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GRAO EN INGLÉS: ESTUDOS LINGÜÍSTICOS E LITERARIOS

Life In Between Floors:

British Society through Period Drama

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1. Abstract

In this dissertation I will highlight some of the issues and events that occurred in Britain between 1903 and 1930 and link them to the portrayal of that specific time in the TV format that is known as period drama. Particularly, I will be using two of the most successful period dramas in Britain: *Downton Abbey* and *Upstairs, Downstairs*. Society experienced several changes during this time, and these social issues, an essential part of British history, haven't given rise to successful films and TV series over the years enjoying very positive reception from the audience. This success is due to the fact that the recreation of historical periods seems to be very appealing to the British public. For this reason, it constitutes an interesting topic for cultural and historical study.

2. Introduction

The First World War is an event that has obviously shaped the history of Britain. It is a key part of it for the British population and it is commemorated every year all over the country on Remembrance Day. This event takes place in the UK the Sunday that is closest to November the 11th. WWI history has come to the foreground again since its centenary is being commemorated between 2014 and 2018. But in order to fully understand the extent of its effects we have to take a look at what happened before and after the conflict. I have chosen to explore this part of history through what is mostly known as period drama. In order to do so I have chosen two TV series: *Downton Abbey* and *Upstairs, Downstairs*.

For this dissertation I have chosen to specifically take a look at society and the issues related to women throughout both of these TV series, which are set between 1903 and 1930. Through the development of these topics, and always using historical backup from several sources, it will be possible to view the changes that were occurring at that time, how they affected the people as well as how they are reflected in the TV format. Those changes not only stirred the situation up at the time, but also had consequences for the future of the country.

This particular choice of topic comes from my interest in British history (more specifically the 1920s) as well as in TV shows set in different periods. I believe these series make history more approachable to the audience, even if the depiction might not be exactly accurate. I also find the topic of my dissertation particularly fitting, as the First World War was the first one to be entwined with popular culture, having several representations in the world of the arts (literature, painting, film, and popular songs).

Regarding the structure of my dissertation, it is divided into five main sections that progress from a wider perspective of a topic to much more specific issues. First, there is an

introduction into the world of TV and period dramas, as well as some notions on how this kind of TV content deals with history. Next we find the three main sections of the work that deal with the topics of society, women and the consequences of the war respectively. Each section is subdivided in order to make its contents clearer and more manageable. Finally, I have included an appendix with visual materials from both the TV series and historical sources in order to illustrate the content of some of the sections.

This work does not seek to add new information to the incredible amount of work and research that has already provided new data about the topics my dissertation deals with. But it does collect some of the information about this that has been provided by authors over many years, as well as linking it to events shown in period dramas. This kind of work could not possibly give new data but it will have helped the reader to understand the cultural importance of this particular period of British history.

3. History and period drama

“Period drama” is the term applied to films or television series that are set in a particular historical period. This label is not exclusive because the content may also be referred to as: costume drama, heritage film, period film, period piece... Labeling it has been a difficult issue as it is still not very clear which type of work should be included in it (modern novels, literary classics, film scripts) (Ambruster, 92). From now on I will be referring to it as period drama, as it seems to be one of its most popular labels.

Even if the labeling has been somehow problematic, the works that would be included in what is generally known as period drama have common elements. They usually show some sort of drama (everyday issues, mainly) that is set in a time of historical change, be it a war, industrial changes, a time of economic wealth, modernization and so on. Even if the actions

focus on the main characters, those historical changes remain an important part of the series, shaping its context and helping incorporate different topics, such as social or religious issues. (Bell & Gray, 181). Sometimes the setting can be limited to a few years or it can be something more general like, for example, the medieval era. Some examples of films and TV series that would fit into this category would be: *The Young Victoria*, *Middle March*, *Boardwalk Empire*, *Peaky Blinders* or *Mad Men*. More recently, the series entitled *The Crown*, which follows the life of Queen Elizabeth II, has been a huge success in this particular genre.

This is a kind of format that has a wide range of viewers, as it interests people from different ages and from many different countries. More specifically, we must mention the remarkable influence that British period drama has always had in the US. It was particularly popular during the 1970s (with *Upstairs, Downstairs* in PBS¹). It faced a slump right after this peak of popularity but it came back in full force again in the 1990s. British period drama has always been a source of cultural inspiration for the American industry, and even if lately they have had a tendency to adapt this format to their own style, it is still very popular (Weissmann, 37).

It is believed that another reason why this kind of TV content is so successful is the fact that the general public tends to think that it is actually more important than what they consider works of fiction. This association occurs because period dramas usually show historical events or important figures in history, or maybe just the general “feeling” that an era is thought to give (Perrine & Lopez, 112). Even if, for example, the cast and crew of *Downton Abbey* have a historical adviser, this doesn’t imply that the show will be one hundred percent historically accurate. This is, however, a good way of making some parts of history (even if sugar-coated and slightly modified) more accessible to the audience.

¹ Public Broadcasting Service. American public broadcaster and television program distributor

In order to illustrate the topics I develop throughout my dissertation I have chosen two of the most successful period dramas set between 1903 and 1930: *Downton Abbey* and *Upstairs, Downstairs*. *Downton Abbey* was created by Julian Fellowes², it was first aired in 2010 and it has been a global success, winning several awards such as Golden Globes, BAFTAs and Emmys. It follows the life of a family and its servants in the fading Edwardian society. On the one hand, we find the family³ that lives upstairs, who are the owners of the house. It is composed of Robert and Cora, Earl and Countess of Grantham, and their three daughters: Mary, Edith and Sybil. Another important member of the family is Violet, the Dowager Countess of Grantham, who does not live with them but is a main pillar of the family. On the other hand we find the servants⁴, who live downstairs and also form a big “family” of their own. Even if there are new additions to this part of the cast as the show goes on, there are some recurrent characters: Charles Carson (butler), Elsie Hughes (housekeeper), Beryl Patmore (cook), Anna Smith (head housemaid), Daisy Robinson (kitchen maid), Thomas Barrow (first footman) and Tom Branson (chauffeur). The six series of the show follow the characters’ lives as they develop between the years 1912 and 1926 (Fellowes, 17).

Upstairs, Downstairs was first shown on British television in 1971 and continued through four series of thirteen episodes each and a fifth series of sixteen episodes. Those 68 episodes covered from the Edwardian period up to post World War I Britain, specifically from 1903 to 1930. Here we have the depiction of the Bellamy family⁵, who live in their family home in Belgravia, London. Upstairs we find Marjorie and Richard, who run the house, and their two adult children: James and Elizabeth. Downstairs we find a group of people that also varies as the seasons progress, some of them being Mr. Angus Hudson (butler), Mrs. Kate Bridges (cook), Emily (kitchen maid), Alfred (footman) and Sarah (under-

²Fellowes is an English actor, film director and screenwriter, and a Conservative peer of the House of Lords

³ See Appendix 1: Downton Abbey’s upstairs and downstairs families

⁴ See Appendix 2: Downton Abbey’s downstairs employees

⁵ See Appendix 3: The Bellamy family and their staff

house parlourmaid). *Upstairs, Downstairs* has had a great influence in the world of television series as it was quite innovative for the time it was released. This success also led to the release of a revival of the series many years later. It has also been nominated and has won several national and international awards.

In this case I decided to use two TV series instead of one because I thought that, as they were produced and aired in different moments they might have focused on different issues. And in fact, this is the case. One of the points in which the series differ is on controversial topics, as they are more often shown in *Upstairs, Downstairs* while *Downton Abbey* focuses slightly more on aesthetics. As a curious fact, I would also like to point out that some of the events shown in both of these TV shows were actually inspired by real life facts, such as the sinking of the RMS Titanic, the Silvertown explosion, the Marconi scandal of 1912, the Spanish influenza pandemic, the formation of the Irish Free State, or the Teapot Dome Scandal. As the series develop they also give the viewers an overview of some of the key issues that were shaping the lives of those who lived at that time. In the case of this dissertation I will be focusing particularly on issues that affected women and society.

4. Society in Britain at the beginning of the twentieth century

Both of the TV series used in this dissertation follow the life of families and their servants from the fading Edwardian society onwards. In both series it is possible to notice the differences between the families that lived upstairs and the ones that lived downstairs. Edwardian society was clearly stratified and was living under quite an important class conflict that was already growing stronger in the years before the war. There was an increasing conflict related to the trade unions, especially because there were more and more industrial

disputes. Also, the radical wing linked to the movement for women's suffrage created more issues for the administration of justice at that time (Jol & Martel, 170).

At the beginning, the outbreak of the war certainly did not make things any easier in any way. At that time, to be accepted into upper society you had to have been born in it. Etiquette and protocol were key, especially in the lives of the people belonging to the upper classes. However, there were also a lot of unwritten rules regarding manners that everyone should know and follow. It worked like a code, and it indicated who you were and where you belonged. The upper classes thought that this was the base that held the old order in place, as everything else seemed to be changing and falling apart. It is because of this that many people in the most powerful classes did not think the working class would be able to fight a conflict of such magnitude. This resulted in a bullying attitude from the upper classes towards them, as fighting was engraved in their history. They did not really need a reason or an incentive to join the Army, as they were already in contact with its world. This was an opportunity for them to show their views on warfare heroism and chivalry. It was a distorted and medieval vision of the war, which was also attributed to some other parts of society, and it was even reflected in some of their descriptions of the war in letters and other documents (Robb, 73).

Even if the economy of the country is not the main focus of this dissertation I must give a few pointers as to what was affecting it because this, evidently, played an important part in people's lives. Their vast Empire was Britain's biggest economic concern at the time so this was the issue that would shape the country's movements. The economic situation of the country was affected by the expense of WWI just as it had been affected by the Boer War, which had been extremely expensive for the country (Broadberry & Harrison, 214). It seems pretty clear that the economic changes that were taking place at the time affected society and were the reflection and result of the previous years. In spite of the economic situation not being good, we must mention that some new inventions were making their way into the

families' houses. Technology also had a lot to do with the shaping of society at that time. The telephone service, electricity, cars... it was all new, and even mysterious. These things, of course, would take some getting used to but it was an important step towards the modern world. This new technology was changing the way people behaved as well as how they communicated. It was obvious that times were changing in many ways, and for British society this seems like a period full of new ideas and prospects, but also a time of conflict and uncertainty.

4.1. Class division in the household

Both in *Downton Abbey* and in *Upstairs, Downstairs* we can find a depiction of society in the era that they portray. The classes and the status quo within the household are very clear. The social distance between the characters is visible right from the start of the series. Viewers can not only sense that there are social and financial differences, but that there is also a physical aspect to it, and it is exactly here where the setting of the lives of the families comes into play. The fact that the people that live in the household are divided into two floors makes the differences of status much more visible. The people with the most power live upstairs and the lower classes, consequently, live downstairs. But this is not the only division in the house, as there is also a clear hierarchy within each floor.

At this time, lineage was more important than money, and that was, obviously, linked to class, which was central to Edwardian society. This played an important part in matters of inheritance. The house and the land always went to the first male heir, and if the family did not have a son, they would go to the nearest male relation. In the case of *Downton Abbey* this nearest male relative was Matthew Crawley. This is probably one of the events shown in the series that especially highlights the importance of status at that time. Matthew Crawley was a

twenty-seven-year-old solicitor who arrived at Downton accompanied by his mother, Isobel. He certainly did not really want to adapt to this new way of life, even if he had no way of escaping it. He was going to become an earl and inherit the estate no matter what, even if he refused to do it. He particularly surprised the family when he made it clear that he did intend to keep his job as a solicitor even after marrying the eldest daughter, Mary, and inheriting the estate. This came as a shock for Lord Grantham, as he did not really have a job to provide for him, he just kept himself busy with the affairs of the estate (Fellowes, 33). The skepticism most members of the Grantham household felt towards him is evident even before he arrived, and regarding this matter we must also take a look at the Dowager Countess' attitude towards Matthew Crawley. To the Countess, aristocratic virtues were much more important than money. She firmly believed in her principles as well as in the way society worked and in its fixed rules. This explains her feelings towards the new heir. He came from the new professional upper class, he was a liberal and he supported the suffragettes' cause. He believed that social change was necessary and, most importantly, it was pretty clear that he had no social ambitions whatsoever. All this, obviously, clashed with the traditional views of some of the members of the family (47).

Regarding class, it must be pointed out that in both *Downton Abbey* and *Upstairs, Downstairs* there was a hierarchy on the top floor, but there were also different statuses downstairs. This was shown, for instance, by who served what when the family was having lunch or dinner, or who could go upstairs when the family was around. Some of the servants could only walk around the top floors when the family was away. Each of the servants had a duty and there were a few of them who could move seamlessly between the two floors as if they were almost a part of the house. They were what were usually known as senior roles in the household, usually the Lord's valet and some of the maids. This allowed them to hear the news and the gossip before the rest of the staff (Fellowes, 107)

Moreover, when talking about life downstairs we must, of course, mention a key concept for those who lived in that part of the house: discretion. Servants knew about everything that happened on both floors, either because they had seen it themselves or because another member of the staff had informed them. But there was an unwritten rule about all this. They were expected to behave as though they did not know about it, they were supposed to keep the family's secrets. An example of this kind of behavior, in what can be considered very extreme circumstances, is portrayed in the first season of *Downton Abbey*. When the Turkish diplomat Mr. Pamuk died in Mary's room, her maid (Anna) helped her solve the problem along with Cora, her mother, and afterwards she did not say a word to any other member of the staff about what happened (17).

Furthermore, at times it seems that life downstairs offered little room for improvement for some of the servants, for example in the Grantham's household in *Downton Abbey*. Some of the servants, especially the older ones and those who held senior roles in the house, did not really talk about their job aspirations. It could be because they knew that they did not have a possibility of a better job or because they were content with what they had and did not want to risk their current position in the household. However, there was another part of the staff that often talked about improving their situation and getting better jobs, most of the time within that same household. Thomas and O'Brien are an example of this. They created schemes to boycott other servants in order to get jobs with a higher rank within the house. In addition, as the TV series progresses we see more and more characters who had other life aspirations and who tried to chase their dreams out of Downton, which was not particularly easy at that time. This is the case of Gwen, a housemaid in *Downton*. She wanted to change her life by becoming a secretary. She was a farmer's daughter and at that time (1913) it was pretty dangerous to risk a good position in the house to venture into another job. It was actually Lady Sybil, Lord Grantham's youngest daughter, who helped her broaden her horizon and get

a job as a secretary. Gwen's case was particularly remarkable not only because she was a character from downstairs who was on her way to a better job, but also because she was a woman and her opportunities at that time were even more limited because of that (131).

As both series develop we find several more characters from downstairs who had dreams and who just could not wait to get out of the houses and live a better and different life. In the case of *Upstairs, Downstairs* we can see this happening within the ranks of the servers, as some of the characters end up climbing that particular social ladder and getting better jobs within the same household. In *Upstairs, Downstairs* we find an example of this in Rose Buck, who entered service when she was thirteen. From 1903 to 1919 she worked as head house parlourmaid in Eaton Place, and from that moment on until 1930 she was Virginia Bellamy's lady's maid. We also get a glimpse of her life after that as she appeared in the *Upstairs, Downstairs* revival, where she run a maid hiring service until she went back to Eaton Place to work as a housekeeper for the new owners.

4.2. Marriage, love and class

There were also some issues related to marriage and class. With such a huge difference between these two groups that we see represented on the two floors of the households in *Downton Abbey* and *Upstairs, Downstairs*, it seemed quite obvious that relationships between people who came from such different backgrounds were frowned upon. It is possible to find examples of this exact situation in both *Downton Abbey* and *Upstairs, Downstairs*. In fact, one of the most famous plotlines that came from the Grantham household (*Downton*) was Tom Branson and Sybil's relationship. She was Lord Grantham's youngest daughter; she was full of curiosity and was really interested in the progressive ideas that were hitting her world at that time. She found in Branson, the family's chauffeur, someone that shared those new

theories and who was not really interested in living by the old rules anymore. He was not afraid to express his opinion, even if it could get him in trouble, and she seemed encouraged and inspired by this. So when they started their relationship, the discomfort in her family was evident. Not only was he someone from a different social status but he was also a socialist and a “radical” Irishman. Branson believed that was it possible to transform the traditional social order and he thought that he and Sybil could change some of the most classist and ancient views of the people around them. It is also curious that this relationship not only surprised and upset Sybil’s family but the servants of the house also thought it was quite outrageous (Fellowes, 75). As the years went by, Branson was more and more accepted into the family even though there was always some reticence from some members of the family as well as some clashes in family reunions. After Sybil’s death he formed a very strong bond with Mary, as they lost their partners and also had to manage the estate together.

As for *Upstairs, Downstairs*, there are several examples of inappropriate relationships. One of them was Alfred Harris, the original footman of Eaton Place. In 1905 he was caught having a sexual encounter with a German spy, who was a guest upstairs. Afraid of the consequences this could bring him, he runs away. Another example from this same series is actually an affair between people who worked on the same floor (downstairs, but in different houses) but who belong to different ranks within each. It is the case of the brief but very intense romance that Emily and William had around 1907. Emily was a kitchen maid who fell madly in love with William, who turned out to be Mrs. Van Groeben’s⁶ footman. When Mrs. Van Groeben found out, she did not let William see or have any encounter with Emily, as she thought the kitchen maid is beneath him. This shows us that there was obviously a hierarchy downstairs and that not only the people that lived on that floor were aware of it but that it was also very present for the upstairs inhabitants. We can even find another example of an affair

⁶ Lady Bellamy's committee associate

between members of different social classes in *Upstairs, Downstairs*. Sarah Moffat arrived at Eaton Place through an agency for domestic servants and after leaving and coming back to the house several times she ended up starting an affair with the owner's son, James Bellamy and becoming pregnant. She and James part ways and she loses the baby. In the end, she married Thomas Watkins, the Bellamy chauffeur.

It is fair to say that finding love and marriage at this time was certainly not easy. For the women who lived on the floor upstairs it was difficult to find a husband that would be suitable, not only for her but also for the family, and this was particularly tricky if matters of inheritance were involved. As for the women who lived downstairs, it was also tough because relationships between the members of the staff were not allowed. In fact, if that was the case they would probably have to leave the service. It was very complicated to find a suitor outside the work space, as there were very few opportunities (217).

4.3.The First World War

Britain had not fought a war in Europe in 99 years, when it was the most important industrial power in the world and had managed to have the largest empire in history. During this time, the country was becoming more and more militarily weak. The resources they had were not even enough to maintain such a huge empire. They had too many demands and needed to become stronger (DeGroot, 3). By the year 1889, it was thought that the biggest enemy of the British Empire was Russia, as its interests in Persia threatened India, the "Imperial Jewel". The British would not be able to defend India from Russia. However, this issue was solved in 1907 through the Anglo-Russian convention, with a worrying consequence for Britain as it just dragged the country deeper into European affairs. This led to a much bigger risk of entering a European war. Consequently, when the assassination of

Archduke Franz Ferdinand took place, it was clear that the European war that was about to take place was also Britain's. They could not stay out of it because that would completely ruin the agreements made to protect the Empire's territories. Moreover, it was impossible for Britain to stand aside and watch Germany become such a powerful and dominant country while taking advantage of the Empire's vulnerability (5).

As the war went on it was obvious that a conflict as huge as a world war took over every aspect of people's lives. It was a conflict like no other before. It involved a new form of warfare that involved air attacks and took the population completely by surprise. Houses and streets collapsed meaning that all of it was happening at home, not at some battlefield somewhere else, the people were not safe anymore. It turned out to be a huge test for the whole country, because there were so many new challenges to face, and new experiences never seen before. Nobody expected that kind of danger to invade the streets because up until that moment it had only been faced by soldiers. Civilians needed protection and the government was in such a risky position, as this situation was so new and unexpected, that nobody really knew what the outcome could be. (Adie, 21). As it was a conflict of such magnitude, soon refugees started to arrive in Britain escaping from the horrors they were living in their home countries. The first ones to arrive were from Belgium. Certainly nobody was expecting them to get to British soil that fast or in such numbers. These people had just seen what the war had done to their homes and so they were also the first ones to tell British citizens about the murders and the manic destruction that were happening there. This helped the British population realize the magnitude of the conflict and to begin to see the horror that came with it (28).

However, the beginning of the war and the huge explosion of energy that came with it was also the loudest call to arms for the British population. Taking into account the Army Order of 1907, on 1 May 1914 the regular British army was almost 11,000 men short. But after the

outbreak of the war there was a massive change. When the country had to improvise an army, the people responded (Robb, 31). We could even split this huge group of volunteers into two: the ones who would become officers (they came mainly from public schools) and those who just filled the other ranks (the rest of society). It is also important to mention that there was a certain way of life that came with this generation. They were brought up on chivalry and manners but they also did not seem to have enough opportunities to see how important they could be in the real world (44). On the other hand, the workers that enlisted were less influenced by this concept of duty, and their motives for joining the army were more diverse (46).

Both *Downton Abbey* and *Upstairs, Downstairs* gave their version of how the characters had lived during the war years. In *Upstairs, Downstairs* we find people from both of the floors of the household fighting in the war. One of them was James Bellamy, Richard and Lady Marjorie's son. After attending the Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst it is known that he worked as an officer in the Life Guards of the British Household Cavalry up until 1919. He ended up being injured in the trenches and was brought back home to recover. As for downstairs, we can find several characters who served in the forces in many different ways. One of them is Edward, who left to go to war in 1915 and also fought in the trenches. Moreover, we also have Gregory Wilmot. Technically he was not one of the downstairs characters, but he was Rose's⁷ fiancé. He became a Sergeant in the ANZACs⁸ and fought in the battle of Gallipoli.

On the other hand, in *Downton* we also find characters that participated in the war and we see how the conflict affected them. One of them was Matthew Crawley⁹. By the year 1916 he

⁷ She was the head house parlourmaid in Eaton Place

⁸ Australian and New Zealand Army Corps. It was a First War World army corps of the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force

⁹ See Appendix 4: Matthew fighting on the Somme

was fighting in the front, specifically in the Battle of the Somme¹⁰. This was actually one of the deadliest battles ever seen, as the number of casualties was even bigger than that of the Second World War. For Matthew, this was a huge and sudden change of scenery. He went from being a middle-class lawyer to a future earl and then he went straight to the trenches, when he had to try to survive as an officer while controlling the soldiers that were under his command (Fellowes, 230). He ended up being promoted to captain and being injured in Amiens (France). In that crucial moment he was saved from an even worse injury by William Mason, his batman, who also happened to be Downton's footman. William protected Matthew Crawley from a shell explosion by throwing himself over his captain. When he went back home, his injuries were so serious that he did not survive. Matthew, on the other hand, returned home to Downton paralyzed from the waist down. But these are not the only two characters from the series that fought on the front, as Thomas Barrow¹¹ was also sent to the trenches, much to his dismay. Later on we learn that, sick of the conflict, he got himself wounded intentionally and was sent away from the front lines.

After the war, the horror that the people who fought in the front had lived through consumed the soldiers, both psychologically and physically¹². For some of them it was almost unbearable and forty-eight hospitals had to be established to treat emotional casualties from WWI. By 1922, 9,000 shell-shock victims were still in hospitals and 65,000 of them were receiving pensions for disability. Shell-shock¹³ is a term which originated from the belief that firepower from the new artillery that was being used in warfare could cause brain damage that would be very difficult to detect. This would be a result of the impact of fragments of a mortar¹⁴. This was an idea that was believed by both civilians and the soldiers and the term

¹⁰ See Appendix 5: Infantry attack on the Somme, 1917

¹¹ Under-footman of the family. Will later on become first footman

¹² See Appendix 6: Hospital, Elizabethville, Birtley National Projectile Factory, 1916-1918

¹³ See Appendix 7: Shells manufactured at Swindon Works, 1915-1918

¹⁴ A short smooth-bore gun for firing shells (technically called bombs) at high angles (Oxford English Dictionary)

was originated precisely in the battlefield, being used by both soldiers and doctors in Britain and France (Leese, 1). In both of the TV series studied in this dissertation we can find portrayals of characters affected by shell-shock. In the case of *Downton Abbey* we have Henry Lang. He was a replacement for Mr. Bates as Lord Grantham's valet but, eventually, he ended up being dismissed as this condition did not let him continue doing his job. In the case of *Upstairs, Downstairs* we have Edward Barnes, who is a footman. He was severely affected by this condition and he was sent to the hospital for treatment. In addition, it is important to mention that a lot of the soldiers would also suffer from what today we call PTS¹⁵ and would sometimes suddenly associate sounds or faces to the horrors they had experienced in the battlefield (DeGroot, 279). We also have to take into account that this war brought a new warfare technique therefore making the wounds much worse for the ones who fought in the conflict. The injuries and the horrendous conditions that the soldiers suffered in the trenches showed how brutal the First World War was. For the ones who had not fought it, seeing the conditions in which their loved ones returned home was something they would never forget. It is clear that the war left a huge psychological and moral impact on the memory of the British people.

4.4. New times, new money

All of the changes and new ideas that took place in this particular period of history also had their influence on economic and business matters. As the war went on, the medieval and romantic version of the conflict was more and more difficult to maintain, as the number of casualties grew bigger and bigger. However, even if the general situation of the country was getting worse and the problems that were already established between capital and labor did

¹⁵ Post-traumatic stress

not cease to exist, the war gave some people plenty of opportunities to launch new businesses (Robb, 71). This is the time when a new generation full of wealth, power and new ideas started to climb up society's ladder, with no connections to the aristocracy. Their influence did not come from their family lines, it came straight from the money they were making and the new businesses they were investing in. They were what is known as "the new rich". Their wealth kept on growing and growing and, at the time, they were the only ones who could afford to buy hereditary estates (78). They made money especially from manufacturing, oil and newspapers. The latter played quite an important part at the time, as it was a growing business and a key piece for the propaganda of the war and recruiting mechanisms. Two of these newspaper magnates who actually made most of their money during the First World War were Max Aitken (later Lord Beaverbrook) and Lord Northcliffe, who helped establish the Daily Express, the Daily Mirror and the Daily Mail. One of *Downton Abbey's* secondary characters was loosely based on their stories. This was reflected in the character called Richard Carlisle. When Mary, Lord Grantham's eldest daughter, appeared with Richard Carlisle at Downton, the viewers can sense that there was worry in the household. He came into their lives when the country was in the middle of a war. He brought new ways into the family and he was also a really confident person who had ambitions and who was not afraid of challenges or failing. His whole attitude was a completely new perspective of the world for the family. He represented the future, a future where connections to aristocracy did not really matter anymore. Obviously, this attitude was not really well received by people whose power came from their family lines. This was particularly worrying for Lord Grantham, as he was born into that society and structure. Now status was threatened by ambitious men with new money and different social groups were becoming stronger and stronger (Fellowes, 65).

5. Women in Britain at the beginning of the twentieth century

During the period of history that this dissertation covers, women were mostly seen as wives, daughters or mothers – not individuals. This was already implied as each time the government passed any kind of legislation or introduced social changes it only addressed men. Women at that time did not really have any kind of independence from their family until they were married. In fact, the only place where women could be treated more favorably if they imitated men was the stage (Adie, 9). As long as they lived in the family household they had to obey their father's rules. They did not have a job or a particular role in the house, and the ones that belonged to the upper classes spent their time learning several languages or how to paint and they also had lessons on how to start and make conversations (Fellowes, 39). Still, the fight for women's rights and the suffrage movement was growing stronger day by day and spreading widely across the country.

5.1. Women from upstairs

After dealing with some of the social differences that can be found among the inhabitants of the houses depending on which floor they lived on. I will now summarize the differences between the women from upstairs and downstairs. In the upstairs section of *Downton Abbey* we find Lord Grantham's daughters (Sybil, Edith and Mary, his wife Cora and the Dowager Countess. I have decided to focus mainly on the three sisters as they are the ones that show more character development and evolution as the series goes on. At the beginning of the series we see that their activities consisted mainly of reading, learning languages and attending parties or any other social gatherings. But as the episodes progress, their lives change and so does their way of thinking. It is very interesting to observe the different evolutions of the sisters and their goals, interests and ideas.

The youngest daughter, Sybil, was full of hope and curiosity and was definitely ready for the challenges that this new time could bring her way. She embraced new ideas and behavior that may had seem to be very progressive, and even outrageous, for the rest of her family. But Sybil's views were also reflected in her clothing and her style. I would particularly like to point out an iconic scene from the series in which she surprises her family by wearing bloomers¹⁶. This only proved her ideas once again: if men could do it, so could women (Fellowes, 149). She was willing to go beyond her class and sex expectations and she found someone to share her ideas with, the chauffeur, Tom Branson. Through the development of their relationship we see that even though she was very enthusiastic about these new ideas, she was also very aware of how difficult real change was (75). On the other hand, Edith, the middle sister, was very different from the youngest. Her only concern at the beginning of the show was getting married, to the point that she seemed almost desperate to compete with her sisters (especially with Mary) to find a suitable husband. But as the series progressed, so did she. She learned how to drive and she also developed a new goal, which she achieved when she started working for a newspaper. Finally Mary, the eldest daughter had a character which actually shows a lot of development throughout the series, as she turned into a much more independent woman as she adapted to the changes that surrounded her, slowly but surely. The twists and turns of her life (losing her husband, becoming a mother) shaped her into a different person. Even if she followed the old rules at the beginning of the series, later on she ended up being a young woman who was aware of the power she had and knew how to use it to her advantage and to prove what she thought was right.

The three sisters reflected the changes the upper class was experiencing. Even if sometimes they shared the same views as their parents, it was clear that this younger

¹⁶ See Appendix 8: *Downton Abbey*, Sybil wearing bloomers

generation was aware of the possibilities that this new situation could bring, even if it was through subtle changes in their lives.

In the case of *Upstairs, Downstairs* this was mostly reflected through Elizabeth¹⁷, the daughter of Richard and Lady Marjorie. She was, just like Sybil, someone really open minded who welcomed the new ideas that were entering her world. She found the life that her family led very confined and she was ready to take on new opportunities and challenges, even getting involved in some situations that could be tricky for someone in her position. In fact, one of those moments is her presentation at Court. When young girls (mostly from the upper classes) turned eighteen they had to enter society as debutantes in what is known as “The Season”, which was mainly all about parties, big gatherings where they would meet the right circle of men until they found a suitable husband. But first they had to be presented at Court in front of the king and the queen. Arranging the marriage this way also gave the girl’s family a general view of who would inherit their properties (Fellowes, 39). We see this traditional presentation in both *Downton* and *Upstairs, Downstairs*. In the case of the latter and the previously mentioned Elizabeth, she decided that at that particular moment it was a good time to flee. Later on she married a poet who decided that he did not want to consummate their marriage. This led her to have a brief affair, arranged by her husband, which resulted in a pregnancy. At some point she also got involved in the socialist movement and joined a group of suffragettes, eventually moving to America after a divorce.

5.2. Women from downstairs

Life for the women who lived downstairs was completely different. They had very little free time, their clothes were certainly not as glamorous as the ones from upstairs and

¹⁷ See Appendix 9: *Upstairs, Downstairs*, Elizabeth Bellamy

opportunities for change and improvement did not come often. They could not have many aspirations in life apart from perhaps moving up within the ranks of the house they were working in. It was already difficult for women to find a job in a great household, no wonder how difficult it would be to find a purpose in life in general. But sometimes they were lucky and they had an opportunity to do something they liked and wanted to, like Gwen and Daisy in *Downton*. Gwen eventually got a different job that she actually liked outside the household with the help of Sybil (Fellowes, 131). Daisy¹⁸, on the other hand, had different goals. Even if in the first seasons of the series she did not seem particularly ambitious, eventually she decided to start studying and even got an offer to go and work as a cook in America, which she declined. The women that lived downstairs did not attend fancy parties or learn French; they spent their time working and doing their chores at the house. They obviously got to enjoy their days off but, at this point and time, there were few and, obviously, the possibilities that their free time offered were not as varied as the ones from the people upstairs. That was the time they would use, occasionally, to find a suitable husband. This was particularly difficult in households like *Downton* because they could not have relationships with other members of the staff. It was not banned by law but it was most definitely frowned upon.

Regarding the differences between women from different social status I would like to point out a plot line that appears in both shows, which is Anna's rape in *Downton*, as well as Mary Strokes' rape and pregnancy in *Upstairs, Downstairs*. This happens to characters that live downstairs, which makes the audience wonder if the situation would have been handled in the same way if it had happened on the top floor of the house. In the case of *Upstairs, Downstairs*, Mary arrived in the household as the new under-house-parlour maid already pregnant. She had been sexually assaulted by her previous employer, who turned out to be a politician with a lot of power. But even if her new employer tried to help her, this certainly

¹⁸ Daisy Mason (née Robinson), kitchen maid and later on assistant cook

did not help the situation and she ended up quitting her job. As for *Downton Abbey* the woman who was assaulted was Anna May Bates, Lady Mary's lady maid. She was brutally attacked by the valet of one of the guests who was staying at the house at that moment. In this case, this plot developed into something much more complicated as the rapist ended up dead and Anna's husband, Mr. Bates, was the primary suspect.

5.3. Women, war and duty

With the arrival of the First World War it was obvious that the path men should follow in that situation was clear. But women's duty in it was full of questions, and most of them were linked to gender politics. What were they supposed to do? It is often assumed that women did not work before WWI but, in fact, they did. However, it is true that numbers of women workers grew during the war years and that working had a novel appeal for quite a lot of them, especially if they had stopped working after getting married, which was often the case (DeGroot, 129). During the war years women ended up taking part in some new and different aspects of life that were usually mostly dominated by men. They wanted to expand their work experiences and be more than nurses. This, of course, brought them praise but also a great deal of criticism. (Robb, 39). But it was obvious that as more men were joining the armed forces, the need to replace people increased as well. When the war started, the strength and skills of women were needed. They were key to increasing productivity in the land. But as could be expected, not everybody welcomed women into this kind of world, as some people thought this was not something ladies should do, and others simply thought they could not do the job. In the end, even if women were actually taking part in the military, most of them were not considered a part of it.

As they entered the war world, women were not only increasing in the workforce but they were also more visible to the population in jobs that they had not done before. Some of

the occupations that women were taking over during World War I included working in munition factories, nursing, driving ambulances or jobs in banks and post offices.

Nurses were the ones that were recruited earliest in the war. The Voluntary Aid Detachment (VAD)¹⁹ provided nurses that had an upper and middle class background. They did not receive a salary at first but in 1915 the government decided to pay them in order to keep them helping. It is important to say that nursing almost had a universal approval, unlike the rest of the jobs women had during the war years. For the younger generations of women, as well as for the ones who came from the middle-class, this was certainly a new experience, as they were working outside their homes (40). We find an example of a young woman who worked as a nurse during some of the war years in Sybil, from *Downton Abbey*. She felt she should be doing something, that she needed to find a purpose, and she found it during the war years, as she started working as a nurse. It was a pretty challenging job, because there was not enough time to give all the nurses full training. But she did the best she could facing injuries and situations she had never seen before. Edith also decided that she did not want to sit around waiting for marriage, and she learned how to drive a tractor (Fellowes, 253). Even if she did not get to demonstrate these skills in the battlefield, it must be mentioned that, when the conflict ended, female ambulance drivers were seen almost as an elite.

In *Upstairs, Downstairs*, we also find some female characters that worked during the war years. There was another VAD nurse, Georgina, who was James' step-cousin and who nurses him back to health when he comes back from the war. We also find Rose Buck, who worked as a bus conductress during the war years. Ruby Finch, on the other hand, left Eaton Place to work as a munitionette²⁰ in Silvertown²¹. Munition factories were full of women because the government needed to send more men to the battlefield. But in this job, even if

¹⁹ See Appendix 10: VAD nurses

²⁰ British women who worked in munition factories during WWI

²¹ See Appendix 11: Silvertown explosion, scene looking South East from top of Firemen's tower, 1917

this was the highest salary most of the women had ever had, they earned half the wages of men. As women were starting to work more and more in factories this also focused the attention on working conditions, as most of those working places were only “suitable” for men. Suddenly, more washrooms and toilets had to be provided (DeGroot, 133). Moreover, they worked long hours and in really dangerous conditions. In fact, hundreds of people were killed in munition factories explosions, such as the one that occurred in the previously mentioned Silverton in 1917 (Robb, 43).

But there was also female presence in the military. In 1917, the Army created the Women’s Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC), where there were actually no military ranks. Most of the women who were in the WAAC did chores and things they usually did at home but this time they got to do them in the front and in a uniform. Later on that year, the Navy created the Women’s Reserve Naval Service (WRNS) and the following year, the Women’s Royal Air Force started operating. Either way, recruitment for the Army was still an issue because the salary was lower than that of women working in industries were getting.

Out of all the jobs that women were taking up, those related to the military field were the ones that received the biggest amount of criticism. There was, obviously, a lot of indignation towards women’s employment because of the thought that they were imitating men but also towards the way some of them spent their salary, for example going to pubs or to the cinema. This was seen as behavior that went against the spirit of a country that was at war (46).

5.4. The suffrage question

Women already had a fight of their own going on at that time. They wanted the government to give them the right to vote. One of the reasons why a part of the population did not want women to vote was because they thought that, as they believed women could not defend the country militarily, they did not really deserve the right of citizenship. The suffrage movement played a key role in the development of this issue in the UK at that time. But the kind of behavior of the women who formed this group was definitely not that expected from them, and before the war they were not exactly portrayed as brave in the press. On the contrary, their attitude and protests received a great deal of criticism. Suffragettes believed that if women helped the Empire during the war, that would show the government how it truly depended on all the citizens, including women. They thought that this would also make the men in power realize that they could no longer deny women the right to vote. Even if most of their organizations supported the war, there were also some members (like Sylvia Pankhurst) who refused. Those members believed that the more organized part of the suffrage movement that wanted to lead a non-violent protest had become part of the strategy of the war (Robb, 37).

Experiencing the war also brought something different to the lives of women: confidence. Moreover, the environment created a favorable opportunity for change. It is possible to see this, for instance, in the first recruiting speech that Mrs. Pankhurst gave in November 1914:

“After this was many things can never again be as they were before it broke out. Some of the changes, perhaps, may be for the worse; the majority... will, we trust, be for the better. It is too much to hope that the altered position and prospects of the women’s movement will be among the national gains?” (Marwick, 49)

These ideas were repeated over and over again through the course of the following years. However, within the suffrage movement there was a division. Some disagreements were political, others intellectual and some even personal. There was a part of the movement that campaigned through speeches and peaceful methods but there was also an aggressive and, at times, spectacularly violent small group. They burned buildings, attacked politicians and had clashes with the police. In 1913, this kind of behavior reached its peak when Emily Davison was killed as she ran out in front of the king's horse at the Derby (Fellowes, 88)

Some people saw these women as freedom fighters, others, as violent rebels. The opinions from the population and the press were varied. Regarding the latter, we must say that women who followed the suffrage movement were even mocked by some cartoonists at the time. But these women's actions were proved to be completely necessary. There was no female representation in the House of Commons, no female MP or officials. And even the women who were sitting in the public had to be separated from men. It was obvious that a big change was needed (Adie, 288).

Within the suffrage movement we must, of course, mention some of its organizations. One of them was the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU), with Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst²². Another one was the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, led by Millicent Fawcett. She was one of the women who believed that all of their campaigning could be done through meetings and political pressure, not through violent actions (291). These organizations became of vital importance during the conflict. Days after the war had been declared, women were mobilizing and suffrage campaigners were involved in plenty of groups of volunteers. This obviously was of great help because they knew not only how to organize

²² See Appendix 12: Suffragettes, Annie Kenny, Christabel Pankhurst, 1906

themselves but also how to publicize and network. With so much effort being put in this sort of activities during the war years, the process of gaining the vote did not really see much progress (299).

Finally, in December 1918, right after the General Election, the Sex Disqualification Act was passed. This meant that women would have more job opportunities in certain fields as well as giving them qualified entry to the civil service, especially to its upper levels. Moreover, in 1919, nursing was recognized as a full job for the first time, thanks to the State Register of Nurses. In 1928 all women over 21 years of age with no qualification were given the right to vote, which meant political emancipation (Fellowes, 49).

This is also one of the topics that developed in both *Upstairs, Downstairs* and in *Downton Abbey*. In the latter there was not as much direct involvement from a character in the suffrage movement. It was definitely mentioned by Sybil and Branson, as they were the ones with the most progressive views on society and women's rights. It was actually Downton's former chauffeur who gave some pamphlets about the vote to Lord Grantham's youngest daughter, as he could see that she was clearly interested in the matter. Sybil was a supporter of the cause but she also decided to put the fight on hold while the war was going on, as many women did at the time. However, in *Upstairs, Downstairs* we can find Elizabeth, Lady Marjorie's daughter, who did actually join a group of militant suffragettes. She became involved in the movement and she ended up participating in an attack on an MP's house. She was arrested, along with her housemaid Rose, who was actually innocent. But eventually, a man who was exiting the MP's house (Julius Karekin) found her card and got Elizabeth out of this problem. The rest of the women who participated in the attack, including Rose, went to prison.

6. After the war

When the war ended, it was clear that the social structure in Britain had not changed that much if we compare it to how it was in 1914. But there were still some important modifications. One of those issues was the poverty in the country before the war. This prewar problem was partly eliminated thanks to the policies regarding nutrition that the government launched during the war period. Another issue that the Britons faced during wartime had to do with the upper classes and how it wasn't clear if they were fitted to rule. This was partly because of the incredible loss of life caused by the war. It also made the aristocracy itself doubt its strength and confidence (Robb, 87). But this didn't make the upper classes disappear or become significantly weaker by any means. In fact, the upper class was being redefined, becoming more of a commercial and financial plutocracy. The middle class was also evolving as its composition was changing and they now saw themselves somewhere in between capital and labor. At this point in time, when people talked about the middle class they referred to a varied group that included civil servants, suburban clerks, shopkeepers and low-level professionals (89). On the other hand, the workings class in Britain seemed to be the one that had gained the most from the war, as their standard of living improved. Unskilled workers were even getting job opportunities that were never available before for them. One of the cities in which it is possible to see this development is Manchester, where this group was becoming more homogenized. Moreover, the working class was now really involved in politics, due to its link to military service and the munition factories during the war years (90). Unemployment started to increase and the political situation was far from normal. This made forcing down wages quite a difficult task, especially as trade unions had gained more power during the war years. They formed councils and made it clear that strikes would start happening if the problem persisted (Lloyd, 106).

But months, and even years, after the war, things seemed to be improving and everyone hoped for a better life now that the conflict was over. A good example and reflection of this feeling was the speech the King gave to the new parliament at that time:

“The aspirations for a better social order which have been quickened in the hearts of my people by the experience of war must be encouraged by prompt and comprehensive action. Before the War, poverty, unemployment, inadequate housing, and many remediable ills were aggravated by division. But since the outbreak of the war every party and every class have worked and fought together for a great ideal... We must continue to manifest the same spirit” (92)

The entire nation modified the way they conducted their lives after the war. Britain had suffered from terrible trauma. But now it was time to get their lives back on track. The war had changed so many things that now it was the time to create a way back to a country that was not at war anymore (Paxman 267). One of the problems politicians had to solve was getting their soldiers back on British soil. In January 1919 there were thousands of complaints from the soldiers that were in the Channel and who wanted to return home once and for all. The following day there were even protests in London. This was solved by the new War Secretary, Winston Churchill, who decided that the soldiers who had been in the military longest were the ones who got to go home first (269).

As for women, it was certain that after the war, their skirts and hair were both shorter. But other things that were far more important had changed as well. Or had they? As the war finished, women were ushered away from their wartime jobs. As life was going back to “normal”, so did women, going back to their homes. The difference now was that they knew they had the courage to face the danger of a world war and to keep the country running. But this was only to a point, as this was not enough yet to change the traditions and rules that were already established in society (Adie, 301).

By the end of 1918, there was still no sign of equal pay for women and the only ones who had obtained the right to vote so far were those over 30 year old who were householders, wives of householders, graduates of British universities or those who occupied a property with an annual rent of 5£. Even if there were still many obstacles for women, this particular generation had done a lot for the younger ones. They had earned their way into public life as well as on stage and their personal lives had been linked to national events, proving once again the importance of their work. And even if this is not that talked about on public records, it still lives on in people's minds and memories.

But we must also say that this new-found confidence women had was also reflected in their fashion in the following years. For the first time, skirts were shorter, which obviously led to more freedom, both physically and metaphorically. But another important change that was introduced was what could potentially be the downfall of the corset industry. This not only meant more freedom of movement but could also have a deeper meaning: the possibility of women being a bit more independent in their lives. Cosmetics also started to play a much more important role in women's lives. And hairstyles were also modified and developed into what might be the most characteristic change of this period for women's fashion: the "bob", a shorter hairstyle that was quite innovative and shocking at the time. Obviously not all women tossed away their old clothes but it was certain that a big change had come (302).

6.1. Downton and Eaton Place after the war

As for the TV series used in this dissertation, we must say they also reflected the changes the country underwent after the war years. One of the post-war aspects that both these series show is how difficult it was for soldiers to get used to their new lives, whether it was because of their physical injuries or post-traumatic stress. Moreover, we must say that the women that worked as nurses in the wartime in both shows stopped working as soon as the

conflict stopped. That was the case of Sybil in *Downton* and Georgina in *Upstairs, Downstairs*. After having worked as a VAD nurse in France during the war years, Georgina came back home and joined a group called the “Bright Young Things” and through it, she and her friend rebelled against the Great Depression. As for Sybil, as the war ended she eloped and married Tom Branson, *Downton*’s chauffeur.

We also get a glimpse into problems that would affect British society later on, such as the Spanish flu which affects characters from both series. In *Downton* Lavinia Swire, Matthew Crawley’s former fiancée died from it in series two. As for *Upstairs, Downstairs*, Hazel Bellamy got the Spanish flu in 1918, when it was a pandemic, and she died.

In addition, we must mention two characters that after the war find new ways of making money. One of them is *Downton*’s Thomas, who got himself into a new scheme, as he discovered a recurrent way of making money during and after the war: the back market. On the other hand, in *Upstairs, Downstairs* we find James Bellamy, who moved to America. Eventually he started speculating on Wall Street and became rich.

Obviously, these kinds of series also reflect the fashion changes of the post-war era. This is especially noticeable in *Downton Abbey* as it tends to focus more on aesthetics. A clear example of this was Mary, the oldest daughter at *Downton*. After mourning the death of her husband, Matthew Crawley, she decided to give a radical switch to her image in 1924. She changed her long hair for a very fashionable bob. It was an unprecedented step in history as well as in the *Downton* family, as for the first time women sported short hair. It gave the impression that such a big change was very important for her and gave her the feeling that she was stronger. It also made her family realize that they really were living in a modern world.

7. Conclusions

The historical data that I have read and collected for this dissertation, as well as its reflection in period drama, have led me to the following conclusions:

The First World War affected every aspect of people's lives: work, social status, technology, politics... As well as obviously affecting the people that were on the battlefield, it also shifted things in society, affecting class and issues related to women.

Regarding British society, we can say that it may not have suffered any major changes during the period that this work covers but it certainly experienced some movement that was noticed on every part of the social ladder. The upper classes were redefined, as new ways of making money were appearing. As for the middle class, one of the most remarkable changes it suffered during this particular time was the modification in its composition. But the working class was definitely the one that experienced the most changes of all. They became much more involved in politics as trade unions gained more and more power.

On the topic of women, this period proved the need for and the importance of the suffrage movement. After years of fighting, women got the right to vote, even if they had to wait until 1928 so that women over 21 could vote. But even so, it was also very clear that inequalities were still very much present as they had to go back home after working during the war years, and that was taking a huge step backwards.

All of this is, to some extent, reflected in *Downton Abbey* and *Upstairs, Downstairs*. After examining the data used in this dissertation and watching how these series include history in their plots, it is safe to say that sometimes this kind of TV format modifies the original facts in order to make the product more appealing but, in the end, it is an acceptable way to bring history to wider audiences, even from different continents. This is especially so of the First World War, as it is a part of history that is still very much engraved into British

people's minds. A special connection has been created between the generation that experienced WWI and their children. This is the way in which these events were passed on into the family, becoming a part of its history, as well as people's memory.

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10. Appendix

10.1. Appendix 1: Downton Abbey's upstairs and downstairs families



10.2. Appendix 2: Downton Abbey's downstairs employees



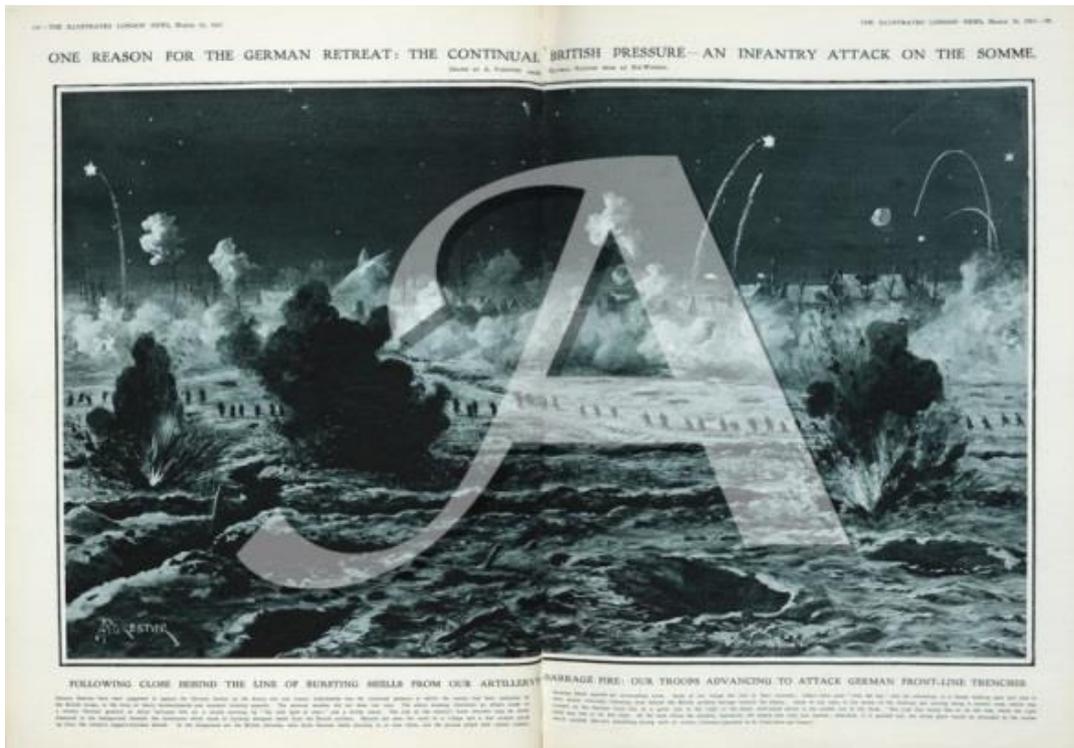
10.3. Appendix 3: The Bellamy family and their staff



10.4. Appendix 4: Matthew fighting on the Somme



10.5. Appendix 5: Infantry attack on the Somme, 1917

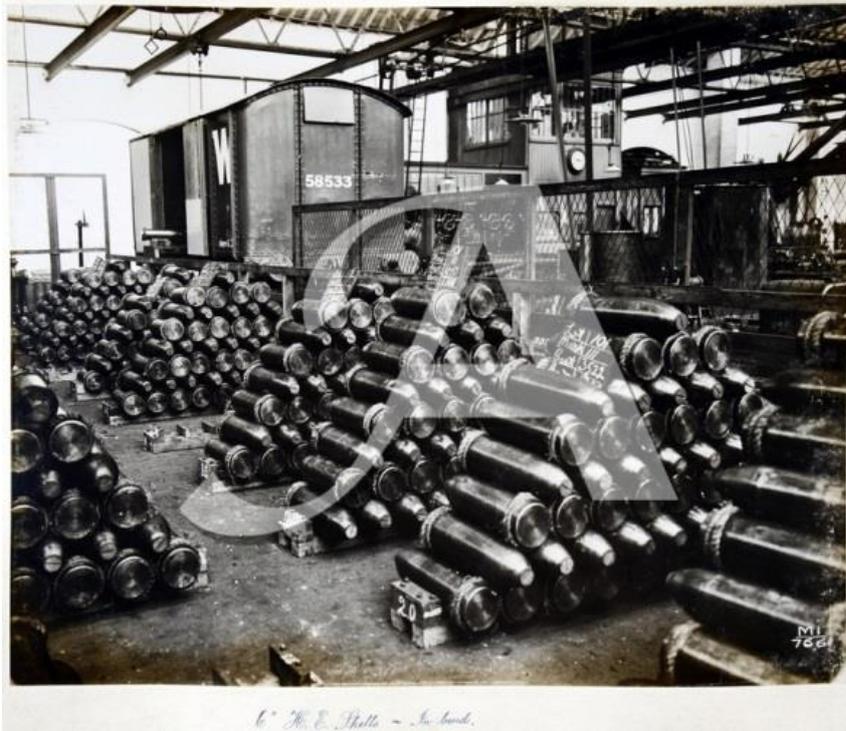


10.6. Appendix 6: Hospital, Elizabethville, Birtley National Projectile Factory, 1916-

1918



10.7. Appendix 7: Shells manufactured at Swindon Works, 1915-1918



10.8. Appendix 8: *Downton Abbey*, Sybil wearing bloomers



10.9. Appendix 9: *Upstairs, Downstairs*, Elizabeth Bellamy



10.10. Appendix 10: VAD nurses



10.11. Appendix 11: Silvertown explosion, scene looking South East from top of Firemen's tower, 1917



10.12. Appendix 12: Suffragettes, Annie Kenny, Christabel Pankhurst, 1906

