

Eduqas GCSE History

Component 1: British Study in Depth

Empire, Reform and War: Britain, 1890-1918

The Second Boer War

Why was the Second Boer War so significant for Britain during this period?

Reasons for the war

The Second Boer War was the result of several factors, both long and short term. The conflict between supporters of **imperialism** and **republicanism** would be mixed with economic factors such as the **discovery of gold on the Witwatersrand**, political factors such as the tensions between **politicians** and more immediate factors such as the role of the **Uitlanders** and the **Jameson Raid**.

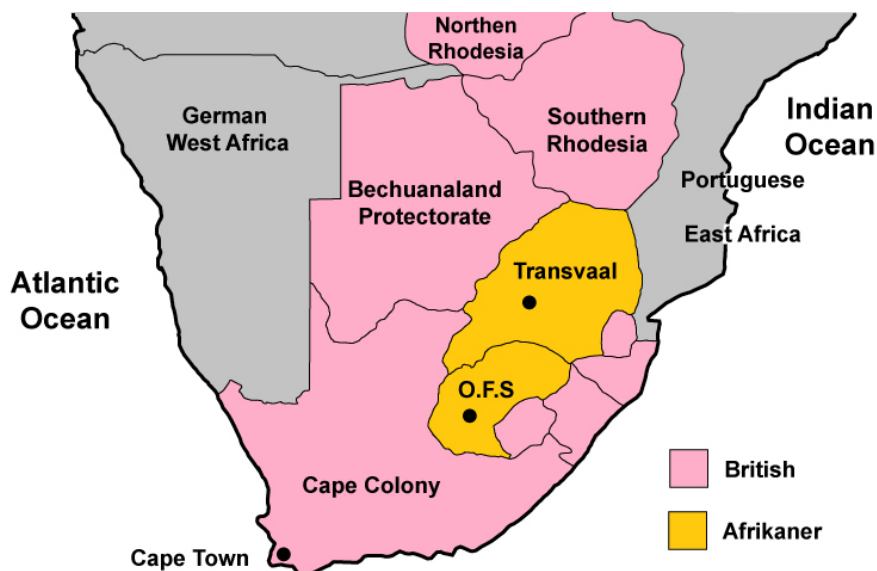
During the mid-1800s, about 15,000 **Dutch settlers** had left Cape Colony which was administered by the British and moved into the vast interior of South Africa. This '**Great Trek**' resulted in the establishment of two independent republics – the **Orange Free State** and the **Transvaal**, which were formally recognised by the British during the 1850s. The settlers became known as **Boers**, the Dutch and Afrikaans word for farmers. Their passive resistance to British attempts to bring the republics into a British controlled federation had resulted in the **First Boer War**, fought between 1880 and 1881. The Boers achieved an important victory over British forces at **Majuba Hill** in February 1881 and in August of that year the Pretoria Convention brought the war to an inconclusive end, with Britain assuming a vague concept of supervisory control over the Transvaal.

The situation was transformed in **1886** when **gold was discovered on the Witwatersrand in the Transvaal**. The discovery now gave the Transvaal considerable economic power and it was believed that this could prove a threat to Britain's position of control in the region, especially at a time when Britain was engaged in the '**Scramble for Africa**' – the drive to assume territorial and economic control over the continent. The Transvaal's increasing prominence in international finance meant a growth of independence for the Republic, which soon overtook Cape Colony as the most powerful economic state in South Africa.

However, since the gold was difficult to mine, deep shafts were needed and individual miners were soon squeezed out by large companies. The result was an enormous influx of prospectors into the Transvaal, especially from Europe. To the people of the Transvaal, these foreigners became known as **Uitlanders** and were considered a threat to the independence of the Republic. In an attempt to control the influence of

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the Uitlanders, the Transvaal government restricted their voting rights with only those who lived there for 14 years or more being entitled to vote. This became known as the **Uitlander franchise** and became a source of tension between the Transvaal and British governments.



South Africa showing British and Afrikaner possessions

The president of the Transvaal was **Paul Kruger**, a determined republican who came into conflict with **Cecil Rhodes**, who had become premier of the Cape Colony in 1890. Rhodes was convinced that the increasing financial power of the Transvaal would result in damage being done to the economies and influence of the British colonies. As a result, he was determined to prevent any expansion of the Transvaal's power. The position of Rhodes was in tune with the increasingly forceful attitude of the British government towards the region and late 1895 saw the first distinct step to war.

As a means of taking over the government of the Transvaal, Rhodes organized an uprising of Uitlanders in Johannesburg, which was to coincide with the invasion of the Transvaal by a force led by **Dr Leander Starr Jameson**. The British Colonial Secretary, **Joseph Chamberlain**, a committed imperialist, helped to organize what became known as **The Jameson Raid**.

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The Jameson Raid was a complete failure. The Uitlanders were not committed to the venture and Rhodes' attempt to stop the raid failed since Jameson had already entered the Transvaal. Jameson and his force were arrested and due to the debacle, Rhodes was forced to resign as premier of Cape Colony. Relations between Orange Free State and Transvaal became closer whilst those between the Afrikaans and English speaking people of the region deteriorated, especially the Uitlanders.

In an effort to win back some respect after the Jameson Raid, Chamberlain invited Kruger to London to talk about votes for the Uitlanders, but Kruger refused to cooperate. **Sir Alfred Milner** was now appointed British High Commissioner in South Africa, which further served to inflame the situation. Milner was an **imperialist** who believed the Transvaal wanted South Africa under Afrikaan control. He considered war to be the only way to prevent such a situation occurring and stirred the Uitlanders up to agitate for the vote. Talks reached deadlock by mid-1899 and in September Chamberlain demanded that they be given full voting rights. In response, Kruger issued an **ultimatum** in October demanding that British troops be withdrawn from the borders of the Transvaal and Orange Free State. The ultimatum was rejected and the **two States declared war on Britain**.

Early Boer success; relief of British garrisons

The start of the war saw the Boers strike into Cape Colony and Natal between October 1899 and January 1900. The British had underestimated the military capabilities of the Boers, who had armed themselves with modern weapons, particularly after the Jameson Raid. Failures of leadership and military intelligence also led to British disasters in the war's early stages. The Boers were highly skilled marksmen, due to the nature of their hunting experience and had invested in Krupp artillery which in many ways were superior to the British guns. As a result the Boers made initial gains, defeating British forces at Nicholson's Nek. The Boers now besieged British garrisons in the towns of **Ladysmith, Mafeking and Kimberley**.

December 1899 saw what was termed '**Black Week**' for the British army. On December 10th General Gatacre was defeated at **Stormberg**, losing 135 men. The next day Lord Methuen's force was driven back by a Boer force led by **Piet Cronje**, losing about 120 men with nearly 700 wounded. The worst defeat took place on the 15th when a force of 20,000 British troops under Sir Redvers Buller, commander-in-chief of the main British army were prevented from crossing the Tugela River on their way to relieve the siege at Ladysmith by a Boer force of 8,000 at the **Battle of Colenso**. The result was 145 men killed and over 1,200 missing or wounded on the British side, compared to only 8 killed on the Boer side. As a result of the defeat, Buller was replaced by **Field Marshal Lord Roberts**, with **Lord Kitchener** as his chief of staff.



Souce 1: Boer riflemen at the Battle of Colenso, December 1899

The sobering reality of these military setbacks resulted in the British assembling the largest overseas force it had ever deployed. In the meantime however, another attempt to relieve Ladysmith met with disaster at the **Battle of Spion Kop** in January 1900. After capturing the hill position, the British forces realised they were open to Boer artillery fire. Poor leadership and the Boer artillery led to 350 men being killed with almost 1,000 wounded. Once again, the British were forced to retreat.



Souce 2: Dead British soldiers after the Battle of Spion Kop

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However, given the industrial and military power of the British, it was inevitable that the superiority in men and equipment would eventually turn the tide of the war. As a result and despite the reverses suffered, the war now entered its second stage – that of British offensives. Under Lord Roberts the heavy reinforcements now started to make a difference to British fortunes. This was also helped by the tactical naivety of the Boers who wasted their energies on the besieged towns and failed to follow up the victories they had won. On February 10th, Roberts launched an offensive and by using diversionary tactics he fooled Cronje, pushing the British forces through difficult conditions onto their objective. As a result **Kimberley was relieved** on February 15th and at the **Battle of Paardeberg** a Boer force of 4,000 under Cronje was eventually overwhelmed, surrendering after ten days' fighting.

The next day **Ladysmith was relieved**, after Buller's force finally crossed the Tulega River at the fifth attempt. The Boers now realised that British military superiority would prevail; Roberts now advanced into the Orange Free State and by March 13th was marching into its capital **Bloemfontein**. Despite a few delays caused by skirmishes with the Boers, the British advance continued. **Mafeking** was finally relieved on May 17th after 217 days' siege, an event that led to mass celebrations in Britain. By the end of May he had reached **Johannesburg** and five days later **Pretoria**, where 3,000 British prisoners of war were released.



Source 3: Celebrations in West Wales for the relief of Mafeking. The photo is dated 19/5/1900

The Boers were now on the run, but were not beaten, despite the fall of the Orange Free State and Transvaal that were now annexed as colonies of Britain. It was assumed in Britain that the war was now over, with Roberts and Buller returning home, leaving Kitchener in command of the mopping up operation.

Guerrilla warfare; scorched earth and concentration camps

However, the war was now to enter its third phase, that of Boer commandos using **guerrilla tactics** to attack British outposts, rail and road communication and convoys. Fighting in small groups, out of uniform and led by experienced leaders such as Christiaan de Wet, the Boers drew the British into a new kind of warfare that had not been experienced before. The size of the area to be ruled meant that apart from in the towns and cities, the Boers still controlled the countryside. Sheltering among Boer civilians and disguised as ordinary farmers, they terrorised British soldiers, often killing unaware groups of soldiers only to immediately return to their unassuming disguise.

Faced with such tactics, the British now adopted a **plan** to clear the vast areas of land of the Boer threat. The country was divided into areas, each protected by a **blockhouse** that was in rifle shot of the next, with barbed wire strung between them. Overall, over 8,000 blockhouses were built that could house up to 8 soldiers. Then, one at a time, the 'squares' were cleared, with a 'scorched earth policy' pursued to deny the Boer commandos provisions and lodgings. Boer farming families were driven out of their homes into concentration camps, homes were destroyed, livestock driven out of the area and wells were poisoned.



Source 4: A Boer family watch as their home is destroyed

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The tactic soon proved to be effective, if extremely expensive both in terms of the financial cost and in terms of the manpower needed to undertake such an operation. The use of **concentration camps**, whilst an undeniably extreme measure, undoubtedly denied the Boer commandos access to food, shelter and horses. The method of internment was a wartime expedient, with the camps mainly populated with Boer women and children. Captured Boer commandos were sent overseas to prisoner of war camps. The concentration camps however, were poorly administered and it was inevitable that conditions in them would soon deteriorate. Inadequate shelter, poor standards of hygiene and insufficient food led to malnutrition, accompanied by diseases such as typhoid and dysentery. As a result, **many thousands of the internees died**.



Source 5: A concentration camp during the Second Boer War

The conditions in the camps soon became a national scandal and certainly contributed to changing attitudes towards the war. An English woman, **Emily Hobhouse** exposed their plight, with the result being that Joseph Chamberlain assumed control over them, with conditions soon improving.

Changing attitudes in Britain

Despite the victory of the Conservative government in the 1900 election, which became known as the '**Khaki election**', the continuation of the war led to a decrease in public enthusiasm. The effect of the increasing publicity surrounding the conditions of the concentration camps was to split public opinion between imperialists and pro-Boers. Politicians such as David Lloyd-George criticised the government over its policy, but the Liberals were split on the issue. British confidence was severely dented by the drawn-out guerrilla war and the cost of the campaign mounted in financial terms.

As a result of the increasing concern about the conditions in the camps, a commission of enquiry was set up, chaired by **Millicent Fawcett**. It supported the claims of

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Emily Hobhouse and as stated above, resulted in Chamberlain instructing Milner to immediately improve conditions. The damage to the government's reputation had been done however and by 1902 the public were longing for a conclusion to the campaign.

In military terms, the pressure exerted by the British forces and the tactics employed, meant that by March 1902, the Boers were looking for peace. By May, the last of the Boer commandos had surrendered and in the **Treaty of Vereeniging** signed on May 31st, the war came to an end. The terms of the treaty were, in the context of the bitterness of the war, conciliatory. The two republics were annexed, but Afrikaans was to be permitted in schools and law courts. £3 million was to be given to the Boers to rebuild destroyed homes and limited self-government was eventually granted in a permanent settlement in 1906.

The human and financial costs of the war were considerable. Over **20,000 British** soldiers were killed through combat or by disease with over 20,000 wounded. Financially the war had cost Britain over **£210 million**, but the damage was also done in terms of its reputation. In the 1906 election, the Conservatives suffered a crushing defeat, partly as a result of lingering public resentment over the impact of the war. Boer losses were over **9,000 killed** in combat or through disease, but over **25,000** through disease and starvation in the concentration camps. The psychological and political effects of the war would be felt for many years to come.

Political developments

What political developments were there in Britain at the start of the nineteenth century?

Liberal government and reform

In January 1906, the **Liberal Party won a landslide** in the election that following the resignation of the Conservative government led by Arthur Balfour. The country decisively rejected the Conservatives with the Liberals winning 377 seats to the Conservatives' 157. The size of the majority meant that they could now seek to push through **widespread reforms**. A younger generation of Liberals were influenced by the reports of Rowntree and Booth into the living conditions of the masses and now saw the need for greater state intervention in the matters of public welfare. Those in the working class who saw the fledgling Labour Party as being too extreme saw an opportunity to support a party who promised legislation to deal with a variety of social and economic ills that defined the period.

In light of these circumstances, the Liberal Government under **Henry Campbell-Bannerman** embarked on a programme of political and social reform that would

constitute the high point of twentieth century Liberalism. His Cabinet, despite being made up of people with often widely contrasting views in many important issues, was talented. Herbert Asquith as Chancellor of the Exchequer and David Lloyd-George as President of the Board of Trade, were two names among many. Despite the majority in the **House of Commons**, however, the Liberal Government had to contend with a permanent Conservative majority in the **House of Lords**. During the previous ten years of Conservative rule, the power the Lords had to revise bills that had come from the Commons had been hardly used. Now that power was reawakened as a means of preventing the Liberal Government from passing legislation that the Lords found not to its liking. The view that a small privileged class had what almost amounted to a divine right to dictate policy to the masses, was to be challenged by a new order that saw for example, 53 Labour MPs made up of men who had been manual workers and men in the Cabinet itself that came from modest backgrounds.

In April 1908, Campbell-Bannerman resigned due to ill health, dying only three weeks later. He was replaced by **Asquith**, his natural successor, who now brought the more radical elements of the Liberal Cabinet to the fore, particularly **Lloyd-George** who took over as **Chancellor of the Exchequer**. **Winston Churchill** took over at the Board of Trade. Both men saw the need for far-reaching changes and now set about challenging the old order.

1909 Budget and the Constitutional Crisis; 1911 Parliament Act

By 1908, the Liberal Government had embarked on a series of **costly social reforms**, of which more will be mentioned later. The reforms coincided with a greater demand for **expenditure on the navy**, which was becoming an increasing priority as the naval rivalry between Britain and Imperial Germany developed. Up until this point the Liberals had managed to bear the cost of reform by reducing Army and Navy estimates, but now it clearly became a choice between either an **increase in taxation** or **no further social legislation**. It was in these circumstances that the **1909 Budget** was delivered.

Lloyd-George was determined that further reforms, such as the setting up of Labour Exchanges and the improvement of roads, were not to be derailed by a commitment to build more Dreadnought battleships. Taxation therefore now became the primary weapon. The Budget proposed that those on an income of more than £3000 would see an **increase in income tax** from five to eight per cent and that **death duty** (the tax paid on property left by rich landowners) would rise to fifteen per cent. A tax on the profits on land sales was an innovation, that combined with the other measures were a direct assault on the landed classes. Entitled the '**People's Budget**', it easily passed through the House of Commons in November 1909 due to the Liberal majority, despite the objections of the Conservatives. As was to be expected however, on passing to

the second chamber, it was **rejected outright by the Lords**.

The rejection, whilst expected, was the culmination of a series of Liberal bills that had been rejected by the Lords. The continuing obstruction of proposed legislation, against a government that had been elected with an enormous majority, now focused attention on the power of Lords and the determination of the Liberal government to curtail it. For over two hundred years the Commons had had control over financial legislation and the rejection of the People's Budget now meant that a **constitutional crisis was inevitable**.

The Liberals immediately took up the challenge, labelling the actions of the Lords against the constitution. A **general election** was therefore called, principally over the issues of the Budget and the future of the House of Lords. The result of the election was a Liberal victory, but by a **much reduced margin** and as a result they now had to rely on the Irish nationalists for support. The price for their support was a demand to **remove the Lords' veto on legislation**, the Irish nationalists hoping that this would bring Irish Home Rule a step closer. In the last resort, only the **creation of hundreds of peers** would get the measure through and King Edward VII informed Asquith that only after another election would he agree to do so.

Faced with such opposition, the **Lords accepted the Budget in April 1910**. The issue of the **Parliament Bill**, designed to restrict the power of the House of Lords, was now the focus of attention. The death of King Edward VII in May did nothing to abate the crisis. The new **King George V** sought to mediate in the dispute between the government and the Lords but the discussions broke down. The King affirmed his support for the stance adopted by his father and in December another election returned almost the same result as before. Another hung parliament meant that the Liberals were reliant upon support from the Irish nationalists and the Labour Party. The battle was now in its last stages with the country entranced by whether the Lords would force the King to create a raft of new peerages. Blinking first, the Lords voted on the issue and finally the **Parliament Bill was voted through** by 131 to 114 votes.

The **Parliament Act of 1911** fundamentally changed the relationship between the House of Commons and the House of Lords and was an important piece of constitutional legislation. The terms were clear – any **money Bill** (Budget) should become law one month after it had been sent to the Lords. Any other Bill could only **be delayed by a maximum of two years** and the duration of Parliament was to be **five years between elections instead of seven**. The consequence was that any government could pass legislation within the first three years of a Parliament providing it had a sufficient majority in the House of Commons.

Power of the trade unions; growth of the Labour party

The trade unions had seen a period of gradual growth during the nineteenth century, although the economic uncertainty of the 1880s had restricted their activities. The recovery of trade in the late 1880s and early 1890s meant that their numbers now expanded. The creation of **large unions of skilled and unskilled workers** saw the power of unions increase. **The Dockers' Strike of 1889** had resulted in a victory for the unskilled work force and **drew public attention to the poverty** of such people in Victorian Britain.

The early 1890s saw the formation of several trade unions, often referred to the 'new unionism', that was essentially far more working class than had previously been the case. However, due to the fact that many of these unions represented unskilled or less skilled labour, the balance of power largely remained in the hands of the employers, who could **easily replace them during a strike**. The growth of these unions served as stimulus to the more traditional unions and by 1892, when the trade boom ended, union membership was 1,576,000, rising to over 2 million by 1900. The increase in membership was accompanied by an increase in **militancy** and therefore stoppages. The miners' lock-out of 1893 had seen widespread violence and a new tactic of trying to stop as many mines as possible from working. In 1897-8, the strike of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers was eventually defeated by the employers, a defeat that stimulated workers into seeking **political** as opposed to trade union action, since it now seemed as the union could only address the issues of wages and working hours and not the wider problem of general poverty.

A major factor that further pushed the working class to seeking a political organisation to represent its interests was the **Taff Vale judgement** of 1900. A strike in the Taff Vale Railway Company in South Wales had resulted in the Company seeking an injunction against the Secretary of the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants for the picketing of stations in Cardiff. In September 1900 the injunction was granted and the **union was made liable**. The later upholding of this decision had enormous implications, mainly that any strike which caused financial loss would be followed by legal action that could effectively bankrupt a union. The result was an increase in the membership of the **Labour Representation Committee**, a political organisation that encompassed trade unionists, social democrats and **Independent Labour Party** (ILP) members. In 1900 it returned two candidates to Parliament, one being the ILP's first leader, **Keir Hardie**. By 1903 its membership had risen to over 860,000 and the result would be the creation of the **Labour Party**.

The Labour Representation Committee had by 1906 become the **Labour Party**. The Liberals were keen not to let Labour become the sole representative of the working class and the reform programme of Liberals can be partly viewed in this context. However, although many people were suspicious of socialism and the more extreme elements of the labour movement, it did make an impact. In the 1906 election Labour won 29 of the 670 seats and the support they gave to the Liberal government resulted in an informal Liberal-Labour alliance that helped the government get much of its social reform legislation through Parliament, such as the National Insurance Bill 1911.

The growth of the Labour Party was, however, threatened by the **Osborne legal judgement** of 1910, which stated that trade union members had to 'contract in' if they wanted some of their wages to go towards a trade union, whereas the previous stipulation was that workers had to 'contract out' to prevent the contribution being made. Despite this, Labour won 40 and 42 seats in the two elections of 1910 and when MPs finally received a salary in 1911, it considerably eased the financial burden on the party. The overturning of this judgement in the **Trade Disputes Act 1913** served to further stimulate an expansion of Labour membership and support. During the First World War, the increasing importance of the Labour Party was underlined by the fact that leading members became part of the coalition government directing the war effort. Its support for issues such as **fair rents and price controls** saw it become increasingly seen as the true party of the working class and in the post-war years with the Liberals in disarray, it would emerge as the **official opposition** to the Conservatives.

Social reform

Why was there a pressing need for social reform in this period?

Extent of poverty in the late nineteenth century

The late nineteenth century had seen little improvement in the lives of working people, particularly in terms of housing and the environment. The increase in population was outstripping the increase in available housing and as a result **overcrowding** was a common occurrence. The north-east of England was the worst affected, but parts of London, Liverpool, Manchester and the South Wales coalfields were notorious for overcrowding and the inevitable desperate living conditions that accompanied it.

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The **conditions** in these areas and in heavily urbanised areas in general, were often appalling. Stinking alleys, little or no sanitation, clean water and a lack of clean air and even sunshine, were characteristics of many dwellings. Towns and cities had not witnessed building improvements and the result was **decay and neglect**. The Second Boer War had inadvertently brought to light the poor condition of the urban classes. The number of recruits that were rejected on physical or medical grounds was brought to the attention of the nation. For example, in 1899 8,000 out of 12,000 men were immediately rejected. For the labouring classes poor physical health was compounded by financial poverty in the towns and cities with London, due to its higher cost of living, being an entire problem in itself. Problems associated with alcohol and its accompanying violence were rife, often a release for workers who worked long hours for little pay in difficult conditions.

Surveys of the period generally found that a **quarter of the population** was living in poverty, with a tenth living below **subsistence level** – the level at which they could not adequately feed themselves. Whilst the extent of poverty was most transparent in urban areas, countryside poverty was also a widespread feature that had remained the case throughout the nineteenth century.



Source 6: A London street scene c.1900

Reports of Booth and Rowntree; educational reforms

The extent of poverty was revealed in two important reports. In 1889 **Charles Booth**, a researcher and reformer, published **Life and Labour of the People of London**, which was the result of an inquiry undertaken in the previous year. Booth had been critical of previous methods of assessing levels of poverty and the results of his methodical research showed that over thirty per cent of people in London lived 'in

poverty'. He also highlighted the fact that thirty five per cent of people in the East End of London lived in abject poverty. A second report published in 1891 covered the whole of London and reinforced the findings of the original. Booth's research led him to conclude that the case for introducing **old age pensions** was strong, particularly as a means of improving the quality of life for people and as such it became an important reference point for the reformist Liberal government.

Partly inspired by the work of Booth, the industrialist **Seebohm Rowntree** undertook an exhaustive investigation into poverty in **York**, visiting the homes of every working class family, which amounted to over 46,000 people. In 1901 his results were published in **Poverty, A Study in Town Life**. The report was the culmination of intensive statistical analysis as well as new investigative methods that looked at the nutritional requirements and calorific intake that were required to sustain people in good health. Further developing the work of Booth on the idea of a '**poverty line**', Rowntree concluded that nearly twenty eight per cent of the population of York lived below the measurement and as such the levels of poverty recorded in London were mirrored around the country. His work also concluded that low wages dictated poverty levels and like Booth, the report was important in informing the social reform programme of the Liberals, stressing the need for new measures to deal with the widespread problems of poverty, unemployment, old age and ill-health.

Education had slowly improved during the century, but its impact upon raising standards as well as the accessibility of education, had been patchy. The 1870 Education Act had established School Boards across Britain which were able to build schools with ratepayers' money if there were not enough school places in the area. A major change however came in 1902 with an Education Act that sought to impose a unified system of education across the country. School Boards were abolished throughout the country and the responsibility for education was now to be in the hands of county or borough councils. The new **Local Education Authorities (LEAs)** were given power to establish new secondary and technical schools in addition to being able to further develop elementary education. The result was that public money was now available to ensure that a standardized level of education with properly paid teachers was provided for all children.

Old Age Pensions; National Insurance Act 1911

Charles Booth's work had clearly stated the case for the introduction of old age pensions. The reformist Liberal government were keen to challenge the problems of the Poor Law as it stood and in 1908 Lloyd George introduced the **Old Age Pensions Act** which would partly contribute to the showdown with the House of Lords a year later. The Act stated that any person over 70 with no other income would be entitled to five shillings per week. Married couples would receive seven shillings and six pence

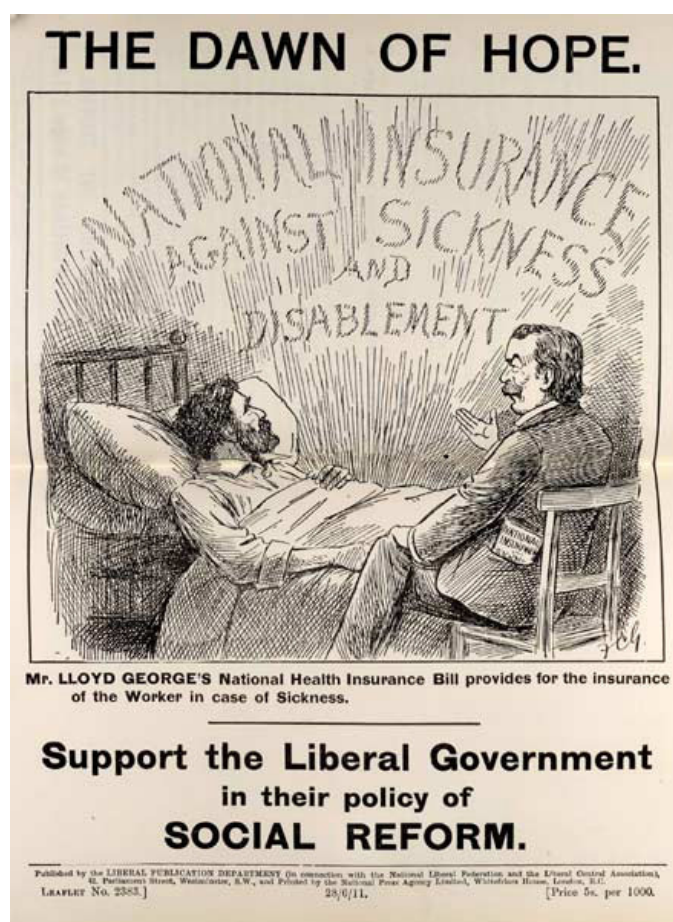
and only people who had lived in Britain for the past 20 years would qualify to receive the benefit. The sums offered were not generous enough for some politicians such as Keir Hardie, but in any event the introduction of the measure had a considerable impact. During the first year alone over 650,000 people collected their old age pensions and as a result the number of people claiming outdoor relief fell by over 80,000.

There is no doubt that the introduction of Old Age Pensions, although not a new idea, was an important reform of the Liberal administration. Being non-contributory in nature, it meant that people did not have to contribute anything to a pension fund. The other significant implication was that the burden of care was now being borne by the government, whereas previously it had been local rates that had supported the poor.

Whilst on holiday in Germany during this period, Lloyd George had been impressed by the system that had existed for many years that insured people against accidents, sickness and old-age. The only schemes available during this period were privately run by friendly societies, but Lloyd George sought to implement an all-encompassing system across the country that would cover as many as possible. The proposal for a **National Insurance Act** first arose in 1908 and by the time the Act was passed in 1911 it was comprised of two parts - health and unemployment.

The first part dealt with **health insurance** with all workers who earned under £160 per year having to join the scheme in which they paid 4d out of each week's wages which would be a 'stamp' on their card. The employer paid 3d and the government, or taxpayer, 2d with the result being that workers could take up to 26 weeks of sick pay as well as having access to free medical care.

The second part of the Act was concerned with providing **short-term unemployment** benefit. To provide for unemployment a further contribution of 2½d from the worker, supplemented by contributions from the employer and government meant that an unemployed worker could receive seven shillings per week for up to 15 weeks, which was deliberately prudent in order to encourage workers to return to work as soon as possible. The impact of the National Insurance Act was immediate and far-reaching and in many ways was the pinnacle of the many achievements of the Liberal government. By 1913 2.3 million people had unemployment insurance and nearly 15 million sickness benefit. The precedent had been established for state responsibility to provide for the welfare of the people.



Source 7: The cover of a leaflet promoting the National Insurance Act

Women's suffrage

How was the cause of women's suffrage advanced during this period?

Millicent Fawcett and the Suffragists

Throughout the nineteenth century there can be little doubt that a woman's place was seen to be in the home. This domestic role essentially prevented women from making decisions of a political nature, which were viewed as a man's preserve. Initial moves towards obtaining women's suffrage were made in 1860s when suffrage organizations were established in major cities. Progress was extremely slow, however, with the prevailing views remaining in the ascendancy until the arguments for **women's suffrage** gained momentum at the turn of the century.

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The first significant move was the joining together of various local women's suffrage societies in **1897** in the **National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS)**. By the early 1900s the campaign had gained considerable support, with its members referred to as **Suffragists**. The leader of the movement was **Millicent Fawcett**, who was married to a Liberal MP until his premature death and who had chaired the government's enquiry into conditions in the concentration camps during the Boer War. The essence of their campaign revolved around using peaceful campaigning methods to secure the vote for women. The primary methods adopted were issuing leaflets, petitioning, lobbying MPs, organized marches and using a variety of other legal methods to exert pressure on Parliament.



Source 8: Millicent Fawcett addressing a Suffragist rally

However, despite the increasing popularity of the NUWSS, it made **little headway** despite the apparent support of many Liberal and Conservative MPs. The leaders of the Liberal Party, despite their reformist agenda, were concerned that giving women with property the vote would result in them voting for the Conservatives. Conversely, whilst the leadership of the Conservative Party were generally pro-women's suffrage, they had to contend with the extremely strong opposition of the majority of their backbench MPs. As result of the stalemate, repeated attempts to push women's suffrage bills through Parliament in the first decade of the twentieth century failed.

The Pankhursts and the Suffragettes

This lack of progress frustrated many suffragists, who as a result now began to consider more radical and militant methods of gaining the vote for women. In 1903, **Emmeline Pankhurst** broke with the NUWSS to form the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU). In 1906, a national newspaper, the Daily Mail, called members of the

organisation **Suffragettes** and from this period on they were referred to as such. Whilst not as popular as the NUWSS in terms of members, it nevertheless became the second largest women's suffrage organisation, led by Pankhurst and supported by her daughters **Christabel** and **Sylvia**.

The WPSU now sought to maximise publicity by adopting a far more militant approach to their protests. They frequently disrupted political meetings, heckling the speakers. The failure of yet another women's suffrage bill in 1908 saw their actions become more assertive. June 1908 saw the WSPU call a 'Women's Sunday' rally in Hyde Park, a meeting that was attended by 500,000 people. The Suffragette Edith New took to making speeches in Downing Street and chained herself to some railings to prevent the police from moving her on. Stones were thrown through the windows of 10 Downing Street and in October of that year Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst were arrested and sent to prison for inciting a crowd to storm the House of Commons.



Source 9: Suffragettes protest by chaining themselves to railings

Emily Davison; tactics used; the Act of 1918

The increasing militancy of the Suffragettes deepened the divisions in the women's suffrage movement. 1911 seemed to be the year in which progress would be made, with a parliamentary bill supporting women's suffrage receiving a majority in Parliament of 167. However, the bill was eventually dropped by Asquith and furious Suffragettes now resorted to more extreme methods of protest.

In June 1913, at the Derby, one of the premier horse racing events on the calendar, held at Epsom race course, Emily Davison, an experienced campaigner for the Suffragette movement, sought to gain maximum publicity for the cause. During the race, she

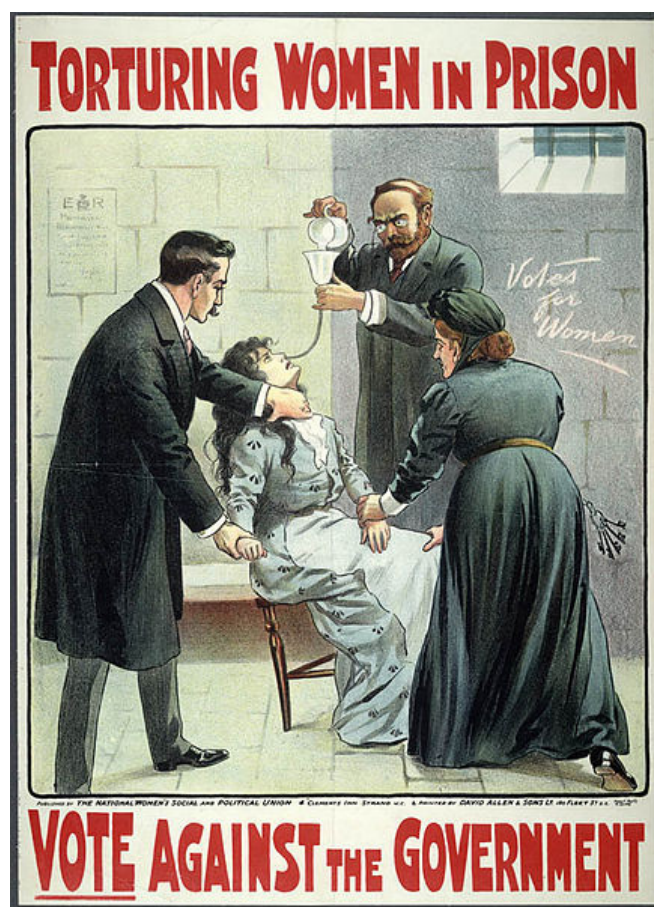
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emerged from the crowd as the horses thundered around Tattenham Corner and tried to attach what has been presumed to be a banner, sash or scarf to the King's horse, Anmer, as a means of drawing attention to the WSPU. The ensuing collision with the horse resulted in fatal injuries for Davison, with her skull fractured along with several other internal injuries. The impact of her death was that the Suffragettes now had, albeit unintentionally, its first **martyr**. Her funeral became a major event, attended by thousands and further served as a rallying point for the women's suffrage movement.



Source 10: A newspaper photograph of the events at the Epsom Derby, 5th June 1913

The events at the Epsom Derby were the culmination of increasingly aggressive tactics from the WSPU. After the failure of the Conciliation Bill in 1911 (mentioned above), they adopted tactics that centred around arson attacks on houses, schools and other public and private buildings. Paintings in galleries were slashed, telephone wires cut and even bombs were placed in various places. The reaction of the public was mixed, but generally hostile to increasing violence. The response of the authorities was naturally to increase arrests. However, even in prison the Suffragettes protested by going on **hunger strike**, only to be force fed by the prison authorities. The brutality of this action did much to win back sympathy for the protestors, forcing the government to pass a law that allowed those on hunger strike to leave prison to recover and then return to complete their prison term. Such a measure became known as the **Cat and Mouse Act**.



Source 11: A poster depicting the treatment of Suffragette hunger strikers

Despite the extreme nature of the tactics being used, it would be the **First World War** that would bring about the change to women's suffrage that they had been campaigning for. The outbreak of war in 1914 led to both the Suffragists and Suffragettes calling off their campaign, with the greater cause of national patriotism now taking priority. The women's suffrage movement now sought to participate fully in the war effort. The war gave women the opportunity to undertake a wide variety of roles that had previously been the preserve of men. There was a desperate shortage of labour in industry and it was women who now filled the gaps left by the absence of men. By 1916 the shortage of workers in manufacturing and engineering meant that women were now predominant in the workforce, particularly in **munitions factories**. Women worked as bus conductors, lorry drivers, farm labourers and in offices.

The result of the immense contribution made by women to the war effort was a change in attitude towards women's suffrage. Discussions regarding changes to the electoral system gathered pace and in 1917 the **Representation of the People Act** was passed by the House of Commons with an overwhelming majority, finally becoming law in **February 1918**. All men over the age of 21 now had the vote, as did **women aged over 30**. Women aged over **21** who were **householders** or were married to householders also gained the vote, which in total amounted to around 8.5 million women. Women

could also stand for Parliament, with **Lady Nancy Astor** becoming the first female MP in 1919. However, it was still the case that Parliament was reluctant to give the vote to young single women – the group that made the most significant contribution to the war effort. The final step in achieving equality would come ten years later in **1928**, when equal voting rights were granted to women, the culmination of decades of committed campaigning.

Culture and fashion

What were the main features of culture and fashion during this period?

Literature – Hardy, Shaw, HG Wells, Beatrix Potter

The 1890s and early 1900s were a time a great literary expansion. For example in 1899 the number of new books published reached almost six thousand which was a considerable increase on just ten years earlier. The novel undoubtedly continued its trend on the way to becoming one of the most popular literary forms and the period witnessed the publication of works that were almost instantly considered to be important literary milestones. The gradual expansion of the education system in the late Victorian period had improved standards of literacy and with the amount of available leisure time increasing, albeit slowly, reading became a vitally important and accessible form of entertainment for the masses.

Poetry was also very popular with an increase in the publication of poetry being a marked feature of literary tastes. Rudyard Kipling was popular as was **Thomas Hardy**, whose poetry was finally published in 1898 after the success of his novel-writing. His last great works of fiction were *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1891) and *Jude the Obscure* (1895), both of which were received in a somewhat negative light at the time due to the portrayal of a 'fallen woman' in *Tess* and the controversial depiction of religion, marriage and sex in *Jude*. The themes of his work focused upon the restrictions on life in Victorian Britain and how they caused unhappiness amongst people.

George Bernard Shaw had by the end of the 1890s already established himself as one of the country's leading playwrights, publishing in book form ten plays. In the early 1900s he then cemented his position as the pre-eminent playwright by writing plays that not only created characters but that identified ideas for discussion. Themes of emancipation and inequalities between the classes and sexes were mixed with religion and politics. His plays *Man and Superman* (1902) and *Pygmalion* (1912) were successful in London and other major cities across Europe as well as in New York. The fact that such themes slowly became part of mainstream theatre which was essentially conservative in nature, showed the influence playwrights such as Shaw had.

Herbert George Wells, or **HG Wells**, rose to fame in the 1890s with a series of **science fiction** works that reflected the increasing popularity of the genre. In 1895 his novel *The Time Machine* explored many themes beyond the science fiction story of an Englishman who develops a time travel machine and immediately cemented his place as a writer of popular fiction. *The Island of Doctor Moreau* (1896), *The Invisible Man* (1897) and *The War of the Worlds* (1898) quickly followed and Wells also developed an interest in predicting the future in his non-fiction book *Anticipations* (1901). Social criticism and social reform were issues that he addressed, always looking for constructive solutions.

Despite the predominance of male writers, it was the growth of women readers that was a marked feature of the period. Female authors did however, start to come to some degree of prominence. One example was **Beatrix Potter**, who despite being principally interested in science and particularly botany, turned a night time story of four rabbits called Flopsy, Mopsy, Cottontail and Peter, into *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* (1902). The book was an immediate success with readers attracted by the quality of her illustrations and the charming characterisations of the animals. Female writers were also, however, at the forefront of the modernist movement that would gain momentum after the First World War, with writers such as **Virginia Woolf** beginning her career in the early 1900s.

Whilst fiction was widely read, the period also witnessed a proliferation of books that dealt with social investigations. Charles Booth, Sidney and Beatrice Webb were authors whose meticulous methods of research gave considerable weight to the results their work produced. Overall it was clear that developments in education and leisure time served to make the period one of considerable literary expansion, both in terms of volume as well as diversity of genres.

Changes in fashion; the music hall

The late-Victorian, early-Edwardian period saw increasing changes to fashion that reflected the gradual loosening up of society that characterised the period. Changing attitudes towards women and what was acceptable to wear, were reflected in fashion becoming more **functional**. For women, the 1890s had been typified by the so-called 'leg of mutton' sleeves, with separate blouse and skirt being predominant. Hats retained their importance but the hat pin now replaced elastic as means of keeping them on. This did however, in some ways restrict women since they discouraged physical activity. An important development was the change from knickers to **thick petticoats**. This eventually led to the shortening of skirts, which reduced the amount of material that had previously restricted women's movement. The increasing popularity of **cycling** may have contributed to this.

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The end of the Victorian period and the onset of the Edwardian era saw women's clothing become less restrictive, lighter and more practical. Heavy petticoats disappeared and skirts gradually became shorter, once again allowing for greater freedom of activity. Another important development was that of **ready-made clothes**. Considerable improvements in quality meant that working class people could now improve their standards of dress. This certainly contributed to removing the stigma that had been associated with the wearing of clothes that were clearly inferior and a reflection of the one's social status.

Men's fashion also saw developments during the period. As with women, the popularity of cycling and outdoor pastimes led to lighter, shorter clothes being worn. The **shorter lounge** coat replaced the frock or tail coat, which soon became the preserve of old style 'gentlemen'. The increasing availability of the aforementioned ready-made clothes meant that class distinctions became blurred as workmen of all kinds now tended to look like clerks. The new century saw clothing become more **functional and hygienic**, although shoes still tended to be worn over the ankle. The period did see the introduction of Oxford lace up shoes that would become more popular after the First World War.

The **music hall** epitomised entertainment for the working class in the towns and cities in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Communities in these towns and cities were often very mixed and as a result accessible means of entertainment were needed. Music halls began to develop in the mid-1800s from public bars, who in competition with each other for customers, provided entertainment. Within time, these evolved into music halls complete with tables and chairs for customers, quite distinct from theatres which were more lavish in their decoration and design. The entertainment of the music halls revolved around **comedians and singers**, but a variety of other acts were often seen. The halls were generally **raucous places** and the acts were often considered to be quite rude for the time.

Much of the music hall entertainment was centred upon new popular songs that the audience could join in with, complete with catchy choruses. The popularity of the music halls meant that many singers and acts became very popular in their own right, with some figures achieving star status. Figures such as **Marie Lloyd, Harry Champion, Joe Elvin and Marie Dainton** became celebrities of their age. As a result of the demand for songs and the need to write new 'hits', professional song-writers were widely employed.



Source 12: Marie Lloyd



Source 13: Harry Champion

London was, without a doubt, the centre of the music hall industry. There were however, music halls across the regions and in all the major cities. Glasgow for example developed a thriving music hall tradition - **Stan Laurel**, born in Scotland to a family with theatrical roots, first appeared in the Britannia Music Hall in Glasgow in 1906. London, however, was where the largest music halls and best known singers were. Famous venues included 'The London Pavilion' and 'The Alhambra' in Leicester Square, 'The Oxford Music Hall' and 'The Gaiety Theatre' in the Strand. This helps to explain why many of the songs of the time are associated with Cockney culture, often incorporating elements of Cockney rhyming slang. Songs such 'Pop Goes the Weasel', 'Any Old Iron' and 'I Do Like to be Beside the Seaside' are examples of music hall standards from this period.



Source 14: The Oxford Music Hall c.1875

The music halls reached the height of their popularity during the **First World War**, when they played an important role in maintaining enthusiasm for the war effort. Patriotic songs such as '**Pack up Your Troubles**' and '**It's a Long Way to Tipperary**' became exceptionally well-known compositions sung in halls around the country. Recruitment songs were abundant in 1914 to early 1915, but as the war progressed they disappeared to be replaced by the theme of wanting to return home.

Development of cinema; sport

The late nineteenth century saw the gradual development of film. In 1895 the Lumiere brothers had caused a sensation by projecting their films onto a screen in front of a paying audience and in 1896 they brought their show to London. Although the early British films were generally of everyday news events, the early twentieth century saw the increasing development of **comedies, dramas and dramatic chase films** that captured audiences' imagination. There was still a tendency for storylines to reflect themes and stories that audiences were familiar with, such as works by Dickens and Shakespeare.

In 1907 the first 'cinema' was opened in Balham in London and by 1914 there were over 4,000 cinemas in Britain. The popularity of cinema soon began to rival the music hall, the main form of entertainment of the period. '**Picture Palaces**' as they were sometimes called, showed silent, black and white films that were more often than

not accompanied by a pianist. Serials became very popular, with cliff-hanger endings ensuring that audiences returned for the next episode and by 1914 the comedy films of **Charlie Chaplin** were attracting audiences across the country. Just like the music hall, the cinema began to provide cheap and accessible entertainment for especially the working class.

As with all leisure activities during this period, the increasing availability of leisure time led to the development and widespread popularity of a variety of sports, in particular **spectator sports**. Major organised events were a feature of the period that continue into modern times, such as the University Boat Race, the major horse racing events such as the Epsom Derby and the Wimbledon Lawn Tennis championship. The early twentieth century saw a gradual, although not uniform transition from a '**gentleman amateur**' tradition to **professional sport**.

Sports that attracted a considerable following, such as football and cricket, saw the introduction of professionalism at a faster rate and as such the standards in these sports rose, as did their mass appeal, particularly amongst the working class. In 1895 the Football Association allowed the payment of players, although a cap on wages was later introduced. It was still felt by some, however, particularly those involved in the games that were often associated with social class, such as tennis, athletics and rugby, that professionalism would make the sports over-competitive, taking away the gentlemanly ethos. Despite this, the popularity of sport was a marked feature of the period with the **crowds** attending being sometimes enormous. The participation of **women** in sport also increased, with the changes in fashion reflecting the fact that women played lawn tennis with greater frequency. Women also began to attend sporting fixtures in greater numbers, although the predominance of men was to remain.

The Western Front

What was life like on the Western Front during the First World War?

Tactics on the Western Front; new technology

The First World War was the product of the increasing rivalries in Europe over empires that had led to the naval arms race that dominated the decade before 1914. These rivalries had led to countries seeking alliances with each other to strengthen their position, which when mixed with the problem of increasing nationalism, had resulted in the fateful events of July 1914 in Sarajevo and the death of Archduke Franz Ferdinand at the hands of Gavrilo Princip. The story and the sequence of events is well known, but it could also be said that the First World War was the culmination of the process of **industrialisation** and the commercial rivalries that became part of the general competitiveness between European nations. That process of industrialisation had

another important consequence of course – that of the ability to mass produce goods and also the ability to wage the first ‘**industrial war**’ that would manifest itself in the First World War.

A conflict between the major European powers had not taken place since 1871, when the new German state had quickly defeated France. By 1914, that event was a distant memory. Overseas wars such as the Boer War had put a strain on Britain and the human cost of the war had led to disillusionment, but the general view was that this new European conflict would be resolved within a few months. Such a perception had contributed to the enthusiasm of the young men of Europe to join up before the conflict was over.

The German war plan had revolved around the **Schlieffen Plan** – the plan to invade France through Belgium, force their submission within six weeks and then turn the might of the German army against Russia. However, the **resistance of the Belgians** and the entry of **Britain** into the war had slowed down the German attack. At the **Battle of Mons** late August 1914, the relatively small British force surprised the Germans with their strength of resistance and even though the British were forced to retreat against overwhelming numbers, the encounter further made the Schlieffen Plan redundant. Russia’s rapid mobilisation and the fact that the German army was now overstretched meant that the **Battle of the Marne** in September saw the Germans forced back by combined British and French forces. The result was that Germans now began to protect their positions by digging **trenches**, fortifying them with machine guns and barbed wire. The anticipated mobile war now started to take the form of a war of attrition.

There now followed a ‘race to the sea’ as both sides sought to outflank each other. The culmination of this was the first **Battle of Ypres** that lasted from 12th October to 11th November 1914. The British held the ground and the war now reached a stalemate. Millions of troops now began to dig into sophisticated trench systems that ran from the Belgian coastline to Switzerland – the **Western Front**. The next four years would see relatively little movement in the positions of the armies and the tactics adopted were slow to change.

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The Western Front by December 1914

The First World War was most obviously characterised by **trench warfare**. Trenches had been used in several previous conflicts, including the Boer War, but the Western Front saw the development of trench systems that were huge in scale, complexity and in terms of their defensive capability. The Germans, who obviously did not want to give up the land they had captured, constructed deep concrete reinforced bunker systems that sheltered them from artillery attack. Row upon row of barbed wire protected their positions, with the flat terrain enabling any attack to be immediately identified and acted upon.

The tactical response to the development of trench warfare was an increased reliance upon the power of **artillery** to destroy enemy trench positions. Artillery placed behind the lines would bombard the enemy with an intensity that had never been seen before and was responsible for more casualties than any other weapon throughout the conflict. The development of modern weaponry also made the use of **cavalry charges** – a key feature of warfare over hundreds of years, **redundant**.

The reliance upon foot soldiers, or **infantry**, now became the key feature of any attack. Artillery would bombard enemy positions and then masses of infantry would '**go over the top**' in an attempt to cross no-man's land to capture the enemy's trenches. The development of the machine gun had clearly resulted in the ability to wipe out an entire assault, but in the absence of any other available tactics, the generals relied on **sheer numbers of infantry** to overwhelm the enemy's front line trenches and then hold onto the captured positions. This war of **attrition** – wearing down the enemy and

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regaining land in a piecemeal fashion, became the tactic of necessity and the pattern of warfare for almost the entire duration of the war.



Source 15: An aerial photograph of opposing trench systems on the Western front. The British positions are to the left, the German to the right.

The age of industrialisation had resulted in the development of **new technology** that was to play an extremely important role in the First World War. **Bolt action rifles** were the standard firearm for infantry, such as the Lee-Enfield. **Machine guns** improved during this period, with the British Vickers machine gun improving on the design of the Maxim gun that had been used since the 1880s. The ability of the machine gun to produce high concentrations of fire contributed to the war of attrition, as well as of course to the exceptionally high casualty rates. **Grenades** were widely used throughout the war and were very effective for fighting in the trenches themselves. The British 'Mills bomb' and the German Model 24 or 'potato masher', became the standard grenades used.

Advances in technology also resulted in the use of chemical weapons, or **poison gas**, for the first time in the history of warfare. Poison gas was first used on a large scale by the Germans in April 1915, when **chlorine** gas was released to drift across no man's land into trenches near Ypres. The psychological impact of gas attacks were considerable, as were the debilitating effects the gas had on soldiers, despite the increasingly effective countermeasures that were developed as the war progressed. From 1915 on, deadlier gases were produced, such as **phosgene**, which took longer to take effect than chlorine but was eventually responsible for 85% of the gas fatalities during the war. In 1917, the Germans used **mustard gas** on the eve of the Third Battle of Ypres. Delivered in shells that when opened, spread an oily liquid on the ground that mixed with air was ingested by soldiers, burning their lungs causing great pain. Although mustard gas only killed approximately 2% of its casualties, it was a very effective means of disabling soldiers. Overall, it is estimated that there were over

1.2 million casualties of gas attacks during the war, with **90,000 fatalities**. There were 180,000 British casualties of gas attacks on the Western Front, with nearly six thousand deaths.



Source 16: A British position after a phosgene gas attack

Aviation also played an important role during the First World War. Aeroplanes were extensively used for reconnaissance purposes, photographing the layout of enemy trench systems and spotting artillery positions. By late 1914, air combat had begun, although in a very primitive form. A change came with the development of machine guns that were synchronized to fire through the propellor of the plane. By late 1915 the Germans had achieved superiority in the air, a period known as the '**Fokker Scourge**', with single seat, single wing fighters shooting down the much slower British and French reconnaissance biplanes. The ascendancy of the Germans remained through 1916 and into 1917, when during '**Bloody April**', German Albatros biplanes shot down over 250 British aircraft during the Battle of Arras. However, superiority in numbers and German material shortages meant that by late 1917 the British and French were able to gain the upper hand with the development of planes such as the **Sopwith Camel**. Overall, although the bombing impact of aeroplanes during the war was minimal, the impact of accurate reconnaissance for informing artillery bombardments was extremely important and the development of fighter planes would play an important role in future military planning.

Tanks were another important development that took place. At first however, their initial impact was severely limited due to the notorious unreliability and lack of manoeuvrability. Used first during the Battle of the Somme in 1916, they caused panic among parts of the German lines, advancing ahead of the infantry and driving over barbed wire defences. However, only nine out thirty-two made it to the German lines and their contribution was therefore limited. Tanks were effective against bullets

and shell fragments but despite their armour, were vulnerable to direct hits from mortar and artillery shells. The first effective use of tanks came during the **Battle of Cambrai** in November 1917, when a widespread breakthrough was made. However, the breakthrough was not followed up and an opportunity to advance further was lost. The importance of the developments made and the tanks potential were, however, not lost upon military planners and as with aeroplanes, the tank would soon assume great significance.



Source 17: A Mark I British tank in action on the Somme, 1916

Major battles – Ypres; the Somme; Verdun

The First World War was defined by several major battles, all of which have in various ways come to symbolise the hardship and slaughter of the war. The Flanders town of **Ypres** was strategically important, dominating the flat landscape and the rivers and canals that characterised the area. Control of the town was important as all roads in the area ran to it. South of the town was an area of high land known as Mesen Ridge which given the flat terrain of Flanders in general, was of considerable importance.

In October 1914, British forces entered the town and managed to repel attacks by the less experienced German forces. Late 1914 witnessed fierce fighting around the town with neither the British nor Germans being able to establish control in the area. Daily shelling by the Germans soon reduced Ypres to virtual rubble and by the full onset of winter the **First Battle of Ypres** ground to a standstill, with the British stoutly defending what remained of the town, supported by their Belgian and French allies. The frontline around Ypres now assumed the shape of a **salient** or bulge, that was to change relatively little during the course of the war.

The **Second Battle of Ypres**, fought during April-May 1915, saw another German

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attempt to capture the town. Its significance is partly due to the first mass use of poison gas by the Germans, which despite its initial success, failed to achieve the gains it was expected to. Once again the German attacks were prevented from accessing the town, although Ypres was closer to the frontline as a result. The casualties from a month of fighting were over 87,000 on the Allied side and over 35,000 on the German side – a reflection of the efforts that were going into the defence of the town.



Source 18: Australians on the way to take up a front line position in the Ypres Sector, 25 October 1917

The general stalemate continued throughout 1916 into mid 1917, as the combatants focused their efforts on Verdun and the Somme. The **Third Battle of Ypres**, also known as the **Battle of Passchendaele**, was fought from July to November 1917 and was an offensive attempt by the British and her allies to push the Germans back. The prelude to the offensive was an attack on the German positions at Messines (Mesen) Ridge, where nineteen mines were exploded under the Germans, with the result being the capture of the strategically important position.

However, the Germans were prepared for the main attack, which was preceded by the firing of over 4.5 million shells into the German lines. This failed to destroy the deeply entrenched German positions and by the start of August exceptionally heavy rain had turned the entire area into a quagmire through which advance was almost impossible. Brief improvements in the weather saw the battles of the Menin Road Ridge and Polygon Wood, but little progress was made. What remained of the village of Passchendaele was eventually captured in early November, at which point the offensive was stopped and success claimed by General Haig.



Source 19: The village of Passchendaele before and after the battle

The casualties were enormous, with estimates varying widely, generally settling on over 325,000 for the Allies and over 250,000 for the Germans. The conditions the soldiers fought in were generally considered to be the worst of the war, for what essentially resulted in the gain of a few miles.

1916 was the year when the war became one of sheer attrition – the attempt to wear down the opposition whatever the cost in men and equipment. The German attack on the French at Verdun was causing enormous losses on both sides and putting the French army under equally enormous pressure. Consequently, the British sought to help their French allies by relieving the pressure with an offensive in the **Somme** area. Plans had been drawn up focusing around a massive artillery bombardment and the detonation of mines to destroy German positions. These would be followed by a mass of British troops advancing over no-man's land to capture the German trenches that it was presumed would have been destroyed in the bombardment.

The week before the troops went over the top saw British guns pounding the German positions. On July 1st the infantry attacked with approximately 750,000 British and French soldiers advancing towards the German lines. However, the British soldiers, weighed down by heavy packs advanced slowly and the lifting of the bombardment

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gave the Germans time to emerge from their deep dug-outs, man their machine guns and inflict terrible damage on the advancing troops. Despite some successes achieved by the French, the result was a disaster for the British army, with over **57,000** casualties on the first day, with about a third of them killed.

Many of the casualties during the following months were from what was termed '**Kitchener's Army**', the soldiers who had enthusiastically volunteered for the duty at the call of Lord Kitchener during the early part of the war. The disaster was compounded by the existence of '**pals**' **battalions**, made up of friends who had volunteered together. Whole units were wiped out and the impact that this had on communities and their attitude towards the war in Britain was considerable.



Source 20: A staged scene from the film 'Battle of the Somme', which was shown in British cinemas in 1916

The failure to achieve a breakthrough made little difference to Haig's military planning. He insisted that the attacks should continue and some minor gains were made in the following weeks. There now followed a series of battles all across the Somme front, for example at Delville Wood, Ginchy, Morval and Thiepval Ridge among many others. September saw the use of tanks for the first time, but to limited effect. The bloody but inconclusive war of attrition continued through until November after the front had been turned into a quagmire by the onset of winter. The Allies had advanced approximately five miles at a **terrible cost** – British and French casualties numbered over 600,000 the Germans around 500,000, making the Battle of the Somme one of the costliest battles of the entire war.

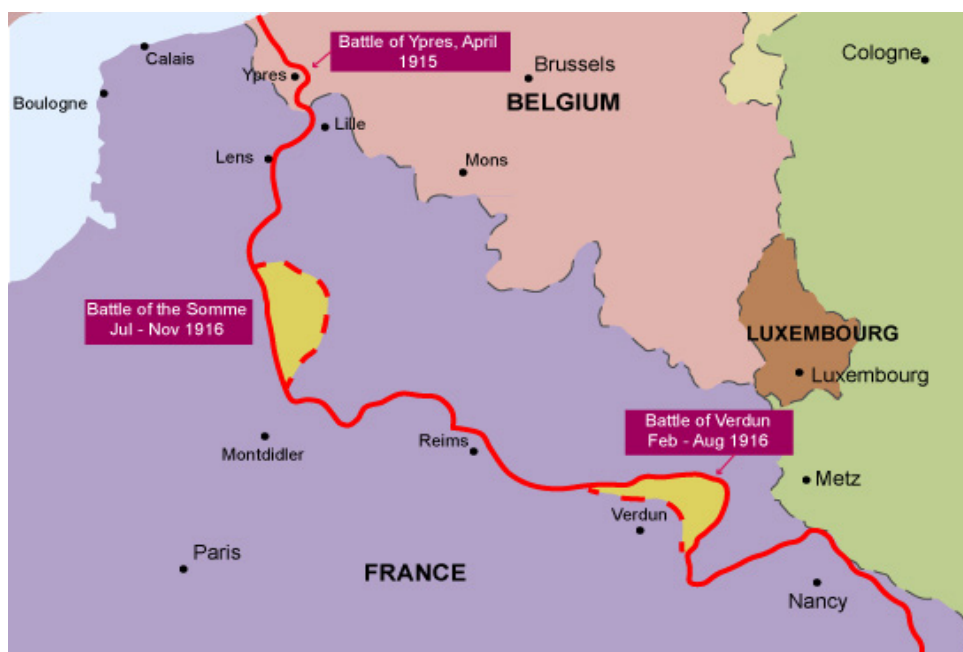
As previously mentioned, the British offensive on the Somme was designed to relieve the intense pressure on the French, who were under a sustained assault from the Germans at **Verdun**. Verdun is as important to French history as the Somme is to British

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history. On February 21st 1916, a massive German attack started on a narrow stretch of land at Verdun, an area containing twenty **major forts** and over forty smaller ones – all built and then improved in order to defend France. The German plan was devised by the German Chief of General Staff, **Erich von Falkenhayn**, whose ambition was to ‘bleed France white’ by forcing the French to drain their resources and reserves of men by defending the area.

Over 140,000 German troops attacked the French positions after an enormous ten hour artillery bombardment during which over one million shells were fired. Gains were soon made and thousands of French taken prisoner with the French fort at **Douaumont**, only five miles from Verdun, soon falling. However, the French were determined to defend the area and General Petain was put in charge of the defence of Verdun. There now followed months of attritional warfare during which both sides suffered enormous losses. In fact, lasting over **three hundred days**, the battle was to become one of the longest and costliest in history.

In early June the Germans once again launched a major assault in an attempt to break the deadlock, but by now they were **overextended**, despite advancing to within three miles of Verdun. The British attack on the Somme served to relieve the pressure at Verdun and by October the French had regained territory, including the forts at Douaumont and Vaux. The battle dragged on into December to an inconclusive end, just like the Battle of the Somme and the losses were enormous with estimates of the casualties on the French side ranging from three to five hundred thousand and from three to four hundred thousand on the German.



Life in the trenches

The horrors of life in the trenches have been well documented. One factor that is often overlooked, however, is the fact that soldiers spent long periods of time not fighting. Actual periods of 'going over the top' were relatively few and far between and for many soldiers the experience of war was one of long periods of **boredom**. Daily routines such as the morning 'stand-to', which was essentially guarding against a possible early morning attack from the enemy, repairing trench systems and maintaining equipment, dominated soldiers' lives. Of course, the intensity of enemy bombardments and periods of battle were extremely stressful and harrowing for soldiers, but for long periods engagement with the enemy did not take place.

Conditions in the trenches were of course the main problem for soldiers. The geography of the Western Front meant that drainage was almost impossible on the flat, low lying terrain. As a result, the trenches filled with water throughout the winter months and during periods of wet weather. '**Trench foot**' was a common problem, caused by the inability to keep feet dry. This was made worse during the winter months when frostbite afflicted soldiers. Sanitation arrangements were relatively primitive and the stench of sewage combined with rotting corpses and unwashed men made the smell all but intolerable especially during the summer months.



Source 21: British soldiers resting in a trench

Rats were unwelcome living companions and the trenches were infested with them. The ready availability of corpses to feed on, as well as the rubbish that was thrown away, resulted in rats growing to the size of small cats. The infection and contamination of food that they spread was a major problem that could simply not be solved due to the ability of the rats to breed so rapidly. Another major hygiene problem was lice, in particular body lice. Infestations were commonplace and soldiers tried various

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methods to get rid of the **lice**, such as cracking them between their fingers or 'popping' the eggs with a lighted candle. However, such methods were ineffective and 'trench fever', a painful disease caused by lice, was widespread although its cause was not detected until 1918.

The **food** provided for soldiers was limited in variety with the majority being served out dry, such as bread, cheese and biscuits. By the time much of these reached the front lines they were inevitably stale and many accounts exist of for example, biscuits being almost impossible to break apart. Tins of corned beef, known to the soldiers as '**bully beef**' were the main source of meat and tins of **Maconochie** stew, made from beef, carrots and turnips in a thin soup, became the standard fare. Soldiers were always under strict instructions to boil water, which since it was often carried in empty petrol cans and had been chlorinated, would invariably taste of those products.

Life in the trenches of course carried with it the constant threat of death. The majority of casualties in the war were caused by **artillery bombardment**. The chance of a direct hit was relatively small, but wounds caused by shrapnel and death by being buried alive under the earth thrown up by the explosion, were constant threats. **Snipers** were always active and many inexperienced soldiers were killed by their own curiosity, being tempted to look over the parapet to view across no-man's land to the enemy positions. However, despite all these immense difficulties, the discipline of soldiers on the Western Front was good, although the penalties for desertion and insubordination were severe. Soldiers developed a strong sense of comradeship that cut across social classes and respect for officers who lived and fought with their men was a strong feature of life on the Western Front.

Impact of the First World War

What was the impact of the war upon life on the Home Front?

Recruitment and conscription; propaganda

The First World War had an enormous impact upon the British people, with every aspect of life being deeply affected. The national effort that was required meant that the government had to take far greater control of people's lives than it had ever done before. Contributions from all sections of society were needed to sustain the war effort that was to physically, mentally and financially exhaust Britain.

At the outbreak of war in 1914, Britain had a relatively small professional army of about a quarter of a million men. To counter the threat from Germany, a continental power with an enormous army, a **massive recruitment drive** was needed. Posters, leaflets, speeches and recruiting offices were all used to encourage men between the

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ages of 19 and 30 to join up. The response was tremendous, with an average of over 30,000 men joining up on a daily basis. During the first month of the campaign, over **half a million men** had signed up.

Men were **motivated** by several factors. A wave of **patriotism** swept the nation, combined with intense anti-German feeling. Many thought of war as an opportunity for adventure, with some believing the war would not last long and that they therefore did not want to miss out on the chance to travel abroad, leave their often mundane and difficult civilian jobs to experience the thrill and rewards of victory. **Peer pressure** undoubtedly played an important part in encouraging groups of friends to join up together. The formation of '**pals battalions**' proved to be an extremely successful recruiting tool. Groups of men from the same workplace, sporting teams, communities could join up and serve together, which whilst effective in terms of recruitment, would prove devastating later in the war when entire communities would lose their men within a short space of time. Women were encouraged to give **white feathers** to those who had not joined up, representing a sign of cowardice and music hall acts further provided motivation through the songs and sketches that were performed.



Source 22: Alfred Leete's famous recruitment poster featuring Lord Kitchener

However, despite the success of the recruitment drive it soon became apparent that conscription of men into the armed forces would be required. Lord Kitchener,

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the Secretary of State for War, insisted that a massive army would be needed for a prolonged war and by the end of 1915 with continuing losses on the Western Front and a falling number of volunteers, conscription now became an imperative. It was also the case that industry and agriculture in Britain were suffering as a result for example, of so many miners joining up. In addition to these factors was a general feeling that some groups were avoiding the war and that the government control was needed to ensure everyone made a contribution. As a result in January 1916 the **Military Service Act** was introduced that introduced conscription for all single men aged 18-41, which was extended to married men in April 1916.

There was inevitably some opposition to the introduction of the measure. Some opposed due to religious or political reasons. Such men were labelled '**conscientious objectors**' or 'conchies'. Many were sent to prison for refusing to serve, some were granted non-combatant status and therefore worked in roles away from the front. Other men appealed against their conscription due to their occupation, meaning they were needed at their place of work and sometimes such cases were given exemptions, or merely temporary exemptions. However, overall the process of conscription was vital to the success of the British war effort, with over 2.5 million men being conscripted.

Supporting the war effort at home meant that people's morale needed to be maintained through a programme of **propaganda**. **Censorship** was also a vital tool in controlling the news and ensuring that the British public were only informed of positive aspects of the military campaign on the Western Front. Influencing public opinion through effective propaganda was carried out in variety of ways. All news was strictly controlled and the overwhelming majority of newspapers in Britain made sure that only good news was reported or that a positive spin was put on military setbacks. **Propaganda posters** and **leaflets** abounded during the war, not only portraying the British cause as just and successful, but also showing the Germans allegedly carrying out atrocities. One such example was the execution by firing squad of the English Red Cross nurse **Edith Cavell**. Cavell was in Brussels during the German occupation and helped British and French soldiers escape into the neutral Netherlands. Her trial and eventual execution by the Germans served as a major propaganda tool throughout the war, particularly in how her death was portrayed as heroic and the actions of the Germans as barbaric. Patriotic books and comics were also produced that glorified the justness of the British cause and films such as **For the Empire** and the previously mentioned **Battle of the Somme** were produced as propaganda instruments, but also as a means of introducing a controlled realism to the way in which the war was portrayed.



Source 23: A British propaganda stamp depicting the execution of Edith Cavell

Role of women; role of government – DORA

As previously discussed, the contribution of women to the war effort was immense. The start of the war saw both the suffragists and Suffragettes call off their campaigns for the vote. The suffragists sought to persuade men to join the forces, whilst the Suffragettes demanded that women be allowed to contribute to the war effort by working in munitions factories. Women were encouraged to identify young men who were not in the forces and give them white feathers to symbolise their cowardice. Posters published by the Mother's Union were aimed at encouraging mothers to persuade their sons to join.

However, it was in **industry** that women undoubtedly played the most significant role. The numbers of men needed for the front meant that there were soon desperate shortages of labour across all industries. Many industrial employers were reluctant to take on women and some unions feared that employing women would lower men's wages. Employers were gradually persuaded to take on more women workers and it soon became apparent that women were quickly able to learn the skills necessary to successfully undertake any roles demanded of them.

Work in the **munitions factories** was particularly difficult and conditions were poor. The health of women employed in producing explosives suffered greatly and accidents were commonplace. Factories in Faversham, Silvertown and Chilwell witnessed enormous explosions between 1916 and 1918, with the collective death toll being over 300. However, despite the often appalling conditions, propaganda posters depicting women as 'doing their bit', were widely used to encourage female participation in the war effort.

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Source 24: Women working in a factory during the First World War

The increasing need for women to contribute to areas of employment that had previously been the preserve of men, led to a **social revolution**. The jobs undertaken by women expanded greatly from their traditional base into almost every aspect of work. Over a quarter of a million women served in the **Women's Land Army**, keeping agricultural production running. Women played an important role in the medical treatment and care of wounded soldiers and many women servants left their employment with middle or upper class employers to work in factories that provided better pay. Overall there can be no doubt that the war played a key role in gaining women the vote in 1918 and changing attitudes towards the position of women in society.

At the outbreak of war the government saw the immediate need to take control of virtually all aspects of the war effort and consequently passed the **Defence of the Realm Act** or **DORA**. Government control of industries vital to war production, propaganda and censorship as well as a wide variety of other measures, were the result of the Act. The taking over of the coal industry was one example of how DORA was utilised. The control it established over people's lives was wide-ranging, for example no-one was allowed to buy binoculars, give bread to wild animals or talk about military matters in public.



Source 25: A poster issued under DORA

DORA also allowed the government to take over land or buildings if it needed to. One result of this was the taking over of land for the growing of crops, which were essential to sustain Britain through the war. The establishment of the Women's Land Army was a further measure enacted to ensure the supply of food. **Prices rose** during the war due to food shortages caused by German U-boats sinking merchant ships and through the hoarding of food by wealthier people. Food shortages became a way of life that the government struggled to resolve, until the **compulsory rationing** of meat, butter, sugar and beer was introduced in early 1918.

Another major problem, indeed scandal, was the inadequate production of ammunition that reached crisis point in 1915. The '**munitions crisis**' was widely publicised and became a national scandal as reports of a lack of artillery shells, rifles and bullets were published. Through the power DORA, the new Minister of Munitions, David Lloyd-George introduced measures to combat the shortage. Efforts were made to tackle the shortage of skilled workers in the most important industries. As mentioned earlier, women were brought into the workforce in large numbers, although Lloyd-George had to overcome the opposition of the trade unions by promising that women would be paid the same wages as men and that they would not be retained when the men returned from war. The result was an improvement in the munitions supply that was a vital factor in sustaining the military campaign.

Growth of disillusionment; attitudes at the end of the war

The early enthusiasm of the British public for the war cannot be doubted. A general wave of patriotism swept the country as recruits for the armed forces flooded in. A common perception, sometimes challenged by historians, was that the war would be over by Christmas 1914. Many people believed that order would be restored in Europe with British superiority re-established. The hardships endured by many people in their everyday pre-war lives would be improved as a result. Support for the war effort was certainly sustained throughout its duration, but there can be no doubt that as the war developed into a stalemate on the Western Front **disillusionment** set in.

Some prominent figures such as the Labour leader Ramsey MacDonald and George Bernard Shaw had expressed anti-war views and had been widely criticised for it. The advent of **trench warfare** and the realisation that the war would be prolonged, served to change the attitude of the public. **Soldiers' letters** from the front, although censored, gave people back home a realistic depiction of conditions and the horrors that were faced. **Poetry** further served to reinforce the desperate struggle that the soldiers faced and represented the increasing sense of disillusionment that was spreading via public opinion. Propaganda was an important method of combating war weariness but 1916 certainly saw attitudes change.

The disaster of the **Battle of the Somme** was in many ways a turning point. The enormous losses for the gain of relatively little land saw the government and generals being **openly criticised** for the way the war was being directed. Excitement about the war had disappeared as whole communities were devastated by the loss of their men. In December 1916, Asquith stood down as Prime Minister to be replaced by Lloyd-George, a man it was felt had more vigour to see the country through. However, whilst the sense of disillusionment was reflected in everyday life, a grim sense of reality to see the war through meant that support for the war effort was maintained.

By 1918, Britain was a very different place in virtually every respect. The end of the war in November 1918 was greeted by an exhausted nation with **relief** despite the obvious celebrations. Although victorious, people realised that little had been gained during the fighting and that the human and financial cost had been enormous. There was now an expectation that Germany would be punished and that improvements to people's lives and suitable rewards for the soldiers who fought would be provided. All the certainties of pre-war British society were swept away. **Class distinctions**, although certainly not gone, were greatly weakened by the collective effort of fighting the war on the Home Front as well as of course on the front itself. Social divisions were to a certain extent lessened by the common experience. Overall, the **attitude** of the public was one of a great sense of loss that gave rise to the idea of a 'lost generation'. The visual impact was also seen in the numbers of disabled, disfigured soldiers who returned.

The war brought about changes in **culture** too and aspects of mass culture were now more visible, such as cigarette smoking, attendance at the cinema, the use of contraceptives and a decline in church attendance. Changes in women's behaviour took place as well. During the war many middle class women had paid jobs, attitudes towards sex changed as did attitudes towards smoking and drinking in public. However, in the months and years following the end of the war attitudes also hardened. People became less respectful of authority and industrial unrest grew as the promised 'homes fit for heroes' did not materialise. Two decades of economic and social turmoil would now follow that would bring back memories of the war and raise the question of whether it was all worth it.

Acknowledgements

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- Source 9: Suffragettes protest by chaining themselves to railings - Hulton Archive / Getty Images
- Source 10: A newspaper photograph of the events at the Epsom Derby, 5th June 1913 - Adam Butler/PA Archive/Press Association Images
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