

Orders of Merit? Hierarchy, Distinction and the British Honours System, 1917-2004

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ABSTRACT

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One of the central challenges in modern British historiography is the reconciliation of narratives about the nature and meaning of the British Empire with older themes of class and hierarchy. The historiographical shift to empire and away from class since the 1980s and 1990s coincided with a fundamental shift in Britain's social structure and composition, which itself demands historical explanation. The history of the British honours system – an institution that has blended ideas of class hierarchy with meritocracy and service – can reveal much about social change in twentieth century Britain and its empire. Using a mixture of official and unofficial sources and organized chronologically, my dissertation charts the history of the honours system from the creation of the Order of the British Empire in 1917 to a major set of reforms at the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first. Honours were an active tool of policy and social distinction. Government decisions about who should receive honours and what honours they should receive reveal the importance of different kinds of service and the social class of the individual to be honored. Applied across the whole empire, the system had a double edge: it produced loyalty and kept different social groups in their place. The ever-presence of the institution means that it gives us a consistent benchmark across the twentieth century for what kinds of service was seen as most in need of recognition at different times by the state.

The creation of the Order of the British Empire in 1917 opened up the honours system to non-elites, women and a much larger proportion of imperial subjects for the first time, and vastly

expanded the number of people who received honours. I argue that change in the honours system during the twentieth century was not a simple matter of linear 'democratization', as it is usually portrayed in the British media and by the modern British monarchy and government. Instead, it reflected different priorities at different times. In the empire, the state used honours to buy loyalty from subjects in exchange for social and cultural distinction; however, its symbolism was also appropriated positively and negatively by different groups to make political claims on or against the imperial state. Changes in who got what honours almost always had a specific purpose, and were often rapid. Initially conceived as a way of rewarding voluntary war work, in peacetime the Order of the British Empire was reworked to become an honour where the majority of awards went to paid central state servants. In the aftermath of the Second World War, in which government experts were well-rewarded with honours, politicians and bureaucrats made an effort to distribute honours more widely around the community. Teachers, health workers and other providers of local services benefitted from this change, as the honours system within Britain expanded almost in direct correlation to its shrinking global influence as the British Empire fragmented. At the end of the century, John Major's Conservative government made a deliberate decision to focus once again on voluntary service to the state. This uncontroversial shift in focus helped to bring together two of the functions of the modern British monarchy: its role since the nineteenth century as the official leader of the voluntary sector, and its function as the authenticator of public recognition through the honours system. This theoretically 'classless' reform to the honours system reinforced existing divisions in British society by distinguishing between lower-ranked voluntary work and high-ranked professional, philanthropic and celebrity service.

There was no clear-cut distinction between merit and hierarchy in the honours system. As a result, in periods of major social change in twentieth-century Britain, honours had an active role in reshaping

social hierarchies in Britain and in parts of the empire/former empire. Honours obfuscated the meaning of distinction in modern Britain through the system's connection to the monarchy and its broad use as a political, imperial and social tool. A complicated and entangled combination of personality, status, merit, peer review and luck determined who received what honours. As a result, Britain's premier system for publicly recognizing service and distinguishing status could never fully differentiate between these two functions. In part this was because those who ran it did not desire to separate hierarchy from distinguished service, and because such separation was effectively impossible within existing frameworks. Citizens, subjects, interest groups and post-colonial governments used honours to challenge political and social structures, but it was difficult to break out of the fundamental framework in which honours gave distinction and status in exchange for a performance of loyalty to the Crown. The only escape was the complete rejection of the system, which was a rare choice except in certain parts of the former empire.

Table of Contents

List of Charts and Illustrations	ii
Acknowledgments.....	iii
Introduction: ‘Why are any of us made anything?’	1
Chapter one: ‘British Democracy’s Own Order of Chivalry’: War and the Expansion of Honours, 1917–1922.....	33
Chapter two: The Shifting Borders of the Empire of Honours, 1922–1939	85
Chapter three: From Inappropriate to Indispensable: Civilian Honours in the Second World War.....	143
Chapter four: New Honours for Old? The Decline of the Imperial Honours System.....	193
Chapter five: Drawing Together? Honours in Britain, 1945–1979	227
Chapter six: The Queen’s Heroes: Reform and the Return of Voluntarism, 1977–2004.....	289
Conclusion	345
Bibliography.....	353

List of Charts and Illustrations

TABLE 1.1: Number of appointments to each rank of the Order of the British Empire, 1917–1920.....	43
TABLE 2.1: Percentage of civilian honours in the Order of the British Empire given to key groups in Britain, 1918–1938.....	105
TABLE 5.1: Percentage of civilian honours in the Order of the British Empire given to key groups in Britain, 1948–1978.....	229
TABLE 6.1: Percentage of civilian honours in the Order of the British Empire given to key groups in Britain, 1988–1998.....	327

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Introduction: 'Why are any of us made anything?'

I.

In March 1918 a group of senior political figures met to talk about how to manage a growing controversy over the government's liberal use of honours. George Nathaniel Curzon, the great champion and aficionado of ceremonial sophistication of the early twentieth century, was frustrated by calls for greater transparency in the honours system:

'It is really very difficult,' said Curzon, 'to say why anybody does get Honours. Why is F.E. Smith made a Baronet? All that one can say is that he is Attorney-General - of Lavery, that he is a painter. Then take X...'

Bonar Law. 'What more can you say?'

Curzon. 'I will put that question to the House; "what more do you want"'

Bonar Law. 'You must not pretend to say that these Honours are not to be given for Party services, but only not for corrupt services.'

Curzon. 'Why are any of us made anything? It is very difficult to say.'¹

Curzon knew as well as anyone in the British Empire how decisions to give honours were made. He understood that behind the traditional, ritualistic and dignified exterior of the honours system was an elaborate set of bureaucratic and political judgments that produced the result of a (usually) twice-yearly honours list. Yet he was committed to hiding, or at least obscuring, this reality. Curzon embodied a paradox that existed both among British elites throughout the twentieth century and in the historiography of honours: that honours have been both central to ideas of social order in Britain and the British Empire, but the people who prized them most and understood them best have often been determined to avoid talking about them.

Shortly before Curzon and Bonar Law had this discussion, the honours system had been transformed by the creation of the Order of the British Empire in 1917. Previously, honours had

¹ Thomas Jones, *Whitehall Diary* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), 53.

been the preserve of a narrow band of men at the top of the social hierarchy. The new order made honours accessible to a much wider range of people – including, for nearly the first time, women – and thus made Curzon’s question about why people received honours all the more important as a public and political problem. The growth of the honours system through the new Order massively expanded the constituency with an interest in the system, bringing the possibility of official recognition of both rank and merit to a much wider proportion of the population. A public who had been onlookers to official markers of social status in Britain and the British Empire could now participate in a new tier of distinction. With this democratization came wider interest in an institution that relied on a certain amount of mystery to operate.

The diffidence about the public discussion of honours exhibited by Curzon and others manifested one of a number of key tensions in this newly democratized honours system: the difficult balance between the secrecy that was thought essential to maintaining the mystery and appeal of honours and a desire for more open government. This was closely linked to another tension between the monarchy, politicians and the bureaucratic machinery of the state, all of whom were invested in a degree of secrecy throughout the century. The idea that honours were a reward for service to the state was also in constant tension with the idea that it was a vehicle for corrupt patronage. These were not as different as they appeared, as the choice of which of the many kinds of service to the state should be rewarded always had political and social implications. Most importantly, at the core of questions over selections for honours was a final tension: between merit and hierarchy. The structure of the honour system rewarded both in different ways. In theory a person’s service determined whether or not they were chosen for an honour, while their social position determined the rank of honour they received. But this relationship was complicated and sometimes it could be hard to tell the difference between merit and hierarchy.

II.

To many observers the honours system has been and is an expression of national culture that, as retired civil servant Hayden Phillips argued in 2004, ‘derives from the simple and laudable wish to recognise exceptional service and achievement and to show gratitude publicly’, a ‘public thank you to those who have demonstrated achievement and exceptional service’.² The occasional corruptions of this system by ambitious, short-sighted politicians were deviations from the norm. In such narratives, the honours system has remained at its core a positive expression of national merit, providing a unified roll of honour of distinguished Britons across the centuries.³ More cynical commentators prefer to depict it as a tool of political patronage that recapitulated social hierarchies.⁴ Few, if any, twentieth century governments did not fall under suspicion of some form of unfair honours patronage, and on a number of occasions this turned into outright scandal when Prime Ministers and whips pushed the boundaries of acceptable honorific patronage too far.

There are elements of truth in both these depictions of the honours system: it was cynically used as political and social currency, and it did distinguish deserving people for valuable service to the state. However, both these portrayals downplay the importance of the honours system by assuming that its social and political function was immutable. They implicitly de-emphasize change within the honours system, as well as the wider social, political and cultural implications and consequences of these changes. Positive depictions of the system present it as an eternal, value-neutral expression of the public will that forms an important and largely innocent part of British

² Hayden Phillips, *Review of the Honours System* (London: Cabinet Office, 2004), 15.

³ Ivan De la Bere, *The Queen's Orders of Chivalry* (London: William Kimber, 1961); Stanley Martin, *The Order of Merit: One Hundred Years of Matchless Honour* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2006); Hugo Vickers, *Royal Orders* (London: Boxtree, 1994).

⁴ Andrew Adonis, *A Class Act: The Myth of Britain's Classless Society* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1997), 78–9; Andrew Cook, *Cash for Honours: The Story of Maundy Gregory* (Stroud: The History Press, 2008); Tom A Cullen, *Maundy Gregory: Purveyor of Honours* (London: Bodley Head, 1974); Michael De-la-Noy, *The Honours System* (London: Allison & Busby, 1985); John Walker, *The Queen Has Been Pleased: The British Honours System at Work* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1986).

heritage. In doing so, they celebrate rather than question the centrality of hierarchical judgments in the system, as well as its use as a political tool. Negative accounts focus primarily on the various forms of patronage and corruption that have influenced honours lists. They risk losing sight of the way in which a majority of honours given in the twentieth century were not party political honours, even if their priorities and functions had a political edge. Reverence and scorn are not the best ways of analyzing the historical complexities of this institution.

A third view of the history of honours can be found in work that focuses on statutory changes within specific orders of chivalry.⁵ Yet for all the detail offered by this literature, it rarely attempts to analyze the meaning and function of honours within the wider context of modern British politics and society. Honours have been an ever-present part of the background to British history, finding their way to the front of public debate only when they played an important part in some sort of wider political crisis. It is time that we take their political and social meaning more seriously.⁶ At any given moment in modern British history hundreds of thousands of people have had legitimate claims on the state for recognition of worthy service. Yet only a fraction received honours at any given time. What was seen as uncontroversial or normal at any given moment in terms of honours is as important as the few controversies that emerged at particular points during the century. How and why has the British state chosen certain citizens and subjects over others to distinguish for valuable service? What do the choices made by the state say about changing ideas about service and merit? How were these choices used by recipients and their communities to

⁵ Robert Esden, *The Story of the Knights Bachelor* (London: The Imperial Society of Knights Bachelor, 2004); Peter Galloway, *Companions of Honour* (London: Chancery Publications, 2002); Peter Galloway, *The Order of the Bath* (Chichester, West Sussex, England: Phillimore, 2006); Peter Galloway, *The Order of St Michael and St George* (London: Third Millennium Publishing, 2002); Peter Galloway, *The Order of the British Empire* (London: Central Chancery of the Orders of Knighthood, 1996); Christopher McCreery, *The Order of Canada: Its Origins, History, and Development* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005); James Charles Risk, *The History of the Order of the Bath and Its Insignia* (London: Spink and Son, 1972).

⁶ The best study of this type is: G. R Searle, *Corruption in British Politics, 1895-1930* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987).

reinforce or undermine the social hierarchies that they were supposed to reflect? Curzon's question about the logic of honours appointments can be answered, even if he, and many others, often wanted to avoid it.

In the optimistic conclusion to American sociologist William J. Goode's 1978 volume *Celebration of Heroes*, Goode argued that modern life offers more opportunities for the celebration of excellence than earlier eras where deference and servility to a 'noble stratum' meant that only a narrow band of heroes were possible in society.⁷ Goode was attacking the idea that pre-modern social structures were better suited for the creation and flourishing of heroes because egalitarian class systems level achievement (and restrict the ability of societies to celebrate it).⁸ Goode was not talking about British society in particular, but his closing remarks relate to a central problem around how we think about honours in modern Britain. The British honours system was imagined as a direct descendant of an era when a 'noble stratum' dominated systems of prestige. For modern commentators, the balance between the anti-egalitarian remnants of this pseudo-medieval legacy and its possible benefits in terms of social stability has been central to debates around the structure and meaning of hierarchy in modern British society. The honours system was an institution where a disenchanted administrative class combined with an enchanted monarchy, and where ideas of meritocracy encountered traditional hierarchies, both in Britain and the British Empire. Conflict and consensus about this system can help us to better understand the meaning of big questions about the nature of modernity in the British Empire. Honours were at the nexus of the old and the new.

At the core of their administration and policy direction, honours were an expression of the mind and will of the civil service. Whitehall ran the honours system within Britain and throughout

⁷ William Josiah Goode, *The Celebration of Heroes: Prestige as a Social Control System* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 394.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 393–4.

the empire, although in the latter case local governors often had more discretion than their politician counterparts in the UK. The story of honours is partly a story of the interaction between the civil service's ideas about social order with the reality of social structures in Britain and the empire. Civil servants were also the most-honored group for much of the century. While historians rely on civil service records for many different themes and topics in British history, the social history of civil servants themselves is underexplored. Rodney Lowe's recent *Official History of the Civil Service* has suggested a number of significant ways in which the civil service led or reflected wider changes in British society, such as computerization and the development of professional careers for women.⁹ But like the literature on honours, histories of the civil service tend to be framed around internal questions rather than the way in which the culture of Whitehall interacted with a wider society.¹⁰

The civil service was an important model for the British fascination, since the 1950s, with the idea, potential and challenges of 'meritocracy'.¹¹ Merit seemed to hold the potential for revolutionizing the social order and dispensing with old, inefficient elites in favor of new efficient ones. Merit also offered the promise of distributive justice and rational governance by cutting out patronage, nepotism and anti-egalitarian theories of aristocratic superiority.¹² By the 1990s it was clear that this promise had not been fulfilled; for example, decades of theoretical meritocracy in

⁹ Rodney Lowe, *The Official History of the British Civil Service: Reforming the Civil Service* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2011).

¹⁰ Richard A. Chapman, *Ethics in the British Civil Service* (London: Routledge, 1988); Richard A. Chapman, *The Civil Service Commission, 1855-1991: A Bureau Biography*, British Politics and Society (London: Routledge, 2004); Robert Pyper, *The British Civil Service: An Introduction* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1995).

¹¹ See, in particular, Michael Young's satire: Michael Dunlop Young, *The Rise of the Meritocracy, 1870-2033; the New Elite of Our Social Revolution* (New York: Random House, 1959); For a more serious statement of the moral principles behind this ideal, see: John Rawls, *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001).

¹² Norman Daniels, "Merit and Meritocracy," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 7, no. 3 (April 1, 1978): 208.

education had failed to create an egalitarian or meritocratic social structure.¹³ What had seemed at one point to be a real challenge to the old order of British society had not succeeded, and new hierarchies that did not conform to liberal ideals of fairness or equality of opportunity had succeeded old ones.

Why did modernity not bring a transformation in class structure and the achievement of an ideal of equality of opportunity? Over the last few decades some historians interested in this question have turned to the relationship between the British modern mass public and what Walter Bagehot famously called the ‘dignified’ components of the British constitution.¹⁴ The survival of traditional institutions like the monarchy and vestiges of the aristocracy has offered an important way to reflect on the features of British democracy (or even British character) in the twentieth century.¹⁵ The force of ‘deference’, which according to Bagehot calmed the turbulent masses, resonated in the twentieth century because of the lack of radicalism among the wider public in Britain. Some historians have approvingly identified the monarchy and other traditional institutions as a powerful force for social cohesion.¹⁶ For other critics, deference to the monarchy and to a mythological tradition is a malevolent spell on the minds of British people, preventing them from

¹³ Spyros Themelis, “Meritocracy through Education and Social Mobility in Post-War Britain: A Critical Examination,” *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 29, no. 5 (September 1, 2008): 427–38.

¹⁴ Walter Bagehot, *The English Constitution, by Walter Bagehot; with an Introduction by the Earl of Balfour* (London: Oxford University Press, 1958); David Cannadine, “The Context, Performance and Meaning of Ritual: The British Monarchy and the ‘Invention of Tradition’, C. 1820-1977,” in *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. E. J. Hobsbawm and T. O. Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 101–64; David Cannadine, *Ornamentalism: How the British Saw Their Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); John Ashton Cannon, *The Modern British Monarchy: A Study in Adaptation* (Reading: University of Reading, 1987); Hennessy, *The Hidden Wiring*; William M. Kuhn, *Democratic Royalism: The Transformation of the British Monarchy, 1861-1914* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1996); Tom Nairn, *The Enchanted Glass: Britain and Its Monarchy* (London: Radius, 1988); Frank Prochaska, *Royal Bounty: The Making of Welfare Monarchy* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995); Frank Prochaska, *The Republic of Britain: 1760-2000* (London: Allen Lane, 2000); J. A. Thompson, *The Modern British Monarchy* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1971).

¹⁵ David Cannadine, *Aspects of Aristocracy: Grandeur and Decline in Modern Britain* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994); Peter Mandler, *The Fall and Rise of the Stately Home* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997).

¹⁶ See, for example: Cannon, *The Modern British Monarchy*; Kuhn, *Democratic Royalism*, 1–14.

claiming their rights and responsibilities as democratic citizens.¹⁷ Among British scholars, this division breaks down in similar ways to the distinction in the historiography of honours discussed above.

In a 1992 essay on the modern British monarchy David Cannadine showed how the monarchy embraced ‘invented traditions’, made up of increasingly elaborate ceremonials, even as their formal political power declined.¹⁸ These ceremonial trappings brought another kind of power as the public favored this new role for the monarchy. Rather than obsolescence, the monarchy found new ways of being relevant through celebrating a mythological past. Other historians have picked up on this argument to reflect in more detail on the modernization of the monarchy, particularly in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.¹⁹ Frank Prochaska in particular has written in detail about how the monarchy has worked itself into a position as the hub of voluntary organizations in Britain.²⁰

Underlying some of these narratives is an assumption that these institutions were innately unfathomable (especially to outsiders), and that this inscrutability made them exceptional. A rational meritocracy was impossible, in this line of thinking, because (as Bagehot put it), ‘the human heart is strong and the human reason weak’.²¹ Present throughout discussions about the non-democratic institutions that manifest this mythology of enchantment is the idea that the constitutional

¹⁷ Adonis, *A Class Act*; Christopher Hitchens, *The Monarchy* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1990); Nairn, *The Enchanted Glass*; Edgar Wilson, *The Myth of British Monarchy* (London: Journeyman, 1989).

¹⁸ Cannadine, “The Context, Performance and Meaning of Ritual: The British Monarchy and the ‘Invention of Tradition’, C. 1820-1977.”

¹⁹ For example: Kuhn, *Democratic Royalism*; Ryan Linkof, “‘The Photographic Attack on His Royal Highness’: The Prince of Wales, Wallis Simpson and the Prehistory of the Paparazzi,” *Photography and Culture* 4, no. 3 (November 1, 2011): 277–91.

²⁰ Prochaska, *Royal Bounty*.

²¹ Bagehot, *The English Constitution, by Walter Bagehot; with an Introduction by the Earl of Balfour.*, 35.

arrangements of this major industrial state were complicated and vague enough that they puzzled even the highest-ranking officials.²² Mystery was a feature of, not a bug in, the British constitution. This line of reasoning leads to a self-sustaining mythology of peculiarity which is in itself a kind of claim to cultural capital for the British. This literature recognizes the enchantment that lies at the heart of the constitutional project, but is situated within a frame of reference where the observers are often themselves under the spell, whether they are fighting or celebrating its effects.²³

These approaches also downplay the implications of the relationship between the British Crown and the wider public of the British Empire/Commonwealth, not least the large parts of it over which the Queen is still sovereign. The expansion of the honours system in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, and ceremonial innovations in general, were driven by imperial as much as domestic political imperatives.²⁴ The Order of the British Empire was for the empire as well as Britain, although it operated differently in different locales. The deferential logic of the honours system worked in the empire as a means of buying the loyalty of local elites, but it was also designed to foster an imperial identity that would create social cohesion. Through honours the imperial state imagined a social hierarchy for the empire. As Cannadine has pointed out, the complexity and importance of imperial racial and gender hierarchies is well understood, but empire-wide social hierarchies have been of less interest to historians.²⁵ For many imperial administrators, especially those committed, ideologically if not always in practice, to some form of racial equality, British

²² Hennessy, *The Hidden Wiring*, 33.

²³ Frank Prochaska and Cannadine's work are a partial exception: Cannadine, "The Context, Performance and Meaning of Ritual: The British Monarchy and the 'Invention of Tradition', C. 1820-1977"; David Cannadine, *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy*, 1st Vintage Books ed (New York: Vintage Books, 1999); Prochaska, *Royal Bounty*; Prochaska, *The Republic of Britain*.

²⁴ Cannadine, *Ornamentalism*.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 9.

domestic social hierarchies served as a model for a wider ordering of empire.²⁶ Honours were a way of ‘homogenizing the heterogeneities’ of a geographically and culturally diverse empire.²⁷

The symbolic and social meaning of honours has been explored in more detail in histories of British colonies than Britain itself. Indian historians, in particular, have taken an interest in the use of honours by the imperial state to enforce loyalty among Indian subjects.²⁸ Recent literature on honours in British Dominions and former Dominions has also added to our understanding of the relationship between the ideals of imperial cohesion that Cannadine explored, and the reality of how local political and cultural imperatives determined honours policy.²⁹ For example, Karen Fox has recently shown how honours provided a forum for former Dominion governments and publics to reflect on their relationship to Britain.³⁰ But this literature is underdeveloped and only begins to show the potential for using honours as a way of exploring the formal and informal meaning of empire and ties to British social hierarchies in colonies in both the Dominions and dependencies.

III.

This dissertation pulls together ideas about imperial hierarchy, the meaning of a democratic public and the history of the civil service by exploring the tensions and conflicts around honours during the twentieth century. It is a social history of honours that works outward from the system’s day-to-day

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid., 10.

²⁸ Nicholas B Dirks, *The Hollow Crown: Ethnohistory of an Indian Kingdom*, 2nd ed (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993); John McLeod, “The English Honours System in Princely India, 1925-1947,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society (Third Series)* 4, no. 02 (1994): 237–49; Jesse S. Palsetia, “‘Honourable Machinations’: The Jamsetjee Jejeebhoy Baronetcy and the Indian Response to the Honours System in India,” *South Asia Research* 23, no. 1 (May 1, 2003): 55–75.

²⁹ Karen Fox, “An ‘Imperial Hangover’? Royal Honours in Australia, Canada and New Zealand, 1917–2009,” *Britain and the World*, no. 1 (February 26, 2014): 6–27; Karen Fox, “Grand Dames and Gentle Helpmeets: Women and the Royal Honours System in New Zealand, 1917–2000,” *Women’s History Review* 19, no. 3 (2010): 375; McCreery, *The Order of Canada*.

³⁰ Fox, “An ‘Imperial Hangover’?”.

workings to explore two key forces that shaped societies in Britain and its empire: democratization and decolonization. My analysis is focused around the problems raised by the major tensions within the honours system, which map onto wider social and political problems in Britain and the empire. Throughout, I both seek to cut through and explore the implications of the enchanted mythology that surrounds honours, because doing so can tell us something about British history and about the social life of honour and distinction in modern societies. This is not just a process of ‘ghost-busting’,³¹ but an attempt to describe a social institution that both had a unique manifestation within Britain and its empire, and also is explicable within a wider understanding of human social relations.

My research shows how the British state and other interest groups actively adapted the honours system to shape and order a democratizing society in a way that maintained social cohesion. The twentieth century saw the declining power of the aristocracy and the partial embourgeoisement of the working class. The most important actors in this story are the bureaucrats who ran the honours system and the middle- and working-class people who were increasingly its beneficiaries throughout the twentieth century. Politicians, royal servants, journalists and historians were often important, but the story of honours in the twentieth century is overwhelmingly that of administrators and extraordinary ‘ordinary’ people. The honours system provided a means through which the Crown thought it could manage and shape social change. These attempts were not always successful, but they often reflected and sometimes shaped the adaptation of social relations in periods where these seemed to be under strain. The honours system reinforced social hierarchies so as to help reconcile elites to democracy.

³¹ As Peter Hennessy describes his project in: Hennessy, *The Hidden Wiring*, 33.

It also gave newly empowered interest groups a real stake in older systems of social order, which they often defended ferociously. Curzon asked why people received honours, but equally important is what they did with them. Honours marked out not only the relationship between the subject and their King (or Emperor), but also the citizen in relation to their fellow citizens. It helped define relationships of equals and, more importantly, near equals by translating a hierarchical social order into the interstices of British democracy. The aftermath of the First World War has been central to discussions of the relationship between class and democracy in Britain as a period where democratic aspirations were controlled and managed by both elites and the public themselves.³² Honours were part of this larger process of the management and political education of a mass public throughout the twentieth century, because they were an active tool for social distinction, both for those who were honored as well as those who did the honoring. They produced enthusiasm for the ceremonial trappings of the monarchy, not just out of a sense of awe and a desire for social stability, but because of the immediate, local benefits that this symbolic structure brought for individuals. Honours could provide both social and cultural capital to people who aspired to reinforce or improve their class position.³³ In the empire, the honours system offered local elites a deal where they gained status in exchange for a performance of their loyalty. The legacy of these transactions was more troubled than the system's ongoing prominence in British society.

One of the central challenges in modern British historiography is the reconciliation of narratives about the nature and meaning of the British Empire with older themes of class and

³² For example, see: Jon Lawrence, "The Transformation of British Public Politics after the First World War," *Past & Present*, no. 190 (February 1, 2006): 185–216; Jon Lawrence and Miles Taylor, eds., *Party, State and Society: Electoral Behaviour in Britain Since 1820* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1997); Ross McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures: England, 1918-1951: A Study of a Democratic Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); McKibbin, *The Ideologies of Class: Social Relations in Britain, 1880-1950* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).

³³ Goode, *The Celebration of Heroes*; Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1984).

hierarchy. The historiographical shift towards empire and away from class since the 1980s and 1990s has coincided with a fundamental shift in Britain's social structure and composition, which itself demands historical explanation. As an institution, the honours system was at the meeting point between royal, civil service, political and public ideas about social order. Because imperial administrators and politicians imagined honours as a trans-imperial means of affirming both prestige and social class, they offer an unusually centralized insight into how the state conceived of a trans-imperial social hierarchy.

I analyze three key interrelated themes: the way honours helped maintain, reinforce and recreate hierarchies in a democratizing society; the way in which administrators used honours to buy loyalty from citizens and imperial subjects; and honours as a reflection of ideas about merit in modern British society. On the surface the idea of merit may seem antagonistic to hierarchy and loyalty. But I argue that, thanks to institutions like the honours system, the shape of British democracy was and continues to be unavoidably framed around a social hierarchy premised on a deferential relationship between the people and the Crown. The honours system provided a historically continuous framework for measuring merit and hierarchy with roots in an imagined past. In doing so it propagated hierarchical judgments about questions which were not necessarily hierarchical, such as the relative merits of different forms of cultural activity, or of voluntary versus philanthropic service. Through honours, which confused the distinction, these questions of merit and service became inextricable from questions of social order in Britain and the British Empire.

IV.

How did the honours system work? The majority of possible awards as well as the net total of people honored during the modern era received their awards based on decisions by politicians or bureaucrats. The system was complicated and localized, working differently in different government

departments, but ultimately it was the Prime Minister who signed off on a list of recipients of the various other honours not in the gift of the crown, which would then go to the monarch for approval – a process that was normally a formality.³⁴ A significant part of the honours system was, therefore, deeply political, and it is these politics that show up most clearly in existing histories that touch on honours.³⁵ However, civil servants had a more important part in developing the lists that made their ways to the desks of the Prime Minister and from there to the monarch than politicians. The various orders within the honours system were governed by statutes, and these statutes limited the number of possible members for most honours. Bureaucrats had the most control over the process of setting these statutory limits, and they modified and amended them in order to adapt to perceived changing conditions. In emergency or unusual situations, such as wartime or the coronation of a new monarch, the government could appoint ‘additional’ members to the various orders. Typically honours were given out twice yearly, at the New Year and the monarch’s birthday, although exceptions (for major royal events such as coronations or on the occasion of the resignation of a Prime Minister) could be made. This twice-yearly pattern was formalized in 1888.³⁶

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the British honours system was organized and ordered around a set of orders of chivalry, each with different conditions for membership. These orders were generally exclusive and had their living membership limited by statute. At the pinnacle of the system was, of course, the reigning monarch. As the ‘fount of honour’, the sovereign was the name behind the honours system, and it was their imprimatur of authority that backed most state honours throughout the empire. The system that flowed from the sovereign was, however, highly

³⁴ King George V did intervene in a number of cases, as recorded by a research assistant to Lord Beaverbrook (Max Aitken): Beaverbrook Papers, BBK/G/4/22, Parliamentary Archives UK (UKPA).

³⁵ Cannadine, *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy*, 297–325; James McMillan, *The Honours Game* (London: Frewin, 1969); De-la-Noy, *The Honours System*; Walker, *The Queen Has Been Pleased*.

³⁶ Cannadine, *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy*, 300.

complex, and decisions about how it should be modified and implemented were largely out of the hands of the monarch and his or her household, although they retained some influence and control. Politicians, various branches of the civil service, colonial governors and governments, the Viceroy of India, the Indian Civil Service, Indian Princely families, the royal household and the Central Chancery of the Orders of Knighthood (CCOK) all had a part to play in the elaborate and somewhat convoluted process of rationing out honours to the subjects of the monarch.

At the pinnacle of the honours system, in a different order of politics and social status, was the peerage. This is the area of the honours system that has most interested and exercised historians because of its integration with the British parliamentary system through the House of Lords. Peers could be Dukes, Marquesses, Earls, Viscounts or Barons, with Dukes being the highest rank and Barons the lowest. These titles were primarily derived from French titles, with Earls being the only one of Anglo-Saxon origin.³⁷ Traditionally, peers made up a socially exclusive, distinctive and politically powerful class with a great deal of stability between generations.³⁸

Cannadine has argued that the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth saw a major expansion not only in honours generally but in titles of nobility specifically, which dramatically changed the traditional structure of the aristocracy.³⁹ This involved both a significant increase in the rate at which new peers were created from 1882 and also an increase in the rate at which existing peers were promoted within the peerage.⁴⁰ Before this era, both the peerage and the honours system as a whole had been ‘essentially patrician, landed and limited’, but by the beginning of the First

³⁷ Bernard Burke, *Burke's Genealogical and Heraldic History of the Peerage, Baronetage & Knightage, Founded 1826*, 99th ed (London: Burke's peerage limited, 1949), cciv.

³⁸ For an excellent survey of the peerage as a class before the First World War, see: Andrew Adonis, *Making Aristocracy Work: The Peerage and the Political System in Britain, 1884-1914* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993).

³⁹ Cannadine, *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy*, 298–9.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 302–3.

World War the expansion of the governing elites in Britain to include professionals from a wider range of social backgrounds was reflected in the kind of people who were being made Peers.⁴¹ The Liberal government was ennobling people at a greater rate than any government before it, and by 1917 Lloyd George was handing out Peerages with a liberality that frightened even his close colleagues in order to raise funds to support his dream of a new political order outside of the traditional two-party system of Tories and Liberals.⁴² But for all of its political prominence and importance, the peerage was only a small part of any given honours list.

The Baronetcy occupied an odd position between a knighthood and a peerage. Baronets bore the title of ‘sir’, but this knighthood was hereditary, being inherited by the eldest son, and it was also associated with a particular location in Britain, like the peerage. Founded by James I in 1611 to raise money for military campaigns in Ireland, its unusual position between the orders of knighthood and the formal aristocracy was buoyed to its utility as a potent tool for patronage and fundraising.⁴³ From the beginning, Baronetcies were desirable. According to Stone, the number of knighthoods purchased by aspirant title-holders halved in 1611 when the Baronetcy was created as an option.⁴⁴ Some colonial figures – such as the New Zealand politician Sir Joseph Ward – also received baronetcies, although the formal meaning and propriety of such awards was ambiguous and politically fragile.

The only non-hereditary award that could recognize general service to the nation or to the state outside the highly specific terms of most of the other orders was the knight bachelor, which, by

⁴¹ Ibid., 301.

⁴² See: *Kelly's Handbook to the Titled, Landed and Official Classes for 1924* (London: Kelly's Directories, 1924), 42–44.

⁴³ Lawrence Stone, “The Inflation of Honours 1558-1641,” *Past & Present*, no. 14 (November 1958): 45–70.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 51.

definition, was restricted to men. The knight bachelor was an ancient award that conferred the title of 'Sir' without making the recipient a member of any chivalric order. As such, it bestowed lower status than a knighthood in any of the orders; however, it was also a more politically and socially flexible honour, as it was not hindered by any restrictions in membership, aside from unspoken conditions related to class and legitimacy. Knights bachelor claimed to be the inheritors of a medieval practice of knighthoods on the field of battle – lacking a chivalric order, knights bachelor appealed to a wider, and in some ways richer, tradition of European knighthood and chivalry.

The early twentieth century saw an increased level of organization on the part of knights bachelor with the formation of the Imperial Society of Knights Bachelor (ISKB) in 1908.⁴⁵ The society advocated for recognition of knights bachelor alongside other orders of knighthood, collected funds in order to provide charitable aid to the families of knights bachelor who had died without the means to support their children, and also served to fulfill other organizational and community functions that this large but diverse class of knights had previously lacked. After centuries of being a broad, loose assortment of title-holders without any community, the ISKB marked an important point in the history of the honour, bringing it closer in its identity, if not its formal status, to a coherent order of knighthood.

Generic knights without membership in any orders could claim ancient origins, but they ranked far down in terms of precedence, and the age of the established chivalric orders conferred a great deal more dignity and status than mere knight bachelor status could ever do. At the top of the chivalric orders were the three 'historic' regional orders, the Order of the Garter (founded in 1348), the Order of the Thistle (1687) and the Order of St Patrick (1783). These were highly exclusive and were in the gift of the monarch, meaning that Prime Ministers had no control over their

⁴⁵ Esden, *The Story of the Knights Bachelor*, 15–16.

disbursement. Unlike the lower-ranked chivalric orders, each of these had only one rank – knight – and each was restricted to people born in their respective regions: England (including Wales, although Lloyd George favored the idea of a separate Welsh Order of St David)⁴⁶, Scotland and Ireland. By the end of the First World War, extinction beckoned for the Order of St Patrick as Ireland set off on a different constitutional and honorific course, but the Thistle and the Garter were highly desired and elite orders. Recipients could be counted (and certainly counted themselves) as the highest men of the land and usually included the most distinguished gentry as well as prominent former politicians – especially Prime Ministers.

The exclusivity of these three orders was carefully fostered and maintained. Their members were almost exclusively already part of the aristocracy, although in 1912 George V bestowed the Garter upon liberal statesman Edward Grey while he was still a commoner (the first to be so honored in this way since Walpole).⁴⁷ On one occasion in the immediate aftermath of the First World War, Lord Curzon saw that the newest knight of the Garter, the Viscount Milner, was wearing his sash on the wrong shoulder at a levee at St James' Palace. Annoyed at his colleagues' carelessness with the traditions of the Garter, he reputedly wrote Milner an angry letter in which he suggested that this indicated that the King had perhaps been mistaken in dubbing him. Curzon 'wrote Milner a letter saying that it was almost inconceivable that anyone who had been given this ancient Order, the highest Order in the land should not even take the trouble to ascertain how it was worn.' Milner had his revenge, however, when a short while later Curzon made a similar mistake, and was teased by the King for wearing his own Order of the Garter Riband incorrectly in the presence of Milner, who 'afterwards wrote to Curzon, repeating nearly word for word that it was

⁴⁶ Order of St David, HO/286/55, National Archives UK (NA).

⁴⁷ Cannadine, *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy*, 301.

almost inconceivable that anyone who had been given this ancient Order, etc. etc.⁴⁸ To Curzon and Milner, occasional errors in ceremony notwithstanding, the Order of the Garter was a source of great pride, a pride that was maintained by its exclusivity and, to a certain extent, its complexity. Holders of the Garter should know how to wear it and understand the many traditions that surrounded it.

The Order of the Thistle was intended as an equivalent to the Garter, but for Scottish subjects of the united monarchy, when it was founded in 1687 as part of what Matikkala has identified as a wider period of refinement and change in the British honours system.⁴⁹ From the early eighteenth century onwards, it was used as a 'junior British order with special regards to Scotland', and by the beginning of the twentieth century dignitaries with ties to both Scotland and England held the Garter and the Thistle simultaneously.⁵⁰ Its junior cousin, the Order of Saint Patrick, had been formed in 1783 with the intent of creating an equivalent Order for Ireland, but its existence and use were complicated by political strife in Ireland, and by 1922 it was dormant.

The Order of the Bath was the next most senior award after the Garter, Thistle and St. Patrick. In 1917 it was most closely associated with the military, although it was awarded in two sections – a civil and a military division. Founded by George I in 1725, its name referred to the medieval practice of prospective knights bathing in order to purify themselves before the ceremony in which they were dubbed, and an early-twentieth-century historian of the Order erroneously claimed that its origins lay in medieval rather than eighteenth-century knighthood practices.⁵¹ At the

⁴⁸ Frederick Edward Grey Ponsonby, *Recollections of Three Reigns*, 1st American ed. (New York: Dutton, 1952), 489–90.

⁴⁹ Antti Matikkala, *The Orders of Knighthood and the Formation of the British Honours System, 1660-1760* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2008), 1–2.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 361; Cannadine, *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy*, 307.

⁵¹ Jocelyn Henry Temple Perkins, *The Most Honourable Order of the Bath. Second and Enlarged Edition* (London: Faith Press, 1920).

beginning of the nineteenth century it was reorganized as a primarily military order: although senior state servants generally could also be appointed, the military still received a larger quota than the civil service. It was limited by statute to a certain number of living members, and it was also distributed in three ranks (Knight Grand Cross, Knight and Companion). Because so large a part of the awards to the Order were to men in the armed forces, the War Office and Admiralty played a major role in selection of candidates, just as the incentive of receiving a rank in the Order was an important factor in senior military politics..⁵²

In 1818 the future George IV founded the Order of St. Michael and St. George with a three-level structure similar to that of the Order of the Bath. For five decades it was reserved for the purpose of recognizing natives of the Ionian Islands, over whom the Crown had just come to rule.⁵³ However, in 1868 it was repurposed with a much broader basis and constituency, looking outwards to the empire as a whole. At the time, the Order of the Bath had only a very small allocation to civilians, and the growing number of senior positions in the empire meant that there was great demand for honours among those working in overseas territories and diplomatic service.⁵⁴ It was reserved for recipients whose work dealt with foreign relations or imperial matters. At the height of empire there was substantial demand, especially as the foreign service could plausibly claim that pre- and post-nominal letters and titles were important for the status and reception of the Empire's representatives.

⁵² 'Recommendations: Honours and Rewards, April 10th to Sept 30th', RAMC 1186/3, Wellcome Library (WL).

⁵³ For a detailed account of its foundation, see: Galloway, *The Order of St Michael and St George*, 9–15.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 61.

The Order of Saint Michael and Saint George covered a large and potentially thorny territory.⁵⁵ Distinguished citizens of the self-governing dominions could possibly aspire to knighthoods, but only politicians and senior or important civil servants in Dominion governments were likely to get ranks in this Order, with a few exceptions. It was a coveted decoration, but the Colonial and Foreign Office control meant that it was even more strictly administered than other honours that appeared in the Prime Minister's List. At the end of the First World War, writer and politician John Buchan quietly campaigned for a knighthood in the order, even though his credentials and background scarcely warranted selection under the customary terms of the order.⁵⁶ While Arthur Balfour was sympathetic to Buchan's propagandistic and political work during the war, he told Beaverbrook (who was lobbying for Buchan) that 'we only have a very small store [of awards] and it would really not be fair to rob men who have been looking forward to this Honour after many years under the Foreign Office in order to reward services, however meritorious, rendered to other departments.'⁵⁷ Beaverbrook subsequently suggested to Buchan that he might have an easier time lobbying the Prime Minister for a Knighthood in the Order of the Bath, which was more directly under the control of the Prime Minister's office.⁵⁸ He failed, however, and had to wait until the 1930s. For Buchan, it was worth the wait, as he eventually received multiple high-level decorations, including a GCMG for his work as Governor General of Canada, and a peerage.

The Order of Saint Michael and Saint George covered much of the empire. However in India another, more elaborate, system governed honours for British and Indian people. The Order

⁵⁵ Ibid., 137–72.

⁵⁶ See: Ibid., 223.

⁵⁷ Balfour to Beaverbrook, 13 December 1918, Beaverbrook Papers, BBK/G/4/22, UKPA.

⁵⁸ Beaverbrook to Buchan, 20 December 1918, Beaverbrook Papers, BBK/G/4/22, UKPA.

of the Star of India (OSI) and the Order of the Indian Empire (OIE) were founded in 1861 and 1878 respectively to serve a variety of purposes in India and were awarded to both British and Indians. The OSI was exclusive, and awarded in three classes (again patterned on the precedent set by the Order of the Bath, with Knights Grand Cross, Knights Commander and Commanders) primarily to very senior civil servants and Indian princely rulers. The OIE was less exclusive and while many senior Indian princes and British civil servants in India were members of both orders, the OIE was given out in greater numbers to a much wider social profile of Indians and Europeans.

It was not just in India that the Victorian state and crown attempted to adapt honours for use in a changing world. Another new honour at the close of the nineteenth century was the Royal Victorian Order (RVO). Founded in 1896, and with its first list in 1897, the year of Queen Victoria's diamond jubilee, it broke from the three-level structure, instead being awarded at Grand Cross, Knight Commander, Commander, Member (fourth class) and Member (fifth class) levels. The RVO was for people who had served the monarch directly. The monarch, not the Prime Minister, chose who received it, making it highly unusual at the time. This five-level structure meant that it could be used to honour people from a wider range of social backgrounds than those chivalric orders that had commander as their lowest level, although it did not include women until the 1930s, Victoria having been strongly opposed to this idea.⁵⁹ It was also used to honour foreign dignitaries and was given out on occasion to members of other royal families. It was particularly associated with royal visits, tours, coronations and jubilees. Diplomats also customarily received it if the monarch visited the country where they were the head of the British mission.⁶⁰ Clergy were also frequent recipients.

⁵⁹ Peter Galloway, *Royal Service* (London: Victorian Publishing, 1996), 29.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 25.

The creation of the Royal Victorian Order was driven to a large extent by the political control over the honours system. Queen Victoria lacked a personal award that could be distributed by her to crown servants and she herself was behind the creation of the new Order.⁶¹ Edward VII was enthusiastic about the order and distributed it liberally, especially at level of the MVO (fifth class).⁶² However, not all were happy with the new order, especially at the higher levels, where some recipients regarded it as unnecessary. Edward Elgar, famous for his personal service to the monarchy in composing ceremonial music, privately called it ‘wretched’ when he received it in 1927, while Spencer Cavendish, the eighth Duke of Devonshire – scornful about honours generally, called it ‘the thing’ when he was offered a GCVO in 1907, and attempted to decline a MVO on behalf of his agent (without heeding his agent’s desire or otherwise to hold membership in the Order).⁶³ For some, the opening up the Order to a wider range of classes rendered it passé.

The most immediate burst of expansion before the First World War saw the introduction of two orders that did not grant knighthoods to their recipients, the Order of Merit (OM) and the Imperial Service Order (ISO). The fact that they were single-rank, non-titular orders was the only thing they had in common. The OM was founded in 1902 as a highly exclusive (twenty-four living members) honour in the gift of the monarch that would short-circuit the politics and patronage involved in existing honours and pick out the most distinguished scientific, literary, artistic and military figures of the land.⁶⁴ The initial wave of appointments in 1902 included men such as Lord Kelvin and the Earl Kitchener. By 1917 it included Sir Edward Elgar, Sir George Trevelyan and

⁶¹ Ibid., 2–3.

⁶² Ibid., 15.

⁶³ Ibid., 28; Ponsonby, *Recollections of Three Reigns*, 205.

⁶⁴ Phillip Mountbatten, “Foreword”, in Martin, *The Order of Merit: One Hundred Years of Matchless Honour*, xvii.

Thomas Hardy. While it did not grant any title, it conferred higher status than most knighthoods, and its exclusivity made it very desirable. Many recipients already possessed titles and other high honours, as the names above suggest, but for some potential recipients the lack of a title made the honour itself more acceptable. For example, John Galsworthy famously (and very publicly) declined a knighthood in 1918, but accepted the OM a few years later.⁶⁵ Women were eligible, although Florence Nightingale (1907) was the first and only female member until 1965.

The ISO was designed for a very different purpose. Founded like the OM in 1902, it was an award for long service in clerical and administrative branches of the civil service. In practice it functioned as a kind of fourth class to the Order of St Michael and St George.⁶⁶ In order to qualify, recipients had to have served for twenty-five years or more, although for workers in conditions deemed by the Pensions Board to be ‘unhealthy’ this was reduced to sixteen years.⁶⁷ Unlike the OM, its recipients were not well-known personalities, and it had a low profile, appearing at the end of honours lists. It was initially given out in substantial numbers to British men and women all around the United Kingdom and the Empire, all of whom became ‘companions’ of the order. The first set of appointments in March 1903 included a number of titled civil servants, such as Sir Henry Sanderson, the Permanent Under-Secretary of State for the Foreign Office, but such appointments were unusual. The majority of companions of the order were people like H.M.I. Swaine, the secretary of the Irish Local Government board, or Bristol Postmaster R.C. Tombs.⁶⁸ Later lists were more oriented towards workers in the empire.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 237.

⁶⁶ Galloway, *The Order of St Michael and St George*, 146.

⁶⁷ ‘Statutes of the Imperial Service Order’, *London Gazette*, 8 August 1902, 5172.

⁶⁸ *London Gazette*, 31 March 1903, 2141-2.

While these two orders were very different in focus and clientele, they both reveal an impulse to try and get away from the perceived problems of the honours system as it was at the beginning of the twentieth century. Both orders ostensibly focused on kinds of merit and service that were not associated with party politics, and both attempted (at different ends of the social scale) to provide a kind of recognition that would be unsullied by patronage. These two orders both seem to address the wider cross-party movement for ‘national efficiency’, which preoccupied many British politicians and commentators around the turn of the century.⁶⁹ The lack of titles was not the only break from the past with the OM and the ISO. While in practice they were hierarchical, they recognized particular kinds of achievement and merit that had previously rated relatively low on the scale of honours and, in ideological terms at least, shifted emphasis from social to professional hierarchies.

The above orders and awards were not the only components of the honours system, which was augmented by a wide range of medals and other honours. Medals for gallantry and exceptional service in war and peace time, for example, were part of the royal honours system. While they were generally seen as a separate kind of honour, there was some overlap in the use of orders and knighthoods for rewarding specific exceptional actions. The Privy Councillorship, which was given to senior judges and distinguished politicians in Britain and the Dominions, was also part of the honours system. Like the peerage, it served a special political and judicial function, and it had a very narrow range of recipients. Many politicians, especially ones disenchanted with the honours system as a whole, desired the Privy Councillorship above other honours. Andrew Bonar Law scorned all letters beside his name except for PC.⁷⁰ There were also a couple of relatively small orders

⁶⁹ G. R Searle, *The Quest for National Efficiency: A Study in British Politics and Political Thought, 1899-1914* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971).

⁷⁰ Max Aitken Beaverbrook, *Men and Power, 1917-1918* (London: Hutchinson, 1956), xix.

exclusively for women in Britain and India, set up in the Victorian era, in order to make up for the fact that women were ineligible for any of the major chivalric orders.

Underlying the empire-wide, complicated, dynamic and deeply hierarchical political and cultural entity that was the honours system in 1917 was an uneven network of recognition and distinction. The complexities of the system were known only to a tiny proportion of the subjects of the crown, and only a slightly larger proportion of the empire could realistically expect to receive some of these honours. The relative proportions and social profiles of potential recipients differed in different places – in India and the Dominions the Indian Orders and the Order of St Michael and St George meant that more people were eligible for honours than in many other parts of the empire. In Britain itself, the proportion of the middle class who were eligible for honours of some sort or another was rising, but was restricted by the specialization of the orders of chivalry, and women were still largely excluded. The Indian orders were more flexible in rewarding a variety of different contributions to the state and community than the British ones, where only the knight bachelorhood could be applied in a widespread fashion to the male citizenry at large, and not at all to women.

This was a problem that had been pressing for many decades before the First World War. Where previously the specialized nature of the old orders had sufficed to serve the political purposes of the honours system, the partial inclusion of new professional and financial elites in honours lists meant that the political and ‘corrupt’ nature of the system was exposed more clearly in a society and a political system that had changed rapidly and in significant ways through the nineteenth century. Demand for honours always exceeded supply in one way or another, but the shape that that demand took was shifting, too.⁷¹ As different social groups became more invested in the state and provided new kinds of service to the state with the development of an increasingly specialized civil service and

⁷¹ Matikkala, *The Orders of Knighthood and the Formation of the British Honours System, 1660-1760*, 361.

new social services that were not merely philanthropic, the honours system came under pressure to include them.

Another concept for thinking about who deserved honours cut across this dynamic between merit and hierarchy: that of ‘personality’. Deborah Cohen has argued that at the turn of the century there was a shift in British culture from a focus on ‘character’ – with its internalized focus on self-control and self-policing – to a more public, display oriented focus on ‘personality’.⁷² This concept corresponded with the more traditional, patrician approach to honours, where the greatest men in the land were given honours because of their fame, dignity and family background. Frederick Guest wrote to Lloyd George in 1919 that he had talked over Lloyd George’s honours list with Winston Churchill, who was largely positive: ‘the cases which I made out, on merit, for each [potential recipient] seem to be very strong and his only comment is that the list lacks distinction.’ The last two words were partly a wry comment on the fact that, on this huge list, so many had clearly paid for their honours, but it also reflected the complexity of attitudes about the nature of merit, personality and service – Guest’s cases for the ‘merit’ of each candidate and Churchill’s view of their ‘distinction’ were different.⁷³ With the decline of aristocratic predominance over politics, the honours system and public life; fame, too was more widely distributed and found. What had once been easily determined about a person – their worth and worthiness to hold a given title or honorific – was less clear. This was to become even more of a significant issue in terms of the honours lists in a later period, but the importance of this idea of personality resonated through the way in which honours were administered and discussed in public.

⁷² Deborah Cohen, *Household Gods: The British and Their Possessions* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 125.

⁷³ Churchill to Guest, 31 January 1919, Lloyd George Papers, LG/F/21/3, UKPA.

V.

Chapter one picks up this story in 1917, when the Crown established the Order of the British Empire in order to deal with these structural problems that existed before the war. For the rest of the century, a majority of honours given out in the British Empire were in this order, in part thanks to its five-tier structure, which accommodated a wider range of social classes. It also was a more flexible honour than older orders, which focused on a narrow range of kinds of service. The new Order could technically be given out to any middle-class man or woman. The founding of the Order of the British Empire came out of the wartime necessity of acknowledging the widespread voluntary mobilization of all of British society. However, it also coincided with the biggest honours scandal in modern British history. Many elite commentators and politicians saw the large number of honours created by David Lloyd George and his government in the last years of the war and the first of the peace as corrupt and as demeaning to the honours system and, by extension, to the King. The Order of the British Empire, while separate from Lloyd George's use of high honours for fundraising, was tarnished by the scandal. The scandal was driven by an elitist sense that the new Order was being given out far too generously (by 1922 over twenty thousand people had received a rank in it). For the new recipients and their communities, however, the Order gave welcome recognition and opened up new possibilities for social display. In the short term the creation of the Political Honours Scrutiny Committee and the fall of Lloyd George seemed the most dramatic and important events relating to the honours system at the end of the war. However, the lasting impact of the events of this period was the creation not only of a new Order but of demand for and interest in honours on the part of communities and interest groups throughout the empire who had not previously been part of the previously rarified, elite system of distinction.

On the administrative side the events of 1917–1922 transformed the way the honours system was managed by the state. Chapter two explores the interwar period, during which the

Treasury consolidated and centralized honours, setting low quotas and attempting to define narrowly what kind of person received what rank of award through looking at pay scales and formal rank as measures of social standing. The honours system was regulated, formalized and standardized across the empire and became a means through which service to the empire and social hierarchy within it could be defined. One consequence was that the Order of the British Empire, which had been founded to reward people for voluntary service to the state, became more of a civil service award. Even among those honours which were not given to central civil servants, a majority went to paid workers with some connection to a government department. In the dominions, governments tended to focus more on giving honours to distinguished citizens for valuable service. In the non-self-governing colonies honours were deployed largely as a tool for promoting loyalty and were often used cynically. At the same time, people, nationalities and communities to whom the honours system had been opened up in 1917 clamored for more recognition and attempted to defend and reinforce the tarnished prestige of the new Order. For the Treasury officials and royal servants who determined honours policy, numerical restriction was the key to restoring the prestige of honours. But to the recipients, *who* received the honour mattered far more than the number of people who received it. The sense of belonging and affirmation on the part of these newly-integrated communities was taken for granted by the Treasury and by the Crown, who assumed that expressions of enthusiasm over honours were primarily signs of loyalty and deference and who saw any sign of dissent or displeasure over the people who received honours as in extremely bad taste.

Chapter three investigates how the state tried to avoid a repeat of the First World War during the Second. In 1939, as a new war with Germany approached, politicians, royals and civil servants alike were keen not to repeat the perceived honorific excesses of the last war. Neville Chamberlain suspended political honours immediately after war was declared. Civilian honours were initially also highly restricted. While honours were not traditionally used as gallantry awards, during

the Second World War honours for gallantry became an important issue because they were one of the only ways to reward gallant civilians, especially heroes of the merchant marine. As the war developed, the civilian demand for honours grew and the initial restrictions were lifted. Government experts – scientists, engineers and statisticians in particular – were rewarded more than other groups. In the empire, too, the neat system of balanced scales of honours was disrupted by war. Most self-governing dominions rejected civilian honours and gave only military ones. In India, the Indian Civil Service continued to see as being more a tool for loyalty and less a reward for service. For Indian nationalists, this made honours all the more a symbol of imperial oppression.

The fourth chapter of this dissertation diverges from the chronological narrative to examine how decolonization reshaped the imperial honours system that had been imagined by the founders of the Order of the British Empire and the Indian orders. The immediate post-war period was an era of fragmentation and controversy. Decolonization disrupted the empire-wide scope of the honours system before 1939. The honours system was often a weight around the neck of successor governments in former colonies. In some, political leaders saw honours as a powerful symbol of an obsolete imperial structure – the Order of the British Empire itself was named for an objectionable institution. Within Britain, the words: ‘Order of the British Empire’ went from being a literal description of a global chivalric award to being a quaint, if a little anachronistic, label with traditional value within the space of a few decades. In the forty years following the Second World War, therefore, the imperial basis of the honours system in 1939 was broken up. The decline of the British Empire seemed to pose a fatal challenge to the notion, built up and reinforced between 1922 and 1945, of an honours system that stretched coherently across the empire. But the extent of the disintegration varied from place to place, and the concept of diverse nations united under a Commonwealth honours system proved more resilient than empire itself. While the idea of honours as a means of enforcing loyalty and hierarchy was dying, the international nature of the honours

system was more resilient, especially in cases where former colonies and dominions could maintain symbolic links to the Crown while discarding inconvenient administrative structures.

In 1947–48 the civil service conducted an extensive review of the honours system, coming to the conclusion that it was too civil-servant oriented, and that it needed to reach out into the community in order to maintain credibility. Chapter five looks at the various attempts by post-war governments to diversify the honours system to meet new social priorities. The honours system reached out into new cultural areas and interest groups. As in the founding years of the Order of the British Empire, inclusion in the honours system could be a mark of affirmation or integration for groups who had previously seldom seen reward from the state, such as local charity workers. The logic of honours that had been laid out in the immediate post-First World War years – that prestige came from numerical restriction, that its most important awards were its most elite, and that its most important function was reinforcing a social hierarchy – was eroded, if not destroyed. The relative success in appealing to new groups in Britain preserved honours against charges of obsolescence and helped create and renew ties between the newly-included interest groups and the Crown. However, concerns over political corruption and cynicism about the civil service’s role in the system continued to excite public skepticism. Honours still overwhelmingly went to people who had been paid to do the work for which they were honored, even though Harold Wilson succeeded in reducing the number of central civil servants who received honours in favor of nurses, teachers and others in local services.

The final chapter examines the reconfiguration of honours in the wake of the social and political changes of the 1980s. In the 1980s and 1990s the proportion of non-civil servants in honours lists increased and honorific rank was theoretically decoupled from perceived social class. Through John Major’s 1993 reforms the majority of honours returned to their First World War focus on voluntary rather than paid service. These reforms were popular. They (with their roots in

the 1960s) could variously be described as ‘democratic’, ‘liberal’, or ‘individualistic’, and their final success in 1993 suggests affinities as well as discontinuity between the reforming impulses of 1965 and those of 1980. Their success lay in their ability to bypass the political and bureaucratic basis of honours and renew a sense of integration and identity between recipients, their communities and the Queen. These reforms thus reintegrated two functions of the monarchy: its role as the affirmer of national merit through the honours system and its status as the leader of the voluntary sector in Britain. However, even though the honours system had evolved away from earlier interwar or immediate post-war models, this evolution was towards new forms of social hierarchy and social order. By the end of the century the honours system operated at two main tiers: in the upper, professionals, philanthropists and civil servants received high honours for their work, while in the lower volunteers and community workers received MBEs and OBEs.

Chapter One: 'British Democracy's Own Order of Chivalry': War and the Expansion of Honours, 1917–1922

I.

In 1918, Mr. Hall of Staffordshire received a letter from the Prime Minister's office offering him the chance to become a Commander of the British Empire (CBE). He politely declined. The potential reasons for this decision were obvious to contemporaries and to historians. The specific conditions of British society and the British honours system at this time provided many reasons for respectable, politically involved and patriotic citizens of the Empire to look askance at the new wave of honours being offered to a larger and more diverse profile of the population than ever before. Yet, the relatively high rate of people declining honours was tiny (no more than 1 percent) in comparison to the thousands of people who accepted and welcomed them.¹ The ostensibly extraordinary rate of rejected honours has received more attention than the more common choice: for the first time, between 1917 and 1922, the British honours system reached a constituency beyond a small set of social, administrative, military and political elites. This constituency remained socially limited and hierarchically organized, but the move to acknowledge the voluntary war service of a large portion of the civilian population was significant in many ways that went beyond the immediate political impact and aims of the expansion of the honours system.

During the war the nature of the civilian voluntary effort justified a transformation of the honours system. In 1913 a few hundred men throughout the British Empire received a military or civilian honour. Five years later, the total appointments to civilian honours alone were an order of magnitude higher, and for the first time honours lists included women alongside men in a major order of chivalry. This expansion was prompted by the perception that the civilian voluntary effort

¹ Discussions of rates of declining honours in extant records tend to be vague, but for some limited discussion of early 1920s rates see: Birthday Honours, 1926, T 352/14, National Archives [NA].

needed some reward because of its size and quality. Royal officials, in active cooperation with the government, created a new order of chivalry to accommodate the civilian voluntary effort.

For A. Winton Thorpe, the author of *Burke's Handbook to the Order of the British Empire*, this shift represented a triumph of merit over hierarchy, of service over 'blood'.² In a revealing introduction to the Handbook – published once in 1921 – Thorpe connected the order to a rearrangement of British society that prized merit over class, dispensing with old class distinctions:

Democracy, thus animated, won the war; the Order of the British Empire is in the truest sense of the word the British Democracy's own Order of Chivalry. All classes are blended therein; the old distinctive qualification of being 'a gentleman of blood' has gone and left no trace; service is the only test of admission, and the service of women here finds its recognition in exactly the same way as the service of men. The newest and latest-born of the British Orders of Chivalry may therefore well be proud of its long list of members, and of the vast unnumbered host of war workers – unrecognised in the way of honorific distinction, but not unappreciated – whose representatives they are.³

However for others, especially but not limited to 'gentlemen of blood', this outpouring of honour was less warranted; a consequence of social disintegration, corruption and a loss of respect for social distinction. The combination of voluntary service and a prestigious institution that was traditionally limited to elites was uneasy, raising questions about the value of different kinds of service deserved recognition in ways that granted social prestige.

During and after the war the care of the wounded and the crippled, in particular, became the job of the public, not of the government, in Britain – a practice that contrasted with continental models, especially Germany.⁴ Volunteer and paid (often the distinction was unclear) nurses of the

² A. Winton Thorpe, *Burke's Handbook to the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire* (London: The Burke publishing co., ltd, 1921), 7.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Deborah Cohen, *The War Come Home: Disabled Veterans in Britain and Germany, 1914-1939* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 15–60.

Red Cross and the Order of Saint John staffed military hospitals. Celebrities, magnates and society figures raised money for these and other charities. Munitions workers were fed by canteens, often set up and organized by middle- and upper-class volunteers. Women in particular, excluded from the front lines, enthusiastically pursued opportunities to contribute to the empire-wide effort to wage a modern war effectively. These opportunities far exceeded those of any war in living memory, creating new debts between the state and the public in addition to the more tangible ones between the state and financiers.

Even before the beginning of the war, officials recognized the British state's inability to reward those who had rendered it voluntary service, especially when compared to continental states. In terms of formal honours, Britain was exclusive relative to other European states. This could be a source of pride. The British government looked on with some satisfaction in the late 1880s when the French President, Jules Grévy, was forced to resign because of accusations that his son-in-law, Daniel Wilson, had peddled awards of the *Légion d'honneur*.⁵ Likewise, the ambitions of Imperial Germany's honours system seemed to overreach its status: its newness aroused skepticism rather than loyalty among many middle-class recipients.⁶ But continental systems were more flexible in being able to reward the cultural and philanthropic service of non-elites. In Denmark, King Frederick VI expanded the Order of the Dannebrog in response to the growing importance of the middle classes in 1808. This re-establishment of the Order declared, in principle, that it could be awarded to any Danish citizen, regardless of rank, on the sole criteria of the magnitude of their service. Napoleon's *Légion d'honneur* served as a model for the Danes: it was established in 1802 with merit (again in principle) as the sole criteria. In practice, these awards did still tend to reflect social

⁵ For an account of this scandal, see: Adrien Dansette, *L'affaire Wilson et la chute du Président Grévy*. (Paris: Librairie académique Perrin, 1936).

⁶ Alastair Thompson, "Honours Uneven: Decorations, the State and Bourgeois Society in Imperial Germany," *Past & Present*, 144 (August 1994): 171–204.

hierarchies, but the British system was less meritocratic and egalitarian. Many within British elites were satisfied with this arrangement, but the government looked to more flexible and wide-ranging continental systems and noted their political impact.

Towards the end of 1915 the Keeper of the Privy Purse and recognized honours expert Sir Frederick Ponsonby pulled together general discussion of the need for a popular order that would reward the war effort at home.⁷ In a November memorandum to the Secretary of the Central Chancery of the Orders of Knighthood [CCOK], he argued that the UK lacked a formal and systematic way of rewarding people who served British society through culture or through philanthropic work, comparing this situation with that in France, where the *Légion d'Honneur* recognized cultural service directly.⁸ The knight bachelor did this to a certain extent, but was a blunt instrument that could only be used on men above a certain high level of seniority, class and fame in their profession. A new order of chivalry was needed to accommodate service outside of the traditional state, aristocratic and military functions of the Orders of the Bath, Garter, and Saint Michael and Saint George. This proposal set in motion a complex and sometimes tortuous series of negotiations between the royal household, the Central Chancery of the Orders of Knighthood, the government and various other interested parties and honours experts, which would end in the first set of thousands of awards of the new Order of the British Empire to Britons from a variety of social backgrounds in June of 1917.

From the beginning, the new Order was carefully planned, with officials taking multiple different factors into consideration. The politicians, civil servants and royal servants involved envisaged two main challenges in creating a new order of chivalry. The first set of problems revolved around fitting the order into the internal logic of the honours system as a whole, the

⁷ Peter Galloway, *The Order of the British Empire* (London: Central Chancery of the Orders of Knighthood, 1996), 1.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 2–4.

second was persuading the public – and in particular social elites – of its legitimacy and usefulness. Both of these reflect the high social position of the people who ran the honours system. The problem of integrating the new order with the wider honours system and rendering it ceremonially sound was only interesting to a narrow group of honours administrators, but it was immensely important to these experts.

An ‘order of British democracy’ that recognized groups such as women and large sections of the middle class faced a number of institutional barriers to its actual implementation. The challenge was that this was to be the first order of knighthood to allow women an equivalent rank to knight. The idea that women might receive a decoration of their own (the Order of St Margaret) was mooted but eventually rejected, while what to call female knights remained a thorny point. Ponsonby proposed ‘Dame’ as a possible title for women.⁹ It had a supposedly medieval heritage and distinguished between women who had received the Order and wives of knights, who held the title ‘Lady’. This was a controversial choice, and King George V himself disliked it because its only modern usage was associated with the Primrose League (others feared it because it was ‘innovative’).¹⁰ In the end the committee adopted ‘Dame’ because they wanted to maintain formal equality between male knights and their female equivalent in order to uphold the principle of equal reward and equal recognition.¹¹ ‘Lady’ would have been confusing in formal and social situations because it did not recognize that the holder of the title herself held it in her own right. The initial honours lists for the Order included large numbers of socially, philanthropically and professionally distinguished women, but as a proportion of total appointments the number of women remained

⁹ Ibid., 4, 16–17.

¹⁰ Ibid., 16.

¹¹ Ibid., 17.

small until the end of the century. Husbands of Dames received no title, a difference that remains through to the present day.

Because of its broad potential range of recipients, the new order was conceived as having five ranks – more than any existing honour bar the Royal Victorian Order. Like other orders, the top two ranks would be knighthoods: Knights Grand Cross as the first class and Knights Commander as the second. These ranks would be distributed along a class basis, with the G, K and C (Knight Grand Cross, Knight/Dame and Commander] ranks scaled similarly to those of other orders. Another hurdle was determining the structure of the lower ranks. The Royal Victorian Order was organized into five classes, but with the clumsy system of having the bottom two classes named ‘Members (fourth class)’ and ‘Members (fifth class)’. These awards tended to go to minor servants of the royal family, such as detectives and gardeners. The larger and more expansive new order was more difficult to scale. The natural solution for this problem was to use occupation and government rank as indicators of the esoteric mix of class, seniority and distinction that determined rank in orders of chivalry.

The medal of the new Order was for people of insufficient distinction to qualify for any ranks within it. It did not give membership, nor did it bestow any post-nominal titles, a fact that was to cause considerable confusion over the coming decades. In essence, this award was for working-class people. Only those from a ‘genteel’ background were supposed to be inducted into orders of chivalry (even at the ‘member’ level). The immediate demand for the medal was for industrial workers – especially in munitions factories. These medals were not technically part of the honours system, but like the similar Royal Victorian and Imperial Service Medals, the British Empire Medal is interesting because it rewarded some of the same kinds of service as the equivalent honour, but was not one because its recipients were not ‘gentlemen’ (or daughters/wives of such). While in most cases during the war it was relatively easy to distinguish between those who should be awarded the

medal versus a rank in the order, this class-based division was to become increasingly problematic in the decades to come.

Officials also considered a range of names for the new order. A long list of possible names formulated in May 1916 included the Order of Saint George, the Order of the Golden Rose, the Order of the United Empire and the Order of Mars (the last was dismissed as being too pagan).¹² The author of this note lamented that there was ‘nothing in the names of any existing British orders which is of any assistance to us in choosing a title’, the Garter and the Bath being ‘ribald’ names, which were to be avoided for the new order, with its broad intended scope across social, sex and geographic boundaries.¹³ The symbolic potential and evocative power of ‘British Empire’ proved compelling in these deliberations – it was always at the front of the pack, and its eventual victory was relatively uncontroversial. The sense that the war effort was an imperial effort was a powerful motivation to give the order an imperial name. As later chapters will show, this decision was to have far-reaching consequences.

Another technical issue was whether or not to make titles compulsory to the two highest ranks of the order. A number of politicians, including Lloyd George, advocated for an order where recipients could choose whether or not to add a pre-nominal title to their name if they received an honour at the knight or knight grand cross level. Because of the honours scandals and the nascent feeling in some dominions that titles were undemocratic, the end of the First World War was the high point of resistance to titular honours. In 1918 John Galsworthy was to decline a knighthood in very public fashion when he insisted that the government withdraw his recently-gazetted honour.¹⁴ As Thomas Hardy remarked about this incident, Galsworthy ‘scored both ways. He has had the

¹² ‘Name for the New Order’, Revised Statutes of the Order of the British Empire, 1918-49, HO 45/22799, NA.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Stanley Martin, *The Order of Merit: One Hundred Years of Matchless Honour* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2006), 237.

honour of being knighted and the honour of having refused a knighthood. Many men would envy him.¹⁵ Galsworthy himself felt that ‘Literature is its own reward’, arguing that ‘artists in Letters, especially those who attempt criticism of life and philosophy, should not accept titles’ (this did not stop him from entering the exclusive, but non-titular, Order of Merit a few years later).¹⁶ By the time the Order of the British Empire was created, however, the general feeling against titles, so particularly manifest in the Nickle Resolution, was not centralized enough to defeat the priority of keeping the precedence of honours coherent and, in spite of support from Lloyd George, the idea of having optional titles was dropped as being unfeasible.

The insistence on retaining titles for all members of the upper two ranks of the Order fed into the simultaneous creation of another order – that of the Companions of Honour. Envisaged as a junior version of the Order of Merit, it was a non-titular award bearing no precedence that was restricted to 65 members distributed across the UK and the rest of the empire. It was supposed to reward outstanding achievement in the arts, sciences, industry and religion, although Rose pointed out that the initial appointments were primarily names who were important to industry and agriculture during the war, sniffing that ‘the name of Smuts has lone survived in the public memory’.¹⁷ The CH was a partial acknowledgement of the trend among artistic and literary figures to decline honours because they did not want to bear a title. It also recognized the position of clergy, who were not permitted to take on the martial character of knights or to receive the militaristic accolade (the process of the monarch dubbing a new knight with a sword) that was an essential part of the knighthood ceremony. More distinguished figures than could be covered by the highly limited

¹⁵ Ibid., 237.

¹⁶ Ibid., 238. Galsworthy was less shy about accepting the Order of Merit, which does not bear a title (but which is ahead of knighthoods in terms of precedence and status) ten years later in 1928.

¹⁷ Kenneth Rose, *King George V* (London: Macmillan, 1984), 259.

OM were seen to want or need a title-less distinction, especially as the senior ranks of the Order of the British Empire were to carry titles.

The complexities of planning the new order show how deeply preoccupied the administrators who ran the honours system were with fine details about how the Order would deal with variations of social position and gender among its potential recipients. Administrators had a very specific idea about how the new Order would work, based on both existing precedents and a hope that it would be flexible enough to expand the British honours system as a whole to a new audience. But within months of its creation, the new Order had become something far larger than what Ponsonby and his colleagues initially imagined. Numbers, as always with honours, were a major issue as the new order was planned. Estimates and opinions as to the appropriate number of appointments in each of the five grades of the order changed a great deal during its evolution. Initial proposals restricted the order to modest numbers in line with the Orders of St Michael and St George or the Bath. Quickly, it became clear that such distributions would not be sufficient to meet the needs of the massive civilian effort and the scope of Lloyd George's plans for the order. Furthermore, while it was initially conceived as a civilian Order, the military (straining against the confines of the statutes of the Order of the Bath) pushed for inclusion. Such a request could hardly be denied in wartime, and a military branch of the Order was created alongside the civilian one. Many a civil servant lived to regret the complexity and bloat that this decision brought. Within a year, the number of appointments to the civil and military divisions of the order was widely considered within the civil service and the royal household to be out of control.

II.

Wartime awards of the Order of the British Empire went to a range of different groups and people. At the upper levels of the civilian division, the government (at the insistence of the CCOK) made a

concerted effort to give distinction to the order through the first list, which was envisaged as containing ‘only eminent names’.¹⁸ The first list contained 19 Knights and Dames Grand Cross, 48 Knight and Dame Commanders, 79 Commanders, 70 Officers, 53 Members and 52 medalists. It included various famous and distinguished Britons (no overseas or imperial appointments were made until the next list) such as the Viscount Gladstone and various volunteer heads of charitable institutions.¹⁹ This was in itself large, but within a year these initial appointments were dwarfed by thousands of others, within Britain and in the wider empire.

The order was created to serve a different kind of potential recipient than any existing order of chivalry. But who exactly was being offered (and accepting) all these honours? Breaking the varied recipients down by profession or by class is difficult, but there were certain kinds of people who were typical recipients. The total numbers for the 1917 to 1920 period were high – around 20,000, most of whom were at the MBE and OBE rank, although the total appointments to the GBE and KBE/DBE ranks were also high (relative to later numbers). These numbers exceeded the expectations of the founders of the order and were driven by an overwhelming flood of interests claiming valuable war work through their various related government departments.

No matter how large the total appointments loomed in the minds of administrators, there was more to these honours than just high numbers. The issue of honours for women, so central to the origins of the order, is particularly important when thinking about its wider impact. At the top level of the order, the Knight/Dame Grand Cross, women made up 34 percent of the appointments in the first four years, but this pattern was not carried through most of the lower ranks of the order.

¹⁸ Secretary of State for India to Viceroy, Telegram, 30 January 1917, Institution of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire. Appointment of certain persons to the Order on the 4th Dec 1917. Congratulatory messages from the For. & Pol. Secretaries to certain recipients of the Order. Transmission to the India Office of thanks conveyed by certain members, India Office Records, R/1/4/814, British Library.

¹⁹ Galloway, *The Order of the British Empire*, 23–4.

At the level of ordinary Knights/Dames, women made up around 9 percent of the total, while at Commander level they made up around 14 percent of the total recipients. The high proportion at the top was a reflection of an explicit effort to give Grand-Cross-level awards to women with a high place in society (often the wives of peers) who were prominently involved in the war effort. Wives of men who already had higher honours were good potential recipients because their new titles would not matter, obscured as they would be by the precedence granted by their husband's higher titles. Proportions at the MBE and OBE level were similarly low. The typical inductee into the order was, therefore, male, middle-class and a recipient of either the OBE or MBE.

TABLE 1.1: Number of appointments to each rank of the Order of the British Empire, 1917–1920²⁰

	GBE	KBE/DBE	CBE	OBE	MBE	Year Total	Cumulative total
1917	23	53	83	78	65	302	302
1918	34	167	681	2311	3047	6240	6542
1919	14	164	1633	7473	4064	13348	19890
1920	26	170	899	2206	3303	6604	26494

These typical recipients in the civil division were often professionals or businessmen who had volunteered to some sort of war work organizational or fundraising committee. In spite of the idea that recipients should be unpaid or voluntary workers, lists often included senior clerks in government positions. John Thomas Moore, for instance, received his MBE as a surveyor for Customs and Excise because of his work in the ‘detention and seizure of enemy cargo in the port of London’.²¹ His honour was for a wartime application of his peacetime work. Cambridge scientist A.V. Hill (whose anxieties and problems with his OBE and the honours system in general will be

²⁰ Calculated from: Thorpe, *Burke's Handbook to the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire*.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 369.

covered in the next chapter in more detail) received his award for service on anti-aircraft committees and as the director of an experimental anti-aircraft weapon project.²²

More than any other organization outside of government departments, the joint organization of the Red Cross and the Order of St John of Jerusalem benefitted from the Order. This was in many ways very appropriate. The Red Cross in particular had grown enormously to meet the needs of the mass mobilization in the war, and most of its workers were women. The mobilization of female nurses and assistants in hospitals across the Empire and on battlefields was massive, dangerous and directly related to battle – few could question the commitment required for such work, even if many became concerned about questions of morality. The administrative burden was also huge, and much of the work done by these organizations was on a voluntary basis. From the early stages of deliberations about the Order of the British Empire, the Red Cross had expressed interest in additional decorations to serve those who did not already get the Royal Red Cross medal, which was reserved for nurses.²³

The Order of St John had its own internal system of honours – including its own knighthoods – that was authorized and backed by the British monarchy, but the younger Red Cross was a relative newcomer to the world of crown honours. It was also a perfect candidate for awards from the Order of the British Empire, with its hundreds of thousands of voluntary staff. Thousands of appointments within the order were made at all levels of the organization, which also developed its own internal system of medals to reward nurses and administrators who did not qualify for the order, in a manner similar to campaign medals in the military. Along with the official state honours, the organization propagated a whole range of badges and ribbons that indicated the seniority and skills of its nurses.

²² Ibid., 257.

²³ Galloway, *The Order of the British Empire*, 3.

Honours and the question of who should get honours (and what they should get) were discussed regularly in the *Red Cross*, the society's official journal. This publication attempted to publish lists of every one of its members who received honours, a task that was made difficult by the massive numbers of candidates, and the fact that it printed lists of medal-winners as well as those who were made members of imperial orders. While these lists were for the British organization and did not include international appointments, the Red Cross was also a major recipient of honours in the dominions, too. The Colonial Office's default position, when asked by governors or premiers in the empire what kind of person should be recommended for the new order, was to suggest that they should nominate the most prominent Red Cross supporters in their territories. This tended to benefit wives of governors and other members of high society at the high ranks of the Order, but it also meant that voluntary workers in the middle classes of various colonies were eligible for honours.

The demographics of the domestic and colonial Red Cross orders are particularly interesting. At the beginning of 1918, in the second major list of the Order of the British Empire, the Red Cross saw six of its members appointed as Knights or Dames Grand Cross in the order – five dames and one knight. There were six Dame Commanders and one Knight Commander, but more men than women were appointed CBEs (seven women out of twenty-six total appointments). However, at the bottom two levels, the appointments were overwhelmingly women. Out of eighty-four OBEs, seventy were women, while 108 of the 134 MBEs were drawn from the sex that, a year before, was largely ineligible for state recognition other than medals or wages.²⁴ This gender ratio was not surprising. The Red Cross's primary activity was providing nursing services. Nurses were women and belonged to a profession at the lower end of the social scale. The women who received MBEs

²⁴ *Red Cross*, 15 February 1918, 15–18.

and OBEs were mostly head nurses at significant hospitals or Red Cross posts, while CBEs went more often to regional administrators or senior office staff in the national body, who were primarily men. At the knight and dame level, awards went to prominent patrons or major leaders of the national body. A year later, in the 1919 New Year List, the ratios were similar, although at the high level the male to female ratio was evened-out, the supply of highly-ranked women supporters of the Red Cross having been exhausted.²⁵ In terms of total appointments, however, there were more than double the number of OBEs and MBEs created in this second list. By 1923 thousands of Red Cross members were also part of the Order of the British Empire.

Many of these initial appointments to the OBE level were also, within a year, promoted to Commander (CBE) level – the list published in the Red Cross in April 1920 included a very large number of Commanders.²⁶ Such promotions were inflationary in a sense, but they also indicated that there was a great deal of uncertainty over what ranks corresponded with what kind of service. The early years of the order saw a great deal of tweaking and, for the Red Cross administrators and Home Office officials who were deciding on nominations, miscalculations could result in needing to promote recipients if their juniors were receiving the same award that they themselves had won in an earlier list.

Despite these huge numbers of appointments, demand within the organization remained far higher. The writers of the journal were balancing responses to two opposite criticisms, both of which, they implied, had been communicated to the journal. On the one hand, they needed to justify to those who thought honours were being given out too generously the magnitude and extent of the service performed by voluntary workers. On the other hand, they needed to explain to readers who wanted honours but had not yet received any why they may have been overlooked. The latter seems

²⁵ *Red Cross*, February 1919, 14–16.

²⁶ *Red Cross*, April 1920, 38–40.

to have been, increasingly, the bigger issue for the Red Cross. They warned readers of the journal that ‘we cannot guarantee the completeness of the lists of honours and mentions which appear [in the journal]’, and that the ‘principles [for the nomination and selection of names] are in many cases both easier to understand than to explain, and easier to sympathise with than to defend with completeness.’²⁷ In the same article, the journal asserted the propriety and wisdom of the choices so far:

Countries, societies, officers, and the different branches of work all have claims which must be considered and which may have the effect of bearing down or postponing those of individuals. The onlooker can only say with some confidence that whoever has had less than he or she deserves, few have had more.²⁸

In a later issue, a response to critics made it clear that the source of reader anger was related to envy:

That everyone will be satisfied with the distribution [of the Order of the British Empire] we do not suppose. Indeed, doubtless many readers will be able to criticise the list and point to names which should have been included. Criticism does no harm if it is realised that it is impossible to give awards to all who deserve them at the same time. Final judgment should be suspended until the distributions finally cease.²⁹

This suggested that, in spite of the lavish distribution, there were still more ‘names which should have been included.’ Inflation was not the issue; rather, the problem for the Red Cross was appeasing the many deserving volunteers who felt themselves excluded from the fount of honour.

The Red Cross was a particular case with its own distinctive honorific culture, but given its importance as a beneficiary of the new order, as well as its gender dynamics, it is an important example of the relationship between honours and social change. Readers of the Red Cross journal

²⁷ *Red Cross*, July 1918, 78.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Red Cross*, February 1919, 16

regularly wrote in about matters of etiquette, uniform and decorations. A November 1919 article detailed the protocol for wearing decorations (including orders) with morning dress, saying that this would ‘answer several inquiries which have reached us from our readers’.³⁰ A few months earlier, the editors had explained a tightening of Red Cross policy on wearing medals by joking about a ‘lady was reported as appearing at an Investiture with both breasts bristling with badges, and in reply to a question as to how they were earned, declared them to be principally canine (dog shows)’.³¹ The Red Cross was clearly worried that their uniform and their service might be mocked because of the public perception that its workers were overly fond of badges and orders (not to mention dresses cut ten inches too short).³²

For most within the Red Cross the order was a boon that affirmed their work and aroused passions among the rank-and-file, but these passions could be negative as well as positive. At every level of the organization volunteers were highly attuned to and invested in the issue of honours. Honours were highly meaningful to a large part because the roles that the recipients played were novel. It was a new order of chivalry, and it was welcomed most among new (or newly recognized) professional, vocational or charitable groups. In this sense, the Red Cross was a microcosm of the situation in a larger part of the middle class as a whole, whose reaction to the offer of an honour for their varied civilian, volunteer (interpreted very liberally) war work was generally favorable. But there were dissenters from this positive view of the new and newly liberal distribution of honours.

³⁰ *Red Cross*, November 1919, 128.

³¹ *Red Cross*, May 1919, 57.

³² See: *Ibid.*

III.

Not everyone accepted these new honours, and the reasons for declining honours in these years were varied. For those skeptical about the new order, the Red Cross was a natural target. The wife of the administrator of St Kitts-Nevis, Katharine Janet Burdon, declined a MBE for Red Cross work because she read ‘scathing remarks (very thinly veiled) about the Red Cross work I was doing which was referred to as “The O.B.E. Stakes”’ in a local newspaper.³³ Significantly, the rate of rejection of these awards was apparently higher than at any other time in the century or, indeed, in the records of the honours system in Britain. While more often than not people who declined honours also declined to give their reasons out of a sense of modesty – this seems to have been the ‘right’ thing to do – the high rate of rejection at this time means that some justifications for declining honours have survived in one form or another, even though the various parties involved (the Treasury, the CCOK and Buckingham Palace) did not keep, or are unwilling to release, comprehensive records. Different people gave different reasons for their rejection, but there were some consistent themes that emerged in their self-justifications. One overriding concern was that people were being offered honours for engaging in activities which, unlike the millions of young men serving on the front lines, carried no physical danger. Some people who willingly accepted foreign honours for their war service were more hesitant about the Order of the British Empire. As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, Mr. Hall of Staffordshire turned down a CBE because he felt at the time that his service: ‘was the very least anyone could do to give gladly their best services to their country and that any honour was entirely unnecessary.’³⁴ Interestingly, he accepted the Legion d’Honneur from the French government, but was reluctant to take an honour from his own. Another man, Arthur

³³ Katharine Janet Burdon to His Excellency the Governor, Leeward Islands, 24 May 1919, Colonial Office: Honours: Original Correspondence, CO 448/18, NA.

³⁴ Mrs Jean Hall to the Acting Secretary of the Order of the British Empire, 12 April 1923, Order of the British Empire: Miscellaneous Correspondence, Requests for Information, etc., T 343/42, NA.

Bellingham, refused an appointment as a Commander of the British Empire because of a combination of what he later called ‘bad health’ and his violent disagreement with the Irish policy of the time. He later regretted this decision and wrote in unsuccessfully during the rule of a government more to his taste to try and get back the honour he once declined.³⁵

Part of the problem at the very beginning of its existence was that, at home and in the colonies, the ‘OBE’ recipient could be a figure of fun in literature, periodicals and newspapers. Either because of the confusion between the abbreviation for ‘Officer of the British Empire’ with the ‘Order of the British Empire’ or else because the OBE was the second most liberally distributed award after the MBE (and the one that went to professional, middle-class, middle-aged men), it was the fourth rank of the Order that was the most reviled by critics. In a long and rough draft of memoirs of the First World War, journalist C.E. Montague wrote a chapter called ‘Honours Easy’ in which he mocked an officer of his acquaintance who collected medals from many different European powers.³⁶ This officer, named ‘Colin’, sought out the OBE because he desired more than anything else badges with red ribbons and the ‘plummy red of the O.B.E. ribbon’ had ‘a place ready on his heart, or about a couple of inches above it.’³⁷ Decades later Anthony Powell captured the scorn that some soldiers had for the OBE as a reward through the character of Sunny Farebrother, a war hero who had received a ‘rather good D.S.O.’ (an award that was only given to officers for bravery).³⁸ Farebrother comments to the teenage narrator, Nicholas Jenkins, that when he received his OBE for work during the peace conference, ‘I told them I should have to wear it on my backside

³⁵ Arthur Bellingham to the Acting Secretary of the Order of the British Empire, 13 February 1923, Order of the British Empire: Miscellaneous Correspondence, Requests for Information, etc., T 343/42, NA.

³⁶ ‘Honours Easy’, Manuscript, n.d., Papers of C.E. Montague, CEM/2/1/4/1, John Rylands Memorial Library Special Collections.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Anthony Powell, *A Dance to the Music of Time: First Movement* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 75.

because it was the only medal I had ever won by sitting in a chair.³⁹ The young Jenkins regarded this view as an ‘unconventional hypothesis’ and was impressed by Farebrother’s seeming modesty. However, this was by no means an uncommon opinion at the time in certain circles. Percy White’s 1923 satirical novel, *Mr. Bailey-Martin, O.B.E.*, counted on its readers having a particular negative orientation towards the award by putting it in the title of the book (the novel was a sequel to his earlier *Mr. Bailey-Martin: A Novel*).⁴⁰ At the conclusion of the book, the pompous, hypocritical titular character complained that he had not received a baronetcy, blaming the sinister influence of his acquaintance Paul Chester, but reflected that in the end ‘A man’s honours are hidden in his heart where they never fade, and an O.B.E. is perhaps better than nothing.’⁴¹ While the novel itself was not a success as a satire, its message being muddled and so specific to its historical moment that it is difficult to read the book’s tone, the OBE, central as it was to the title, had a negative meaning. Its prominence captured a moment in the public imagination where OBE could be a shameful rather than a positive appendage.

A 1922 cartoon by David Low made the link between the wider perception of the honours system as corrupt and the liberal distribution of the Order explicit. In it, a shop front filled with ‘Earls Marked Down’ and ‘Bargain Barons’ mocked the honours distribution system which by 1922 had developed into a major scandal.⁴² In a corner of the shop window, another sign promised ‘10 OBE’s given away with every 1/- spent’. The implication that a shilling could give you ten OBEs (a lot of OBEs, given the thousands of pounds that were being spent at the time on peerages) showed how cheap and ‘easy’ OBEs were perceived as being. In fact, this very ‘cheapness’ and lack of

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 85.

⁴⁰ Percy White, *Mr. Bailey-Martin, O.B.E.* (London: Wm. Heinemann, 1923); Percy White, *Mr. Bailey-Martin. A Novel* (London: W. Heinemann, 1894).

⁴¹ White, *Mr. Bailey-Martin, O.B.E.*, 321.

⁴² *Star*, [?] July 1922.

prestige amongst those inclined towards buying honours meant that ranks in the Order were not the subject of any direct corruption – those with the money and inclination to buy honours would not be interested in a new order associated with common people. But this cartoon illustrates the bad timing of the foundation of the Order. Even though it was relatively uncorrupt, its close association with Lloyd George meant that it was intimately associated with the scandal that was eventually to lead to Lloyd George's dismissal from the office of Prime Minister.

Later in the same year an anonymous writer in the *Saturday Review* attacked the Order of the British Empire directly, explicitly on the basis that the ongoing honours scandal tarnished the Order. The writer identified the Order as being a project 'incubated painfully under the protecting warmth of a Government Committee for many years without result when Mr. Lloyd George found out that it would be a convenient method of rewarding civilian workers for the war, and had it hatched out of hand.'⁴³ The writer marshaled a whole set of criticisms against the Order, suggesting that it was too profligately distributed, that it was inappropriate to give awards to civilians in wartime (especially munitions workers who had benefited from staying home and being paid) and most of all that the Order gave 'a most improper precedence to civilians over people who had medals for fighting in the war, and it has done its worst damage by introducing into the simplicity of our ordinary customs in these matters a spirit of folly and jealousy which is quite unnational'.⁴⁴

This piece is interesting because the writer was relatively tolerant of the representation of political and financial allies of the government in honours lists. Their main concern in the essay was not with the high-level corruption that was about to bring down Lloyd George but with the Order, which they saw as representing what was truly wrong with the honours system. The Order of the British Empire was a 'minor, but not less important, scandal' where:

⁴³ *Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science and Art*, 22 July 1922, 133.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

men and women who are loyal subjects and who would be gratified by receiving some distinction as a recognition of their work, are continually put off and encouraged to excuse the acceptance of honours which have been properly awarded to them by the spectacle of the absurd conferring of titles on authors of music-hall songs, or on the producers of any sort of temporary and popular triviality...

According to this account, people were put off accepting the order because it was also bestowed on certain types of people unworthy of such distinction, as well as being distributed too liberally. In their view:

other honours, which carry titles but not decorations ... can be given, and rightly given, for public distinction, for services done to the community in which the people who receive them live; even for contributions to Party funds; but first and always they ought to be given for personality, and if they are given for that nobody is likely to quarrel with them.⁴⁵

It is not entirely clear precisely what 'personality' meant to the writer – surely authors of 'music-hall songs' possessed this in abundance. However, their general objection to the Order was clear, and built on a particular assumption about the function and nature of the honours system that the Order challenged at a fundamental level. While it is only implicit in this account, the author was suggesting that only those people with the vaguely-defined 'personality' deserved honours. Or, rather, that honours were only for a certain kind of person. These could be: 'an eminent author or an eminent painter or business man, or professional man or politician', but not the music-hall composer.⁴⁶

Hierarchies in the arts, as well as in society, were important in determining who should get what honours. For forms of entertainment at the bottom of such hierarchies, honours were seen as inappropriate, no matter how much they entertained the troops. The Order of the British Empire went too far because it was too open and allowed for too many different professions.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

The critical comment about the order, and about the honours system more generally in this era, must also be read in context and compared to some positive press and representations that emerged from the closing years of the war. Whether or not one scorned or celebrated honours was very much a matter of perspective and, while elite accounts that expressed skepticism about the Order of the British Empire alongside the more flagrant abuses of the peerage and honour system are often more accessible, slight shifts in frame can show very different attitudes towards the new surge in honours. The *Era Annual*, a trade publication for actors, warmly celebrated the appointment of its members to various honours, especially in 1919, when ‘a Quartet of Music Hall Magnates’ were knighted for various charitable services during the war.⁴⁷ These included Sir Walter de Frere, knighted in 1919 for his work as the ‘honorary organiser of theatre, music hall and picture palace entertainments’ for the Ministry of Pensions. He was praised by the *Annual* for his ‘splendid work’ in both this and in fundraising for war charities.⁴⁸ De Frere, along with Sir Alfred Butt and Sir Oswald Stoll, was a producer and manager, but the final new knight was an actual performer, in addition to his entrepreneurial skills as a theater manager. Harry Lauder, who sang songs such as ‘Roaming in the Gloaming’ and ‘Stop Yer Ticklin’, Jock’, was knighted for singing for soldiers in France and successfully raising over a million pounds for charities for the benefit of Scottish regiments.⁴⁹ In another trade publication, *The Performer*, contributor F.V. St Claire always appended ‘O.B.E.’ to his name and in 1921 wrote an article celebrating ‘Titled Song-Writers’, including de Frere.⁵⁰

To take another, quite different example, the *Financial Times*’ coverage of higher honours diverged from newspapers that were more critical of Lloyd George’s generosity and the increasing

⁴⁷ *The Era Annual*. 1919, 33–34.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 34.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *The Performer*, 14 July 1921.

number of businessmen who were being included in honours lists. In 1908 the editor had explicitly criticized the manner in which the ‘taint of trade’ prevented political participation on the part of talented businessmen (as opposed to lawyers), but praised the trend that he identified in honours lists towards the increased recognition of ‘prominent members of the commercial community’ although he recognized ‘party services [in other words, political donations] have probably counted for much in their selection’.⁵¹ By the end of the war the newspaper was celebrating the ‘well deserved recognition of individual merit’ surrounding appointments to honours for businessmen and engineers involved in major businesses.⁵² While the newspaper did state in 1924 that the reduction in total numbers of honours happening by that point was desirable and proper, it did not complain about the increased recognition of ‘men of commerce’ that occurred during the war.⁵³ For them, the recognition of their particular interest group was the best sign of the health and propriety of honours lists.

This pattern of welcoming recognition of one’s own tribe continued at the individual level. For thousands of recipients, like Thorpe, the Order of the British Empire was received with something other than ambivalence or disgust. For each of the people who declined their appointments to the order, there were scores more who accepted it, many of them with eagerness. The many Red Cross matrons and nurses who celebrated their honours were one such group (the staff of Oakhurst hospital in Greenwich presented their nurse Commandant with a commemorative ‘silver rose bowl, filled with violets and lilies’ to celebrate her MBE)⁵⁴ but many more people than Red Cross workers also received it with enthusiasm. The trade unionist and politician George

⁵¹ *Financial Times*, 10 November 1908, 2.

⁵² *Financial Times*, 3 June 1918, 2.

⁵³ *Financial Times*, 1 January 1924, 4.

⁵⁴ *Red Cross*, April 19, 49.

Edwards would not let ill health prevent him from going down to Buckingham Palace in February 1919 to receive his OBE.⁵⁵ He managed to struggle through the ceremony, but ‘broke down’ within hours of receiving his medal and had to be nursed back to health by his niece. However, he did not regret the experience and welcomed the distinction that the medal bestowed.⁵⁶ His confusion about the meaning of the initials OBE, thinking of it as the ‘Grand Order of the British Empire, known as the O.B.E.’, was to repeat itself many times, as the next chapter will show, but his gratitude and happiness at receiving the award was transparent in his 1922 memoir.⁵⁷

Communities – professional, social and otherwise – also relished the award of honours to their members, even if they occasionally questioned the overall size of honours lists. The wartime secretary of the British Medical Association, Alfred Cox, wrote with some relish in his memoirs about the awards won by members of that association.⁵⁸ In his autobiography, he praised his superior, T. Jenner Verrall, remarking that Verrall’s knighthood was welcomed by all who knew him (especially his staff), while celebrating his own OBE and the MBE of his ‘principal woman assistant’, Miss A.L. Lawrence.⁵⁹ The hierarchy of honours in this environment was clear, but the celebration of all of them was wholehearted.

Mary Scharlieb, one of the first female medical doctors in Britain, received a CBE in 1917 and was made a Dame in 1926.⁶⁰ She was awarded the first honour for ‘social services during the

⁵⁵ George Edwards, *From Crow-Scaring to Westminster: An Autobiography* (S.I.: Labour Pub. Co, 1922), 210.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 210.

⁵⁸ Alfred Cox, *Among the Doctors. An Autobiography* (London: Christopher Johnson, 1950), 119.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ Greta Jones, “Scharlieb, Dame Mary Ann Dacomb (1845–1930)”, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, online edn, Oxford University Press, Sept 2004 (<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/35968>, accessed 20 June 2010); “SCHARLIEB, Dame Mary Ann Dacomb”, *Who Was Who*, A & C Black, 1920–2008; online edn, Oxford University Press, Dec 2007 (<http://www.ukwhoswho.com/view/article/oupww/whowaswho/U216751>, accessed 10 June 2010).

Great War', and her 1924 memoir recorded her enthusiastic and extensive war service in detail, although she was careful to remind readers that her usual work as a gynecologist in London hospitals continued throughout the war.⁶¹ Her *Reminiscences* described the experience of receiving the CBE in highly positive terms. For her, it was a vindication of her work and of the difficulties she had encountered as a woman in a profession which was highly resistant to women's involvement. Her memoir is full of stories about women working hard during the war, and she places the CBE as an important moment where her work – and the work of other women – was recognized. In one anecdote, Lord Esher visited a ward where soldiers (both enlisted men and, to his shock, officers) were being cared for by female nurses and prior to touring the ward, he expressed strong disapproval to the doctors that women should be involved. However, his actual experience of the women's work transformed his thinking on the topic: 'He went from bed to bed, found that the men were admirably cared for, and that not only was everything spotlessly clean and well arranged, but the men were cheerful, and they told him how the ladies received them'.⁶² As a result of this visit, the cause of women in health was advanced. Scharlieb almost missed the actual ceremony where she was awarded the CBE due to sciatica, but in the end was able to attend. She found that 'the ceremony went off very well, and their Majesties were as gracious and friendly as I have always found them.'⁶³

In addition to these happy recipients, many more people hoped for, but never received, honours in the Order of the British Empire. As we shall see more clearly in Chapter two, some people even attempted to lobby government departments for honours, with greater or lesser degrees

⁶¹ See: Mary Scharlieb, *Reminiscences* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1924), 187–201.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 201.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 204–5.

of subtlety.⁶⁴ The possibility of honours – previously closed to so many – sparked an interest across a wide range of people who had contributed to the war effort, many of whom saw the impact of their endeavors in substantially inflated terms. Underlying this enthusiasm for the Order of the British Empire was the fact that the Order recognized so many groups who previously had no chance of being recognized by the honours system. Scharlieb saw her honours as an affirmation of women’s medical work and she was not alone in this association of individual honours with the recognition of a wider community. As the Red Cross shows, this interest was at its most intense in areas where the Crown honours system had previously never reached.

IV.

There was a major problem for all those in government, the royal household and the wider public who hoped that the new Order would find a comfortable place in the social order and the public imagination. The Red Cross welcomed the Order, but others scorned it for a variety of reasons. By the end of the First World War, the honours system was mired in accusations of corruption, tarnished in the minds of many throughout Britain and the Empire by its profligacy and by dark mutterings about the men at the receiving end of the fount of honour. This debate only intensified in the following years. In 1922 honours were at the center of a much larger political crisis for Lloyd George when his Conservative coalition allies deserted him, in part, because of the way in which he and his subordinates sold high honours to raise funds for his vision of a national government. The Lloyd George scandals remain the occasion in which honours have figured most prominently in public debate in modern British history. The explicit invocation of corruption, always potent in modern British politics, meant that Lloyd George’s association with the honours system was tainted,

⁶⁴ See, for example, G. Weymouth to Henry William Forester, 28 October 1920, Colonial Office: Honours: Original Correspondence, 1918, CO 448/23, NA.

and he has become synonymous for corruption in relation to honours. Scandals came before, and were to come again, but Lloyd George remains the epitome of how not to do honours.

These scandals were felt beyond the British Isles. In the self-governing dominions in particular they blended with existing concerns about the appropriateness and usefulness of certain kinds of honours to cause tension between certain dominions and the British government. Controversy about the sale of honours stimulated debate over the relative power and right of the British government to give honours to dominion citizens, particularly in Canada and South Africa. The appropriateness of titles (and, in some places, the honours system as a whole) came under question towards the end of the war. In 1919 the Canadian government officially requested that no titles – knighthoods, damehoods, baronetcies and peerages – be given to Canadian citizens. In effect, this went beyond titles to affect all honours, including those at Companion/Commander level and below, which did not carry pre-nominal titles. This request can be seen as the first major move in the slow, piecemeal and regionally diverse process of the fragmentation of imperial honours that was to develop later in the twentieth century.

Debates around honours were intertwined with debates about political power and the respective roles of the aristocracy and of other groups – especially new money – in modern Britain. This was an old debate, and a complex one. Buying into chivalric orders was as real and as ancient a tradition as winning them through meritorious conduct or through social distinction. But it was at the end of the First World War and the beginning of the peace that this issue became controversial to the point of scandal. The role of the peerage and honours in Lloyd George's wartime and immediate post-war political activities, and in his eventual downfall, has been written about at some length. Maundy Gregory, the self-consciously mysterious and unquestionably scurrilous honours tout, who remains the only person prosecuted in Britain for the sale of honours, has been the

subject of a number of biographies.⁶⁵ The 1922 honours scandal that brought down Lloyd George's coalition government has been written about by a range of historians. The tone of these opinions has tended to vary according to the writers' attitudes towards the man himself, especially in biographies.

The most thorough existing analysis of the Lloyd George honours scandal can be found in G.R. Searle's *Corruption in British Politics*.⁶⁶ Searle took a broad view of the honours scandal as reflective of a preoccupation with a discourse of 'purity' in British political life. Searle argued that the honours scandal of 1922 was significant not only because of its widening of divisions between Lloyd George and his Conservative allies but also because it supported, or symbolized, a broad perception that the coalition government had lost credibility through its lack of 'integrity and reliability'.⁶⁷ This perception had been building up for a long time, and the issue of honours had always lurked as one of the more tangible signs of this corruption. The scandal serves as the climax of Searle's book, which concludes by comparing discourses about corruption in Britain with scandals in France and the USA.⁶⁸ Importantly, Searle pointed out that, for all the controversy, in practice both the Liberal and Conservative parties were engaged in behaviors – in particular the use of honours to reward party donors – that were considered scandalous. The use of honours to raise money was a consistent element of British politics rather than an unusual wartime practice.

David Cannadine's account of the scandal in his *Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy* followed similar lines to Searle's, with a greater emphasis on the role of social distinction and aristocratic snobbery in the scandal. Like Searle, Cannadine emphasized the near-universal use of

⁶⁵ Andrew Cook, *Cash for Honours: The Story of Maundy Gregory* (Stroud: The History Press, 2008); Gerald Macmillan, *Honours for Sale: The Strange Story of Maundy Gregory* (London: Richards Press, 1954).

⁶⁶ G. R Searle, *Corruption in British Politics, 1895-1930* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987).

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 374–6.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 424–7.

honours by political parties to raise money and he stressed that the desire to keep the aristocracy exclusive conflicted with the particular party interest of raising money. For Cannadine, the momentum of honours sales was one more factor in the erosion of traditional aristocratic power, and what contemporaries saw as the ‘dilution’ of the aristocracy through the transformation of cash into titles.⁶⁹ In such narratives, Lloyd George’s excesses tend to be exonerated, or at least minimized.

In comparison, Kenneth Rose’s biography of King George V offered a more direct view of the problematic aspects of Lloyd George’s lavish distribution of honours. Seen from the King’s perspective, Lloyd George (and, to a certain extent, Asquith before him) was brazen in his exercise of his power to distribute honours, and George V was vigilant in reading honours lists and attempting to exercise his royal prerogative to question, criticize and sometimes even block appointments.⁷⁰ Lloyd George did not consult the King before promising titles to certain political allies, gave out honours at an unprecedented rate to people of supposedly questionable character and was relaxed about the use of agents to negotiate honours sales by his subordinates. All of these habits made the King angry.⁷¹

Lloyd George’s practice of ignoring the conventions when it came to excessive honours distribution reflected his cynicism about the system. While he himself pressured the King for special recognition in the form of a DSO at the end of the war – an award that was technically improper given his non-combatant status – and was to accept the customary Earldom for a retired Prime Minister later in life, his cavalier attitude showed that in general he had scant respect for the

⁶⁹ David Cannadine, *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy*, 1st Vintage Books ed (New York: Vintage Books, 1999), 322.

⁷⁰ Rose, *King George V*, 246–7.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 247.

unwritten rules of honours.⁷² Or, rather, he gave them a low priority. As he himself argued and historians since have pointed out, Lloyd George's sin was to stretch existing practices in selling honours rather than to invent wholly new ones. The link between political donations and honours had always been hidden, but it was undoubtedly there. Lloyd George privately argued to the conservative fundraiser J.C.C. Davidson that the practice of selling honours was actually a positive aspect of the constitution.⁷³ According to him, in the United States, wealth bought political policy and influence; how much less corrupt than this was channeling new money into the less offensive and dangerous realm of social distinction.⁷⁴

The basic aspects of the honours scandal narrative – its characters, timeline and extent – are well-established, both in the works of the historians mentioned above and in more popular accounts.⁷⁵ However, certain features of the scandal as it unfolded are particularly interesting when considering the honours system across the broader timeframe of the twentieth century. Because the honours scandal was a public scandal, it involved extensive discussion about the meaning and function of honours, some of which went beyond the aspects of social change at the aristocratic level that Cannadine has detailed so extensively. Debates around honours were not just about social distinction but also the nature of service. While the scandal and its (partial) resolution through the 1922 Royal Commission on Honours (and, eventually, the 1925 Honours [Prevention of Abuses] Act) focused on the aristocracy and the highest levels of the King's ability to grant titles of honour

⁷² Ibid., 259.

⁷³ John Colin Campbell Davidson, *Memoirs of a Conservative: J.C.C. Davidson's Memoirs and Papers, 1910-37* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1969), 288.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Cook, *Cash for Honours*; James McMillan, *The Honours Game* (London: Frewin, 1969); Michael De-la -Noy, *The Honours System* (London: Allison & Busby, 1985); John Walker, *The Queen Has Been Pleased: The British Honours System at Work* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1986).

to his citizens, it also made explicit values around what kinds of service to the state, empire and crown deserved recognition.

The public debate in newspapers and in the houses of parliament around honours ranged across a variety of issues and, as Searle has pointed out, there was an undercurrent of anti-business and anti-new money sentiment.⁷⁶ The dilution of honours and, therefore, of the aristocracy was the major issue in much of the pre-war debate. Honours periodically sprouted up in parliamentary debates in the years leading up to the full-blown emergence of the honours issue as a scandal. As early as 1907 the issue of possible brokerage of peerages had come up in the House of Commons.⁷⁷ In February 1914 the House of Lords passed a motion resolving that:

...a contribution to Party funds should not be a consideration to a Minister when he recommends any name for an honour to His Majesty: that effectual measures should be taken in order to assure the nation that Governments, from whatever political Party they are drawn, will act according to this rule: and that this House requests the concurrence of the House of Commons in the foregoing Resolution.⁷⁸

The Earl of Selborne, who proposed this motion, drew a sharp division between political honours ‘given on the advice of Ministers’ with civil service and military honours. Honours were an issue of ‘public morality’ because ‘it does matter whether the hall-mark of honour is to genius or noble life, or position, or public service, or whether the hall-mark of honour is... to be simply wealth by whomsoever owned and howsoever got’.⁷⁹ ‘Public opinion’ had been lax in pursuing this issue, but Selborne worried that Britain’s reputation globally might be suffering from a whiff of hypocrisy – it

⁷⁶ Searle, *Corruption in British Politics, 1895-1930*, 427.

⁷⁷ Royal Commission on Honours, 1922, Extracts from Parliamentary Debates 1907-1922, Press Cuttings August 1922-January 1923, T 348/1, NA.

⁷⁸ *House of Lords Parliamentary Debates*, 23 February 1914, 251.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 254-5.

criticized other nations for corruption, but had a ‘beam in our own eye’.⁸⁰ The ensuing discussion in the Lords gravitated inevitably towards the nature of the peerage, with Lord Willoughby de Broke arguing that preserving the integrity of the aristocracy was the most important issue, and others following on from this argument with greater or lesser degrees of agreement and levity.⁸¹ The motion was agreed to at the end of the debate, but had no teeth and no consequences: it was ignored by the House of Commons, and within a few months more weighty issues were occupying both houses.

However, the war did not stop concerns about the use of honours by the government; in fact, as I have already suggested, the conditions of the war and the political tactics of Lloyd George made the issue of honours and the grant of peerages all the more urgent to those, such as Selborne, who were concerned about them. By 1917 the issue came up again in the Lords, with Selborne elaborating on his earlier motion by again suggesting that the government was selling honours in a dishonorable way.⁸² The Marquess of Crewe was among a number of Lords who spoke up in agreement. While honours were often deserved for civilians who had ‘performed great national work, like starting hospitals, and so on’, many honours being given out were simply to do with money:

This war will be celebrated in history for the large numbers of honours, rewards, promotions, and even office given to people who have disastrously failed. Nobody can deny that. Many of these people who have received honours have no earthly right to them except that they were lucky enough to be plutocrats.⁸³

⁸⁰ Ibid., 259.

⁸¹ Ibid., 267-73.

⁸² *House of Lords Parliamentary Debates*, 7 August 1917, 171-82

⁸³ Ibid.

Crewe, among others, called for detailed public citations explaining why people on honours lists received their awards. Such a measure, he claimed, would embarrass the underserving into declining and, eventually, force the government to stop giving to such people.

Government ministers in the Lords were more defensive about this controversy. The Earl Curzon, the former Viceroy of India, War Cabinet minister and recent recipient of various peerages, came to the defense of the system as it existed. Honours, he argued, were a legitimate ambition, and while ‘such desires are sometimes silly... [and] sometimes even sordid’, mostly they ‘spring from a deeply-rooted instinct of human nature, an instinct which is not without an element of sentiment and romance – namely, the desire to possess, and even to exhibit to the world, some visible witness either to personal merit or to public achievement.’⁸⁴ Honours were also a ‘source of gratification to the nation, which takes pleasure in seeing its public men rewarded.’⁸⁵ Desire for honours, the broadening and democratization of their availability (which I discuss in more detail below) and the increase in quantities of honours available to an enthusiastic public were all, therefore, positive aspects of the modern system, according to Curzon (although his rhetoric still limited them to ‘public men’, a category that was already being exceeded by honours at the time).⁸⁶ He also pointed out the awkwardness inherent in Selborne’s claims that some Peers had acquired their rank through corrupt means in the House of Lords.⁸⁷ In saying this, he was criticizing his own colleagues.

The simmering controversy reached the height of its public scandal after the war, as Lloyd George continued to reward political allies (especially donors) with great generosity. The war was part of the motivation for this, but Lloyd George and his immediate political allies, such as Freddie

⁸⁴ Ibid., 192.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 192-5.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 195.

Guest, were keen to use the fundraising power of honours for their own political purposes – for Lloyd George, they offered an opportunity to raise money to create a new political organization. The resulting feast of new peerages and baronetcies was aggravating to the Conservative Party (whose potential donors were being poached), to elites who felt that the honours system was being diluted through too many appointments and to politicians and Asquithian Liberals, to whom this was rank corruption (and whose potential donors were also being poached). David Cannadine has labeled these honorific practices as a kind of ‘free-market’ system of honours, where ‘demand rather than merit’ held sway.⁸⁸ While the extent to which any kind of ‘merit’ governed the honours system before this point is questionable, Lloyd George’s wartime practices were a break from tradition in their wantonness and in the administrative structure of honours touts who were needed to connect donors with their honours. Rather than discreetly concealing the manner in which the wealthy could purchase knighthoods, baronetcies or peerages, he and his colleagues told potential recipients explicitly that cash could bring honours.

A series of appointments in 1922 brought the controversy to a head.⁸⁹ These included the elderly South African tycoon Sir Joseph Robinson, who became something of a symbol for what was wrong with the honours system. On the same list in July of that year William Vesty, who had moved his meat cold storage business to Argentina to avoid taxes; Samuel Waring, who had been accused of wartime profiteering; and Archibald Williamson, who was alleged to have traded with the enemy, also received honours.⁹⁰ These appointments had clearly been bought, but Lloyd George was unapologetic. The Press, some Conservative, Liberal and Labour politicians and the King himself were angered by the apparent corruption. Robinson himself was forced to decline his proffered

⁸⁸ Cannadine, *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy*, 316.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 316–7.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 317.

peerage, although in private he angrily defended himself from accusations that he had been an exploitative and corrupt businessman.⁹¹

When the scandal broke, the conservative daily *Morning Post* led the charge for a public enquiry, serving as a vehicle for the Duke of Northumberland's public letter alleging that a 'Mr. Shaw' was told through an agent that he could acquire a baronetcy by giving money to Lloyd George's political fund in August 1922.⁹² Over the following weeks, the *Morning Post* reported almost daily on the issue, reporting on the various political responses and questioning the protestations of innocence that issued from various government figures. Other newspapers picked up on the scandal as it deepened in parliament and as the Royal Commission began, but it was the *Morning Post* that pursued the issue most aggressively. Its main concern was the accumulation of funds through honours sales to disreputable people who might have criminal records and bad characters. The focus of such articles was political and relatively unconnected to broader questions about the kinds of service performed by potential honours recipients. It was their status and character, as much as their actions, which were questioned.

The Robinson scandal and the Duke of Northumberland's allegations about widespread corruption finally spurred the government into direct action on the issue. While Lloyd George had hoped that the issue would fade away, he was under pressure from the press, politicians from all parties in both Houses of Parliament and the royal household. Forced to confront the issue, which had been smoldering for so long, he appointed a royal commission with a mandate to 'advise on the procedure to be adopted in future to assist the Prime Minister in making recommendations of

⁹¹ The Robinson Facts, LG/F/252, Lloyd George Papers, Parliamentary Archives (UK).

⁹² *Morning Post*, 28 August 1922, in: Royal Commission on Honours, 1922, Extracts from Parliamentary Debates 1907-1922, Press Cuttings August 1922-January 1923, T 348/1, NA.

names of persons deserving special honour.⁹³ The Royal Commission on Honours, which met in late 1922, was chaired by the Law Lord Viscount Dunedin, and it was made up of the Duke of Devonshire; the Asquithian Liberal and former Governor General of Australia Baron Denman; Sir Evelyn Cecil, a backbencher who had recently been knighted for his wartime work as the secretary-general of the Order of St John of Jerusalem; Sir Samuel Hoare, another junior conservative MP and former intelligence officer; lawyer and Liberal politician Sir George Marks; and Labour MP Arthur Henderson, whose postnominals of MC (Military Cross) and PC (Privy Councilor) looked sparse in comparison to the Grand Crosses and elaborate pre-nominal adornments of his fellow commissioners.⁹⁴ James Rae served as secretary to the commission.

While its terms of reference were sterilized of any reference to the more scandalous elements of existing practice, the Royal Commission did seek testimony from an appropriate (though hardly ambitious) range of political and administrative sources. The key witnesses who appeared before the Commission were past and present party leaders and whips. Rae made enquiries with the Foreign and Colonial Offices and the various branches of the military about the procedures they used to select people for honours, but the Orders of the Bath and of St Michael and St George were not the central issue, and it was honours for political service that were the central preoccupation of the Commission.⁹⁵ Lloyd George, Asquith and Balfour were summoned to appear, and testimony was sought about the honours process as far back as during Gladstone's time as Premier.⁹⁶

⁹³ J. Rae to Lloyd George, 10 October 1922, Royal Commission on Honours 1922, Minutes & Statements of Evidence taken by Royal Commission, T 348-3, NA.

⁹⁴ Lloyd George to King George V, 4 August 1922, Royal Commission on Honours 1922, Correspondence, Proofs and Report, T 348-2, NA.

⁹⁵ See: Paper no.7, Royal Commission on Honours 1922, Correspondence, Proofs and Report, T 348-2, NA.

⁹⁶ Note by Lord Kilbracken, 10 November 1922, Royal Commission on Honours 1922, Correspondence, Proofs and Report, T 348-2, NA.

This evidence was full of evasion and inconsistency. Freddie Guest, who as Lloyd George's patronage secretary from 1917–1921 was almost certainly the guiltiest party to be interviewed, asserted that honours were a party privilege, but denied any substantial wrongdoing.⁹⁷ In particular, he emphasized that he did not delegate any power to any outside official for political and public service honours. Implicitly, this was a denial of the use of honours brokers. The Liberal Whip Lord Gainford was similarly defensive, arguing that while whips always had many people making demands on their influence on the question of honours, and while party supporters would sometimes threaten to withhold support if they did not receive an honour, this was not a factor in who actually received them.⁹⁸ The exception was on occasions when people offered money or put forward their own cases more aggressively; Gainford primly emphasized that such individuals were summarily dismissed and sometimes reported. Lord Marchamley, Campbell-Bannerman's whip from 1906–1908, was more frank about the connection between contributions to party funds and honours, but defended this on the basis that he knew of no occasions when this process involved actual bargaining, which would imply that the government conceded some power to outside individuals in honours distribution.⁹⁹ Throughout their testimony, therefore, witnesses found it important to stress that no outside forces were involved in brokering honours and that, even if individual choices were misguided, the government retained exclusive control over the process.

The most vocal critic of the system in the House of Lords, the Duke of Northumberland, also appeared before the commission on its second-to-last day of interviews. He, and the Earl of Selborne (Unionist Whip from 1887–1892), cited the various cases of honours for money that had

⁹⁷ Francis Guest's Evidence, Royal Commission on Honours 1922, Minutes & Statements of Evidence taken by Royal Commission, T 348-3, NA

⁹⁸ Lord Gainford's Evidence, Royal Commission on Honours 1922, Minutes & Statements of Evidence taken by Royal Commission, T 348-3, NA.

⁹⁹ Lord Marchamley's Evidence, Royal Commission on Honours 1922, Minutes & Statements of Evidence taken by Royal Commission, T 348-3, NA.

been leaking into the press, many of which they had already brought up in the Lords. The Duke of Northumberland lamented, in particular, that the old practice of giving honours to long-term subscribers to party funds had degenerated into giving honours for single payments. Importantly, it was not so much rewarding people for giving money to parties that annoyed Northumberland as the idea that people who had not shown a long-term commitment to serving their party were being rewarded.

The problem, as articulated by the witnesses, was one of disorganization. Collectively, with allowance for personal biases for or against the current Prime Minister, they suggested that problems arose when the Prime Minister was either too busy, poorly advised or, at worst, careless enough that names of insufficient distinction whose bearers had performed questionable services could slip through. Thanks to discussion in the press and in the Lords, the idea of some sort of advisory or scrutiny committee made up of Privy Councillors was already in the air: many of the witnesses referred to this idea. Few advocated extensive changes to the system that had prevailed before the war. Insofar as the problem was characterized as a systemic one, the fault was presented to the commission as a creeping rot rather than a fundamental structural defect.

The final report of the commission reflected the narrowness of its mandate (unable as it was to inquire deeply into past decisions) and the immediate political interests of the established parties. While there was no real attempt to pass judgment on the more flagrant divergences from existing custom in which Lloyd George indulged, it sought to regulate honours more strictly while at least partially restoring the pre-war situation. Civil Service honours were not criticized, because they ‘had no hint of dissatisfaction with this system’, and thus the commission thought alteration was unnecessary because ‘there does not appear any possible chance of suggestion or preference due to

improper motives.’¹⁰⁰ The second class of honours that the report identified were those given to ‘persons who, for their services in art, literature and science are worthy of such recognition’ with whom the committee combined people who had done philanthropic service.¹⁰¹ Again, this group was considered largely benign provided that Prime Ministers were well-advised by experts in these fields. The possibility of this not being the case, or of people eligible for artistic, scientific or philanthropic honours overlapping with political or financial interests was not raised, although the division between political patronage and philanthropy in particular was often ambiguous.

‘Political’ honours were where the problems lay, according to the Committee’s report.¹⁰² These ‘differences of opinion’ were apparently rare, but the report highlighted them as having the greatest potential for both controversy and, implicitly, corruption. The report was quick to emphasize the long tradition of giving honours for political services and to defend this idea (in the draft of the report, it pointed out that the Earl of Selborne showed ‘possible’ opposition to this, but this was erased in favor of a milder anonymous qualification) that ‘such a system is right and ought to prevail.’¹⁰³ The commission implied very obliquely that some of its members might hold different opinions (a sentence apologizing that the views of the seven men on the commission were ‘entitled to no greater weight than our opinion on any other subject’ was erased from the final draft of the report) but conceded that political honours would endure.¹⁰⁴ Following this moment of hesitation, the report went on to describe the piecemeal way in which the Prime Minister received nominations for his final list from his patronage secretaries, whips and ‘other influential persons in the Party’,

¹⁰⁰ Draft Report of the Royal Commission on Honours, Royal Commission on Honours 1922, Correspondence, Proofs and Report, T 348-2, NA, 3

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 4-5.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 5-6.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 6.

emphasizing that the internal cultures of the different parties (and indeed the idiosyncrasies of individual Prime Ministers) meant that this practice was not necessarily consistent over time.¹⁰⁵ The small, restricted pool of witnesses limited the reach of the commission, but their testimony, guarded as it was, told the commission quite a lot about the political maneuvering and background to the creation of honours lists at this time.

The report also stressed that the constitutional relationship between the King and Prime Minister with relation to most honours was one where the King (through his Private Secretaries) should never have to be in a position to make inquiries into the appropriateness of honours.¹⁰⁶ Responsibility rested with the Prime Minister, even if it was the King whose name lent dignity to the system. Any measures taken to ensure that the correct people were on the honours list needed to happen before the list arrived on the King's desk. To this end, it recommended that the political list be examined by a group of no more than three Privy Councilors appointed by the Prime Minister to investigate the individuals nominated and ensure that none of them were there for questionable reasons or possessed histories sufficiently checkered to disgrace the institution of honours and the name of the monarch who sponsored them. Each name submitted to this committee would be required to have attached to it a 'statement of the service in respect of which, and the reasons for which the recommendation is proposed to be made along with the name and address of the person whom the Prime Minister considers was the original suggestor [sic] of the name of the proposed recipient'.¹⁰⁷ This committee would not have the power to remove names from the list, but would be obliged to report to the monarch that certain names were compromised if they felt it to be so.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 7.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 3-4.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 14.

The report also proposed that parliament pass an act to impose ‘a penalty on anyone promising to secure, or to endeavor to secure, an Honour in respect of any pecuniary payment or other valuable consideration, and any person promising such payment or consideration in order to receive an honour.’¹⁰⁸ As Cannadine and Searle have pointed out, this law actually benefitted the existing structure of party patronage, because by making paying money for an honour illegal, this would make it impossible for anyone who had attempted to do so to complain. It penalized both potentially corrupt aspirants and touts. In doing so, it strengthened the power of governments by more rigorously defining them as being the sole agents for honours – the idea that one could give generous donations for an honour remained in the air, but no-one could claim any kind of entitlement to an honour in exchange for money without risking either looking a fool or, worse, getting in legal trouble. In the form of the Honours (Prevention of Abuses) Act, this measure was eventually passed into law in 1925.

But the report was not unanimous. Arthur Henderson was not an outsider to the Commission only in his lack of a title, but also in that he disagreed with its conclusion, producing what was effectively a minority report that called for stricter controls and a more intensive investigation into the political nature of the honours system.¹⁰⁹ Henderson attacked the existing system because ‘Party service’ rather than public service had dominated the system. He was not convinced that the measures advocated by the commission would change this situation. Abolishing political honours was, according to Henderson, the best option for cleansing the system of any taint of corruption:

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 15.

¹⁰⁹ Note of Dissent by Mr. Arthur Henderson, Royal Commission on Honours 1922, Correspondence, Proofs and Report, T 348-2, NA.

It is indisputable that public service of great value has been rendered by men and women whose thoughts have never dwelt upon titled reward, and in view of the difficulty of keeping the honours list pure, I do not believe that the abolition of political honours would in any way diminish either the volume or quality of the services given to the community by its citizens. If it were desirable to give public recognition to individuals of outstanding merit, it could be given without recourse to titles and the inclusion of the names of honoured persons in a list of miscellaneous quality and distinction.¹¹⁰

The commission's report had taken for granted that honours for political and party service would continue, but Henderson's view of 'service' was different. In his note of dissent, honours were, in principle, for 'services given to the community by its citizens' of 'outstanding merit'. There was no room for political honours in such a view. As a relative outsider to the world of honours in politics, he could make such an argument more clearly than Liberals and Conservatives whose parties were deeply integrated into the system. Henderson himself never accepted any honours, even though later in his career Labour politicians were began to accept titles, though this was often controversial (see Chapter two).¹¹¹

Labour had not shared in the same lavish bounty of honours as Liberal and Conservative supporters and politicians, and workers were largely excluded from the orders of chivalry, so Henderson had less to lose in arguing that the existing practice was essentially corrupt and had been for some time. Already, however, Labour organizers and politicians alike were beginning to start receiving honours. The following chapters will explore in more detail the troubled relationship between the new party and the honours system. For now, the minority report was a striking statement, but not a particularly successful one. It exposed the weaknesses of the Royal Commission in addressing the underlying integration of honours with politics but, while it attracted some media attention, it did not significantly alter the way in which the post-war system was changed (except

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Rose, *King George V*, 255.

possibly to alert the civil service and Conservative politicians to the necessity of getting Labour on board with the system).

Furthermore, the Commission's report as a whole was significant in a couple of ways in spite of the obvious weaknesses that Henderson's minority report highlighted. In the first place, it contained a revealing, if limited, interrogation of how the honours system worked behind the doors of Whitehall and Downing Street. While brief, this was not a trivial moment of exposure. Then, as for the rest of the century (and even today, in the era of 'open government') the precise workings of the honours selection process were deliberately opaque. The fact that the commission questioned whips and patronage secretaries made the vested interests in party fundraising explicit. While the commission stopped short of being explicit about these hidden negotiations, it is a useful source in that it shows how dependent the process for political honours was on individual, and sometimes haphazard, personal connections. It was especially dependent upon the patronage secretaries and whips of the major parties in particular.

More importantly, the commission's conclusions put in place institutions and cemented ideas that were to become central to the way in which the honours system was run from that point onwards. The Political Honours Scrutiny Committee was formed along the lines suggested by the report. At the same time the government began extensive reforms within the civil service aimed at rationalizing and standardizing the process of honours nomination (as we shall see in the next chapter). The Honours (Prevention of Abuses) Act that was eventually passed in 1925 was also, as I have suggested, an essentially conservative measure. The failure to challenge the underlying structure of honours and the principles that governed it meant that there was discursive continuity between the pre-war and post-war honours systems, but at the same time the commission made explicit certain assumptions about worthiness and the nature of 'service' that hinted at broader changes in attitudes. Political service was the most important aspect for these politicians, even though, as we

shall see, numerically other kinds of service to the state were starting to be rewarded more liberally. Just as historians have done, the Royal Commission focused on the elite honours rather than the full spectrum of state recognition.

While the Royal Commission was a key moment in the political and administrative history of honours in twentieth-century Britain, the creation and evolution of the Order of the British Empire (and, to a lesser extent, the simultaneous establishment of the Order of the Companions of Honour) was the most significant addition to the honours system in terms of how it was conceived as a social, cultural and, indeed, political institution and force in Britain and the empire, especially in the longer term. The Royal Commission was, ultimately, oriented around maintaining a status quo that would support political and social conventions, but the function of honours was changing as the scope of honours changed. Curzon's comments about the democratization of honours alluded to these changes, but in general the political and public debates about honours focused almost exclusively on the highest ranks of honours and the peerage, which had a political and social function above and beyond the recognition of service through crown and state honours. The Order of the British Empire was more tarnished by association with the sale of honours and by the large numbers in which it was given out. Of the thousands of recipients, only a tiny minority were in any way linked to the corrupt practices of Lloyd George and Freddy Guest. But in its first few years the new Order fell under the shadow of the scandal. In the wider empire, though, it encountered other problems.

V.

Organizing and communicating the purpose of the Order of the British Empire was a challenge in the empire, especially in the Dominions. The problems that the Colonial Office had in administering awards reflected, in microcosm, the wider confusion and, in some cases, chaos that accompanied the many different calls on the honours system by different interests at home and within the empire.

The Order of Saint Michael and Saint George was a more exclusive order oriented around overseas recipients. Distinguished politicians, public figures in the Dominions, governors, diplomats and other civil servants, could all aspire to its heights. Before and during the war, the Colonial Office funneled recommendations from governors and governors-general through to the Prime Minister and from there to the Queen. The new order was larger and less distinguished, and its origin in domestic social and political concerns meant that some governments and governors-general were unclear about how precisely they were supposed to use it. Many colonial governors and dominion governments defaulted to imitating Britain in focusing on war relief organizations, especially the Red Cross.

As in Britain, many in the colonies were aware of the newly expanded honours system. Like in Britain, too, there was a great deal of confusion about how to nominate people and, indeed, the threshold of service and class required for nomination. The time delay in transmitting detailed correspondence between colonies and Whitehall also posed problems, especially after the war when the Civil Service began to attempt retrenchment of the honours system just as colonial governors and Dominion governments became used to the idea of a more liberal distribution of awards. Pressure for better communication went both ways. The Australian Press Association requested the Colonial Office provide lists of honours ‘affecting Australia and New Zealand as early as possible before publication’ because of the ‘great congestion on the cables’.¹¹²

Canada, too, was an ongoing problem. The Nickle Resolution of 1919 in the Canadian House of Commons requested the British government to avoid nominating Canadian residents for honours. Only military medals were permissible.¹¹³ The Resolution had been prompted by disgust at

¹¹² Taylor Darbyshire to the Undersecretary of State for the Colonies, 17 December 1919, Honours: Misc Offices and Individuals, 1919, CO 448/21, NA.

¹¹³ Christopher McCreery, *The Order of Canada: Its Origins, History, and Development* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 17–121.

Canadian businessmen like Max Aitken accepting (and paying for) British titles, but it had wider ramifications for lower honours as well – the Canadian government interpreted it as applying to all civilian honours. It also led to a great deal of confusion between the Colonial Office, the Canadian government and other British government departments, who were sometimes unaware that people they wanted to nominate were Canadian. Sir George Fiddes of the Colonial Office wrote an angry letter to a counterpart in the War Office in November 1919 about nominations made by them of Canadian soldiers, but followed it mere days later with another, apologetic letter saying that the Canadian Prime Minister, Robert Borden, had changed his mind about military honours and was once again allowing the British War Office to make them.¹¹⁴ Confusion about whether Canadians – military or civilian – were eligible for lower honours in the Orders of the Bath, Saint Michael and Saint George and British Empire continued for some time, although the Colonial Office quickly learned to scrutinize lists sent in by other departments to avoid the risk of offending the Canadian Government.¹¹⁵

Another problem centered on the difference in honorific recognition between the Home Civil Service and the (often growing) civil services in the Dominions. In August 1919 Cabinet Secretary Maurice Hankey suggested to the Colonial Office that the assistants of the Dominion Prime Ministers (with the exception, of course, of Canada) at the Paris Peace Conference be made Companions of the Order of Saint Michael and Saint George (CMG).¹¹⁶ The Colonial Office replied that this would be too great a drain on the limited pool of CMGs, but that they could spare five of

¹¹⁴ Sir George Fiddes to R. Brade, 29 November 1919, 2 December 1919, Honours: Misc Offices and Individuals, 1919, CO 448/21, NA.

¹¹⁵ G.G. Whiskard to F. Batterbee, 16 January 1920, Honours: Misc Offices and Individuals, 1919, CO 448/21, NA.

¹¹⁶ M.P.A. Hankey to Milner, 12 August 1919, Honours: Misc Offices and Individuals, 1919, CO 448/21, NA.

the newer, more numerous CBEs.¹¹⁷ Milner wrote to the appropriate governors general along these lines.¹¹⁸ However, the Prime Ministers made problems about three of the five men concerned – New Zealand Prime Minister William Massey’s assistant F.D. Thomson and the Private Secretaries to Jan Smuts and Louis Botha, E.F.C. Lane and G. Brebner. Smuts wrote that Lane had been indispensable to the War Cabinet and that while ‘he is a most modest fellow and had not himself set great store by these things’, a CMG or CB would make Smuts ‘feel much easier in my conscience’.¹¹⁹ Brebner and Thomson, insulted by the junior nature of the CBE relative to the CMGs and CBs that were so often awarded to their counterparts in the British civil service, were less modest and declined the proffered CBEs outright.¹²⁰ This opposition from the New Zealand and South African leaders and their secretaries prompted the Colonial Office to change their minds about the reserve of CMGs and offer them to all five men concerned.¹²¹ These offers proved acceptable. The pride of a select group of private secretaries was saved, although Thomson (who went on to become an important figure in the modernization and centralization of the New Zealand civil service) desired a CB rather than his CMG, leading to a later campaign by Massey to get him one.¹²² In this, Massey was unsuccessful. The CMG was one thing, but the CB remained largely the preserve of British civil servants and soldiers.

The addition of the Order of the British Empire was, however, an important development for the empire as a whole because, as in Britain, it opened up many new areas of service to colonial

¹¹⁷ H.C. Thornton to M.P.A Hankey, 18 August 1919, Honours: Misc Offices and Individuals, 1919, CO 448/21, NA.

¹¹⁸ Lord Alfred Milner to Governors-General, 22 August 1919, Honours: Misc Offices and Individuals, 1919, CO 448/21, NA.

¹¹⁹ Quoted in: Hankey to Thornton, 8 September 1919, Honours: Misc Offices and Individuals, 1919, CO 448/21, NA.

¹²⁰ Hankey to Thornton, 8 September 1919, Honours: Misc Offices and Individuals, 1919, CO 448/21, NA.

¹²¹ Thornton to Hankey, 19 September 1919, Honours: Misc Offices and Individuals, 1919, CO 448/21, NA

¹²² Governor General Sir Charles Fergusson to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 28 April 1925, Honours: Correspondence 1925, CO 448/31, NA.

and dominion governments for honorific distinction. The CMG (and, in India, the two Indian orders) were exclusive and limited. The new order was still centrally controlled, but it did offer up new options, and in its very name it implied a more widespread reward for imperial service: lobbyists for constituents, friends or family members to receive honours clearly took the name of the order more seriously than many in Whitehall and stressed that the service of the person nominated was imperial rather than merely local in nature. One of the best examples of this was an Australian who wrote in to lobby for a higher honour than that which he had been offered. Major J. Henley of New South Wales, who was offered an OBE for his work with the Australian Comforts Funds war organization, rejected the honour on the basis that it was too minor considering the services that he had rendered to the Empire. Clearly aiming for a knighthood, he argued that his ‘constituents’ would ‘strongly resent my accepting 4th grade honours’.¹²³ In a long letter to G. Whiskard, the Acting Secretary of the order, he detailed his extensive service to the Empire since 1900, including his lectures about imperial loyalty given to large numbers of working ‘boys’ in the Municipalities under his direction after 1910, 2000 of whom later volunteered for the war. Furthermore, he explained his active resistance to the plans of the ‘Socialist State Government of New South Wales’ in 1912. This group, which was ‘influenced by the then growing I.W.W. movement (since proved to be largely German), decided upon the closing of Government House, Sydney, as a Vice-regal residence’. Henley formed a citizen’s protest committee that preserved the governor’s residence from what he saw as the socialist menace. Henley also detailed his war work in recruiting and soldiers’ comfort, concluding that:

You will therefore understand that, considering the years of Honorary Empire Work I put in before the War and for nearly three years of costly war service [original emphasis] which

¹²³ J. Henley to G.G. Whiskard, Acting Secretary of the Order of the British Empire, 29 May 1918, Colonial Office: Honours: Original Correspondence, 1918, CO 448/16, NA.

has been, and now is being willingly given, I feel sure that I can ask that my name be graciously withdrawn from the proposed list of Honours as an Officer of the Order of the British Empire.¹²⁴

Henley took the name of the order seriously – perhaps more seriously than most in Britain – and in promoting his own worthiness for higher honours than a mere OBE emphasized his specific service to the empire as a whole.

In spite of its name, the Order of the British Empire was designed more to meet domestic priorities within Britain than to serve a wider imperial structure. But both its structure and its design made it an imperial order, too. Over the next few decades, part of the challenge for administrators in the Home Office, Treasury and Colonial Office (and its successors) was to manage the divergent claims on the honour system between Britain and Britain's colonies. The Order of the British Empire was the first honour to have a genuinely broad base that unified a wide range of different kinds of service across Britain and the empire. In doing so, it presented an ambitious notion of trans-imperial loyalty and service, but as J. Henley's case showed, the reality of the demands of colonial governance struggled to live up to this ideal.

VI.

The editor of the *Burke's Handbook*, A. Winton Thorpe, received an OBE in 1918 for his services as the director of publicity for the Ministry of Food from 1917–1918.¹²⁵ In many ways, he was representative of the civilian men who received this first wave of new honours, as he was a civilian who had served the state voluntarily during the war, offering his area of expertise – publishing and propaganda – to the cause. Thorpe was a locally notable figure. In his time and place he was

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ "THORPE, A[rthur] Winton", *Who Was Who*, A & C Black, 1920–2008; online edn, Oxford University Press, Dec 2007 (<http://www.ukwhoswho.com/view/article/oupww/whowaswho/U243726>, accessed 21 June 201).

significant, but not significant enough to warrant an entry in the canonical directory of historically important Britons: the *Dictionary of National Biography*. Born in 1865, he married Alice Wheeler of Northampton in 1897, with whom he had one son. He worked as a journalist in England and France and along with his managing editorship of *Burke's Peerage* he also served as the managing director of the London News Agency until 1919.¹²⁶ He structured the *Handbook* in such a way that its potted biographies of members of the Order, while in many ways similar to those that one would find in *Who's Who* or *Burke's Peerage*, specifically mentioned the recipient's war service. From this, we know that he himself served both at the Ministry of Food but also the Metropolitan Central Constabulary.¹²⁷ According to him, the Order was rendered necessary because the war had become 'an intimate part of everyone's life. Its demands were inexorable and insatiable.'¹²⁸ The war was won because:

All the energies of the State, all the energies of industry, all the energies of individuals were directed towards the carrying on of a devouring and devastating struggle, which some day – but no one knew when – was to end in the victory of the allies, because on victory the will of the British people was firmly and immovably set. This unconquerable will to victory on the part of the British people is, next to the heroism of the British soldiers and sailors, the proudest memory of the Great War.¹²⁹

Clearly proud of his own participation in this broader effort to win the war, he saw himself as a representative of a grand democratic effort to victory on the part of the whole British people – the Order could be 'proud of its long list of members, and of the vast unnumbered host of war workers

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Thorpe, *Burke's Handbook to the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire*, 513.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 9.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 9–10.

– unrecognised in the way of honorific distinction, but not unappreciated – whose representatives they are.’¹³⁰

From this perspective, the new constellation of honours was a ‘democratic’ structure for a democratic Britain. While this democratic unity arose out of an emergency situation, the new order was presented as an expression and recognition of the will of the people, which, now united, was deserving of the highest praise. For the elites who ran the honours system, as we have seen, this was not necessarily the case – for one thing, the Order of the British Empire contained more rather than fewer hierarchical distinctions with its five levels (as opposed to the more traditional three or four). The new order defined and reinforced hierarchy even as it recognized a wider range of people as deserving of honorific reward. But the wider public throughout Britain and its empire interpreted the new honour not in terms of its rigorous hierarchy but in terms of its ability – or otherwise – to acknowledge their services and their local interest groups in the wider empire through a direct symbolic link to the crown.

At the same time, it did not replicate the normative political function of the honours system: rather than focusing on patronage and fundraising, the newly enlarged honours system rewarded people for vaguely defined service to the state, an idea that could carry all manner of meanings, many of them outside the traditional focus on professional civil servants and military officers and political donors. In practice, this relied on networks of patronage and relationships within existing structures, but these were sometimes different to those which had been involved in past political, military and civil service honours (if anything, they were most related to the latter). Backlash against the Order of the British Empire, while couched in terms of opposition to corruption and inflation, also carried an underlying disgruntlement at the expansion of entitlement beyond the bounds of

¹³⁰ Ibid., 12.

social, administrative and political elites. The theme of the Royal Commission – that people outside government and the Crown had too much agency in demanding and soliciting honours – was also true of the new order. As the next chapter will show, this was quickly reined in by the Treasury, but for a few years the wider demand for honours was met with a generous response from the government. The bubble burst, but it left behind a more enduring desire for participation in the honours system than pre-war honours planners would have imagined.

What about someone like Mr. Hall, whose rejection of a CBE opened this chapter? By 1923 his family was regretting that decision. The reason his detailed explanation for declining his honour survived is that his wife later wrote in to the government to see if he could reverse his decision.¹³¹ According to her, his children were already wondering why their father had no honours from the British government, and she was sure that if he were offered it again he would accept for his family's sake. The heat of wartime passions and fervor had died down, and the CBE would be more acceptable. The civil service could do nothing about this, of course, since war honours had by that point closed. Rejected once, the honour was, in his case, lost forever. But the struggle within Hall's household, and between his wife and the Treasury's ceremonial division, shows how complex and how uncertain the meaning of these new honours was. Their importance went beyond their party political function or the narrow administrative logic of deflation. As the next chapter will show, the holders and aspiring holders of honours saw in them something that spoke to wider ideas about community, loyalty, service and empire.

¹³¹ Mrs Jean Hall to the Acting Secretary of the Order of the British Empire, 12 April 1923, Order of the British Empire: Miscellaneous Correspondence, Requests for Information, etc., T 343/42, NA.

Chapter 2: The Shifting Borders of the Empire of Honours, 1922–1939

In 1921 the London Metropolitan Police approached chimney sweep J. Brixey with a serious concern about his cart. This had nothing to do with its shape or its contents, but with what he had written on it: 'J. Brixey, O.B.E'. Following an article in the *Daily Mail* about the 'Sweep OBE', a number of individuals had written in to the Home Office to complain about Brixey, whose low social status seemed to them to devalue the honour of being an Officer of the British Empire.¹ They suspected that he was claiming an honour he had not won. As it turned out, Brixey had been given the Medal of the Order of the British Empire for services as a fireman during the war; he had seen respectable men who were Officers of the British Empire use 'OBE' after their names and had come to believe himself to also be entitled to these blazons of middle-class respectability. He was not alone in making this mistake. Many other working class men and women who received the lower-status medal of the Order used the ambiguity of the Order's acronyms to claim for themselves, often inadvertently, the rank of 'Officer'. The multiple people who saw the article and were intuitively suspicious of Brixey's claims were also not alone: during the 1920s and 1930s holders of the Order of the British Empire spent a great deal of time and energy writing in to the Treasury to complain about people who were claiming honours that did not belong to them through the use 'OBE' or 'MBE' after their name. Not only did they do this, but Treasury officials themselves responded with action, enlisting local police to clamp down on the misuse of titles and post-nominals. Brixey, who was shocked to receive such a hostile visit from the police, was obliged to re-paint his cart.

This was not merely a domestic British issue. Throughout the British Empire, the new chivalric order of that name was appropriated to defend claims to social respectability and

¹ *Daily Mail*, 23 April 1921. Clipping located in: Various communications about OBE, HO/45/11071, National Archives [NA].

distinction during the interwar years. As the government deflated the total numbers of awards following the end of wartime inflation, the value of such claims increased. People took the entitlements that honours gave very seriously – probably all the more seriously because of the scandals of the early 1920s. In India, Foreign Office and India Office officials scrambled to control Indian princes who sought to acquire honours from European states. In Hong Kong, one of the colony’s leading businessmen wrote in to the Colonial Office to harass them with requests for more honours, while in Canada politicians and the public struggled with the issue of which honours should be available to Canadian citizens. All around the empire, honours, as symbols of the relationship between the Crown and the people, took on a variety of meanings. But there were common themes. The control of honours and restrictions both on who should receive them and how people should be able to *use* them, were vitally important to the imperial state and to subjects concerned about their social and cultural status.

The shade of the profligacy at the end of the Great War haunted honours policy for the whole interwar period and beyond. Lloyd George’s honorific generosity was a warning to politicians and administrators because of the public scandal it created. But more powerfully than that, it fed a fear of general debasement, which civil servants and others in British politics and government felt that it had brought to the honours system as a whole. The years 1917–1922 and the difficult birth of the Order of the British Empire remained a defining era in the imaginations of the men who ran the honours system. Retrenchment and economy for the sake of reputation and value were the watchwords of the Treasury, most politicians and the Central Chancery of the Orders of Knighthood [CCOK]. In the interwar years, these men were able to shape the outlines of the once-scandalized honours system into what was in formal terms a respectable, trans-imperial, well-ordered and carefully hierarchical system through centralization and careful regulation. But for all its power at the top of society and in the halls of Whitehall, a different dynamic governed the ways in which

people felt about honours at the other end of the system. In community halls in Yorkshire, government buildings in Canberra and Ottawa, or in the palaces of Princely States, recipients, potential recipients and their neighbors looked at honours in different ways. People at the demand side of honours had much more of a focus on the prestige or disgrace that an honour brought in their locality, although not without an eye to the specific nature of the connection that honours symbolized with the wider Empire, or with the Crown itself. They did not simply passively accept the social order that it implied; instead, they saw themselves as actively buying into and shaping it through accepting honours.

Concerns over the woes afflicting the British economy in the interwar period had their mirror in the management of the honours system. 'Honours inflation' was a major concern at the same time as currency inflation. Just as wartime spending cast its inflationary shadow over the interwar economy, honours expansion worried administrators. As we shall see, the solution to the perceived problems with the new, expanded honours system was overwhelmingly understood to be a matter of controlling inflation by cutting down on numbers, both in terms of the statutes that controlled honours quotas and the actual number of honours given out at any given time. Parsimony was the guiding principle of interwar honours and continued to be central to the way in which honours were thought about by politicians, the royal household and the civil service throughout the century.

In Chapter one, the story of honours revolved around political figures making decisions about the system with specific, often short-term, political objectives, but in the interwar period the management of the honours system was placed firmly in the hands of non-elected administrators. The Civil Service itself underwent extensive and sometimes dramatic changes in the in the later years of the war. The nature of the post-war settlement around the question of honours policy was intertwined with the shape and objectives of the Civil Service, as well as with ideas around how the

Civil Service should operate in a more democratic post-war Britain. In 1919 Warren Fisher was appointed the Head of the Treasury, and one of his first tasks was the renovation of the honours system. The legacy of this transfer to Treasury control was vitally important for almost all of the rest of the twentieth century.

Another increasingly-central figure behind the scenes was Robert Uchtred Eyre Knox, who was to be one of the most important and knowledgeable civil servants on the topic of honours in the twentieth century.² Educated at Cambridge, from which he graduated in 1911, he served as a Captain on the Western Front from 1914 to 1916, where he was severely wounded, mentioned in dispatches and won the DSO. From 1918 to 1919 he served in the War Office, before joining the Treasury in 1920. During his long career (he died in 1965) he became the civil service's leading expert on honours in his role as Private Secretary to Fisher, then as the Secretary of the Political Honours Scrutiny Committee (from 1939). As Secretary to Coronation Commissions and Committees in 1936–37 and 1952–53 he was a key liaison between the royal household and the civil service. In 1937 he was made a Knight of the Royal Victorian Order, an honour in the gift of the King for personal service to the Royal Family. As we shall see later, his fingerprints (or, rather, his initials) can be found throughout the Treasury files on honours from the 1920s up until his death. While he was not an active voice in the deliberations about the future of the honours system immediately after the war, we will see a great deal more of him later in this chapter and in later chapters, as he was central to the day-to-day running of the honours system.

In 1920 the King asked Warren Fisher to set up a small committee to consider the 'permanent establishment' (establishment was the internal technical term for the process of setting

² "Knox, Sir Robert Uchtred Eyre", *Who Was Who*, A & C Black, 1920–2008; online edn, Oxford University Press, Dec 2007 (<http://www.ukwhoswho.com/view/article/oupww/whowaswho/U47717>, accessed 23 July 2011).

quotas for honours) of the Order of the British Empire.³ After lengthy deliberations, it produced a final report in 1922, which set the total numbers of awards in the Order by statute. The committee received advice from a variety of sources, but was ultimately controlled by the priorities of the Treasury and the royal household more than those of Lloyd George's government, whose reputation on the issue of honours was already low. The committee effectively had a royal mandate to revise and renegotiate the nature of the new honours (and changes to honours) that had come about during the war. Implicitly it was charged with reversing the most gratuitous of wartime honorific excesses. Frederick Ponsonby, who had been so central to the creation of the Order of the British Empire, suggested that 'there would be little to justify its existence' if it was given out on 'precisely the same lines as the existing orders', by which he meant that it should not merely be a junior (and inferior) supplement to the Bath or the Order of St Michael and St George (the latter already 'supplemented' by proxy by the Imperial Service Order).⁴ If it were to become a mere 'sop to the disappointed' among civil servants and soldiers it would 'depreciate in value and become meaningless'. As a result, Ponsonby stressed the importance of awarding it to non-traditional groups such as artists, scientists, philanthropists, people in local government and women. He enclosed a submission he himself had received from Herbert Jessel (a politician and soon-to-be peer), who argued that the CBE, OBE and MBE would be ideal decorations for local Mayors in order to give 'encouragement and recognition' to people who had served in local politics.⁵ However, Baron Stamfordham (the King's private secretary) and Fisher rejected Ponsonby's suggestion that Mayors

³ Order of the British Empire: Committee on the Permanent Establishment, Memoranda/Report, T 343/1, NA.

⁴ Memorandum by Sir Frederick Ponsonby, 12 May 1921, Order of the British Empire: Committee on the Permanent Establishment, Memoranda/Report, T 343/1, NA.

⁵ Memorandum from Col. Sir Herbert Jessel, Bart., Order of the British Empire: Committee on the Permanent Establishment, Memoranda/Report, T 343/1, NA.

be given honours – Stamfordham argued for a more parsimonious approach with ‘very careful superintendence’ to keep in check the ‘growing love and demand for decorations’.⁶

While not exactly a key moment, this exchange of correspondence at the beginning of the interwar period represents both a clash in visions of how the Order of the British Empire should work and the eventual direction honours policy would take. Ponsonby’s idealistic vision for the Order of the British Empire as an award for outstanding service by people outside of the traditional political and administrative elite was in line with the original wartime idea of the Order as an award for unpaid service by the people of Britain. It was, indeed, to become an award that was given to artists, local politicians, and philanthropists in Britain and some Dominions. But the dominant trend of the interwar period was not towards more honours for these ‘worthy’ and undoubtedly neglected groups. Instead, the Treasury took a more broadly conservative and, in a sense, practical approach to reorganizing the Order: they gave most of them to civil servants.

Explaining the logic of this move, which appeared to contradict the original premise of the Order, requires an expedition into the realm of Civil Service records and into the minds of the Treasury officials who had been given two tasks. First, they had to re-write the statutes of the Order of the British Empire. Second, and more nebulously, they were to restore and reinforce its reputation. Re-establishing the Order was particularly difficult for the civil servants tasked with its restoration because there were so many interested parties, all of whom wanted more awards than could be supplied. The military wanted to continue their involvement in the Order, claiming that it was necessary to reward officers who did not qualify for the Bath, while the Foreign Office, Colonial Office and India Office all needed their own allocations. This was surprising for some of those involved in the administration of the order, who had assumed that the armed forces would

⁶ Stamfordham to Fisher, 13 May 1921, Order of the British Empire: Committee on the Permanent Establishment, Memoranda/Report, T 343/1, NA.

eventually disclaim their share in the awards, since they already received the bulk of the Order of the Bath. The Colonial Office had to deal with Dominion governments (and in the case of Australia, state governments). The eventual report of the committee recommended, as in the case of the more senior orders, that the top three classes be limited by the number of living members, while the Officer and Member classes be limited by the number given out per year.⁷ The suggestion that the Order be phased out, briefly mooted at the height of the perceived excesses of 1919–1920, was quickly extinguished.

After resolving that the Order of the British Empire would continue to be awarded and having taken over ongoing responsibility for the Order from the Home Office, the Treasury set about enhancing the Order's prestige in the public eye. The first priority was to restrict the number of total awards, in order to make honours more valuable through making them rarer. The proposal for the newly re-established Order was to go ahead with New Year appointments at one third of the total yearly statutory allocation, rather than the more typical half. The plan was to restrict honours to levels below their statutory limits in order to counter the inflation of the war period. This was an ongoing, rather than one-off, project. These restrictions were above and beyond the new statutory regulations, but they were for the same reason – to 'raise the prestige of the Order by curtailing the list of awards' and to 'set... a high standard for individual appointments'.⁸ By 1925 Fisher was claiming victory in this respect, although to him and others in the Treasury this was a constant, ongoing battle. Restriction of honours was vitally important in this view. Any backsliding on this issue would sully the honours system.

⁷ Peter Galloway, *The Order of the British Empire* (London: Central Chancery of the Orders of Knighthood, 1996), 50–51.

⁸ N.F. Warren Fisher to Eyre Crowe, 26 March 1925, Order of the British Empire: Restriction of Awards, 1923-1926, T 343/31, NA

Overseas awards presented special problems for this project of deflation. The Colonial and India offices were not notified soon enough of the restrictions on awards for the New Year of 1923, and the Viceroy of India sent in his list to the India Office before he could be told that he needed to restrict appointments to one third of the statutory scale.⁹ The Colonial Office, too, had problems with the timing (as they often did with honours, especially for distant parts of the Empire such as the Antipodes and Singapore).¹⁰ Furthermore, such restrictions on awards that were supposed to be selected by Dominion and Commonwealth governments were embarrassing for constitutional reasons – the British Treasury was imposing restrictions directly on Dominion governments and thus restricting their ability to honour their citizens. This was certainly unwelcome, if not unexpected. Fisher recognized these problems and, in the end, the Indian Civil Service and Dominion governments were exempted from the one-third restriction, although they still had to stick with the new, revised, shrunken limits imposed by the statutes.¹¹ Furthermore, local political complexities in Australia had meant that Billy Hughes, the wartime Prime Minister who had just resigned from leadership of a national government, had not recommended Australia's full allotment of awards in previous lists. The new, more conservative government (Hughes had initially led a Labour government) was likely to want to appoint some of their missed OBEs, CBEs and KBEs.¹² The Secretary of State for the Colonies was able to promise, however, that the Colonial Office could impose restrictions on the non-self-governing colonies, since there was no problem to be overcome

⁹ F.W. Duke to N.F. Warren Fisher, 30 November 1922, Order of the British Empire: Restriction of Awards, 1923-1926, T 343/31, NA.

¹⁰ H.J. Read to N.F. Warren Fisher, 1 December 1922, Order of the British Empire: Restriction of Awards, 1923-1926, T 343/31, NA.

¹¹ Fisher to Duke, 8 December 1922, Order of the British Empire: Restriction of Awards, 1923-1926, T 343/31, NA.

¹² J. Masterton-Smith to Fisher, 26 February 1923, Order of the British Empire: Restriction of Awards, 1923-1926, T 343/31, NA.

with their local governments.¹³ Quirks of wartime politics were resolved within a couple of years. By 1925 the Treasury was demanding that even the self-governing Dominions should obey these restrictions, as illustrated by a letter from Fisher wherein he presented the reduction of awards through the Colonial office as a matter of urgency, arguing that:

A reduction is of course most imperative in the case of G.B.E's and K.B.E's, but unless it applies in some degree to all the Classes of the Order the number of appointments outside the United Kingdom will appear to be disproportionately large and the people overseas will regard this as a sign that the Order is not greatly valued at home.¹⁴

According to this logic, even small variations in allocations between different components of the honours system – in this case domestic versus colonial – could compromise its integrity. The production of a surplus of available awards was, therefore, an inevitable, 'foreseen' and, apparently, desirable consequence of this policy.¹⁵

By 1933, Knox wrote that the statutory limitations of 1922 and the restriction of awards in the mid- to late-1920s had saved 'the Order from impending disrepute and... create[d] a security valve'. As a result it 'has acquired a real prestige'.¹⁶ Still further vigilance was required, however, to maintain this reputation: Ponsonby, on behalf of King George V, wrote to the Honours Scales committee of 1933 that its priority needed to be maintaining the 'high standard that British Decorations have hitherto attained' and to avoid the perceived excesses of overseas honours. It was imperative that they must not be allowed to 'deteriorate and become as common and ridiculous as

¹³ J. Masterton-Smith to Fisher, 26 February 1923, Order of the British Empire: Restriction of Awards, 1923-1926, T 343/31, NA.

¹⁴ Fisher to Eyre Crowe, 25 March 1925, Order of the British Empire: Restriction of Awards, 1923-1926, T 343/31, NA.

¹⁵ Fisher to William Tyrrell, 12 March 1926, Order of the British Empire: Restriction of Awards, 1923-1926, T 343/31, NA.

¹⁶ Knox to Findlater Stewart, 6 July 1933, Honours Scales: Review of Honours Scales, 1933, Committee on the Order of the British Empire, T 344/5, NA.

some of the foreign decorations'.¹⁷ Ponsonby stressed once again that appointments during the Great War were supernumerary to the actual statutory establishment, and that the King hoped that they could keep the total number of living people within the order – wartime members excluded – around 10,000. This number was less than half that of the awards given out in the war. The committee broadly agreed with these priorities and insisted that they had helped serve this cause by 'ruthlessly prun[ing] departmental requests' for honours in order to ensure that the total numbers remained below the statutory limits.¹⁸ While they suggested some small increases in the statutory limits, the committee defended these by pointing out that they were very modest and also very necessary given the very broad scope of the award. Throughout both Britain and the Empire, meanwhile, the Treasury noted with some satisfaction that 'demands from Departments for this Honour [in this case, the OBE] as a reward for services of all kinds, local and otherwise, are of course far in excess of the numbers available'.¹⁹ This was precisely the situation that those in charge of the honours system desired.

II.

The re-establishment of the Order of the British Empire was just one part of a wider reorganization and consolidation of the honours system as a whole. One of the main problems with the early years of the Order of the British Empire was that the Home Office was responsible for its domestic distribution, a responsibility for which it was not prepared. The transition to Treasury control saw a centralization of the honours system that rendered it more efficient and coherent on the government

¹⁷ Memorandum by Sir Frederick Ponsonby, 9 October 1933, Honours Scales: Review of Honours Scales, 1933, Committee on the Order of the British Empire, T 344/5, NA.

¹⁸ Note on Sir Frederick Ponsonby's memorandum of the 9th October, 1933, Honours Scales: Review of Honours Scales, 1933, Committee on the Order of the British Empire, T 344/5, NA.

¹⁹ Civil Division, United Kingdom Allocation, 17 July 1933, Honours Scales: Review of Honours Scales 1930, Committee of the Order of the Bath, T 344/3, NA.

side, as did the contemporaneous centralization of the royal side under the Central Chancery of the Orders of Knighthood. The re-establishment of the Order of the British Empire was thought so successful that in 1924 the King requested that the same thing be done with the Order of the Bath. The earlier review was seen as a model for this process of consolidation and it was run in a similar manner, with different government departments (and, for the Bath, in particular different branches of the armed forces) petitioning the Treasury committee for particular scales of honours.²⁰

Further 'reviews' of honours scales became a regular process by the 1930s, although this process did not involve the Order of St Michael and St George, which was still administered separately by the Foreign Office up until the Second World War. The committee on honours scales reviewed the Order of the Bath in 1930 and the Order of the British Empire again in 1933. These reviews, which analyzed the existing quotas, solicited interested government parties for suggestions about changing them and then set new quotas until the next review, enabled the Treasury to coordinate with other interested parties, such as the Indian, Colonial and Foreign offices, and the CCOK. They meant that there was for the first time centralized and internally consistent government control over most of the Orders of Knighthood plus the knights bachelor. This enforced greater consistency in the honours system and meant that the statutory establishments of the different honours could be internally coordinated. These reviews also affected the honours system across the empire, seeing it as a unified whole rather than a set of different orders.

These honours quotas were organized by government department, with a special category called 'Maecenas' for artists and scholars. Scientists were rewarded through affiliation with one or another government department. Political honours, which shall be covered later, constituted a further, exceptional category. One of the ways in which the Treasury dealt with extra demands for

²⁰ Honours Scales: Review of Honours Scales 1924-1925, Committee of the Order of the Bath, T 344/2, NA.

honours was to 'lend' honours between these departments. In 1930, for example, the War Office offered to reduce the Army establishment of CBs in order to allow the Air Force and the Navy (as well as the Royal Indian Marines) a larger share of the most junior rank in the Bath.²¹ These internal acts of beneficence could be on a more temporary basis, too: the Treasury 'lent' fairly large numbers of the OBEs and MBEs accumulated through their deflationary measures on the domestic civilian list in the 1920s to the Foreign and the India Office.²² The committees in charge of the honours scales kept detailed records of the numbers allocated to each department, making careful note of who lent honours to whom. Treasury centralization meant that this internal economy of honours could be more rigorously policed and controlled.

George V's Silver Jubilee Honours of 1935 were a model for this new regime. Coronations and jubilees were some of only a few occasions – along with wartime and other special circumstances – when extra honours could be given out. Here the reference point to be repudiated was not the war years but George V's coronation of 1911. The 'modern standards' of the late 1920s and early 1930s demanded a less generous distribution than was seen in 1911, when in India awards were given out with a lavishness that seemed excessive to the eyes of Fisher and his comrades.²³ George V was in total agreement, asking Fisher to make sure, while allowing 'some increase' to the usual lists, that there would be no repeat of the 'substantial increase such as occurred on the occasion of the Coronation 1911–1912'.²⁴ The Committee on the Scales of Honours decided that the best thing to do would be to make all recommendations for the Birthday List associated with the

²¹ Order of the Bath: Committee on the Distribution of the Permanent Establishment, 7 July 1930, Honours Scales: Review of Honours Scales 1930, Committee of the Order of the Bath, T 344/3, NA.

²² Civil Division, United Kingdom Allocation, 17 July 1933, Honours Scales: Review of Honours Scales 1930, Committee of the Order of the Bath, T 344/3, NA.

²³ Draft Letter: Fisher to Croft, n.d., Honours Scales: Review of Honours Scales 1935, Silver Jubilee, T 344/6, NA.

²⁴ Clive Wigram to Fisher, 19 November 1934, Honours Scales: Review of Honours Scales 1935, Silver Jubilee, T 344/6, NA.

King's Jubilee additional to normal allocations, so as to not 'disrupt' the 'flow of normal recommendations'.²⁵ The Committee rationed out a modest number of new awards to three groups: 'His Majesty's Civil Service', 'The Defense Services' and 'India, Dominions and Colonies'. The first of these is particularly telling. The Civil Service was only a subset of the people who normally received domestic civilian honours, but it was now the dominant group within that category. While standards were high, the committee felt that Civil Servants should have a share of the Jubilee honours because seeing extra awards going to the military might generate resentment. The other groups who would normally expect civilian awards, such as professionals, business people, those involved 'local services', and cultural and scientific figures were not a factor in these discussions: it was the Civil Service that was pre-eminent in this logic. However, the committee did recommend that an extra quota be created for political and local services.²⁶

The idea that the honours system needed to recognize more service at the local and non-civil service level came up again when George VI's imminent coronation prompted a further review of honours scales. Discussions around how to reward people involved in the coronation followed a very similar pattern to the Silver Jubilee discussions of the year before, with the King and the Treasury agreeing that the precedents of 1911 and of the First World War should not be followed. The new King would allow the list to be increased 'to a certain extent', but with 'nothing comparable to what occurred at the last coronation'.²⁷ The Civil Service also discussed the possibility of creating a new honour and spent some time meditating upon the continuing problem of political honours.

Ramsay MacDonald and Neville Chamberlain had suggested that the government create a new order

²⁵ Report of the Committee on the Scale of the Silver Jubilee Honours List, 6 February 1935, Honours Scales: Review of Honours Scales 1935, Silver Jubilee, T 344/6, NA.

²⁶ Fisher to Cromer, 24 June 1937, Honours Scales: Review of Honours Scales 1939, Committee on the Order of the British Empire, T 344/10, NA.

²⁷ Alexander Hardinge to Fisher, 28 October 1936, Honours Scales: Review of Honours Scales 1936-37, Coronation Honours, T 344/9, NA.

of chivalry to recognize local services, a proposal that was considered, and almost unanimously rejected, by a meeting of the 'Committee on a Proposed New Order or Decoration for Local Services' in 1936.²⁸ Fisher suggested that such a new order would be unsuitable because there was a 'risk that those appointed to it would be regarded as pariahs not worthy of consideration for appointment to the Order of the British Empire'.²⁹ The formation of new orders should not be undertaken lightly, and people involved in voluntary local work, local councilors and other such people could be recognized by the Order of the British Empire which, Fisher argued, had taken years to raise out of the 'lowly position into which it had quickly fallen'.³⁰ Again, Fisher and his colleagues in the Treasury were certain that the Order of the British Empire had been cast into disrepute through excessive and unwise distribution and had been rescued by their own deflationary effort.

In the same committee meeting, the Secretary of the CCOK, Harry Stockley, opposed the idea of a new award by invoking the existing role and history of the Order of the British Empire.³¹ He argued that the committee that decided to continue the existence of the Order in 1920 had based that decision partly on the fact that it was flexible enough to reward local service. Another committee member, Board of Trade permanent secretary Horace Hamilton, suggested that the country had 'not yet digested' the Order of the British Empire, and so any extensive alterations of the honours system would be premature and disruptive, especially to its arrangement throughout the wider empire.³² The meeting noted that over the preceding five or six years, awards of knights

²⁸ Committee on a Proposed New Order or Decoration for Local Services, 10 November 1936, Honours Scales: Review of Honours Scales 1936-37, Coronation Honours, T 344/9, NA.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

bachelor and the Order of the British Empire at all levels had increasingly been given for 'local services'.³³ At the same time, many of the different members of the committee (who represented various different divisions of the civil service) argued that their particular ministry was underrepresented in these local honours. For example, Henry Pelham, the Permanent Secretary of the Board of Education, pointed out that few CBEs had been given to unpaid chairs of local education committees. He also noted his subordinates wanted more honours at the OBE level for teachers, but that these could not be met within the existing quotas for his department (MBEs were less of a problem).³⁴ Exceptional teachers were understood to belong to the officer rather than member level. Likewise, the Ministry of Transport wanted more knights bachelor, while the Ministry of Labour desired MBEs, OBEs and felt that 'A few additional C.B.E.s would be of great assistance.'³⁵ However, these demands were difficult to meet, because the Order of the British Empire was bound by statute to a certain number of awards and these statutes were only reviewed every seven to ten years.

In order to resolve this difficulty, the committee provisionally suggested that the number of honours set aside for local services should be modified to include more lower-level honours. Their analysis suggested that local services received four or five knighthoods, two or three CBEs, eighteen or nineteen OBEs and twenty-five to twenty-seven MBEs per year, all of which were lower than the actual number assigned to local services.³⁶ They suggested that a new scale with roughly double the MBEs, thirty OBEs and fifteen CBEs be adopted and that the total for the UK be increased accordingly. The next formal meeting of the statute revision committee was set for 1940, but the

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

committee considered this issue urgent enough to make changes three years early.³⁷ The committee decided that an increase in total awards across the board, including India, the Dominions and the Colonies, was necessary, although in typical fashion they added a clause in their minutes reaffirming their commitment to ‘the necessity of maintaining standards and not allowing the numerical increases suggested in this memorandum to be so used as to jeopardise standards’.³⁸ Political honours were a further problem – the Chief Whip had suggested to the committee that more political honours be given out, and Fisher mooted the idea that another new honour for political service should be created, although the various scales committees did not pursue this idea any further.³⁹ However, the committee was willing to increase the political quota along with the other increases of 1937.⁴⁰

As these discussions suggest, in Britain itself the overwhelming number of honours went to state servants rather than citizens outside the employ of the government. Throughout the period from 1922 until the Second World War, the quota of honours for awards in the UK for ‘persons not in the State Services, excluding awards for Political or for Local Services’ was small relative to the civil service or even the smaller quota for political awards. In 1937, for example, the quota was approximately six knights, half a GBE, one-and-a-half KBE/DBEs, three-and-a-half CBEs, two or three OBEs and three or four MBEs.⁴¹ This was a very small proportion of total awards. Civil

³⁷ Ibid.; Order of the British Empire: Committee of 1937 on the Distribution of the Permanent Establishment, 6 June 1937, Honours Scales: Review of Honours Scales 1939, Committee on the Order of the British Empire, T 344/10, NA.

³⁸ Order of the British Empire: Committee of 1937 on the Distribution of the Permanent Establishment, 6 June 1937, Honours Scales: Review of Honours Scales 1939, Committee on the Order of the British Empire, T 344/10, NA.

³⁹ Committee on a Proposed New Order or Decoration for Local Services, 10 November 1936, Honours Scales: Review of Honours Scales 1936-37, Coronation Honours, T 344/9, NA.

⁴⁰ Order of the British Empire: Committee of 1937 on the Distribution of the Permanent Establishment, 6 June 1937, Honours Scales: Review of Honours Scales 1939, Committee on the Order of the British Empire, T 344/10, NA.

⁴¹ Committee on the Scale of the Coronation Honours List, 7 January 1937, Honours Scales: Review of Honours Scales 1936-37, Coronation Honours, T 344/9, NA.

service honours made up more than half of almost every civilian honours list for most of the interwar period, in stark contrast to the first few years of the Order, when it was given mostly to volunteer workers who were not paid state employees.

This trend towards civil servants being the main beneficiaries of not only the older orders of chivalry but also the new honour of the Order of the British Empire was in some ways driven by the desire to regulate and regularize honours in the wake of wartime excesses. The committees that selected honours were largely made up of civil servants, and it was simply easier for them to decide on deserving candidates and to measure the social class of those candidates when they were assessing people within their own world. During the war there had been large numbers of paid and unpaid civilians who were not usually part of the civil service involved in government, and so government departments had more opportunities to notice and recognize unpaid civilian service along the lines initially envisioned by the founders of the Order of the British Empire. Peace, and the imperative to restrict honours, changed the situation.

The logic of honorific hierarchies also made giving honours to civil servants and military officers a more practical task than trying to guess the appropriate rank of non-government employees. Because honours in the order were supposed to correspond to the social class of their recipient, it was easier to give honours to civil servants because the Civil Service had a system of internal ranks and pay scales that could be correlated with the five ranks of the Order. Thus when in the 1922 reclassification and re-establishment of the Order the Treasury produced charts that laid out what kind of person could receive what kind of honour, there was a bias built into the classification in favor of easily-classifiable kinds of service.⁴² MBEs were for ‘officers of minor rank’ in the colonies, assistant principals in the Civil Service and Superintendents of Police, while OBEs

⁴² Order of the British Empire, Table of Grading Classification, T 343/30, NA.

went to principals, ‘deputy heads of important departments’ in the colonial service and assistant chief constables.⁴³ Senior Ambassadors, Permanent Secretaries of State and ‘other heads of First Class Departments’ could expect Knight Commander or Knight Grand Cross awards. While there was some flexibility in this system, it was geared towards state servants.

In addition to these practical considerations, these policies were also predicated on the assumption that value came from rarity. But in the latter case, since it had almost complete control over honours, it was a great deal more successful. The idea that it was through small numbers that honours gained status was the dominant framework for politicians, civil servants and royal servants. This ideology of distinction was partly in response, as I suggested in the previous chapter, to a perception that continental honours systems lacked worth because they were too liberal, but it was also part of an elitist hierarchy that was very concerned about the value of a few, top awards – the Grand Cross and Knight Commander ranks in some orders and the Orders of the Garter and of the Thistle – and that was sensitive to even small increases in these awards.

One of the principal goals of these efforts to reorganize the honours system was to lend prestige to the Order of the British Empire and the honours system generally. At the end of the First World War, social elites presumed that the Order lacked credibility due to its recent creation and the overabundance of its awards. In Chapter one I argued that this view was not universal and that criticism of the Order was infused with a kind of elitism as well as legitimate concerns about the wrong people receiving honours. There were many people who embraced and enjoyed it in its early years, particularly those from groups who saw its creation as a validation of their place in national and imperial life. However, there were ongoing questions of credibility, especially among the more difficult-to-impress social elites. Controlling inflation, it was hoped, would create this credibility by

⁴³ Ibid.

rendering the Order more exclusive. As a result, some of its 'democratic' appeal was itself diluted in the interwar period.

It is important to stress this point, because – as demonstrated above – the overwhelming logic of the honours system at the administrative, governmental and royal level was that prestige and credibility were intimately tied into the fine details of total numbers. The metaphor of honours as an economy was embraced by the Treasury to the extent that even small variations in honours numbers were seen as a threat to the prestige of the various orders of chivalry. However, this logic was also based on a particular perspective on the social function of honours and did not reflect the attitudes of many at the 'demand side' of the honours system. For the administrators of the honours system, the restriction of awards was not only a matter of prestige but also one of social class and hierarchy, so control and restriction of senior awards in particular was natural for social as well as 'economic' reasons. Ultimately, honours were not like money. They were not tied to commodities or production, nor were they subject to market forces, to export and import rates, or to the supply of gold (although the decorations of certain elite awards did require sufficient amounts of specie to be very costly). Instead, they were tied to more abstract judgments about people's social position. These judgments were easier to make about people within the civil service structure than those outside of it.

This logic can be clearly seen in a debate between the Treasury and the Admiralty about whether a dockyard manager should receive the MBE or the Medal of the Order following unspecified 'Meritorious Service' in 1932. Mr. George Hoit was the general foreman of works at Portsmouth and, when he was initially recommended by the Admiralty for the MBE, Knox suggested that his low rate of salary meant he was unlikely to be selected if the Admiralty

recommended him.⁴⁴ In a letter to Fisher, Oswyn Murray (an Admiralty official) pointed out that this raised problems. Despite his low rate of pay, Hoit was still eligible for appointment because foremen saw themselves as officer-class. Because the Medal could only be awarded to those not eligible for appointment to any of the five ranks in the order, the implication that foremen were ineligible for the MBE ‘would cause a distinct flutter in the Dockyard Service, where it has been understood up to the present that Foremen are eligible for the M.B.E., however few and far between the awards of the honour may be.’⁴⁵ In the past, recommendations had been rare, which made Hoit’s all the more significant – his service had been so important that the Admiralty felt it had to recommend him, and they would prefer to recommend him for the MBE and be unsuccessful than to imply that foremen were of a lower class, even if it would mean Hoit received recognition through the Medal of the Order.

The Treasury disagreed. Fearing that any ‘concession’ to the Admiralty over giving MBEs to dock foremen might oblige them to extend to the War Office greater quotas of awards for workers in ordnance factories and arguing that, as a civilian worker, it would be better to compare his salary to civil service MBEs (who were paid more) rather than Naval Warrant Officers eligible for the MBE (who were paid less), they concluded that the Medal was a more appropriate reward for dockyard foremen than the MBE.⁴⁶ In an attempt to justify to the Admiralty this decision, Knox argued that the Medal of the Order was routinely used to reward outstanding service and that it was by no means a booby-prize: ‘the Medal of the Order of the British Empire is awarded very sparingly

⁴⁴ O.A.R. Murray to Fisher, 21 November 1932, Order of the British Empire: MBE (Civil), Status for appointment As, T 343/50, NA.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Herbert Creedy to Fisher, 8 December 1932, Order of the British Empire: MBE (Civil), Status for appointment As, T 343/50, NA.

and only for quite exceptional service'.⁴⁷ This response did not address the underlying problem of judging the social class of the potential recipient. In spite of the rigorous statutes that demanded a clear distinction between the Medal and membership in the Order, the bureaucrats tasked with resolving such problems faced a very difficult task. Cases such as these were destined to be resolved by drawing arbitrary lines in rank and pay between Members and Medalists.

TABLE 2.1: Percentage of civilian honours in the Order of the British Empire given to key groups in Britain, 1918–1938*

	Central civil servants	Non-volunteer local service	Political	Voluntary service	Other
1918	31%	7%	0%	32%	30%
1928	44%	21%	8%	16%	11%
1938	35%	20%	23%	12%	10%

* Estimates based on citations published in the ordinary (New Year and King's/Queen's Birthday) honours lists in supplements to the *London Gazette*. Includes domestic civilian honours at all ranks of the Order of the British Empire.

What were the broader consequences of this deflationary impulse within the honours system? As we have seen, there was a general political, royal and administrative consensus that honours had been tarnished by the excesses of the war and that they needed to be reined in in a manner that approximated, if not exactly matched, the pre-war honours system. Intentionally or otherwise, the methods used by the Treasury and the various other interested parties led to a drive towards uniformity across the honours system, a uniformity that reflected a particular idea about two key ideas: social hierarchy and some kind of judgment about the magnitude and the nature of service. Within Britain itself, as I have argued, Civil Service control led to the honours system being more strongly oriented towards rewarding civil servants, because it was easier to sort government

⁴⁷ Knox to Boucher, 28 November 1932, Order of the British Empire: MBE (Civil), Status for appointment As, T 343/50, NA.

employees hierarchically than other groups and because it was easier to make decisions about relative worthiness in-house rather than having to assess and weigh the merits of people in different communities and professions.

III.

In the wider empire, however, different sets of priorities and policies shaped the way in which honours were given out. Canada had made no recommendations for honours since the Nickle Resolution, but in the early 1930s this situation temporarily changed with a change of government. Honours remained a difficult issue in Canadian politics – when the Conservative Prime Minister R.B. Bennett attempted to test the issue of knighthoods in 1933 by promoting Sir George Perley from KCMG (which he received in 1915, before the Nickle Resolution) to GCMG, Liberals in the Canadian House of Commons responded by moving a motion suggesting that the Prime Minister should not recommend titles or honours to British residents in Canada.⁴⁸ It failed, but another reasserting the Nickle Resolution by condemning titular honours was successful in 1935. However, Bennett persisted with his policy of using the British honours system – including knighthoods – to reward Canadian worthies. Christopher McCreery has approvingly argued that these awards reflected a ‘Dominion-Commonwealth honours system – that is, a British system controlled by Canadian officials and used to serve Canadian interests’.⁴⁹ Bennett appointed famous Canadians in scholarly and artistic fields rather than political allies in order to avoid controversy and, according to McCreery, to reform honours as a ‘tool of national recognition’.⁵⁰ Conveniently, the bestowal of

⁴⁸ Christopher McCreery, *The Order of Canada: Its Origins, History, and Development* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 54.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 51.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 52.

titles only to professionals outside of politics also meant that Bennett was not violating the letter of the Nickle Resolution, which rejected any title except those which were of a 'professional or vocational character or which appertain to an office'.⁵¹ McCreery has emphasized that Bennett's honours appointments were an important move because his use of honours asserted that 'control over honours was now in the hands of the Canadian Prime Minister, who was in effect dealing directly with the Sovereign'.⁵² However, this view downplays the significance of civil service control – the scales of honours remained firmly in the hands of the Treasury. McCreery's observations about the rise of honours for 'volunteerism' rather than cronyism are true to a certain extent, but overplay the uniqueness of the Canadian situation and largely ignore developments in Britain and around the empire as a whole. The imperial honours system had a measure of local versatility – governors, viceroys and prime ministers all had a significant say about which of their citizens could receive honours – but remained centrally controlled.

In the non-self-governing parts of the Empire, on the other hand, honours policy was more tightly controlled, although individual governors could be idiosyncratic. Treasury control over honours throughout the empire was further rationalized in 1939 when they (along with the CCOK) took administrative control over the Indian honours system, which had previously been run by the Indian Civil Service.⁵³ The cost of medals was taken out of the hands of the ICS and put into those of the CCOK (which, in turn, received money for honours from the Treasury voted through the Miscellaneous Expenses Vote).⁵⁴ This move did mean that the system as a whole was brought into a tighter orbit around the Treasury and CCOK. However, the political problems associated with

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 52–3.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 53.

⁵³ Rumbold to PSV, 9 November 1938, Expenditure on English Honours Incurred in India, IOR/R/3/1/214, British Library (BL).

⁵⁴ Knox to P.J. Patrick, 30 November 1937, Expenditure on English Honours Incurred in India, IOR/R/3/1/214, (BL).

honours in India – and in the Princely States in particular – continued much as before.

Administrative control of Indian honours came to London, but they remained a political tool used in a characteristic way by the Indian Civil Service. Double-standards between European and Indian appointees to the various Indian orders of chivalry continued to be central to the system, even as it maintained a careful equality in numbers of different awards. At high levels – Knight and Knight Grand Cross – the Indian or native quotas were given out primarily to Princes and important Diwars, while British administrators and senior professionals (especially doctors and police) were the primary recipients on the European side.

The Viceroy and the Indian Civil Service continued to control who received what very carefully – especially among the Indian recipients – and the higher levels of both orders were seen as important political tools by the Political and Viceregal offices in India.⁵⁵ While administrators and royal officials were careful to emphasize that Indians and Europeans had rough parity in terms of the distribution of these honours, there was a divergence in terms of criteria for British versus Indian recipients, especially at the high (Grand Cross and Knight Commander) levels. Indian princes and members of princely families were awarded high ranks in these orders based on the seniority and importance of their princely state (as measured in the number of guns used in diplomatic salutes), and the political office of the Indian Civil Service saw these awards as being both an incentive to loyalty and, secondarily, to administrative competence. For example, the Maharaja Bhagwati Prasad Singh of Balrampur was awarded the KCIE in 1906 with the following citation, emphasizing his good character and charitable interests:

Maharaja Bhagwati Prasad Singh of Balrampur. In Oudh, - the Maharaja is the premier Talukdar (after the Raja of Kapurthala), is well-meaning, and of a thoroughly respectable life.

⁵⁵ John McLeod, “The English Honours System in Princely India, 1925-1947,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society (Third Series)* 4, no. 02 (1994): 237–49; Jesse S. Palsetia, “‘Honourable Machinations’: The Jamsetjee Jejeebhoy Baronetcy and the Indian Response to the Honours System in India,” *South Asia Research* 23, no. 1 (May 1, 2003): 55–75.

He recently gave three lakhs to the Canning College, Lucknow, and later on three lakhs to the Medical College. He is always ready to spend money on the Balrampur Hospital, Lucknow, for which the District is indebted to his father, Sir Dighjai Singh.⁵⁶

In a later case, in 1914, a statement in support of a CIE for Nawab Khair Bakhsh, Khan Bahadur, Tumandar of the Mari tribe in Baluchistan was explicit that the award was to appease the chieftain, rather than something that he deserved on the basis of merit or even seniority. As the 'Chief of what is perhaps the most powerful tribe in Baluchistan', the Khan needed to receive an honour that would roughly balance that of his rival, with whom he had recently made peace and who had received a KCIE.⁵⁷

On the European side, awards were given on the basis of seniority and meritorious service. Citations for British officers and civil servants tended to emphasize efficiency and talent, presenting British recipients as active agents of the Crown. In the same list as Maharajah Singh, John Jenkins was awarded a CSI on the following terms:

The Honourable Mr. John Lewis Jenkins, Indian Civil Service, Commissioner of Customs, Salt, Opium and Abkari, and Reporter-General of External Commerce, Bombay, and an Additional Member of the Council of the Governor of Bombay for making Laws and Regulations. The Governor speaks of Mr. Jenkins as one of the most efficient officers in the Bombay Service, and as one without a rival in his mastery of excise questions. The Excise Committee were impressed with his extraordinary ability, knowledge of facts, and grasp of the problems which had to be dealt with.⁵⁸

In Jenkins' case, it was his initiative, intelligence and activity that prompted his relatively high honour.

⁵⁶ Papers relating to the gentlemen decorated on the 26th June 1906, India Office Records, IOR/R/1/4/595, British Library [BL].

⁵⁷ Statement of Reasons for the grant of honours to recipients on the 3rd June 1914, India Office Records, IOR R/1/4/607, BL.

⁵⁸ Papers relating to the gentlemen decorated on the 26th June 1906, India Office Records, IOR/R/1/4/595, BL.

There was a double-standard here, but it was a subtle and partial one. The Indian honours system was set up in such a way as to emphasize equality of honour between the different races. It was in the execution that the inequalities emerged. As Cannadine has argued, the official ideology and impulse behind the expansion of the honours system across the empire was to place all members of the empire under the same crown, and while having separate Indian honours was a seemingly counter-intuitive way of doing this, the system stressed equality in a formal sense.⁵⁹ The monarchy actively opposed attempts in the early twentieth century to socially discriminate against Indian knights. The Indian Civil Service did assume that Indian princes, politicians and soldiers were susceptible to honours, but the same could be said about the political function of honours in Britain itself, and of the Indian honours system as applied to British people in India. If, as Steven Patterson has argued, a concept of honor borrowed from the British perception of ancient Rome guided ideologies of empire in India and justified the ideology proclaiming the superior ability of British men to rule India, this idea was not manifest in the formal structure of the honours itself.⁶⁰ The Indian orders of chivalry asserted formal equality.

IV.

How were the names of people to receive honours actually chosen? The consolidation within the honours system in the early 1920s clarified both the differences between the various orders of chivalry and how ranks within these orders were determined. But the kind and magnitude of service that determined whether an honour was awarded to a person or not, the different groups within society who received the awards, as well as the process through which those people were nominated, were more difficult to organize. Officially, people who wanted to nominate others (or to acquire

⁵⁹ David Cannadine, *Ornamentalism: How the British Saw Their Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 100.

⁶⁰ Steven Patterson, *The Cult of Imperial Honor in British India*, 1st ed (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

honours for themselves) were supposed to write in to the Prime Minister's office with an explanation of why the person concerned should receive the honour suggested. The actual process of selection itself, which involved secret committees of civil servants deciding on honours by department and field, remained opaque and confusing to the wider public. For the many people who felt that they or a colleague deserved an honour, the path to that honour was unclear. At the same time, there were certain organizations and individuals that served as intermediaries for the process of nomination.

Leaders of national and imperial institutions such as the Archbishop of Canterbury and the President of the Royal Society did not officially recommend honours, but at the same time often put their weight behind particular distinguished people from within their worlds. Such men were reluctant to recommend names unless they were personally connected to the potential recipient, an attitude which sometimes led to double-standards in their honours recommendation behavior. Cosmo Lang, the Archbishop of Canterbury from 1928 to 1942, wrote occasional recommendations for a variety of different kinds of honour and was frequently asked by people within the Church of England to give recommendations for still more names. At the end of 1938 Sidney Dark, the editor of the *Church Times*, specifically petitioned Lang for 'any recognition that I might receive from the state', and Lang agreed, writing to the Prime Minister that Dark 'would like a Knighthood'.⁶¹ If not that, then a Companionship in the Order of the British Empire or a Companionship of Honour seemed appropriate (Lang perhaps misjudged the exclusivity of the latter).⁶² Dark's nomination was not successful, probably because, by the time the honour would have come round to the stage where it was before honours committees in late 1939, the government was increasingly preoccupied with other forms of service to the state (see Chapter three). The Order of the Companions of Honour

⁶¹ Sidney Dark to Cosmo Lang, 23 November 1938, Cosmo Lang Papers, Lang 169/141, Lambeth Palace Library.

⁶² Lang to Neville Chamberlain, 28 January 1939, Cosmo Lang Papers, Lang 169/143, Lambeth Palace Library.

was certainly taking on a clerical tone, to the extent that in 1939 when the Archbishop suggested to the Prime Minister's secretary, O.S. Cleverly, that the BBC's director of religious broadcasting, Dr. Iremoner, would like a CH. Cleverly suggested that a CBE would be easier to wrangle, as the 'Prime Minister has recently found some difficulty in adding a further name from the Clergy [to the CH]'.⁶³

Men such as the President of the Royal Society, Archbishops and Lord Lieutenants of counties had some authority when recommending individuals for honours, but ultimately all these recommendations were supposed to be sent to the Prime Minister's office. Their fate from that point was a set of civil service committees such as the slightly mysterious 'Maecenas' committee that selected artists, writers and scholars for honours. From these committees, the names would go on to the Prime Minister and from there to the monarch. At the high level of the Order of Merit, existing members were also consulted on possible appointees in their various areas of specialization. As a whole, though, the Treasury, relevant branches of the civil service, and Colonial governors and governments were the conduits for most honours recommendations. Political honours, as well as the few orders in the gift of the monarch, were the exceptional cases.

The source of all the trouble at the end of Lloyd George's premiership, the so-called 'Political' honours, went through a slightly different route – they were selected through Party machinery and had to go through the additional step of the Political Honours Scrutiny Committee, which during the interwar period took little action in terms of actively barring appointments. This additional step was counterbalanced in some senses by the fact that these honours did not make their laborious way through the various civil service committees through which other honours recommendations proceeded. Political honours could be forced through the system given enough political will, but during the interwar period the PHSC actually had very little to do. Controversial

⁶³ O.S. Cleverly to Lang, 26 April 1939, Cosmo Lang Papers, Lang 170/281, Lambeth Palace Library.

choices were largely absent from the political sections of honours lists, and political honours were distributed in much the same ways as they had before the war, only with the hand of the government strengthened by the changes of 1922.

Changes in the administration of honours were backed by broad, albeit relatively distant, political support, although Labour, as the new opposition party in 1919 (and, briefly, as the government in 1924 and 1929–31), had a much more difficult relationship to the honours system than Liberals or Conservatives. For the Conservatives and the Liberals, a large part of the process of stabilizing honours in the interwar years was ensuring that they were not too badly tarnished by the honours scandals of 1922, while at the same time continuing to reap the benefits of patronage. The conclusions of the Royal Commission had built a fairly strong foundation for this process, and in the years following 1922 J.C.C. Davidson reconfigured Conservative Party fundraising to wipe out the stain of the ‘Lloyd George tradition’ by eliminating visible honours sales.⁶⁴ In his memoirs Davidson (and the editor of his memoirs, Robert Rhodes James) presented this process as a selfless refusal to raise funds by honours sales, but in reality it was more of a return to the pre-war system in which honours functioned as an indirect recognition of donations to the party.⁶⁵ In fact, Davidson enjoyed extensive powers of patronage and used these for blatantly political ends. Cannadine and others have pointed out that Davidson’s success at raising money for the Conservative Party in the years following the honours scandal was almost certainly through the ‘traditional way’.⁶⁶ As late as 1953 he lobbied for a peerage for Harold Bowden, a long-time party donor, by including a lengthy list of Bowden’s donations to the party and to various charitable causes in a letter to Frederick

⁶⁴ John Colin Campbell Davidson, *Memoirs of a Conservative: J.C.C. Davidson’s Memoirs and Papers, 1910-37* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1969), 278.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 288.

⁶⁶ David Cannadine, *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy*, 1st Vintage Books ed (New York: Vintage Books, 1999), 323.

Woolton.⁶⁷ While the immediate case for Bowden involved his donations to a hospital, the inclusion of his longer-term donations (on a much larger scale) to Conservative Party organizations betrayed a subtext linking honours to donations. This discreet concealment of the close ties between honours and party donations was largely successful – no major honours scandals blighted the Conservative Party during the interwar period – and this impulse towards the appearance of purity dovetailed nicely with the civil service and royal household’s desire to restrict and generally ‘clean up’ honours.

Davidson also claimed victory over the most infamous honours tout, Maundy Gregory, in 1933, when Gregory became the first (and only) person to be convicted of honours brokerage under the 1925 Act. The Conservative Party did not forgive Gregory for his efforts in poaching potential patronage recipients in the Lloyd George era, nor had they appreciated the unintentional and crude exposure of the networks of patronage that funded parties leading up to the scandal.⁶⁸ The heights of his honours-touting and fantastical self-fashioning at the end of the war had been replaced by increasing financial desperation, and in response Gregory tried to raise money through promising titles that he could not deliver. In 1932 he approached Commander Billyard-Leake with the offer of a knighthood on payment of a substantial sum. Unfortunately, Leake was well-connected and already the holder of various medals and overseas honours and thus not a particularly suitable target for honours-touting.⁶⁹ Leake immediately saw through Gregory’s posturing (which included a CV that presented Gregory as a master-spy along with numerous other accomplishments) and set about entrapping him through contacts in the government.⁷⁰ Gregory was eventually arrested and convicted in a brief trial of attempting to sell a knighthood.

⁶⁷ J.C.C. Davidson to Lord Woolton, 14 April 1953, J.C.C. Davidson papers, DAV 308, Parliamentary Archives (PA).

⁶⁸ Cannadine, *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy*, 323.

⁶⁹ Gerald Macmillan, *Honours for Sale: The Strange Story of Maundy Gregory* (London: Richards Press, 1954), 202–6.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 210.

However, Gregory did have a hidden defense – he possessed incriminating and potentially embarrassing information about the messy past of political honours, and thus Davidson and Stanley Baldwin bought his silence, providing him with a large pension of £2,000 per year, a mild sentence and a boat to France.⁷¹ He died in Dieppe, styling himself a knight, in 1941.⁷² This pension was paid for by Sir Julien Chan, who received a baronetcy in 1933 for this rather underhand service to the various political parties involved. Then-Prime Minister and leader of a National Government, Ramsey MacDonald, was initially reluctant to sign off on this honour, because Gregory held no incriminating information on Labour. However, Baldwin was able to persuade him that even he had political allies who could be implicated, including Arthur Henderson (in spite of Henderson's objections to the report of the Royal Commission).⁷³ The matter of Maundy Gregory was resolved tidily, leaving behind guilt, sleaze and discontent, but little else.

MacDonald's brush with the ghosts of honours scandals past was one of an increasing number of encounters between the newest major political party and the old political institution of honours. Labour's transition into the political establishment meant that it was forced to deal with a different set of problems and controversies around the honours system. As the first Labour Prime Minister in 1924, MacDonald only nominated one name for political honours: T.P. O'Connor was put forward for a Barony.⁷⁴ This was more of a practical move to increase Labour's presence in the House of Lords than an exercise of patronage in the traditional sense, and the absence of other political honours (especially knighthoods) indicated that there was not yet any imperative for MacDonald and the Labour Party to give out honours for political services. However, this was not

⁷¹ Cannadine, *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy*, 323.

⁷² Andrew Cook, *Cash for Honours: The Story of Maundy Gregory* (Stroud: The History Press, 2008), 258–9.

⁷³ Cannadine, *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy*, 323–4.

⁷⁴ James Rae to G.N. Barnes, 22 May 1924, Royal Commission on Honours 1922 - Correspondence, Proofs and Report, T 348/2, NA.

the case in MacDonald's second term as Prime Minister, during which time he was forced to more directly patronize his supporters. By 1931 he was being pressed by Herbert Morrison to include Arthur Griffith-Boscawen in the new honours list, but was resisting, saying that:

The tendency is to make our Honours as cheap as the French Legion of Honour, and I must resist it. One specific bit of work is not really good enough for an Honour, and the widening assumption that, if a man subscribes money to a hospital or has done something like making a record flight, the nation is under some obligation to give him a title is becoming absolutely devastating. We have almost reached the point now when the greatest distinction that a man who has done anything can have is to have no Honour at all, and I have to choose whether it would not be a good thing to let that tendency increase and cheapen all titles, or try to stop it.⁷⁵

This sounded much less like the principled left-wing objection to honours elaborated below, which focused on their integration into the capitalist class system and much more like something from the mouths of civil servants or CCOK officials. Furthermore, the perception that honours were inflating in 1931 was very much incorrect – as shown above, the tendency throughout the 1920s was to deflate honours under the strict control of the Treasury.

When Walter Citrine was knighted (a KBE) in 1935, there was a very mixed reaction within the labor movement. Citrine had been an important Trade Unionist (at the time, he was the general secretary of the Trade Union Council) and his acceptance of a knighthood seemed to many of his old colleagues to be selling out – perhaps even worse than Ramsey MacDonald's plans to cut unemployment benefits in 1931, against which Citrine had led the movement, resulting in MacDonald's expulsion from the Labour Party. Citrine himself clearly valued the various honours that he received through his long career (culminating in a Peerage in 1947), and he kept a file with press clippings, some limited commentary and notes on letters of congratulation that he received in

⁷⁵ Ramsey MacDonald to Herbert Morrison, 11 April 1931, Ramsey MacDonald Papers, RMD/1/14/141, John Rylands Memorial Library, Manchester.

1935.⁷⁶ He was congratulated by various political figures, as well as senior fellow-members of the Trade Union Council. Many of his constituents, too, wrote in to congratulate him. However, his acceptance of a knighthood also had negative repercussions for his image among more left-wing colleagues and constituents. In 1936, for example, he faced a large protest while giving a speech in Hyde Park at which the protestors cited his title as symbolic of wider problems with his leadership.⁷⁷

The 1936 Labour Party Conference in Brighton passed a resolution asserting that: ‘This conference deprecates the acceptance by members of the Party of titles or honours other than those which a Labour Government finds necessary for the furtherance of its own business in Parliament.’⁷⁸ This was a clear reference to Citrine’s knighthood. By titles ‘necessary for the furtherance of its own business in Parliament’ the resolution meant the grant of peerages to Labour supporters, itself a fraught issue, as Phillip Williamson has pointed out in a detailed article on the subject of early Labour peers.⁷⁹ The resolution was amended to explain that ‘socialists must define more clearly their attitude towards the ceremonial functions and so-called honours by which the decaying capitalist system seeks to maintain its prestige and influence over immature minds’, and that ‘Socialist participation in such functions and honours can be justified only in exceptional circumstances for the express purpose of frustrating the propaganda of the capitalist parties’.⁸⁰

In response, the Labour Party Constitutional Committee produced a provisional memorandum about attendance at ceremonial functions and honours in early 1936, and Citrine

⁷⁶ See: Citrine Papers, Citrine 9/1, London School of Economics Library (LSE).

⁷⁷ Citrine’s papers included a collection of clippings about this event, see: Citrine Papers, Citrine 9/1, LSE.

⁷⁸ Labour Party Constitution Committee, Memorandum on (a) Attendance at Ceremonial Functions, (b) Honours, Citrine Papers, Citrine 9/1, LSE.

⁷⁹ Philip Williamson, “The Labour Party and the House of Lords, 1918–1931,” *Parliamentary History* 10, no. 2 (October 1, 1991): 317–41.

⁸⁰ Labour Party Constitution Committee, Memorandum on (a) Attendance at Ceremonial Functions, (b) Honours, Citrine Papers, Citrine 9/1, LSE.

himself wrote a set of comments about the memorandum.⁸¹ Given that he himself already had a ‘capitalist title’ (his name on the report was given as ‘Sir Walter Citrine’), this was quite a brazen move, but Citrine approached his report with seriousness and was not at all ashamed of his title – quite the opposite. He argued that if honours were wrong, then it would be wrong for Labour Governments to give honours to anyone, while if Labour gave honours only to its supporters then it would make honours even more party-oriented than they already were. He added: ‘I cannot believe that any such intent was in the minds of those associated with the resolution.’⁸² Because of this inconsistency, he argued that the reasoning behind the resolution was flawed and that Labour needed to do more thinking about its position with regard to the honours system and ceremonial functions in general. Finally, he suggested that a paragraph defending honours to Labour Party members be added along these lines:

With regard to other types [other than the peerage and Privy Councillorships] of honorific distinctions, for a considerable number of years past, “honours” of various kinds have been conferred upon members of the Labour Party in recognition of public service. At no time has the Party indicated its opposition to this. It has hitherto been regarded as a matter for decision by the individual concerned in the exercise of his civic right. It is difficult to draw any hard and fast line between various categories of honours, nor would it be practicable to lay down a binding rule which would govern the conduct of all individual members of the Party.⁸³

Such a statement was far from the intention and spirit of the original resolution condemning honours as part of the capitalist system. However it was Citrine’s attitude, in the end, that was to win out in the Labour Party, reflecting a wider acceptance of honours in British society, as well as the general direction of the party as it was integrated into the political establishment. The final report that was adopted by the National Executive Committee argued that as long as the House of Lords

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

continued to exist, Labour had to at least have allies among the peers, and that judging which honours were and was not acceptable to the movement was unfeasible.⁸⁴ 'It would be impossible for the Labour Movement to lay down a binding rule which would bar individuals from accepting Honours', because this could only be enforced by the draconian means of expulsion from the Party and choosing between acceptable and unacceptable honours would be impossible.⁸⁵ As we shall see, anti-honours sentiment persisted within the Labour movement, but Citrine's viewpoint, like Citrine himself, was in the ascendant as the party dealt with the practical realities of being in power and opposition and of marshaling nationwide support among a constituency with a wide variety of attitudes towards the honours system. Many in the Labour Party wanted to ignore the honours system and clear out the 'old corruption' of the fundraising systems that had ossified around the old Liberal-Conservative relationship, but in the end it was Labour that had to change, not the honours system. Labour had to participate, as much as it did not want to, because Labour's integration into the political establishment after their attainment of opposition status in 1919 demanded a relationship with the honours system. Some within the Labour movement were as eager as anyone to reap the honorific benefits of Labour's new taste of power in the interwar years.

V.

Outside of the world of party politics, the prestige of the honours system was being defended and reinforced by another group – its recipients themselves. There were no more stern and alert defenders of the various different honours than those who received them, even if they had received them in the era of greatest profligacy. As we shall see, the issue for these people was less a quantitative one than qualitative. The kind of person who had been awarded, or claimed to possess,

⁸⁴ Appendix VII, Ceremonial Functions and Honours, Shore Papers, Shore 4/68, LSE.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

ranks in the Order was more important than total numbers of recipients to such people, many of whom won awards at the end of the war: precisely the historical moment that the people running the honours system wanted to avoid repeating. These people's behavior towards the honours that they received reflected wider anxieties among the middle class in the interwar period. As Ross McKibbin and Matthew Hinton have pointed out, the amorphous and dynamic collection of people who made up the British middle class in the interwar period were anxious to prove class distinctions, even as some of those distinctions were eroded by social change.⁸⁶

Wittingly or unwittingly, there were many people through the 1920s and 1930s who assumed styles that they did not deserve. The Home Office, Treasury and members of the public (and, particularly, legitimate members of the Order of the British Empire) policed these transgressions with some intent during these decades. Confusion between the medal of the Order and membership in the Order itself was one of the main frustrations for those who wanted to police correct titles and post-nominal letters. As mentioned at the start of this chapter, in 1921 the Home Office asked the London Metropolitan Police to give chimney sweep J. Brixey a 'gentle hint' that he needed to remove the letters 'OBE' from his barrow.⁸⁷ In a similar case, A.J. Harris, a garage proprietor in Wembley, used 'OBE' illegitimately on his bill heads in 1922. Again, when confronted by police, he promised to stop doing this (although only when his supply of bills with the offending letters had been exhausted).⁸⁸ In both cases, the confusion seems to have been innocent – both men had received the medal of the Order of the British Empire and, presumably, assumed that this entitled

⁸⁶ James Hinton, "'The "Class" Complex': Mass-Observation and Cultural Distinction in Pre-War Britain," *Past & Present*, no. 199 (May 1, 2008): 207–36; Ross McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures: England, 1918-1951: A Study of a Democratic Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 98–105.

⁸⁷ Note from Robert Knox, 21 March 1929, Order of the British Empire: 1) Use after their names, by persons appointed to the Order or awarded the medal, of letters to which they are not entitled. 2) Applications for Information as to the use of letters, T 343/44, NA.

⁸⁸ Unknown to Major H.H.F. Stockey, 1 May 1922, Various communications about OBE, HO/45/11071, NA.

them to the letters, thinking erroneously (as many have before and since) that OBE stood for ‘Order’, rather than ‘Officer’.

Brixey and Harris had both been reported to the Home Office or the Central Chancery of the Orders of Knighthood by other citizens. In Harris’s case the complainant was Dr. Charles Goddard, who received an OBE himself in 1918 after war service in both France and as a hospital chairman in London.⁸⁹ Goddard told Harris that ‘I thought it was irregular’ and wrote in to ask that the government ‘be so good as to inform him of his error’.⁹⁰ Two men had objected to Brixey’s use of the letters after an article appeared in the *Daily Mail* about the ‘Sweep O.B.E’.⁹¹ No doubt struck (as the *Daily Mail* was) by the incongruity of a chimney sweep possessing an award that was more for professionals, both had consulted their copies of Burke’s Order of the British Empire and had failed to find Brixey’s name.⁹² And, once again, both men were themselves legitimate officers of the Order – Norman Cockell and J.C. Telford had both been made OBE for work with the Ministry of Shipping during the war, Cockell as a consultant and Telford as assistant director of the C.G.M.S.⁹³ In both cases OBE holders had been offended by the illegitimate, if relatively innocuous, use by others of the post-nominals that they had themselves acquired. This emphasized the value they placed on their awards and their desire to defend the status of the Order.

These were the two earliest cases of this kind of behavior, both during an era when the Home Office was in charge of civilian awards in the Order, but they were by no means the last.

⁸⁹ Acting Secretary, Order of the British Empire to Charles E. Goddard, 28 April 1922, Various communications about OBE, HO/45/11071, NA; A. Winton Thorpe, *Burke’s Handbook to the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire* (London: The Burke publishing co., ltd, 1921), 215.

⁹⁰ Charles Goddard to Acting Secretary, Order of the British Empire, 13 March 1922, Various communications about OBE, HO/45/11071, NA.

⁹¹ *Daily Mail*, 23 April 1921. Clipping located in: Various communications about OBE, HO/45/11071, NA.

⁹² J.C. Telford to Sir Edward Troup, 24 April 1921, Norman Cockell to Sir George Cave, 26 April 1921, Various communications about OBE, HO/45/11071, NA.

⁹³ Thorpe, *Burke’s Handbook to the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire*, 123, 505.

Once control of the Order was handed over to the Treasury, Robert Knox regularly dealt with various similar complaints. In March 1929 the Treasury received an anonymous communication enclosing the letterhead from ‘Marshall’s Automobile Engineers’ of Cambridge naming its titular partner, D.G. Marshall, as an O.B.E.⁹⁴ Unfortunately, Marshall was only a MBE, and Knox asked the Home Office to arrange through the local police to have ‘a hint conveyed to him [Marshall] that persons appointed to the fourth Class or “Officers of the Order are alone entitled to use the letters O.B.E after their names’ and that he could only use MBE.⁹⁵ Informed by local police of his misrepresentation, Marshall assured them that it was an error on his firm’s bill-head and that he would take steps to have it removed.⁹⁶

The most enthusiastic defender of the honour of the Order in the interwar years was Ernest A. Loftus, who was an Officer of the military division of the Order of the British Empire and Deputy Lieutenant for Essex, who worked at the Barking Abbey School in Essex. Loftus first wrote in to the Central Chancery of the Orders of Knighthood in August 1936, complaining about two people who ‘I believe, were awarded a Medal of the Order of the B.E. [who] are calling themselves O.B.E. and this is apt to bring the decoration of the O.B.E. itself into disrepute as these people are not the type to be awarded that Order’.⁹⁷ Loftus asked whether there was a list of members of the Order that he could consult. If there were none, he suggested, ‘it is obvious that there is no remedy

⁹⁴ Order of the British Empire: 1) Use after their names, by persons appointed to the Order or awarded the medal, of letters to which they are not entitled. 2) Applications for Information as to the use of letters, T 343/44, NA.

⁹⁵ R.U.E. Knox to G.B.W. McAlpine, 21 March 1929, Order of the British Empire: 1) Use after their names, by persons appointed to the Order or awarded the medal, of letters to which they are not entitled. 2) Applications for Information as to the use of letters, T 343/44, NA.

⁹⁶ McAlpine to Knox, 4 April 1929, Order of the British Empire: 1) Use after their names, by persons appointed to the Order or awarded the medal, of letters to which they are not entitled. 2) Applications for Information as to the use of letters, T 343/44, NA.

⁹⁷ E.A. Loftus to the Secretary of the Order of the British Empire, 30 August, 1936, Order of the British Empire: 1) Use after their names, by persons appointed to the Order or awarded the medal, of letters to which they are not entitled. 2) Applications for Information as to the use of letters, T 343/44, NA.

for abuse of this nature without a lot of trouble'.⁹⁸ In reply, Loftus was asked whether he could give the names of the suspects, to which he replied that "The names of two people who pose as O.B.E.s to my knowledge are a Mrs. Wilkins who states she obtained the order as Miss L.F. Grasham in 1919 and a Mr. S.P. Carvell."⁹⁹ Within a month, he also reported Mr. A. Lipscombe for appearing in a newspaper cutting in which he was 'given an order to which, apparently, he has no claim'. Loftus had done his research and had been told by an informant that Lipscombe had been the recipient of a Medal of the Order as a member of the Barking Fire Brigade.¹⁰⁰ The clipping concerned was an announcement of the marriage of Lipscombe's daughter.

Lengthy correspondence between Loftus, Knox and the Central Chancery followed. Frustrated by the abuse of inappropriate post-nominals, he suggested that those awarded the Medal of the Order needed to be told when they received their medal that it did not entitle them to any letters after their name.¹⁰¹ He clearly saw this as a major problem which was 'growing to serious dimensions', and while he continued to feed names and information to Knox and the Central Chancery, he also suggested that they needed to take some broader action to crack down on people who had mistaken their status in the Order and in society in general.¹⁰² In 1937, he sent four more cases, supported by clippings, of people allegedly inappropriately claiming to have received honours

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Loftus to A.C. Michils, 31 August 1936, Order of the British Empire: 1) Use after their names, by persons appointed to the Order or awarded the medal, of letters to which they are not entitled. 2) Applications for Information as to the use of letters, T 343/44, NA.

¹⁰⁰ Loftus to the Secretary of the Order of the British Empire, 29 September 1936, Order of the British Empire: 1) Use after their names, by persons appointed to the Order or awarded the medal, of letters to which they are not entitled. 2) Applications for Information as to the use of letters, T 343/44, NA.

¹⁰¹ Loftus to The Secretary of the Order of the British Empire, 23 October 1936, Order of the British Empire: 1) Use after their names, by persons appointed to the Order or awarded the medal, of letters to which they are not entitled. 2) Applications for Information as to the use of letters, T 343/44, NA.

¹⁰² Loftus to the Secretary of the Order of the British Empire, 19 October 1936, Order of the British Empire: 1) Use after their names, by persons appointed to the Order or awarded the medal, of letters to which they are not entitled. 2) Applications for Information as to the use of letters, T 343/44, NA.

of various types.¹⁰³ Again he stressed the ‘confusion in the public mind [which] seems to arise from ignorance’ about what the letters OBE stood for.¹⁰⁴ While Knox said that he found himself ‘in much sympathy with your point of view’, he pointed out that in almost all the cases, it was press errors rather than arrogance or misrepresentation by the individuals concerned that had perpetuated the errors.¹⁰⁵

Such explanations did little to appease Loftus, who continued to send letters to Knox asserting the need for a change in terminology to avoid confusion.¹⁰⁶ He suggested that ‘Fellows’ or ‘Associates’ be used in place of Officer, probably not realizing that Associates was the initial suggested title for MBEs in the early stages of the development of the Order. Knox disagreed, arguing that this suggested ‘a Society of some kind rather than a great Order of Chivalry’.¹⁰⁷ When within a year Loftus sent yet another letter in to the Treasury about another of his neighbors who seemed to be misusing the infamous three letters, Knox was led to remark in a letter to Harold Stockey, the Secretary of the Order, that ‘It seems to be almost a point of honour among the neighbours of Colonel Loftus to describe themselves in this way.’¹⁰⁸ On establishing that this was,

¹⁰³ Loftus to the Secretary of the Order of the British Empire, 9 February 1937, Order of the British Empire: 1) Use after their names, by persons appointed to the Order or awarded the medal, of letters to which they are not entitled. 2) Applications for Information as to the use of letters, T 343/44, NA.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Knox to Loftus, 15 February 1937, Order of the British Empire: 1) Use after their names, by persons appointed to the Order or awarded the medal, of letters to which they are not entitled. 2) Applications for Information as to the use of letters, T 343/44, NA.

¹⁰⁶ See, for example, Loftus to Knox, 19 July 1937, Order of the British Empire: 1) Use after their names, by persons appointed to the Order or awarded the medal, of letters to which they are not entitled. 2) Applications for Information as to the use of letters, T 343/44, NA.

¹⁰⁷ Knox to Loftus, 23 July 1937, Order of the British Empire: 1) Use after their names, by persons appointed to the Order or awarded the medal, of letters to which they are not entitled. 2) Applications for Information as to the use of letters, T 343/44, NA.

¹⁰⁸ Knox to Stockey, 15 October 1937, Order of the British Empire: 1) Use after their names, by persons appointed to the Order or awarded the medal, of letters to which they are not entitled. 2) Applications for Information as to the use of letters, T 343/44, NA.

indeed, yet another case of the misuse of the post-nominals, Stockey replied dryly that ‘Loftus seems to have struck a very bad patch in his district’.¹⁰⁹ W.G. Day, the elderly, mostly deaf gentleman who was the culprit in this case, was astonished to learn that he was misusing the letters and was very apologetic in a personal interview with Knox. Knox was inclined to be tolerant and polite, because his own enquiries about the character of Day indicated that the man was ‘intelligent and very helpful’.¹¹⁰ Without this knowledge, Loftus was less tolerant and continued to harass Knox with his own enquiries until he was informed of the outcome of Knox’s meeting with Day – he clearly feared that not enough was being done to resolve the ‘very bad patch’ of OBE misusers that plagued his existence.

Loftus’s campaign against the Essex imposters continued into 1938, but at this point he made something of a misstep by bringing two men to the attention of Knox who, he claimed, seemed to be medal holders who both, in fact, held ranks in the Order – one a member and one an officer.¹¹¹ In this instance, Loftus found their names and postnominals in the committee meeting minutes for the King George Hospital in Ilford, but he managed to misjudge their status and, although in his letter in reply to Knox he expressed himself ‘relieved’, his action must have been embarrassing. He closed his reply with the justificatory sentence: ‘But what a state of confusion reigns in this order!’¹¹² This mistake was presumably based off a misreading of these men’s social

¹⁰⁹ Stockey to Loftus, 15 October 1937, Order of the British Empire: 1) Use after their names, by persons appointed to the Order or awarded the medal, of letters to which they are not entitled. 2) Applications for Information as to the use of letters, T 343/44, NA.

¹¹⁰ Note by R.U.E.K., 23 November 1937, Order of the British Empire: 1) Use after their names, by persons appointed to the Order or awarded the medal, of letters to which they are not entitled. 2) Applications for Information as to the use of letters, T 343/44, NA.

¹¹¹ Loftus to Knox, 10 March 1938; Knox to Loftus, 11 March 1938, Order of the British Empire: 1) Use after their names, by persons appointed to the Order or awarded the medal, of letters to which they are not entitled. 2) Applications for Information as to the use of letters, T 343/44, NA.

¹¹² Loftus to Knox, 12 March 1938, Order of the British Empire: 1) Use after their names, by persons appointed to the Order or awarded the medal, of letters to which they are not entitled. 2) Applications for Information as to the use of letters, T 343/44, NA.

status. While combing – for whatever reason – through the hospital committee minutes, he had come across their names and decided that their claims to MBEs and OBEs did not hold up to their social status. In this case, he was wrong.

This was not the last time Loftus wrote to the Treasury, nor were the cases mentioned above the only ones of mistaken honorific identity that came to Knox's desk. Many members of the Order of the British Empire around Britain and the empire were keen to stop others from impersonating their honour. Loftus was, however, the most persistent and prolix correspondent, which makes him particularly interesting, as his words did reveal something of his motivations and commitment to maintaining high standards and ensuring that the Order of the British Empire was untarnished by illegitimate use. As the deputy Lieutenant of his county, he had, if not actual responsibility, at very least a greater interest in the area of honours than the average citizen. As a former Colonel, the OBE was at the lower end of possible honours for those in his social position, which may have further motivated him to enforce and assert its importance as a marker of status.

Not all people who illegitimately assumed titles or post-nominal letters did so innocently. William Pickersgill, a businessman in the shipping industry and a former merchant naval officer, signed various articles that he wrote for the *Shipping World* with his name and the letters 'C.B.E.', a practice that came to the attention of the Treasury and the Central Chancery of the Orders of Knighthood, who confirmed that no-one of that name had a CBE. When confronted by the police, he claimed, nonsensically, that the 'information contained in the article to which you refer was obtained from the 'Baltic in town', and that he would not style himself CBE again.¹¹³ The War Office suggested that the London Gazette print a statement giving notice that Pickersgill was not a Commander of the Order of the British Empire. This was a serious enough threat for Pickersgill to

¹¹³ A.J. Newling to Knox, 19 June 1930, Order of the British Empire: 1) Use after their names, by persons appointed to the Order or awarded the medal, of letters to which they are not entitled. 2) Applications for Information as to the use of letters, T 343/44, NA.

repent of his deception, and this action was seen as unnecessary after he sent the War Office copies of letters to the ‘clubs etc.’ where he had been styling himself CBE.¹¹⁴

The honours system also attracted the more deluded. George Purcell Nuttall wrote to the CCOK in 1943 insisting that he held both the Victoria Cross (for capturing Hitler during the First World War) and the OBE for his work in the secret service. These more ridiculous claims were dismissed by the Central Chancery, and his letter seems to have been circulated more for the amusement of the honours administration fraternity rather than out of serious concern, but the fact that he claimed to be OBE illustrated the increasing respectability and desirability of that status. It was a feasible award for secret service work during the First World War and, as we shall see, was increasingly associated with certain kinds of gallant service during the Second.

Confusion over postnominals and status within the Order of the British Empire was not just an issue of impersonation and misrepresentation. In October 1928, J. Fox wrote to the Secretary of State to inquire ‘whether the person named on the enclosed slip (who is my son and now serving in India) is entitled to use the words O.B.E. after his name’.¹¹⁵ The letter was passed on to Knox, who informed Fox that his son was awarded the medal and therefore that he could use no letters after his name. Once again, confusion about the medal and the Order had struck. In 1931 a couple of naval workers who had been presented with the Medal wrote to the Prime Minister’s private secretary to ask whether their new medals entitled them to any letters after their name, saying that ‘so many people ask and we are at a loss to say whether we are entitled to place the letters of the order to our

¹¹⁴ Note by R.U.E. Knox, 24 April 1931, Order of the British Empire: 1) Use after their names, by persons appointed to the Order or awarded the medal, of letters to which they are not entitled. 2) Applications for Information as to the use of letters, T 343/44, NA.

¹¹⁵ J. Fox to Secretary of State, 17 October 1928, Order of the British Empire: 1) Use after their names, by persons appointed to the Order or awarded the medal, of letters to which they are not entitled. 2) Applications for Information as to the use of letters, T 343/44, NA.

names and we do not wish to mislead others'.¹¹⁶ A host of similar cases can be found in the Treasury's files, mostly letters from people who received the British Empire Medal in the 1920s and 1930s.¹¹⁷ In one case, correspondence revolved around advice given by the librarian of the *Daily Mail* to a correspondent who asked whether they, as a holder of the Empire Gallantry Medal, were entitled to any letters after their name. The librarian replied incorrectly that they could use MBE, a response that was brought to the attention of the Treasury and that once again sparked a set of indignant corrective letters to the medal-holder concerned and to the newspaper.¹¹⁸

The expansion of the honours system had fed, but not sated, a widespread desire for honours and titles among people who previously had little or no chance of being personally honored by the monarch. Structural engineer Herbert John Davey, who received a MBE in 1920 for his service during the war as a naval engineer, wrote in to the Acting Secretary of the Order in 1923 to ask whether his service since 1920 would warrant promotion in the Order. Davey attached a letter received from one of superiors stressing his 'admirable' service with an engineering inspection organization.¹¹⁹ Rather disingenuously, the civil servant charged with replying stated that 'I am desired by the Secretary of the Order to inform you that your application will be considered, but it is impossible to say with what results'.¹²⁰ Given that the selection process for honours was at the time

¹¹⁶ James McManus to Prime Minister's Private Secretary, 12 February 1931, Order of the British Empire: 1) Use after their names, by persons appointed to the Order or awarded the medal, of letters to which they are not entitled. 2) Applications for Information as to the use of letters, T 343/44, NA.

¹¹⁷ See, for example, P.J. Westwood to Home Office Secretary, 5 May 1937; R. Burt to Home Office Secretary, 1 July 1937, Order of the British Empire: 1) Use after their names, by persons appointed to the Order or awarded the medal, of letters to which they are not entitled. 2) Applications for Information as to the use of letters, T 343/44, NA.

¹¹⁸ P. Parker to F.W. Holden, 20 April 1939; Knox to General Manager, Associated Newspapers, 5 May 1939, Order of the British Empire: 1) Use after their names, by persons appointed to the Order or awarded the medal, of letters to which they are not entitled. 2) Applications for Information as to the use of letters, T 343/44, NA.

¹¹⁹ H.J. Davey to Acting Secretary, Order of the British Empire, 5 January 1923, Order of the British Empire: Miscellaneous Correspondence, Requests For Information, etc., T 343/42, NA.

¹²⁰ Unknown to H.J. Davey, 18 February 1923, Order of the British Empire: Miscellaneous Correspondence, Requests For Information, etc., T 343/42, NA.

undergoing changes and was not in the hands of the secretary, this answer was evasive at best. Many other people, such as J. Bird-Howard, wrote in to the Acting Secretary of the Order in the early 1920s asking whether they would be given honours. Bird-Howard considered himself entitled to a rank in the Order because he founded, then served as the secretary and treasurer of, a 'War Savings Club' in Hampton Wick.¹²¹ Once again, this petition was misdirected and unsuccessful, and Bird-Howard wrote twice in the following year in an attempt to follow up on his request. Finally, seven months after his initial request, a civil servant clarified that no more appointments to the Order were being made in recognition of war service, so his petitions were without hope of reward, a fact that they could have told him back in 1923 at the time of his first petition.¹²²

In 1927 prominent Hong Kong businessman Robert Ho Tung, already a knight bachelor, petitioned political acquaintances and the Colonial Office for a KBE or KCMG to complement his existing awards, which included honours given by other governments. His campaign for a knighthood in one of the orders was particularly interesting because he was so direct and explicit in his approach. Knowing that honours stemmed from charitable donations, he was explicit about the connection between charity and knighthoods. In a letter to Sir Ronald Waterhouse in March he suggested that donations amounting to tens of thousands of pounds to the YMCA and the Anglican Diocesan Girl's school in Hong Kong warranted such an honour.¹²³ Without modesty, an earlier letter had made the case that Ho Tung had been the most prominent citizen of the colony and thus deserved more extensive recognition.¹²⁴ The Colonial Office was not unimpressed by his confidence

¹²¹ J. Bird-Howard to the Acting Secretary, Order of the British Empire, 1 September 1923, Order of the British Empire: Miscellaneous Correspondence, Requests For Information, etc., T 343/42, NA.

¹²² Unknown to J. Bird-Howard, 11 March 1924, Order of the British Empire: Miscellaneous Correspondence, Requests For Information, etc., T 343/42, NA.

¹²³ Robert Ho Tung to Ronald Waterhouse, 29 March 1927, Colonial Office Correspondence, CO 448/34, NA.

¹²⁴ Ho Tung to Waterhouse, 12 January 1927, Colonial Office Correspondence, CO 448/34, NA.

and honesty. Waterhouse himself, who had already been subject to a great deal of pressure from Ho Tung in the past, wrote to a colleague that ‘the Eastern tranquility of his effrontery is the only excuse, I think, for its Western application which as you know is really very difficult to resist without rudeness.’¹²⁵ Ho Tung’s ‘undiminished pertinacity’ continued, and this was not the last occasion on which he sent in his or his wife’s philanthropic record in the hope of attaining a specific honour. A later memo from the 1940s labeled him as a ‘collector of foreign decorations.’¹²⁶ While Ho Tung understood that it was through conspicuous and extensive donations that Colonial businessmen could receive honours, he did not understand the unspoken code that those people did not dictate to the Crown. Recipients of honours were supposed to be grateful and loyal for their rewards and not dictate that they needed, or even wanted, them.

As Loftus remarked, confusion did indeed prevail among many holders of medals and honours related to the Order of the British Empire, as well as among some in the public more generally. These various correspondents misunderstood how honours recipients were selected and how the Order as a whole functioned. But this does not mean that their enthusiasm for promotion in the Order was not significant or genuine. Loftus himself was an example of this, even if he expressed his enthusiasm negatively. Taken together, these various cases show that there were individuals who were passionate about policing the status and prestige of the Order of the British Empire and the honours system as a whole. Furthermore, this honorific vigilantism was implicitly authorized and endorsed by the Treasury, who consistently pursued the various reported cases of the misuse of post-nominals with vigor and tolerated what bordered on meddling from correspondents such as Ernest Loftus. Every case that was brought to their attention was investigated thoroughly. When they discovered that people were incorrectly using post-nominals or

¹²⁵ Waterhouse to J.A.P. Edgcombe, 8 February 1927, Colonial Office Correspondence, CO 448/34, NA.

¹²⁶ See: Colonial Office Correspondence, CO 448/65, NA.

titles, they took action to stop this, sometimes employing local police to communicate the problem to the culprits.

However, the possession of an honour, especially those won during the war, could be a source of bitterness as well as pride. Recognition was relative to those around an individual recipient, and the perception that a colleague (especially a less competent colleague) was receiving greater honours than oneself could cause great discontent. This was the darker side of the community enthusiasm over seeing friends and colleagues recognized: knowing those people who had been honored could prompt jealousy as well as civil or community pride. A.B. Kirby, a British civil servant in Tanganyika, received the OBE in 1925 for his work on the British Empire Exhibition, but over the next decade he accrued no more honours, even as he jealously watched colleagues receive higher awards.¹²⁷ On his retirement in 1934, he anticipated some further recognition, but was, as he put it, 'passed over'.¹²⁸ Spurred on by talk from 'sympathizers' who fueled his belief that he was being ignored as some form of censure for his work (which, he explained in a letter to his superiors, copied to the CCOK, was excellent), he insisted on relinquishing the honour. He returned his badge to the CCOK and eventually, with much reluctance on the part of it and the Treasury, he was struck off the list of the Order. 'Once proud of the decoration', it had, over ten years, turned to ashes in his mouth, and he could 'feel no satisfaction in the possession of it'.¹²⁹ He was probably not aware that his superiors had recommended him for a CBE in 1930, but that this recommendation had not succeeded.¹³⁰

¹²⁷ A.B. Kirby to Mr Fiddian, December 19 1934, Relinquishment of an O.B.E. (Mr A.B. Kirby), CO 448/43, NA.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Note by T.J. Hardy, 21 December 1934, Relinquishment of an O.B.E. (Mr A.B. Kirby), CO 448/43, NA.

These cases illustrate another very important point: there were many people who wanted to assume – innocently or otherwise – whatever forms of status the Order of the British Empire gave to them in the context of their local or professional community. People appended post-nominals related to the Order of the British Empire – particularly OBE – to their names when they thought they might be eligible or when they sought social approbation at a certain level. The actual possession of an honour had a direct appeal, and its denial, as Kirby’s case showed, could cause great distress. Recipients wanted them enough to want to start participating in the process of selection and distribution. The case of Ho Tung illustrated this directly. From the perspective of the civil servants who ran the honours system, honours were the Crown’s prerogative, and while nominations were welcome, the bond they created was one of loyalty, not one that carried any obligation for the Crown. However, the opening up of honours meant that people throughout the empire were keen to participate in the system and saw it more as it was in practical terms: a relationship between the Crown and the people of the empire that was mediated by particular kinds of service and through which certain services would result in particular social distinctions.

VI.

Civil service records are full of expressions of controversy, anxiety and curiosity about honours, but these still deal with only those exceptional cases that somehow made their way to the Treasury, or other official office. For a more intimate view of how people responded to receiving an honour as members of communities, we can turn to a number of sources. Various forms of writing, especially autobiographies but also fiction stories and newspapers, can give clues as to how particular communities thought about honours and their recipients. Another source that shows reflections about honours is the ever-present sub-genre of correspondence: the letter of congratulation. Inevitably, these, along with any replies that the lucky recipient of an honour tendered, were

formulaic, but there are a number of interesting characteristics to this formula, especially among groups new to the world of honours in this era. Civil servants were more accustomed to the receipt of honours and were conditioned to certain formalities when congratulated and congratulating.

William Beveridge replied to all the hundreds of letters of congratulation that he received on receipt of his KCB in 1919, for example, and he took care to congratulate any of his correspondents who had also received honours in the same list.¹³¹ G.M. Trevelyan made a point of writing to former students of Trinity College, Cambridge who received honours, commenting to one such new knight, a scientist, that ‘Dear old Trinity doesn’t seem to have been doing badly in the honours list today.’¹³²

One regular pattern in letters of congratulation and replies to such was to emphasize that the honour concerned was a collective as well as an individual honour. This was particularly the case for groups who saw themselves as marginal, or on the fringes of the establishment, although honours were a source of pride for most communities who saw their leaders recognized. When Maude Royden, famous feminist, preacher, speaker and author, was appointed to the Order of the Companions of Honour in 1930 her correspondents included more feminists than clergymen.¹³³ One Australian correspondent (Royden had gone on a world tour that included Australia and New Zealand in the middle of the 1920s) said that she ‘appreciate[d] your gaining it as a Leader of Women’.¹³⁴

The question of women’s honours remained an ongoing issue in the wake of the near-simultaneous granting of votes for women and the creation of the Order of the British Empire.

Helena Normanton, a successful solicitor and columnist for the women’s magazine *Good*

¹³¹ Letters of Congratulation on KCB, 1919, Beveridge Papers, Beveridge i/d/3, LSE.

¹³² G.M. Trevelyan to Frederick Hopkins, 1 January 1925, Bayliss Papers, GC/233/C.1, Wellcome Library.

¹³³ Companion of Honour (Congratulatory Letters), Maude Royden Papers, 7AMR/1/16, FL221, Women’s Library.

¹³⁴ Elizabeth Goldsmith to Royden, 28 January 1930, Companion of Honour (Congratulatory Letters), Maude Royden Papers, 7AMR/1/16, FL221, Women’s Library.

Housekeeping, felt that the inclusion of women in the British Empire Order was not enough.¹³⁵

Normanton wrote about a wide variety of issues, including politics, finance, nationality and international relations. In her March 1933 column, she argued that the government needed to ‘realise that a few minor decorations to worthy and obscure women missionaries, schoolmistresses and civil servants do not leave us, as a sex, content’.¹³⁶ Where, she asked, were the women scientists, writers and archaeologists? She questioned the fairness of the exclusion of women from the Order of the Garter, saying that the Order of the British Empire was ‘rather dull’. Later, in 1935, Normanton also asked why women were barred from the peerage and why no women had been inducted into the Order of Merit since Florence Nightingale, who, as Normanton pointed out, was by that point senile and largely unaware of the magnitude of the honour.¹³⁷ It was unfair to restrict women to the Order of the British Empire, she argued, because ‘no new order can have the same prestige as the older orders of a country with so long a history as our own’.

Normanton had a fairly detailed historical grasp of the background of honours and women, citing cases in the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries when women had been appointed to the peerage and to the Garter. According to her historical analysis, Britain in the 1930s was both lacking in much-needed aristocratic leadership and seeing a movement of power away from women and towards men. She argued that despite the expansion of honours to include women in 1917 the deeper past, when women could be Ladies of the Garter and peeresses, held up a better example to women leaders in the present.¹³⁸ This view was doubtless idiosyncratic, as the experience of the

¹³⁵ Articles from ‘Good Housekeeping’ by Helena Normanton, Helena Normanton Papers, 7HLN/C/03, box 7, Women’s Library.

¹³⁶ *Good Housekeeping*, March 1933, p.144, in: Articles from ‘Good Housekeeping’ by Helena Normanton, Helena Normanton Papers, 7HLN/C/03, box 7, Women’s Library.

¹³⁷ *The Queen*, 27 March 1935, p.48, in: Articles from ‘The Queen’ by Helena Normanton, Helena Normanton Papers, 7/HLN/C/04, box OS77, Women’s Library.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

thousands of women who welcomed their appointments in the Order of the British Empire (and the few who made it into the Companions of Honour, such as Maude Royden) showed, but it certainly reflected a wider view among feminist leaders that the narrow range of honours available to women was unfair and untenable, especially as women more and more stood out as public figures, and as the achievements of individual women in different fields stressed their ability to do the things for which men had for a long time received honours. The narrow range of honours was also aesthetically displeasing: as M.M. Homersham wrote to Royden: ‘You seem to have acquired the only really nice-sounding decoration awarded to women! I can’t imagine you a “Dame” and I’m sure you would refuse an ugly title. “Companion of Honour” is lovely, and gallant!’¹³⁹

When Miss A. Werner won the CBE in 1931, she requested to be able to attend the royal investiture at which she would receive the award wearing her academic robes.¹⁴⁰ Worried that she might be expected to wear ‘court dress’, she felt more comfortable wearing her hard-won academic robes. She was assured, however, that the extra expense of ‘court dress’ was not necessary and that she merely needed to wear morning dress – the most formal category of attire. Whether this was any easier for Werner than court dress is uncertain. Investitures in general were exciting occasions for honours recipients, and for women in particular in the interwar period there was a particular excitement for meeting the King (or a prince). Theatrical painter Laura Knight was made a Dame in 1929. On the occasion of her investiture she had to procure some white kid gloves to complete her outfit. However, this proved more difficult than she expected and, after various mishaps, she ended up shaking hands with the then Prince of Wales (later Edward VIII and the Duke of Windsor) with

¹³⁹ M.M. Homersham to Royden, 1 January 1930, Companion of Honour (Congratulatory Letters), Maude Royden Papers, 7AMR/1/16, FL221, Women’s Library.

¹⁴⁰ A. Werner to E.B. Boyd, 19 May 1931, CO 448/36, NA.

gloves with a hole in their thumb.¹⁴¹ Overall, the occasion was a success, and her story about the hole in the thumb of her gloves served to both portray her as out of place but also to present the royal occasion as being one where the Prince showed both graciousness and good humor in his relations with his father's subjects. The overall impression given by Knight about the honour that she received was one of gratitude and pride, mixed with a hint of embarrassment and the sense that she was out of place at such a grand occasion as the investiture. However, there was no sense in her autobiographical account that she was unworthy or illegitimate. Instead, she was a curious and eager guest of a world that people such as her had seldom before shared, yet now could begin to experience.

The honours system was ill-equipped to cater to married women as individual achievers, separate from their husbands, especially when those husbands were famous or already had titles themselves. The debate around the use of 'Dame' when the Order of the British Empire was founded showed this, as did its continued administration through the interwar years. The consolidation and re-establishment of the Order also saw a rethinking of the recognition of individual women, numerically as well as administratively. In an era of retrenchment rather than profligacy, the recognition of women for the sake of bringing some kind of more even gender balance was less of a priority. In Chapter one, we saw how one of the ways in which colonial quotas for the new Order of the British Empire were filled was to give honours to the most distinguished women in the colony, especially those who had contributed publicly to the war effort by patronizing the Red Cross, Order of St John and/or soldiers' friendly societies. Usually, the most prominent such women were the wives of governors. As a result, the wives of many governors and governors general wives received honours independent of their husbands, who themselves were in a group

¹⁴¹ Laura Knight, *Laura Knight, D.B.E., A.R.A.* (London: The Studio, 1932), 194.

well-rewarded for their services through the Order of the British Empire and the Order of St Michael and St George (and perhaps even higher honours).

In the 1920s and 1930s, however, the idea that wives of governors should or could receive honours separate from those of their husbands was explicitly repudiated. Through the interwar period the Colonial Office received a number of requests from governors that their wives receive promotions in the Order of the British Empire, or new awards. This was an inherently awkward situation for a governor, because they themselves were the conduit for recommendations and, in the non-self-governing territories, had ultimate responsibility for the names that appeared on their list. The distinguished diplomat Hubert Young, at the time the governor of Northern Rhodesia, wrote in to the Foreign Office to ask about the etiquette for recommending his wife ('one of the hardest worked people in the colony') for some sort of honour.¹⁴² But while exceptions were sometimes made and 'both during and after the War decorations were conferred on the wives of several Governors', the official policy of the Colonial Office was that 'the wife of a Governor should be regarded as participating in her husband's honours' and therefore needed no independent honorific recognition, regardless of her services.¹⁴³ In a similar case a few years later, this policy was reaffirmed: internal correspondence about Lady Bourdillon, wife of Bernard Bourdillon, Governor of Nigeria, suggested that she be sent a letter of appreciation, but no more than that. The Colonial Office would continue in its policy of 'shin[ing] in the reflected glory of her husband'.¹⁴⁴

Only special public services apart from their duties as governors' wives could be considered to be worthy of honours. Unlike their husbands, wives did not receive honours by default for doing their duty – they had to do special extra services in order to win recognition. In the case of Lady

¹⁴² Hubert Young to James Maffey, 8 January 1936, Honours for Wives of Governors – Procedure, CO 448/45, NA.

¹⁴³ Note by J. Lloyd, 20 January 1936, Honours for Wives of Governors – Procedure, CO 448/45, NA.

¹⁴⁴ Note, 27 March 1943, Honours Recommendations: Lady Bourdillon, CO 448/55, NA.

Bourdillon, her hard work, her talent in getting along well with various native peoples around the world and her long tolerance of tropical conditions – all qualities cited by her husband as being worthy of some individual honorific recognition – were regarded as duties of a governor's wife rather than deserving of honours outside the 'reflected glory' of Sir Bernard.¹⁴⁵ This policy suggested that such honours as women were eligible for should be awarded for particular services rather than for fulfilling positions and duties, which were the traditional means through which most of the older honours were given. However, this policy was not always consistent – now that women were eligible for honours the balance between rewarding women who had contributed to their husbands' public achievements and those who had achieved some distinction on their own was difficult to resolve. The Order of the British Empire was by its nature – and by some of the internal discussions around its purpose – a more democratic but also more meritocratic chivalric order. Colonial governors, like generals, admirals and certain senior civil servants, could expect to eventually receive some sort of knighthood, but their wives, like people in non-civil service professions, had to win them through some more distinctive achievement.

The case of Christina Massey in 1925–1926 illustrates some of the complexities and uncertainties about how these new honours for women should work. William Massey was the long-serving Prime Minister of New Zealand, who had led the Dominion from 1912 until his death in 1925. As leader of the farming-based Reform Party, he had revitalized conservative politics in New Zealand and had been a staunch and loyal supporter of an ideal of imperial duty on the part of Dominion governments. In the course of his wartime leadership and later he had been offered high honours on a number of occasions, but had always demurred. The exact reasons for this modesty were unclear, but probably had to do with popular opinion among some of his local supporters

¹⁴⁵ M. MacDonald to Bourdillon, 30 March 1939, Honours Recommendations: Lady Bourdillon, CO 448/55, NA.

being against titles, as well as the habit of his detested political rival, Joseph Ward, to himself accumulate British honours. However, the cost of this was that his wife was denied a title that, it seems, she desired. Immediately on his death, Leo Amery, as Secretary of State for the Colonies, initiated a successful campaign to have her made GBE (the wives of both Lloyd George and Australian wartime Prime Minister Billy Hughes had also received this award and thus served as a precedent).¹⁴⁶ In some ways this appointment was irregular. It was initiated by the British Government, rather than that of New Zealand, and while New Zealand's new Prime Minister, Gordon Coates, was happy to affirm the appointment, the Colonial Office was not supposed to initiate the process of giving honours to Dominion citizens. Earlier incidents with the Canadian and Australian governments had made this clear. But in Christina Massey's case the exceptional circumstances of her husband's honorific recalcitrance was enough to overcome both this problem and questions of her actual contribution. Her appointment was justified by the fact that she 'must have contributed largely to his [William Massey's] success, since their married life was of the happiest and both were regarded with a high degree of affection everywhere in the Dominion'.¹⁴⁷

This was undoubtedly an exceptional case, but it illustrates the tension and uncertainty inherent in including women in a system of social recognition that had previously been almost exclusively a man's world. It also cut across problems with the application of the honours system to the self-governing Dominions. William Massey found it politically impossible to accept a knighthood, yet his wife, the Colonial Office and his successor as Premier in New Zealand alike thought it entirely suitable (and, the Colonial Office believed, locally popular) to make his wife a Dame on his death. One Colonial Office official wrote that this move would be 'much appreciated

¹⁴⁶ Ronald Waterhouse to A.E. Edgecombe, 12 November 1925, CO 448/32, NA.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

throughout New Zealand'.¹⁴⁸ In an age of honours retrenchment, the GBE for Christina Massey also shows how political will and a desire to reward stalwart allies (or their wives) could still provide a powerful impulse to make appointments that, on the surface, might have seemed unwarranted considered purely on the grounds of individual meritorious service. In the end, it was not a case of the late William Massey sharing in the honour of his wife, or of Christina Massey sharing in that of her husband. Their shared distinction, while lacking in precedent, showed that the system could be flexible when the people who ran it really wanted to be so.

VII.

Later politicians, royal servants, civil servants and historians of honours agreed that during the mid-late 1920s and the 1930s the honours system's credibility was restored after the bad years of the war. As a historical judgment, this is based largely on the view of social and political elites, with anecdotal backing from select newspaper articles and other cultural miscellanea produced in this era. As I have shown, honours policy was decided primarily on the basis of this assumption. Controlling inflation and restricting honours was seen as the primary solution to the perceived problems with honours. But the actual changes in the social profile of honours recipients that occurred at the end of the war, and during the 1920s and 1930s, suggest a different interpretation of the meaning of honours in Britain and its empire. In the Dominions and to a certain extent in the Colonies and India, honours were a political issue less because of the number that was given out, than for the type of person who was being recognized.

The same was true, to a large extent, in the United Kingdom itself. At a local, professional and community level, the significance of honours was not in the total numbers given out but in the

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

kind of person who received them. The recognition, or non-recognition, of different groups in British society had a greater impact on the credibility and relevance of honours to different groups. And 1917 had enormously expanded the pool of people for whom honours were potentially (if not in practice) relevant. Honours were a marker of integration into the establishment as well as of one's position in the social hierarchy. Among the new groups who had begun to be recognized during the 1917–1922 period, it was the novelty of being able to receive honours rather than the rank of the honour that mattered. OBEs and MBEs, which would have been disdained by the people 'in the know' who cared about the details of the honours system, were also the most celebrated awards by their recipients. As the CCOK noted after the war, it was OBE and MBE holders who tended to write letters of thanks in to the monarch. The stories of the various defenders of the Order of the British Empire in the 1920s and 1930s show this in multiple ways: people were both eager to take up post-nominal initials even when they were not entitled to them, while others who held those honours were very keen to stop the former group from misusing them. For Ernest Loftus, furthermore, the method for finding such people was not to consult reference works such as *Who's Who* (which, after all, only included people at Commander/Companion level and above) but to make a judgment on the basis of what he perceived to be their social position – a strategy that, as we have seen, could backfire.

The seeming achievement of this era in the British honours system was to create a system that spanned the empire, wherein a distinguished judge could expect a knighthood whether he was in London or Lucknow, or a heroic hospital matron could get a MBE for her services in Hong Kong or in Hobart. This hierarchy was a false representation of the complex relationships between race, class, gender and professional groups within Britain and its empire, but it was the closest thing that the Imperial state (or collection of states) had to a coherent statement of relative social hierarchy. However, while there was a degree of uniformity, there were also massive inconsistencies.

The twin honorific functions of recognizing service and asserting hierarchies could and did clash when they combined with local political imperatives. To use an extreme example, knighthoods in Canada and India could mean very different things in the early 1930s: the son of an Indian Prince could receive a knighthood in one of the Indian Orders for merely being a Prince, whereas in Australia, guided by very different political imperatives, it was only possible to confer awards on people who were seen as distinguished citizens and servants of the country. The piecemeal history and generally idiosyncratic nature of the honours system, as well as the differences in administration and local conditions through the Empire and within the UK, worked against uniformity.

The most lasting and more important effect of the honours system within Britain and the empire was its power to inspire strong feelings and invest recipients and their communities in ideas of national and imperial hierarchy. Desire, aspiration, envy, curiosity, anger and vanity all attended on the fount of honour. While honours brought only limited material and, in most cases, social benefits, the aggregate of energy and effort put into their acquisition and management shows the symbolic importance of the imagined bond that they created between the citizen (or subject) and the crown. This bond worked because it connected the nebulous, alien and distant concepts of Crown and Empire with the concrete concerns of the locality. But it was also a bond, not a mere exercise of power. Perceived in the corridors of Whitehall or Windsor Palace as primarily an expression of loyalty, peoples' enthusiasm and concern about honours was actually seen by recipients as a two-way process, entangled with local concerns, entitlements and privileges. The work that honours did to cement a sense of connection within the empire created demands on, as well as benefits for, the Crown.

Chapter three: From Inappropriate to Indispensable: Civilian Honours in the Second World War

I.

In March 1941 Henry Dale, the President of the Royal Society, dropped in on his friend and the secretary of the Society, A.V. Hill, to hint that he was planning on recommending Hill for a knighthood. With Dale's recommendation, such an honour would be almost guaranteed, especially as knighthoods for a couple of previous secretaries of the society suggested a precedent (or maybe even the beginnings of a tradition).¹ Dale thought that his confidential conversation with Hill was a friendly, if technically improper, formality. He had already written to Winston Churchill to nominate Hill, whom he said occupied a 'leading position among the distinguished scientific research workers of the present day', and whose 'reputation is probably as high in the United States of America, and in other foreign countries, as in Britain'.² A knighthood would be appropriate not only because of Hill's eminence as a physiologist, but also in light of his 'important' and 'confidential' public services 'in connexion with the present war'.³ Even before the war had started, Hill had been involved in the development of radar and the rescue of refugee academics from Nazi Germany through the Society for the Protection of Science and Learning. A few decades previously, Dale was aware, Hill had accepted an OBE for wartime scientific work in 1918 when he was more junior – if no less talented – in his profession. It seemed entirely reasonable that he should welcome higher honours.

¹ A.V. Hill to Henry Dale, 30 March 1941, Honours List Correspondence, Henry Dale Papers, HD/6/8/7/13/6, Royal Society Archives.

² Dale to Winston Churchill, 11 March 1941, Honours List Correspondence, Henry Dale Papers, HD/6/8/7/13/5, Royal Society Archives.

³ Ibid.

However, Dale had not realized that not only had this earlier award become something of an embarrassment for his friend, but also that a knighthood was wholly unacceptable from Hill's point of view. The conversation, which Dale had hoped would bring pleasure, ended in awkwardness as Hill immediately rejected the idea of a knighthood. Lest his friend think his reaction to the offer rude Hill quickly wrote to Dale to clarify his reasons. Hill recalled his OBE – won at the time of greatest public skepticism about the new Order of the British Empire – with something approaching shame. Even though his research was of direct importance to the prosecution of the First World War, he was guilty that he had not been suffering on the front lines with others of his generation (see Chapter one). He gave Dale two reasons for declining the knighthood. In terms of the good of the Royal Society, he argued that his receiving such a title would create an undesirable and unnecessary precedent of automaticity:

It may actually be an advantage to break a sequence [of knighthoods for secretaries of the Society] which is in danger of becoming automatic. These automatic awards can better be kept for people in the Government Service. The prestige of the Royal Society does not depend on such things.⁴

More importantly, he attested to a 'deep-rooted personal dislike of the whole "honours" system'.⁵

The system was bad for scientists 'because it causes jealousy and a feeling that their contributions are not recognised in those who don't get honours'.⁶ Among their colleagues, Hill suggested, knighthoods and the prestige they brought had become too important as markers of status and, consequently, promoted professional envy and wider discord. The whole game of titles, this

⁴ A.V. Hill to Dale, 30 March 1941, Honours List Correspondence, Henry Dale Papers, HD/6/8/7/13/6, Royal Society Archives.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ A.V. Hill to Dale, 7 March 1943, Honours List Correspondence, Henry Dale Papers, HD/6/8/7/13/13, Royal Society Archives.

response implied, was below Hill (although he did not stress this point too much – Dale had accepted a knighthood almost ten years earlier).

In his unpublished memoirs, Hill railed against what he perceived as the integration of the Royal Society into the government and argued that the Society's independence should be preserved, citing the automatic knighthoods for secretaries as an indication of this invidious integration with the 'Establishment'.⁷ In an honorific sense, as this chapter will show, this integration was catalyzed by the Second World War and the importance of scientific research to the conduct of the war. Hill also justified his rejection of a knighthood by quoting Thomas Huxley's argument that "The sole order of nobility which, in my judgment, becomes a philosopher, is the rank which he holds in the estimation of his fellow-workers, who are the only competent judges in such matters."⁸ Faraday, Darwin, Shakespeare and George Trevelyan never adorned their names with the title 'Sir'. Privately Hill relished the fact that in this way he kept company with such luminaries.⁹ This did not stop him from accepting the CH from the government, which did not carry a title (but which, if anything, aroused a greater sense of competition and jealousy than knighthoods because of its exclusivity) in 1946. His biographer suggested his reluctance for accepting a knighthood may have had something to do with his detestation for his given names, Archibald Vivian.¹⁰ Being styled 'Sir Archibald' would have been frustrating for the man who wanted to be known as 'Professor Hill'.

Like every other man and woman who declined a British honour in the twentieth century, Hill was in a minority, and he had idiosyncratic reasons for his decision. All around him, colleagues in science, along with civilians in a range of other fields related to the prosecution of the war, were

⁷ A.V. Hill, *Memoires*, 266-7, A.V. Hill Papers, AVHL I 5/4, Churchill Archives Center, Cambridge.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Press Cutting in: A.V. Hill Papers, AVHL I 5/6/31, Churchill Archives Center, Cambridge.

¹⁰ Sir Bernard Katz, "Archibald Vivian Hill, 1886-1977, Elected F.R.S. 1918", A.V. Hill Papers, AVHL 8/5, Churchill Archives Center, Cambridge.

accepting various honours, as Hill did in the First World War. As in 1914–1918, the Second World War brought questions of who was worthy firmly to the forefront of internal government and public discussions about the honours system. Total war saw a massive voluntary and professional civilian effort throughout the empire and also produced obligations to decorate larger than usual numbers of foreign allies. But the way in which honours were managed and given out was very different in the second war. Honours lists over the six years of the war (and through to 1948, when wartime honours finally ended) were different in composition and size than those of the First World War. The mass inflation of 1917–1921 was avoided almost entirely, while the focus on voluntary work from the first few years of the Order of the British Empire was not reproduced to any great extent. The new decorations that the Crown created were for gallantry, not for voluntary civilian service, and they were not orders of chivalry that fell into the traditional boundaries of the honours system, but medals that better served the singular, discrete nature of heroic acts.

In principle if not always in practice the Order of the British Empire at its inception in the First World War had portrayed Britain's civilian heroes as an army of volunteers, working individually towards the collective good of the state. It was imagined to be, as A. Winton Thorpe wrote, 'British Democracy's own Order of Chivalry': the people come together to support the boys on the front lines (see Chapter one). The messages sent by the way in which the honours system was run in the Second World War were more complicated, with the civilian heroes of this new war being recognized more sparingly and narrowly. By the final years of the war, the total number of British civilians receiving honours per year was moderately elevated from pre-war levels, in comparison to the tens of thousands who were made members of the Order in 1918 and 1919. In 1938, seventy men in Britain were made knights bachelor, with another eleven in the dominions, twenty-seven in India and twelve in other colonies. In the Order of the British Empire in the same year, hundreds rather than thousands of people received awards. Four years into the war, in 1943, the crown made

sixty-six men in Britain knights bachelor, maintaining pre-war levels without any inflation. The other major orders, including the Order of the British Empire, were more inflated, mostly because of higher rates of military honours. The Order of the Bath in particular saw much larger numbers of military appointments, but this was inevitable in wartime due the much larger size of the military and the higher rate of valuable and exceptional service. At the civilian level, there was some inflation, although this was driven by high rates of honours to civil defense and the merchant navy (discussed below). Overall, the number of total civilian honours was inflated from pre-war levels, but not by orders of magnitude as in the previous war.

Many of the people who were honored during the Second World War were the same kind of people who received honours in peacetime, but more had specialist, technical roles in the war. Some were volunteers, but the focus of honours was not on voluntary workers so much as on experts and technocrats. In terms of civilian decorations, it was a specialist's war. In addition to a few other select groups whose gallantry and importance were unquestionable the male and female civilians who were most honored for their contribution to victory were people like Hill: scientists, statisticians, planners and other experts working for central or local government to maximize the efficiency of Britain's war effort. These people were organized within and honored by a powerful central state apparatus, which saw itself better able to identify and rank service that was worthy of distinction than the more scattered and chaotic system in place during the first war.

Outside of Britain, in the colonies and dominions of the wider empire, the distribution of honours was even less liberal than within the British Isles. There was also a sharp division in practice between the self-governing dominions and other parts of the empire, including India. White dominion governments were reluctant to give any civilian honours, while the Colonial and India offices maintained a strict hold over the total numbers of honours given. At the same time, those decorations that were given out were done so strategically. As global war placed even more strain

than usual on colonial relationships, honours as a way of recognizing loyalty to the empire were seen by colonial officials as all the more important. For all the impulses at the beginning of the war to avoid political honours during times of struggle, honours selections were innately political in recognizing key groups in British society and in the empire who were perceived as essential to the war effort. The politics of honours were defined in relation to the First World War and they took off immediately as the war began.

II.

Shortly after Britain and the empire declared a state of war against the Axis powers, Neville Chamberlain suspended all political honours in Britain. For the past few decades, civil servants and politicians had shared the view that the excessive use of honours during the First World War had been unequivocally bad for everyone concerned. It was bad for the honours system because it devalued the distinction that honours conferred, and it was bad for politics because it discredited politicians and cast doubt on the suitability of newly-made peers. The exposure of the political workings of the honours system was also bad for the credibility of the monarchy – too many peerages or knighthoods stripped away the symbolic fiction of the relationship between the Crown, government and the people of the Empire. This critique of Lloyd George's flood of honours was accepted by almost all of the leaders of the three main parties: the Conservative Party had been happy to use honours for its more subtle forms of patronage and fundraising; the Liberal Party wanted to put the stigma of Lloyd George's 'corruption' behind it; and the Labour Party had been critical of the honours system as a whole even before the wartime premier inflated it. In 1931, for example, Ramsay MacDonald wrote to Herbert Morrison, who was pressing him to give an honour to an ally, that 'the tendency is to make our Honours as cheap as the French Legion of Honour, and

I must resist it'.¹¹ The suspension of political honours made sense when it had for the past two decades symbolized everything that was wrong with the government at the end of the last war – Chamberlain (and, for a couple of years, Churchill after him) wanted to dissociate themselves from the taint of corruption. A pure government was needed to fight a just and desperate war.

Chamberlain's government did not stop with political honours, and for a year the government considered even civilian honours of any kind 'inappropriate' given the nature and course of the war in 1939 and 1940.¹² No honours list was published at the customary time of New Year 1940, and while a longer list was produced for the Queen's Birthday in June, it contained only military honours.¹³ Civilian honours – even the non-political ones that usually made up a majority of that part of the list – would have to wait until a 'more appropriate time, which will not, in any event, be before the New Year, 1941.'¹⁴ An internal memorandum stressed that it was important that the civil service not feel slighted by the exclusion of civilians from the honours lists in 1940, given the 'way in which the Service has dealt with the great additional burdens which have fallen to it since the outbreak of war'.¹⁵ Already officials were anxious that the exclusion of one group (especially one that was, by tradition, both privileged and demanding) would give rise to discontent. The explanation for the exclusion of civilian honours was vague: 'it seemed inappropriate' at that point, to honour 'individuals outside the military services'.¹⁶ Military honours were continued, but civilian

¹¹ MacDonald to Herbert Morrison, 11 April 1931, Ramsay MacDonald Papers, RMD/1/14/141, John Rylands Library, University of Manchester.

¹² Robert Knox [R.U.E.K.] to Henry Bedeley, 2 November 1939, Half-Yearly Honours List (Civil), New Year, Birthday 1940, T 305/7, National Archives [NA].

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Note by R.U.E.K., 25 June 1940, Half-Yearly Honours List (Civil), New Year, Birthday 1940, T 305/7, NA.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

honours for bravery had to wait. Initially, it was the latter that made the most calls on the honours system, contradicting the idea that all civilian honours were ‘inappropriate’.

For most of the war, honours were overseen by a special wartime Committee on the Grant of Honours, Decorations and Medals in Time of War, formed in 1939. The focus of this dissertation is the honours system as utilized through the orders of chivalry and the knighthood and does not cover the still more complex, convoluted and variable world of medals. In wartime, however, the use of honours and the use of medals converged. In Whitehall the honour committee was known until at least 1942 as the ‘Horace Wilson Committee’ after its chair, and Robert Knox (see Chapter two) was its secretary.¹⁷ Wilson was the Permanent Secretary of the Treasury. He is now best known for his involvement in guiding Neville Chamberlain’s appeasement policies.¹⁸ His involvement in appeasement led to his dismissal in 1942, as neither Churchill nor Attlee trusted or liked him. Knox, as was the case before the war, endured as the leading figure behind the scenes of honours through until after 1945. The committee’s main area of interest was medals rather than order of chivalry, and many of the specific changes to British and imperial decorations happened in the area of gallantry awards rather than civilian honours. Like the peacetime honours committee, multiple smaller sub-committees served it: these ‘expert’ sub-committees included ones for Local Services, scientific research, medicine and for civil defense services not connected to gallantry. Gallantry awards were considered separately and were additional to existing quotas.¹⁹ It was questions around how to recognize gallantry and decorate civilian heroes that caused the most problems, but the regular

¹⁷ Note to F.N. Smith, 27 March 1942, Honours in War for Civil Defense Services, Grading Schedules, etc., HO 187/1829, NA.

¹⁸ “Wilson, Sir Horace John (1882–1972),” Rodney Lowe in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004); online ed., ed. Lawrence Goldman, January 2008, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/31844> (accessed March 23, 2014).

¹⁹ Horace Wilson to Churchill, 9 May 1941, Half-Yearly Honours List (Civil), Birthday 1941, T 305/9, NA.

civilian honours continued, and their incidence and focus followed similar patterns to pre-war honours.

The tap of civilian honour was opened again in the New Year 1941 list, but in spite of the accrued demand (especially for gallantry honours), the flow never turned into a flood. An increase of 50 percent on the usual quota was permitted to compensate for the lack of civilian honours over the previous year, but no more was allowed. In the end, the civilian list contained 323 names for Great Britain, a majority of which, as usual, were either OBEs or MBEs. The Treasury followed pre-war practice in dividing the list into 'State Services' for central civil servants, 'Local Services' for local government and charitable work, and 'Miscellaneous'.²⁰ An additional category, 'Civil Defense', was added. Of these, state service, as usual, had the largest share, with 135, while civil defense received a significant portion of the total, with forty-nine honours (forty-four of which were either OBEs or MBEs). The Dowager Marchioness of Reading, as the Chairman of Women's Voluntary Services, won the one award at the dame/knight level for civil defense, while the other honours mostly went to workers in particular localities. At the CBE and OBE levels, civil defense honours went to engineers and managers who had helped prepare their towns and cities for air raid attack: people like Ernest Ford, the city engineer and surveyor of Coventry, or Samuel Loxton, the Dover town clerk, both of whom were made Officers of the British Empire.²¹ Air Raid Wardens, medical clerks and nurses, and Air Raid Precautions [ARP] Officers were more likely to get MBEs.

Other parts of the list had clear connections to the war. A certain amount of doubling-up was also possible through the local services list: many names from this were linked to civil defense, especially firemen. Unlike the ARP, fire departments already had channels through which they could nominate OBEs and MBEs and thus could use the local list rather than a special wartime category.

²⁰ Note by Horace Wilson, 28 November 1940, Half-Yearly Honours List (Civil), New Year 1941, T 305/8, NA.

²¹ Half-Yearly Honours List (Civil), New Year 1941, T 305/8, NA.

Of the state servants who received honours, a larger than usual number of names appeared from ministries directly involved in the running of the war, such as the war cabinet, aircraft and ship production and the military ministries. But almost every ministry was contributing in some way or another to the war effort and in many cases there was no way of distinguishing between whether the service for which an honour was won was directly related to the war or not. The Ministry of Food and the Forestry Commission were important in a total war, just like aircraft production. In the other categories, civilians received honours for many of the same things for which they would have been honored in peacetime. Most miscellaneous honours went to people who clearly had some connection to the war, such as Peter Mairhead, who received a MBE for his work as the director and works manager for a Vickers-Armstrong (an engineering company that produced military vehicles and aircraft) factory in Newcastle-on-Tyne.²²

Civilian honours followed a similar pattern in 1942. The New Year's list was about 50 percent larger than pre-war quotas, thanks to increased merchant navy appointments (discussed below) as well as demand from civil defense and the armaments industries, according to Horace Wilson.²³ The Birthday list, too, was longer than in peacetime. Again, the main factor involved in inflating it was the large number of merchant navy OBEs and MBEs – an easily justifiable and unavoidable expansion, backed strongly by Churchill. By Birthday 1942 the number of honours for the civil service exceeded those for the merchant navy once again. Each category made up around 20 percent of the total number of civilians recommended for honours, although almost all of these were at the CBE, OBE or MBE level – there was one merchant navy knight, while civil defense won two: Thomas Frank, the coordinating officer for public utility services in London (and chief engineer and surveyor for London County) and Cecil Abrahams, Chairman of the Stores Committee

²² Ibid.

²³ Wilson to Churchill, 28 November 1941, Half-Yearly Honours List (Civil), New Year 1942, T 305/10, NA.

of the joint war organization of the Red Cross and the Order of Saint John.²⁴ As in the cases of these two men, a majority of lower honours for civil defense tended to be for organizational skills rather than gallantry; for example, Thomas Mackie's CBE for services to civil defense were no doubt useful and important, but did not involve facing the enemy.²⁵

Churchill continued to take an active hand in these lists. For Birthday 1942, he added expatriate Hungarian filmmaker Alexander Korda for his services to the war effort, making Korda the first film director to receive that high honour.²⁶ 'By his services to this country and his distinction in the art of the cinema', Churchill argued, Korda was 'well qualified for the Honour for which I propose to submit his name.'²⁷ The war added dignity and importance to the work of film directors as well as scientists, merchant seamen and Red Cross workers. When Horace Wilson and Robert Knox protested at Churchill's addition of two new CBEs to the honours list on the recommendation of some of his political allies, he promised Wilson that he would 'ask the King to be more generous'.²⁸ This was not the inflation of the First World War, but Wilson's report of this conversation to Knox did carry a hint of disapproval at this minor profligacy in the face of the 'difficulty' of 'finding' two additional CBEs.²⁹

By 1943, the outlook for the war was much different to that in 1939–1940, when political and civilian honours were suspended. In North Africa the Allied forces were driving back the German and Italian armies, and by the end of the year American and imperial troops would be in

²⁴ Half-Yearly Honours List (Civil), Birthday 1942, T 302/11, NA.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Churchill to Horace Wilson, 18 May 1942, Half-Yearly Honours List (Civil), Birthday 1942, T 302/11, NA.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Wilson to Knox, 18 May 1942, Half-Yearly Honours List (Civil), Birthday 1942, T 302/11, NA.

²⁹ Ibid.

Italy. The North Sea convoys were feeding a burgeoning Russian war machine that was rolling back the Nazi invasion. In Canada and the United States, liberty ships were being built faster than the Germans could sink them, and American troops and equipment were building up in Britain's cities – a concrete demonstration of Allied power and burgeoning supremacy. Even in Burma, where the long jungle campaign was still unresolved, the greatest losses were behind the British-Indian forces, which were beginning to drive back the Japanese. With success came increased demand for recognition among the many different interests who had worked hard to mobilize and support the war machine and now began to see victory as the fruits of their myriad different services to the state.

As the war grew less desperate, politicians and civil servants saw the ban on political honours as increasingly untenable. The inclusion of the Liberal and Labour Parties in the coalition government created a different kind of demand than in peacetime for political honours. In 1941, for example, Winston Churchill created four new Labour peers at Clement Attlee's insistence in order to give Labour more representation in the House of Lords.³⁰ These included William Wedgwood Benn, whose son, Anthony Wedgwood (Tony) Benn, became the first peer to legally and voluntarily divest himself of his title a little over two decades later and who was to become one of the most vocal and persistent critics of the honours system in the latter half of the century. According to Churchill, these peerages were not 'political honours' but 'a measure of state policy' for the purposes of constitutional balance.³¹ When Attlee requested that Churchill make a Labour MP a Privy Councillor, Churchill replied that this was impossible and that the peerages were for 'the smooth working of our

³⁰ R.U.E.K. to Lord McMillan, 14 May 1941, Political Honours Scrutiny Committee, a. New Year 1941, b. Birthday 1941, c. July 1941, Sept. 1941, d. October 1941, Dec 1941, T 352/24, NA.

³¹ Churchill to Lord McMillan, 9 July 1941, Political Honours Scrutiny Committee, a. New Year 1941, b. Birthday 1941, c. July 1941, Sept. 1941, d. October 1941, Dec 1941, T 352/24, NA.

Parliamentary institution under conditions of Coalition Government'.³² This was a thin distinction and it fed the ever-present hunger of whips for access to honours.³³ Furthermore, the ban on political honours in wartime created an unfortunate impression, according to some insiders, that political service to the country was undeserving of recognition and therefore that politics was somehow an unusually corrupt field, lacking in 'virtue'.³⁴ The ban caused 'hardship' for certain MPs whose political or public services would have brought reward in peacetime. However, according to Robert Knox, the reduced activity of party workers (who also would expect some honorific recognition in peacetime) because of the war meant that demand for political honours was already reduced.³⁵ Knox argued that any stigma attached to the word 'political' in the citation 'public and political service' had faded and that as a result there was no problem with resuming political honours.³⁶ By the middle of the war, therefore, the ban on political honours was reversed and unnecessary and potentially harmful. In 1944, the label 'for Parliamentary and Political Services' started to appear in honours lists, a slight variation on the pre-war 'Political and Public Service' tag.

But unlike the previous war, the inclusion of political honours did not cause a flood of new appointments. Instead, under the watchful eye of Knox, Churchill and other political leaders who had always been fed tales of the evils of honorific profligacy by interwar tales of Lloyd George's corruption, honours were mildly inflated, but without any widespread suspicion of excess. The conditions of the war played a part in this: after 1941 Britain was never desperate and, in comparison

³² Churchill to Attlee, 1 April 1941, Churchill Papers 20/21, in: Winston Churchill, *The Churchill War Papers Volume 3, The Ever-Widening War: 1941* (London: Heinemann, 2000), 437.

³³ R.U.E.K. to McMillan, 17 December 1941, Political Honours Scrutiny Committee, a. New Year 1941, b. Birthday 1941, c. July 1941, Sept. 1941, d. October 1941, Dec 1941, T 352/24, NA.

³⁴ Memorandum on Honours, 9 February 1943, PHSC Birthday 1943, T 352/25, NA.

³⁵ Memorandum by R.U.E.K., 23 February 1943, PHSC Birthday 1943, T 352/25, NA.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

to most combatant countries, came through the war relatively secure and with a minimum of damage. On the Eastern Front, in China, in Japan and in Central Europe towns, cities and communities had been ravaged or wiped out. Even certain other parts of the empire suffered more desperate conditions than Britain: in an area of the Bengal close to, but not in, a war zone a famine exacerbated by the demands of the imperial wartime economy had killed more civilians than had lost their lives through enemy action in Britain during the entire war. Yet at the same time these conditions could have caused inflation in the same way the accumulated debt to civilian volunteer and expert service did in the First War – perhaps even more so given the global and total nature of the commitment to the war.

Like many more important things, the honours scales review process that had become normal in the interwar years was disrupted by the war. The Honours Committee was due to hold sequels to the 1937 and 1939 reviews within seven to ten years, so in 1946 it held a new round of discussions to determine the peacetime configuration of Britain's orders of chivalry. Even at that stage, accumulated service and demand meant that there was a waiting list for war honours that took another couple of years to fully resolve. As always, the honours scales review was most preoccupied with civil service and military honours. One of its first decisions was to declare all wartime awards in the Order of the Bath and in the Order of the British Empire to be additional – that is, to not count towards the existing quotas set by statute.³⁷ Orders for gallantry in particular, the Honours Committee decided, needed to be additional and would be distinct from the usual half-yearly lists in order to further emphasize the division between gallantry and non-gallantry honours. This wartime use of additional honours was officially ended in December 1946.³⁸ The use of additional honours

³⁷ HD Committee Draft Report on the Order of the British Empire Permanent Establishment, HW 2888, 11 July 1946, Honours Scales: Review of Honours Scales 1946, General and H.D. Papers, T 344/11, NA.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

created a surplus rather than a deficit in positions in that Order, especially in the military services where wartime mortality had thinned the ranks of the Bath. From the perspective of the Treasury, the Order of the British Empire, too, was in decent shape: they ‘did not expect’ the full quota to be used up in any given peacetime year under a Labour government.³⁹

The war also made evident subtle but significant changes in the relationship between the state and industry. During the interwar years, civilian shipbuilders and dock workers who produced material for the Admiralty were eligible for – and shared in an allocation of – honours. The War Office and the Air Ministry also used this ‘technical quota’ to reward civilian workers, but as Edward Bridges pointed out in one of the immediate post-war meetings, there were now plenty of other government departments with workers with equivalent jobs who were indispensable to the running of the state, singling out the Ministry of Supply and the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research. Workers in these departments did ‘technical work for the forces’ and should, therefore, be eligible for the same pool of honours.⁴⁰

It is important to note the way in which the Treasury – Knox and the new head of the Home Civil Service, Edward Bridges, in particular – treated the war in their deliberations. A quiet, bureaucratic sense of self-satisfaction pervaded their discussions about the administration of the honours system in wartime: they had solved what they saw as the overwhelming ‘problem’ of honours – inflation – and had avoided any repeat of the First World War. By their standards, the way in which they and the politicians they advised had run the honours system during the war had been a complete success. This success was tangible and measurable by the numbers and the quotas

³⁹ E. Bridges, note of 30 July 1946, Honours Scales: Review of Honours Scales 1946, General and H.D. Papers, T 344/11, NA.

⁴⁰ Conclusions of the Meeting of the Committee on the Grant of Honours, Decorations and Medals, Held on Tuesday 23 July 1946, at the Treasury, HW 2932, Honours Scales: Review of Honours Scales 1946, General and H.D. Papers, T 344/11, NA.

(even if the use of additional awards helped them achieve this goal through a kind of creative accounting). In the conclusion to the draft report on the post-war arrangements for the Order of the British Empire, they sought to maintain these standards, recommending that: ‘these [new quota] allocations should not be used to the full, unless actually required’.⁴¹ They did not define exactly how ‘required’ was defined, but the implication seemed to be that peacetime was unlikely to produce many such situations.

III.

The avoidance of the ‘problems’ of the previous war was not the only problem for wartime honours, however. There were new challenges presented by war. The most pressing problem that the Honours Committee faced in the first years of the war was how to deal with bravery. Civilian gallantry quickly outgrew the range, variety and allocation of medals assigned to it in peacetime and overflowed into honours usually reserved for other kinds of service, a phenomenon that made many uncomfortable. The various British orders of chivalry had long been mostly dissociated from gallantry and bravery. The military’s share of the Orders of the Bath and of the British Empire went to officers primarily as a reward for seniority or distinction away from the battlefield. The Distinguished Service Order was reserved for officers who performed gallant acts in time of war, but it was more a medal than an order of chivalry in the formal sense. Beyond the DSO, the military also had an elaborate hierarchical range of medals for gallantry with clear distinctions between enlisted men and officers. During the interwar period, the Crown used the British Empire Medal (and its offshoot, the more prestigious Empire Gallantry Medal) to reward heroic service by mostly working- or lower-middle-class civilians and servicemen. However, the new war placed new demands on the

⁴¹ HD Committee Draft Report on the Order of the British Empire Permanent Establishment, HW 2888, 11 July 1946, Honours Scales: Review of Honours Scales 1946, General and H.D. Papers, T 344/11, NA.

overall structure of British gallantry awards. As the war evolved and new areas of civilian bravery, often under fire, emerged as important, the Crown adapted the honours system, using the Order of the British Empire and its medal as a way of recognizing civilian heroism. However not all of the groups rewarded in this way were pleased.

In September 1940 the German air campaign over Britain shifted from an attempt to gain air superiority to a strategy of mass bombing of British cities. The Blitz produced new challenges and new heroes. On September 17 the War Cabinet discussed the idea of creating a new award to recognize civilian bravery for nurses, firemen, people involved in bomb disposal, police and air raid wardens. This decoration would have two classes, to be known as the George Cross and the George Medal and would replace the Empire Gallantry Medal (itself an offshoot of the BEM). The EGM, according to Anthony Eden, then Secretary of State for War, could be discarded because it was not 'widely known'.⁴²

This reshuffling of civilian gallantry awards was part of an urgent need for more honours for civilian service. Chamberlain's restrictions on the Prime Minister's List meant that civilian honours had been deflated in the first two years of the war. But demand from within war industries and civilian services such as the ARP pressed on the war cabinet, which in September 1940 invited the Prime Minister to nominate: 'honours and decorations in connection with civilian war work, including the work of the managements and staffs of munitions and aircraft factories and the services of A.R.P. workers of all kinds.'⁴³ The British war machine was gearing up for a long war, and civilians were essential to this, especially as German bombs were still falling across the south of England.

⁴² Conclusions of a Meeting of the War Cabinet held in the Cabinet War Room, S.W.1, on Tuesday, September 17 1940, at 9 P.M., War Cabinet 252, War Cabinet Papers, CAB 65/9/14, NA.

⁴³ Conclusions of a Meeting of the War Cabinet held at 10 Downing Street, S.W.1, on Friday, September 6, 1940, at 11:30 A.M., War Cabinet 244 (40), War Cabinet Papers, CAB 65/9/6, NA.

More urgent still was the situation with the merchant marine. Already, merchant sailors were suffering higher casualties than any other service – civilian or military – in the empire. The magnitude of this toll was commensurate with the strategic importance of the merchant navy. Britain depended on imports for food and munitions, and while the empire contained potentially enormous reserves of manpower, imperial armies often needed to be transported vast distances to be usefully deployed. It mattered not how faithful New Zealand soldiers were, or how enthusiastically Indians volunteered for the imperial army, if they could not be sent where they were needed. Not only were sailors essential to the state, they were also the subject of a great deal of public sympathy. With war came the language of ‘sacrifice’, and of all the different services the merchant navy was the most dangerous and, in a sense, the most innocent. Ships and the sea had historical resonance for Britain, but it was not just the traditional relationship between Britannia and sailors that evoked sympathy – the very nature of the German strategy of attacking merchant vessels with submarines and mines made its victims seem both brave and victimized.

There was no question, therefore, in the cabinet and the pages of dailies, that the merchant marine deserved a substantial share of honours. However, the civilian status of merchant sailors posed a particular problem in terms of honours, as the range of decorations available to heroic seamen was substantially narrower than those available to the military. The new George Medal and George Cross offered a solution for civilian gallantry at the very highest level, but it was only to be given out sparingly, and there was nothing sparing about the bravery of merchant sailors. The decoration out of which these had evolved – the British Empire Medal – worked for ordinary sailors, but its status as a medal for the working class meant that it was inappropriate for officers. The natural solution, therefore, was to give officers the same decoration that they might have received on the rare occasions in peacetime when they performed with some unusual distinction: an appointment to a rank in the Order of the British Empire appropriate to their seniority and

importance. The Order's section of civilian honours lists from the first three years of the war in particular were full of – in fact, almost dominated by – officers from merchant ships. These appointments were 'additional' – that is, additional to the ordinary quotas for civilian awards in the Order of the British Empire. This meant that there was no direct numerical restriction, freeing the Crown to reward seamen when necessary. Because of this, for a few years at the beginning of the war, gallantry became a common means for the winning of civilian honours. By early 1941, the Crown had given seventy-four OBEs and 45 MBEs (as well as six George Medals, fifty-five BEMs and over three hundred commendations published in the *London Gazette*) to sailors in the merchant navy. Even then, Winston Churchill remarked that this distribution seemed 'niggardly'.⁴⁴ In response, he insisted that the 'flow' of awards to merchants be increased. By the end of the year, Robert Knox reported that the Admiralty, who were responsible for nominating merchant seamen for medals and honours, had effected a fourfold increase, but Churchill and Horace Wilson still felt that the flow of medals was too slow and pressed the Admiralty and the Treasury to give more.⁴⁵

Sailors who received ranks in the Order for gallantry also received special notice in the form of extended citations published in the London Gazette. Most citations for honours were a sentence, but from 1939 merchant recipients of the BEM and the various ranks in the Order were given full paragraphs of three to four sentences describing their deeds in narrative form.⁴⁶ An example of such a citation was that for Captain Thomas Farrar, the Master of the merchant *S.S. Baharistan*.⁴⁷ In December 1939 he was made an Officer of the British Empire after surviving a U-Boat attack without losing his ship or any of the sailors aboard. 'The ship was not armed', began the citation:

⁴⁴ Note attached to H.J.W. to Winston Churchill, 10 April 1941, Merchant Navy Honours, T 335/1, NA.

⁴⁵ Knox to Wilson, 12 August 1941, Merchant Navy Honours, T 335/1, NA.

⁴⁶ See: Merchant Navy Honours: Gazettes, T 335/3, NA.

⁴⁷ *Supplement to the London Gazette*, 1 December 1939, 8032.

She was suddenly attacked at the dead of night by an enemy submarine at very short range not far off shore near the Lands' End. The U-Boat fired from ahead of her on her seaward bow, so that to escape she had to turn towards the land. The Master could not have been blamed for heaving to and abandoning ship. But he determined at great risk to defy the enemy and at once brought the gun flashes astern. The submarine now brought her searchlight to bear, extinguished it, and continued firing. All shots fell very close, but by the bold decision and ready skill of her master, "Baharistan" made good her escape and anchored safely in Mounts Bay to await daylight.⁴⁸

The exploits of Farrar were the stuff of a rousing children's adventure story. His citation was far more exciting than the usual 'public and political service', or 'services to nursing in Shropshire' that accompanied announcements of honours. It emphasized a set of key factors in the brief engagement between the *Baharistan* and the German submarine: the lack of armament on the merchant ship, the danger of the situation as expressed by the determination of the submarine to keep shooting at the ship and most importantly the fact that Farrar's decision to evade rather than submit to the attack was optional and thus heroic. This was effectively the citation for a medal, not an OBE. But the OBE was the most appropriate decoration available for a civilian of captain rank who heroically went beyond his duty.

In 1940 officials in the Ministry of Shipping and in the Treasury argued that MBEs and OBEs were particularly appropriate and useful for merchant officers because it was given for services 'that only officers could give'.⁴⁹ The new George Medal was for gallant acts by both officers and men and recognized a kind of physical heroism, as opposed to the Order of the British Empire, which, it was intended, was for courage and ingenuity shown in command roles. The inclusion of merchant navy officers in the ranks of the Order, officials hoped, would increase the prestige of the

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ R. Gleadowe to R.U.E.K., 31 October 1940, Merchant Navy Honours, T 335/1, NA.

Order in addition to serving as a fitting reward for nautical initiative.⁵⁰ They were anxious that neither the George Medal nor the Order of the British Empire should be seen as an inferior decoration by the merchant services: already at the end of 1940 it would not be fair to give the new medal to men whose ‘brother Officers’ had previously received ranks in the Order.⁵¹

However, many commentators and potential honours recipients were unimpressed that Britain’s maritime heroes were receiving the same honours and coming to bear the same letters after their name as miscellaneous civil servants and other voluntary workers from peacetime. For many, the letters ‘OBE’ still carried a negative stigma. The popular image of the sort of person who had OBE after his or her name was at best worthy, but it was not heroic, even with the tradition of using it as a military decoration. Official anxiety over the possibility of recipients seeing OBEs and inferior to the new medal for heroism was justified. The *Daily Express* was particularly vigorous in making this criticism and brought it up as an issue in multiple editorials, much to the frustration of the Treasury.⁵²

Merchant officers had their own idea about how to solve this honorific problem – they wanted military medals and honours. Several recipients of the OBE (civil division) had ‘felt dissatisfied with’ their honour, and some had even considered declining it, according to W.I.C. Smith, the clerk of the Honourable Company of Master Mariners.⁵³ Smith cited the specific case of Captain T.S. Horn, Master of the S.S. *Sydney Star*, which was part of a convoy to the besieged island of Malta in July 1941. Despite being struck by a torpedo, the *Sydney Star* managed to limp into port

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ W.I.C. Smith to Horace Wilson, 27 May 1942, Merchant Navy Honours, T 335/1, NA.

under Horn's guidance, evading the circling German torpedo boats.⁵⁴ A nearby British destroyer, the *Nestor*, had successfully evacuated a large number of Army officers who had been aboard and had helped guide the stricken transport to port. The captain of the *Nestor* had received a DSO, while Horn had to be content with an OBE. To Smith this was deeply unfair: Horn had risked more and shown more initiative and daring by staying aboard his damaged ship. Yet he received what he clearly considered to be an inferior decoration.

Politicians and administrators had considered similar proposals earlier in the war, but had dismissed the idea for legal and propaganda reasons. In theory, sailors were non-combatants, even though they were targets. During the First World War, Charles Algernon Fryatt, the captain of an unarmed British merchant ship, was court-martialed and executed by German forces for attempting to ram a surfaced U-boat after being captured in another, later engagement. Part of the proof offered up by the German military courts denouncing him as an illegal combatant was a gold watch with an inscription praising his earlier actions.⁵⁵ In situations like Dunkirk, when merchant ships were operating under the direct command of the Admiralty, merchant seamen were eligible for military awards (provided they had signed T.124 contracts that made them temporary employees of the Admiralty).⁵⁶ But the Admiralty and the Treasury were worried that giving military decorations to seamen might risk a similar situation to Fryatt's gold watch. While a sailor awarded a military medal for an action against enemy submarines may not have been acting illegally, if he was found to be wearing a military ribbon when taken prisoner 'it might in practice increase the chances of the recipient being brought to trial'.⁵⁷ The legal status of non-combatants who attempted to defend

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ C.H.M. Walcock to R.U.E.K., 2 October 1941, Merchant Navy Honours, T 335/1, NA.

⁵⁶ Minute by R.U.E.K., 2 October 1941, Merchant Navy Honours, T 335/1, NA.

⁵⁷ Note by Sir William Malkin, 26 September 1941, Merchant Navy Honours, T 335/1, NA.

themselves against attack was unclear, and the Admiralty was worried that giving military decorations to civilian sailors would place them at greater risk, through either prosecution as *franc-tireurs* or through greater ruthlessness on the part of U-boat commanders. ‘We cannot be too careful’, argued one official in 1941, ‘in emphasising the non-military character of our merchant ships’, both in the eyes of Germans and neutrals, whose ports and exports Britain relied upon at that stage of the war (this letter was written a month before Japan attacked Pearl Harbor).⁵⁸

A second objection was that bending to the demands of merchant seamen, politicians and journalists to give military honours to civilian sailors would imply that somehow civilian honours were inferior to their equivalent in the military. What then would that imply about the OBEs and MBEs given to men and women involved in civil defense?⁵⁹ Gallant ARP Wardens, railway workers and fire service personnel were performing acts of bravery during and after air raids every evening. In the process they won civilian decorations.⁶⁰ It was ‘fair and logical’, therefore, that the Merchant Navy should not enjoy special privileges in the realm of decorations. Knox also pointed out that changing to military honours would risk devaluing the hundreds of awards already given through the implication that military honours were superior. Taking this distinction seriously, Knox himself seemed to flirt with this idea in his carefully-worded memos and letters, but did not want to popularize it: ‘Whether it would be wise to spread that notion is a matter of doubt’.⁶¹

The Honourable Company of Master Mariners was not content with these justifications for civilian rather than military honours.⁶² Allies in the House of Commons and the House of Lords

⁵⁸ C.H.M. Walcock to R.U.E.K., 2 October 1941, Merchant Navy Honours, T 335/1, NA.

⁵⁹ R.U.E.K. to Sir Henry Markham, 13 September 1941, Merchant Navy Honours, T 335/1, NA.

⁶⁰ Proposal that Naval Decorations Should be Made Generally Available in the Merchant Navy, September/October 1941, Merchant Navy Honours, T 335/1, NA.

⁶¹ R.U.E.K. to Sir Cyril Hurcomb, 13 October 1941, Merchant Navy Honours, T 335/1, NA.

⁶² Lord Marchwood to Horace Wilson, 31 July 1942, Merchant Navy Honours, T 335/1, NA.

brought up the issue of decorations for mariners in their respective houses, creating a substantial amount of extra work for the civil servants concerned. One MP, E.H. Keeling, advocated the creation of a distinct award for gallantry in the merchant services, insisting that the situation of the merchant navy was more like that of the combatant services than those involved in air raids.⁶³ Churchill replied that the inclusion of merchant sailors was ‘a compliment to the civilians’, perhaps unwittingly implying that merchant sailors were in a slightly different class to ‘civilians’.⁶⁴ In the house of Lords, Lord Marchwood pressed for a revision of the rules that would make merchant navy honours military ones. According to Marchwood, speaking in the House of Lords in September 1942, the difference in honours between ‘the two Navies’ was a violation of the principle of ‘equality of sacrifice’.⁶⁵ Somewhat spuriously, he asserted that the merchant navy was part of the military and deserved military decorations. Furthermore, Marchwood argued, actions of gallantry should be distinguished from ungallant service: ‘a man can sit in his office for ten years, doing good service to the state, and very possibly he will get a high award in the Civil Division’.⁶⁶ Merchant officers were working under ‘the same’ conditions as naval officers and should be awarded in the same way.⁶⁷ The Admiralty made some concessions, such as an allowance for merchant sailors to receive the Distinguished Service Order and Medal in exceptional circumstances, but remained firm on the issue that the merchant marine, not being military, should not receive military honours.⁶⁸

⁶³ E.H. Keeling to Atlee, 5 August 1942, Merchant Navy Honours, T 335/1, NA.

⁶⁴ *Hansard*, 8 September 1942, 46-47.

⁶⁵ *Hansard*, House of Lords Debates, 8 September 1942, 290.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 295.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ R. Gleadowe to R.U.E.K., 17 August 1942, Merchant Navy Honours, T 335/1, NA.

The question of how to decorate gallant seamen consumed a large amount of time and energy and resulted, eventually, in a proposal to add ‘for gallantry’ the citation for the MBE, OBE or CBE when relevant.⁶⁹ Knox intended this proposal to be a way of reconciling the strong objections of Keeling and Marchwood to merchant sailors sharing OBEs with pencil-pushers, but it too failed to find a unanimously positive reception in the Committee for the Grant of Honours, Decorations and Medals in time of War.⁷⁰ The idea that the letters of the Order of the British Empire be followed with a ‘for gallantry’ note was dismissed because CBEG or OBEG would sound ridiculous.⁷¹ A later suggestion that the distinction between the military and civil divisions of the Order be abolished was similarly dismissed, especially by the Dominions Office. In New Zealand, South Africa and Australia, war governments had ceased giving civilian awards in the Order, but had continued to give military ones and they would resent the abolition of the distinction.⁷² The honours system was too broad and inflexible to carve out a new award for merchant seamen, especially because the need for these honours was brief and highly contingent.

The situation in the British honours system brought on by the Battle of the Atlantic was temporary and unique. By the end of the war, the number of merchant officers winning honours had dropped to a smaller proportion of the total honours lists. The sudden, precipitous decline in the British merchant fleet brought on by the war meant that this was one last surge of glory for the British sailor before a long era of decline. For a moment, merchant seamen were one of – perhaps the most – important categories in the honours list. Churchill certainly thought so for a couple of

⁶⁹ Order of the British Empire, Gallantry Awards, 21 September 1942, HW 549, Merchant Navy Honours, T 335/1, NA.

⁷⁰ Order of the British Empire, Gallantry Awards, HW 582, Merchant Navy Honours, T 335/1, NA.

⁷¹ Notes on R.U.E.K.’s Confidential Memorandum on Gallantry Awards dated 21.9.42, Honours in War for Civil Defense Services, Grading Schedules, etc., HO 187/1829, NA.

⁷² The Order of the British Empire and the Merchant Navy, Dominions Office Memorandum, HW 651, Merchant Navy Honours, T 335/1, NA.

years in 1941–1942. But theirs was not the only sacrifice, and as the war went on many other groups had an equally compelling cause to call upon the honours system.

As mentioned above, the other category to appear out of nowhere in honours lists during the war was civil defense. Merchant sailors were not the only civilians who were sacrificing life and health for the war effort. Early in the war, civil defense workers tended to be volunteers, but as its importance grew, paid civil defense workers were increasingly important. When in 1943 Lady Reading proposed that a special civilian award be created for civil defense workers, one of the sticking points was whether paid staff would be eligible or, as with the Order of the British Empire in the First World War, volunteers only should be recognized.⁷³ While Reading and some of her allies within the Home Office felt that voluntary service should be particularly distinguished, a Cabinet paper on the proposed decoration called attention to the problems that such distinction would produce.⁷⁴ As with the merchant navy, therefore, in civil defense the existing ranks of the Order of the British Empire were the most versatile decorations that could be used in all but the most exceptional cases of gallantry in the face of enemy bombs and missiles, as well as for the recognition of technical and planning expertise in preparing for bombardment. At the high (dame/knight) levels and above more volunteers appeared, but at the basic levels it was easier to recognize the paid staff. This was partly simply because the O and M levels of the Order of the British Empire went to people in the middle- to lower levels of the middle classes. Such people could not afford to do both paid and a large amount of extra unpaid work for the state.

The category of civil defense also included Red Cross nurses, volunteers and other staff.

While thousands of Red Cross nurses were made members of the Order of the British Empire in the

⁷³ Institution of an Award to be Granted to Voluntary Workers in Civil Defense, meeting of 22 June 1943, Honours in War for Civil Defense Services, Grading Schedules, etc., HO 187/1829, NA.

⁷⁴ Draft Memorandum by the Home Secretary and the Minister of Home Security, Honours in War for Civil Defense Services, Grading Schedules, etc., HO 187/1829, NA.

first war (see Chapter One), a few hundred (mostly at either the administrative level or for a few cases of gallantry) were elevated to that distinction in the second. The organization knew that it would not get the same kind of numbers as it did in the first war: in fact, of the approximately four hundred Red Cross workers nominated for awards between 1941 and 1947 more than half eventually did get some kind of recognition.⁷⁵ In fact, the Treasury gave the Red Cross a specific allocation, which they were then supposed to fill with the appropriate names. A large number of these were given in the immediate aftermath of the war in 1946, even though they had been recommended for an honour much earlier in the war: for example, Mr. A.D. Robertson's name was put forward in both 1942 and 1943, but he was not offered an honour (which, unusually, he refused) until 1946.⁷⁶

War created a more intense desire for honours on the part of the various groups who contributed to the war effort. More than that, it created a desire for distinction – merchant sailors did not want the same honours as firemen, air raid wardens or government clerks. Lady Reading wanted special distinctions for civil defense workers, but only those who were unpaid. These different groups wanted distinctive medals for what they argued was distinctive service. It mattered less whether these were old or new decorations: the important thing was that they were different. But it was this kind of distinction between different kinds of service and different kinds of heroism that the administrators of the honours system wanted to avoid, even though (or perhaps because) the complex civilian honours system was already programmed to make a large number of social, professional and geographical distinctions (which were all the more complex once military decorations were included).

⁷⁵ Honours put forward by the War Organisation and other organisations, 1941-1947, Acc. 69/185/7, Red Cross Museum and Archives.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

The underlying issue in the cases of both the merchant navy and civil defense was gallantry. The George Cross and the George Medal provided a coherent, prestigious and well-liked way of recognizing exceptional bravery, but lesser cases remained under the old honours system, and in the end attempts to create further new honours and further distinctions failed. The fact that there continued to be no differentiation between OBEs and MBEs for a single gallant action and those for diligent, clever or important service over a medium to long period of time was a problem, but not so urgent a problem that the proposals to make such a distinction were accepted, especially as there were already special medals for lower-ranked police and fire servicemen, as well as the British Empire Medal for working class heroes. But the distinction of the merchant marine and civil defense workers was not the only kind of special selection going on in wartime. Beyond these areas where danger and gallantry made claims to honour seemingly self-evident, there were other groups gaining increased access to ranks within the British orders of chivalry.

IV.

Gallant service was special and significant, but it was not the only kind of meritorious war service, and there were other, less unusual, demands on the honours system. Scientific research in particular was a major issue in the wartime distribution of honours, and few scientists were as reluctant as Hill to accept honours. Over two decades after they discovered penicillin, Howard Florey and Alexander Fleming were knighted in 1944. The timing of their honours was no coincidence: antibiotics had proved invaluable in battlefield medicine during the war. Among their peers, these knighthoods were much celebrated. Florey received a large number of letters of congratulation from colleagues, peers and supporters, most of whom expressed delight at the knighthood because it was so well deserved in the context of the war and of the field of medical science. As one correspondent, J.H. Burns, put it: 'Hearty congratulations on your knighthood. If these decorations or honours were always so well

deserved as yours, would that not be grand!"⁷⁷ These congratulations followed all the generic forms of such letters, such as requesting that the recipient not respond because they will be receiving so much mail, emphasizing the deservedness of the recipient and reminding them of their connections with their wider community and interest group (in this case, medical researchers). More unusual was G.A. Clark's letter. Florey's knighthood had inspired Clark to poetry:

All hail! O Knight of Penicillin;
The musty mould hath served thee well
Providing no late lance with poison fell
Wherewith the bugs that do the killin'
Themselves are slain

So has the fear of septic focus
Been much reduced. Shorn too, I hope
Will be the greed of those who grope
And grovel making fortunes by the hocus
Of trade-marked antiseptics!

Forward Australia! But it now remains,
Having an antidote to coccal strains,
To search in wider fields and wrest
From nature a weapon for the dual pest
Of rabbit and of cactus!⁷⁸

Three verses were all that Clark had in him: "The muse deserted me at this point - thank God!"⁷⁹ But the content of these verses, for all their questionable quality, spoke to a kind of optimism about the present and future successes of science, as well as to Florey's Australian origins. While not alluding directly to the war, it supported the idea that scientific progress was indispensable to modern problems.

⁷⁷ J.H. Burns to Florey, 8 June 1944, Letters of congratulations on knighthood, June 1944, Henry Florey Papers, HF/1/23/9/25, Royal Society Archives.

⁷⁸ G.A. Clark to Florey, 8 June 1944, Letters of congratulations on knighthood, June 1944, Henry Florey Papers, HF/1/23/9/25, Royal Society Archives.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

The interwar role of the Royal Society in being an unofficial channel for honours continued during the war and was amplified by the importance of scientific expertise to the war effort. For all of Hill's reservations and reasons for declining a knighthood, Churchill was eager to give one to him. Dale, was apologetic in reporting the news of Hill's unwillingness to accept the honour to Churchill, writing that: "I had no reason to suppose that he would not welcome an honour, which his predecessors in his present post have been glad to accept".⁸⁰ The fact that there was an informal sounding-out process for Hill showed how closely the Royal Society's was connected to the establishment. Recipients were not supposed to know that they were being considered for an honour until they received the letter from the Prime Minister, and while this rule was often broken, this tended to happen within the context of people and organizations that were well-connected to and comfortable with the process of honours nomination. Dale was one of three members of the 'small Committee on Scientific Honours' during his tenure as president and thus had a great deal of sway over which scientists received honours during the war.⁸¹ Particular notable discoveries and projects, such as the atomic bomb (discussed below) and advances in battlefield medicine attracted the notice of this committee. For example, in 1943 they considered a number of candidates for honours in relation to the use of sulphanilamide (another early antibiotic) against pneumonia. One co-discoverer, Arthur Ewins (a research chemist) had already received a FRS which, Dale judged, was already an unexpectedly high honour in the world of scientists. As a result, he did not need a knighthood, which might embarrass him with its loftiness and should at most receive a CBE.⁸²

Ewins was 'a modest fellow, and not of very big gauge in science or personality', and other scientists

⁸⁰ Dale to Churchill, 25 April 1941, Honours List Correspondence 1941-1945, Henry Dale Papers, HD/6/8/7/13/7, Royal Society Archives.

⁸¹ Dale to Richard Hopkins, 20 November 1942, Honours List Correspondence 1941-1945, Henry Dale Papers, HD/6/8/7/13/11, Royal Society Archives.

⁸² Dale to John Anderson, 27 July 1943, Honours List Correspondence 1941-1945, Henry Dale Papers, HD/6/8/7/13/14, Royal Society Archives.

might be offended by such a minor figure receiving an honour.⁸³ If anyone should be knighted for the significant work of the battle against pneumonia, it should be Lionel Whitby, according to Dale.⁸⁴ Whitby was eventually knighted in 1945, although this may have also been related to his competent and discreet treatment of Churchill's fevers in 1943 and 1944.⁸⁵

As in so many other fields, even the increased recognition of scientists in wartime honours lists could not keep up with the demand for scientific honours, creating a nasty side to the seemingly positive recognition of scientific merit. Scientists were already highly interested in the use of honours – state or otherwise – as markers of professional achievement. The Nobel Prize and Fellowships of the Royal Society were highly coveted by notable scientists, the latter being seen by many as roughly equivalent for a knighthood (sometimes one could be a consolation for the absence of the other). The local and international culture of honorary degrees also fed into this scientific market for honours of all kinds. For disappointed parties, the sense that they were missing out based on factors other than relative merit fuelled professional rivalry and jealousy. Hill pressed Dale in 1943 to arrange some kind of honour (preferably a knighthood) for Frederick William Lanchester, an engineer who, in the interwar period, accurately predicted a number of important wartime developments in air combat technology and tactics.⁸⁶ Lanchester was a 'great man', but had been overlooked because of his 'defects of character – quarrelsome nature, etc.'⁸⁷ According to Hill: 'it is obvious that many people have been "honoured" whose contributions have been quite minor ones

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ A. D. Gardner, "Whitby, Sir Lionel Ernest Howard (1895–1956)," rev. E. M. Tansey, in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004); online ed., ed. Lawrence Goldman, (<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/36858>, accessed July 9, 2012).

⁸⁶ Hill to Dale, 7 March 1943, Honours List Correspondence 1941-1945, Henry Dale Papers, HD/6/8/7/13/13, Royal Society Archives.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

compared with his: and this has produced an awful bee in the silly old man's bonnet'.⁸⁸ However, nothing came of this suggestion – Lanchester had alienated too many of his colleagues and was known for his jealousy and generally hostile approach to his professional relationships. In relatively close-knit communities like the world of science, being a 'prophet' was little use in the competition for honours if one was also 'truculent and unreasonable'.⁸⁹

Increased demand for honours also increased the importance of the Royal Society's gatekeeping function. While Dale was happy to intervene in honours for scientists, petitions from individuals on the borders of the scientific profession were less welcome. In 1941 Percy Sykes wrote to Dale to ask for his support in Sykes' campaign to get the eighty-year-old Central Asian archaeologist Aurel Stein inducted into the Order of Merit. Sykes had been lobbying various different organizations to this end, including the British Academy and the Royal Geographic Society.⁹⁰ Dale replied that it was impossible for him to act on this matter because:

we could not, with any propriety or consistency, as the Council of the Society to consider the action which you suggest, in support for the recommendation of Sir Aurel Stein for the Order of Merit. The position is that the Royal Society has never as a corporate body, either through resolution of its Council or otherwise, been concerned in recommending the award of any public honour to anyone, not even to any of its own Fellows.⁹¹

Dale suggested that Sykes focus on lobbying existing members of the Order of Merit, as: 'in the past, action to bring to the notice of the Sovereign the claims of a Fellow of the Royal Society to the Order of Merit has... been taken, in a personal capacity, by Fellows who had themselves already

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Percy Sykes to Dale, 5 October 1941, Honours List Correspondence 1941-1945, Henry Dale Papers, HD/6/8/7/13/9, Royal Society Archives.

⁹¹ Dale to Sykes, 10 October 1941, Honours List Correspondence 1941-1945, Henry Dale Papers, HD/6/8/7/13/10, Royal Society Archives.

received that honour'.⁹² This was a good suggestion – the royal household did consult existing OMs about who should be added to their ranks – but Dale's refusal to take action was also disingenuous. Dale clearly did have some power over honours to scientists through his membership in government committees and his position as the leader of the empire's pre-eminent scientific organization. While in the narrowest sense what he said about the Royal Society not 'being concerned' in recommending public honours may have been true, he and his predecessors in the position of president clearly had an integral, if often unofficial, role in recommending honours.

In general, scientists did very well in terms of honours during the war, partly because of Winston Churchill's direct intervention. Churchill took an active hand in recommending particular people for (especially high) honours. While his contributions made up only a small proportion of total honours, they were significant in their emphasis. In the Birthday 1941 list, for example, he asked for a GBE for chemist Henry Tizard, which was too much for Horace Wilson, who commented that the military might resent too many civilian 'G's. 'Could Tizard wait till next time', asked Wilson, because 'the scientists are already getting a G in the person of [industrial physicist] Frank Smith?' Churchill wrote 'no' next to the first question and noted that Smith could wait.⁹³ It is unclear exactly what happened with these two awards: both men ended up receiving GCBs – Smith within a year in 1942, while Tizard waited until 1949 – but Tizard never received a GBE (he possibly declined it in the hope of being offered better things in the future). Tizard and Smith were both scientists who took up senior civil service advisor roles, and it was scientists like them who received the highest decorations of any in their profession during (and immediately after) the war.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Churchill notes from 14 May 1941 on Wilson to Churchill, 13 May 1941, Half-Yearly Honours List (Civil), Birthday 1941, T 305/9, NA.

Significantly, both Tizard and Smith already had knighthoods of some sort before the war. The recognition of scientific expertise had a long history within the honours system, and the interwar years had included many honours for senior scientists working within the establishment. In 1938 the only scientists to be made knights bachelor were doctors, but government chemist John Jacob Fox was made a knight of the Bath, while a few other scientists won lower awards.⁹⁴ The war meant that more scientists were brought more closely into the establishment; thanks to the specialist committee on scientific honours, engineers and scientists were more likely to be nominated. Distinguished work that benefitted the state indirectly (such as pharmaceutical development) was brought to the forefront of public and government consciousness by the war.

Scientists were a subset (albeit a prominent one) of the wider category of experts and technocrats that ran the British war machine and who ultimately were the most generously rewarded – especially at the ‘C’ level and above – of all the civilian groups who received honours during the war. This was more in continuity rather than divergence from peacetime practice: the focus on civil servants from the interwar years was continued, but also slightly modified to include more and more engineers, scientists and statisticians. Hill’s fear that the Royal Society (and the scientific profession as a whole) was on the verge of becoming part of the establishment was partially vindicated by what was going on in the civil service – and, as a result, the honours system – during the war.

In 1943, for example C.P. Snow accepted a CBE for services in telecommunications (as chapter five will discuss, he received a number of higher honours later in life). Snow is today best known for taking the part of science against F.R. Leavis in the ‘two cultures controversy’, but his scientific and academic career was mixed with extensive work as a government administrator – work that is at least partially reflected in his ‘Strangers and Brothers’ series of novels, narrated by the

⁹⁴ See: *Supplement to the London Gazette*, 31 December 1937, 7 June 1938, 1-21, 3685-3709.

cagey, determined lawyer and civil servant, Lewis Eliot. In his 1955 novel *The New Men*, Snow presented a fictional view of British nuclear scientists trying to develop a functional atomic weapon during the latter stages of the war. The project leader, Cyril Drawbell, was a bureaucrat in charge of scientists, and as the project developed, became increasingly desirous of a knighthood. At one point a colleague of Eliot's observes to him that: "Those Drawbells! Between them they'd do anything to get a K, wouldn't they?" He meant a knighthood. He was constantly amused at the maneuvers men engaged in to win titles, and no one understood them better.⁹⁵ The civil servants, lawyers and scientists in Snow's novels, especially those set during the war, relish the intrigue around honours and maintain an interested but sardonic tone when discussing them. Eliot as a character is curious about others without giving away a great deal about himself and is particularly cagey and modest about his own honours, which he alludes to very obliquely, but his environment amongst civil servants and scientists is one of constant interest in and discussion about honours. Later in the same novel, he describes Drawbell's frustration with his missing 'K' in the following terms:

Just about the same time, people at Barford noticed that Drawbell, whose Christian name no one had been known to utter, whose friends called him 'C.F.', had begun to sign himself with a large, plain, mesomorphic 'Cyril Drawbell.'
"A bad case of knight starvation," said someone. It was the kind of joke the scientists did not get tired of.

Even Hill would have liked this 'joke'. For all his objections to scientific knighthoods, he was part of a community where they were an essential component of the social hierarchy. Whether one was cynical, enthusiastic, disgusted or apathetic, for senior male scientists the prenominal 'Sir' was as important as the coveted postnominals 'F.R.S.' (Fellow of the Royal Society).

⁹⁵ C. P. Snow, *The New Men* (New York: Scribner, 1955), 52.

V.

The presence of allies outside of just the empire created even more unusual obligations on the honours system, because it gave the British government a way of acknowledging the support of other countries in an era of unusually intense international engagement. Honorary honours to foreign nationals were a small but regular custom in peacetime (the one exception being in mandates, where the lack of citizenship in the British Empire meant that mandate citizens had to be given honorary awards), but the war created a much greater perceived need for recognition of services by foreigners. An extensive trade in honours and medals between the various allied powers existed, with many British liaison officers and heroes being awarded honours like the French *Légion d'Honneur*. The British gave as good as they got in this realm. From soviet citizens to Chiang Kai Shek to Tito, a wide variety of different allies were proposed as potential recipients for honorary honours.⁹⁶ As the nexus for exiled allied armies from Poland, Czechoslovakia and France, British officers and diplomats were part of a wider world of international honours. In an era of crisis and shortage, honours were something that governments (and governments-in-exile) could supply to their allies relatively cheaply, even if they could not provide munitions or guns.

The exchange of honorary awards also resulted in the strange phenomenon of Soviet citizens being made honorary members of the Order of the British Empire. In 1943, for example, Evgenia Pusireva was given a MBE for gallantry after surviving the sinking of the steamer S.S. Stalingrad in September 1942. After being rescued from the arctic waters by a British naval vessel in the same convoy, she organized a group of other woman survivors 'clad only', the report on her MBE remarked, 'in a blanket'.⁹⁷ This display of stoicism impressed British sailors and civil servants alike,

⁹⁶ Far East: Foreign Office telegram to Chungking, No 190. Proposed honours for Chiang Kai Shek, FO 954/6C/504, NA; Yugoslavia: Private Secretary No 10 to Private Secretary Foreign Office. Question of an honour for Tito, FO 954/34B/288.

⁹⁷ Awards to Merchant Seamen, 1943, FO 372/3506, NA.

and she was successfully nominated for an award more usually given to junior civil servants or hospital matrons. By nature, the merchant marine was crewed with people of a wide range of nationalities and as it won a large share of honours, the foreign sailors who aided Britain won recognition. But honorary awards could also carry a measure of political risk. For example, the government was careful not to give any honours to Irish citizens without first consulting the government of Eire – a potential problem given that many Irish sailors served in the British merchant marine.

The Crown also gave a variety of MBEs, OBEs and CBEs to American scientists involved in the Manhattan Project.⁹⁸ While some of the scientists declined the opportunity to join the Order of the British Empire, Vannevar Bush was one of those who accepted an honorary CBE. A key figure in scientific cooperation between Britain and the United States, Bush thanked his allies warmly for the honour, writing to James Chadwick (the main British liaison in the Manhattan Project) that:

I am very happy indeed to state to you that it would be decidedly acceptable to me were the appointment which you mention to be made. I would regard it as a permanent link with my many British friends and colleagues, and as a token of the happy associations which have made such a bright spot in an otherwise dismal world during the war years.⁹⁹

The honour symbolized the productive spirit of cooperation between the two powers, and Bush would remember, he wrote: ‘The cordiality and effectiveness that marked all of the relations between scientists of the two great democracies’, which ‘was gratifying and highly encouraging as we look

⁹⁸ British Honours awarded to Americans Engaged in Manhattan Project and American Honours Awarded to British Staff, James Chadwick Papers, CHAD IV 3/15, Churchill Archives Center.

⁹⁹ V. Bush to Sir James Chadwick, 26 Feb 1946, British Honours awarded to Americans Engaged in Manhattan Project and American Honours Awarded to British Staff, James Chadwick Papers, CHAD IV 3/15, Churchill Archives Center.

toward the future'.¹⁰⁰ They were a sign of optimism and progress, in spite of their questionable name.

The imperial situation was more complex. By 1943 the Canadian Government, always uncomfortable with honours, had ceased using British awards entirely. Prime Minister William MacKenzie King, not wanting to address the issue of honours, with all its political dangers, was strongly resistant to giving any awards in the Orders of the British Empire, the Bath or Saint Michael and Saint George. The Canadian military, however, were unhappy with the perceived disadvantage they suffered relative to their American, British and other dominion colleagues because of their lack of access to any British orders. A separate Canadian order of chivalry had been mooted as early as 1935, but its driving force, the Canadian High Commissioner to London (and later, Governor-General) Vincent Massey, met little success. By the early 1940s wartime demand was driving the Canadian government to consider the question of honours more closely, but there was not a strong public or political will to push the issue through, and while a new medal was created, it was never actually awarded. New Zealand, Australia and (as always reluctantly and with reservations) South Africa continued using British honours, but they suspended civilian honours for the whole course of the war. The practice of giving honours to state servants was not as institutionalized in the dominions, and in most of them the politics of honours was problematic for local governments, even if it was not as much as it was in Canada.

Matters were easier in the non-self-governing empire. There and in India, the Colonial Office was as generous as ever in distributing honours. Global war made honours function as a way of promoting loyalty in the colonies all the more important. British administrators and local notables alike continued to receive honours – the officials for their service as employees of the colonial state,

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

and the community figures as reward for volunteer work, lower-level administration and fundraising. In a sense, this asymmetry mirrored the difference between honours for men versus women in Britain: at the Commander/Companion and above levels the men of Britain and the colonial administrators were honored for their paid service, while women and colonial subjects tended to be distinguished for their volunteer service. This parallelism was a quirk of the priorities of the British imperial state, but it is an interesting one. Honours reflected the subordination of women and subject races by recognizing their volunteer work – through the commitment of time or money – more than paid state service to a large extent because they had no access to the senior state positions that were traditionally recognized with knighthoods. Chapter six will return in detail to the transformation of the relationship between voluntarism and state recognition, but it is worth noting here that volunteer work was the main way through which these groups could gain access to elite status. At the lower levels – the OBE and the MBE – women and colonial subjects were more likely to be honored for state work because they were actually beginning to find employment at the administrative levels where these honours operated.

The political function of imperial honours could be seen most clearly in India, where even as British rule became increasingly fragile, the way in which the Indian Civil Service used honours as a way of promoting loyalty continued as it had for the past century. Honours had long been the elite carrot to the more widespread stick of police repression. From the perspective of the Viceroy's office, the rank of honour given to Indian princes and politicians corresponded to both their hierarchy as measured by the 'salute' system (the number of guns used to salute the prince) in combination with the 'personality' of the ruler. Cooperative rulers who engaged in charitable and developmental work in their kingdoms were favored over those who made no attempt to develop educational and health infrastructure. In 1941 some officials attempted to regulate the rank by the

gun number, but this proposal was rejected because it detracted from the political flexibility that an element of unpredictability and incentive gave to the system. As one official put it:

If any hard and fast rules like the one now indicated by the PSV are laid down and especially if it is decided to regulate Honours according to the salutes, it is feared that Honours might become a matter of routine expectation for Princes and the element of pleasant surprise and healthy competition might be lost altogether.¹⁰¹

The advent of the war added a new kind of service for which honours could act as an incentive. Princes who were seen to have contributed generously to the war effort were rewarded with high ranks in the Order of the Indian Empire and the Order of the Star of India. Princes and ministers who remained 'loyal' and who contributed money or propaganda to the war effort were rewarded.

The Princes, too, used the opportunity of the war to place pressure on their overlords for a better haul of honours. In 1942 the Maharajah of Bikaner enclosed a detailed breakdown of honours to people in his state in a letter suggesting that 'Imperial honours would be of great encouragement to continued involvement in the war effort'.¹⁰² The apparent popularity of honours among princely elites in the First World War created an expectation that similar service would be rewarded again. As one official wrote: 'human nature being what it is, and Imperial Honours being naturally valued more than any local recognition, I can testify from personal experience of the last war that the conferment of such additional Honours for War services will be an added stimulus'.¹⁰³ The India Office initially intended to suspend civilian honours to Indians until the end of the war, in a policy that mirrored Chamberlain's reluctance to give political honours in the first years of the war.

¹⁰¹ Note from Ramsay, 2 September 1941, Political Department, G Branch, 1941. Principles to be observed in recommending Ruling Princes for English Honours. Statement showing English Honours received by Ruling Princes and Chiefs, India Office Records, R/1/4/518, British Library [BL].

¹⁰² Ganga Singh to 'HE', 19 May 1942, Political Department, G Branch. Question of War Honours for Indian States, India Office Records, R/1/4/527, BL.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

However, demand was strong, as were the contributions of some rulers. Privately, officials were annoyed that Indian princes were demanding more honours. One official claimed that if the voluntary contributions of Indian states to the war effort were compared to the taxes paid by wealthy Britons they seemed limited and minor: 'there are nearly 400 persons in England each paying income tax of about 50000 pounds pa or more, for which, in their more serious moments, they do not expect a GBE. I know of no ruler who is contributing anything approaching this sum from his Privy Purse'.¹⁰⁴ Unlike in Britain, the Indian Civil Service was mostly able to hold out on giving honours for war service to Indian Princes until the end of the war, but then, the demands on the system were high and carried a degree of political danger.

The Nizam of Hyderabad, Osman Ali Khan, already possessed almost every available high British Indian honour, but he still actively courted more British honours for his sons during the Second World War, as he had done during the First. Khan was the richest and one of the most politically important of the Princely rulers, and the Indian Civil Service was generous in its recognition of his continued support. Arthur Lothian, the resident at Hyderabad, recommended to the Viceroy's secretary that the Crown give a KCIE to the Nizam's son, Moazzam Jah, in spite of the young man's dissolute history, because:

On merits, so far as Moazzam Jah as an individual is concerned, he has done nothing whatever to deserve this honour. On the other hand, as you are aware, it is exceedingly difficult for the Crown Representative to recognise the Hyderabad State's war service in any tangible way, and this offers an opportunity for doing so in a way pleasing to the Ruler. Moreover as in the case of the Order of Garter there is generally little or no question of "damned merit" about Honours in the case of young Princes, and Moazzam's misdoings (which are relatively minor) would probably have escaped official notice if they had not been brought to the attention of His Excellency by his own father.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ Note by Undersecretary, Political Department, G Branch. Question of War Honours for Indian States, India Office Records, R/1/4/527, BL.

¹⁰⁵ Arthur Lothian to L.C.L. Griffin, 10th May 1945, War Rewards for Ruling Princes and Chiefs. 2. Honours granted to H.E.H. the Nizam and his two sons, India Office Records, R/1/4/426, BL.

The comparison with the very highest of British honours was apt: high Indian honours were driven by political considerations and social standing rather than individual merit. To put it another way, the ‘service’ that they recognized was often a roundabout form of political support. In an era when the people of India at large were almost unanimously disgusted with British rule, honours were a symbolic coin with which certain powers could be bought off. As one Indian official put it, honours were important at the moment towards the end of the war because ‘I am not certain of the conditions that may prevail in Post-war British India and therefore I am desirous to have a contented and happy Hyderabad to meet those circumstances’.¹⁰⁶ There was an implied threat in this letter: without British generosity in honours, among other things, Hyderabad might be less supportive in whatever post-war negotiations went on. The Nizam also lobbied for his eldest son, the Prince of Berar, to receive a high honour for his service as the Commander in Chief of the princely state’s military, a role that did not involve active combat in the war.¹⁰⁷ In India, like in the dominions, the negotiations around honours went both ways, and it was clear that the local elites had a certain kind of power to dictate the terms of how the honours system was distributed.

However, honours were a coin that increasingly did not interest the people with real political power in British India. Gandhi, Nehru and the new generation of nationalists in the early-to-mid twentieth century were not interested in titles or postnominal letters, especially not as a bribe for loyalty. To Indians involved in the nationalist movement, these honours were symbolic of the subordination of India to Britain and were, therefore, both unappealing and offensive. Leaders who accepted honours were attacked more than celebrated. When the Prince of Berar received a GBE in

¹⁰⁶ Ahmad Said to Lothian, 19 May 1945, War Rewards for Ruling Princes and Chiefs. 2. Honours granted to H.E.H. the Nizam and his two sons, India Office Records, R/1/4/426, BL.

¹⁰⁷ Mir Osman Ali Khan Bahadur to Lothian, 16 May 1945, War Rewards for Ruling Princes and Chiefs. 2. Honours granted to H.E.H. the Nizam and his two sons, India Office Records, R/1/4/426, BL.

1943, for example, a local leader identified by the British as Bahadur Khan engaged in some ‘agitation’ in protest at the ‘subordination alleged to be implied by the grant of such British Honours’.¹⁰⁸ The use of honours as recognition for war service was, therefore, politically expedient in the sense of keeping some Princely rulers aligned with Britain, but also dangerous because this political expediency was so transparent to other political actors in India. Although the Viceroy’s office and the India Office seem to have been acutely unaware of this, it was in India more than anywhere in the empire that the credibility of the honours system was most harmed by its political use.

VI.

How did the public respond to these often subtle but occasionally controversial policy decisions around honours? As always, it very much depended on whom one asked. Skeptics about honours, especially but not exclusively on the left, continued to question the motives of recipients. This kind of critique was amplified by the democratic nature of wartime rhetoric and the urgency of the overall situation. Such skepticism about wartime honours reflected on the idea that a person’s duty to the nation should not need a reward. Edie Rutherford, writing for *Mass-Observation* commented in her diary for June 1945 that ‘The Honours List today makes me want to be sick as usual. Are there no men who serve because they love their fellow men and realise that if they have the God-given ability to serve them, it is reward in itself?’¹⁰⁹ But this cynicism does not seem to have been the default or the normal response to honours.

¹⁰⁸ Lothian to Griffin, 31 May 1945, War Rewards for Ruling Princes and Chiefs. 2. Honours granted to H.E.H. the Nizam and his two sons, India Office Records, R/1/4/426, BL.

¹⁰⁹ Simon Garfield, *Our Hidden Lives: The Everyday Diaries of a Forgotten Britain, 1945-1948* (London: Ebury, 2004).

The people who actually received these honours were not necessarily expecting them. Pioneering female pilot Pauline Gower was instrumental in training and organizing woman pilots in the Air Transport Authority (ATA) in the early years of the Second World War. Her biographer repeated a story that when awarded a MBE for her services with the ATA in 1942 she was asked what it was that she had done to deserve the decoration. ‘Search me’, she replied ‘I take it as recognition of the work the A.T.A. women are doing’.¹¹⁰ As in peacetime, a stance of humility and the argument that honours stood in as a symbol for wider community achievement determined recipients’ responses to their honours. People took an interest in the honours given to their peers and advocated for recognition of the services to which they were most closely related.

As in peacetime, newspapers took a parochial interest in honours lists and their reporting on honours reflected the interests of the sectors that they served as well as a wider sense of what kinds of service were of national import. The seeming importance of wartime recognition meant that this commentary often took on a stronger, more urgent tone when they perceived certain interests to be under-recognized. A *Manchester Guardian* piece on the New Year 1944 list remarked that while the honours list, dominated as it was by war honours, was an ‘impressive reminder of the way in which the war has spread over every branch of life’, it did neglect certain areas and groups.¹¹¹ The article singled out women, the arts and the north-west of England as being under-represented in the list, especially in terms of titles. While these groups enjoyed lower honours, the *Manchester Guardian* argued that their contributions deserved more recognition at the high level. The newspaper’s northern parochialism was even more on display a year later, when it remarked that ‘as one would expect when hard work is valued by the country, many honours came north’.¹¹² It was ‘hard work’

¹¹⁰ Michael Fahie, *A Harvest of Memories: The Life of Pauline Gower M.B.E* (Peterborough: GMS Enterprises, 1995), 165.

¹¹¹ *Manchester Guardian*, 1 January 1944, 4.

¹¹² *Manchester Guardian*, 1 January 1945, 4.

across all areas of national life that the newspaper emphasized, implying that a wide range of people across British society were making sacrifices for victory. This approach to honours lists was not dissimilar to that taken by the newspaper in peacetime.

The transition to a Labour Government at the end of the war did not substantially change the way in which honours were distributed, but the honours system in principle still had its fair share of critics on the left. For example, one writer for the *Manchester Guardian* reminisced about Ramsay MacDonald's suspicion of honours with a story from 1939 about a union man rejecting a proffered CBE. MacDonald replied that the man's refusal 'did my heart good'.¹¹³ But the acceptance of honours by Labour Party members and union officials during and before the war outweighed the objections within the movement. Even self-proclaimed communist Nan Berger (for more detail, see chapter five) accepted an OBE in 1948 for her wartime statistical work in the Ministry of Fuel.¹¹⁴ While some of her fellow travelers were not impressed, Berger herself seemed to have been at least a little proud of the recognition and attributed any criticism she received from leftist colleagues as being motivated by jealousy more than sound ideology.

Public and private discussion of honours is difficult to find for the war years. The traditions of media discretion about discussing honours, which were the province of the monarch, and private discretion and humility among recipients meant that commentary on most appointments was rare. The same kind of mixture of pride and satisfaction that characterized earlier and later individual responses to honours probably held true during the war. Exceptional cases like merchant navy gallantry honours excepted, wartime honours were marked by continuity in attitudes as well as some

¹¹³ *Manchester Guardian*, 17 February 1945, 4.

¹¹⁴ Nan Berger, 'Twenty-nine Thousand Nights: How a middle-class girl became a life long communist, turning away from a nouveau riche home of capitalist ideals, where making money, on the backs of working class people was the main ethic' Autobiography, 1995, unpublished, Nan Berger Papers, 7NBE/2/6, The Women's Library.

of the actual appointments and the different groups appointed, as much as by the numerical changes driven by wartime inflation.

In the first year of the war through to early 1941, when matters seemed most desperate, honours and decorations were militarized. It was 'inappropriate' to carry on with civilian honours and only a few classes of civilians were recognized for war-specific work. However, by 1941 this policy had been rescinded. Demand from within the civil service and politicians, as well as the massive size of the civilian mobilization, meant that once the most desperate year was past, civilian honours were reinstated. Decorations should not be reserved for soldiers in the field, as almost everyone was in danger and everyone was supposed to be contributing to (and making sacrifices for) the war effort. The idea that military service and military sacrifice were alone in deserving honorific recognition gave way to the reality of total war. In a sense, the return of civilian honours in 1941 was a return to a kind of normality. At the most dire point of the war in 1940, only the military was honored, but once the Battle of Britain had been won and, later, the Americans and Russians joined the British against the Axis, the distribution of civilian honours for service other than gallantry was an affirmation that life and work went on, even in war. The numbers of honours given for civil defense; technical, administrative and scientific service; to foreign allies; and in the merchant marine were high, but they did not make up the full extent of the lists. Educators, clerics, civil servants and others whose service was not directly tied to the prosecution of the war went on receiving honours as they had before the war and continued to after it. The war saw the honours system exhibiting two of its primary traits: adaptation to changing state priorities and an innate conservatism and unwillingness to change *too* much. The latter had been what had been violated in the First World War, a violation that would not happen again as long as honours were under the firm hand of the Treasury. At the same time, however, the changes that did happen can tell us a lot about how the state saw the civilian contribution to the war effort.

The extent to which the idea that World War Two was a ‘people’s war’ was reality versus being constructed has occupied historians at some length. Honours played into this question indirectly. In war their function as a currency with which to buy support, as well as to publicly symbolize and set the priorities of the state, was amplified by a sense of urgency and the sense of righteous national sacrifice. The reasons for the difference between the First and the Second World Wars were contingent on the political concerns and, even more than that, the administrative structures of the day. The administration of the honours system in the in the Second World War was framed, as I have already argued, in a way to avoid the perceived mistakes and excesses of the First. But the structure of honours distribution can contribute to the question that emerges from the ‘people’s war’ debate – as Sonya Rose put it, ‘which people?’¹¹⁵ For Rose, while unity was a central theme in the British culture of war, the very power of the idea of one people fighting together emphasized the inability of Britain (let alone the empire) to articulate a unified national identity.¹¹⁶ As I have already suggested in earlier chapters, in peace and in war honours were a trans-imperial structure that claimed to unite everyone under one system, albeit a hierarchical one. Because of the conservatism of the honours system, even small changes in emphasis reflected significant decision on the part of the politicians and civil servants involved. The shifts seen in wartime, therefore, can tell us a lot about wartime priorities.

Individuals recognized by the state through the honours system included a wide range of professions, but not the full variety of British society, nor even the full range of people who had contributed through paid or volunteer work to the war effort. Women and the working-classes were underrepresented, but these biases already existed in the honours system – in the case of the latter, it

¹¹⁵ Sonya Rose, *Which People’s War? National Identity and Citizenship in Britain, 1939-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 20–21, 290.

was programmed into it – and the proportions of each in honours lists declined only slightly. Starting from such a low point, things could hardly get worse. It is easier to see particular interest and professional groups who were disproportionately recognized in honours lists during the war. Scientists and technicians in the employ of the state did very well out of the honours system, while merchant navy officers also made up a large number of those receiving honours, even if they often would have preferred another kind of recognition. It is harder to find volunteers and charitable workers in honours lists from 1941–1945. They did appear, but there was a significant bias towards experts above volunteers, unlike in 1917–1921.

State recognition of wartime service was, therefore, uneven and hierarchical for most of the war, following more than breaking from a pattern set by the pre-war system of state honours. Structural problems and inequalities in the system were not solved by the war: war did not make the bulk of the honour system more egalitarian or broader in its social base. Women remained marginal to the honours process and the working class continued to be excluded from the orders of chivalry. The most innovation and flexibility existed at the lower levels of the honours system – the OBE and MBE especially. The divergence in policy between Britain and its closest allies, the dominions, also showed up how differently dominion and colonial governments viewed crown honours from the British government. As the next chapter will discuss, these tensions and problems were to worsen in the next few decades.

David Edgerton has argued that the wartime British state prized expertise and technical solutions to the problem of war above all others.¹¹⁷ According to Edgerton, the British state before and throughout the war showed confidence in the powers of invention and adaptation of its expert administrators and engineers. The British showed an ‘extravagant commitment to technical

¹¹⁷ David Edgerton, *Britain's War Machine: Weapons, Resources, and Experts in the Second World War* (London: Allen Lane, 2011).

solutions' backed up by 'massive material and technical capacity' that instilled confidence in their ability to win the war from the very beginning.¹¹⁸ The distribution of honours during the war, with some quirks, demonstrated this cultural predilection for and commitment to a form of centrally-recognized expertise. But there was still a moment at the beginning of the war when only the forces could be legitimately distinguished and raised above by the crown. For a little more than a year of crisis at the beginning of the war when victory was far from sight, the civilian honours system became 'inappropriate'. The demands of experts, politicians, civil servants and volunteers alike were put to one side and only the servicemen and women received honours. Britain's administrators and experts received lavish reward in due time, but not until after two years of uncertainty and the exclusive celebration of martial heroism. The pre-existing function of the honours system as a means of rewarding particular interests that were of importance to the state – including the promotion of loyalty in the empire – coexisted uneasily in a time of crisis with a sense of national and imperial unity and sacrifice.

In terms of the symbolic function and the administrative apparatus of the honours system, therefore, the Second World War was a period of continuity rather than of change. The changes that did happen were in line with the priorities of the interwar period more than a break from them. The Colonial and Dominions Offices continued to use it clumsily in the empire, clashing with dominion governments and maintaining a tradition of cynicism in their approach to colonial honours; a cynicism that was magnified by an increasing sense that loyalty and support in India were both essential and wavering. The continuance of interwar policies also meant that the initial promise of the Order of the British Empire as an order that would serve British democracy and integrate them into a wider social hierarchy, remained only partially realized. It never matched the broadness of

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 301.

scale and social reach that it achieved at the end of the First World War. While it was definitely appreciated by recipients and potential recipients (with a few exceptions), it only recognized a particular set of groups with close connections to the state.

Chapter four: New Honours for Old? The Decline of the Imperial Honours System

The ancestors would turn in graves
Those poor black folk that once were slaves would wonder
How our souls were sold
And check our strategies,
The empire strikes back and waves
Tamed warriors bow on parades
When they have done what they've been told
They get their OBEs.

'Bought and Sold', Benjamin Zephaniah, 2001¹

I.

In 2003 the British government offered to make the UK-based Rastafarian poet Benjamin Zephaniah an Officer of the British Empire. Zephaniah, who had already written the above lines suggesting that the acceptance of OBEs by former colonial subjects was hypocritical, publicly declined, writing in the *Guardian*:

Me, OBE? Whoever is behind this offer can never have read any of my work. Why don't they just give me some of those great African works of art that were taken in the name of the empire and let me return them to their rightful place? You can't fool me, Mr. Blair... You have lied to us, and you continue to lie to us, and you have poured the working-class dream of a fair, compassionate, caring society down the dirty drain of empire. Stick it, Mr. Blair - and Mrs. Queen, stop going on about the empire. Let's do something else.²

Zephaniah's objection was well-publicized, but his response to the proffered honour was unusual.³

A vast majority of people in Britain who were offered awards in the Order of the British Empire

¹ Benjamin Zephaniah, *Too Black, Too Strong* (Tarset, Northumberland: Bloodaxe, 2001).

² Benjamin Zephaniah, "Me? I thought, OBE me? Up yours, I thought", *Guardian*, 23 November 2003, online at: (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2003/nov/27/poetry.monarchy> accessed 10 March 2013).

³ Sarah Lyall, "In Britain, a Partial List of Those Who Declined to be Called 'Sir'", *New York Times*, 26 January 2012, online at: (http://www.nytimes.com/2012/01/27/world/europe/britain-releases-partial-list-of-those-declining-knighthood.html?_r=0, accessed 18 February 2014).

over the last few decades have accepted them in spite of the anachronism in the name. In the former empire, however, the story has been more complex. While most post-colonial states have adopted their own honours systems with nationalist rather than imperialist names, the Order of the British Empire has itself endured – even thrived – in Britain and a few other places. It remains as it has been since its foundation: the most widely-distributed, accessible and important of all the British orders of chivalry. While he offered a vivid critique of post-colonial subjects accepting imperial honours, Zephaniah represented only one end of a spectrum of attitudes towards the British honours system among residents from former colonies living in Britain and in the former colonies themselves. The Order of the British Empire has outlasted the institution after which it was named and has survived all threats of renaming or rebranding within Britain. The Imperial Service Order, while not as successful or as widely-distributed, also survived the decline of the Empire until being disbanded in 1993. How did these imperial orders fare in a post-imperial world?

Just a few decades after its creation, the political entity after which the Order of the British Empire had been named was beginning to disintegrate. As British politicians and bureaucrats considered the future of the honours system, they were forced to address the anachronism of the system's most widely distributed order. Even the royal family, especially the Duke of Edinburgh, took an interest in the possibility of changing the name of the Order of the British Empire because of the problems that the name raised in the wider Commonwealth. Such a change would have allowed the order (and the monarchy that stood at its head) to retain its international scope. However, the name was not changed and Britain retained the Order of the British Empire through into the twenty-first century. This was not the case in the rest of the Empire, former empire and Commonwealth. Newly independent states found better options for a range of reasons, both symbolic and administrative. As Zephaniah pointed out by connecting the name with centuries of

oppression, slavery and theft, the Order was not only a reminder of a problematic political entity, but also a hindrance to the use of honours as a political tool by independent governments.

However, the decolonization of honours was complicated. Like decolonization in general, it was partial and idiosyncratic. Two contrasting models for the decolonization of honours developed in former colonies. The first was the Indian way: the complete rejection of the old system and the adoption of a completely new national system of state recognition that had no connection with the British monarch or the British state. The second approach, exemplified by Canada, was to retain elements of the British system, especially the connection to the Queen. Most of the former self-governing Dominions as well as a number of smaller new nations embraced this kind of system. Different countries adopted different new regimes at different times. Some nations, especially from the 1960s onwards, phased out the British system slowly, so that, for example, in New Zealand the Order of the British Empire coexisted with the domestic Queen's Service Order for about twenty years before it was finally phased out. The process did follow a typical pattern, however. Post-colonial honours systems tended to mirror the constitutional arrangements of post-colonial states: nations without the British monarch abandoned the old and had to completely recreate their systems, while those states who retained links to the crown renovated the old orders into new national honours, which usually kept the Queen as the sovereign of the order.

The attitude of civil servants in the Colonial, Dominion, India and Foreign Offices towards the abandonment or modification of British orders varied, but in the first couple of decades after the war British authorities were resistant to any divestment. For almost a century honours had been imagined as a way of controlling subject populations and buying their loyalty. They had been a tool with which the imperial state could court the colonial middle class and other groups with whom the Crown sought to form alliances against nationalists and other dissidents. Buying into the honours system, with its attractions in the form of social distinction and elaborate, attractive medals, implied

collaboration with the wider imperial project and administrators were all too aware that the rejection of honours in the dependent colonies symbolized a rejection of British rule.

The symbolic and administrative decolonization of honours was initially resisted by British administrators. However, as it became clear from the mid-1950s onwards that newly independent states had their own ideas for honours systems the British government and crown shifted to accommodate the diverse desires of the former empire. Rapid administrative changes in the way in which the government interacted with the rest of the world reflected the changing priorities of commonwealth and international relations. Immediately after the war, in 1947, the Labour government created the Commonwealth Relations Office out of the existing structure of the Dominions Office. In addition to this newly rebranded office, the Colonial Office continued to manage territories that were directly ruled by Britain. In 1966 the Commonwealth Relations and the Colonial Office were merged. Two years later in 1968 this Commonwealth Office was incorporated into the Foreign Office, becoming the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. It was through these departments that honours policy was mediated, although as discussed below the Treasury still controlled quotas of the British orders, a structure that was to cause problems for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office as well as national government.

II.

Decolonization in India presented the first challenge to the old logic of how honours served larger imperial strategies. Indian honours had always been special. The Order of the Indian Empire and the Order of the Star of India were the only two orders of chivalry that were still focused on only one part of the Empire, administered directly by the Viceroy's office. Indians and the ICS also enjoyed a substantial share of awards in other orders, including the Imperial Service Order and the Order of the British Empire. The Imperial state gave honours in equal numbers to Indians and British civil

servants or other workers in India.⁴ It was in India that the economic logic of honours at its most basic was most evident: the India Office and the Indian Civil Service [ICS] saw them as instrumental in buying the loyalty of Indian subjects in exchange for status and attractive medals – as earlier chapters have pointed out, administrators believed that Indians were conditioned to love shiny medals and titles as markers of status in a highly hierarchical society.

The questions of whether the newly partitioned India and Pakistan should retain links with the British honours system and whether there should be a 1947 list for India both caused substantial behind-the-scenes debate in the negotiations around independence in the subcontinent. As earlier chapters have described, for almost a century, the British government of India had directly and explicitly used honours as a tool for promoting loyalty to the Crown. The two Indian orders of chivalry were created in the aftermath of the 1857 rebellion (the Order of the Star of India in the 1860s, the Order of the Indian Empire in the 1870s) as a means of ensuring native loyalty and rewarding the service of senior ICS officials. This dual nature had always been a problem in the sense that it was supposed to maintain a kind of equality between Indian and European recipients, but in reality each received it for very different kinds of service. As earlier chapter have shown, the Indian orders were imagined as means of buying the loyalty of Indian princes and politicians, while among Europeans their use was more along the lines of domestic honours: that is, they were given to administrators in the ICS and to charitable workers and philanthropists.

In the final negotiations with Lord Wavell for independence in 1946 and 1947 Jawaharlal Nehru insisted that the British government not give any honours to Indians in January 1947. In September 1946 Nehru wrote that: ‘IT [sic] would appear therefore that there is a general demand for the ending of this system. IT is true that the conferment of Honours brings a certain incentive to

⁴ English Honours 1937, IOR R/1/4/480 NEG 17236, British Library [BL].

a certain type of person. IT is also true that it has certain obvious harmful results. In any event in the present situation of India it is certainly desirable that conferment of Honours should cease.⁵ For Nehru, following on from an earlier example set by Gandhi, honours were particularly invidious because they had been so openly used by the colonial government as an incentive for loyal behavior and were thus counter to the principles of the independence movement and of a new democratic state. He portrayed them as harmful because they were given and received in the wrong spirit and for the wrong reasons. In the face of intransigent British opposition Nehru insisted on the point. He and his colleagues were 'all of one mind in the matter', together 'opposed to the conferment of honours, both British honours and so-called Indian honours, on any Indian'.⁶

Krishna Sinha, the Chief Minister of Bihar, also argued that honours were in principle against the spirit of an independent and democratic India. In a note to the governor of Bihar, H. Dow, he argued that honours from the British Crown worked and would work against the principles of good government.⁷ For a new Indian government to be run 'efficiently and well it is necessary that Government officers should look for rewards and punishment of those who are responsible for administration'.⁸ The receipt of honours by Indians who were to be part of a new non-British India would compromise its independence by implying that its sovereignty was divided. This was

⁵ Jawaharlal Nehru to Eric Coates, 14 September 1946, Attitude of Ministers to Honours. Decision that instructions issued in 1938 should be followed for the time being. Decision that no honours and titles, except KiH Medals, KFSM, IPM and gallantry decorations and OM should be awarded to Indians in the future lists. Rulers and their subjects should continue to be awarded English Honours only. Issue of a press communique on the subject., IOR R/3/1/267, BL.

⁶ Nehru to Wavell, 23 October 1946, Attitude of Ministers to Honours. Decision that instructions issued in 1938 should be followed for the time being. Decision that no honours and titles, except KiH Medals, KFSM, IPM and gallantry decorations and OM should be awarded to Indians in the future lists. Rulers and their subjects should continue to be awarded English Honours only. Issue of a press communique on the subject., IOR R/3/1/267, BL.

⁷ S.K. Sinha to H.Dow (Governor of Bihar), 6 September 1946, Attitude of Ministers to Honours. Decision that instructions issued in 1938 should be followed for the time being. Decision that no honours and titles, except KiH Medals, KFSM, IPM and gallantry decorations and OM should be awarded to Indians in the future lists. Rulers and their subjects should continue to be awarded English Honours only. Issue of a press communique on the subject., IOR R/3/1/267, BL.

⁸ Ibid.

especially true in cases where honours were going to members of the colonial police and military who had been involved in the suppression of the nationalist movement, whose loyalties were probably 'of divided allegiance'.⁹ Sinha cited a couple of specific examples of Indians in line for honours whose appointments would anger nationalists, including a Colonel Nalwa who worked in the Jail Department who, according to Sinha, was 'still a believer in ideals which have been abandoned long ago by the civilised world'.¹⁰ His honour was outrageous because he had been directly implicated in violence by the imperial state against the very people who were about to succeed it.

The British fought Nehru, his allies and the Muslim League on the issue of honours as India slid towards decolonization and partition. The primary rationalization for this intransigence was that honours were an indispensable administrative tool. British administrators in India were not sympathetic to Nehru's insistence on the issue. The fact that the Muslim League agreed with Nehru on this point, if few others by this stage of the process, was also frustrating for the ICS. Their first argument for the necessity of an honours list in India in January 1947 was that without the standard military honours no government – British or Indian – would be able to keep order in the Indian Army, especially as partition approached. But the idea that Indians wanted or needed honours in order to be properly governed went far deeper than just this specific argument about the military. Nehru was, in fact, willing to concede this point and allow military honours, but internal ICS correspondence indicated that the British administrators were still strongly opposed to the phasing-out of the Indian honours system. In response to Nehru's insistence in September 1946 that conferment of honours cease the Viceroy's office favored 'the adoption of "stonewalling" tactics rather than the giving of any form of authoritative reply purporting to come from His Majesty or his

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

representatives in the United Kingdom'.¹¹ Because the future of the Indian orders was something that technically needed to be managed by London, ICS workers hoped to delay the decision as long as possible by holding trans-continental enquiries and consulting as widely as possible. Indian honours and titles were 'a very useful method of securing assistance in district and provincial administration, and in rewarding such assistance and financial generosity to humanitarian causes'.¹² Recommendations for the New Year 1947 list had already been received and processed, and officials argued to Nehru that the next round needed to go ahead because it was already in motion.¹³

Wavell himself wrote to provincial governors in a telegram in late September that Indian political leaders were against the conferment of honours and it would be 'difficult to continue awarding them to Indians', but the '[Muslim] League attitude may change if we get a coalition'.¹⁴ Failing to give honours to Indian officers in particular would, 'introduce unfortunate discrimination', because their European counterparts would still be receiving honours from the King.¹⁵ Wavell hoped that 'humanitarian' honours might still be acceptable to Indian politicians, although Nehru had already categorically declared that he wanted no civilian Indians to receive honours. The fact that Nehru was pressing the issue and that this rushed the transition from honours to no honours was 'unfortunate', and Wavell wrongly hoped that Nehru would not object to a list in January. Finally, he recognized that his governors were not happy about this, closing his telegram with the

¹¹ Attitude of Ministers to Honours. Decision that instructions issued in 1938 should be followed for the time being. Decision that no honours and titles, except KiH Medals, KFMS, IPM and gallantry decorations and OM should be awarded to Indians in the future lists. Rulers and their subjects should continue to be awarded English Honours only. Issue of a press communique on the subject., IOR R/3/1/267, BL.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Viceroy to all Governors, telegram, 28 September 1946, Attitude of Ministers to Honours. Decision that instructions issued in 1938 should be followed for the time being. Decision that no honours and titles, except KiH Medals, KFMS, IPM and gallantry decorations and OM should be awarded to Indians in the future lists. Rulers and their subjects should continue to be awarded English Honours only. Issue of a press communique on the subject., IOR R/3/1/267, BL.

¹⁵ Ibid.

message that: 'I realise that in most Provinces Honours and Titles [sic] are still a useful weapon in the hands of the administration and I expect Governors would like to postpone the change as long as possible.'¹⁶

The replies to Wavell's inquiry by his governors showed that his intuition about their preferences was correct. They were in agreement that honours should be retained. The governor of Bengal told Wavell in October 1946 that most Indians liked the honours system. He did 'not observe any aversion among Indians from titles as such' and believed that any 'opposition to the present system of conferment of honours is confined to politically minded elements and is based solely on the fact that honours are conferred in the name of King Emperor.'¹⁷ The governor of the United Provinces agreed, suggesting that the 'failure to issue customary list would I think cause real shock to many people who cannot or will not realise that we mean to go', and that, 'For so long as parliament [of the UK] is responsible for administration of country, it seems unnecessary to administer this shock.'¹⁸ As a result of these various comments, Wavell resolved to try and delay the complete phasing out of the honours system as long as possible. While they had to respect the wishes of a new Indian government once it had been constituted, the British officials wanted to

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Governor of Bengal to Viceroy, telegram, 3 October 1946, Attitude of Ministers to Honours. Decision that instructions issued in 1938 should be followed for the time being. Decision that no honours and titles, except KiH Medals, KFSM, IPM and gallantry decorations and OM should be awarded to Indians in the future lists. Rulers and their subjects should continue to be awarded English Honours only. Issue of a press communique on the subject, IOR R/3/1/267, BL.

¹⁸ Secretary of Governor United Provinces, K.R. Nagappa to Viceroy, September 30 1946, Attitude of Ministers to Honours. Decision that instructions issued in 1938 should be followed for the time being. Decision that no honours and titles, except KiH Medals, KFSM, IPM and gallantry decorations and OM should be awarded to Indians in the future lists. Rulers and their subjects should continue to be awarded English Honours only. Issue of a press communique on the subject, IOR R/3/1/267, BL.

continue honours as long as possible, perhaps in part because many of them were themselves hoping for a higher rank in one of the Indian orders.¹⁹

In response to Sinha's objections to specific cases of Indian officers who may have been involved in the repression of nationalism, his governor, Dow, wrote to Wavell that Sinha's objections were 'extremely illogical', and the two British officials discussed Sinha's lack of power over the honours with satisfaction that would have been scandalous in a self-governing Dominion.²⁰ Dow reflected that the two honours to which Sinha objected were 'the most deserving on the list' and that Sinha's objections were based largely on a sense of vindictiveness: 'He told me that he entirely disapproved of the grant of honours and would make no recommendations, but he is vindictive enough to want to prevent the grant of these "useless baubles" to those whom he personally dislikes.'²¹ The language of this note is particularly interesting, because through the use of 'but' Dow implied that the idea of barring honours to problematic candidates was somehow contrary to a principled objection to honours. The logic of this response to Sinha's objections, much like Colonel Nalwa's methods, was tortuous. Wavell, however, agreed that it was appropriate to 'disregard' Sinha's objections, although he was worried that they might reflect a wider popular opinion and that the honours might embarrass the officers to whom they had been offered.²² Dow

¹⁹ DPSV, 8/10/46, Attitude of Ministers to Honours. Decision that instructions issued in 1938 should be followed for the time being. Decision that no honours and titles, except KiH Medals, KFMS, IPM and gallantry decorations and OM should be awarded to Indians in the future lists. Rulers and their subjects should continue to be awarded English Honours only. Issue of a press communique on the subject., IOR R/3/1/267, BL.

²⁰ Dow to Wavell, 7 September 1946, Attitude of Ministers to Honours. Decision that instructions issued in 1938 should be followed for the time being. Decision that no honours and titles, except KiH Medals, KFMS, IPM and gallantry decorations and OM should be awarded to Indians in the future lists. Rulers and their subjects should continue to be awarded English Honours only. Issue of a press communique on the subject., IOR R/3/1/267, BL.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Wavell to Dow, 10 September 1946, Attitude of Ministers to Honours. Decision that instructions issued in 1938 should be followed for the time being. Decision that no honours and titles, except KiH Medals, KFMS, IPM and gallantry decorations and OM should be awarded to Indians in the future lists. Rulers and their subjects should continue to be awarded English Honours only. Issue of a press communique on the subject., IOR R/3/1/267, BL.

was sure that the latter would not be the case. In fact, if somehow they found out about their Prime Minister's objection to their honours, he thought they would relish the fact that they had received honours in spite of the wishes of the Indian leadership:

If they [the officers] did come to know [that their honours had been opposed] through the Prime Minister's unwise talk, they, and other officers too, would probably feel only the more encouraged by knowing that political "zid" on the part of the Ministry was not a bar to the recognition by His Majesty of good work. The Ministry, until it learns better by experience, is likely to harass these officers anyhow, and would not treat them any better if they were done out of a well-earned title.²³

This response essentially vindicated Sinha's fears that honours would lead to divided loyalties: even at this late stage, months away from independence, Dow was presenting the function of honours as enforcing loyalty to the Crown, as well as undermining the authority of local leaders, as a positive good. The 'recognition by His Majesty of good work' transcended local Indian politics, according to these administrators.

British administrators and officials had, therefore, a range of justifications for at very least the temporary continuation of honours in India. But the form of their rationalizations betrayed the underlying beliefs about the relationship between honours and Indian governance, as well as their optimistic desire to use honours to exert some kind of influence over a post-colonial Indian state. These arguments were weak in the face of Congress and Muslim League opposition, and in the end the ICS was forced to concede Nehru's point. And other than a few military gallantry medals and some awards to British civil servants and the odd Princely State, 1946 saw the end of British honours in India. On 13 November 1946 Wavell morosely sent a telegram to the Secretary of State for India saying that he had 'not succeeded in getting my way over Honours', and accepted that, at

²³ Dow to Wavell, 14 September 1946, Attitude of Ministers to Honours. Decision that instructions issued in 1938 should be followed for the time being. Decision that no honours and titles, except KiH Medals, KFMS, IPM and gallantry decorations and OM should be awarded to Indians in the future lists. Rulers and their subjects should continue to be awarded English Honours only. Issue of a press communique on the subject., IOR R/3/1/267, BL.

the near unanimous request of Indian politicians, all Indians, with the exception of those within Princely States, 'should be disqualified for appointment in the English orders and for Indian titles'.²⁴ He was 'sorry the political parties insisted on this', but recognized that he could not disregard their combined opposition'.²⁵ It was necessary to surrender on this point not to reinforce the sovereign authority of what would become the new Indian government, but to spare embarrassment and preserve the status of the honours system, because had Indians declined honours in large numbers the British, and particularly the King, would have found themselves in 'a very undignified position'.²⁶

Ultimately, ICS intransigence had if anything the opposite effect to the intentions of the officials. In India, the honours system had long been tarnished by its cynical and manipulative use, and their attitude only confirmed its unsuitability for an independent India. By forcing the nationalists to insist on the issue, the British officials did more damage to the abstract categories of the 'prestige' and 'status' of the system and of the Crown than any Indian. For generations of Indians with an egalitarian, nationalist, educated outlook, knighthoods and titles became associated with the worst elements of the nation's modern history. The honours system demonstrated to them that even at the very end of British imperialism in India the British were operating in bad faith. This minor episode in the difficult story of Indian decolonization reflected many of the wider political and social problems of imperial and post-imperial India. At the same time, it offers an illustration of the mindset of British administrators. Historians and anthropologists of colonial India have stressed the importance of imagination and symbolism in maintaining British rule; in honours, British India had an institution that occupied an important place in the minds (and imaginations) of colonial

²⁴ Wavell to SecState India, 13 November 1946, Attitude of Ministers to Honours. Decision that instructions issued in 1938 should be followed for the time being. Decision that no honours and titles, except KiH Medals, KFSM, IPM and gallantry decorations and OM should be awarded to Indians in the future lists. Rulers and their subjects should continue to be awarded English Honours only. Issue of a press communique on the subject., IOR R/3/1/267, BL.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

administrators and many Indians.²⁷ Its quick demise reflected its aggressive use in the colonial setting as a symbol of British rule. The positive connotations that honours could have – of social mobility, meritocracy and loyalty – paled in comparison to what became an unacceptable reminder of empire.

In place of the British system, successive Indian governments built up a new, elaborate set of honours organized under quite different terms to the old British system. India's highest civilian honour, the Bharat Ratna, was introduced by Rajendra Prasad in 1954.²⁸ A medal worn on a ribbon around the neck, it avoided replicating the ceremonial characteristics of the British Indian orders with their stars and crosses. Fewer than fifty men and women have received this honour since its establishment.²⁹ Yet its exclusivity meant that, as ever with honours systems, individual appointments could lead to controversy and even to accusations of corruption or political partiality. After a multi-year debate, in 2013 the Indian government gave the Bharat Ratna to cricketer Sachin Tendulkar, in the process changing the rules of the award to include anyone who had shown 'exceptional service/performance in any field of human endeavour'.³⁰ The Indian Ministry of Home Affairs allegedly contested this proposal on the basis that it would create too many claimants to the exclusive honour.³¹ Historian and cricket writer Ramachandra Guha suggested that it was premature to give high honours to a relatively young man like Tendulkar, who was only just about to retire

²⁷ Nicholas B Dirks, *The Hollow Crown: Ethnohistory of an Indian Kingdom*, 2nd ed (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993); Bernard Cohn, "Representing Authority in Victorian India," in *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. E. J Hobsbawm and T. O Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 165–210.

²⁸ "Bharat Ratna", Ministry of Home Affairs (India), online at: (http://mha.nic.in/sites/upload_files/mha/files/Scheme-BR.pdf accessed 18 February 2014).

²⁹ "Recipients of Bharat Ratna", Ministry of Home Affairs (India), online at: (http://mha.nic.in/sites/upload_files/mha/files/Recipients-BR_0.pdf accessed 18 February 2014).

³⁰ Neha Shukla, "Home Ministry did not want sports as category for Bharat Ratna", *Times of India*, 27 September 2013, online at: (<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Home-ministry-did-not-want-sports-as-category-for-Bharat-Ratna/articleshow/23158878.cms?referral=PM> accessed 18 February 2014).

³¹ Ibid.

from his career as an athlete.³² Critics questioned the legitimacy of India's relatively young honours system because it seemed to be too closely tied to politics. There was never any question for Indian nationalists in the 1940s that India would keep its connection to the British crown, but the problems that Indian politicians have experienced with their fresh honours system partially illustrate why other post-colonial states did not always join it in starting entirely anew. Having finally dispensed with an honours system that had a blatantly political purpose in 1947, Indian politicians and administrators found it hard to maintain the legitimacy of a national, republican honours system when it remained controlled by politicians.

III.

India had a longer and more complex history with the honours system than most other parts of the empire, beginning with the creation of the Indian orders in the 1860s. Other colonies had to share in the Order of Saint Michael and Saint George from the mid-nineteenth century and then the Order of the British Empire from 1917. But the Indian debates around honours illustrate a set of constitutional problems faced by Britain and former colonies as decolonization gathered pace. The Order of the British Empire was both an established institution for the recognition of valuable work at a local level and an affirmation of imperial rule. In the former function, it was often popular with certain elites and part of the machinery of social status. In the latter sense there was much more of a problem – already by the 1930s Britain was moving away from the language of the empire towards the language of 'Commonwealth'. A majority of post-colonial states in the Commonwealth followed the Indian example and developed their own post-colonial honours systems. Former colonies which

³² Rohit Mahajan, "Among India's Greatest?", *Outlook India*, 28 March 2011, online at: (<http://www.outlookindia.com/printarticle.aspx?270926> accessed 18 February 2014).

then became republics always dispensed with British honours, because dispensing with the British monarchy necessarily meant getting rid of British honours.

Independent and semi-independent states that retained close ties to Britain through the retention of the British sovereign as head of state, on the other hand, usually continued to use British honours – at least for a time. Quotas for these honours were set in London by the Treasury, as they had since the beginning of the century. Local governments had the ability to nominate people for honours, but not to set quotas. Their hands were tied by centrally-set quotas. The Order of the British Empire (and to a lesser extent the less visible Imperial Service Order) was also a constant reminder of what was an increasingly inconvenient history. This legacy was easy to expunge with revolutionary change in the status of the state, but much less easy when decolonization took on a slower form.

In the former dominions, as Karen Fox has pointed out, the slow and partial move towards national honours systems was connected to a process of ‘de-dominionization’ where national cultures began to take precedence over an increasingly obsolete and irrelevant imperial patriotism.³³ This, at least, was the stated rationale behind these new local honours: domestic political debate around the issue almost always focused on finding an independent identity from Britain, and while the timing of moves to discard the British system was complex, it was connected to moments of political separation and sometimes disenchantment with the connection to the British ‘home’.³⁴ Fox rightly points to ambiguity and hesitancy in this process. While eventually almost all former colonies created new systems, they did not do so through being ‘swept away under a tide of confident new

³³ Karen Fox, “An ‘imperial Hangover’? Royal Honours in Australia, Canada and New Zealand, 1917–2009,” *Britain and the World*, no. 1 (February 26, 2014): 7–8.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 13–15.

nationalism'.³⁵ At the same time, there were practical reasons as well as nationalistic ones for both former dominions and former colonies to discard the Order of the British Empire. It was not just a matter of ageing livery, but also of increasingly inconvenient administrative ties.

In Canada, which had dispensed with titles in 1919, but which retained the use of certain medals and orders, the government created a new chivalric order in 1967 that entirely superseded the Order of the British Empire while maintaining a connection to the Queen. The Order of Canada was the product of a lengthy process of chivalric creation that dated back to before the war. Deadlock between opponents and supporters of giving honours to Canadians within successive governments had meant that Canadians had received no honours outside of military medals since the war.³⁶ Christopher McCreery has described in great detail the multiple attempts by Canadian politicians to change this situation between the 1940s and the 1960s, but it was not until the 1967 Canadian Centennial that the vigorous internal debate about the nature and constitution of Canada's own order finally furnished the nation with a functional honours system.³⁷

Initially, the new Canadian order had only one rank: Companion. The government published an inaugural list of ninety names in July 1967. These people were selected by an advisory council to the Prime Minister. Unlike in the British system, where anonymous Whitehall committees formulated preliminary lists, the identities of council members were public, and it accepted public nominations solicited by newspaper advertisements.³⁸ The list itself also differed substantially from British counterparts: artists, sportspeople, scholars and philanthropists dominated the initial

³⁵ Ibid., 27.

³⁶ Christopher McCreery, *The Order of Canada: Its Origins, History, and Development* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 108.

³⁷ Ibid., 108–23.

³⁸ Ibid., 136.

Companions of the order.³⁹ Artists were the largest group, with civil servants second, but the latter only made up 16 percent of the total – a small proportion in comparison to contemporary British lists. Attempts to introduce some kind of gender equality foundered on a lack of women nominees, and as a result only thirteen women were included in the order in the first list.⁴⁰ In 1972 two new lower tiers were added to the system: Officer and Member. While the initial list was not limited by statutory quotas, officials were unwilling to expand the single-rank order to the extent that was necessary to include a wider base of Canadians. Administrative and social pressure demanded a tiered system that would distinguish between different kinds of service and different kinds of people.

The Order of Canada was an opportunity to create a new national system, but its constitution was modeled on British ideas about honours and affected by input from British royal officials. Like the creation of the Order of the British Empire, the whole process was riddled with quibbling over many small details. For the first part of the planning process, officials and politicians planned to have only one class to the order in order to represent Canada's egalitarian ethos, mirroring Canada's earlier rejection of titles as being a hierarchical hangover. This initial plan would have appointed all members of the order as Companions, and also included a 'Medal of Courage' for gallantry. However British and Canadian honours experts, along with Liberal Prime Minister Lester Pearson, questioned this policy, suggesting that a three-tier system would serve better. The justification for this hierarchy was that having only one grade would restrict the order to only a small elite, and would mean that more 'humble' servants of Canada would miss out.⁴¹ Pearson wanted the new order to be awarded to a broad geographical and social base of Canadians, and he saw multiple

³⁹ Ibid., 143.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 142.

⁴¹ Ibid., 124–5.

ranks along the lines of the bottom three ranks of the Order of the British Empire as a means of achieving this goal.

The new order was tied to the British system in one other significant way, in that it was controlled by the Canadian government, but Queen Elizabeth II remained the head of state and the fount of honour. As her representative and viceroy, the Governor General presented awards on the recommendation of the Prime Minister in a system that echoed the British one. It dispensed with titles and with the livery of empire, but its structure echoed the British orders. In this sense it did not revolutionize what it replaced. A three-tier honour with the Queen at its head had been a staple of the British system for over a century.

The Order of Canada looked a lot, therefore, like the bottom three ranks of the Order of the British Empire (or the three ranks of the Order of Saint Michael and Saint George) dressed up in a new Canadian morning suit. The revised order reflected the long-standing Canadian aversion to titles in its three ranks, which took their names from the lower rather than the upper three categories for most British orders (Companion, Officer and Member).⁴² The assumption on the part of Canadian elites that a single-tier order would be for the enjoyment of them alone, and that they needed a three-tier system to serve the wider population was based on the logic of the British system, where honours moved from the top-down: the idea that a single-tier system would be the most democratic because it levelled service was, as discussed above, dismissed because, perversely, it was believed that such egalitarianism would have naturally been exclusive. While having just one national order was egalitarian, honours systems gravitated towards hierarchical distinction through pressure from the bottom and the top: as with the creation of the Order of the British Empire, the

⁴² “The Order of Canada”, online at: (<http://www.gg.ca/document.aspx?id=14940&lan=eng>, accessed 14 February 2014).

impulse towards including more different ranks in society led to the creation of new, lower ranks rather than the expansion of the 'C' level. Egalitarianism had its limits.

Many other colonies adopted similar systems to the Canadian model, including Trinidad and Tobago in 1967, Jamaica in 1969 (although the Queen was not sovereign of the new Jamaican or Trinidadian systems), Australia in 1975, Barbados in 1980, New Zealand in 1996, and Antigua and Barbuda in 1998. Some of these places continued to give some awards in the Order of the British Empire: in 1975 Australia, New Zealand, Malta, Barbados, Mauritius, Fiji, the Bahamas and Grenada all still gave some awards in the Order.⁴³ Papua New Guinea retained the imperial system even longer, only instituting its own set of royal orders in 2005, on the occasion of the nation's thirtieth anniversary.⁴⁴ The Order of the British Empire, not the New Zealand Order of Merit, is still (as of 2013) used by the Cook Islands, formally a dependency of New Zealand. The structure of British honours – including some of their hierarchical elements – was preserved with modifications in these systems. In Jamaica, for example the Order of the National Hero exceeded the Order of Distinction in status, the latter being equivalent to the OBE or MBE in the old imperial system, while the former was roughly equivalent to a dame- or knighthood. The names were different, but the complex ranking of different honours echoed the structure of European orders of chivalry.

From the perspective of former colonies, there was a different set of problems with how the honours system worked in practice, which could not be resolved without the adoption of national systems independent of the British civil service, if not the Queen. Administratively, former colonies had good reason to break off and create their own systems, even if those systems retained the

⁴³ British Empire Order: Annual Totals of Specific Quotas, Honours Scales: Review of Honours Scales 1974, General Papers, T 344/51, National Archives [NA].

⁴⁴ "The Orders of Papua New Guinea: Nomination Form", Papua New Guinea Prime Minister's Office, online at: ([http://web.archive.org/web/20080528185619/http://www.pm.gov.pg/pmsoffice/PMsoffice.nsf/40d31752b13cb92c4a256b5f002c8fa4/659b6e11ce88aa0f4a25706d007edc4e/\\$FILE/Nomination%20Information.pdf](http://web.archive.org/web/20080528185619/http://www.pm.gov.pg/pmsoffice/PMsoffice.nsf/40d31752b13cb92c4a256b5f002c8fa4/659b6e11ce88aa0f4a25706d007edc4e/$FILE/Nomination%20Information.pdf), accessed 19 September 2014).

symbolic link to the Crown. As long as Commonwealth nations maintained the direct link to the Order of the British Empire they were obliged to deal with the statutory limits on the order, which were administered centrally. Local orders gave more control over quotas and distribution, as was evident in the New Zealand case when local politicians were wrangling with the British civil service over total numbers as late as the 1970s. New Zealand Labour Party Prime Minister Norman Kirk (known affectionately by supporters as ‘Big Norm’) complained that New Zealand quotas were insufficient and that a new order for New Zealand to supplement the Order of the British Empire would help his government recognize a wider range of volunteer service.⁴⁵ In 1974 Kirk proposed an increase in size for New Zealand quotas as a possible first step in creating an independent honours system for the nation. Kirk wanted administrative autonomy as a first step to eventually creating a new system: ‘the [NZ] Government wants to establish formulae within which it can operate flexibly and, to some degree, independently without devaluing the system.’⁴⁶ A new minor order – the Queen’s Service Order – for New Zealand was the first step to honorific independence. Milner-Barry was not overjoyed by this proposal, as (as always) it seemed to move too fast for his liking – earlier discussions with Kirk had given them the impression that Kirk planned to create a New Zealand specific medal, not a whole order.⁴⁷ However, Whitehall interference in New Zealand state affairs would have been inappropriate, and in early 1975 the New Zealand government had its first semi-autonomous order of chivalry, as well as a small increase in quotas for the Order of the British Empire.

⁴⁵ Norman Kirk to Dennis Blundell, 21 June 1974, Honours Scales: Honours Scales Allocation for New Zealand Discussion 1974-1985, T 344/52, NA.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Milner-Barry to J.N.O Curle, 17 July 1974, Honours Scales: Honours Scales Allocation for New Zealand Discussion 1974-1985, T 344/52, NA.

New Zealand had greater autonomy and control than smaller, non-white former colonies: as was the case before the Second World War, the former Dominions received many more honours per capita than non-self-governing colonies. Quotas for these former colonies were constructed around a racial and civilizational logic that resulted in them receiving fewer honours than New Zealand, Canada and Australia. This effectively racial disproportion in honours made the Treasury and the Foreign Office uncomfortable, but they argued that they could do little about it. When New Zealand took control of their own honours quotas some members of the Main Honours Committee were worried that potential ‘relaxations’ on quotas in New Zealand would disrupt the overall pool of awards that was allocated for commonwealth countries, although it was clear by this point that Australia’s adoption of its own order would free up a large proportion of the commonwealth allocation.⁴⁸ British civil servants were anxious to appear fair, but as long as New Zealand, with its relatively small population, maintained its administrative connection to the British system through the Order of the British Empire, they continued to assign it a higher quota than most other non-white countries that did the same.

By the 1960s and 1970s former colonies who suffered from this discrimination were starting to notice and protest. In 1976 Christopher Talie, the secretary of the Governor General of Papua New Guinea, wrote to complain that his territory received a disproportionately small share of this pool.⁴⁹ In spite of its population being near that of New Zealand, and five times larger than Fiji’s, Papua New Guinea received barely more senior awards than Fiji and far fewer than New Zealand and some Australian states.⁵⁰ While Talie suspected that ‘other criteria for the allocation of annual

⁴⁸ *Quinquennium 1975-1979: Revision of Annual Quotas for Commonwealth Monarchies and Problem of Separate Provision for New Zealand, Honours Scales: Review of Honours Scales 1974*, General Papers, T 344/51, NA.

⁴⁹ Christopher Talie to R.W.H. du Boulay, 5 April 1976, *Honours Scales: Review of Honours Scales 1974*, General Papers, T 344/51, NA.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

quotas' were in place, 'I would presume that the most logical method of setting of [sic] quotas was based on the population of a country'.⁵¹ In reply, Commonwealth Office official Roger du Boulay defended the quotas on the basis that they were set 'by reference to the average number of honours that are achieved in the ten List [sic] over the five years immediately preceding Independence'.⁵² However, de Boulay offered Talie a modest increase for 1977. Milner-Barry confidentially congratulated de Boulay on his draft reply. 'One cannot say', he suggested, 'to Papua New Guinea that the population yardstick is not by itself very relevant when you compare them, for example, with New Zealand', even though this was clearly the logic behind the quotas.⁵³ De Boulay's draft made, 'the best of this somewhat delicate task, and I hope that you will be able to hold the present line'. However, Milner-Barry suspected that Papua New Guinea might by 1979 have adopted its own system under the Queen (although this actually did not happen until 2004), and therefore suggested that the civil service should be generous and increase the existing quotas.⁵⁴

A similar kind of civilizational logic operated in the few remaining 'dependent' colonies. By the 1970s only a few of these remained in the empire: Hong Kong, British Honduras, the Bahamas and the Western Pacific (which was treated as one colony 'for honours purposes').⁵⁵ These colonies, too, received honours directly from London. As always, numbers were limited and local administrators were frustrated by their inability to dispense honours as generously as they wished. In 1971 Hong Kong pushed the Treasury for more honours.⁵⁶ According to one British civil servant,

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² De Boulay to Talie, 8 June 1976, Honours Scales: Review of Honours Scales 1974, General Papers, T 344/51, NA.

⁵³ Milner-Barry to de Boulay, 21 May 1976, Honours Scales: Review of Honours Scales 1974, General Papers, T 344/51, NA.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Private Secretary to Mr Royle, 5 July 1971, Honours Policy: Hong Kong, FCO 57/250, NA.

⁵⁶ David Trench to Leslie Monson, 28 August 1971, Honours Policy: Hong Kong, FCO 57/250, NA.

there was an ‘ever present need to maintain a balance between awards to people of Chinese race and British expatriates, officials and unofficials [sic], in the Colony’.⁵⁷ He noted with satisfaction that Chinese and British men had one knighthood each, while the remainder of the small list was mostly balanced, although British recipients dominated the CBE, while ‘locals’ had a larger share of the smaller honours.⁵⁸ He went on to lobby for a larger number of honours for the colony, not only because of the size of its population but also because ‘the chief criterion [for allocating honours] is the quality of the services rendered and the potential ability of the population to render such services as can be rewarded by the bestowal of honours’.⁵⁹ In this respect, he argued, ‘there can be no question that Hong Kong is by far the most important Dependent Territory both in terms of population and economically, and its inhabitants are by and large both culturally and economically at a higher level than those in the other territories’.⁶⁰ These debates in the early 1970s over the relatively small quotas for these territories maintained the logic embraced by the Indian Civil Service when it attempted to balance European versus Indian honours before 1947.⁶¹

If post-colonial states lacked other incentives to develop their own honours systems, therefore, they had to deal with an administrative problem around post-colonial honours: the British Treasury controlled quotas in the Order of the British Empire, even when those quotas were allocated to independent states. The Treasury organized these honours based on imperial assumptions about race and civilization, while maintaining the strict policy of anti-inflationary restriction of honours that they had embraced in the 1920s and never departed from since. This

⁵⁷ A.L. Wayall to R.T. Armstrong, 28 October 1971, Honours Policy: Hong Kong, FCO 57/250, NA.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ Honours Policy: Hong Kong, FCO 57/250, NA.

provided a strong administrative incentive in addition to the political ones for states to create their own honours systems, even if those new systems remained tied to the Queen. Even though this was only a shadow of imperial control, the centralization of honours in the Treasury was an often unwelcome reminder of political control, even for states like New Zealand who had a relatively positive relationship with the United Kingdom. Even where the British Empire still may have had some positive connotations (especially among conservatives and social elites), interacting with the administrative apparatus in the Treasury that controlled the Order of the British Empire had political and administrative costs. New national honours cut out the very annoying middle man. Post-colonial states had to weigh a set of incentives around honours as they slowly but inevitably moved towards the adoption of national rather than imperial systems. On the one hand, the British system brought prestige. On the other, it brought administrative difficulties that mirrored the paternalism of Empire, in addition to the underlying problems of the imperial livery of the most widely-distributed order.

In his admirably detailed history of the Order of Canada Christopher McCreery mostly dismissed the idea of ‘distinction’ as articulated by Pierre Bourdieu.⁶² According to McCreery, the lack of controversy and widespread admiration for recipients of the Order of Canada since its inception shows that it is an institution that commands the respect of all Canadians and is not tied up with some ‘larger game’ of status through symbolic capital. But the Order of Canada, like many other post-colonial orders, not only built on the ideas of merit and service but also those of hierarchy. The conscious decision, driven by social and political elites, to stratify most of these new orders showed how they continued to reflect and reinforce hierarchies. Control over the selection and prioritization of different forms of service (as McCreery himself showed) made up a large part

⁶² McCreery, *The Order of Canada*, 235.

of the reason why post-colonial states wanted to create their own honours systems. The legacy of a hierarchical imperial honours system lived on in the choices made and not made by post-imperial states in constructing their new alternative systems. These alternatives, too, continued to reflect and reinforce hierarchical organization.

Why did certain former colonies maintain links to the British system? This process always involved a delicate balance. On the one hand, retaining a connection to the British crown was unacceptable for many post-colonial nations. The violence of anti-imperial struggles and of colonial occupation made the retention of British honours absurd or impossible in many places. On the other hand, the antiquity (or seeming antiquity) of British honours meant that for nations whose break from the British Empire had been politically and militarily gentler often wanted to retain a link. Creating new national honours was always a risk, as their newness could compromise their credibility. In one sense, the Queen could offer a form of antiquity, tradition and a sense of dignity to honours. The Crown had been giving honours on the advice of Dominion governments for decades, and while these had suffered occasional intervention from the Colonial or Dominions office, the responsibility had been mostly in the hands of local governments; this process set a precedent for a link between honours and the crown that mostly elided the intervention of Whitehall. Autonomy could be paired with the credibility that the British monarch (and the titles of knight and dame) held for many distinguished citizens of the former empire.

IV.

The fading of the formal British Empire produced an entirely reasonable question about honours within Britain: what would happen to its eponymous order? The Order of the British Empire was named in an age when the empire was a popular and seemingly enduring institution. It made perfect sense to patriotic and imperial-minded politicians and administrators to give it that name in 1917;

however, within a few decades the empire's largest and most widely-distributed order was starting to sound bad at home and abroad. Through the order's name, unpalatable to nationalists, they could attack the imperial state and the monarchy alike. For all its utility for promoting imperial affiliation in the past, the symbolic structure that tied together the crown, empire and state was vulnerable to criticism once the empire looked more and more obsolete.

The civil service – particularly the Ceremonial Office of the Treasury, pre-empted and disarmed attacks on the name of the Order from within and outside the civil service from the 1960s. This defense of the name of the Order was based on assumptions about the value and meaning of the Order both in Britain and former colonies that were themselves founded on an optimistic view of the legacy of empire. Even as the Order became more problematic outside of Britain, its name was disassociated from the political structure of empire within. In parliament the issue of the order's name came up a number of times from the 1960s as parliamentary questions to the Prime Minister. In July 1964 John Rankin, Labour Co-operative MP for Glasgow, asked Alec Douglas-Home whether he would introduce legislation to abolish the Order of the British Empire.⁶³ The Prime Minister's office having been notified beforehand of this question through the protocol for parliamentary questions, the issue was dispatched to the ceremonial office for a reply. Robert Knox, who was still working there at the age of seventy-five (he was to die a year later), was tasked with briefing Home on how to reply. Knox's memo outlined a set of reasons for the retention of the order in reply to the supplementary questions submitted by Rankin. First of all, the order had been created by the sovereign, and its abolition was the sovereign's business.⁶⁴ This was a disingenuous answer given that politicians and civil servants (Knox himself being one of the most important) had

⁶³ 28 July 1964, Q.14, Order of the British Empire: Parliamentary Questions, T 343/3, NA.

⁶⁴ 28 July 1964, Draft Reply suggested by Sir R. Knox and being agreed with Sir L. Helsey, Order of the British Empire: Parliamentary Questions, T 343/3, NA.

long advised the monarch on honours policy and (as I will discuss below) even prevented the sovereign or her family from changing it. Next, in response to the core criticism that the order had a faulty and anachronistic ‘description’, Knox suggested that the name had ‘historical interest’ and argued that there was no evidence that anyone had declined the order because of offence at its name. Refusal rates were lower, pointed out Knox, than during the Lloyd George years, which continued to serve as an example for the ceremonial branch of how honours could go wrong.⁶⁵ Knox recommended that Home’s reply to the question be a simple ‘No’, a recommendation that was willingly adopted.⁶⁶

In 1966 the Colonial Office was merged with the new Commonwealth Relations Office (itself the result of a merger between the India Office and the Dominions Office two decades earlier). This merger was symbolic of the wider shift in government rhetoric and effective power from the empire – with the appearance, if not always the reality of centralized government through Whitehall – and the Commonwealth. This shift in nomenclature from empire to commonwealth was a moment of symbolic potential because names were of central importance to the honours system. As a result it was in 1967, as empire gave way to commonwealth in the structures of government as well as in the realities of local politics, that the name of the Order of the British Empire was most questioned in the British parliament.

In January of 1967, Labour MP for West Ham North, Arthur Lewis, asked his own Prime Minister, Harold Wilson, about the future of the order in the light of the demise of the Colonial Office. As Chapter five will discuss, Wilson himself drove a set of changes on the honours system, but there were many within his party who wanted more. ‘In view of the changed circumstances arising from the development of the British Empire into the British Commonwealth of nations’,

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

asked Lewis, would it be necessary ‘to advise or request Her Majesty to change the Orders [sic] of the British Empire into those of the British Commonwealth’.⁶⁷ The reply to Lewis’s question was folded into another similar question from Edwin Brooks, which was the ‘same in substance’ (Brooks’ question suggested that the recent abolition of the Colonial Office signaled that the abolition of the order would be next).⁶⁸ This time, the ceremonial branch was if anything more aggressive in its defense of the order’s name. The initial draft reply stated that there was ‘no evidence that the title is unwelcome, either among members of the Commonwealth or in foreign countries. The indications point the other way, even in the newly independent territories’.⁶⁹ However, the latter sentence was crossed out, and the ‘no’ in the former was replaced with ‘little’. As I will show below, the Foreign Office knew all too well that there were people in ‘newly independent territories’ who objected to the name. The drafter also argued that Australian and New Zealand sentiment ‘is strongly in favour of the present title’ (in less than a decade Australia adopted its own order that superseded the Order of the British Empire), that the order had its own traditions and customs that should be preserved, and that the ‘Order of the Commonwealth’ would not be an improvement either aesthetically or politically.⁷⁰

But it was more than just a few Labour politicians pressing for a name change behind the scenes. In 1963 and in 1966 the prince consort, Prince Philip, in his role as the Grand Master of the Order of the British Empire, attempted to change the name of the order to something less empire-oriented and lobbied both the civil service and some politicians on this matter. His primary concern

⁶⁷ Question given Monday 30 January 1967 for Oral reply on 2 February 1967, Order of the British Empire: Parliamentary Questions, T 343/3, NA.

⁶⁸ A.M. Bailey to P. Le Cheminant, 31 January 1967, Order of the British Empire: Parliamentary Questions, T 343/3, NA.

⁶⁹ Notes for Supplementaries, Order of the British Empire: Parliamentary Questions, T 343/3, NA.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

was to accommodate people in the Commonwealth, for whom the name of the Order of the British Empire could potentially carry ‘neo-colonialist overtones’.⁷¹ One tentative suggestion was that the orders of the Bath and St Michael and St George might be expanded through the addition of more ranks.⁷² The Foreign Office, highly sensitive to the potential offensiveness of nomenclature involving empire, were favorable to this change and forwarded the suggestion to the Treasury, suggesting tentatively that the ‘Royal Windsor Order’ or the ‘Order of Elizabeth and Philip’ be substituted.⁷³ However, this idea was rejected outright by P.S. Milner-Barry, by this point Knox’s replacement as the Treasury’s Ceremonial Officer with direct responsibility for the honours system, who: ‘was not quite clear why it was necessary to change the name of the order at all, since no foreigner objected to the name, nor did members of ex-Colonial territories. On the other hand, members of the old Commonwealth countries were strongly opposed to changing the name of the order.’⁷⁴ When in response a Foreign Office official pointed out to Milner-Barry that the name of the order was fast becoming an anachronism, he responded by saying that Treasury Permanent Secretary Lawrence Helsby favored ‘names for Orders being as anachronistic as possible, since this added to the glamour of their antiquity.’⁷⁵ The obsolescence of the institution of the British Empire meant that hostility could be avoided, because when ‘the name is related to an existing institution the

⁷¹ Memorandum by A.L. Mayall, 9 June 1966, Prince Philip has suggested that perhaps the name of the Order of the British Empire should be changed, FO 372/8056, NA; Draft Note for Sir Lawrence Helsby, to be sent to Mr Halls, Prince Philip has suggested that perhaps the name of the Order of the British Empire should be changed, FO 372/8056, NA.

⁷² Draft Note for Sir Lawrence Helsby, to be sent to Mr Halls, Prince Philip has suggested that perhaps the name of the Order of the British Empire should be changed, FO 372/8056, NA.

⁷³ Memorandum by A.L. Mayall, 9 June 1966, Prince Philip has suggested that perhaps the name of the Order of the British Empire should be changed, FO 372/8056, NA.

⁷⁴ Memorandum by A.L. Myall, 22 June 1966, Prince Philip has suggested that perhaps the name of the Order of the British Empire should be changed, FO 372/8056, NA.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

possibility of controversy and of political difficulties and sensitivity arises'.⁷⁶ In this interpretation the imperial connotations of the name of the order were a good thing because rather than in spite of the increasing anachronism of the British Empire.

Helsby himself soon also intervened in favor of the status quo, much to the frustration of Foreign Office officials. He added to the existing objections the fact that a new Chapel for the Order had recently been established, and that any change to the name would waste the extensive fundraising that had gone into this.⁷⁷ Helsby hinted to the Foreign Office that the Duke of Edinburgh's suggestion was motivated by a desire to see whether Harold Wilson's government would take a 'different line' from previous administrations, and pointed out that the Grand Master had made a similar petition in 1962–3, with the assistance of the Commonwealth Secretary (then Douglas Sandys).⁷⁸ The Treasury had also, according to Helsby, investigated with 'considerable thoroughness' whether or not the name of the order was acceptable to recipients and had found that it was liked by the 'overwhelming majority of the members of the order'. Unlike the prince consort, 'He did not feel that the passing of the Empire made the retention of the name in any way inappropriate or objectionable.'⁷⁹

However, this 'investigation' was limited in scope and very selective in its sources. It did not bear out one official's claim to Helsby that 'there was virtually no feeling against the present title' – the same claim that Helsby and others repeated to the Prime Ministers of the 1960s and 1970s.⁸⁰

⁷⁶ Draft Note for Sir Lawrence Helsby, to be sent to Mr Halls, Prince Philip has suggested that perhaps the name of the Order of the British Empire should be changed, FO 372/8056, NA.

⁷⁷ Memorandum by P.H. Gore-Booth, 15 July 1966, Prince Philip has suggested that perhaps the name of the Order of the British Empire should be changed, FO 372/8056, NA.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ F.H. Gore-Booth to Helsby, 29 July 1966, Prince Philip has suggested that perhaps the name of the Order of the British Empire should be changed, FO 372/8056, NA.

The Treasury's enquiries about the suitability of the name of the order were based on a set of discussions with Commonwealth High Commissioners in 1964. Australia, New Zealand and Southern Rhodesia all returned favorable remarks about the name of the order.⁸¹ Whether the fact that 'the majority of Europeans have a nostalgic regard for the days of Empire and would regard a change as regrettable' in Southern Rhodesia was a valid argument for its continuation was not questioned, and the African state was not alone in its nostalgia: such a feeling apparently existed in New Zealand as well.⁸² The report stated that the high commissioner knew of no-one who had declined an honour in Rhodesia, 'even among the most intransigent critics of any race'.⁸³

The Commonwealth Relations Office, which drew up this set of responses, also said that any change 'would only arouse adverse comment among our best friends [in Australia]'.⁸⁴ The report discounted Canada because of its reluctance to use the honours system. The survey also returned ambiguous comments about Trinidad and Tobago, Sierra Leone, and Jamaica. In Sierra Leone, there 'have been a few private comments about the title', but the high commissioner feared that any change would draw unwelcome attention to the 'somewhat anomalous situation of Sierra Leone citizens receiving British awards'.⁸⁵ While one Jamaican newspaper article (the report did not specify the newspaper) had criticized the use of the anachronistic 'British Empire' in the order's name, 'a subsequent article in another paper' was more favorable and took the line that the Order of the British Empire evoked 'a perfume of Clive at Plassey and Wolfe in Quebec' that was, apparently, a

⁸¹ Order of the British Empire, Views of British High Commissioners, February 1964, Prince Philip has suggested that perhaps the name of the Order of the British Empire should be changed, FO 372/8056, NA.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

not unwelcome scent.⁸⁶ In Trinidad, it had been rumored that Eric Williams' government was considering forming their own honours system, but the report doubted that this would be the case, as 'such orders would be much less acceptable to their recipients than the older British orders'.⁸⁷ Both these estimates of public opinion in the Caribbean were off-target, as within a few years both Trinidad and Tobago (1969) and Jamaica (1968) were to adopt their own local systems. The 'older British orders' swayed the hearts and minds of Caribbean states less than the Commonwealth Office imagined.

Intentionally or unintentionally, the report was misleading, as was the Treasury's interpretation of it as showing little opposition to the name of the order. It was with this data, however, that the civil service justified its answers to the various parliamentary questions through the 1960s and 1970s. While white settlers in colonies and former Dominions may have had some 'nostalgia' for the empire, states where the majority populations had suffered rather than inflicted the disruption of colonial occupation were quick to discard the Order of the British Empire, even if they were split on the quality of the link they retained with the Crown itself in their honours systems. Furthermore, even in Australia, Canada and New Zealand the appeal of autonomous orders with national rather than imperial names had considerable appeal. As Prince Philip and the Foreign Office feared, almost everywhere eventually discarded the Order of the British Empire, leaving Britain nearly alone in giving that order to its citizens.

In suggesting that the only people who objected to the name were not important to the politics of former colonies they were wrong; however, their other defense of the Order's name – that its anachronism made it appealing at a domestic level – had some traction. In Britain the name of the Order became almost overnight a joke rather than a problematic reminder of past institutions.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

From the 1950s recipients, their friends and other commentators increasingly laughed at the name. Some kind of wry comment about the anachronism became a regular feature of letters of congratulation, which had always been a formulaic genre. ‘Heartiest congratulations on the well earned [sic] C.B.E.!', wrote a friend to pharmaceutical researcher Bill Paton in 1968, ‘I’m afraid the British Empire which you will now command is in a state of increasing contraction, but perhaps the letters also mean Contributor to British Exports.’⁸⁸ Two of Paton’s friends also provided poems reflecting on his award (a common practice in letters of congratulation – see Chapter three), including one which began ‘Commander of the British What? [original emphasis]’.⁸⁹ Such honours were not unwelcome, but the fact of their name was a joke – sometimes a sad one. In some senses at home, if not abroad, the Treasury’s assessment that the anachronistic name made the order more charming, quaint and in some ways more acceptable worked for a large proportion of those who accepted the honour in the last part of the century. A vocal minority on the left questioned its propriety, but most just laughed at its anachronism, or maybe felt a twinge of nostalgia.

Against skepticism and criticism in the Empire/Commonwealth, the administration of honours was characterized by a conservatism that tried to hide problems and dissent. Critics of honours overseas focused on the imperialist symbolism of the Order of the British Empire and the system as a whole, pointing out that the system had been closely implicated in the management of the empire, not merely as a symbol but as a tool for the state. The most radical critics attacked the monarchical symbolism of the system, but most saw honours in a more instrumental way. The critique of the function of the honours system had weight in the former colonies too. Even where local elites still liked or tolerated the Order of the British Empire, the fact that it was administered through the civil service of the UK caused problems for both the Treasury and local governments.

⁸⁸ Cyril Keele to Bill Paton, 1 January 1968, PP/WDP/A/1/4, Bill Paton Papers, Wellcome Library.

⁸⁹ John ? to Bill Paton, 11 January 1968, PP/WDP/A/1/4, Bill Paton Papers, Wellcome Library.

But some states found its antiquity useful and maintained links to British honours in multiple ways, both institutionally and in terms of emulating the style of imperial honours.

How should we understand this mixed afterlife of the British honours system in the former empire? Through all of these examples, the British administrators of the honour system felt that it could be in some way useful for maintaining post-imperial bonds between Britain and its former colonies. In India, they hoped to maintain order and a lingering loyalty to the crown through honours. These hopes were quickly shown to be optimistic in India and other former colonies with republican inclinations. In the former Dominions, the Commonwealth Office selectively identified lingering loyalties rather than recognizing nationalist tendencies. In dependencies, they sought to distinguish a civilized elite who would continue to be loyal to Britain even given the uncertainty of future political ties. These aspirations to a transnational bond ran aground on the centralized administration of Crown honours and the hierarchical structure of the system. In spite of its name, the Order of the British Empire was organized and run primarily for a British market. It was less flexible when applied to the diversity of overseas arrangements. The Order's tiered hierarchy and the ongoing sovereignty that the Treasury exercised over it made it a clumsy tool for the divergent purposes to which local governments aimed to put honour, even in places where a majority of potential recipients (if not a majority of the actual population) were still charmed by its imperial livery and connection to the Crown.

Chapter five: Drawing Together? Honours in Britain, 1945–1979

I.

In the 1950s and early 1960s a group of politicians and public figures involved in Welsh affairs put together a proposal to the Conservative government to establish a new Order of Chivalry. It would be called the Order of St David and would serve as a Welsh equivalent to the senior chivalric orders of England and Scotland: the Order of the Garter and the Order of the Thistle.¹ This idea was not new. In 1907 Lloyd George had supported the creation of a Welsh order, but by the time he was premier the honour that would become the Order of the British Empire was a higher priority.² Officials in the Home Office had serious objections to the proposal. They claimed that it would raise problems with the dormant Irish equivalent, the Order of Saint Patrick, which had been discontinued in 1922 for political reasons. There were many in Northern Ireland who would have liked to see the Order of Saint Patrick revived, even though this was politically untenable. They would have seen the creation of a Welsh Order as unfair without the revival of the Irish one. Another senior, elite order would also contradict the ‘democratic’ spirit of the times, according to one senior Home Office official.³ Against these objections the advocates of the Order of St David were helpless. The idea had failed. It did, however, make it as far as a conversation between Queen Elizabeth II and her aide, Michael Adeane, at the end of which the Queen commented on the

¹ Order of St David, HO 286/55, National Archives [NA].

² Order of St David Memorandum, 16 April 1963, Order of St David, HO 286/55, NA.

³ *Ibid.*

controversy that the proposal caused: ‘I thought Orders were intended to draw people together instead of encouraging them to separate.’⁴

With all that seemed to be falling apart in the aftermath of the Second World War, in the empire and within Britain, the forces that ‘were intended to draw people together’ took on new importance. The Queen’s comment captured, intentionally or otherwise, the divided nature of the post-war trajectories of the British honours system. On the one hand, decolonization undermined the symbolic coherence of the system of awards and hierarchy that had stretched across the empire only a few years earlier. At the same time as the global fragmentation described in Chapter four, within the United Kingdom the honours system’s social base expanded amid a more explicit discussion about its place in British society than had existed in previous decades. Reforms to the composition and nature of the various honours were executed through a mixture of political and internal bureaucratic will, and more thoroughgoing critics of the honours system were marginalized.

The bias towards paid state servants within the honours system from 1922 continued through the immediate post-war period, but politicians chipped away at it (see Table 5.1). In spite of criticism of honours in general, the traditional honours and orders remained, but they were slowly reshaped to cater to a different focus. These shifts were conscious and intentional, and they did not necessarily change many of the mechanisms for honours recommendations, which still went through state departments. Rather, they reflected a concern to keep honours relevant and to retain its power to define social hierarchies, even if these hierarchies were different to what they were a few decades before. As a result, the way in which the kind of people who were recommended for honours changed and the integration of new groups into the honours system can tell us much about the establishment’s views about social change. As was the case in the years immediately following the

⁴ Order of St David Memorandum, 20 May 1959, Order of St David, HO 286/55, NA.

creation of the Order of the British Empire, the expansion of honours recognized and attempted to foster a particular kind of relationship between the state, the Crown and civil society.

TABLE 5.1: Percentage of civilian honours in the Order of the British Empire given to key groups in Britain, 1948–1978*

	Central civil servants	Non-volunteer local service	Political	Voluntary service	Other
1948	47%	23%	<1%	12%	18%
1958	40%	26%	9%	10%	15%
1968	22%	38%	N/A	15%	25%
1978	19%	36%	N/A	19%	26%

* Estimates based on citations published in the ordinary (New Year and King’s/Queen’s Birthday) honours lists in supplements to the *London Gazette*. Includes domestic civilian honours at all ranks of the Order of the British Empire.

The most striking changes in the regular honours lists between the 1940s and the 1970s happened mostly at the lower levels of the honours system – the OBE and MBE. Table 5.1 shows that the number of central civil servants who received honours declined and that the greatest beneficiaries of this process were paid employees of local organizations, including people in business (included under ‘other’). However, these total numbers do not show how the largest changes were at the lower levels of the system. Traditional elites continued to enjoy a large share of honours at the knighthood level and above. At the same time, more and more new kinds of people were being honored at the lowest levels of the system: sportspeople, cultural figures from outside of the traditional high culture sectors, a scattering of union officials, a greater number of engineers and other workers in businesses with close ties to the state, and volunteers from a wider variety of charitable organizations. Before the war one or two people would be honored for service to some sort of sport, for example. By 1968 that number had increased to ten, while by 1978 twenty-nine people involved in a wide variety of sports, from cycling to rugby league, found their way onto the honours lists. These totals remained a tiny proportion of the overall lists, which averaged around a

thousand people per list (two thousand per year), but this increased attention to non-government sectors was significant for those communities.

These changes were driven by a conscious effort by politicians and sometimes administrators to align the honours system with British society. This effort was underpinned by a sense that in doing so the government could exercise a measure of control over social change. This was particularly important in an era when social change seemed in some ways out of control. The inclusion of new groups was a way of investing them in an older system of social hierarchy as well as a form of recognition of their importance in modern society. Throughout the post-war period, the civil service in particular kept a close eye on the way in which honours were distributed, ensuring that the system retained key traditional characteristics, even as it changed its shape and constituency. However, by doing so, they hindered the most radical (and potentially popular changes). The attitude and approach of those at the high levels of honours administration remained elitist and secretive, which produced an increasing contrast between public interest in honours and its central administration.

II.

As the war honours wound down the civil service looked to re-establish and re-assess the honours system in peacetime. In the next few years, the central Honours Committee considered a wide range of issues across all the various Orders of Chivalry for which the Treasury had responsibility. These related not just to issues of internal administration and organization but also to revising and reconditioning honours in the changed post-war climate. In their own way, the Treasury and civil service officials involved in these deliberations were shaping the way in which Britain recognized and defined citizenship and service.

The end of the war saw the establishment of a new committee for managing honours policy within the Treasury. The Treasury was still dealing with wartime honours in 1946 and 1947, but by 1948 the need for reorganization and reconciliation in the new postwar society was central to thinking about honours. During the war, all appointments, civil and military, to the main orders of chivalry were ‘additional’ – that is, they did not count towards the quotas of living members in the order, so from the perspective of the Treasury and court officials filling vacancies and rearranging priorities was important.⁵ It was important, too, for all the orders of chivalry to be rearranged in the aftermath of war. For more than five years, the whole system had been under peculiar constraints and stresses and its administrators were keen to reconcile and adjust the orders.

One of the first issues was directly related to the new Labour government after 1945. Clement Attlee’s government nationalized the Bank of England and civil aviation in 1946, coal and various transport and communication industries in 1947, and then energy in 1948. For the civil service, this naturally raised the question of whether new expanded allocations of honours should be made for the various nationalized industries. Attlee himself supported the expansion of honours to nationalized industries on the same scale as they were given to existing civil servants. Internally, part of the justification for this was similar to the traditional one used for the civil service: workers in nationalized industries (specifically, in this case, gas and electricity) were less well remunerated than those in the private sector.⁶

At the end of 1947 Edward Bridges, the new Permanent Secretary of the Treasury, conducted a survey of distinguished members of various professions and branches of the civil

⁵ R.U.E. Knox to Alan Lascelles, 4 July 1946, Honours Scales: Review of Honours Scales 1946, General and H.D. Papers, T 344/1, NA.

⁶ Summary of Comments on UKCH (‘48), Honours Scales: Review of Honours Scales 1948 Enquiry, instigated by Lord (Then Sir Edward) Bridges, on outside opinion of honours lists, T 344/15, NA.

service, seeking their opinions about how well the honour system worked within their department or professional community. While some of his colleagues doubted the wisdom of consultation, Bridges was determined to find out what the wider community thought about honours. In a memorandum to the committee, he pointed out that scales had increased in size since the interwar period, and he raised the concern that press comment often ‘picked out for praise or blame’ the ‘inclusion or omission of certain individuals’.⁷ Bridges wanted to know how people, especially in the ‘lower grades or walks of life’ felt about receiving honours and about their fellows receiving them: ‘What, for example, is the effect in a factory when a foreman or supervisor gets the M.B.E. or B.E.M.? And what is the effect in the Savings Bank when one of the senior staff is honoured?’⁸ The ‘teaching profession, the Universities, the Civil Service, local government service, [and] various branches of industry’ all received quotas of honours. These quotas were determined in part by the Honours Committee, but Bridges feared that he lacked sufficient information about the reception of these honours.⁹ The nationalization of industry compounded this problem, because any expansion in the inclusiveness of honours meant that new people, with potentially unformed attitudes towards honours, were now being exposed to them.

Bridges initially envisioned this enquiry as being wide ranging, if covert: he wanted to ask twenty or thirty senior people in each government department with any concern in the honours system to ‘keep their ears open at the time the honours list is published’ and to confidentially report back to the Honours Committee with their impressions.¹⁰ The Prime Minister’s Office liked the idea

⁷ Honours Committee, Draft Memorandum by the Chairman, 28 October 1947, Honours Scales: Review of Honours Scales 1948 Enquiry, instigated by Lord (Then Sir Edward) Bridges, on outside opinion of honours lists, T 344/15, NA.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Honours Committee, Draft Memorandum by the Chairman, 28 October 1947, Honours Scales: Review of Honours Scales 1948 Enquiry, instigated by Lord (Then Sir Edward) Bridges, on outside opinion of honours lists, T 344/15, NA.

in general, but were afraid that this broad scale would ruin the chances of the enquiry being confidential, suggesting instead that enquiries be restricted to a smaller field of ‘very carefully selected people’.¹¹ Both Bridges and the Prime Minister’s Office felt that such investigations would be most worthwhile and interesting ‘in the field of learning, the arts and science’ than in industry, because recommendations for honours associated with ‘Production Departments’ were more of an in-house process than those in the arts and sciences.¹² Some other civil service department heads were skeptical, especially because, like the Prime Minister’s Office, they feared that the public or the press would learn of the enquiry. This concern was most clearly expressed by J.W. Phillips, of the Ministry of National Insurance, who argued that public knowledge of any consultation would be ‘dangerous’ because it would expose the fact that honours were decided upon by a mixture of civil servants and politicians, not by the monarch. Because honours lists were conventionally understood as a ‘manifestation of Royal grace, which is not open to public challenge’, consultation could be seen as inviting criticism of a royal prerogative that should not be criticized.¹³ Other colleagues suggested that any enquiry was unnecessary because civil servants and the public in general were mostly fairly happy with the honours system. In spite of these reservations, Bridges was determined that the enquiry should go ahead, and he pushed it through a meeting of the Honours Selection Committee on 15 November 1948.¹⁴

¹¹ L.M.t. to Bridges, 30 October 1947, Honours Scales: Review of Honours Scales 1948 Enquiry, instigated by Lord (Then Sir Edward) Bridges, on outside opinion of honours lists, T 344/15, NA.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ J.W. Phillips to Bridges, 8 November 1947, Honours Scales: Review of Honours Scales 1948 Enquiry, instigated by Lord (Then Sir Edward) Bridges, on outside opinion of honours lists, T 344/15, NA.

¹⁴ Conclusions of a Meeting of the Honours Selection Committee, 15 November 1947, Honours Scales: Review of Honours Scales 1948 Enquiry, instigated by Lord (Then Sir Edward) Bridges, on outside opinion of honours lists, T 344/15, NA.

Relying on the advice of the various department heads, Bridges formulated a list of apparently reliable people whose opinions on honours he could sound, without fear of their imprudence betraying to the wider public any word of the project. Over half of these men already bore titles, with only the occasional 'Mr.' taking his place on the list.¹⁵ Women were not seen as a possible independent group with an interest in honours, and all those consulted were men. This reflected both a lack of interest in seeing women as a group with any special investment in increased representation in the honours system and the continued centrality of civil servants to honours. In total, Bridges and his department heads received fifty-eight responses to the survey, mostly in industry, commerce 'and the professions closely in touch with Government Departments on day to day matters' such as medical doctors.¹⁶ In spite of Bridges' stated intention that it gather information about the broad public view of the honours system, the enquiry was addressed to a particular kind of official: male, senior professionals who were seen as leaders in their field (and were usually recipients of 'C' level or above honours).

The enquiry was couched in general terms. Bridges' first question was leading: he enquired whether the number of awards was too high or too few and 'in particular, is it felt that the grant of more awards in the lower grades (particularly M.B.E. and B.E.M.) would be more advantageous?'¹⁷ Bridges was also particularly interested in whether the professions, literature and the arts were receiving enough awards – clearly he feared (or had been told) that they were not. These questions were not always exactly what the various informants were asked, however. Some of the enquiries

¹⁵ Honours Scales: Review of Honours Scales 1948 Enquiry, instigated by Lord (Then Sir Edward) Bridges, on outside opinion of honours lists, T 344/15, NA.

¹⁶ Review of Honours Reactions, Honours Scales: Review of Honours Scales 1948 Enquiry, instigated by Lord (Then Sir Edward) Bridges, on outside opinion of honours lists, T 344/15, NA.

¹⁷ David Milne to Bridges, 31 January 1948, Honours Scales: Review of Honours Scales 1948 Enquiry, instigated by Lord (Then Sir Edward) Bridges, on outside opinion of honours lists, T 344/15, NA.

were farmed out to various other civil servants, who summarized Bridges' questions. A. Barlow's interpretation of the enquiry led to him to ask of his informants both the broader question: 'Do honours as a rule go to the right people' (with its riskier counterpart: 'Do they often go to definitely wrong people?') and also specific questions about the 'correct' numbers for certain honours and whether they were too weighted towards any one group.¹⁸ The Order of the British Empire was often singled out by questioners as of particular interest because of its broad range and potential applicability.

The many responses were hard to summarize, but Bridges noted to the honours committee that the responses were, he felt, surprisingly positive, with few of the respondents complaining that their 'class or interest' was unfairly unrepresented.¹⁹ More common were comments suggesting that their various interests or professions would appreciate a little more recognition at the lower levels. In fact, the responses were varied and tended to focus on local issues within the respondent's professional circles, although there were a number of consistent themes. While Bridges was right to say that, in general, there was little anger about honours, respondents did tend to whine about groups within their own sphere of influence who were insufficiently rewarded, including: working farmers, free church ministers, General Practitioners, as well as people in particular regions such as parts of Wales outside of Cardiff.²⁰ In what was an unusually honest comment, A.H. Ward commented that 'a large part of the [Civil] Service is always on the verge of a sneer at the [honours] list', but that this was usually kept 'at bay' by the odd excellent choice, but that bad choices, which

¹⁸ A. Barlow to Bridges, 12 February 1948, Honours Scales: Review of Honours Scales 1948 Enquiry, instigated by Lord (Then Sir Edward) Bridges, on outside opinion of honours lists, T 344/15, NA.

¹⁹ Review of Honours Reactions, Honours Scales: Review of Honours Scales 1948 Enquiry, instigated by Lord (Then Sir Edward) Bridges, on outside opinion of honours lists, T 344/15, NA.

²⁰ Harold Sent to Alexander Maxwell, 26 January 1948; Summary of Views of Persons Approached by Sir Geoffrey Ince; Note from G.D. Shepherd, 24 January 1948; all in: Honours Scales: Review of Honours Scales 1948 Enquiry, instigated by Lord (Then Sir Edward) Bridges, on outside opinion of honours lists, T 344/15, NA.

would be ‘unerringly spotted’, could bring the sneer out from the souls of civil servants and onto their faces.²¹ The implication of these comments was that these ‘excellent choices’ were ones internal to the civil service and that the status of honours depended on local factors to departments or professions: people respected or sneered at the list in response to the names they knew from within their world.

Despite the recent war, a large number of those questioned about honours felt that they were too heavily weighted in favor of the armed services. Cyril Lakin argued that this was because the services were more ‘efficient’ in recommending honours, meaning that their clear chains of command and rank systems were better at filtering and processing recommendations than the diverse departments of the civil service.²² Honours in the Bath and the Order of the British Empire were also suspiciously routine in some branches of the military, and many informants singled out the armed forces as being the place where ‘Buggins’ Turn’ reined over the distribution of honours. As one of A. Barlow’s subordinates argued, the services already had a near monopoly over certain orders, yet they continued to ‘encroach’ on other, non-military honours.²³

Respondents did not agree about the arts and sciences, but in general more seemed to think that the sciences were better rewarded than scholarly and artistic professions.²⁴ One respondent from the Ministry of Education even suggested that because scientists were better organized than the diverse artistic and scholarly organizations, there was a risk that scientists receive more than their

²¹ A.H. Ward to Bridges, 2 March 1948, Honours Scales: Review of Honours Scales 1948 Enquiry, instigated by Lord (Then Sir Edward) Bridges, on outside opinion of honours lists, T 344/15, NA.

²² Cyril Lakin to A. Barlow, 6 January 1948, Honours Scales: Review of Honours Scales 1948 Enquiry, instigated by Lord (Then Sir Edward) Bridges, on outside opinion of honours lists, T 344/15, NA.

²³ A. Barlow to Bridges, 12 February 1948, Honours Scales: Review of Honours Scales 1948 Enquiry, instigated by Lord (Then Sir Edward) Bridges, on outside opinion of honours lists, T 344/15, NA.

²⁴ W. J. Larke to Edward Appleton, 2 February 1948, Honours Scales: Review of Honours Scales 1948 Enquiry, instigated by Lord (Then Sir Edward) Bridges, on outside opinion of honours lists, T 344/15, NA.

fair share, whatever that share may be.²⁵ Harry Willink of Magdalene College, Oxford, wrote a reply with details about a number of different cases, including that of Evelyn Sharp who, he pointed out, was a civil servant who would have received a relatively high award had she not been a woman.²⁶ He also dissented with the more common opinion that more OBE and CBE level awards were needed, arguing that there were too many of these but that more MBEs were needed because there were so many eligible ‘competitors’ and that the MBE was itself a ‘jolly sort of thing’.²⁷ By implication, officials could be more carefree in their distribution of the MBE because the social stakes were lower.

A large number of respondents commented that the bias towards civil service and local government in the honours lists was disproportionate and that more people with no connection to government (and certainly, who were not paid by some form of local or national administration) should be considered for honours. Respondents, as well as Bridges and others at the higher levels of the Treasury, feared that civil servants might be (or might be perceived to be) receiving awards for ‘perform[ing] their duties virtuously but without distinction over a long period of years’.²⁸ While the Imperial Service Order was officially for such long, consistent service, this was not the proper function of the larger and more elaborate Order of the British Empire.²⁹ Respondents also argued that more awards should be available for younger people who had performed exceptional or

²⁵ John Maud to Bridges, 4 February 1948, Honours Scales: Review of Honours Scales 1948 Enquiry, instigated by Lord (Then Sir Edward) Bridges, on outside opinion of honours lists, T 344/15, NA.

²⁶ Harry Willink to Bridges, 1 January 1948, Honours Scales: Review of Honours Scales 1948 Enquiry, instigated by Lord (Then Sir Edward) Bridges, on outside opinion of honours lists, T 344/15, NA.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Review of Honours Reactions, Honours Scales: Review of Honours Scales 1948 Enquiry, instigated by Lord (Then Sir Edward) Bridges, on outside opinion of honours lists, T 344/15, NA.

‘brilliant’ service, as opposed to, once again, long-serving but mediocre individuals. Bridges’ summary report also argued that awards for scientists seemed to be about right, but that younger writers and artists may have had cause to complain that they were unrecognized by the system (although given that these opinions were derived from senior professionals, they may have overestimated the demand of honours among more iconoclastic, junior members of the creative professions).³⁰

A letter from Ivan de la Bere (who was later to write a history of the honours system)³¹ to Bridges in response to the enquiry is a particularly telling indication of attitudes towards the honours system on the part of those who ran it. De la Bere, who at this point was a senior official at the Central Chancery of the Orders of Knighthood, argued first of all that OBEs, MBEs and BEMs ‘given to those persons in comparatively minor posts’ were probably the most deeply appreciated honours, citing the fact that almost all ‘grateful message[s] of loyalty and thanks to His Majesty’ came from recipients of these lower honours. ‘More satisfaction and good’, therefore, resulted from such awards. De la Bere agreed, therefore, that increasing the quotas of such awards was a good idea, although he also argued that artistic, literary and cultural types were less likely to appreciate them than those in ‘welfare work’.³² While he did not specify why exactly cultural figures would disdain OBEs and MBEs the implication was that artistic and literary activities suggested a higher social status, and thus that senior cultural figures were of a professional class above those who usually received the lowest two ranks in the Order. One of the people consulted during the enquiry, Theobald Matthew, the director of public prosecutions, had argued that in terms of theatrical

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ivan De la Bere, *The Queen’s Orders of Chivalry* (London: William Kimber, 1961).

³² Ivan de la Bere to Bridges, 22 April 1948, Honours Scales: Review of Honours Scales 1948 Enquiry, instigated by Lord (Then Sir Edward) Bridges, on outside opinion of honours lists, T 344/15, NA.

honours, priority should be given to actors and theatre workers who were willing to ‘subordinate the commercial aspect of his work’ to the production of ‘shows of artistic and literary value even if the production is not very remunerative’.³³

De la Bere also pointed out that these lower ranks did not enjoy, at that time, the same ‘privileges’ that senior members of other Orders enjoyed. In particular, he suggested that attendance at Royal Garden Parties and Order-specific church services (at the time, the Order still lacked a chapel) would be well-received by those with MBEs and OBEs.³⁴ While the idea that they be able to attend garden parties was quickly rejected as impractical, the point that OBEs and MBEs did not enjoy the privilege of an audience with the monarch at a royal investiture was taken up by the Honours Committee, which agreed that the royal touch was important to honours.³⁵ Proposals to run other events for the Order of the British Empire recipients were also investigated, as we shall see later in this chapter. To exclude the lower echelons of the system – whose members were thought to be the most profusely loyal of all honours recipients – from actually meeting the monarch from whom their honours flowed was unfair, especially in the post-war British environment. Labour was in power, industries had been nationalized and people of all classes were enjoying the benefits of social democracy: should not the people get to meet their monarch?

³³ AT to Bridges, 30 January 1948, Honours Scales: Review of Honours Scales 1948 Enquiry, instigated by Lord (Then Sir Edward) Bridges, on outside opinion of honours lists, T 344/15, NA.

³⁴ Ivan de la Bere to Bridges, 22 April 1948, Honours Scales: Review of Honours Scales 1948 Enquiry, instigated by Lord (Then Sir Edward) Bridges, on outside opinion of honours lists, T 344/15, NA.

³⁵ Scale of Half-Yearly Civil Honours on the United Kingdom List, Conclusions of a meeting held on Wednesday, 5 May 1948, Honours Scales: Review of Honours Scales 1948 Enquiry, instigated by Lord (Then Sir Edward) Bridges, on outside opinion of honours lists, T 344/15, NA.

On 5 May 1948 Bridges chaired a meeting of the Honours Scales Committee to discuss the findings of the enquiry and to put them to use in the formulation of post-war honours policy.³⁶ Its decisions reflected the enquiry's findings about widespread interest in honours and concerns over the importance of getting the lower levels of the honours system right. In turn, its conclusions set out precedents and structures for the administrative side of honours policy for the next few decades. The larger committee created new regional committees to make recommendations for MBEs and BEMs for potential recipients outside of the civil service and political honours, in an attempt to regularize this process.³⁷ While these regional committees would be careful to present themselves merely as channels for recommendations for honours to the Prime Minister, rather than having actual decision-making power, in effect they were also a way for the civil service to retain greater control over the whole process. In aiding politicians by doing the work of collecting and managing recommendations, they took away much of the choice that Prime Ministers supposedly had in their prerogative to nominate honours to the Queen.

The ability of recipients to attend investitures was another issue about which both de la Bere and Bridges were very concerned. They agreed that it would be highly desirable, once the backlog of wartime honours had finally cleared, to request that the King make investitures for all civilian honours recipients a priority.³⁸ Investitures 'by THE KING were a great addition to the value of the awards', and while some attendees hoped that maybe these investitures could become a travelling show around the counties or charitable institutions, de la Bere made it clear that Buckingham Palace

³⁶ Conclusions of a Meeting Held on Wednesday, 5th May 1948, Committee on the Scale of United Kingdom Civil Honours (UKCH) Circulated Papers, 1947-53, T 344/24, NA.

³⁷ Committee on the joint regional preparation of recommendations for the M.B.E. and B.E.M., 23 June 1948, Committee on the Scale of United Kingdom Civil Honours (UKCH) Circulated Papers, 1947-53, T 344/24, NA.

³⁸ Conclusions of a Meeting Held on Wednesday, 5th May 1948, Committee on the Scale of United Kingdom Civil Honours (UKCH) Circulated Papers, 1947-53, T 344/24, NA.

was the proper place – and the only proper place – for such events.³⁹ The wartime practice of offering recipients extra tickets for two guests was also affirmed as highly successful, and thus worth continuing for all of those to be honored at royal investitures.

Alongside these changes in the distribution of honours the Honours Committee also considered other ways to broaden the honours selection process. Selecting people from professions that were outside of civil service networks was a problem. The Committee dealt with this by putting together lists of professional societies that could be consulted about the worthiness of members with ‘some claim to recognition’ through honours.⁴⁰ This represented a general expansion of information networks about honours. As shown in Chapter two, there were already a number of organizations whom politicians and civil servants regularly but unofficially used to collect recommendations, but these discussions in the late 1940s expanded and formalized some of these relationships. The committee was worried that its existing sources were too limited or too focused on certain sectors of society. Organized into groups such as ‘Architects’, ‘Forestry’ and ‘Engineers, etc.’, the initial proposed list included fifty-five different associations, institutes and societies.⁴¹ Each was assigned to a government department: for example, the Institute of Fuel [engineers] was assigned to the Admiralty, while the British Bankers Association was assigned to the Board of Trade.⁴² The list continued to be maintained through the early 1950s, with departments tweaking the

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ List of Professional Societies, 8 February 1949, Committee on the Scale of United Kingdom Civil Honours (UKCH) Circulated Papers, 1947-53, T 344/24, NA.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

different groups included in order to adapt to the closure of old and the creation of new professional organizations.⁴³

The 1947–48 revisions, enquiries and reviews around honours have a strong sense of spring cleaning to them. Bridges wanted to consolidate, reassess and renovate honours for the post-war era. But there was also a new element to this official discussion of honours that had, at most, been submerged in pre-war discussions. The public perspective was taken into account more readily than in the 1920s and 1930s; however, the Treasury sought to corral and control this perspective. Under this model, honours were drawn from diverse sources but the civil service had, if anything, more power over organizing and selecting candidates. These views in turn show a minefield of judgments about the cultural value and the social significance of the various different honours, especially the lower ranks of the Order of the British Empire. The existence of alternative perspectives on the honours system was recognized and became part of the overall calculations of those who ran the system in the civil service and the CCOK. Among the host of different temporary and permanent committees regulating and making decisions about honours, there was a growing recognition that the lower-level honours had a specific, important social function that they needed to attend to carefully.

Without the policies of the Labour Government and Britain's post-war shift towards social democratic policies, this impulse towards consultation and inclusion may have been less likely. However, these revisions to the way in which honours were run were driven primarily by civil servants rather than politicians – the honours system was not a priority for Attlee or his cabinet. The issue of honours remained a difficult one for the Labour Party, with many of the issues of the interwar years remaining, or becoming confounded by, Labour's political success and integration

⁴³ List of Professional Societies, 1 September 1953, Committee on the Scale of United Kingdom Civil Honours (UKCH) Circulated Papers, 1947-53, T 344/24, NA.

into the ruling establishment. It was not until the second post-war Labour government led by Harold Wilson that honours were more directly tackled as a political issue by Labour. The decisions made by Wilson and his government were not necessarily decisive in changing the honours system – the civil service retained too much control to allow Labour to transform the area – but they were very important in realigning the focus of honours. Furthermore, Wilson’s government, more than any of its predecessors, thought out the ideological justification for the broader post-war shift in honours. The fact that they were willing to engage in this kind of ideological work was itself important for preserving the honours system in a recognizable form.

In 1965 Wilson asked the civil service to investigate whether they could get rid of automatic honours and reduce the proportion given to civil servants. Officials passively resisted these efforts, arguing that their share was already declining and that automaticity was a myth.⁴⁴ Various departments sent in memoranda showing how they had reduced their quotas or went through elaborate selection systems that were not automatic.⁴⁵ From the perspective of the civil service, their share in honours lists did indeed seem to be shrinking, as it seemed to many of them that higher ranks were required for lower-level orders than a few decades before.⁴⁶ The Under Secretary level in particular was, senior civil servants claimed, ‘hard done by’.⁴⁷ By 1973 the leading figure in the Treasury Ceremonial Office, P.S. Milner-Barry, was actively trying to increase the numbers given to civil servants, especially at the CBE, OBE and MBE level.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ P.S. Milner-Barry to Saville Garner, 20 December 1966, Honours for State Servants, TNA, FCO 57/16.

⁴⁵ L.J. Dunnett to Milner-Barry, 21 December 1966, Honours for State Servants, TNA, FCO 57/16.

⁴⁶ Lawrence Helsby to William Haley, 9 February 1965, Honours for State Servants, TNA, FCO 57/16.

⁴⁷ Note by P.S. Milner-Barry, 19 March 1973, Honours Scales: Review of Honours Scales 1974, General Papers, TNA, T 344/51.

⁴⁸ Note by P.S. Milner-Barry, 8 June 1973, Honours Scales: Review of Honours Scales 1974, General Papers, TNA, T 344/51.

Wilson and his colleagues had a difficult relationship with the honours system. Critics within his own party questioned his willingness to make significant changes, while his resignation list (see below) attracted a great deal of negative attention in the media because of the incredulous reaction to some of the names on the list from the Political Honours Scrutiny Committee [PHSC]. At the same time, these internal and external controversies should not conceal the fact that Harold Wilson's election in 1964 marked a key moment in governmental policy towards honours. Wilson encouraged further moves away from the Order of the British Empire as a civil service honour and expanded the range of different people who could receive MBEs and OBEs in particular.

At the same time, from the 1960s the honours system also moved towards greater gender equality. In 1965 women were admitted to the Order of Saint Michael and Saint George for the first time, although the reluctance of the Foreign Office to employ women in overseas positions for decades beforehand meant that there were few eligible candidates for many years.⁴⁹ The Honours Committee proposed that women be admitted to the Order of the Bath in 1969, but ran into substantial opposition from existing members of the Order and figures in the Central Chancery of the Orders of Knighthood, who wrangled with the Honours Committee for over a year before acquiescing.⁵⁰ Senior figures in the Order argued that its status as a 'brotherhood of fighting men' meant that the increasing number of women whose service as senior civil servants would otherwise qualify them for the Bath should stick to the Order of the British Empire. They also suggested that expansion to women would 'debase' the order, a familiar argument about honours that was nevertheless clearly bizarre in the context of the changing professional landscape of the civil service.

⁴⁹ Peter Galloway, *The Order of St Michael and St George* (London: Third Millennium Publishing, 2002), 266.

⁵⁰ Peter Galloway, *The Order of the Bath* (Chichester, West Sussex, England: Phillimore, 2006), 376–84.

These arguments were rejected by Milner-Barry and the royal household.⁵¹ The first women were named to the Order in 1971.⁵²

While it may not have been a central part of the new Labour government's agenda, the honours system was seen by many within the party, including Wilson, as of symbolic importance in ushering in a new, modern Britain. Wilson seemed to pride himself on making popular choices for honours that held symbolic weight for promoting his values. In 1968 the English cricket team was to tour South Africa, but the tour was cancelled because of the controversial selection of the talented South African-born batsman Basil D'Oliviera in the English team. D'Oliviera had immigrated to England in 1960 because he was barred from playing high-level cricket in South Africa because he was classified by the Apartheid government as 'coloured'. In 1969, Wilson arranged for D'Oliviera to receive an OBE, and he boasted to Tony Benn that this inclusion showed that 'there's magic in my honours list'.⁵³

III.

Wilson's relationship with honours and his attempts at reform did not end happily. Honours triggered the last great crisis of his career as a politician. As had been the case with Lloyd George, Wilson's attitude towards honours was generally cynical, and because of this cynicism he was prone to tactical and sometimes careless use of political and civil honours.⁵⁴ Leaders with greater respect for the system were more likely to preserve its conventions, but Wilson had little interest in doing

⁵¹ Ibid., 380–4.

⁵² Ibid., 383.

⁵³ Tony Benn, *Office Without Power: Diaries, 1968-72* (London: Hutchinson, 1988), 193.

⁵⁴ Ben Pimlott, *Harold Wilson* (London: Harper Collins, 1992), 687.

this. It was this carelessness that produced the biggest honours scandal since the end of the First World War.

Wilson's infamous resignation 'lavender list' of 1976 was so labeled because it was allegedly first composed by Wilson's personal and public secretary, Marcia Falkender (by that point the Baroness Falkender, formerly Marcia Williams) on a sheet of lavender-colored notepaper. There is no proof for this allegation, but it stuck. Wilson was tired; worn down by attacks from within and outside his party. As he prepared the customary resignation honours list (traditionally used to reward Downing Street employees and political assistants) he nominated a number of people who had neither contributed to the Labour Party directly nor had performed some service that was traditionally recognized by the honours system. Because political resignation lists went around the usual civil service machinery for the oversight of potential appointments, this list enabled Wilson to nominate people who would otherwise never have been considered by the usual committees. The result was unpleasant for both Labour stalwarts and the Conservative opposition. As Wilson's biographer Ben Pimlott has pointed out, the list of names that found its way from Wilson's desk to the PHSC featured, 'the glitziest, and in some cases most unacceptable, faces of capitalism'.⁵⁵ It was met with almost universal criticism.

The 'lavender list' incident was made worse by an ongoing power struggle between Falkender and Wilson's policy staff, especially press secretary Joe Haines and senior policy adviser Bernard Donoughue. The two men resented Falkender's hold over the Prime Minister, which was deep, personal and resilient. Wilson was terrified of the woman who had worked for him since 1956, and Haines went on to suggest that she was blackmailing him with the memory of a sexual relationship, although Haines's evidence was speculative, fragmentary and circumstantial. In his 1977

⁵⁵ Ibid.

memoir, Haines portrayed Falkender as someone who was useful to Wilson because she ‘focused his ambition’, but whose helpfulness had been replaced by monomania and a desire to control everything about Wilson’s career as PM by his second term.⁵⁶ Haines and Donoughue themselves had a large influence on the Prime Minister, who relied on Haines for a substantial amount of his speechwriting. Donoughue, a former lecturer in political science at the London School of Economics, self-identified as being to the right of the Labour Party. Some figures on the left resented his influence on government policy.

It is unclear how much this list was influenced by Falkender, because the extent of her involvement has become the subject of much debate and dispute between the various parties involved. Wilson and Falkender claimed it was Wilson’s list, while Haines and Donoughue both later argued that the controversial names on the list were the product of Falkender’s influence over their boss.⁵⁷ According to Haines and Donoughue, Falkender had been pressing for honours for her friends and allies for some time. Donoughue kept a detailed diary (published in 2005) in which honours featured in Donoughue’s concerns about the difficult relationship between himself, Haines, Wilson and Falkender.⁵⁸ As a political adviser to Wilson, Donoughue had a certain amount of influence over the Prime Minister’s list after it had gone through the civil service and, in the case of political honours, the whips. He did not claim to have had direct influence over the addition of new names, but he was certainly involved in editing out the names of people, including: ‘some right-wing academics, most of the architects, and some mediocre establishment musicians’.⁵⁹ As one of the last

⁵⁶ Joe Haines, *The Politics of Power* (London: Cape, 1977), 163–5.

⁵⁷ Pimlott, *Harold Wilson*, 687.

⁵⁸ Bernard Donoughue, *Downing Street Diary: With Harold Wilson in No. 10* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2005).

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 568.

to review these lists before they reached the Queen, he exercised substantial negative power over nominations in ordinary lists.

Donoughue, Haines and the various other civil servants and political advisers who tried to dissuade Wilson from publishing his resignation list in its proposed form were all unsuccessful and the list went through to the PHSC. The Privy Councilors who sat on the PHSC and the administrators who ran it were, inevitably, unimpressed with some of the names. Even before the list arrived at their office rumors emanating from Wilson's staff and other civil servants, fuelled in part by the wider dislike for Falkender, suggested that parts of the list might be outrageous. The *Daily Mail* ran suggestive headlines in anticipation of a controversy, picking up on the Whitehall rumor mill.⁶⁰ The actual PHSC file on the list is partly redacted, so the full response of the committee to the names is unavailable, but some hints of the way in which the controversy played out in Whitehall remain.

The list that went to the PHSC included appointments typical of resignation lists, especially at the lower levels of proposed recipients of the Order of the British Empire such as Harold Wilson's driver Bill Housden (MBE), various Transport House officials and Wilson's policy adviser Andrew Graham (OBE). At the higher levels, however – knighthoods and life peerages – some unusual names appeared. The chief executives of EMI and Associated Television, Bernard Delfont and Lew Grade (both already knights bachelor from earlier Wilson government lists) were offered baronies in the list.⁶¹ Harold Wilson was known for his fondness for honours to people in the entertainment industry, but it was unusual to find people with limited personal connections to the Prime Minister in resignation lists. Joseph Kagan, a Lithuanian immigrant who founded the

⁶⁰ Pimlott, *Harold Wilson*, 686.

⁶¹ Resignation Honours List Draft, 31 March 1976, Resignation List April 1976 (Mr Wilson) General Papers, T 352/36, NA.

company whose raincoats Wilson regularly wore, was made a Baron. In 1980 Kagan was convicted of theft for tax evasion. James Goldsmith, a financier whom Wilson offered a knighthood, had been the subject of journalistic and government investigations into his business practices and his active extra-marital sex life.⁶² All these men were public figures in the sense that they were prominent businessmen, but those named above had unsavory reputations for one reason or another. They were mostly self-made men – immigrants or Jews from outside of traditional social elites. Their activities consisted primarily of making money without those other key ingredient of honored businessmen: public and prominent spending on philanthropic endeavors, and extensive party political involvement. The hint of sexual impropriety in the case of (at very least) Goldsmith was also usually grounds for removal from draft honours lists within the civil service.

The Secretary to the PHSC, Treasury civil servant P.S. Milner-Barry, disclaimed any personal animosity towards the list, but was unimpressed by the unorthodoxy of Wilson's suggestion of honours for personal friends. In Wilson's previous resignation list of 1970, he wrote in a minute on the list, 'there were signs of a new concept in the knighthoods awarded to J D Brayley, Joseph Kagan and Kenneth Selby, and the MBE awarded to H J Fowler, the actor', because they were 'Labour sympathisers, but not... people particularly associated with party political organization'.⁶³ This was a diversion from orthodoxy that he saw as being expanded by Wilson's new list, which 'carries the embryo 1970 concept a great deal further'.⁶⁴ The presence of 'Show-biz tycoons' should be questioned by the PHSC, according to Milner-Barry, because they were unusual in a resignation

⁶² P.S. Milner-Barry to J Hobson, 2 April 1976, Resignation List April 1976 (Mr Wilson) General Papers, T 352/36, NA.

⁶³ P.S. Milner-Barry to J. Hobson, 1 (?) April 1976, Resignation List April 1976 (Mr Wilson) General Papers, T 352/36, NA.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

list.⁶⁵ Milner-Barry had no problems, on the other hand, with personal appointments at the CBE and lower level, which he considered to be normal for resignation lists. Milner-Barry implied that Douglas Allen, the head of the Home Civil Service, might want to encourage Wilson ‘to follow a more traditional list’, because while he could ‘see no serious objection to a List [sic] which included the genuine political names as well as the “Personal List” names, even though this would be an innovation in the case of a Prime Minister handing over voluntarily to a successor of the same party’, he felt that the proposed list ‘would do damage to the prestige of the Honours [sic] system’.⁶⁶ Wilson’s appointments to the Life Peerage had already, he felt, damaged the credibility of the system in the eyes of Milner-Barry’s friends (although such people were hardly representative of wider public opinion: Milner-Barry cited Lord Shackleton as his example of someone who was dismayed by Wilson’s appointments).⁶⁷ At the end of his minute, Milner-Barry pointed out that the PHSC had little real power to change Wilson’s mind on these, instead supporting the use of persuasion by civil servants rather than attacks by the committee to change the list.⁶⁸ This analysis of the lack of power of the PHSC was to prove correct.

The list continued to prey on Milner-Barry’s mind, and in a second minute he pointed out three names that he felt deserved the attention of the PHSC: financier and publisher James Goldsmith, businessman and philanthropist Sigmund Sternberg, and boxing manager Jarvis Astaire. Astaire had ‘figured prominently in today’s Private Eye’ and was guilty of unspecified improprieties (possibly sexual or financial) that Milner-Barry and the Home Office felt made him unsuitable for

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

high honours.⁶⁹ Sternberg had been involved in ‘three episodes which suggest caution’, while Goldsmith was subject to ‘reservations’ which Milner-Barry shared with the Department of Trade.⁷⁰ After hinting at these vague improprieties, Milner-Barry went on to say that he would ‘brood further’ over whether he would recommend to the committee that they report adversely on the names over the upcoming weekend.⁷¹ Further enquiries raised doubts about more names: economist John Vaizey’s proposed life peerage was questioned by Milner-Barry, who suggested that he was an intellectual ‘lightweight’ and that a recent ‘intemperate attack on the Civil Service in the columns of the *Evening Standard*’ was grounds for Vaizey’s disqualification.⁷² In the same memo he suggested that three other names on the list were suspected of employing legal forms of tax evasion that disqualified them from honours.⁷³

Milner-Barry’s role in the PHSC’s actions, even before the committee met, is revealing. The fact that he felt that his decision was the key one in determining the actions of the PHSC indicates the power that Milner-Barry exercised in the inner workings of the honours system and was characteristic of the civil service’s involvement in honours. The fact that Vaizey’s attack on civil servants was thought by Whitehall to be partial grounds for blocking an appointment to the life peerage was precisely the kind of activity that fostered resentment towards the civil service. Other documents in the file pertaining to the list are unavailable, having been retained by the civil service for unspecified reasons, even though they were created more than thirty years ago.

⁶⁹ Milner-Barry to Hobson, 2 April 1976, Resignation List April 1976 (Mr Wilson) General Papers, T 352/36, NA.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Memorandum by Milner-Barry, 5 April 1976, Resignation List April 1976 (Mr Wilson) General Papers, T 352/36, NA.

⁷³ Ibid.

At a meeting on the fifth of April the PHSC accepted Milner-Barry's recommendation that about half the names on the list, including most of the Life Peers and Knighthoods, be rejected. Officially these names were 'eliminated' on the basis that they lacked any 'element of political service' – in other words, the potential recipients had no record of being major donors to or actors within the Labour Party. Not only were some of the names inappropriate, but Allen also suggested that a resignation list that included political as opposed to personal appointments from a Prime Minister who was to be succeeded by a colleague from the same party was unprecedented: in 1955 and 1957 Winston Churchill and Anthony Eden did not make resignation lists.⁷⁴ While not unconstitutional, this was unprecedented and thus risked being 'severely criticised'.⁷⁵ Behind the PHSC's rejection of the names, clearly, was a unified Whitehall effort to prevent Wilson's careless use of honours.

Wilson ignored the advice of the PHSC, exposing its powerlessness in the face of a determined Prime Minister with nothing political to lose. But the list was delayed by civil service and political attempts to prevent Wilson from giving honours to people who were seen as outrageous.⁷⁶ The delay fed press speculation about the list, and when it was finally published at the end of May the media and the opposition alike relished the opportunity to attack it. Douglas Hurd, then a first-term Conservative MP, attacked the list in a speech to his constituency as a 'bizarre collection of individuals', and asserted, against his own party's normal practice, that the honours list should not be something 'by which a Prime Minister buys popularity in Fleet Street or in the kingdom of sport or

⁷⁴ D.A.V. Allen to K.R. Stowe, 5 April 1976, Resignation List April 1976 (Mr Wilson) General Papers, T 352/36, NA.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Pimlott, *Harold Wilson*, 687.

entertainment'.⁷⁷ The core of Hurd's argument was that wealth and fame should not be rewarded with honours.⁷⁸ This critique was picked up by the *Daily Mail*, which attacked Wilson with great relish.

Wilson's relationship with the press in general had deteriorated over the course of the 1974-76 government, and his resignation list offered the opportunity for one final attack on his reputation. The unconventional nature of the list gave journalists and politicians (Conservative and Labour) a symbol for everything that they believed was wrong about Wilson, politics and modern British society in general. The substance of Hurd's critique, which suggested that newly famous sportspeople and entertainers should not be honored, was part of a wider discontent among cultural conservatives about honours to new celebrities even though few of his appointments were actually to such people. It also offered a form of payback for enemies of Falkender in particular, for whom she was a kind of be-skirted Cardinal Richelieu, exercising illicit control over Wilson, whose once-great political abilities were now on the decline. The once-great leader's fall could be presented as all the more tragic by presenting him as being in the power of a woman (one who held the title of 'secretary', no less). This myth took hold in the imaginations of the press and the public and became the standard narrative for the incident, although there was no proof for any of Haines' allegations.

It is worth looking at this controversy in detail because only the most partisan Wilson-hater alleged that there was any financial impropriety involved; in fact, the problem with these appointments was that they were made to people who had no discernible link – financial or otherwise – to the Labour Party. Instead, they were friends or allies of Wilson and/or Falkender. As one Wilson supporter wrote later after reading about the feud between Haines and Falkender in

⁷⁷ Mark Stuart, *Douglas Hurd: The Public Servant: An Authorised Biography* (Edinburgh: Mainstream, 1998), 92.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 92–3.

Haines's memoirs, Wilson's problem was not 'deviousness', but 'too much loyalty'.⁷⁹ The personal connection, not any genuine suggestion of financial impropriety, was the problem. The PHSC had emerged out of a controversy about the sale of honours, but now it blocked honours because their recipients had not donated money to the Labour Party. The tone of this new scandal demonstrated a political reality that had subsisted since before the First World War: to party hierarchies, the problem with buying honours had always been more with the idea that people might buy honours through personal rather than party channels. This articulation of the problem of patronage went largely unquestioned as the media and politicians on both sides of the house competed with each other to denounce Wilson.

I have no interest in either assigning blame or defending Wilson for what were undoubtedly unconventional choices. Wilson's exact motivations may well die with Falkender, who has aggressively sued any media outlet that has tried to suggest any kind of improper relationship between herself and her boss.⁸⁰ Most of their colleagues tend to argue that Falkender exercised some kind of psychological or moral domination over Wilson; however, barring the improbably discovery of a list of names in Falkender's handwriting on pastel notepaper we will not know exactly whose choices the names on the list were, or why they ended up being honored. At the same time, there were undoubtedly other names on other lists which made their way through to the monarch without comment that were more unworthy and found their way on the list through more 'corrupt' (especially if corrupt is to mean any honours associated with financial transactions) means. In fact, most senior political honours to non-politicians were almost certainly associated with party donations. Wilson's sins were different: alienating civil servants and advisers, and making appointments to people whose 'type' was not usually honored.

⁷⁹ Ian Aitken, "Harold's real weakness? Too much loyalty", *Guardian*, 8 February 1977, 11.

⁸⁰ "Wilson Aide Wins BBC Libel Payout," *BBC*, April 4, 2007, online at: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/entertainment/6525657.stm>, accessed 23 September 2013).

The process by which the anomalous names appeared on Wilson's resignation list is less interesting than the response these names received. The irony of the whole incident was that Wilson was unsuccessfully censured by an organization set up to prevent the sale of honours because there was no evidence that any of the prospective recipients had any link to his party organization. The PHSC had become the defender of an institutionalized form of patronage; it enabled rather than prevented a form of the sale of honours. The near-universal censure that Wilson suffered for his admittedly dubious list was directed towards his perceived failure to abide by conventions and behave like a Labour Party prime minister (or a man) should.

IV.

Attacks on Wilson's resignation list were the most dramatic part of a much wider expansion of criticism of honours lists by elites. In the 1950s through to the 1980s public criticism of the honours system increased within Britain. This was partly a function of broader shifts in political and public discourse. In the first part of the century criticism of the honours system was problematic for 'respectable' publications because it implied criticism of the monarchy, not just of politicians. Part of the criticism of Lloyd George's honorific profligacy, for example, was that he put King George V in an awkward position through his recommendations. Cultural conservatives always couched criticism of the honours system carefully so as to avoid being seen to attack the monarchy in any way. As one critic of the Beatles' MBEs in 1965 (see below) put it when he returned his British Empire Medal 'there is no disrespect to the Queen in my action... I think she was wrongly advised.'⁸¹ Controversial public policies were one thing, but making the monarchy look bad through the manipulation of honours policy was an even worse sin. Journalists in the mainstream press were always careful to

⁸¹ "Beatles MBE protests mount", *Daily Telegraph*, 16 June 1965, 17.

moderate criticism of appointments in the honours system. Unusual appointments were the subject of jokes rather than harsh criticism. In the post-war period this changed. Mainstream public ironic commentary and outright criticism – present but veiled in past eras – became more prevalent and more explicit.

By the 1960s the left wing of the Labour party was suggesting radical reforms to the honours system that went far beyond those actually instituted by Wilson. Tony Benn's paper to the Labour Home Policy Sub-Committee in 1964, as Labour looked forward to victory in the next election, suggested radical changes to the honours system.⁸² After a brief introduction that highlighted the medieval origins of honours and pointed out that while the Crown, as the fount of honour, was an 'inexhaustible' resource, it was 'firmly capped'.⁸³ After briefly and colorfully describing the various categories of crown honour, Benn then proceeded to tell his colleagues what specifically was wrong with the system. In arguing, first of all, that hereditary honours were wrong outright, Benn was being consistent with his own actions: in 1963 he had pushed for the formulation of the Peerage Act that allowed people to renounce their peerages and immediately used this legislation to renounce his own, inherited from his father William Wedgwood Benn, the first Viscount Stansgate. According to Benn, hereditary appointments were particularly invidious because they conferred 'privilege without merit' and posed a threat to the political primacy of the House of Commons.⁸⁴ At the same time, Benn also found non-hereditary honours that entitled their bearer to a title a challenge to social equality because they divided 'people into social categories built on the lines of superior and inferior

⁸² Tony Benn, "Labour Party Home Policy Sub-Committee, Honours and Awards, January 1964", Shore 4-103, Shore Papers, LSE.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

human beings'.⁸⁵ The fact that people still desired such titles was, for him, immensely frustrating: 'There is no more depressing social phenomenon than this.'⁸⁶

Benn next turned his attention to the less controversial problem of excessive honours being given to paid public servants. Again, however, his analysis was more focused on class and social hierarchy than issues of balance between public and non-public servants. Pointing to the explicit use of status and position in determining the rank of a received award, he argued that too many awards were given for status rather than service.⁸⁷ This was also a more conventional critique of 'Buggins' Turn'. The idea that under the British system, 'a senior civil servant will move progressively up from say an O.B.E. to a G.B.E. as he rises in the office while a Sub-Postmistress who bravely grapples with a murderous criminal and thus protects a bag of registered mail will get a B.E.M.', was outrageous.⁸⁸ Finally, he pointed to the hierarchy of gallantry awards, which still at that point gave awards such as the Distinguished Service Order and Military Cross to officers while awarding men with the Distinguished Service Medal and Military Medal. As Benn pointed out, the more modern Victoria Cross and George Cross were available to all ranks, but most awards were segregated across rank.⁸⁹

Having attacked the specific hierarchies within the honours system, Benn proceeded to question the means through which honours were dispensed, the numbers of honours given out and the constitutional and heraldic function of honours. The 'fiction of the Crown as the sole source of

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 3.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

Honour' was 'out of date' and, to Benn, gave off a strong stench of its feudal origins.⁹⁰ Although many honours had their origins in more recent centuries, to Benn these were all phony imitations of medieval customs that have no place in a modern democratic society'.⁹¹ Furthermore, Benn read the large number of honours given to civil servants and the military as reinforcing the low status given by British society to science, technology, the arts and industry. Finally, he returned to attacking the feudal nature of honours by accusing the College of Heralds of running a scam by selling coats of arms, an accusation that, while connected to the honours system, was somewhat at a tangent to the issue of honours themselves.⁹²

In place of this 'feudal' system with the Crown at the center, Benn wanted the next Labour Government to set up an entirely new system of recognition of outstanding endeavor on the part of British citizens. The Labour Government should not be caught using the honours system for cynical political purposes, as had so often been the case, according to Benn, with earlier governments, but should 'herald... in a new era' and create a new mood by abandoning the old methods of patronage.⁹³ Trying to tinker with the existing system would be futile, because any repurposing of existing orders, with their elaborate hierarchies, would simply reveal the class basis of honours even more. Awarding a BEM to a Field Marshal and a Dame Grand Cross of the British Empire to a Postmistress would be absurd and insulting (possibly to both parties).⁹⁴ The abolition of hereditary honours, and reform of the House of Lords, would be a first priority under Benn's scheme, but

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid., 4-5.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 4.

following that Benn suggested a more radical revolution in honours themselves, involving the abolition of Orders of Chivalry, the transplanting of the fount of honour from the person of the Queen to parliament and the democratization of all honours. Key to these reforms would be the fact that ‘the Fount of Honour would have been taken over by the people and the occasion would be one for public festivity rather than feudal pomp’.⁹⁵

Benn concluded by arguing that honours were important because they reflected social attitudes, and social attitudes, as much as ‘exports and the balance of payments’ were crucial to building a ‘New Britain’.⁹⁶ Reforms to the economy were nothing without reforms to society: ‘Nothing would create more disillusionment than the feeling that a change of Government only meant that it was our turn to dish out honours to our people and exercise the powers of patronage for our own purposes.’⁹⁷ Despite, or perhaps because of, his cynicism towards the system and its alleged medieval roots and more recent history as a capitalist ‘invented tradition’ (to apply a useful anachronism), Benn saw honours as very important. His political diaries from the 1960s and 1970s in particular contain various reflections – most of them angry – on the way the system worked.

As early as 1963 Benn had been contemplating proposing changes to the honours system that would abolish all hereditary titles and shift the symbolic source of honour from the monarch to the ‘people’, as represented by parliament.⁹⁸ In the same year, he was disgusted by a new acquaintance’s suggestion that his parliamentary colleague Bob Mellish should receive a baronetcy (Mellish was eventually made a life peer in 1985).⁹⁹ He avoided the conservative Prime Minister Alec

⁹⁵ Ibid., 7.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Tony Benn, *Out of the Wilderness: Diaries, 1963-67* (London: Hutchinson, 1987), 16.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 25.

Douglas-Home in the corridors of parliament because Home had tried to make small talk about the question of the renunciation of the peerage (which Home himself had used to become a credible candidate for Prime Minister), in a way that to Benn seemed to make a ‘game’ of renunciation that ‘gave us a special bond against everyone else’.¹⁰⁰ He was disappointed, too, by the reception of his 1964 paper by the Home Policy Committee: from the chair George Brown cut off discussion by saying that they had spent ‘too long on an unimportant subject’, which Benn interpreted as the ‘killing’ of his paper. ‘The only hope’, Benn reflected, ‘is whether I can interest Harold [Wilson] in some of its proposals but he is so conservative that I am not optimistic.’¹⁰¹ This optimism was correct, and as discussed above, Wilson’s reforms were more conservative, if not insignificant.

While most were less radical than Benn, in the post-war period various commentators had adopted a posture of skepticism and cynicism about honours. James McMillan’s 1969 history of the honours system, *The Honours Game*, embodied this cynicism.¹⁰² As the title suggested, McMillan presented the honours system as a kind of elaborate, nationwide game, with a set of ‘rules’ and ‘players’. The extended metaphor dominated the book to the extent that it ceased to be metaphorical; indeed, in places McMillan seemed to think of the honours system as a literal game. For him, it was a fundamental rule of society that people have ‘an insatiable appetite for baubles’.¹⁰³ From this rule, all others surrounding the honours game derived. Honours, and the status games that they perpetuated, were inescapable parts of modern society. McMillan presented the ‘Honours Game’ as a trivial, sordid but occasionally (and unfortunately) important side-show to the main-

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 77.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 116–7.

¹⁰² James McMillan, *The Honours Game* (London: Frewin, 1969).

¹⁰³ Ibid., 199.

stream of British history. For example, he flippantly blamed Curzon's death in 1925 on his disappointment (or 'broken heart') on not having been made Prime Minister in 1923, having effectively been disqualified by his peerage (attained, McMillan pointed out, through his assiduous mastery of the 'game').¹⁰⁴ Still more spuriously, McMillan also suggested that Curzon, rather than the 'pig-stroking squire of Worcestershire' (Baldwin) would have been the man to re-arm Britain in the 1930s in preparation for the war.¹⁰⁵

As a commentator on modern British politics and society, McMillan was most interested in pointing out how problems with the honours system reflected wider constitutional issues. For him, the central weakness of British politics was the growing power of the executive branch of government; the cure for this ailment was seeing 'the Honours Game [sic], which has been a bit of a lark for generations' be 'taken seriously again' and used to reform and empower the House of Lords.¹⁰⁶ The Conservative Party in particular needed to try to create a 'real purposeful House of Lords' composed of active and intelligent 'representatives of interests' to counterbalance and critique the power of the Prime Minister and the civil servants in the Prime Minister's Office.¹⁰⁷ It was at the elite level that honours were important and could make a difference; according to McMillan, all other honours were trivial baubles: 'a bit of a lark'.¹⁰⁸ Lower-ranked honours like the OBE and MBE had no real political value beyond distraction.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 120.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 204.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 205.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

In fiction that dealt with the world of the civil service, knighthoods stood in for ambition; often for misplaced or unnecessary ambition. In the novels of C.P. Snow's 'Strangers and Brothers' series honours are an important part of the background of narrator Lewis Eliot's world, especially once, after the start of the Second World War, he becomes a senior civil servant. Various characters covet or aspire to honours. From Eliot's point of view, this desire on the part of some of his colleagues or friends defines and confirms aspects of their character. Side comments, like the Master of Eliot's college's remark that 'Knighthoods and addresses on vellum, that's the way to please distinguished scholars', indicated that knighthoods were part of the various professional worlds (law, academia and the civil service) that Eliot inhabits.¹⁰⁹ Another character, civil servant Cyril Drawbell (see Chapter three), is defined by his desire for a knighthood, in spite of his incompetence. Drawbell manages the wartime project to develop a British atomic bomb, and, unlike the scientists under him, is largely ignorant of the details of nuclear physics.¹¹⁰ Snobbery about honours is also characteristic of some of the aristocratic characters in the series: on one occasion, Eliot is travelling in Monaco when a member of his social circle, Foreign Office official Houston Eggar, receives a CBE in a new year's honours list. Eggar is almost apologetic when he discusses it with Eliot because it was not a CMG, which would have been more normal for a Foreign Office official of his rank. He asks Eliot to explain to their other acquaintances in Monaco (a group which includes an aristocratic family, the Boscastles) that he received the CBE for special service that could not be rewarded with a CMG for 'technical reasons', but that will lead to greater things in the future.¹¹¹ Eggar's hopes are in vain – later, Lady Muriel Boscastle and her friend Mrs. Seymour are seen by Eliot reading the honours list

¹⁰⁹ C. P. Snow, *The Light and the Dark* [1947] (New York: Scribner, 1961), 73.

¹¹⁰ C. P. Snow, *The New Men* [1954] (New York: Scribner, 1955), 52.

¹¹¹ Snow, *The Light and the Dark*, 95.

in the *Times*: “‘Muriel,’ she [Mrs. Seymour] cried excitedly, “did you see that Houston has got a C.B.E.?’” “No, Doris,” said Lady Muriel with finality. “I never read as low in the list as that.”¹¹² Eliot himself alludes to but never discusses his own (it is implied, high) honours, just as his creator, Snow himself, won a CBE, knighthood and eventually a life peerage for his work as a civil servant.

In John Le Carré’s 1973 spy novel *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy*, Percy Alleline’s desire for a knighthood serves as a symbol for the ambition that blinded him to the reliability of his sources and, in turn, put the whole structure of Britain’s intelligence services at risk from a dangerous mole. Alleline, a Scot, was on the margins of the leadership of the Secret Intelligence Service, having been alienated by his mutual antipathy with ‘Control’, his superior and former don at Cambridge.¹¹³ Control could not countenance Alleline’s ambition, alleging to his lieutenant George Smiley that: ‘Alleline would sell his mother for a knighthood and this service for a seat in the House of Lords.’¹¹⁴ Following Control’s disgrace and dismissal, Alleline takes his place thanks to the success of ‘operation Witchcraft’, and his subsequent ‘beloved knighthood’ is taken as a symbol of his having made it despite the difficult conditions.¹¹⁵ At the end of the novel, Alleline keeps his knighthood, but his success turns to dust when he himself is disgraced by the revelation that the mole was behind all the intelligence produced by Witchcraft.

Honours figured as a complex symbol in these works. They stood in for various kinds of middle-class pretensions to grandeur; however, the mixture of ambition and pretentiousness that accompanied them meant that they could be used to lend immediacy or even poignancy to the social aspirations of their recipients (or aspiring recipients). These characters who aspired to honours were

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ John Le Carré, *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy* (New York: Pocket Books, 2002), 133.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 135–6.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 157.

in some cases foolish for doing so, but their portrayal was not unsympathetic; this was especially so in cases when the possession of an honour brought material advantage in society. To Snow in particular honours were a component of the world in which his characters (and indeed Snow himself) operated. Propriety dictated that people who wanted honours not advertise the fact and pretend that they were indifferent; however, honours were still desirable and worthy of covetousness and envy even though one was not supposed to covet or envy them.

The television series *Yes Minister* focused on the efforts of the idealistic government minister Jim Hacker and his inevitably futile struggles to enact change, which are constantly thwarted by his Civil Servants, led by the Permanent Secretary of Hacker's (fictional) Department for Administrative Affairs, Sir Humphrey Appleby. Bernard Donoughue, with his insider experience of the Prime Minister's Office, served as a secret adviser to the creators.¹¹⁶ In March 1981, during the second season of the show, it aired an episode about honours specifically. The episode's portrayal of the way in which Appleby manipulated his minister and controlled the honours system had a lot in common with internal political critiques of the civil service over the previous two decades. In it, Hacker hatches the idea that honours for civil servants in his departments be made contingent on their abilities to cut spending (an appropriate theme in an era when government spending was widely seen as out of control). This idea rattles Appleby, whose usual calm is briefly disrupted by this direct attack on an old civil service prerogative. Things look dangerous for Appleby, whose civil service boss fears that this might be a sign that he is unable to control Hacker adequately, and that the plague of meritocratic honours might infect other departments, but Appleby is eventually able to work the situation to his advantage. He arranges for Hacker to be offered an honorary degree at an Oxbridge College, making Hacker a hypocrite if he accepted it yet also stopped his civil servants

¹¹⁶ Bernard Donoughue, *The Heat of the Kitchen: An Autobiography* (London: Politico's, 2003), 131.

from receiving honours that they did not deserve. Wanting the doctorate, Hacker arranges to 'deserve' it by helping the college (the future of which had been uncertain), while Appleby arranges for everyone in the department to make token economies, thus securing their next round of honours.

This plot followed the familiar framework for episodes in the series: Hacker has an idea, tries to get Appleby to implement it. Appleby then finds ways of stalling and confounding the planned change. The series as a whole was a harsh but not unrealistic critique of the way in which the civil service operated and the way in which Whitehall saw itself as the true power in British government. The episode illustrated a particular kind of insider cynicism about honours which, it could easily be argued, were a microcosm of the wider problem with governance in Britain: they were more under the control of Whitehall than Downing Street; they served civil servants far more than the ordinary Britons who actually deserved state recognition; and they were inherently conservative and unchangeable. While not *all* these criticisms were entirely fair, they were a standard critique of honours leading into the 1980s and 1990s.

These critiques of the honours system came from elites within or close to the centers of political and social power. Aside from Benn, they did not condemn the honours system outright. But they all expressed skepticism about how the system worked. These various critiques presented civil servants and other administrators as using honours in a cynical way, but were themselves made by people who had access to and knowledge about the confusing and opaque world of honours. Whether they were shared by a wider public with less access to the insider worlds of politics, journalism and administration was another question, however.

V.

For all this indirect and direct criticism, the honours system enjoyed growing popularity among its wider public at the local level, especially those groups on the margins of inclusion in the system. The honorific appointment that Wilson was most proud of was the decision to give all four of the Beatles MBEs in 1965. It is this, more than the 1976 scandal, which endures in the public consciousness as a key moment of interaction between society and the honours system. Even a year before, Wilson's conservative predecessor Douglas-Home had half-joked that the fab four were the only reason Britain had avoided a dollar crisis in 1964, and the award in 1965 was for 'services for export'.¹¹⁷ This award caused a minor controversy that prompted animated newspaper discussion for a few weeks, as well as a number of older MBE-holders to attempt to hand back their honours. The fact that this honours list continued other trends established under the new Labour government sharpened newspaper attention, and while the *Daily Telegraph* noted that the list's lasting importance was as much in the solidification of the policy of not creating any hereditary titles as in its inclusion of pop stars, the MBEs for the Beatles have gone down in the cultural memory of Britons as a meaningful reflection of something about the spirit of the sixties.¹¹⁸

For Benn, the Beatles' MBEs were a craven attempt to buy support for the government through the use of an institution that would ultimately reinforce conservatism.¹¹⁹ From his perspective, the royals gained more than the Beatles from the association.¹²⁰ But this was an unusual criticism of the honours list. For other critics of the Beatles, the problem was with giving awards to young people who were widely seen as being of lesser worth than others who had won the MBE,

¹¹⁷ *Daily Telegraph*, 12 June 1965, 1.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹¹⁹ Benn, *Out of the Wilderness*, 272–3.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 273.

especially those who had received it for war work. As we have seen, this was in many ways an unfair comparison: most living MBEs in the mid-1960s would have received that honour for services unrelated to bravery and personal risk. But the very multi-purpose nature of the Order of the British Empire meant that for those who had, the Beatles' appointment seemed to compromise recognition of their own wartime efforts less than three decades earlier. The members of the Order of the British Empire who were most indignant about the Beatles' MBEs tended to be ex-military and typically received their awards during the war, probably for non-combat duties (heroism was, within the military, rewarded through medals more than the Order of the British Empire).

It was not only conservative supporters who criticized the MBEs – a few vocal Labour supporters voiced their objections directly to Wilson. Alan Baker was moved to write in to Wilson to express his disgust in order to get 'this sick feeling out of my stomach'.¹²¹ In a letter that suggested spiritualistic beliefs, he argued that the award was in some ways a betrayal rather than a realization of Labour's vision of an egalitarian British society: 'There must be many bewildered spirits earthbound and depressed I mean in particular the old Socialist Pioneers how can they evolve when one of their people is responsible for the handing out of M.B.E. to these phony producers of hysterics and neurotics.'¹²² Gladys Duncan, too, was angered by the Beatles' honours:

When I remember that my son Patrick... gave his life in Pakistan for the Empire, and received the M.B.E. - with no thought of reward, his father got the M.C. [military cross] during the 1914 war, my brother the Kaiser-i-Hind Gold Medal for dangerous service in the I.C.S. [Indian Civil Service] in India and various other relations, nephews etc. M.C. or other decorations, all without thought of self or financial benefit, it infuriates me to think that the Queen will have to bestow the M.B.E. on the Beatles, who have done nothing to inspire the youth of the present generation.¹²³

¹²¹ Mr. N. Baker to Harold Wilson, 15 June 1965, Harold Wilson Papers, MS Wilson c.57, Fol.51, Bodleian Library Special Collections [Bodleian SC].

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Gladys Duncan to Harold Wilson, 14 June 1965, Harold Wilson Papers, MS Wilson c.64, fol.223, Bodleian SC.

Major R.J. Tomlin of London wrote a letter to the editor of the *Daily Telegraph* in which he claimed that the Beatles' MBEs were the final straw and that he would be giving up his membership in the Labour Party because of this 'vulgar folly' along with Wilson's 'shameful crawling to the United States over Vietnam'.¹²⁴ For many older members of the Party, this catering to a 'youth vote' compounded other frustrations with Wilson's leadership and turned them away from their old political allegiances.

Wilson and his office were quick to defend the award. Duncan received a similar response from Wilson's office to other critics who felt strongly enough to write to the Prime Minister. According to Wilson, the Beatles deserved the honours not only because of the much-needed dollars that they brought from across the Atlantic but also because they had done valuable social work: 'As you will understand, it is not customary to explain [sic] individual recommendations for honours, but in this particular case, the press has given far too little recognition to the work these young people have done to diminish juvenile delinquency - particularly on Merseyside.'¹²⁵ Identifying the youth of the Beatles as being one of the criticisms, Wilson's representative also suggested that there were precedents for youth honours, noting: 'It is perhaps surprising that this award should have been criticized when, on past occasions, the chairman [sic] of branches of Young Conservatives have received the M.B.E., and such honours have passed unremarked.'¹²⁶ As we will see for later celebrity honours, the Beatles' MBEs were defended on the basis not only (and not even primarily) on the basis of artistic achievement, but through an explanation of their social or philanthropic

¹²⁴ *Daily Telegraph*, 17 June 1965, 17.

¹²⁵ For example: Political assistant to Harold Wilson to Mr. N. Baker, 1 July 1965, Harold Wilson Papers, MS Wilson c.57, Fol.50, Bodleian SC.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

service. Indeed, artistic achievement would almost certainly been a more controversial label to append to the four musicians at the time.

In contrast, the *Daily Telegraph*, for all its conservative inclinations (Maurice Green, the editor in 1965, later actively supported Margaret Thatcher) was quick to speak out in support of the Beatles' MBEs. In an editorial immediately after the announcement of the Beatles' MBEs (and before much of the controversy around their award blossomed into a public debate), one writer commented that if the honour was for services to export industries, they deserved a higher honour – perhaps something more like a CBE – and that the MBE was in some sense insulting.¹²⁷ The *Daily Telegraph* published a range of letters for and against honours for the Beatles, but in general their coverage was weighted in favor of the Liverpool youths – according to the editor, 80 percent of correspondents on the issue favored the award.¹²⁸ This was not only because of the export dollars they had generated but also because they were 'charming', because they made people happy, because they were producing worthwhile culture and, according to Mrs. S. Peebles of Suffolk, because their success showed that unlike totalitarian countries in Europe, British youth could produce their own heroes without the need for political camps and youth organizations, 'even if they are inconveniently noisy about it'.¹²⁹ While Peebles 'prefer[red] Bach', she pointed out that the message that 'Money Can't Buy Me Love' was not wholly without worth to the youth of the nation.¹³⁰

For all the conservatism within and criticism from without the system the politicians and administrators who ran it preserved much of its symbolism, social tone and governmental function.

¹²⁷ *Daily Telegraph*, 12 June 1965, 8.

¹²⁸ *Daily Telegraph*, 19 June 1965, 10.

¹²⁹ *Daily Telegraph*, 17 June 1965, 10.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

It was not until the 1990s that the system was dramatically reformed. Through the post-war period, especially under Wilson in the 1960s, the honours system within Britain was altered incrementally to adjust to political imperatives and perceived social change. These reforms attempted to manage and contain social change by integrating new groups into an old system, hoping that society would be changed by its traditions more than change them. The Beatles' MBEs were the best symbol of this process: these awards combined sixties chic with a sense of heraldic tradition by literally sending pop stars to the palace. The fact that these changes were happening, and their effect on the people involved, was more important than the brief controversies that sometimes attended such shifts in the honours system. Often, the reforms of the post-war period were successful in integrating various groups, although people's responses varied and almost always diverged from the official attitude that was supposed to be taken by recipients of honours.

The controversy over the Beatles' MBEs, like Benn's opposition to honours and the sporadic objections discussed in the last chapter to the use of the terms 'British Empire' in the most ubiquitous order of chivalry, was in the end a minor impediment against the general current of attitudes towards the honours system at the time. As one letter-to-the-editor writer pointed out – and as de la Bere was happy to remind people – the act of returning an honour was meaningless in terms of the system as a whole. Members of orders could not resign, and the only way to be struck off the roll of an order of chivalry was to commit a serious enough crime as to make your name's existence on the roll repugnant. Furthermore, a cursory look at the same list in which the Beatles were awarded their MBEs would show other entertainers from other forms of popular culture whose lesser fame and more advanced age shielded them from the same kind of vitriol: Violet Carson, an actor on *Coronation Street*, singer Frankie Vaughan and television actor Jack Warner all

received MBEs or OBEs on the same day.¹³¹ The Beatles were being targeted as a symbol of a trend in the honours lists towards celebrities and entertainers and away from civil servants and soldiers. It was no coincidence that almost all of the men who publicly attempted to return their MBEs were former military officers who had received their awards during the war. Critics of the Beatles were part of old guards on the left and on the right whose influence over honours and over the mood of the nation was limited.

In the same honours list in which the Beatles received their MBEs, an ancient icon of the left received a loftier award when Victor Gollancz became Sir Victor. In publicity terms, he was a victim of the celebrity-status of his fellow honorees, but his knighthood signified the continuance of the interwar trend towards the honoring of Labour figures, senior and junior alike. This trend incensed figures like Benn who understood the honours system to be incompatible with a truly democratic and socialist Britain. But, as in the interwar period, Labour figures who suggested that good socialists could not be members of chivalric orders were fighting a losing battle, especially as Labour governments became more enmeshed with the system. Wilson's willingness to reform the system slowly itself signified an acceptance of honours as an institution of governance that would not and should not go away.

This trend can be seen most clearly in the institutions of the left. Increasingly, the Trades Union Congress (TUC) received letters not about how its members should disdain honours, but about how to go about nominating individuals from local union branches. Furthermore, Vincent Tewson (himself a knight), the general secretary of the TUC from 1946 to 1960, made a point of writing letters of congratulation to trade union members who had been honored in recent lists.¹³²

¹³¹ *Daily Worker*, 12 June 1965, 2.

¹³² See: TUC papers, MSS.292/701.12/2, Warwick Modern Records Centre.

One recipient of such a letter, along with thanking Tewson, commented that 'it gives some satisfaction that our work for the Trade Union movement gets a mention [in the honours list] now and again'.¹³³ Such convivial internal correspondence portrayed the inclusion of the trade union movement in the honours system as a natural and reasonable right, earned by the movement thanks to its place in British society and its prominence as an institution working for the national good. The movement was growing to expect honours for its members: one member, signing himself only as 'Welshman', wrote to the TUC to complain that there were not enough Welsh industrial workers represented in the honours list and recommending that T.E. Sweet, a civil engineer, be honored.¹³⁴

This recommendation was marked only with the penciled phrase 'No Action'. The TUC in the 1950s and 1960s stopped short of being an organization that could actively sponsor its members for honours. All the same, Tewson and the TUC fielded many requests from local unions for support in putting forward members for honours. For example, in 1956 F. Bachelor of the Folkestone and District Trades Council asked whether the TUC would support a recommendation that was part way through the process. According to Bachelor, G. Taylor, a senior member, had been recommended for the list and had an excellent record of service to the local union and to the public.¹³⁵ Such recommendations were turned aside, with the organization department of the TUC advising interested parties to send recommendations to their Local Employment Committees, who would send them on to the relevant government department.¹³⁶ Even in Taylor's case, where they were asked merely to support an active recommendation already in the system, they demurred.

¹³³ A.G. Brammer to Vincent Tewson, 12 January 1959, TUC papers, MSS.292/701.12/2, Warwick Modern Records Centre.

¹³⁴ 'Welshman' to Tewson, 1 March 1950, TUC papers, MSS.292/701.12/2, Warwick Modern Records Centre.

¹³⁵ F. Bachelor to Tewson, 8 July 1956, TUC papers, MSS.292/701.12/2, Warwick Modern Records Centre.

¹³⁶ Organization Department to F. Bachelor, 10 July 1956, TUC papers, MSS.292/701.12/2, Warwick Modern Records Centre.

Officially, the TUC was not and in the immediate post-war years, did not want to, become one of those organizations that served as a conduit for recommendations, or an aid to the civil service in doing so. However, in special cases, as in so many other organizations, senior individuals in the movement did organize to try and get particularly distinguished, important or representative individuals honored. Such practices mirrored what organizations such as the Church of England and the Royal Society had been doing for decades (see Chapter two).

Nan Berger's unpublished autobiography was entitled: 'Twenty-nine Thousand Nights: How a middle-class girl became a life long [sic] communist, turning away from a nouveau riche home of capitalist ideals, where making money, on the backs of working class people was the main ethic'.¹³⁷ However, her pride in her OBE, awarded in the New Year's list of 1948, was undiminished by her conversion from 'middle-class girl' to communist. She kept the letter from the Prime Minister announcing her award, as well as correspondence (including a letter from Hugh Gaitskell) in her papers.¹³⁸ She received the award for her work as a statistician in the Ministry of Fuel. The *Evening Standard* featured her in its article about the honours list, emphasizing the dual nature of her life as a wife and mother and as a hard-working and 'brilliant' civil servant who was performing invaluable work on the 'distribution and consumption of coal ore'.¹³⁹ In her autobiography she explained the circumstances behind the honour in more detail. Her boss, Francis Hemming (who, as she pointed out, already had many honours) had told her beforehand that she was in line for a MBE, but then said 'you don't want that do you?', suggesting that an OBE would be a better honour because one

¹³⁷ Nan Berger, "Twenty-nine Thousand Nights: How a middle-class girl became a life long communist, turning away from a nouveau riche home of capitalist ideals, where making money, on the backs of working class people was the main ethic" Autobiography, 1995, unpublished, Nan Berger Papers, 7NBE/2/6, The Women's Library.

¹³⁸ OBE Award 1947-1948, 7NBE/3/3, box 2, Nan Berger Papers, The Women's Library.

¹³⁹ *Evening Standard*, 2 January 1948, in: OBE Award 1947-1948, 7NBE/3/3, box 2, Nan Berger Papers, The Women's Library.

should always ‘go for the next step up’.¹⁴⁰ Later, she reflected that Hemming was right, ‘the sort of people who were awarded M’s were not those who could be termed high fliers’, and the ‘O’ was good because it ‘[was] in the first range [sic] in the professional ladder’.¹⁴¹ Berger’s ability to identify these differences between the two honours indicated a familiarity and even a kind of enthusiasm for the finer points of status distinction within the system. While some of her ‘political’ colleagues criticized her for her move, suggesting that the letters after her name stood for ‘Other Buggers’ Energy’ (a variant on the ubiquitous ‘Other Buggers’ Efforts’, a version of the OBE as old as the Order of the British Empire itself), Berger was unapologetic about accepting the honour. The fact that this predated the policy change to invite all OBEs and MBEs to royal investitures was even a benefit for her, as Berger was ‘spared the hypocrisy [sic] of bowing to George VI’.¹⁴² The honour emanating from the crown was less a problem for Berger than the prospect of actually receiving it from the King’s hand. She was also vindicated in part by her mother’s approbation. Even as her mother huddled in the cold winter thanks to the coal shortage, she was proud of and pleased with her daughter because of the honour.¹⁴³

While there was anxiety within the Labour party and the left more generally about honours, therefore, the benefits and authority that could be gained from receiving an honour outweighed the costs for most potential recipients. In January 2012 the BBC forced the Cabinet Office to release a list of people who had declined honours between the 1950s and the late 2000s.¹⁴⁴ Privacy laws

¹⁴⁰ Berger, “Twenty-nine Thousand Nights”, 81.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴² *Ibid.*

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 82.

¹⁴⁴ “People Who Snubbed Honours Named”, *BBC*, 26 January 2012, online at (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-16736495>, accessed 29 February 2012).

restricted the release to dead people – the release of any information concerning proposed honours to living people is and has been, by convention and by law, forbidden. The list was not long. Only 277 names qualified, although there may have been others who were eliminated from contention for political honours through informal sounding processes during this period, such as Isaiah Berlin, who was considered for a Life Peerage in 1980, but who made it clear to Thatcher's aides that he was not interested before he could be formally offered the Barony.¹⁴⁵ A number of famous names stood out from this list, such as L.S. Lowry, C.S. Lewis and Roald Dahl, but 277 people was a very small number. The reasons for these individuals' actions are difficult to determine, but were almost certainly diverse and idiosyncratic. Political factors doubtless affected some of them, but modesty and (in some cases when the award was too low) offended pride were also important factors.

Agencies and organizations who had not previously participated in the honours system to any great extent – whether because they were new or, like the TUC, had in the past not been considered in the system – often wanted to become unofficial conduits for recommendations. Officers of the Medical Women's Federation (MWF) repeatedly attempted to use political influence to nominate prominent woman physicians for DBEs and CBEs, although they were often frustrated in this endeavor. Woman doctors, like Mary Ann Scharlieb, had received Damehoods or other honours in the past, but by the 1950s some officials in the MWF were feeling that insufficient recognition was coming to doctors like Mary Esslemont and Agnes Kelynack.¹⁴⁶ In March 1952 Mrs. M. Nisbet wrote to the Prime Minister's Principal Private Secretary to argue that Dr. Agnes Kelynack should receive a CBE:

¹⁴⁵ New Year's Honours, 1980, T 352/38, NA.

¹⁴⁶ Requests for Honours for Women Doctors, SA/MWF/C.243, Medical Women's Federation Papers, Wellcome Library (WL).

I understand that there is in being an "Honours Committee", the members of which give close consideration to the merits of those whose claims are put forward. Apparently it is usual for well-wishers to write to the Prime Minister's Private Secretary, sending some details of the activities of the person concerned, and expressing the desire for such claim to receive full consideration.

I think you know Dr. Agnes Kelynack well, and are in full sympathy with all the voluntary work she does. I am therefore venturing to enclose a list of her charitable activities in the hope that you may feel able and willing to take some action.¹⁴⁷

The language of this letter was characteristic of recommendations made by outsiders to the opaque honours nomination process. Committees did indeed exist, but little was known by most people about their activities, and the Prime Minister's secretary was the official conduit. Formally, this letter was exactly the right procedure for nominating someone for an honour. No CBE resulted from this recommendation, but in the future officers of the MWF were to take a more direct and coordinated approach to recommending honours. Within a few years the MWF was going beyond the formal proprieties of writing to the PPC and trying to bring about agitation for honours for its members through more political conduits.

When the Federation's secretary, Mabel Rew, decided that Mary Esslemont was deserving of an honour of some sort in 1954, she embarked on a letter-writing campaign not to the PPC but to political allies of the MWF and other influential members whom she felt might be able to penetrate the machinery of the honours system. While she used the MWF letterhead, these letters were clearly marked 'Not Official Federation Business [original emphasis]'.¹⁴⁸ This was particularly important for her because, as she remarked to Josephine Barnes in a letter asking for advice about whom to contact, 'a Dame general practitioner would be unique', and even if that were impossible a CBE

¹⁴⁷ Mrs M. Nisbet to Principal Private Secretary, 5 March 1952, Requests for Honours for Women Doctors, SA/MWF/C.243, Medical Women's Federation Papers, WL.

¹⁴⁸ Mabel Rew to Dr Walker, 23 March 1954, Requests for Honours for Women Doctors, SA/MWF/C.243, Medical Women's Federation Papers, WL.

would be appropriate for Esslemont's long service to the MWF and her local community.¹⁴⁹ In response to one of Rew's sounding letters, Helen M. Taylor said that while she and her husband would be happy to see Esslemont receive an honour, she was not sure what she could do to help, and that it would be best to contact leading medical women and men and encourage them to lobby for the honour.¹⁵⁰ Rew received different advice from political insiders. Violet Bonham-Carter pointed out to her that lobbying leading liberals such as her was unwise, as Esslemont should be receiving the honour for her medical rather than political work. While Esslemont and her husband were well-known liberals in Scotland the honour should not be a political one.¹⁵¹ The Ministry of Health, not the Liberal Party, was the proper channel for such an honour. Charles Hill, another politician, advised against precisely what Rew was doing:

I have not had much experience in this business, but I should have thought that to canvass her claims widely by letter would be a mistake. If, on the other hand, a distinguished figure in the profession, say one of the English or Scottish Presidents, would support her in a private communication to the Minister of Health, that would be worth all the circularisation - indeed such circularisation might do her more harm than good.¹⁵²

This was probably the soundest advice that Rew received, but she was given different advice by different people. Eric Linklater, for instance, suggested that the Secretary of State for Scotland was

¹⁴⁹ Mabel Rew to Josephine Barnes, 23 March 1954, Requests for Honours for Women Doctors, SA/MWF/C.243, Medical Women's Federation Papers, WL.

¹⁵⁰ Helen M. Taylor to Rew, 28 March 1954, Requests for Honours for Women Doctors, SA/MWF/C.243, Medical Women's Federation Papers, WL.

¹⁵¹ Violet Bonham-Carter to Rew, 6 May 1954, Requests for Honours for Women Doctors, SA/MWF/C.243, Medical Women's Federation Papers, WL.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

the best person to lobby. According to Linklater, the Secretary of State's support would be better than mere letters to the Prime Minister's office.¹⁵³

Campaigning on the part of the MWF for honours for its members remained an unsystematic and fraught process. This reflected the wider opacity of the recommendation system – recommenders, as always, were supposed to write to the Prime Minister's secretary, but Rew knew that influence was unequally distributed and wanted to promote the MWF to a position where it was one of the groups who had more ready access to the pool of honours. These attempts were not consistently successful: the MWF never reached the same status as a group like the Royal Society or the Royal College of Surgeons in this regard. Rew's campaign on behalf of Esslemont was unsuccessful, but this did not deter her from trying to organize further honours nominations. Three years later, in 1957, she wrote a host of letters to political and medical allies in support of Jean MacIntosh, while in 1964 she attempted to arrange for Jean Aitken to be promoted from CBE to DBE.¹⁵⁴ The campaign for Aitken also hit a hurdle when the promisingly friendly correspondence between members of the MWF and conservative Prime Minister Alec Douglas-Home was ended by his election defeat.¹⁵⁵ Harold Wilson's secretary, Derek Mitchell, assured a letter-writer that Aitken's name would be taken into consideration, but this was a form letter, and in the end she was not promoted.¹⁵⁶ This was probably at least partially because, by this point, such a promotion was not customary. People with 'Cs' were seen as having reached a kind of honorific ceiling. The MWF had

¹⁵³ Eric Linklater to Rew, 9 May 1954, Requests for Honours for Women Doctors, SA/MWF/C.243, Medical Women's Federation Papers, WL.

¹⁵⁴ See: Requests for Honours for Women Doctors, SA/MWF/C.243, Medical Women's Federation Papers, WL.

¹⁵⁵ Jean Lawrie to Miss McCarlein, n.d., Requests for Honours for Women Doctors, SA/MWF/C.243, Medical Women's Federation Papers, WL.

¹⁵⁶ Derek Mitchell to Mary Crosse, 6 October 1964, Requests for Honours for Women Doctors, SA/MWF/C.243, Medical Women's Federation Papers, WL.

some successes in promoting honours for its members, but in general their semi-formal organizing in the 1950s through to the 1970s was only sporadically successful because the best way to apply pressure was unclear. They had some political connections, but they received divergent advice and failed to tap into the most important channels and they were unable to make themselves into a group whom the civil service reflexively consulted about potential awards.

Individuals in the TUC and the MWF were part of a much wider group of people with connections to charitable and professional organizations who sought to influence (or to avoid getting involved in) the honours system, which continued, as in the interwar period and before, to involve a complex array of unofficial but important sources of information about nominees. The formal process for nominating someone for an award remained, as it had been since the 1920s and, for appropriate awards, earlier, to write to the Prime Minister's secretary to suggest that someone should receive an honour. But organizations were conscious that there was a larger network of informal relationships and advice that governed the decisions that the Prime Minister (and the more secretive civil service committees) made about honours. Even with the benefit of hindsight, it is difficult to work out precisely how these worked. The various civil service departments such as Education and Health were central to these, as they had quotas to fill and tended to nominate insiders to awards. Outsiders found it more difficult to get their people nominated; however, in general they very much wanted to find a way into the system. Political and cultural elites could scoff as much as they liked at the honours system, or (often justly) criticize its biases, but for people on the margins of inclusion in the system the attractions of potential inclusion were great, and the effort of trying to find a way in very much worth it.

VI.

As the class and occupational basis for honours broadened, slowly but surely, through the twentieth century more and more people who had not previously imagined themselves as recipients of honours found themselves receiving the fateful letter from the Prime Minister, reading their names in the *London Gazette* and possibly local newspapers and newsletters and eventually going to the Palace to receive the award itself.

For example, The Imperial Society of Knights Bachelor [ISKB] refined its purpose and actively built up the respectability of its members in the post-war period. Founded in 1908 to give knights bachelor a representative body to deal with the CCOK and, later, the Treasury, the society kept a register of all knights bachelor. The knight bachelor was an anomalous honour in that it was senior yet lacked an order of chivalry: it was not a 'statutory order'. The society saw itself as necessary to counterbalance this perceived lack by asserting the ceremonial and chivalric rights of its members, and in the 1960s and 1970s it won a couple of extra rights for its members.¹⁵⁷ To start with, members saw the creation of chapel as a key mark of the credibility of the non-order. Plans for a chapel were first made in 1939, but were shelved during the war and not revived again until 1962.¹⁵⁸ The Society established a fund to dedicate a chapel in the medieval-era Priory Church of St Bartholomew-the-Great in West Smithfield, London, and the Queen attended its dedication in that same year.¹⁵⁹

Having won this distinction, the Society went on to lobby the Treasury and the Home Office for further ceremonial recognition. Over the next few decades the Society attained for its members

¹⁵⁷ Robert Esden, *The Story of the Knights Bachelor* (London: The Imperial Society of Knights Bachelor, 2004), 21–25.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 21.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 21, 32.

an official heraldic badge (1971), a neck badge that could be worn on non-formal attire (1973), a new breast badge (1974) and a ceremonial sword called 'Chivalry' to be used at chapel gatherings (1995).¹⁶⁰ The Society also arranged for various additional accoutrements for the chapel, including a banner, cross and candlesticks. The 1960s and 1970s seem to have been a period of vigorous ceremonial creation within the society, as it also finally managed to set up a charitable organization, associated with the chapel, in 1966 to support the families of deceased knights.

Each of these individual attainments of the society may seem trivial, but taken together they indicate a significant investment of time, energy, money and emotion in the institution of the knights bachelor and in a desire to distinguish those who received the honour. Each of these seemingly small changes required specific decisions on the part of the civil service and, therefore, effort on the part of the Society. When the Society petitioned the Home Office to introduce a neck badge in 1970 Milner-Barry commented that he 'could see no reason why' the request could not be approved, but it still took a few years to get all the new badges.¹⁶¹ Difficulties with the wording of the draft warrant and objections around the proposed design slowed the process.¹⁶² The Palace and the Home Office arranged for the Queen to personally grant the knights bachelor their new badge, as she was 'anxious to show them some favor'.¹⁶³ Officials agreed that the knights bachelor deserved certain distinctions, with one arguing that the pseudo-medieval notion of knights bachelor as being a separate class representing certain 'ideals and a way of life' had long ago given way to the knighthood as being one

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 21–24, 29.

¹⁶¹ Memo, 2 November 1970, Knights bachelor: Insignia badges. Design and prices. The Imperial Society for Knights Bachelor, HO 286/104, NA.

¹⁶² Memo, 5 July 1973, Knights bachelor: Insignia badges. Design and prices. The Imperial Society for Knights Bachelor, HO 286/104, NA.

¹⁶³ Memo, 16 August 1973, Knights bachelor: Insignia badges. Design and prices. The Imperial Society for Knights Bachelor, HO 286/104, NA.

part of a larger system of honours.¹⁶⁴ The special relationship with the sovereign implied by ‘medieval’ knighthood had been replaced by a different special relationship more like the Orders of Chivalry, where the knighthood was a ‘reward for merit and a mark of Royal favor’.¹⁶⁵ Equality with other orders of chivalry, who received badges free of charge from the state, unlike knights bachelor who, until the 1970s, had to pay for them, was an important concern.

The Queen was herself concerned about this because, according to one official, she was ‘increasingly conscious that Knights Bachelor, as a body, were in many ways more distinguished than members of the various Royal Orders, since they tended to be drawn from a very much wider range of ability and experience’.¹⁶⁶ The Order of the Bath was for civil servants, the Royal Victorian Order for royal servants and the Order of Saint Michael and Saint George for diplomats, but the knighthood encompassed a wide range of men. Only the Order of the British Empire had a wider ‘catchment’.¹⁶⁷ As a result of this discussion, one palace official, Philip Moore, suggested the radical measure of making the knights bachelor into a separate order, a proposal that was brought before the Honours Committee and quickly rejected as unfeasible.¹⁶⁸ Miss E. Harrison, a clerk who had worked in the honours office for decades, including some time under R.U.E. Knox, pointed out that the ‘present climate of public opinion about the honours system’ made the creation of a new order potentially unwelcome, and that it would also entail considerable expense because of the need to

¹⁶⁴ Memo, 28 February 1974, Knights bachelor: Insignia badges. Design and prices. The Imperial Society for Knights Bachelor, HO 286/104, NA.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Memo, 25 March 1974, Knights bachelor: Insignia badges. Design and prices. The Imperial Society for Knights Bachelor, HO 286/104, NA.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

create new ceremonial instruments and hire more staff.¹⁶⁹ In 1974 Britain, any extra government expense was certainly unwelcome. The palace's desire to improve the status of the knights bachelor could only, therefore, go so far. A new order was impossible for the above reasons, as well as a host of smaller technical matters, such as the letters to be used (which would potentially conflict with those already used by the Bath) and the lack of a complete register with the names of all existing knights bachelor. K.P. Witney of the Home Office wrote to Moore in May 1974 rejecting the idea that they create a new order, suggesting that the lack of a formal order was politically useful because it 'provides a degree of flexibility in the bestowal of honours which the Prime Minister and others would be reluctant to sacrifice'.¹⁷⁰ Unlike the orders of chivalry, the knights bachelor was not limited by statute to a certain size. Witney concluded that the Queen should show favor to the ISKB by becoming its patron and attending its events, rather than by changing the status of the honour.¹⁷¹

The Queen summoned the Knight Principal of the ISKB, along with six other members of its Council, to Buckingham Palace on 30 November 1973, where she personally gave them a warrant to 'extend' their insignia with the new badges.¹⁷² This audience was a sign of royal favor, as it did not have to happen. The council members, including the Knight Principal, Sir John Russell, wore Morning dress. Because of heraldic concerns on the part of the Garter Principal, the warrant was handed over to the council members, then returned to its home at the College of Arms (a copy would have been 'inappropriate', while the College was unwilling to consider a long-term loan of the

¹⁶⁹ Memo, 10 May 1974, Knights bachelor: Insignia badges. Design and prices. The Imperial Society for Knights Bachelor, HO 286/104, NA.

¹⁷⁰ K.P. Witney to Philip Moore, 28 May 1974, Knights bachelor: Insignia badges. Design and prices. The Imperial Society for Knights Bachelor, HO 286/104, NA.

¹⁷¹ Witney to Martin Charteris, 4 March 1974, Knights bachelor: Insignia badges. Design and prices. The Imperial Society for Knights Bachelor, HO 286/104, NA.

¹⁷² Buckingham Palace to John Russell, 15 November 1973, Knights bachelor: Insignia badges. Design and prices. The Imperial Society for Knights Bachelor, HO 286/104, NA.

treasured document).¹⁷³ The ISKB had been successful in navigating the complex institutional and symbolic world of honours to assert (or reassert) the importance of its members.

The Order of the British Empire did not produce the same kind of ‘self-generating’ society or events at a national level. In 1965, a few months after the Beatles were inducted into the Order of the British Empire, the Garter King of Arms (a senior heraldic position with the responsibility of running the College of Arms) A.R. Wagner wrote an extended series of letters to David Carey, an assistant to Geoffrey Fisher, the Archbishop of Canterbury. The issue at stake was clerical knighthoods. Because of the martial tone of the accolade involved in the process of knighting men, clergy from an Anglican or Roman Catholic tradition were barred from receiving knighthoods, but following a recent change in policy that meant that people did not have to attend a ceremony in order to become knights, Wagner suggested that there was now no longer any bar for clergy accepting knighthoods.¹⁷⁴ Carey responded, on behalf of Fisher, that the Archbishop felt that knighthoods were still objectionable. Wagner was skeptical, in part because bishops could become lords – a more senior and more definitive title than knights possessed.¹⁷⁵ But Carey continued to insist that there should be no clerical knights. For one thing, the idea that the wife of a vicar should be distinguished from the other ladies of a congregation by the title ‘lady’ was particularly troublesome for Carey and Fisher. Clergy and their wives should not be ‘raised above either his fellow clergymen or above his parishioners by reason of secular honour’.¹⁷⁶ The peerage did not count, because it was a political appointment that had a specific function. While he was willing to

¹⁷³ K.P.W. to Miss Boxall, 7 November 1973, Knights bachelor: Insignia badges. Design and prices. The Imperial Society for Knights Bachelor, HO 286/104, NA.

¹⁷⁴ A.R. Wagner to David Carey, 20 October 1965, Vol. 78, Fisher Papers, Lambeth Palace Library.

¹⁷⁵ Wagner to Carey, 3 November 1965, Fisher Papers, Vol. 78, Lambeth Palace Library.

¹⁷⁶ Carey to Wagner, 1 November 1965; Wagner to Carey, 23 December 1965, Fisher Papers, Vol. 78, Lambeth Palace Library.

accept this general objection to clerical knighthoods, Wagner's reply to this point about the peerage was revealing about the ideology and symbolism of honours at the time and about the changes that were happening in the honours system as a whole. It was the duty of people offered honours to accept them, according to Wagner. Furthermore, he felt 'bound to demur gently to the suggestion that Peerages are functional but other honours not. To my way of thinking honours are an essential part of a hierarchical society and I believe in a secular hierarchy just as I believe in the ecclesiastical one.'¹⁷⁷

The idea that the honours system was a way of regulating and defining this 'secular hierarchy' was not exclusive to the Garter King of Arms. A number of senior members and officials of the Order of the British Empire were pushing for there to be a reception for members of the order at the Guildhall in London as part of a wider effort to raise funds for the upkeep of the order's chapel in St Paul's Cathedral. However, the obvious problem was that there were too many members, and the numbers would potentially far exceed the capacity of the Guildhall. General Gordon Lennox (who had been knighted KBE in 1964 and had been King of Arms of the Order of the British Empire since 1968) suggested that the reception could be restricted to CBEs and higher.¹⁷⁸ Such a measure would, he joked, not only solve the problem of numbers but also have the happy result of 'exclude[ing] the Beatles!'¹⁷⁹ Milner-Barry responded that he was wary of restricting the invitations to CBE and above, as he was 'not sure that would be a good thing'.¹⁸⁰ When the issue was discussed at a later meeting of the chapel committee of the order, the issue of a reception was

¹⁷⁷ Wagner to Carey, 23 December 1965, Fisher Papers, Vol.78, Lambeth Palace Library.

¹⁷⁸ Gordon Lennox to Milner-Barry, 30 January 1970, Order of the British Empire: Suggested Reception at the Guildhall, T 343/83, NA.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ Milner-Barry to Martin Sullivan, 4 March 1970, Order of the British Empire: Suggested Reception at the Guildhall, T 343/83, NA.

discussed further. According to the minutes: 'Differing views were expressed on the value of a function of this kind for an order of the size and ramifications of the Order of the British Empire, where a sense of corporate unity was more difficult [than with similar ceremonies associated with the Order of the Bath and the Knights Bachelor] to foster.'¹⁸¹ In other words, members of the order were too socially diverse and broad to be able to be encompassed by one social event. The committee note-taker was sensitive to the expanding basis of the order and its application beyond Christians for whom a chapel service was sufficient, but also noted that no members were actively lobbying for a secular function: 'While there were attractions about the idea of a Reception [sic] which could be attended by those to whom a religious ceremony might not necessarily make an appeal, there had not so far been a self-generating demand for such a gathering.'¹⁸² Failing such demand, the difficulties of accommodating all potential attendees worked against a reception, especially as any kind of restriction to CBEs and above would be 'contrary to the democratic character [of the order] which the Grand Master [Prince Philip] was anxious to uphold'.¹⁸³ Excluding the majority of members was too hierarchical and non-democratic a move. Lennox held a senior rank and wanted to introduce more ceremony and socialization into the order (it may have vexed him that while he was a CB, his knighthood was in the more junior order) that was incompatible with its broad base of members.

Even as the honours system expanded to reach new groups in society, this democratization of honours worked in concert with, not against, the system's function as a 'secular hierarchy'. Incremental reforms by Labour and Conservative governments went some way towards breaking

¹⁸¹ Order of the British Empire and St Paul's Cathedral, Chapel Committee of the Order, 5 May 1970, Order of the British Empire: Suggested Reception at the Guildhall, T 343/83, NA.

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

down the traditional structure of the honours system by including a wider range of the population, but they did not undermine the hierarchical basis of the system. By accepting honours, newly-honored groups helped to maintain this secular hierarchy by affirming its continued relevance in society. Its legitimacy was questioned by some, but never fully undermined: even when Wilson made his questionable appointments in what may well have been a passive-aggressive attempt to discredit or mock the system as a whole, the blame was put on him rather than the system, even though his appointments were more exaggerating rather than diverging from normal practice. The stresses of decolonization and increasing public criticism prompted the people who managed the honours system work even harder to maintain its legitimacy.

Chapter six: The Queen's Heroes: Reform and the Return of Voluntarism, 1977–2004

I.

In 2004 Hayden Phillips, a civil servant who chaired Whitehall's main Honours Committee, wrote a detailed public report about the state of the honours system, complete with recommendations as to how to further reform it to better suit the needs, as he perceived them, of the nation. In around sixty pages of points, recommendations and appendices, he presented an interpretation and ideology of honours for the new century, seemingly stripped of many of the ideas that had governed it over the past hundred years.¹ In their place was a vision of honours as an egalitarian, democratic, diverse and broad institution for a Britain with those same characteristics. Previous chapters in this dissertation have argued that, at a local level, honours were more important for the way in which they recognized and connected specific groups with the wider empire or nation than for their hierarchical function as conceived at the center of the system. Phillips' report illustrated how at the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first, the official narrative and structure of honours shifted to publicly embrace this general feeling. Phillips emphasized that honours were most appreciated at the level of local communities and interest groups and that one of the system's key functions was to integrate and recognize the diversity of modern British life. This was a part of the honours system's reason for existence, which was summarized by Phillips in a defense of the system:

The honours system derives from the simple and laudable wish to recognise exceptional service and achievement and to show gratitude publicly... it provides distinctive recognition by the State – in our constitution, by the Sovereign, as Head of State... Although some argue for abolition of the honours system, there is no general pressure for this. Indeed, the high rate of acceptance of the honours themselves ... suggests that they are highly valued. The value is not only highly prized by the recipients themselves but by their families and friends and sometimes whole communities, who feel vicarious pleasure at the award of an

¹ Hayden Phillips, *Review of the Honours System* (London: Cabinet Office, 2004).

honour or by the fact that their walk of life or part of the country has been recognised... Certainly, some argument surrounds the form that the honours system should take but there is general agreement that some form of national honours system should exist so that the country can give a public thank you to those who have demonstrated achievement and exceptional service.²

This innocent vision of the honours system seemed uncontroversial by 2000. However, Phillips's rosy depiction of the honours system concealed as much as it revealed. Through the 1970s and 1980s, even as the structure of British society was transformed and its composition changed, the honours system retained its formal connection between social and honorific rank. It was only in the 1990s that this connection was theoretically severed, although this severance was not total. New hierarchies replaced and reconfigured old ones.

Phillips offered an official vision of Britain as a diverse, pluralistic, egalitarian society. In it, honours (and the monarchy that sponsored them) were innocent of crude politics and attuned to the spirit of the nation at large through the wise management of independent committees (crewed by people like Phillips). By the early 2000s this meritorious, classless, pluralistic ideal of how honours worked or should work had become authorized ideology of honours, although this public face did not necessarily correspond to the reality. At the same time as the honours system was allegedly becoming classless, there were a number of other shifts in the kind of people receiving honours. Most importantly, there was a significant shift towards honours for voluntary service. The old ideal that had energized the first few years of the Order of the British Empire of unpaid service as the most deserving of honour returned all the stronger at the end of the century. Politically, this was a shift enacted by John Major and it reflected a neo-liberal conception of virtue and merit in the community. Under Harold Wilson, the reduction of civil service honours had led to more people in 'local services' whose paychecks may still have come from some form of government department

² "Justification for an Honours System", in Phillips, *Review of the Honours System*, 15.

receiving honours, by the end of the century it was those who gave voluntary service or charitable donations who made up the overwhelming, uncontroversial majority recipients of honours.

This renewed shift in the 1990s was seen as necessary because, in spite of the significant changes in the composition of honours lists away from civil servants that Harold Wilson encouraged in the 1960s, the 1970s and 1980s were an era of cynicism, dissatisfaction and skepticism about honours in Britain. But from the early 1990s a set of reforms culminating in the Phillips report changed once again the nature of honours lists and the way in which they were composed. Why did these changes happen, and what was their actual effect? The seemingly common sense, egalitarian and apolitical system in fact was shaped by political forces that were selective and contingent in their inclusion of particular groups in British society. The transformation of the honours in the late 1990s embodied and reinforced specific values and approaches to social welfare and society as a whole, and in creating a consensus around voluntarism melded with wider patterns in the relationship between the monarchy and society. In expanding the honours system's reach into voluntary service, the state also managed to preserve traditional interests who continued to enjoy honours.

Between 1980 and the early 2000s British society underwent significant transformations. Immigration and European integration continued to cause anxiety over Britain's increasing racial and cultural diversity. The decline of the traditional industrial working class and growth of the proportion of the population who identified as part of a broad middle changed the shape of local communities and national politics. People's aspirations and expectations from life were changed through the expansion of education and the rapidly shifting configuration of employment opportunities. The changes within the honours system can help define and interpret these transformations; especially in that it gives us a sense of how social hierarchies were reconfigured in this period. Changes in who received what honours were the result of conscious policy shifts made against decades of institutional inertia. As it had earlier in the century the government executed these

changes in a way that both responded to and sought to manage shifts in British society. In doing so it brought new weapons and techniques to the task, initiating transformations to the honours system that were more successful in reconciling a democratic public to a hierarchical vision of social order than earlier reforms.

II.

Criticism of honours was never a prominent part of social and cultural commentary in Britain, but it increased in the 1980s. For decades the honours system as a whole, as well as individual appointments, had been difficult for respectable publications to criticize outright because they were formally a royal prerogative. Public dialog over honours was discouraged and at most barely tolerated by the civil service. Criticism of specific appointments could be interpreted as criticism of the sovereign. The symbolic function of the Queen as the source of all honour served to dampen and hide the political and civil service machinery that shaped appointments. Aside from the exceptional few years at the end of the First World War, criticism of individual appointments tended to be muted or implicit for much of the century. But by the 1970s and 1980s both politics and the media were changing. Snide comments could be less veiled, and the core principles of honorific distribution were increasingly questioned publicly as well as privately.

The attitude taken by the civil service leading up to the 1980s around publicity concerning the honours system can be seen in a background to a series of articles in the *Times* researched and written by Peter Hennessy in the wake of the Harold Wilson resignation scandal. In researching these, he met with P.S. Milner-Barry, who cooperated to a certain extent with his investigation. But his cooperation was measured and partial, as it had been when the *Sunday Times* and the *Telegraph*

Magazine did similar articles in 1966 and 1975 respectively.³ Internal correspondence between Milner-Barry and his colleagues indicated that they thought of contact with the press as a necessary evil. In spite of the public interest element and the generally ‘fair’ tone of Hennessy’s article, Milner-Barry could ‘not help regretting it’.⁴ The whole Wilson scandal had placed too much attention on the honours system, and Milner-Barry argued that further discussion in the media was not productive. Hennessy’s two articles were hardly scandalous or intrusive, instead focusing on the strengths and weaknesses of the honours system and its workings. Milner-Barry felt that the first article was harmless: ‘not too seriously written, and I should guess quite entertaining to the layman’.⁵ The second, however, was ‘rather more detailed than anything that has been published on previous occasions’.⁶ ‘There was clearly no possibility of heading him [Hennessy] off’, reflected Milner-Barry, and the article ‘is mainly a straightforward account of how the machine works’.⁷ Because of the increasingly ‘open’ environment in Whitehall, the article might even have a positive effect in showing how ‘seriously the task of trying to arrive at a fair result is taken’. Regrettably, from his perspective, Hennessy made a ‘remarkably silly’ argument that the Order of Saint Michael and Saint George should be abolished.⁸ This correspondence showed the civil service’s close control over

³ Milner-Barry to J. Hobson, 26 May 1977, Press Comment Arising From Sir Harold Wilson's 1976 Resignation List, T 352/10, National Archives [NA]; *Sunday Times*, 30 October 1966, 10-11.

⁴ Milner-Barry to J. Hobson, 26 May 1977, Press Comment Arising From Sir Harold Wilson's 1976 Resignation List, T 352/10, NA.

⁵ Ibid. See also: Peter Hennessy, ‘Honours System 1: Fascination persists despite demands for abolition’, ‘Honours System 2: Making list is continuous job like painting forth Bridge’, *Times*, 10 June 1977, 4, 6.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

information about honours and their fear that public access to this information would affect the credibility and coherence of the system. Honours needed to preserve their mystery.

During the 1980s Michael De-la-Noy (1985) and John Walker (1986) wrote two new critical histories of the honours system. Both of these works took aim at trends and figures in contemporary British politics. Margaret Thatcher's practice of giving out honours to sympathetic journalists and the CEOs of major donors to the Conservative Party came under particular attack, with both authors drawing on the *Labour Research* article discussed below. De-la-Noy argued that honours were, by nature, 'socially divisive' because of the assumptions about class that governed the assignment of ranks within each order.⁹ However, the problem for him lay more in the upper levels of the honours system: the constitution of the House of Lords, the use of honours to reward mediocre but faithful political service and the many honours available to civil servants.¹⁰ He was, if not positive, then at least accepting of the lower levels of the honours system: in principle, the Order of the British Empire served 'perfectly adequately as a general order for the general public'.¹¹ The problem was with the elite, not the quotidian, honours.

Walker, on the other hand, condemned the opacity of the 'mysterious official machinery of the honours system' as a whole and suggested that the corruption at the upper levels under Thatcher might extend to the whole system, including junior awards for community service.¹² To Walker, the whole system – its politics, its governance and its hierarchy – was the problem, and even the non-hierarchical, seemingly apolitical elements were tainted by its structural corruption. Both authors

⁹ Michael De-la-Noy, *The Honours System* (London: Allison & Busby, 1985), 167.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 170–80.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 175.

¹² John Walker, *The Queen Has Been Pleased: The British Honours System at Work* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1986), 189.

focused much more on the comparatively small allocation of political honours and the possibility of corruption, although De La Noy made some pointed comments about press honours, as well. Both books were cynical about Margaret Thatcher and Thatcherism, and by connecting her time in office with an older form of corruption, they provided a consistent narrative about abuses of political power – especially Tory abuses.

An *Economist* editorial in 1987 argued that only honours given to ‘ordinary people who give public service’ were truly defensible and that political and civil service honours should be abolished.¹³ Although the *Economist*, with its detached, worldly and cynical editorial tone, had advocated the sale of peerages as a useful way of raising funds in the past, by the late 1980s it advocated the abolition of political honours.¹⁴ A more extreme position was taken by David Carlton, who wrote in the *Radical*, a neo-liberal, ‘Thatcherite’ publication.¹⁵ Disappointed that the ‘most radical Prime Minister in modern times’ had failed to reform the ‘feudal’ system, Carlton advocated the elimination of hereditary titles, the use of ‘sensible-sounding awards (e.g. Medals of Merit) in place of traditional names like the Order of the British Empire or Garter, and the elimination of political influence in recommending people for honours.’¹⁶ Carlton was a historian, who wrote a biography of Anthony Eden and who favored the theme of post-war British decline. Titles were a disgrace because Britain had become the ‘one of the poorest, and arguably the most brutish, of countries in the advanced world’, and titles only made sense when ‘we really were seen as the Lords of Humankind’.¹⁷ Invoking Corelli Barnett’s pessimistic histories of post-war British decline, Carlton

¹³ *Economist*, 3 January 1987, 13.

¹⁴ *Economist*, 18 June 1983, 42.

¹⁵ *The Radical: The Journal of the Radical Society*, September 1989, 15.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

suggested that titular honours were a cultural problem because they maintained delusions of grandeur in an era when such memories were counterproductive.¹⁸ For him, honours were a barrier to a neo-liberal ideal of classlessness and equality of opportunity; an unfair intervention in social structure by a clumsy and antiquated government.

Another conservative critic of the honours system at the end of the century was former MP, author and minor celebrity Gyles Brandreth. Brandreth's commentary was idiosyncratic, but it illustrated some of the political and administrative problems of honours – especially in the Maecenas category, which was his particular area of interest. His diaries, which promised to unveil the secret world of Westminster whips, contained various references to the honours system, including anecdotes about dealing with secretive civil servants.¹⁹ His dual interest in politics and a particular insider view of the arts and entertainment world meant that he was preoccupied with honours to entertainers. If Joan Collins received an OBE then 'why a CBE for Ned Sherrin?' in the same list, he wondered when the 1997 New Year's list was published.²⁰ The absence of a knighthood for actor Donald Sinden in the same list frustrated him, although this was to come that same year in the Queen's Birthday list.²¹ He had clearly been plotting with some of his colleagues in parliament and in cultural circles to advocate for certain figures such as Sinden, although he did not specify the details of his maneuvers in Sinden's favor in his diaries. After complaining about Sinden he described a conversation with John Major in which they both expressed this frustration with the mechanisms of honours. Major had been 'trying to get a knighthood for [cricketer] Alec Bedser', but as he himself

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Gyles Brandreth, *Breaking the Code: Westminster Diaries May 1990 - May 1997* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1999), 306–8, 445.

²⁰ Ibid., 445.

²¹ Ibid.

(as the one person who, in theory, had the most power over honours lists) said: ‘It isn’t easy.’²²

Brandreth was probably one of the people Major remembered when he later commented that he was ‘shocked’ by the extent to which ‘a minority of people [MPs] were prepared to lobby for Honours and, in some cases, at the extent to which they became disaffected if their petition was ignored.’²³

A year later, now out of parliament, Brandreth penned a feature article for the *Daily Telegraph* about honours and the arts, entitled ‘Of all the Mysteries in British Society, None is More Shrouded in Secrecy than the Honours System. Gyles Brandreth Asks: Who Gives out the Gongs for the Arts?’²⁴ The article was partly a critique of New Labour. It implied, disingenuously, that Tony Blair would politicize cultural honours to a greater degree than his predecessors, using the testimony of former Conservative Secretary of State for national heritage, Virginia Bottomley, who claimed that honorific appointments during her years as a minister were politically neutral. More than that, however, the article criticized the opacity and mystery of the system at the level of the honours secretariat of the civil service. One of Brandreth’s first anecdotes was a description of how he contacted the secretariat, at which point he was passed from person to person until finally being promised a written response to some of his questions, a response that did not arrive in time for his article deadline.²⁵

In 2001 Brandreth hosted a documentary about the honours system that continued these themes. The documentary, directed by Don Jordan, elided honours and the peerage, opening with

²² Ibid.

²³ Memorandum by the Rt Hon John Major, CH, HON 95, Fifth Committee on Public Administration, 2004, online at: (<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200304/cmselect/cmpubadm/212/4052002.htm> accessed 14 June 2012).

²⁴ Gyles Brandreth, ‘Who Gives out the Gongs for the Arts?’, *Daily Telegraph*, Arts and Books Supplement, 6 June 1998, 1.

²⁵ Ibid.

Brandreth dressed in a Life Peer's robes while riding a London bus. Quickly, however, the topic of the peerage was dropped and Brandreth recited a number of his earlier critiques of the honours system, using a heavily ironic tone: it was elitist, it was incompetent and unpredictable in its treatment of entertainers and it enabled various forms of political corruption. The documentary was framed around Brandreth trying to arrange an honour for the cross-dressing entertainer Danny La Rue (born Daniel Patrick Carroll). Presenting himself, with tongue partially in cheek, as La Rue's champion, Brandreth used his attempt to expedite an honour for La Rue to highlight the opacity of the nomination system. After collecting letters from various supporters (including MPs, church figures and show business figures) Brandreth was shown delivering a nomination by hand to Downing Street and then, a few weeks later, receiving in return a letter from the Secretary of State for Culture and Sport, at which point he triumphantly declared that La Rue was 'now in the system'. However, the letter as shown on screen actually stated that La Rue was already being considered for an honour, which made Brandreth's work – and some of his cynicism – less compelling in hindsight. La Rue was made OBE in the 2002 Queen's Birthday list.

The documentary was full of different anecdotes and discussions, including a brief interview with the eternal critic of honours, Tony Benn. The producers also put together a panel of 'experts', including Bottomley, as well as select media insiders, who offered various cynical viewpoints about the system. The documentary presented honours as a world of insiders and political intrigue, governed by subtle, manipulative mandarins like Hayden Phillips, who was presented negatively in both Brandreth's written and television work. In a key scene, Brandreth narrated an encounter with Phillips during his time as a government whip, in which the latter deliberately attempted to overawe the junior politician with secrecy (refusing to let a mere politician see key documents about a forthcoming list). Smiling smugly, Brandreth paraphrased their conversation in a theatrical manner:

'Very good of you to see me'
'Now Gyles, you must realise that we are not really here.'
'Oh'
'This meeting never took place.'
'Awarding honours is serious business, Gyles. You ministers must have your say, but the final list is put together here at the department, by us'
'Of course'
'Naturally the hush-hush scrutiny committees go over our recommendations with a tooth comb - can't have too many skeletons popping up later on'
'That goes without saying'
'Jolly good. We've prepared a little digest of the rules, Gyles. It's confidential.'
'Oh'
'Don't go waving it about in the tearoom'
'Oh yes I understand. Thank you. Thank you very much indeed!'²⁶

He then proceeded to say that he still had the document and that he was not supposed to share it, but 'believe[d] in open government', and would reveal its contents. These were unspectacular, stressing the secrecy of honours and the importance of avoiding honoring men and women with a 'past history that would make the person unsuitable to receive an honour'. 'Poor Hugh Grant', Brandreth reflected, 'Poor George Michael. Come to think of it, poor me!'²⁷ Indeed, all three men remained without honours as of 2014. In this, Brandreth mirrored De-La-Noy's self-deprecating comment a few decades before that 'if you really and truly want to receive an honour, do not, whatever else you do, write a book on the subject'.²⁸

Brandreth's various texts on honours offered more heat than light and were sometimes disingenuous and contradictory, but their underlying themes included complaints at the opacity of the system, the menace of politicization and the pomposity and arrogance of the civil servants who ran the system, all of which were understandable. His interest in the relationship between honours

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ De-la-Noy, *The Honours System*, 180.

and culture was significant. He was an insider to a particular constellation of British media celebrities, as well as to the Conservative Party, and from this position he lobbied for the recognition of entertainers and used his public platform to question the honours system. His accounts of his encounters with civil servants during his brief time in office emphasize the frustration that he and his colleagues felt with the system, a frustration that clearly had a strong effect on him, even half a decade after he left the world of Westminster politics.

All these critics suggested that honours in the 1980s and 1990s were still an opaque, elitist world. Like the critics of the 1960s and 1970s, they themselves were insiders of sorts to the world of politics and journalism. Yet they felt excluded by civil service and political control of honours. More importantly, critics on both the left and right argued for a more egalitarian, 'fair' basis for the system that would better reflect modern British society. Their impatience with the status quo was based on a firm belief that it was not accurately reflecting a wider public consensus about the value of service and the nature of modern hierarchies.

III.

For all the criticism directed at the honours system, however, its expansion from the 1960s won it a great deal of popularity among those groups who were recently included. Where once speculation about who would get what was the topic of gossip in faculty rooms, clubs, editorial offices and the corridors of the houses of parliament (the worlds of the critics above), the expansion of honours to different parts of the community changed meant that they started to express a wider range of rivalries, jealousies and taste judgments. As the honours system expanded out into more sections of the community, newly honored groups tended to welcome it as a sign of integration into a wider polity.

In 1995 Choudry Mohammed Walayat ‘ironically became’ a Member of the British Empire ‘once again’.²⁹ Born in Kashmir in 1936, he had left Pakistan in the early 1960s for England, where he made a successful career in Sheffield as a union organizer and a political and community activist. His symbolic reintegration with the Crown was not a problem for him, because the contrast between the two ‘British Empires’ was also the contrast between being born into poverty and making a success of his life in England. As Walayat described the experience of going to the palace in his autobiography, *Made in England*: ‘for a boy who was raised in abject poverty in a disputed land many thousands of miles away, to be now talking to the Queen of England in Buckingham Palace was an amazing and unforgettable experience.’³⁰ His honour was recognition not only of his service, but of his community, and he dismissed the idea that he should not have accepted it for political reasons, citing the example of colleagues in the Labour Party who, in spite of their seeming suspicion of the institution: ‘seem prepared to accept them [honours] when they are offered one themselves.’³¹ The MBE showed respect to both him and his fellow Pakistanis in Sheffield, as well as to his colleagues in the town council, all of whom apparently expressed collective pleasure at the fact that someone from their community had been recognized in the honours list. For him, even the inscription of ‘For God and Empire’ on the medal he received from the hand of the Queen was not insulting or perverse but ‘rather quaint’.³² In this case, at least, the predictions of the Treasury officials in the 1960s that anachronism would render the name of the Order of the British Empire charming rather than offensive were correct.

²⁹ Choudry Mohammed Walayat, *Made in England: The Memoirs of Dr. Choudry Mohammed Walayat MBE* (Sheffield: Kashaf Walayat, 2008), 88.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 88–89.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 89.

³² *Ibid.*, 88.

While a partial, uncertain attempt at openness has been one of the characteristics of the governance of honours, there has been nothing partial or uncertain about the willingness of Walayat or many other recipients to talk about their experience of receiving honours. The last four decades of the twentieth century also saw an increasing openness on the part of recipients of honours in talking about their awards. Tens of thousands of people have gone to Buckingham palace to receive an award from the hand of the Queen (or a close relative) during the twentieth century. From the 1970s, autobiographical accounts of these encounters tend to be more effusive, lengthy and available. The visit to Buckingham Palace to receive an honour, along with Royal Garden Parties, has become one of the main ways in which ‘ordinary’ Britons have access to their sovereign. Unlike Royal Garden Parties, where guests have little opportunity to interact with the Queen in person, at investitures each honours recipient has had the opportunity to talk with her or whichever of her close relatives was running the ceremony, albeit for an average of just twenty-four seconds per person.³³ The return to the policy of having all honours recipients meet a senior royal in 1948, discussed in the previous chapter, has taken on a central part in the world of honours. For recipients and for the royal family – the latter otherwise largely detached from the process of honours distribution – the symbolism of honours as crown recognition of service to the nation has coalesced around this ceremonial moment. In his 2002 biography of Queen Elizabeth II, Robert Lacey presented these Royal Investitures as being a central part of the Queen’s life.³⁴ Quoting an un-cited 1992 interview, Lacey claimed that the Queen said that she saw investitures as the ‘most important’ part of her job, where she got to meet her ‘heroes’.³⁵ Royal equerries spend time researching each

³³ According to Robert Lacey, the Queen processes honours recipients at a rate of five every two minutes: Robert Lacey, *Royal: Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II* (London: Little, Brown, 2002), 398.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 397–8.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 397.

recipient (especially at the lower – OBE and MBE – levels) and brief the royal presenter about each case so that they can sound informed.³⁶ According to Lacey, the generic response of honours recipients has tended to be ‘It was lovely’ and ‘We chatted for several minutes’.³⁷ In the presence of the Queen, time tended to dilate, turning seconds into minutes, and melting stout (if not republican) hearts.

It is easy to dismiss these investitures. These few seconds of conversation, repeated thousands of times, can seem banal, but in fact they illustrate one of the most important aspects of the honours system in the twentieth century – and especially since the 1960s. In the face of persistent political manipulation and bureaucratic opacity, the royal touch has maintained the credibility and status of the honours system. One of the chief functions of the modern British royal family – and other constitutional monarchies – has been the authentication of the public recognition of meritorious service. Royal involvement does not exactly hide the political and bureaucratic role in honours, but for many recipients it has rendered it unimportant. In defiance of reality, honours have tended to be associated most strongly with the Queen, rather than Westminster or Whitehall. The royal family and the honours system have fed off one another in a symbiotic relationship of prestige and credibility.

This trend can clearly be seen in the ways in which honours recipients responded to their awards – particularly their investitures. While the observation of the unnamed royal official that recipients almost always found the experience ‘lovely’ was not necessarily incorrect, a close analysis of autobiographical accounts of honours investitures can show a great deal more about the complexities of this relationship between royalty and the honours system. It is easier to find such

³⁶ Ibid., 398.

³⁷ Ibid.

narratives from about 1960 onwards. Whether this is a function of a greater number of ‘ordinary’ people writing autobiographies, a more self-revelatory culture, or a greater interest in honours is unclear, but the availability and content of these accounts makes them a useful source for thinking about the relationship between the Crown, honours and honours recipients. These accounts were not simple recitations of the loveliness of the Queen and the palace, but actually portrayed the experience of the investiture in a more complex and specific way.

The process of receiving an honour was marked, for most people, by three key events. The first was the letter from the Prime Minister notifying the recipient that he planned to nominate them for an honour and asking them whether this would ‘be acceptable’ to them. It was at this point that recipients could politely (and secretly) opt out of the process. Very few people did this, and for many this was an exciting moment. Bound to secrecy (the letter warned that the honour was not guaranteed, although by this stage it was pretty much a sure thing), they struggled to contain the news. About half a year later, at either the New Year or Queen’s Birthday list, their honour would be formally gazetted, and they would be inundated with letters of congratulation and in some cases media visits. Finally, a few months after that, they would go to the Palace to receive the medal of the award (and the accolade, if the award was a knighthood) itself. In most of these narratives, it was this final stage that was both the climax and the most important part of the process. While the first letter from the Prime Minister was the most accurate reflection of the bureaucratic and political processes that went into the creation of honours lists, the fiction that the Queen gave honours to the people was more powerful than any letter. It symbolically dissociated honours from politics, re-enchanting them with all the pomp and tradition that Buckingham Palace could give.

A consistent theme was that the words spoken by the royal personage at the investiture both held a sacred weight and demonstrated the empathy and intelligence of the royals. George Head, who received a MBE in 1978 for his service as headmaster of a hospital school, was impressed by

Prince Charles' intuition that Head's work at his hospital school 'must have been very interesting'.³⁸ Few of these brief conversations were as awkward as skier Liz Hobbs's comment to the Queen at her investiture in 1986 that: 'Rumour has it, Ma'am that you've been in the blackcurrant bushes with my dad!'³⁹ Her parents were suppliers of blackcurrant-picking machinery to Sandringham. Apparently the Queen got the joke: an equerry told Hobbs that he saw Her Majesty's shoulders shake with laughter.⁴⁰ For her, the distinctive and unusual connection created by both her parents' relationship to the Palace and her ability to amuse the Queen helped to make her investiture special. This was in addition the happiness that she derived from the recognition by the state of her minor sport. When ballet dancer and choreographer Anton Dolin was knighted in 1981, the words that the Queen said to him after his accolade were ones that 'I will never forget', although he was too discreet to repeat them in his autobiography.⁴¹ The otherwise prolix deejay, television presenter and (it was discovered after his death in 2011) serial child molester Jimmy Savile was similarly secretive about his conversation with the Queen Mother when he visited the palace for his OBE in 1971.⁴² For these men (Dolin also included a photo of himself with the Queen and the Queen Mother, with the caption 'the two ladies I admire most in the world') the words spoken at the investiture were too sacred to repeat.⁴³

Most accounts paid a great deal of attention to the personal appearance of not just the palace but also the royals themselves. Industrialist and engineer Wilf Ward was instructed by royal servants

³⁸ George Head, *George Head MBE* (Ferrybridge: Write Books CPR, 2008), 14.

³⁹ Liz Hobbs, *Liz Hobbs MBE: Autobiography* (Haywards Heath: Partridge, 1987), 118.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Anton Dolin, *Last Words: A Final Autobiography* (London: Century, 1985), 163.

⁴² Jimmy Savile, *As It Happens, Jimmy Savile, O.B.E.: His Autobiography* (London: Barrie and Jenkins, 1974), 115.

⁴³ Dolin, *Last Words*, plate 1.

at his investiture for an OBE in 1983 that he should not shake the Queen's hand but merely offer his hand for her to touch.⁴⁴ Noting this aspect of the protocol with approval, he approached the Queen carefully and modestly, and as she took his hand 'time seemed to stand still' and he became very flustered, almost tripping over himself as he backed away after receiving his medal.⁴⁵

Throughout his autobiography Ward projected the image of a gruff, manly engineer. He tackled unions, clients, officials and fellow engineers with the same kind of rugged practicality. Yet in the presence of the Queen he melted – it was the only moment in his autobiography where he showed himself to be overwhelmed by the experience. Another recipient, journalist and anti-cancer fundraiser Pat Seed, remarked that the while the Queen was: 'Petite and charming', she was very conscious at the investiture that: 'this gracious lady is queen of Great Britain and the Commonwealth. One is also conscious of the fact that she works as hard, if not harder, than any of her subjects. In her presence, one's affection and respect are renewed.'⁴⁶ The Queen's physical presence was portrayed as affecting people strongly. It stood in as a symbol for something bigger. Recipients were quick to juxtapose her physical features and presence with her position as matriarch or sovereign of large political units like the British state and the Commonwealth.

Savile wrote an exuberant account of the experience of receiving his OBE. The investiture formed the climax and the conclusion of his autobiography (written in 1974). This colorful memoir featured his postnominal letters prominently after his name on the front cover.⁴⁷ While he acknowledged that his fast life (detailed energetically, if not entirely candidly, in other parts of the

⁴⁴ Wilf Ward, *The Wilf Ward Story: Wilf Ward OBE, 1916-2005* (Pickering: The Wilf Ward Family Trust, 2005), 163.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 163–4.

⁴⁶ Pat Seed, *One Day at a Time* (London: Heinemann, 1979), 185.

⁴⁷ Savile, *As it happens*, 111-5.

memoir) came ‘well, well down on God’s personal honours list and there are many people without medals up to whose shoulders I will never reach’, he was tremendously excited and comforted by the award ‘if only for one reason. Imagine being able to take your mother to Buckingham Palace for a [sic] lifelong recognition.’⁴⁸ Savile opened the letter from the Prime Minister one night at 2:30am at his home in Leeds, after arriving back from another part of the country. He was so excited that he telephoned his brother (who was unappreciative), then spent the rest of the night working off his excitement by wheeling around gurneys at the local hospital where he volunteered.⁴⁹ The announcement itself and subsequent congratulations from friends and colleagues produced ‘embarrassment, guilt, pride and a mild form of agoraphobia’.⁵⁰ Savile was torn between a desire to broadcast to the world that he would soon be OBE and the secrecy demanded by the Prime Minister’s letter.

Savile called the day of the investiture itself ‘our palace day’, which he shared with his mother (whom he called ‘Duchess’) and his porter friend from the hospital, named ‘Joe’.⁵¹ The Duchess was ‘unbelieving’, and Joe treated the ceremony as if it were entirely in recognition of Savile himself. Savile portrayed his mother and friend as being in total awe, both bewildering and ‘like winning the pools’.⁵² By displacing part of the awe and sense of being overwhelmed onto his less worldly guests, Savile did present himself as being more sophisticated and less awed by the experience, but nonetheless he was clearly very impressed by the whole occasion. The ceremony was

⁴⁸ Ibid., 111–2.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 112–3.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 113.

⁵¹ Ibid., 114.

⁵² Ibid.

‘of the order of magnificence that only 1,000 years of tradition could sustain’. After the ceremony and a celebratory lunch organized by Edward Lewis, a Decca Records executive, Savile proceeded to a dance hall in Croydon, where, still in his morning dress and wearing his medal, he ‘weaved the spell over 2,000 teen-types’.⁵³

Reformed alcoholic Nick Charles, who formed and ran a charity to help others with his erstwhile condition, used the honours investiture a symbol of closure, reform and success in his 1998 autobiography. Presented with a MBE by Prince Charles in 1996, his investiture narrative contained multiple references to his past life on the streets. Before the investiture, one of his companions complained of his need for a toilet and Charles used his knowledge gained through years of living in London’s parks and vacant lots to locate a public facility near the palace which, amusingly for Charles, had: ‘A line of men, like me, immaculately dressed in morning suits, all in urgent need.’⁵⁴ During the ceremony, he ritualistically repeated to himself the names of dead friends from his days living on the street as an alcoholic.⁵⁵ He carried in his breast pocket a photograph of the last bed in which he had slept in a Salvation Army shelter.⁵⁶ The aftermath of his investiture, however, was even more intensely symbolic of his progress from hopeless alcoholism to national respectability. Taking hold of a BBC camera crew waiting outside the palace, he drove to Hungerford Bridge beneath Charing Cross viaduct, a place where he used to sleep when he lived on the streets.⁵⁷ There, he serendipitously met with ‘Bob’, whom he had known years before when that

⁵³ Ibid., 115.

⁵⁴ Nick Charles, *Through a Glass Brightly: The Fall and Rise of an Alcoholic* (London: Robson, 1998), 189.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 190.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 190–1.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 191–2.

location had been called ‘Cardboard city’ after the many homeless people who lived there in boxes.⁵⁸ Embracing his friend, he reminisced about the old days when they procured dodgy alcohol and semi-rotten fruit from nearby markets, and Charles insisted that he would come back to visit his homeless friend. “‘No you won’t’” replied Bob, ‘there was no anger in his tone. “You won’t come back ‘cause you gotta keep going forward, you’re all we’ve got, you gotta do what none of us could do, you’re all we got left.”’⁵⁹ As they parted ways, crying, Charles suggested to his old comrade that some things never changed, but again Bob disagreed: “‘One thing’s changed,” he said. “One of us has made it to the Palace.”’⁶⁰

This story’s symbolism was clear. Like Savile’s account of his OBE, it was the conclusion and the climax to Charles’ autobiography: no other event in his life could so capture the arc of homeless alcoholic to successful charitable personality than the story of Charles visiting his old friend in his old sleeping-place. The OBE itself was of symbolic importance not only because it recognized the merit involved in Charles’ work with alcoholics but also because it resulted in a trip to Buckingham Palace. The investiture was the concrete manifestation of state recognition of the service that Charles and his colleagues had performed to society and it had special value because of this – far more value than the letter from the Prime Minister that first intimated that the OBE was coming, or the announcement in the *London Gazette* through which Charles was officially made an OBE. Not only that, but it served, like Savile’s investiture, as a decisive moment in Charles’ life, providing closure (through his meeting with Bob) and triumph.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 192.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 192–3.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 193.

As previous chapters have suggested and as Hayden Phillips stressed in his 2004 report, honours were also a symbol of pride for the community as a whole. Communal recognition was central to the process from the perspective of the communities concerned and the recipients. This process was driven by letters of congratulation and community newsletters. As more and more charity workers received honours, this was all the more important. For example, Seed received her MBE in the late 1970s for her work leading a campaign to raise money for a CT scanner – then a very recent innovation that promised more accurate cancer diagnosis and treatment – for a local hospital. After receiving the award she was initially embarrassed about showing it off, but her husband encouraged her to bring it to fundraising appeal meetings as a symbol of state recognition for the project in which they was engaged.⁶¹ She later reflected that he was right: ‘The silver medal on its coral pink and light grey ribbon bow was passed around, admired, tried on. Children were thrilled to wear it for a few minutes, or have their picture taken, wearing it pinned to their school blazers. It was a source of pride and pleasure. Everybody felt they had a share in it. The medal belonged to them, and so did I.’⁶² In her memoir she took particular pride in describing the occasion when she showed the medal to Stephen Bilyenskyj, a blind twenty-year-old who had a few years before raised money for the scanner appeal through doing a sponsored swim. Placing it in his hands, she described the colors in detail, ‘watching his young blond head bend over the medal, and his expression of concentration and of pride’.⁶³ For Seed the honour stood in not just for personal achievement but for community pride and recognition – in fact, this was the most important aspect and the deciding factor in her welcoming the award.

⁶¹ Seed, *One Day at a Time*, 167.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 168.

Investitures involved both official and unofficial rituals. The necessity of wearing morning dress – a novelty to most recipients – offered delicious but sometimes challenging prospects to those who went to the Palace. It was also standard for a friend of the recipient to host a luncheon after the investiture (which always happened in the morning). This latter ritual reinforced the communal nature of the investiture. After her 1969 OBE investiture, Vera Lynn was hosted to a party by the Stars Foundation for Cerebral Palsy, which she had helped found.⁶⁴ Less famous and well-connected recipients also relished this tradition, because it gave them a chance to connect with friends in London and to be treated to a ‘higher’ class of living than those they normally experienced. The experience of the palace was matched with the experience of a fancy meal. The occasion (and the honour) was imbued with a sense of specialness and classiness. A friend had organized a ‘Singing Waitergram’ for Liz Hobbs during her post-investiture lunch at the Dochester, but the restaurant did not allow the singer in.⁶⁵ Anton Dolin enjoyed a celebratory lunch and a dinner, the former with friends and the latter with family.⁶⁶ Neither was as special to him, however, as the brief reception immediately after his investiture hosted by a friend who was a royal servant and attended briefly by the Queen Mother. Jimmy Savile was treated to lunch by Sir Edward Lewis, the boss of Decca Records.⁶⁷

As earlier chapters have observed, letters of congratulation, defensive justifications of the acceptance of honours and personal reflections on the system have tended to take on a generic quality. Like declarations of love or apologies, congratulation and gratitude happen often enough

⁶⁴ Vera Lynn, *Some Sunny Day: My Autobiography* (London: HarperCollins, 2009), 282.

⁶⁵ Hobbs, *Liz Hobbs MBE*, 118.

⁶⁶ Dolin, *Last Words*, 164.

⁶⁷ Savile, *As It Happens, Jimmy Savile, O.B.E.*, 115.

that their expression has inevitably tended towards the cliché. Such expressions continued into the final decades of the century, even as the constituency of honours lists changed. These habits, clichés and rituals had become a central part of the public and private experience of honours. Just as cynics played with the abbreviations involved in the Order of the British Empire to create names like the ‘Order of Britain’s Everybody’ at the beginning of the century, later recipients – and their friends and colleagues – had fun with the postnominal letters involved in honours. Wilf Ward’s brother (and business partner) Frank teased him with the old cliché that OBE stood for ‘Other Buggers’ Efforts’.⁶⁸ On the other hand, one of Pat Seed’s correspondents, Maxine Hukin, had a much more positive interpretation of Seed’s MBE: it stood for ‘Many Blessings Eternally’.⁶⁹ The religious connotations of this reinterpretation of MBE implied a connection between the temporary, carnal nature of the state honour and a more sacred world of spiritual rewards for Seed’s work.

These examples of personal encounters with the honours system and the Queen show that by the 1980s and 1990s large numbers of these people welcomed the broadening of the range of people whom were honored with MBEs and OBEs. Many were re-encharmed by their encounters with a royal, traditional institution. Some groups and individuals remained skeptical and cynical about the system, but in general the connections with the crown and the sense of affirmation that came with recognition by the state worked to increase the status and credibility of honours. The politics of honours were less important in terms of the overall public image of the system because people associated honours less with the political and administrative machinery behind them, instead seeing them as part of an enchanted realm of the national, rather than the state. The sense that honours were becoming associated as much with community and charitable work as with distant

⁶⁸ Ward, *The Wilf Ward Story*, 164.

⁶⁹ Pat Seed, *Another Day* (London: Heinemann, 1983), 99.

civil servants added to the monarchy's moral power and credibility: the more the Queen was associated with her 'heroes', the more the monarchy seemed relevant to the daily lives of 'ordinary' Britons.

In spite of the disenchanted mechanism that produced honours lists, therefore, honours derived great power because so many people's emotional reactions to them re-enchanted their experience of public life. In this sense, the 'quaint' nature of the system and the lack of political power in the hands of the Queen took on special significance: quaintness and inoffensiveness were powerful precisely because of what they were and what they were not. Honours brought together multiple agendas and principles: monarchy, meritocracy, aristocracy and democracy. The dignity of the monarch and of the investiture process helped to smooth over the conflict and reconcile divergences within these principles.

IV.

Among some of the most grateful and visible of the categories of recipients who enjoyed more and more audiences with the Queen were those who received honours for some form of cultural service. Maecenas honours, which included art, literature, 'learning' and science, made up a small proportion of any given honours lists, but they were usually among the most well-publicized because of the national fame of most recipients, especially after Wilson's innovations in giving honours to popular culture figures became more and more normal. The proportion of Maecenas awards did not change significantly over the last few decades of the century, but the shape and prominence of cultural figures on the lists did, thanks to the inclusion of a different kind of cultural celebrity.

The diversity of different kinds of people receiving honours meant that the problem of judging what rank to give out to successful nominees became more rather than less pressing.

Including more different kinds of achievement meant having to judge the relative as well as overall

magnitude of these achievements. The changes in honours to popular musicians in the second half of the twentieth century clearly showed this challenge. Chapter five demonstrated that the justification for the Beatles' honours was two-fold: economic and charitable. Their MBEs were not supported purely on the basis of their artistic merit but because of their contribution to the dollar balance and to youth services in Manchester. This was in contrast to artists in fields of cultural endeavor that might be considered 'high'. Ballet dancers and directors, poets, composers and opera singers generally had greater access than 'popular' culture practitioners to the limited number of awards available to artists and cultural figures. It was not until the 1990s that popular musicians began to receive honours for their cultural output rather than their charitable efforts. For example, the first rock stars to receive knighthoods were Bob Geldorf in 1986 (although this was an honorary KBE, since Geldorf was an Irish citizen) and Cliff Richard in 1995. Few would have argued, at the time or now, that Richard was the most talented or significant figure in his profession, but his extensive charity work combined with his relatively wholesome image meant that he preceded later pop knights like Paul McCartney (1997), Mick Jagger (1998) and Elton John (CBE in 1996, knighted in 1998). This spurt of knighthoods and other honours to popular musicians in the late 1990s was a break with earlier practice: while John and Richard were knighted for 'services to music and charitable services', McCartney and Jagger were knighted for 'services to music'. While the Sex Pistols are still unlikely to receive honours from the 'fascist regime', other rock stars from the 1990s were increasingly part of the system. With their inclusion, however, came the problem of how to decide which pop musicians were worthy of what honour.

This was especially true of popular musicians who had been successful in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. Dusty Springfield (whose real name was Mary O'Brien) was made OBE in 1999, decades after her greatest successes, which had coincided roughly with the Beatles' MBE back in the mid-1960s. Springfield died before she could attend an investiture, but was granted special permission to

have her managers collect her medal and take it to her in hospital.⁷⁰ Eric Clapton received a CBE in 2004, despite having in the past advocated cocaine use in his music and, perhaps more damningly, supported Enoch Powell. The logic that determined rank in these pop honours did not correlate with the traditional social hierarchies that had governed honours. Most of these honored musicians were internationally successful. Instead, rank seemed to correlate roughly with fame and with markers of status internal to the music industry. The knighthoods given to McCartney and Jagger suggested that they were a tier above figures like Eric Clapton or Queen guitarist Brian May, who received CBEs. Acts like Springfield who were successful but not huge stars over multiple decades received MBEs or OBEs. With some exceptions, rhythm sections of major bands have done a lot less well in terms of honours than songwriters, lead singers and guitarist.

The end of the century not only saw a broadening of the kinds of cultural activity but also the loosening of some of the informal rules that had governed the administration of honours. People who once were excluded because of perceived inappropriate behavior or failure to pay tax in the UK began to be more acceptable. Possibly the most famous case of this was P.G. Wodehouse's knighthood. Wodehouse suffered from the dual stigma of having lived overseas (and had, therefore, not paid taxes in the UK for decades) and of having been disgraced by his war conduct: he had been captured by the Nazi forces and forced to make a propaganda broadcast. Before the war he had been suggested for a knighthood, but for reasons that are unclear this had not gone through, and his disgrace and his residency in the USA blocked any later recognition for over a decade.⁷¹ Foreign Office officials were at first unsure about whether or not he should receive an honorary knighthood,

⁷⁰ "Springfield, Dusty (1939–1999)," Alice R. Carr in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004); online ed., ed. Lawrence Goldman, January 2011, (<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/72120>, accessed 23 June 2012).

⁷¹ See: Half-yearly Honours List (Civil), New Year 1937, T 305/1, NA.

because he had become a US citizen.⁷² A knighthood for the writer was mooted by Walter Citrine in the 1960s, but was roundly rejected by the civil service because of his war record and because Bertie Wooster's image as a loveable aristocratic idiot was thought to be out of step with the spirit of the times. Proposals originating with the Conservative Foreign Minister Alec Douglas-Home in 1971 also failed, until finally, mere months before Wodehouse's death, Harold Wilson succeeded in getting a knighthood for the ninety-four year old.⁷³ This was a case, once again, of politicians wanting to give out an honour but being stalled by civil servants. By the 1970s Milner-Barry, by then the leading figure behind the scenes in the honours secretariat, was willing to concede that 'the time has ... come to disregard this [the Nazi broadcast] behavior, or at least give the benefit of the doubt.'⁷⁴ While a CH was mooted, in the end a knighthood was judged the more appropriate honour. It was probably appreciated a great deal by a writer whose famous character, the valet Jeeves, once blackmailed another character by threatening to reveal to his wife that the latter had rejected a knighthood because he did not want to be known as 'Sir Lemuel'.

Wodehouse was well-known and well-liked by many within British elites, so it is not surprising that he had supporters willing to lobby for his knighthood. By the late 1990s, writers who published in non-literary popular genres were also receiving honours. In 1998 comic fantasy writer Terry Pratchett was made OBE (he was knighted eleven years later) for 'services to literature'. While he was 'mightily chuffed about it', Pratchett employed his characteristic love of paradox by

⁷² Honours: USA: P.G. Wodehouse: Honorary Award, FCO 57/278, NA.

⁷³ "Wodehouse denied a knighthood by Bertie", *Daily Telegraph*, 16 August 2002, online at: (<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/1404567/Wodehouse-denied-a-knighthood-by-Bertie.html>), accessed 18 May 2012).

⁷⁴ Question of the Award of a CH to Mr P.G. Wodehouse, Honours: USA: P.G. Wodehouse: Honorary Award, FCO 57/278, NA.

commenting that his services to literature ‘consisted of refraining from trying to write any’.⁷⁵ While it would be difficult to deny that Pratchett’s influence or success as a novelist deserved high honour (indeed, a case could be made that he was a kind of Wodehouse for a new generation), the inclusion of ‘genre’ writers in honours lists made judging relative merit more and more difficult. As with the expansion of pop music honours, it was unclear how honours committees were judging cultural merit. Was it a function of popularity? Of peer review? And how did the charitable work of the candidate influence their nomination? The more different interest groups and fields of cultural endeavor were included in the honours system, the more difficult it was to standardize how many, what kind and whether honours were given to them at all.

Cultural, show business and sports people made up a visible and growing minority in honours lists in the later part of the twentieth century. While they were a minority (these three groups made up no more than 10 percent of any given list by the 1980s and 1990s), these groups show how difficult it was to assign ranks to service and how celebrity and personality were translated into a formal hierarchy. Critics like Brandreth lamented the seemingly disorganized nature of these selections, but there was a formal logic behind both who received honours and what honours they received. This logic was driven by political imperatives and by perceptions on Britain’s changing society. What seemed like random appointments to honours made up a small part of a larger set of calculations and quotas that sought to achieve particular social and political ends. Individual selections for honours lists may have seemed idiosyncratic and erratic to observers with a deep knowledge of the relative merits of potential recipients. But in terms of aggregate numbers and overall trends, an intentional political logic was at work behind shifts in the honours system. The

⁷⁵ *Ansible* 132, July 1998, online at: (<http://news.ansible.co.uk/a132.html>, accessed 20 June 2012).

appearance of soap stars and pop idols in honours lists, sometimes at the expense of ballet dancers and composers, was a part of this logic.⁷⁶

V.

Through the 1980s the political function and party use of honours in Britain continued much as it had for decades. Wilson was able to reduce the total proportion of civil service honours and recognize more people in other forms of public and community service, which was by no means an insignificant achievement. The shape of honours lists between the 1950s and the 1970s changed substantially, with many new groups being included. However, the upper echelons of the honours system, in particular, operated much as they had at the beginning of the century: rewarding politicians, social elites and senior civil servants (including military officers). Margaret Thatcher's conservative government from 1979 to 1989 was adept at using honours to reward donors without raising a great deal of controversy, as were its predecessors throughout the century. As discussed below, Thatcher was also probably responsible for one of the most cynical and unusual individual appointments of the second half of the century. But this was increasingly at odds with the overall pattern of distribution and wider attitudes towards who deserved what, especially with the expanding popularity of the lower ranks discussed above. Actual practice had always been at least a little at odds with the formal structure of honours and the by the 1970s they had diverged to the extent that was increasingly difficult to support or justify. The class basis of rank, in particular, continued to cause problems as the range of society recognized by honours broadened. It was all very well giving knighthoods and damehoods to distinguished composers and great poets, but what happened when rock stars and fantasy novelists were thrown into the mix? The politics of honours through this

⁷⁶ Ian Inglis, "The Politics Of Stardust Or The Politics Of Cool: Popular Music And The British Honours System," *International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music* 41, no. 1 (June 1, 2010): 51–71.

period attempted to resolve this divergence and to deal with ongoing concerns around political honours.

When officials consulted Thatcher about honours policy, her response was that there needed to be fewer civil service honours and more for the private sector. In other words, she supported the kind of changes that happened under Wilson. According to a mid-1980s civil service aide memoire, Thatcher was ‘closely interested in the distribution in her list between the private and the public sector [original emphasis]’, although ‘her concern need not mean changes in overall numbers’, but in the general emphasis of the honours lists.⁷⁷ This theme of rewarding more private sector services and fewer civil servants ran through discussions between the Prime Minister’s office and the Civil Service during her years as premier. Three quinquennial reviews of honours scales occurred during Thatcher’s time in office – in 1979, 1984 and 1989 – and in each she made a similar contribution. In the first review, the head of the civil service, Ian Bancroft, defended the proportion of honours (then around 20 percent, reduced from almost 40 percent in 1960) given to civil servants and the military. At the time, he was more concerned with the balance in numbers between home and overseas divisions of the civil service, which had been causing some internal tensions, especially among the former, who felt that their share was relatively low compared to those enjoyed by the military and diplomats.⁷⁸ These reviews continued to be concerned most of all with the balance and proportions of civil service honours rather than with the overall shape of honours policy. In 1985, the Ceremonial Office was wary about reducing the proportion of civil servants receiving honours because of ‘the present state of morale in the [Home Civil] Service’.⁷⁹ E.R. Gardener and M.E.

⁷⁷ Quinquennial Review of Honours 1985-9, Aide Memoire, Honours Scales: Review of Honours Scales 1984, general papers, T 344/55, NA.

⁷⁸ Note to Sir Robert Armstrong, 1983, Honours Scales: Review of Honours Scales 1984, general papers, T 344/55, NA.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

Hedley Miller of the Ceremonial Office suggested to Robert Armstrong in 1984 that Thatcher's desire to see a larger proportion of honours from the private sector should be delayed because they 'would rather keep an open mind, until there has been further analysis, about whether an overall limit on the public sector would be the best solution'.⁸⁰ Such discussions indicate that the Ceremonial Office was committed to the status quo.

While the Prime Minister was consulted, Thatcher was on the margins rather than at the center of the Ceremonial Office's deliberations about honours scales and the overall shape of honours lists. During the 1970s and 1980s the Ceremonial Office used the same kind of categories that had existed for decades: honours lists were internally divided between Local Services (which included police, nursing, education, local government and social work); State Servants; Political Service; Maecenas; Medicine and science; and journalism, sport, law and religion.⁸¹ Within the civil service and the military professional rank still corresponded directly and predictably with the rank of honour received. Departmental secretaries and three-star Lieutenant-Generals still received knighthoods and CBs, while men and women in the ranks and non-professional divisions still received BEMs throughout the 1980s, even if fewer in each category were actually being awarded these.⁸² The bar for entry was higher, but the way in which the end result was determined remained how it had been in the mid-1920s. In the quinquennial reviews, the issue of disparities between different divisions of state service in an era when the number of civil service honours was declining was a more significant point of discussion than the overall balance of honours. The diplomatic

⁸⁰ E.R. Gardener and M.E. Hedley Miller to Sir Robert Armstrong, 21 May 1984, Honours Scales: Review of Honours Scales 1984, general papers, T 344/55, NA.

⁸¹ Quinquennial Review of Honours 1985-9, Aide Memoire, Honours Scales: Review of Honours Scales 1984, general papers, T 344/55, NA.

⁸² M.E. Hedley-Miller to Sir Robert Armstrong, 28 June 1984, Annex 1, Honours Scales: Review of Honours Scales 1984, general papers, T 344/55, NA.

service and the military both enjoyed unusually high proportions of honours relative to their size. Military honours were defended on the basis that military service remained a special kind of service to the state: the fact that soldiers and sailors risked their lives, operated in an unusually hierarchical and insignia-oriented environment and retired relatively early all meant that they deserved a 'generous allocation of state awards'.⁸³ The defense of diplomatic service honours was similar: diplomats had individual commands, more significant status games to play and unusual demands on their time and energies that meant that they had greater need of honours. The 1989 review of honours scales, like that of 1984, was evolutionary and incremental in its changes. Thatcher endorsed a proposal by the Ceremonial Office to create a new committee dealing with honours to the media (including radio and television) and pushed for more private sector honours. Officials agreed with her criticisms and once again made incremental changes.

When asked for policy direction by the Ceremonial office, Thatcher emphasized the private sector and, eventually, voluntarism, but she did not force the issue. Many of the non-civil service honours being given out during the 1980s were going to people who were nonetheless on the public payroll, or else people who were paid to do the service for which they were being honoured: in particular people like medical professionals and police. Recipients working in the arts and in science were also often funded publicly. They were not counted as being civil servants – instead they fell into one of the other categories, often 'local services'.⁸⁴ Thatcher's desire to see more private sector honorees was, therefore, ambiguous. When this was pointed out to her in 1984 by Robert

⁸³ M.E. Hedley-Miller to Sir Robert Armstrong, 28 June 1984, Annex 2, Honours Scales: Review of Honours Scales 1984, general papers, T 344/55, NA.

⁸⁴ Sir Robert Armstrong, minute to the Prime Minister, 20 September 1984, Honours Scales: Review of Honours Scales 1984, general papers, T 344/55, NA.

Armstrong, she agreed that extensive change would be undesirable.⁸⁵ In principle, Thatcher wanted a more private sector-oriented system, but she did not have the political will to push the issue. In the end, the 1984-5 report concluded that while the Ceremonial Branch needed to consider how to solicit more recommendations from the private sector, there was no need for awards ‘in the business and industrial sector to be on a significantly more generous scale than at present’.⁸⁶ It would be another ten years before the balance of honours between different sectors would be significantly revised, and that would be framed in a significantly different way. It was the ‘voluntary’ rather than the business sector that would win out under a conservative government within a decade.

These negotiations between the Prime Minister’s Office and the Ceremonial Office show a predictable correlation between Thatcher’s attitude towards honours and her ideological orientation: it is not surprising that she wanted to emphasize the private sector over civil servants. But how much effect did this actually have on who received what honours? Her contributions to the honours scales review process seem to have been mostly neutralized by the honours committee. Some small changes were made to priorities, but there was no revolutionary change. Civil servants kept their walled gardens of the Orders of the Bath and Saint Michael and Saint George, while the actual proportions of awards in different sectors seem to have changed little in the two reviews held under Thatcher. As Chapter five showed, the shift from a civil service-dominated honours system to one that focused on the wider community was already underway before Thatcher came to power. The idea that honours should be less focused around Whitehall was common to both Labour and the

⁸⁵ F.E.R.B. to Sir Robert Armstrong, 1 October 1984, Honours Scales: Review of Honours Scales 1984, general papers, T 344/55, NA.

⁸⁶ HD Committee, HD 7426, Quinquennial Report, 4 December 1984, Honours Scales: Review of Honours Scales 1984, general papers, T 344/55, NA.

Conservatives, even if they sometimes had different ideas about which part of the community should be enjoying the bounty of the system.

In fact, the most significant change that Thatcher instituted was a return to an older practice. Soon after she came to power, she took the same action that the last Conservative Prime Minister, Edward Heath, had also taken almost ten years before: the restoration of political honours. It was in the arena of political funding and the rewarding of cash support with honours that she was most criticized by opponents. Political honours alone made up a high proportion of about 20 percent of honours given out for much of the decade. Thatcher, like many of her predecessors used knighthoods to reward faithful long-serving backbenchers for their political service. Political honours had also been a sensitive issue in the Labour party: in January 1976, for example, the National Executive Committee voted to condemn Harold Wilson after Ray Brookes, the chairman of a company that gave large donations to the Conservative Party, was given an honour in spite of Labour's official policy to suspend political honours.⁸⁷ Barbara Castle was one of the only members of the committee to vote against this motion, and she noted later, with some satisfaction, that evidence showed that Brookes was not Wilson's choice, but one made by the leader of the opposition. 'If I were Wedgie [Castle's name for Tony Benn] I would feel rather small', she remarked, alluding to Tony Benn's continuing aggressive approach to the honours system, which led him to attack Wilson over the incident.⁸⁸ This episode showed that for Labour political honours remained a difficult issue because they were still not unanimous about how to use them. The difference between the Conservative Party's attitude to honours – a 'corrupt' but well-honed and

⁸⁷ Barbara Castle, *The Castle Diaries, 1974-76* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1980), 633.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 634.

traditional practice – and the residue of idealism within Labour for a meritocratic society continued to be complicated by those within the latter party who desired honours.

The political list could be seen as an abuse of the honours system, but it was a traditional abuse, with a history that went back long before Lloyd George. But the implication that the Conservative Party of the 1980s was giving out honours in return for funding and political support went further than just the conventional political list. In 1983 *Labour Research* published the results of an investigation into the people who were receiving honours outside of the political list (especially high honours) under Thatcher, which indicated that CEOs of companies that had made large donations to the Conservative Party were receiving peerages and knighthoods at unusually high rates. The size of the donation, rather than the size or worth of the company, seemed to determine the honours received by these men.⁸⁹ According to the journal, while 41 percent of Britain's largest one hundred industrial companies since 1979 had donated to the Conservative Party, 78 percent of companies whose directors had received honours had been donors.⁹⁰ While the forty-one men (eight peers and thirty-three knights) listed in *Labour Research* were 'clearly industrialists of significance and the kind of people who would be expected to receive honours from a conservative administration', the article pointed out that these were not awards for political and public services and thus had not been subject to the Political Honours Scrutiny Committee.⁹¹ Essentially, it implied that the Conservative Party, in league with the opaque civil service committees that governed non-political

⁸⁹ *Labour Research*, December 1983, 308-10

⁹⁰ *Labour Research*, December 1983, 308.

⁹¹ *Labour Research*, December 1983, 309-10

honours and with donors, was playing the system in order to evade scrutiny. As a solution, Labour Research suggested that the PHSC's ambit be expanded to include non-political honours.⁹²

For all their suggestiveness, these statistics did not prove wrongdoing let alone criminal activity on the part of Conservative fundraisers. Instead they exposed once again what had been the case for centuries: the intimate connection between political fundraising and certain parts of the honours system. *Labour Research's* statistics were accompanied by speculation and some evidence that Tory funding was 'in crisis'.⁹³ Using research by an American political scientist into British political funding, the article pointed to a shift since the end of the Second World War from private individuals to corporations giving donations to the Conservative Party.⁹⁴ Again, the suggestion of a connection between funding problems and the disproportionate rewards to donors was persuasive, but the precise connections and mechanisms remained murky. The entrenched mechanisms of party finance – corrupt as they were – were not as dramatic or as sexy as the scandal surrounding Wilson's resignation list. For all the efforts of *Labour Research* and some journalists, the outcry against Thatcher's fundraising habits failed to really capture the public imagination at the time, although they did contribute to widespread cynicism.

The final act honorific inventiveness by Thatcher came soon after her resignation from the premiership, a year before she became a life peer upon her departure from the House of Commons. In 1991, John Major made Denis Thatcher a baronet, making him the first and only non-royal to be given a hereditary honour since the 1960s. While Denis Thatcher was eligible for a knighthood for his political service to his wife and his success as a businessman, his baronetcy was exceptional and

⁹² Ibid., 310.

⁹³ Ibid., 309.

⁹⁴ Michael Pinto-Duschinsky, *British Political Finance, 1830-1980* (Washington: American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, 1981), 55.

unusual. By convention, they had not been given since 1965, when hereditary peerages were replaced by life peerages. It is unclear exactly why Thatcher received this honour, but critics suggested that the baronetcy had been created to allow their otherwise undistinguished son, Mark to receive a title on his father's death. It also meant that for the last months of her time in the Commons, Thatcher held the title of 'Lady', although this could have just as easily been achieved through a knighthood. When questioned a little over a decade later in the Select Committee on Public Administration on the issue of why Thatcher received a baronetcy, Major demurred. When asked by the chair of the committee about the appointment, Major replied only that: 'It was a response to powerful representations that I felt inclined to grant at the time. But I do not think I am going to elaborate upon that.'⁹⁵ When asked directly whether he had made the appointment at the behest of his predecessor as Prime Minister, he again refused to elaborate. The closest he gave to a clear justification was that Denis Thatcher's situation – the husband of the first female Prime Minister, who herself served for eleven years – meant that he deserved unusual recognition.⁹⁶ It was Denis Thatcher's sex that warranted a baronetcy.

For all the opposition to Thatcher's honours habits, she never faced one individual major public scandal like Wilson's resignation list. Aside from Denis Thatcher's baronetcy, her appointments were consistently political, which in itself was a kind of largely unspoken tradition. Wilson's resignation list was extraordinary because the favor shown was personal rather than political. As argued in Chapter four, his list would have passed through the Political Honours Scrutiny Committee unscathed had the various recipients been regular political donors to the Labour

⁹⁵ Select Committee on Public Administration Minutes of Evidence, Examination of Witnesses (Questions 860-879), 20 May 2004, online at: (<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200304/cmselect/cmpubadm/212/4052005.htm>, accessed 10 May 2012).

⁹⁶ Ibid.

Party, rather than people to whom Wilson – not the Party – owed personal debts. The recognition of donors by party machinery was also such an entrenched process that it was invisible in comparison to Wilson’s eccentric, individual choices. But although Thatcher was not caught out by any individual scandal, her time in office coincided with an era of increasing criticism of the honours system and increasing use of the honours system as a way of criticizing wider problems in British society.

VI.

TABLE 6.1: Percentage of civilian honours in the Order of the British Empire given to key groups in Britain, 1988–1998*

	Central civil servants	Non-volunteer local service	Political	Voluntary service	Other
1988	14%	36%	8%	16%	26%
1998	7%	21%	N/A	52%	20%

* Estimates based on citations published in the ordinary (New Year and King’s/Queen’s Birthday) honours lists in supplements to the *London Gazette*. Political honours were formally abolished in 1997.

In 1992, the Head of the Home Civil Service, in conjunction with John Major, launched a new review of the honours system. The deliberations that went on in various committees remain mostly inaccessible. Its results, however, were clear: in 1993 John Major announced to Parliament that he would introduce a set of significant changes to the system with the goal of making it officially classless and merit-based. Introducing these changes, Major argued that in spite of ‘huge changes in national life’, the present system ‘has remained largely unchanged for 70 years’.⁹⁷ In place of a hierarchical system, Major wanted to embrace the principle that honours should be awarded on the basis of merit without reference to class. Furthermore, this merit needed to be unusual and not

⁹⁷ *House of Commons Parliamentary Papers*, 4 March 1993, 453.

merely what was expected from the recipient. According to Major, honours should be: ‘for exceptional achievement or exceptional service, over and above that which normally might be expected’.⁹⁸ Civil servants and other office-holders who had, in the past, received honours or titles on the basis of their position, should not, he argued, receive honours simply on the basis of holding that position. Instead of the rank of an honour being determined by social or professional status, Major asserted, it should correspond to the degree of merit and service performed by the recipient. Different levels of honour should reflect ‘different levels of achievement’.⁹⁹

The second major change that Major announced was the elimination of the British Empire Medal and the Imperial Service Order (although not the Imperial Service Medal). As earlier chapters have shown, the BEM had always been a source of anxiety and confusion, especially among recipients. While he did not phrase the objections to the BEM in terms of its basis as a kind of honour for the working classes who were not eligible for chivalric orders, he made it clear that the initial purpose of the medal had become obsolete or, at best, obscure:

The distinction between service meriting the award of an MBE and that meriting a British Empire Medal has become increasingly tenuous. It can no longer be sustained. I therefore intend in future to increase the number of recommendations for MBEs and to discontinue recommending awards of BEMs.¹⁰⁰

A corresponding increase in the number of MBEs would be welcome, Major argued, because MBEs entitled recipients to a royal investiture, while BEMs did not. This change also brought the wider world of honours into line with the elimination of the distinction between white and blue collar jobs

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

in the civil service.¹⁰¹ Recipients of MBEs, OBEs and CBEs who preferred a local ceremony for family reasons or other reasons of convenience could choose to receive their honour from their local Lord Lieutenant rather than at Buckingham Palace.¹⁰² The removal of the Imperial Service Order in favor of expanding the Imperial Service Medal was based on a similar principle. The Medal had been for working-class recipients, while the Order was for officer-level and middle class civil servants, but both were long-service awards. By phasing the Order out, Major both removed the class distinction and moved the award away from being an honour and towards simply being a decoration, thus protecting the principle of merit rather than long-service being the basis for honours. To complement this ideology of classlessness, Major suggested that the same principle should also apply to military medals. The next review of gallantry awards would attempt to reorganize medals so that they were no longer linked to the rank of the recipient – which applied in every case except that of the Victoria Cross, which was designed to be available for any rank from its inception in 1856.¹⁰³

Finally, Major argued that: ‘the means of nomination for honour should be more widely known and more open. It is, at present, too haphazard.’¹⁰⁴ Again, this was a longstanding problem, as the numerous people mentioned in previous chapters who wrote to diverse politicians, secretaries, civil servants and royal officials to try to work out how to nominate an acquaintance or colleague showed. Major’s proposed solution involved the creation of nomination forms, as well as their

¹⁰¹ Robin Butler to Andrew Turnbull, 22 September 1989, Honours Scales: Review of Honours Scales 1989, general papers, T 344/56, NA.

¹⁰² *House of Commons Parliamentary Papers*, 4 March 1993, 454

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 455.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

distribution ‘both to members of the public and particularly to voluntary bodies and charities’.¹⁰⁵

Where in the past voluntary workers had been the most confused about how to nominate their colleagues for honours, Major emphasized the importance of getting information to them, saying that this would ‘help increase the recognition of merit of all kinds’.¹⁰⁶ He concluded his speech to parliament by emphasizing the value of the honours system as a tradition and an institution: ‘The honours system has been with us for centuries and has a continuing and valued role to play in British life. I strongly support it, but it is right that it should periodically be examined.’¹⁰⁷

The debate that followed focused on other quirks of the honours system that remained unreformed amidst Major’s suggestions. While opposition MPs approved of the general democratization of honours (after all, it had been an issue in the Labour Party for decades), they argued that the continuation of political honours continued to be an unsightly anomaly.¹⁰⁸ John Smith, the MP for Monklands East, repeated the older criticism of the ‘British Empire’ in the Order of that name. He then proceeded to his main criticism: that Conservative governments were the primary users of political honours:

...there is nothing haphazard [a word Major had used earlier to describe the system] about the award of political honours to the Conservative Party. Has he [Major] no shame about the way in which eight Conservative Members of Parliament regularly and automatically collect knighthoods each year, for no other reason than that they are supporters of the ruling political party?¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

Conservative politicians, Smith suggested, were the one group immune to Major's principled stand against 'Buggins' Turn'. Political and 'genuine public service' needed to be differentiated by a reformed honours system. In his defense, Major cited the usual justification for the name of the Order of the British Empire – that it had 'historical pedigree [and] is respected and familiar'. In response to the more substantive criticism of political honours, Major argued that the 'people who work to sustain our democratic system' had as legitimate a claim to public honours as anyone else. He then suggested that the Political Honours Scrutiny Committee protected the system from corruption – a view that took for granted the reliability and efficacy of the Committee.¹¹⁰ Other MPs offered further criticisms of the reforms: Paddy Ashdown suggested they were timid, and that the system should be further leveled through the use of just one order and the abolition of the Prime Minister's power of patronage, while Tony Benn embraced the opportunity to repeat many of the same criticisms of honours that he had been making for the previous three decades.¹¹¹ The most common criticism was similar to Smith's: that the continuation of political honours was problematic. The contrast between Conservative MPs, press figures and donors receiving knighthoods or damehoods and the idea of the democratization was too great for Major to reconcile, according to his critics in parliament. This tension boiled down to fundamental disagreement over the nature of what it meant to democratize honours and what it meant to have a 'classless society'.

Other critics outside of parliament did not agree with Major's execution (if not the broad principle) of honours changes designed to achieve a 'classless society'. Hugo Vickers, who wrote a history of honours in 1994 that focused on the ritual and ceremonial details of the system, argued that the notion that the BEM was a working class award was a misunderstanding and that while it

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 456.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 456-7.

‘sounds sensible’, it actually meant that some in the army who might have received medals before its elimination would miss out.¹¹² Pointing out that Denis Thatcher’s baronetcy was all the more hypocritical in the context of the attempted elimination of class, Vickers belonged to a group of critics who reveled in and embraced the antiquity of honours: changes, he implied, were dangerous because they risked compromising the honours system through the elimination of tradition. Vickers also argued that one particular traditional basis for honours, rejected by Major, should actually be retained. Honours for long service, which were not technically for any merit other than obstinacy and good health, were appropriate in Vickers’ philosophy of honours.¹¹³

How much did this actually change the way in which the honours system operated? The attempt to formally decouple honours from the class system was symbolically significant, but these revisions did not render the honours system classless, or indeed free it from political influence. As the parliamentary debate showed, the power of political parties to use honours for patronage purposes was left essentially unchanged. Whatever Major’s personal feelings on this issue may have been (in private, he seems to have had little affection for the political use of honours) the use of honours for political patronage remained an essential and well-loved institution within the Conservative Party and was also used, more tentatively, by Labour. Some of this had been displaced to the peerage, which by this point was a separate – and much more political – institution to the honours system, but knighthoods remained an important tool for whips. Major’s spurious defense of honours for political service and donations meant that these practices continued to affect the credibility of claims to democratization and classlessness. Major does seem to have been the political

¹¹² Hugo Vickers, *Royal Orders* (London: Boxtree, 1994), 11, 132–3.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 11.

force that pushed for change, as the review of the changes at the end of the decade showed, but he could not escape aspects of the system that reflected poorly on politicians involved.

At the same time, the transformation of BEMs into MBEs was significant. Not only did it remove an ongoing source of confusion for journalists, recipients, politicians, civil servants and medal collectors, it also expanded the number of people who received their awards for what was often community service of some kind from the hand of the Queen or a member of her close family. This in itself was significant for both the image of the royal family and the people and communities who received these awards, as explained above. It also symbolically decoupled social from honorific rank. One's rank in an order of chivalry was no longer officially tied to social status (although it still gave social precedence at formal occasions). Major's introduction of a direct system for public nominations made the process for nominating honours less opaque and, in theory at least, more accessible for a wider range of groups and people.

Over the next decade there were three more major reviews of honours that further changed the system in an attempt to revise it for a new century. In 2000 the Cabinet Secretary, Richard Wilson, undertook another review to evaluate how Major's reforms were working.¹¹⁴ It focused first of all on the relative success of the public nominations system, which had expanded from 28 percent of honours given in 1994 to an average of around 45 percent in the last few years of the 1990s.¹¹⁵ The number of honours given out to people doing voluntary work specifically had also substantially expanded. In 1994 a third of honours were given to the voluntary sector. By 2000 the proportion was, on average, a little over half.¹¹⁶ The data in Figure 1 supports these internal results, although

¹¹⁴ Note on Honours, Standard Note SN/PC/02832, House of Commons Library, 13-16.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 14.

both hide the extent to which the expansion of the voluntary sector only happened through a subsection of honours lists. The proportion given to state servants specifically had fallen from 20 percent to 15 percent of total honours between 1992 and 2000.¹¹⁷ These shifts were explained, suggested Wilson, because:

...in 1993 there was sufficient political pressure to bring about change. Mr. Major went public about his wish to have an honours system which reflected his pursuit of a classless society. As the review proceeded, and the case was made for keeping things broadly as they were, he objected that he could not have a review which brought forth a mouse. It was the Prime Minister's advance public commitment to reform that delivered change on this occasion.¹¹⁸

Finally, Wilson's report suggested that while nominations were easier, the actual process of selection remained clouded by secrecy, especially after increased restrictions on access imposed by exemptions around honours in the 2000 Freedom of Information Act. The membership of the individual committees who contributed to honours lists remained secret, although Wilson recommended that this be changed. This measure was adopted, finally, in 2004.

In 2003-4 the Committee on Public Administration [PASC] produced a further report concurrently with Hayden Phillips' investigation. In it, they sought direct feedback from the public. Over a hundred individuals and groups wrote in to give a wide variety of perspectives on the honours system. Some had specific suggestions for reform that matched many of the ideas being discussed in parliament and Whitehall. Other submissions were aimed at a different target: they pressed for honours for individuals or interest groups whom they felt were being neglected. Richard Lewis of the Rugby Football League wrote to point out the high numbers of supporters and distinguished performance of the British team on the international stage in that sport which, with its

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 15

working class origins and lower status compared to rugby union and soccer, had not seen many honours.¹¹⁹

The PASC's report was comprehensive and wide-ranging. It consulted experts from a variety of different backgrounds, such as historians, journalists, politicians and the chairs of various professional organizations. Its conclusions were mixed, but flirted with a more radical tone: citing Charles de Gaulle's culling of French orders after the Second World War the report suggested that 'a ruthlessly unsentimental approach to the honours system can co-exist with fervent patriotism'.¹²⁰ Their conclusions criticized the lack of clarity and independence in decision-making, as well as continuing the long-standing criticism of civil service honours. The report also criticized the name of the Order of the British Empire, whose anachronism was not innocent. In a diverse Britain, with immigrants from all over the former empire, the name still had a negative symbolic meaning because it could be: 'anachronistic and insensitive, an inappropriate symbol for today's Britain. The United Kingdom has an increasingly diverse population, many of them with links to the countries of the former Empire, and they are often uneasy at something that reminds them of imperial domination.'¹²¹ Increasing diversity through more awards to women and minority ethnic groups had been a matter of policy for Tony Blair's Labour government, and the committee report supported the expansion of this policy. Titles, too, came under criticism because of their implied class basis. In fact, according to the report's authors, titles were one of the most confusing aspects of the honours

¹¹⁹ Memorandum of the Rugby Football League, Select Committee on Public Administration, Fifth Report, Written Evidence, Volume II, Hon 93, online at: (<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200304/cmselect/cmpubadm/212/21202.htm>, accessed 30 May 2012).

¹²⁰ Conclusions, Committee on Public Administration, Fifth Report, online at: (<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200304/cmselect/cmpubadm/212/21208.htm#a29>, accessed June 5 2012).

¹²¹ Ibid.

system and as such ‘carry connotations of social divisiveness’.¹²² The report called for the retirement of the Orders of the Bath and of Saint Michael and Saint George; the renaming of the Order of the British Empire to the Order of British Excellence (a move favored by many of the witnesses, including John Major); the phasing out of all titles; a fully independent commission that would govern appointments; annual public reports on diversity and proportions of honours given out; and a more thoroughgoing effort to include a wider range of communities in the system.¹²³

Many of the same ideas animated Phillips’ report of the same year; however, in almost every way he advocated more moderate, tentative change and opposed the abolition or renaming of existing orders. Phillips opened his 2004 report with a defense of honours systems in general and the British system in particular. Honours in Britain were more famous and well-respected because of its system’s antiquity and complexity. ‘Put... simply’, he argued, changes to the honours system needed to be done with caution because:

The honours system is our way, within our cultural history, of saying thank you, publicly. Many other countries do the same – with titles and orders – which reflect their cultural history whether that is more ancient or more recent than ours. (Some people will find interesting the information this review has gathered together on the systems in other countries)¹²⁴

Honours were at their core innocent and ‘laudable’. They originated not in a desire for political patronage but in a general public wish to ‘show gratitude: “The honours system derives from the simple and laudable wish to recognise exceptional service and achievement and to show gratitude

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Conclusions and Recommendations, Committee on Public Administration, Fifth Report, online at: (<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200304/cmselect/cmpubadm/212/21210.htm>, accessed June 5 2012).

¹²⁴ While late in the report Phillips thanked David Cannadine for the ‘powerful insight’ of his scholarship on the system, there was little sense of the wider historical context, or of how the honours system itself may have influenced the cultural history of the country. Phillips, *Review of the Honours System*, 4, 10.

publicly.¹²⁵ Its popularity was proven by the high rate of acceptance (98 percent, according to Phillips) and the regularity of letters which demonstrated the ‘vicarious pleasure at the award of an honour’ on the part of recipients’ communities. While ‘some argument’ about the form of honours existed, ‘there is general agreement that some form of national honours system should exist so that the country can give a public thank you to those who have demonstrated achievement and exceptional service’.¹²⁶

Merit was the foremost criteria for the award of an honour, defined as a combination of ‘achievement’ and ‘exceptional service’.¹²⁷ Honours could be delayed in order to compensate for the fact that an exceptional person was ‘still on the way up’ and thus could be expected to do even greater things, but should not be given only to those at the end of their careers. ‘Outstanding and enduring contributions’ should be ‘linked or soon after specific achievements’.¹²⁸ As for the level of the honour, this should not be in any way associated with social class. In the military and ‘other hierarchical organizations’ there would still be a link between rank and honour, but ‘this is not an inviolable rule’.¹²⁹ For the majority of honours in society at large, the MBE should correspond to service at the community level, the OBE for regional or county service, the CBE for national service and the ‘kighthood and above’ for: ‘pre-eminent contribution in any field, usually, but not exclusively, at a national level, or in a capacity which will be recognized by peer groups as inspirational and significant nationally, and which demonstrates sustained commitment and/or

¹²⁵ Ibid., 15.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 26

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 28.

public service'.¹³⁰ It was the scope of the service, not the nature of the recipient, which should, according to Phillips, determine the rank of the award in the Order of the British Empire.

Phillips' report made three main recommendations: that 'local networks' be strengthened in order to better honor underrepresented groups; that the special committees that decided on honours should be more open, and be chaired by independent outsiders from the civil service and government; and that the proportion of awards to civil servants be further reduced to 20 percent of total honours, in order to 'help in re-examining the number of honours allocated to different sectors of our national life'.¹³¹ To Phillips, the problems with the honours system, as it stood, were mostly to do with underrepresentation and the difficulty of assessing the quality of 'distinction' and 'service' – the two categories for which honours were awarded, according to him.¹³² Political interference was of negligible importance, and the report barely mentioned class.¹³³ It was geographical, gender and cultural diversity that presented the greatest challenges to the experts who ran the system, but these challenges were in the process of being overcome. 'This would never be perfect, but, according to Phillips, common sense had created and would create balanced honours lists: 'No one list can pretend to get this absolutely right but the important point is to ensure, as lists are taken together over time, that the changing balance reflects what reasonable people would consider fair.'¹³⁴

In the end, it was the suggestions of Hayden Phillips' report that won out. The Public Administration Select Committee's report was comprehensive and varied, but its multiple authors,

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Phillips, *Review of the Honours System*, iii.

¹³² Ibid., 5-7.

¹³³ Ibid., 5.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 6.

wide range of witnesses and resultant lack of focus, combined with its more radical recommendations, were a problem. Phillips offered one authoritative voice. In advocating moderate change, he was neither too radical while also appearing to be a knowledgeable but impartial judge. Unlike the members of the Select Committee, he was not a politician, and his recommendations seemed less political as a result, even as they contained a number of implicit political positions about the meaning of honours and of their position in British culture. Almost all the recommendations in his report were adopted, including his formal system for determining the rank of honours.

This final set of reforms was a natural continuation and evolution of Major's changes to the honours system, with a couple of notable exceptions. Political honours in their older form were finally reined in – the impotent Political Honours Scrutiny Committee was disbanded and its role taken up by the various honours committees, which now had to investigate any political links of nominees. This was not an antidote to political influence (indeed, in some ways it was potentially more invisible), but it did reduce the power of the Prime Minister and the whips to determine honours lists. In doing so, it increased the power of the honours committees. By making the identity of members of these committees public, it also made the system more open and less opaque (although also potentially opening it to influence from a wider range of people). Aside from this, for all the radical changes discussed by the select committee, the reforms of 2004 were moderate. They were governed by certain assumptions and priorities. For one thing, these reports and reviews defined the 'problem' with honours as an essentially political one: the public needed to be protected from politicians bringing in their own interests, and the politicians needed to be protected from themselves and the temptation to use honours for patronage purposes. The function of honours and the nature of proper service to the state were not analyzed in any depth and were generally assumed to be accepted as having a certain politically neutral meaning. While 'Buggins' turn' and the opacity of the system came under criticism, in reality the power to judge merit was vested more firmly in

committees of experts selected by civil servants in the Ceremonial office. Political patronage was reduced, but civil service control was not. Just as the monarchy's credibility increased once its political power was gone, the divestment of the majority of honours from the civil service seemed to give civil servants such as Phillips and Wilson a sense of greater authority and technical ability when it came to dictating honours policy and deciding on who should receive honours.

Wilson's report suggested that the government had transformed the honours system through these reforms in such a way that the primary focus of honours was on deserving, community-oriented service. However, this redefinition of public honour was not achieved through a fundamental redistribution of who received what across the board, as the percentages in Wilson's report seemed to indicate. In fact, the numbers were manipulated to produce a high percentage of voluntary workers by flooding the lowest rung of the honours hierarchy, especially the MBE, at minimal cost to groups who had traditionally enjoyed higher honours. People who previously received the newly-abolished BEM now received the MBE. In the New Year 1998 list just under a third of honours at the OBE level and above went to voluntary service. But a large majority of awards in the newly-expanded MBE went to volunteers. Where in previous decades between a third and a half of appointees to the order received MBEs, in 1998 it was two-thirds.¹³⁵ The composition of the higher levels, especially CBE and above looked much the same as in 1988 or 1978. Businesspeople, civil servants and senior professionals enjoyed larger share of higher honours than volunteers.¹³⁶ At the upper levels honours lists looked similar in composition to the 1960s and 1970s, which saw an increase in honours to people associated with businesses with links to the state. The numerical focus on voluntary service concealed the reinforcement of a tiered honours system

¹³⁵ *Supplement to the London Gazette*, 30 December 1997, 5-24.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

that focused on different kinds of service at different ranks. While important, the reforms did not strip the system of its hierarchical foundations. The government thus found a way to have it both ways: the upper levels of the system continued to be exclusive, while the system's popularity as a whole was boosted by the expansion and renovation of the MBE to focus on voluntary service. In theory, Wilson, Major and all other parties involved argued for a classless honours system. In practice the reforms produced something that reiterated and replicated hierarchies just as much as its predecessor.

VII.

Ever since 1917, administrators of the honours system struggled with the balance between public desire for the expansion of honours to reward deserving people and a conservative instinct to preserve the status of honours by restricting numbers. The abolition of the BEM and the expansion of the MBE offered a partial solution to this: after Major's reforms large numbers of people in a variety of different areas could be honored without detracting from the exclusivity of higher honours. By the end of the 1990s, the principle that had supposedly been at the core of the Order of the British Empire at its foundation in 1917 – voluntarism – seemed to have won out as the top priority of the honours system. This shift came about through a combination of a self-conscious attempt to reward more volunteer workers and a change in the way in which nominations were processed that gave more access to the community at large and relied less on nominations through government channels. These changes helped define valuable public service at the lower tier of the system as service without remuneration.

Changes in the honours system defined this shift in the perception of service in part through its association with the monarchy. The focus on voluntarism finally brought together in the honours system two central functions of the monarchy: the authenticator of honour and leader of the

voluntary sector. The monarch was the traditional fount of honour, and it was their symbolic status as sovereign that authenticated the honours system's ability to pronounce on who was deserving of recognition. At the same time, as Frank Prochaska has suggested, the royal family held the symbolic leadership of a large proportion of charitable enterprises in Britain (and through much of the commonwealth).¹³⁷ The monarchy was able to combine its mission more directly with the most popular aspects of the honours system, even as the honours system discarded some of its more egregious forms of patronage. The credibility of both was boosted by this symbiosis. The constellation of honours and monarchical welfare reinforced an idea of society where the most worthy kind of welfare was that which was given on a voluntary basis. At the OBE and MBE level nurses, teachers and other purveyors of state services who were being paid to do a job were not as honour-worthy as volunteers who went beyond their paid work, or who gave time or money in addition to their work obligations. At the upper (CBE and above) level, professional elites continued to receive honours.

For this shift in the official ideology of service to the Crown, the Conservative Party and the monarchy could thank John Major, whose will to intervene in the workings of the honours system meant that he made the most significant political intervention in the honours system since 1917. The other factor that contributed to this was the weakening of the civil service under Major's predecessor.¹³⁸ In the end, the civil service was willing to let go its share of honours to retain its hold over them as the specialists who determined the nature of worthy service. Given the shrinking size of the home and foreign civil service, the trade-off was not as much of a problem as it may have seemed. The top tiers of the civil service retained a good chance of getting knight- or damehoods.

¹³⁷ Frank Prochaska, *Royal Bounty: The Making of Welfare Monarchy* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995).

¹³⁸ Rodney Lowe, *The Official History of the British Civil Service: Reforming the Civil Service* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2011).

The Wilson Review and John Major agreed that honours selection was an ‘art rather than a science’; a good thing, according to Major, because it prevented automatic honours.¹³⁹ Honours committees needed these ‘artistic’ skills all the more in an era when the class hierarchies that had traditionally determined rank were formally removed. While it had never been easy to determine a nominee’s class and assign it a honorific rank, the idea that a hierarchical honours system should be ‘classless’ meant that honours deliberations still did not simply boil down to a ‘yes’ or a ‘no’ – merit had a rank and that rank continued to be important. Phillips’ criteria, which depended on a judgment of the geographical scale of the service concerned, were useful only in a subset of cases. The actual judgments about who received what continued to reflect social and cultural hierarchies, and evaluations within and outside of individual fields as to the quality and magnitude of the service of the honored. And the upper levels of the honours system continued to reward new and traditional elites rather than taking on the new focus of the lowest ranks on local volunteers.

Official reformers – Major, Wilson, Phillips and the members of the Public Administration Select Committee – agreed that honours should be and were becoming less political. But this was only true in the sense that the traditional patronage relationship between parties, whips, prime ministers and donors was disrupted. Honours were innately political, because they always involved choices between and among groups. By the end of the century, politicians and administrators had squared the circle in that they had resolved the problem that had plagued the honours system through the whole century: that there was a political need to make the honours system more democratic, yet the internal logic of honours demanded numerical restriction in order to maintain their prestige. By expanding the lowest ranks of the system while keeping the upper ranks intact, the

¹³⁹ Memorandum by the Rt Hon John Major, CH, HON 95, Fifth Committee on Public Administration, 2004, online at: (<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200304/cmselect/cmpubadm/212/4052002.htm>, accessed 14 June 2012).

state was able to give more people a stake in honours hierarchies. At the same time, honours reconciled elites to democratization by preserving their traditional entitlements. As earlier chapters suggest, this was the pattern of honours throughout the twentieth century; however, the 1993 and 2004 reforms were two of the most successful attempts. They helped win for the honours system unprecedented popularity among recipients and their communities without stripping elites of the honours and the status they enjoyed through those honours. The process of re-enchantment through the heraldry of the honours system and the intimacy of recipients' encounters with the royal family occluded the underlying class dynamics of this system.

In the last couple of decades of the twentieth century reforms to the honours system were successful in shedding some of the system's class and imperial baggage through a combination of changes to the Order of the British Empire, overall shifts in the kind of people who were honored and the way in which honours were publicized. At the same time, the system continued to reflect particular political and social priorities and hierarchies. In fact, the new focus on voluntary service sent a more politically pointed and coherent message than in earlier honours lists. Attempts to make honours classless and apolitical were problematic, not only in terms of what they revealed about the honours system up to that point but also in terms of what kinds of new class hierarchies replaced the old ones. Merit and service, the concepts at the core of so many people's ideals throughout the century of how the honours system should work, continued to be difficult to define.

Conclusion

More than half a century after Canada, in 1986 and 2000 respectively Australia and New Zealand finally phased out the chivalric titles of ‘Sir’ and ‘Dame’. This development had a sense of inevitability about it: the move to discard titular distinctions made perfect sense in the wider transnational context of the decolonization of honours. Yet conservative governments of the early twenty-first century in both countries disagreed. In 2009 the leader of New Zealand’s National Party, John Key, announced his government would revive dames and knights within the New Zealand Order of Merit. Key offered every New Zealander who had accepted an equivalent award (Principal and Distinguished Companions of the New Zealand Order of Merit) between 2000 and 2009 the chance to take up a title. A large majority (seventy-two out of eighty-five) accepted.¹ In early 2014 Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott followed Key’s example and reversed nearly three decades of state policy by reviving titles in Australia. Rather than replacing existing hierarchies within the Order of Australia, Abbott restored an upper tier above existing awards.²

Critics, such as New Zealand literary scholar Vincent O’Sullivan, claimed that this move showed a reluctance to embrace the small nation’s cultural autonomy: ‘We love talking about our individual spirit, but if there’s an opportunity to sit on mother’s [Britain’s] knee again, we’ll take it.’³ The director of the Australian Republican Movement, David Morris, argued that Australia’s move showed a ‘colonial frame of mind’.⁴ Yet the return of titles had many defenders. More than one of

¹ Nicola Murphy, “Sir Sam and Sir Witi unlikely to arise”, *New Zealand Herald*, 18 July 2009, online at: (http://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c_id=1&objectid=10585202, accessed 29 March 2014).

² Tory Shepherd, “Nothing like a Dame”, *Australian*, 26 March 2014, online at: (<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/nothing-like-a-dame-pm-tony-abbott-reintroduces-knighthoods-and-honours-outgoing-governorgeneral-quentin-bryce/story-e6fgr6n6-1226864799202>, accessed 29 March 2014).

³ Murphy, “Sir Sam and Sir Witi”.

⁴ Shepherd, “Nothing like a Dame”.

those New Zealanders whose local honours were transformed into titles claimed that it gave them ‘visibility’ and recognition. Others suggested that titles were part of a national as well as an imperial tradition.⁵ Many recipients and potential recipients saw them as a way of promoting their causes and celebrating national heroes, rather than in any way a return to a hierarchy where titles marked a qualitative distinction between different classes of people.

We tend to expect post-colonial political evolution go just one way: away from British traditions. But the recent New Zealand and Australian examples complicate any simple narrative of movement away from loyalism and towards egalitarianism. British insiders to the honours system were not impressed because these policy changes were so obviously political, thus exposing the Queen’s lack of power in the decision-making process.⁶ But titles (and the monarchy) were useful for Key and Abbott: useful for rewarding supporters and national heroes; for making grand political statements; and for making an impact on international contacts to whom postnominal letters would mean nothing in comparison to ‘Sir’. Both men will likely be knights within the next decade, too.

Meanwhile, in Britain in January 2014 the Cabinet Office announced with great satisfaction that of the 1195 people who received honours, 611 (51 percent) were female. For the first time since women were included alongside men in 1917, they (barely) outnumbered them in the list.⁷ 74 percent of recipients received their awards for voluntary work, which was explained in part by the fact that the vast majority (1038) of awardees were given honours at the level of OBE and below.

There is something odd about these figures, which only becomes clear when the list is broken down. At the CBE level and above, a large majority of recipients were men: while the

⁵ “Reinstating titular honours – what the honourees are saying”, *New Zealand Herald*, 9 March 2009, online at: (http://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c_id=1&objectid=10560662, accessed 29 March 2014).

⁶ Personal information.

⁷ “New Year’s Honours 2014”, Cabinet Office, 30 December 2014, online at: (<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/the-new-years-honours-2014>, accessed 20 March 2014).

selection of famous and distinguished women who were honored in the list received disproportionate press attention at the high levels, men continued to dominate them numerically.⁸ At the OBE and MBE level, the numbers were almost exactly equal. The female majority was achieved through a form of clever accounting. Two years before, in 2012, David Cameron had re-introduced the British Empire Medal that John Major had abolished in 1993. As the last chapter shows, it was this abolition and the subsequent expansion of the MBE that has enabled the government to achieve such high rates of honours to volunteers since the mid- to late 1990s. The reasoning behind this re-introduction was that it would allow the government to recognize ‘very local community service’ to the ‘Big Society’ which the MBE did not cover.⁹ The presence of the BEM would ‘ensure that the right award is given for the right level of service’.¹⁰ The distinction between the BEM and the MBE remained vague: the MBE was supposed to be for ‘Service in and to the community of a responsible kind which is outstanding in its field; or very local “hands-on” service which stands out as an example to others’.¹¹

A large majority of BEMs in the 2014 list went to women, pushing the balance of net honours across the 50 percent mark to create the female majority. The peculiar thing about this was that it re-defined the BEM as an ‘honour’ in a way that had never existed before the medal’s retirement in 1993. What was and what was not an honour had always been vague, but previous

⁸ See, for example: “New Year honours list recognizes more women than men for first time”, *Guardian*, 30 December 2013, online at: (<http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2013/dec/30/new-year-honours-list-2014-women>, accessed 20 March 2014); “New Year Honours 2014 newsflash: Women are just as awesome as men”, *Telegraph*, 31 December 2013, online at: (<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/women/womens-life/10542663/New-Year-Honours-2014-newsflash-Women-are-just-as-awesome-as-men.html>, accessed 20 March 2014).

⁹ “Second Report on the Operation of the Reformed Honours System”, Note by the Cabinet Office, 2011, online at: (https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/61213/Second_report_on_operation_of_the_reformed_honours_system.pdf, accessed 20 March 2014), 3-4; 13.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 2.

honours lists had generally been understood to refer only to the ranks within orders plus the knight bachelor. Earlier in the century the difference between the MBE and the BEM had symbolized the vague and nearly indefinable distinction between the lower middle class and the working class, and as a result the qualitative difference between the two was of great importance to recipients and administrators (as Chapter two shows). The BEM was a medal, a working class award that granted no precedence and did not entitle its holder to an audience with the Queen. The ‘Second Report on the Operation of the Reformed Honours System’, which announced the reintroduction of the medal, was itself vague about whether it was an honour.¹² Without the newly redefined honour, the gender balance in 2014 would have remained much as it had been for the previous five years at around 40 to 45 percent women. In 1993 the government had combined the BEM with the MBE to produce a ‘classless’ system with an emphasis on voluntarism. In 2012 it resurrected the BEM and within two years used it to achieve the long-desired public relations coup of gender equality.

As with honours reforms throughout the century, this was not equality as such. Voluntary work was explicitly distinguished from philanthropic work by the wealthy. Donors to charities were rewarded in the same report with an increased quota of knighthoods, damehoods and CBEs. These were selected by a new committee separate from the honours committee that dealt with voluntary work.¹³ The resurrection of the BEM sharpened the tiered distinction in the honours system where voluntary, local, majority female work was at the bottom of a hierarchy of service, with (predominantly male) big donors to social and political causes at the top.¹⁴ The upper tier rewarded service through money, fame and professional seniority, while the lower tier focused on voluntary labor.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid., 7.

¹⁴ Ibid.

These selective reforms at the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first were more successful than many earlier attempts at shaping the honours system to public opinion. They were also characteristic of the genre of honours reforms as a whole, in that they sought to include more of society while maintaining clear social divisions between different kinds of service and different kinds of people. As in New Zealand and Australia, these early twenty-first century reforms created stronger social distinctions that were justified in terms of recipients' magnitude of service. Their vision of national, commonwealth or community unity was predicated on hierarchy. This vision was also ever-present: as Ross McKibbin has remarked, even as social democracy was established in Britain in the 1940s and 1950s, the 'old "ideological apparatus of the state" [remained] largely intact'.¹⁵ The honours system was a primary vector for this ideological apparatus, and the civil service used it consciously.

For many formerly excluded non-elites, though, buying into this hierarchy was worth it because of the social advantage and public credibility that it brought them. Observers of the tiered system claimed that these lower ranks – especially the MBE – became badges of pride that gave more happiness than any other honour, and that their function of giving joy was more important than their reinforcement of people's lower place in society.¹⁶ By concentrating on a certain kind of worthy service in the lower ranks of the system, the state gave those lower ranks a form of credibility that did not always extend to the upper ones. For many lower-middle and working-class people, the MBE was more relevant to social distinction than the knight- or damehood.

This kind of social cohesion and consensus around the worthiness of certain kinds of public service was easier to accomplish credibly when it was just national unity at stake, rather than imperial

¹⁵ Ross McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures: England 1918-1951* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 536.

¹⁶ Peter Galloway argues that MBE recipients are the most worthy and the most happy in: Peter Galloway, *Applause and Disgrace: The Uses of the United Kingdom Honours System: A Lecture Delivered at Brunel University on 23 October 2007* (Uxbridge: Brunel University, 2008), 17.

unity as had been the case a few decades earlier. At its greatest geographical extent, the honours system offered a vision of unity of imperial purpose that it never really came close to realizing. Decolonization made the democratization of honours within Britain more plausible, even though many in the Colonial Office and its successors hoped that honours could unite people under one sovereign across post-imperial national boundaries. This dream of a trans-imperial hierarchy lasted longer than the empire itself. The monarchy took over from the state as the bearer of this dream, partly through its integration in post-colonial honours systems.

In twentieth century Britain a mass democratic public emerged at around the same time as an increasingly broad-based honours system, although the constituency for the latter took a long time to catch up with the former. This mass public did not overturn the older social order, in spite of the hopes of politicians and scholars who hoped that democracy would bring with it a liberal ideal of equal opportunity and meritocracy where prestige and power were determined by whether people deserved it rather than by their relative social rank. Many historians have been frustrated by this failure to overturn the legacy of a seemingly pre-modern social order that was fundamentally anti-egalitarian and unjust. The honours system can help us to understand how these hierarchies worked and how they have changed in modern Britain.

There was no clear-cut distinction between merit and hierarchy in the honours system. As a result, in periods of major social change in twentieth-century Britain, honours had an active role in reshaping social hierarchies in Britain and in parts of the empire/former empire. The celebration of public service and (civilian) individual heroism in Britain was never clearly separated from the affirmation of a social order where some forms of service and some kinds of people were qualitatively superior to others. Honours obfuscated the meaning of distinction in modern Britain through the system's connection to the monarchy and its broad use as a political, imperial and social tool. A complicated and entangled combination of personality, status, merit, peer review and luck

determined who received what honours. As a result, the premier system for publicly recognizing service and distinguishing status could never fully differentiate between these two functions. In part this was because those who ran it did not desire to separate hierarchy from distinguished service. It was also because such separation was effectively impossible within existing frameworks.

For recipients, too, honours were useful as both a means of celebrating achievement and asserting status. Citizens, subjects, interest groups and post-colonial governments used honours to challenge political and social structures, but it was difficult to break out of the fundamental framework in which honours gave distinction and status in exchange for a performance of loyalty to the Crown.

The only escape was the complete rejection of the system, which was a rare choice except in certain parts of the former empire. Even then, at moments of political and social revolution, questions of merit remained entangled with questions of social hierarchy and political calculation. In Britain and the former empire, many others chose to embrace the benefits of a hierarchical honours system, even though this involved deference to the Crown and the hierarchy that the Crown represented. Whether this deal is worth it is an open question with real social and political consequences.

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MS Attlee Attlee Papers
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MS Berlin Berlin Papers
MS Eng. Lambert Correspondence and Papers
MS Sherfield Sherfield Papers
MS Wilson Wilson Papers

British Library

IOR India Office Records
MSS EUR Curzon Papers
Parliamentary Labour Party Archives (database)

Churchill Archives Center

AVHL A.V. Hill Papers
BINN George Binney Papers
CHAD Chadwick Papers
KNNK Kinnock Papers
LASL Lascelles Papers
MCKN McKenna Papers
PRTZ Perutz Papers

Imperial Society of Knights Bachelor Library

Register of the Knights Bachelor

John Rylands Library, University of Manchester

AEH Annie Horniman Papers
CEM C.E. Montague Papers
FA2 E.A. Freeman Papers
NCN Norman Nicholson Papers
RMD Ramsey MacDonald Papers

Lambeth Palace Library

Fisher Papers
Lang Papers

Ramsey Papers

London School of Economics Archives

Beveridge	Beveridge Papers
Citrine	Citrine Papers
Ketherington	Ketherington Papers
Prentice	Prentice Papers
Sandelson	Sandelson Papers
Shore	Shore Papers
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DAV	J.C. Davidson Papers
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Acc.69

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JHG	J.H. Gaddum Papers
PB	P.M.S. Blackett Papers

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GC/233	Bayliss Papers
PP/AMO	Amoroso Papers
PP/HEA	Henry Head Papers
PP/HHD	Henry Dale Papers
RAMC	RAMC Military Hospital Papers
SA/HUA	Kent-Parsons Personal Papers
SAMWF	Medical Women's Federation Papers

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