

July 1914

On 4 August, the United Kingdom declared war on Germany, but few would have credited such an outcome in early July.

The summer of 1914 was hot. The weather during the school holidays was described as delightful, with both July and August experiencing highs of 83F (28C). Linlithgow depended for its water supply on Cockleroi reservoir, as Beecraigs had yet to open. Unfortunately it had run dry. Colonel Chalmers of Lochmill Paper Mill suggested that Glasgow's sooty atmosphere might be capturing rain that should have fallen on the town.

The *Gazette's* front page contained many adverts. Linlithgow Motor Touring Co was advertising motor tours by the grey torpedo car (a kind of bus) to Blackness, Strathyre and Aberfoyle, quite a distance given the state of some roads. Alternatively, the 1914 Harley Davidson motor cycle was for sale at 247 High Street. Alexander MacDonald, 213 High Street, was advertising the fresh arrival of new blouses and trimmed hats for summer wear, and A & R Melville, 13 High Street, offered Ladies' Summer Combinations in White Fine Stockinette with Fancy Top and no sleeves, for 2/3d (11p). Gillespie's, 68 High Street, was selling the new Vacuum Clothes-Washer: 'a tub of clothes washed perfectly clean in 4 minutes'. Readers were invited to travel by Carron Line package ship from Grangemouth and Bo'ness to London and a High Street grocer was advertising Donaldson Line tickets for the Glasgow to Canada route. The extensive celebrations of the 'Sex-Centenary of Bannockburn' and the arrangements for the forthcoming royal visit to the town by King George and Queen Mary were fully reported.

It would be wrong, however, to think of this as a summer free of anxiety. Irish Home Rule was of great interest. Many in the county had been born in Ireland or were of Irish extraction.. The *Gazette's* 'Our Notebook' opinion column described how Unionists had organised a trip to Ireland by local politicians, Liberals as well as Tories, to investigate Home Rule ('devo max' in current terminology). Unionist objections were causing great difficulty in progressing the legislation through Westminster. In an argument with echoes today, the editor wrote 'The Tories cannot have it both ways, much as they would like to. On the one hand they say Nationalist Ireland is backward and unprogressive; on the other hand they say Nationalist Ireland is prospering under the Union...' There was a Scottish Home Rule meeting in Bathgate which reported progress on an Act for Scotland. Suffragette activity and the wrongful conviction for murder of Oscar Slater were also of interest.

There was another cause of public concern that was perhaps more below the surface than Irish Home Rule, but no less real. The United Kingdom's dominance over Germany in industrial production was being eroded, and in many areas lost. The resulting unease was exacerbated by the growth of the German navy, although it was still much smaller than the Royal Navy.

Despite these concerns, the assassination in Serbia of the heir to the throne of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire was not mentioned in the *Gazette*. However, the July 3 edition did report the leader of a group of Berlin manufacturers and merchants declaring, in language unremarkable at the time, that 'it was the desire of every business man in Germany that there should be peace and friendship between the two great commercial nations of the world. Armaments might not be avoidable, but they should only be used for protection against uncivilised or half-civilised nations...'

As warm July rolled on, the main focus of attention became the royal visit. This prompted musings on the desirability of restoring the Palace. 'Nowhere in all Scotland is there anything to equal or approach it as an ancient building or one that so completely symbolises and epitomises the Royal history of Scotland....Money is spent on less worthy objects than the sum that would be required...' The royal visit to the town took place on Saturday 11 July. King George and Queen Mary visited both St Michael's Church and the Palace. A bright sun shone from a cloudless sky and a large crowd turned out. The edition of the *Gazette* the following Friday provided a detailed description of the day including, unusually, several photographs.

The last peacetime edition of the paper appeared on Friday 31 July. It is remarkable how little space was devoted to the possibility of a European war. The editorial was devoted to Irish Home Rule (there was a hope that 'Unhappy Ireland' might yet unite in peace) and the health dangers of tuberculosis. In the 'Pencilling' column, the royal visit was still the main topic but the editor goes on to write, with some prescience, 'It is said that the reservists are looking forward to a possible call to arms in the near future. We cannot tell what might happen in that powder magazine, military Europe. Fervently as every humane person wishes that such a calamity may never descend upon the civilised world, we may be upon the brink of Armageddon.' Further on he writes on war prices. 'When people have to pay extortionate prices for food they begin to understand that war is not only an affair of the field, but a grim struggle against starvation as well.'

On a lighter note, long-distance motorists were reported as praising the roads around Linlithgow 'which they say cannot be excelled in respect to smooth surfaces in any part of the country'. It was noted that the Marquis of Linlithgow and his brother Lord Charles Hope, who in 1913 was the amateur golf champion of France, had played Linlithgow Golf Course. The golf club held a meeting to review its finances following completion of the course and clubhouse. The County Cricket Club was unable to restore the lost glories of Linlithgow. The County men were exhorted to put their hands to the wheel and to practice with persistence and determination. Finally, the editor's thoughts turned to holidays, be it the beach at Portobello, the golf courses of the Fife coast, or sweet Rothesay Bay, adding 'and even our little seaside resort of Blackness displays its charms at this time.'

Further into the paper there was an article headlined 'Special Servicemen Called Up – Barassie Camp, Thursday'. (The 10th Royal Scots were on manoeuvres at a routine camp at Barassie on the Ayrshire coast.) The special service section of the 10th Royal Scots 'have received instruction to take up their war stations and entrained at Barassie station – no information on their destination.'

Finally, on page eight, the paper reported that 'Austria Declares War on Serbia –Anxious days for Europe'.

August 1914

On 7 August, under a normal-sized headline, the news appeared on the *Gazette's* front page: '**WAR!** At last the cloud which, a fortnight ago, appeared no bigger than a man's hand on the European horizon, has covered the whole sky, and the greatest war the world has ever known is begun. The end no man can foretell...'

It was believed that the Territorials, though mobilised very effectively, would not be needed in action but that it would be an intensely serious situation if this necessity ever arose. (Several Territorial Battalions of the Royal Scots were in action by the following summer.)

Under the heading, 'The Catastrophic War', the editor wrote:

'Never before...have such hosts of soldiers been summoned forth to engage in grim and deadly combat. This is the result of "bloated battalions" by which the forces of the chief military nations have kept on growing from hundreds of thousands to millions.'

The 10th Royal Scots Territorials 'A' Company mustered at Linlithgow HQ on Wednesday morning and were despatched from the Drill Hall. There had been a very good turnout despite only a few hours' notice. According to rumour, the troops were bound for East Lothian by train. Tents and baggage had been conveyed the previous day by motor lorry. Bo'ness learned that its port, along with the entire upper Forth, had been commandeered by the Admiralty, thus closing the docks to commercial shipping.

Panic buying was causing a rapid increase in the prices of foodstuffs. By the Tuesday, the day war was declared, sugar was up to 6d / lb, (5.5p per kilo) and there were only 4 instead of 5 morning rolls for 2d. Sugar and flour quickly sold out. The paper commented that 'there has been needless panic and rush to buy in food by the comfortable classes and thus denying the poorer classes who can only buy in small quantities.' At the Bo'ness Co-operative Society quarterly meeting on the previous Monday the Manager, Mr King, confirmed that the Society had 'three or four weeks' supply' of flour in hand. A Mr Grant stated 'It will all be over by that time' and Mr King replied 'I think so: It will be very short and sweet.' This was the only instance of such ill-founded optimism found in the *Gazette*. Later in the week, the first panic was exhausted and a calmer feeling prevailed in view of the assurances issued by the Government that no scarcity would take place.

In the edition of 14 August it was reported that Lord Linlithgow had set aside the 'spacious and magnificent' ballroom at Hopetoun House for hospital accommodation for the sick and wounded.

It was still the season for holidays for those who could afford them. Most people holidaying in the early 20th century remained in Scotland. However the usual trips and tours could not be guaranteed and cheap fares were off. Many aspects of normal life continued of course: a cyclist by name of O'Hara came off his bike in front of the Star & Garter: his face was badly hurt and he lost consciousness for a time. He was carried to the garage yard opposite where Dr Cross came to attend him, then he was conveyed home to North Tarbrax in a cab. In the burgh court, a labourer was admonished for attempting to enter the West Port Inn in a state of intoxication and two female vagrants were fined for breach of the peace. Although about thirty years of age they had fought in a desperate manner, while their language was disgraceful.

The beautiful weather of the summer of 1914 produced a good harvest of wheat. The crop had withstood the drought better than barley and oats.

But the war was having its impact. The *Gazette* was to be reduced in size due to serious reductions in paper supplies. There was strict censorship as to what was happening in the war on land and at sea, although the editor accepted it as necessary. A public notice declared: 'No War Pictures at Cinemas - Proprietors and managers of cinema houses are notified that no pictures dealing with the war, in any shape or form, are permitted on the screen. A violation of this order will mean instant cancelling of a licence.'

Many of the Territorials had offered themselves for service abroad but their movements since then were unknown. However the 10th Cyclist Battalion of the Royal Scots had gained 'golden opinions' for their efficiency 'and it may be safely said that nowhere could be found a better trained and equipped unit of the Territorial Army.'

The raising of public funds to support the servicemen had begun. The Prince of Wales Relief Fund raised subscriptions under the leadership of Lord Rosebery.

A branch of the Red Cross was formed after a meeting of the Linlithgow branch of the Soldiers' and Sailors' Families Association, Lady Linlithgow in the chair. A National Relief Fund opened. The Ladies' Guild of the Parish Church had organised itself to provide various articles of clothing for the fighting men. Knitting sessions were taking place in Longcroft Hall.

The churches were full on the first Sunday after the declaration of war. The *Gazette* reported some sermons at length. It was reported that the congregations felt the deep and thrilling solemnity of the sermons and felt a strong sense of unity of all sections of the community, high and low, rich and poor, in face of the national emergency.

In St Michael's Kirk, whose walls in earlier centuries had experienced directly the curse of war, the Rev. Robert Coupar rallied the congregation by saying 'Surely it is a matter of gratitude that this war is our calamity, not our crime... We never sought it; we did not desire it; we did not even blunder into it.' He went on to note that 'we do not require to create our armies by conscription or any other despotic method'. He could not have foreseen that conscription would be introduced in early 1916, nor sadly that he would lose his own son, Captain Sydney Coupar, near Bapaume in December 1918.

In the United Free High Church, the Rev. Alexander Mitchell reflected upon how even the previous Sunday it was hoped the country could honourably remain neutral, but the extraordinary conduct of the German Emperor and his advisers made this impossible.

Again the seriousness of the war was recognised. 'We are face to face...with a war unparalleled in the whole history of the world. No man knows what the end is going to be...As I went last week...to see our own Territorials away...what impressed me was the new look on the faces of the men. There was no attempt to minimise the uncertainty regarding the future. As one of the officers said to me "God only knows the end of this". But through it all, along with the uncertainty, there was the quiet yet determined bearing - We are in for it, and by God's help we shall do our best to see it through...There has been no foolish boasting, ...no music, no processions, no flag waving – although, of course, there has been a natural exhibition of patriotic enthusiasm in the city where the Sovereign resides...Men going to the call of duty require no preacher to remind them that they have to face death, and that the last parting may have taken place between them and their loved ones.' In a contrasting note he went on to declare 'The nation is sounding the great waters, and a new life is being born. Ireland, our Indian Empire, and our Colonies united and loyal; trade disputes forgotten; London ostentatious wealth a thing of the past; party strife obliterated and forgotten; and round about us on every hand we behold only brethren belonging to the same land, facing a common foe, and willing to bear one another's burdens. Is it not wonderful?' Mitchell also addressed the conundrum that the Kaiser too was entreating the Almighty for support. 'When the Kaiser breaks his plighted word, and the plighted word of the whole German nation, and tears in tatters the most solemn of treaties (with Luxembourg and Belgium), and then cries to the Almighty for help and for victory, he is guilty of nothing less than the rankest blasphemy'.

The Rev. Henry McKinley of the Congregational EU Church also sought the positives. Referring to the situation in Ireland, he said that 'the dark cloud of civil war, which had been overhanging the country, had been dispelled in a day, and both volunteer forces, who were strongly opposed are now standing shoulder to shoulder'. Further, 'the militant suffragettes... had allowed their sympathetic womanhood to rise above their political grievances and were now to be engaged in the noblest and best work – the work a woman is best fitted for – tending the wounded.'

A meeting was held that Sunday night in Longcroft Hall where the Rev. Alex. Mitchell intimated the latest war news. He recapped events leading up to the war, from the Franco-Prussian War of 1870, and answered questions that working men may have had about its causes. He was assisted by two large maps of Europe and the Balkans and pointed out 'our duty as a nation and as individuals'. Finally the minister, who had been repeatedly cheered, asked if those present thought it useful that these meetings should be continued and '99%

voted yes'. It was suggested that, if there should be room, women as well as men should be in future invited, and this was agreed to.

On a different note, a deserter from the Seaforth Highlanders was brought before the Sheriff-Substitute at Linlithgow Sheriff Court, having surrendered himself the previous day. He said he wished to join his regiment and he was remanded pending such an arrangement being made. Presumably his conduct had been viewed as simply being absent without leave.

Although growing international tensions had given rise to some feeling of inevitability, there was prior to the outbreak of war a powerful pacifist movement. Indeed at Westminster two members of the cabinet resigned rather than abandon neutrality. After the declaration most opinion swung behind the government. In Linlithgow, the editor of the *Gazette* and the ministers in their pulpits on the Sunday had no doubt that Kaiser Wilhelm carried most if not all responsibility for the war's outbreak ('war maker and evil genius') and that the war must now be won whatever the cost. In the edition of 14 August the MP for Falkirk Burghs, JA Murray MacDonald, who had opposed the war, wrote to say he no longer supported neutrality. He had always been an advocate of peace and had opposed the course of the Governments of the world, including Britain's, in terms of armaments but was now of the view that the German Government – not the people of Germany – had forced war upon the world, and the suffering and sorrow that must come from it should be born 'because it comes in the plain path of duty'.

Not everyone swung round to support the war, however. At the East of Scotland Cooperative Conference (held in Bathgate) the Chairman is quoted as saying 'This was not a war of cooperators or of the common people; it is a war of the ruling classes. They had come to this pass that half a dozen men in Europe could drench the Continent with blood.' He looked forward to the day 'when man to man the world o'er will brothers be for a' that'.

By 21 August it was being reported that food prices were back to peace time causing 'mortification for those who bought big quantities at inflated prices.'

In the Pencillings column the editor wryly commented that 'The 'Song of Socks' is the music of today – knit, knit, knit.' On a more serious note he refers to the scandalous mismanagement of stores at the time of Crimea leaving 'bitter and ugly memories of the ill-judged war with Russia in the "sixties"... It is to be hoped that when the end of the war arrives no-one will be able to point the finger of scorn and say that the nation which lauded

the soldier and sailor when the safety of the Empire depended upon their heroism and devotion, forgot them and neglected the widows and orphans as soon as the danger of the war was over. This reproach and scandal has defaced the history of our country. Now is the time to arrange that it will be for ever wiped out by a more humane generation.'

The edition of August 28 reported the third in a series of talks on the war at Longcroft Hall. The lecturer was a Mr J. Walker and frustration at the lack of hard war news was evident: 'We must trust Lord Kitchener (Secretary of State for War) implicitly even though we are not receiving full information at present. An important end was being served by this conspiracy of secrecy...There were dark places and dark days ahead of us...'

September 1914

The good summer continued into early September and it would appear that the town was adjusting to being at war. Door to door collections for the Relief Fund were instituted throughout the parish. £10 (over £400 in today's money) was given by Nobel factory employees and they intended to make weekly contributions until the end of the war. Individual donations to the 'Garments for Troops' fund were listed in the newspaper, no doubt increasing the pressure on others to donate. St Michael's Women's Guild gave £10, Mr and Mrs Chalmers (Lochmill Paper Mill) £10, Mrs Lovell £5 (Avon Paper Mill), Mrs Wyville Thomson £1 (probably the widow of Professor Wyville Thomson of the Challenger expedition). The 'Pencilings of the Week' column encouraged such giving:

'Let everyone give as much as his means will allow to relieve the anxieties of the wives and children of our defenders – many of whom are widows and orphans now, or will be before long...It is intolerable to think that a rich country like ours...should allow want or poverty to fall upon the wives or bairns who have made the supreme sacrifice of giving up the life of the breadwinner'.

The 'Our Notebook' column reflected 'If a man had predicted two months ago that the time was at hand when all Europe would be engaged in war, he would have been called a lunatic...it was too terrible to contemplate. Yet the reality has arrived in all its grim horror...it must not be forgotten that the road is long and dangerous, and that it will demand heavy sacrifices.' Later the writer commented that it was 'perfectly evident that the optimism which prevailed at the beginning of the war as to the vulnerability of the German army was premature'.

The recruiting offices were extremely busy during the previous week. Elderly men who were barred out by present regulations were as eager to offer themselves as young men. Some 80 to 100 enlistments were made at Linlithgow Drill Hall including 17 in one day – but some of these men would have come from outwith Linlithgow – and Bathgate recruited 100 in three days. (Many men were content to wait until called up). On the Wednesday 11 young men volunteered, ‘of average height 5 ft 10 ins and chest 37 inches’. It was commented upon that the physique of the men was exceptionally good. Linlithgow must have been a healthy town as, nationally, medical examinations of recruits revealed a high proportion of young men unfit for duty. The majority of recruits were joining for the duration of the war and therefore, under the rules, although they were assured they would be posted to a Scottish regiment, they could not choose which one.

Conclusion

What does this study of Linlithgow’s reaction to the outbreak of war tell us? First of all, there is no evidence that there was rejoicing in the streets and indeed the Rev. Alex. Mitchell says it was not so. But it seems clear also that the arguments for staying neutral quickly dissipated. The view that the Kaiser was personally to blame and that the war must be fought to a conclusion, whatever the cost, prevailed.

The seriousness of the coming war seems to have been well understood by the editor of the local paper, and the local ministers. Over the previous century Central Scotland had become one of the most heavily industrialised parts of the world. It seems that in Linlithgow few doubted that a new war would be very different from the Napoleonic wars, a point made in the *Gazette*.

A view has developed today that back in August 1914 people thought that the troops would be ‘home by Christmas’, and while there is one incidence of this optimism reported, the prevailing view was the reverse. Most of those whose opinions were expressed in the *Linlithgowshire Gazette* seemed only too aware of the likely prolonged duration of the conflict, and the high number of casualties to be expected.

©David Elliot, Linlithgow in the Great War Group

Note on the *Linlithgowshire Gazette*

During the First World War, the Linlithgowshire Gazette was published every Friday, price one old penny. It covered the entire county, from Whitburn to Bo’ness. As was normal for a

local paper at that time, it reported and commented upon all news: local, national and international. It was a staunch Liberal paper, strongly anti-Tory, and supportive of Irish Home Rule. The editor from 1913 to 1919 was George Craig. He was highly regarded in the town and at his farewell presentation, held in the Star & Garter Hotel, he was gifted the sum of £50, worth over £2100 today.