



Swansea University  
Prifysgol Abertawe



## Cronfa - Swansea University Open Access Repository

---

This is an author produced version of a paper published in:  
*Armed Forces & Society*

Cronfa URL for this paper:  
<http://cronfa.swan.ac.uk/Record/cronfa31443>

---

### **Paper:**

Penn, R. & Berridge, D. (in press). Football and the military in contemporary Britain: An exploration of invisible nationalism. *Armed Forces & Society*  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0095327X16682784>

---

This item is brought to you by Swansea University. Any person downloading material is agreeing to abide by the terms of the repository licence. Copies of full text items may be used or reproduced in any format or medium, without prior permission for personal research or study, educational or non-commercial purposes only. The copyright for any work remains with the original author unless otherwise specified. The full-text must not be sold in any format or medium without the formal permission of the copyright holder.

Permission for multiple reproductions should be obtained from the original author.

Authors are personally responsible for adhering to copyright and publisher restrictions when uploading content to the repository.

<http://www.swansea.ac.uk/library/researchsupport/ris-support/>

## **Football and the Military in Contemporary Britain: An Exploration of Invisible Nationalism**

**Abstract:** This paper examines the relationship between football [soccer] and the military in Britain to explore how ‘invisible nationalism’ has evolved. Here ‘invisible nationalism’ refers to the phenomena by which the presence of the military at major British sporting events is both highly visual and has been rendered culturally and politically invisible: it is hidden ‘in plain sight’. We applied the conceptual framework associated with the ‘Annales’ School of structuralist history to explore how the inextricable links between football, the military, the monarchy and Established Church have influenced the evolution of invisible nationalism. We conducted ethnographic fieldwork, including observations, interviews and focus groups, and also analysed visual data. These comprised television broadcasts of national sporting events and photographs taken at English football clubs. We conclude that the power of the dominant metanarratives of British nationalism serve to render these phenomena invisible to most spectators, especially those who consume football via television.

**Keywords:** Football, Military, Britain, Nationalism, Visual Data.

## Introduction

This paper examines the relationship between association football [soccer] and the military in contemporary Britain. The study is situated within the broad trajectory of the oscillating relationship between popular attitudes and the military in Britain over the last four hundred years. The analysis of the current conjuncture explores this relationship empirically in relation to football at both the national and the local level. The interpretation is supported in part with visual data and involves the application of the notion of 'invisible nationalism'.

There has been considerable variation in popular attitudes in Britain towards the military over the last four hundred years or so. From the seventeenth century onwards there has been a persistent hostility amongst the British populace to the notion of a 'standing army' [i.e. a permanent army under the direct control of the monarch] (Christie, 1982). Reliance for national defence was placed primarily upon naval supremacy (Robson, 1957). Nevertheless, in the eighteenth century, as the British Empire emerged globally, recruitment to the navy was often forced using the institution of 'press ganging' sailors at the main Channel ports in the south of England (Bromley & Ryan, 1970).

Britain's post-Napoleonic Empire was rooted in overwhelming global naval superiority (Best, 1982). There remained popular hostility towards the army such that by 1914, at the outbreak of the First World War, Britain possessed a very small army (Beloff, 1984). Indeed, unlike the other major powers in Europe like Germany, France, Russia and Austria-Hungary, Britain did not rely on mass conscription prior to the outbreak of hostilities. The two World Wars in the twentieth century witnessed widespread [almost universal] conscription (Parker, 1979). At the end of both wars, there was a strong reaction against military values involving the growth of both internationalism and pacifism, especially amongst those on the left of the political spectrum. By the 1960s, military values and, *pari passu*, the military itself were generally unpopular in Britain (Marwick, 1988 and Forster, 2012). However, over recent decades there has been a concerted effort by successive British Governments, as well as by the military itself, to promote the armed services and to legitimize the near-permanent state of war.

This has been evident across a wide range of contexts. In 2006, the Government initiated Veteran's Day at the instigation of the then Chancellor of the Exchequer, Gordon Brown, to recognize the contribution of British veterans. This was changed to Armed Forces Day in 2009 and has involved a burgeoning array of events that involve and celebrate the three armed services. There has also been a growth of links between the military and the educational system. Cadet Forces have been expanded in state schools and the Ministry of Defence [MoD] has funded 'military ethos' projects in schools to the tune of £45 million since 2011. The MoD has provided teaching resources to help promote the armed forces (Ministry of Defence, 2014) and, in addition, has created a programme designed to channel ex-service personnel into the teaching profession through the 'Troops to Teachers' scheme. There have also been examples of secondary school Academies being funded by defence-related companies, most notably *BAe Systems's* sponsorship of Furness Academy in Cumbria. Remembrance Day has become increasingly prominent in recent years and this intensified in 2014 at the hundredth anniversary of the outbreak of the First World War.

Sport, and association football in particular, has been at the epicentre of these developments. This paper describes these changes both in terms of national sporting events but also at the more local level. By so doing, the paper reveals how sport and the military are increasingly intertwined in contemporary Britain.

### **The Empirical Research**

The paper explores the relationship between football and the military in contemporary Britain. This has become significantly closer in recent years and can be seen as part of an increasing incorporation of the military within mainstream British culture and society. Much of this process is situated within longstanding historical cultural, political and social templates. Unlike the United States, the process is largely implicit and part of a deeply sedimented, taken-for-granted wider set of ideological assumptions about British life and British nationalism and is invisible to the vast majority of audiences. The research was conducted in 2014 and 2015 and included ethnographic fieldwork primarily in the north west of England. It involved over forty interviews, including a series of focus groups as well as interviews with key protagonists in English football. The research also involved a series of observations at a range of football sites, some of which were captured in the photographs

used in the main body of the text. These photographs are an important element in the argument put forward in the paper and represent an example of the increasing use of visual data in contemporary sociological discourse (Rose, 2007 and Pink, 2012). As Jay noted in 1993, the visual has been marginal to social science until comparatively recently. Over the last twenty years, sociologists and ethnographers have increasingly incorporated visual materials into their overall research strategies (Margolis & Pauwels, 2011). Such ocular data can be generated relatively easily nowadays using digital cameras, camcorders and mobile [cell] phones. Visual data have featured more commonly within the sociology of sport than in sociological analyses of the military (see Hockey & Allen-Collinson, 2006 and Chaplin, 2011). This paper involves a combination of the two, albeit through the use of nine photographs. The underlying theoretical stance of the paper involves the application of the conceptual framework associated with the 'Annales' School of structuralist history (Braudel, 1949 and Duby, 1973). This emphasizes three separate arenas for analysis: long-term 'structures', shorter-term 'conjunctures' and immediate 'events'.

### **Recent Sociological Literature on Sport and the Military**

The preponderance of recent sociological literature on the relationship between sport and the military has originated from the United States. Over the past two decades social scientists have highlighted the growing relationship between the entertainment industries and the military in the USA, which has been particularly prominent in the sphere of sport (Butterworth, 2012). In the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, sport and the media have cultivated highly visible partnerships with the American military. This has led to many sporting events where appreciation has been shown for the military personnel fighting in America's wars overseas, notably in Afghanistan and Iraq. In 2010, for example, *Fox TV* included live coverage from Afghanistan during its Thanksgiving pre-match football coverage and other networks have staged live broadcasts from US warships on active service, as well as from the Bagram airbase in Afghanistan (Silk, 2012). In 2011 NBC commemorated the tenth anniversary of 9/11 with a special *Sunday Night Football* programme which witnessed the unrolling of an American flag the size of the entire field of play. New York City Fire Department fire fighters, New York Police Department personnel and members of the armed services lined up on the field between the professional football players themselves and Robert de Niro eulogized the civilian victims of 9/11. Subsequently the crowd chanted

“USA! USA!” and George W. Bush came onto the field and flipped the coin to determine ends. This was followed by a highly emotional performance of the ‘Star Spangled Banner’ (Fischer, 2014).

Various American authors have produced conceptual schemes of ever-increasing complexity to capture these phenomena in the USA. Hertz (1997) discussed such connections in terms of a ‘military-entertainment complex’ and Der Derian (2001) followed this up with his own notion of a ‘military-industrial-media-entertainment network’. Turse (2008) subsequently generated the notion of a ‘new military-industrial-technological-entertainment-academic-scientific-media-intelligence-homeland security-surveillance-national security-corporate complex’. This he labelled in shorthand as ‘The Complex’! Unfortunately these abstruse conceptual schemes have tended to elide important empirical variations within abstract relationships that are assumed rather than demonstrated with evidence.

Nonetheless, the general thrust of such approaches is to posit an erosion of the boundaries between the military and everyday life in America. Butterworth and Moskal (2009) portrayed this as part of the wider creation of a ‘perpetual state of fear and surveillance’ by increasingly paranoid US governments. The military were both lauded and normalized as part of ‘the natural order of things’. Jansen and Sabo (1994) earlier explained these phenomena in terms of the symbiosis of sport and war within the semiotic systems of contemporary America as revealed by the explicit militarization of the Super Bowl and other sporting events in the USA since the late 1960s. Fischer (2014) argued that the NFL’s commemoration ceremonies are ‘complicit in the silent re-empowerment of the neo-liberal state in times of perpetual war’.

This American literature on the sociology of sport and the military shares a general range of features. Much of it is explicitly hostile to the military itself. Authors make a virtue of their partisanship. There is, consequently, very little discussion of how audiences both at sporting events directly, or watching more remotely on television, respond or react to such developments. There is a powerful ‘marxisant’ view that such audiences are passive dupes of externally-imposed ideological forces that exhibit and exemplify ‘false consciousness’. Personal observations made by one of the authors at live US sporting events over the years

in San Francisco, Los Angeles, St. Louis, Detroit, Phoenix, Chicago and Los Angeles suggest that the powerful displays of nationalism evident on such occasions appear consonant with the dominant values of the spectators present.

The analysis of the growing relationship between football and the military in Britain presented here is deliberately neutral as to whether these are desirable phenomena. Rather it takes a broadly Weberian (Weber, 1949) stance: what is of interest sociologically is that the relationship has happened and continues to develop and that, in the main, it has received very little comment in Britain from either social scientists (the main exception has been Mason and Reid's (2010) study of the historical relationship of sport and the military) or from general commentators and pundits. Indeed, it is this very silence that is of central interest in this analysis. The paper is restricted to an analysis of football. There are important links between other sports and the military in Britain – most notably that involving rugby union. However, these are beyond the scope of the present analysis. Nonetheless, football remains the most important and popular sport in contemporary Britain, both in terms of participation and of support.

### **The Triangular Relationship of Monarch, Church and the Military in Britain**

The connection between the military and football in Britain is deeply sedimented within broader taken-for-granted cultural, political and social relationships which have powerful historical antecedents. Indeed, the entwining of football and the armed services is part of a wider triadic relationship that sits at the core of British nationalism and of dominant notions of 'Britishness'. The military provides one of the central foundations that underpins the British monarchy. The monarch is head of the armed services and service personnel swear allegiance to the 'Crown', pledging to protect the monarch and his or her family. No reference is made within these ceremonies either to the nation or to Parliament. The Royal Family itself has a long association with all the armed services. Prince William and Prince Andrew were both RAF pilots and Prince Harry was an army officer, serving in Afghanistan until recently. Earlier, the Duke of Edinburgh served in the Royal Navy, as did many of the current Queen's ancestors. Regiments and warships receive royal names and members of the Royal Family often appear in military uniforms in their ceremonial roles as heads of various branches of the armed services. This was evident both at the funeral of the Queen

Mother in 2002 and more recently at Prince William's marriage when he wore his uniform as colonel in the Irish Guards.

The monarch is, of course, also head of the Church of England and has been since the time of Henry VIII. The military are also closely connected to the established Anglican Church. In Holywood, in County Down, army personnel from the local barracks attended the cenotaph in the centre of the town on 10th November 2013 and then marched up to the nearby Church of St Philip and St James (which is part of the Anglican Church), for a Service of Remembrance that was identical in form and content to those taking place simultaneously in the Church of England on the mainland. Behind the pulpit within the church itself was a memorial to a deceased British soldier from the town who had died during the First World War and had been awarded the Victoria Cross (see Photo A). His marble epitaph had the union flag as its background motif. Surrounding the font at the other end of the aisle hung a series of regimental standards from the British army and the British Legion, all of which also contained the union flag. These symbols and objects are standard in all Anglican churches in the UK (as illustrated in Photo B from Hexham Abbey in Northumbria in England).

## **PHOTOGRAPHS A AND B ABOUT HERE**

### **Football, the Military and the Monarchy**

Football in Britain is linked to this triangular relationship of the monarchy, established Anglican religion and the military in a variety of ways. Football is closely connected to the Royal Family. George V attended many F.A. Cup Finals in the early decades of the twentieth century. The first was in 1914. Subsequently he made it known that 'Abide with Me' – the Cup Final hymn sung since 1927 – was both his and his wife's favourite (see Russell, 2008 and Nannestad, 2010). This was introduced into the repertoire and choreography of successive F.A. Cup Finals as part of the general commemoration of the military sacrifice made during World War 1 and was part of a much wider set of traditions created during the 1920s to commemorate the slaughter during the First World War (Ashplant, Dawson & Roper, 2000). The hymn had been sung earlier in the trenches by Allied troops during World War I and also by nurse Edith Cavell the night before her execution by the Germans in 1915 for aiding British troops in Belgium. Nowadays it is accompanied at Wembley by a military band, which also marches up and down the pitch playing military marching tunes prior to



kick-off and during the half-time interval. In a real sense, these features embody central elements in the 'invention of a modern tradition' around football, the military and the F.A. Cup Final (Hobsbawn & Ranger, 1983). Weber defined the nation as unified around memories of a common political destiny, central to which was war: indeed, societies remember the past through very specific constructs, within which warfare has been pivotal (Connerton, 2000). Images of the past also serve to legitimate the present social order. This became increasingly apparent in 2014 with extensive commemorations of the start of World War I, particularly on *BBC* television and radio.

The Queen attended her first F.A. Cup Final in 1949 when she presented the trophy and has attended many since, as well as the World Cup Final at Wembley in 1966. Prince William, a keen player and fan, is currently President of the English Football Association [F.A.] and regularly attends the Cup Final. The armed services are also closely involved with the internal organization and governance of the F.A. Currently all three branches – the Army, the Navy and the Royal Air Force – have representatives sitting on its governing body. Indeed, football has been an integral part of the British armed services since the game's inception in the last third of the nineteenth century (Fuller, 1991).

### **The Crisis of Legitimacy**

During the 1970s, crowds at Wembley became increasingly reluctant to sing either the hymn 'Abide with Me' or the National Anthem. Often they would drown these out with their own songs such as 'You'll Never Walk Alone' when Liverpool were one of the finalists. Pop stars like Rod Stewart were brought out to try and engage with the fans without any evident success. This was part of a general distrust of traditional exhibitions of patriotism associated with the rebellious late 1960s and 1970s (see Garvy, 2007 and Gildea, Mark & Warring, 2013). It also had a strong class and ethnic element which still is in evidence when certain England players conspicuously fail to sing the National Anthem before international fixtures.

A turning point occurred with the Falklands War in 1982 when singing the U.K. national anthem 'God Save the Queen' became fashionable again. This initiated a re-militarisation of the Cup Final and a re-calibration of its ideological traditions. This has intensified since the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan and has been paralleled at other major footballing events such as the Play Offs at Wembley that complete the season in England. At the 2008 Play-off

Final between Rochdale and Stockport County, a range of service personnel from different arms of the military marched around the perimeter of the pitch to loud applause prior to the game (see Photo C). These developments paralleled a wider transformation in the way military sacrifice had come to be represented in Britain (King, 2010).

## **PHOTOGRAPH C ABOUT HERE**

### **The 2014 and 2015 English FA Cup Finals**

During the preliminaries to the 2014 English F.A. Cup Final at Wembley in London between Arsenal and Hull City, a sailor in full uniform brought the new F.A. Cup onto the pitch and placed it on a plinth with both clubs' sets of ribbons. This merited no comments from the match presenters on *BT Sport* which was showing the match live on television. In the press the next day, there was also a complete silence about this aspect of the immediate build-up to the game. Subsequently, twenty people who had watched the build-up to the game on television were interviewed in two focus groups and not one reported noticing these events! When pushed, the focus group respondents simply had not seen what had been presented on television. Indeed, they were much more likely to have noticed the pitch-side advertisements than these specific phenomena. This prompted us to research what these events signified and subsequently to broaden the focus to encompass the current relationship between professional football in Britain and the military.

A very similar set of events featured during the 2015 English F.A. Cup Final between Aston Villa and Arsenal. Music before the match was played by the Band of the Brigade of Gurkhas. This was not mentioned at all on *BBC1* or *BT Sport* who both televised the game live. In fact, the choice of the Gurkhas [who originate from Nepal] was deeply symbolic of their historic imperial links since 2015 represented the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of their service within the British Army.

The FA Cup was brought onto the pitch and placed on a plinth by a Gurkha soldier in full uniform. This was not shown on *BBC* nor mentioned by their commentary team. *BT*, on the other hand, showed the episode but did not comment upon it. The soldier was Sergeant Dipprasad Pun who had received the Conspicuous Gallantry Cross for his actions in Afghanistan in 2010. Subsequently the hymn 'Abide with Me' was sung by a choir of 64

fans, each of whom represented one of the 64 clubs who featured in the 3<sup>rd</sup> round of that year's competition. The BBC commentator called this "one of those great traditions of the Cup Final", despite its novel character. Once again, twenty people who had watched the game on television took part in three focus group discussions and, once more, none mentioned these aspects of the coverage of the game despite some gentle prodding. Clearly the insertion of the military into the heart of England's most important annual game of football was invisible despite its being an integral part of the recent rituals associated with the build-up to the match.

### **Renewed Nationalism**

As has been described earlier, during the build-up to the 2014 F.A. Cup Final at Wembley, the band of the Welsh Guards provided the music for the hymn 'Abide with Me' and a sailor placed the new F.A. Cup trophy on a plinth on the pitch before the players walked out for the match. The sailor – Liam O'Grady – had won the Military Cross in Afghanistan in 2012. This was followed by Prince William being introduced to the two teams, followed by a lusty rendition of 'God Save the Queen'.

These rituals are part of a collective unconscious of sedimented taken-for-granted nationalistic tropes, myths and assumptions built into the very fabric of successive F.A. Cup Finals. Such is the level of ideological routinization that these features no longer merit comment. Football's show case end of season match is celebrated amidst the monarch (or her representative), the military and the communal singing of religious and patriotic/nationalistic songs. In a real sense, the nation is re-imagined (Anderson, 1983), re-created and celebrated anew but within tightly circumscribed parameters. It is in this sense that the notion of 'invisible nationalism' has been deployed as a hermeneutic device for this analysis. However, as always at such occasions, there is a profound ambiguity as to which nation (or nations) is being evoked. Is it Britain or England or both? The monarch herself represents both as does the National Anthem, whilst the Welsh Guards clearly represent another part of the U.K. and not England, a complexity enhanced by the fact that major Welsh football teams feature in the F.A. Cup competition itself. This ambiguity is a longstanding feature of British nationalism, forged as it was in the eighteenth century

amidst military conflict with France at a time of burgeoning imperial ambitions (Colley, 1992).

### **Football and the Military: Local Links**

The increasing links between football and the military in Britain can also be seen clearly at a more local level at specific English professional football clubs. Bolton Wanderers, for instance, has a Book of Remembrance built into the structure of the Macron Stadium [formerly the Reebok Stadium] (see Photo D). This originally commemorated those Bolton spectators who had died at the Burnden Park [their previous ground] disaster in 1946. More recently, it has been extended to include the names of other Wanderers' supporters who have passed away. The pages are turned daily in a way that mimics Books of Remembrance for fallen members of the armed services in Anglican churches (see Photo E). The club also holds an Annual Service of Remembrance for those listed in the Book of Remembrance which starts pitch-side and then moves into a suite inside the stadium itself. Here the names of all those who have been added to the Book of Remembrance over the last twelve months are read out. In addition, all the names in the Book are scrolled onto a screen and families can light a candle to commemorate their deceased loved ones. Generally between 300 and 400 people attend. This is complemented by readings from the Bible plus the singing of 'Abide with Me'. In 2014 a generic commemorative message was added to the Book of Remembrance on 4<sup>th</sup> August (the anniversary of the UK's entry into World War I) as a memorial to the dead of the First World War. A Remembrance Service to commemorate the centenary of the outbreak of the First World War was held at the stadium in August 2014 [see Photograph F].

### **PHOTOGRAPHS D, E AND F ABOUT HERE**

In 2013 the club also created a new Duke of Lancaster Regiment Suite within their stadium. This was based on a desire to recognize the dead in recent years from the local Regiment, many of whom had been Wanderers' supporters. In the words of the club's chaplain, Phil Mason, this is part of the club's wish to recognize military service for country as a "part of everyday life". The club sends mementos to troops serving abroad with the Regiment. On Remembrance Day itself (11<sup>th</sup> November), the club holds a short ceremony and then the traditional two minutes silence at the pitch-side for those Bolton Wanderers' employees

who wish to attend and it also supports the British Legion's Poppy Appeal at an appropriate home match. In 2014 the club commemorated the outbreak of The First World War a century earlier. Bolton Wanderers has a long tradition of supporting charities that assist veterans of the armed forces and announced that *BLESMA* – The Limbless Veterans Charity – was their national charity of choice for the 2014/2015 season. This had the wholehearted support of the club's new Italian shirt sponsors – *Macron* – who recognized a shared history of mass slaughter in Britain and Italy during the First World War. In September 2014 the club brought out a special, limited edition green 'military-style' third strip for wearing at certain away games during the 2014/2015 season to support BLESMA (see Photograph G). For each shirt sold, the charity received £10. The shirt had the words 'Lest We Forget' embossed on the reverse with the words from Laurence Binyon's poem 'For The Fallen' featured inside the neck label (see Photograph H).

#### **PHOTOGRAPHS G AND H ABOUT HERE**

These recent developments are situated within a long tradition of close relations between Bolton Wanderers and the military. Famously, in August 1939, at the beginning of the new league season, the captain of the first team announced to the home crowd that the entire team was going to join up immediately after the match. This they did and the team were incorporated into the 53rd Field Regiment of the Bolton Artillery that faced action in the North African, Italian and Normandy campaigns as part of the Eighth Army from 1941 onwards (Purcell & Gething, 1996). This paralleled earlier examples of footballers joining the army as volunteers in 1914 and 1915 (see Foley, 2007; Terret & Mangan, 2012 and McCrery, 2014), most notably the Footballers' Battalion (the 17<sup>th</sup>) of the Middlesex Regiment which saw action at the Battle of the Somme in 1916 and incurred heavy casualties (Riddoch & Kemp, 2011).

#### **Remembrance and Nationalism**

Remembrance itself is situated within broad tropes of British nationalism (Winter, 1995). The commemorating of the sacrifices made in successive World Wars is intimately connected to the victories in these conflicts (Wilson, 2015). The addition of successive wars to the litany of sacrifice serves also to incorporate them into this broad commemorative matrix (King, 2015). However, many of Britain's military engagements since 1945 have been

far less successful and some, notably the invasion of Suez in 1956, were disasters politically and failed to achieve their military aims. The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have been increasingly seen as mistakes by the majority of the British population and in many respects as failures (see Hines, Gribbler, Wesley, Dandeker & Fear, 2015). Currently, at the time of writing, the British Government is in the process of waging war in Syria, despite strong popular hostility.

The commemoration of the centenary of the outbreak of the First World War in 1914 ratcheted up these phenomena throughout 2014. Amidst the commemoration of the enormous numbers who died during the First World War [almost a million dead out of a total military force of around six million], the military were prominent (Winter & Sivan, 1999). They embodied the continuities between past and present, thereby eliding and obfuscating the nature of contemporary military entanglements, whilst to a large degree legitimizing them. This was seen clearly before the kick-off at Villa Park on November 2<sup>nd</sup> 2014. Prior to the game between Aston Villa and Tottenham Hotspur, a bugler from the Signals Regiment played the 'Last Post'. On the perimeter of the pitch a group of veterans from the Normandy landings in 1944 were lined up and members of the current armed services stood to attention during the minute's rendition. The crowd of 32,000 remained totally silent during this episode. The television commentary was restricted to stating that the minute's silence "had been totally respected by the crowd". None of the other elements were explained or even noted. Similar phenomena occurred at the match between Liverpool and Chelsea at Anfield on November 8<sup>th</sup> 2014. The commemoration of the centenary of the outbreak of World War I was situated within televised shots of both current servicemen and veterans standing to attention during the minute's silence at the ground. Past and present were conflated and the presence of the military in uniform – itself a relatively uncommon sight – linked past sacrifice and the current military into one integrated visual spectacle as part of the reproduction of the hegemonic metanarrative of British nationalism (Laclau, 1990).

There was an interesting difference in the style of commemoration between football and rugby union over that weekend. During the former it was the outbreak of the First World War that was commemorated, whilst at the two rugby union international matches at Twickenham in London and at the Millennium Stadium in Cardiff, explicit references were

made by television commentators to the 'sacrifices' made in both World Wars and more recently, in Iraq and Afghanistan. This message was reinforced by soldiers located on the perimeter of the national flags laid out on the pitch. They were dressed in combat uniforms as if ready for war. The uniforms themselves were in the new 'desert' camouflage style. The link with the increasing involvement of the military in Iraq and Syria was there hidden in plain sight!

These phenomena are built upon deeply sedimented popular cultural references. The chant popular with England football fans 'Two World Wars and One World Cup' emphasises the trope of victory. This is reinforced by films, magazines, television programmes and even comics. Fans also sing or whistle the theme tune to 'The Great Escape': a film about prisoners of war escaping from a German camp in World War II which culminated in the murder of many of them upon recapture. This is the central ambiguity at the core of remembrance. The sacrifices made in the two World Wars were in pursuit of victories that were and remain relatively uncontroversial. Indeed they underpin strong elements of the national narrative which includes 'Standing Alone' and the bravery of 'The Few'. More recent conflicts have been much more controversial. It is by no means clear that either the Iraq wars or the Afghan war were victories or even successful. Remembrance also evokes collective thoughts of futility and destruction. As poststructuralists such as Laclau and Mouffe (2001) have shown, the plural, polysemic significance of these collective historical memories means that remembering is clearly a double-edged sword.

### **Football and the Military: Further Local Links**

Carlisle United represents another English professional football club that exemplifies more general links between football and the military at a local level. Seven years ago the club joined the 'Tickets for Troops' scheme. This mimicked earlier US schemes such as *Gameday for Heroes* and *Seats4Soldiers* and provides free tickets for members of the armed services to attend Carlisle United home matches. This was partly because the Duke of Lancaster Regiment (also the club's local Regiment as a result of the reorganization of the army) was deployed at the time in Afghanistan and there was a sizeable contingent of Carlisle United fans there on active service.

On three occasions the club arranged special celebrations for the return of the Regiment from overseas' tours of duty (twice to Afghanistan and once to Northern Ireland). On these occasions 10 soldiers provided a guard of honour for the players' entry onto the pitch and also brought the ball out to present it to the referee (see Photograph I). These soldiers were provided with free tickets, food and hospitality. Around the 11<sup>th</sup> of November each year, the players commemorate Remembrance Day by wearing black arm bands with a poppy on them along with many other teams in Britain. Every summer the Duke of Lancaster Regiment's Outreach Team visits the club to provide military-style training as part of the club's pre-season preparations.

### **PHOTOGRAPH I ABOUT HERE**

#### **Challenges to the Increasingly Close Relationship between Football and the Military**

The increasingly symbiotic relationship between football and the military evident in Britain over recent years has not gone unchallenged. Explicit hostility to the incorporation of military themes within professional league football has centred on spectators and players who contest the current constitution of the United Kingdom, particularly the status of Northern Ireland. In 2010, spectators at Celtic Park in Glasgow held up a large banner on the day the club had agreed that their players would wear a poppy on their shirts to commemorate Remembrance Day. This read 'Ireland, Iraq, Afghanistan; No Blood Stained Poppy on Our Hoops; Your Deeds Would Shame All the Devils in Hell'. The Celtic club and its supporters have a longstanding historical connection to the cause of Irish nationalism which is symbolized by the flying of the Irish tricolor over its ground. In 2012 the Sunderland player, James Maclean, who had grown up in the Nationalist Creggan estate in Derry in Northern Ireland where six of the dead shot by British paratroopers in controversial circumstances on 'Bloody Sunday' in 1972 had lived, refused to wear a special shirt with a poppy on its chest as part of the Remembrance Sunday commemoration. Maclean has continued with this stance in the period since at Wigan and West Bromwich Albion, to the increasing anger of many English football supporters.



## Conclusions

The phenomena outlined in this paper and illustrated by the photographic evidence that has been included reveal a powerful and burgeoning link between English football and the military. Much of it remains invisible in the main, scarcely worthy of comment in most cases within the media. Evidence from the focus groups revealed that television audiences also failed to see these phenomena. This raises important theoretical and conceptual issues. How can one interpret phenomena that are both invisible and present? Discourse analysis (see Gee, 1999 and Wooffit, 2005) provides a way of simultaneously probing what is present and what is absent. However, in the case presented here, the phenomena are present but generally invisible. In many ways they represent the unexamined backcloth to professional football in contemporary England. They are seen as 'natural' by media commentators, crowds at matches and, in all probability, by most television audiences as well. They represent a classic example of cultural hegemony whereby dominant ideological nationalist assumptions present a particular representation of what is 'normal' and 'natural' (Merleau-Ponty, 1968). Indeed, they suggest that the power of the dominant metanarratives of British nationalism are to be located more in liminal, marginal, peripheral areas of social life than in explicit ideological expressions. Underlying these phenomena is a form of perceptual overload (Lavie, 1995) that merits further research.

They also represent and exemplify the changing role of the military in contemporary British culture. There has been a longstanding suspicion of the military in Britain historically. Alone among the main combatant nations in 1914, Britain did not make use of conscription for providing its military forces. This was grounded in a longstanding hostility to notions of a 'standing army' and the press-ganging of sailors into the navy. For the last two hundred years most of the British army has been billeted abroad as a cornerstone to the wider imperial project. Its barracks in Britain were (and remain) largely outside the large conurbations where the vast majority of the British population live. Soldiers, sailors and RAF personnel are rarely to be seen in British cities, partly because generally they do not wear their uniforms when off-duty.

Nonetheless, despite the fact that Britain has been in an almost permanent state of war since 1945 (Dorling, Newman & Barford, 2008 and Smith, 2014), the Falklands War in 1982

marked a seminal moment in the relationship between the military and wider British society (Middlebrook, 2012). The television pictures from Goose Green and the assault on Stanley rendered the war immediate and graphic to the population back in the UK. It is interesting to note that in the early years of teaching by one of the authors at Lancaster University, the Falklands War stood out as the only political issue where students came to blows with each other. The Falklands War represented a turning point in public perceptions of Britain's military. This has been ratcheted up further as a result of the Iraq and Afghan Wars. These are routinely conflated in contemporary commemorative practices (Danilova, 2015). The paradox is that whilst these wars have become increasingly unpopular (Hines, Gribbler, Wesley, Dandeker & Fear, 2015), the military have become more and more centre stage in Britain.

The pervasive power of such ideological hegemonic assumptions renders the phenomena examined in this paper for the most part invisible. They embody a scopic regime that is simply not seen by most participants and audiences in English football. They are part of the covert institutionalization of memory (Catela, 2015) that is central to the hegemonic metanarratives of contemporary British nationalism (Molden, 2016). In a real sense, these phenomena which are highly visual have been rendered culturally and politically invisible. They are hidden in full sight. They are the equivalent of cultural wallpaper (Keeble, 2010) - there but rarely seen or acknowledged. The photographs presented as corroborative evidence in this paper are also of a similar status: they delineate key visual aspects of phenomena that are generally invisible.

The argument presented in this analysis is significantly different from most US literature on the relationship between sport and the military. The practices and patterns under scrutiny in Britain are far less explicit than those evident in the USA. They are understated, subtle, scarcely visible, hidden in plain view but nonetheless powerful. They represent part of an emergent set of phenomena in the present conjuncture.

Our argument also goes a stage further than Billig's classic analysis of banal nationalism (1995). The phenomena analysed in this paper are more than taken-for-granted 'natural' events. Rather they are invisible to most spectators. They are simply not present within the

dominant focus of vision. Indeed, in a literal sense, they are outside the dominant frame of interpretation.

Are these phenomena new? In certain respects the present conjuncture represents a new phase in the complex and ambiguous structural relationship between the military and popular sentiment in Britain (King, 2015). In the case of football there has been an increasing interpenetration of the two institutional spheres. However, these developments also represent a return to an earlier relationship between the two which was evident during the two twentieth century World Wars and also in the immediate post-1945 era. This was partly underpinned by the large number of men [and to a lesser extent women] who had direct experience of military service through conscription. This ended in 1960. The 1960s and 1970s witnessed an increasing disconnect between popular sentiments and the military in Britain. This has been progressively reversed since the Falklands War and the phenomena analyzed in this paper reveal some of its central features in the sphere of football.

## References

- Anderson, B. (1983). *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso.
- Ashplant, T., Dawson, G. & Roper, M. (Eds.). (2000). *The Politics of War Memory and Commemoration*. London: Routledge.
- Beloff, M. (1984). *Wars and Welfare: Britain 1914-1945*. London: Edward Arnold.
- Best, G. (1982). *War and Society in Revolutionary Europe, 1770-1870*. Leicester: Leicester University Press.
- Billig, M. (1995) *Banal Nationalism*. London: Sage.
- Braudel, F. (1949). *La Méditerranée et le Monde Méditerranéen à l'Époque de Philippe II* : 3 vols. Paris: Livre de Poche.
- Bromley, J. & Ryan, A. (1970). Navies. In J. S. Bromley [Ed.], *The Rise of Great Britain and Russia, 1688-1721*. (pp.790-833). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Butterworth, M. (2012). Militarism and Memorializing at the Pro Football Hall of Fame. *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies*, 9, 3, September, 241-258.
- Butterworth, M. & Moskal, S. (2009). American Football, Flags, and "Fun": The Bell Helicopter Armed Forces Bowl and the Rhetorical Production of Militarism. *Communication, Culture & Critique*, 2, 411-433.
- Catela, L. (2015). Staged memories: Conflicts and tensions in Argentine memory sites, *Memory Studies*, 8, 1, 9-21.
- Chaplin, E. (2011). The Photo Diary as an Autoethnographic Method. In E. Margolis & L. Pauwels [Eds.]. *The Sage Handbook of Visual Research Methods*. London: Sage, 2011, 241-262.
- Christie, I. (1982). *Wars and Revolutions*. London: Edward Arnold.
- Colley, L. (1992). *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

- Connerton, P. (2000). *How Societies Remember*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Danilova, N. (2015). The Politics of Mourning: The Virtual Memorialisation of British fatalities in Iraq and Afghanistan, *Memory Studies*, 8, 3, 267-281.
- Der Derian, J. (2001). *Virtuous War: Mapping the Military-Industrial-Media-Entertainment Network*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Dorling, D., Newman, M. & Barford, A. (2008). *The Atlas of the Real World: Mapping the Way we Live*. London: Thames & Hudson.
- Duby, G. (1973). *Dimanche de Bouvines*. Paris: Gallimard.
- Fischer, M. (2014). Commemorating 9/11 NFL style: Insights into America's Culture of Militarism. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, 38, 3, 199-221.
- Foley, M. (2007). *Hard as Nails: The Sportsman's Battalion of World War One*. London: Spellmount Publishers.
- Forster, A. (2012). The Military Covenant and British Civil-Military Relations: Letting the Genie out of the Bottle. *Armed Forces & Society*, 38, 2, 273-290.
- Fuller, J.G. (1991). *Troop Morale and Popular Culture in the British and Dominion Armies 1914-1918*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Garvy, H. (2007). *Rebels with a Cause*. Market Harborough: Shire Press.
- Gee, J. (1999). *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis: Theory and Method*. London: Routledge.
- Gildea, R., Mark, J. & Warring, A. (Eds), (2013). *Europe's 1968: Voice of Revolt*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hertz, J. (1997). *Joystick Nation*. New York: Little Brown.
- Hines L., Gribbler, R., Wesley, S., Dandeker, C. and Fear, N. (2015). Are the Armed Forces Understood and Supported by the Public? *Armed Forces & Society*, 41, 4, 688-713.

Hobsbawn, E. & Ranger, T. (Eds). (1983). *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hockey, J. & Allen-Collinson, J. (2006). Seeing the way: visual sociology and the distance runner's perspective. *Visual Studies*, 21, 1, 70-81.

Jansen, S. & Sabo, D. (1994). The Sport/War Metaphor: Hegemonic Masculinity, the Persian Gulf War, and the New World Order. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 11, 1-17.

Jay, M. (1993). *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Keeble, T. (2010). *Walls are Talking: Wallpaper, Art and Culture*. Chicago: KWS Publishers.

King, A. (2010). The Afghan War and Postmodern Memory: Commemoration and the Dead of Helmand. *British Journal of Sociology*, 61, 1, 1-25.

King, A. (2015). Sport, War and Commemoration: Representations of Football, War and Sacrifice in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries. Paper presented to European Association for the Sociology of Sport Conference on 'Sport, Unity & Conflict', Dublin, June 2015.

Laclau, E. (2005). *On Populist Reason*. London: Verso.

Laclau, E. & Mouffe, C. (2001). *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*. New York: Verso.

Lavie, N. (1995) Perceptual load as a necessary condition for selective attention. *Journal of Experimental Psychology*, 21, 451-468.

Margolis, E. & Pauwels, L. (Eds). (2011). *The Sage Handbook of Visual Research Methods*. London: Sage.

Marwick, A. (1988). (Ed.). *Total War and Social Change*. London: Macmillan.

Mason, T. & Reidi, E. (2010). *Sport and the Military: The British Armed Forces 1880-1960*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- McCrery, N. (2014). *The Final Season: The Footballers Who Fought and Died in the Great War*. London: Random House.
- Merleau-Ponty, M. (1968). *The Visible and the Invisible*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.
- Middlebrook, M. (2012). *The Falklands War*. Barnsley: Pen & Sword.
- Ministry of Defence (2014). *The British Armed Forces Learning Resource 2014*. London.
- Molden, B. (2016). Resistant pasts versus mnemonic hegemony: On the power relations of collective memory. *Memory Studies*, 9, 2, 125-142.
- Nannestad, I. (2010). Pack Up Your Troubles: Football and Community Singing. *Soccer History*, 22, 3-6.
- Parker, G. (1979). Warfare. In P. Burke [Ed.]. *The New Cambridge Modern History Companion Volume (201-219)*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Pink, S. (Ed). (2012). *Advances in Visual Methodology*. London: Sage.
- Purcell, T. & Gething, M. (1996). *Wartime Wanderers: Bolton Wanderers- A Football Team at War*. Edinburgh: Mainstream Publishing.
- Riddoch, A. & Kemp, J. (2011). *When the Whistle Blows: The Story of the Footballers' Battalion in the Great War*. Yeovil: Haynes.
- Robson, E. (1957). The Armed Forces and the Art of War. In J. Lindsay [Ed.]. *The Old Regime, 1713-63 (163-190)*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Rose, G. (2007). *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to the Interpretation of Visual Methods*. [2nd Edition]. London: Sage.
- Russell, D. (2008). Abiding Memories: The Community Singing Movement and English Social Life in the 1920s. *Popular Music*, 27, 1, 117-133.
- Silk, M. (2012). *The Cultural Politics of Post 9/11 American Sport*. London: Routledge.
- Smith, D. (2014). *The State of the World Atlas (Ninth Edition)*. Oxford: New Internationalist.

- Terret, T. & Mangan, J. (Eds.). (2012). *Sport, Militarism and the Great War: Martial Manliness and Armageddon*. London: Routledge.
- Turse, N. (2008). *The Complex: How the Military Invades Our Everyday Lives*. New York: Metropolitan Books.
- Weber, M. (1949). *Max Weber on the Methodology of the Social Sciences*. Glencoe, IL: Free Press.
- Wilson, R. (2015). Still fighting in the trenches: 'War discourse' and the memory of the First World War in Britain. *Memory Studies*, 8, 4, 454-469.
- Winter, J. (1995). *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Winter, J. & Sivan, E. (Eds.) (1999). *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Wooffit, R. (2005). *Conversational Analysis and Discourse Analysis: A Comparative and Critical Introduction*. London: Sage.





Photograph B: Banners in Hexham Abbey, 2014.



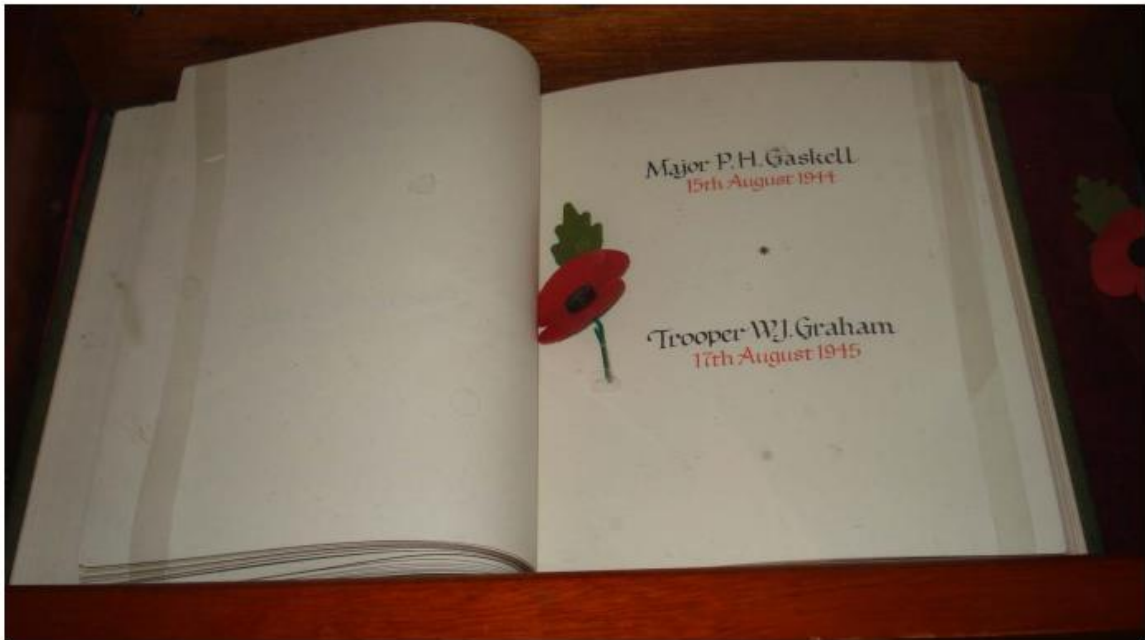
**Photograph C: Service Personnel on the Perimeter of the Pitch at Wembley, Rochdale vs. Stockport County, May 26<sup>th</sup> 2008.**



Photograph D: Book of Remembrance, Bolton Wanderers, 2014.



Photograph E: Book of Remembrance, Hexham Abbey, 2014.



**Photograph F: World War I Remembrance Service, Bolton Wanderers, 2014.**



**Photograph G: Bolton Wanderers Commemorative Shirt, 2014.**



Photograph H: Poem inside the Collar of Bolton Wanderers' Commemorative Shirt.





**Photograph I: Soldiers from the Duke of Lancaster's Regiment provide a Guard of Honour at the Match between Carlisle United and MK Dons, February 23<sup>rd</sup> 2014.**

