

Warrior Generation, 1865-1885: Militarism and British Working Class Boys. By Richard Fulton. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021. ISBN 978-1-3501-3875-9. Figures. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Pp. viii, 331. \$115.00 (hardback).

The relationship between masculinity and bellicosity is one that is much to the fore in explaining both battlefield effectiveness and changing attitudes to war. Indeed, as I write the first draft of this review, there is an op-ed piece in the (London) *Times* in which Max Hastings reflects on the problems of reconciling the “laddish” culture of the army with modern British society.

The past situation has attracted some good work over the past decade, not least by Douglas Ronald on the Napoleonic navy. Richard Fulton’s well-researched and appropriately-illustrated study engages with the Victorian army at a time of social change that was as profound, if different, to that today. He makes particularly apt use of adventure magazines, schooling, and family contexts, and shows how these combined to provide a positive account of military service. At the same time, would-be recruits are given agency with Fulton’s argument that there was a clear awareness of the drawbacks of military service. Yet, as Fulton shows, the military became a central facet of the world of adventure through which boys participated through their magazines. As such, the military operated, Fulton argues, alongside other aspects of adventure, including emigrating. The common theme was of a wish to reject a sameness, a wish that was appropriate for a society in which there was a high rate of social change, not least through urbanisation and the introduction of compulsory education. An active young masculinity is seen as an aspect of a vigorous society.

Fulton carefully distinguishes British militarism from a culture in which everyone joins the army and submits to state discipline, which was a very different context to that praised in Britain. As a consequence, there was an “openness” about British militarism, for it did not necessarily correspond with any direct engagement in military service. For example, while the popularity of fighting in working-class culture is noted by Fulton, this is seen as separate to the discipline sought by the military, a theme that could have been further pursued with reference to the important case of Ireland, which was a major source of volunteers. So also with sport, and, as is discussed at length, with school discipline. Fulton writes:

“discipline, the use of force, physical prowess, and competition – all attributes of militarism – were actually all attributes embedded in lower-class boys’ culture. They may have been turned briefly toward militarism in some of the jingo demonstrations in the later part of the century, but they were just as quickly turned away from militarism and toward class solidarity” (p. 179).

This passage is characteristic of a bit too much of a tendency for an “either ... or” approach, rather than one that focuses on the ability to reconcile different tendencies. Moreover, it would have been instructive to consider particular cultures and regions. Thus, Ireland and Scotland are essentially

ignored. Conan Doyle was to write interestingly on Irish heroism within the British army. It would also have been instructive to consider at length both differences between army and navy, and those between different branches of the army, and how far both reflected changes due to the events of empire. Separately, the reflections of contemporary radicals on the situation would have been interesting, not least in considering the class dimension.

Yet, it would be inappropriate to end on a critical note. This is an absorbing book that deserves attention. The book deserves emulation, not least for other periods of British history and for the British Dominions.

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