians of spy fever, subscribed to the ‘hydraulic model’ and argued that the ‘history of the West is the history of increasing emotional restraint’. The hydraulic model assumes emotions are universal and are either ‘on’ or ‘off’ depending on collective or individual control.¹¹ Instead, Rosenwein argues that ‘emotions depend on language, cultural practices, expectations, and moral beliefs’. Consequently, ‘emotions are not pressing to be set free; they are created by each society, each culture, and each community’.¹² ‘Emotional communities’, therefore, represent certain emotional standards for specific purposes, and shared customs regarding the expression of the identified feelings. While there is often a dominant community, which she admits is synonymous with Reddy’s regime, it always accommodates other ‘marginal’ spaces and coexists with other competing groups. Individuals are therefore forced to continuously move from one community to another during which they can, and are occasionally obliged to, adjust their emotional judgements and how they display their feelings according to the appropriate cultural convention.¹³ As a consequence, an individual can conform to several standards of feeling, each

Theory 49/2 (2010) pp. 255-6; Rosenwein, ‘William M. Reddy. *The Navigation of Feeling*’, p. 1182; Plamper, *History of Emotions*, p. 262.

¹⁰ Reddy supposed that following the French Revolution, French society merely had one emotional regime without any consideration of ‘refuges’ because it promoted little ‘suffering’.

¹¹ Rosenwein, ‘Worrying about Emotions in History’, p. 834-6; Plamper, *History of Emotions*, p. 67-8.

¹² Rosenwein, ‘Worrying about Emotions in History’, p. 837.

¹³ Barbara H. Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages* (Cornell, 2006) pp. 1-31; Plamper, ‘An Interview with William Reddy, Barbara Rosenwein, and Peter Stearns’, pp. 255-61; Rosenwein, *Generations of Feeling*, pp. 3-10.

depending on their immediate social environment and circumstance when faced with various scenarios.¹⁴

Rosenwein's conceptualisation of emotional communities, therefore, implies that spy fever was merely one emotional standard among many. Exploring this emotional community within the context of wartime society will not only provide a more nuanced understanding of the British Home Front, but it will also return to the question posed in the previous chapters, namely, why did attempts to manipulate emotional reactions fail to achieve the desired outcome? Reddy's definition of emotions, however, offers some tentative answers. Notwithstanding the suitability of Rosenwein's theory of collective emotions to analysing spy fever, Reddy identifies the ideological foundations of feelings. Since emotional standards are connected to political outlooks, opposing ideologies inevitably result in rival emotional communities.¹⁵ Within this model, certain types of emotion inescapably shape moral judgements by prioritising different feelings that form distinct perceptions of right and wrong to reinforce particular ideologies.¹⁶ By prioritising certain values, institutions such as religious groups and political philosophies can dictate the spectrum of emotional selection available within the community.¹⁷ Only through understanding

¹⁴ When faced with these issues, Reddy conceded that his model would benefit from considering plural regimes: Plamper, 'The History of Emotions: An Interview'.

¹⁵ Employing a range of modern thinkers, and mirroring Reddy's suggestion that emotions are goal-orientated, Martha Nussbaum contends that political principles in every society are derived and sustained through cultivating politically pertinent emotions. Even in liberal democracies, she maintains that politically relevant emotions are fostered through leadership, education, government policy, and culture, without necessarily impinging upon individual autonomy and agency: Martha C. Nussbaum, *Political Emotions: Why Love Matters for Justice* (London, 2013) pp. 1-5; Stephen Macedo, *Liberal Virtues: Citizenship, Virtue, and Community in Liberal Constitutionalism* (Oxford, 1990) pp. 265-76, 284; Stephen Macedo, *Diversity and Distrust: Civic Education in a Multicultural Democracy* (Harvard, 2000) pp. 277-29; Michael Walzer, *Politics and Passion: Toward a More Egalitarian Liberalism* (Yale, 2004) p. 126; William A. Galston, *Liberal Purposes: Goods, Virtues, and Diversity in the Liberal State* (Cambridge, 1991) pp. 8-10.

¹⁶ Nussbaum, *Political Emotions*, p. 11; Elizabeth J. Horberg, Christopher Oveis, Dacher Keltner, 'Emotions as Moral Amplifiers: An Appraisal Tendency Approach to the Influences of Distinct Emotions upon Moral Judgement', *Emotion Review* 3/3 (2011) p. 237.

¹⁷ Martha C. Nussbaum, *Hiding from Humanity: Disgust, Shame, and the Law* (Princeton, 2006) pp. 61-2.

where these emotions prevailed can historians begin to assess how far this particular emotional community gained widespread acceptance.

Owing to the inherent plurality of emotional communities, this chapter examines the various emotional frameworks that shaped responses to the spy peril during the first eighteen months of the war. The first part features individuals seemingly unaware of the covert danger or oblivious to the panic that supposedly engulfed society. After challenging the presumed emotional hegemony of spy fever, it moves on to show how diverse communities each cultivated varying responses that centred on the alleged peril. The following section looks at how radical conservatism stimulated contemporary fears and anxieties, and focuses on right-wing discourse that conveyed the image of the spy as a specific object of danger. The third section begins to situate this community within the wider political and emotion context by highlighting the alienation of extremist ideology from the mainstream. The fourth provides a reinterpretation of radical discourse to reflect society's failure to universally assimilate to extremist ideals, while the final section examines deliberate attempts to resist the values and emotions advocated through spy fever. Together they emphasise a lack of conformity and establish the existence of conflicting communities that offered sanctuary from radical politics. Consequently, this chapter contends that spy fever was far from ubiquitous. It was predominantly limited to individuals already familiar with similar emotional standards, and as a result, should be perceived as a conservative emotional sub-community, rather than a universal British phenomenon.

A 'BENEVOLENT' AND 'INCREDULOUS' BRITISH PUBLIC

Michael Roper argues that historians have often had difficulty writing about emotional history 'because it gave rise to contradictory emotional states', and as a result, historians 'have lacked concepts that can accommodate the contrary character of emotions'.¹⁸ Studies of spy fever undeniably fall into this rubric since historians typically observe only a single emotional experience, and as a result, presume the dominance of spy phobias without the necessary scrutiny. Although spies featured extensively throughout wartime culture, fear and anxiety were not universal feelings. An example of this ambiguity can be found in *The Army and Navy Gazette*. In October 1914, it declared that there were two schools of thought regarding the spy question in Britain:

On the one side there are the benevolent or incredulous public who have not hitherto had the question brought seriously before their notice, who neither realise the danger to the country of individual or organised spies, and that England is so secure that, even if they do exist, they can do no harm; and more mischievous still, the large section of society who, partly from false good nature, partly from an ill founded sense of superiority, and partly from sheer ignorance and indifference, deliberately close their eyes to the danger which the experience of France and Belgium clearly illustrates is real.

On the other side, we have the almost equally mischievous section that believe the wildest rumours and thoughtlessly advocate measures that cannot possibly be taken.¹⁹

Yet the criticism of both over-zealous and nonchalant responses to the espionage threat implies that a third approach, favouring pragmatism over fanaticism, was considered more appropriate. In any case, despite the contemporary prominence of

¹⁸ Michael Roper, *The Secret Battle: Emotional Survival in the Great War* (Manchester, 2010) p. 14.

¹⁹ 'The Spy Question.' *Army and Navy Gazette*, 17 October 1914, p. 5.

spy phobias, and the occasional insistence among radicals that fears had become widespread, individuals could appear oblivious to the peril. More significantly, though, entire communities could remain seemingly unaware of the panic. In August 1914, the *Edinburgh Evening News* claimed that ‘spy mania had largely abated in London, and the public are now beginning to see that their fears were overdone... There is good reason to believe that the public have quite misjudged the point of danger in regarding every other German waiter or hairdresser as suspect’.²⁰ But similar fears were considered to be even less significant in Scotland.²¹ The dearth of concerns within certain communities suggests that society was not beholden to alarmist rhetoric and was not unanimously overcome by paranoia.

Testimony to the absence of alarm was the frequent denial of spy fever in the press. Local stories proved relatively straightforward to dismiss because the lack of evidence was easily discernible.²² One bewildered resident wrote to the *Belper News* pondering the origins of local spy stories:

It is passing strange where all the foolish rumours come from at the present moment with respect to the machinations of German spies in our own district. We hear of bombs being discovered here and there, and detailed plans of roads and railways unearthed in private houses, all in the possession of the police superintendent of Belper. The only detail lacking about these stories is that the superintendent himself knows nothing of the circumstances so glibly related.²³

For others, it was simply implausible that spies would have infiltrated their locale: ‘If German scouts are on the lookout for important places... they will certainly give our burgh the go-bye and go on to Montrose’, claimed one perplexed resident of

²⁰ ‘Spies in Society.’ *Edinburgh Evening News*, 25 August 1914, p. 2.

²¹ ‘The Alien Peril.’ *Edinburgh Evening News*, 18 June 1915, p. 4.

²² Although Pamala Horn’s study of English rural life during the First World War includes a number of frivolous spy stories, she concedes that they were usually caused the government’s defensive measures, are were not necessary characteristic of rural attitudes: Horn, *Rural Life in England*, pp. 36-8.

²³ *Belper News*, 11 September 1914, p. 2.

Arbroath.²⁴ Despite rumours that German agents had captured a nearby fort, Bexhill-on-Sea was likewise considered ‘the last place where one would find a German, and a spy would not have dared to set foot within the borough’.²⁵ Even in areas designated as likely targets for German espionage, spy fever could be noticeably absent. During his time defending the Firth of Forth in 1915, Nowell Turner Smith, a Second Lieutenant in the Highland Light Infantry, intimated that spy fever was practically non-existent around Edinburgh and revealed that ‘work is going along quite smoothly. There have been no scares to investigate and no spies to track down’.²⁶ While an interest in foreign espionage suggests that spy fever had become a customary concern, denying the existence of foreign agents and displaying ignorance towards the emergence of widespread panic implies that the sense of danger was not universally felt.

Notwithstanding the increase in discrimination during the First World War, and the importance of rural xenophobia to early spy scares, familiar settings often restricted the manifestation of suspicion and fashioned a reluctance to perpetuate the phobia.²⁷ Working in internment camps during the war, Dr Odlum became accustomed to enemy aliens and reiterated that the prisoners she encountered were ‘far, far, far from spies’.²⁸ Miss Kempson was equally hesitant to disclose reports of secret German mining operations owing to the embarrassment incurred if her suspicions were found to be untrue.²⁹ Even more influential than potential

²⁴ ‘Walking in Darkness.’ *Arbroath Herald and Advertiser for the Montrose Burghs*, 25 September 1914, p. 4.

²⁵ ‘Town Talk.’ *Bexhill-on-Sea Observer*, 13 March 1914, p. 4.

²⁶ Liddle GS 1640: N.A. Turner-Smith Papers, Diary entry 23 August 1915, p. 36.

²⁷ Especially in rural communities, the most obvious source of disruption was typically the Territorial forces scattered across Britain because they were unfamiliar with the area and the community in which they were stationed: Horn, *Rural Life in England*, p. 34.

²⁸ Liddle TR 05/58: Tape recording of Dr Odlum (1981)

²⁹ John St Loe Strachey Papers, STR/10/3/5: Letter dated 19 October 1914.

awkwardness and humiliation, however, was a continued sense of community that occasionally superseded the growth of nationalism during the war:

Now all of these aliens, especially from Hull, some of who I know quite well, are not in the least guilty. They have lived in England since they were babies, and can neither speak or understand the German language.³⁰

In Bradford, the German community had integrated into the community so auspiciously that many civic figures originated from German families. The town was saturated with German influences; ranging from street names to church services. Consequently, a rise in anti-Germanism was considered an affront to the town's unity and economic prosperity.³¹ But even villages without a considerable German presence maintained an affinity with 'outsiders'. Although Peggy Larken recognised the importance of conforming to patriotic narratives, she intimated that few people acted on them within her village. When asked about wartime hatred, she recalled the extent of anti-Germanism but insisted that society was 'taught to hate'. Owing to the prevalence of wartime rumour, 'we all thought that these high dignitaries were spies'. But when pressed about her first-hand experiences, Larken insisted that the German in her village had been 'left alone' by local residents.³² Larken's suggestion that her community remained indifferent to the espionage threat, despite the consumption of anti-alien discourse, challenges the assumed impact of the alarmist rhetoric and illustrates the reluctance of certain communities to contort the alien menace.

Despite its prominence in certain communities spy fever seems not to have been the dominant emotional standard. As a consequence, individuals could appear

³⁰ 'Aliens on the Coast,' *Hull Daily Mail*, 5 February 1915, p. 6.

³¹ Lynch, *Yorkshire's War*, p. 36. However, Lynch does also highlight the virulence of anti-German activity across Yorkshire, pp. 36-41.

³² IWM Sound: 13386, Eileen Margaret 'Peggy' Larken (1993) reels 1 and 2. Even if untrue or a slightly distorted memory, any hostility aimed at von Herkimer went seemingly unnoticed by Larken suggesting that it was insignificant in her local context.

ignorant of both the apparent threat as well as the subsequent alarm.³³ Immediately following the outbreak of war in August 1914, for instance, Bruce Stanbridge, recorded his anticipation of the impending conflict, but gave no sign that espionage was the cause. As soon as war was declared, he foresaw the unprecedented scale and significance of what was to come, and by the end of the month had already recognised that the crisis was ‘getting very bad’. Though he exhibited some minor concern, this primarily derived from the shortage of war news and his anxieties were never seemingly influenced by the spy peril.³⁴ While travelling across the south east of England in August 1914, Horace Joseph claimed that there was little disruption and ‘no signs of excitement on the way’. Upon arrival in Tunbridge Wells, he continued to observe ‘no signs of anything unusual’.³⁵ Although Fannie Fieldsend believed that Britain had ‘been drawn into the most stupendous conflict the world has ever known’, and her diary diligently recorded every significant event, as she understood them at least, she never referred to foreign espionage.³⁶ Like many, John Bamber took a keen interest in the activities of the authorities, and wrote that rural Lancashire was full of ‘precaution and preparation for war’, but appeared unaware of any social anxieties regarding espionage. While the government were busy ‘rounding up those Devils’, collective fears went unnoticed.³⁷ Bamber’s testimony suggests that, in particular areas at least, official measures combatting the spy threat were more conspicuous than public concern, which rarely amounted to a feverish panic. The absence of public

³³ Fife Archives, Monteith Family Papers, A/ABG/1/11: Diary of Rev. W.N. Monteith, 1914.

³⁴ Bedfordshire Record Office, X978/5: Diary kept by Bruce J. Stanbridge, Green End Farm, Kensworth, August 1914.

³⁵ Bodleian Library Special Collections, MSS. Top. Oxon. e. 288, Diary of Horace William Brindley Joseph, 14 August 1914, pp. 17-8.

³⁶ The diary attentively recorded the diplomatic context, which nations were entering the war, where fighting was taking place, how events were affecting the continent, the fighting capabilities of British troops, and comments by prominent figures. Lincolnshire Archives, MISC DEP 265/32, Diary of Fannie Rainey Fieldsend, 5 August 1914.

³⁷ Lancashire Archives and Record Office, Bamber Family Records, DDX 1841/1/40: John Bamber Diary, 8-10 August 1914.

qualms, therefore, implies that popular alarm was commonly deemed insignificant and not worthy of warranting inclusion. But an unwillingness to connect personal anxieties with collective espionage fears also suggests that individuals either remained indisposed to spy fever, or they simply never encountered public scaremongering. While the latter is impossible to objectively verify, they both intimate that collective concerns were far from comprehensive. Either way, the persuasiveness of spy fever clearly lacked consistency.

Although vague allegations of police activity have been used to assess spy fever, reactions among constabularies varied.³⁸ Even within the metropolitan police force, which has commonly been associated with a virulent epidemic of spy fever, their reaction to the espionage peril was not necessarily as hostile as is often portrayed. In August 1914, for instance, the famed espionage novelist and self-appointed expert on Germany's secret service, William Le Queux, was growing increasingly anxious. He claimed to be in receipt of anonymous letters making threats against his life. In response, he wrote to the Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police demanding protection to ensure his family's continued safety. He intimated that his close association with MO5, as well as his public persona as a famous spy catcher had placed him in considerable danger. Unfortunately for Le Queux, it was thought that he had undoubtedly 'imagined the receipt of these letters, just as he was imagining that he was in personal danger'. As a result, his request was repeatedly, and unceremoniously, denied. Thus, despite the contention that Le Queux's anthology of lurid spy novels was responsible for encouraging widespread phobias, Scotland Yard attributed his paranoia to narcissistic fantasy:

³⁸ Gwent Archives, Griffithstown Police Station Records, D2113/3: Daily Occurrence Book, November 1914 – December 1916; D2113/19: Information Book, May 1914 – December 1916; D2113/57: Sergeant's Journals, Charles Nurden, January 1914 – March 1915. Leicestershire Record Office, Leicestershire Constabulary Records, DE3831/8: Minutes of the Standing Joint Committee, No.7 November 1911 – October 1919. See chapter one for further details.

Mr Le Queux... is not a person to be taken seriously and his ways are somewhat tortuous... In his own eyes he is a person of importance and dangerous to the enemy, who would be glad to get rid of him... The authorities, who view him in proper perspective, informed him that he would receive such protection as might be deemed necessary and there the matter rests.³⁹

Le Queux's attempt to conflate fictitious stories of German secret agents with actual events, therefore, did not exist devoid of scrutiny. Even in the Metropolitan Police, who were actually responsible for rounding up potential German spies, their degree of apprehension was far more nuanced than historians have observed.

Elements within the Church also seem to have remained largely unaffected by the phobia, presumably because the connection between religious doctrine and German theologians threatened to intensify opposition to the Church's authority.⁴⁰ Instead, concerns were focused on the challenge facing Christian ideology. Alexander Wilkinson argues that the war aroused novel dilemmas for religious teaching: 'both individually and corporately Christians were ethically ill-prepared to meet the subtlety and complexity of many wartime moral problems'. Although this ambiguity inevitably blurred the distinctions between right and wrong, the Church maintained that society must 'allow no war-passion to becloud our conscience, or brutalise our instinct. We must still love those whom we fight, and desire nothing more than to be reconciled and at peace with them'.⁴¹ For many clergymen, therefore, traditional issues ostensibly exacerbated by the conflict took precedence. Shortly before the outbreak of war at least, Reverend George Mackay failed to notice the presence of

³⁹ TNA MEPO 3/243: William Le Queux Request for Personal Protection (1914-1915).

⁴⁰ While Church sermons often espoused popular patriotism, it usually refrained from overt hostility and spy fever: Liddle DF 026: Rev. Wolstan Dixie Churchill Sermons, no. 8, 19 September 1915. The Church even opposed retaliation against German attacks on civilians, including British ones. Stuart Bell, 'The Church and the First World War', in Stephen G. Parker and Tom Lawson (eds.), *God and War: The Church of England and Armed Conflict in the Twentieth Century* (Farnham, 2012) pp. 40-3.

⁴¹ Alexander Wilkinson, *The Church of England and the First World War* (Cambridge, 2014) pp. 98-9.

espionage concerns despite acknowledging that ‘grave fears are held for our own country. People are talking in hushed whispers everywhere. Great anxiety prevails’. But the ‘greatest menace’ that Mackay identified was ‘the degradation of immortal souls made for God’.⁴² Likewise, according to Cosmo Gordon Lang, the Archbishop of York, the four principal problems facing wartime society were the public’s foolish treatment of soldiers, the preservation of female modesty and fidelity, and the strengthening of religious participation. He gave no mention of the potential dangers of foreign subversion.⁴³ This lack of institutional adherence to spy fever presumably provided emotional nourishment that sustained standards of feeling opposed to the development of extreme nationalism and prejudice.

The existence of this emotional community inevitably provided refuge in areas otherwise suffering the effects of spy fever. Individuals could thus remain unaffected and even unaware of its consequences, regardless of their purported vulnerability to spies and saboteurs. In Plymouth, a virulent spy fever seemingly occurred, but this atmosphere of suspicion emerged completely unbeknown to some residents.⁴⁴ In a letter describing the outbreak of war in Plymouth, one resident noted the ‘infestation’ of troops and lamented the queues outside the local Co-Operative stores, but as soon as they had disappeared, the city supposedly returned to normality with little noticeable change.⁴⁵ The same was true on the east coast. Upon visiting Cleethorpes in September 1914, Helen Fane remarked that the town seemed strangely peaceful. Aside from being full of soldiers, ‘one would never know that England was at war’.⁴⁶ In Newcastle, the most noticeable manifestation of panic was not against the alien or

⁴² IWM docs: 74/135/1, Papers of Reverend J. Mackay, Diary entry 1 August 1914.

⁴³ ‘War Items.’ *Gloucestershire Echo*, 2 November 1914, p. 4.

⁴⁴ Pennell, *A Kingdom United*, p. 107.

⁴⁵ Plymouth and West Devon Record Office, Papers of Charles Calmady-Hamlyn, 511/1: Letter from W Eares, 8 August 1914.

⁴⁶ Diary of Helen Beatrice Fane vol. 2, 1 October 1914.

the spy but in the city's grocery shops as people sought to gather emergency rations.⁴⁷ In Essex, Reverend Andrew Clark noted how there was no sign of 'any khaki-clad figure, or any war-wagon, or other sign of war, other than posters inviting recruits or announcing Red Cross Lectures'.⁴⁸ Even in London, the public often appeared to 'go about their amusements or business as if nothing unusual was happening'.⁴⁹ Moreover, individuals did not automatically associate tragedy with German sabotage. Owing to the emphasis given to protecting the railways, the Quintinshill rail disaster in May 1915, the worst in British history, could have easily been attributed to spies, yet there is little evidence implicating any form of malicious activity.⁵⁰

One of the most extraordinary cases of ignorance occurred at Aberdeen in November 1914, when a Belgian refugee named Henry Vander Vin, inquired into the operations of the fishing port there. Although there is no explicit evidence confirming the ill intentions of the author, it seems likely that this was the work of an agent attempting to procure information on behalf of Germany.⁵¹ He claimed that following his 'forced exile' from Antwerp, where he had been employed as the chief engineer in at the port, he would 'gather information concerning certain ports of the United Kingdom, where I have been received with such feeling and generosity'. Acquiring this information would supposedly enable him 'to follow its development, to take account of its present position, its dispositions, the conditions under which this industry is carried on both as regards the reception and removal of the fish'. Furthermore, the letter contained an extensive series of questions that, if answered,

⁴⁷ Papers of Reverend J. Mackay, Diary entry 4 August 1914. But this was not a unique observation: Papers of Miss M. Coules, p. 5; Papers of Harry Miller, 6 August 1914.

⁴⁸ Diary of Andrew Clark vol. II, 25 September 1914, p. 110.

⁴⁹ Papers of Frederick Arthur Robinson, Diary entry 13 August 1914.

⁵⁰ IWM docs: 96/52/1, Papers of F.T. Lockwood, Diary entry 22 May 1915; Papers of Ada McGuire, Undated letter from Ada to 'Dearest E'.

⁵¹ Boghardt, *Spies of the Kaiser*, p. 91. The timing of his inquiry is also incredibly suspect coming shortly before the German raids on the British east coast.

would disclose substantial amounts of information regarding the city of Aberdeen, the harbour, and most significantly, its defences. The questions included:

1. Number of Inhabitants of the City of Aberdeen.
3. By what railway is it served?
10. By what is the fishing port made up – docks, locks, quays, extent of water, disposition of quays and their special uses, depth of water on an average high and low tide.
16. By what are the quay walls constructed?

Of course, the appeal concluded by asserting that the ‘information required merely concerns the fishing port,’ but more alarmingly, he requested that their answers include maps and plans.⁵² Despite the intrusiveness, resulting internal correspondence reveals little regard for the spy peril. The town clerk showed some interest in establishing the identity of the author upon receiving the request, but even without such knowledge the harbour engineer complied and even forwarded additional information. Although he momentarily conceded that it might have been necessary to obtain further information about the author, he believed that there was ‘no reason to think that he is other than stated in his letter’.⁵³ Notwithstanding the potential value of this information to an invading force requiring logistical support, or a naval squadron attempting to destroy the harbour, the port officials almost entirely overlooked the possible involvement of a foreign spy.⁵⁴ If spy fever were a truly widespread concern, individuals responsible for infrastructure, especially in areas vulnerable to a German attack, would have been conversant with the threat and inclined to take it seriously. The careless disregard towards the possibility that Vander Vin may have been a

⁵² Aberdeen City Archives, Aberdeen Harbour Records, CA/14/4/31: Harbour Commissioner’s Incoming Letter Book 1914-1916, 1 November 1914, p. 78b.

⁵³ Ibid, 4 December 1914, p. 78c.

⁵⁴ This type of request was more than enough to warrant suspicion. The editor of *The Spectator*, for example, wrote to the foreign Secretary, Edward Grey, after receiving two mysterious letters purportedly from foreign attaches. He requested that the police investigate simply because of their anonymity. John St Loe Strachey Papers, STR/7/8/26: Letter dated 18 February 1915.

German agent shows that spy phobias were not omnipotent, and some individuals remained completely oblivious to the peril.

Although historians commonly suggest spy fever ‘attacked indiscriminately’ and became an ever-present anxiety during the First World War, the diversity between various emotional communities implies that rival regimes sustained different emotional standards. Notwithstanding its prominence in the press, the appeal and potency of spy fever was varied. The failure of certain individuals and institutions to recognise the effects of spy fever suggests that it was not a contagion that attacked mercilessly. Despite the presumed resonance of individual spy phobias, the indifference of certain people, even in close proximity to spy panics, implies that they interacted with different emotional communities. But while individuals appeared unacquainted with patriotic narratives, institutional reticence also preserved public apathy towards the danger. Thus, the capacity to either ignore the espionage threat or remain unaffected by the outbreak of alarm reflects the inherent limits of spy fever as an emotional community. Only through analysing the origins of the espionage obsessed community, as well as the degree of emotional resistance to it, can we begin to assess the significance of wartime spy phobias.

RADICAL CONSERVATISM DURING THE EDWARDIAN ERA

During the early weeks of the war, elements within British society were frequently exposed to warnings about spies and instructed on how to respond to the expected dangers by local figures of authority. While regional apprehensions often compelled this transformation, it represented an attempt to mobilise particular communities for the anticipated challenges following the declaration of the war. Once the parameters

of war became clearer, though, the immediate threats facing society appeared to decline, and local anxieties subsided as people became accustomed to the conditions of war. From around mid-September, though, there was an increasingly virulent discourse designed to capitalise on the paranoia that emerged in August 1914. This rhetoric was almost entirely distinct from early outbreaks of suspicion since efforts to maintain this emotional standard began to exhibit a much greater degree of coordination as well as an overt political agenda. This subsequent stage in the history of spy phobias focused less on isolated incidents intended to arouse suspicion, and instead sought to highlight the broader problems allegedly created by foreign influences. Through analysing the origins and content of this discourse, the connection between spy fever and the radical right can be established.

Since the difficulties incurred fighting against the Boers in southern Africa had exposed the weaknesses of the Empire, the British public had grown increasingly conscious of the nation's defences.⁵⁵ As a result, Edwardian society witnessed a complete reversal of Victorian attitudes towards military participation and developed a form of militarism entirely consistent with its traditional liberal culture.⁵⁶ Imitating earlier invasions scares, and building on the expansion of militarism across British society, the spy offered a convenient image to embolden conservative policies.⁵⁷ Matthew Hendley argues that Shakespeare became a central figure in the 'cultural self

⁵⁵ John Gooch, *The Prospect of War: The British Defence Policy, 1847-1914* (Abingdon, 1981) p. 9; John Gooch, 'Britain and the Boer War', in George J. Andreopoulos and Harold E. Selesky (eds.), *The Aftermath of Defeat: Societies, Armed Forces, and the Challenge of Recovery* (Yale, 1994) pp. 40-3; Glenn R. Wilkinson, 'The Blessings of War': The Depiction of Military Force in Edwardian Newspapers', *Journal of Contemporary History* 33/1 (1998) pp. 98, 115.

⁵⁶ Summers, 'Militarism in Britain before the Great War', pp. 104-23; John Gooch, 'Attitudes to War in Late Victorian and Edwardian England', in Brian Bond and Ian Roy (eds.), *War and Society: A Yearbook of Military History Volume 1* (London, 1977) pp. 88-102; Matthew Johnson, 'The Liberal Party and the Navy League in Britain before the Great War', *Twentieth Century British History*, 22/2 (2011) p. 163.

⁵⁷ 'Civilian Volunteers.' *Birmingham Mail*, 15 August 1914, p. 3; 'German Spies Handicapping our Navy on the East Coast.' *Western Times*, 15 September 1914, p. 5; 'Thoughts on the War.' *Chelmsford Chronicle*, 16 October 1914, p. 7.

mobilization' of Britain during the First World War because he represented a conspicuous symbol of Englishness. The image of spy on the other hand, served to highlight that which was not English, and by extension, directly opposed to the war effort.⁵⁸ For Conservatives in Parliament, the spy peril presented an opportunity to criticise the Government's perceived inertia during the initial stages of the conflict.⁵⁹ Outraged at the apparent system of German espionage on the east coast, Lord Leith of Fyvie used the spy peril to frame his discriminatory agenda. He suggested that the government's bureaucratic confusion and administrative difficulties were hindering an efficient and wholesale restriction on aliens, which was exacerbating the current threat to the nation's security.⁶⁰ Such criticisms, however, were not limited to Parliament. One angry Scotsman wrote a scathing essay to the editor of his local newspaper highlighting the inconsistencies within current policies targeting spies. While he denounced the leniency displayed by the Government and likened it to criminal negligence, his principal concern was that the country was 'suffering from unpreparedness'.⁶¹ Beresford's initial efforts to galvanise popular hostility towards enemy aliens were thus based on the premise that the Government's precautions against spies were hopelessly insufficient.⁶² Given the focus on Britain's defensive capabilities and the existential threat posed by an enemy within, this political rhetoric

⁵⁸ Matthew C. Hendley, 'Cultural Mobilization and British Responses to Cultural Transfer in Total War: The Shakespeare Tercentenary of 1916', *First World War Studies* 3/1 (2012) pp. 25-49.

⁵⁹ Rowland Hunt, *Hansard*, 27 August 1914; Earl Stanhope, *Hansard*, 10 September 1914; Joynson-Hicks, *Hansard*, 12 November 1914; Marquess of Londonderry, *Hansard*, 18 November 1914; Lord Leith of Fyvie, *Hansard*, 25 November 1914. Wilson, *The Myriad Faces of War*, pp. 198-9.

⁶⁰ TNA HO 45/10756/267450: 'ALIENS The 'Spy Peril' and the question of interning all enemy aliens'. Lord Leith of Fyvie to the House of Lords, 25 November 1914.

⁶¹ 'Letters to the Editor. Alien Spies.' *The Scotsman*, 12 October 1914, p. 10. This was indicative of the right wing press more generally: 'German in England.' *The Globe*, 25 August 1914, p. 6; 'The Spy Folly.' *John Bull* Vol. XVII No. 5 December 1914, p. 2;

⁶² 'Alien Spy Peril.' *Portsmouth Evening News*, 18 November 1914, p. 6; 'The Espionage Danger.' *Western Mail*, 19 November 1914, p. 4. Horatio Bottomley made similar accusations: 'Foes at Home.' *John Bull* Vol. XVII No. 432, 12 September 1914, p. 11.

was undoubtedly characteristic of radical Edwardian conservatism and reflected a continuity in right-wing politics.⁶³

Although the inclusion of the spy offered a novelty to extremism and provided a degree of urgency and necessity to their ideology, attacking the leniency of Liberalism was not uncommon among Conservatives. Before the war, Liberals demonstrating a commitment to Cobdenite principles were accused of endangering the Empire, the security of the nation, and the morale of British society.⁶⁴ In July 1914, Leo Maxse, one of the most vocal radical activists, warned the readers of the *National Review* that ‘either this country must destroy the Asquith government or the Asquith Government will destroy this country’.⁶⁵ To many critics, liberalism appeared ill-prepared and unequipped to deal with an anticipated future contest. Following the outbreak of war, liberalism still appeared to lack the qualities necessary for a successful outcome, while the Party itself failed to provide legislative responses that offered the doggedness believed to be necessary.⁶⁶ Determining the processes through which the spy became a conduit for political engagement has wider ramifications for how spy fever can be located. As a device for political opposition, the image of the spy was shaped by the British political landscape. Although historians have typically perceived spy fever as an organic precursor to more extreme forms of anti-alienism, they have overlooked the close association between espionage concerns and right-

⁶³ Richard Thurlow, *Fascism in Britain: From Oswald Mosley's Blackshirts to the National Front* (London, 2006) pp. 3-4.

⁶⁴ Stephen E. Koss, *Lord Haldane: Scapegoat for Liberalism* (London, 1969) p. 152; Geoffrey Searle, ‘The ‘Revolt from the Right in Edwardian Britain’, in Paul Kennedy and Anthony James Nicholls (eds.), *Nationalist and Racialist Movements in Britain and Germany Before 1914* (London, 1981) p. 25; Frans Coetzee and Marilyn Shevin Coetzee, ‘Rethinking the Radical Right in Germany and Britain before 1914’, *Journal of Contemporary History* 21/4 (1986) p. 517; Nigel Keohane, *The Party of Patriotism: The Conservative Party and the First World War* (Farnham, 2010) p. 105.

⁶⁵ Morris, *The Scaremongers*, p. 383; John Hutchinson, *Leopold Maxse and the National Review, 1893–1914: Right-Wing Politics and Journalism in the Edwardian Era* (London, 1989) p. 461.

⁶⁶ Koss, *Haldane: Scapegoat for Liberalism*, pp. 152-5; TNA HO 45/10756/267450: The ‘Spy Peril’ and the question of interning all enemy aliens, House of Lords, 25 November 1914.

wing ideologies.⁶⁷ Highlighting the rise of foreign influences, intensifying current crises, and exaggerating the scale of the security threat, all resemble far-right strategies to legitimise immigration debates.⁶⁸

The outbreak of war undoubtedly provided the radical right with a fresh impetus. As the initial furore subsided after the early weeks of the war, security discourse shifted from specific, localised disturbances to more centralised policy discussions.⁶⁹ Although both Liberals and Conservatives questioned the government's policy, the most profound criticism specifically employing the image of the spy originated from Parliamentarians in both Houses with connections to the radical right. In the Commons, William Joynson-Hicks and Lord Charles Beresford were instrumental in forming opposition to the Government's alleged indiscretions.⁷⁰ At the beginning of September 1914, Joynson-Hicks pressed McKenna on the necessity of appointing a small non-party committee to advise on the appropriate steps to secure the nation from German spies. He initially seemed content with the Home Secretary's rebuttal that such a committee had been established in 1910 and had fully considered the question of aliens in wartime.⁷¹ Yet only a week later, he suggested that the Home Office go so far as to publish the names and addresses of all registered enemy aliens so 'that Englishmen may know with whom they are transacting business'.⁷² In November, he reiterated that 'our first duty is to protect ourselves', and claimed he 'would rather that irreparable damage should be done to any individual or individuals

⁶⁷ The portrayal of spy fever as an indiscriminate condition has also clearly obstructed this connection.

⁶⁸ Roger Eatwell, *Fascism: A History* (London, 2003) pp. 222-7; Stanley G. Payne, *A History of Fascism 1914-45* (Abingdon, 2005) pp. 35-41.

⁶⁹ See chapter one for initial responses to the outbreak of war. By mid-September the spy scares that had characterised the initial period following the declaration of war had significantly died down.

⁷⁰ 'Spies.' *Evening Dispatch*, 28 August 1914, p. 1; 'Home Secretary and the Spy Question.' *Coventry Evening Telegraph*, 28 August 1914, p. 3; 'The Spy Peril. Lord C. Beresford and the Home Office.' *Dublin Daily Express*, 3 October 1914, p. 5; 'Lord C. Beresford and Alien Spies.' *Exeter and Plymouth Gazette*, 3 October 1914, p. 3; 'Lord C. Beresford and the Spy Question.' *Western Gazette*, 16 October 1914, p. 10.

⁷¹ Joynson-Hicks, *Hansard*, 9 September 1914.

⁷² Joynson-Hicks, *Hansard*, 16 September 1914.

rather than our country should be placed in danger even for a moment'. Adamant that rumours of German spies operating in France and Belgium were illustrative of threats in Britain, he became convinced of the Government's ineptitude: 'I am quite prepared to say that I believe there are, and that there have been... men who for the interests of the country would have been very much better shot than left where they were. I say that without hesitation'. To which McKenna replied, 'can the honourable Gentleman give me the names of any of these people?' But of course, he could not.⁷³ His eagerness to suspend *habeas corpus* and his ferociousness in advocating a series of illegal executions were indicative of his radical nature, which is itself reflective of the ideological position many of the notable proponents of spy fever held.

Although Beresford provided an equally dissenting voice in the Commons, he was more influential in extending extremist narratives outside of Parliament. Although Beresford took an active role in the recruitment campaign during September 1914, during which he used conceptions of race to accentuate volunteering, and ironically juxtaposed Prussian militarism and authoritarianism with the more favourable ideals associated with British liberty and democracy, the spy was ostensibly absent from this rhetoric.⁷⁴ During October 1914, however, Beresford initiated a campaign targeting the Government's national security policies. He began by holding local meetings to propagate extremist ideology, which sought to emphasise the gravity of the situation and expose the Home Office's failure to recognise the spy peril facing Britain. As a consequence, he recommended that all aliens, naturalised or

⁷³ Joynson-Hicks – McKenna, *Hansard*, 12 November 1914.

⁷⁴ 'Lord C. Beresford's Call.' *Portsmouth Evening News*, 1 September 1914, p. 2; 'Lord Charles' Beresford's Appeal.' *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, 4 September 1914, p. 3; 'Lord Charles' Beresford's Appeal.' *Birmingham Daily Post*, 7 September 1914, p. 8; 'Call to Arms at Halifax.' *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, 15 September 1914, p.3; 'Lord Charles Beresford's Recruiting Campaign.' *Leeds Mercury*, 17 September 1914, p. 4.

not, be interned immediately.⁷⁵ This local campaigning culminated with a letter released to the press in which he appealed to the country's nationalistic urges to combat the threat of German espionage:

I appeal to my countrymen to take a strong line of action with regard to the crowd of alien enemies in our midst. They are creating a real danger to the State. Are we to wait for those ordinary commonsense precautions necessary during war until a catastrophe occurs? It is time for plain speaking, for deeds and not words. The plea that there must be some proof or evidence that an alien is going to commit a treacherous act before he can be arrested or sentenced cannot hold water in war time.

After exposing the 'real danger' and the need for an abrupt and profound response, he emphasised the urgency by using the image of 'Poor little Belgium':

Belgium has suffered countless horrors by the dastardly action of Germans who were naturalised. Immediately war broke out these supposed friends placed all their local knowledge at the disposal of the enemy. Before the war these Germans were considered as friends, and every confidence was placed in their loyalty. A false friend is far more dangerous than a declared enemy.

Unsurprisingly, the prevention of similar circumstances befalling Britain required increased regulations and restrictions placed upon aliens:

Meetings should be held in every town, and resolutions should be carried protesting against the present state of affairs, and sent to the Premier. We are all one in the country in supporting the Government in all that they do to enable them to fight this war out to a finish, but public men would be traitors if they did not call attention to facts liable to cause disaster. The sooner we recognise the fact that we are at war the better. Numbers of men have been caught red-handed signalling and have been discharged, 'not sufficient evidence'. German hatred of us is little understood in this

⁷⁵ 'Lord Charles Beresford and Alien Spies. An Infamous System.' *Aberdeen Evening Express*, 3 October 1914, p. 4. Haste, *Keep the Home Fires Burning*, p. 114; Pennell, *A Kingdom United*, p. 112.

country. The doctrine has been forced into the German mind by their Press and in their schools. It blossoms forth in the actions of treacherous spies.⁷⁶

By amplifying the danger confronting the public, Beresford was able to highlight the apparent weaknesses within the government. More importantly, though, assimilating the spy peril into this rhetoric provided an allusion of legitimacy to publicly discuss and promote his pre-existing anti-immigrant agenda.⁷⁷ The use of counter-factual comparisons that accentuated the urgency of the current crisis, the importance of a collective grass roots response, and the limitations of existing legislative capabilities, are typical of right wing radicalism.⁷⁸ Beresford's underlying message was therefore consistent with wider attempts to popularise extremist narratives. He was thus not overly concerned that Britain should become more vigilant or conscious of covert operations, but instead sought to promote the control and restriction of immigrants.

Ultra conservative magazines were especially eager to promote the spy as an object of danger and cause for alarm. Following Britain's entry into the war, the *National Review* continued to lament the British government for their alleged incompetence.⁷⁹ It argued that because of 'Haldaneism' and pro-Germanism within the Cabinet Britain had continuously miscalculated Germany's belligerence, which had carelessly brought about a war that the government was unprepared and unequipped to fight. In a deliberate attempt to incite further radical opposition, its

⁷⁶ 'Alien Enemies. Our Danger from Within.' *Daily Record*, 13 October 1914, p. 2; 'Alien Enemies in Our Midst. Lord Chas. Beresford's Appeal.' *Western Daily Press*, 13 October 1914, p. 5; 'False Friends in Our Midst. Lord C. Beresford and the Spy Danger.' *Leeds Mercury*, 13 October 1914, p. 2; 'Enemies in England.' *Cornishman*, 22 October 1914, p. 7

⁷⁷ Frans Coetzee, *For Party or Country? Nationalism and the Dilemmas of Popular Conservatism in Edwardian England* (Oxford, 1990) p. 96. For specific examples see L. J. Maxse, *Germany on the Brain or, The Obsession of a 'Crank': Gleanings from The National Review, 1899-1914* (London, 1915).

⁷⁸ Peter Davies and Derek Lynch, *The Routledge Companion to Fascism and the Far Right* (London, 2002) p. 168.

⁷⁹ Maxse specifically wrote that 'at this crisis of our fate the British Empire is at the mercy of a cabal of short-sighted at self-seeking partisans, who will be tempted to subordinate permanent national interests to passing party exigencies.' 'Partisans and Patriotism.' *National Review* No. 381, November 1914.

editor, Leo Maxse, declared that:

It is only by vigilance in the patriotic cause that we shall prevent a continuance of the hideous blunders which were within an ace of ruining our name and our fame... Politicians do not become capable and trustworthy simply because they have drifted into war. They will require as vigorous 'bingeing up' throughout the war as in the crisis preceding the war.⁸⁰

This appeal for 'vigilance', however, was soon aimed at mobilising public hostility towards German influences because of the hidden spies that had supposedly 'honey-combed' Britain.⁸¹ While not all aliens were considered dangerous, dutiful citizens were instructed to remain cautious:

Germany has displayed such genius in the peculiarly dirty business of organising espionage, and employs every stray scoundrel of any nationality who will sell himself for a sufficiently small sum, that we cannot be too careful.⁸²

Owing to the government's negligence, and the resulting spy peril that they had created, the *National Review* had a fathomable reason for attacking Britain's naturalisation laws.⁸³ More importantly, though, the implicit secrecy of an army of spies seemingly validated their conspiratorial fantasies. Central to the *National Review*'s Germanophobia, was a belief that the Hanseatic League had been clandestinely subverting British interests since the medieval period.⁸⁴ But it was primarily through the prominence of espionage suspicions that their myth of a German 'hidden hand' found any real resonance.⁸⁵

The 'spy' proved equally useful in launching the most active and vocal extremist organisation to emerge in Britain during the First World War: the British

⁸⁰ 'Episodes of the Month.' *National Review* No. 379, September 1914.

⁸¹ 'What Every Cabinet Minister Knew.' *National Review* No. 381, November 1914.

⁸² 'Undesirable Aliens.' *National Review* No. 382, December 1914.

⁸³ *John Bull* similarly lambasted Britain's traditional hospitality to foreigners in this way: 'Points for Patriots.' *John Bull* Vol. XVII No. 429, p. 10.

⁸⁴ Ian. D. Colvin, *The Germans in England 1066-1598* (London, 1915) pp. xi-xxxi.

⁸⁵ Panayi, 'The Hidden Hand', p. 257.

Empire Union (BEU). Formed in 1915 under its original appellation, the Anti-German Union, it integrated the ideas and objectives from various pre-war Conservative pressure groups.⁸⁶ Rather than demonstrate the distinctions between anti-alienism and espionage phobias, the creation of the British Empire Union illustrates the intimate relationship between spy fever and wider xenophobia. The image of the spy was vehemently capitalised on by the BEU wherever it was beneficial to their interests, but there is little evidence to suggest that as an organisation they took the threat of espionage and covert operations seriously.⁸⁷ During a series of initial meetings, in which they hoped to establish their ideology, they frequently reiterated the British parallels with Belgium before the German invasion. In response to Britain becoming 'overrun and swamped' by foreign spies during the years preceding the outbreak of war, they portrayed themselves as the defenders of British security while also advocating ever-restrictive measures.⁸⁸

We are hunting down agents and spies, but especially we are out to defend British freedom, rights, and privileges ... Those of us who cannot fight in the trenches can assist in expelling the Germans secret societies from our country. Men and women could not do better than enrol themselves in this union, and be your own private detective. Your help will be the greatest value ...

The Anti-German Union has an Intelligence Branch, which investigates reports of suspected espionage, alien enemies at large, and any other information pointing to hidden dangers to our nation. These reports are dealt with accordingly, and are either

⁸⁶ Firstly, Beresford, Joynson-Hicks, and the Lord Leith of Fyvie were all prominent members of the BEU, which provided a degree of unity and continuity with earlier associations. Secondly, their ideology was far from unique. They replicated Ian Colvin's conspiracy theories regarding the German 'Hidden Hand' and appropriated the Tariff Reformers' advocacy of imperial unity. Panayi, 'The British Empire Union', p. 125.

⁸⁷ IWM K52496-4, BEU no.8, 'Britain In The Web Of The German Spider'; K52496-5, BEU no.9, 'What The British Empire Union Wants'; K52496-9, BEU no.13, 'Germans In London The 'Mysterious Hand' Of Influence At Work'; K52496-17, BEU no.23, 'What The British Empire Union Advocates'.

⁸⁸ 'Anti-German Demonstration in London.' *Manchester Evening News*, 28 May 1915, p. 5; 'Spies in England.' *Portsmouth Evening News*, 18 June 1915, p. 4.

handed over to the authorities, or are dealt with in some other way which seems appropriate.⁸⁹

Depicting the spy in this manner facilitated further discrimination against aliens under the guise of patriotism. Toning down their extremism and integrating it within acceptable narratives made the BEU appear more palatable to a much broader demographic. But evoking the imagery of the spy also allowed them to associate their advocated measures with existing government policies, which provided a semblance of official endorsement while also drawing upon the themes of excitement and adventure found in popular culture. Individuals were thus invited to become their 'own private detective' like the heroes of contemporary literature to alleviate their guilt or dissatisfaction at being unable to participate on the front line.⁹⁰ Thus, while the spy provided the initial impetus for the growth in anti-alien sentiment, its practicality and association with xenophobic narratives meant that it continued to have an enduring role in public discourses beyond the autumn of 1914.

The image of the spy, therefore, played a key role in the promotion of radical politics. Radical politicians, newspapers, and organisations, all had a vested interest in exaggerating the danger of foreign espionage. Germany's purported infiltration of Britain appeared to some to necessitate a radical response: enhanced military powers and legislative capabilities, the mobilisation of popular xenophobic hostilities, and occasionally, the removal of supposedly complacent politicians. As a result, spy fever should be perceived as a preeminent conservative emotional sub-community, rather than a universal British phenomenon. Attributing spy fever to a specific ideology, challenges historical narratives that affirm the ubiquity of spy fever. The existence of

⁸⁹ 'Anti-German Union Being formed in Hull.' *Hull Daily Mail*, 21 September 1915, p. 2; similar depictions were made elsewhere: 'The Enemy Alien Danger.' *Western Mail*, 6 November 1915, p. 8.

⁹⁰ David Stafford, 'Spies and Gentlemen: The Birth of the British Spy Novel, 1893-1914' *Victorian Studies* 24/4 (1981) pp. 489-509.

one politically orientated emotional community implies that distinct standards of feeling likewise reflected opposing ideologies. Crucially, though, the expediency of the spy to radical conservative strategies suggests that espionage phobias were primarily located within individuals already familiar with similar emotional standards. Consequently, ascertaining the wider impact of the radical right is essential in determining both the reception of spy concerns and the influence that the corresponding emotional community attained.

EXTENT OF SPY FEVER

Although the concept of emotional communities theoretically challenges the prevalence of spy fever, analysing how far alarmist rhetoric infiltrated mainstream discourse offers an empirical assessment of the impact that this community achieved. To measure the extent of spy fever, this section considers where, when, and how espionage featured in the popular press to examine how society were confronted by the spy peril. In his seminal history of spy fever, David French claims that the appearance of espionage stories in the press provides an indication that society had become receptive to spy concerns, while Panayi aptly points out that the Unionist press were particularly responsible for exploiting this apprehension.⁹¹ Panayi specifically highlights the *Daily Mail* and the *Globe* in playing ‘a prominent part in arousing suspicion’.⁹² However, such claims require much greater contextual analysis than previously attempted. H.W.B Joseph, a philosopher at New College Oxford, considered Northcliffe’s publications, the *Daily Mail* and the *Times*, ‘disgusting’ and

⁹¹ French, ‘Spy Fever in Britain’, p. 356.

⁹² Panayi, *Enemy in our Midst*, p. 154. See also Haste, *Keep the Home Fires Burning*, p. 109.

‘insults [to] the working man’, for example.⁹³ Without placing the alarm featured in the Unionist press into a wider context, therefore, grandiose claims of widespread fear remain unsubstantiated.⁹⁴ Analysing how often these concerns were replicated throughout the British press independent of right wing newspapers offers a method of assessing the existence of spy fever more generally. Crucially, this broader perspective suggests historians have occasionally misinterpreted the scale of the paranoia. While spy stories commonly reveal collective anxieties, they often directed anger towards society’s disregard of the apparent spy danger. The angst that was often conveyed outside of the right wing press actually reflected a predominant indifference towards the spy peril rather than widespread panic. This level of ambiguity needs clarifying to accurately measure the extent of spy fears compared with the prominence of espionage in popular discourse.

To incorporate as much of society as possible, this analysis surveys thirty-six newspapers from across England, Scotland, and Wales.⁹⁵ It has thus catalogued the portrayal of emotional reactions based on nearly seven thousand articles referring to spies.⁹⁶ Owing to the higher rate of spy scares in rural and coastal areas, it distinguishes between inland and coastal regions as well as between urban and rural locations (see Table 1.1). As a result, it includes 6 papers from inland urban areas, 6 from port cities, 12 from rural areas along the coast, and 12 from provincial areas

⁹³ Diary of Horace William Brindley Joseph, 9 May 1915, p. 157.

⁹⁴ Brett Holman’s work on defence panics and the construction of the German aerial threat, for example, suggests that newspaper readers did not blindly accept everything that they read in the conservative press: Holman, *The Next War in the Air*, p. 174.

⁹⁵ The selection was primarily determined by the availability of digitised copies at the time of collection, which permitted enhanced search techniques. As far as was possible, the selection process tried to include newspapers from all areas of Britain and did not knowingly prioritise publications with a particular political stance. Where locations had multiple publications either the most popular (in the case of two options) was chosen, or the publication with the medium number of search hits (in the case of three options) was used to provide a fair indication.

⁹⁶ The exact figure is 6,921. The ability to search thousands of articles has been made possible by the British Newspaper Archive and their online search engine. Every effort has been made to ensure that it contains every possible article, but the collection inevitably relies on the integrity of this technology.

inland.⁹⁷ To appreciate the degree of alarm conveyed in the press, and to comment on the extensive collection of reports, articles that were found to contain the words ‘spy’, ‘spying’, and ‘spies’ were grouped into several categories. Distinguishing between the different forms of popular interest helps interpret the inclusion of the spy within mainstream discourse and isolate alarmist rhetoric from a mere fascination with espionage:

Investigations, Arrests, Detainments, and Prosecutions: Essentially, this category represents tangible reports of spy scares. It includes official and unofficial claims of espionage where the name of either the suspect or accuser was present. The only exceptions to this were trials where the names of the suspect(s) were not released. That the case was prosecuted is enough to recognise that the concern was taken seriously. It is important to separate abstract claims of foreign espionage from tangible instances of local suspicion because while the former represents attempts to arouse suspicion, the latter reveals the impact of those efforts on patterns of behaviour. Isolating incidents of suspicion is therefore necessary in analysing individual fears compared with collective anxieties.

Alarmist Reports: Attempts to warn society of the dangers posed by foreign espionage and subversion, or evidence claiming to show a general anxiety within a specified location. This category also includes rhetoric designed to amplify the threat of espionage and attack government policies, as well as loose accusations devoid of specific cases or people. Attempts to encourage xenophobia or intolerance against race, ethnicity, ideology, or sexuality through the image of the spy were also included.

⁹⁷ I used a greater number of rural newspapers because, unlike their urban counterparts, they were not printed daily.

Reports that were not explicitly alarmist, but reflected a general assumption that the spy peril had become a conventional concern were also entered into this group. This selection of reports gives the most important indication of spy fever's prevalence in the press. Analysing the extent of alarmist rhetoric in various journals across Britain can locate the attempts to establish an emotional community that prioritised a fear of spies, and thus determine the significance of spy phobias as a collective anxiety.

Opposition to Spy Fever: Rhetoric designed to impede the prevalence of spy fever and demonstrate the fallacy and exaggeration of spy stories. This includes reports that implied a lack of spy fever, despite a subtle interest in espionage. This category also incorporated concerns that ostensibly mirrored the spy rhetoric but criticised society for not acting against the threat. Since these claims described an unresponsive public, despite the predilection of the author, they suggest that spy fever was not ubiquitous, and instead located within specific communities. In order to establish the significance of spy fever, the way in which discourse discredited the danger, as well as the prominence of scaremongering, needs to be identified and assessed.

Stories of Spies Abroad: All news of espionage activity that occurred overseas. Cases of espionage emanating from foreign countries were analysed independently from concerned or suspicious reports occurring within Britain. Although the appearance of these stories reflected British interests in espionage, they were not a representation of local anxieties. Nor were these stories typically portrayed as an immediate danger to Britain, and should not be considered as alarmist unless there was an explicit attempt to link cases of espionage occurring abroad with potential threats in Britain.

Entertainment and Popular Culture: Advertisements or reviews of novels, plays, and films. Also includes short stories, jokes, and poems published in newspapers. This categorisation illustrates the extent of society's interest in spies as oppose to their purportedly anxiety. Along with stories of spies abroad, these two categories reflect the intense cultural fascination with espionage that is explored in the subsequent chapter.

These classifications embody the various ways in which espionage featured in the press between August 1914 and December 1915.⁹⁸ But given the parameters of spy fever identified in the previous chapter, only 'Investigations' and 'Alarmist Reports' amounted to what contemporaries would have considered representative of a spy fever.⁹⁹ By grouping reports in this way, this section can analyse the attempts to establish and maintain an emotional community built around the spy peril, as well as distinguish this community from others that merely fashioned a cultural interest in spying.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ There were also reports that contained the word 'spy' that were not included, when it was used as either a verb or to represent an object (spy-glass or spy-hole, for instance). This category is largely irrelevant to the study of spy fever, but allows every article to be accounted for.

⁹⁹ The latter two categories are explored further in the following chapter.

¹⁰⁰ Whereas 'suspicion' featured previously and 'opposition' is discussed below, articles considered as 'abroad' and 'entertainment' are both used as analytical tools in the following chapter.

Table 3.1 Frequency of espionage in the press compared with the intensity of alarm

	Total number of issues	No. of spy articles	Average no. of spy articles per issue		No. of alarmist articles	Intensity of alarm (%)
Globe	426	900	2.1	Globe	605	67.2
Faringdon Advertiser	73	118	1.6	Chelmsford Chronicle	36	63.2
Whitby Gazette	74	115	1.6	Cornishman	51	57.3
Diss Express	74	93	1.3	Diss Express	51	54.8
Fife Free Press	73	91	1.2	Shepton Mallet Journal	40	54.1
Cornishman	74	89	1.2	Dumfries and Galloway	63	52.5
Edinburgh News	435	481	1.1	Nantwich Guardian	22	52.4
Birmingham Mail	435	477	1.1	Warwickshire Advertiser	21	50
Hull Daily Mail	435	471	1.1	Fife Free Press	45	49.5
Western Mail	420	443	1.1	Nottingham Journal	161	49.1
Shepton Mallet Journal	74	74	1	Whitstable Times	20	47.6
Liverpool Echo	435	400	0.9	Hull Daily Mail	222	47.1
Berwickshire News	74	68	0.9	Whitby Gazette	53	46.1
Leeds Mercury	443	405	0.9	Portsmouth News	137	44.2
Daily Record	447	399	0.9	Berwickshire News	30	44.1
Monmouthshire Beacon	74	66	0.9	Leeds Mercury	178	44
Aberdeen Express	442	381	0.9	Monmouthshire Beacon	29	43.9
Thanet Advertiser	73	62	0.8	Western Mail	188	42.4
Shipley Times	121	102	0.8	Aberdeen Express	155	40.7
Bexhill-on-Sea Observer	73	60	0.8	Tamworth Herald	17	40.5
Dumfries and Galloway	146	120	0.8	Faringdon Advertiser	47	39.8
Manchester News	438	359	0.8	Birmingham Mail	187	39.2
Chelmsford Chronicle	74	57	0.8	Dorking and Leatherhead	20	38.5
Nottingham Journal	435	328	0.8	Thanet Advertiser	23	37.1
Cheshire Observer	72	53	0.7	Manchester News	133	37
Southern Reporter	74	53	0.7	Liverpool Echo	138	34.5
Dorking and Leatherhead	73	52	0.7	Southern Reporter	18	34
Portsmouth News	436	310	0.7	Arbroath Herald	13	33.3
Warwickshire Advertiser	73	42	0.6	Edinburgh News	156	32.4
Tamworth Herald	73	42	0.6	Cheshire Observer	17	32.1
Arbroath Herald	74	39	0.5	Daily Record	126	31.6
Belper News	74	35	0.5	Bexhill-on-Sea Observer	18	30
Kilsyth Chronicle	74	33	0.4	Kilsyth Chronicle	9	27.3
Hawick News	74	24	0.3	Belper News	8	22.9
Nantwich Guardian	146	42	0.3	Shipley Times	22	21.6
Whitstable Times	146	42	0.3	Hawick News	3	12.5

Although many critics condemned the sensationalism of the conservative press during the Edwardian period, its readership grew exponentially. Northcliffe's *Daily*

Mail and *Daily Mirror*, along with Lord Beaverbrook's *Globe* and *Daily Express* successfully exploited the growing demand for accessible and affordable journalism. Combined, they circulated staunchly conservative ideals that were explicitly founded on patriotism and anti-German antipathy.¹⁰¹ Nevertheless, there had been a clear ideological divide between the 'jingo' and 'cocoa' press.¹⁰² Although historians have repeatedly used right wing journals such as the *Globe*, *Daily Mail*, and *National Review* as evidence of spy fever, table 3.1 illustrates the exceptionality of these institutions compared with mainstream journalism. Not only was the *Globe* responsible for almost twice as many articles featuring the spy than the *Edinburgh Evening News* or the *Birmingham Mail*, the average number of articles per issue was also significantly higher than every other case study examined. Compared with the two spy stories published in each issue of the *Globe*, metropolitan newspapers typically only featured spies in a single article per issue. But not only did the *Globe* display twice as much interest in foreign spies, it was also more alarmist than any other periodical. Whereas alarmist reports and spy scares comprised forty percent of espionage related discourse within urban-based journals, the same content constituted over two-thirds of the *Globe*'s fascination with spies. The acute sense of fear conveyed in the *Globe*, therefore, was far more conspicuous than in mainstream journals. Spy phobias had undoubtedly become a prominent concern in the emotional community that many of the *Globe*'s readers subscribed to, but the intensity and frequency in disseminating alarmist rhetoric was less discernible outside of the radical right wing press. The uniqueness of the *Globe* in perpetuating alarm suggests that spy phobias were more influential among right wing communities that were susceptible to

¹⁰¹ Gregory, *Clash of Cultures*, p. 17.

¹⁰² Gregory, *Last Great War*, p. 17. 'Cocoa' was the derogatory name given to liberal newspapers.

radical ideology. Presumably, therefore, spy phobias were not as noticeable or as pervasive throughout society more generally.

Despite the contention that spy fever was a widespread, delusional paranoia, society's obsession with spies was far more nuanced than reports in the *Globe* suggested. Many provincial newspapers rarely encouraged a fierce hatred of strangers. Notwithstanding the continual presence of espionage in the right wing media, journals such as the *Hawick News*, *Kilsyth Chronicle*, and *Belper News* scarcely even mentioned the spy. Moreover, there was not always a correlation between the attention given to spying and the display of anxiety in the press. In only seven of the newspapers were the majority of spy stories indicative of a suspicious or alarmed public. Both the *Faringdon Advertiser* and the *Birmingham Mail* regularly reported spy stories but were far less alarmist than their interest in clandestine operations suggested. Similarly, the *Edinburgh Evening News* produced more articles involving spies than any other case study besides the *Globe*, which could easily be mistaken for a propensity to spread fear and concern. But the inclusion of espionage in the *Edinburgh Evening News* was presumably not designed to scare. Less than a third of their reports mirrored the spy rhetoric that featured in the Unionist press, and it was instead responsible for the second highest number of articles denouncing the spy threat behind the *Leeds Mercury*.

Even in communities that ostensibly adopted the rhetoric of the spy peril, alarm was not necessarily evidence of a widespread fear of spies. Much of the alarm contained within the spy rhetoric itself reflected a concern that society was failing to take the threat seriously, which indicates an absence of collective fear.¹⁰³ Despite the intensified precautions taken in Sussex in August 1914, Ernest Cartwright grew

¹⁰³ 'Germans in England.' *The Globe*, 24 August 1914, p. 7.

increasingly outraged at the apparent negligence displayed by the Chief Constable. Cartwright claimed that two strangers who had been seen in his vicinity men were actually foreigners, based ‘on the evidence of several educated people, at least two of them personal friends of my own, who heard them speak... in a German accent’, but the Chief Constable had ignored his testimony. Notwithstanding Cartwright’s personal suspicions, similar fears were not necessarily ubiquitous. Leo Maxse, the journalist behind the conservative *National Review*, commonly lamented those who ‘devoted themselves to pooh-poohing the German peril’, and who ‘discount the German danger as the malignant invention of Teutophobe scaremongers or crazy Jingoists’.¹⁰⁴ Letters written to local newspapers, although ostensibly imitating the emotional standards advocated by the spy rhetoric, also frequently despised the lenient treatment of aliens and lamented both the lack of public uproar against immigrants as well as the compassion and tolerance that they received occasionally received.¹⁰⁵ In Devon, for example, there were supposedly a ‘good many people who ... fail to realise the seriousness of strict obedience’, and it was estimated that half of the community failed to observe the imposed regulations owing to sheer ignorance.¹⁰⁶ Despite the increased police activity in particular regions, one angry correspondent, self-named ‘Vigilance’, wrote to a Scottish newspaper questioning whether the police realised the importance of monitoring the movements of every German in the district or even acknowledged the spy peril.¹⁰⁷ When communities did react to the spy danger in a way that was inconsistent with the spy rhetoric, it invariably infuriated the adherents of spy fever. As comical ‘exploits’ of German spies were frequently exposed, one anxious individual wrote to the *Chelmsford Chronicle* claiming that ‘it is a mistake to fix

¹⁰⁴ ‘Undesirable Aliens.’ *National Review* No. 382, December 1914.

¹⁰⁵ ‘People and the War. The Spy Danger.’ *Edinburgh Evening Express*, 11 September 1914, p. 4; ‘German Spies’ – And Other.’ *Cornishman*, 22 October 1914, p. 3.

¹⁰⁶ ‘Notes of the Day.’ *Exeter and Plymouth Gazette*, 22 December 1915, p. 3.

¹⁰⁷ ‘Police and Spy Trouble.’ *Aberdeen Evening Express*, 14 September 1915, p. 4.

public attention on the spy danger by trivialities of this sort, which provoke laughter rather than terror, and make the danger appear less serious than it is'.¹⁰⁸ Another angry reader wrote to the *Bexhill-on-Sea Observer* condemning the 'soft-headed people' who opposed wholesale restrictions.¹⁰⁹ A week later it was further suggested that, in the spirit of wartime sacrifice, those who ridicule the spy peril and who 'decline to think ill of any fellow creature', should sacrifice their principles on behalf of the war effort and assist in 'systematic investigation'.¹¹⁰ Thus, although this rhetoric was often symptomatic of an extensive spy fever, it also betrays a perception that the appropriate levels of concern had not necessarily permeated society.

Table 3.1 also implies that location was largely irrelevant to the existence of spy phobias in the press, which makes mapping the geographic spread of spy rhetoric particularly problematic. Nevertheless, there are some general trends. Urban areas appear to have taken a much greater interest in spies, since five of the twelve metropolitan newspapers featured more than one spy story per issue, whereas only five out of twenty-four rural papers produced the same frequency. But alarmist rhetoric, as opposed to mere interest, was more prominent in rural newspapers. Six of the seven cases with a majority of alarmist reports were therefore based in rural areas. Additionally, both the rates of interest and alarm were slightly higher in coastal locations. Eleven coastal newspapers were among the eighteen papers responsible for the highest rate of anxiety. But aside from these minor discrepancies, the frequency of alarm was relatively even across both urban and rural publications.¹¹¹ However, these results do not necessarily represent their respective societies. More influential than geographic location to the perpetuation of the spy in the press was the political

¹⁰⁸ 'Notes on the War.' *Chelmsford Chronicle*, 6 November 1914, p. 4.

¹⁰⁹ 'Our Friends the Enemy.' *Bexhill-on-Sea Observer*, 21 November 1914, p. 6.

¹¹⁰ 'Germans at Bexhill!' *Bexhill-on-Sea Observer*, 28 November 1914, p. 2.

¹¹¹ Above the average rate of alarmist rhetoric, for instance, there were six newspapers from cities and twelve from rural areas, which constituted exactly half of each category.

alignment of the newspaper. As a result, publications based in the same location often produced vastly dissimilar results. During the height of spy fever in the press, the prevalence of espionage concerns varied among the *Birmingham Daily Post*, *Birmingham Mail*, and *Birmingham Daily Post*. Although the *Post* was responsible for the highest number of spy stories between September and November 1914, the *Mail* included the most alarmist reports.¹¹² While the *Mail* published forty-seven articles that can be considered alarmist in nature, the *Gazette* merely furnished twenty-five, almost half that of the *Mail*. Moreover, whereas the *Mail* only produced two articles that conveyed or encouraged a rival emotional response to spy fever, both the *Post* and the *Gazette* were far more likely to denounce the spy threat.¹¹³

Attempts to maintain spy fever through the manipulation of a specific emotional community undoubtedly transpired throughout the popular press. But the historiographical focus placed on certain publications has distorted the portrayal of the alleged hysteria. Although the influence of the *Hawick News* was trivial compared to that of the *Globe*, analysing the inclusion of the spy throughout the popular press reveals that there was no singular, dominant interpretation. This lack of uniformity, and the distinction between fanatical right wing newspapers and more liberally inclined journals, reflects the inherent disparity in how different communities perceived the significance of the danger. Contextualising popular spy concerns within a broader discourse implies that fear was far less prominent than a reading of the *Globe* would suggest. Despite the dominance of alarmist rhetoric in the *Globe*, the inclusion of spies more generally was sporadic and ambiguous, and the most ferocious concerns were often predicated on the belief that the public remained impervious to warnings issued by the yellow press. While this does not itself show

¹¹² Total number of spy stories (1 September – 30 November 1914) *Post*: 140, *Mail*: 137, *Gazette*: 102.

¹¹³ The *Post* was responsible for eight opposition articles and the *Gazette* eleven.

that society was less responsive to spy fever, it supports the contention that several emotional communities could exist simultaneously. Since geography only had a negligible impact on the prevalence of anxiety, this varied interest in espionage was most likely caused by ideological differences, which were reflected in the political persuasions of the newspapers examined. That spy fever had a greater significance to radical conservatives and was most severe in right wing discourses, insinuates that it was this community that most commonly connected the alien with the spy, and thus, most receptive to this form of fear and anxiety as an appropriate emotional response.

INFLUENCE OF THE RADICAL RIGHT

Following the initial furore encountered in August 1914, certain individuals and organisations associated with the radical right sought to capitalise on the spy peril and establish an emotional community that prioritised feelings deemed necessary for the war effort. Since the primary advocates of the resulting discourse endorsed a radical agenda and appealed to those who adhered to a mutual philosophy, the origin of this emotional community is discernable. But the absorption of the spy into extremist rhetoric achieved some degree of success. When Ada McGuire learnt of the supposed connections between German spies and the sinking of the *Lusitania*, her initial response was to condemn the system of government. She wrote that ‘England is too slow... Everything must be debated and so valuable time is lost... In time of war military measures should not be left to a civilian government’. Owing to the manner in which espionage had featured in extremist rhetoric, McGuire reckoned that the treasonous activity of spies demanded authoritarian leadership: ‘A military staff of experts and naval staff of experts should be able to say ‘this must be done whether

you like it or not'. I am sure other countries think we are not half awake'.¹¹⁴ McGuire's readiness to remove democratic traditions because of setbacks she associated with a network of German spies illustrates how this rhetoric became an important framework for interpreting the events of the First World War. But like Winifred Taylor's description of German spies on the Isle of Wight however, it does not insinuate that spy fever amounted to a universally dominant experience.

The impact of the war on British politics has often been oversimplified and misinterpreted by historians to mean that conservative ideology was better prepared to prosecute the war effort.¹¹⁵ Although all parties had been redefining their relationship with patriotism, it was the Tories who had firmly cemented their image as the most prominent patriotic party during the Edwardian era.¹¹⁶ While they strongly portrayed themselves as the staunchly patriotic party, they also distinguished their idea of patriotism from both nationalism and jingoism. It is a mistake, though, to assume that the Conservative Party was resolutely anti-German and that it consisted entirely of scaremongers who contributed to the growth of Anglo-German antagonism. There was a sharp divide between the diffidence maintained by the leadership and the enthusiasm of peripheral elements inside the Party, which emphatically promoted Germanophobia.¹¹⁷ Radical Conservatives, for example, specifically justified their extreme methods on the grounds that the Conservative leadership were ineffectual compromisers that needed replacing.¹¹⁸ By attributing spy fever to an alienated form

¹¹⁴ Papers of Ada McGuire, Letter dated 31 May 1915.

¹¹⁵ Robert Blake, *The Conservative Party from Peel to Thatcher* (London, 1985) pp. 195-6; Trevor Wilson, *The Downfall of the Liberal Party, 1914-35* (London, 1966) p. 55; Keohane, *The Party of Patriotism*, pp. 2-11.

¹¹⁶ Paul Readman, 'The Liberal Party and Patriotism in Early Twentieth Century Britain', *Twentieth Century British History* xii (2001) pp. 269 -302.

¹¹⁷ Searle, 'The 'Revolt from the Right'', p. 25; Frank McDonough, *The Conservative Party and Anglo-German Relations, 1905-1914* (Basingstoke, 2007) p. 9; Keohane, *The Party of Patriotism*, pp. 103, 209-11.

¹¹⁸ Gregory D. Phillips, 'Lord Willoughby de Broke: Radicalism and Conservatism', in J.A. Thompson and Arthur Mejia (eds.), *Edwardian Conservatism: Five Studies in Adaption* (London, 1988) p. 78.

of conservatism distinct from the official party line, this section dissociates widespread fears of subversion from central Conservative ideals.¹¹⁹ Given that the influence of the radical right remained negligible, despite the notoriety of certain figures, their ideology was inevitably open to reproach.

The dichotomy between the Conservative Party leadership and its radical elements has frequently been interpreted as a ‘crisis of Conservatism’, but this argument contains various methodological flaws.¹²⁰ Not only does it misinterpret their collective intentions, but it also presumes a degree of coherent opposition inside the Party, which was almost entirely non-existent.¹²¹ In recent examinations of Edwardian conservatism, Frank McDonough and Rhodri Williams contend that ‘scaremongering’ against Germany was limited to ‘outcasts’ and marginalised ‘wild men’ who had almost no impact on the direction of the Party.¹²² Geoffrey Searle describes this ‘radical right’ as a loose coalition of ‘super patriots’ who feared imperial decline, constitutional imbalance, and increasing class-consciousness. They regularly attacked aliens, cosmopolitans, intellectuals, Jews, political parties, as well as parliamentary democracy itself, and as a result, radical individuals were often alienated from all

¹¹⁹ Even Richard Haldane, who experienced a torrent of abuse for his alleged connections with Germany, recognised that only small elements within society were responsible for such hostility: Richard Haldane, *Richard Burdon Haldane: An Autobiography* (London, 1929) p. 284.

¹²⁰ Eric Hobsbawm, *Industry and Empire: From 1750 to the Present Day* (London, 1968) p. 163; Paul Kennedy, ‘The Pre war Right’ in Kennedy and Nicholls, *Nationalist and Racist Movements in Britain and Germany*, p. 1; Martin Blinkhorn, *Fascists and Conservatives: The Radical Right and the Establishment in Twentieth Century Europe* (London 1990) p. 2; Thurlow, *Fascism in Britain*, pp. 3-4.

¹²¹ This idea was first conceived by Geoffrey Searle in ‘The Revolt from the Right’, but was initially challenged by Alan Sykes. Sykes argued that the radical right were ‘all but swamped in a sea of traditional Conservatives defending traditional causes’ to suggest that the ‘Crisis of Conservatism’ was over, but he mistakes the decline of tariff reform for the demise of a ‘radical’ alternative, and confuses tactical disagreements with arguments over political principals. In fact, the radical right was at least as active and influential during the First World War as they had been beforehand. Searle, ‘The ‘Revolt from the Right’ in Edwardian Britain’.

¹²² Williams, *Defending the Empire*, p.2; McDonough, *The Conservative Party and Anglo-German Relations*, p. 138.

political parties.¹²³ As a consequence, 'the actions of the 'radical right' can be interpreted as propaganda exercises designed to weaken the Liberal Party rather than the outward manifestation of deep ideological beliefs'.¹²⁴ By attributing the spread of espionage phobias to the extreme right of the Conservative Party, it deprives spy fever of mainstream support. Starved of the legitimacy afforded by the Party's leadership, the acceptance of spy fears was inevitably limited to individuals sympathetic to a traditionally marginalised ideology.

Despite an unprecedented level of support during the Edwardian era, the influence and popularity of the radical right remained tangential. Notwithstanding the plethora of radical groups that spanned the fin de siècle, the most influential was the National Service League.¹²⁵ Aimed at reducing Britain's aversion to conscription, the League grew exponentially from its creation in 1902. In 1904, the organisation only comprised of 1,725 members, but by 1909, with fears of German naval expansion rising, membership had grown to 35,000 across fifty branches nationwide. By 1914, the league's following had swollen even further.¹²⁶ Although dissatisfied Conservatives filled their ranks, the leadership sought to obtain support from across the political and social divide.¹²⁷ Yet their attempt to inaugurate a cross-party mass movement was a complete failure. The majority of participants continued to derive from traditional and long-standing middle-class supporters of the Conservative Party, while the extreme radical elements within the Party, who had grown deeply concerned

¹²³ G.C. Webber, 'Intolerance and Discretion: Conservatives and British Fascism, 1918-1926', in *Traditions of Intolerance*, p. 155. Panikos Panayi arrives at similar conclusions: 'Review Article: National and Racial Minorities in Total War', *Immigrants and Minorities* 9/2 (1990) p. 193.

¹²⁴ Keohane, *The Party of Patriotism*, pp. 14, 8.

¹²⁵ Coetzee and Coetzee, 'Rethinking the Radical Right', p. 516; Stuart Ball, *The Conservative Party and British Politics, 1902-1951* (London, 1995) p. 54; McDonough, *The Conservative Party and Anglo-German Relations*, p. 108.

¹²⁶ McDonough, *The Conservative Party and Anglo-German Relations*, p. 108.

¹²⁷ Coetzee, *For Party or Country*, p. 41.

about the German threat, provided leadership and direction.¹²⁸ Contrary to the historiographical narrative of spy fever, however, a leading historian of the Edwardian radical right surmises that ‘not many sensible people took these far-fetched stories seriously at the time’, and that ‘historians who make grandiose claims about the influence of the ‘radical right’ need to appreciate more fully how marginalised and plain ‘loony’ many of its leading figures were’.¹²⁹ Most of their followers were widely considered to be ‘hyper-patriots’ or ‘ultra-imperialists’ who held a simple view of Germany. They were undoubtedly preoccupied with the military and Britain’s vulnerability to invasion, and derided the traditional parties for their negligence and reticence in dealing with the German peril.¹³⁰

Throughout the Edwardian period, it was the right wing press that had been instrumental in exaggerating the German menace and the alien problem in Britain.¹³¹ In August 1914, Horatio Bottomley conceitedly re-printed the profuse warnings that had appeared in *John Bull* prior to the outbreak of war, but evidently regarded his aversion to the German menace as an anomaly, while the prominence of racial identity was indicative of his radicalism:

Alone amongst journalists, alone amongst public men, have we been warning the nation, during the past five years, of what was coming; and as will be seen from the following pages, we have been deadly correct in our information... We want to impress upon the public mind the fact that we, at any rate, are, and always have been,

¹²⁸ McDonough, *The Conservative Party and Anglo-German Relations*, pp. 108-9.

¹²⁹ McDonough, *The Conservative Party and Anglo-German Relations*, p. 113. Along with the Navy League, the National Service League shared the label of ‘scaremonger’: Coetzee, *For Party or Country*, p. 41. Anne Summers takes a more pragmatic view of right wing nationalists, but she nonetheless portrays them as fundamentally conservative and unable to secure a mass following. Anne Summers, ‘The Character of Edwardian Nationalism: Three Popular Leagues’, in *Nationalist and Racist Movements in Britain and Germany Before 1914* (London, 1981) pp. 68-87.

¹³⁰ McDonough, *The Conservative Party and Anglo-German Relations*, p. 110.

¹³¹ Adrian Bingham and Martin Conboy, *Tabloid Century: The Popular Press in Britain, 1896 to the Present* (Oxford, 2015) pp. 28, 203-5. Horatio Bottomley referred to the ‘great debt of gratitude’ the nation owed to the *Daily Mail* and the *Evening News*, for example. ‘Spies, Bombs and Butchery.’ *John Bull* Vol. XVII No. 439, 31 October 1914, p. 4.

alive to the true reading of signs and portents which indicate the destiny of our race.¹³²

Leopold Maxse, the editor of the radical *National Review*, espoused similar views that equally espoused radical Conservatism during the Edwardian era. Despite Maxse's overt frustrations, he maintained that he was not anti-German, and instead claimed that he was opposed to the 'irresponsible oligarchy called German government'. Consequently, he revered the vibrancy and strength of Germany compared with what he perceived as the more timorous disposition of British politicians intent on maintaining electoral support at the expense of Britain's continued progress and security.¹³³ But even Maxse recognised that he was regarded as a 'disruptive right-wing' Germanophobe by the mainstream, and his self-perception as an outcast on the fringes of conventional political discourse was captured by a typical editorial written in May 1912:

Great Britain herself may be compared to a Titanic obviously plunging at full speed towards certain disaster, because her so-called statesmen refuse to see the obvious or to prepare against the inevitable... Those are denounced as 'cranks' who call attention to the danger which is apparent to every man with eyes to see.¹³⁴

Right wing activists believed that the central propaganda aim of the League needed to 'grip the imagination' and 'stir the blood', and thus centred their rhetoric on Germany's detailed invasion plans and the abundance of covert saboteurs in Britain. Consequently, the League sponsored numerous articles, books, pamphlets, magazines,

¹³² 'The Voice in the Wilderness that was heard at Last.' *John Bull* Vol. XVII No. 428, 15 August 1914, p. 6.

¹³³ 'A 'Tame' Reichstag', *National Review*, October 1908, in Maxse, *Germany on the Brain*, pp. 257-8.

¹³⁴ 'The Titanic', *National Review*, May 1912, in Maxse, *Germany on the Brain*, p. 320. The editor of *The Spectator*, John St Loe Strachey, similarly believed that his and Maxse's ideas and concerns were 'too much' for the authorities. John St Loe Strachey Papers, STR/10/9/20: Covering note written in August 1919 of a letter dated 28 October 1914. Maxse first realised that the majority of the Conservative Party no longer believed as he did following the issues over tariff reform in 1912. After the failure of this cause that he had supported so vigorously, Maxse became so engrossed in his own efforts to discredit the Liberal Party that he was no longer averse to encouraging internal dissent among Conservatives. Hutchinson, *Leopold Maxse and the National Review*, pp. 405-6.

plays, posters, and comics, which brought the invasion scare and the espionage peril to the attention of the British public.

Of course, for such rhetoric to have any success, the spy needed to be considered as a realistic and imminent danger. Associates of the radical right, therefore, were most often responsible for reaffirming the public's apparent concern towards the spy threat. Many spy novelists were themselves vociferous supporters of the radical right, and espionage literature was seldom more than thinly veiled propaganda.¹³⁵ Frequent allegations of society's intense fear of German spies was also most commonly purported by the likes of Maxse, Beresford, Joynson-Hicks, and Lord Leith of Fyvie.¹³⁶ But unsurprisingly, these radical conservative figures most strongly appealed to right wing sympathisers, and the correspondence they received from members of the public should not be used to characterise such a diverse society.¹³⁷ Conservative pressure groups were also instrumental in coordinating the manifestation of this alarm and conveying its significance to the government. In October 1914, the Navy League wrote to the Admiralty, offering their assistance. They had supposedly been 'inundated with correspondence relating to the spy question and we are urged from every corner of the country to take some action in a definite and organised way to reduce what is, at all events in the public mind, regarded as the enormity of this evil'.¹³⁸ Although the Navy League increasingly incorporated Liberal members, it was traditionally an ultra patriotic organisation

¹³⁵ Stafford, *The Silent Game*, pp. 6, 11; David Trotter, 'The Politics of Adventure in the Early British spy Novel', in Wesley K. Wark (ed.), *Spy Fiction, Spy Films and Real Intelligence* (London, 1991) pp. 31-2. Some examples clearly dispensed with this guise altogether: Lionel James, *The German Spy System From Within* by Ex-Intelligence Officer, especially pp. 124-5.

¹³⁶ Lord Charles Beresford, *Hansard*, 28 August 1914; Earl of Crawford, *Hansard*, 10 September 1914; 'Notes of the Day.' *The Globe*, 16 September 1914, p. 4; Joynson-Hicks, *Hansard*, 12 November 1914; 'Undesirable Aliens.' *National Review* No. 382, December 1914.

¹³⁷ Gregory, *Last Great War*, p. 240.

¹³⁸ TNA HO 45/10756/267450: The 'Spy Peril' and the question of interning all enemy aliens, P.J. Hannon - Graham Greene, 26 October 1914.

reliant on extreme conservative ideology and support.¹³⁹ That their membership may have demonstrated a high susceptibility to spy fever is hardly surprising given their political allegiance, but it should not be considered representative of British society as a whole. When mainstream actors identified spy fever as a significant concern, they were often responses to unfounded criticism and were thus most likely an attempt to subdue radical opposition.¹⁴⁰ Consequently, abstract claims pertaining to British society and its paranoia should be viewed with caution, and the level of concern should be evaluated independently from right wing rhetoric that inflated the popularity of radical politics.

According to the fluctuations in membership totals, the appeal of radical ideals was determined by varying social factors rather than a significant commitment to extremist ideology. Thus, the inability of radical right groups to sustain a consistent membership during this period is best explained by separating popular support from ideological parity. Historians have tended to perceive nationalist groups as collectives that entertained homogenous ideas, but in reality, the rank and file membership often held considerably different views from the leadership.¹⁴¹ Certain organisations were even reliant on material incentives and social activities to encourage participation. Though some individuals undoubtedly joined in support of specific goals, they rarely viewed their involvement as an ideological and political renovation of the British right as the leadership often did. Radical nationalism was thus largely confined to the leadership and was not necessarily shared among its members.¹⁴² Take, for instance,

¹³⁹ Summers, 'Edwardian Nationalism', p. 68; Johnson, 'The Liberal Party and the Navy League', pp.154-62.

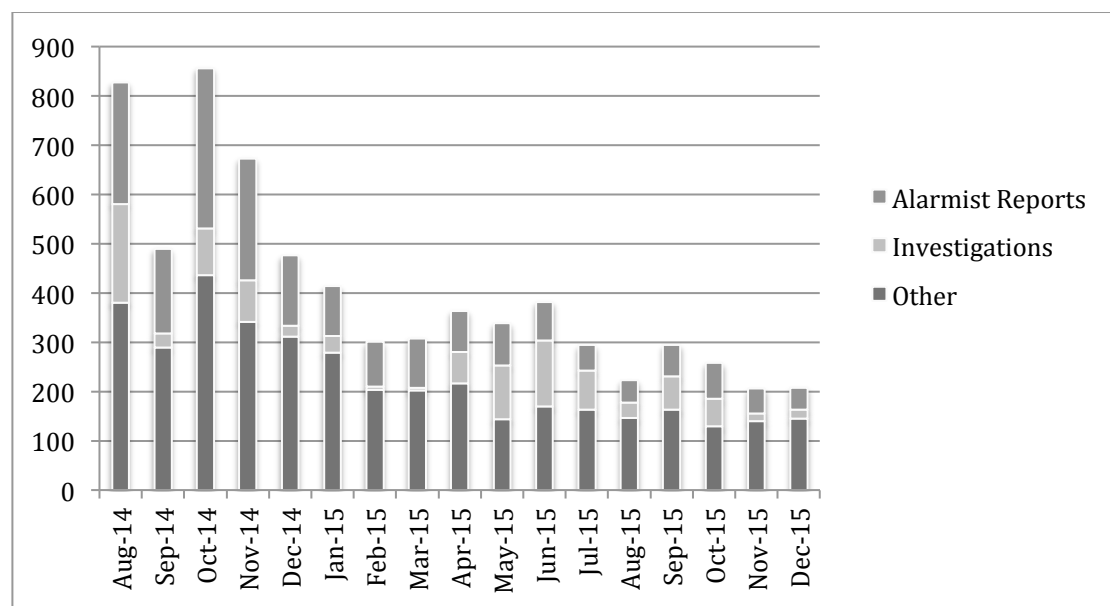
¹⁴⁰ Parliamentary Archives, Ralph David Blumenfeld Papers, Letter from Reginald McKenna dated 29 September 1914; John St Loe Strachey Papers, STR/7/8/26: Letter dated 15 October 1914.

¹⁴¹ Jan Rüger convincingly argues that interest in militaristic pageantry and entertainment should not be mistaken as a popular militarism that complimented or affirmed government strategies, and that not every participant identified themselves as part of a 'warrior nation': *The Great Naval Game: Britain and Germany in the Age of Empire* (Cambridge, 2009) pp. 124-5.

¹⁴² Coetzee and Coetzee, 'Rethinking the Radical Right', pp. 521-9.

Lord Charles Beresford, one of the chief proponents of xenophobia and espionage concerns, and Member of Parliament for Portsmouth in 1914. Despite Beresford's acrimonious speeches exaggerating the spy threat, the *Portsmouth Evening News* appeared relatively detached from similar concerns (see Table 3.1). Given that it had fewer references to spies than any other urban based newspaper sampled, interest in Beresford's hostility towards German spies was clearly not shared by all of his constituents. Notwithstanding the outbreak of war in 1914 and the opportunities that it offered the radical right, Searle contends that radicals remained impotent. Despite the platform provided by the popular press, their ideology failed to pervade the British public owing to the dominance of the Conservative Party. The Tories continued to offer refuge for both disgruntled opposition as well as anxious patriots, making it a locus for protest against the establishment. As a consequence of the enduring appeal of the Conservative Party, the majority did not need to resort to radical ideals.¹⁴³

Table 3.2 Reports of Alarm, Investigations, Arrests, Detainments, and Prosecutions.



¹⁴³ Geoffrey Crossick, 'The Emergence of the Lower Middle Class in Britain', in Geoffrey Crossick (ed.), *The Lower Middle Class in Britain 1870-1914* (London, 1977) pp. 40-4; Searle, 'The 'Revolt from the Right' in Edwardian Britain', p. 35; Summers, 'Character of Edwardian Nationalism', p. 84.

The lack of influence attained by the radical right is best evidenced by the relatively short-lived prominence of alarm and suspicion in popular discourse. Table 3.2 shows that although alarmist rhetoric comprised around half of all articles mentioning the spy between August and November 1914, beyond this initial period it only ever constituted a fraction of society's interest in espionage. Besides the waning appearance of alarm in the press there is little evidence that conservative pressure groups took the espionage threat literally. Beyond the BEU's initial attempt at mass public engagement, the inclusion of spy dwindled as their efforts became far more extremist and conspiratorial.¹⁴⁴ Despite early attempts to conceal their more extreme ambitions using the image of the spy, their primary objectives became increasingly evident within subsequent propaganda. In a leaflet entitled 'What the British Empire Union Wants', the BEU specifically demanded an immediate closure of all German banks across the British Empire as well as legislation preventing them from re-opening after the war. Furthermore, they called for the internment of all enemy aliens, reformed naturalisation laws, the suppression of pacifism and pro-Germanism, the prohibition of enemy businesses, a worldwide boycott of Germany, and, finally, the regulation of all industrial and commercial enterprises throughout the Empire.¹⁴⁵ None of which included or even referred to the spy danger.¹⁴⁶ Increasing employment, rather than combating espionage, became their central objective. They strongly objected to foreign workers undermining the British labour force, and candidly called upon society, especially women, to ensure that returning soldiers enjoyed a comfortable and prosperous life by eradicating German commerce from the

¹⁴⁴ IWM docs K52496-4: BEU no.8, 'Britain In The Web Of The German Spider'; and K52496-9: BEU no.13, 'Germans In London The 'Mysterious Hand' Of Influence At Work'.

¹⁴⁵ IWM docs K52496-5: BEU no.9, 'What The British Empire Union Wants'.

¹⁴⁶ IWM docs K52496-20: BEU no.9, 'Aims and Objects'; K52496-17, BEU no.23, 'What The British Empire Union Advocates.'

Empire.¹⁴⁷ While the degree of fanaticism is readily apparent, there is little evidence to suggest that espionage was a preeminent concern. The readiness with which the BEU dispensed with the spy narrative is arguably illustrative of a disingenuous concern towards the apparent ‘threat’ and suggests that their advocacy of it was mainly for publicity purposes. Thus, not only was radicalism a marginal force in British politics, which inevitably constrained the appeal of its ideology, reports of hidden saboteurs were often superfluous compared with more central objectives. The prominence of espionage in right wing discourse, therefore, is not necessarily proportional to its impact or its pervasiveness even within radical communities.

The historiography of radical politics during the Edwardian era suggests that support for such groups remained trivial throughout the period, which inevitably limited its influence. More importantly, though, the lack of ideological support even among its associates further constrained the tangible impact that they achieved. Despite the popularity of the *Globe* and the Northcliffe press empire, radical politics continuously remained subservient to mainstream Conservatism. Thus, while the interpretation of spy fever as an emotional community implies that there were additional standards of feeling that individuals could access, the unremitting aversion to radical politics between August 1914 and December 1915 suggests that spy fever was an equally unconventional response. Although not every individual who subscribed to the spy rhetoric had to be a vehement radical, recipients required some form of sympathy towards the objectives of the radical right. While this community expanded somewhat during the First World War, it demonstrates that spy fever did not infect anybody. It did not resemble a contagion. It merely liberated pre-existing

¹⁴⁷ IWM docs K52496-2: BEU no.3, ‘British Wages For British Pockets’; K52496-7: BEU no.11, ‘What Our Men Will Want’; K52496-21: BEU no.12, ‘Women Of The Empire This is Your War!’

tendencies, however dormant or animated, within individuals who occupied or interacted with an overly right wing conservative emotional community.

RESISTANCE TO SPY FEVER

In contrast to vociferous responses to the enemy within, a paradoxical discourse developed that continued to dismiss the danger and encourage a more rational, liberal tolerance. Whereas Conservative Unionist newspapers like the *Daily Mail*, *Evening News*, and *John Bull* sympathised with anti-German rioters and even occasionally incited further hostility, liberal papers like the *Manchester Guardian* and *Westminster Gazette* deplored attacks on aliens.¹⁴⁸ Despite the assumed ubiquity of espionage phobias, resistance to spy fever represented a distinct set of emotions that inspired and sustained a collective reluctance to replicate suspicion and accept prejudicial attitudes. Notwithstanding the relatively minor impact of oppositional rhetoric within the newspapers surveyed, its existence demonstrates the plurality of emotional communities, which has inevitable implications for understanding spy fever. The capability to remain ignorant or indifferent towards the spy peril further suggests that this rhetoric attained some degree of influence. Combined, indifference and resistance towards spy fever suggest that it was both subject to cultural forces that impeded the spread of fear and anxiety as well as political ideologies that contested the ideals advocated by the spy rhetoric.

Despite the rise of conservatism during the First World War, traditional liberalism was not monolithically affected by the war and did not immediately

¹⁴⁸ Panayi, 'Anti-German Riots', p. 188; Robb, *Culture and the First World War*, p. 9.

dissolve in August 1914.¹⁴⁹ Attempts to subdue the sense of danger emphasised the lack of evidence corroborating the threat and claimed that it was ‘essentially a time for sitting tight and keeping cool’.¹⁵⁰ Amidst the height of spy fever, the *Nottingham Journal* called on its readers to oppose the scaremongering and divisive rhetoric:

Let us again enter the strongest protest against all language calculated to incite suspicion or inflame feeling against the large numbers of innocent foreigners who are obliged to remain in this country in time of war ... to raise clamours for the forcible deportation of these unfortunate people is wicked and mischievous.¹⁵¹

Although many came to realise towards the end of 1914 that it was unlikely thousands of saboteurs remained hidden in Britain, as early as August 1914 there was already a growing aversion towards attacks against traditional British liberties.¹⁵² While early spy scares were condemned as ‘ignorant and idiotic’, individuals who acknowledged the threat also recognised that mob force ‘would perhaps be more serious even than the operations of the German spy’.¹⁵³ Moreover, as the number of innocent victims of the spy panic grew, their experiences became increasingly difficult to ignore:

In some cases the hunt for German spies has passed from ludicrous to the serious. I have heard, and have repeated in this column, some of the funny incidents. But I now call attention to a more grave case where the hunt for German undesirables has been

¹⁴⁹ Stuart Hall and Bill Schwarz, ‘State and Society, 1880-1930’ in Mary Langan and Bill Schwarz (eds), *Crisis in the British State, 1880-1930* (London, 1985) pp. 7-32; Adams and Poirer, *The Conscription Controversy in Great Britain*; Matthew Johnson, ‘The Liberal War Committee and the Liberal Advocacy of Conscription in Britain, 1914-1916’, *The Historical Journal* 51/2 (2008) pp. 399-420; Keohane, *The Party of Patriotism*, p. 6.

¹⁵⁰ ‘Registration of Aliens.’ *Bexhill-on-Sea Observer*, 22 August 1914, p. 5; ‘Spy Allegations.’ *Aberdeen Evening Express*, 28 August 1914, p. 3; ‘Enemies in Our midst.’ *Diss Express*, 18 September 1914, p. 3; ‘Comments on Current Topics.’ *Edinburgh Evening News*, 12 October 1914, p. 4; ‘Is the Spy Question Killed?’ *Edinburgh Evening News*, 19 October 1914, p. 4; ‘The Treatment of Alien Enemies.’ *Hull Daily Mail*, 23 October 1914, p. 4; ‘Amusing Kirkcaldy ‘Scare’ Story.’ *Edinburgh Evening News*, 26 October 1914, p. 2; ‘Spy Gossip.’ *Fifeshire Advertiser*, 5 January 1915, p. 3; ‘Police Work in Wartime.’ *Dorking and Leatherhead Advertiser*, 9 January 1915, p. 8; ‘The Lords and Invasion.’ *Whitby Gazette*, 15 January 1915, p. 6.

¹⁵¹ ‘Spy Hunting Mania.’ *Nottingham Journal*, 8 August 1914, p. 4.

¹⁵² ‘Humber-Side Echoes.’ *Hull Daily Mail*, 13 April 1915, p. 3;

¹⁵³ ‘The Spy Scare.’ *Aberdeen Evening Express*, 8 August 1914, p. 4; ‘Chelsea Gossip.’ *Chelsea News and General Advertiser*, 6 November 1914, p. 5; ‘The German Spy.’ *Arbroath Herald*, 23 October 1914, p. 4.

made the occasion of private or political persecution. A decent man of nearly 70 years of age, British born and English by both his father and mother, has been the victim of a galling search and imprisonment owing to secret information lodged against him.

The case turned out to be a mare's nest.¹⁵⁴

Not only does this report capture the alleged infractions committed under the pretence of security, but it also demonstrates the widening ideological divide developing within society. In this case, suspicion was aimed at the victim for his connections to a Liberal Association in a notoriously intolerant district, which supposedly made him an adversary of the local Tory leadership, and consequently, a target of mob vigilance.¹⁵⁵

To further denounce the manipulation and exaggeration of the spy threat as well as the subtle infractions against traditional civil liberties that it advocated, violent nationalism became associated with German authoritarianism and oppression. Although Britain and Germany shared more similarities than differences before the outbreak of war in 1914, nationalist rhetoric in Britain typically highlighted their division.¹⁵⁶ Building on the assumption that British values were diametrically opposed to German morals, an idea emboldened by the outbreak of war, attempts to placate fears of espionage commonly compared British responses to spies with Prussian oppression.¹⁵⁷ German reactions to their own internal 'spy threat' were repeatedly derided as a form of 'mania', and were used to reinforce notions of Britain's superior physical strength and moral justification.¹⁵⁸ According to this narrative of events transpiring in Germany, military law had become predominant, state surveillance was

¹⁵⁴ 'Victim of the Spy Crusade.' *Arbroath Herald*, 6 November 1914, p. 2. See also, 'Their Position in Britain.' *Monmouthshire Beacon*, 13 November 1914, p. 6.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Weber, *Our Friend 'The Enemy'*, p. 8.

¹⁵⁷ 'Chaplain's Life in Germany.' *Warwick and Warwickshire Advertiser*, 17 July 1915, p. 4.

¹⁵⁸ 'British Aeroplane Raid Spreads Terror, *Western Mail*, 2 October 1914, p. 6; 'Berwickshire Lady's Experiences in Germany.' *Berwickshire News and General Advertiser*, 6 October 1914, p. 6; 'Germans Enfiladed.' *Aberdeen Evening Express*, 6 November 1914, p. 3; 'Irish Nun's Story of the Germans.' *Dorking and Leatherhead Advertiser*, 17 July 1915, p. 8.

dramatically expanded, executions were widespread, and the freedom of the press had been removed.¹⁵⁹ Not only were these conditions associated with Prussianism, but also with the ‘spy mania and foreigner-baiting’ that had generated a crazed and over-zealous mob.¹⁶⁰ Aliens, it was supposed, ‘are liable to summary arrest, and possibly to mob violence, at the instigation of any fool or busybody who chooses to raise a cry of ‘spy’ against them’.¹⁶¹ While these claims were themselves subject to exaggeration, the descriptive language such as ‘mania’, ‘crazed’, and ‘fool’, implies that this essentially German reaction was considered abhorrent in Britain. The association made between spy fever and German despotism, therefore, implies there was a continued effort to try and protect freedom and justice by portraying enhanced security restrictions as an enemy to civil liberties and public order.

Correspondence sections in local newspapers regularly featured denunciations of the spy threat and repeatedly displayed antipathy towards popular spy phobias. In August 1914, one reader of the *Birmingham Daily Post* deplored the social animosity aimed at suspected spies:

Sir, - I venture to suggest a note of warning to be considerate in our behaviour to Germans in England... Let the authorities quietly deal with undoubted spies, but do not let us give way to hysterics. It seems to me a great pity that the official notice bears the heading ‘Hue and Cry’. This is an absurd and meaningless relic of old times – circulated on to inflame. It should be remembered that many of us have relations and friends stranded on the Continent... If we are to expect considerate treatment for

¹⁵⁹ ‘Short shrift for Spies.’ *Portsmouth Evening News*, 7 August 1914, p. 6; ‘Germany from the Inside.’ *Bexhill-on-Sea Observer*, 5 September 1914, p. 2; ‘Through German Goggles.’ *Aberdeen Evening Express*, 23 November 1915, p. 2.

¹⁶⁰ ‘Berlin News.’ *Portsmouth Evening News*, 20 August 1914, p. 3; ‘A Song of Blood.’ *Whitby Gazette*, 21 August 1914, p. 4

¹⁶¹ ‘Danger of Mob Violence.’ *Western Mail*, 8 August 1914, p. 5

these, we must show ourselves prepared to extend similar treatment to the stranger within our gates.¹⁶²

Notwithstanding the growth of radical conservatism, liberalism continued to offer an ideological alternative to enhanced restriction and xenophobia. Opposition to spy fever defined itself against the hysterical nature of espionage phobias and valued empathy and pragmatism over suspicion and hostility. The potency of paranoia and spy rhetoric, however, often determined the strength of this confrontational approach. As a bastion of radical politics, the *Globe* attracted significant criticism and resistance to its discriminatory agenda. In August, one reader began questioning the advantageousness of generating race hatred, while another condemned those responsible for attacking innocent Germans and looting their property.¹⁶³ Drawing upon notions of patriotism, one reader even sought to redefine concepts of ‘Englishness’ to challenge the prevalence of spy phobias:

I am sorry to think that ‘The Globe’ could have condescended to such an idle and ill-natured suggestion... It is the duty of every Englishman to remember the traditions of hospitality sacred to Englishmen and do the best to alleviate the distress of those unwittingly stranded in England, to extend help to them in every possible way... The police are quite able to tell us who are possible spies and who it is undesirable to help, but do not let ‘The Globe’ go mad over spies.¹⁶⁴

The presence of oppositional discourse, even within a staunchly conservative newspaper such as the *Globe*, indicates that the readership of a single newspaper was not itself a coherent entity and that even within this single demographic, individuals were not obliged to subscribe to the same emotional community.

¹⁶² ‘Germans in England.’ *Birmingham Daily Post*, 11 August 1914, p. 2.

¹⁶³ ‘Germans in England.’ *The Globe*, 25 August 1914, p. 6; ‘Fairplay to Germans.’ *The Globe*, 28 October 1914, p. 4.

¹⁶⁴ ‘Germans in England.’ *The Globe*, 21 August 1914, p. 8.

Local contexts often exacerbated tensions between the anti-alien establishment and the political mainstream. In Bexhill-on-Sea, there was a particularly nasty exchange between liberal and conservative supporters that originated in a dispute over the authenticity of the spy threat. Having been baited by a local xenophobe, Reverend J. Osbourne attacked the coherency and persuasiveness of the anti-German argument purporting the existence of a fifth column:

Mr. Ash begins by classifying me with the pro-German element in Bexhill, and he asserts that I am a champion of German Kulture. But these assertions are, of course, considerable untruths ... Mr. Ash gives no evidence nor makes any quotation from my letter to prove his point. But what can one expect from a man in a state of ecstasy? [sic] In this exalted mood he proclaimed in a former letter that he knew that every town and village had its spies and secret German agents. Later in the same letter this omniscience was watered down to a 'suspicion,' which was a rather tame ending, a sort of drop from the sublime to the ridiculous. The typical line of suggestion (for there is no reasoned argument) is this: If an opponent does not share my ecstatic fury against honourable Anglo-Germans, call him a pro-German ... he is not only dealing in falsehood but utters a farrago of nonsense.¹⁶⁵

Although many conceded that the danger of espionage was a legitimate concern of the state, the level of hostility was often criticised. Frequent attempts to inflate the spy menace were exposed as illogical and inconsistent. While opposition did not necessarily deny the existence of foreign spies, the measures adopted by society were inevitably subject to criticism. As a consequence, reactions consistent with spy fever were disassociated from state led counter-espionage and open to reproach.

A far more subtle way of conveying this type of resistance to spy fever, though, was through humour. Parodying the invasion and spy genres had been well

¹⁶⁵ 'The Rev. J. Osbourne and the War.' *Bexhill-on-Sea Observer*, 21 November 1914, p. 2.

established by comics such as A.A. Milne and P.G. Wodehouse during the previous decade.¹⁶⁶ But the considerable cultural impact of the enemy within throughout the First World War ensured spies remained an ever-present feature of comedic narratives, many of which openly mocked the prevalence of contemporary espionage phobias:

- German spy (seeing a lady with a Belgian hat on): ‘Ach! The Englishwomen are forming a Belgian corps. Ah! I have something to report to my beloved Kaiser at last!’¹⁶⁷
- Sergeant: ‘You may have one wish gratified before you die’. Spy: ‘May I choose the place in which I shall be shot?’ Sgt: ‘Certainly!’ Spy: ‘I wish to be shot in the arm’.¹⁶⁸

Although one avid reader of *Punch*, a leading British satirical magazine, thought that humorous cartoons were designed to ‘whip up public hatred of the Boshe’, historians consider humour a mechanism for managing fear and suffering, as well as stimulating it.¹⁶⁹ Though they suggest that wartime humour combated distress, historians also contend that it was more important as a space in which problematic issues could be reviewed and discussed.¹⁷⁰ As a consequence, it provided a space for communication and evaluation that was inherently paradoxical: it inspired confidence while causing trepidation, unveiling hard truths while also distorting their reality.¹⁷¹ The Belgian hat

¹⁶⁶ Charles Lowe, ‘About German Spies’, *Contemporary Review* 97 (January, 1910) pp. 42-56; A.a. Milne, ‘The Secret of the Army Aeroplane’, *Punch* (26 May 1909) p. 366; P.G. Woodhouse, ‘The Swoop! Or how Clarence Saved England. A Tale of the Great Invasion’, in P.G. Woodhouse, *The Swoop! And Other Stories* (New York, 1979) pp. 2-25. Nicholas Hiley, ‘The Play, the Parody, the Censor and the Film’, *Intelligence and National Security* 6/1 (1991) p. 222; Harry Wood, ‘Sharpening the Mind: The German Menace and Edwardian National Identity’, in Naomi Carle, Samuel Shaw and Sarah Shaw (eds.), *Edwardian Culture: Beyond the Garden Party* (Abingdon, 2018) pp. 115-32.

¹⁶⁷ *Faringdon Advertiser and Vale of the White Horse Gazette*, 19 December 1914, p. 2

¹⁶⁸ *Monmouthshire Beacon*, 17 September 1915, p. 8.

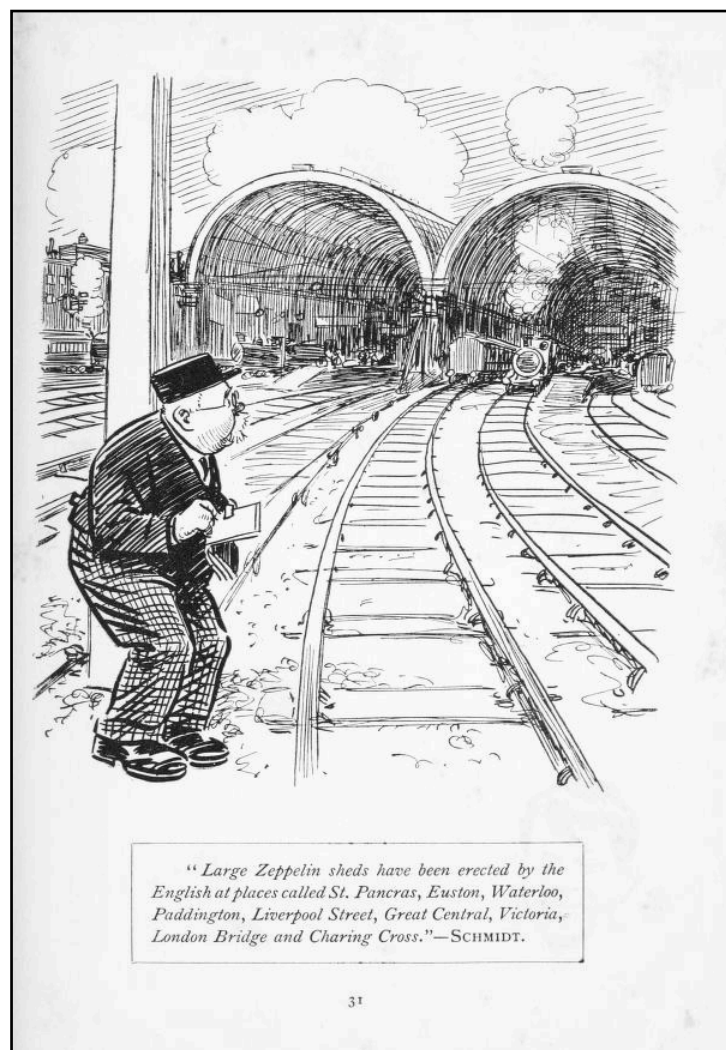
¹⁶⁹ Papers of Barbara Duguid, ‘The Unforgivable Years, 1914-1918’ (1984) p. 9; Tammy Proctor, *Female Intelligence: Women and Espionage in the First World War* (New York, 2003) p. 37.

¹⁷⁰ Linda D. Henman, ‘Humor as a Coping Mechanism: Lessons from POWs’, *Humor* 14/1 (2001) pp. 83-94; Andreas C. Samson and James J. Gross, ‘Humour as Emotion Regulation: The Differential Consequences of Negative Versus Positive Humour’, *Cognition and Emotion* 26/2 (2012) pp. 375-84.

¹⁷¹ Clémentine Tholas-Disset and Karen A. Ritzenhoff, ‘Introduction’, in Clémentine Tholas-Disset and Karen A. Ritzenhoff (eds.), *Humor, Entertainment, and Popular Culture during World War I* (Basingstoke, 2015) p. 1.

joke, for instance, reinforced assumptions regarding German duplicity while also highlighting the absurdity of collective concerns by implying that spies had no reason to conduct operations in Britain. ‘Schmidt the Spy’, created by Alfred Leete in 1914 for the *London Opinion*, likewise drew upon the hyperbole surrounding the spy peril to highlight the absurdity of many of the accusations. Thus, as well as an expression of fear, humour allowed taboos customarily repressed by society to be openly articulated and expressed, such as the dissatisfaction toward an existing consensus.¹⁷²

Figure 3.1 ‘The British are discovered to be building Zeppelins also’.



¹⁷² Koenraad Du Pont, ‘Nature and Functions of Humor in Trench Newspapers (1914-1918)’, in *Humor, Entertainment, and Popular Culture during World War I*, p. 112; Edward Madigan, ‘Sticking to a Hateful Task’: Resilience, Humour, and British Understandings of Combatant courage, 1914-1918’, *War in History* 20/1 (2013) p. 93.

Figure 3.2 ‘Schmidt detects trickery on the part of the British Navy’.



Caricaturing the spy threat, therefore, became an important device to criticise the bigotry and prejudice that was advocated by the spy rhetoric:

- Mary Jane (at the climax of a fearful story of German spy): ‘And when the police searched the cellars they found enough ambition to blow up the whole of London’.¹⁷³
- ‘Now, then, what are you doing here at this time of night? Spying, I expect’. ‘No. I’m only burgling!’ ‘I beg you pardon. Sorry I troubled you. Good night’.¹⁷⁴

While the former play on words implied that spy fever was established primarily among over-zealous individuals, the second mocked those responsible for attributing

¹⁷³ *Reading Mercury*, 24 October 1914, p.

¹⁷⁴ *Portsmouth Evening News*, 11 August 1915, p. 6.

such importance to the spy threat. As a consequence, it provided a benign way of directly criticising the zeal and callowness of the individuals responsible for creating and perpetuating paranoia:

- Nurse: 'Goodness me! What 'ave you been doing to your dolls?' Joan: 'Charlie's killed them! He said they were made in Germany, and how were we to know they weren't spies?'¹⁷⁵
- To a Parisian policeman searching for secret concrete gun emplacements: 'Pst! Are you looking for German spies?' 'Mais oui!' said the policeman, taking from under his coat his notebook and pencil. 'Then go to the Hotel de Blanc and arrest the proprietor. He's put up at least two concrete beds there. I know, because my wife and I slept in 'em last night'.¹⁷⁶

While also mocking the extreme measures promoted to combat the alleged peril:

- [Printed over the Christmas period] A somewhat bloodthirsty correspondent suggests that those who give information to the enemy should, as of old, be hanged, drawn, and quartered. The quartering seems out of season. Minced spies would be more appropriate.
- 'If I had my way', writes one correspondent, 'I would shoot every spy on the spot'. 'Yes, but supposing he hasn't got a spot?'¹⁷⁷

More significant, however, were the satirical stories ridiculing the nature of the panic and the incongruity of suspicious persons:

The Humours of Spy-Hunting.

An officer, who had been warned of a spy, a woman said to have a flaming red head, was worried at lunch by the arrival of three lots of men, each with a red headed woman. 'Then the regimental sergeant-major saluted and said, in a hoarse whisper, that if I wanted any more there was another in the next farm. This appalling collection

¹⁷⁵ *Reading Mercury*, 24 October 1914, p.

¹⁷⁶ *Edinburgh Evening News*, 19 June 15, p. 10.

¹⁷⁷ *Bucks Herald*, 27 February 1915, p. 3.

of heterogeneous females, all red-headed and all ugly, completely unmanned me, but not for long! I sent the whole boiling off to the Provost-Marshall with a note that I had more arriving later. Result, a motor-orderly to beg me not to send any more, as he had already got a yard full of them, and was at his wits' end to know how to feed or keep them quiet, for they were all fighting!¹⁷⁸

Satirists write not merely out of personal indignation, but with a sense of moral vocation and concern for the public interest.¹⁷⁹ As a tool to express discontent, historians have increasingly incorporated humorous and satirical creations into their analysis to examine social convention. Given that humour afforded artists and writers the freedom to explore alternatives to contemporary realities, it provided a space to uncover truths omitted by popular discourse. Their research demonstrates that the genre both critiqued political events and figures, but also preserved cultural conceptions of prejudice, oppression, and subjugation.¹⁸⁰ By comically replacing spies with evilly disposed red-headed women, for example, satirists were able to exaggerate the processes exemplified by spy fever to foolish proportions and attribute their reactions to an overstated, irrational paranoia. As a consequence, they could indirectly criticise the elements of society that were sustaining the panic, while using humour to convey their messages of discontent to a larger audience.

Although the politicised nature of this debate mostly confined it to public discourse, it did occasionally enter the private correspondence of individuals encountering the effects of spy fever. James Thomas, Professor of Sculpture at University College London, condemned society for being so easily misled by 'nonsense' theories that were a 'nuisance to dear England' and profited the 'vanity of

¹⁷⁸ *Portsmouth Evening News*, 13 February 1915, p. 2.

¹⁷⁹ Ruben Quintero, 'Introduction: Understanding Satire', in Ruben Quintero (ed.) *A Companion to Satire: Ancient and Modern* (Oxford, 2011) p. 1.

¹⁸⁰ Jill E. Twark, 'Approaching History as Cultural Memory Through Humour, Satire, Comics and Graphic Novels', *Contemporary European History* 26/1 (2017) p. 176.

the Kaiser'.¹⁸¹ Following the aforementioned case during which she was suspected as a spy for travelling in a motorcar, Margaret Constable similarly ridiculed the logic (or lack thereof) that prompted the rationale of the mob:

They were only pacified when we told them that it was Colonel Constable's car, one of the women said her husband was a soldier and that she had seen Col. Constable, so they were satisfied (Observe the logic). They later discovered they had been reported to the police, although the police never took it seriously, the officer told them to avoid the side streets because there were many 'excited' people about.¹⁸²

After the capture of a man with a letter, supposedly written using a German cipher, Constable also sarcastically wrote that it was 'conclusive proof' of his unlawful intentions.¹⁸³ Constable's willingness to dispute claims of espionage and her inclination to mock the intellectual capacity of individuals perpetuating spy fever, exemplifies the endurance of opposing values and emotions that encouraged tolerance rather than hostility.

Exemption from spy fever could thus take various forms. Mentioned above are the passive forms of opposition, the obliviousness of some and the denial of others, or in other words, the conscious or unconscious decision to remain unaffected by spy mania. Resistance, however, embodied a more fervent challenge to the acceptance of widespread xenophobia. These three reactions, resistance, denial, and ignorance, each offered spaces of opposition that represented conflicting emotional communities. Although oppositional discourse was relatively insignificant compared to the burgeoning anti-alien campaign, its presence implies that society was not beholden to alarmist rhetoric, and therefore, not universally afraid of the German spy.

¹⁸¹ Norfolk Record Office, MC 2235/1/32/107, 943XB: Papers of Peter Henry Emerson, Letter dated 19 October 1914.

¹⁸² East Ridings Record Office, DDST/1/8/2/1: Papers of Margaret Elizabeth-Constable, Diary entry 10 June 1915.

¹⁸³ East Ridings Record Office, DDST/1/8/2/2: Papers of Margaret Elizabeth-Constable, Diary entry for December 1915.



Rather than a ubiquitous panic, the proliferation of spy fever as an appropriate emotional reaction to the First World War was disproportional to the degree of prominence that the spy peril received in the right wing press. Reddy's interpretation of emotional regimes stipulates that emotions coincide with political ideologies, which are themselves sustained by prioritised values and feelings. Thus, not only were individual trepidations transient experiences, which inevitably constrained the wider impact of spy fever, they were typically limited to communities susceptible to radical conservatism. This is evidenced by the creation of a discourse originating from right wing individuals and conservative pressure groups that conveyed the relevancy of espionage anxieties to stimulate their ideals. By identifying scaremongering within extremist rhetoric, and contextualising it within mainstream discourse, this chapter has associated spy fever with the radical right. Despite the intermittent prominence and significance of this radical element within British politics, they remained tangential and without the necessary support to attain any considerable influence, especially during the first eighteen months of the war. Consequently, the conception of spy fever as a distinct conservative emotional community challenges the view that it may have been a dominant reaction, and the inability of radicals to synthesise ideological parity from popular support further encumbered the popularity of their values. The failure to generate conformity among their supporters, as well as the lack of conviction they expressed towards a genuine espionage threat, suggests that this emotional regime seldom enforced strict emotional discipline. For the majority,

therefore, spy fever only ever constituted a lenient set of emotional standards, which explains why individual phobias were often transient and fleeting concerns.

Reimagining spy fever as a particular set of emotional standards that constituted a distinguishable community of prioritised feelings has several implications for understanding the scale of espionage phobias. Rosenwein's theory of emotional communities insists that rival regimes existed simultaneously to spy fever. As an emotional community, spy fever not only failed to dictate stringent emotional values, but individuals were also able to adhere to competing standards, which offered the freedom to ignore or resist the increasingly prejudiced feelings. Observing how these spaces of opposition were generated through discourse reveals that they were equally representative of political ideals. Whereas Panayi contends that the animosity displayed towards Germans was so intense and widespread that it affected vast sections of British society and swept away traditional liberalism, the continued capacity to confront popular discrimination shows that these values were not entirely abandoned between 1914 and 1915.¹⁸⁴ Owing to the cultural impact of espionage and the conspicuousness of spy phobias, historians have inadvertently overstated the significance of such fears and exaggerated their pervasiveness. But the acceptance of the spy peril as a legitimate anxiety was limited to particular communities, the majority of which already possessed latent xenophobic concerns. Consequently, although spy fever afforded the radical right greater expression, liberalism retained the ability to provide an emotional counter community and shape wartime experience. Why the image of the spy appeared so prominently across British society, despite the absence of anxiety in many communities, is the subject of the following chapter.

¹⁸⁴ Panayi, *Enemy in Our Midst*, p. 153.

4. Explaining the Phenomenon

Recognising the brevity of espionage phobias and locating them within typically conservative communities necessitates a re-examination of why the image of the spy pervaded British society so extensively. Since historians regard spy fever as a contagious panic that manifested as delusional paranoia and widespread suspicion, the effects of spy phobias have often dominated subsequent analyses; why these fears took the form that they did has received little attention, however. Moreover, presuming that spy fever naturally transformed into a more malicious anti-alien campaign supports the contention that while the possibility of foreign espionage engendered suspicion, which developed into a hatred of all things German, these were simple and ‘unsophisticated’ emotional consequences. But the experience and interpretation of fear can be both ambiguous and subjective. Suffering from anxiety can compel productivity, while proximity to danger can excite the senses. Contemplating terror can provide entertainment, and overcoming fear can facilitate a feeling of heroism.¹ The creation of an enemy, therefore, does not inevitably provoke panic and why it appeared to do so requires further exploration. Thus, the purpose of this chapter is to examine the reasons behind the apparent acceptance and perpetuation of spy phobias. Although the previous chapter adhered to the notion that spy fever was largely a facet of a growing xenophobia and anti-alienism, it also demonstrated that those sentiments were typically limited to particular communities only. Given the paradox between the restraints on radical conservatism, especially during the initial stages of the war, and the ubiquity of the ‘spy’ during the same

¹ Roper, *The Secret Battle*, p. 18.

period, the emergence of concerns revolved around espionage cannot be explained by any single interpretation.

By ignoring the complexity of fear, historians of spy fever have been forced to adopt simplified explanations of how the secret agent became socially significant as well as culturally dominant. Although spy fever was heavily sponsored by the radical right and built on traditions of xenophobia, historians typically presume the absorption of the spy into this discriminatory narrative originated from the consumption of invasion and espionage literature. David French's pioneering work, for instance, asserts that 'a gullible British public was beginning to mistake fiction for fact', and this observation has shaped nearly all subsequent inquiries.² In a deliberate attempt to evaluate the implications of the espionage peril rather than the experience of the phobia, historians have therefore assumed an emotional influence of spy novels upon vast swathes of society without understanding how and why the figure of the spy became such a powerful image.³ James Hampshire similarly claims that 'it was the blurring of the boundary of fiction and reality which made the phenomenon of spy fever so virulent', and argues that society almost unequivocally interpreted these novels as evidence of Germany's infiltration of Britain.⁴ This one-dimensional approach reinforces the suspected irrationality of spy fever, but by re-establishing the commonality and rationality of historical spy fears, a much more nuanced explanation is required. This chapter examines the portrayal of the spy in popular culture to analyse how espionage fears were articulated in order to identify the mechanisms that encouraged them. Consequently, it attempts to move away from unfounded theories pertaining to a widespread inability to distinguish between fact and fiction, and

² French, 'Spy Fever in Britain', p. 356.

³ Andrew, *Secret Service*, p. 267.

⁴ Hampshire, 'Spy Fever in Britain, 1900 to 1914', p. 24.

instead offers some insights into how the spy became a central feature among social responses to the First World War.

Spy fiction became undoubtedly popular during the Edwardian period. Although many European societies expressed an interest in anticipated conflicts, as their fascination with fictional portrayals of an impending war attests to, it was in Britain that the genre received the most vociferous literary response. Britons were exposed to considerably more tales of future conflict than other Europeans, and many of these stories incorporated tales of illicit espionage.⁵ Widely considered one of the founding texts, and certainly the greatest of the early espionage genre in Britain, was Erskine Childers' *The Riddle of the Sands*. Published in May 1903, it set the tone of Edwardian popular fiction and established the spy as a legitimate and thrilling protagonist that would entertain audiences for over a century. Historians and literary critics alike have frequently alluded to spy novels as a distinct literary phenomenon that was inexorably linked with the developments of the twentieth century. According to this understanding, spy novels were fashioned through an amalgamation of Victorian imperial adventure stories and famed detective fiction, and were essentially responses to mounting social pressures following the turn of the century. More than either of its predecessors, the genre is closely associated with international diplomacy and the resulting political and social tensions.⁶ David Stafford argues that spy fiction invariably reflects upon contemporary settings and the amateur agent's exploits within the 'real world' of present-day politics and international intrigue sets it apart from other works of fiction and fantasy. Through the depiction of authentic dangers, he contends that spy novels provide a barometer for measuring the fragility of the

⁵ Between 1871 and 1914, there were only two years without a novel alluding to future conflict published in Britain, and between 1880 and 1900, there were three English stories to every French one, while Germany produced half of the number that appeared in France. Clarke, 'Forecasts of Warfare in Fiction 1803–1914', pp. 1–25.

⁶ Clive Bloom, *Spy Thrillers, From Buchan to le Carré* (Basingstoke, 1990) p. 1.

political status quo and social order. Rarely are they explorations of intelligence craft or the monotony of surveillance; instead, they aim to portray national vulnerabilities through the representation of the duplicitous spy.⁷ Thus, Stafford sees Edwardian espionage fiction as an outcome of revolutionary changes in Britain's international relations, as emerging competitors supplanted her economic might and growing European rivalries concluded nearly a century of isolationist policies.⁸

The portrayal of fictional antagonists to articulate current threats and contemporary identities does not necessarily prove that readers developed an intense paranoia as a result. The contention that society mistook fiction for fact assumes that all literature influences the political consciousness of the reader and that its impact is directly proportionate to its circulation.⁹ In his recent thesis examining Edwardian invasion literature, however, Harry Wood argues that historians have not yet explored 'how (if at all) such fiction influenced its readership in general'. Although invasion novels achieved widespread success during a period of intensifying Germanophobia, he contends that historians should be wary of assuming a connection between the two.¹⁰ Yet the broader impact of this genre on notions of patriotism and national loyalty is indisputable. The familiar concept of the spy provided a useful device to express and sustain various forms of patriotism. In response to Guy de Maurier's play, *An Englishman's Home* (1909), for instance, military enthusiasm soared. First shown at the Wyndham Theatre in London, the play inspired enlistment to such an extent that the London Territorials opened a recruiting booth in the foyer.¹¹

⁷ Stafford, *The Silent Game*, p. 3.

⁸ Stafford, 'Spies and Gentlemen: The Birth of the British Spy Novel, 1883-1914', p. 496.

⁹ Jonathan Rose, 'Rereading the English Common Reader: A Preface to a History of Audiences', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 53/1 (1992) p. 48.

¹⁰ Wood, 'External Threats Mask Internal Fears', p. 9.

¹¹ Hiley, 'The Play, the Parody, the Censor and the Film', p. 222.

Notwithstanding the impact cultural portrays had on patriotism, this does not indicate that society unanimously accepted fictional narratives as factual exposés.

Despite Stafford's assertion that espionage fiction was fundamentally symptomatic of the twentieth century, Nicholas Hiley contends that this blurring of fiction and reality displayed greater parallels with previous forms of literature and popular culture than is typically perceived. Edwardian spy stories, he argues, were essentially imitations of urban legends, themselves a recognised form of modern folk-narrative. Like an urban legend, spy stories merged the 'real world' with elements from myth and fairy-tale to construct stories relating to recent or foreseeable events involving the actions of supposedly 'normal' people. Believed or not, spy stories replicated urban legends and 'served an underlying need to know about and to try and understand bizarre, frightening, and potentially dangerous or embarrassing events that may have happened'.¹² Hiley does not see the army of fictional spies purely as a product of the last century in the way that Stafford does. Instead, he argues that their principal function, similar to dreams, was to provide access to the subconscious mind, which was achieved through a three-fold structure comprised of reality, fictional reality, and the hidden world of the spy. But only at the third level, twice removed from reality, did the content of spy stories find expression. By confining espionage legends to hidden and secret worlds, and comparing them to existing spaces of Victorian pornography, Hiley demonstrates that spy stories owed very little to reality and that their sole purpose was to facilitate the subconscious fantasies enjoyed by adolescents and insecure middle-class men.¹³ Whereas Stafford sees spy novels as a literary phenomenon that exacerbated contemporary concerns, Hiley demonstrates

¹² Nicholas Hiley, 'Decoding German Spies: British Spy Fiction 1908-18' *Intelligence and National Security* 5/4 (1990).p. 56.

¹³ Hiley, 'Decoding German Spies', p. 76.

that they were equally significant in providing expression to some of the ideals and aspirations of their readership.

Distinguishing between the fictional realms inhabited by spies and the real world of the reader, Hiley challenges the contention that the espionage threats conveyed in literature were taken literally. But he also recognises the massive cultural impact that they had. Nicoletta Gullace, in a similar vein, argues that culture and social practice are inextricably linked. She asserts that systems of representation influence historical change by establishing conventional ideas and behaviour. Pieces of literature, such as spy novels, are thus important historical sources because they reveal a cultural environment in which Britons found the resources necessary to rationalise and comprehend complex and otherwise unfamiliar experiences.¹⁴ Building on the work of Hiley and Gullace, therefore, this chapter analyses how the popularity of the espionage genre established a cultural framework with which society could interpret the crisis that emerged in August 1914, and begin to comprehend the scale and uniqueness of the conflict. It suggests that popular concerns were often centred on foreign espionage because of society's familiarity with the 'spy', and not because people were naive or gullible. After all, the prevailing message of Edwardian spy fiction was not that spies were dangerous. Most stories were seldom an expression of alarm since British agents proved continuously capable of thwarting Germany's covert intrigues.¹⁵

The impact of popular culture on modes of emotional and physical expression was wide ranging. Samuel Hynes trilogy of works, *The Edwardian Turn of Mind* about the period between 1900 and 1910, *The Auden Generation: Literature and*

¹⁴ Nicoletta Gullace, *The Blood of Our Sons: Men, Women and the Renegotiation of British Citizenship During the Great War* (Basingstoke, 2002) p. 10. Similarly, George Robb argues that 'most people viewed the war through the lens of popular culture', while popular culture itself formed a crucial aspect of national mobilisation: *British Culture and the First World War*, pp. 182, 196.

¹⁵ Hiley, 'Decoding German Spies', p. 70.

Politics in England in the 1930s, and *A War Imagined: The First World War and English Culture*, each attest to the impact of popular culture on perceptions of reality.¹⁶ To understand how literary culture shaped responses to the First World War, this chapter attempts to explain why individual and collective spy phobias were widely accepted in Britain. Since spy fever manifested both as individual fears and collective anxieties, this chapter examines each individually to challenge previous assertions that suspicion and xenophobia were simple and inevitable responses to spy novels. The first section highlights the ways in which espionage literature interacted with contemporary identities to examine why the figure of the spy became so pertinent between 1914-1915. The second section analyses the narrative being constructed through the retelling of spy stories to expose the distinctions between mainstream popular culture and the rhetoric broadcast by the radical right. Building on Hiley's contention that spy novels provided access to idealised versions of reality, this chapter argues that the figure of the spy appealed to masculine identities in a way that compelled individual participation, while the depiction of espionage exploits also satisfied a collective need for information, however inaccurate or unbelievable.¹⁷

BECOMING THE HERO

While novels deliberately sought to subvert Britain's customary distaste for spying to facilitate the creation of a professional intelligence bureau, the hero was equally

¹⁶ Jacek Wisniewski, 'Review Article: The First World War Imagined', *The International History Review* 14/1 (1992) p. 94. Samuel Hynes, *A War Imagined: The First World War and English Culture* (London, 1992) p. 52.

¹⁷ These two points are also consistent with Marc Bloch's 1921 essay on the propagation of false news in wartime. Bloch argued that there were two essential functions of false news during the First World War. First, he argued that such stories emerged in order to attribute national setbacks to extraordinary causes, thereby displacing collective defeatism. As a result, 'everyone was on the lookout for something to confirm a common prejudice'. Secondly, he supposed that as false news arises from pre-existing collective representations, it serves as a 'mirror wherein the 'collective consciousness' contemplates its own features'. Bloch, 'Reflections of a Historian on the False News of the War'.

instrumental in forming popular ideas about masculine experience and soldierly bravado.¹⁸ Although both sexes were exposed to the ideal of sacrifice, representations of patriotism, glory, and honour were all shaped by gendered assumptions regarding appropriate roles for men and for women.¹⁹ But historians have regularly overlooked the importance of gender in the creation of individual fears of espionage. The aforementioned analysis of spy scares in August 1914 provides some insight into the development of the phobia. Of the 135 cases, 71 originated with individuals in positions of authority (Territorial soldiers or Police officers) that were invariably male, concerned civilians initiated 23 scares, while 41 reports failed to include the origin of suspicion. A conservative estimate, therefore, suggests that men instigated at least two thirds of the total number of spy scares witnessed in August 1914. What is equally significant, however, is the gender of those suspected. In nine of the 135 cases, the identity and gender of the accused went unreported. But of the remaining 126 suspects, 119 of them were male.²⁰ Thus, the overwhelming proportion of spy scares involved men asserting their authority over other men deemed inferior or threatening.²¹ The construction of male identities around concepts of heroism and

¹⁸ Despite claiming to be a work of non-fiction, Karl Graves's testimony as a former spy reflects the perception that covert activities enhanced one's grandeur. Although briefly employed as an agent in German naval intelligence, Graves embellished the degree of risk and sense of adventure associated with spying, as well as the financial rewards and significance of his work. Only by imitating the protagonists of espionage literature, therefore, did Graves cement his position as a world famous secret agent: Graves, *Secrets of the German War Office*, pp. 17-37; Boghardt, *Spies of the Kaiser*, pp. 60-1. Similarly, Ignatius Timothy Trebitsch-Lincoln, a Hungarian con artist, equally sought to elevate his reputation by exaggerating his superficial connection to German espionage: Lincoln, *Revelations of an International Spy* (New York, 1916). See also Bernard Wasserstein, *The Secret Lives of Trebitsch Lincoln* (Yale, 1988) p. 114.

¹⁹ Janet S. K. Watson, *Fighting Different Wars: Experience, Memory, and the First World War in Britain* (Cambridge, 2004) p. 41.

²⁰ In his popular work on the 'reality' of German espionage, Lionel James, a self-appointed expert on intelligence methods, wrote that women were very rarely officially employed as spies. According to James, women could not be trusted with state secrets because they could become easily infatuated with men seeking to betray them: *The German Spy System From Within*, pp. 71, 106. See also, papers of Arnold White, WHI/186, Undated letter, p. 2. The author highlighted the danger of female spies, but argued that few in Britain took the threat of enemy women seriously.

²¹ As the war continued, however, women were increasingly portrayed as a threat. Tammy Proctor argues that women constituted a particular problem for the British government in its attempt to define citizenship. Since female citizenship was defined by their husband's nationality, and because this

military participation, therefore, appear to have aroused wartime anxieties. To understand why the spy peril stimulated individual fears, the formation of Edwardian masculinity, especially in relation to the spy, needs to be examined.

Ideas of manliness during the Edwardian period relied upon images of imperial adventure and military endeavour. Throughout the nineteenth century, the most ardent depiction of idealised masculinity had been the imperial soldier hero.²² Since colonisation primarily served the political and social elite, continued support for the British Empire required the cultivation of imperial identities that transcended class. Consequently, the application of a predominantly masculine culture romanticised the adventurer and soldier tasked with exploring and defending the frontiers of empire, which supplied the necessary psychological sustenance to maintain popular support.²³ The characterisation of the imperial soldier hero focused on his endurance, adaptability, courage, and unrelenting service to his country.²⁴ This ‘pleasure culture of war’, as Michael Dawson has termed it, promoted an intense fascination and excitement among men, and had a significant impact upon their future identities as well as nationalist policies. As such, heroic and romantic representations of conflict became essential to the development of popular militarism, which made

ambiguity was exacerbated by ‘sexual anger’, which was directed at women occupying new roles, they provided a convenient scapegoat for a hidden spy menace and fears of an enemy within: Proctor, *Female Intelligence*, pp. 29-51.

²² George Mosse, *The Image of Man: The Creation of Modern Masculinity* (Oxford, 1996) p. 52; Jessica Meyer, *Men of War: Masculinity and the First World War in Britain* (Basingstoke, 2011) pp. 5-10.

²³ Linda Colley, *Britons Forging The Nation 1707-1837* (London, 1996) p. 265; John Tosh, *Manliness And Masculinities In Nineteenth Century Britain* (Edinburgh, 2005) p. 192.

²⁴ Meyer, *Men of War*, p. 6. This was juxtaposed with continental rivals who were regularly portrayed as inherently feminine: Robert McGregor, *The Popular Press and the Creation of Military Masculinities in Georgian Britain*, in Paul Higate (ed.), *Military Masculinities: Identity and the State* (London, 2003) p. 143-4.

the prospect of war palatable, and individual participation a necessary component of future struggles.²⁵

The protagonist of the spy novel closely resembled the imperial soldier hero of the nineteenth century and encapsulated the ideals and qualities that he represented. In the classic espionage thriller, *Spies of the Kaiser: Plotting the Downfall of England* (1909), for instance, William Le Queux intimated that amateur spy catching provided a titillating form of detective work that combined both physical bravado and intellectual reasoning.²⁶ David Stafford argues that fictional amateur spy catchers were ‘scrupulous, dutiful, fair, and loyal to country, family, and God. He was a man of the right social class and with the correct education carrying out his duty to his country regardless of cost or sacrifice’. He was, in short, the ideal gentleman. As an incorruptible force in the fight against internal and external threats, his distinctive ‘Britishness’ separated him from foreign adversaries.²⁷ More than the imperial soldier or adventurer, the amateur spy catcher provided a glimpse into an otherwise secret world of international intrigue and clandestine operations.²⁸ Placing the familiar military hero into the unfamiliar context of international diplomacy offered stability in an ever-changing world and reassured the reader of Britain’s position within it. But replicating popular Victorian heroes also alluded to the continued success of British masculine identities despite the challenges emerging following the turn of the century. Although inexperienced, the central male protagonist always led Britain through

²⁵ Graham Dawson, *Soldier Heroes: British Adventure, Empire and the Imagining of Masculinities* (London, 1994); Michael Paris, *Warrior Nation: Images of War in British Popular Culture, 1850-2000* (London, 2000). Wartime propaganda also strongly reiterated these themes and the idea of sacrifice depicted by the National War Aims Committee commonly portrayed male actions on images of the ‘ultimate sacrifice’ achieved through martial death: Monger, *Patriotism and Propaganda in First World War Britain*, p. 107.

²⁶ William le Queux, *Spies of the Kaiser: Plotting the Downfall of England* (London, 1909) pp. 12-6. However, le Queux also staunchly advocated a professional British intelligence agency: ‘Little does the average Englishman dream of the work of the secret agent, or how his success or failure is reflected in our diplomatic negotiations... yet to the spy is left the real work of diplomacy’. p. 168.

²⁷ Stafford, ‘Spies and Gentlemen’, p. 503; Trotter, ‘The Politics of Adventure’, p. 31.

²⁸ Bloom, *Spy Thrillers, From Buchan to le Carré*, p. 3.

increasingly complex international relations, and confirmed that individual enterprise would continue to secure national prosperity.²⁹

Central to the success of espionage novels was the amateur sleuth or accidental spy who stumbled across a fiendish foreign plot. In *The German Spy System from Within* (1914), Lionel James, despite falsely claiming to be an ex-intelligence officer, described espionage as a ‘despicable business. Your perfect spy is a man of criminal impulse, a moral pervert of sorts’.³⁰ The British spy, however, could justify his clandestine exploits within a conventional gentlemanly code principally because he remained an amateur adventurer.³¹ Following the outbreak of war, it became increasingly acceptable for the protagonist to be engaged in professional espionage activity, but it was still routinely considered inconsistent with traditional British values. In Escott Lynn’s, *In Khaki for the King* (1915), Vivian, an ingenious British agent operating in Germany, repeatedly outwitted German soldiers, manages to escape Germany, warn of enemy plots, and take up a commission in the Belgian Army. Given the opportunity to meet the enemy on the battlefield, the vulgarity of espionage is juxtaposed with the honour of conventional combat. After his commissioning into the Belgian army, Vivian remarked: ‘Thank goodness! I can now throw off this disguise, and can meet these Germans as I’ve always longed to, in the field, face to face, and with a good sword in my hand’.³² The routine portrayal of untrained amateur spies whose ingenuity repeatedly thwarted Germany’s military proficiency circumvented the traditional aversion to espionage, and served as an ideal for British men to aspire to.

²⁹ Stafford, ‘Spies and Gentlemen’, p. 491; Bloom, *Spy Thrillers, From Buchan to le Carré*, p. 1.

³⁰ Lionel James, *The German Spy System from Within* (London, 1914) p. 7.

³¹ Oliver S. Buckton, *Espionage in British Fiction and Film since 1900: The Changing Enemy* (London, 2015) pp. 31-3.

³² Escott Lynn’s, *In Khaki for the King* (London, 1915) p. 70.

That spy scares were primary generated by men against men implies that latent male insecurities were developing as a consequence of war. Indeed, gender historians frequently indicate that masculine identities grew increasingly fragile during the conflict.³³ Emulating this image of heroic and masculine endeavour helped maintain these identities and reinforced positive interpretations of male non-combatant sacrifices, despite their detachment from the fighting front. But masculinity and security also became incredibly congealed. Nicoletta Gullace, for instance, argues that the ‘hysterical’ attacks on decadence and homosexuality during the First World War only make sense within a context in which national security had become entirely synonymous with masculinity.³⁴ Characteristic of contemporary notions of chauvinism, *John Bull* expressed the importance of virility to the prosecution of conflict:

We hear the call of the bugle and the beating of the drum and the tramping of the troops... Let every Briton, therefore, gird his armour. It is not necessary to be a soldier – but it is necessary to be a MAN. There is a mental armour and a moral armour – more enduring than steel. Gird it on.³⁵

³³ Joanna Bourke, *Dismembering the Male: Men's Bodies, Britain and the Great War* (London, 1996) pp. 13-4; Laura Ugolini, *Civvies: Middle-Class Men on the English Home Front, 1914-18* (Manchester, 2017) pp. 4-7. But this crisis in masculinity had been developing since at least 1870. The advocacy of women's rights, the influence of new mass media, frequent periods of labour unrest, and the advent of new technologies all threatened to question the most important presuppositions on which society was based. See, Mosse, *The Image of Man*, pp. 78-9. Notwithstanding the importance of soldiering to masculine identity, most men of military age chose not to volunteer and faced widespread disapproval as a result: Gregory, *Last Great War*, pp. 89-90.

³⁴ Gullace, *Blood of Our Sons*, p. 42. Michael Roper also contends that since masculinity is conceived of as an idea created by social convention, this approach leaves unanswered questions about how codes of masculinity related to the behavior and disposition of individual actors. Without analysing experience, masculinity can only be perceived as a set of abstract codes. By examining the connections between masculine ideals and physical manifestations of suspicion, this chapter can offer new insights into the how the war generated new forms of self-expression. Roper, ‘Between Manliness and Masculinity: The ‘War Generation’ and the Psychology of Fear in Britain, 1914-1950’, *Journal of British Studies* 44/2 (2005) p. 345.

³⁵ ‘The Dawn of Britain's Greatest Glory.’ *John Bull* Vol. XVII No. 428, 15 August 1914, p. 4.

Given the perception of war as an intrinsically masculine endeavour, it inevitably reduced the Home Front to a distinctly feminine space.³⁶ Owing to the gendering of combat, as well as the intense pressure on men to enlist, the war threatened to subordinate the status of non-military men.³⁷ Propaganda routinely emphasised the gendered nature of the conflict in an attempt to explain the necessity of military action.³⁸ With images like the ‘Rape of Belgium’, German aggression was ostensibly aimed at women and children, which amplified the importance of male volunteerism.³⁹ To subdue the threats facing British masculinity, Laura Ugolini argues that civilian men made considerable efforts to bridge the gap between themselves and the front line.⁴⁰ Thus, males who were unable or unwilling to fight went to great lengths to construct personal identities as manly civilians to avoid being labelled as subordinate ‘non-men’.⁴¹ It is in this connection that the image of the amateur spy catcher provided a symbol of masculinity, as well as an attestation to Britain’s defensive capabilities, and it was often for this reason that suspicion pervaded responses to the outbreak of war. By emulating the amateur spy catcher, men on the

³⁶ Miriam Cooke and Angela Woollacott, ‘Introduction’, in Miriam Cooke and Angela Woollacott (eds.), *Gendering War Talk* (Princeton, 1993) p. IX; Gullace, *The Blood of Our Sons*, pp. 2-3; Meyer, *Men of War*, p. 9; Ugolini, *Middle-Class Men on the English Home Front*, p. 6.

³⁷ Ugolini, *Middle-Class Men on the English Home Front*, p. 4. This was compounded by a popular belief that the struggle represented an opportunity to assert one’s manliness by defending women from the horrors of war: Bourke, *Dismembering the Male*, pp. 76-123; Robb, *British Culture and the First World War*, pp. 58-60; Wilkinson, *The Church of England and the First World War*, pp. 94-6.

³⁸ For an example of this sentiment see: Harold Ashton, *First from the Front* (London, 1914) pp. 73-4.

³⁹ British manhood was juxtaposed with German brutality. There were three characters, Germany – the brutal militarist, Britain – the chivalric rescuer, and Belgian – the suffering women who had been metaphorically raped. Conversely, national danger was associated with failed manliness. Gullace, *Blood of Our Sons*, pp. 33-46.

⁴⁰ Ugolini, *Middle-Class Men on the English Home Front*, p. 51. Tammy Proctor similarly argues that the distinction between soldier and civilian is an anachronistic construct. The divide between the home and fighting front was never entirely clear. Although propaganda regularly augmented this gendered division, such dichotomies fail to capture the multiple identities and experiences of war. As a consequence, the imaginary boundary separating the civilian from the conflict was not necessarily apparent. Proctor, *Civilians in a World at War*, pp. 3-15.

⁴¹ Ugolini, *Middle-Class Men on the English Home Front*, p. 7.

Home Front were able to assert their masculinity by conforming to standards of military participation and heroism, despite their civilian or non-combatant status.⁴²

In her study of masculinity during the First World War, Jessica Meyer argues that the difficulty in comprehending and explaining experiences of combat forced soldiers to rely on abstractions that had been central to pre-war concepts of manliness.⁴³ Thus, owing to the success of espionage literature as a cultural sensation, replicating the amateur spy catcher became a popular method for asserting one's masculinity and heroism. In writing *My Adventures as a Spy* (1915), for instance, Robert Baden-Powell reflected upon the contemporary appeal of the spy:

To be a really effective spy, a man has to be endowed with a strong spirit of self-sacrifice, courage, and self-control, with the power of acting a part, quick at observation and deduction, and blessed with good health and a nerve of exceptional quality.⁴⁴

Similarly, Brigadier-General John Charteris, Haig's Chief of Intelligence at GHQ between 1915 and 1918, recounted the sense of excitement and adventure attained through spy hunting:

The prevailing ailment is spy-fever. Everyone sees a spy in every un-uniformed human being, and a spy-signal in every inanimate feature of the landscape. So long as we are fighting on French soil, there is not much chance of successful German spying. But when we get to Germany it will be different, and suspicion is a healthy

⁴² Stephane Audoin-Rouzeau and Annette Becker contend that there was a massive emotional investment in the war from as early as August 1914. Despite early skepticism, many societies quickly adopted an unwavering patriotic support in favour of entering the conflict, and individuals began volunteering on an unprecedented scale. Audoin-Rouzeau and Becker suggest that this wave of jingoism across most belligerent states emerged for the defence of the nation. Even in territories not vulnerable to German aggression, defending the idea of the nation, and of civilization itself, was pivotal in stimulating popular support. Preventing treacherous German agents from undermining the coherency and effectiveness of the nation, as well as ensuring the survival of civilization against duplicitous spies, was therefore a popular manifestation of this sentiment. *1914-1918 Understanding the Great War* (London, 2002) p. 97.

⁴³ Meyer, *Men of War*, p. 9, 45-6. See also, Hans-Joachim Neubauer, *The Rumour: A Cultural History* (London, 1999) p. 82.

⁴⁴ Robert Baden-Powell, *My Adventures as a Spy* (Stroud, 2014) p. 33.

atmosphere to encourage against that time, so when the spy tales come to me, as most of them do, however ridiculous they are, I do not pour too much cold water on them – indeed, yesterday we had a pleasant interlude in our monotony. Some German spies were reported to be hiding in some caves in a wood near our head-quarters, so we organized a hunt and drove the woods. It proved a blank, of course, but it was quite amusing and greatly encouraged our amateur Sherlock Holmeses [sic].⁴⁵

For soldiers on the Western Front, spy scares were not irrational pursuits since adventure and terror provided a distraction from the monotony of trench life.⁴⁶ But portraying personal experiences through the lens of fiction not only shielded civilians, especially women and children, from the horrors of combat, it also amplified a soldier's sense of gallantry.⁴⁷ Adopting the venerated persona of the amateur spy catcher not only imitated the heroic deeds of popular literature, but, as Charteris' retrospective enthusiasm for catching spies indicates, it also became intimately related with soldierly ideals, which relentlessly expressed notions of manliness.⁴⁸

For British Tommies on the Western Front, spy phobias became particularly pertinent owing to the movement of locals so close to the British front line. In a similar vein to the instructions given to Territorials in August 1914, commands from GHQ similarly emphasised that vigilance should be maintained across the British sector.⁴⁹ But recognised concepts of masculinity were equally significant in generating suspicion, and the pride of capturing a 'spy' often featured in letters home. Within five days of disembarking in France, Alfred Thurlow claimed to have captured

⁴⁵ Charteris, *At GHQ*, p. 43.

⁴⁶ Neubauer, *The Rumour*, p. 94; Roper, *The Secret Battle*, p. 17. IWM, docs: 11573, Papers of W.V. Hindle, Diary entry 7 June 1915; Leicestershire Record Office, DE 3695/116, Letters of Arthur Percival Marsh to his fiancé, Letter dated 27 June 1915.

⁴⁷ Diary of Horace William Brindley Joseph, 30 May 1915, p. 164.

⁴⁸ The excitement of clandestine operations was frequently likened to military activity. During a ruse to escape Germany, Stewart, a surgeon and not a spy, began 'tingling all over with a sudden sense of danger – tingling as a soldier tingles as he awaits the command to charge'. Burton E. Stevenson, *Little Comrade: A Tale of the Great War* (New York, 1915) p. 93.

⁴⁹ Craig Gibson, *Behind the Front: British Soldiers and French Civilians, 1914-1918* (Cambridge, 2014) pp. 54-7, 158-63.

two German spies in a café before he had even arrived at the front.⁵⁰ George Fear, in a somewhat candid letter that seemingly escaped the censor, wrote about engaging a German agent in single combat. Having been stopped by a spy and deprived of his rifle, the German then supposedly attempted to commandeer his horse:

He pointed a revolver at me and I was taken unawares so I told him he could take the horse but let me have the rifle. He said he wanted the lot so I said take it. I got off the horse and stepped away from him. He went to get up on the horse so as he did, I had a little friend around my waist, under my overcoat. That was a revolver. So as he got into the saddle I put two rounds into him.⁵¹

By encountering a spy, as opposed to a regular German soldier, Fear was able to demonstrate his resolve and ingenuity as a warrior. Overcoming this enemy required a level of cunning and audacity not necessary against ‘normal’ men. Defeating the spy, therefore, underlined his manliness and bravery, but, more significantly, confirmed his success as a soldier:

I searched him and found a lot of papers on him and it was a lot of plans that he had taken from our guns. I got a lot of praise for that. I was not a bit afraid when he said he would shoot me but of course if I had said no you shan’t have my horse, I expect I could have said goodbye... I can account for 16 dead Germans now and hope to account for more yet.⁵²

That First World War soldiers, the very personification of contemporary notions of masculinity, found expression of the relevant ideals connected to military service and courage through mimicking spy fiction is a testament to the cultural impact of both adventure novels and espionage literature during this period.⁵³ It is unsurprising,

⁵⁰ Lincoln Museum, LINRM: 2000/16, Diary of Alfred Thurlow, 10 March 1915.

⁵¹ IWM, docs: 16328, Papers of George Fear, Letter dated 29 November 1914.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Stories involving soldiers, usually local residents, catching spies on the Western Front was a frequent source of pride and admiration in newspapers. ‘Cheshires Capture Spy.’ *Cheshire Observer*, 27 March 1915, p. 10; ‘Another Kilsyth Soldier’s Experiences.’ *Kilsyth Chronicle*, 23 April 1915, p. 1. While

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therefore, that men on the Home Front, even more anxious to prove their value and masculinity than the soldiers in the BEF, also resorted to sensationalised stories of secret agents in order to demonstrate their valour.

Figure 4.1. Sketch by Private C. G. W. Joss of himself chasing a German Spy, made in August 1914 while serving in the Honourable Artillery Company.⁵⁴

[Image removed for copyright purposes]

For soldiers serving on the Home Front, enjoyment was especially scarce. Owing to a growing sense of boredom, men in uniform were particularly eager to capture a German spy.⁵⁵ John Buchan's *The Thirty-Nine Steps* (1915) reflected this convention. In the first outing of Richard Hannay, amateur spy catching was explicitly portrayed as an effective antidote to the boredom encountered on the Home Front.⁵⁶ In a letter to his mother in August 1914, Private Joss, a Reservist in the London Regiment, conveyed his excitement following the declaration of war. Joss ostensibly believed that the appropriate way of expressing his delight was through an association with the amateur spy catcher, and so he sent a self portrait of himself chasing a German spy to his mother. Given that he drew the 'spy' wearing a traditional Prussian helmet, he had very little idea of what a spy looked like. But his sketch was shared with family members, which suggests that capturing a spy was a conventional pursuit with assumed accolades, and the expression on Joss' face as he chases the spy

British civilians abroad equally found excitement and pride in disclosing their own efforts to thwart a German spy: Thomas A. Baggs, *Back from the Front: An Eyewitness's Narrative of the Beginnings of the Great War of 1914* (London, 1914) pp. 46-8.

⁵⁴ Liddle GS 0569: Papers of C.G.W. Joss, Letter dated 10 August 1914.

⁵⁵ IWM docs: 13271, Anonymous Royal Naval Division Memoir, First World War (n.d).

⁵⁶ John Buchan, *The Thirty-Nine Steps* (New York, 1915) pp. 11, 38, 64.

illustrates the satisfaction he thought would be attained through such an endeavour. Joss later described how a detachment of soldiers from his Brigade caused a riot in Winchester after venturing out on a 'German hunt'.⁵⁷ But for Richard Orlebar, although spy catching offered a thrill, it more importantly afforded him a soldierly appearance. Given that Territorials on the Home Front were effectively non-combatants, Orlebar felt it necessary to emphasise the importance of his work in a letter to his Aunt:

Last night I was on guard at the 'Naval Oil Tanks', and had a great spy hunt. We drew blank but we have managed to mark down his house and incidentally we fancy we have spotted our man, and he knows nothing at all about it. He is one of these coast signallers and was spotted by H.M.S. Loyal signalling while a cruiser was going out of harbour. A landing party came and woke me up and together we went out in search but owing to the awful night we were unable to get anything more than a general direction. We ended up our evening outside a house which we eventually proved to be the house in question... We eventually proved ourselves right because just as day was drawing my sergeant saw signals from the house we surrounded, 10 minutes later the destroyer patrol left the harbour.⁵⁸

Similarly, Horace Joseph heard one territorial boasting that he had allegedly killed a spy, supposedly in possession of explosives, whilst guarding the nearby haystacks.⁵⁹ By associating their purported activities with the celebrated amateur spy catcher, inactive sentries could depict themselves as functioning soldiers guarding against the gravest concern of all: invasion. Describing an alleged investigation into a network of German spies also gave the impression that the threat was imminent, which made their efforts all the more necessary. Such elaborate stories suggest that these men

⁵⁷ Papers of C.G.W. Joss, Letter dated 20 May 1915. Spy hunting became a noteworthy event in the life of a Territorial on the home front: Papers of Walter Rye, Letter to his sister, 19 April 1915.

⁵⁸ Liddle GS 1205: Papers of Richard Astry Bourne Orlebar, Letter dated 1 December 1914.

⁵⁹ War Dairies of HWB Joseph, 4 October 1914, p. 102.

considered it essential to present themselves as a relevant facet of the war effort, and more importantly, one that nullified the enemy threat.

Images of chivalry and self-sacrifice, also commonly defined civilian ideas of conflict.⁶⁰ Alexander Watson, for example, argues that the degree of support for the war in Britain and Germany left men in both countries with a compulsion to take part.⁶¹ This inevitably led to a sense of guilt among men not taking part. Unfortunately for Colonel (retired) Alfred Tufnell Robinson, the compulsion to serve was too great. In a letter describing why he took his own life he wrote:

The strain of this terrible crisis is too much for me. I feel I am too old in my seventieth year to do anything for my county and only make an additional mouth to feed. Therefore I had better go at once.⁶²

Despite being categorised as ‘civilian’, Tammy Proctor argues that many men felt that there was little distinguishing them from soldiers. In particular, she intimates that through private vigilance and surveillance, people were able to maintain an emotional connection to the war and diminish the physical separation from the battlefield.⁶³ Newspapers also frequently associated patriotic duty with the espionage peril. The *Daily Telegraph*, for instance, claimed spies not only endangered the Navy and Army, ‘but our hearths and homes may be imperilled’. Guarding against this supposed threat became a staunchly patriotic social endeavour.⁶⁴ Consequently, successful spy

⁶⁰ Stephan Goebel, *The Great War and Medieval Memory: War, Remembrance and Medievalism in Britain and Germany, 1914-1940* (Cambridge, 2007) pp. 232-3; Madigan, ‘A Hateful Task’, p. 82.

⁶¹ Alexander Watson, *Enduring the Great War: Combat, Morale and Collapse in the German and British Armies, 1914-1918* (Cambridge, 2009) p. 53.

⁶² Quoted in Lynch, *Yorkshire's War*, p. 30.

⁶³ Proctor, *World at War*, pp. 15, 37, 80, 110. It was presumably this widespread civilian dissatisfaction that the BEU tried to mobilise through recruitment campaigns that directly targeted men: ‘If you cannot join the Army, join the Anti-German League.’ *Nantwich Guardian*, 24 September 1915, p. 7.

⁶⁴ ‘Spies in Our Midst.’ *Daily Telegraph*, 1 October 1914. Andrew Clark also recognised that individuals mistrustful of strangers believed it to be an obligation or duty during wartime. Diary of Andrew Clark vol. II, 28 September 1914, p. 131. Like soldiers on the home front, civilians found comparable levels of boredom and frustration owing to their separation from the fighting front and sought ways of appropriating soldierly ideals: Essex Record Office, D/DU 418/15, Diary of George H. Rose, entries 11 August, 9 September, 12-14 October 1914.

catching became synonymous with military success. Sir Richard Pennefather, a retired civil servant living in Essex in 1914, appeared rather pleased with himself after believing that he had ‘caught a spy’.⁶⁵ While in Shepton Mallet, a newly appointed Special Constable became a local hero after apprehending his first ‘spy’.⁶⁶ The degree of self-importance presumably gained through this endeavor became so expedient that individuals desperately aimed to replicate popular fiction, even at their own personal expense. One man hoped to enhance his reputation by claiming to have aided a sentry in the pursuit of spy whilst under enemy fire. But instead of receiving praise, the story turned out to be false and the man was prosecuted under the Defence of the Realm act for circulating a fabricated story.⁶⁷

As adolescents in 1914, Augustus and Arthur Alexander equally recognised the perceived achievement of catching a German spy. The two brothers, indoctrinated in the importance of military service, unsurprisingly displayed adulation at the opportunities that the war offered. As a result, Augustus’ diary diligently documented the early engagements of the British military, but also included stories of military bravado closer to home:

I heard that an officer at Aldershot went to a German hairdresser to have his hair cut, and began talking about the war, and the German began insulting the British. Then the Officer got suspicious and thought he would investigate, and burst a door open, and found 6 other Germans with rifles and maps of Aldershot on a table in front of them, they were all immediately arrested and shot.⁶⁸

For Augustus, his fascination with sensationalised stories of British officers arresting duplicitous German spies reinforced notions of British courage and righteousness

⁶⁵ However, the apparent ‘spy’ was nothing more than an elderly lady with a German accent. Diary of Andrew Clark vol. II, 26 September 1914, p. 124.

⁶⁶ ‘War Items.’ *Shepton Mallet Journal*, 21 August 1914, p. 3.

⁶⁷ ‘Armed German Spy.’ *Dover Express*, 2 October 1914, p. 5; ‘The Alleged Spy Story.’ *Dover Express*, 9 October 1914, p. 5.

⁶⁸ Liddle DF 001: Papers of Augustus Gordon Stewart, Diary entry 20 September 1914

deemed inherent in military service.⁶⁹ But this theme attracted much attention in popular culture. The central premise of *The Man Who Stayed at Home*, for example, was that ‘diplomacy and espionage are amusing recreations for men at home’.⁷⁰ First performed in 1914, the play celebrated the sacrifice and bravery of ordinary citizens and became one of the most successful espionage thrillers during the First World War.⁷¹ Although Christopher Brent is a composed and fearless protagonist, he is repeatedly berated for his apparent unwillingness to join the colours. It soon transpires, however, that he is secretly working for British intelligence. Through his creativity and astuteness, he thwarts a network of spies and facilitates the destruction of German U-boats haunting the British coastline. As a dashing figure, Brent also captures the interest of Molly, but her infatuation meets with indignation from her father, who considers Brent a coward. After it becomes clear Brent was actually a hero, Molly reaffirms her admiration: ‘And that’s the man we all sneered at because he stayed at home’.⁷²

Whereas the espionage genre outlined the characteristics of courage and machismo, William Freeland Waddell’s *The Patriot and the Spies*, published in 1915, parodies the popularity of amateur spy catching and reflects a wider appreciation that this behaviour allayed the guilt and shame felt by civilians unable or too afraid to engage the enemy directly. The novel tells the story of Dugald MacBitter, a native of Drumlie, a fictional town on the west coast of Scotland. As a melodramatic and satirical rendition of over-zealous patriots, it ridicules the stupidity and recklessness of chauvinistic bedevilment. Through a series of increasingly absurd exploits, Dugald

⁶⁹ Papers of Augustus Gordon Stewart, Transcript of Interview (1976), Diary entry 5 October 1914; Liddle DF 002: Papers of Arthur Hoyer Alexander, Scrapbook diary 1914-1915.

⁷⁰ Lechmere Worrall and J.E. Harold Terry, *The Man Who Stayed at Home* (London, 1916) p. 143.

⁷¹ Mary Luckhurst, ‘A Wounded Stage: Drama and World War I’, in Mary Luckhurst (ed.) *A Companion to Modern British and Irish Drama 1880-2005* (Oxford, 2006) pp. 302-3.

⁷² Worrall and Terry, *The Man Who Stayed at Home*, p. 143.

faces the trials and tribulations of an amateur spy catcher. His initial effort focused on capturing a foreign visitor called Gecherstein, after witnessing the suspect reading a newspaper, “a clear case o’ espionage, if ever there was ane”. The reader discovers that Gecherstein was really Geraldson, and had lived in Drumlie during his youth.⁷³ Adamant that a ‘successful capture would lead, if not to recognition by the War Office, at least to increased importance in Drumlie’, Dugald continued in his quest:

Armed with binoculars, Dugald marched with firm step to the shore, and trained them on some curious object out at sea. “I’m richt!” he ejaculated, with great fervour. “It’s jist whit I thocht – a mine, an’ nae mistak’. I could wager ma lugs on’t.”⁷⁴

However, despite courageously towing the explosive back to shore in front of a gathering crowd, he fails to secure the adoration of the town as the object turns out to be nothing more than a fallen tree, and Dugald is again humiliated.⁷⁵

Owing to his frenzied and incongruous search for spies, Dugald is repeatedly disgraced and shown to be a liability. After being approached by a man named Diddle, supposedly a likeminded patriot equally incensed by the refusal to take the internal threat seriously, Dugald readily discloses the deprived state of the local defence. After Dugald shows him Drumlie harbour, informs him of the number of Territorials in the area, confesses that a Royal Navy had never visited the region, and discloses the most suitable place for landing an invading force, Diddle departs. After driving off, however, Dugald is shocked to discover a note fallen from Diddle’s pocket. Unable to read the foreign language with which it was written, he took the message to Dr Whitlow who translated it for him:

ARMY SECRET SERVICE, BERLIN.

⁷³ William Freeland Waddell, *The Patriot and the Spies* (London, 1915) pp. 12-15.

⁷⁴ Ibid, p. 16.

⁷⁵ Ibid, pp. 22-3.

HERR VON GREBERSTEIN, - Code 1193. Immediate. Ascertain particulars of coast at Drumlie, and all particulars, as usual. To save time and to obtain accurate information, get in touch with a native. You know the rest. Last enclosure serviceable. Remittance enclosed herewith. All well with the fatherland. Kaiser jubilant on account of the war. God bless him! – FUNKLESTEIN.

“Well, well,” said the doctor, half amused, “all we can say is he has ‘diddled’ you, Dugald, most completely.”⁷⁶ In response, the disgraced Dugald becomes determined to catch Greberstein and sets out to reconnoitre the nearby Windymoor Territorial camp following reports of a man fitting Greberstein’s description staying nearby. During his investigation, a nervous sentry stops and searches him. In a final touch of irony, the sentry arrests Dugald and detains him as a German spy because Dugald has carelessly left Greberstein’s note in his pocket.⁷⁷

Although primarily a satirical exposition, and despite Dugald’s eventual success in capturing Greberstein and uncovering a network of German spies in Drumlie, *The Patriot and the Spies* reflects contemporary customs regarding masculinity and military participation. Before the war, Dugald was seldom aggressive, but became insular and intolerant as the war dragged on.⁷⁸ Consequently, the impetus behind Dugald’s quest to discover German spies in his remote little town is palpably clear:

A man was “nae patriot ava” unless he could pass with ease from the pacific mood to a belligerent one.

“I’ll let them see,” was his oft-repeated remark, “that I’m at least willin’ an’ ready tae souse the Germans, supposing; they were as atrocious an’ wily as the deil himself.”

⁷⁶ Ibid, pp. 60-9.

⁷⁷ Ibid, pp. 80-101.

⁷⁸ Ibid, pp. 9, 50.

Despite suffering from various disabilities preventing him from joining the colours, Dugald desperately sought to prove his worthiness and support his country:

“A patriot canna remain inactive. I’m as guid the day as the day I first met ye. Ower auld at forty! Let them spin that theory try Dugald MacBitter. I’ll mak’ them change their minds. If I had been at the front there wad hae been nae fall o’ Namur. I hae a plan.”

“Ma plan will be usefu’ at home. Ye ken, Janet [Dugald’s wife], there’s German spies about, an’ ma plan is tae collar some o’ them. Will that no aye be helpin’ the country?”⁷⁹

As a satirical commentary on contemporary culture, Dugald’s belligerence is inevitably reflective of the customary remorse many men felt at their civilian status, which often generated a desire to dispel the enemy within. However, Dugald’s esteem for soldiering juxtaposes with feminine passivity. Whereas news of the front only stimulated Dugald’s desire to destroy the internal threat, Janet is distressed by the thought of death: “I dinna see hoo you men can tak’” sich delight in sheddin’ bluid... War’s no a thing tae mak’ sport o’,” she pronounced.⁸⁰ The association of manliness with active combatants, therefore, was widely accepted and the importance of non-combatant males finding additional ways to reassert their masculinity became crucial. Like soldiers in the BEF, the consumption of popular culture and its portrayal of heroic amateur spy catchers stimulated belligerence among many non-combatants.⁸¹

Although historians are right to suggest popular spy fears emerged, in part, as a consequence of popular culture, individual fears did not merely result from a naïve

⁷⁹ Ibid, pp. 9-10.

⁸⁰ Ibid, pp. 132-4.

⁸¹ Following the east coast raid in December 1914, one schoolboy grew equally determined to prove his value and offered his services to defend ‘a bridge or something’. If not allowed, it was professed, he ‘will go to fight in France [anyway] and pity the poor spy they get hold of.’ *Manchester Evening News*, 19 December 1914, p. 2; *The Cornishman*, 31 December 1914, p. 8. Like all civilians, children had been explicitly called upon to participate and indoctrinated on the importance of sacrifice. Lancashire Record Office, PR 2908/9/5: ‘What you can do for you country: an appeal to the boys and girls of the Empire’ (1915).

inability to distinguish fact from fiction. Rather than associate the spy peril with irrational thought, a burgeoning xenophobia, or a collective gullibility, for example, the *Daily Herald* also recognised the significance of spy hunting in moderating civilian guilt. In October 1914, it claimed that ‘every nation suffers in some degree in wartime from spy-fever’, but insisted that there was a fathomable reason:

The soldiers who are at the front work off the passions of war in action. Their hatred of the enemy, if they feel any, is blown away with the smoke of their rifles. It is the non-combatant at home who nurses his wrath, and for lack of a healthy vent for it, turns to brooding on spies and inventing conspiracies.⁸²

Despite the difficulty historians have faced attempting to explain the acceptance of individual spy phobias, the social conventions that were emboldening certain communities to search for German spies were nevertheless apparent. Since this form of counter-espionage offered an opportunity to confront the enemy, containing the internal threat legitimised the presence of male civilians on the Home Front and alleviated the guilt caused by their non-combatant status.

Although this conception of patriotism closely aligned with Edwardian ideas of masculinity, and despite the majority of early spy scares being conducted by males, British men were not alone in their desire to participate. Following the onset of war, female chauvinists felt equally compelled to participate in a military capacity and more than 100,000 women served in various paramilitary units across Britain.⁸³ Members of the Women’s Emergency Corps and Women’s Voluntary Reserve began donning khaki uniforms and stressed their desire to defend the nation from the threat of invasion. Most joined out of a deep sense of patriotism, despite the economic

⁸² ‘Hunting out the Spies.’ *Daily Herald*, 24 October 1914, p. 7.

⁸³ Angela Woollacott, ‘Sisters and Brothers in Arms: Family, Class, and Gendering in World War I Britain’, in *Gendering War Talk*, p. 143; Susan R. Grayzel, *Women and the First World War* (Harlow, 2002) p. 43.

disadvantages that it entailed, and it was often seen as an opportunity to provide a sense of adventure as well as demonstrating the efficacy and courage of women.⁸⁴ For Beatrice Trefusis, the war offered a ‘most thrilling experience’, and she wrote in her diary how glad she was that it was occurring during her lifetime. From March 1915, Trefusis worked in the Censor’s Office’s under Lieutenant Colonel George Cockerill, Director of Special Intelligence from April 1915. Confiding in her diary, she wrote that:

It is interesting and not a little exciting. All very secret, of course. You are not supposed to tell any but the necessary people that you are even working there – of course no mention of anything of the work that goes on there is allowed outside... Perhaps it would be as well not to write here anything further about it until after the war – perhaps not even then – or mention names of anyone else in it. One certainly derives lots of amusement from the work, and a certain amount of insight into the ‘feeling’ in various countries. And its fun to be doing war office work.⁸⁵

Defying the need for secrecy, Trefusis’ desire to disclose her wartime activities, whether through her diary or post war memoirs, reflects an assumption that espionage activity was meaningful and imperative to the war effort. Nevertheless, she seldom made accusations of illicit espionage. Although Trefusis developed private suspicions about possible German spies, she was incredibly reticent about revealing them publicly.⁸⁶ But by expressing a willingness to make sacrifices akin to their male counterparts, women were able to appropriate the male version of patriotism rather than remain passive onlookers. Although many women continued to be employed in

⁸⁴ Krisztina Robert, ‘Gender, Class, and Patriotism: Women’s Paramilitary Units in First World War Britain’, *The International History Review* 19/1 (1997) pp. 52-4.

⁸⁵ Papers of Beatrice M Trefusis, Diary entry for March 1915.

⁸⁶ Papers of Beatrice M Trefusis, Diary entry 26 October 1914.

traditional female roles, assisting the armed forces in service of their country helped redefine their identity and establish new gender identities.⁸⁷

Individual spy phobias thus reflected deep-rooted fears regarding the insecurities of failing to conform to contemporary standards of patriotic behaviour and gendered identities. To compensate, overtly chauvinistic civilians disillusioned or ashamed of their passive existence found gratification through emulating the celebrated heroics of espionage fiction. But others believed this manifestation of patriotism inherently hypocritical. In October 1914, the *Nantwich Guardian* printed a comedic verse that dissociated spy hunting from patriotism, and likened individuals acting on espionage phobias as ‘shirkers’ who were avoiding actual military service:

Eh, Jack, but we’d some sport on Sat’d day night!
You never ‘eard of it? Why, where was you?
We said we’d ‘ad enough of these ‘ere spies:
Pretending to be English – English wives,
And kiddies speakin’ English, and all that:
But reely ‘Uns – ‘a menace to the state’ –
‘The enemy in our midst’ – that’s what they are
So out we goes, some fifty chaps or more,
And crowds comes with us, just to see the fun.
Ah, fun it was, and make no mistake. The brutes!
Spy-‘untin’ ‘s better sport and safer, too
I tell yer, Jack, you missed a proper treat.
Next time, it’s on I’ll come and... What?
What’s that?
You’ve been and gone and ‘listed? Lord deliver us!⁸⁸

⁸⁷ Robert, ‘Gender, Class, and Patriotism’, p. 65.

⁸⁸ ‘The Patriots.’ *Nantwich Guardian*, 30 October 1914, p. 5.

Although pointing out the irony in violent forms of chauvinism epitomises the alienation many over-zealous patriots faced in certain communities, it reflects a customary practice of correlating spy phobias with a sense of national loyalty. Thus, while espionage fiction did induce fears of spies and saboteurs, it also shaped the way in which certain individuals interpreted warfare. Many men felt compelled to combat the enemy within, not primarily because society unequivocally accepted the hyperbole surrounding the threat, but because for certain individuals, a heightened sense of national loyalty demanded it.

COMPREHENDING THE WAR

As previously demonstrated, the ‘spy’ was far more potent as a focal point for collective anxieties rather than individual fears. While overt masculine identities occasionally prompted an outburst of suspicion, conventional wartime gender roles fail to explain the longevity and impact that the image of the spy attained. Instead, accounting for the ubiquity of the spy as a cultural phenomenon also requires an understanding of why espionage featured so prominently in popular discourse. Given that the actual extent of Germany’s global espionage network was overstated, the majority of accusations were overtly influenced by hearsay that represented an anticipated reality. Consequently, this fictional world of clandestine operations permeated the British psyche through an assortment of rumour, gossip, and sensationalist news. This narrative, as oppose to the extremist rhetoric broadcast by the radical right, was far less alarmist and conspiratorial. By analysing this discourse, this section illustrates that spies became a prevailing feature in contemporary culture because the fictional world that they inhabited provided a useful analogy with which

society could comprehend the unprecedented scale of the international situation and grapple with the feelings that the war provoked. For many, the image of the spy did not simply cause alarm; it actually served to alleviate wider concerns and sustain popular morale.

Whereas the previous section demonstrated how the dispersion of spy fever allowed civilian men to assuage their feelings of guilt, the portrayal of the spy was also used to moderate other concerns that often coincided with the way in which various stages of the conflict were perceived.⁸⁹ For instance, following entry into the war, Britain's security became increasingly precarious. With little knowledge of how the British army was performing in France, the dearth of war news only exacerbated the degree of anxiety. In response to this shortage of accurate sources of news, spy stories made a complex crisis appear intelligible and relatable through familiar tales rooted in popular fiction. But to fully comprehend and consent to the conflict, however, society needed to believe that it was surmountable. Explaining Britain's early setbacks, therefore, became essential to society's understanding, and acceptance, of the war. As increasingly ominous news of the fighting in France began to reach Britain, spies also provided a convenient scapegoat that vindicated British failures by accrediting them to German treachery, rather than British incompetence. By attributing failures to German espionage, this narrative refocused anxieties away from the far more troubling concern over whether Britain could actually overcome Germany's conventional military prowess. Besides the dangers imposed on masculine identities, this section brings attention to collective concerns regarding Britain's entry into the war and how the resulting tensions among a society clamouring for

⁸⁹ Martin Farrar similarly observes a distinct change in how the war was reported to the British public between August 1914 and May 1915. During the early weeks, there was an almost total absence of officially accredited news. But by September 1914, vague reports had turned into solemn news as stories of casualties emerged following the British retreat from Mons. *News from the Front: War Correspondents on the Western Front* (Stroud, 1998) pp. 2-65, esp. 18.

information led to a protracted, but symbolic, conflict between fictional, yet plausible, enemies.

Rather than presume that the prominence of this narrative reflected a literal acceptance of the anticipated peril, historians recognise that rumours and gossip embody subconscious thoughts. Although these are often difficult to interpret, they offer a means of accessing historical mentalities.⁹⁰ As a result, they provide historians with a glimpse into how identities were formed, the dynamics of social interaction, and the conventions governing individual and collective behaviour.⁹¹ Thus, owing to the historical specificity of particular rumours, historians have increasingly used them as an indicator of broader notions of continuity and change within any given society. Since spy novels often imitated contemporary politics and diplomacy, social discourses constructed around espionage offered a convenient and recognisable interpretation of events unfolding during the war, without the need to access accurate sources of information. That stories of espionage were fallacious was irrelevant; by envisaging the war through the lens of popular spy fiction, society could celebrate military 'success' as well as mitigate anguish through a shared dialogue and an imagined collective experience. Perpetuating this espionage discourse, therefore, afforded a sense of agency, which dispelled fears of the unknown generated by the outbreak of war.⁹²

From the BEF's arrival in France until their retreat at Mons, the British public was largely kept in the dark about events in France and Flanders. Owing to his experiences in South Africa, Kitchener deliberately set out to restrict journalists from operating in areas close to the front line. Public knowledge of the BEF's early

⁹⁰ David Coast and Jo Fox, 'Rumour and Politics', *History Compass* 13/5 (2015) pp. 224-6.

⁹¹ Neubauer, *The Rumour*, p. 24.

⁹² Catriona Pennell, 'Believing the Unbelievable: The Myth of the Russians with snow on their Boots' in the United Kingdom, 1914', *Cultural and Social History* 11/1 (2014). p. 73.

activities, therefore, became incredibly elusive.⁹³ On 5 August 1914, the government launched a Press Bureau to examine all press releases and provide instruction to editors regarding what aspects should be downplayed or emphasised. Though most newspapers practiced self-censorship, the Bureau could censor, suppress, or delay material that they considered harmful to the war effort.⁹⁴ As a result, word of mouth became the principal source of information, which resulted in a deluge of distorted and exaggerated reports.⁹⁵ What official details did reach the Home Front rarely went beyond a broad outline of events that scarcely mentioned the soldiers involved.⁹⁶ Philip Gibbs, one of the correspondents on the Western Front from 1915, believed that this only exacerbated the hyperbole on the Home Front:

Owing to the rigid refusal of the War Office to give any official credentials to correspondents, the British press, as hungry for news as the British public whose little professional army had disappeared behind a deathlike silence, printed any scrap of description, any glimmer of truth, any wild statement, rumour, fairy tale, or deliberate lie, which reached them from France and Belgium.⁹⁷

This wartime context provided ample conditions for rumour mongering, and scare stories included an assortment of threats ranging from invented German invasions, catastrophic Zeppelin raids, imaginary naval battles, and, most famously, fictional Russian armies.⁹⁸ Writing in 1915 about her experiences following the outbreak of

⁹³ Horace Joseph initially accredited the lack of awareness to the military's astuteness in guarding against the unquestionable existence of German spies in Britain: War Dairies of HWB Joseph, 9 August 1914, p. 11. But for further entries regarding the lack of war news see, 13-26 August 1914, pp. 13-36.

⁹⁴ Robb, *British Culture and the First World War*, p. 134.

⁹⁵ Diary of Andrew Clark vol. III, 30 October 1914, p. 150.

⁹⁶ Farrar, *News from the Front*, pp. x-xv, 41.

⁹⁷ Philip Gibbs, *Adventures in Journalism* (London, 1923) p. 217. Only from May 1915 did the War Office accept their responsibility to provide the British public with officially accredited reports of the fighting.

⁹⁸ Liddle DF 003: Papers of K.M. Alexander, Diary entry 24 November 1914; John Terraine, *The Smoke and the Fire: Myths and Anti-myths of War, 1861-1945* (London, 1992); Horne and Kramer, *A History of Denial*; David Clarke, *The Angel of Mons* (Chichester, 2004); James Hayward, *Myths and Legends of the First World War* (Stroud, 2002); Catriona Pennell, 'Believing the Unbelievable: The

war, one Londoner believed ‘the way in which we believed every rumour in those early days was quite pitiful’.⁹⁹

Of course, much hearsay focused on the supposed presence of duplicitous Germans operating in Britain. Although German barbers and waiters received the brunt of hostility during the early weeks, talk increasingly incorporated the nefarious practices of German Fräuleins, with one rumour even purporting that Asquith’s governess had been a spy.¹⁰⁰ While rumours commonly depicted national threats by implying that spies were aiding German U-boats, guiding zeppelins in motorcars, or covertly constructing a network of concrete gun emplacements across Britain, local gossip was equally prominent.¹⁰¹ At his local choir practice, for instance, the reverend Andrew Clark heard of a tragic incident that had supposedly occurred the previous night at nearby Chelmsford. It was insinuated by a friend that while on guard duty at the Marconi wireless station, a sentry had been shot dead by ‘a German agent in a motor’, which had allegedly resulted in a barricade preventing vehicles from travelling in the area. Why the suspected enemy agent thought it necessary to assassinate a sentry was never questioned, but the debacle ensured that residents of Little Waltham felt involved in the war effort.¹⁰² Other stories were slightly more outlandish. Peggie Alexander, for example, recalled how as a young girl she heard that:

Myth of the Russians with snow on their Boots’ in the United Kingdom, 1914’, *Cultural and Social History* 11/1 (2014).

⁹⁹ Papers of Miss M. Coules, p. 8. See also, Papers of Dorothy Bowes, ‘Looking Back to 1914-18’ (1991) p. 3. Sigmund Freud also wrote in 1915 how ‘the state [in war] demands of its citizens the utmost obedience and sacrifice, however, it incapacitates them with an excess of secrecy and censorship, which makes them, intellectually oppressed in this way, defenceless against every unfortunate situation and every wild rumour.’

¹⁰⁰ Papers of Florence Schuster, Diary entry 23 September 1914; Diary of Horace William Brindley Joseph, 23 September 1914, p. 93.

¹⁰¹ Papers of G.M. West, Diary entry 1 February 1915, p. 6; Papers of Ada McGuire, Letter dated 31 May 1915; Holman, ‘Constructing the Enemy Within’, pp. 22-42. For the difference between rumour and gossip see, Coast and Fox. ‘Rumour and Politics’, p. 223.

¹⁰² Diary of Andrew Clark vol. IV, 5 November 1914, p. 96.

When a German spy wants to let the German soldiers know what they are to do and what their enemies are doing they draw a cow on a gate, or a fence, or anything they can find, if it is a small cow it means that the road is only weakly defended; a medium cow means that our troops were somewhere near; if it was a large cow it was a warning that there were earthworks or trenches nearby. If the cow's head pointed in the air it meant that the Germans had better send up an aeroplane before advancing.¹⁰³

While stories of illicit espionage were incredibly diverse, all were geared towards incentivising popular support and encouraging a general mobilisation among the British public.¹⁰⁴ Although comical, Peggie's story of cows etched onto local fences demonstrates how national and local security became synonymous, and how provincial communities felt connected to the war effort and committed to upholding the ideals associated with military service. Rather than literal translations of spy fears, the scale of espionage rumours circulating in Britain during the early months also signified a growing awareness of the totality of the conflict and reflected the importance of widespread involvement in the war effort.¹⁰⁵

As a result, popular stories supposedly disclosing Germany's clandestine activities in Britain should not be taken as objective indications of a ubiquitous spy fever. Their existence merely denotes a widespread cultural fascination with espionage. Even *John Bull* could apply a degree of criticism to such stories. In a touch of irony, Bottomley bemoaned that 'what spoof – and wicked spoof – the Press indulges in when war is on! Nearly everything which appears is pure invention, and, to the initiated, obvious fake'.¹⁰⁶ Within this context, espionage rumours were not always symptomatic of widespread alarm. Contradicting the idea that spy fever and

¹⁰³ Papers of Katrine Margaret Alexander.

¹⁰⁴ Proctor, *Civilians in a World at War*, p. 20.

¹⁰⁵ Holman, 'Constructing the Enemy Within', p. 23.

¹⁰⁶ 'War 'News'!' *John Bull* vol. XVII no. 428, 15 August 1914, p.1. See also, Gregory, 'A Clash of Cultures', p. 16.

rumour mongering were closely related to one another, Sir George Aston later recalled the wealth of spy stories circulated during the war but argued that the British public remained ill disposed to public disturbance or panic of any type.¹⁰⁷ Similarly, in describing the situation following the declaration of war, Robert Saunders claimed that strict censorship had reduced newspapers to rumour and hearsay, which were ‘far from satisfying’, and not credible sources of information.¹⁰⁸ Beatrice Trefusis, to take another example, claimed that the prevalence of rumour was not because of gullibility or naivety, but of desperation: ‘everyone has some special bit of rumour, more or less unlikely... One has so little news from authentic sources, that one seizes any odd rumours with glee – crumbs to live on’.¹⁰⁹ Thus, although the press was instrumental in conveying the spy peril, there was an implicit disparity between official releases regarding cases of espionage and hearsay.¹¹⁰ Newspapers also regularly voiced criticisms of the censor through editorials and cartoons, but by attesting to its influence, they inevitably undermined the authenticity of their own coverage.¹¹¹ The distorted reality that rumours engendered, therefore, did not go unnoticed. In recalling an invasion claim, for instance, Hilda Davison wrote that ‘we talked about ‘the invasion’, but I don’t think we ever dreamt it could really happen’.¹¹² Likewise, when Fred Robinson heard reports of a great naval battle off the Norfolk coast in August

¹⁰⁷ He added that the proliferation of rumour was an entirely customary affair, even during peace. Aston, *Secret Service*, pp. 81-2. Wartime cartoons also seemingly mocked the popularity of prominent rumours. Liddle, DF 047: Papers of Barbara Dunn.

¹⁰⁸ Papers of Robert Saunders, Letter dated 8 August 1914.

¹⁰⁹ Beatrice Morwenna Trefusis papers, Diary entries 6 and 21 August 1914.

¹¹⁰ Editorial staffs were surely aware of the falsity of spy rumours since the Press Bureau individually delayed the publication of a number of genuine cases of espionage. The fact that they were allowed to publish the details of various spy stories unconstrained by the censor itself revealed that there was little truth in them: TNA HO 139/43, ‘D’ Notices. See nos. 96 (10 November 1914) 157 (19 February 1915) 164 (24 February 1915) 167 (25 February 1915) 195 (2 April 1915) and 210 (15 May 1915) in particular.

¹¹¹ Robb, *British Culture and the First World War*, p.139

¹¹² Hilda W. Davison, ‘Memories of the Great War’, p. 10.

1914, he similarly doubted its genuineness.¹¹³ Stories of espionage were commonly subjected to scrutiny and were rarely considered an accurate representation of events. People were seldom unable to distinguish between fictional anecdotes and sensible journalism, but the shortage of the latter meant that society relied on sensationalist stories and rumours of espionage to satisfy a desire for information.¹¹⁴

Public demand for war news directly stimulated much of the contemporary espionage discourse. Although historians often presume that the prominence of espionage in the press pertained to an enemy within complex, the majority of intangible reports referred to German spies operating abroad.¹¹⁵ Rather than a straightforward enemy-within-complex, spy stories provided a semblance of reality that allowed society to follow the events of the emerging crisis. As the German Army advanced through Belgium, spy stories predominantly centred on Germany's clandestine activities in the Low Countries.¹¹⁶ But after victory on the Marne and the establishment of trench warfare on the Western Front, the principal arena for Germany's clandestine operations shifted to correspond with the actual fighting in France.¹¹⁷ Notwithstanding this emphasis placed on covert activity in the primary theatre of war, the popular world of espionage also allowed people to grasp the international scale of the conflict.¹¹⁸ After the Ottoman Empire entered the conflict in November 1914, and commenced military operations against Russia in the Caucasus,

¹¹³ Papers of Frederick Arthur Robinson, Diary entry 6 August 1914.

¹¹⁴ Tamotsu Shibutani argues that the circulation of rumour is a process in which society construct their own self-serving explanations for ambiguous or ineffable situations. *Improvised News: A Sociological Study of Rumor* (New York, 1966) p. 199.

¹¹⁵ 34% of the 6,921 articles surveyed depicted activities of spies abroad. Only 29% displayed explicit concern towards the direct threat of espionage in Britain.

¹¹⁶ In August 1914, 48% of stories involving German spies abroad referred to events transpiring in Belgium.

¹¹⁷ Between October and December 1914, 49% of spy rumours referring to spies abroad related to activity in France.

¹¹⁸ Spy stories related to Germany's clandestine activity across the globe; America, Angola, Australia, Bosnia, Bulgaria, Denmark, Canada, China, Egypt, Finland, Gibraltar, Greece, Hong Kong, India, Mexico, Morocco, the Pacific Islands, South Africa, Spain, and Sweden all featured in espionage tales.

rumours of spies in Turkey began to emerge in the British press for the first time.¹¹⁹ Tales of espionage on the Eastern Front and at Salonika also coincided with major operations there, while escalating tensions between Italy and the Central Powers likewise prompted a spate of spy stories.¹²⁰ Tales of espionage thus became an important way of following international diplomacy and military engagements. Envisaging the increasingly volatile situation as a trial of wits between two individuals seemingly made contemporary events both accessible and engaging, while at the same concealing some of the more distressing facets of war from the British public.¹²¹

¹¹⁹ Although the Bergmann Offensive opened the fighting in the Caucasus, it was principally a Russian initiative. The flurry of reports pertaining to espionage in Turkey therefore coincided with the first major engagement between Russian and Ottoman forces during the Battle of Sarikamish (22 December 1914 – 17 January 1915). ‘Condemned as a Spy.’ *Birmingham Mail*, 17 December 1914, p. 3; ‘A Greek Subject’s Sentence.’ *Western Mail*, 26 December 1914, p. 4; ‘In Constantinople.’ *Globe*, 30 December 1914, p. 3; ‘Greece and Turkey.’ *Aberdeen Evening Express*, 9 January 1915, p. 3; ‘Foreigners in Stambul.’ *Daily Record*, 11 January 1915, p. 3.

¹²⁰ The majority of spy stories relating to the Eastern Front emerged during the exact period following the Silesian Offensive (11 November – 6 December 1914) and the Russian offensive in the Carpathians (2 January – 12 April 1915). ‘Czar and the Peasant.’ *Edinburgh Evening News*, 5 December 1914, p. 5; ‘Germans Outwitted.’ *Leeds Mercury*, 12 December 1914, p. 5; ‘The Fight for Warsaw.’ *Birmingham Daily Mail*, 26 December 1914, p. 3; ‘River Dammed with Corpses.’ *Aberdeen Evening Express*, 26 December 1914, p. 3; ‘Grim Struggle for Warsaw.’ *Liverpool Echo*, 26 December 1914, p. 3; ‘Batoum to Archangel.’ *Edinburgh Evening News*, 5 January 1915, p. 2; ‘Germans Driven to Death.’ *Aberdeen Evening Express*, 6 January 1915, p. 2.

Twenty-seven reports of spies in Salonika were published between 20 October and 31 December 1915, which followed the Battle of Krivolak (18 October – 4 November 1915) the first engagement on the Salonika Front. Only one article had previously mentioned spies in Salonika in March 1915. ‘Salonika.’ *Hull Daily Mail*, 20 October 1915, p. 5; ‘Spies and the Salonika Landing.’ *Western Mail*, 25 October 1915, p. 5; ‘A Bishop as a Spy.’ *Daily Record*, 11 November 1915, p. 5; ‘Spies at Salonika.’ *Birmingham Daily Mail*, 20 November 1915, p. 6; ‘Swarms of Spies in Salonika.’ *Aberdeen Evening Express*, 26 November 1915, p. 4; ‘The Spies of Salonika.’ *Liverpool Echo*, 26 November 1915, p. 5.

Almost half of reports relating to Italy between August 1914 and December 1915 appeared in the British press just as Italy declared war and as the First Battle of the Isonzo began (23 June – 7 July 1915). ‘Austria and Italy. Signs of Imminent Rupture.’ *Daily Record*, 22 March 1915, p. 5; ‘Germans in Italy.’ *Liverpool Echo*, 22 March 1915, p. 5; ‘Keep an Eye on Germans!’ *Manchester Evening News*, 23 March 1915, p. 7; ‘Kaiser’s Double Arrested in Italy.’ *Edinburgh Evening News*, 5 April 1915, p. 5; ‘Italians Clearing the Country of Spies.’ *Globe*, 19 April 1915, p. 1; ‘Diplomat-Thief-Spy. Wanted at Rome.’ *Globe*, 28 April 1915, p. 4; ‘Germans and Austrians Arrested in Italy.’ *Birmingham Daily Mail*, 12 May 1915, p. 3; ‘Rioting in Milan. An Anti-German Outburst.’ *Portsmouth Evening News*, 28 May 1915, p. 6; ‘Spy Peril.’ *Birmingham Mail*, 31 May 1915, p. 2; ‘Italian Campaign.’ *Nottingham Journal*, 29 June 1915, p. 3; ‘Spies Sentenced.’ *Birmingham Mail*, 8 July 1915, p. 4; ‘Official Reports. Italy.’ *Edinburgh Evening News*, 10 July 1915, p. 5.

¹²¹ Rather than admit military failure, for instance, newspapers commonly attributed such distressing rumours to the activities of German spies. It was recommended, therefore, that people take little notice of the difficulties experienced at the front: ‘Story of the War.’ *Leeds Mercury*, 19 August 1914, p. 2;

As well as provide society with the means of comprehending the war's international scale, popular characterisations of the spy also encouraged introspective reflection. Although Edwardian invasion novels have become notorious for depicting Germany as a ruthless external foe, their portrayal of danger was highly abstract. Consequently, Harry Wood suggests that the German menace was most commonly used to accentuate domestic social and political concerns, rather than represent tangible military realities. He points to A. J. Dawson's, *The Message* (1907), in particular, as a critical observation on contemporary life in which Dawson exploited the invasion threat to both encourage and deride political and social change to revitalise idyllic Edwardian culture.¹²² As a prominent feature within satirical representations of British society, popular characterisations of the spy could likewise expose domestic issues as well demonise enemy aliens. As an 'outsider', 'Schmidt the Spy', the popular caricature in wartime espionage discourse, was well placed to provide a critical commentary on British society. Aspects of the Home Front that appeared to debase British values, or that seemed counterproductive to the war effort, commonly featured as the theme of Schmidt's investigations. Figure 4.2 shows Schmidt making various discoveries: an inept home defence force, an excessive degree of jingoism, and an indifference towards the suffering on the Western Front. By subtly criticising collective behaviour, these cartoons sought to regulate society according to wartime values. Employing the image of the spy reinforced the desirable behaviour since it candidly associated the external enemy with the internal problems identified by the satirists. Not only did espionage facilitate conceptions of

'Our London Letter.' *Diss Express*, 28 August 1914, p. 6; 'London Letter.' *Whitstable Times and Herne Bay Herald*, 29 August 1914, p. 4; 'More False News.' *Dumfries and Galloway Standard*, 9 January 1915, p. 2.

¹²² Wood, 'Sharpening the Mind', pp. 119-27.

international political and military developments, but depictions of the spy also encouraged society to reflect upon and comprehend their own experiences of war.

Figure 4.2 ‘The night precautions of the military authorities are investigated’.



Figure 4.3 ‘The iron hand of discipline is everywhere visible’.



That tales of espionage were used as a means of interpreting the conflict during the early stages was evidenced by how communities responded to news of a captured spy. Spy scares often focused on success rather than alarm, and the language used to describe such events seldom conveyed fear. Instead, the press regularly depicted spy hunts as thrilling incidents designed to excite rather than alarm the reader.¹²³ News of a captured spy, therefore, caused great excitement within the community. In Tring, after a German spy had supposedly been caught and placed in

¹²³ 'Supposed Spy Shot. A Newcastle Chase.' *Portsmouth Evening News*, 8 August 1914, p. 7; 'Midnight Spy Incident. Excitement at Dumfermline.' *Edinburgh Evening News*, 11 August 1914, p. 2; 'Exciting Incident in Wigan.' *Wigan Observer and District Advertiser*, 15 August 1914, p. 6; 'Spy Scare at Shepton Mallet. Veterinary Surgeon Bitten with the Mania. Territorial Officer's Exciting Adventure.' *Taunton Courier and Western Advertiser*, 19 August 1914, p. 8; 'Supposed Spy Chase at Torry. A Daring Escapade.' *Aberdeen Evening Express*, 25 August 1914, p. 3; 'Shadowing a 'Spy'. Exciting Incident at Cardiff.' *Western Mail*, 8 September 1914, p. 6; 'Spy Hunt Comedy. Exciting Incident at Scarborough.' *Birmingham Mail*, 18 December 1914, p. 4.

local custody, the *Bucks Herald* claimed that ‘a crowd quickly gathered, and for some time the road and pathways near the police headquarters were blocked by an excited crowd of soldiers and civilians, anxious to know the truth of the rumour’.¹²⁴ A similar incident supposedly occurred in Aberdeen:

Cries of ‘German Spy’ resounded in Union Street last night shortly after nine o’clock, when a foreign looking man, handcuffed to a stalwart constable of the city police, was escorted along the thoroughfare to the central office in Lodge Walk. The east end in Union Street was crowded at the time, and as the cry spread there was a rush to get a view of the constable and his quarry. Fortunately there was no disorder, and in the absence of accurate information regarding the identity of the apprehended man, there was no hostile demonstration, and the constable experienced no difficulty in taking his captive to the police-office. On inquiry, it was learned that the apprehended man was a foreigner, but was not an enemy agent, and had been apprehended on a minor charge.¹²⁵

That people were desperate to catch a glimpse of the infamous German ‘spy’ demonstrates a degree of fascination among contemporaries. For many people, instead of growing increasingly anxious of the espionage peril, the personification of the spy encouraged excitement, because capturing one became comparable to military triumph. In Exeter, for instance, a crowd became especially disappointed after discovering a stranger believed to be a German spy was nothing more than an Irishman about to enlist.¹²⁶ The spectacle of apprehending a spy and the eagerness to behold one in the flesh suggests that it had become customary to perceive the impediment of German espionage as an indicator of broader military attainment. The ‘spy’, therefore, was imperative to collective interpretations of the war. Not only were

¹²⁴ ‘Tring.’ *Bucks Herald*, 12 December 1914, p. 10.

¹²⁵ ‘“Spy” Scare in Aberdeen.’ *Aberdeen Evening Express*, 9 September 1914, p. 2.

¹²⁶ ‘Amusing Spy Story at Exeter.’ *Western Times*, 14 August 1914, p. 5.

espionage tales crucial for society to remain informed about the escalating conflict, they were equally important for sustaining morale by providing an allusion of success during a time when a lack of news prohibited outbursts of jubilation in response to conventional military endeavours.

But depictions of German spies helped maintain morale even as news of the conflict began to reach the Home Front. To fully comprehend the nature of the conflict, and Britain's role within it, early setbacks that became increasingly conspicuous had to be explained to sustain popular support. Since the spy rhetoric had frequently indicated a prejudice towards enemy aliens, the subjects of rumour and gossip were easily fashioned into convenient scapegoats.¹²⁷ Charles Beresford sought to capitalise on the phenomenon and publicly condemned spies for their role in sinking three British cruisers off the Scottish coast in November 1914. He claimed to have made inquiries and found undisputed evidence that spies 'had something to do with those cruisers being put down'.¹²⁸ But he failed to disclose this evidence when asked by the Director of Public Prosecutions. Instead, he responded by reaffirming the hazards posed by enemy agents resident in Britain, and stressed that 'the danger is increased by a system of enjoining that proof or evidence must be forthcoming that an alien is going to commit some treacherous act before he is arrested or before he is sentenced'.¹²⁹ This type of scapegoating was presumably not intended to confirm or convince people of the ubiquity of German spies throughout Britain; it was merely designed to infer a covert interference transpiring within Britain that could generate hostility and retribution against anything perceived foreign.

¹²⁷ Neubauer, *The Rumour*, p. 4.

¹²⁸ Lord Charles Beresford, Hansard, 12 November 1914.

¹²⁹ TNA HO 45/10756/267450: The 'Spy Peril' and the Question of Interning all enemy Aliens. Lord Charles Beresford – Guy Stephenson, 9 October 1914.

Given the clandestine nature of espionage, an inability to perceive the existence of German spies did not automatically discount the reality of foreign infiltration. Despite the degree of scepticism, therefore, the figure of the spy provided a scapegoat that society could never entirely negate. Consequently, the depiction of spies became central to ensuring that confidence and morale endured Britain's early failures. Cate Haste, for instance, argues that the propaganda campaign against spies 'achieved very little in terms of its declared aim – to safeguard the security of the country', but that 'the propagandists were people gripped by war hysteria themselves, who found a convenient scapegoat for the failures of the war in enemy aliens'.¹³⁰ British naval losses at Coronel and the bombardment of the British East Coast, for example, were both explained by accrediting German success to the machinations of secret agents.¹³¹ The official intelligence reports following the raids on the British east coast, however, completely omitted the possibility that German spies had been involved, which highlights the discord between popular sensationalism and official pragmatism.¹³² Nonetheless, espionage was also deemed to have contributed to the sinking of the *Lusitania*, facilitated the success of the *Emden*, and led to the death of Kitchener, while spies were frequently purported to be aiding Zeppelin raids.¹³³ The

¹³⁰ Haste, *Keep the Home Fires Burning*, p. 138.

¹³¹ For reports of the Battle of Coronel: 'Today's Naval News.' *Hull Daily Mail*, 5 November 1914, p. 4; 'Fear for the Good Hope.' *Liverpool Echo*, 5 November 1914, p. 6; 'The Good Hope.' *Portsmouth Evening News*, 5 November 1911, p. 3; 'The Good Hope.' *Western Mail*, 6 November 1911, p. 5. For the response to the East Coast Raid: 'Territorials' Baptism of Fire.' *Aberdeen Evening Express*, 17 December 1914, p. 2; 'Stories of the Raid.' *Liverpool Echo*, 17 December 1914, p. 8; 'Spies on the East Coast.' *Portsmouth Evening News*, 17 December 1914, p. 6; 'The Search for Spies.' *Edinburgh Evening News*, 18 December 1914, p. 6; 'Spying at Scarborough.' *Portsmouth Evening News*, 19 December 1914, p. 5; 'Spy Work at Scarbro.' *Liverpool Echo*, 21 December 1914, p. 4; 'Spies on the East Coast.' *Western Mail*, 21 December 1914, p. 10.

¹³² TNA CAB 45/263: Raids on the Coast of Great Britain: British Intelligence Reports, nos. 1-2 dated 3 November and 16 December 1914 respectively.

¹³³ For the connection between spies and the sinking of the *Lusitania*: 'Lusitania. Resumption of the Official Enquiry.' *Birmingham Mail*, 16 June 1915, p. 4; 'Lusitania's Speed Explained.' *Liverpool Echo*, 16 June 1915, p. 5; 'The Lusitania Inquiry. Were Germans on Board?' *Daily Record*, 17 June 1915; 'The Spy Danger.' *Western Mail*, 17 June 1915, p. 4.

expediency of this imagery, due to the secrecy surrounding espionage, made it applicable to an assortment of unpopular setbacks.¹³⁴ Thus, despite the commonly implied irrationality of spy fever, this type of discourse was an entirely rational pursuit. Whether scapegoating involves a deliberate attempt to divert blame to ensure the survival of the status quo, or an unconscious effort to grapple with the tensions caused by known and unknown factors, both are typically considered to be rationalisations.¹³⁵ Besides framing military events in a familiar context and offering opportunities for celebration, the image of the spy also presented some of the difficulties encountered in the early months in a way that was both intelligible and palatable to the British public.

While certain individuals inevitably consumed rumours and spy stories as factual exposés of German espionage and subversion, the existence of this discourse does not translate to a ubiquitous state of paranoia. For some, popular spy fictions provided a useful representation of the international context. By substituting fears of

For their role in facilitating the success of the Emden: 'The Price of Dreadnoughts.' *Cheshire Observer*, 24 October 1914, p. 5; 'What the Military Experts Say.' *Aberdeen Evening Express*, 11 November 1914, p. 2; 'Alien Enemy Sentenced.' *Hull Daily Mail*, 26 November 1914, p. 6.

For spies bringing about the death of Kitchener: 'German Spies.' *Daily Record*, 7 June 1916, p. 2; 'The Spy Theory.' *Liverpool Echo*, 7 June 1916, p. 7; 'Menace of the Hun Spy. Kitchener Tragedy.' *Aberdeen Evening Express*, 8 June 1916, p. 2; 'Lord Kitchener and His Staff Drowned at Sea. Possible Work of a Spy.' *Taunton Courier and Western Advertiser*, 14 June 1916, p. 6.

For local disturbances thought to aid Zeppelin raids: 'Agricultural Notes.' *Southern Reporter*, 3 September 1914, p. 3; 'Bumbles Letter from Beeford.' *Hull Daily Mail*, 31 October 1914, p. 3; 'Airship Raid on Norfolk Coast.' *Hull Daily Mail*, 20 January 1915, p. 5; 'News of Air Raids.' *Hull Daily Mail*, 20 August 1915, p. 3. See also, Papers of L.B. Stanley, Letter dated 10 September 1915.

¹³⁴ Spies were reportedly responsible for outbreaks of foot and mouth disease, factory explosions, sunken vessels, failed assassinations, haystack fires, burst water pipes, British troop losses, and what President Trump has termed 'fake news'. 'Milngavie Flooded.' *Daily Record*, 14 August 1914, p. 4; 'Story of the War.' *Leeds Mercury*, 19 August 1914, p. 2; 'Our London Letter.' *Diss Express*, 28 August 1914, p. 6; 'Epidemic of Falsehood.' *Whitstable Times and Herne Bay Herald*, 29 August 1914, p. 4; 'Agricultural Notes.' *Southern Reporter*, 3 September 1914, p. 3; 'Scottish Regiments' Heavy Losses.' *Aberdeen Evening Express*, 11 August 1914, p. 3; 'Bumbles Letter from Beeford.' *Hull Daily Mail*, 31 October 1914, p. 3; 'Attempt on King Albert and French President.' *Aberdeen Evening Express*, 3 November 1914, p. 3; '800 French Horses Killed.' *Portsmouth Evening News*, 11 November 1914, p. 6; 'The Alien Peril.' *Nottingham Journal*, 13 November 1914, p. 3; 'More False News.' *Dumfries and Galloway Standard*, 9 January 1915, p. 2; 'Two Vessels Sunk in the Irish Sea.' *Fife Free Press and Kirkcaldy Guardian*, 27 February 1915, p. 2; 'Who Caused the Lerwick Explosion?' *Aberdeen Evening Express*, 22 April 1915, p. 5; 'Foot and Mouth Disease in Wiltshire.' *Warwick and Warwickshire Advertiser*, 20 November 1915, p. 7.

¹³⁵ Tom Douglas, *Scapegoats: Transferring Blame* (London, 2003) p. 108.

the unknown with the spy threat, society could focus on a clear and identifiable danger, instead of an abstract and potentially fatal reality, which alleviated former anxieties through collective understanding. Sensationalist stories and spy rumours also afforded an interpretation of the crisis that was equally comforting; they invariably revealed German agents outwitted by British ingenuity, while Britain's allies abroad were continuously victorious in the face of German treachery. Yet as the reality of war began to reach people on the Home Front, especially after Britain sustained the first civilian casualties of the conflict, the nature of spy rumours began to change. No longer were such stories simply aimed at satisfying a need for information; they also sought to explain British failures. Using stories of espionage to fill the void of war news, popular discourses provided an allusion of military success, challenged supposedly inappropriate activities on the Home Front, as well as circumvented some of the harsh realities created by early setbacks. Each offered a means of comprehending the war through a familiar framework in which Britain invariably prevailed. The spy was therefore not simply an object of danger, but the corresponding imagery was simultaneously employed to stimulate popular support and ensure British morale endured the early stages of war.



Widespread concerns regarding foreign espionage did not necessarily emerge through literal fears of clandestine subversion. Instead, the prevalence of spy fever represented an assortment of anxieties that each reflected an intensified vulnerability. Besides a fear that the perceived rise in immigration threatened Britain's national and ethnic cohesion, the spy peril also conveyed fears of the unknown engendered by the crisis

of August 1914. At a personal level, the degree of uncertainty, especially in the relationship between the individual and the state, threatened to transform how identities were maintained during the conflict. With the outbreak of war, notions of masculinity were inevitably reshaped according to the intensified militaristic environment. As a result, non-combatants employed the emotions and physical behaviours endorsed by the rhetoric surrounding the spy peril to protect their status as civilians. It afforded them the appearance of becoming militarily involved in the conflict, thereby making them an important facet of the war effort, despite remaining as non-combatants. Collectively, however, disseminating and partaking in the discourse surrounding the spy peril also fashioned a sense of agency among passive onlookers unable to shape the events around them. By conceiving of the conflict through popular literary models, society could remain confident that the war would follow a recognisable pattern. Moreover, capturing German spies seemingly reaffirmed that the conflict would inevitably conclude with a successful British victory, despite the intrigues of the German Empire. Therefore, spy fever did not necessarily derived from naïve credulity. For many individuals, adopting this narrative assuaged various anxieties that arose from an unstable international context as well as from the uncertainty regarding their own involvement in the national war effort. The popularity of the spy was thus not irrational; it served an underlying need to feel secure at a time of intense crisis.

Conclusion

During the First World War, British society experienced various emotional responses to the perceived dangers posed by the threat of German espionage. Although historians generally agree on the shape, size, and significance of this ‘spy fever’, contemporaries shared no similar consensus. Basil Thompson described it as a malady that attacked indiscriminately and triggered an unrelenting delusional paranoia; Caroline Playne claimed that spy phobias were confined to certain newspapers known for insidious sensationalism; and Winston Churchill thought that such fears were only influential among a certain class of people. These conflicting assessments reflect the various ways in which society experienced and perceived their own attitudes and behaviour. There can be little doubt that many Britons developed an intense fascination with German espionage during the First World War. Yet although retrospective assessments of spy fever have typically perceived a single homogeneous experience, there were various emotional and physical responses related to presumed German intrigues. Owing to the disputed nature of wartime espionage phobias among contemporaries, applying the common understanding of spy fever to any one of these experiences is anachronistic. Rather than introduce various terminologies to account for this diversity, my research has approached ‘spy fever’ as a broad concept that embodies an array of reactions to the depiction and perception of foreign espionage.

The clearest way to distinguish between different emotional responses is to separate individual fears from collective anxieties. While the former are most closely aligned with historiographical accounts of spy fever, the latter were far more pervasive and influential. Individual fears of spies were most apparent during the

early weeks of the conflict, but these concerns quickly abated and became largely ineffectual. When anxiety caused instances of widespread suspicion, the nature of that fear typically conformed to the expectations of what German sabotage would involve. Owing to the secrecy of espionage, Germany's illicit activity remained intangible. It was only by outlining specific scenarios that the German spy could be identified and deemed threatening. But, significantly, when these conditions were not observed, or were shown to be fallacious, these fears subsided. Individuals believing in the existence of German spies rarely suffered from hysterical delusions; instead, they responded to official directives that had saturated society during the initial stages of the war. For this reason, they were not acting irrationally, but complying with local strategies to mobilise society against the expected dangers of an enemy within. The practice of using 'fever' to describe these emotions is therefore misguided because it mistakenly characterises this type of response as a severe psychological disorder. Since the majority of emotional experiences were short-lived, and limited to specific individuals and scenarios, spy phobias were far more influential as collective anxieties.

As an elusive threat, spy fever needed to be culturally constructed for society to understand when, where, and how particular emotions and reactions became appropriate. In August 1914 spy fever emerged through sensationalist journalism that encouraged, even demanded, enhanced vigilance. While it outlined the threat – treacherous German spies would subvert Britain's mobilisation by destroying key infrastructure – it simultaneously called on society to be part of the solution. The difficulty in identifying the source of this peril, however, meant that these instructions were usually vague and open to exaggeration. 'Strangers' were to be diligently watched and anybody seen 'loitering' near 'vulnerable' locations, even those with

little military significance, was to be considered suspect. As the nation prepared for war, encountering unfamiliar faces was inevitable. This imprecision gave anxious individuals a license to direct their aversions towards others with near impunity. More importantly, though, this narrative was frequently reinforced by the activities of local authorities. What occurred in August 1914 suggests that anxieties were not as widespread as previously thought. Physical outbreaks of fear and suspicion were not only caused by transient emotional states, but they were mostly confined to specific groups of individuals. The appearance of panic in August 1914 was largely due to an erratic search for covert German agents conducted by various County Constabularies and Territorial units, which set the tone of popular paranoia in certain communities. The combination of rhetoric in the press and the willingness of local officials to display suspicion, explicitly called upon society to ensure that Britain remained secure despite the events transpiring on the continent.

It is commonly believed that ‘spy fever’ amounted to a widespread panic caused by genuine fears of spies and saboteurs secretly infiltrating Britain. But the dangers symbolised by the spy peril changed as the war progressed. After the mobilisation period, when fears of sabotage were most noticeable, the importance of organising society for an impending conflict no longer applied. Moreover, as the parameters of the war became more clearly defined, the initial apprehension created by the imminent conflict dissipated. Even so, the vagueness of the spy peril made it easily applicable, and so espionage continued to epitomise various fears. With no clear understanding of what a German spy might look like, early suspicions assimilated with broader concerns to target anything deemed inappropriate or detrimental to the war effort. Rather than encourage popular vigilance against suspicious looking individuals, abstract claims of German subversion now promoted

antipathy toward the continued presence of alien communities. Primarily, these claims included calls to terminate long-standing nationalisation policies. But a range of internal challenges seen to be undermining the war effort could equally be associated with the enemy within. As a result, homosexuals, pacifists, and socialists were often considered complicit in Germany's attempt to subvert Britain, while traditional animosities between ethnicities and social classes were likewise evoked through the image of the spy. For this reason, the endurance of spy fever should be considered as a continuation of British intolerances that had become more visible in the latter half of the nineteenth century, rather than a spontaneous hysteria.

Since local searches for potential German spies had significantly diminished by mid-September 1914, discourse was essential in creating and maintaining an emotional standard formed around the image of the spy. Radical conservatives capitalised on this, and used the threat of espionage to promote their radical agenda. Although historians have typically argued that espionage phobias were prolific during the First World War, the depiction of duplicitous threats involving secret German agents featured much more regularly in right wing rhetoric. Conservative backbenchers such as Lord Charles Beresford and William Joynson-Hicks repeatedly voiced their frustration at the Government's perceived negligence in dealing with enemy aliens, which they believed exacerbated the nation's vulnerability to foreign espionage and subversion. Influential xenophobes and jingoists like Leopold Maxse and Horatio Bottomley used platforms such as *National Review* and *John Bull* to incite hostility towards anything foreign on the grounds that aliens were covertly undermining the authority of the British Empire. Meanwhile, notable press magnates, Lords Northcliffe and Beaverbrook, transmitted this message to the masses through the pages of the *Daily Mail* and the *Globe*. Utilising the image of the spy served two

long-standing aims of radical conservatives. Firstly, by persistently highlighting the existence of a foreign enemy within Britain, radicals continued in their goal to 'expose' the inadequacy of liberalism in matters of security and defence. Secondly, it challenged the continued effectiveness of Britain's immigration and nationalisation policies, a hallmark of Edwardian liberalism, which had been a constant source of indignation among the radical right.

The growth of radical discourse alone does not imply that the narrative was accepted, or that this form of spy fever amounted to a substantial social anxiety. Notwithstanding the conspicuousness of the 'spy' throughout British culture during the First World War, individuals were not 'infected' by fears of an enemy within. Rather, these concerns represented an emotional community that shaped the way certain people thought and behaved by prioritising specific feelings. Given the nature of emotional communities, various emotional standards could be embraced depending on the individual's social environment. This plurality suggests that conflicting emotional standards coexisted in opposition to spy fever. As a result, some individuals remained oblivious to fears of espionage, while others refused to accept the discrimination and prejudice connected to spy fever. Not only were fears of the other restricted to individuals sympathetic to radical politics, different types of anxiety represented by spy fever shifted as the war progressed.

Despite the close association with the radical right, the frequency with which the image of the spy pervaded the political mainstream has often been mistaken for adherence to xenophobia and chauvinism. In reality, however, there were other reasons besides extreme nationalism that explain this popularity. One of most influential was the crisis facing male non-combatants on the home front. Since masculinity had been repeatedly linked with military bravado throughout the

nineteenth century, the rise of a nation-in-arms cemented the soldier hero as the embodiment of masculine identity. Creating an enemy to combat on the Home Front afforded the illusion of participation, which offset the sense of inferiority associated with civilian status. But the portrayal of espionage through journalism, literature, theatre, comedy, and satire also provided an equally important method for society to contemplate the sheer scale of the war. With little information about early engagements reaching the Home Front, stories of spies being captured across the globe filled this void. Furthermore, the figure of the spy played a key role in mitigating any residual angst over whether Britain would eventually emerge victorious. Reducing the conflict to a trial of wits between two individuals reaffirmed society's creativity, intellect, and gallantry, which assured many that Britain would emerge victorious against a treacherous and deceitful foe. What is more, by also attributing British failures to Germany's dishonest tactics, the image of the spy refuted claims that military setbacks were caused by incompetence. The frequency of espionage in popular culture, therefore, was not simply a result of an increased xenophobia. Although fears of aliens and subversion formed a significant component of spy fever, espionage phobias simultaneously reflected fears of the unknown, fears of failure, and fears generated by increasingly fragile identities, all of which coincided with onset of the First World War.

Research into spy fever has important ramifications for the study of wartime anti-alienism and xenophobia. Such attitudes did not occur ubiquitously, or immediately, following the outbreak of war. The rise in extreme Germanophobia was a complex phenomenon that cannot be entirely explained by attributing it to naïve beliefs regarding the presumed capabilities of German espionage. Although the early impact of fear during the war was less influential than formerly believed, the history of

emotions could offer further insights into the expansion of anti-alienism. Given the difficulty in analysing public opinion, investigating how fears developed during the latter stages of the conflict, when anti-alienism reached its zenith, can shed light on the pervasiveness of intense nationalism more generally. But by analysing various feelings, historians can better understand the emotional communities that encouraged resentment. Studies of hatred, for example, could help distinguish between emotional responses in regard to the German nation as a whole as opposed to the feelings generated towards individual Germans. Consequently, this would help determine how complicit individuals were in the growth of anti-alien violence. Moreover, examining the presence of compassion can similarly contextualise the degree of xenophobia, and enhance our understanding of tolerance during the war, which has been relatively neglected.

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