

THE WAR LORD MAYORS: THE MAYORALTY AND THE GREAT WAR, 1914-1918

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8 October 2018

President, Historians.

If I were to ask you to go away and research the role of the Lord Mayor in the Great War you would, I suspect, be hard pressed to find any readily available scholarship. Recent academic papers on the role of cities in the Great War regard the City as very much part of what we would call ‘Greater London’, or London as an Imperial city of which the Square Mile is one constituent part¹.

The magisterial work of David Kynaston and his third volume on the history of the City examines the whole canvas of the Square Mile during the period 1914-1945 – a canvas so varied and complex that the Lord Mayor somewhat inevitably is consigned to a walk-on role².

Recent dedicated histories of the Mayoralty are restricted to referencing some war Lord Mayors in brief. For example, **Sir Charles Wakefield** is considered notable for the fact he established his company Castrol oil as a household name, and that he took the time during his year-long mayoralty to shake the hand of army recruits who signed up at Mansion House³, or the Great War Lord Mayors are examined as part of a wider consideration of the City of London in both the First and Second World Wars⁴.

Similarly, *The City of London in the Great War* gives a splendid overview of the Square Mile during that period which does include information of the various war Lord Mayors, and the role of the City of London Police. My purpose with this paper, however, is to highlight further the role of the Mayoralty in the Great War⁵.

¹ Adrian Gregory (2016) ‘Imperial Capitals at War: a Comparative Perspective’ *The London Journal* (41:3, 219-232) Stefan Goebel & Jerry White (2016) ‘London and the First World War’ *The London Journal* (41:3, 199-218) Stefan Goebel ‘Cities’ in *The Cambridge History of the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014) pp. 358-381.

² David Kynaston *The City of London Volume III: Illusions of Gold, 1914-45* (London: Pimlico).

³ Valerie Hope *My Lord Mayor: 800 Years of London’s Mayoralty* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1989) pp.161-162

⁴ Emma Hatfield *London’s Lord Mayors: 800 Years of Shaping the City* (London: Amberley, 2015) pp.237-253

⁵ Stephen Wynn *City of London in the Great War* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword, 2016) provides pen portraits of the war Lord Mayors pp.40-46.

Mobilising the City – the role of the Lord Mayor in wartime recruitment

Sir Vansittart Bowater is our first war Lord Mayor. In the summer of 1914, his itinerary was typical of a peacetime Lord Mayor. In June, he led a City delegation to Paris. In July he visited Brussels where his schedule included lunch with King Albert of the Belgians, a visit to the Chamber of Commerce, and a call at the Persian Legation.

All the while of course, the July crisis was unfolding. On his return to London Sir Vansittart had time to attend the City of London School Prize Giving prior to setting off on a motoring holiday to France for the August recess. Alas, he was forced to turn back at Dieppe once war was declared⁶.

By the end of the month, he was stood on a table at the Tower of London, reading the oath of allegiance *en masse* to the 1100 men of the newly formed 10th Battalion Royal Fusiliers⁷ – the ‘Stockbrokers’ Battalion’ - one of the first ‘pals’ battalions of the British Army.

The Mayoralty was a driving force for second ‘pals’ battalion a year later, from August 1915, the so called ‘Bankers’ Battalion’ or 26th Battalion Royal Fusiliers. Under the stewardship of the Lord Mayor Locum Tenens **Sir John Knill**, a committee of business leaders including representatives of Lloyds Bank and the National Bank of Scotland oversaw the formation of that battalion⁸, which joined the British Army from November 1915, and went overseas to France from May 1916.

As the war progressed, and the level of voluntary enlistment declined, central government adopted a method of quasi-conscription named the Derby Scheme, whereby men could register for service in classes according to their age, occupation and marital status. The Lord Mayor for 1915/16 **Sir Charles Wakefield** threw the support of the Mayoralty behind the Scheme, opening Mansion House as a registration centre during January 1916.

Registration was conducted for 12 hours a day. Mid-week recruits shared cigars in the Long Parlour with Grand Duke Michael of Russia, who had come to lunch with Sir Charles. On Thursday, keen to maintain momentum, Sir Charles

⁶ Arthur Thomas *Activities of the Lord Mayor and the Corporation during the Great War* (1920?) (LMA: COL/SJ/05/002) pp.2-3

⁷ Thomas *Activities* p.5. On 29 August 1914, 1156 men mustered in Temple Gardens where they were addressed by Field Marshal Earl Roberts. They then marched to the Tower of London where they paraded in the (dry!) moat and took the oath of allegiance from Sir Vansittart. The battalion moved to Colchester on 3 September 1914. It moved to France with 37th Division in July 1915 and remained on the Western Front until the end of the war.

⁸ Thomas *Activities* p.26

addressed a public meeting from a platform opposite the Walbrook entrance to Mansion House.

The event was extended for a second week and Sir Charles's efforts were advertised by central government to all Chief Magistrates across England as an example of best practice. Sir Charles hosted both Lord Mayor of Bradford and Lord Mayor of Newcastle, who visited to see the recruitment event in progress. The Lord Mayor of Bristol requested a written briefing, so that he could stage a similar event of his own⁹.

The ceremony surrounding the Mayoralty was also geared towards encouraging recruitment to the armed forces. **Sir Charles Johnston**, on becoming Lord Mayor in November 1914 decided that in wartime Lord Mayor's Day (Lord Mayor's Parade, as we know it today) should adopt a military ethos.

With the blessing of both the Admiralty and the War Office, Royal Marines of the Royal Naval Division – veterans of the defence of Antwerp that summer – took part alongside Territorial (reservist) soldiers from the British Army. The parade also included mounted contingents from Canada and New Zealand, and Officer Training Corps cadets from the City of London School¹⁰.

Lord Mayor's Day 1915 included an increased contingent from the armed forces. Five thousand soldiers, including men home on leave from the fighting fronts, and displays of captured German artillery, paraded through the London streets in heavy rain. Recruiting meetings were held along the route, with new recruits encouraged to join the parade and follow the Lord Mayor back into the City¹¹.

As the war progressed, the military ethos of Lord Mayor's Day was maintained, but grew to reflect Britain's total war economy. Lord Mayor's Day 1918 took place immediately prior to the Armistice and was designed '...to bring home to the citizens of London the wide organisation of the country's forces...' with contingents from the armies of Serbia, Italy, Portugal and the United States taking part.

The role of women in the wartime economy was highlighted through women munitions workers demonstrating the assembly of munitions on the back of lorries. Three tanks also rumbled through the City to demonstrate the emerging role of armour in modern warfare.

⁹ Thomas *Activities* p.49

¹⁰ Thomas *Activities* p.10

¹¹ Thomas *Activities* pp.35-38

Contemporaries recalled that ‘...events were fast hastening towards the Armistice and the spirit of Victory was in the air’ – as was, unfortunately, the Spanish Flu, which prevented the participation of contingents of the armies of Greece and France¹².

Representing the City – the Lord Mayor as Ambassador

Then, as now, the accession of a new Lord Mayor involves a banquet at Guildhall for the outgoing Lord Mayor at which the Prime Minister leads distinguished keynote speakers. The Banquet and its attendees are an acknowledgement of the Lord Mayor’s role as ambassador for the City of London.

Consistent attendees at the Lord Mayor’s Banquet throughout the war included Prime Ministers Asquith and Lloyd George, senior politicians such as the Home Secretaries and First Lords of the Admiralty, and ambassadors of key allies and Dominions such as France, Italy, Canada, Australia and New Zealand.

The Lord Mayor’s Banquet culminated, on 9 November 1918, as being the forum in which Prime Minister David Lloyd George announced the abdication of the German Kaiser.

Lord Mayors visited the Western Front twice during the Great War. **Sir Charles Wakefield** in June 1916 inspected both the 56th (1st London) and 47th (2nd London) Divisions, where he met men who he had recruited to the armed forces during the Derby Scheme registration at Mansion House in January earlier that year¹³. Sir Charles went on to visit the Grand Fleet at Scapa Flow towards the end of his Mayoralty, taking lunch with Sir John Jellicoe on board HMS Iron Duke. **Sir William Dunn** visited the Western Front during September 1917, where he had dinner with First Army Commander General Sir Henry Horne, and overall commander of the British Expeditionary Force, Field Marshal Sir Douglas Haig. Sir William visited the eastern slopes of the recently captured Vimy Ridge and ventured to within a mile of the German trenches from where he observed German-occupied Douai. He also witnessed a British artillery battery engaging targets at 9,000 yards. Sir William also ventured into the subterranean tunnels of Arras, many of which he noted were named by London troops after familiar City streets, such as Lombard Street¹⁴.

Sir Charles Hanson visited Italy during Summer 1918, visiting Turin, Venice and Rome. During his visit he inspected troops of both the Italian and British armies. His visit was allegedly intended as a private holiday, but it came to

¹² Thomas *Activities* pp.161-163

¹³ Thomas *Activities* p.75

¹⁴ Thomas *Activities* p.114

resemble a ‘triumphal progress’, involving lunches and dinners with, among others, the Italian Commander-in-Chief, the Mayor of Rome, and the King of Italy.

During his stay in Rome, Sir Charles indulged in his first bit of air travel and accompanied the Italian Minister of War and Minister of Aviation in an airship above the city, providing him ample opportunity to take, he reported, a number of photographs. Sir Charles had hoped to visit the Western Front on his return through France by train but was limited to sheltering in the cellars of the Paris Ritz during a German air raid¹⁵.

London during the Great War was an Imperial City, and it is no surprise therefore that the Lord Mayor played a role in exercising the City’s ‘soft power’ to strengthen Britain’s relationship with the Dominions. Then, as today, this ‘soft power’ manifested itself through the provision of hospitality, and the award of Freedom of the City.

The Mayoralty of **Sir Charles Wakefield** was considered by contemporaries to be significant in this regard, with the award of Freedoms, and lavish dinners in honour of, the Premiers of Australia and New Zealand¹⁶. Collective Freedoms were awarded to Special Constables of the City of London Police, and, in 1920, all the sons of Common Councilmen who had served in the armed forces.

Mayoral hospitality was also used to underpin both diplomatic relationships and mark the contribution of key groups in society. In May 1916, a Mansion House Banquet was held in honour of visiting Members of the Russian Parliament. The next month, Sir Charles became President of the Anglo-Russian Trade Bureau, which aimed to diminish German influence on the Russian economy post-war¹⁷ – all of which became moot, of course, following the abdication of Tsar Nicholas II in March 1917.

Sir William Dunn hosted a lunch at Mansion House in December 1916 in honour of a delegation of French women munitions workers – among the guests were suffragettes Emmeline Pankhurst and Annie Kenney¹⁸. When we consider that Ms Kenney was a working-class militant suffragette who had served time in prison for her beliefs, this lunch can be taken as a prime example of the Mayoralty’s role in building national and Allied consensus around the war effort and the role of women in the wartime economy.

¹⁵ Thomas *Activities* p.136-137

¹⁶ Thomas *Activities* p.54

¹⁷ Thomas *Activities* p.62-63

¹⁸ Thomas *Activities* p.111

The use of Freedoms and hospitality as ‘soft power’ in support of the City and central government culminated under **Sir Horace Brooks Marshall**, who on becoming Lord Mayor in November 1918 felt that ‘first place must be given to his endeavours to create a closer understanding between the Allies’ – this included hospitality for **Prince Faisal**, who had fought with Lawrence of Arabia and would later be King of Greater Syria and of Iraq, and the **Queen of Romania**, **Canadian General Sir Arthur Currie** and, at the request of central government, the **Brazilian President**, among others.

The Lord Mayor was also a municipal ambassador. As early as the first week of war in August 1914 a conference of London Mayors was convened at Mansion House at which **Sir Vansittart** stressed the importance of maintaining employment, providing support for the families of mobilised reservists, and providing support for the Prince of Wales’s National Relief Fund¹⁹.

More significantly, **Sir William Dunn** played a leading role in influencing national policy, leading a deputation to Whitehall to meet Prime Minister Lloyd George in April 1917, and successfully lobbying for the government scheme for free insurance and compensation for war damage to be extended to less affluent sections of the UK population²⁰.

The Lord Mayor and wartime philanthropy

The Mayoralty has a strong tradition of philanthropy and there are numerous examples of this tradition during the Great War. Even before he was Lord Mayor, **Sir Charles Wakefield** donated his home in Hythe, Kent in August 1914 as a war hospital with 100 beds²¹.

I have noted **Sir Vansittart Bowater’s** conference of London mayors that stressed the importance of local authorities in supporting national relief efforts for families in hardship following the mobilisation of family bread-winners.

Sir Charles Johnston established the precedent of the Lord Mayor of the day serving as President of the national Committee for the Relief of Belgium. When the Committee was taken over by the United States in 1917, the Lord Mayor could report that he had overseen the collection of £165m in today’s money. These were funds that both prevented famine in occupied Belgium and ensured the large Belgian refugee population in the UK were given the support they needed.

¹⁹ Thomas *Activities* p.4

²⁰ Thomas *Activities* pp.100-102

²¹ Thomas *Activities* p.4

Sir Charles Hanson was acknowledged by contemporaries for having an emphasis on promoting the interests of soldiers and sailors through fundraising for initiatives including the Comforts of Mesopotamia Fund, fundraising that provided additional clothing, books and luxury food items for soldiers on remote fighting fronts, crucial to maintaining morale.

Sir Charles, before the war had even ended, also celebrated the surviving men of the original British Expeditionary Force that had fought at Mons and Le Cateau in 1914, hosting over 700 veterans to lunch across the City in December 1917 – 200 joined him at the Cannon Street Hotel, with the remainder taking lunch at various Livery Halls across the City.

In February 1918, Sir Charles hosted a fundraiser for the Queen Mary Auxiliary Hospitals at Roehampton, that worked with amputee veterans to enable them to transition as well as possible into civilian life.

Sir Charles Hanson, as late as July 1918, continued to encourage philanthropy of a significant scale. For the King and Queen's Silver Wedding Anniversary, their Majesties were presented by the Lord Mayor on behalf of the City a silver cup which had, in turn, been presented by Charles II to a citizen of London.

The gift of this silver cup was accompanied by a donation of nearly £3m in current money, raised from among the Members of the Court of Common Council. Their Majesties directed that the monies be turned over to the Minister of Pensions for the benefit of disabled soldiers, sailors and their dependents²².

Conclusion

I must bring my paper to a close by noting that I have not done justice to all aspects of the Mayoralty in the Great War. I have not touched on the Lord Mayor's role in mobilising the wartime economy and wartime finance such as national war loan campaigns, **Sir Charles Johnston's** sponsorship of the National Guard²³, a precursor to the Second World War Home Guard, **Sir Charles Wakefield's** sponsorship of the Army Cadets, **Sir William Dunn's** efforts to improve the air defence of the City, or efforts to support national food economy. We have of course not considered the work of the wider Corporation of London.

In closing I should acknowledge a debt to a predecessor and fellow City of London Corporation employee, Arthur Thomas, records clerk at the City of

²² Thomas *Activities* p.131

²³ For more detail see Wynn *City of London* pp.77-96 and Thomas *Activities* pp.13-17

London Corporation from 1914 until his retirement in 1945 – apart from, that is, three years of active service in the trenches of the Western Front from 1915-17²⁴.

Mr Thomas is the man responsible, at the direction of the Court of Common Council, for interviewing the war Lord Mayors first hand during the early 1920s and for hand-writing the single copy of *Activities of the Lord Mayor and the Corporation during the Great War*, which is held at the London Metropolitan Archives. His work has been a pleasure to consult, and to reflect upon.

The Lord Mayor and City of London Corporation both continue to play a significant role in engaging with stakeholders at a London, national and international level and moreover the City Corporation and in particular The City Bridge Trust is a tremendous philanthropic force for good.

In all of this, the Mayoralty and the City continue the traditions maintained by the Lord Mayors during the Great War which I hope I have, in some small part, brought to light once more.

Thank you to your clerk, Elizabeth Scudder. Thank you to Deputy Catherine McGuinness, who first suggested I deliver a Great War paper to you today. Thank you to Michael Welbank, for his gentle reminders of today's deadline.

President, thank you. Thank you all for listening – it has been a privilege and a pleasure addressing you today. Thank you.

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Adrian Gregory (2016) 'Imperial Capitals at War: a Comparative Perspective' *The London Journal* (41:3, 219-232)

²⁴ Arthur Thomas was born in Newton Heath, Lancashire on 5 April 1877. He married his wife Marie Louise in Camberwell in 1902 and, at the time of the 1911 census, was holidaying at Raynor's Hotel in Ventnor on the Isle of Wight from his employment as a lecturer at the University of Sheffield. He joined the Corporation of London as Records Clerk in February 1914, becoming a Freeman of the City the same year. He served with 10th Battalion, Lancashire Fusiliers from 1914-1918, and on the Western Front from 1915-1917, rising to the rank of Major. He returned to the Corporation, eventually becoming Deputy Keeper of the Records before he retired in 1945. His son Philip joined the Royal Canadian Airforce and was killed in an air accident in Northern Ireland in December 1943. Arthur Thomas died, aged 94, in Sussex in 1971.

Emma Hatfield *London's Lord Mayors: 800 Years of Shaping the City* (London: Amberley, 2015)

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Arthur Thomas *Activities of the Lord Mayor and the Corporation during the Great War (1920?)* (LMA: COL/SJ/05/002)

Stephen Wynn *City of London in the Great War* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword, 2016)

Appendix 1 – The War Lord Mayors

Sir (Thomas) Vansittart Bowater (1862-1938) served as Lord Mayor in 1913/14. Sir Vansittart had served as Sheriff in 1906, following which he had been knighted. On the conclusion of his Mayoralty in November 1914, he became Baronet Bowater of Hill Crest in Croydon and was later one of the two Members of Parliament for the City of London between 1924-1938.

Sir Charles Johnston (1848-1933) served as Lord Mayor in 1914/15. Born in Manchester, he moved to London in 1876 to establish the London office of his company, Wingate and Johnston. In 1890 he succeeded his father as head of the company. He was Common Councilman for Aldersgate from 1890 and became Alderman for that ward in 1910. He had a reputation for ‘common sense, business aptitude and initiative’, and was a great advocate for the Orphan School, now the City of London Freemen’s School.

Sir Charles Wakefield (1859-1941) served as Lord Mayor 1915/16. He is perhaps best known for founding the Wakefield Oil Company in 1899, subsequently changing its name to Castrol and building it into a household name. The City’s history notes that he had ‘peculiar qualities for wielding a wide influence...his temperament was sanguine and cheerful...he could convey his own feelings to others in a homely and direct style and was quickly in touch with any gathering of citizens which he addressed. He possessed a restless and tireless energy...but in addition to these natural gifts, he has an immense respect for the City.’ In later life he established the Wakefield Trust in partnership with Reverend Tubby Clayton (now the Wakefield and Tetley Trust).

Sir William Dunn (1856-1926) served as Lord Mayor 1916/17. A native of Clitheroe, Lancashire, Sir William was elected as Common Councilman in 1904, and Alderman for the Ward of Cheap in 1909. He was briefly Conservative MP for Southwark West in 1910. He was a senior partner of a surveyor’s company, Chairman of the Royal Botanic Society, and served as an officer of the Territorial Force. In contrast to the dynamism of Sir Charles Wakefield, Sir William was ‘content, by quiet performance of his duties, to merit appreciation of the Livery, expressed in warm terms at the conclusion of his term’ as Lord Mayor.

Sir Charles Hanson (1846-1922) served as Lord Mayor 1917/18. A Cornishman, he built Fowey Hall in 1899 which later served as the inspiration for Toad Hall in the novel *The Wind in the Willows*. He served as Coalition Conservative MP for Bodmin between 1916-1922.

Sir Horace Brooks Marshall (1st Baron Marshall of Chipstead) (1865-1936) served as Lord Mayor 1918/19. Born in Streatham, Sir Horace joined his father's wholesale newspaper business based in Fleet Street. He was elected as Common Councilman for Farringdon Without in 1896 and knighted in 1902. He became Alderman for Vintry in 1909. He joined the Privy Council in 1919 and was raised to the peerage in 1921.