



From Tangier to Locarno: The Experience of War in Nottingham and Language Use in Local Newspapers, 1905-1925

Ben Braber & Natalie Braber

To cite this article: Ben Braber & Natalie Braber (2021) From Tangier to Locarno: The Experience of War in Nottingham and Language Use in Local Newspapers, 1905-1925, *Midland History*, 46:3, 318-338, DOI: [10.1080/0047729X.2021.1975230](https://doi.org/10.1080/0047729X.2021.1975230)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/0047729X.2021.1975230>



© 2021 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.



Published online: 12 Sep 2021.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 183



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)



From Tangier to Locarno: The Experience of War in Nottingham and Language Use in Local Newspapers, 1905–1925

Ben Braber^a and Natalie Braber^b

^aSchool of Humanities, University of Glasgow, Glasgow, UK; ^bSchool of Arts & Humanities, Nottingham Trent University, Nottingham, UK

ABSTRACT

This article applies a historical linguistic approach to compare specific word choice before, during and after the First World War in a sample of UK newspapers and two Nottingham papers. It finds that language use in Nottingham newspapers was similar to UK papers but at the same time showed marked differences, possibly as a result of local characteristics, circumstances, events and developments, which suggests that people's experience of war in this city did not always follow an overall UK pattern.

KEYWORDS

United Kingdom; Nottingham; First World War; Locarno; home front; newspapers; language use; word choice

Introduction

On 31 March 1905, the German Emperor Wilhelm II disembarked from a warship at Tangier in Morocco, which was under French influence, to make a speech advocating Moroccan independence. It was an attempt to break up the understanding between the United Kingdom and France on spheres of colonial influence. The speech caused a crisis in international relations, which followed the rise of the German Empire – a competitor for dominance of international markets and global military superiority. Six years later a second Moroccan crisis came and went, with the Chancellor of the Exchequer David Lloyd George warning against further German expansion.¹ By that time, the main European powers had bolstered their armies and navies. Few people wanted war, but most took it for granted that a major international conflict would come. It arrived in 1914, lasted four years and became known as ‘the Great War’. The Versailles peace accord heralded a period of ongoing uncertainty and it was not until

CONTACT Ben Braber  benbraber@btinternet.com  18 Boundary Road, Newark NG24 4AL, UK.

¹*The Times*, July 22, 1911. See also T. Boyle, ‘New Light on Lloyd George’s Mansion House Speech,’ *The Historical Journal*, 23 (1980), 431–3; K. O. Morgan, ‘Lloyd George and Germany,’ *The Historical Journal*, 39 (1996), 755–66.

© 2021 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way.

1925 that the European powers normalized their relations, signing a number of treaties, known as the Locarno Pacts, in the Swiss town of Locarno.

The existing literature on the British experience of the prelude, course and aftermath of what we now call the First World War has paid attention to propaganda and local feelings throughout the UK,² including Nottingham, where John Beckett has indicated that an older picture of the British public being shored up in their support for the war through atrocity propaganda no longer seems appropriate.³ The connection between war and language in this period has also been examined, but as yet no study has been made of the relation between experience of war in Nottingham and language use in its local newspapers.⁴ This article attempts to help fill that gap by applying a historical linguistic approach for a study of specific word choice before, during and after the First World War in two Nottingham papers, comparing them to a sample of UK newspapers.

During the period 1905–1926 newspapers played a large role in forming and voicing public opinion. In 1910 nearly one in ten Britons bought a national daily newspaper.⁵ Numerous regional and local papers were published, printing stories from their areas alongside national and international news, gathered from competitors and other papers such as *The Times*, organizations such as the Press Association and agencies such as Reuters. Andrew Hobbs has concluded that during the second half of the nineteenth century local newspapers were more widely read than the London papers, and following Rachel Matthews, it can be argued that studying the regional press will result in a better understanding of the newspaper industry, for example, its social influence.⁶

Of course, books, pamphlets and private correspondence also circulated information and evoked feeling. News spread by word-of-mouth on the street, in the workplace and at home, and during incidental gatherings. Cinemas with newsreels and moving pictures started gaining ground, as did the radio. During the war, the contents of propaganda campaigns found its way to people, for example through publications,

²This article is not intended to critically analyse the existing literature; it builds on published work such as A. Gregory, *The Last Great War: British Society and the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); H. D. Lasswell, *Propaganda Technique in World War I* (Cambridge (Mass) / London: MIT Press, 1971); D. Monger, *Patriotism and Propaganda in First World War Britain. The National War Aims Committee and Civilian Morale* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2012); T. R. E. Paddock, ed., *World War I and propaganda* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2014); M. L. Sanders and P. M. Taylor, *British Propaganda during the First World War, 1914–18* (London: Macmillan, 1982); and P. M. Taylor, *Munitions of the Mind: A History of Propaganda* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003). See also footnotes 3, 4 and 6.

³For example J. Beckett, 'Maintaining Morale. Promoting the First World War, 1914–16,' *Historian*, 130 (2016), 12–16; J. Beckett, 'Patriotism in Nottinghamshire. Challenging the Unconvinced, 1914–1917,' *Midland History*, 39 (2014), 185–201. On Nottingham, see also C. Lovejoy Edwards, *Nottingham in the Great War* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword Books, 2015); D. Marcombe, ed., *Nottingham and the Great War*, University of Nottingham (typescript), 1984; and D. Nunn, *Britannia Calls. Nottingham Schools and the Push for Great War Victory* (Knowle Hill: Knowle Hill Publishing, 2010).

⁴For example, R. Wodak, ed., *Language, Power and Ideology: Studies in Political Discourse* (Amsterdam/Philadelphia: J. Benjamins Pub. Co., 1989); C. Declercq and J. Walker, eds., *Languages and the First World War. Representation and Memory* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016); P. Doyle and J. Walker, *Trench Talk. Words of the First World War* (Stroud: History Press, 2012); M. Kelly, H. Footitt and M. Salama-Carr, eds., *The Palgrave Handbook of Languages and Conflict* (London: Palgrave, 2019); G. D. Sheffield, *Forgotten Victory: The First World War Myths and Realities* (London: Headline, 2001); J. Walker, *Words and the First World War: Language, Memory, Vocabulary* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017); and D. Williams, *Media, Memory, and the First World War* (Montreal: McGill University Press, 2009).

⁵Walker, *Words and the First World War*, p. 16.

⁶A. Hobbs, *A Fleet Street in Every Town. The Provincial Press in England, 1855–1900* (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2018); R. Matthews, *The History of the Provincial Press in England* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017). See also H. Barker and S. Burrows, eds., *Press, Politics and the Public Sphere in Europe and North America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 1760–1820; and M. Conboy and J. Steel, eds., *Routledge Companion to British Media History* (London: Routledge, 2015).

meetings and film screenings.⁷ For this article, it is impossible to review all these media and therefore a decision has been made to concentrate on two local newspapers and use a UK sample for comparisons.

This article analyses language use in these newspapers, notably the occurrence of specific words and phrases that were applied to denote German and British combatants, war aims and military actions. The number of terms that can be analysed is limited by the physical scope of this article. However, the analysis is enabled by the existence of a publicly accessible digital corpus: the *British Newspaper Archive* (BNA). The BNA is a project to digitize up to 40 million pages from the British Library's collection of historical newspapers, including at the time of the research for this article, almost 1,200 titles with many papers from cities across the UK like Nottingham such as Birmingham, Derby, Glasgow, Leicester and Manchester, and local papers from London.⁸ Although this online resource contains a random selection of newspapers, which does not represent the entire UK press, it provides a large sample suitable for corpus analysis.

The BNA contains two newspapers from Nottingham that were published throughout the period under review: the *Nottingham Evening Post* and the *Nottingham Journal*. Again, these papers may not be representative of the Nottingham press, and no distribution figures are available, but their digitized presence in the BNA offers an opportunity for comparison.

The *Post* was founded in 1878 by Thomas Forman. He had been printing in Nottingham since 1848. His son Jesse became editor of the *Post*. The first issue expressed the paper's intention not to become an exclusive organ of a religious or political party.⁹ The *Journal* was older and had come about in 1787 when Samuel Cresswell changed the name of his recently acquired *The Courant* to *The Nottingham Journal*. In 1860, the paper moved into new premises on Pelham Street, where the author J. M. Barrie was employed from 1883 to 1884. The novelist Cecil Roberts was its editor for five years from 1920. In 1922, he stood for Parliament for the Liberal Party. During a brief period in the 1920s, another author, Graham Greene, worked on the paper as sub-editor. Before and after the First World War, both papers occasionally showed support for Liberals at election times and promoted what were deemed progressive or popular causes.¹⁰ This support may have resulted from the political preferences of individual owners, editors and journalists, which they not necessarily shared with all their readers, and these attitudes could also have influenced how these papers reported war news.

The contents of the BNA papers have been captured using optical character recognition software. Unfortunately, this technology still causes imprecision, which arises in data gathering, digitizing and searching. As a result, the statistical datasets produced in this article contain errors and remain incomplete. For example, as will be discussed, 'Hun' was used to denote (a) German. However, a search for 'Hun' also brings up many misspellings and words the search programme recognizes as 'Hun' but are not actually

⁷Beckett, 'Maintaining Morale,' pp. 12–16; D. Monger, 'Familiarity Breeds Consent? Patriotic Rituals in British First World War Propaganda,' *Twentieth Century British History*, 26, 4 (2015), 501–28.

⁸*British Newspaper Archive* (BNA) <<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/>> using advanced search with 'Use exact phrase' and 'Exact search' in all article types, conducted March–May 2020.

⁹*Nottingham Evening Post* (NEP), May 1, 1878.

¹⁰See for example N. Hayes, 'Civic perceptions: housing and local decision-making in English cities in the 1920s,' *Urban History*, 27 (2000), 211–33.

Hun, such as ‘run’; in the *BNA* pages of the *Nottingham Journal* ‘Hun’ appears 217 times in 1912, but none of them refers to (a) German. Furthermore, for several years, the records of some papers are missing. For example, there are none for the *Journal* in 1911. Therefore, the value of the search results for single words lies not in providing exact numbers but in revealing trends in word use.

Fortunately, more accuracy can be achieved by searching the *BNA* for strings where a specific word, such as German, is combined with pre- and post-modifiers. A wide range of modifiers have been applied here to detect the most-used ones and analyse their meaning and use. In doing so, this article compares the findings for the entire *BNA* with the two Nottingham newspapers to bring out where Nottingham deviated from the national pattern and to investigate possible causes of this divergence.

Words

The role of language in war is a broad and complex subject. It has been established that language actually plays several roles, often in ways that are taken for granted. For example, in symbolizing groups of belligerents, where writers and speakers make word choices for combatants that are shaped by the social and cultural scripts available to them for understanding their experiences.¹¹ It has also been recognized that new words came into the language and other words gained fresh meanings in the context of the First World War.¹²

Some of the major changes that shaped public feeling about the war transpired in the use of specific words and phrases. Many of these applications were brought about by the experience of soldiers who coined new terms and modified the use of existing ones.¹³ They quickly spread in everyday language across Britain through personal correspondence from soldiers in army units, nurses in field hospitals and direct communication with men and women on home leave.¹⁴ Another cause of change was the use of particular words and phrases in newspapers, which was also triggered by official statements and propaganda campaigns conducted by a variety of institutions.¹⁵ The press offered British propaganda one of its most important, yet occasionally critical means of communication with the public.¹⁶ This way, language that glorified the British soldier and vilified the enemy, foremost the Germans, also came from institutions such as the Press Bureau, War Propaganda Bureau, Central Committee for National Patriotic Organizations, National War Aims Committee and Department of Information. The efforts of the National War Aims Committee, for example, were successful at regional and local level. It attained ‘uniform success’ in the East Midlands, according to a report

¹¹Kelly, Footitt and Salama-Carr, ‘Introduction. The Shock of War,’ in *The Palgrave Handbook of Languages and Conflict*, pp. 1–25.

¹²For example, K. Robbins, *The First World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 150; Walker, *Words and the First World War*, p. 1.

¹³For an extensive study, see Doyle and Walker, *Trench Talk*. Compare M. Ryabova, ‘Euphemisms and media framing,’ *European Scientific Journal*, 9 (2013), 33–44.

¹⁴G. R. Wilkinson, ‘The Blessings of War’: The Depiction of Military Force in Edwardian Newspapers,’ *Journal of Contemporary History*, 33 (1998), 97–115; G. R. Wilkinson, ‘Literary Images of Vicarious Warfare: British Newspapers and the Origin of the First World War, 1899–1914,’ in *The Literature of the Great War Reconsidered. Beyond Modern Memory*, ed. by P. J. Quinn and S. Trout (London: Palgrave, 2001), pp. 24–34.

¹⁵See for an example, Monger, *Patriotism and Propaganda in First World War Britain*, pp. 116. For the wider context, Sanders and Taylor, *British Propaganda during the First World War*, pp. 137–63.

¹⁶Sanders and Taylor, *British propaganda during the First World War*, p. 31, see also pp. 2, 8, 20, 65 and 157.

of the Ministry of Labour, and the Committee itself said it could rely on local newspapers that were 'more representative of solid English opinion' than national papers.¹⁷

The existing literature has offered the words Hun, Boche, Fritz, Jerry, Kraut and Alleyman as nicknames for Germans during the First World War.¹⁸ These words can be searched in the *BNA*. However, the already noted inaccuracy in the search programme and the appearance of numerous different meanings (such as first names, see below), makes manual checking of all search results mandatory which proves impractical for the purpose of this article. To give some indication of their occurrence: 'Hun' appeared 10,808 times in the entire *BNA* in 1914, rising to 24,117 times in 1918; 'Boche' 187 times in 1914 and 3,052 in 1918; 'Jerry' 3,270 in 1914 and 2,482 in 1918; 'Fritz' 1,215 in 1914 and 1,930 in 1918; 'Kraut' 400 in 1914 and 252 in 1918 and 'Alleyman' 2 in 1914 and 2 in 1918 (in total 6 times in 1914–1918).

Two of these words were also used as first names. This concerns Fritz, since 1883 a characteristic name for a German that came from the German familiar form of Friedrich, and Jerry, probably an alteration of the word German based on Jerry, a popular form of Jeremy, or derived from the steel helmet introduced in the German army in 1916, which was said to resemble a chamber pot or 'jerry'.¹⁹ An examination of Kraut is also unpractical, because it also has the meaning of 'cabbage' and appears often in search results as a part of the word 'sauerkraut', for example in advertisements for the pickled vegetable.

Nevertheless, these figures suggest that, as a substitute for (a) German, the *BNA* newspapers used 'Hun' more than 'Boche', 'Fritz', 'Jerry', 'Kraut' and 'Alleyman' combined. From 1914 to 1918 the appearance of 'Hun' more than doubled. Although numerically much lower, the incidence of 'Boche' actually rose relatively higher. These two words therefore deserve more detailed attention.

The word Hun could be used as a noun and as an adverb. As a noun it originally meant a person from a tribe of central Asia that overran Europe in the fourth and fifth centuries. It came from the Medieval Latin *Hunni*. In 1784, a 'Hun' was recorded as a savage and fierce person. In addition to this barbarian brute, from 1806 a 'Hun' was associated with damage and vandalism, in the sense of being a reckless destroyer of beauty. As a nickname, it was given in 1900 to German soldiers bound for China. During the First World War 'Hun' was applied as a derogatory mark and could mean a native or inhabitant of Germany, a German serviceman, the collective German forces or the German people as a whole. As an adjective, it meant German, as in the news article heading 'Famous Hun town bombed'.²⁰

'Boche' was a similarly pejorative word, both as noun and adverb, but it carried less connotation with brutal destruction and possibly had a stronger sense of making a German a subject of ridicule and insult. It came from the French word *Boche*, meaning rascal, a word of unknown origin but perhaps derived from the French *Allemand* (German), in eastern French *Al(le)moché*, which was in the nineteenth

¹⁷Monger, *Patriotism and Propaganda in First World War Britain*, pp. 245, 263, see also pp. 17, 24, 26 and 266.

¹⁸For a recent and comprehensive study, see Walker, *Words and the First World War*, notably pp. 147–212.

¹⁹The descriptions of the origin and history of this and the other words discussed here (and their meanings) are based on The Historical Thesaurus of English <<https://ht.ac.uk>> and the Online Etymology Dictionary <<https://www.etymonline.com>>.

²⁰*NEP*, July 20, 1918.

Table 1. Trends in the use of the word Hun in percentages (*BNA* = total British Newspaper Archive; *NEP*=*Nottingham Evening Post*; *NJ*=*Nottingham Journal*).

	BNA	NEP	NJ
1914	100	100	100
1915	133	70	134
1916	158	93	157
1917	184	419	121
1918	223	557	138

century altered contemptuously to *Alboche* by association with *caboche*, a slang word for head, literally meaning ‘cabbage’. Used as a noun, during the First World War this insulting word came to mean a native or inhabitant of Germany or a German soldier.

Although it is impossible to provide accurate numbers on the use of ‘Hun’ and ‘Boche’ in *BNA* newspapers, trends in this usage can be detected. [Tables 1 and 2](#) list increase and decrease in wartime usage expressed in percentages, where the 1914 value is put at 100. These trends show a steady rise in the use of the derogatory ‘Hun’ from 1914 to 1918 and a sharp increase for the insulting ‘Boche’ from 1914 to 1916, after which it fell.

While the *BNA* newspapers used the words Hun and Boche for German, they called the British soldier ‘Tommy’. The word had been in use with the meaning of a common British soldier since 1884. It may have come from ‘Tommy Atkins’, an exemplary soldier in the British army or a typical sample name for filling in army forms. The word had other meanings, for example, a puffin, antelope, simpleton and small axe, but from the end of the nineteenth century ‘Tommy’ was increasingly used as an endearing term for a private in the British army.²¹

Tommy was of course also a popular first name and a familiar form of Tom and Thomas. To eliminate first names and familiar forms, the search conducted in the *BNA* looked for ‘Tommies’ instead of ‘Tommy’. In 1914 ‘Tommies’ appeared 2,663 times, 6,365 times in 1915, 5,283 in 1916, 4,418 in 1917 and 2,694 in 1918 (the trend is listed in [Table 3](#)). This suggests that the *BNA* papers used ‘Tommy’ less than ‘Hun’. If that suggestion is correct, these newspapers employed more slang words for German than for British soldiers or they simply wrote more about Germans than Brits.

Table 2. Trends in the use of the word Boche in percentages (*BNA* = total British Newspaper Archive; *NEP* = *Nottingham Evening Post*; *NJ* = *Nottingham Journal*).

	BNA	NEP	NJ
1914	100	100	100
1915	348	1100	350
1916	1705	5000	1350
1917	1523	3700	450
1918	1632	5200	1400

²¹See also R. Holmes, *Tommy. The British Soldier on the Western Front, 1914–1918* (London: Harper Collins, 2005).

Table 3. Trends in the use of the word Tommies in percentages (*BNA* = total British Newspaper Archive; *NEP* = *Nottingham Evening Post*; *NJ* = *Nottingham Journal*).

	BNA	NEP	NJ
1914	100	100	100
1915	239	272	225
1916	198	355	62
1917	165	222	62
1918	101	227	118

Phrases

More accuracy can be achieved with a search for phrases that were used to symbolize the war aims and military actions of Germany and the UK. In these phrases, the words German and Brit or British have been combined with pre- and post-modifiers. A range of modifiers has been examined. The findings on the appearance of negative pre-modifiers with ‘German’ in the entire *BNA* for the period 1914–1918 include the five most-used ones: brutal 580 times; offensive 549, including the military term for attack; terrible 484, including ‘terrible German losses’; false 342; and bad 289, including ‘bad German news’ (less, but frequently used: abominable; appalling; atrocious; awful; barbarian; beastly; criminal; coward; cruel; despicable; disgraceful; evil; foul; ghastly; hateful; horrible; lawless; malevolent; mean; murderous; nasty; outrageous; vicious; vile; and wicked).

The most popular pre-modifier was ‘brutal’, which also appeared in combination with ‘Hun’ (in contrast, ‘brutal Brit’ does not appear much in the *BNA*). It has been stated that the effect of British propaganda ‘was the creation of a national stereotype of the German as a “Beastly Hun” capable of the worst crimes imaginable [...]’ and that the majority of the British press ‘did not find it difficult to conjure up an image of the “evil Hun” and his atrocities.’²² However, these two phrases were not often employed by *BNA* newspapers. For example, the highest appearance of ‘Beastly Hun’ occurred in 1918: 13 times (the second highest was 6 in 1916). ‘Evil Hun’ made three appearances in 1917 (one in 1916). More popular was ‘brutal Hun’, which appeared 108 times in 1918 and, in total, 222 times in the years 1914–1918. The *Nottingham Evening Post* and the *Nottingham Journal* did not use ‘beastly Hun’ and ‘evil Hun’, while ‘brutal Hun’ appeared only once in the *Post*, namely in 1918.

The adverb ‘brutal’ came into the English language in the fifteenth century from Old French *brutal*, from Latin *brutus*, meaning bestial, pertaining to or resembling an animal (as opposed to a human). By 1914 it was related to violent, cruel or savage behaviour.

The *BNA* use of ‘brutal German’ and ‘brutal Germans’ is listed in [Table 4](#). It shows that before 1914 they appeared occasionally, from a high start in 1905, the year of the first Moroccan crisis. The peak in their use was reached in 1915. After the war, they remained in use, with a relatively high occurrence in 1923, which can be explained by their appearance in the reporting on the military occupation of the Ruhr region of Germany by France and Belgium. The occupation, which started in January 1923, was a response to Germany defaulting on reparation payments agreed at Versailles. Germans engaged in acts

²²Robbins, *The First World War*, pp. 137–8; Sanders and Taylor, *British Propaganda During the First World War*, p. 162.

Table 4. The use of the phrase ‘brutal German’ in numbers (*BNA* = total British Newspaper Archive; *NEP* = *Nottingham Evening Post*; *NJ* = *Nottingham Journal*).

	BNA	NEP	NJ
1905	15	0	0
1906	2	0	0
1907	6	0	0
1908	0	0	0
1909	1	0	0
1910	0	0	0
1911	1	0	0
1912	0	0	0
1913	0	0	0
1914	215	1	1
1915	243	5	3
1916	129	1	2
1917	88	1	0
1918	105	2	0
1919	35	0	0
1920	11	1	0
1921	12	0	0
1922	7	0	0
1923	18	1	1
1924	4	0	0
1925	4	0	0

of resistance, which caused deaths, were deemed criminal and raised public protests, for example in Belgium. In July 1923, the *Nottingham Evening Post* announced that demonstrations organized by the League of Belgian War Volunteers would take place Brussels to protest against the ‘German crimes in the Ruhr’.²³

The findings on the appearance of positive pre-modifiers for ‘Brit’ and ‘British’ in the entire *BNA* for the period 1914–1918 include the five most-used ones: gallant 1442 times; good 1091, including ‘good British news’; brave 1079; valiant 465; and heroic 484 (less, but frequently used: bold; daring; dashing; decent; fearless; courageous; honest; honourable; just; noble; plucky; and worthy).

In addition to ‘gallant Brit’ and ‘gallant British’, ‘gallant Tommy’ appeared 282 times (in contrast, ‘gallant German’ appeared less; only three times in the *Nottingham Evening Post*). The word gallant came from Old French *galant*, meaning courteous. In the fifteenth century, it also denoted a fashionable and pleasing appearance, and in the early seventeenth century the adverb acquired an additional sense of being politely attentive to women and lovingly caring towards them. In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, it was related to fighting men. During the First World War, it turned an ordinary British private into a dashing hero who cared for women.

The *BNA* use of ‘gallant Brit’ and ‘gallant British’ is listed in [Table 5](#). They appeared regularly before 1914, with the exception of 1911, a low which remains unexplained. The height in wartime occurrence was reached in 1915, the same year in which ‘brutal German(s)’ peaked. It remained in use after the war.

The findings on the appearance of post-modifiers for ‘German’ in the entire *BNA* for the period 1914–1918 include the five most-used ones: militarism 9,142 times; atrocity

²³*NEP*, July 3, 1923. Compare *NEP*, February 2, 1922.

Table 5. The use of the phrase ‘gallant Brit’ in numbers (BNA = total British Newspaper Archive; NEP = *Nottingham Evening Post*; NJ = *Nottingham Journal*).

	BNA	NEP	NJ
1905	34	0	0
1906	25	0	0
1907	25	0	1
1908	38	2	0
1909	24	0	0
1910	29	1	0
1911	8	0	
1912	23	0	0
1913	17	0	1
1914	241	2	3
1915	385	5	3
1916	374	5	3
1917	251	5	2
1918	191	3	0
1919	103	2	3
1920	57	2	1
1921	23	1	0
1922	27	1	1
1923	24	0	0
1924	43	0	0
1925	28	1	0

and atrocities 5,974; menace 3,773; barbarism, barbarity and barbarities 3,165; and brutality and brutalities 2,865 (less, but frequently used: abuse; aggression; crime; culture; danger; Hun; monster; murderer; outrage, peril; terror; threat; and villain).

Next to ‘German militarism’, the phrase ‘Prussian militarism’ appeared 13,002 times in 1914–1918 and ‘Hun militarism’ 22 times, of which two in the *Nottingham Evening Post* when it wrote about the expected results of the 1917 entry of the United States in the war, possibly copying the term from an American news report: ‘A powerful blow to Hun militarism’.²⁴

Used more than ‘German militarism’, the phrase ‘Prussian militarism’ deserves attention. The word militarism was first recorded in English in 1841, from the French *militarisme*, from *militaire* (military, which had been an English word since the fifteenth century). Militarism suggested having a soldierly spirit, addiction to war or martial practice. By 1864, this word was, in a negative sense, used in reference to nations, societies or governments, also meaning to have a predominant military class or a ruling elite, which showed a willingness to maintain power by means of armed forces. The adjective Prussian had been in use in English since the sixteenth century, to denote someone or something coming from the *Preussen* region of Germany. During the First World War, it was related to German behaviour, war aims and military strategy, negatively denoting strict ideas about discipline and aggressive use of military capability.²⁵

British contemporaries sought the cause of the First World War often in the phenomenon of ‘Prussian militarism’. It was believed that the German war aim was the

²⁴NEP, August 30, 1917 and September 21, 1917.

²⁵Sanders and Taylor, *British Propaganda during the First World War*, p. 137; Walker, *Words and the First World War*, p. 172.

preservation of Prussian dominance. Under the heading ‘The real German aim’ the *Nottingham Evening Post* wrote in 1917: ‘[...] the real issue in this war was the survival of Prussian militarism [...]’²⁶ In this sense, the use of ‘Prussian militarism’ also revealed the user’s thinking about what they regarded as a sinister intention behind the German war aims.

The *BNA* use of ‘Prussian militarism’ is listed in [Table 6](#). It was irregular before 1914, increased vastly during the war, to drop and decline from 1919 to 1924. In 1925, its appearance grew again, possibly because it was used in reports on the Locarno treaties.

The second-highest scoring post-modifier is ‘atrocities’ or ‘atrocities’. In addition, ‘Hun atrocity’ or ‘Hun atrocities’ appeared 170 times in 1914–1918. The noun ‘atrocities’ came from Middle French *atrocité* or from Latin *atrocitatem*. From the sixteenth century, it denoted an enormous wickedness. Two centuries later an ‘atrocious deed’ also involved cruelty, evil, badness and heinousness. During the First World War, it was related to brutal acts of war, conducted by individual soldiers, the armed forces or a nation as a whole. Such acts were often deemed to be war crimes – breaches of the rules of war, recently laid down in the 1906 Geneva Convention and codified the next year at the Peace Conference in The Hague.

The *BNA* use of ‘German atrocity’ and ‘German atrocities’ is listed in [Table 7](#). It shows that between 1906 and 1914 they were seldom used, their appearance peaked in 1915 and fell after that.

Table 6. The use of the phrase ‘Prussian militarism’ in numbers (*BNA* = total British Newspaper Archive; *NEP* = *Nottingham Evening Post*; *NJ* = *Nottingham Journal*).

	BNA	NEP	NJ
1905	4	0	0
1906	4	0	0
1907	3	0	0
1908	2	0	0
1909	12	0	0
1910	1	0	0
1911	0	0	0
1912	0	0	0
1913	6	0	0
1914	1658	1	17
1915	3018	10	19
1916	2498	20	8
1917	3117	26	6
1918	2994	24	35
1919	448	5	2
1920	174	3	3
1921	91	1	1
1922	71	0	0
1923	39	0	1
1924	22	0	0
1925	45	1	0

²⁶*NEP*, March 2, 1917.

Table 7. The use of the phrase ‘German atrocity’ in numbers (*BNA* = total British Newspaper Archive; *NEP* = *Nottingham Evening Post*; *NJ* = *Nottingham Journal*).

	BNA	NEP	NJ
1905	23	0	0
1906	8	1	0
1907	1	0	0
1908	0	0	0
1909	0	0	0
1910	1	0	0
1911	0	0	0
1912	0	0	0
1913	1	0	0
1914	2021	16	16
1915	2365	24	22
1916	668	7	5
1917	435	7	2
1918	485	5	1
1919	141	5	2
1920	67	2	4
1921	38	0	1
1922	54	0	0
1923	22	0	0
1924	10	0	0
1925	8	0	0

In contrast, the phrases ‘British atrocity’ and ‘British militarism’ appeared 71 and 111 times, respectively, in the *BNA* in 1914–1918. Sometimes they were used in quotations from German reports about Britain and its armed forces or in articles on or by Socialists or others who opposed the war. After 1918 they were employed by opponents of Britain, such as the Irish who fought for independence.²⁷ During the First World War, *BNA* papers occasionally mentioned potential British war crimes. For example, when a commentator was quoted: ‘Some people, notably the gentlemen of the Press, seemingly discern a difference between German and British outrages. The German ravisher is a Hun; the British despoiler is a hero.’²⁸

Rather than discussing the influence of militarism on British war aims, the *BNA* newspapers wrote about maintaining British democracy. The findings on the appearance of post-modifiers for ‘Brit’ or ‘British’ in the entire *BNA* for the period 1914–1918 include the following five that can be related to the war: democracy 2,110 times; hero, heroes and heroism 1,855; civilization and civilization 197; culture 65; and crusade and crusader 9.

The word democracy came from Middle French *démocratie*, from Medieval Latin *democratia*, from Greek *dēmokratia*. In the sense of a system of government, it has been recorded since 1574 and had a general positive connotation since the middle of the nineteenth century. ‘British democracy’ meant the parliamentary system in the UK, which was favoured over ‘Prussian militarism’, where the military class and armed forces ruled.

The *BNA* use of ‘British democracy’ is listed in [Table 8](#). It shows the phrase appeared regularly before 1914, with a peak in 1910, the year of two elections in the United

²⁷*Labour Leader*, June 21, 1917; *NEP*, April 8, 1920.

²⁸*Clarion*, March 26, 1915. Compare *Nottingham Journal (NJ)*, October 8, 1923.

Kingdom of which the first was to settle a constitutional crisis caused by the rejection of the government's budget in the House of Lords. This pre-war peak was transcended in 1914, and after a dip in 1915, the occurrence of the phrase in the remaining war years stayed relatively high.

A comparison of [Tables 6 and 8](#) shows 'British democracy' appearing less than 'Prussian militarism', which suggests that the *BNA* papers described the causes of the First World War and motivation about entering and conducting the war more often with negative rather than positive terms, for example, to defeat 'Prussian militarism' rather than to defend 'British democracy'. Further evidence for this suggestion can be found in the use of 'German democracy', which appears relatively less: 47 times in 1914, with peaks in August, September and October – the first three months after the United Kingdom entered the war, while 'Prussian democracy' is totally absent in 1914. In that year, the emphasis in the *BNA* papers was on 'German culture', which may have been regarded highly by some but was, according to these newspapers, now dominated by 'Prussian militarism' (the phrase 'German culture' was used 1,554 times in 1914, including peaks in August, September and October; in contrast, 'Prussian culture' was mentioned 48 times in 1914).

Deviation

The full series of tables also show how the two Nottingham papers differ from the entire *BNA*. [Tables 1–3](#) deal with the trends in the use of 'Hun', 'Boche' and 'Tommies'. They reveal that while the appearance of 'Hun' rose steadily during the war in the entire *BNA*, it first declined in the *Post* in 1915, climbed slightly in 1916, increased more than four times in 1917 and grew even further in 1918. In the *Journal* it rose in line with the

Table 8. The use of the phrase 'British democracy' in numbers (*BNA* = total British Newspaper Archive; *NEP* = *Nottingham Evening Post*; *NJ* = *Nottingham Journal*).

	BNA	NEP	NJ
1905	103	1	0
1906	215	1	2
1907	213	1	1
1908	262	2	1
1909	339	1	0
1910	520	20	6
1911	349	0	
1912	285	0	5
1913	419	4	5
1914	546	4	2
1915	295	2	3
1916	406	3	2
1917	467	5	1
1918	426	2	7
1919	188	1	2
1920	205	4	2
1921	119	1	0
1922	70	0	1
1923	72	1	2
1924	133	0	1
1925	40	0	0

BNA, but then dropped in 1917, to rise slightly in 1918. Used much less than ‘Hun’, the application of ‘Boche’ rose relatively high in the *Post* in 1916, to drop somewhat in the *Post* and *Journal* in 1917, after which it grew again in both papers.

The rise of ‘Tommies’ in the *Post* and *Journal* followed the *BNA* trend to 1915, but during the next year it dropped in the *BNA* and the *Journal*, while it increased in the *Post* until 1916, after which it dropped and then stabilized in this paper between 1917 and 1918. In that last year the *Journal* bucked the trend with a rising use of ‘Tommies’.

In addition to ‘Tommies’, servicemen from Nottingham, including members of the Sherwood Foresters (Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire Regiment), were sometimes affectionately called ‘Robin Hoods’, after the legendary local hero, who robbed the rich to give to the poor.²⁹ Furthermore, some of these soldiers were members of the Robin Hood Battalion or Robin Hoods Rifles, a volunteer force that fought in Belgium and France. The reference ‘Robin Hoods’ appeared 592 times in the *Post* and the *Journal* in 1914, 636 in 1915, 187 in 1916, 61 in 1917 and 35 in 1918. The 1915 figure of 636 constituted half the total number of appearances of ‘Robin Hoods’ in the entire *BNA*. The frequent use of the phrase signifies the attachment Nottingham papers and probably their readers felt with men in these army units.

It is impossible to establish with accuracy the relative frequency in the use of the single words in the *Post* and *Journal*, but it was probably high. The *BNA* exists of almost 1,200 newspapers. This suggests, for example, an average frequency in the use of ‘Hun’ of about nine per paper in 1914 and about 20 in 1918. Throughout the war years the *Post* and *Journal* scored much higher than the *BNA* average with all three words. However, no conclusions can be drawn from this score, because we cannot establish the relative size of the *Post* and *Journal* in terms of the numbers of words they contributed to the entire corpus, and neither can we overcome the earlier highlighted errors in the datasets.

Tables 4–8 are concerned with phrases. They show that before 1914 the *Post* and the *Journal* did not use ‘brutal German(s)’ and both employed it once in 1914, unlike ‘gallant Brit’ that had been used before 1914. However, after that came relatively high rises of ‘brutal German(s)’ in the *Post* and *Journal*, then a fall in the *Post* but remaining still relatively higher than the *BNA*. In 1918, the *Post* again employed the phrase more, but the *Journal* did not use it at all. After 1918, the two Nottingham papers used it only three times.

Almost similarly, ‘German atrocity’ and ‘German atrocities’ appeared once in the *Post* before 1914, with a relatively high rise in 1915 in the *Post* and a smaller increase in the *Journal*. After that year, the falling trends in the *Post* and the *Journal* were more in line with the *BNA*, the *Post* being slightly higher and the *Journal* lower. Following the decline after 1915, the two Nottingham newspapers only used the phrase once after 1920.

‘Prussian militarism’ was not used by the *Post* and the *Journal* before 1914, and it appeared once the *Post* in 1914. After that, it was much more in vogue in the *Post*, notably in 1917. In contrast, its use dropped in the *Journal* in 1917, to rise again in 1918. After that, the appearance of the phrase declined and it was used only four times after 1920. In stark contrast to the *Post*, in 1914 the *Journal* used ‘Prussian militarism’

²⁹For example, *NEP*, April 26, 1915.

relatively frequently (17 times). It mostly appeared in reports that quoted politicians in London, such as, '[...] there is no country anywhere in the world which would be safe from Prussian militarism. Mr. Churchill says [...]'³⁰

The Nottingham papers also deviated from the *BNA* pattern in the application of 'gallant Brit' or 'gallant British' and 'British democracy'. The use of 'gallant Brit' and 'gallant British' rose relatively high in the *Post* in 1915 and suffered a steep fall in 1918. The application in the *Journal* was stable until 1916, after which it fell and disappeared entirely in 1918.

The rise of 'British democracy' in the *Journal* in 1915 stands out, as in this year the use dropped almost identically in the *Post* and the *BNA*, to rise again in 1916. After that year more divergence occurred. In 1917 'British democracy' appeared more in the *Post* than the year before, to fall again in 1918, but it appeared less in the *Journal* in 1917, to rise relatively high in 1918.

Not all differences can be explained, but what follows from these comparisons is that, perhaps apart from the use of 'German atrocity' and 'German atrocities', during several years the trends in the use of specific words and phrases in the two Nottingham papers did not follow the national pattern. In 1914, the *Post* and the *Journal* shied away from 'Hun' and 'Prussian militarism'. In 1916, both Nottingham papers showed an unusual appetite for 'Boche' – the *Post* more so than the *Journal* – but the craving diminished in 1917. Before 1916 the two papers relatively often wrote 'brutal German(s)', but in 1917 and 1918 the emphasis in the *Post* shifted to 'Hun', while 'Prussian militarism' peaked in the *Post* in 1917. In addition to the frequently applied 'Robin Hoods', the relatively high growth in the use of 'Tommy's' in the *Post* in 1916 was matched by a fall in the *Journal*. Unlike the *BNA*, the occurrence of 'Tommy's' stabilized in the *Post*, but in 1918 it grew in the *Journal*. The 'gallant Brit' or 'gallant British' appeared relatively more in the *Post* during the first three war years, while the *Journal* favoured 'British democracy' in 1915 and 1918. After 1918 the two Nottingham newspapers were also less inclined than the other *BNA* papers to use the phrases 'brutal German', 'German atrocity' and 'Prussian militarism'.

Differences between the two Nottingham newspapers should not be overrated. The number of times a specific word or phrase was used was small, so that variation appears large. However, the dissimilarity in trends between the *Post* and the *Journal* does suggest preferences for particular words and phrases, such as 'Prussian militarism' in the *Journal* in 1914. These preferences could have been a result of the tastes and skills of their owners, editors and journalists. As little is known about these people, we can only speculate about the *Post's* earlier declared intention not to become a political mouthpiece. Or we can surmise that these papers employed independent thinkers during the First World War, similar to the authors Barrie, Roberts and Greene on the *Journal*, who perhaps wished to stand out from the press crowd.

However, much more poignant is the divergence of the Nottingham papers from the national pattern. Perhaps something happened in the course of the war to shift the preference of the local papers for the descriptive 'brutal German' and the

³⁰*NJ*, August 31, 1914.

insulting ‘Boche’ to the derogatory ‘Hun’ and the sinister ‘Prussian militarism’. And perhaps after the war the relatively low use of ‘brutal German’, ‘German atrocity’ and ‘Prussian militarism’ showed how in the news coverage of these two local papers other subjects overshadowed the continuing uncertainty about the UK’s relationship with Germany, which seems to echo their non-appearance and limited use before 1914.

Local wartime events

1914

A possible explanation is that the Nottingham deviation resulted from local events, during which the population of city directly experienced the effects of war. This started when the United Kingdom entered the conflict and the government called for volunteers in August 1914. In their reports about the declaration of war, the *Post* and the *Journal* did not use the word ‘Hun’ to describe the enemy. This confirms what Julian Walker has found, namely that in 1914 ‘Hun’ took some time to catch on in Britain as a slang word for German.³¹ It first appeared in the *Post* in November 1914 – in an advert. The first editorial use followed almost a week later in a report about a German battleship: ‘Her commander [was not an] unmerciful Hun, like so many the German officers operating on land.’³² In fact, 101 of the 103 appearances of ‘Hun’ in the *Post* in 1914 were not related to (a) German. The *Journal* had used ‘Hun’ earlier. First in September when it called the German emperor ‘William the Hun’ and wrote about ‘a royal Hun’, followed in October by another reference to the emperor: ‘[...] the Kaiser will strike blow at Britain [...] even if like Attila, the other Hun, he should perish.’³³ Meanwhile, the *Post* had already applied ‘brutal Germans’ when it reported on the ‘barbarity’ of their troops on the Russian front.³⁴ Perhaps, this mixed choice of words reflected the mood of the Nottinghamshire population, which Beckett has described as ‘not one of universal, unthinking enthusiasm’ for the war.³⁵

In any case, the mood may have changed when in October 1914 groups of wounded soldiers started to arrive in Nottingham from the fronts in Belgium and France. At first mainly injured Belgians were taken to a hospital in the city. Then, more British casualties came. At that time, in October, the use of ‘Tommies’ in the *Post* reached its highest monthly total of 1914. Two months later British soldiers were sent to a new Red Cross Hospital, which had been set up in a pavilion on the Notts Cricket Ground. The *Post* reported: ‘Eleven more wounded soldiers arrived [...] Two Nottingham men were amongst the number [...]’³⁶ Later the convalescing soldiers watched ‘with interest’ the cricket being played outside the pavilion. The sight of maimed soldiers gave the population of Nottingham an impression of the human costs of war.³⁷ In the reports about the casualties, the two papers used plain descriptions rather than of derogatory and insulting words or sinister phrases. In September 1914, the *Journal* quoted

³¹Walker, *Words and the First World War*, p. 167.

³²*NEP*, November 5, 10, 1914.

³³*NJ*, September 17, 1914, September 30, 1914 and October 29, 1914.

³⁴*NEP*, August 13, 1914.

³⁵Beckett, ‘Patriotism in Nottinghamshire’, 186.

³⁶*NEP*, October 21, 1914.

³⁷*NEP*, December 9, 1914, March 16, 1915 and May 4, 1915.

a speaker who praised the women in the Red Cross Hospital and remarked on the Germans ‘that there was [not a] rule of warfare they had not broken.’³⁸

1915

In 1915 greater use was made of the derogatory ‘Hun’. Of the 73 times it appeared in the *Post*, about one-third related to (a) German. Three months in 1915 had a notably high score, including November, when ‘Hun’ three times referred to German, including: ‘A second German [...] This one was a real Hun.’³⁹ By that time, another event had occurred with severe repercussions for local feelings about Germans.

On Friday 7 May 1915 a German submarine sank the *Lusitania*. Over a thousand of her passengers and crew drowned. The ship was sailing from New York to Liverpool. It was claimed she carried passengers, not troops or arms, and according to Nottingham newspapers, a couple of local men worked on board as stewards.⁴⁰ The next day anti-German riots broke out in Liverpool, then advanced to Manchester and Salford, where they endured for a couple of days, and spread from there across the country. On Monday, stories about the rioting reached Nottingham. Two days later the large plate-glass shop window of Frederick Denner, a butcher in Nottingham’s Union Road, was broken. People had been spitting at his window, believing he was a German, but now violence had struck. This was the first reported anti-German attack in the city.⁴¹

Later, the *Post* reported that shortly after nine o’clock in the evening of Saturday 15 May ‘angry crowds assembled in various parts of [Nottingham] and smashed the windows of a number of shops occupied by pork butchers and others bearing German names.’ During the previous days special police guards had been on duty near some of the shops, but on Saturday they could not stop the attacks from crowds that numbered up to 2,000 people. Hastily called police reinforcements stopped pillaging and gradually drove the mobs back, but they could not prevent missiles being thrown at the shops. Among the rioters was a man who said he had smashed a window in anger, because he believed his son had gone down with the *Lusitania*.⁴²

As argued elsewhere,⁴³ local circumstances could prevent the outbreak of anti-German riots or curtail their effects. In Nottingham, the rioters caused less damage than in other cities, perhaps because the police undertook protective and crowd-dispersing actions that limited the violence. The police action was welcomed by the Nottingham political establishment. The Recorder of the City of Nottingham, Sir William Ryland Dent Adkins MP, declared at the Quarter Sessions:

I regret to notice quite recently a very slight outbreak of that temper, of indignation, which has shown itself in some parts of the country; but I am quite sure that it is only a passing exhibition, and that in the city of Nottingham that attitude of stern and resolute self-

³⁸*NJ*, September 22, 1914.

³⁹*NEP*, November 26, 30, 1915.

⁴⁰*NEP* and *NJ*, May 8, 1915.

⁴¹*NEP*, May 10, 11 and 12, 1915.

⁴²*NEP*, May 17 and 26, 1915.

⁴³B. Braber, ‘Living with the Enemy: German immigrants in Nottingham during the First World War,’ *Midland History*, 42 (2017), 72–91; B. Braber, ‘Within Our Gates: A New Perspective on Germans in Glasgow during the First World War,’ *Journal of Scottish Historical Studies*, 29 (2009), 87–105.

control, which is the only proper attitude in these times, will be carefully and rigorously preserved.⁴⁴

Adkins' words referred to what was seen as a typically British virtue, namely self-control, but while the Brit was virtuous, the enemy was denoted as 'brutal'. May was one of the three months in 1915 that the use of 'Hun' to refer to (a) German reached its highest total in the *Post*. On one occasion, the paper made a link to the sinking of the *Lusitania* when a speaker was quoted: 'Would you assist the Hun carry on his barbarities? Remember [...] the *Lusitania* [...]'⁴⁵ In comparison, it was not until December that the use of 'Hun' in the *Journal* reached its highest monthly total of 1915.

1916

During the next year, more local men were drawn into the armed forces through conscription, fear for their fate grew, notably after the Battle of the Somme started in July, and two months later civilians in Nottingham were attacked from the air.

Just before one o'clock in the morning of Sunday 24 September 1916 a German Zeppelin flew over the city. Possibly targeting the railway station and surrounding factories, it dropped bombs and incendiary devices, which hit residential areas. Alfred and Rosanna Rogers were killed when a bomb demolished their house in the Meadows and Harold Renshaw burned to death in his bed after an inflammable explosive crashed through his roof in the Broadmarch. The explosions woke many people and the following days the bomb sites drew much attention. The raid also heightened a sense of terror, which was aggravated by a constant stream of reports on Zeppelin raids near Nottingham, using words and phrases such as 'danger', 'raiding fleet', 'miraculous escape of children' and 'death-roll'.⁴⁶

The two papers did not immediately report the Nottingham raid, conceivably because it was feared that this would affect home front morale, but on 27 September 1916 the *Post* wrote about an inquest into the death of 'three victims of the Zeppelin raid [on] Sunday last.' It concluded they had been killed by a person or persons unknown through the explosion of bombs dropped from an airship.⁴⁷ Much earlier in the month, the *Post* had written about Zeppelin raids on the East Coast of England and used 'Hun'; September showed the highest 1916 monthly total in the paper's application of 'Hun' – 19 appearances in total, of which 17 referred to (a) German.⁴⁸ Perhaps, this high use can be explained by the feeling that Zeppelin raids hit civilian targets, which should be regarded as criminal, not legitimate acts of war. The use of 'Prussian militarism' in the *Post* reached its highest monthly total in December 1916.

⁴⁴*NEP*, May 17, 1915. See also *NEP*, May 22, 1915.

⁴⁵*NEP*, May 20, 1915.

⁴⁶*NEP*, September 25, 26, 27 and 30, 1916 and January 2, 1919; *NJ*, September 25 and 30, 1916.

⁴⁷*NEP*, September 27, 1916. See also *NEP*, January 2 and 4, 1919.

⁴⁸*NEP*, September 4, 13 and 22, 1916.

1917

At the start of the following year, January 1917, the use of ‘Hun’ in the *Post* was relatively low. There was news on the British blockade of Germany, which had a ‘very grave effect on the enemy’ and ‘Hun allies’.⁴⁹ Meanwhile, unrestricted German submarine warfare brought food shortages to Nottingham. The idea of food rationing had been mentioned earlier and eventually a Nottingham rationing scheme was approved in 1918, with protests from miners ‘who risked their lives every day’, ‘angry crowds’ and ‘knots’ of women outside some shops, looking for scarce goods, such as meat, butter, margarine and tea.⁵⁰ However, the scheme eased some of the queuing. It may also have strengthened the idea that in this way the civilian population at home made a sacrifice, which echoed the sacrifices made by soldiers and nurses on the front.⁵¹

The ultimate sacrifice was made by a local hero. Albert Ball was born in 1896, a son of a Nottingham businessman and politician, who served as Mayor of the city. He joined the Sherwood Foresters at the outbreak of the First World War but was transferred to the Royal Flying Corps and eventually posted in France. In August 1916, he was the first Flying Corps pilot to shoot down three German aircraft in one sortie. Later, Ball destroyed about forty more enemy planes and was promoted to Flight Commander. In February 1917, he was given the honorary freedom of the city of Nottingham. However, three months later Ball was reported missing in action, and it was learned that he had died when his plane crashed in enemy-occupied territory.⁵²

Stories about the war in the air appealed to the imagination of newspaper readers: ‘battles 10,000 feet up’. In May 1917, the *Post* wrote about ‘Hun planes’ being brought down and the bombing of the Ghent railway station in Belgium: ‘What happened to the Hun officers?’⁵³

Three months later, August showed the highest monthly total use of ‘Hun’ in the *Post*, but this followed the start of the Battle of Passchendaele in July. The word was applied in a battlefield report under the heading ‘Our losses very light’: ‘[The] Huns, reeling under the terrific blow that was launched on them in the darkest hour that preceded the dawn [...]’.⁵⁴ In September, the use of ‘Prussian militarism’ in the *Post* reached its highest monthly total of 1917.

Ball’s story produced further reports with favourable word choice. He was posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross and it was decided to raise a statue in his honour in Nottingham. The *Post* reported:

Our City is proud of its heroes, of whom there are great numbers. That Nottingham should be the birthplace of one of Britain’s greatest heroes fills us all with justifiable pride. Captain Albert Ball VC DSO [...] The wonderful boy [...]⁵⁵

⁴⁹*NEP*, January 20, 1917.

⁵⁰*NEP*, May 23, 1916, October 12, 1916, February 23, 1917, January 8 and 12, 1918, February 7 and 25, 1918.

⁵¹*NEP*, February 6, 1918. See also Monger, *Patriotism and Propaganda in First World War Britain*, pp. 85, 96, and 106; A. Watson and P. Porter, ‘Bereaved and aggrieved: combat motivation and the ideology of sacrifice in the First World War,’ *Historical Research*, 83 (2010), 146–64.

⁵²*NEP*, February 15, 16 and 19, 1917; May 7, 10, 11, 18 and 23, 1917.

⁵³*NEP*, May 4, 9, 14 and 31, 1917.

⁵⁴*NEP*, August 1, 1917.

⁵⁵*NEP*, November 8, 1917. See also *NEP*, June 4 and 9, 1917.

The *Journal* published fewer reports on Ball, but commended ‘the noble deeds of England’s greatest young airman’ who ‘[...] brought glory to British aviation [...]’⁵⁶

1918

In contrast to the innocent victims of the earlier criminal Zeppelin raid and the image of a brave young local man, a year after Ball’s death the newspapers gloated over bombardments of German cities under headings such as ‘33 Raids on Hun towns last month’ and ‘Famous Hun town bombed’.⁵⁷ Perhaps, the gloating can also be explained by the despair felt over British losses. About fifty-thousand men from Nottingham served in the armed forces during the First World War – about half of them conscripted – and more than ten percent of them lost their life.

At home, their families suffered from aerial attacks and food shortages. Nottingham women were expected to make further sacrifices. Their work was affected. Factories changed production to support the armed forces. Nottingham hosiers started working on government contracts, Raleigh expanded into the production of gun magazines, Boots began making gas masks, and almost all of the additional workers they hired were females.⁵⁸ Thousands of workers were employed from 1916 in the National Shell Filling Factory in the nearby village of Chilwell, many of them women who produced munitions.

On 1 July 1918, an explosion in the munition factory rocked Nottingham and destroyed part of the plant. The *Post* initially wrote: ‘The extent of the casualties cannot yet be ascertained, but it is feared that between 60 and 70’ of the factory workers had died in the blast.’⁵⁹ However, the death toll almost doubled, and it turned out to be impossible to identify most of the victims. Between two and three hundred more workers were injured. The *Post* and the *Journal* published a telegram from Winston Churchill, the Minister of Munitions:

[...] those who have perished have died at their stations on the field of duty and those who have lost their dear ones should fortify themselves with this thought, the courage and spirit shown by all concerned both men and women command our admiration, and the decision to which you have all come to carry on without a break is worthy of the spirit which animates our soldiers in the field.⁶⁰

The Minister’s claim about ‘carry on without a break’ was misleading. Mmunition workers eventually came back to work and worked overtime, but many of those who returned relatively quickly did so because they simply needed money. However, what is important is that the two Nottingham papers reproduced the claim, obviously because they felt like Churchill that this was how people had to behave on the home front.

⁵⁶*NJ*, May 24, 1917 and June 9, 1917. See also *NJ*, May 12, 1917.

⁵⁷*NEP*, July 17 and 20, 1918.

⁵⁸See also *NEP*, July 5, 1918 for a report on the war effort of Nottingham’s lace industry.

⁵⁹*NEP*, July 2, 1918.

⁶⁰*NEP*, July 4, 1918; *NJ*, July 4, 1918.

By way of comparison, the *Post* wrote in the same month about two women who displayed unacceptable behaviour:

[A] cook and [a] nurse [were] sent to gaol [...] For having communicated with German prisoners [of war] and for having supplied them with cigarettes, tobacco and the like.' According to the paper, the women were jailed on the Wirral peninsula near Liverpool, and the 35-year-old cook had said she 'only did it for fun [...]'⁶¹

Writing about the sacrifices needed for achieving the British war aims brought the frequent use of 'British democracy' and 'Tommies', which reached their highest monthly total of 1918 in the *Journal* respectively in February and May.

Conclusion

This article has compared the use of specific words in two Nottingham newspapers with the word choice in a sample of UK papers to bring out where Nottingham deviated from a national pattern and to investigate possible causes of this divergence. The conclusions from this examination are of course provisional; much more research remains to be done, for instance: different Nottingham papers can be analysed to decide whether the two papers that were used here are representative of the Nottingham press; other media and ways in which information spread and opinions were formed can be investigated; further comparisons can be made between Nottingham and other cities in the East and West Midlands and across the UK, which would also enable regional comparisons; and in addition to the words and phrases analysed in this article, further research can also investigate other language use, such as the application of caricature by mocking how Germans composed and pronounced English. Finally, this article has recorded how often and when selected terms were used; it was not intended to describe comprehensively the image of the enemy in the Nottingham public mind, of which it can only provide impressions.

What arises from this case study is that during the First World War newspapers in a random UK sample conjured up an image of an endearing 'Tommy', a gallant fighter defending British democracy against brutal Germans – the 'Hun' – and shielding the women and children at home from Prussian militarism that resulted in German atrocities. Some of these words were used before 1914 and arose from international tension, but their use swiftly rose after the United Kingdom declared war in 1914 and quickly declined after 1919, notably when an enduring peace came in sight.

The *Nottingham Evening Post* and the *Nottingham Journal* told a similar story, but they also deviated from the national script. At first, the *Post* and the *Journal* seemed more reluctant to use the derogatory 'Hun' than the UK sample newspapers. The same goes for the application of the sinister 'Prussian militarism'. However, during the final three war years these terms appeared relatively more often in the *Post* and the *Journal* than in other UK papers. During the first two years of the war, notably in 1915, the Nottingham papers had shown affection by calling local servicemen 'Robin Hoods'. At the end of the war, the *Journal* also used the appealing 'Tommies' and the positive

⁶¹*NEP*, July 30, 1918. See also C.A. Culleton, 'A Gender-charged munitions. The language of World War I munitions reports,' *Women's Studies International Forum*, 11 (1988), 109–16; S. Pedersen, 'A Surfeit of Socks? The Impact of the First World War on Women Correspondents to Daily Newspapers,' *Journal of Scottish Historical Studies*, 22 (2008), 50–72; and Watson and Porter, 'Bereaved and aggrieved,' pp. 146–64.

phrase ‘British democracy’ relatively more. However, the *Post* had employed ‘Tommy’s’ more during the early years of the war. In contrast to the UK newspapers, phrases such as ‘brutal German’, ‘German atrocity’ and ‘Prussian militarism’ were largely absent in the Nottingham papers before 1914, then adopted at varying speeds, but sometimes only hesitantly, and after the war years their decline was relatively steep.

The choice of words and phrases in Nottingham papers was probably influenced by different factors, such as the identity of their contributors, but there also appears to be a link with the local population’s direct experiences of the war. For example, May 1915 saw the torpedoing of the *Lusitania*, which reportedly had crew members from Nottingham on board, and the venting of anger against local shopkeepers with German names about this and other atrocities. May was also one of the three months in this year with the highest total use of ‘Hun’ in the *Post*. September 1916 brought a Zeppelin attack on the city, which coincided with the highest monthly application of ‘Hun’ in the *Post* in that year. In other words, when people in Nottingham directly felt the consequences of war, their local newspapers used the most derogatory language about the enemy, in contrast with the years before and after the war when these papers were more likely focused on other subjects.

In short, language use in Nottingham – as applied in contemporary local newspaper reporting on the First World War – followed similar patterns to the word choice of UK papers but at the same time had marked differences as a result of local characteristics, circumstances, events and developments. This means that our understanding of how people on the home front experienced the war will only be deepened when we accept there was no uniform UK experience and take full account of a multitude of factors, including personal and local issues, which can also contribute to the sense and expression of identity – in Nottingham between 1905 and 1925 some of these feelings arose from local people suffering directly from the war and these sentiments were moulded and put into words by local newspapers.

Acknowledgements

The authors are grateful to the Centre for Hidden Histories, a World War One Engagement Centre established by the Arts and Humanities Research Council, for funding the research for this article.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Notes on contributors

Ben Braber is Honorary Research Fellow in the School of Humanities at University of Glasgow. His main interest is integration of immigrants and their descendants into modern West-European societies

Natalie Braber is Professor of Linguistics at Nottingham Trent University. Her main interests are in the fields of sociolinguistics and language variation, with a particular focus on the East Midlands. Her research examines language variation in the region and the sense of local identity in relation to language features