

Close Encounters of an Unprecedented Kind: Police and German Enemy Aliens in Britain during the First World War

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Abstract The First World War introduced new tasks into British policing. One significant addition was the close and systematic surveillance of aliens residing in Britain, a role never before undertaken by the British police and one that would previously have been considered un-English. During the war, various official bodies participated in the regulation of the lives of foreigners, but the police played a crucial part. Foreigners hailing from enemy countries, particularly Germans, bore the brunt of police attention, which can be described as nothing short of discriminatory and oppressive. This article examines the new responsibilities of the British police for controlling German nationals and the public response to the new policing. It also assesses the police's wartime performance and the implications of their conduct for the lives of these Germans, all of which has hitherto been little explored. The police were widely considered, both by large segments of the British public and in many other countries, as the best police force in the world, morally superior to other constabularies, especially in their relatively tolerant attitudes toward the public. Their conduct in a time of national crisis, and particularly the degree of tolerance they exercised in their relations with a hated, indeed outcast minority, offers an illuminating case study.

With the advent of the First World War, new tasks introduced into British policing, including the close surveillance of aliens residing in Britain. Various official bodies participated in regulating the wartime lives of aliens, but the police played the crucial role and had most contact with these communities. No such systematic supervision of the foreign population had ever been undertaken by the British police or any other official institution in Britain.¹ Unsurprisingly, foreigners from enemy countries bore the brunt of police attention; they were subjected to more regular and intensive meetings with officers than were other non-British subjects. These encounters, newly introduced in the course of the war, had a far-reaching impact on both police work and the lives of these foreigners. This article throws light on this aspect of the influence of the First World War on British policing and British society, a facet of the war that has not yet been fully explored.

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¹ J. C. Bird, *Control of Enemy Alien Civilians in Great Britain, 1914–1918* (Abingdon, 2015), 6.

Of the major groups of enemy aliens in Britain at the time, the German community is the focus of this article. It was not only by far the largest group (about fifty-three thousand out of seventy-five thousand Germans, Austro-Hungarians, Ottomans, and Bulgarians on the eve of the war)² but also more tightly regulated than was any other group of enemy aliens. The Germans were not just any ethnic minority, of course: connected to the nation's principal, most hated enemy, they were widely considered a security risk of the highest order to the state and every citizen. We now know that the assumption dictating the policing of foreigners of German extraction—that they constituted a grave menace to national safety—was false, and that they were unjustly treated, subjected to stringent rules and regulations implemented in Britain for the first time. Without question, they were the ultimate victim group on the British home front, and their plight, a crucial determinant of which was their interaction with the police, was unique.³ The fact that prior to the war, despite growing anti-German sentiments, this community was relatively well integrated in British society adds an important dimension to its wartime experience.⁴

Scrutiny of the wartime conduct of the British police is of a particular interest because they were regarded by large segments of the British public and in many other countries (principally by liberals) as the best police force in the world, typified by “an indulgent tradition” worth studying and even emulating.⁵ Although this image was criticized at the time (and, more recently, by some police historians) as incompatible with the reality on the ground, British police had been repeatedly idealized as morally superior to other constabularies, especially for their relatively tolerant attitudes toward the public. Historians have shown that in the years prior to the Great War, the British police were also more restrained and careful in their treatment of foreign anarchists and anticolonial activists than were their continental and colonial counterparts, even when the authorities perceived such individuals' presence in Britain as a threat to the nation or the empire, as was the case with Indian nationalists.⁶

How did this police force behave toward a detested—in fact, outcast—minority during a total war when all national resources had been allocated to fight this enemy? It should be noted that intolerance of aliens of enemy extraction during the war was not exclusive to Britain: similar or even harsher measures were imposed in almost all the countries that took part in the war.⁷ It should also be

² *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 5th series, vol. 83, 29 June 1916, col. 1063.

³ Panikos Panayi, “The Destruction of the German Communities in Britain during the First World War,” in *Germans in Britain since 1500*, ed. Panikos Panayi (London, 1996), 113–30, at 113–14, 129–30.

⁴ Panikos Panayi, *Prisoners of Britain: German Civilian and Combatant Internees during the First World War* (Manchester, 2014), 302.

⁵ Anja Johansen, “Police-Public Relations: Interpretations of Policing and Democratic Governance,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Crime and Criminal Justice*, ed. Paul Knepper and Anja Johansen (Oxford, 2016), 497–518; Clive Emsley, “The English Bobby: An Indulgent Tradition,” in *Myths of the English*, ed. Roy Porter (London, 1992), 114–35.

⁶ Richard Bach Jensen, “The Secret Agent, International Policing, and Anarchist Terrorism: 1900–1914,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 29, no. 4 (2017): 735–71, at 737; Nicholas Owen, “The Soft Heart of the British Empire: Indian Radicals in Edwardian London,” *Past and Present*, no. 220 (August 2013): 143–84, at 156–59.

⁷ For official restrictions on aliens in other countries, including some colonies, and public attitudes to them, see Matthew Stibbe, *Civilian Internment during the First World War: A European and Global History, 1914–1920* (London, 2019), chap. 3; Daniela L. Caglioti, “Dealing with Enemy Aliens in

remembered that Britain was then ruled by Liberal-led governments, some of whose prominent politicians, among them Home Secretary Reginald McKenna (October 1911–May 1915), harbored deep feelings of unease about the pervasive Germanophobia and the curbing of civil liberties.⁸ Nonetheless, it was on their watch that, in order to enforce the new regulations, police were given greater powers to act than they had before the war and were expected to heighten the use of covert intelligence tactics previously treated with great (if decreasing) caution.

In this context, I examine the new responsibilities of the British police for controlling German nationals during the First World War, highlighting the many points of contact created between the two groups and the implications of these encounters for both police work and the lives of these aliens. I assess the wartime performance of the police and the degree of tolerance they exercised in their relations with the suspected enemy within, and I pay attention to the public response to this new policing and the extent to which it differed from that of the prewar years.

Examining how this distinct law-enforcement agency conducted itself during a national crisis of such magnitude provides insights into how modern wars can affect the precariousness of enemy nationals in the population and the role the police can play in influencing society's levels of tolerance toward this group. Since the modern police serve as a powerful arm of the state, investigating their behavior in wartime can also add to understanding of how wars can affect the control and the reach of the state.

As the police began to treat aliens as a likely threat to the nation even before the war started, the first portion of the article concentrates on the prewar years.

A SHORT HISTORY OF ALIENS IN BRITAIN

Legal restrictions on foreign nationals that did not apply to British citizens had already been enacted and enforced during the wars with France in the late eighteenth century and lingered into the early nineteenth century.⁹ However, throughout the Victorian period, foreigners could for the most part come and go freely and live undisturbed for as long as they wished in Britain, which thereby became a haven for men and women discontented with aspects of life in their own countries.¹⁰ The massive influx of East European Jews into Britain in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries gave rise to anti-alien feelings that disrupted the tolerant, if not necessarily welcoming, atmosphere. The inflow also resulted in the passage

WW1," *Italian Journal of Public Law* 2, no. 2 (2011): 180–94. See also Panikos Panayi, ed., *Germans as Minorities during the First World War: A Global Comparative Perspective* (London, 2014).

⁸ Martin Farr, *Reginald McKenna: Financier among Statesmen, 1863–1916* (New York, 2008), 267–68; "Arrests of Aliens," *Times* (London), 10 August 1914, 3.

⁹ For acts passed and measures taken with regard to the control of aliens during the wars with France, 1793–1815, see *Resumé of certain Acts of Parliament passed in the reign of His Majesty King George III, regarding the Control of Aliens in the United Kingdom, during the Napoleonic Wars, 1793–1814*, The National Archives, CAB 17/90, 87–96. Hereafter this repository is abbreviated as TNA.

¹⁰ Bernard Porter, *The Refugee Question in Mid-Victorian Politics* (Cambridge, 1979), 1–4; David Cesarani, "An Alien Concept? The Continuity of Anti-alienism in British Society before 1940," in *The Internment of Aliens in Twentieth Century Britain*, ed. David Cesarani and Tony Kushner (London, 1993), 25–52, at 27.

of the Aliens Act in 1905, which imposed restrictions on entry to Britain and provided for the expulsion of individual aliens.¹¹ Immigration continued, as did the right to asylum, but the heated public debate that preceded the act signified not only a rising preoccupation with nonnationals, whether newly arrived or earlier newcomers, but also the emergence of the notion of the alien as a threat that should be addressed.¹² The idea that it was acceptable for special legal procedures to single out foreign nationals as targets became gradually but noticeably fixed in the public mind.¹³

Although the police made recommendations as to which aliens should be expelled and helped to enforce expulsion orders, otherwise the implementation of the act was left to other officials. The police's main concern with regard to foreigners was either with those who broke the law or seemed to imperil the existing order or with revolutionaries who had fled repression in their own countries and whose governments had requested information about them from the largely reluctant British police.¹⁴ Since the majority of nonnationals in Britain were not among these categories, they were not subject to any special police notice.

Yet another line of public discourse concerning foreign residents emerged at the same time, this one a natural outgrowth of the geopolitical situation. The rise in international tensions toward the end of the Victorian period, magnified at the beginning of the twentieth century, generated fears of an impending war that, unlike all other wars in which Britain had participated in the course of hundreds of years, would profoundly affect the home front, as it would likely involve an invasion of the British Isles.¹⁵ These anxieties focused on the most obvious enemy of British interests. If the country's principal adversary had traditionally been France, Germany gradually replaced it, particularly with the signing of the *entente cordiale* between Britain and France in 1904. The alliance made France an important ally of Britain and consolidated the status of Imperial Germany as its chief industrial, commercial, and military rival in Europe.¹⁶ The perceived peril was to Britain's status in the international arena and to its safety.

Not only did the German state seem to spell danger for Britain, but its subjects who now resided in Britain, whether permanently or temporarily, were increasingly feared as a potential fifth column. Germans had long settled in Britain, but their numbers

¹¹ Report of the Aliens Committee, 25 January 1918, 49, TNA, CAB 1/26. For the history of English reactions to immigration and the steps leading to the act at the turn of the twentieth century, see John A. Garrard, *The English and Immigration, 1880–1910* (London, 1971).

¹² David Saunders, "Aliens in Britain and the Empire during the First World War," *Immigrants & Minorities* 4, no. 1 (1985): 5–27, at 7; Cesarani, "An Alien Concept?," 32; Tony Kushner and David Cesarani, "Alien Internment in Britain during the Twentieth Century: An Introduction," in Cesarani and Kushner, *Internment of Aliens*, 1–22, at 11.

¹³ Cesarani, "An Alien Concept?," 32–34.

¹⁴ Haia Shpayer, "British Anarchism 1881–1914: Reality and Appearance" (PhD diss., University of London, 1981), 325–47; Bernard Porter, *The Origins of the Vigilant State: The London Metropolitan Police Special Branch before the First World War* (London, 1987), 161–63. On the limited, though increasing, official cooperation of the British police with foreign governments regarding alien revolutionaries in London in the prewar period, see Pietro Di Paola, "The Spies Who Came in from the Heat: The International Surveillance of the Anarchists in London," *European History Quarterly* 37, no. 2 (2007): 189–215, at 196–98, 204–8.

¹⁵ Christopher Andrew, *Her Majesty's Secret Service: The Making of the British Intelligence Community* (New York, 1986), 33.

¹⁶ W. J. Reader, *At Duty's Call: A Study in Obsolete Patriotism* (Manchester, 1988), 61, 72–74.

swelled during the second half of the nineteenth century, becoming the largest foreign-born minority in Britain (until the end of the century when the Russian Jewish community moved it into second place).¹⁷ While Germans settled in Britain had endured some animosity as foreign nationals, mainly stemming from competition for jobs,¹⁸ they largely enjoyed a positive reputation for their high culture, efficiency, and shared origins with the host country, especially when compared with the negative attitudes directed at the Irish and, toward the end of the century, East European Jews.¹⁹ The escalating Anglo-German rivalry during the Edwardian era had deleterious effects on the image of Germans living in Britain, manifested in scathing reports in the press and in stories in popular literature depicting them either as spies in the service of the German kaiser or as seemingly innocent immigrants who engaged in diverse forms of sabotage out of loyalty to the German cause.²⁰ Such exaggerated characterizations became so widespread that at times they acted as a spur to anti-German riots, although anti-German sentiment prior to the war did not result in any great hardship for the Germans living in Britain.²¹

THE LAST YEARS OF PEACE

As clouds gathered in the prewar years, suspicions about the Germans in Britain ran high, penetrating official circles and looming large in deliberations about how best to prepare the home front for war, which emphasized how to cope with foreign agents and would-be traitors.²² The underlying assumption of many discussions at the top levels of government was that foreigners of enemy nationality would have to be restricted in one form or another once war commenced. The police were assigned a central role in that mission, both in the preparations for war and in wartime.

Concerns about German espionage had already been voiced at the end of the nineteenth century, but regular official discussions of possible measures to combat this perceived menace were underway only from 1907.²³ Many Liberals, whose party

¹⁷ Panikos Panayi, "German Immigrants in Britain, 1815–1914," in Panayi, *Germans in Britain since 1500*, 73–93, at 73, 77. As the chapter title suggests, Panayi also discusses the development of the German community during the Victorian and Edwardian periods.

¹⁸ Wilhelm F. Brand, *London Life Seen with German Eyes* (London, 1902), 119–22; Reader, *At Duty's Call*, 65.

¹⁹ C. Sheridan Jones, *The Unspeakable Prussian* (London, 1914), 1; Panayi, "German Immigrants in Britain," 88; Panikos Panayi, *German Immigrants in Britain during the Nineteenth Century, 1815–1914* (Oxford, 1995), xix. On British attitudes to Germans before the war, see Panayi, *German Immigrants in Britain*, 201–51.

²⁰ For typical examples of alarmist literature, see William le Queux, *The Invasion of 1910: With a Full Account of the Siege of London* (London, 1906); William le Queux, *Spies of the Kaiser: Plotting the Downfall of England* (London, 1909).

²¹ Panikos Panayi, "Anti-German Riots in London during the First World War," *German History* 7, no. 2 (1989): 184–203, at 185.

²² See Report and Proceedings of a Sub-Committee of the Committee of Imperial Defence on the Question of Foreign Espionage in the United Kingdom, 1909, TNA, CAB 16/8; Report and Proceedings of the Standing Sub-Committee on the Committee of Imperial Defence on the Treatment of Aliens in Times of War, 1913, TNA, CAB 16/25 [hereafter 1913 Report].

²³ Thomas Boghardt, *Spies of the Kaiser: German Covert Operations in Great Britain during the First World War Era* (Basingstoke, 2004), 28; Nicholas Hiley, "The Failure of British Counter-espionage against Germany, 1907–1914," *Historical Journal* 28, no. 4 (December 1985): 835–62, at 835–38.

formed the government from 1906, rejected not only theories of a probable invasion but also the notion that the German population in Britain posed a serious threat to the nation's security. Nonetheless, hard pressed by sections of the public and certain officials, primarily those at the War Office, a subcommittee of the Committee of Imperial Defence that dealt with German espionage in the United Kingdom decided to strengthen and reorganize the army's small intelligence unit, and in October 1909, the Secret Service Bureau began operating as a counterespionage agency within the War Office.²⁴ This agency soon split into two sections responsible for counterespionage: one for activities overseas, the other for those in the United Kingdom (later MI6 and MI5, respectively). The head of the new bureau for internal counterespionage (designated MO(t)) was Captain Vernon G. W. Kell. Kell, a staunch believer in a German conspiratorial plot with tentacles reaching every corner of the British Isles, ran the small department with a firm hand on the basis of that utterly fixed though unfounded conviction.²⁵

Before long, Kell's section became the nerve center for various government departments involved in policy making, following up reported spying cases and keeping track of suspicious alien activity.²⁶ The permission given by the home secretary, Winston Churchill, in 1911 to intercept the numerous letters and telegrams of individuals under suspicion for espionage was crucial for the counterespionage work of identifying spies and learning their whereabouts.²⁷ Yet given the acute shortage of manpower at MO(t) and the fact that the unit had no powers of arrest, police cooperation was (and was considered by the section itself to be) inevitable and essential.²⁸ More than any other body, the police, acting under Kell's direction, had the necessary infrastructure and personnel to trace leads in every part of the country and even abroad, and to keep watch on the movements of individuals who attempted to obtain or communicate information useful to the enemy.²⁹ Their findings were sent to the secret service, which in turn disseminated them to the relevant police forces. Because German spies were disproportionately interested in the Royal Navy, a great deal of domestic counterespionage work was carried out by provincial constabularies in coastal areas, which were considered more vulnerable to invasion.³⁰ However, the chief player in this undertaking nationwide was Scotland Yard. The central detective unit of the Metropolitan Police of London, it served as a kind of a national agency—particularly Special Branch, its political wing and the center of police counterespionage operations.³¹

²⁴ M.I.5. F Branch Report (1921), part 1, 8, TNA, KV 1/35 [hereafter M.I.5. F Branch Report]; Boghardt, *Spies of the Kaiser*, 31–41.

²⁵ Hiley, "Failure of British Counter-espionage," 861.

²⁶ Martin John Farrar, "The Illusory Threat: Enemy Aliens in Britain during the Great War" (PhD diss., King's College London, 2016), 45–47.

²⁷ M.I.5. G Branch Report (1921), part 1, 30, TNA, KV 1/39 [hereafter M.I.5. G Branch Report]; Nigel West, ed., *MI5 in the Great War* (London, 2014), 5, 39; Nicholas Hiley, "Entering the Lists: MI5's Great Spy Round-Up of August 1914," *Intelligence and National Security* 21, no. 1 (2006): 46–76, at 48–49.

²⁸ M.I.5. G Branch Report, part 1, 24, 29–30, 35–36, 120.

²⁹ M.I.5. G Branch Report, part 1, 116, 147, 220.

³⁰ M.I.5. G Branch Report, part 1, 31.

³¹ Hiley, "Failure of British Counter-espionage," 849, 857; David French, "Spy Fever in Britain, 1900–1915," *Historical Journal* 21, no. 2 (June 1978): 355–70, at 362.

In retrospect, whatever the scale of German intelligence activities in Britain (apparently “not very extensive”), they fell far short of what many at the time imagined.³² Moreover, contrary to British popular opinion of the day, it was almost impossible for the Germans to recruit their compatriots in Britain as spies.³³ While a great number of cases were investigated, only a few espionage agents were ever caught and brought to justice.³⁴ Still, these occasional indications of anti-British operations by German spies and the trials of a handful of them were sufficient for hardline politicians, bureaucrats, newspaper owners, journalists, and members of the public to justify the conspiracy theories about subterranean spy rings infesting Britain and to conclude that every effort should be made to frustrate their schemes.³⁵

Given this conclusion, and the recommendations of another subcommittee of the Committee of Imperial Defence created in March 1910 and designed to consider the treatment of aliens in time of war, collection was begun—particularly in strategic areas—of information on alien residents about whom no specific suspicions existed.³⁶ The stated rationale behind this systematic registration was the possibility of its “furnishing a means of discovering the designs of suspicious aliens and as being likely to act as a check upon their conduct.”³⁷ Registration thus constituted both a detective and a preventive measure. The data were also meant to be used as a control mechanism over aliens on the outbreak of war.³⁸

In the gathering of personal details about aliens living in their localities and assessing the degree of risk they posed, the police outside London, first in counties and then in boroughs and cities, gave Kell’s unofficial plans indispensable support.³⁹ Together with the 1911 Census, the findings from this undertaking served as the basis for a central register of aliens, set up in 1910 and administered by Kell’s office. Secretly compiled and continuously updated—chiefly from police reports—it was used to monitor possible suspects.⁴⁰ For their part, local police forces kept registers of aliens living in their areas in a standardized form that facilitated quick and easy retrieval. By July 1913, the central register contained over 28,830 names of aliens of all nationalities, out of whom 11,100 were of German or Austrian descent.⁴¹ Since their establishment in the second quarter of the nineteenth century, the modern police had recorded and stored the personal characteristics of individuals, a practice that gained momentum during the 1860s and 1870s; however, the individuals included had typically been criminals and convicts, the

³² Boghardt, *Spies of the Kaiser*, 80. For German operations in Britain and their limited success prior to the war, see 44–73.

³³ Boghardt, 44–46. For such an attempt that was refused, see M.I.5. G Branch Report, part 1, 33.

³⁴ For a detailed examination of the agents operating in Britain before the war, see West, *MI5 in the Great War*, chaps. 1 and 2 (to page 178).

³⁵ Boghardt, *Spies of the Kaiser*, 71–73.

³⁶ 1913 Report, 5–6.

³⁷ 1913 Report, 5.

³⁸ M.I.5. F Branch Report, part 1, 16, 18.

³⁹ M.I.5. F Branch Report, part 1, 39–43, 47–50.

⁴⁰ M.I.5. F Branch Report, part 1, 17–18. This register, combined with other intelligence sources, such as the intercepted correspondence, served as the basis for other, much smaller, lists of individuals to be dealt with during the war, arranged according to the estimated degree of danger they posed (Hiley, “Entering the Lists,” 48–49). For the compilation of the aliens register in prewar Britain, see Farrar, “Illusory Threat,” 45–66.

⁴¹ M.I.5. F Branch Report, part 1, 43.

natural targets of law enforcement.⁴² Now the police were documenting the personal details of people whose only “sin” was their nationality and their presumed but unproven potential association with future enemies of the state. All this work had to be conducted discreetly owing to fears on the part of the authorities that the collection of information, which had no parliamentary approval, would meet with serious objections as to its legitimacy; it was also important to “prevent potential enemies from realizing the existence of the register.”⁴³ Thus, any prewar contact between officers and most foreign-born subjects was minimal.

TARGETING THE GERMAN COMMUNITY IN WARTIME

The war entirely transformed the relationship between the police and the alien population in the United Kingdom. While anti-alienism was already rooted in British society, deep-seated patriotism now combined with a keen sense of insecurity to set apart from British citizens the non-naturalized foreign community (numbering over a quarter of a million people) and to make them a focus of both public and official concerns. Still, of all the aliens, German nationals were uniquely vulnerable to antagonistic behavior, especially now that, as predicted prior to the war, their mother country turned out to be Britain’s principal foe.⁴⁴ Even Austrians and Hungarians were not as hated or badly treated as the Germans.⁴⁵ With the declaration of war, unsubstantiated stories about German spies assaulting innocent Britons, committing acts of sabotage, or assembling information likely to undermine national security were disseminated even more forcefully in all manner of forums.⁴⁶ As a result, Germans, particularly those who were not naturalized, were exposed to abuse, dismissal, social and economic boycott, physical and mental harassment, internment, and deportation. This was the context in which the police functioned during the war.

SPY CATCHING

With the onset of hostilities, the contingency plans regarding aliens were put into operation. Given that the atmosphere on the eve of war was marked by spy mania, the most urgent police task as soon as war seemed a certainty was to investigate thoroughly “all cases where they had reason to suspect espionage.”⁴⁷ The network of

⁴² Edward Higgs, *Identifying the English: A History of Personal Identification 1500 to the Present* (London, 2011), 125–26.

⁴³ Andrew Cook, *M: MI5’s First Spymaster* (Stroud, 2004), 195; M.I.5. F Branch Report, part 1, 40–41, 44; Statement by the Home Office that appeared in the press on 9 October 1914, in Alexander Pulling, *Manual of Emergency Legislation comprising all the Acts of Parliament, Proclamations, Orders, &c., passed and made in consequence of the War to September 30th, 1914* (London, 1914), 517.

⁴⁴ Panikos Panayi, “An Intolerant Act by an Intolerant Society: The Internment of Germans in Britain during the First World War,” in Cesarani and Kushner, *Internment of Aliens*, 53–75, at 55.

⁴⁵ For example, Austrians were relatively more likely to obtain exemptions from internment than were Germans: Home Office to Kell, 15 January 1916, 29, TNA, KV 1/66.

⁴⁶ Michael Foley, *Prisoners of the British: Internees and Prisoners of War during the First World War* (London, 2015), 16.

⁴⁷ Report by the Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police to the Home Secretary, 9 September 1914, *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 5th series, vol. 66, col. 564.

information gathering of police forces around the country, with Kell's unit at its center, now seemed to enjoy success. On 5 August 1914, the day after the declaration of war, Reginald McKenna, the home secretary, announced in the House of Commons that during the previous twenty-four hours no fewer than twenty-one spies had been rounded up around the country.⁴⁸ The arrests were presented soon after as a brilliant preemptive strike that dealt a fatal blow to German intelligence and destroyed any spy organization it may have had in Britain. This version of events was celebrated for decades by officials and scholars alike, who were full of praise for the work of the precursor of MI5.⁴⁹

This representation has today become highly contentious, as it contradicts archival evidence as to the number of spies arrested that day, their identity, and their actual involvement in espionage. Nicholas Hiley, who has written a great deal on German espionage during this period, has gone as far as arguing that the event was a "complete fabrication" and a "deliberate lie" by Kell, who invented the success story when he found himself on the eve of the war with only a few spies to arrest, despite the intensified search he had generated.⁵⁰ Whatever the truth, while a few individuals were arrested that day, not all the known agents were caught and those who were did not necessarily end up being treated as spies, often for lack of evidence.⁵¹ At any rate, their number bore little resemblance to Kell's predictions.⁵²

In fact, scholars are divided as to the size of the spy community in Britain throughout the war, the degree of threat they presented, and the level of success the British security forces achieved in exposing them.⁵³ A recent study, based on extensive research in both German and British archives, contends that the majority of German spies eluded the police.⁵⁴ German agents are known to have arrived and been active in Britain after the war started,⁵⁵ but only thirty-one of those apprehended were put on trial, twelve of whom were sentenced to death and executed.⁵⁶ In any case, the overall number of arrested spies fell substantially below the prevailing official estimates.⁵⁷ Hence, the work of the British security and law enforcement

⁴⁸ Report by the Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police to the Home Secretary, 5 August 1914, *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 5th series, vol. 65, col. 1986.

⁴⁹ Statement by the Home Office, 9 October 1914, Pulling, *Manual of Emergency*, 517, 519; Sidney Theodore Felstead, *German Spies at Bay* (London, 1920), 5; M.I.5. F Branch Report, part 1, 51–52; M.I.5. G Branch Report, part 1, 50; Hiley, "Entering the Lists," 46–47; Andrew, *Her Majesty's Secret Service*, 70, 177.

⁵⁰ Hiley, "Entering the Lists," 59, 69–70. For Hiley's revision of the story of the arrests in August 1914, see Nicholas Hiley, "Entering the Lists"; Nicholas Hiley, "Re-entering the Lists: MI5's Authorized History and the August 1914 Arrests," *Intelligence and National Security* 25, no. 4 (2010): 415–52. See also Boghardt, *Spies of the Kaiser*, 79–80.

⁵¹ Boghardt, *Spies of the Kaiser*, 69.

⁵² Boghardt, 58–59.

⁵³ Andrew, *Her Majesty's Secret Service*, 72–73; Boghardt, *Spies of the Kaiser*, 106; West, *MI5 in the Great War*, xii.

⁵⁴ Boghardt, *Spies of the Kaiser*, 97, 105–9.

⁵⁵ Farrar, "Illusory Threat," 70.

⁵⁶ Nicholas Hiley, "Counter-espionage and Security in Great Britain during the First World War," *English Historical Review* 101, no. 400 (July 1986): 635–70, at 639, 668; Panikos Panayi, *The Enemy in Our Midst: Germans in Britain during the First World War* (Oxford, 1991), 182–83. For details of the eleven agents executed in the Tower of London, see Leonard Sellers, *Shot in the Tower: The Stories of the Spies Executed in the Tower of London during the First World War* (Barnsley, 2015).

⁵⁷ Andrew, *Her Majesty's Secret Service*, 177–78; Hiley, "Failure of British Counter-espionage," 859–61.

agencies cannot be described as a great achievement. On the other hand, the German intelligence operation in Britain was neither efficient nor highly professional, and its agents failed to contribute significantly to the German war effort.⁵⁸ This conclusion matches the widely accepted view today that German spies posed only a minor threat to internal security.⁵⁹ All in all, no real proof exists of an organization of German saboteurs or spies during the war, and no German plan to invade Britain, or any effective arsenal, was ever found.⁶⁰

The pursuit and capture of those understood to be professional agents in wartime Britain remained the result of collaboration between various bodies and departments of state. The interception of post, alongside private informers, informants, and tip-offs from foreign intelligence agencies and police forces, continued to provide both real and imaginary clues to suspected activities.⁶¹ However, as before the war, the subsequent counterespionage work was, to a great extent, based on a division of labor and close communication between the intelligence unit of the War Office and the police.

Kell's unit (from August 1914 called MO5(g), and from January 1916 known as MI5) continued to be the center of government policy making with regard to foreign residents, and it was also the repository of related records and registers supplied by police reports from different parts of the country and from other sources.⁶² Kell's bureau not only took charge of the inquiries but also conducted investigations, watched and shadowed actual and potential enemy agents, and prepared cases for prosecution. In the process, it expanded the number of its personnel from seven officers and ten clerks on 5 August 1914 to 133 officers and three hundred clerks on Armistice Day.⁶³ Yet despite the dominant role commonly ascribed to the bureau, the police, with an unrivaled geographical spread and available manpower, spent significantly more time and energy gathering information, making inquiries, conducting searches, scrutinizing thousands of documents, and monitoring the movements of enemy aliens (and those of other aliens), and tracking their communications.⁶⁴ In addition, the police were entrusted with making arrests and establishing those cases that would go to court.⁶⁵

Despite this "enormous amount of work" that was shifted to the detectives of certain police forces, it was the Special Branch at Scotland Yard, headed by Basil Thomson, assistant commissioner between 1913 and 1919, that was "the hardest worked section," at least at the onset of war during the mad rush to apprehend the

⁵⁸ Andrew, *Her Majesty's Secret Service*, 54, 61; Boghardt, *Spies of the Kaiser*, 108.

⁵⁹ Boghardt, *Spies of the Kaiser*, 143.

⁶⁰ Andrew, *Her Majesty's Secret Service*, 72–73; Bird, *Control of Enemy Alien Civilians*, 344; Farrar, "Illusory Threat," 116.

⁶¹ Harold Brust, *In Plain Clothes: Further Memoirs of a Political Police Officer* (London, 1937), 98; Andrew, *Her Majesty's Secret Service*, 176; Boghardt, *Spies of the Kaiser*, 106–7.

⁶² M.I.5. F Branch Report, part 2, 72–74. For the wide range of tasks carried out by the Secret Service Bureau during the war, see M.I.5. G Branch Report, part 1, 187–201, 212–13; Farrar, "Illusory Threat," 73–117.

⁶³ M.I.5. F Branch Report, part 2, 66, 70.

⁶⁴ *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 5th series, vol. 66, 9 September 1914, cols. 564–65; M.I.5. G Branch Report, part 1, 198.

⁶⁵ Felstead, *German Spies at Bay*, 162.

countless suspected spies lurking in the shadows.⁶⁶ In addition to making inquiries and keeping a special watch on allegedly dangerous individuals, this highly experienced branch conducted most interrogations of those who came under suspicion, as the counterintelligence bureau was considered to be lacking the necessary expertise and personnel.⁶⁷ Writing shortly after the war, the journalist Sidney Theodore Felstead further explained that although the bureau employed several barristers capable of examining suspects, it could not accommodate detainees, nor did it have detectives at its beck and call as did the Special Branch.⁶⁸

From accumulated evidence, it is clear that police counterespionage work was strenuous and included considerable wasted effort. In the first month of the war alone, the police investigated some eight thousand to nine thousand individuals reported to them by members of the public, as well as the aliens listed as suspects before the war.⁶⁹ Sometimes, “just in case,” hundreds of personal calls had to be made, houses raided and inquiries conducted, only to come up empty-handed.⁷⁰ As Harold Brust, a Special Branch detective, later attested, the majority of letters arriving at Scotland Yard with supposedly incriminating evidence of treasonous activities “proved useless as far as actual apprehension of spies was concerned.”⁷¹ To be sure, at the beginning of the war, the home secretary conveyed the opinion of the London police commissioner to the House of Commons that, with all the police work, “not a tittle of evidence has been obtained indicating any combination amongst alien enemies to commit acts hostile to this country.”⁷² Furthermore, in all the Home Office correspondence, instructions were given to the police to “show every consideration . . . compatible with safety” when dealing with enemy aliens.⁷³ Many innocent people were nonetheless pounced on and locked up as alleged spies even though, as was acknowledged in some circles, “suspecting them was absurd.”⁷⁴

So much extra work was eventually imposed on the Special Branch at the onset of war that manpower priorities were changed within Scotland Yard, and “crack detectives” were turned into “spy-catchers.”⁷⁵ Moreover, as the incidence of ordinary crime fell in Britain in this period, the authority of Special Branch in the police was dramatically enhanced.⁷⁶ What also changed was that the police became less discrete and suspects were more likely to find themselves face to face with their pursuers.⁷⁷

⁶⁶ “Aliens in Liverpool,” *Police Review*, 25 June 1915, 302; “Special Work for the Metropolitan Police,” *Police Review*, 14 August 1914, 391.

⁶⁷ Pulling, *Manual of Emergency*, 517; Assistant Commissioner of Police, Special Branch, to Under Secretary of State, 12 September 1914, TNA, MEPO 2/1643; Felstead, *German Spies at Bay*, 159–62.

⁶⁸ Felstead, 163.

⁶⁹ *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 5th series, vol. 66, 9 September 1914, col. 564.

⁷⁰ Brust, *In Plain Clothes*, 86.

⁷¹ Brust, 86.

⁷² *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 5th series, vol. 66, 9 September 1914, col. 565.

⁷³ See, for example, Telegrams by Under Secretary, Home Office, 8 August 1914, TNA, HO 45/10729/255193.

⁷⁴ “Sub Rosa,” *Sheffield Daily Independent*, 29 October 1914, 4.

⁷⁵ Brust, *In Plain Clothes*, 69, 87.

⁷⁶ Harold Brust, *“I Guarded Kings”*: *The Memoirs of a Political Police Officer* (New York, 1936), 158.

⁷⁷ Lucy Farrer, preface to West, *MI5 in the Great War*, xv–xxi, at xx.

REGULATING THE DAILY LIFE OF ENEMY ALIENS IN THE NAME OF INTERNAL SECURITY

Beyond keeping a careful watch over individual aliens about whom some suspicion already existed, the police were now entrusted with the task of keeping close control of *all* foreign residents from enemy nations everywhere in the country, although the vast majority had no previous record of subversive activity and a great number were long-time residents of Britain. In the years leading up to the war, the authorities had attempted to locate and observe foreigners who might in times of war work against Britain's interests from within; with the outbreak of war, no stone was to be left unturned, and no enemy alien was to escape the police gaze. This policy clearly entailed a broadening of police duties well beyond the partial gathering of information about resident aliens carried out in the years before the war.

These special responsibilities were principally a result of the passage of the Aliens Restriction Act—a detailed draft of which had been drawn up before the war by the Committee of Imperial Defence⁷⁸—and the new clauses and amendments that were added to it in the course of the war, all of which were informed by rampant fears, both public and official, of the grave danger to domestic security potentially posed by aliens in general but most likely by enemy aliens (all the provisions still complying with international law⁷⁹). Because the act was prepared prior to the war, it was enacted the day after war was declared on Germany, and without opposition. It allowed the crown to impose wartime restrictions on aliens (as the act's title implies) by Order in Council, making such provisions “as appear necessary or expedient for carrying such restrictions into effect” without parliamentary procedure.⁸⁰

The Aliens Restriction Act was essentially preventive legislation, designed to enable the government to have complete knowledge of the whereabouts and property of non-naturalized foreigners of any category and to curb their ability to live or move freely in Britain whenever it was deemed necessary to safeguard military or public security. Ironically, this initiative was undertaken by a government led by the Liberal Party, which in the past had been not only resolutely opposed to restrictions on immigration but also a defender of immigrants, individual and property rights, and freedom of movement; however, “from the day the Aliens Act of 1905 passed into law, the Liberal consensus of opposition to it began to erode and the anti-alien faction to increase.”⁸¹

The Orders in Council emanating from the act imposed on both uniformed and plainclothes police the unprecedented role of managing the alien community. In addition to investigating actual or potential agents, they now had to ensure that the various orders were scrupulously observed, which involved detecting transgressions and at times apprehending offenders and giving evidence against them in court.⁸² Consequently, and depending on the size of the alien community in the area, a considerable proportion of police work in wartime Britain was taken up with handling

⁷⁸ Draft Report on the Aliens Restriction Act, 1914 and orders made thereunder, 253, TNA, KV 1/66 [hereafter Draft Report]. For the contents of the act, see Pulling, *Manual of Emergency*, 6–8.

⁷⁹ M.I.5. F Branch Report, part 2, 134–38.

⁸⁰ Pulling, *Manual of Emergency*, 6.

⁸¹ Bernard Gainer, *The Alien Invasion: The Origins of the Aliens Act of 1905* (London, 1972), 64, 144, 209.

⁸² See, for example, “An Enemy Alien,” *Chelsea News and General Advertiser*, 28 August 1914, 6.

aliens, following many procedures with which they were unaccustomed. While some provisions applied to all aliens or to certain categories of aliens, others related exclusively to nationals of enemy origin. Initially, enemy aliens were far more restricted, but as the war progressed, the distinctions became blurred, and naturalized Germans, alien friends, and residents from neutral countries were increasingly subject to more restrictive regulations, similar to those targeting enemy aliens.⁸³ While not all the provisions involved the police, they were dominant in implementing the orders, often in cooperation with the intelligence bureau of the War Office.⁸⁴ Because the legislation required restrictions on almost every aspect of the lives of aliens of enemy descent, it was no longer possible for any of them to avoid encounters with the police.

To gain control of enemy nationals, the police in every locality had to know details of who they were, where they were at any given time, what possessions they had, and how they lived their lives. The Home Office more than once impressed upon chief constables the need, regarded as crucial, to oblige aliens to produce adequate documentary evidence of nationality to prevent all Germans from enjoying reduced scrutiny—as happened, for example, to a Swiss citizen born of German parents.⁸⁵

Passed immediately after the Aliens Restriction Act, the Aliens Restriction Order of 5 August 1914 made way for the sustained surveillance of the presumed internal enemy by compelling enemy subjects everywhere in the country (and aliens residing in a prohibited area) to register immediately at the nearest police station and provide particulars (nationality, birthplace, age, gender, occupation, distinctive marks, place of residence and business, military service to a foreign government, and a photograph) of themselves and alien members of their households. This course of action was similar to that adopted during the wars with France in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and for a while afterward but otherwise was associated in peacetime Britain with repressive continental regimes.⁸⁶ To include as many enemy nationals as possible, householders were required to notify the nearest police station of the presence of a German national in their household.⁸⁷

If aliens were largely unaware before the war of the amassing of data about them, now no secrecy was necessary, and they were required by law to take steps to supply the information themselves.⁸⁸ For the majority of aliens with an enemy nationality, this was their first encounter with the police, and it would certainly have been an unsettling experience even when the officers were cordial. A sense of this comes through in the memoirs of the German painter Paul Cohen-Portheim, who was visiting England at the start of hostilities and then had to spend the rest of the war there as an enemy alien. Like all other German nationals, he was required to register at the nearest police station, where he had to expose his private circumstances to utter strangers, after which he found himself standing “in very many queues.”⁸⁹ Many

⁸³ Police Orders, 17 February 1916, 125–27, TNA, MEPO 7/78; Farrar, “Illusory Threat,” 152.

⁸⁴ On the work of the intelligence bureau in connection with the Aliens Restriction Orders and its cooperation with the police, see M.I.5. F Branch Report, part 3, 35–37, 70–83.

⁸⁵ Memorandum A by the Secretary of State to Chief Constables, 15 March 1918, 1, TNA, HO 45/10800/307293.

⁸⁶ Pulling, *Manual of Emergency*, 53, 63. See also note 9 above.

⁸⁷ “The Police and Aliens,” *Illustrated Police News*, 13 August 1914, 6.

⁸⁸ M.I.5. F Branch Report, part 3, 82.

⁸⁹ Paul Cohen-Portheim, *Time Stood Still: My Internment in England, 1914–1918*. (New York, 1932), 8.

enemy aliens who failed to register were brought to trial and were liable to be sentenced to heavy fines and even imprisonment with hard labor for up to six months.⁹⁰ Some had not registered because they were not sure of their ancestry or place of birth or could not provide the required documents.⁹¹ Others had been in Britain for some time and did not report themselves as aliens of enemy nationality for fear of possible disagreeable repercussions.⁹² All the same, the authorities regarded such omissions as serious offenses.

The registration of all enemy aliens alone, and the increasing amount of personal details recorded, demanded ample resources and was an “enormous labour for the Police.”⁹³ To start the procedure, officers had to distribute posters throughout the policed area to let the public know of the new regulations. Moreover, they were required to hand out the forms, collect them after completion, and take note of defaulters.⁹⁴ During the rush of the first few days, as many as a thousand men and women could be seen at some stations in the metropolis, waiting to register.⁹⁵ By mid-October 1914, a total of seventy thousand enemy aliens had registered in the United Kingdom.⁹⁶ The workload only partially subsided after the initial registration, as any change in address, even temporary, or personal circumstances was obliged to be reported to the police.⁹⁷ Officers were also kept busy certifying the details supplied by aliens, which involved an even deeper invasion of their private lives.⁹⁸

The ability that aliens enjoyed before the war to move freely from place to place without official supervision, as was not the case in many countries on the continent, was now denied to all aliens, but enemy aliens suffered much greater restriction. The police, for the most part, implemented the regulations in the United Kingdom. The first Order in Council under the Aliens Restriction Act declared that enemy aliens were allowed to enter or leave the country only through approved ports and provided they possessed a special permit—a restriction mainly administered by immigration officers, albeit with the assistance and support of the police.⁹⁹ Many aliens did leave during the first few days, but those who stayed, the vast majority, were not allowed to travel more than five miles from their registered homes without police authorization and were required to report all of their movements to the police.¹⁰⁰ This order also gave police the unpleasant job of dictating to enemy nationals where they could reside and excluding or removing them from prohibited areas,

⁹⁰ “Drama in Police Court,” *Western Mail* (Glamorgan), 26 September 1914, 7; “The Aliens Act,” *Police Review*, 13 August 1915, 386.

⁹¹ “Charge against an Alien” *Newcastle Daily Journal*, 4 August 1915, 3.

⁹² “Enemy Aliens at Large,” *Pall Mall Gazette*, 10 September 1917, 8; “German Baker Fined £200,” *Times* (London), 15 December 1917, 3.

⁹³ *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 5th series, vol. 66, 27 August 1914, col. 139; William Nott-Bower, *Fifty-Two Years a Policeman* (London, 1926), 267.

⁹⁴ “An Enemy Alien,” *Chelsea News and General Advertiser*, 28 August 1914, 6.

⁹⁵ “Special Work for the Metropolitan Police,” *Police Review*, 14 August 1914, 391.

⁹⁶ “Enemy Aliens,” *Times* (London), 23 October 1914, 4.

⁹⁷ Pulling, *Manual of Emergency*, 53; “An Impudent Alien,” *Chelsea News and General Advertiser*, 11 September 1914, 3.

⁹⁸ “An Enemy Alien,” *Chelsea News and General Advertiser*, 28 August 1914, 6; Home Office to Chief Constables, 10 June 1916, 115, TNA, KV 1/66.

⁹⁹ Pulling, *Manual of Emergency*, 49–51.

¹⁰⁰ Pulling, 53–54.

principally along the coast. These areas were constantly extended so that, in less than two years, they covered nearly half of the country.¹⁰¹ Civilians of enemy origin who did not manage to obtain an exemption thus not only were barred from a sizable part of the British Isles but could also be turned out of their homes and places of work within a very short period, often a few days.

As the control of uninterned enemy aliens became even stricter, in many police districts all enemy aliens at large had to report to the police in person once a week.¹⁰² In Sheffield, they were required to report to the police twice a week.¹⁰³ By instituting night curfews in certain areas, the police limited not only the geographical mobility of enemy nationals but also the time when they could be outside their homes.¹⁰⁴

To further prevent any possibility of enemy subjects threatening the security of the realm, the police were allocated the duty of ensuring that they were not in possession of restricted items. These included firearms, explosives, petroleum, signaling devices and any means of communicating secretly, motor cars and bicycles, telephones, carrier pigeons, photographic equipment, and other potentially dangerous articles.¹⁰⁵ If enemy aliens had any of these forbidden items without a special permit—which was not easily obtained—they were suspected of a sinister intention, such as planning to acquire valuable information and transmit it to the enemy; one German was sentenced to six months' imprisonment for failing on registering to disclose to the police that he kept a pigeon in his house.¹⁰⁶ Thus, behaviors that in peacetime would have likely gone unnoticed (although these protocols were planned in the prewar years), such as looking in the direction of a strategically sensitive location, were seen as deeply suspicious and calling for police intervention.¹⁰⁷ Whether such encounters resulted in prosecution or, more commonly, only a routine search of the home and neighborhood of enemy aliens, they were unfamiliar experiences for both parties, and highly unpleasant chiefly for the person subjected to the inspection.

In the name of security, the social, political, and economic lives of enemy nationals were also tightly circumscribed by the police. For example, restrictions were placed on the opening hours of venues habitually frequented by enemy aliens, such as clubs, hotels, restaurants, bars, and places “of public resort or entertainment,” or the venues were closed down altogether.¹⁰⁸ The police also enforced the prohibition against the publication and circulation of newspapers in the language of an enemy state.¹⁰⁹ Public enmity resulted in aliens of enemy nationality being increasingly dismissed from their jobs and left with no means of support.¹¹⁰ To make things worse,

¹⁰¹ Pulling, 52, 57–63; Bird, *Control of Enemy Alien Civilians*, 210–11, 214.

¹⁰² Secretary of State to War Office, 16 January 1918, 4, TNA, HO 45/10881/338498.

¹⁰³ Chief Constable of Sheffield to Under Secretary of State at the Home Office, 5 September 1917, TNA, HO 45/10881/338498.

¹⁰⁴ “Enemy Aliens Interned,” *Manchester Guardian*, 17 May 1915, 9.

¹⁰⁵ Pulling, *Manual of Emergency*, 54.

¹⁰⁶ “Aliens in England,” *Times* (London), 25 August 1914, 3; “Pimlico Aliens Charged,” *Chelsea News and General Advertiser*, 25 June 1915, 6; “Alien Enemy Menace,” *Police Review*, 11 September 1914, 448.

¹⁰⁷ M.I.5. F Branch Report, part 1, 26–27; “Alien Spies on the East Coast,” *Scotsman* (Edinburgh), 11 September 1914, 9; Basil Thomson, *Queer People* (London, 1922), 37–39, 43–44.

¹⁰⁸ Pulling, *Manual of Emergency*, 76; Police Orders, 5 April 1917, 248, TNA, MEPO 7/79.

¹⁰⁹ Pulling, *Manual of Emergency*, 67.

¹¹⁰ Richard Noschke, *An Insight into Civilian Internment in Britain during WWI: From the Diary of Richard Noschke and a Short Essay by Rudolf Rocker* (Maidenhead, 1998), 10; Draft Report, 266.

the Aliens Restriction orders implemented by the police prohibited enemy aliens from engaging in certain occupations or jobs, like banking, without permission.¹¹¹ These restrictions were presented as acts of national defense.

The emergency orders were continuously extended and amended throughout the war, limiting further the lives of the already highly surveilled enemy aliens. Correspondingly, the overworked police forces were burdened with ever more time-consuming obligations, including responding to requests from various official bodies for information, following up on further inquiries, or taking some other action concerning enemy aliens.¹¹² The newly added requirements to register and administer restrictions on other types of aliens, whose numbers far exceeded those of enemy aliens, obviously represented a substantial additional load on officers in the various police forces and signified further state intervention and curtailment of individual freedoms.

INTERNMENT AND DEPORTATION

The available body of legal rules gave the authorities yet another instrument for the control of enemy aliens: the power to intern them. Throughout the war (and for a while after) many thousands of enemy aliens—in fact, the majority of males¹¹³—were segregated for an indefinite period of time, without trial, in what were widely labeled “concentration camps”—a term previously applied to camps built by the British in South Africa for Boers and Black Africans during the Boer War.¹¹⁴ The decision makers in wartime Britain were divided in their opinion on this policy.¹¹⁵ Although enemy nationals were imprisoned during the wars with France, Britain had never resorted to the mass incarceration of foreign subjects on its soil, and no plans had been made for such a scheme in official deliberations before the war.¹¹⁶ Yet the practice allowed for the much closer—in fact, total—surveillance of enemy subjects and was predicated on the strongly held official view that the state had an indisputable right to detain the citizens of an enemy state. This position was reinforced when it transpired that both sides in the war had adopted the practice.¹¹⁷ Another decisive factor was the overpowering pressure, typically from the radical right, exerted since the war’s beginning to take not even the slightest chance with enemy aliens, least of all Germans, and increasingly even naturalized Germans, and to physically remove them from society.¹¹⁸ Apparently, the ability to know and restrict the whereabouts of nationals of enemy states at all times was considered insufficient to secure the safety of the realm.

¹¹¹ Pulling, *Manual of Emergency*, 64. For other drastic measures affecting the economic survival of enemy aliens, see Panayi, *Enemy in Our Midst*, 138–49.

¹¹² Home Office to Chief Constables, 12 March 1918, TNA, HO/45/10890/355329.

¹¹³ M.I.5. F Branch Report, part 2, 191.

¹¹⁴ “Enemy Aliens,” *Times* (London), 23 October 1914, 4.

¹¹⁵ *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 5th series, vol. 68, 11 November 1914, cols. 27–28; Thomson, *Queer People*, 60. For the division of opinions in the last two years of the war, see Bird, *Control of Enemy Alien Civilians*, 115–29.

¹¹⁶ Panayi, *Prisoners of Britain*, 300.

¹¹⁷ M.I.5. F Branch Report, part 2, 136–37, 189–90.

¹¹⁸ See Lord Beresford speech to the House of Commons, 12 November 1914, *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 5th series, vol. 68, cols. 114–16.

A few hours before war was declared and in the following days, the police were instructed to arrest the few known enemy agents.¹¹⁹ Internment, however, was mainly to be used as a precautionary measure.¹²⁰ Enemy nationals were normally detained for what they might do rather than for anything they had already done.¹²¹ At first, the government was undecided as to whom they would detain, and contradictory orders were issued. The chief suspects were non-naturalized German males of military age (initially between seventeen and forty-five) who had undergone military training and were thus suitable for German military service.¹²² Incarcerating these Germans as well as other supposedly dangerous foreigners began with the onset of hostilities. After about six weeks, no fewer than eleven thousand men had been interned.¹²³ The government was so unprepared for internment that from August to October 1914, the policy went through various phases: a cycle of arrest, pause, and release of internees believed unlikely to cause any harm, followed by a resumption of the operation, and then another suspension.¹²⁴ The main problem was the shortage of suitable accommodation.

A relative lull in implementing the internment policy was disrupted on 13 May 1915 when Prime Minister Herbert H. Asquith (1908–1916) announced to the House of Commons that *all* non-naturalized enemy males of military age (then seventeen to fifty-five) were to be segregated and interned, apart from exceptions recommended by an advisory committee.¹²⁵ The shift in strategy was not the result of any threatening behavior by the aliens but was caused, above all, by the atmosphere of vindictiveness gripping large sections of the public at the news of the sinking of the British ocean liner *Lusitania* on 7 May 1915 by a German submarine off the Irish coast, killing about twelve hundred passengers and crew.¹²⁶

In announcing the new plan, the prime minister revealed to the House of Commons that nineteen thousand enemy aliens, all of them men (as would be the case throughout the war), had been interned at that point.¹²⁷ The authorities had still not prepared new camps, however, when many enemy aliens voluntarily presented themselves at police stations. The *Manchester Guardian* reported, “The only effect of this was to embarrass the police, who did not know what to do with them.”¹²⁸ Nonetheless, the authorities gradually became better organized, and the number of interned enemy nationals rose sharply, to about thirty thousand by the end of three years of war.¹²⁹ The great majority were German (more than twenty-

¹¹⁹ Draft Report, 264–65.

¹²⁰ “Arrests of Aliens,” *Times* (London), 10 August 1914, 3.

¹²¹ M.I.5. F Branch Report, part 2, 190.

¹²² Telegram by War Office, London, 7 August 1914, TNA, HO 45/10729/255193; Troup to War Office, 27 August 1914, TNA, HO 45/10729/255193; Troup to Chief Constables, 7 September 1914, TNA, HO 45/10729/255193.

¹²³ Draft Report, 269.

¹²⁴ Draft Report, 264–72; French, “Spy Fever in Britain,” 367–68.

¹²⁵ *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 5th series, vol. 71, 13 May 1915, col. 1842.

¹²⁶ “Cabinet Proposals,” *Times* (London), 13 May 1915, 9.

¹²⁷ *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 5th series, vol. 71, 13 May 1915, col. 1842.

¹²⁸ “Rounding-Up the Aliens,” *Manchester Guardian*, 15 May 1915, 11.

¹²⁹ Report of the Aliens Committee, 25 January 1918, 47, TNA, CAB 1/26.

five thousand). Only about 12,500 male nationals of enemy states were then still at liberty, 5,800 of them over or under military age.¹³⁰

Officers from Scotland Yard “engaged frequently in duties at the camps.”¹³¹ In some places, the police served as guards, at times temporarily, since the resulting lack of officers had a detrimental effect on the carrying out of ordinary police duties.¹³² Police on the Isle of Man, a key internment center, fulfilled various tasks related to the camps, such as investigating crimes by inmates or searching for escaped prisoners.¹³³ However, where the police played a pivotal role was in setting in motion the process leading to confinement. Hence, enemy aliens had their most intensive meetings with police officers at this preparatory stage.

It was the police who identified non-naturalized enemy aliens and affirmed the nationality of people when there was doubt.¹³⁴ They also searched for enemy aliens marked for deportation whose exact location was unknown.¹³⁵ Yet perhaps even more critical to the enemy aliens’ destiny was the major intervention by the police (though not exclusively) in evaluating who was qualified for internment and, indeed, for release or exemption.

Performing these duties demanded hard work and much time as well as the possession of data and a keen sense of judgment and discernment, especially during the first months of the war when the guidelines changed frequently. In the first few days, the police were instructed to assess who among the enemy subjects could be “reasonably suspected of being in any way dangerous to the safety of the realm,” and, at the same time, to be careful “not to arrest persons whose known character precludes suspicion or who are personally vouched for by British residents of standing.”¹³⁶ A short time later, they were directed to pay special attention to German and Austrian reservists who had lost their jobs “and might be rendered desperate by destitution.”¹³⁷ In addition, officers were meant to resolve the cases of those asking for exemption and to verify that those Germans who did not register themselves as having done military service in Germany were telling the truth.¹³⁸ Police were able to use discretion in granting exceptions in relation to individuals occupying public or educational positions or working in essential industries or whose detention could lead to loss of employment for British subjects.¹³⁹ In each case, officers were to be satisfied of the absence of “hostile intentions or

¹³⁰ Circular Memorandum No. 10, War Office to the Field-Marshal Commanding-in-Chief, Home Force, 21 June 1917, TNA, HO 45/10881/338498.

¹³¹ Brust, *In Plain Clothes*, 88.

¹³² “The German Farm Colony,” *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 24 July 1915, 4.

¹³³ Jennifer Kewley Draskau, “Keeping the Peace in WWI: The Crucial Role of the Manx Police during the Great War,” *Journal of the Police History Society*, no. 25 (2010): 15–19, at 16.

¹³⁴ “What’s in a Name?” *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 26 June 1915, 4.

¹³⁵ “A German to Be Deported,” *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 30 October 1915, 6.

¹³⁶ Telegram by Under Secretary, Home Office, 8 August 1914, TNA, HO 45/10729/255193.

¹³⁷ Troup to War Office, 27 August 1914, TNA, HO 45/10729/255193.

¹³⁸ Home Office to War Office, 27 October 1914, 6, TNA, HO 45/10729/255193; Home Office Circular to Chief Constables, 12 November 1914, 10, in Correspondence as to the Internment and Release of Alien Enemies in the United Kingdom, 4 August 1914–13 May 1915, TNA, HO 45/10729/255193 [hereafter Correspondence as to Internment and Release].

¹³⁹ Home Office Circular to Chief Constables, 7 September 1914, in Correspondence as to Internment and Release, 2.

desires.”¹⁴⁰ Obviously, to reach such conclusions, they had to delve deeply not only into the circumstances of the individual but also into his mind. Further, the police were assigned the task of approving the two guarantors whom prisoners of war on parole had to provide to vouch for their good behavior, and of deciding the sum of money to be paid if the conditions of the parole were violated.¹⁴¹ They then were required to keep a close eye on the movements of those they allowed to remain free.¹⁴²

As the war wore on, the cabinet gave other bodies a greater role in vetting those to be released, but the police assisted in the selection and in assessing the many thousands of appeals for exemption.¹⁴³ The greater the number of enemy aliens destined for internment, the busier the police became in singling out those who should stay free. All these assignments demanded filling in and handling many forms, which only contributed to the dramatic growth of the police bureaucracy.¹⁴⁴ What facilitated the police’s work in tracking those at liberty and making assessments were the detailed and updated registers containing the particulars and exact location of aliens.¹⁴⁵ Nevertheless, in dealing with internment, the resources of some forces “were taxed to their utmost capacity.”¹⁴⁶

The possibility of obtaining an exemption from internment (and other restrictions) gave enemy aliens an opportunity to escape a ruinous fate. However, increasingly, the vetting process failed to provide the exemption, if not immediately, then in the long run. When the decision was made for confinement in a camp or for deportation, it was frequently the police who would inform the individual of the bleak result.¹⁴⁷ It was a detective who one evening called on Paul Cohen-Portheim, who was then working as a costume designer in London for an international group of singers, and told him he had to appear at the police station the next morning for the purpose of internment.¹⁴⁸ It is not hard to imagine that the news distressed aliens considerably, as it did Cohen-Portheim. In many instances, men had to leave their homes within twenty-four hours, with little time to say goodbye, arrange their affairs, or close their businesses properly. Cohen-Portheim “had not the slightest idea of what internment meant” and was “utterly unprepared,” nor did he receive any helpful advice from the detective.¹⁴⁹ The role of police officers often went beyond that of messengers: they made arrests and handed men over to the military authorities. Cohen-Portheim and others with him were escorted by an officer from the police station in London to a temporary camp in Stratford in the East End, which was deployed as a clearing house.¹⁵⁰ The moment when life for enemy subjects

¹⁴⁰ Home Office Circular to Chief Constables, 7 September 1914, in *Correspondence as to Internment and Release*, 2.

¹⁴¹ Home Office Memorandum, 5 October 1914, TNA, HO45/10729/255193.

¹⁴² Home Office to War Office, 27 January 1915, in *Correspondence as to Internment and Release*, 14.

¹⁴³ Home Office to War Office, 12 November 1914, in *Correspondence as to Internment and Release*, 10.

¹⁴⁴ See, for example, Troup to Chief Constables, 30 August 1914, TNA, HO 45/10729/255193.

¹⁴⁵ “Clean Sweep of Alien Enemies,” *Daily Mirror* (London), 23 October 1914, 2.

¹⁴⁶ “Aliens in Liverpool,” *Police Review*, 25 June 1915, 302.

¹⁴⁷ Noschke, *Insight into Civilian Internment*, 10–11; “A German to Be Deported,” *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 30 October 1915, 6.

¹⁴⁸ Cohen-Portheim, *Time Stood Still*, 20.

¹⁴⁹ Cohen-Portheim, 21, 29.

¹⁵⁰ Cohen-Portheim, 26.

was crudely interrupted in this way was therefore associated with the police. From that moment on, for Cohen-Portheim, there was “No more police.”¹⁵¹

The Aliens Restriction Act 1914 also made provisions for the complete removal of aliens from the United Kingdom, a measure that was operative from very early in the war and continued beyond its cessation.¹⁵² By mid-1919, close to thirty thousand enemy aliens had been deported or repatriated, mostly after armistice, many against their will.¹⁵³ The vast majority were German women and children, and men over military age—that is, men who on grounds of age were unlikely to participate in the enemy’s war. In this operation, too, the police had essential tasks to fulfil, thereby expanding the range of awkward encounters between them and enemy aliens. The police had to ensure that all those who qualified for deportation were rounded up, searched, and sent to the appropriate location.

So assiduous were the security forces that in time the belief spread that they had managed to deal a serious blow to the capacity of enemy subjects to engage in undercover operations, and the police turned growing attention to other aliens who, it was now argued, might actually pose a greater menace to the nation as they had not been the subject of meticulous observation.¹⁵⁴ The focus of policing also gradually shifted to internal threats by British nationals, such as activities by pacifists, conscientious objectors, and labor activists.¹⁵⁵

ADDITIONAL IMPACTS ON THE POLICE

The police assignments introduced during the war had a marked impact not only on enemy aliens but also on the police themselves. Police officers were far from content with their new responsibilities. In addition to substantially increasing their usual workload so that their numbers became insufficient to carry out the required tasks, certain orders were so complicated, detailed, and full of contingencies that they caused confusion among the police rank and file, not least as the orders were constantly being revised and sometimes contradictory.¹⁵⁶ They also required a huge amount of extra paperwork, which the rank-and-file always sought to avoid.¹⁵⁷ Not that police work was easy or stress-free prior to the war, but officers were now pushed almost to the limit, day in and day out, year after year, with little respite. The continuous overwork accompanied by a lack of adequate remuneration steadily stirred up grievances that finally erupted in

¹⁵¹ Cohen-Portheim, 26.

¹⁵² Pulling, *Manual of Emergency*, 6.

¹⁵³ Bird, *Control of Enemy Alien Civilians*, 199; Memo by War Office [B. B. Cubitt], 1 March 1916, TNA, KV 1/66, 66; see Panayi, *Enemy in Our Midst*, 97, table 3.1, for approximate figures of the decline of the German population in Britain between 1914 and 1919, when only about twenty-two thousand were left.

¹⁵⁴ *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 5th series, vol. 83, 29 June 1916, col. 1075.

¹⁵⁵ Farrar, “Illusory Threat,” 94.

¹⁵⁶ Criminal Investigation Department, Special Branch Report, 20 November 1914, TNA, MEPO2/1643; Peter Cahalan, *Belgian Refugee Relief in England during the Great War* (New York, 1982), 110, 362, 368–70.

¹⁵⁷ Kewley Draskau, “Keeping the Peace in WW1,” 17.

the form of police strikes toward the end of the war and soon after. For the police leadership, dealing with so many people who had not formerly needed policing put an enormous strain on budgets and stretched resources to the limit.¹⁵⁸

However, handling aliens also benefited the police, especially as an institution. Beyond expanding their powers to enforce the law, the extra responsibilities provided an opportunity to gain expertise and sharpen their professional skills, particularly those required in the matters of national security that increasingly fell to the police. Most notably, those skills involved the use of surveillance, the accumulation of information, data analysis, counterespionage techniques, and administrative control. Although the country's police forces were themselves subjected to greater central control during the war, they also learned how to improve cooperation and coordination. The most significant outcome of their supervision of the publicly reviled enemy aliens was an enhanced authority and status in society, at least for the duration of the war. The British police had always shown a marked sensitivity to respectable opinion in their past attempts to earn public support.¹⁵⁹ Indeed, with the help of press reports about their work, the police's image had improved significantly by the outbreak of war,¹⁶⁰ and that gain was only reinforced by the ensuing conflict. Although the left-wing press criticized the police for not protecting Germans against mob violence, and the right-wing press criticized them for not doing enough to restrict aliens, the mainstream press showed considerable support, broadly presenting the police as veritable guardians of the people against internal foes, a view that resonated in other contemporary publications; a case in point is the play *Prime Minister* by Hall Caine.¹⁶¹

In fact, never before had the public collaborated with the police on such a scale, so willingly and consistently and for such a long time. This was particularly evident in the overwhelming number of reports the police received from keen individuals who informed on aliens, and not always Germans, for having failed to comply with any of the emergency orders or for alleged subversive or illegal activity.¹⁶² Those who acted as informants made common cause with the police and shared their commitment. Although the involvement of the public in this way added greatly to the volume of police work, since the police were determined to pursue every lead,¹⁶³ the prevailing public approval allowed them a freer hand in carrying out their responsibilities and resorting to methods that in peacetime might have elicited widespread condemnation. A vital question concerns what the police did with the greater latitude they had.

¹⁵⁸ Criminal Investigation Department, Special Branch Report, 20 November 1914, TNA, MEPO2/1643.

¹⁵⁹ W. L. Melville Lee, *A History of Police in England* (London, 1901), 329–32.

¹⁶⁰ Haia Shpayer-Makov, *The Making of a Policeman: A Social History of a Labour Force in Metropolitan London, 1829–1914* (Aldershot, 2002), 72–73, 123.

¹⁶¹ Farrar, "Illusory Threat," 161–62; David Englander, "Police and Public Order in Britain 1914–1918," in *Policing Western Europe: Politics, Professionalism, and Public Order, 1850–1940*, ed. Clive Emsley and Barbara Weinberger (New York, 1991), 90–138, at 108.

¹⁶² *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 5th series, vol. 66, 9 September 1914, col. 564; "Anonymous, of Course," *Daily Mirror* (London), 1 October 1914, 8; Thomson, *Queer People*, 39–46.

¹⁶³ Brust, *In Plain Clothes*, 86.

POLICE PERFORMANCE: AN ASSESSMENT

When assessing the performance of the British police during the critical years of the Great War, it must be borne in mind that the emergency orders related to enemy nationals obliged the police to operate within a profoundly intolerant legal framework. Their prescribed duties can be described as nothing short of discriminatory and oppressive. Policemen had to adhere to the terms of the legislation, which singled out enemy aliens as a suspect population and portrayed them as an existential danger to the nation that should be thoroughly constrained by means of a novel and highly stringent legal strategy. Moreover, while the police always had the right to use force to ensure compliance with the law, the new instructions gave them greater authority to enter by force, search, or occupy any premises and to compel individuals to abide by highly restrictive regulations.¹⁶⁴

Accordingly, police officers inevitably intruded deeply into the private lives of enemy aliens, secretly or openly spying on them, knocking on their doors unannounced at any time to check on their whereabouts, questioning them about personal matters, invading and even ransacking their homes and the places they frequented, wrenching them from their usual milieu, and crucially, labelling them. Although those from the poorest classes of society had been subject to harsh law enforcement practices in the not too distant past, their treatment was never as rigorous or thorough as that meted out to the German population. The war exposed a minority community, whose members shared a national but not a class background, to systematic and prolonged persecution by means of state-sanctioned discrimination as never before. Admittedly, other emergency statutes provided the police with extensive powers to interfere in the lives of British citizens who acted in a manner prejudicial to public safety and defense of the realm, but neither the scope of the regulations nor the police implementation of them was in any way similar.¹⁶⁵

All the same, notwithstanding the restrictive and binding legal framework, enforcement was selective and, officially, left a degree of discretion to the officers, from the top of the police hierarchy to the very bottom. In fact, the exercise of discretionary power was intrinsic to the very structure of the police and varied from one force to another.¹⁶⁶ The Home Office had authority only over the Metropolitan Police, while all other police forces (almost two hundred) were answerable to their local authorities. The Home Office did issue directives to police forces around the country as laid down in the acts of Parliament and the orders made under them, but it also gave out instructions as “advice” “for the guidance of the chief constables in the exercise of the discretion entrusted to them.”¹⁶⁷ As a result, there were “considerable divergences of policy” between various police forces, and “no conformity of procedure.”¹⁶⁸ Operational decisions and practices were no doubt swayed by the prevailing hostility to Germans and by events linking Germany with brutality and abuse,

¹⁶⁴ Pulling, *Manual of Emergency*, 43, 54, 64.

¹⁶⁵ The most influential was the Defence of the Realm Act (passed on 8 August 1914) and its extensions and amendments; see Pulling, 146–55.

¹⁶⁶ Chris A. Williams, *Police Control Systems in Britain, 1775–1975* (Manchester, 2014), 72–73.

¹⁶⁷ Alien Enemies in Prohibited Areas (London, 1916), 177, TNA, KV 1/66 [hereafter Alien Enemies in Prohibited Areas].

¹⁶⁸ Alien Enemies in Prohibited Areas, 177; Chief Constable of Gloucestershire to Vernon Kell, M.I.5., 22 January 1918, TNA, HO 45/10800/307293.

such as the German air raids, the conquest of Belgium, and the arrival of Belgian refugees with stories of real or imagined German atrocities visited on hapless civilians.¹⁶⁹ It is equally reasonable to assume that official policies were colored by changes in the cabinet and the shifts in outlook these entailed, such as Lloyd George's preference for sterner measures.¹⁷⁰

Certain police chiefs knew full well that they had to strike a balance between their awareness on the one hand that not all the inquiries dealt with evildoers and their wish on the other hand to allay the public's fears and their own that no risk was taken. The chief constable of Beverley succinctly defined the inherent dilemma: "To deal with aliens satisfactorily is rather a delicate matter, and requires a great deal of tact. A man need not necessarily cease to be a law-abiding individual because his Government is at War with our own, but, on the other hand, he may be a spy of the most dangerous type."¹⁷¹ Hence, whereas the chief constable of Gloucestershire and the Cardiff City Police opted for greater control over aliens with hardly any exemptions, there were others who were known for stretching "considerations of humanity" even to what were considered relatively trivial cases that "merely" involved inconvenience to enemy subjects or their loss of money.¹⁷² Internment was also justified as an "act of kindness" to protect enemy aliens against raging crowds.¹⁷³ That said, the dominant attitude in each force was not necessarily fixed or monolithic and could be lenient on some issues and stricter on others. It should also be pointed out that what may be interpreted as a benevolent approach was sometimes rather the outcome of the depletion of police manpower or other pragmatic considerations. For example, several chief constables preferred to allow enemy nationals to stay in prohibited areas and not compel them to move, believing that it would be easier to monitor their activities in places where they were known to their neighbors and local police than in areas where they were anonymous.¹⁷⁴

Whereas police chiefs were responsible for policing strategies and the overall management of the force with regard to aliens, the manner in which the aliens experienced the strict rules and regulations was in many respects crucially contingent on the individual officers they met during many encounters with law enforcement officers throughout the war. Naturally, police at the lower and intermediate levels had most interaction with aliens. These officers of course had to obey procedures and policies in the course of their duties, but with the discretionary power they possessed, they made autonomous decisions in some areas affecting aliens and their families.

Even more than before the war, police had the authority to brand individuals as harmful to society or, alternatively, as persons who should be left alone or at least not be subject to the full set of treatments designed for enemy aliens, primarily

¹⁶⁹ Alien Enemies in Prohibited Areas, 178.

¹⁷⁰ Bird, *Control of Enemy Alien Civilians*, 123–25. David Lloyd George replaced Asquith as prime minister at the end of 1916.

¹⁷¹ John W. Moore, *A Short Treatise on the Work and Duties of Town Guards and Special Constables* (Beverley, 1914), 18.

¹⁷² Chief Constable of Gloucestershire to Vernon Kell, MI5, 22 January 1918, TNA, HO 45/10800/307293; Alien Enemies in Prohibited Areas, 177; M.I.5. F Branch Report, part 3, 83–85. For the different policies in the largest cities regarding internment early on in the war, see Arrest of German and Austrian Reservists in the Provinces, 31 August 1914, TNA, HO 45/10729/253193.

¹⁷³ Stibbe, *Civilian Internment during the First World War*, 92.

¹⁷⁴ Alien Enemies in Prohibited Areas, 177.

internment and deportation.¹⁷⁵ Moreover, the interaction with individual officers was fundamental to the nature and magnitude of the psychological scars left on the alien. After all, officers were in a position to be a sympathetic ear and ease the aliens' inevitable troubles or to be insensitive to them. Functioning in a largely jingoistic climate, ordinary police officers, like their senior officials, were likely to be influenced by it to some extent. Yet the degree to which they translated their feelings into their style of enforcement varied greatly.

It is difficult to know to what extent officers adopted an aggressive operational manner or indeed exceeded their legitimate powers and applied inappropriate force in their encounters with aliens. Much of the evidence about such encounters derives from press reports and observations of police officers, both tending to overlook or even purposely hide violent incidents. To be sure, the police had never shunned the excessive use of force in their dealings with the community at large, and there is no reason why they should have done so in relation to the foreign community during the war, especially since they did not expect the mainstream press to criticize them for heavy-handedness in this context.¹⁷⁶ There is existing evidence of police maltreatment of enemy nationals, such as locking them up in a prison cell for no obvious reason for more than twelve hours as if they "were a felon," or rounding them up "manacled and chained together."¹⁷⁷ However, the overall evidence indicates that use of undue force by the police was uncommon. After all, the behavior of enemy aliens did not normally necessitate the use of abusive means. True, not all aliens submitted peacefully to police demands, and exchanges of insults did occur between the two sides. In late August 1914, for example, a German traveler was sentenced to three months' hard labor at Croydon for using provocative language and assaulting a detective;¹⁷⁸ other such incidents also reached the press.¹⁷⁹

Yet these seem to have been isolated events that decreased in number as time went on. By and large, the foreigners were docile, and the police did not anticipate violent behavior from them. If the police did resort to a firmer hand than was necessary, it was likely to have been unprovoked. Enemy aliens tried desperately not to antagonize either the public or the police. They ordinarily complied with the regulations and surrendered themselves voluntarily, becoming even more compliant as their conditions worsened and the number of humiliating incidents they suffered accumulated.¹⁸⁰ The more common method of resistance was evasion, which obviously involved no force. The police could therefore largely discharge their duties peacefully within the remit of the law.

¹⁷⁵ "A German to Be Deported," *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 30 October 1915, 6; "Chief Constables' Mistake," *Pall Mall Gazette*, 23 December 1916, 1.

¹⁷⁶ John E. Archer, *The Monster Evil: Policing and Violence in Victorian Liverpool* (Liverpool, 2011), 39–50.

¹⁷⁷ "Sub Rosa," *Sheffield Daily Independent*, 29 October 1914, 4. See also Panayi, *Prisoners of Britain*, 47–48; compare to the military response to a riot over conditions in a detention camp on the Isle of Man in which five inmates were shot dead and several were wounded: "Five Aliens Shot Dead," *London Standard*, 26 November 1914, 7.

¹⁷⁸ "The Alien Enemy," *Derby Daily Telegraph*, 31 August 1914, 3.

¹⁷⁹ "The Alien Enemy," *Derby Daily Telegraph*, 31 August 1914, 3; "Alien Enemy Menace," *Police Review* 11 September 1914, 448; "Barbarous English," *People*, 25 October 1914, 9.

¹⁸⁰ "Rounding-Up the Aliens," *Manchester Guardian*, 15 May 1915 11; "Alien Camps," *Times* (London), 17 May 1915, 5; Panayi, *Prisoners of Britain*, 52–53.

Officers evidently pursued their duties with varying degrees of flexibility. Alongside moments of heavy-handedness (and carelessness, ineptitude, and indifference), they not infrequently showed consideration and compassion to enemy subjects in adverse circumstances, such as ignoring their moving beyond the five-mile limit from their place of residence or exempting them from internment.¹⁸¹ An officer could hold anti-alien views and at the same time feel empathy for an individual and behave in a decent manner. As was true of some foreign revolutionaries living in London before the war who praised the British police for their “scrupulous regard” for “personal freedoms,”¹⁸² certain enemy aliens publicly paid tribute to the “courtesy” shown to them by the police and favorably compared their own treatment to what they imagined aliens would have been subjected to in contemporary Germany (although paying such compliments may have had ulterior motives).¹⁸³ Paul Cohen-Portheim found the detective who informed him of the decision to send him to an internment camp “very amiable throughout that interview.”¹⁸⁴ It is worth emphasizing, however, that some of the more relaxed supervision was the result of incompetence or negligence rather than generosity of spirit.¹⁸⁵

The performance of the police in the course of anti-German riots can further illustrate not only how police officers reconciled conflicting pressures during the war but also the constraints under which they operated. Alongside sporadic attacks on Germans and other aliens by individuals in the streets, crowds periodically vented their frustration very aggressively on hated groups of foreigners, predominantly Germans.¹⁸⁶ The sheer fact that people were German or of German extraction, or suspected to be such, was often enough to spark violence on a large scale. Several waves of anti-German riots occurred during the war in different parts of Britain, and these events differed widely in terms of the scale of damage to persons and property, duration, and police conduct.

The police were initially surprised by the riots and their ferocity, but even later, when such events should have been anticipated, if not their exact timing, contemporary accounts make clear that while on the whole police offered aliens some protection, they frequently merely reacted to events and did not attempt to preempt riotous behavior or stop it in its infancy. It was not unusual for police to stand still during a riot and intervene only after damage was done, giving the impression that they were reluctant to take action.¹⁸⁷ This pattern of behavior can best be explained either by apathy or belief that the rioters had valid reasons for their grievances and the Germans they attacked deserved what they received. Another factor in the way the police coped with riots was the shortage of manpower. Indeed, sometimes disturbances were quelled only when additional police or special constables, or even the

¹⁸¹ Bird, *Control of Enemy Alien Civilians*, 117.

¹⁸² Owen, “The Soft Heart of the British Empire,” 156.

¹⁸³ “Alien Enemy Menace,” *Police Review*, 11 September 1914, 448.

¹⁸⁴ Cohen-Portheim, *Time Stood Still*, 21.

¹⁸⁵ Circular by Troup to Chief Constables, 17 November 1916, TNA, KV1/66, 209; Letter by M.I.5. to Moylan, Home Office, 22 March 1917, TNA, HO 45/10881/338498.

¹⁸⁶ “The Anti-German Riots,” *Police Review*, 21 May 1915, 242. For a description of the anti-German riots, see Panikos Panayi, “Anti-German Riots in Britain during the First World War,” in *Racial Violence in Britain in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, ed. Panikos Panayi (London, 1996), 65–91.

¹⁸⁷ Noschke, *Insight into Civilian Internment*, 10.

army, were called out to clear the streets.¹⁸⁸ Worse, the crowd was frequently undeterred by the police presence and continued raiding shops and houses and attacking enemy aliens even when confronted by officers of the law.¹⁸⁹ It was apparently far from easy to take effective action against crowds determined to vent their anger.

Police officers could pay a price for shielding Germans during these disturbances. While attempting to quell the riots, they sometimes bore the brunt of the ferocity and not infrequently suffered bodily injuries. Examples are abundant. In Rotherham in mid-May 1915, at the height of anti-German disturbances, mounted police scattered a rioting crowd after the premises of every German butcher were vandalized and looted and a large public house was attacked. At that point, as the *Police Review* reported, “hatred against the Germans was forgotten, and the feelings of the crowds were wholly directed against the Police”—not sparing the chief constable who was struck on the head by a large brick or the inspector who was hit in the face with a bottle.¹⁹⁰ Some rioters seemingly felt that police who tried to defend Germans deserved to be the targets of their rage.

The police may have ignored attacks on Germans, miscalculated their scale, failed to act as neutral agents, or were “powerless” in the face of the riots as they were not present in a sufficiently strong force.¹⁹¹ Yet overall, they acted as a restraining factor, eventually dispersed the crowd, arrested many of its members, and safeguarded the victims.¹⁹² In fact, police often arrested enemy aliens for their own protection. In addition, Germans and other persecuted minorities would turn to the police for help as a matter of course, realizing that at times they were the only barrier between themselves and the belligerent crowd. Smuggling aliens out of their homes or shops was a common response by the police who may have known the individuals.¹⁹³ Whatever their inclination, the police could not allow the confrontational behavior of the crowd, and anyway did not want to be seen as letting their private, at time prejudicial, sentiments prevail over their official obligations.¹⁹⁴ After all, as police officers, they could not afford to accept public disorder or permit the crowds to control the streets. To do so would have communicated a message that they were not fulfilling their role, a message certain to undermine their authority and the maintenance of adequate law and order at a time of great upheaval.

CONCLUSION

The interaction between police officers and enemy aliens took a variety of forms. Despite this diversity, more than a few historians of the First World War have expressed the view that in general the police and the Home Office tended to be

¹⁸⁸ “Anti-German Riots,” *Manchester Guardian*, 13 May 1915, 6.

¹⁸⁹ “Anti-German Shop Raids in London,” *Manchester Guardian*, 20 October 1914, 12. See also “German Shops Wrecked in Liverpool,” *Grantham Journal*, 15 May 1915, 7; “Anti-Alien Demonstration in London,” *Times* (London), 10 June 1916, 6.

¹⁹⁰ “The Anti-German Riots,” *Police Review*, 21 May 1915, 242. See also “The Anti-German Riots,” *Police Review*, 28 May 1915, 264.

¹⁹¹ “All Enemy Aliens to Be Interned,” *Daily Mirror* (London), 14 May 1915, 4.

¹⁹² “German Women in London,” *Times* (London), 10 March 1916, 6.

¹⁹³ “Anti-German Shop Raids in London,” *Manchester Guardian*, 20 October 1914, 12.

¹⁹⁴ “Looting Outrages,” *Police Review*, 28 May 1915, 258.

more measured in their appraisal of the German threat than the officials of the War Office, and MO5(g) specifically, who were largely responsible for the alarmist attitude governing policies toward foreigners, a view confirmed by some contemporary officials.¹⁹⁵ Furthermore, police chiefs were on the whole more moderate than military commanders in managing the day-to-day implementation of the provisions designed to control enemy nationals.¹⁹⁶ This general state of mind must have defined the operational boundaries of police forces in their dealings with aliens throughout the war. As indicated, the police were in no way an enlightened institution, but, given the draconian laws and regulations against enemy aliens that they had to follow, and the xenophobic atmosphere in which they worked, their (in the main) nonabusive treatment of the most hated foreign minority in Britain stands out. Enemy nationals had almost no protection against police arbitrariness, and their survival in many respects rested in police hands; still, my research has found no evidence of more than the occasional exploitation of vulnerability. Moreover, despite some harshness on the part of officers, the police were at times accused of being too soft in executing orders and too liberal in providing exemptions.¹⁹⁷ The fact that they had to stand up to pressure to be stricter with enemy aliens speaks for itself.¹⁹⁸ Against this backdrop, the police, even with their sometimes flawed performances, appear all the more restrained, their attitude to enemy aliens more balanced than that of policy makers and large sections of the British public. It may well be that this attitude stemmed from their close encounters with enemy aliens, and perhaps also from prewar acquaintance with them, convincing some officers that the objects of their policing typically constituted no danger to national security.

It also seems that, with all the pressure on the police from alien-baiters to adopt a more aggressive and uncompromising stance, their handling of the German minority won overwhelming public support for being seen as in the national interest. From this perspective, even if in reality their regulation of enemy aliens did little to contribute to the security of the nation, the police—who were, after all, the most public face of the state—undoubtedly contributed to its standing in civil society.

Yet notwithstanding their at times “indulgent” attitude, the police, even if judged solely by their treatment of enemy aliens, unquestionably became a good deal more interventionist in wartime and prone to use measures previously considered un-English,¹⁹⁹ thereby playing a part in expanding the reach of the state and the erosion of liberal values. In this respect, the First World War was a watershed, bringing about new regulatory norms toward aliens previously unknown in peacetime. Tight control of noncitizens remained state policy and persisted tenaciously after

¹⁹⁵ Letter by Troup to Kell, 11 May 1917, TNA, HO 45/10881/338498; Memorandum by Troup, 22 June 1918, 36, TNA, KV 1/67; Bird, *Control of Enemy Alien Civilians*, 204–7; Porter, *The Origins of the Vigilant State*, 172–73; Cahalan, *Belgian Refugee Relief*, 367–68, 371; Hiley, “The Failure of British Counter-espionage,” 861.

¹⁹⁶ Alien Enemies in Prohibited Areas, 177; M.I.5. F Branch Report, part 2, 190; Cahalan, *Belgian Refugee Relief*, 363.

¹⁹⁷ *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 5th series, vol. 83, 29 June 1916, cols. 1047–53, 1057–58; Memorandum by the Home Secretary, 10 July 1918, 56, TNA, KV 1/67; Farrar, “Illusory Threat,” 183–84; Bird, *Control of Enemy Alien Civilians*, 213, 218, 220–22; “Rounding-Up the Aliens,” *Manchester Guardian*, 15 May 1915, 11.

¹⁹⁸ *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 5th series, vol. 66, 9 September 1914, cols. 563–66.

¹⁹⁹ “National Registration,” *Police Review*, 23 July 1915, 355.

the war, although not to the same extent as during the extreme circumstances of war. Liberal concepts were still “an active force,”²⁰⁰ but in its attitude to foreigners, postwar Britain would never return to the liberalism of the prewar years, let alone to the relatively nonintrusive liberalism that marked the mid-Victorian era.²⁰¹

²⁰⁰ Stuart Hall and Bill Schwarz, “State and Society, 1880–1930,” in *Crises in the British State 1880–1930*, ed. Mary Langan and Bill Schwarz (London, 1985), 7–32, at 9–10.

²⁰¹ For anti-alienism in the postwar period, see David Cesarani, “Anti-Alienism in England after the First World War,” *Immigrants and Minorities* 6, no. 1 (1987): 5–29.