**An Uneasy Peace? Peace Celebrations in Lancashire in 1919**

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Two weeks after the Versailles Treaty was signed in Paris, George V issued a proclamation announcing that a Bank Holiday should be held on 19 July to celebrate the formal conclusion of hostilities with Germany. The King asked the people of Britain 'to order themselves accordingly'.[1] The population of Haslingden, a Lancashire mill town situated twenty miles north-west of Manchester, responded with enthusiasm to the call. Rare film footage taken that day provides an insight into the way in which a close-knit industrial community celebrated 'Peace Day', just a few months after the end of a war that had cost millions of lives across Europe, including many men from Haslingden itself.[2] The film shows the town's residents taking part in processions, playing bowls and dancing round maypoles. A cardboard cut-out of Charlie Chaplin was installed on the steps of the local cinema. Children lined up in their best Sunday clothes to receive commemorative bookmarks in honour of the occasion. Although a few men in uniform strolled through the crowds, there was nothing jingoistic about the images captured on film. The scenes had an innocent quality that seemed to hark back to a time when the horrors of total war were still unimaginable to the men and women of Lancashire.

The celebrations at Haslingden were echoed up and down the country, both on 19 July itself, and in the weeks that followed. In some towns such as Rothesay, on the West Coast of Scotland, the crowds hooted with derision at crude effigies of the Kaiser.[3] In many other places, though, there was a deliberate effort to move on from the jingoism of war. Just as studies of the memorialisation of the Great War in Britain can tell us a great deal about the country in a time of peace,[4] so a study of the peace celebrations of 1919 can reveal something about the state of British society in the months following victory on the battlefield. The planning of such events inevitably raised questions about their character and focus. What did it mean to celebrate peace? Should the focus be on those who had fought for victory? Or should it be on the restoration of the rhythms of community life devastated by four years of war? And was it in any case right to celebrate at a time when the international situation was still ominous, and large numbers of ex-servicemen were finding it hard to settle back into their old lives? Such questions were raised with sufficient frequency to suggest that although peace celebrations could serve as a focus for unity, they also had the potential to unmask conflicting perspectives and values in communities up and down Britain.

Some peace celebrations were anything but peaceful. In Luton, the official celebrations held on 19 July were followed by a riot that culminated in the burning of the Town Hall at a cost of £250,000 (perhaps £12.5 million in today's money).[5] There was also widespread disorder in Coventry, where shop windows were smashed, and police with batons were summoned to disperse a mob of thousands.[6] In Bilston near Wolverhampton the crowd used battering rams to wreck the local police station.[7] Disturbances also took place in Swindon, where a recently-built flag-pole was pulled down, and 'a senseless orgy of window-smashing' took place.[8] Such events need to be understood within the broader context of 1919 – often described as a 'year of revolution' both in Britain and across Europe.[9] It was the year when a police strike in Liverpool led to mass looting and the dispatch of warships to the River Mersey to help restore calm.[10] 1919 was also the year when strikes on 'Red' Clydeside led to major disorder.[11] The Town Clerk in Luton believed that the rioters there had been inspired by 'Bolshevism, anarchy and rebellion of the worst type', adding that unless such behaviour was checked, 'Civilisation would go to the wall'.[12] The same sentiments were expressed in Coventry. Yet close examination of events in towns like Luton, Coventry and Swindon suggests that the grievances that fuelled the violence were often very local in character. All three places were 'new' industrial towns that had grown rapidly over the previous twenty-five years, while the local dignitaries had failed to understand the burgeoning grievances of a population with few roots in the area, creating a brew of resentment that easily spilled over into violence.[13] The Peace Day riots are indeed a reminder that the impact of the First World War and its chaotic aftermath was inevitably mediated at a local level through the prism of contingent circumstances (something that makes so valuable the numerous studies that have appeared in recent years examining how the First World War affected communities up and down Britain).[14]

The rest of this article focuses on the peace celebrations that took place in Lancashire during the summer of 1919. The county at that time included major cities like Manchester and Liverpool, as well as smaller industrial towns such as Haslingden, along with older settlements like Lancaster and numerous smaller towns and villages. It is striking, and in some ways surprising, that most disorders that took place during the peace celebrations occurred in such places as Luton and Coventry rather than in the older industrial settlements of the north of England (which typically had a longer tradition of radical politics and more experience of mass protest of various kinds). The expenditure of money on peace celebrations certainly caused considerable discontent in some towns and cities in Lancashire, not least from ex-servicemen who felt cheated of 'the land fit for heroes' they had been promised when fighting in the

trenches, but the tensions never escalated to the point of violence. Careful patterns of local accommodation meant that the scenes played out in Luton and Coventry never erupted on the streets of Lancashire. And, in any case, the form of peace celebrations in Lancashire was as diverse as the county itself. Just as the global drama of the First World War 'played out' differently across the county, so too did the festivities that marked its formal conclusion.

The people of Lancashire reacted with predictable joy when news of the armistice began to circulate on the morning of 11 November 1918.[15] The *Lancashire Evening* Post reported 'unprecedented scenes' in Blackpool, where 'young people paraded through the streets waving flags. An airplane dropped thousands of leaflets formally proclaiming the Armistice'. In Nelson there were 'scenes of great enthusiasm' culminating after dark with a firework display. In Barrow, as in many other towns and cities, crowds flooded out on to the streets from their factories and offices. In Preston bands played in the parks. Most of the local press agreed that despite 'great joy' and exuberance there was little 'mafficking'.[16] The *Liverpool Daily Post* noted that there was 'no drunkenness'.[17] A similar picture emerged in Blackburn where the *Northern Daily Telegraph* reported how:

> The hoisting of the flag on the Telegraph Offices in Station Road [Now Railway Road] about half-past ten was the first intimation that the great news had reached Blackburn…a great crowd in front of the offices received the glad news with every manifestation of pleasure. From this joy-centre the import of the message quickly spread all over the town, and the demonstration was taken up with Great Spirit. The tension of expectancy was over, and the heartfelt satisfaction that all is over found expression in various ways. Very soon the national colours and those of our Allies were fluttering in every street of the town… About a score of lads in khaki and hospital blue, headed by one who twirled a long stick in true drum-major fashion paraded the town, waving flags, blowing weird instruments, and followed by cheering juveniles. A team of ringers having been got together, the bells of the Parish Church rung merrily, and the main streets presented a very animated appearance throughout the afternoon.[18]

A stark reminder of the anguish of the previous few years also took place in Blackburn after a firework was let off. A demobbed soldier fell to the ground, startled by the explosion, which brought back memories of the horrors of the trenches.

The *Liverpool Daily Post* rightly noted that there was in all these celebrations 'little in the way of pre-arranged celebration'.[19] The local authorities and churches responded quickly to events over the next few days, organising civic ceremonies and thanksgiving services, providing a kind of official gloss to the spontaneous expressions of relief at the end of the fighting. The carnival spirit prompted by news of the armistice inevitably faded quickly, in the face of growing realisation that the end of hostilities would not signal the rapid return to normality, given the scale of the challenges facing Britain. The military authorities were initially loath to authorise rapid demobilisation, given the uncertain international situation, while some government ministers fretted about the unrest that might follow the return of millions of men back to Britain. Protests in a number of military units over the next few months, amounting in a few cases to outright mutiny, prompted efforts to increase the pace of demobilisation. Yet the scenes that erupted on 'Red Clydeside' in January 1919, when police battled with strikers in George Square, showed how the carnival spirit that followed the armistice could easily take on another form. The good-humoured exuberance of the crowds who celebrated peace had the potential to become something very different.

Such thoughts may or may not have passed through the minds of ministers in the War Cabinet in February 1919, when they approved a new committee to oversee preparations for national celebrations planned to take place following the conclusion of formal peace treaty with Germany. The committee did not meet until May, chaired by the former Viceroy of India Lord Curzon, a delay that was presumably due to the slow pace of negotiations in Paris. When its members did finally assemble, there was some ambivalence about both the scale and character of the planned celebrations, not least because of their potential cost and disruption to national life. Curzon had as Viceroy of India recognised that grand ceremonies could underpin and project an aura of authority.[20] Yet he also recognised that while his committee 'would be justified in recommending … celebrations on an extensive scale', both the tense international situation and considerations of economy meant that 'it would be advisable to restrict' their scope.[21] The Committee heard how the spontaneous celebrations that followed the armistice had cost a good deal of money. Its members hoped that by providing a strong steer from government, they would be able both to limit disruption and ensure that festivities formed part of a great national event.

Curzon was fixated above all on the character of the celebrations in London, as well as across the Empire, and his committee spent little time thinking about what events should take place in the provinces. Despite the Committee's initial commitment to restraint, it came up

with plans for a four-day celebration to take place round the Bank Holiday in early August, with each day assigned a particular theme. Curzon initially suggested that one day be devoted to military marches, a second to religious observance, and a third to 'festivities'. Another member suggested that the fourth day should be celebrated as 'the children's day'. The committee's proposals receive short shrift from Lloyd George, who believed that they were too protracted, and would in any case be largely overtaken by 'spontaneous rejoicings'.[22] Nor was the prospect of four days of celebrations welcomed by many seaside resorts anxious about the impact on the summer season. It was for this reason that it was decided a Bank Holiday should be declared for Saturday 19 July with celebrations limited to a single day. In its later meetings, Curzon's committee focused almost entirely on planning the events in London, including a military march involving soldiers from all the allied and associated powers, as well as a naval pageant on the Thames.[23]

The uncertainty over the timing of the Versailles Treaty, when combined with the national and imperial focus of Curzon's Peace Celebrations Committee, meant that local authorities often 'filled the gap' when planning the character of events in their own areas. It was for this reason that some councils in Lancashire – as well as in other regions – decided to hold events on the Bank Holiday weekend in early August rather than on 19 July (this was of course the original proposal of the Curzon Committee, and many local councils had started to plan on that basis, deciding that it was too late to change once the extra Bank Holiday was announced for July). Most councils in Lancashire were ready to take a lead in the process, establishing special committees for the purpose, as well as making a financial contribution. In May 1919, Lancaster Town Council agreed to give £780 to support peace celebrations. Accrington Council had the previous month agreed to provide £800. Blackpool agreed to contribute £5,000.[24]

There were protests in some areas that the money voted by local councils to support the festivities was not generous enough.[25] There were, however, others who thought that the planned expenditure was too generous. In Burnley, one councillor noted that 'the ratepayers would not thank the municipal authorities for spending £2000 in peace celebrations', successfully proposing that the sum be halved, even against protests from other councillors who argued that after five years of 'suspense and anxiety' the town should have 'the opportunity for rejoicing in a reasonable and beneficial manner'.[26] More often, though, protests focused on the need to spend money on returning veterans (one Burnley councillor noted that there was strong feeling locally that the sum voted should be reduced still further to £500 at a time when there was so little support for demobilised soldiers). And, on occasion, attacks on

the planned peace celebrations in Lancashire took a more political form, focusing on the fact that there was no real peace given that fighting was continuing in various places around the world, and that British forces were involved in supporting white forces against the Bolshevik government that had seized power in Russia in October 1917.[27]

Some of these tensions were visible in the preparations that were made for Peace Day in Haslingden (which unlike some of its neighbours in east Lancashire did choose to celebrate on 19 July). Many of the problems revolved around the plight of the men who had returned to the town after demobilisation, only to find that their old jobs were no longer open to them, and that the sub-standard housing was far below the quality to be expected in 'a land fit for heroes'. By April 1919, unemployment in the town was according to the local newspaper, the *Haslingden Guardian*, the highest in the town's history.[28] The Town Council had a Patriotic Committee that organised events to mark the return home of the men who had been in the services. In April it organised a tea for Prisoners of War who had been released from German camps.[29] A few days later, the Mayor welcomed the return of the 1/5 East Lancs Regiment (in which many Haslingden men had served).[30] The following month, both the mayor and the local MP for Rossendale, David Waddington, spoke at a Church Service praising the men who had returned home for their 'magnificent victory for right and for justice'. The local Wesleyan Minister also held a service to thank ex-servicemen for their part in preserving 'the freedom and integrity of the nation'.[31] Such warm rhetoric was doubtless welcome to men trying to orient themselves after a long time away from their homes and families. Yet the words must have seemed of limited relevance to the practical problems they faced as they tried to adjust back to their old lives.

Three main organisations were set up during the final years of the war to provide support to men returning home from the battlefield. The first was the National Association of Discharged and Demobilised Sailors and Soldiers, formed after a conference at Blackburn at the start of 1917, while the National Federation of Discharged Soldiers and Sailors was established a few weeks later in London. The Federation had close ties to the radical wing of the Liberal Party, while some members of the Association had links with the Independent Labour Party and the trade unions, although both organisations were by the middle of 1919 anxious to emphasise their non-partisan character. The third organisation set up to represent the interests of ex-servicemen was the Comrades of the Great War, which attracted a significant degree of official patronage, and was formed in response to the radical position taken by the other two organisations over such issues as the re-deployment of wounded men to the front line. The

records of all three organisations have largely disappeared, even though they each had a large membership, establishing branches and premises up and down Britain. The Association was particularly strong in Lancashire. The reports of local branches in the Bulletin of the Federation – which had a significantly larger national membership than the Association – suggests it had a smaller presence in the county. The Comrades attracted most support in towns with a long military tradition like Lancaster and Preston.

The local branch of the National Association of Discharged and Demobilised Sailors and Soldiers was the organisation that became embroiled in a row with the council in Haslingden over Peace Day celebrations. Both the Association and the Federation were at a national level critical of the expenditure of large sums of money on peace celebrations at a time when they were campaigning for more financial support for demobilised men needing help in areas ranging from war-pensions to housing. The Annual Conference of the Federation, meeting at Manchester in the summer of 1919, passed a resolution:

> That in the opinion of this Conference the first step towards Peace Celebrations should be the placing of Discharged and Demobilised men in employment, and the substantial increase of Pensions and Allowances to Widows and Dependents. In the event of no steps being taken, nationally, to satisfactorily grant these demands, the Conference recommend that all Branches should take no part in Peace Festivities.[32]

Some branches of the Federation planned their own Peace Day events (the riot at Luton was in part a response to attempts by the local council to prevent members of the Federation assembling in a local park to begin their own march).[33] They were also successful in a number of areas at campaigning for a reduction in spending on festivities. The Association tended to be more decentralised than the Federation, and local branches generally took the lead in deciding how to respond to preparations for peace celebrations, with the result that its members pursued different policies in different towns and cities.

The tension in Haslingden seems to have first erupted in the second half of May at a meeting of a local branch of the National Association. The Chairman of the branch, a local Baptist minister and former army chaplain named T. Miller Johnson, told his audience that ‘They had made England free and their town was forgetting them’. He attacked the Council’s recent decision to accept the Government’s offer of a tank, to be displayed as a souvenir of the war, since it ‘would remind them of things they did not want to be reminded of’. The Secretary of

the local branch of the Association followed up by noting that a gun carriage would be of more value since it could be used to carry the bodies of former servicemen to their funerals. Both men complained bitterly that the Council had made no effort to consult them about what form the peace celebrations should take in Haslingden. As a result, the Branch developed its own proposals for a series of events, starting with a parade by ex-servicemen 'on their own', to be followed by an open-air concert in the afternoon and a dance in the evening. The report of the meeting in the local newspaper expressed shock at the anger expressed by speakers, suggesting that the local Council had behaved 'generously', and concluded rather patronisingly that as a 'comparatively new' body the Association did not have 'a large experience of public work'.

A number of themes emerge from this clash between the council in Haslingden and the local branch of the National Association of Discharged and Demobilised Sailors and Soldiers. The issue was above all about who should be the focus of peace celebrations. Some of the remarks made by Revd Miller Johnson suggest that he thought the mayor and the council were planning to take too big a role, turning the celebrations into a civic event, rather than honouring the men who had fought in the trenches. This may in fact have partly reflected bureaucratic confusion. The records show that the Council's Peace Celebrations Committee did consider proposals contained in a letter from the Association on 5 May, though failed to respond, subsequently suggesting that the omission was due to a simple error by the Town Clerk. Members of the Association were doubtful of this claim, instead believing that they had been snubbed (the minutes of the Peace Celebrations Committee certainly contain no record of a formal decision to respond to the proposals).[34] The high levels of unemployment in Haslingden also fuelled discontent among men who believed they were returning to 'a land fit for heroes'. The mayor himself alternated between defending the council and reassuring demobilised Servicemen that as 'an old soldier' himself he valued their contribution and sacrifice. The tension between the two sides abated over the following weeks – ironically as it built up in places like Coventry and Luton – in large part because of a mutual readiness to compromise. By the middle of July, the Haslingden Peace Celebrations Committee had decided on a format designed to avoid any major (and costly) civic events or big military parades. The focus was instead on offering entertainment for the children of the town, including a number of sports events to be organised by members of the Association, 'who are co-operating in the festivities as a whole' (they were given twenty pounds by the Council to fund prizes).[35] The sense of a community at play, which comes through in the archive film footage discussed earlier, seems to have reflected a

successful attempt to defuse tensions that could, if dealt with less effectively, have made the celebrations much more fraught.

There were protests about the cost and character of planned Peace Day events in other Lancashire towns. A meeting of the Preston branch of the National Association passed a resolution in June saying its members would take no part in peace celebrations. The city's mayor was concerned enough about their stance to address an Association meeting two weeks later, where voices were raised complaining that ex-servicemen were being 'shabbily treated, locally as well as nationally'. The mayor carefully avoided meeting such points 'head-on', arguing instead that local people would welcome an opportunity to thank the soldiers and sailors who had fought for them. After some discussion, the branch rescinded its earlier resolution and the men agreed to take part in peace celebrations.[36] The large Burnley branch of the Association was particularly radical, regularly holding large meetings at which members complained about issues ranging from pensions to unemployment. One speaker at a meeting in June 1919 told his audience that 'they knew very well that discharged soldiers … were still looked upon as hotbeds of revolutionary propaganda', though in response to one approving cry of 'they ought to be' he argued that the Association should stick to 'constitutional methods'.[37] The branch agreed to boycott preparations for the local peace celebrations, as was the case in nearby Nelson, where members declined to take part given the treatment of discharged servicemen.[38]

Anger over the peace celebrations became something of a focus for radical politics in Lancashire as in other parts of Britain. At the end of May, Lancaster Labour Party passed a resolution 'that there is no peace, as fighting is taking place against the democratic government of Russia' (this was a time at which members of the Labour Party and some trade unions were mounting a 'Hands-Off Russia' campaign designed to end western intervention against the Bolshevik regime in Moscow). The Preston Trades and Labour Council agreed at the end of June 1919 that it would take no part in peace celebrations given the British government's aggressive policy towards Russia.[39] Some local union branches passed resolutions praising local branches of the Association and Federation that refused to take part in Peace Day celebrations. Yet both organisations were by this time anxious to reject the idea that they were 'anti-establishment' groups, preferring to work closely with local and national government on issues affecting the welfare of ex-servicemen. Although members were ready to protest against the cost of peace celebrations, in order to highlight their campaign for better treatment of men demobilised from the forces, their most prominent representatives repeatedly sought to

disassociate themselves from the radical political sentiments that were widely expressed in Britain during the revolutionary year of 1919. Both organisations argued vigorously that women who had entered the workforce during the war should now give up 'men's jobs' and return to the domestic sphere. They also repeatedly protested about the employment of foreign workers. The 'disgrace of the non-reinstatement of the returned man' was a common theme at meetings of the National Association and National Federation across Lancashire.[40]

It is hardly surprising that peace celebrations took different forms in different parts of Lancashire, reflecting local circumstances and attitudes, as well as wider disagreements about the purpose of such events. One historian who has looked at the celebrations in forty-one towns and cities across Britain found that the 'core event' in ten of them was a military parade while in another fourteen it was a war veteran's parade. Entertainment for children was the lead event in ten other towns and cities. Civil parades or religious services were the focus in the remaining places.[41] It is difficult to say with any precision how Lancashire compared, but an impressionistic assessment of reports in local newspapers suggests that military parades were less frequent than elsewhere, while children's entertainments and other general community events were more common. The pattern nevertheless varied from place to place. In Lancaster, home to the King's Own Regiment, there was a more 'martial' air to the celebrations when compared with some other places (there was even a proposal to include representatives from allied armies in the main procession, echoing the pattern in London, although it is not clear how the organisers hoped to achieve such a goal). Yet in Lancaster, too, there were events directed at the whole community, including dancing and firework displays, as well as sports events for the local schoolchildren.[42]

A few other examples can give some sense of the diversity of events. In genteel St Annes-on-Sea, near Blackpool, the community 'entered heart and soul into an epoch-making commemoration'. There were processions and feasts as well as a gymkhana. The emphasis was on patriotism, including the enthusiastic communal singing of the national anthem, but also on entertaining 800 returning Servicemen and their partners. The local paper noted rather hopefully than the celebrations not only marked the defeat of Germany but also 'a new epoch … of Brotherhood, Justice and Liberty'.[43] In Clitheroe, some thirty-five miles to the east, the ambience was more military. Some 1500 men marched through the town, although there was also a parade in which prizes were awarded for everything from the best-decorated horse to the best-decorated bicycle, while in the evening there was a torchlight procession through the streets.[44] In Nelson, where the peace celebrations had attracted significant local criticism, ex-

servicemen were given a lunch that was followed later in the day by dancing and fireworks.[45] In the town of Bacup, in east Lancashire, all sections of the community took part in the two processions that converged in a local park for an open-air Thanksgiving Service, including ex-Servicemen, boy scouts, trade unions, teachers, councillors and magistrates.[46] In Oldham, ex-Servicemen were given free entry to local cinemas.

The peace celebrations in Lancashire's two largest cities were somewhat muted when compared with other places in the county. The *Manchester Guardian* noted that the celebrations in the city on 19 July 'could not recapture on Saturday the delirious joy of Armistice night. That was the sudden release of a long confined effervescence of feeling. It burst with explosive force without any official drawing of the cork. Saturday was a day appointed for the celebration of peace, and the demonstrations had the inevitable defect of all organised and previsaged things – lack of the sparkle of spontaneity'. The reporter described somewhat caustically how the crowds walked through the streets puzzled by the lack of decorations and entertainment. It was only after nightfall that there was some 'mafficking' – partly prompted by 'a liberal use of intoxicants … with results not always pleasant'. The paper also noted – though without much comment – that there had during the day been a march of unemployed ex-soldiers who 'carried banners by means of which they expressed their demands for "justice" and "employment", "work not charity". The printed invocation to the crowds to "Honour the dead remember the living" was a depressing note to strike in the midst of jubilation'.[47]

The march in Manchester was organised by the National Federation as part of its programme of boycotting official celebrations. It had over the previous days been a focus of concern for the police, who were anxious that it could lead to disorder, although in the event such fears were not realised.[48] It seems unlikely that the 'depressing note' created by the demonstration was the major cause of the somewhat downbeat celebrations in Manchester. Nor was it really the fault of the local council (which had voted a generous sum of money to support the festivities). The author of the report in the *Manchester Guardian* was probably right in suggesting that it was difficult to recapture the spirit of Armistice Day, not least given the difficulties that had developed in the intervening few months, ranging from unemployment and industrial unrest at home through to the uncertain situation abroad.[49] And perhaps, too, it was harder in a large urban centre to mobilise the kind of community spirit that featured in the peace celebrations of some of the smaller Lancashire towns.

The peace celebrations in Liverpool were similarly low-key (there were letters in some of the local papers complaining that the city should be 'ashamed' of its preparations).[50] The *Liverpool Echo* reported on 21 July that while there had been 'a spirit of festivity and rejoicing' in Birkenhead and Bootle, Liverpool 'was comparatively quiet, the only festivities being a municipal garden-party at Calderstones Park in the afternoon, followed by a similar entertainment for war widows and orphans'. There were no fireworks, although according to *The Times* bonfires were lit along the banks of the River Mersey, while in one place an effigy of the Kaiser was burnt.[51] The city had witnessed some turbulent scenes over the previous few weeks. In early June there had been a series of race riots in Liverpool, ostensibly prompted by a minor incident in a local pub, although the disorder also reflected deeper tensions relating to employment on the numerous ships that sailed to and from the port (similar disorders took place in a number of port cities across Britain).[52] It is possible that the local authorities were happy to foster a low-key approach to peace celebrations, fearing that any public event might turn violent. The city certainly remained quiet during the peace celebrations of 19 July. One journalist writing in the *Echo* a few days later was nevertheless deeply sensitive to the tensions facing both Liverpool and the rest of Britain. He lamented that 'the respect for law and order which generations of government had implanted has gone by the board'. He went on to note that the recent experience of war had made the problem worse since [men] face all problems, in moments of anger, with the feeling born of war, that nothing is sacred. Work is scare, food and clothes dear, and there are no houses to live in except other people's. And so the spirit is bitter and the bark is loud'.[53] The author's concern that the experience of war had created a new emotional and political landscape of collective frustration and anger seemed amply borne out just a few days later in his own city, when the Liverpool police strike led to major looting, as well as numerous public meetings calling for struggle against the 'capitalist government'.[54]

The official Peace Day Bank Holiday was disrupted in some parts of Lancashire by industrial action, evidence perhaps that a sense of pride and thanksgiving did not always outweigh more immediate material concerns. Miners in some of the county's pits came out on strike on 18 July. Many cotton mills were closed by industrial action. In Blackpool plumbers and cabinet makers went on strike.[55] An editorial published in the *Lancashire Evening Post* on the eve of Peace Day noted that 'Unfortunately no prophets have been so fully justified by events as those who foretold that the years of the great war would be followed by a period of industrial trouble of an acute kind'.[56] The disruption was particularly acute in the east of the county. The *Burnley News* ran an article on 16 July under the heading 'Peace-Day Bombshell

for Burnley', noting that both gas workers and tram workers had decided not to work on the Bank Holiday which took place three days later. The decision in part reflected disagreement over extra payments, but also deep-seated resentments about other issues, dating back at least to Armistice Day. A few days later the *News* attacked the tram workers for causing 'annoyance and vexation' to those hoping to enjoy the Bank Holiday,[57] although another local paper carried a letter from one of the men on strike, who bitterly complained that the Council wanted to deny tram workers 'any peace celebrations'.[58] Burnley itself did not in fact plan to hold its own peace celebrations until the first weekend in August, a factor that presumably helps to explain why the local corporation was less inclined to be generous than other authorities in Lancashire in allowing extra payments for working over the July Bank Holiday. In the event, the festivities that took place in the town over the August Bank Holiday passed off without incident, including three separate processions by thousands of local children, as well as various sports events and an open-air gala. The same was true in Nelson, which also held its peace celebrations in August. Despite the decision of the local branch of the National Association of Discharged and Demobilised Sailors and Soldiers to boycott the event, many ex-servicemen marched in a local parade, and were entertained at a meal specially laid on for them.[59] At Colne, the local branch of the Association took part in the celebrations, organising a match with the local cricket club.[60]

One issue that raised considerable concern ahead of the peace celebrations of 1919 was the question of drink. There was no shortage of voices in Lancashire arguing that the end of hostilities should not lead to a relaxation of the controls over the sale of alcohol introduced during the war. The Bishop of Burnley argued in a letter published in May 1919 that there was a need to reduce 'facilities for unnecessary drinking'.[61] There was also a tacit recognition in some quarters that any form of celebration might become a carnival of anarchy if the authorities allowed the mass consumption of alcohol. A letter that subsequently appeared in *The Times* noted there was much 'anxiety' among 'serious-minded people' that peace celebrations would become 'a wild orgy' and that 'liberty' would descend into 'licence'.[62] Alcohol appears to have been a factor in causing the Peace Day riots in places like Swindon, as well as many other incidents of disorder that took place across Britain in 1919. And yet, if the newspaper reports are anything to go by, public intoxication was not a major issue in Lancashire during the various peace celebrations, despite the strictures of the *Manchester Guardian* noted earlier. One man at Burnley was taken to Court for 'swearing, and behaving in a very disorderly manner' (he was fined twenty shillings and criticised for failing to behave in a suitably restrained fashion).[63] The presiding magistrate and the town's mayor did not agree on whether such drunkenness had

been common during the celebrations, but it does appear to have been the only case in Burnley sufficiently serious to warrant prosecution. Many pubs were given permission to open for longer than usual, as long as they took care not to serve customers who had already drunk too much, and concern by licence holders not to fall foul of the authorities doubtless encouraged them to abide by their commitments.

What can we learn from this brief discussion of the nature and significance of the 1919 peace celebrations in Lancashire? Perhaps the first conclusion to be drawn is precisely the difficulty of drawing any general conclusions! Nor should this be a surprise. Lancashire in 1919 was a large county of nearly five million people. Its borders stretched from the industrial and commercial hubs of Manchester and Liverpool in the south to the rural fringes of the Lake District in the north, encompassing in-between towns ranging from sea-side resorts like Blackpool to mill towns such as Nelson. The population was similarly diverse. Nor was this simply a question of 'class'. The life of a worker in one of the small mill towns of east Lancashire was very different from the life of a docker in Liverpool, while a 'middle class' cotton merchant in Manchester had little in common with a 'genteel' retiree living off a small private income in a place like St Anne's. Although patriotic pride and jubilation at the end of 'the war to end all wars' helped to create a significant degree of shared national sentiment, such collective emotions could never fully supplant differences of class and education, let alone the particular traditions of community and region.

The second striking thing to be drawn from this study of peace celebrations in Lancashire in the summer of 1919 is, quite simply, the speed with which both circumstances and popular preoccupations moved on following the end of the war with the central powers. The Armistice of November 1918 was greeted with spontaneous joy up and down Britain, as millions poured on to the streets to express a shared sense of relief at the end of the fighting that had claimed so many lives, and dominated the national psyche for more than four years. Yet the exhilaration that accompanied the end of hostilities soon faded as new challenges emerged, whether the negotiation of formal peace treaties with the defeated central powers, or the practical problems of integrating back into society millions of men demobilised from the forces. By the time the Versailles Treaty with Germany was signed at the end of June 1919 – with no shortage of detractors warning that its harsh terms might lead in due course to another war – peace

celebrations were bound to have a different character from the outburst of relief seen on Armistice Day. The unbridled emotion of November 1918 had long since been spent.

The third theme worth drawing out from the previous pages concerns the role of the organisations that claimed to represent ex-servicemen. Both the National Association of Discharged and Demobilised Sailors and Soldiers and the National Federation of Discharged Soldiers and Sailors pursued an unashamedly 'constitutional' approach in promoting the welfare of demobilised men. The same was true of the Comrades of the Great War. All three organisations sought to be, in the parlance of modern political analysis, 'insider groups' that worked closely with national and local government to achieve their objectives. The Federation and the Association were particularly sensitive to claims that they were 'anti-government'. Although they were to a greater or lesser degree critical of the costs of the peace celebrations, their primary objective was to help integrate ex-servicemen back into society, rather than challenge the social and political *status quo*. It was an important contrast with Germany, where ex-servicemen became an important focus for anti-democratic politics after 1918, fuelling street fighting and the growth of political extremism. Equally importantly, local councils in Lancashire were generally willing to work with the grain of the community in planning peace celebrations. They were as a result less likely to become a focus for discontent, as happened in towns like Luton, where senior councillors misjudged the local mood and proved reluctant to engage with ex-servicemen. The Council in Blackburn, for example, worked closely with the National Association in planning the town's peace celebrations. In Haslingden, as was seen earlier, the Council responded quickly to criticism and worked hard to persuade members of the Association to cooperate with them. The same was true in Preston, where the mayor succeeded in persuading the local branch of the Association to reverse its initial decision to boycott the celebrations. Nor does the decision by some local Trades and Labour Councils in Lancashire to support a boycott of peace celebrations seem to have had much effect. It might indeed be plausible to suggest that the presence of well-established unions actually helped to prevent the kind of riots seen in more recently industrialised towns like Coventry and Luton, since they channelled anger and resentment into organised labour disputes, rather than allowing them to fester and erupt in public disorder.

The fourth theme that emerges from this study is the extent to which local responses to war and international politics after 1918 reflected a wider national discourse while still maintaining a distinctively local character. During the war itself, communities up and down Britain were anxious to express their patriotism, whether through such actions as the purchase of war bonds,

or by providing practical and emotional support to men who had left their local communities to defend the world against the ravages of the uncivilised 'Hun'. Yet by 1919 subtle changes had started to develop. It was seen earlier that the national and imperial focus of the Peace Celebrations Committee in London meant that the character of provincial peace celebrations was to a considerable extend shaped by local circumstances. The celebrations in London emphasised 'pomp and circumstance', intended to honour those who fought, but also to serve as a symbol of British power both at home and abroad. Peace celebrations in Lancashire – as indeed elsewhere across the country – generally had a somewhat different emphasis. Most places were anxious to stress the part that they had played in securing victory and keen to honour those who had left their homes to fight for their country. More often than not, though, peace was also implicitly celebrated as ushering in the prospect of a return to normality, allowing individuals and communities a chance to return to the rhythms of a life disrupted by the grim realities of war. It was not that there was much significant questioning of the validity of the 'grand patriotic narrative' – that Britain had fought in a struggle for civilisation against barbarism – but rather that the narrative no longer exercised such a powerful hold on the collective imagination. The dearth of anti-German feeling evident in most peace celebrations suggests that local concerns and priorities had started to reassert their importance after five years of subordination to the needs of the nation. It was indeed the case that the 'grand patriotic narrative' often fuelled protests *against* peace celebrations, on the grounds that they diverted resources away from those who had fought for their country, and failed to acknowledge the challenges faced by ex-servicemen as they sought to rebuild their lives.

A good deal of recent scholarly work has sought to understand the First World War in terms of its impact on the home front. The somewhat unattractive term 'glocal' has been coined to emphasise how a full understanding of the conflict requires research that understands both its global and its local character.[64] The intellectual challenges involved in carrying out such research are considerable, but perhaps even more daunting is the fact that 'the local' itself often proves to be elusive and uncertain. This short article has shown how the peace celebrations that took place in Lancashire in the summer of 1919 can help us to understand some of the challenges facing Britain in the turbulent period following the end of the First World War. Yet it has also shown how hard it is to draw any firm conclusions or make any definite generalisations even when focusing on a single county. The character of peace celebrations was shaped by a wide variety of factors, both local and national, as well as by the kind of chance contingencies that invariably help to frame the warp and woof of historical

development. It is perhaps worth finishing with a brief return to the footage taken of the peace celebrations at Haslingden in July 1919. The film as noted earlier captured the gentle rhythms of a community at play. Yet while the camera may not lie, nor does it always capture the tensions and back-stories that shape the scenes that it captures, and the very power of the images it produces can create a patina of truth that is at best partial and at worst misleading. The peace celebrations that took place in Lancashire in 1919 reflected both the hopes and fears of communities that had emerged from the trauma of war into an uncertain world containing its own new set of challenges and threats.

[1] *Times*, 11 July 1919.
[2] For a copy of the footage, see the website of the British Film Institute at https://player.bfi.org.uk/free/film/watch-peace-celebrations-at-haslingden-july-19th-1919-1919-online. On Haslingden's war dead, see the valuable discussion on the Haslingden Old and New website at https://haslingdens.blogspot.com/2012/12/to-help-us-over-coming-daysweeksmonths.html.
[3] For film footage of the Rothesay celebrations, see https://www.facebook.com/scranlife/videos/1143117269056697/?fallback=1.
[4] For the classic work on this subject, see Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning* (Cambridge University Press, 1998).
[5] For a description of the disturbances in Luton, see Dave Craddock, *Where they Burnt the Town Hall Down. Luton, the First World War and the Peace Day Riots of July 1919* (Book Castle, 1999). See, too, Neil Gordon Orr, 'Keep the Home Fires Burning: Peace Day in Luton, 1919', *Family & Community History*, 2, 1 (1999), pp. 17-32.
[6] *Coventry Herald*, 26 July 1919; *Coventry Evening Telegraph*, 21 July 1919.
[7] *Hull Daily Mail*, 23 July 1919.
[8] *Gloucester Journal*, 26 July 1919. On the disturbances in Swindon see, too, the details on the BBC World War I site at www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p01qb45n.
[9] Among the large literature, see, for example, Simon Webb, *1919 Britain's Year of Revolution* (Pen and Sword, 2016); Anthony Read, *The World of Fire: 1919 and the Battle with Bolshevism* (Pimlico, 2009).
[10] On the Liverpool police strike, see A.V. Sellwood, *Police Strike, 1919* (W.H. Allen, 1978).
[11] On radicalism in Glasgow during World War I, see Iain Maclean, *The Legend of Red Clydeside* (Edinburgh, 1983).
[12] *Luton Reporter*, 5 August 1919.
[13] Brad Beaven, Leisure, citizenship and working-class men in Britain, 1850-1945 (Manchester University Press, 2005), p. 125ff. See, too, Brad Beaven, 'Challenges to Civic Governance in Post-War England: the Peace Disturbances of 1919', *Urban History*, 33, 3 (2006), pp. 369-92.
[14] For a useful collection of articles looking at the First World War through this prism, see Nick Mansfield and Craig Horner (eds), *The Great War: Localities and Regional Identities* (Cambridge Scholars, 2014). See, too, the numerous studies of the impact of World War I on British cities in the series Great War Britain published by The History Press.
[15] For a lively review of Armistice Day across Britain, see Guy Cuthbertson, *Peace at Last: A Portrait of Armistice Day, 11 November 1918* (Yale University Press, 2018).
[16] *Lancashire Evening Post*, 12 November 1919.
[17] *Liverpool Daily Post*, 12 November 1919.
[18] *Northern Daily Telegraph* (probably 13 November 1919) quoted at, http://www.cottontown.org/Wars/World%20War%201/1918%20and%20Armistice/Pages/default.aspx.
[19] *Liverpool Daily Post*, 12 November 1919.
[20] See, for example, the brief description in Elizabeth Taylor, *The Old World and the New: The Marriage and Colonial Adventures of Lord and Lady Northcote* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2013), pp. 56-58.
[21] National Archives (Kew), CAB 27/52, Meeting of the Peace Celebrations Committee, 9 May 1919.
[22] National Archives (Kew), CAB 27/52, Meeting of the Peace Celebrations Committee, 18 June 1919.
[23] National Archives (Kew), CAB 27/52, Meetings of the Peace Celebrations Committee, 1 July 1919, 9 July 1919.
[24] *Lancashire Evening Post*, 15 May 1919, 29 April 1919, 30 April 1919.
[25] *Liverpool Echo*, 16 July 1919.
[26] *Lancashire Evening Post*, 6 March 1919. The municipal authorities in Burnley – as in many other places – sought to encourage voluntary subscriptions to meet part of the cost of the peace celebrations. See *Burnley News*, 26 July 1919.
[27] See, for example, the motion passed by the Preston Trades and Labour Council, reported in *Lancashire Evening Post*, 20 June 1919.
[28] *Haslingden Guardian*, 4 April 1919.
[29] Lancashire Archives, MBH/47/1, Minutes of a Meeting of the Haslingden Peace Celebrations Committee, 12 April 1919.
[30] *Haslingden Guardian*, 18 April 1919.
[31] *Haslingden Guardian*, 16 May 1919.

[32] *The Bulletin of the National Federation of Discharged and Demobilised Sailors and Soldiers*, No.9, 3 July 1919.
[33] Craddock, *Where they Burnt the Town Hall Down*, passim.
[34] Lancashire Archives, MBH/47/1, Minutes of a Meeting of the Haslingden Peace Celebrations Committee, 5 May 1919.
[35] Lancashire Archives, MBH/47/1, Meeting of the Haslingden Peace Celebrations Committee, 8 July 1919.
[36] *Lancashire Evening Post*, 10 July 1919.
[37] *Burnley News*, 25 June 1919.
[38] *Burnley Express*, 19 July 1919. The Burnley branch of the National Association did vote by a large majority to boycott the town's peace celebrations.
[39] *Lancashire Evening Post*, 20 June 1919.
[40] See, for example, the meeting of the Burnley branch of the National Association reported in the *Burnley News*, 25 June 1919.
[41] Beaven, *Leisure, Citizenship and Working-Class Men*, p. 126.
[42] For details see Lancashire Archives, MBLA acc. 8326, Box 75, Minutes of the Lancaster Peace Celebrations Committee. See, too, *Lancaster Borough Peace Celebrations. Official Programme*. For photographs of the celebrations, see www.kingsownmuseum.com/gallerydepot1919.htm.
[43] *St Annes-on-the-Sea Express*, 25 July 1919, available at *https://amounderness.co.uk/st.annes_peace_celebrations_1919.html*
[44] *Lancashire Evening Post*, 9 August 1919 (Clitheroe's celebrations took place over the August Bank Holiday).
[45] *Lancashire Daily Post*, 5 August 1919 (Nelson, too, celebrated Peace Day over the August Bank Holiday).
[46] For details see Lancashire Archives, DDX 1237/4/20, *Borough of Bacup Peace Celebrations Programme and Souvenir* (1919).
[47] *Manchester Guardian*, 21 July 1919.
[48] National Archives, MEPO 3/1786, Memorandum dated 19 July 1919 by Policewoman Naylor 'Re. Probable Disorders on Peace Day'.
[49] *Manchester Guardian*, 21 July 1919.
[50] *Liverpool Echo*, 18 July 1919.
[51] *Times*, 21 July 1919.
[52] On the race riots in Liverpool and other British cities in 1919, see Jacqueline Jenkinson, *Black 1919 Riots, Racism and Resistance in Imperial Britain* (Liverpool University Press, 2009). For contemporary reports of the violence in Liverpool, see *Liverpool Echo* 19 June 1919; *Manchester Guardian* 7 June 1919.
[53] *Liverpool Echo*, 23 July 1919.
[54] National Archives, MEPO 3/1786 (Chief Inspector Fyles to HQ 3 August 1919).
[55] *Lancashire Evening Post*, 22 July 1919.
[56] *Lancashire Evening Post*, 18 July 1919.
[57] *Burnley News*, 19 July 1919.
[58] *Burnley Express*, 26 July 1919.
[59] *Burnley News*, 26 July 1919.
[60] *Burnley News*, 6 August 1919.
[61] *Burnley News* 10 May 1919.
[62] *Times*, 21 May 1919.
[63] *Burnley News*, 6 August 1919.
[64] For a brief discussion of one major project based at Oxford University that seeks to take this approach to the study of the First World War, focusing in particular on religion, see http://greatwar.history.ox.ac.uk/?page_id=2244.

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