

The Persistence of Anglo-Saxonism in Britain and the origins of Britain's appeasement policy towards Germany

Robert Boyce

According to standard historical accounts, the British public became increasingly antagonistic towards Germany after the Anglo-German naval race began in 1898 and, except for a very small number of socialists and conscientious objectors, Britain went willingly to war on 4 August 1914.¹ As evidence of the prevailing mood, historians note that British firms and individuals with German names faced abuse and physical attack. Prince Louis of Battenberg reluctantly resigned as First Sea Lord in October 1914 and later changed his name to Mountbatten. In July 1917 the British Royal family followed his example and changed its name from Saxe-Coburg-Gotha to Windsor. Meanwhile orchestras faced demands to cease performing German compositions. Universities turned away from teaching German literature and philosophy, and at Oxford trustees suspended the German Rhodes scholarship scheme, using the money saved to provide scholarships to students from Allied countries and dependencies. Nor, allegedly, did the hostility end with the Armistice. Britain persisted in blockading Germany despite the suffering it caused, and at the Paris Peace Conference in the Spring of 1919 British delegates demanded more onerous reparation payments than their Allied colleagues.² Although in the 1930s, after Hitler took power, Britain persisted in appeasing Germany until the Second World War had practically begun, this was due to the overwhelming economic and strategic constraints facing Britain at the time.³

This in outline is the picture that most historical accounts present of British attitudes towards Germany in the era of the First World War, and in most particulars it is sound enough. Yet it omits a great deal of evidence which points towards a much more ambivalent attitude, especially among Britain's educated middle classes, towards Germany and the war itself. Some historians, seeking an explanation of Britain's readiness to appease Germany after the war, speculate that it was due in

¹ Hew Strachan, *The First World War*, vol. I: *To Arms* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 131-133, 159-161.

² David Bilton, *The Home Front in the Great War: Aspects of the Conflict, 1914-1918*, Barnsley, Leo Cooper, 2003, p. 18-22, 44-48; J. M. Winter, 'British Identity and the First World War', in S. J. D. Green and R. C. Whiting (eds.), *The Boundaries of the State in Modern Britain*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996, p. 261-277; J. M. Winter, 'Oxford and the First World War', in Brian Harrison (ed.), *The History of the University of Oxford*, Vol. VIII, Oxford, The Clarendon Press, 1994, p. 5.

³ For a typical summary of Britain's intractable problems, see Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000*, London, Fontana, 1989, p. 410-413.

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some measure to Britain's continuing suspicions of France as its 'traditional enemy'.⁴ This, as the present account will explain, is broadly true. However, it is only part of a more comprehensive self-definition of Englishness developed in the nineteenth century but traceable to earlier centuries, which formed the bedrock of British attitudes to Continental Europe until at least the Second World War.

Origins And Establishment Of Anglo-Saxonism

As early as the fourteenth century, as illustrated by Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, the myth had taken hold that the England of sturdy yeomen was essentially an Anglo-Saxon country, although it had succumbed to the 'Norman yoke' in 1066.⁵ The myth received new impetus in 1534, when Henry VIII's break with Rome prompted English scholars to seek evidence of an essentially independent Anglo-Saxon church that could serve to legitimise the (re-)establishment of a separate English church.⁶ The following century the myth of an ancient Anglo-Saxon society of simple but jealously independent small-holders suffering under the Norman yoke again served a political purpose by opponents of the Stuarts who they likened to the Normans. Subsequently the Whigs and radicals embraced the myth, which provided a common narrative in the many national histories published in the eighteenth century.⁷

The appearance of an English translation of *Germania* by the late Roman historian Cornelius Tacitus and in 1776 the first volume of Edward Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, which drew liberally from *Germania*, added new underpinnings to the myth by presenting the ancient Germans as suitable ancestors for England's Anglo-Saxons. Gibbon, who acknowledged Tacitus as the first modern historian, endorsed his view that the Germans had established a primitive society of free men based upon the principles of justice, equality and fairness. The Germans were poor, brutal and illiterate, and lived in a state of nature, but they 'found compensation for this savage state in the enjoyment of liberty.'⁸ Accordingly, '[t]he most civilised nations of modern Europe issued from the woods of Europe; and in the rude institutions of these barbarians we may still distinguish the original principles of our present laws and manners.'⁹

⁴ P. M. H. Bell, *France and Britain, 1900-1940: Entente and Estrangement*, London, Longman, 1996, p. 3; R. A. C. Parker, *Chamberlain and Appeasement: British Policy and the Coming of the Second World War*, Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1993, p. 317-318; Michael Dockrill, 'British Official Perceptions of France and the French, 1936-1940', in Philippe Chassaing and Michael Dockrill (eds.), *Anglo-French Relations, 1898-1998: From Fashoda to Jospin*, Basingstoke, Palgrave, 2002, p. 94-108.

⁵ Deanne Williams, *The French Fetish from Chaucer to Shakespeare*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 2.

⁶ David C. Douglas, *English Scholars, 1660-1730*, rev. ed., London, Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1951, p. 13, 15.

⁷ Reginald Horsman, 'Origins of Racial Anglo-Saxonism in Great Britain before 1850', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 37, no. 3, 1976, p. 387-389.

⁸ Edward Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, vol. 1, London, John Murray, 1854, p. 359.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 349.

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Once again, in the final decade of the eighteenth century, political crisis stimulated interest in the Anglo-Saxon foundational myth when, with Britain threatened by France, Sharon Turner, a London barrister and antiquarian, published the first of his three-volume *History of the Anglo-Saxons*. As in earlier accounts, Turner portrayed England's Germanic ancestors as vigorous defenders of their personal and collective liberty. However, instead of presenting them as primitive, violent barbarians, they emerge in his account as noble savages and altogether more sympathetic than before.¹⁰ For the first time, as well, Turner described Europe as comprised of three sets of tribes or races: 'the Kimmerian and Keltic race ... the Scythian, Gothic and German tribes, from whom most of the modern nations of Continental Europe have descended ... [and] the Slavonian and Sarmatian nations ... who have now established themselves in Poland, Bohemia, Russia and their vicinities'; or as they came to be known, the Latin, Germanic and Slavic peoples.¹¹ The 'Kimmerian and Keltic race' bears the characteristics that Turner's English contemporaries associated with the French: clever, technically accomplished and intellectually subtle, but also 'avaricious, devoted to religious and civic ceremony, effeminate, corrupt, subject to repression, decadent.'¹² The Germanic tribes in turn embodied the qualities that English contemporaries claimed for themselves.

They differed in attainments from their more polished relatives; but were not in all things their inferiors. It is unjust to degrade those with the appellation of barbarians, in the present meaning of the term, from whose minds, institutions, and manners, all that we now possess in civilization, superior to the most cultivated states of antiquity, has been principally derived.¹³

In contrast to the Kelts, Turner affirmed,

Liberty was the spring and principle of their political associations; and pervaded the few civil institutions which their habits required, and their humours permitted. Neither chief nor priest was suffered to have much power. Influence, not authority, was the characteristic of the shadowy government which they respected....[I]t was the sacred custom of almost all their tribes, that a national council should be an inseparable portion of the sovereignty or civil government of each; in which all legislation should originate; by which the executive power of the chosen leader should be continually controuled [sic]; in which all general measures of the state should be considered and determined, and all taxes imposed; and to which every free man that was aggrieved might appeal for redress.¹⁴

¹⁰ Clare A. Simmons, *Reversing the Conquest: History and Myth in Nineteenth Century British Literature*, New Brunswick NJ, Rutgers University Press, 1990, p. 60.

¹¹ Sharon Turner, *The History of the Anglo-Saxons from the Earliest Period to the Norman Conquest*, 6th ed. vol. 1, Paris, Baudry's European Library, 1840, p. 3.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 7-8.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

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So popular was Turner's history that a second edition was published in 1807 and reprinted no less than four times before his death in 1847.¹⁵

Over the next century, a host of historians, philologists, ethnologists, literary scholars, novelists, dramatists, poets, painters and illustrators embellished the Anglo-Saxon foundational myth. Among other things they now emphasised the continuity of English history. Anglo-Saxon Britain had endured Viking and Norman invasions, but these did not mark decisive breaks since the Vikings and Normans were also Germanic people whose common spirit ensured their eventual integration into British society. They elevated King Alfred to iconic status as the greatest of English monarchs. They popularised the study of Nordic mythology, which became a feature of English literature as well as academic study. And during the nineteenth century they increasingly stressed Britain's racial as well as cultural links with Germany. Thus, for example, Baron Henry Bulwer Lytton, the historian, diplomat and Liberal politician, affirmed in a speech in Parliament in 1832, the German source of England's political and religious freedom:

With that land and the people of that land, the people of this country must be forever connected. [For]it was in the free forests of Germany that the infant genius of our liberty was nursed. It was from the free altars of Germany that the light of our purer religion first arose.¹⁶

Ten years later, Thomas Arnold, in his *Introductory Lectures on Modern History* at Oxford, asserted England's racial link:

scarcely one drop of our blood [came] from Roman fathers; we are in our race strangers to Greece, and strangers to Israel. ...Our English race is the German race; for though our Norman fathers had learned to speak a stranger's language, yet in blood, as we know, they were the Saxon's brethren both alike belonging to the Teutonic or German stock.¹⁷

Goldwin Smith, Regius Professor of Modern History at Oxford (1855-1866), wrote of the enduring distinction between the freedom-loving Anglo-Saxons or Teutons of the Germanic world including Britain and the unerringly authoritarian Kelts of France:

The Teuton loves laws and parliaments, the Kelt loves a king. After a moment of constitutional government, [the Kelt] reverts, with a bias which the fatalist might call irresistible, to despotism in some form, whether it be that of a Bonaparte or that of a Robespierre.¹⁸

The same contrasting characterisation had received more popular treatment in 1819 in Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe*, in which, Asa Briggs writes, 'no effort was spared... to press

¹⁵ Julie Ellen Towell, 'The « Rise and Progress » of Anglo-Saxonism and English National Identity: Old English Literature in the Nineteenth Century', doctoral dissertation, Wayne State University, 2003, <http://digitalcommons.wayne.edu/dissertations/AAI3086478/> last accessed 25 April 2011, p. 77.

¹⁶ Hugh A. MacDougall, *Racial Myth in English History: Trojans, Teutons, and Anglo-Saxons*, Montreal, Harvest House, 1982, p. 90-91.

¹⁷ Julie Ellen Towell, 'The « Rise and Progress » of Anglo-Saxonism and English National Identity...', *op. cit.*, p. 523.

¹⁸ Hugh A. MacDougall, *Racial Myth in English History...*, *op. cit.*, p. 97-98.

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the claims of the Saxons and to make fools or rogues of the Normans.¹⁹ Among the almost innumerable popularisers of the myth in the following years was William Wordsworth who composed a tribute to King Alfred, published as one of his *Ecclesiastical Sonnets* in 1822. In 1848 Edward Bulwer-Lytton published a highly popular novel, *Harold: or the Last of the Saxon Kings*. Three years later, Charles Dickens in *A Child's History of England* enthused on King Alfred and affirmed the superiority of the Anglo-Saxon race, which, according to Dickens, entitled it to pursue its civilising mission in the world. In later years other popularisers included Charles Kingsley whose historical novel *Hereward the Wake: Last of the English* was published in 1866; Alfred Lord Tennyson whose *Harold: a Drama* appeared in 1877;²⁰ and William Morris whose *The Tale of Beowulf, sometime king of the folk of the Weder Geats*, composed in the form of an Old Norse saga, appeared in 1895.²¹ In his *History of the Norman Conquest* in 1867, E. A. Freeman (Regius Professor of Modern History at Oxford between 1884 and 1894) was one of the first academic historians to insist that the Saxons and their influence lived on after the Conquest on account of the Normans' Germanic reasonableness. According to Freeman, the Normans had

cast away the laws and the speech of their forefathers, but [they] now came to the Teutonic island to be won back into the Teutonic fold, to be washed clean from the traces of their sojourn in Roman lands, and to win for themselves, among the brethren whom they were to meet as momentary enemies, a right to an equal share in the name, the laws, and the glories of Teutonic England.²²

This was also the claim of Arnold, Kingsley, Thomas Macaulay, Thomas Carlyle and Goldwin Smith. Smith, Regius Professor of Modern History at Oxford from 1858 to 1866, wrote of the Norman Conquest:

The independent self-development of a nation purely Teutonic, not in blood only – (the Normans were that) – but in character and institutions, was lost to humanity. ...Civilization generally was thrown back by the havoc. ...although so completely did the Norman element at last blend with the English, that to doubt the beneficence of the Norman Conquest seems like a disparagement of ourselves.²³

¹⁹ Asa Briggs, 'Saxons, Normans and Victorians', in *The Collected Essays of Asa Briggs*, Vol. II: *Images, Problems, Standpoints, Forecasts*, Brighton, Harvester Press, 1985, p. 222. On British representations of the French in Victorian times, see Jean-François Moisan, 'De l'Angleterre victorienne, de la France et des Français, peut-on parler de Francophobie?', in Pascale Avenel and Pierre Vaydat (eds.), *La France fascinante et détestée*, Arras, Artois Presses Université, 2000, p. 57-74; Sylvaine Marandon, *L'Image de la France dans l'Angleterre victorienne*, Paris, Armand Colin, 1967; Myriam Boussahba-Bravard, 'Ici Londres, des Européens parlent de l'Europe, 1904-1914: Emil Reich, J. Ellis Barker et les "races" européennes dans les grandes revues édouardiennes', unpublished (2006).

²⁰ Julie Ellen Towell, 'The « Rise and Progress » of Anglo-Saxonism and English National Identity', *op. cit.*, p. 493, 497, 505, 532.

²¹ *The Tale of Beowulf, sometime king of the folk of the Weder Geats*, translated by William Morris and A. J. Wyatt, New York, Longmans Green & Co, 1904.

²² Asa Briggs, 'Saxons, Normans and Victorians', *op. cit.*, p. 216; Julie Ellen Towell, 'The « Rise and Progress » of Anglo-Saxonism and English National Identity', *op. cit.*, p. 512-13.

²³ Asa Briggs, 'Saxons, Normans and Victorians', *op. cit.*, p. 217.

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Rudyard Kipling, perhaps the most influential writer of the late Victorian and Edwardian eras, addressed the issue of the Norman Conquest several times in his fictional writing. As an Anglo-Saxon people who had succumbed to the Normans, he regarded the English as both a colonised and colonising nation. This informed his ambivalent view of the British empire, but also his conviction that the English were uniquely suited to govern other peoples on account of their capacity to see both sides of the imperial project.²⁴

Kingsley, Regius Professor of Modern History at Cambridge from 1860 to 1869, wrote of the English as Teutons who had settled in Britain 'to till the ground in comparative peace, keeping unbroken the old Teutonic laws, unstained the old Teutonic faith and virtue...' He stressed the ennobling legacy of England's German link:

if our English law, our English ideas of justice and mercy, have retained, more than most European codes, the freedom, the truthfulness, the kindliness, of the old Teutonic laws, we owe it to the fact, that England escaped, more than any other land, the taint of effete Roman civilization; that she therefore first of the lands, in the 12th century, rebelled against, and first of them, in the 16th century, threw off, the Ultramontane yoke.

Kingsley, however, was not only a devoted Christian but also an unself-conscious imperialist and racist who had corresponded with Darwin and seems to have been captured by the idea of natural selection among human races. Accordingly, for him the mission of the Teuton – including the modern Englishman – was universal, for 'the welfare of the Teutonic race is the welfare of the world.'²⁵ And as he wrote on another occasion,

The truest benevolence is occasional severity. It *is* expedient that one man die for the people. One tribe exterminated, if need be, to save a whole continent, "sacrifice of human life?" Prove that it is *human* life.'²⁶

Sir Charles Dilke, a Liberal radical and also a fervent imperialist and racist, published a widely popular account of his travels through the English-speaking world, *Greater Britain*, in 1868, which went through four editions. Reflecting Darwin's influence, Dilke anticipated a racial struggle that ended with the triumph of the Anglo-Saxons and 'the gradual extinction of the inferior races [which] is not only a law of nature, but a blessing to mankind.'²⁷

John Stubbs, Regius Professor of Modern History at Oxford from 1866 to 1884, similarly emphasised England's Germanic racial and cultural origins. In his words,

²⁴ Deanne Williams, 'Rudyard Kipling and the Norman Conquest', *Ariel*, vol. 39, no. 3, July 2008, p. 108, 113.

²⁵ Charles Kingsley, *The Roman and the Teuton: A Series of Lectures Delivered before the University of Cambridge*, London, Macmillan, 1889, lecture 1, p. 10, 12.

²⁶ Reginald Horsman, 'Origins of Racial Anglo-Saxonism in Great Britain before 1850', *op. cit.*, p. 410 (Italics in the original).

²⁷ Charles Wentworth Dilke, *Greater Britain: A Record of Travel in English-Speaking Countries during 1866 and 1867*, vol. 1, London, Macmillan and Co, 1868, p. 130.

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[The English] are a people of German descent in the main constituents of blood character and language, but most especially ... in the possession of the elements of primitive German civilisation and the common germs of German institutions. ... It is to ancient Germany that we must look for the earliest traces of our forefathers, for the best part of almost all of us is originally German: though we call ourselves Britons, the name has only a geographical significance. The blood that is in our veins comes from German ancestors.²⁸

Stubbs was a high Tory. Edward Freeman, his successor as Regius Professor of Modern History at Oxford, was a Gladstonian Liberal. But he, even more than Stubbs, presented history in racial terms. Three successive Aryan nations, the Greek, the Roman and the Teuton, he wrote, were destined 'to be the rulers and teachers of the world.' By Teuton, he evidently meant mainly the English or British.²⁹

As Christians, Stubbs, Freeman and the other historians were constrained to accept the principle of monogenesis. Some such as Dilke and Stubbs, however, evidently excluded non-whites from humankind. And with the rapid expansion of the Empire in Asia and Africa in the latter part of the nineteenth century the racial character of Britain's origins became steadily more accepted among the Britain's – or at least England's – educated classes. This created a potentially disorienting situation when in March 1898 the German Reichstag adopted the first Navy expansion bill. In the following fifteen years Germany's challenge to Britain's naval supremacy aroused increasing suspicion among diplomats and senior officials at the Foreign Office, while fears of a German surprise attack, the subject of several best-selling novels, provoked outbursts of public anger.³⁰ Yet the English middle classes found it difficult to believe they could actually find themselves fighting their Teutonic cousins – a sentiment, in fact, widely shared by their counterparts in Germany.³¹ When, therefore, war suddenly became imminent in the summer of 1914, they betrayed dismay at the disorienting spectre of Britain aligning itself with France and Russia, the leading Latin and Slav powers, against Germany.

Anglo-Saxonism and the Two-Germany Thesis in the First World War

On 1 August, Norman Angell, the popular liberal journalist warned against Britain contributing to 'the victory of Russia and the "defeat" of that Teutonic civilisation with which we have such close and ancient racial and moral affinity'.³² That same day the principals of two Oxford colleges, the Cavendish professor of experimental physics at Cambridge and six other leading academics issued a public 'Appeal to Scholars', which was printed in several national newspapers. 'War upon [Germany] in the interest of Servia [sic] and Russia', they wrote, 'will be a sin against civilisation',

²⁸ Hugh A. MacDougall, *Racial Myth in English History...*, *op. cit.*, p. 102.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 100.

³⁰ Hew Strachan, *The First World War*, vol. I, *op. cit.*, p. 106, 145.

³¹ The evidence is summarised in Robert Boyce, *The Great Interwar Crisis and the Collapse of Globalization*, Basingstoke, Palgrave, 2009, p. 456, f. 15.

³² 'Norman Angellism and the War', *Daily Mail*, 1 August 1914, p. 4.

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and they protested against 'being drawn into the struggle with a nation so near akin to our own, and with whom we have so much in common.'³³ On 3 August sixty Cambridge academics signed another widely publicised open letter urging neutrality.³⁴ Simultaneously the lord mayors of Manchester and Glasgow, the bishops of Lincoln and Hereford and other leading liberals warned that Britain must not side with 'only partly civilised' Russia against Germany, which they described as

highly civilised... with a culture that has contributed enormously in the past to Western civilisation, racially allied to ourselves] and with moral ideals largely resembling our own.³⁵

Liberal Radicals including the journalist J. A. Hobson, the historians J. L. Hammond and G. M. Trevelyan, the sociologist Graham Wallas and the classicist Gilbert Murray, along with the Labour politician Ramsay MacDonald and others issued a similar appeal.³⁶ Hobson was clear that Britain must not go to war against its 'racial allies' in Germany.³⁷ John Maynard Keynes, the Cambridge economist, declared himself a conscientious objector to avoid fighting Germans.³⁸ William Beveridge, the future administrator and social reformer, was satisfied that the German invasion of Belgium left Britain, which had guaranteed Belgium's neutrality, with no alternative but to enter the war. Yet he admitted,

The whole thing is an incredible nightmare come true. ... [I]t's all against the grain with me to go in against the Germans with the French and Russians.³⁹

In September, at the start of the university term, T. B. Strong, vice-chancellor of Oxford University, expressed regret that Britain should find itself at war against Germany, 'the one power in Europe with which we have the closest affinity.'⁴⁰ The historian Jay Winter, an authority on the social history of the First World War, writes that from August 1914 "Englishness" was everything "Germanness" was not',

³³ 'An Appeal to Scholars', *Manchester Guardian*, 1 Aug. 1914, p. 9; *ibid.*, 3 Aug. 1914, p. 9.

³⁴ Including the historians J. H. Clapham, J. Holland Rose and C. K. Webster, the mathematician E. W. Hobson, the scientists J. E. McTaggart, G. H. F. Nuttall and G. Sims Woodhead, and the philosophers Bertrand Russell and James Ward.

³⁵ 'Cambridge University' and 'The Movement for British Neutrality', *Daily Chronicle*, 3 Aug. 1914, p. 4; 'Cambridge Support' and Balance of Power', *Daily News and Leader*, 3 Aug. 1914, p. 7; 'The Text of the Manifesto' and 'Cambridge Scholars' Manifesto', *Manchester Guardian*, 3 Aug. 1914, p. 10; 'England Should not go to War', *Daily Herald*, 3 Aug. 1914, p. 2.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Stuart Wallace, *War and the Image of Germany: British Academics, 1914-1918*, Edinburgh, John Donald, 1988, p. 25.

³⁸ Robert Skidelsky, *John Maynard Keynes*, vol. 1: *Hopes Betrayed, 1883-1920*, London, Macmillan, 1983, p. 317-321. As a student at Eton at the turn of the century, Keynes had written that Jews 'can no more be assimilated to European civilisation than cats can be made to love dogs; and he concluded that racial characteristics 'are unchanged by lapse of time and by revolution.' But by 1918 his judgment was affected not by the place of Jews but of Germans with whom he sympathised and French and Russians whom he despised: *ibid.*, p. 92 93, 296, 367.

³⁹ Lord Beveridge, *Power and Influence*, London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1953, p. 133.

⁴⁰ Samuel L. Hynes, *A War Imagined: The First World War and English Culture*, New York, Collier Books, 1990, p. 68.

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and '[a]nti-German sentiment played a crucial role in the redefinition of British national identity during and after the ... war.'⁴¹ It is true that most Britons accepted that Germany's aggression had brought on the war, and reacted angrily to reports of German air raids, the sinking of passenger ships and alleged war crimes in Belgium. The same anger, aroused by the tabloid press, led to the victimisation of individuals with German names or connections, and prompted the Royal family to change its name from Saxe-Cobourg-Gotha to Windsor.

But this is only a part, and not the central part, of the story. For the evidence of anti-German feeling is episodic and limited by and large to the actions of the working classes. Ambivalence among the middle classes about entering the war was such that the government hastily commissioned a group of Oxford historians to write *Why We Are At War*, which was rushed out a few weeks after the outbreak of war.⁴² In 1915 pressure was put on the London orchestras to cease playing German compositions, and briefly the Royal Philharmonic succumbed. But the idea was ridiculed by music-lovers, attendance fell away, and the ban was soon lifted.⁴³ As for the German Rhodes scholarships, trustees hoped to postpone a decision until after the war and agreed to suppress them only in 1916, two years after the war began.⁴⁴ Throughout the war Radical members of the liberal movement expressed deep unease at the impact of the war upon Britain's liberal principles. In February 1916 the Radicals' weekly journal *The Nation* complained, 'Free Speech, Free Press, Habeas Corpus, Voluntary Service, Free Trade – [all abandoned] in this war for liberty!'⁴⁵ In August that year it accused the government of betraying liberalism over 'Ireland, Free Trade, Free Service and the Right of Asylum.'⁴⁶ Repeatedly the complaint went up that Britain, in order to defeat Prussianism, had adopted Prussian methods.⁴⁷

The Army meanwhile sought to maintain the fighting spirit of soldiers by depicting the enemy as an Asiatic 'Hun', and in the heat of battle some soldiers behaved with extreme brutality. Yet perhaps two-thirds of front-line soldiers participated in an unofficial truce in the first Christmas of the war and many of them joined in singing carols and playing football with their German opponents.⁴⁸ The British High Command saw to it that this did not happen again. Yet officers, drawn largely from the middle classes, seldom displayed anything but regret at the need to fight the

⁴¹ J. M. Winter, 'British Identity and the First World War', *op. cit.*, p. 266, 268.

⁴² Ernest Barker, H. W. C. Davis, C. R. L. Fletcher, Arthur Hassall, L. G. Wickham Legg and F. Morgan, *Why We Are At War by Members of the Oxford Faculty of Modern History*, 3rd ed. rev., Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1914.

⁴³ 'Dr Somervell on German Music', *Times*, 5 January 1916, p. 5; 'A "Parsifall" Concert', *Times*, 22 April 1916, p. 7; Samuel L. Hynes, *A War Imagined, op. cit.*, p. 74-78.

⁴⁴ Niall Ferguson, *The Pity of War* (London: Penguin Books, 1999), p. 183. In July 1929 Stanley Baldwin, enthusiastically supported by the Prince of Wales, announced the creation of new German Rhodes scholarships. 'Rhodes Scholarships for Germans', *Economist*, 13 July. 1929, p. 63

⁴⁵ Peter Clarke, *Liberals and Social Democrats*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978, p. 181.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 182.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 174, 181.

⁴⁸ Jay Winter and Blaine Baggett, *1914-18: The Great War and the Shaping of the 20th Century*, London, BBC Books, 1996, p. 96-99.

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Germans.⁴⁹ Indeed, in many cases the carnage had the effect of increasing their hostility towards the French rather than the Germans. This displacement was also evident among upper-class officers, including Field-Marshal Haig, commander of the British forces, whose diary is replete with hostile references to the French. Historians usually put this down to frustration at co-ordinating operations with his French allies and competition for scarce resources.⁵⁰ Yet British officers who had scarcely any dealings with French forces often displayed the same attitude. Many, it seems, suspected that the clever, self-interested, 'materialistic' French had drawn phlegmatic and trusting Britain into a war of their own making and were now leaving the British to do the fighting. Britons of all classes had no quarrel with ordinary Germans. They reserved their criticism for the Kaiser and the German High Command, whom they defined as Prussian rather than German and held chiefly responsible for the war. Vivid evidence of this outlook was offered in 1916, during the Battle of the Somme, when the Prime Minister requested the advice of the British High Command on suitable peace aims. The High Command replied that, so long as the Prussians were removed from power, Germany would not be a problem but, on the contrary, an essential force for stability between the leading Slav and Latin powers.⁵¹

Germany's decision to invade Belgium had been one reason why most liberals acquiesced in the government's decision for war. However, a second and probably more important reason was the belief shared by liberals inside as well as outside government that the war was necessary to eradicate Prussian militarism. For instance, when the Prime Minister, Herbert Henry Asquith, announced to Parliament on 4 August 1914 that Britain was at war, he declared that they must fight on 'until the military domination of Prussia is wholly and finally destroyed.'⁵² The Oxford historians who argued the case for war later that month presented it as a struggle between Prussianism and Anglo-Saxonism. In their words, 'the principle of raison d'état', which had led Germany into war 'is not really the doctrine of Germany, but rather the doctrine of Prussia'; and they added, 'England has drawn her sword. How could she have done otherwise, with those traditions of law so deep in all Anglo-Saxon blood'.⁵³ Edward Grey, the Foreign Secretary, speaking to his Berwick constituents in September that year affirmed: 'It is against German militarism we must fight....for it is not the German people, but Prussian militarism that had driven

⁴⁹ Attitudes of enlisted men were not greatly different. The men cited in Malcolm Brown, *The Imperial War Museum Book of the Somme* (London, Sidgwick and Jackson, 1996), almost invariably refer to the Hun, but not one speaks ill of the Germans and several acknowledge sympathy and respect. Similarly, British troops entering Germany after the Armistice did so in a mood of 'curiosity and compassion.' David G. Williamson, *The British in Germany, 1918-1930: The Reluctant Occupiers*, New York and Oxford, Berg, 1991, p. 17. See also Richard Holmes, *Tommy: The British Soldier on the Western Front, 1914-1918*, London, Harper Collins, 2004, p. 535-536, 541.

⁵⁰ William Philpott, 'Haig and Britain's European Allies', in Brian Bond and Nigel Cave (eds.), *Haig: A Reappraisal 70 Years On*, Barnsley, Leo Cooper, 1999, p. 130.

⁵¹ Harold I. Nelson, *Land and Power: British and Allied Power on Germany's Frontiers, 1916-1919*, Newton Abbot, David & Charles, 1971, p. 9; Field-Marshal Sir William Robertson, *Soldiers and Statesmen, 1914-1918*, vol. 1, London, Cassell and Company, 1926, p. 281.

⁵² Herbert Henry Asquith, *Speeches by the Earl of Oxford and Asquith, K.G.*, London, Hutchinson & Co., 1927, p. 224.

⁵³ Ernest Barker, H. W. C. Davis *et al.*, *Why We Are At War...*, *op. cit.*, p. 114, 116.

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Germany and Europe into this war.⁵⁴ In October, he repeated this claim in a private letter to a friend. The problem, he affirmed, was the Prussians who were brutes and aggressors and racially different from ordinary Germans. '[I]t is the Prussian Junkers alone who have created all this [conflict], and the rest of the Germans are people more akin to ourselves than any other race.'⁵⁵ H. G. Wells, the popular novelist, similarly distinguished between the German people – 'the greatest people in Europe' – and the Prussians who had led them into war.⁵⁶ So, too, did David Lloyd George, who succeeded Asquith as Prime Minister in 1916,⁵⁷ Lord Haldane, the minister chiefly responsible for preparing the British Expeditionary Force before the war,⁵⁸ and Winston Churchill, first Lord of the Admiralty. In Churchill's words, Britain was fighting 'Prussian militarism', which bore no relation to 'the quiet, sober, commercial elements in Germany, nor of the common people of Germany, with all their virtues'.⁵⁹

Britain's diplomats also subscribed to the 'two-Germany' thesis. Sir Cecil Spring Rice, the ambassador in Washington, distinguished between the 'gentle, kind, sympathetic' Germans and the Prussian brutes who had 'put the soul of the German people in chains.'⁶⁰ Sir Nevile Henderson, claiming to speak for the British diplomatic service as a whole, echoed this view. '[I]t was the Prussians rather than the Germans whom we regarded as our real enemies and ...not the Germans as a race.' He and his colleagues had nothing but respect for

the great qualities of order and efficiency, probity and kindness of the purer German of Northwest, West, and South Germany, with whom an Englishman on his travels abroad finds himself in such natural sympathy.

The trouble arose from the Prussians, whose character was corrupted by a 'considerable admixture of Slav blood', and who dominated the country through the Kaiser and military High Command. '[T]he Prussians, of whom even Goethe spoke as barbarians, are a distinctive European type, which has imposed itself and its characteristics upon the rest of Germany.'⁶¹

⁵⁴ 'Sir E. Grey on German Militarism', *Times*, 5 Sept. 1914, p. 9. Confusingly, Grey claimed in his memoirs written ten years later that this had not been his view in 1914: 'A section [in Parliament and in the country] identified Germany with Prussian militarism, and identified Prussian militarism with all that was evil and hostile to Britain. It was a concentrated and active section, but it did not express the prevailing feeling in the country.' Viscount Grey of Fallodon, *Twenty-five Years, 1892-1916*, London, Hodder & Stoughton, 1928, p. 324-325.

⁵⁵ George M. Trevelyan, *Grey of Fallodon*, London, Longmans, Green & Co, 1940, p. 271, also p. 314, 333, 334.

⁵⁶ H. G. Wells, 'The Sword of Peace', *Daily Chronicle*, 7 Aug. 1914, p. 4.

⁵⁷ Peter Rowland, *Lloyd George*, London, Barrie & Jenkins, 1975, p. 251, 287-8, 384, 428; Norman Davies, *Europe, a History*, London, Pimlico, 1997, p. 892.

⁵⁸ Viscount Haldane, *Before the War*, London, Cassel and Company, 1920, p. 83-84, 184-185.

⁵⁹ 'Mr. Churchill on the British Case', *Times*, 31 Aug. 1914, p. 5. See also 'Why England is Fighting', *Observer*, 16 Aug. 1914, p. 7, Sir Frederick Pollock's statement for the Council of the Atlantic Union, explaining Britain's decision for war.

⁶⁰ Stephen Gwynn (ed.), *The Letters and Friendships of Sir Cecil Spring Rice, a Record*, Vol. II, London, Constable and Co., 1929, p. 434.

⁶¹ Nevile Henderson, *Failure of a Mission: Berlin, 1937-1939*, 2nd ed., Toronto, Mussen Book Company, 1940, p. 4-5, 23.

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Accordingly, for most educated Britons 9 November 1918 – 9/11 – the day Berlin announced the Kaiser's abdication and the German High Command disintegrated, was if anything more important than 11 November, the day of the Armistice. In the words of Evelyn Wrench, founder of the English-Speaking Union:

The great event we had been living for had come at last, for to us the Kaiser was the symbol of Prussian might, Prussian efficiency and Prussian war-spirit. Once the influence of the Kaiser and of the military clique was eradicated, we believed that...Germany would adopt a democratic form of Government and settle down as a happy member of the European family.⁶²

Arthur Balfour, the Foreign Secretary, echoed this view at the Lord Mayor's Banquet at the Guildhall two days later.⁶³ So too did the Conservative *Daily Telegraph*⁶⁴, the Liberal *Daily News* and the government itself. In the words of Lord Riddell, Lloyd George's closest companion:

The official point of view is that the German nation were not responsible for the war, that the Junkers have been ejected, that the German Government should be supported, that German industries should be revived and that, generally, the Germans should not be regarded with suspicion.⁶⁵

Britain's Role in the Peace Settlement of 1919

Contemporary French observers remained aware that Germany, despite its eleventh-hour conversion to a republic, was governed by men who had doggedly supported the war; its civil administration, law courts and universities were similarly unreconstructed; and its defeated military leaders continued to enjoy great prestige.⁶⁶ But British statesmen were convinced that with the Prussian element vanquished they could draw a line under recent history and assume that another war with Germany was out of the question. As a result, even before the Peace Conference began they brushed aside Marshal Foch's appeals to bear in mind the potential threat that Germany posed to the European balance of power and the crucially important role of Eastern Europe within the overall balance. Instead, they took out their frustration on France for constantly raising these awkward questions.

Thereafter Franco-British relations went from bad to worse. At the Peace Conference Clemenceau sought practical guarantees against a renewal of German aggression. Lloyd George resisted him at every turn. Clemenceau, a liberal Anglophone who as a young man had translated J. S. Mill's *Life of Auguste Comte* and the first volume of

⁶² John Evelyn Wrench, *Struggle, 1914-1920*, London, Ivor Nicholson & Watson, 1935, p. 346.

⁶³ 'Banquet Speeches at Guildhall', *Times*, 11 Nov. 1918, p. 4. Lloyd George's speech is reported in full in 'Premier's Great Speech', *Daily Chronicle*, 11 Nov. 1918, p. 2. See also 'Mr. Asquith & the War', *Manchester Guardian*, 2 Nov. 1918, p. 8.

⁶⁴ 'End of the Hohenzollerns', *Daily Telegraph*, 11 Nov. 1918, p. 6.

⁶⁵ Lord Riddell, *Intimate Diary of the Peace Conference and After, 1918-1923*, London, Victor Gollancz, 1933, p. 188. Though Riddell wrote this in 1920, it evidently applied to the whole post-Armistice period.

⁶⁶ 'France on Her Guard. Watching the Hun "Democrats"', *Daily Mail*, 12 Nov. 1918, p. 5; 'Sceptical Paris: No Belief in German Repentance', *Morning Post*, 14 Nov. 1918, p. 5.

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Logic, was dismayed, but sought to reason with the British. To no avail. The British delegation flatly rejected all warnings about Germany from either him or Foch.⁶⁷ On the weekend of 21-23 March, Lloyd George, frustrated by French policy, gathered his advisers for two days of reflection at Fontainebleau. The resulting memorandum, circulated in Lloyd George's name to the French and Americans, has won praise from generations of historians as an exemplary statement of enlightened internationalism.⁶⁸ No doubt this was just how Lloyd George and his colleagues regarded it. Yet his reference to Alsace-Lorraine, used to illustrate the consequences of an oppressive peace settlement, reveals a different feature of British attitudes. According to the memorandum, Prussia-Germany's seizure of these French provinces in 1870 should have made Germany stronger and France weaker, but in fact it had done just the opposite because it led France to create alliances and eventually force the return of the lost provinces.

France itself has demonstrated that those who say you can make Germany so feeble that she will never be able to hit back are utterly wrong. Year by year France became numerically weaker in comparison with her victorious neighbour, but in reality she became ever more powerful. She kept watch on Europe; she made alliance with those whom Germany had wronged or menaced; she never ceased to warn the world of its danger and ultimately she was able to secure the overthrow of the far mightier power which had trampled so brutally upon her. You may strip Germany of her colonies, reduce her armaments [armies] to a mere police force and her navy to that of a fifth rate power; all the same in the end if she feels that she has been unjustly treated in the peace of 1919 she will find means of exacting retribution from her conquerors.⁶⁹

The last sentence was perhaps fair comment, but the history itself was remarkably self-serving. The assertion that France had grown stronger after 1870 and eventually prevailed over Germany ignored the fact that France had made no effort to regain Alsace-Lorraine for forty years, and had only done so in a war brought on largely by Germany itself. In fact, Lloyd George was baldly suggesting that the Great War had been a war of revenge instigated by France. It is tempting to treat this as merely an unfortunate use of language, and to assume he meant simply that ill-feeling over the seizure of territories in 1870-1871 contributed to the tense atmosphere of the pre-war period. But Lloyd George was to repeat the claim many times in the next few years (without correction from colleagues) that French *revanchisme* over Alsace-Lorraine – not German aggression – caused the war.⁷⁰ Placed in context, there are compelling grounds for thinking he believed it.

⁶⁷ Robert Boyce, *The Great Interwar Crisis...*, *op. cit.*, p. 39-62.

⁶⁸ Antony Lentin, an authority on the peace settlement, describes the memorandum as 'wise and far-sighted', although he accepts that it was also 'a deliberate attack on French policy': *Lloyd George and the Lost Peace: From Versailles to Hitler, 1919-1940*, London, Palgrave, 2001, p. 5, 18. Harold I. Nelson, *Land and Power...*, *op. cit.*, p. 224-225, describes it as 'a mixture of common sense and impractical idealism'. Kenneth O. Morgan, *Lloyd George*, London, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1974, p. 133-134.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 462.

⁷⁰ See, for instance, House of Lords Record Office, Lloyd George papers, LG/F/89/2/23, Lloyd George to Kerr, 18 Feb. 1919; *ibid.*, LG/F/30/3/40, Lloyd George to Bonar Law, 30 Mar. 1919; A. J. P. Taylor (ed.), *Lloyd George: 12 Essays*, New York, Atheneum, 1971, p. 176; Lord Riddell, *Intimate Diary of the Peace Conference*, *op. cit.*, p. 40, 61, 247; CAB 29/92, I.C.P.182, Notes of an Allied Conference at 10 Downing

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As we have seen, Lloyd George and most of Britain's educated classes had entered the war with great reluctance. The French were their *Entente* partners and allies against Prussian aggression, but they remained French, Britain's 'hereditary enemy', a race apart, whereas the Germans, notwithstanding the recklessness of the Kaiser and his Prussian High Command, were Britain's cousins. At the end of a war which had cost a million casualties, therefore, Britain's educated classes betrayed a scarcely veiled loathing of the French. Being Latins, they were clever, witty, sophisticated, but also self-regarding, mercurial, 'materialistic' and amoral. Had they not employed these qualities to draw Britain into the war in furtherance of their own national interests? In short, had it not been a French war, in which the British, trusting and phlegmatic, had been deceived into fighting their own cousins, in order to serve French imperialism? In the words of one contemporary, it was a case of 'the more nimble quicker-witted French, as against the stolid [English] Teuton'.⁷¹

Viewed in this light, Lloyd George's statement was fully consistent with much that followed. Among other things, it helps explain the bitterness with which most British statesmen regarded France. It also explains their opposition to severe sanctions against Germany, their reluctance to believe that Britain and Germany could ever again fight one another, and their determination to discourage France from repeating its allegedly aggressive behaviour in Europe. In the words of the Fontainebleau memorandum, the Germans were 'one of the most vigorous and powerful races of the world'. The Latins and Slavs in contrast were represented as essentially trouble-makers who could hope for security only once German 'rights' were conceded.

The Legacy Of Anglo-Saxonism In The Inter-War Period

In late 1919 the Coalition government formed a committee to consider the construction of a Channel tunnel, which Lloyd George had promised as a concession to Clemenceau at the Paris Peace Conference. In light of the acute wartime congestion in the Channel ports which had hindered the prosecution of the war and delayed soldiers from returning on leave, the tunnel proposal was briefly popular in British business circles and acceptable to the Navy. But as soon as senior officials warned of the threat of a French invasion through the tunnel, ministerial support dwindled.⁷²

In August 1919 the peace treaty with Germany had still not been ratified, but with the Prussians – the Kaiser and the German High Command – gone from the scene, British ministers adopted the 'ten-year rule', whereby the prospects of another major

Street, 9 Mar. 1921 at 6 p.m.: 'There was a real horror in this country of creating another Alsace-Lorraine. Alsace-Lorraine had cost Europe so much; we had had to pay for it.'

⁷¹ 'The Marching Capacity of Germans', *Observer*, 16 Aug. 1914, p. 6. This version of history has not completely died. According to one very popular English historian, 'The English [sic] entered the great Continental war as a French puppet; worse, from the outset, they became a French military puppet: Paul Johnson, *The Offshore Islanders. England's People from Roman Occupation to the Present*, Harmondsworth Middlesex, Penguin, 1972, p. 514.

⁷² Robert Boyce, *The Great Interwar Crisis...*, *op. cit.*, p. 73-75.

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conflict were regarded as sufficiently remote as to be ruled out for at least ten years.⁷³ Two years later the same ministers supported the establishment of a separate Royal Air Force in order to counter a possible French aerial attack.⁷⁴

Within governing circles and the educated middle classes it is possible to identify some individuals who dissented from this view. Among the former were Viscount Esher, Alfred Lord Milner, Lord Rothermere and probably Andrew Bonar Law and Austen Chamberlain; among the latter, the journalist Leopold Maxse and the author and critic G. K. Chesterton. In 1920 Chesterton lamented the perniciousness of Anglo-Saxonism among the English middle classes, including himself, who had allowed this myth to blind them to the dangers of German imperialism and nearly cost them the war. 'I believed, because all educated England believed, in the Anglo-Saxon, or Teutonic, theory of English history.' Regrettably, by repeating it in his writing, he had made his own small contribution to

the triumphal march of Prussia. For Prussia came so near to triumph because a vague belief in a Teutonic brotherhood led us to regard the defeat of the Poles and the French as the inevitable fall of inferior and decadent races.

As he stressed,

It was solely and entirely an educated error. ...It was rare to meet a coster or a cabman who traced the origin of his family to the Folk-Wanderings of the world-conquering Germanic tribe. A costermonger would laugh at a German as a foreigner, exactly as he would laugh at a Frenchman as a foreigner. And the costermonger would be right.⁷⁵

Chesterton, however, seems to have been practically alone in drawing this lesson. More typical was the situation that Robert Graves described. Graves, the poet and novelist, had put off university in 1914 to enlist in the army and spent much of the war as a junior officer on the Western front. When he finally went up to Oxford in 1919, he found,

"anti-French feeling among most ex-soldiers amounted almost to an obsession. [His contemporary and fellow officer and poet] Edmund [Blunden], shaking with nerves, used to say at this time: "No more wars for me at any price! Except against the French. If there's ever a war with them, I'll go like a shot." Pro-German feeling had been increasing. With the war over and the German armies beaten, we could give the German soldier credit for being the most efficient fighting-man in Europe. ... Some undergraduates even insisted that we had been fighting on the wrong side: our natural enemies were the French".⁷⁶

Graves's account of his war experience may not be accurate in every respect, but there is no reason to doubt his description on post-war Oxford and Blunden's reaction to

⁷³ N. H. Gibbs, *Grand Strategy*, Volume I: *Rearmament Policy*, London, Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1976, p. 3-4.

⁷⁴ Robert Boyce, *The Great Interwar Crisis...*, *op. cit.*, p. 112-113.

⁷⁵ G. K. Chesterton, 'Starting Afresh', in W. L. Courtney (ed.), *Is It a New World?*, London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1920, p. 221. I am grateful to Myriam Boussahba-Bravard for drawing the article to my attention.

⁷⁶ Robert Graves, *Goodbye to All That*, London, Penguin, 2000, p. 240.

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the conflict.⁷⁷ According to one friend, Blunden himself remained strongly in favour of appeasing Germany practically until the Second World War.⁷⁸ G. E. R. Gedye, an officer on the political intelligence staff of the British Army of the Rhine, wrote of the sudden resurgence of 'racial kinship' between Briton and German in the spring of 1919 and a corresponding anger at French mistreatment of their defeated enemy.⁷⁹ Numerous accounts confirm that British ex-servicemen's organisations became very anti-French between the wars.⁸⁰

The same attitude was reflected in February 1920 when the Oxford University Union supported the motion, 'that the Peace Treaty is an economic disaster for Europe', and another motion in May of that year that 'condemns the vacillating policy of this Government towards Germany, and recommends the immediate re-establishment of cordial relations.'⁸¹ In October 1920 a letter signed by 57 eminent Oxford academics expressed regret at the disruption of relations with their German and Austrian counterparts during the war and appealed to them to help restore 'a wider sympathy and better understanding between our kindred nations.'⁸² Despite the controversy stirred up by the letter, students of the Cambridge Union soon adopted the motion 'that this House desires to associate itself with the sentiments expressed in the Oxford letter to the German professors.'⁸³

Early the following year the Cambridge Union defeated a motion favouring a Franco-British alliance, while not to be outdone the Oxford Union defeated a motion endorsing 'the continuance of an Anglo-French Entente as a guiding principle in British foreign policy.'⁸⁴ The pattern continued in March 1923 when the Oxford Union adopted the motion 'that ...the crushing defeat of Germany was a blow both for Europe and for Great Britain'. Several weeks later Union members adopted by 128 to 71 the motion that 'the selfishness of French policy since 1918 has condemned humanity to another World War.' In June, with the Prime Minister speaking in opposition, the Union debated the motion that 'the Treaty of Versailles is devoid of the principles of wisdom and justice'. It was the practice of the Union to avoid embarrassing distinguished visitors by rejecting their position, but on this occasion the motion was only narrowly defeated.⁸⁵

⁷⁷ Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000, p. 204-220.

⁷⁸ John Stuart Roberts, *Siegfried Sassoon, 1886-1967* (London, Richard Cohen, 1999, p. 274.

⁷⁹ G. E. R. Gedye, *The Revolver Republic: France's Bid for the Rhine*, London, Arrowsmith, 1930, p. 32-3, 18-20 and *passim*.

⁸⁰ R. A. C. Parker, *Chamberlain and Appeasement, op. cit.*, p. 64.

⁸¹ 'Oxford Union and the Treaty', *Times*, 27 Feb. 1920, p. 11; 'Oxford Union and Germany', *ibid.*, 28 May 1920, p. 9.

⁸² 'Reconciliation. Oxford Letter to German Intellectuals', *Times*, 18 Oct. 1920, p. 8.

⁸³ 'Cambridge and the German Professors', *Times*, 10 Nov. 1920, p. 9.

⁸⁴ 'Cambridge Union and France', *Times*, 9 Feb. 1921, p. 7; 'Oxford and the Entente', *ibid.*, 6 May 1921, p. 7.

⁸⁵ 'Mr. Lloyd George at Oxford', *Times*, 23 June 1923, p. 14; Hermann Kantorowicz, *The Spirit of British Policy and the Myth of Encirclement of Germany*, trans. By W. H. Johnston (London: Allen & Unwin, 1931), p. 166-167.

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Ten years later the Oxford Union voted 275 to 153 that 'this House will in no circumstances fight for its King and Country.'⁸⁶ Historians, overlooking the earlier motions, commonly treat this one as evidence simply of pacifism, which is probably not a complete explanation of the students' motives.⁸⁷ Suspicion of France and sympathy for Germany remained widespread in British liberal circles, even more than among conservatives, until the very eve of the war. Throughout the inter-war period officials in Britain and Germany commissioned memorials to the fallen in the First World War that drew on their common medieval mythology. For Britain, the decision to associate their heroic dead with medieval knights and in particular with Alfred the Great – an omnipresent figure in the monumental statuary – meant a reaffirmation of Anglo-Saxonism and its intimate link to Germany.⁸⁸

Anglo-Saxonism and Appeasement

In the aftermath of the Second World War and the subsequent collapse of European colonial empires, historians have devoted great attention to racism. Yet paradoxically by focussing upon the specific forms of racism that emerged most prominently at this time, namely anti-Semitism and colour racism, they have obscured the much broader place that racism occupied in Western society of a half-century ago. In the case of Britain, a large fraction of the educated classes appear to have viewed the whole of humankind as composed of racial as well as national, religious and linguistic groups. Looking across the English Channel to Continental Europe, they saw three dominant racial groups, the Latin, the Germanic, Teutonic or Anglo-Saxon, and the Slav, and, as the foregoing account has shown, since the late eighteenth century at least they associated themselves with the Germanic, Teutonic or Anglo-Saxon group. This did not affect Britain's decision for war against Germany in 1914 because the German invasion of Belgium and France posed a direct threat to Britain's security. It did, however, viscerally disturb many educated Britons, who consoled themselves that they were not in fact fighting the Germans but the Prussians, in the person of the

⁸⁶ 'Oxford Union Debate', *Times*, 11 Feb. 1933, p. 8. According to Maurice C. Hollis, *The Oxford Union*, London: Evans, 1965, p. 191, there is no evidence that the debaters had Germany in mind. This is more than a little surprising, given that the debate took place less than a fortnight after Hitler took power, prompting public demonstrations against him in London, New York and elsewhere. A year later the Union voted 125 to 25 for the motion, 'That the acceptance of the German claim to arms equality is essential to the preservation of European peace.' *Ibid.*, p. 194. Martin Ceadel similarly identifies the motives of the supporters as pacifism and fear of 'the cynical exploitation of patriotic idealism at a time of international jitteriness when the British government's half-heartedness over disarmament was causing it to be branded as itself a major threat to peace.': 'The King and Country Debate, 1933: Student Politics, Pacifism and the Dictators', *Historical Journal*, vol. 22, no. 2 (June 1979), p. 418.

⁸⁷ Ferguson, *The Pity of War*, p. 397; Alan Cassels, 'Repairing the Entente Cordiale and the New Diplomacy', *Historical Journal*, vol. 23, no. 1 (March, 1980) p. 137; Charles Loch Mowat, *Britain between the Wars, 1918-1940*, London, Methuen, 1978, p. 422.

⁸⁸ Stefan Goebel, *The Great War and Medieval Memory: War, Remembrance and Medievalism in Britain and Germany, 1914-1940*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007, p. 291 and *passim*. Goebel claims that the British associated German atrocities in the war with the Germans and their 'Germanness', and not just their commanders. But his own evidence suggests that very few did, since practically none of the imagery he examines presents the enemy as evil. p. 213.

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Kaiser and the Army High Command, who controlled Germany. Once the Prussians were gone, they refused to treat Germany any longer as an enemy. Britain's appeasement of Germany thus began even before the Paris Peace Conference got under way in 1919. As other historians frequently point out, Britain faced an acutely difficult situation by the 1930s, when, amidst acute economic difficulties, the threat of Italian and Japanese aggression arose just as Hitler took control of Germany and threatened the European order. This, however, scarcely explains Britain's appeasement policy. As the foregoing evidence suggests, the persistence of Anglo-Saxonism after the First World War biased Britain against France as well as Czechoslovakia, Poland and the Slav lands to the East, and strongly in favour of appeasing Germany, which continued until the Second World War.

L'auteur

Robert Boyce teaches international history at the London School of Economics and Political Science. A revised paperback version of his monograph, *The Great Interwar Crisis and the Collapse of Globalization*, will be published by Palgrave-Macmillan in 2011.

Robert Boyce enseigne l'histoire internationale à la London School of Economics and Political Science. Une version révisée de poche de son ouvrage, *La Grande crise de l'entre-deux-guerres et l'effondrement de la mondialisation*, sera publiée par Palgrave-Macmillan en 2011.

Résumé

Depuis le XIV^e siècle, les Britanniques se considèrent comme des Anglo-Saxons. Les historiens britanniques du le XIX^e siècle ont encouragé ce mythe des origines, qui a été renforcé par l'intérêt scientifique et pseudo-scientifique du racisme. En conséquence, la déclaration de guerre de 1914 contre leurs cousins germaniques et anglo-saxons et l'alliance avec les puissances latines et slaves posa problème. Leur détermination à éviter à nouveau cette situation a conduit à une politique d'apaisement de l'Allemagne, qui s'est poursuivie au moins jusqu'en 1939.

Mots clés : anglo-Saxonisme, politique d'apaisement, Première Guerre mondiale, relations anglo-françaises, relations franco-britanniques et germano-britanniques.

Abstract

Since the fourteenth century Britons regarded themselves as Anglo-Saxon people. British historians consistently encouraged this belief in the nineteenth century, which was reinforced by scientific and pseudo-scientific interest in racism. In consequence, Britons were dismayed to find themselves at war in 1914 with their Anglo-Saxon cousins in Germany and allies with the leading Latin and Slav powers. Their determination to avoid a repetition of this situation led to the appeasement of Germany, which continued until at least 1939.

Key words : Anglo-Saxonism, appeasement, First World War, Anglo-French relations, Anglo-German relations.



Robert Boyce, « The Persistence of Anglo-Saxonism in Britain and the origins of Britain's appeasement policy towards Germany », *Histoire@Politique. Politique, culture, société*, n° 15, septembre-décembre 2011, www.histoire-politique.fr

Pour citer cet article : Robert Boyce, « The Persistence of Anglo-Saxonism in Britain and the origins of Britain's appeasement policy towards Germany », *Histoire@Politique. Politique, culture, société*, n° 15, septembre-décembre 2011, www.histoire-politique.fr