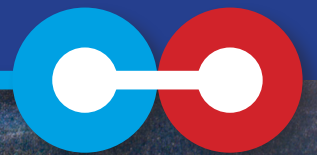


The Impact of the Great War

1914–1928



Euan M. Duncan

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Dr Elliot is a historian focusing on late nineteenth and twentieth century British and German history. She has written on national registration in the First World War as well as the impact of the war on domestic life in Scotland. She is currently working on the history of marriage, divorce and the family in Scotland.



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Introduction

The Great War of 1914–18 was frequently referred to by contemporaries as ‘the war to end all wars’. This phrase was a reflection of the scale of suffering and loss faced by families whose loved ones had fought in the conflict. As military tactics struggled to adapt to the realities of new industrialised weapons like the machine gun and heavy artillery, often the only real outcome of a battle was high casualty rates on both sides. However, off the battlefield, the war had equally far-reaching ramifications. Politically, socially and economically, all nations involved in the war saw significant changes both during the conflict and in the decades that followed. For Scotland, the experience was no different. This book explores the impact of the war through a Scottish lens, considering the experiences of Scots on the Western Front and the consequences of the war for Scotland’s home front in terms of society, economy and politics.

Chapter 1 covers the experiences of Scots on the Western Front, from Douglas Haig, Commander-in-Chief of the British Army from 1915, to rank-and-file volunteer recruits. We will consider the motivations of those Scots who volunteered to fight for Britain in the early months of the war, before investigating their experiences in the trenches of the Western Front and their role in key battles. We will assess the overall contribution of Scottish military personnel, including the contribution of Scottish women through medical support, to the conflict on the Western Front.

Chapter 2 shifts focus to the Scottish home front and the impact of the war on Scottish society. The effects of military losses, and efforts to commemorate and memorialise the fallen, represent perhaps the most obvious societal impact. However, there were also positive impacts. For Scottish women, the war provided revolutionary opportunities both within the job market and in political leadership of the rent strike campaigns and the anti-war movement.

As Chapter 3 explores, economically the war provided a temporary boom to many Scottish industries, which benefited from increased demand and reduced competition. However, the long-term impact for the Scottish economy was more dramatic: in the post-war years demand slumped, markets and trading partners were lost, and unemployment rose. It was in this context that the Scottish population declined noticeably, with thousands of people emigrating to England, North America and Australasia.

Finally, Chapter 4 considers the impact of the war on the Scottish political landscape. Prior to the war, Scotland could be described as aligned to the Liberal Party values of individualism and small government. However, the war appears to have had a polarising effect on Scottish politics, with support for the Liberals being eroded and replaced by staunch support for political unionism among middle-class Scots, contrasted with increasingly left-wing working-class communities, which saw themselves as Labour strongholds.

The Great War shaped Scottish society, Scottish politics and the Scottish economy more than any other event of the twentieth century.

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It is important to remember that this topic of Higher History is about the impact of the Great War on Scotland. It is not a comprehensive history of the course of the war, rather a study of how the war impacted Scotland socially, economically and politically. In relation to the fighting on the Western Front in particular, we must be careful not to fall into the trap of Scottish exceptionalism and give the impression that Scots fought with greater bravery, skill and determination than soldiers of other nationalities. While notable examples of Scottish heroism and bravery on the battlefield feature in this book, a textbook focused on the role of soldiers from any nation involved would be filled with similar accounts.

Whether revising for an examination, writing an assignment or deepening your understanding of a particular area, this book will help you. Each chapter covers a specific issue that could appear as a Paper 2 source question, and the information contained in the following pages will support you in writing a powerful response.

Good luck!



Chapter 1

Scots on the Western Front

The aim of this chapter is to understand the experiences of Scots on the Western Front.

LINK TO EXAM

Higher

Key issue 1: Scots on the Western Front

This chapter will help the reader understand the role of Scots on the Western Front. It will assist them in evaluating and analysing the role that Scots had in terms of recruitment and service, and how they were impacted by the war.

Background

When Britain declared war on Germany on 4 August 1914, it did so with one of the smallest **standing armies** in Europe. The British Expeditionary Force that was deployed to France that August numbered around 100,000 soldiers and was dwarfed by the German Army of more than 1,900,000. If Britain was to be a useful ally to the French and Belgians on the **Western Front**, it was clear a much larger army needed to be raised. While other governments used **conscription** to bolster their fighting forces, the British Government initially relied on a mixture of propaganda, **patriotism** and peer pressure to encourage volunteers to enlist in the armed forces.

Field Marshal Lord Kitchener was appointed Secretary of War and oversaw the initial recruitment campaign. Kitchener planned to create a 'New Army' of volunteers, asking for 100,000 men to sign up by the end of August 1914. Kitchener's face adorned recruiting posters, instructing men that 'Your country needs you', and recruiting stations popped up across towns and cities to process the volunteers. Scots responded in great number to the request for volunteers. In total, 690,235 Scots served within the armed forces during the war.



Figure 1.1 'Your country needs you' recruitment poster

Scottish soldiers saw action in various theatres of war from Gallipoli in the Ottoman Empire to Salonika in the Balkans, and Egypt, Palestine and Mesopotamia in the Middle East. However, it was on the Western Front across north-eastern France and Flanders in Belgium where Scots fought in the greatest number.



Figure 1.2 Theatres of the First World War (with contemporary geography and place names), showing battle lines on all fronts and the extent of the German submarine blockade as of 1 August 1917

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This chapter will follow the experiences of Scottish soldiers who fought on the Western Front. First, we will consider the motivations of those Scots who volunteered to fight for Britain in the early months of the war, before investigating their experiences in the trenches of the Western Front and their role in key battles. We will then assess the overall contribution of Scottish military personnel, including the contribution of Scottish women through medical support, to the conflict on the Western Front.

For the exam, it is important to have an understanding of the experiences of Scots on the Western Front.

This section will examine the following factors:

Voluntary recruitment
The experience of Scots on the Western Front, with reference to the Battles of Loos and the Somme
The kilted regiments
The role of Scottish military personnel in terms of commitment, casualties, leadership and overall contribution to the military effort

1.1 Voluntary recruitment

By the end of 1915, 2,466,719 men from across Britain and Ireland had volunteered for the armed forces. Of these, 320,589 were Scots, 13 per cent of the total. As Scotland made up only 10 per cent of the total population of Britain and Ireland at the time, this shows a marginally higher recruitment rate among Scots in the early stages of the war.

The reasons for volunteering varied greatly according to individual circumstance. Indeed, some new soldiers found it difficult to pin down any specific reason for their enlistment. However, in general terms, Scots were motivated to join the army through a mixture of propaganda, war excitement, peer pressure and patriotism. Although recruitment rates were higher among the working classes, men of all backgrounds and professions enlisted. The Scottish **battalions** raised from volunteers were, in the words of historian T. Royle, 'very much the Nation in uniform'.

For the exam, you need to be able to explain the different factors that motivated Scots to enlist in the armed forces. We will investigate some of the key motivating factors behind enlistment in more detail below.

1.1.1 War excitement

Across much of Britain, the outbreak of war was met with a wave of excitement and patriotism. The newspaper *The Scotsman* announced that the declaration of war had been met with great enthusiasm across Edinburgh, and that a small anti-war demonstration held on the Mound had been broken up by a large crowd. At times, patriotism bordered on hysteria, with crowds descending on recruiting stations, cheering men as they volunteered. The story of Carson Stewart, a volunteer from Cambuslang, is not unusual. Stewart described walking down to the Institute building in his hometown to watch the crowds of young men queuing to join up. He was so caught up in the enthusiasm and cheering that he decided on the spot to join up himself and was duly sworn in to the Cameron Highlanders. In Source 1 (on page 4), historian E. Cameron explains how the easy access to recruiting stations in Scottish towns and cities often encouraged the 'impulsive' recruitment experienced by the likes of Carson Stewart:

SOURCE 1

[I]n the urban areas of Scotland, civic institutions, such as city halls and public spaces, which were used in order to appeal to recruits were numerous and conveniently located ... The role of employers in Scotland was also important; promises of jobs kept open for recruits and other incentives, such as bonuses, were quite common in 1914 when the economic impact of the war was uncertain.

E. Cameron, *Impaled on a Thistle: Scotland Since 1880*, 2010

The optimism that led employers to promise to leave jobs open or offer financial reward to recruits was shared by the general public at the outset of the war. There was widespread belief that the war would be over by Christmas. Many young Scots did not wish to miss out on the opportunity of a trip to France. In the early months of the First World War, the realities of modern warfare were still to be uncovered, and the war was widely viewed as 'a bit of a lark' (something different and exciting in which they could take part). In the early months of the recruitment campaign this sense of adventure, combined with romanticised images of war and of Scottish soldiers, was enough to convince many young Scots to enlist.

By the end of August 1914, *The Glasgow Herald* reported that Glasgow's recruiting office in the Gallowgate had already processed 20,000 volunteers. Equally brisk and enthusiastic enlistment was reported from other parts of Scotland too: 1500 men had volunteered in Coatbridge, 940 in Dumbarton and 900 in Clydebank. By December 1914, 25 per cent of the male labour force of western Scotland had signed up.

1.1.2 Opportunity and coercion

For young Scots men facing unemployment or job uncertainty, the army offered an attractive alternative. Scots who had relative employment security, but found themselves working in unskilled, repetitive jobs also saw enlistment as an opportunity to break from the drudgery of their working lives. In 1914, the minimum pay for an **infantry** soldier was seven shillings seven pence per week, considerably more than rates of pay in some low-skilled or apprentice jobs. Historian H. Strachan notes that the bulk of the British Army was drawn from 'the lower end of the working class' and that, for them, the pay would have been a significant motivating factor.

In areas where Scots faced economic uncertainty, recruitment rates appear to have been considerably higher. The Scottish coal mining industry, particularly east coast mines, relied on exports. Within days of the war commencing, many of these export markets were lost. Miners were faced with reduced hours or unemployment as a result, with 4500 miners from Fife and Edinburgh collieries laid off by 4 August 1914. The link between economic uncertainty and recruitment is clear to see in the mining industry. By March 1915, on average 20.7 per cent of Scottish coal miners had enlisted. However, this is a figure that hides regional variations. In Ayrshire mines, which were less reliant on exports, only 16.8 per cent of the mining workforce had volunteered by March 1915. In Haddingtonshire (now called East Lothian), a mining area much more reliant on export markets, the percentage of volunteers was almost double at 31.8 per cent.

Many other young Scots, however, joined the armed forces simply because they felt they had no choice, being subject to **coercion**. Some employers, such as the Earl of Wemyss, threatened to dismiss any employee on his estates between the ages of 18 and 30 who did not volunteer. Other employers took a different approach and offered incentives to sign up, including bonuses and guarantees of employment upon return from war.

In the Highlands, the issue of land ownership had been a strong source of discontent among **crofters** in the decades preceding the war. In several Highland communities speeches and propaganda encouraging recruitment made promises that soldiers would be rewarded with land after the war in return for their enlistment. However, these promises were often vaguely worded and were designed only to provide extra persuasion to crofters to enlist. As we will see in Chapter 3, returning soldiers found the promise of land was not honoured.

1.1.3 Military tradition

Scottish military tradition was an important factor in motivating Scots to enlist in the armed forces during the Great War. In the decades prior to the war, the '**Volunteer** craze' had gripped Scotland. Volunteering involved part-time amateur soldiering; including shooting practice, drill and, crucially, full military uniform. In Scotland the recruitment figures for Volunteers were twice the British average. This high rate of Volunteering can partly be explained by the Highland dress associated with Scottish Volunteer units. Historian T. Royle describes the allure of kilts, tartan **trews** and ornate feathers as 'an irresistible attraction'. For Scots, Volunteering provided an outlet to express their Scottish national identity in a way that was distinct from British identity. Regimental tartans were a powerful symbol of both local and national identity, and undoubtedly played a role in encouraging Scots to sign up.



Figure 1.3 Recruitment poster depicting a Scottish soldier

Lord Kitchener appears to have been confident that Scottish military tradition would lead to a high number of soldiers signing up. In a letter to Sir Alexander Baird, Lord Lieutenant of Kincardineshire (see Source 2 on page 6), which was widely published in the Scottish press, Kitchener wrote:

SOURCE 2

I feel certain that Scotsmen have only to know that the country urgently needs their services to offer them with the same splendid patriotism as they have always shown in the past ... Tell them from me, please, that their services were never more needed than they are today and I rely confidently on a splendid response to the national appeal.

Letter from Lord Kitchener to Sir Alexander Baird, Lord Lieutenant of Kincardineshire, from *The Scotsman*, 12 August 1914

Scottish **regiments** usually recruited from defined geographical areas (see Figure 1.4). These regiments had built strong reputations and developed local connections, becoming sources of pride for their local communities. For instance, Taysiders took great pride in the reputation gained by the Black Watch as the senior Highland regiment and in the government tartan worn by Black Watch soldiers. Those from Edinburgh and the Lowlands could boast that the oldest line infantry regiment in the British Army was the Royal Scots. The reputation of the Black Watch appears to have played a role in the brisk early recruitment reported by *The Courier* in September 1914:

SOURCE 3

Recruits in their hundreds still roll up to the Black Watch depot at Perth. Probably at no time in its history has the popularity of the regiment been so emphatically demonstrated. From all parts of the country have come strapping young fellows – from America and from Canada and other colonies.

***The Courier*, 14 September 1914**

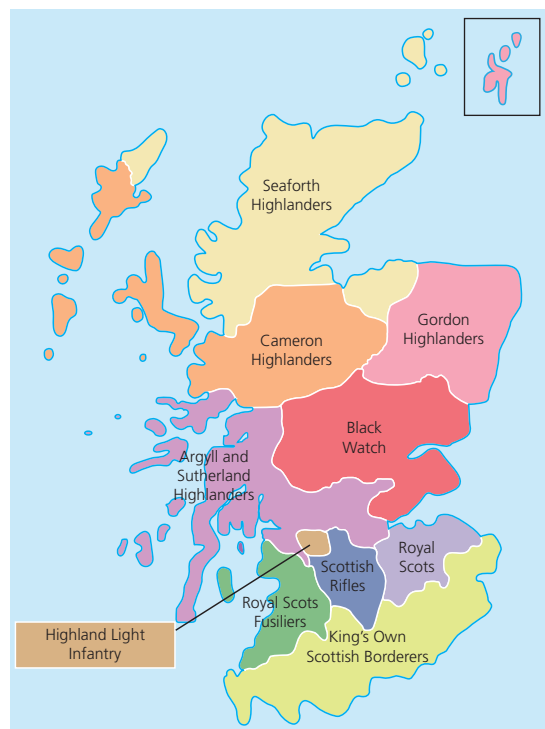


Figure 1.4 Map showing the recruiting areas of Scottish regiments in 1914

Prior to the war, military matters had been widely reported in the Scottish press. For instance, *The Scotsman* published regular 'Military and Naval Notes'. Furthermore,

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soldiers returning from overseas dispatches were always given a warm welcome by members of the public as they marched from harbours back to their barracks.

Scottish military tradition had helped ensure that by 1914 soldiering was well established as an honourable calling for young Scots. This was an era when many young Scots had a strong sense of patriotic duty. Furthermore, soldiering was respected by all classes: for the working classes it offered attractive wages and greater opportunities for social betterment than most other career paths available to them; for the middle and upper classes, the military officer class was a desirable profession. A strong indication of the perceived 'respectability' of soldiering was apparent in research carried out by the Reverend Duncan Cameron, Minister of Kilsyth, who calculated that 90 per cent of the country's ministers had sons who had enlisted in the armed forces following the outbreak of war.

1.1.4 Pals battalions

A total of 215 pals battalions had been raised across Britain by the end of summer 1916. The idea behind pals battalions was that friends and family from the same town, or the same social, sporting or working clubs, would enlist, train and serve together. The government hoped this would encourage hesitant men to sign up in the relative comfort of their peer groups and would also encourage recruitment through local rivalries. In Scotland, the title 'pals battalions' was not formally used, however several battalions were raised in Edinburgh and Glasgow that were pals battalions in all but name.

On 1 September 1914, Glasgow Council approved the formation of a Highland Light Infantry Battalion made up of workers from the city's public transport system. The following Monday, 7 September, 1102 motormen and conductors from the Glasgow Corporation Tramways department paraded through the streets behind a pipe band, wearing their green Tramways uniforms, to formally enlist in what would become the 15th (Tramways) Battalion of the Highland Light Infantry. It was reported that the battalion was raised within 16 hours of the initial request for volunteers.

Encouraged by the success of the Tramways Battalion, the 16th (Boys' Brigade) Battalion of the Highland Light Infantry was raised from former members of the Boys' Brigade. This was followed by the establishment of the 17th Battalion, which was raised largely from merchants and white-collar workers associated with the Glasgow Chamber of Commerce. The 17th also included networks of former pupils of local schools, notably the High School of Glasgow and Glasgow Academy.

Pals battalions were designed to play on local rivalries and encourage towns to try to outdo one another in terms of number of recruits. Rivalry with Glasgow was a factor in the development of two Edinburgh-raised pals battalions. On 12 September 1914 the Edinburgh Lord Provost, Robert Kirk Inches, announced that a 'City of Edinburgh Battalion' would be formed. This, the 15th Royal Scots, was the first pals battalion to be raised in Edinburgh and was also known as Cranston's Battalion after Sir Robert Cranston, the commanding officer who had overseen recruitment. However, in forming its first pals battalion Edinburgh lagged far behind Glasgow in terms of speed: Cranston's had taken nearly seven weeks to raise and its ranks were in fact boosted by a large number of recruits from Manchester.

The 16th Royal Scots, also known as McCrae's Battalion, was the second pals battalion raised in Edinburgh and is arguably one of the most famous Scottish battalions to have served in the First World War. Put in charge of raising the battalion, Colonel George McCrae announced that recruiting would commence at the city's Usher Hall on 27 November at a grand public meeting. There he gave a rousing speech to the

crowd, in which, rather than insisting it was the duty of young men to sign up, he invited them to join him on the battlefield: 'I would not, I could not, ask you to serve unless I share danger at your side.'

McCrae's charisma and personal appeal was perhaps not necessary. Two days earlier, he had already revealed his trump card at a press conference held in the boardroom of Tynecastle Park, home of Heart of Midlothian football club. Here he announced that 11 Hearts players had enlisted in his new battalion. In total, 15 Hearts players served with McCrae's and a further 16 enlisted in other battalions throughout the war. McCrae's Battalion of 1350 men was raised within a week, an estimated 500 Hearts fans signing up to serve alongside their footballing heroes. Players from other clubs and sports followed the Hearts team into McCrae's. The battalion included professional footballers from Raith Rovers, Falkirk, Dunfermline and Hibernian, and also featured international rugby players and golfers.

SOURCE 4

Do not ask where Hearts are playing and look at me askance;
If it's football that you're wanting, you must come with us to France.

Verse read by George McCrae at the King's Theatre in Edinburgh, 1914

1.1.5 Peer pressure

Peer pressure also played a role in encouraging young Scots to enlist. The white feather campaign was organised to shame men who had not already signed up into enlisting. Women were encouraged to present men who had not enlisted with white feathers as a symbol of their cowardice.

It is difficult to measure the impact the white feather campaign would have had on encouraging Scots to enlist. Those who were shamed by the feather into signing up would be unlikely to admit it; however, there are some instances that show the campaign did have an impact. In 1914, Edward Martindale from Largs in Ayrshire was 16 years old and thus too young to serve in the armed forces. Despite this, he was targeted by the campaign and received a box of white feathers in the post. His family believe it was the shame caused by this that resulted in Martindale deciding to sign up, lying about his age at the recruitment office. He was killed in action in March 1918.

Professional footballers became an easy target for the white feather campaign. They were accused of being 'shirkers' and 'cowards' who were content to hide at home while 'better men' risked their lives on the front line. As undefeated leaders of the Scottish League, Hearts came in for particular criticism. On 6 November 1914, the *Edinburgh Evening News* published a letter from a 'Soldier's Daughter', who suggested that 'while Hearts continue to play football, enabled thus to pursue their peaceful play by the sacrifice of the lives of thousands of their countrymen, they might adopt, temporarily, a **nom de plume**, say "The White Feathers of Midlothian".' Hearts players were also the target of personal attacks, some receiving letters that included directions to recruiting offices. It can be argued that the media pressure and personal attacks played a key role in their decision to enlist in McCrae's Battalion.

Scots enlisted in the armed forces for a variety of reasons depending on individual circumstances. The forces of patriotism, propaganda and peer pressure were a clear influence in the recruitment of many Scots. However, for others, recruitment was more a response to the economic circumstances they found themselves in at the start of the war.

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ACTIVITIES

The following activities are designed to build the knowledge and skills that will help you achieve exam success in this issue.

- 1 Create a mind map with 'Reasons for Scottish recruitment' as the centre point. Use the motivating factors listed in Sections 1.1.1 to 1.1.5 as the branches. Add at least four explanations to each branch to show how each factor motivated Scots to enlist. Remember to keep to the principles of mind mapping: use colour coding and images, and keep the text brief!
- 2 Which motivating factor do you believe played the most significant role in encouraging Scots to enlist? Support your answer with at least two pieces of evidence.
- 3 Create battle fact files on each of the three battles covered in Section 1.2. For each battle, include the following information:
 - a) Name
 - b) Date
 - c) Aims
 - d) Scottish divisions/battalions involved
 - e) Examples of Scottish successes
 - f) Losses experienced by Scottish divisions/battalions
- 4 'Kilts were more of a benefit than a hindrance to Scottish soldiers.' How valid is this view? Use Section 1.3 to help form your answer. Aim to use at least three pieces of evidence to support and oppose this view, before explaining your own opinion.
- 5 Design a new memorial to commemorate Scottish sacrifices in the First World War. This could be a national, regimental or local monument, or could even be a memorial to an individual act of heroism. Write a short paragraph explaining your memorial, including details of who you have decided to commemorate and why.
- 6 Re-read the information on Douglas Haig in Section 1.4.3 before answering the following questions.
 - a) Summarise three arguments to support the view that Haig deserves to be remembered as a callous 'butcher'.
 - b) Summarise three arguments to support the view that Haig deserves to be remembered as the 'architect' of victory.
 - c) Which interpretation of Haig do you believe is most valid? Use at least two pieces of evidence to support your answer.
- 7 Summarise the contributions of Mairi Chisholm and the Duchess of Sutherland to the conflict on the Western Front. Note down at least three bullet points for each.
- 8 Complete the table below. Use the entire chapter to help and aim for at least eight reasons with a detailed explanation of the impact of each. Ideally try to spread your reasons evenly across the four issues examined in the four sections of this chapter.

Reason why Scots played an important role on the Western Front	Explanation
Scottish soldiers were heavily involved in the Battle of Loos.	More than 30,000 Scottish soldiers fought at Loos, making an important contribution to the conflict. For instance, the 8th Gordon Highlanders reached the second line of German trenches within three hours.

GLOSSARY

Term	Meaning
battalion	A sub-unit of a regiment, usually with around 1000 soldiers.
cavalry	Soldiers on horseback.
coercion	Persuading someone to do something through force or threats.
conscription	A system where men (in this context) over a certain age are forced to undertake military service.
creeping barrage	A tactic that involves artillery fire moving gradually forward in stages aimed just ahead of the advancing infantry.
crofter	A person who farms on a small, rented piece of land called a croft. Crofters mostly lived in the Highlands.
division	Divisions usually numbered around 18,000 soldiers.
infantry	Foot soldiers.
leapfrog	A military tactic where two sections of infantry help each other advance. One remains stationary and fires to provide cover, while the other advances. Roles are reversed to allow both sections to advance.
no man's land	The area of land between opposing trenches.
nom de plume	A nickname, usually used by writers to hide their real identity, though in this context it really just refers to a nickname.
'over the bags'	A phrase used by Scottish soldiers to describe leaving a front-line trench to cross no man's land. This was also referred to as going 'over the top'.
patriotism	Pride in your country.
regiment	A unit of an army, usually divided into battalions.
salient	In this context, a section of trenches that juts out to form an angle.
Scottish exceptionalism	In this context, the belief that Scottish soldiers fought with greater heroism and bravery than soldiers of other nationalities.
standing army	A permanent army made up of professional soldiers.
trews	Close-fitting tartan trousers worn by certain Scottish regiments.
Victoria Cross	The highest military medal awarded to British soldiers for bravery or sacrifice.
Volunteering	With a capital V, this refers to a Victorian trend that involved men enlisting in Volunteer regiments where they would practise military drills.
Western Front	An area of trenches in the First World War stretching from the English Channel in the north to the Swiss border with France in the south.

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What does the cover photo show?

A painting depicting Daniel 'Piper' Laidlaw bagging soldiers from the King's Own Scottish Borderers across no-man's land at the Battle of Loos on 25 September 1915. Piper Laidlaw was awarded the Victoria Cross for bravery for his actions at Loos. It should also be noted that events like this have been used to mythologise the bravery and determination of Scottish soldiers.

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