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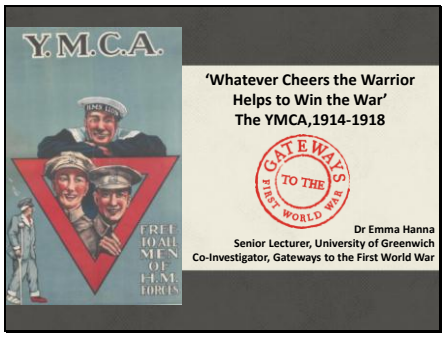


This morning I am going to give an overview of the wartime cinema facilities provided by the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA),and of just a few of the civilians who worked for the organisation both at home and abroad during the First World War. The YMCA was established in London in 1844 as a prayer and bible study group for apprentice drapers to keep them away from the 'dreadful delights' of London. At the outbreak of war in August 1914, the organisation turned its attention to providing support for troops fighting for Britain and her Empire. Not straying from its original remit, the YMCA's wartime mission was signified by the Red Triangle emblem showing that their aim was to nourish a man's mind, body and spirit. By October 1914, 400 large marquees had been erected in Britain, and in November the YMCA were actively working with the British Expeditionary Force to establish the YMCA in Le Havre, expanding into further centres down to Marseilles, and across the Mediterranean.

Slide 2

YMCA activities during the war were based around canteens and huts which provided a variety of facilities for rest and recreation. The huts were built to provide soldiers with a wholesome place to rest in Base Camps, on the frontline, and at home in military camps and railway stations. The huts were funded by charitable donations, with events such as 'Hut Week' raising thousands of pounds for the cause. Each hut was named after the person or organisation which funded it, which can be seen in the diversity of hut names, from 'The Children's Society' and 'Drapers' huts to one named after 'Dogs and Cats'.

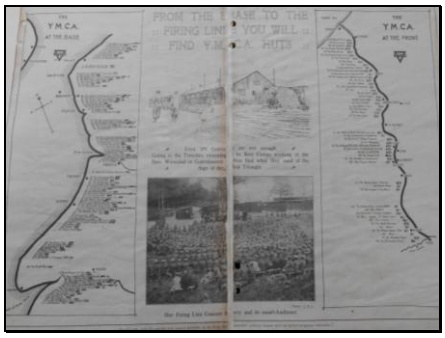
Slide 3

The YMCA spent around £18 million in today's money. This went on free stationery, games, sports, concerts, educational work and lectures, hospitality to relatives of wounded, gifts to wounded. In total the YMCA's wartime budget The YMCA's wartime expenditure was equivalent to £5.1 billion today, the majority raised by charitable subscriptions and donations.

Slide 4

The symbol of the red triangle became synonymous with rest and recreation for weary soldiers. These are just some of the postcard images which the YMCA sold to raise money for their wartime activities, giving a taste of what they were doing on the Western Front, for example running motor kitchens and canteens. There are also many others which detail the accommodation they provided for relatives of the dangerously wounded. The YMCA established several huts near to base camp hospitals where relatives could stay and be near their husband or son in the last days, and receive pastoral care once the relative had passed away. The YMCA filled the gaps the British Army would or could not. For this reason the YMCA was much loved by British servicemen.

Slide 5

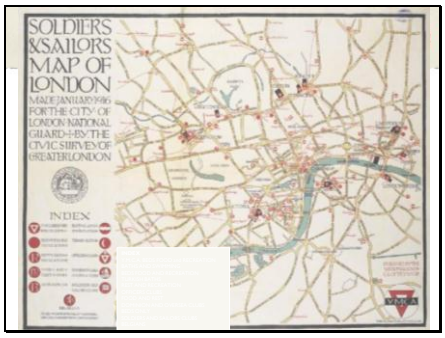


By 1918 over 300 YMCA centres had been established in France. Most camps featured a canteen, chapel, concert hall, library, games room, classroom, and a quiet room. The centres were staffed by approximately 1700 volunteers; many were women coordinated by the YMCA Ladies Auxiliary Committee under Princess Helena Victoria and volunteers from Britain's religious community. This map of base camps on the left and front line huts on the right gives an idea of the size and scale of YMCA operations in France.

Slide 6

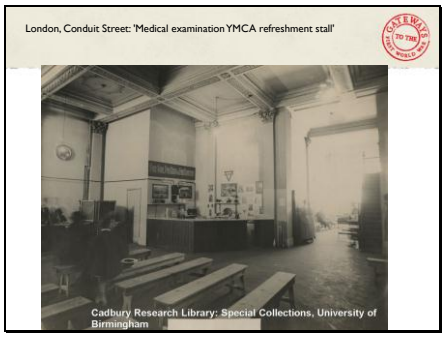
The YMCA provided the BEF with sports equipment such as footballs, cricket and tennis sets, boxing gloves and hockey sticks. Sport was popular, and as General Jack said 'no British troops ever travel without footballs or the energy to kick them'. Seaside excursions, race meetings, the playing of cards and the cinema were also popular forms of entertainment which were vital for the maintenance of soldiers' morale. Athletics tournaments were organised and the YMCA formed its own Football League at Boulogne. In addition, around 600,000 books were provided in YMCA libraries.

Slide 7



Keeping Tommy Atkins and his colleagues from the dreadful delights of London, France and anywhere else they happened to be was a major preoccupation of the YMCA. This map of London for soldiers and sailors, produced in December 1915, shows a certain amount of anxiety about millions of soldiers passing through the capital at any one time. But here is also a good example of the YMCA's determination that they would not be pushing religion down anyone's throat. Certainly, the hut leader in Havre said he was 'positive that thousands of men hold a different view of Christianity and the YMCA as a result of [our] work.' Places of worship are not flagged up here as the emphasis throughout the war is helping servicemen happy, comfortable and therefore in good condition to fight. This was greatly appreciated by British soldiers, the majority of whom would have accessed some or all of the YMCA's services.

Slide 8

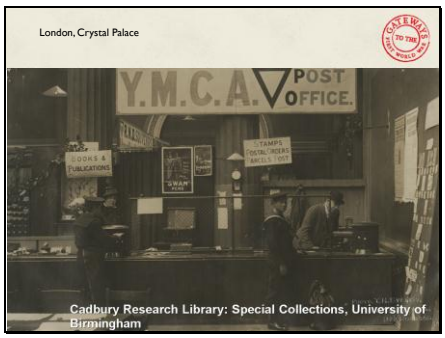


YMCA – supporting the recruitment effort with a refreshment stall at a facility which was being used for medical examinations as men joined up for service in the forces. It was the small things like a cup of tea and a bun which made all the difference to servicemen both at home and abroad.

Slide 9

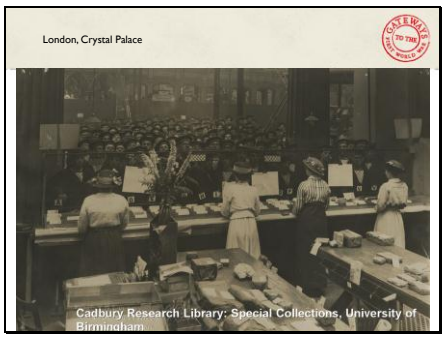
Here this group of sailors outside the Clapham branch of the YMCA would have been able to have accessed a reading room and a canteen, reminders of home which were vitally important to their morale.

Slide 10



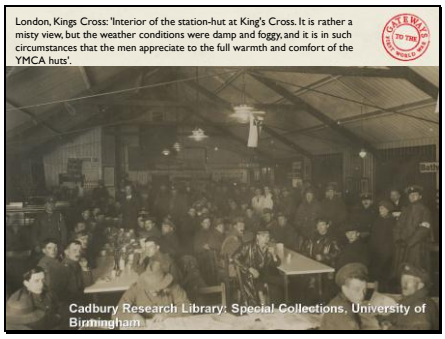
Other essential services provided by the YMCA included a post office, as seen here at Crystal Palace.

Slide 11



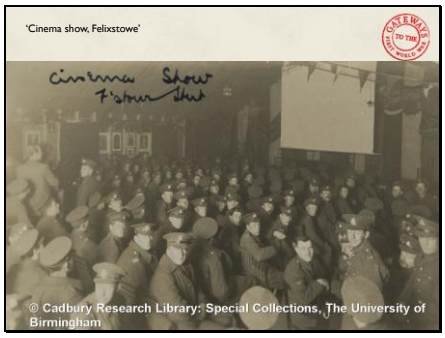
The popularity of this facility can be seen here.

Slide 12



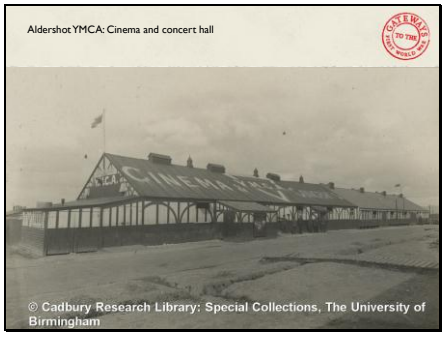
The YMCA were particularly concerned about servicemen hanging around ports and stations, believing that they might be tempted into pubs - or worse - brothels. YMCA huts like the one here at King's Cross station provided a more wholesome place to rest and wait for their trains.

Slide 13



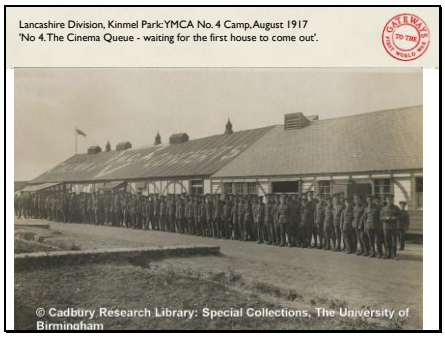
Cinema shows became a central feature of YMCA entertainment provision. Here is a mobile unit at work here in Felixstowe, where a screen has been erected in a YMCA hut.

Slide 14



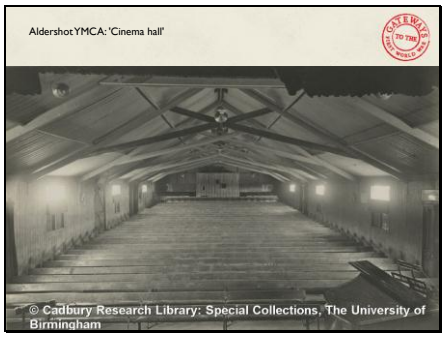
The cinema huts were of a similar design, but those in Britain were a little more sturdy than those erected along the lines of communication. Here is a photo of the Aldershot Cinema and concert hall.

Slide 15



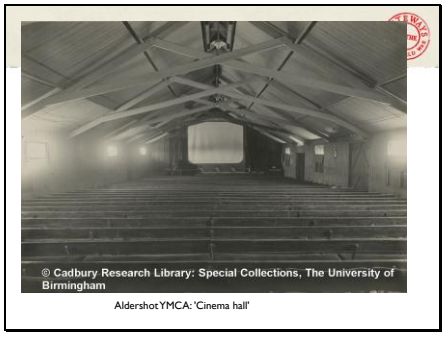
And this is the Lancashire Division waiting outside the YMCA cinema at Kinmel Park in August 1917. This shows the popularity of the facility as this photograph is captioned 'No 4. The Cinema Queue - waiting for the first house to come out'.

Slide 16



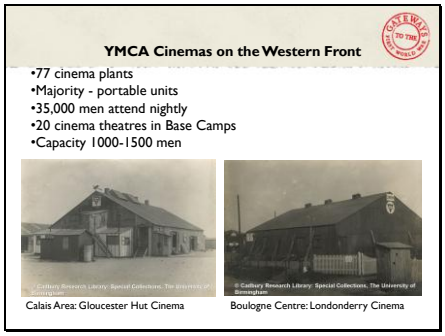
Back to Aldershot, this is the interior of the 'Cinema hall' taken from the stage, facing the projection box. The construction is solid and care has been taken to provide permanent wooden benches.

Slide 17



Here is the view of the stage and the screen. Here the dual purpose of the halls can be seen with the grand piano in place so concert parties could also use this facility as required.

Slide 18



Films were normally shown as part of the concert party programme, with cinema halls also acting as theatres. Cinema shows were a central part of the YMCA's provision for servicemen's' rest and relaxation. The YMCA had 77 cinema plants, the majority of which were portable units providing free showings to men in forward positions. There were 20 specially constructed cinema theatres in principal Base Camps, with a capacity of up to 1500 men. Towards the end of the war the organisation estimated that they had shown films to 35,000 men a night.

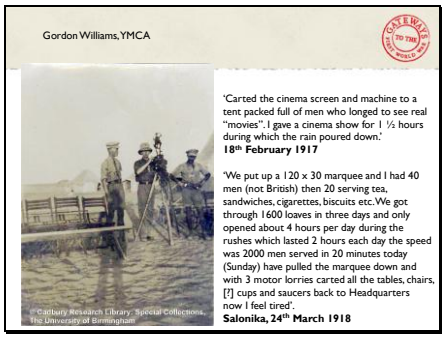
Slide 19

This is Ivo Humphries Godfrey (1897-1991) Head of Stores at the YMCA in Le Havre, and sometime assistant to the YMCA's Organising Secretary in France. Between 1914 and 1918, he worked for the YMCA in France. For over a year he lived on the Rue d'Ypres, Bailleul, showing cinema films to troops near to the front line. Godfrey and his colleagues were part of a huge wartime effort.

Slide 20

This photograph: 'Ballieul cinema Hut site' c.1918, shows that the buildings were not always in safe areas, and that YMCA workers faced death or injury in the course of their duties.

Slide 21



Another volunteer, Gordon Williams, describes his experiences taking a travelling cinema to give entertainments to servicemen in Salonika. He speaks of travelling in large motor lorries on bumpy roads, in muddy and snowy conditions, moving on to a new location every day. He says that he 'Carted the cinema screen and machine to a tent packed full of men who longed to see real "movies". I gave a cinema show for 1 ½ hours during which the rain poured down.' Williams was still very busy in November 1917. He worked to open 3 new YMCA centres within a week, and into 1918 things were going well. By then the YMCA had 40 centres in Salonika, all of which he had visited. His traveling schedule was punishing. He recalled sleeping in a different bed every night for 14 nights, taking a motorcycle or mule

and wagons where the bike couldn't go. He wasn't just working with the cinema equipment, he had to muck in with the canteen as well. In March 1918 he said 'We put up a 120 x 30 marquee and I had 40 men (not British) then 20 serving tea, sandwiches, cigarettes, biscuits etc. We got through 1600 loaves in three days and only opened about 4 hours per day during the rushes which lasted 2 hours each day the speed was 2000 men served in 20 minutes today (Sunday) have pulled the marquee down and with 3 motor lorries carted all the tables, chairs, [?] cups and saucers back to Headquarters now I feel tired'.

Slide 22

The YMCA's entertainment provision was driven by the actress-manager Lena Ashwell who approached the organisations to suggest that performers should be utilised to help boost soldier's morale by putting on entertainments. Ashwell became a leader of concert parties, the first of which was held at No.15 Camp, Harfleur Valley, on 18th February 1915. The company set the pattern for the 'Lena Ashwell concerts' which would follow throughout the war with singers, instrumentalists and entertainers. Over the next fifteen days 35 concerts were held at the camp, and the success of the venture led the YMCA to appoint a committee to oversee Ashwell in appointing other artists, promoting the concerts and also raising money to continue putting them on. Described as 'one of the greatest assets of the YMCA at this time', Ashwell was praised: 'The concert parties are doing a great piece of Christian service, negatively by affording the men diversion and

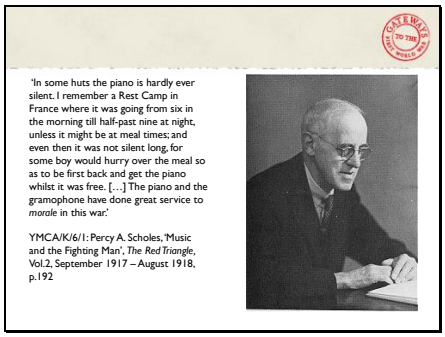
recreation when they might be tempted to spend their time unprofitably were there no concerts, and positively by maintaining a splendidly high tone in every programme that they rendered, thus exerting a strong and noble influence over the thought and life of the men.' Each 'Lena Ashwell' performer was given a sturdy coat and the pay was £1 a week. The average group was made up of 5 members who would go on tours of around 4 months duration, often living in tents. By the summer of 1916 it was reported that Ashwell's groups had put on 2000 concerts in hospitals and various YMCA huts. A party was sent to Malta, and many concerts were put on for the Navy, including on board troop transport ships.

Slide 23

Running in tandem with the Lena Ashwell concert parties, which were run by the Ladies' Auxiliary Committee, the YMCA had a designated music department, which worked with a number of composers, and carried the motto 'Whatever cheers the warrior helps to win the war'. Musical competitions were organised at home and on the front, and instruments and music were provided. Those involved with the work of the YMCA Music Department identified a 'tremendous awakening of interest [...] in music and in the sister art of drama, both from the point of view of performance and appreciation.' It was thought that it was the organisation's duty to do this work, and that 'an Association which has no sign of such activity should question itself very seriously as to whether it is being left behind and

becoming hopelessly old-fashioned.' The YMCA Music Department was very well resourced. Among its activities was the ability to organise speakers for talks on composers and on subject such as 'how to form an orchestra'; providing a list of musicians, lecturers and entertainers available; maintaining a music library; and the sale of instruments at reduced prices through deals with suppliers. The Music Department also started a 'Competition Festival Movement' because they 'afford excellent opportunities for the neighbourly exchange of ideas and for the testing and improving of local standards.' Musical competitions were also held on the Western Front.

Slide 24



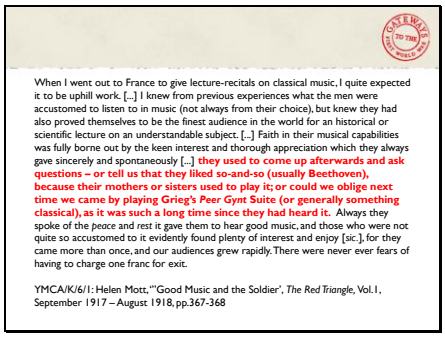
The value of morale-boosting music in wartime was seen as central to the YMCA Music Department's activities. The composer Percy Scholes (1877–1958), who led the department. Scholes was an English musician and author, whose best-known achievement was his compilation of the first edition of *The Oxford Companion to Music*. Scholes' other activities included an early recognition of the possibilities of the gramophone as an aid to knowledge and understanding of music. Scholes is remembered as 'pioneered the cause of musical appreciation and enhanced and strengthened the place of music in our educational system.' Scholes maintained that the existence of instruments, particularly the piano, was widely known to help provide a relaxing atmosphere in the rest areas: 'In some huts the piano is hardly ever silent. I remember a Rest Camp in France where it was going

from six in the morning till half-past nine at night, unless it might be at meal times; and even then it was not silent long, for some boy would hurry over the meal so as to be first back and get the piano whilst it was free. There were all sorts of players – boys who could merely pick out the notes of the airs of a song-book, extemporizing a left-hand part that did not fit, boys with wonderful natural “ear”, who without having had a lesson in their lives or knowing the name of a note could rattle out rag-time by the hour, and boys who played Beethoven and Chopin in a way which must have made our poor little French piano feel ashamed that it could not do these great composers greater justice. The piano and the gramophone have done great service to *morale* in this war.’

Slide 25

The nature of the YMCA concert parties would be a little different to the more raucous divisional events. There is a definite sense that the YMCA is taking the opportunity of the war to civilise the masses of men serving in the forces. Classical music was standard fare as were readings from Shakespeare, together with some religious teaching and the singing of hymns. Many of the classical musicians who went out to perform for the troops recall their surprise that so many of the men were keen to listen and learn about the great composers.

Slide 26

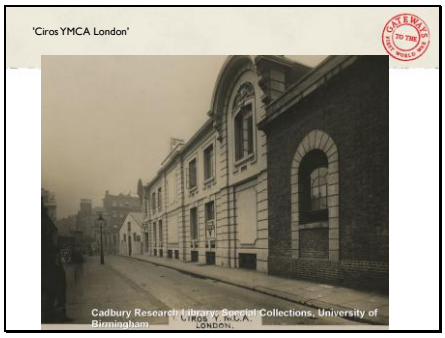


When I went out to France to give lecture-recitals on classical music, I quite expected it to be uphill work. [...] I knew from previous experiences what the men were accustomed to listen to in music (not always from their choice), but knew they had also proved themselves to be the finest audience in the world for an historical or scientific lecture on an understandable subject. [...] Faith in their musical capabilities was fully borne out by the keen interest and thorough appreciation which they always gave sincerely and spontaneously [...] **they used to come up afterwards and ask questions – or tell us that they liked so-and-so (usually Beethoven), because their mothers or sisters used to play it; or could we oblige next time we came by playing Grieg's *Peer Gynt* Suite (or generally something classical), as it was such a long time since they had heard it.** Always they spoke of the *peace* and *rest* it gave them to hear good music, and those who were not quite so accustomed to it evidently found plenty of interest and enjoy [*sic.*], for they came more than once, and our audiences grew rapidly. There were never ever fears of having to charge one franc for exit.

YMCA/K/6/1: Helen Mott, '"Good Music and the Soldier', *The Red Triangle*, Vol. 1, September 1917 – August 1918, pp.367-368

The 'cellist Helen Mott recalled that: 'When I went out to France to give lecture-recitals on classical music, I quite expected it to be uphill work. [...] I knew from previous experiences what the men were accustomed to listen to in music (not always from their choice), but knew they had also proved themselves to be the finest audience in the world for an historical or scientific lecture on an understandable subject. [...] Faith in their musical capabilities was fully borne out by the keen interest and thorough appreciation which they always gave sincerely and spontaneously [...] they used to come up afterwards and ask questions – or tell us that they liked so-and-so (usually Beethoven), because their mothers or sisters used to play it; or could we oblige next time we came by playing Grieg's *Peer Gynt* Suite (or generally something classical), as it was such a long time since they had heard it. Always they spoke of the *peace* and *rest* it gave them to hear good music, and those who were not quite so accustomed to it evidently found plenty of interest and enjoy [*sic.*], for they came more than once, and our audiences grew rapidly. There were never ever fears of having to charge one franc for exit.' Mott explained that she liked to keep the lecture element on the recital to a minimum so the music 'served as a relaxation, and I purposefully kept away from all technical basis, aiming more to give an idea of the period in question, the character and human aspects of the composer, and [...] where all this could be traced in the particular piece of music.'

Slide 27



Back on the home front, in the spring of 1917 the management of Ciro's nightclub offered their premises in Orange Street, Central London, to the YMCA free of rent until the end of the war. It was felt that the concert parties on Salisbury Plain had been so successful the work should be extended further, and the YMCA'S Emergency War Committee awarded a further £100 to Ashwell's funds and a sum of £350 for equipment at Ciro's. The YMCA were anxious about running a London club and kept a close watch on proceedings at Ciro's in the summer of 1917. But Ciro's proved to be a huge success. It was reported in June 1917 that in twelve days the premises at Ciro's were used by 1780 men and 300 women. Entertainments were held every afternoon and evening under the direction of Lena Ashwell but also the composer John Foulds who worked as musical director.

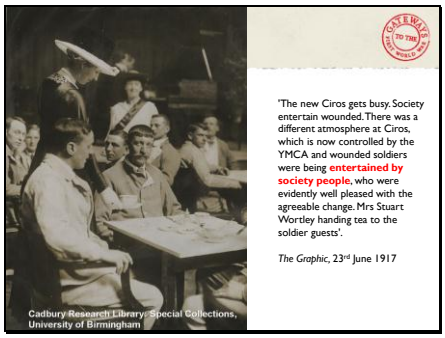
Slide 28

Interior of Ciro's

Slide 29

YMCA/K/1/11/6, Printed picture: London, Ciros., June 1917, There is some handwritten text underneath the picture which reads: ''Graphic' June 23rd 1917'.

Slide 30

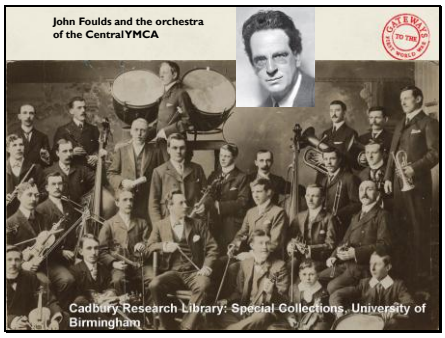


YMCA/K/1/11/3, Photograph: London, Ciros: 'Mrs Stuart Wortley handing tea to the soldier guests'. There is some text underneath the photograph which reads: 'The new Ciros gets busy. Society entertain wounded. There was a different atmosphere at Ciros, which is now controlled by the YMCA and wounded soldiers were being entertained by society people, who were evidently well pleased with the agreeable change. Mrs Stuart Wortley handing tea to the soldier guests'.

Slide 31

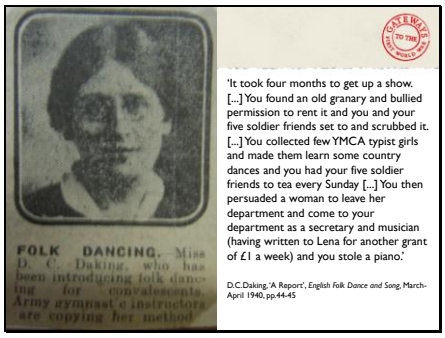
YMCA/K/1/11/5, Photograph: London, Ciros.

Slide 32



John Foulds, a Manchester born cellist and composer, who after falling short of Army fitness requirements served as Musical Director of the Central YMCA during the war, worked at the YMCA as musical director from May 1917. His mission was 'to create and sustain an interest in the highest walks of the musical art where none was previously existent, to men who in the main must be considered as non-musical. [...] this branch of the Association is now known throughout London, not to mention the provinces, as being the keenest musical centre of any in the whole kingdom.' Foulds worked at Ciro's every day from May 1917 and the end of 1918. After the war he continued to organise 106 special Sunday concerts of dedicated and sacred music at Ciro's. He founded an amateur orchestra and choral society called Centymca, and he would write and print the programmes for all the concerts. Yet references to Foulds' wartime work with the YMCA are few. Once again, he appears to have been ignored by History, his tireless work going unrecorded and therefore forgotten over time. Much better recorded is the wartime work of Gustav Holst. In 1917 the YMCA invited the composer to work as Musical Organizer in their educational work among the troops in the Near East.

Slide 33



A second individual almost lost in the mists of time is a woman by the name of Daisy Caroline Daking. She gets a fleeting mention in a very recent biography of Lena Ashwell, as Daking originally started her war service in France as part of Ashwell's team. Country dancing was an established form of recreation and exercise in the pre-war years, it is not unexpected that the English Folk Dance Society was invited to contribute to the wartime entertainments schedule. Daisy Daking, an established folk dancer, teacher, and active member of the EFDS, she was asked to go to France by a senior member of the YMCA in 1917. The exact chronology is unclear, but Daking's journal details that she arrived in France and made herself known to the YMCA headquarters in Le Havre. The YMCA in France were clearly rather perplexed at the sight of this woman who claimed she had been sent to teach soldiers to do folk dancing. She recalled that 'It took four months to get up a show. [...] You found an old granary and bullied permission to rent it and you and your five soldier friends set to and scrubbed it. [...] You collected few YMCA typist girls and made them learn some country dances and you had your five soldier friends to tea every Sunday [...] You then persuaded a woman to leave her department and come to your department as a secretary and musician (having written to Lena for another grant of £1 a week) and you stole a piano.'

Slide 34

Daisy Daking's travel documents – a civilian allowed into the back areas of the war strictly by permission of the authorities.

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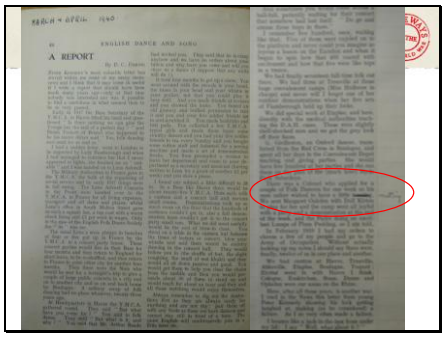
Daisy Daking had a significant impact as she eventually led a team of 17 full-time dance teachers who worked at the convalescent camps at Trouville, as well as Boulogne and Etaples. The latter is particularly interesting. The official line in British military history maintains that the British Army did not experience a breakdown of discipline at any time. Where other forces mutinied, the British stood firm. There are some historians who maintain that there was a mutiny at the infamous Etaples camp in 1917, as popularised by the television series *The Monocled Mutineer* in the late 1980s, but historians alleging a mutiny have always been marginalised as reliable evidence one way or another isn't available. Yet. The National Archives, at some point in 2017, will be releasing documents relating to the camp at Etaples. With a 100 year clearance there must be something interesting in there. Which is why a little annotation in Daisy Daking's article from 1940 caught my eye.

Slide 36


ENGLISH DANCE AND SONG

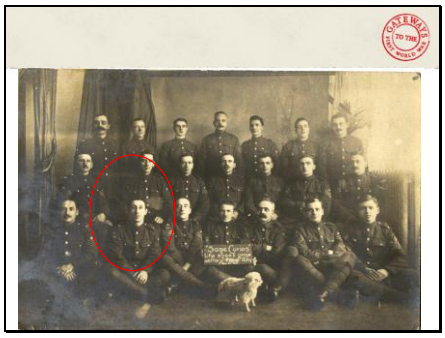
A REPORT

In an article she published in 1940, the sixth paragraph on Etaples she says that ‘there was a colonel who applied for a couple of folk dancers for one as week as his men rather wished to have a meeting’. But she has crossed out the word ‘meeting’ and written in the word ‘mutiny’. Unless the outbreak of folk dancing was mistaken for a breakdown in military discipline, we may yet find out what occurred at that camp in the next few years.

Slide 37

An 8 page booklet was produced giving details of folk, sword and country dances.
Daking noted in her journal that ‘this work lasted for 2 years and then had to be abandoned because lack of money meant the closing down of many YMCA departments, the Music Section included. But good work was done – the Lake District branch was started off – one travelled Oxfordshire, Nottinghamshire, Lincolnshire, Cumberland and the Lakes – made very many contacts and handed over little groups of enthusiasts to the EFDS. But except in the Lake District the work mainly fizzled out.’

Slide 38



Daking and Foulds, and hundreds of others like them, had a huge impact on the morale of the troops serving in the Great War. And here is a final individual to whom I have been recently introduced. His name is Frank Keeffe, a man from Woolwich who from 1915 served as a sergeant in the Army ordnance Corps. Frank was a gifted musician and played the organ at his local catholic church in Woolwich. When he was posted to France with his regiment he spent most of his time in Le Havre where the AOD had a large depot, and by coincidence, it was where the headquarters of the YMCA in France were based. Frank offered his services as organist at Le Havre cathedral, and he also organised concert parties acting as bandmaster for the AOD seen here. His letters also talk of working with the great Lena Ashwell, and of playing to hundreds of soldiers who enjoyed his music so much they would not let him off the stage without a number of encores. I have only just met Frank. His personal archive was found in a battered old leather suitcase in the loft of a house in Shooters Hill where laid untouched for decades and which is in now in the process of being deposited in the archives of the Greenwich Heritage Centre. I am the first historian honoured to read about his wartime musical exploits, but there will be hundreds of other Franks.

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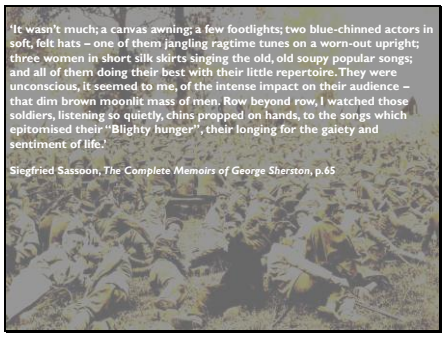

In conclusion, therefore, I want to finish by saying that we should perhaps have a greater appreciation of how the soldiers of the Great War lived, as well as how too many of them died. I suggest that the most fitting memorial to them would be to understand the privations but also the pleasures that they experienced which spurred them to victory. This short quote from the memoirs of Siegfried Sassoon says a great deal about the impact of recreation and morale during the Great War: 'It wasn't much; a canvas awning; a few footlights; two blue-chinned actors in soft, felt hats – one of them jangling ragtime tunes on a worn-out upright; three women in short silk skirts singing the old, old soupy popular songs; and all of them doing their best with their little repertoire. They were unconscious, it seemed to me, of the intense impact on their audience – that dim brown moonlit mass of men. Row beyond row, I watched those soldiers, listening so quietly, chins propped on hands, to the songs which epitomised their "Blighty hunger", their longing for the gaiety and sentiment of life.' Through the stories of people like Ivo Humphreies,Gordon Williams, John Foulds, Daisy Daking and Frank Keeffe, we are only just beginning to appreciate the work of these volunteers, their efforts forming a vital part of the British war effort in the First World War.

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