'And those who live, how shall I tell their fame?' Historical pageants, collective remembrance and the First World War, 1919–39*

Angela Bartie
University of Edinburgh

Linda Fleming
University of Glasgow

Mark Freeman
U.C.L. Institute of Education

Tom Hulme
Queen's University Belfast

Paul Readman
King's College London

Charlotte Tupman
University of Exeter

Abstract

This article examines the ways in which the First World War was represented in historical pageants during the interwar period. Pageants in this period are often overlooked as sites of commemoration and dramatic representation. Three types of pageant are identified: those that portrayed the war hyper-realistically, those which relied on symbolism and allegory to convey messages about war and peace, and those which sought to incorporate the war into the longer histories of the communities whose pasts they depicted. The article argues that 'traditional' forms of representation of the past proved to be resilient features of popular commemoration and remembrance.

On 7 July 1919 an outdoor audience in Nottingham witnessed the performance of a scene set in an unknown British port on a bright August afternoon five years earlier. Troops marched into the centre of an arena as two heralds trumpeted nearby. Sweethearts, wives and sisters rushed forward and kissed the men goodbye. The marching soldiers reached their destination: a giant troopship. They passed up the gangway, waving their rifles and caps, before forming lines on the deck. The cheering from the crowd reached fever pitch, before a choir and all those present sang 'Auld Lang Syne', and the curtains at the front of the mobile stage closed. In the next scene, set one month later, the focus was quite different. British soldiers, armed with rifles, frantically ran across a muddy field, their breath visible in the air. Soldiers on horseback followed;

Figure 1. Scene from the St. Dunstan's Pageant of Peace, 1919. By permission of the British Pathé, 'Peace Pageant 1918–19', film ID 2342.26.

Figure 2. Scene from the St. Dunstan's Pageant of Peace, 1919. By permission of the British Pathé, 'Peace Pageant 1918–19', film ID 2342.26.

artillery smoke billowed in the background; objects fell from the sky; confusion reigned. In a later scene, wounded servicemen were taken away on stretchers, as medics attended to others. Valiant soldiers carried their comrades on their backs. In a matter of minutes, the retreat from Mons had been vividly recreated for thousands of watching civilians.[1] Such scenes were repeated in many other British cities in the summer months of 1919, as the St. Dunstan's Pageant of Peace travelled round the country (see Figures 1 and 2).

[1] *Official Souvenir of the Pageant of Peace* (Nottingham, 1919); 'Peace Pageant 1918–19' [newsreel clip, online], *British Pathé*, 1918–19, 5 mins. 2 secs. <http://www.britishpathe.com/video/peace-pageant> [accessed 6 July 2015].

To modern eyes it might seem remarkable that, so soon after the end of the First World War, the horrors of the conflict would be voluntarily re-enacted by casts of thousands, including men who had seen frontline action, to large and enthusiastic audiences. However, in the early post-war years such re-enactments of war – even under the ironic name of 'peace pageant' – were a popular means of collective remembrance, forming part of a more general impulse to commemorate through dramatic performance. In 1918 the League of Arts for National and Civic Ceremonies had been formed, with the primary aim of expressing the 'national joys or aspirations' of Britain 'through the co-operation of all the arts'.[2] One of its first actions was to submit plans to a Cabinet-appointed committee to consider the question of peace celebrations.[3] Theatrical commemoration loomed large in the League's suggestions, which were subsequently taken up by the government – from the performance of open-air Shakespeare plays in all the London boroughs, to the Thames Pageant, at which 500 barges, decorated in honour of the mercantile marine, sailed down the river.[4] Out of this event emerged the book *Rejoice Greatly: How to Organise Public Ceremonies* (1920), published by the League, in conjunction with the British Institute of Industrial Art.[5] One chapter, written by the actor and producer Frank Benson, a prominent figure in the League, outlined the benefits of historical pageantry.[6] In the same volume, the artist and craftsman Henry Wilson described how pageantry – a form of theatre with deep roots – 'marks the tides of National life', and argued that, in a nation suffering from 'the prevailing paralysis of artistic expression', an annual peace pageant would restore pride in the nation's history.[7] Wilson concluded with a bold declaration: 'In a world, war-wounded, Pageantry is the greatest panacea, for it evokes, stimulates, gives a field for the expression of those creative forces by which the world was made, and of which humanity itself is the latest manifestation'.[8]

This article considers the ways in which men and women in interwar Britain turned to historical pageantry as a means of making sense of, and commemorating, the events of the First World War. We identify and discuss three main modes of portraying the war, thus shedding new light on the ways in which the conflict was understood in its immediate aftermath. We argue that the 'traditional' form of the historical pageant was sufficiently adaptable, in the short run, to be applied in radically new ways to the commemoration of the war, and, in the longer term, that pageants were able to incorporate the war into pre-existing narratives of community progress over the passage of many centuries. Despite the shattering experience of 1914–18, these narratives proved resilient and adaptable: historical pageants offered important redress to a shell-shocked modernity. Indeed, the prominence and popularity of pageantry suggests, we argue, that the First World War had a less disruptive impact than might be thought on public engagement with the past – and by extension with the (historical) community identities that such engagement supported.

There is a large body of scholarship on memory and the First World War. The aftermath of the war has often been seen as a period of collective grief and

---

[2] 'Art and patriotism', *The Times*, 25 March 1919, p. 15.

[3] Founded in 1918, its name was at first the League for National Music and Pageantry (*The Times*, 14 Dec. 1918, p. 5).

[4] 'Peace day in London', *The Times*, 15 Apr. 1919, p. 9; 'Peace celebrations', *Hull Daily Mail*, 12 Apr. 1919, p. 4.

[5] *Rejoice Greatly: How to Organise Public Ceremonies*, ed. T. L. Horabin (1920).

[6] F. R. Benson, 'Pageantry', in Horabin, pp. 17–26.

[7] H. Wilson, 'Pageantry', in Horabin, pp. 27–9, at p. 28.

[8] Wilson, p. 29.

disillusionment, nurtured by the realist poetry of Wilfred Owen, Robert Graves and Siegfried Sassoon.[9] Samuel Hynes argued that many artists who experienced the war rejected the official acts of closure in the form of grand monuments, instead creating anti-monuments in the form of art and literature that commemorated the loss of values, order and belief in the glory of sacrifice.[10] This led, in Mark Connelly's words, to the creation of a powerful cultural image of the interwar period as a time of bitter disillusion in the aftermath of a 'horrific slaughter ... followed by a botched peace in which ex–servicemen were cast aside and left to atrophy on street corners or in the dole queue'.[11] Implicit within this image of the war was its supposed relation to artistic modernism. In his *The Great War and Modern Memory* (1975), Paul Fussell argued that soldier-artists accelerated the creation of a new language that could show the true horrors of war in poetry, prose and visual art.[12] They rejected conventional ideas of patriotism and glory, and brought what one historian has called 'the aesthetics of direct experience' to their portrayal of the war.[13] Fussell's work served, for a long time, in Nicoletta Gullace's words, to 'reinforce the idea that World War I stood as a watershed in contemporary history, starkly dividing the modern era from virtually all that had come before'.[14] More recent scholarship has emphasized the complex sensory aspects of the representation of war in art and literature, among both male and female participants.[15]

However, the dominance of negative portrayals of the war has also been challenged. As Connelly has pointed out, veterans were present in large numbers at the unveiling of memorials, suggesting that 'the concept of soldiering was hardly a distasteful subject ... despite the alleged reaction against all things military'.[16] Even when large parts of the public moved towards pacifism in the late nineteen-twenties, Anthony Fletcher claimed, a stream of popular memoirs of veterans 'looked back on a hard time without hard feeling'.[17] Self-sacrifice was also seen to be accompanied by the collective value of comradeship – solidarity, co-operation and brotherly love, modelled on the Christian ideal.[18] Moreover, the relationship between war and modernity has come under increasing scrutiny, notably in the work of Jay Winter. As he influentially pointed out in 1996, the rupture of the war was by no means complete: there was an overlap of vocabularies and approaches between the old and the new, or the 'traditional' and the 'modern', both during and after the conflict, when both artists and the public more generally self-consciously returned to forms and themes popular in the nineteenth

---

[9] L. Beers and G. Thomas, 'Introduction: nation and "nations" in inter-war Britain', in *Brave New World: Imperial and Democratic Nation-Building in Britain Between the Wars*, ed. L. Beers and G. Thomas (2011), pp. 1–38, at p. 24.

[10] S. Hynes, *A War Imagined: the First World War and English Culture* (1990), esp. pp. 283–310; A. King, *Memorials of the Great War in Britain: the Symbolism and Politics of Remembrance* (Oxford, 1998), p. 7.

[11] M. Connelly, *The Great War, Memory and Ritual: Commemoration in the City and East London, 1916–39* (Woodbridge, 2002), p. 2.

[12] P. Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford, 1975).

[13] J. Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: the Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge, 1996), p. 2.

[14] N. F. Gullace, 'Memory, memorials, and the postwar literary experience: traditional values and the legacy of World War I', *Twentieth Century British History*, x (1999), 235–43, at p. 235.

[15] S. Das, *Touch and Intimacy in First World War Literature* (Cambridge, 2005).

[16] Connelly, p. 66.

[17] A. Fletcher, 'Patriotism, identity and commemoration: new light on the Great War from the papers of Major Reggie Chenevix Trench', *History*, xc (2005), 532–49, at p. 548.

[18] Fletcher, p. 176. See also Das, esp. ch. 3.

century.[19] Thus, as Stefan Goebel has shown, post–First World War communal commemoration turned to classical, medieval and romantic motifs, often remaking them.[20] Connelly emphasized the persistence of older ideals of patriotism and service to the nation in the nineteen-twenties and thirties; commemoration served as a constant reminder of timeless values.[21]

In recent years there has been a tendency to refer to the 'collective memory' of the First World War. However, as Winter and Emmanuel Sivan have recently argued, this term is a catch-all category that fails to capture the complexities of memory in society and does not take account of the differences between the ways in which individuals and groups remember, if indeed groups 'remember' things at all.[22] As an alternative, Winter and Sivan propose the more useful term 'collective remembrance', which focuses specifically on the activities of individuals coming together in public, 'gathering bits and pieces of the past, and joining them together'.[23] Historical pageants were one way in which interwar Britons did just that. This has been overlooked in the literature on commemoration, which has focused mainly on war memorials and Armistice Day,[24] but historical pageants can add a further dimension to our understanding of collective remembrance. In this article we show how the performance of the past – and the war in particular – drew on both the 'truth-telling' of modernism but also on older forms and structures of historical performance. Historical pageants could affirm and propagandize political ideas about wars and the nations that fought them, while also lamenting the horrors of modern warfare.[25] Pageants showcased patriotism and imperialism, but could also convey more subtle understandings of the nature of loss and sacrifice. Participants and spectators could find an outlet for their sense of collective belonging, while also expressing and resolving the emotional traumas of individual loss. Pageants were thus sites of mourning.[26] However, the collective performance of history, both distant and more recent, also held lessons for the future. According to King, commemoration 'played on the pathological aspects of grief, and set out deliberately to prolong them, in order to improve, morally and politically, post-war society'.[27] This aspect of commemoration was found in other countries too: in his study of Weimar Germany, Benjamin Ziemann noted that 'Commemorative practices faced similar challenges in all countries . . . they had to transcend the contingency of violent mass death and endow it with higher meaning, to offer consolation to the grieving and bereaved, and to demonstrate how the loss of the fallen soldiers could be turned into a positive example for the living'.[28] In British historical pageants, as in commemorative

[19] Winter, *Sites of Memory*, pp. 3–4.
[20] S. Goebel, *The Great War and Medieval Memory: War, Remembrance and Medievalism in Britain and Germany, 1914–40* (Cambridge, 2007), esp. pp. 190–2, and S. Goebel, 'Cultural memory and the Great War: medievalism and classicism in British and German war memorials', in *Cultures of Commemoration: War Memorials, Ancient and Modern*, ed. P. Low, G. Oliver and P. J. Rhodes (Oxford, 2012), pp. 135–58.
[21] Connelly, p. 9.
[22] J. Winter and E. Sivan, 'Setting the framework', in *War and Remembrance in the 20th Century*, ed. J. Winter and E. Sivan (Cambridge, 1999), pp. 6–39, at p. 9.
[23] Winter and Sivan, pp. 11, 6.
[24] A. Gregory, *The Silence of Memory: Armistice Day 1919–46* (Oxford, 1994); Goebel, *Great War and Medieval Memory*; Winter, *Sites of Memory*.
[25] Hynes; G. L. Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars* (Oxford, 1990); B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1983), p. 6; King, p. 6.
[26] King, p. 7; Winter, *Sites of Memory*.
[27] King, p. 221.
[28] B. Ziemann, *Contested Commemorations: Republican War Veterans and Weimar Political Culture* (Cambridge, 2013), p. 11.

Figure 3. The death of Ethelbald: scene from the Sherborne pageant of 1905. By permission of Dorset History Centre, D.2259/6.

rituals elsewhere, pre-war values were modified, applied to the horrors of war, and recast in a post-war context.

Historical pageants had emerged as a key element of popular engagement with the past in the Edwardian period.[29] Following the Sherborne pageant of 1905 (see Figure 3), produced by the playwright and theatrical impresario Louis Napoleon Parker, 'pageant fever' spread to communities across Britain. Thousands of local volunteers staged dramatized versions of a series of episodes from their local pasts, watched by many thousands more, usually in outdoor venues. Pageant narratives typically began in ancient or early medieval times, and did not usually depict events later than the seventeenth century. While many Edwardian pageants sought to raise money for charitable purposes, they often did not make a profit; rather, their purpose was to extol the virtues of a sort of imagined 'classless' community. Pageantry spread rapidly across England, and into Scotland and Wales. Individuals such as Parker, Frank Lascelles and Frank Benson himself emerged as an identifiable group of 'pageant-masters'; Benson, for example, was responsible for pageants at Romsey (1907) and Winchester (1908). Pageants were sites of collective activity, requiring the participation of people from all levels of society: mayors and merchants, shop girls and clerks, labourers and children. A pageant had to be written, produced, directed, financed, performed and watched. Proponents such as Parker believed

[29] A. Yoshino, *Pageant Fever: Local History and Consumerism in Edwardian England* (Tokyo, 2011); P. Readman, 'The place of the past in English culture', *Past & Present*, clxxxvi (2005), 147–99; M. Freeman, '"Splendid display; pompous spectacle": historical pageants in 20th-century Britain', *Social History*, xxxviii (2013), 423–55.

that pageants brought communities together in a 'Festival of Brotherhood', although some historians have argued that their primary aim was the maintenance of 'hegemonic power structures'.[30] The survival of the tradition of historical pageantry into the nineteen-twenties and thirties is sometimes overlooked or underestimated by scholars, with one recent judgement being that that the Edwardian 'craze for pageantry . . . largely abated in the post-war years'.[31] Yet such a conclusion seems misplaced. As Mick Wallis and Helen McCarthy have shown, the pageant form was adaptable to political and campaigning purposes in the period, being deployed by organizations such as the League of Nations Union and in support of movements such as the Popular Front.[32] We will argue here that historical pageants were not confined to the sphere of political activism, but remained a central part of mainstream historical culture, and – not least through their handling of the war – played an important role in supporting local community identities in the aftermath of collective trauma.

Here we identify three broad types of historical pageant that depicted the First World War in some way. We begin with the ironically named 'pageants of peace', in which the events of the war were re-enacted hyper-realistically, and the pre-1914 pageant form was radically altered. These pageants were no longer focused on the locality, as had been the case in most Edwardian performances, but rather featured key events from the recent war itself. A second category is what we call 'pageants of victory', which relied more heavily on allegory and symbolism to convey their understanding of the horrors of the war. Unlike 'pageants of peace', these pageants did place the events of the war in a longer historical context, but did not return to the local and community focus of the Edwardian pageant tradition. Finally, we consider pageants that, in some way, incorporated the recent events of 1914–18 into a local story: pageants that would have been familiar to Edwardian observers in most other respects. Our three categories of pageant overlapped chronologically, but they do loosely reflect changes in the wider culture of commemoration, and also the evolution of theatrical responses to the war. As Clive Barker has shown, a short period saw the dominance of realism in stage productions of the First World War, but by the late nineteen-twenties 'ghosts from the Front' were becoming more common, while in the nineteen-thirties the future increasingly came to predominate.[33] The strength and adaptability of the pageant form, together with the robust infrastructure that supported community amateur dramatics in the interwar period,[34] allowed historical pageants to continue to flourish, and in some

---

[30] M. Woods, 'Performing power: local politics and the Taunton pageant of 1928', *Jour. Hist. Geography*, xxv (1999), 57–74.

[31] M. Lau, 'Performing history: the war-time pageants of Louis Napoleon Parker', *Modern Drama*, liii (2011), 265–86, at p. 282.

[32] M. Wallis, 'Pageantry and the popular front: ideological production in the 'thirties', *New Theatre Quarterly*, x (1994), 132–56; M. Wallis, 'The popular front pageant: its emergence and decline', *New Theatre Quarterly*, xi (1995), 17–32; M. Wallis, 'Heirs to the pageant: mass spectacle and the popular front', in *A Weapon in the Struggle: the Cultural History of the Communist Party in Britain*, ed. A. Croft (1998), pp. 48–67; H. McCarthy, 'The League of Nations, public ritual and national identity in Britain c.1919–56', *History Workshop Jour.*, lxx (2010), 108–32.

[33] C. Barker, 'The ghosts of war: stage ghosts and time slips as a response to war', in *British Theatre Between the Wars 1918–39*, ed. C. Barker and M. B. Gale (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 215–43.

[34] The British Drama League was founded in 1919 as an umbrella organization for dramatic associations; its establishment was followed by an efflorescence of other new groupings of various kinds, including the British and International Dramatic Association, the People's Theatre Society, the Repertory Players and the Interlude Theatre Guild. For a discussion of 'this teeming world of clubs, societies and guilds', see A. Nicoll, *English Drama, 1900–30: the Beginnings of the Modern Period, part I* (Cambridge, 1973; repr. 2009), pp. 87–93, quotation at pp. 88–9.

cases to tell the story of the local contribution to the First World War as an element of a longer community history.

In some respects these community pageants were similar to those in America that David Glassberg has examined. He has shown that these pageants, which were heavily influenced by the Parker tradition, usually depicted the events of the war, although invariably focusing on the home front and emphasizing the community's support for the war from a distance.[35] In Britain, although the war was often mentioned and usually alluded to in some way, most pageants did not give it a full episode: some continued the common pre-war practice of ending with the Elizabethan period, while others came more up-to-date but avoided the most recent history.[36] Yet, as the spectacular example of the re-enactments at Nottingham and elsewhere in 1919 shows, some pageants did depict the war directly, and did so in an arresting manner. Our purpose here is to use historical pageants as a lens through which to view the nuanced and varied reactions to war in the nineteen-twenties and thirties, considering themes ranging from sacrifice to duty, to gruesome acknowledgement and cathartic reliving. Following Adrian Gregory, studies of commemoration have increasingly tended to emphasize the plurality and multivocality of post-war commemorative practices, yet the significance of these pageants – as highly visible sites of shared memory – has gone largely unrecognized, not least in the literature on historical pageants themselves.[37] This is surprising, given the great popularity of these events: the St. Dunstan's peace pageants of 1919, for example, were watched by an estimated 1.5 million people, and involved a total of 30,000 performers.[38] Many more saw at least one theatrical re-enactment of the war at some point during the interwar period.

The St. Dunstan's pageants were the most widespread and popular pageants in the immediate aftermath of war. They were performed to raise money for the St. Dunstan's home, an institution for soldiers blinded in the war that had been established in 1915 and aimed to provide them with vocational training.[39] The pageants formed part of a wider spectrum of peace celebrations, most notably Peace Day on 19 July 1919, for which festivities were, in Brad Beavan's words, 'designed to forge social unity and patriotic loyalty at both a local and national level'.[40] They included military and veterans' parades, civic processions, and free meals and musical entertainment for children. Despite the momentous and supposedly 'happy' event that they commemorated, some Peace Day celebrations were not well received by all sections of the population. In Luton, the decision to ban the National Federation of Discharged and Demobilised Sailors and Soldiers' plan to hold a memorial for the dead led to tensions, the mayor being taunted by a hostile crowd as he read the King's Proclamation. In the

---

[35] D. Glassberg, *American Historical Pageantry: the Uses of Tradition in the Early 20th Century* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1990), p. 267.

[36] For a large-scale pageant, produced by Frank Lascelles, see *Handbook of the Harrow Historical Pageant, 7pm, June 28 to July 5, 1923* (Harrow, 1923). This had scenes set in the 17th and 18th centuries, and depicted a number of 19th-century characters.

[37] Gregory, *Silence of Memory*.

[38] *Official Souvenir of the Pageant of Peace*, p. 9.

[39] S. Dark, *The Life of Sir Arthur Pearson* (1922); J. Rose, *Changing Focus: the Development of Blind Welfare in Britain* (1970).

[40] B. Beaven, 'Challenges to civic governance in post-war England: the Peace Day disturbances of 1919', *Urban History*, xxxiii (2006), 369–92, at p. 370.

riot that followed, the town hall was burned to the ground.[41] Coventry saw still worse violence. A hundred people were injured, damage was done to thirty-five premises, widespread looting took place, with up to 7,000 involved, and the police were attacked.[42] Much of the opposition to Peace Day celebrations centred on the idea that promises made to returning soldiers had been broken: in Merthyr Tydfil, 25,000 people boycotted the official celebrations and attended an alternative ceremony offering a thanksgiving for peace that ended with a call for higher pensions for ex-servicemen and their dependants.[43]

Despite this unrest and protest, however, there were many more examples of hugely popular celebrations. The country was 'beflagged from ends to end', averred *The Times*, as 'Peace was celebrated with the greatest enthusiasm in all parts of the British Isles'.[44] The St. Dunstan's Pageant of Peace was one form of collective remembrance that was particularly successful in bringing thousands of people together to participate and spectate, and seemed to engender little or no opposition. It toured the country and was performed in Birmingham, Leeds, Nottingham, Newcastle, Sheffield and Manchester, among other places.[45] The inventor, author and producer of the pageant was Leolyn Hart, best known as a scenic artist for the theatre.[46] The public face of the pageant was the much more renowned Sir Arthur Pearson, the founder of St. Dunstan's, a former newspaper magnate who had lost his sight due to glaucoma.[47] The pageant was an impressive and well-organized spectacle. Hart claimed that it had taken twelve months to prepare, which suggests that it was being planned even before the end of the war.[48] No expense was spared in its production. Around 200 motor lorries were needed to shift the 400 tons of equipment, which included six eighteen-pound field guns which had been used in the retreat from Mons, as well as an anti-aircraft searchlight on a forty-foot tower.[49] At each location the same script, stage and grandstand were used, and the pageant was organized and produced by the same committee. As a travelling pageant, it concentrated wholly on national and imperial stories rather than specifically on the localities in which it was staged. Despite this, the pageant did also have some additional local organizers and civic patrons alongside the main London-based committee, and the performers were still drawn from the various localities – particularly ex-servicemen.[50]

As the press recognized, the St. Dunstan's pageant was different in several respects to the pre-war civic pageant form that had been established by Parker. Rather than using spoken dialogue, it was 'enacted almost entirely in dumb show', and had an innovative stage, divided into several moving parts which enabled the revealing and covering of

---

[41] D. Craddock, *'Where They Burnt the Town Hall Down': Luton, the First World War and the Peace Day Riots of July 1919* (Dunstable, 1999).

[42] Beaven, p. 384.

[43] N. Hanson, *The Unknown Soldier: the Story of the Missing of the Great War* (2005), p. 343; A. Gregory, *A War of Peoples 1914–19* (Oxford, 2014), p. 18.

[44] 'Festivities in the country', *The Times*, 21 July 1919, p. 17.

[45] *Official Souvenir of the Pageant of Peace*, p. 9.

[46] *Who's Who in the Theatre: a Biographical Record of the Contemporary Stage*, ed. J. Parker (1914), advertisement in front matter.

[47] Dark.

[48] 'For blinded soldiers', *Manchester Guardian*, 8 July 1919, p. 14.

[49] 'Amusements in and out of Manchester', *Manchester Guardian*, 8 Sept. 1919, p. 4.

[50] During the Manchester run, there were about 3,000 performers, including three platoons of the Leicester Regiment and many men of the Manchester Regiment ('St. Dunstan's pageant: a great spectacle and a noble cause', *Manchester Guardian*, 9 Sept. 1919, p. 6).

emblematical tableaux and scenic devices as the main scenes unfolded.[51] Most obviously, whereas the Parker pageant tradition emphasized the importance of depicting successive scenes from a community's history over several centuries, the St. Dunstan's pageant showed only scenes from the recent war. Yet it clearly drew heavily on the established format of historical pageantry by being staged in the open air, addressing themes of national identity, drawing performers from the local populace, and presenting the action in several episodes. Issues of authenticity were also foregrounded. Whereas Parker and some other pre-war pageant enthusiasts had emphasized the importance of staging performances close to where the events portrayed had actually happened, and even of using actual descendants of the historical figures that featured in the drama to play their parts where possible,[52] authenticity in the peace pageants was ensured by featuring graphic reconstructions of battles, using real weapons loaned by the military authorities, and involving veterans themselves.[53] Whether the scenes were re-enacted faithfully is less clear, but a sense of realism predominated.

Unsurprisingly perhaps, many of the scenes in the St. Dunstan's pageants emphasized the heroism of the troops. This was particularly evident in Episode III, where soldiers reperformed acts of front-line bravery such as carrying other wounded soldiers or capturing German trenches, and in Episode IV, where naval victories were portrayed. Other scenes, however, offered a graphic demonstration of the horror and chaos of war, such as in the confusion of the retreat from Mons in Episode III, and the bombed-out and burning Belgian town in Episode V, as women, children and injured soldiers fled the incoming artillery bombardment. The final scene returned to triumphant victory, with a procession 'blazing with colour, the flags of the victorious Allies and the multi-hued uniforms of artillery, cavalry and infantry', a troop of trained children (500 at Nottingham) 'forming a living Union Jack', and a final blast of the national anthem – all this creating an 'imposing spectacle' to end the pageant.[54] The Spirit of Peace stood at the centre of the final procession, with the crushed Spirit of War lying at her feet. Here, the pageant struck an allegorical and symbolic note in stark contrast to the hyper-realism of the previous five scenes.

It was the latter aspect of the St. Dunstan's pageants on which most accounts focused. What the *Nottingham Evening Post* praised as the 'astonishing realism' of the pageant's representation of the war was considered a suitable way in which to pay one's respects to disabled soldiers and to raise money for their care. In his generic 'message' in the souvenir programme, Pearson described the 'gallantry of these men at the Front' and the necessity of making sure that, upon their return, they could be reintegrated into British society.[55] Hart further highlighted the cause in his own foreword, declaring the pageant an opportunity for 'everyone to answer the call' and show that 'the people of this country are willing and anxious to respond to' the plight of those suddenly 'plunged into life-long darkness'.[56] Attending the pageant was thus intended to serve as a visible

---

[51] 'The pageant of peace', *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, 24 June 1919, p. 11. The *Manchester Guardian* made similar comparisons ('St. Dunstan's pageant', *Manchester Guardian*, 4 Sept. 1919, p. 12).

[52] L. N. Parker, *Several of My Lives* (1928), pp. 279–80, 285–6; R. Barr, 'The pageant epidemic', *Idler*, xxxi (1907), 437–46.

[53] 'Pageant of battle scenes', *The Times*, 7 June 1919, p. 9.

[54] 'A Peace Pageant', *Nottingham Evening Post*, 28 Apr. 1919, p. 3.

[55] 'Nottm. Peace Pageant', *Nottingham Evening Post*, 8 July 1919, p. 3; 'A message from Sir Arthur Pearson, Bart., G.B.E.', *Official Souvenir of the Pageant of Peace*, p. 3.

[56] *Official Souvenir of the Pageant of Peace*, p. 9.

declaration of patriotism and respect for the soldiers of the First World War and the sufferings they had endured – sufferings that were so vividly and realistically dramatized in the pageant performance. As one newspaper advert for the Nottingham performances declared, 'Give thanks and help the lads who have given their sight for England'.[57] The pageant was, at once, a symbolic coming together of empire; a portrayal of patriotic sacrifice and a deserved victory; yet also a recognition of the violent and bloody suffering this victory involved.

Audience reaction, though difficult to gauge, seemed to be positive. Following the symbolic picture of the empire again at peace in the final tableau during the Nottingham performances, 'there were well-deserved rounds of cheering'.[58] Undoubtedly the scenes were stirring for local spectators. As the *Nottingham Evening Post* described, 'The sight of a company of the Robin Hood [Rifle]s fighting under their old officers and N.C.O.'s aroused great enthusiasm'.[59] The *Manchester Guardian* reported that the pageant 'had won golden opinions in the towns and cities' where it was performed.[60] The St. Dunstan's pageant was thus an immediate, visceral and popular act of remembrance. Visiting the pageant to pay one's respects to the heroic yet horrific sacrifice was constructed as an act of civic pride and, by extension, good citizenship. However, after its run in 1919, it was not performed again, and although hyper-realism featured now and then in the historical pageantry of interwar Britain, it never again predominated in representations of the First World War.

One reason for the disappearance of this hyper-realism may have been an increased awareness of the mentally as well as physically injurious effects of modern warfare, and specifically the lasting nature of these effects. The 1920 report of the War Office Committee of Inquiry into Shell Shock generated much public discussion, not least on account of its repetition of the wartime association between shell-shock and dereliction of duty or malingering – a claim strongly denied, of course, by many veterans and their families.[61] In any case, the need to provide treatment for shell-shocked ex-servicemen was accepted by the state and the voluntary sector, although the need was not adequately met.[62] In 1929, nearly 75,000 neurological cases remained under Ministry of Pensions treatment.[63] In this context, as Peter Leese has suggested, 'shell shock transcended the experience of the individual soldier' to become a powerful symbol of the suffering of all solders; it came, in short, to stand as a cynosure for the lasting damage caused by modern war.[64] It seems reasonable to suggest, therefore, that deepening appreciation of this damage restricted the scope for collective remembrance by means of hyper-realistic re-enactment of the war; if pageants were to deal appropriately with the war, the approach taken in the St. Dunstan's performances would no longer serve.

---

[57] 'Thanksgiving concerts', *Nottingham Evening Post*, 3 July 1919, p. 2. See also 'The pageant of peace', *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, 24 June 1919, p. 11.

[58] 'Nottm. Peace Pageant', *Nottingham Evening Post*, 8 July 1919, p. 3.

[59] 'Nottm. Peace Pageant', *Nottingham Evening Post*, 8 July 1919, p. 3.

[60] 'Amusements in and out of Manchester', *Manchester Guardian*, 8 Sept. 1919, p. 4.

[61] P. Leese, *Shell Shock: Traumatic Neurosis and the British Soldiers of the First World War* (Basingstoke, 2002), pp. 124–7, 161–2. See also J. Bourke, 'Effeminacy, ethnicity, and the end of trauma: the sufferings of "shell-shocked" men in Great Britain and Ireland, 1914–39', *Jour. Contemporary Hist.*, xxxv (2000), 57–69.

[62] See E. Jones and S. Wessely, *Shell Shock to P.T.S.D.: Military Psychiatry from 1900 to the Gulf War* (Hove, 2005), pp. 57–64; Leese, pp. 123–4.

[63] Leese, p. 124.

[64] Leese, p. 180. See also Jay Winter's remark as to shell-shock turning 'from a diagnosis into a metaphor' (J. Winter, 'Shell-shock and the cultural history of the Great War', *Jour. Contemporary Hist.*, xxxv (2000), 7–11, at p. 7).

In contrast to the hyper-realism of the early post-war St. Dunstan's pageants, another series of theatrical responses to the war focused on aspects of the national and international dimensions of the conflict, with allegory and symbolism featuring more prominently. The two pageant types overlapped chronologically, with 1919 seeing some interesting examples of the allegorical mode of representation, but these pageants – which we have termed 'pageants of victory' – continued to thrive into the nineteen-thirties, alongside the community pageants that we examine in the next section. Pageants of victory shared with the St. Dunstan's pageants a focus on national, imperial and international events, with the local context marginalized: the Oxford Pageant of Victory in 1919, for example, contained nothing about the history of Oxford.[65] Whereas the St. Dunstan's pageants had showcased particular episodes from the war itself, pageants of victory placed the conflict in a longer-term historical context. In this respect they had more similarities with Edwardian historical pageants, but the episodes and contextual material were national, imperial or international in scope, with the 'community' drawn upon a larger canvas than had been envisaged in the localism of Sherborne and its Edwardian successors. The format enabled imperial themes to be emphasized strongly in pageants such as Arthur Bryant's 'Vision of Empire', intended to be performed in 1933. Louis Napoleon Parker, though better known for pageants on the lines of Sherborne, had himself produced a West End play entitled *The Masque of War and Peace* in February 1900, during the siege of Mafeking, depicting historical and current events through the use of allegorical figures such as War and Peace and archetypes such as the War Worker and the Soldier.[66] During the First World War he produced three more pageants of this kind, including 'The Pageant of Freedom', in which Britannia appeared along with figures representing the four nations of Britain, as well as Youth, Faith, Hope, Love, Courage, Pity and many other allegorical personifications.[67] Some post-war pageants followed Parker's example and were wholly allegorical in content: one example was a 'pageant of peace' in Lewes, Sussex, in 1919.[68] Most pageants of victory, however, blended allegory with depictions of real historical events in an episodic progression, with the choice of events determined by the messages that pageant organizers wanted to convey about the war and its lessons.

The Oxford Pageant of Victory, written by Bernice de Bergerac, is an important early example of this type of pageant. It was performed seven times at the university football ground, to raise money for the Radcliffe Infirmary and St. Dunstan's Hospital, as well as the regimental fund of the Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry. It was organized by a large executive committee and involved many hundreds of performers – 700 children, for example, took part in the episode depicting a Japanese gala day.[69] On one level, the pageant was conceived as a local event: in his foreword to the book of words, Oxford historian J. A. R. Marriott outlined the history of the city, noting – in the style of many pre-war pageant souvenir programmes – that 'Oxford . . . contains, and to the observing eye presents, a microcosm of English history'. Here, he claimed, 'the memorials of the past confront you; and not merely isolated memorials, but the materials for a consecutive study of the evolution

---

[65] There was one scene featuring the Banbury revels, set in the Elizabethan period (B. de Bergerac, *The Oxford Pageant of Victory 1919* (Oxford, [1919]), p. 34).

[66] Lau, 'Performing history', pp. 273–4.

[67] M. Lau, 'The shape of history: literary form and the First World War' (unpublished Rutgers University Ph.D. thesis, 2010), pp. 222–36; Lau, 'Performing history', pp. 279–82. See also Glassberg, p. 216.

[68] 'Peace Pageant at Lewes', *Sussex Agricultural Express*, 14 Nov. 1919, p. 7.

[69] 'Oxford pageant of history', *Observer*, 15 June 1919, p. 12. See also 'Oxford victory pageant', *The Times*, 27 June 1919, p. 9; 'Oxford pageant', *The Stage*, 3 July 1919, p. 15.

of the nation, and indeed of the Empire'.[70] In fact, the subject matter of the pageant was international, with Part I featuring the First World War allies and Part II the nations of the empire – including Wales, Scotland and Ireland. Episodes in Part I, as well as the Japanese scene, included 'The Joyous Entry into Bruges' (set in 1429), the marriage of Henry V to Princess Katharine of France in 1420, and a scene set in 1341 in Rome, featuring Petrarch and Laura. These scenes were clearly aimed at fixing wartime alliances in a longer-term historical perspective. Perhaps the most intriguing was Episode VI, 'America: the Old Country and the New', set in 1496. Here, John Cabot and his three sons set sail for America, singing 'Bobby Shafto' and waving a British flag and a 'Flag of Good Fortune' representing the star-spangled banner. The scene shifted to 1917, and a figure called the 'Spirit of Freedom' emerged, praising – in verse – the New World and the alliance between Britain and America. The U.S. army entered the arena, played by real American servicemen, whose names were listed in the book of words. The soldiers sang:

> We come, the Atlantic Armada,
> Our place in grim warfare to hold,
> We sang our way over the Ocean
> Like Mayflower Pilgrims of old.
> Young acorns from oak-trees of England,
> In American soil we were grown,
> Till we stretch, an impassable forest,
> To the steps of the Mother-land's throne.
> We come in our millions on millions,
> With war-ships, with craft of the air,
> And bring you the best of our manhood
> The stress of the conflict to share ...[71]

The invocation of the Armada echoed the near universal appearance in English historical pageants of an Elizabethan scene, and even this pageant, following the American episode, had an interlude of maypole dancing in Elizabethan costume. Here was an excellent demonstration of the adaptability of the pageant form to the commemoration of war.

Part II featured the nations of Britain and the overseas dominions, with episodes portraying King Arthur, St. Patrick, Malcolm Canmore and Edward I, among others. There was a scene showing Richard I setting off for the crusades in 1194, in which an aged monk predicted the First World War and its implications for the Middle East. The monk foresaw:

a great Crusade, the mightiest the world has ever known. Hard shall be the fight and long, but the Lord shall give them Victory! ... Quietly, and with all humility shall the conquerors enter Jerusalem, and claim it thus for God and Christ evermore![72]

The pageant ended with an ambitious tableau in which a figure representing England received a salute from the patron saints, including St. George; there was a procession with representatives of the dominions. Finally, a 'Rally of War Workers' took place, and performers and audience sang together 'O God Our Help in Ages Past' and 'Land of

---

[70] J. A. R. Marriott, 'Oxford and its pageant of victory', in de Bergerac, pp. 7–11, at pp. 9, 7.
[71] De Bergerac, pp. 32–3.
[72] De Bergerac, p. 41.

Hope and Glory'. Marriott's foreword waxed lyrical about the imperial dimension of the pageant and the war:

> the World–Empire or Commonwealth … holds a great part of the world, not in fee, but in trust for the happiness and well-being of mankind. That sense of trusteeship has never, we may devoutly believe, been absent from the minds of those to whom the destinies of the Empire have been committed. To these finer spirits it is not the glint or the glamour or the glory of Empire that has appealed, but the possibility of service to the best interests of humanity.[73]

This heavy emphasis reflects the power of imperial themes in the early post-war years, albeit in a changed context from the conditions of the Edwardian period.

There is an ongoing debate concerning the importance of imperial themes in Edwardian historical pageants,[74] but on some occasions the empire was represented spectacularly in pageant form, most strikingly in the Pageant of London of 1911, which formed a part of the Festival of Empire at the Crystal Palace. Produced by the flamboyant pageant–master Frank Lascelles, this extravaganza contained forty scenes played over three days, culminating in a 'Masque Imperial' in which symbolic characters such as Britannia and the 'Queen of Wisdom' presented the dominions as daughters of the mother country and eulogized the imperial pioneers.[75] Conquest, commerce and ritual were important themes. After the First World War, as Jim English has shown, annual Empire Day festivities remained a popular element of civic ritual, but with a different emphasis, reflecting the importance of sombre commemoration. In a period when 'unrestrained jingoism became inappropriate, Empire Day retained its hegemonic potency by amalgamating the emerging traditions of sombre commemoration into the repertoire of imperial festivity'. Furthermore, according to English, 'The survival of Empire Day after the First World War and its successful incorporation within rituals of commemoration are indicators of its social significance and the continued importance of imperialism during the interwar years'.[76] Meanings of imperialism had shifted, and pageants of victory refashioned empire as a vehicle for peace and human progress. The 1924 Pageant of Empire provides a good example of this.

A huge undertaking involving a cast of 15,000 people and supported by £100,000 of government funding,[77] the pageant was one of the centrepieces of the British Empire Exhibition held at Wembley. Its message matched that of the exhibition as a whole. This eschewed the aggressively jingoistic flag-waving associated with late Victorian and Edwardian expressions of imperial patriotism in favour of a confident emphasis on the material, technological and moral value of the empire, which – drawing strength from the colonial contribution to the war effort – was now increasingly described as a 'commonwealth' of free nations.[78] The pageant celebrated the usual set of imperial and

---

[73] Marriott, p. 11.

[74] Readman, pp. 182–90; Yoshino, pp. 119–26, 178–81; Freeman, pp. 433–5, 441.

[75] D. S. Ryan, 'Staging the imperial city: the pageant of London, 1911', in *Imperial Cities: Landscape, Display and Identity*, ed. F. Driver and D. Gilbert (Manchester, 1999), pp. 117–35.

[76] J. English, 'Empire Day in Britain, 1904–58', *Historical Jour.*, xlix (2006), 247–76, at pp. 247, 248.

[77] *The Times*, 29 July 1924, p. 11.

[78] As a *Daily Chronicle* editorial put it on the occasion of the exhibition's opening, the event was designed to celebrate 'the most wonderful experiment in government that the world has ever seen … a great commonwealth of free nations, free to live its own life in its own way, and yet strong as iron in its unity' (cited in D. Simonelli, '"Laughing nations of happy children who have never grown up": race, the concept of commonwealth and the 1924–5 British Empire Exhibition', *Jour. Colonialism and Colonial History*, x (2009), doi: 10.1353/cch.0.0044). For the 'progress'-oriented character of the exhibition, see D. Stephen, *The Empire of Progress: West Africans, Indians, and Britons at the British Empire Exhibition 1924–5* (New York, 2013).

military heroes, but to this was added an accent on interracial unity, the First World War having shown the world, as the exhibition's official guidebook put it, that the empire had 'a hundred languages and races ... but one soul and mind, and could ... concentrate all its power for a common purpose'.[79] This narrative of unity was blended with claims as to the progressive economic development and growth of prosperity in various parts of the British dominions, from Newfoundland fisheries, to New Zealand orchards, to West Indies banana plantations.[80] As the prince of Wales, who was the president of the exhibition, put it, the pageant was conceived as a grand representation of 'all the races under our flag', and one 'which would illustrate fully the economic resources of all our territories and our peoples'.[81] The war was integrated into the story told by the pageant: much was made, for example, of the contributions of New Zealanders in 1914–18, including those made by the Maoris (whose earlier resistance to the British was presented as having been marked by 'bravery and chivalry').[82] But most significant of all was the solemn, commemorative note on which the whole performance ended, the sacrifices made by the men of Britain and the empire in 1914–18 providing the symbolic capstone of the event. The finale began with Edward Elgar's musical version of 'The Immortal Legions', a poem by Alfred Noyes that paid tribute to the fallen of the First World War.[83] Then came a solemn organ march and a rendition of Elgar's 'With Proud Thanksgiving', and finally a closing tableau ('The Empire's Thanksgiving'), the musical elements of which were Nicolas Gatty's 'Anthem of the Sister Nations', and Herbert Bunning's setting of Kipling's poem 'Recessional'.[84]

Imperial themes persisted into some of the historical pageants of the nineteen-thirties, in which the war was again shown through allegory and symbolic representation. The most notable were those produced by Arthur Bryant, the conservative historian and schoolmaster, and one of the leading public intellectuals of the period. His 'A Vision of Empire' pageant was commissioned by the *Daily Express* as part of the Empire Day celebrations of 1933. Written as a short display lasting only thirty minutes, the pageant was to be shown once only, in Hyde Park. It lacked dialogue except for brief announcements setting each scene.[85] The first half concentrated on historical events, presented in a traditional way, such as Francis Drake on Plymouth Hoe in 1588 before the defeat of the Spanish Armada, the Storming of Quebec and death of General Wolfe in 1759, and the funeral of Cecil Rhodes in 1902. Such scenes aimed to underline the importance of the empire, the courage of British soldiers, and the value of sacrifice for a greater good. What followed in the second half combined patriotism, duty and the glorification of soldiers with the confusion, horror and reality of modern warfare. Opening on Hampstead Heath on the 1914 August bank holiday, the scene was one of carnival, but this soon gave way to a violent but figurative depiction of the horrors of war, featuring a bugler dressed in khaki with a bandaged head, the body of a dead

---

[79]   Cited in J. Richards, *Imperialism and Music: Britain, 1876–1953* (Manchester, 2001), p. 194.

[80]   E. V. Lucas, *The Pageant of Empire Souvenir Volume* (1924); C. Oman, *The Pageant of Empire: an Historical Survey* (1924).

[81]   *The Times*, 28 July 1923, p. 12.

[82]   *The Times*, 28 July 1924, p. 8; 29 July 1924, p. 11; Oman, pp. 34–7.

[83]   A. Noyes and E. Elgar, *The Immortal Legions: Song* (1924).

[84]   L. Foreman, 'A voice in the desert: Elgar's war music', in *Oh, My Horses! Elgar and the Great War*, ed. L. Foreman (Rickmansworth, 2001), pp. 279–84.

[85]   King's College London, Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, Arthur Bryant papers, fan-letters and other correspondence about Bryant's books and articles, J5, A. Bryant, 'A Vision of Empire. A pageant. To be enacted by night in the Cock Pit, Hyde Park. Empire Day 1932' (1932, original typesheet).

peasant, and men in civilian dress from every part of the empire, followed by soldiers in the uniforms of the dominion armies of 1914. Flashes of light and sounds of gunfire were interspersed with dim figures of men in steel helmets and gas masks, and lines of infantry with bayonets. At the end of the carnage the stage was lit, revealing the Union flag and those of the dominions, and, in the centre of the stage, the motionless white figure of Peace.[86]

In the event, 'A Vision of Empire' was never performed: it was cancelled after spectators – 150,000, according to one report[87] – surged towards the stage, breaking through roped barriers. Horse-mounted police tried to maintain control, but the situation got out of hand, and it was not possible for the pageant to go ahead.[88] It should be emphasized that this was due to the enthusiasm, not the displeasure, of the crowd. The following year, Bryant took up many of the themes from 'A Vision of Empire' in the Greenwich Night Pageant, which was seen by around 100,000 people over nine performances in 1933.[89] This pageant took place in the Royal Naval College, and raised £4,000 for various military charities.[90] It consisted of a prologue and four acts, each with two or three scenes, depicting military history from the Elizabethan period to the modern day, as well as some episodes from the local history of Greenwich and Blackheath. Like Bryant's abortive Hyde Park venture, the Greenwich pageant eschewed hyper-realism in its portrayal of the most recent conflict, preferring symbolic devices similar to those used the previous year. Thus the pageant featured robot soldiers (see Figure 4), the mounted figure of Death with a skull head, and vivid light effects – the spectacle being further enhanced by gunfire and burning buildings.[91] Again, a bugler featured, as well as scenes of August 1914. Bryant contrasted the cheerful and confident pre-war crowd with the horror of battle, while celebrating the 'common man', in the form of the naval officer, and the sacrifices that he had made. For Bryant, there was an obvious patriotic purpose behind these adaptations of the historical pageant form. As his biographer Julia Stapleton has asserted, Bryant's commitment to the pageant was 'rooted in his conviction that the heritage of military – particularly naval – strength remained a legitimate, indeed crucial object of British national pride'.[92]

Patriotism was not the only political 'message' that could be delivered through historical pageantry, however. As Wallis has argued, pageants organized by the Left could also agitate for a Popular Front, and were an attempt to 'recruit', to 'do ideological work', and to 'popularize political theory'.[93] Such pageants portrayed incidents of working-class history in order to both convert more people to the cause, as well as to affirm the beliefs of those who took part. The League of Nations Union, formed in 1918, also used pageantry to communicate the key aspects of liberal-internationalism, such as global interdependence, international government and world citizenship, to a new mass electorate.[94] McCarthy has shown how the use of dramatic and often allegorical tableaux, linked by music, movement and dialogue, reinforced the

---

[86]   Bryant, 'A Vision of Empire'.
[87]   'The ravishing blue Danube', *Cornishman*, 2 June 1932, p. 4.
[88]   'Hyde Park pageant abandoned', *The Times*, 25 May 1932, p. 11.
[89]   'Greenwich Night Pageant', *The Times*, 27 June 1933, p. 11.
[90]   *The Times*, 25 Feb. 1935, p. 11.
[91]   *Book of the Pageant, Greenwich, 1933* (1933).
[92]   J. Stapleton, *Sir Arthur Bryant and National History in 20th-Century Britain* (Lanham, Md., 2005), p. 54.
[93]   Wallis, 'Pageantry and the popular front', p. 136.
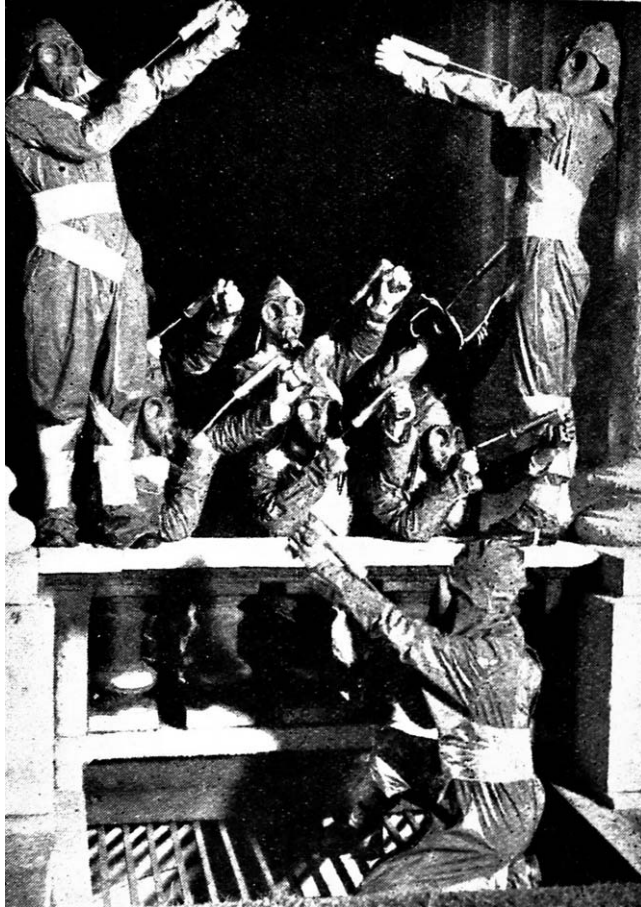[94]   McCarthy, p. 110.

Figure 4. 'Robot Soldiers': a scene from the Greenwich Night Pageant, 1933. By permission of Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, Bryant J6, folder 1.

message. Such pageants 'typically depicted the figure of Peace or Mother Earth weeping over the follies of mankind, followed by a scene in which the League proceeds to banish war and pestilence from the world and a grand finale where the assembled nations swear solemnly to live together peacefully under a common law'.[95] Although these pageants were often not historical as such, they drew on 'the Edwardian genre of historical pageantry' – recognizing that it was more useful 'to synthesize and reframe existing symbolic practices ... [than] to fracture or displace them'.[96] Some pageants of this kind combined both history and allegory. A good example was the Aberystwyth Peace Pageant of 1935, performed in the castle ruins. This pageant was organized thematically rather than chronologically, and featured military leaders ranging from Joshua to Napoleon, and those who had tried to stop wars, such as the ancient Sabine women, or mitigate their effects, such as Florence Nightingale. There was also an allegorical 'Ballet

[95] McCarthy, p. 113.
[96] McCarthy, pp. 115, 120.

of War and Peace', where witch-like figures of Fear, Hatred, Jealousy and Suspicion conjured up War Maidens, only to be defeated by the figure of Peace, aided by Industry, Commerce, Science and Art. The final scene brought the action to the present day, when 1,000 children, in the national dress of over fifty different countries, marched into the arena and took their place in front of the crowds.[97]

A number of other pageants staged in Wales in the nineteen-twenties and thirties provide further evidence of the importance of allegorical representations of war – including the First World War – in the context of longer historical timelines. Although some aspects of these pageants were distinctively Welsh, they echoed many of the themes that were present at Oxford in 1919; Welsh responses to the war had both similarities to and differences from those in England.[98] A pageant at Harlech, performed in 1920, 1922 and 1927, placed the war in the context of a series of episodes featuring the military history of the castle. It ended with a scene entitled 'The Coming of Peace', which included characters such as Old Time (dressed in a long grey robe and carrying a sickle), War, Peace and Tomorrow. A procession of soldiers, including the 'walking wounded' and Red Cross ambulances, took place in the middle of this finale, and at the very end Peace, bearing an olive bough, declared: 'The wars are done. Take this for a sign. A leaf to you, and a leaf to you. Go, dear children my swift messengers, bear to every nation in the great world'.[99] The message intended here was not lost on observers. As one press report commented of the processions, 'Wounded men in khaki, attended by Red Cross nurses, and other modern features, illustrated the gallant new order that succeeded the heroic old'.[100] Alongside the figure of Peace, personifications of Wales and Britannia also featured in the pageant. Meanwhile, a series of events at the week-long Conway Bridge Centenary Celebration in 1927, including two pageants and a military tattoo, used various allegorical characters to connect the past to the present, including a Man of Doubt and the Queen of Peace. A group of heralds – each dressed in the colours of a different nation, including Scotland, Ireland, France, America, Belgium, Italy, Russia and even Germany – made a pledge of allegiance to the Queen of Peace, with the heralds of both England and Wales making short speeches, finally convincing the Man of Doubt of the rightness of the cause of peace.[101] The Cardiff Castle Pageant of 1931 also featured a scene entitled 'In Memoriam 1914–18'; it was the only post-1340 episode in a pageant seen by at least 45,000 people.[102] Scottish pageants also depicted the war, although it was absent from both the national pageant at Craigmillar Castle in 1927 and the Glasgow pageant in the following year. In 1931 the Boys' Brigade pageant at Waverley Market in Edinburgh, with over 1,700 performers and 3,000 spectators, ended its account of Scottish national history with a scene entitled 'Cloud of War', in which the gathering of volunteers was shown, followed by the sounds of a gun battle and finally a village war memorial with a widow kneeling beside it, lit by a spotlight.[103]

[97] National Library of Wales (hereafter N.L.W.), press cutting in scrapbook 23/1 in series 'Pageants in Wales 1909–49', compiled by D. R. Davies, 'Children in Peace Pageant' (unknown date; no other details).

[98] T. Thacker, *British Culture and the First World War: Experience, Representation and Memory* (2014), p. 9.

[99] N.L.W., MS. 3264D, The Harlech Pageant [*c*.1920]: correspondence, historical sketches, etc. relating to the historical pageant in aid of a Harlech War Memorial Hall held in the castle grounds at Harlech, Aug. 1920.

[100] N.L.W., Durrant's press cuttings 1895–1939, box 5, 'Harlech Pageant', *Liverpool Daily Courier*, 28 Aug. 1920.

[101] 'Conway pageant', *Western Morning News*, 13 Sept. 1927, p. 7.

[102] N.L.W., Durrant's press cuttings 1895–1939, box 10, 'The grand finale', *Western Mail*, 26 June 1931.

[103] 'Hail, Caledonia: Boys' Brigade pageant', *Scotsman*, 24 Sept. 1931, p. 8.

The immediate post-war period, then, saw the emergence of two distinct adaptations of the Edwardian pageant format: on the one hand, a hyper-realistic portrayal of actual combat, giving both performers and audience the opportunity to express empathy and solidarity, while also recognizing and commemorating the soldiers' sacrifice for larger ideals; and on the other, a much more allegorical and symbolic performance, which did not directly depict the intricacies of battle but often provoked powerful responses with its uses of the sights and sounds of war. The increasing use of allegory and symbolism – and the turn away from hyper-realism – can be seen as a recognition that the experiences of the First World War could not be represented in the 'normal' style of historical pageantry: they were too recent, too horrific, and too evocative of the human suffering of which the shell-shocked ex-serviceman was increasingly emblematic. Meghan Lau has argued that Parker's use of allegory in his war pageants produced a formal distance from the present, overcoming the lack of historical distance between the present and the events being depicted.[104] It was not strictly necessary to do this: as the St. Dunstan's pageants showed, it was possible, at least in the immediate post-1918 period, to present scenes from the recent war hyper-realistically and with minimal affective distance. Allegory, however, enabled a wider set of messages to be conveyed through the depiction of war in dramatic form – and over time it became increasingly prominent in pageant performances. In this respect historical pageantry had some parallels with contemporaneous developments in theatre, where allegory was also increasingly in the ascendant, at least from the mid nineteen-twenties.[105] What the pageants of victory also did, in many cases, was to present the war in the context of other episodes of conflict in the past. This strategy could support the promotion of imperial, national or indeed internationalist and pacifist themes. All these adaptations of the traditions of historical pageantry demonstrate that popular understandings of history were also affected by the need to commemorate and understand the experiences of war. In the next section we examine how the war affected the ways in which local communities told their own stories, and how the Edwardian historical pageant evolved to incorporate the First World War in longer narratives of local history.

By the end of the nineteen-twenties the more established style of historical pageant underwent a resurgence. This has been remarked upon by a number of scholars, though there has been a tendency to see historical pageantry in this period as largely confined to rural England – a tendency perhaps encouraged by Virginia Woolf's novel *Between the Acts*, the action of which was set around a village pageant of the late nineteen-thirties.[106] Yet despite the influence of Woolf's account (particularly on literary scholars), pageants were an important feature of urban as well as rural cultural life in these years. Indeed, they featured in many towns and spread to larger cities than had usually been the case before

---

[104] Lau, 'Shape of history', p. 223.

[105] The immediate post-war period saw a number of plays presenting realistic and sometimes quite graphic accounts of life and death in the trenches. These culminated in R. C. Sherriff's hit melodrama *Journey's End* (1928–9), after which point playwrights dealing with the First World War showed a marked tendency towards more imaginative, symbolic and allegorical approaches to the subject (see Nicoll, pp. 439–41; Barker, 'Ghosts of war', pp. 222–3).

[106] See, e.g., the discussion in A. Harris, *Romantic Moderns: English Writers, Artists and the Imagination from Virginia Woolf to John Piper* (2010), pp. 189–92; J. Esty, *A Shrinking Island: Modernism and National Culture in England* (Princeton, N.J., 2004), pp. 54ff. Another novelist, E. M. Forster, wrote the scripts for two village pageants performed in 1934 and 1938 (see E. M. Forster, *Pageant of Abinger* [Abinger, 1934], and *England's Pleasant Land: a Pageant-Play* [Westcott, 1940]).

1914. When the war appeared at all in these pageants, it was typically as the final scene, representing the culmination of a longer and historically visible ideal of patriotism, civic pride and civic responsibility, and usually featuring the home front. Honouring the sacrifices of the war and giving meaning to them was a central purpose of these scenes, which, in Gullace's words, 'reaffirmed a core set of British values'.[107] As had been the case in the Edwardian period, locality was at the centre of these values: recent historiography has emphasized the 'local patriotism' that fuelled the 'pageant fever' of this period, and its persistence into the mid twentieth century.[108] These local and community pageants overlapped chronologically with the pageants of victory discussed in the previous section, and shared many of the same features. Sometimes local pageant-masters used allegory in their depictions of the war, although they rarely did so in the other scenes. What unites these pageants is their placing of the First World War in the context of the longer history of a specific community, providing further evidence of the resilience and adaptability of the pageant form – specifically its ability to incorporate more recent episodes and particularly the very recent past. In this respect the collective remembrance of the war became part of an older, though still evolving, tradition of public ritual. Depicting the war was still difficult – hence the resort to allegory and symbolism – but it was often seen as a necessary aspect of the celebration of locality that was the main theme of the historical pageant.

While St. Dunstan's dominated the pageant landscape in 1919, the beginnings of a return to the traditional chronological and episodic narrative of local history popularized in the Edwardian period could already be seen. The Salisbury Peace Pageant, while similarly named to other pageants in 1919, would actually have been much more recognizable to Edwardian pageant enthusiasts. Taking place on 28 July, a week after the official Peace Day celebrations, its driving force was Frank Stevens, the curator of the Salisbury, South Wiltshire and Blackmore Museum. Stevens acted as both author and pageant-master, and his wife took the position of 'mistress of the robes'.[109] Almost entirely acted by more than 500 children, apart from the characters of Father Time, Fame and Peace, the pageant was light on dialogue and moralizing, instead combining joviality with pathos. It was Salisbury's 'first attempt at pageantry upon an ambitious scale', and was successful and popular, attracting a total audience of 20,000.[110] The pageant was a bold attempt to entertain, yet also reflected on both history and war. Each episode was performed by a different school, with headmasters acting as producers. As surviving film footage shows, the entire cast, grouped into their respective episodes and carrying banners emblazoned with the episode title, processed to the pageant ground together with thousands of other children, many dancing and cavorting along the way, in front of crowds of cheering spectators.[111] In the episodes themselves, what dialogue there was came mostly from Fame and Time, who acted as guides through the past of the town, often conversing and conveying judgement upon the historical characters portrayed.[112] In total, there were sixteen scenes, beginning with the prehistoric 'Dim Past' and reaching the early

---

[107] Gullace, p. 239, discussing R. M. Bracco, *Merchants of Hope: British Middlebrow Writers and the First World War 1919–39* (Oxford, 1993).

[108] Readman; Freeman.

[109] R. Withington, 'Post-bellum giants', *Studies in Philology*, xviii (1921), 1–9.

[110] *Children's Peace Pageant at Salisbury* (Salisbury, 1919), pp. 3, 5.

[111] 'Peace Celebrations at Salisbury, 1918–19' [newsreel clip, online], *British Pathé*, 1918–19, 7 mins. 54 secs. <http://www.britishpathe.com/video/peace-celebrations-at-salisbury/> [accessed 6 Apr. 2017].

[112] 'The children's pageant', *Salisbury Times*, 1 Apr. 1919, p. 3.

seventeenth century before the final episode that dealt with the First World War in the allegorical manner that would become familiar in many 'pageants of victory'. Here, however, the war was presented not as an episode in national or imperial military history, but as an integral element in the life of the local community – an integral element, moreover, of the contribution made by the locality to the national story. That the pageant was performed by children was significant; as the book of words declared, 'These are the children! God be thanked for them! In every Age they sing the song of Hope that died upon the weary lips of those who went before them'.[113] The pageantry of youth, performing the past, thus also represented the future.

There were plenty of humorous moments. Towards the end of the pageant there were two scenes in fast succession that had music, dancing, and even a dragon chasing the boys and girls around the arena. Robert Withington, a contemporaneous writer on pageantry, was particularly pleased to see the attention given to folk traditions – like the inclusion of the St. Christopher Giant model, a centuries-old figure in Salisbury celebrations. As he happily concluded, 'despite the changes wrought by the war, beneath an upheaval which seemed cataclysmic, English civilization still endures, and the spirit of the folk remains the same'.[114] The pageant contained many direct and indirect references to the English spirit: in a Saxon episode, for example, the figure of Time announced that 'Saxon blood and courage still doth run/Within the English veins to-day', and similar courage was displayed by the stoical mayor in the episode depicting the plague.[115] The conclusion was the most powerful episode, mirroring the allegorical depictions of war that were witnessed elsewhere in 1919 and later. Five sisters, dressed in black and representing each year of the war, entered with their arms manacled. Fame then spoke to the crowd, and implored them to look back in freedom on those who had rallied to 'serve the Motherland', nobly dying so that 'She' may live. After this invocation of sacrifice, the figure of Peace entered, bearing a golden olive branch. Peace proclaimed freedom from the years of war, and greeted the sisters, the fetters falling from their arms. The pageant epitomized a moment of collective remembrance and hope that seems to have had a significant impact on those involved: the judgment of the *Salisbury Times* was that 'None of those who were present, either in the capacity of participator or spectator, will ever forget the scene'.[116]

Other pageants also emphasized the contribution that localities – from the smallest to the largest – had made to the war effort. The Sydling Pageant in 1925 was a small production with just sixty performers (the village, in Dorset, had a population of only around 400).[117] Its final scene, '1914', consisted solely of a poem highlighting the response of this tiny village to the outbreak of war:

> And when the war of nineteen-fourteen called
> The manhood of the nation to defend
> Our country, Sydling men did not hold back;
> And wives and mothers did their loved ones send.
> Then thirteen gallant lads laid down their lives.
> There, in the church, a tablet near the door

---

[113] 'From pageant to memorial', *Salisbury Times*, 1 Aug. 1919, p. 2.
[114] Withington, 'Post-bellum giants'.
[115] *Children's Peace Pageant at Salisbury*, p. 11.
[116] 'From pageant to memorial', *Salisbury Times*, 1 Aug. 1919, p. 2.
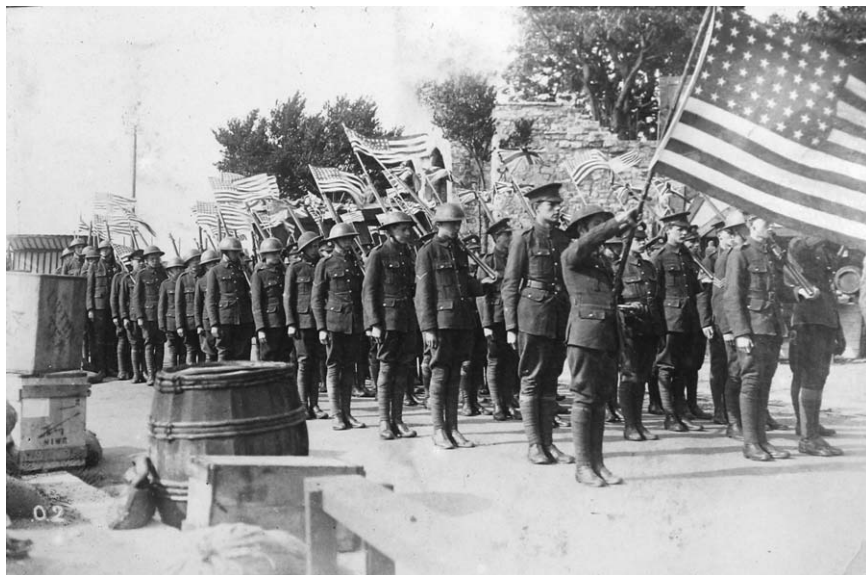[117] 'Sydling's 1,000th anniversary', *Western Gazette*, 24 July 1925, p. 7.

Figure 5. U.S. soldiers in the Southampton Mayflower Pageant, 1920. By permission of Southampton City Archives, P.236/3 (L).

> Records the names of those who fell. Those names
> That with the nation's dead, will live for evermore![118]

The first nine scenes of the pageant had been jovial, poking fun at the idea that the place had been left behind by modernity. But the sombre tone of the final episode presented an important contrast. The *Dorset County Chronicle* described it as 'beautiful in the extreme', the words of the poem 'taking the spectator back to the outbreak of the Great War'. As the last bugle sounded from the church in the neighbouring field, the crowd, according to the *Western Gazette,* rose and bowed their heads.[119] Sacrifice was not visually portrayed as it had been in the 'pageants of peace', but the same point was made.

This is not to say that many or even most interwar pageants depicted the First World War. Indeed, in contrast to the American pageants discussed by Glassberg, where the contribution of the locality to the war effort was clearly a central element of the civic pride that underlay historical pageantry, in Britain this feature was much less widespread.[120] However, the war was often present even where not directly depicted, if only through allusion. For example, in the epilogue of the Southampton Mayflower Pageant in 1920, the First World War was shown briefly as part of a vision of one of the Pilgrim Fathers 300 years earlier (see Figure 5).[121]

Elsewhere, the war was invoked as a source of inspiration for future conduct. In the Ilminster Pageant (1927), which was staged to raise money for the local church, the sacrifice of the war was used as a ploy to encourage further service and pride in the present – particularly in the maintenance of the church. As the Old Man (the narrator of the pageant) said to himself and the audience, 'many of our soldier boys have but lately

---

[118] 'Sydling's 1,000th anniversary', *Western Gazette*, 24 July 1925, p. 7.
[119] 'Sydling's 1,000th anniversary', *Western Gazette*, 24 July 1925, p. 7; *Dorset County Chronicle*, 23 July 1925, p. 8.
[120] Glassberg, pp. 226–7.
[121] H. Parry, *The Historical Pageant of the 'Mayflower', 1620–1920* [1920], pp. 55–6.

given their lives for an ideal, the ideal of home and country. Their names are written within the church. We calls [sic] it the Roll of Honour, surely it is to our honour to keep our beautiful church as it was when our brave boys knelt in it by our side'.[122] Vital here was a continuation of one of the principal ideals of the Edwardian historical pageant: the past, in the form of the deeds performed by local predecessors and in the contribution made by the locality to the national and imperial story, provided an example for the future.[123] The Manchester Historical Pageant in 1926, for example, aimed to 'symbolise the growing power of the people through the centuries … to recall forgotten glories so that we may appreciate Manchester's contribution to world progress'.[124] After showing episodes of local importance, such as the arrival of Flemish weavers in the city in 1363 and the opening of the Bridgewater Canal in 1761, the pageant ended with a depiction of Manchester's heroic efforts in the First World War, and a symbolic show of 'the unity of past, present and future'.[125] Southampton's Jubilee Pageant in 1935, seen by at least 150,000 people over eight performances, took a similar approach.[126] An undying flame, 'the spirit of England', was introduced in the first episode and became the 'symbol of the pageant' – an example of how a burning torch, which those still living had a responsibility to carry forward, had come to represent the sacrifice of those who had died, following the publication of John McCrae's popular poem 'In Flanders Fields' in 1915 ('To you from failing hands we throw/The torch; be yours to hold it high').[127] As scenes from Southampton's history were depicted, from Roman times through Elizabethan, Georgian and Victorian eras, the flame was ever-present. In the final episode, '1914–18', the flame was carried across the stage as an image of the Southampton Cenotaph, designed by Edwin Lutyens, was illuminated in the background. In the finale, the character Youth, 'clear-eyed, looking forward, hopeful, representing the hopes of which this splendid background is the justification', watched a new figure representing the Spirit of England seizing the torch. The Spirit 'h[eld] it aloft, an inspiration to youth', and the pageant ended.[128] With the profits of the pageant going to the King George V Silver Jubilee Trust, a subscription fund set up that year to assist juvenile organizations, the implication of the celebration was obvious: it was on the youth of the city and nation that the future spirit of England depended.[129]

By the nineteen-thirties, the re-enactment of war in a hyper-realistic sense had declined. Pageants, in general, returned to the comforting and instructive Edwardian style of pageantry. Yet the First World War was not necessarily ignored. As long as the memory of the conflict stayed fresh, there was a place in many pageants for recognition of the sacrifice of both soldiers and their loved ones. Rather than being portrayed in accurate

---

[122]   R. Lovett Turner, *Scenes of Old Ilminster: the Story of the Pageant* (Ilminster, 1928), p. 10. For other pageants that mentioned but did not portray the war, see, e.g., *The Spirit of Dorset: Book of Words and Programme* (Dorchester, 1939).

[123]   Readman, pp. 193–5. R. Withington, *English Pageantry: an Historical Outline* (2 vols., New York, 1926), ii. 195.

[124]   *Historical Pageant of Manchester: Heaton Park* (Manchester, 1926), p. 4.

[125]   *Historical Pageant of Manchester*, pp. 18–20.

[126]   Exact statistics are hard to find. 20,000 saw the opening performance, a complete sell-out, and it was performed a further seven times – the final three dates being added due to demand. It is likely, then, that it was close to a sell-out every night ('Love of England motif', *Southern Daily Echo*, 8 May 1935, p. 5; 'Pageant to run next week', *Southern Daily Echo*, 11 May 1935, p. 1).

[127]   King, pp. 130–1.

[128]   *Grand Floodlit Pageant on the Southampton Common* (Southampton, 1935).

[129]   'Southampton's silver jubilee programme', *Southern Daily Echo*, 2 May 1935, p. 1; 'Love of England motif', *Southern Daily Echo*, 8 May 1935, p. 5.

scenes of fighting and bombardment, however, pageants featured allegory, romance and 'traditional certainties'.[130] By giving the portrayal of war an allegorical or theatrical nuance, the 1914–16 conflict was placed in the lineage of other historical events, reflecting a 'yearning for reconnection with the values of the past' rather than a wholesale break.[131]

Millions of people across Britain in the interwar period saw at least one dramatic re-enactment of the First World War. Press opinion was almost always favourable, and the pageants were highly profitable. The Nottingham run of the St. Dunstan's Pageant of Peace alone, for example, made nearly £5,000 – around £100,000 in 2017 values.[132] Beyond press coverage, however, it is difficult to gauge public reaction more generally. In one sense, performers' willingness to participate and spectators' enthusiasm for attending is compelling evidence of the widespread appeal of this form of collective remembrance. Thousands performed, and thousands more helped produce scenery, costumes and props, as well as stewarding the performances. Pageants, like wartime shrines, were expressions of popular feeling based on the contributions that local people made towards their success.[133] For both performers and observers, pageants laid emphasis on the individual's place in the community or nation, as an ideal citizen. Pageants required the exercise of both official and unofficial power; of both governments and associations, and everyday volunteers.[134] They acted as '"sites of memory", facing the past instead of the future'.[135] However, observers now had an obligation to be active citizens, like their forefathers; builders of a new world in honour of the dead.

  It is unsurprising, then, that pageants have been seen as instruments of social control, used by elites to maintain and legitimate a rigid urban power structure.[136] It is certainly true that civic elites often took the leading role in organizing and producing pageants, and that the lower social classes were relegated to performance, usually only in minor roles. Such an interpretation, however, overlooks the extent to which the motives of organizers and participants could be shared. It is more useful to think of pageants as an example of 'social steering': a relationship more of bargaining than control, which drew on both a shared pride and understanding of the past, as well as a desire to contribute in the present.[137] The failure of the Peace Day celebrations at Coventry in 1919 illustrates this nuance aptly. Civic elites believed that these events would showcase the past glories of town, city and nation, and foster civic pride in the present. However, they were criticized in the press for their cost, for their inappropriateness in a context of widespread social unrest, and for the exclusion of veterans. The pageant format itself was criticized as outdated and irrelevant, and eventually the opposition erupted into violence, with shops owned by councillors being targeted. The social exclusiveness of the pageant was widely condemned.[138] In contrast, pageants as varied in scale and content as the St. Dunstan's Pageant of Peace, the large civic events at Salisbury, Oxford and elsewhere, and the imperialist extravaganzas of Hyde Park and Greenwich, all

---

[130] Gullace, p. 242.

[131] Gullace, p. 242.

[132] 'Nearly £5,000 raised', *Nottingham Evening Post*, 14 July 1919, p. 3.

[133] King, p. 60.

[134] King, p. 6.

[135] Winter, *Sites of Memory*, p. 223.

[136] Woods, p. 60.

[137] R. J. Morris, 'Governance: two centuries of urban growth', in *Urban Governance: Britain and Beyond Since 1750*, ed. R. J. Morris and R. H. Trainor (Ashgate, 2000), pp. 1–14, at p. 10.

[138] Beaven, pp. 380–3.

successfully mobilized whole communities behind the theatrical representation of the war. The pageant form demonstrated its adaptability, with the horrors of war being depicted in some cases hyper-realistically, and in other cases through symbolism and allegory. Pageants could explore the history of Britain's relations with its allies and dominions through episodes depicting scenes far removed in time and place from the communities in which they were performed. Alternatively they could emphasize the importance of local sacrifice and contribution to the larger national endeavour.

This last way of representing the First World War was the most durable. From villages to large towns it proved possible to incorporate the war within a longer account of civic and national history, in which the war became the final episode in a pageant that might otherwise have been familiar to Edwardian spectators. The large-scale pageants held at Manchester in 1926 and 1938 bear out this point well. As we have seen, in 1926 the organizers sought to celebrate 'the unity of past, present and future' by means of a whiggish narrative of the area's development from Roman to modern times, culminating with an episode commemorating 'The Great War Effort' – which, as the *Manchester Guardian* put it, 'ended the pageant on a page as near up to date as need be'.[139] This integration of the war into familiar teleologies of progress was yet more apparent in the 1938 pageant. Here, the First World War was not given its own episode, though once again it formed the capstone of the story told. After ten episodes, beginning again with the Romans and ending with Queen Victoria's opening of the Manchester Ship Canal in 1894, the pageant offered a finale in which local veterans from the Second Boer and First World Wars were shown processing across the arena. As they did, the Spirit of Things Past declared,

> Ere to the tomb these phantoms dread,
> Forget not we the men who fought and bled
> For England's cause on many a foreign field.
> To them their meed of grateful praise we yield.[140]

This final incident encapsulated, in a way, the whole point of the pageant: a lesson in the meaning of service and sacrifice for the city and the nation. As Father Time summarized:

> These mighty dead, while they on earth did live,
> To Manchester did faithful service give;
> To whom, in presence of your fathers great,
> I bid you all your lives to dedicate.[141]

Placing the war in a lineage of other historical events and looking in various ways to the future, such pageants embodied what Gullace has called a 'yearning for reconnection with the values of the past'.[142] It was a yearning that found expression in collective remembrance more generally. War memorials provide one illustration of this. As Goebel has shown, the memorials put up in Britain (and Germany) drew heavily on pre-existing historical ideas and imagery, often medieval in character: hence the widespread use of such

---

[139] *Manchester Guardian*, 4 Oct. 1926, p. 11.
[140] *Manchester Historical Pageant (Book of Words)* (Manchester, 1938), p. 106.
[141] *Manchester Historical Pageant (Book of Words)* (Manchester, 1938), p. 106.
[142] Gullace, p. 242.

devices as St. George as soldier-saint, Arthurian knights, stained-glass windows and much else besides.[143] The emphasis on the distant past reflected a desire to assert 'older lines of continuity', and to integrate the experience of the First World War into these narratives.[144] Such an intention was clearly evident in the monument erected at Royston, in Hertfordshire. The centrepiece of this sculpture was the bronze figure of what one journalist called 'a typical "Tommy" who "did his bit" in the mud of Flanders'; but behind him, in stone relief, were figures of a medieval longbowman, a foot-soldier of the Napoleonic wars, and more 'ancestors of Royston, who, in the past, have on the battlefields and elsewhere done their bit'.[145] Other memorials relied more on symbolism, while still seeking to connect the First World War with the conflicts and sacrifices of past ages. The design for the memorial at Bedford drew heavily on traditional motifs and a medievalist aesthetic, linking the war that it sought to commemorate with historic struggles, in this case the tenth-century battles against the Danes.[146]

Pageants sought to do something similar. Indeed, arguably they offered a more satisfying means of integrating the war into established historical narratives, and by so doing commemorating the sufferings and sacrifice of those involved. Salisbury showed how this could be done in 1919, in an early example of an adaptation of the Edwardian 'invented tradition' of the historical pageant to the post-war context. In this case and others in the immediate post-war years, allegory and symbolism were used in the final scene but not elsewhere: the war was difficult, perhaps impossible, to depict in the usual pageant style at this early stage. However, over time the war was more easily incorporated into the usual structure and format of historical pageantry, albeit with a particular poignancy that was lacking from episodes depicting the more distant past. It was still comparatively rare for pageants to portray the First World War even in the second half of the twentieth century, but where they did, it was as part of a longer community history. It was a tragic and decisive event, but it did not disrupt the 'timeless traditions' and historical continuities that were increasingly placed at the centre of pageant narratives.[147] At the same time, although national and imperial themes were by no means absent, pageants continued to be inspired by the proud localism that was so important in the Edwardian pageant movement, and which, as has been argued elsewhere, became even more significant in the pageants of the nineteen-fifties.[148] Pageants embodied the blend of traditional and modern forms and themes that Winter has seen as central to the culture of commemoration after the First World War, and this blend remained an important aspect of historical pageantry as it evolved into the mid twentieth century, before declining to become the largely forgotten cultural phenomenon that it is today. In the interwar period, it would be hard to find anyone in Britain who did not know what a pageant was, and many saw the events of the First World War itself re-enacted in one or more pageant scenes. At Salisbury in 1919, the figure of Fame asked 'And those who live, how shall I tell their fame?'[149] For many of those who sought to commemorate the war, the answer was clear − in a historical pageant.

---

[143] Goebel, *Great War and Medieval Memory*, esp. pp. 190–2.

[144] Goebel, *Great War and Medieval Memory*, p. 286.

[145] Goebel, *Great War and Medieval Memory*, p. 39.

[146] A. Barlow, 'Mixing memory and desire: British and German war memorials after 1918', in *The Silent Morning: Culture and Memory after the Armistice*, ed. T. Tate and K. Kennedy (Manchester, 2013), pp. 309–31, at p. 317.

[147] E.g., *Pageant of Cambuslang: in the Institute* (Cambuslang, 1955).

[148] Freeman.

[149] *Children's Peace Pageant at Salisbury*, p. 38.