

TROZE

The Online Journal of the National Maritime Museum Cornwall www.nmmc.co.uk

A Quaker Record of Maritime Falmouth in World War One

By Pamela Richardson

December 2008

Volume 1 Number 2

TROZE

Troze is the journal of the National Maritime Museum Cornwall whose mission is to promote an understanding of small boats and their place in people's lives, and of the maritime history of Cornwall.

'Troze: the sound made by water about the bows of a boat in motion'
From R. Morton Nance, *A Glossary of Cornish Sea Words*

Editorial Board

Editor

Commander Bob Wilson MA RN

Dr Helen Doe, University of Exeter

Dr Anna Green, University of Exeter, Tremough

Captain George Hogg RN, National Maritime Museum Cornwall

Dr Alston Kennerley, University of Plymouth

Tony Pawlyn, Head of Library, National Maritime Museum Cornwall

Professor Philip Payton, Institute of Cornish Studies, University of Exeter

Dr Nigel Rigby, National Maritime Museum

Michael Stammers, Merseyside Maritime Museum

We welcome article submissions on any aspect relating to our mission.

Please contact the editor at troze@nmmc.co.uk or

National Maritime Museum Cornwall

Discovery Quay

Falmouth

Cornwall

TR11 3QY

United Kingdom

© National Maritime Museum Cornwall and Pamela Richardson

Pamela Richardson

Pamela Richardson was awarded her PhD in 2007 at the University of Exeter where she is currently an Honorary Fellow. Her thesis was *'The West Country Fox Family. A Study of English Provincial Quakerism 1840-1920'*. This followed an honours degree in Social History at the Open University. She writes and speaks on a variety of Quaker related subjects and is publishing a family history and an edited World War One journal in 2009.

A Quaker Record of Maritime Falmouth in World War One

Pamela Richardson

Introduction

This paper presents a picture of maritime Falmouth in World War One. Opening with a short history of the Fox family connection with the town there follows a roughly chronological account of how the war's progress affected the town and its inhabitants and finally it provides a snapshot of Falmouth from 1918 to 1919 with an analysis of the change which occurred. Most of the information is taken from Fox family journals of the period which are full of interesting detail, however, it should be realised that these are personal accounts of family life and port activity rather than formal records.¹ The family papers have been supplemented from other local archives; local newspapers and trade directories.

The principal aim here is to emphasise the continuing role played by Falmouth in the history of shipping. In the early days of the Packet ships, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the port was vital in the transfer of mail and intelligence to the capital. Through the Napoleonic Wars of the early nineteenth century when the French were interfering with trade in the North Sea and the Baltic, as the most westerly harbour, Falmouth provided a port of call for trade between Europe and the rest of the world. During the First World War Falmouth helped preserve the vital free movement of ships, troops and supplies between Great Britain, Europe and their allies, especially America and Canada.

This paper is partly the story of the well-known Quaker Fox family finding their ship agency once again involved in this task but it also details the manner in which, on a more personal level, they met the challenge that war presented to all Quakers. The group conscience of the Society of Friends was totally anti-war but they allowed freedom of conscience to all members to make their own decisions, and the choices of Fox family members are an illustration of differing reactions. There were historical resonances here for in 1854, as Britain and France entered what contemporaries knew as the Russian war, a member of the Fox family 'had his worst fears confirmed' and as a pacifist he deplored 'the general thirst for war and bloodshed'.² This is also the story of how the town and its inhabitants coped with the difficulties of their town being taken over by national needs.

Falmouth is 312 miles from London; in 1914 the journey took seven hours by train and yet in the First World War Falmouth was on the front line. It has one of the finest harbours in the country and to take full advantage of that the docks, covering one hundred and twenty acres, were built in 1860. Foxes invested £40,000 in the new docks and in 1863 lobbied Parliament for the introduction of the railway which would serve town and port. The development had two graving docks, extensive warehouses and cranes and was railway connected. At a cost of £10,000, the Prince of Wales pier was opened in 1905 to increase the facility for sea traffic. In 1911 the population of the town was 8,728 and the parliamentary borough was 17,620 of which twenty percent were electors.



Figure 1: Ordnance Survey Map 1909
Source: Cornwall Record Office OSS 715E/2

In 1912, 358 British and foreign ships left Falmouth, 151 of those to other British ports. In the same year 2,000 coastal ships were received and 2,137 left with cargo or in ballast. Falmouth's fishing fleet of 191 boats, employing about 733 men and boys, operated out of the port which also contained 30 steamers for towage and boarding and seven pilot cutters. The Falmouth Register listed 150 merchant ships. In 1913, the port handled 532,702 tons of foreign cargo and 301,400 tons of cargo of British Possessions; Customs revenue in 1913 was £10,000.³

It was a busy, efficient port and the Fox family played a prominent part in its business. Members of the family had the consulates of Belgium and Denmark, vice-consulates of Brazil, Portugal, Greece, Honduras, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Germany, Norway and Russia and a consular agency for Italy.⁴ From the seventeenth century the family had built up their ship agency G. C. Fox & Co. and added five allied companies over the years. Their early history was chronicled in detail by Barclay Fox (1818-1855) and his fascinating journals have recently been re-edited.⁵ The Fox family's chief competitors in the twentieth century were the Tamlyns and the Broads, but it was in the main a friendly rivalry.

The Quaker Fox Family and Falmouth

In 1914 there were five Fox family partners, four of mature years. George Henry (69) was senior partner, with him were his brother Howard (78) a Fellow of the Royal Geological Society, Howard's son Charles Masson Fox (48), cousin Robert Barclay (41) known to all as Barclay and grandson of Robert Were Fox II, and Cuthbert, the youngest partner (29), eldest son of George Henry. The elder brother Alfred Lloyd died in 1885. The younger brother Wilson Lloyd was not involved with the business and was no longer a Quaker. While he attended the local parish church they regularly attended Quaker meetings, usually in Gylling Street meeting house (erected in 1873), sometimes

at Come-to-Good at Carnon Down. George Henry was an Elder; his wife Rachel a member who represented Devon and Cornwall Quarterly Meeting at the Meeting for Suffering, a role later taken over by her daughter Annette. Cuthbert played a part in local politics as a councillor for the Arewenack ward. They lived close to each other, mostly in the Wood Lane and Melville Road area, and had summer properties near the sea.

George Henry had four girls and two boys. The fourth child, Erica, was 22 when the war began and it is her journal, together with the one kept by her uncle Wilson which have been the main sources of information for this paper. Erica's journal is a scrapbook of newspaper cuttings, personal comment on shipping and local events with additions from other family members. She records nothing of her thoughts and feelings as a Quaker, concentrating on the disruption to local and business life and how people coped. The journal of her uncle, on the other hand, is a detailed day by day record, even having a weather code. He was 67 years old, married to Constance (nee Rogers) but with no children. He was a solicitor, county magistrate, registrar and high bailiff, also honorary secretary of the Falmouth Observatory, honorary treasurer of the Royal Cornwall Polytechnic Society, a keen fisherman, bee-keeper and stamp collector.

1914 Outbreak of War

In 1914 the town was busy and prosperous, a charming place in which to live. At the end of July there was national financial turmoil as the bank rate fluctuated. In Falmouth there was initial chaos when war was declared on 3 August. The mayor (Alderman Chard) called a special meeting of the town council to report on the action he had taken with reference to the landing of aliens, the dealing with house refuse and plans for the draining of Swanpool. At the time, the latter appeared to be a necessary defence as the inlet was a possible invasion site. The sanitary inspector, the medical officer, the mayor and committee were given powers to take any necessary action and incur expense to meet additional burden. The waterworks would be guarded and the manager employed five men to guard the pools until such time as he was advised that the military authorities would do so. The mayor announced, 'We deprecate anything approaching a panic through persons overstocking themselves and that we show our disapproval of any traders raising the price of commodities.'⁶

The Hamburg America liner *Prince Adelbert* (Captain Schonfeldt) came into harbour on 4 August closely followed by *Kronprinzessen Cecilie*. She was stopped by the War Department who first supposed her to be the Norddeutscher Lloyd liner of the same name, due at Plymouth with £2 million of specie (coins) on board. Both ships were taken to London in charge of the Admiralty.



Figure 2: Kronprinzessen Cecilie
Source: Charles Fox Archive

Aliens and crew were transferred to shore from the *Kronprinzessen Cecilie* by the Fox tug *Victor*. One hundred and eight aliens were sent to local workhouses, ninety went to Redruth but records are lacking for Falmouth. This number probably included some crew members although some were imprisoned. Emergency plans were formed to find accommodation in the town; captains and officers were billeted at first for which the council paid twenty-two shillings per man per week. They appealed for Government financial help in this emergency but none was forthcoming so a Relief Fund was launched which was supported by the Harbour Commissioners who included Howard and Barclay Fox. Barclay felt that Falmouth was a dumping ground for aliens. It was the only port between Folkestone and Bristol authorised to land them and the only permitted landing place for them was Custom House quay. Mrs George Henry, as a committed Quaker, spoke out at a meeting of the Falmouth Liberal Association about excessive bitterness towards Germans.

As troops arrived for local defence they were billeted in the town for 1s 1d per day. In September there were four captured German ships in harbour; the four-masted barque *Goldbeck* (2,476 tons), *Orlando* (2,065 tons) with a cargo of nitrate en route to Falmouth for orders, the schooner *Caracas* (409 tons) and *Fritz* (2,024 tons) loaded with nitrate also making for Falmouth for orders. These were valuable prizes. More ships arrived; the Dutch mail ship *Gervia* escorted by a cruiser, the four-masted German ship *Ponape* with a cargo of wheat and *Potsdam* with passengers, mail and cargo. From the *Potsdam*, 471 people were made prisoners of war but neutral aliens and women were allowed to remain on board. *Ponape* was moored up river near the King Harry ferry. Henry Scott Tuke (1858-1929), the well-known artist, was given permission to board her to sketch the working crew. He had extensive knowledge of the layout of a rigged ship and his pictures "Pulley Hauley" and "Stowing Headsails" were worked from these sketches. He also painted the *Amsterdam* in Falmouth harbour in 1914.⁷ *Hera* (2,084 tons) a four-masted barque owned by Rhederei Aktien Gesellschaft of Hamburg (Captain Lorentz) also bound for Falmouth with nitrate from Chile, sank in fog east of Falmouth to the west of Gull Rock in 1914. Five of her crew were saved; nineteen are buried in Veryan churchyard.

There was an immediate restriction on shipping. Movement in and out of the harbour was prohibited except with special permission to be obtained at

Custom House where licences were issued; rowing and fishing boats were exempt at first, but the latter were restricted from 1915. The Fox family continued to go fishing but, like all fishermen, had written permits with time stated on them. Examples of both are shown below.

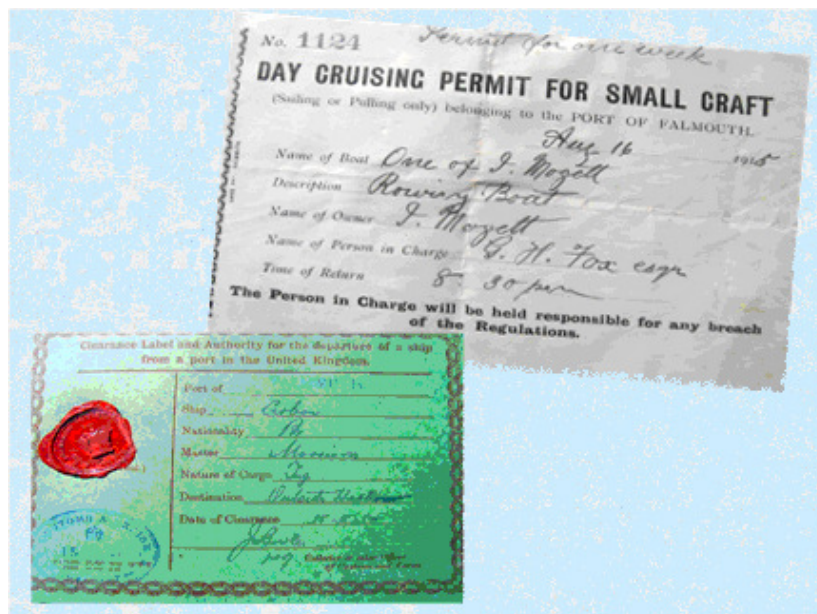


Figure 3: Fishing permits
Source: Charles Fox Archive

Falmouth was declared a defended harbour, an examination steamer *New Resolute* was posted near St Anthony lighthouse to police movement. Tugs and other vessels were requisitioned by the Admiralty which also took over the docks. The Fox steamship *Perran* was taken to Folkestone and the tugs had to travel long distances on escort duty.⁸ Prior to the war Fox tugs had always run uninsured, relying on the seamanship and skill of their captains, and that skill proved invaluable in wartime. The tug *Norman* was commandeered to lighter water to the troops at St Anthony and coaling was mostly done from hulks within the harbour. In the first month there were, at one time, thirty ships at anchor and the town bore the impact of an influx of passengers, crews and aliens in addition to an even larger arrival of troops. There were captains, well known to G. C. Fox & Co in peacetime, pleading for help, but this could not be given as they became prisoners of war and their ships were impounded. The consuls were kept busy but in many cases were powerless to help.

The twice weekly Petty Sessions Courts soon had to be supplemented to deal with increasing prosecutions arising from the growing number of people coming to Falmouth. On 5 August Wilson Fox presided at a Court at which all cases were struck out owing to the declaration of war. The following week the Court dealt with a suspected spy, Johannes Engel, who was a ship's chandler in the town and married to a Cornish woman from Penzance. He had been in custody for a week, was acquitted and then re-arrested as an alien and ordered to be deported. Everywhere there was paranoia about spies.

In that first week of the war twenty-four members of the Fox family held their own Quaker meeting for peace, with prayers and readings. They gathered at Glendurgan for what Wilson described as 'an historic meeting'. Rachel Fox wore her mother's Quaker bonnet and cape cloak, 'looked very sweet in them, recalling the dear mother vividly', and a group photograph was taken to record

the event.⁹ Although Wilson was a member of the Church of England and worshipped at the parish church he maintained his Quaker way of life and connections through the family. The war was uppermost in all their minds as they discussed how they should respond. A fishing friend of the Fox family, also a Friend, offered to speak at an evening Meeting on the conflicting duties of Quakers but no-one wanted to hear his pronounced views. Instead he gave an address on his experiences in Belgium to the soldiers which they seemed to appreciate. Within a few days Distress Funds were set up to help Belgian refugees, Armenians, dependants of interned aliens and local Service families. There were appeals for games for soldiers and wounded, clothes for the destitute, facilities for recreation; there were so many needs to be met. Fund raising continued throughout the war and generosity never flagged.

The purchase of supplies locally did help firms in the town, including the timber company Fox Stanton, as there was very little civilian construction; on 14 August the *Cornish Echo* reported:

AN ARMED CAMP

FALMOUTH'S DEFENCES

The strength of the defences in and around Falmouth, amounts, it is stated, to about 6,000 soldiers. There are about 1,000 at St Anthony, whilst at Trefusis, Penryn and Flushing large numbers are quartered.

Almost every available space and building at Falmouth is given over to the troops. In addition to huge companies at the Castle and RE barracks, sections of men are quartered at the Drill Hall, Free Library, Grammar School, Wellington Terrace, the Boy's Brigade barracks in High Street, the King's Hotel and the recreation Ground. On Sunday several special trains conveyed troops from various depots to the town. The West Yorkshire regiment came from York, the Royal Irish Fusiliers from Dublin and the DCLI (Devon and Cornwall Light Infantry) from Bodmin.

It is understood that timber and corrugated iron are being purchased locally for the erection of buildings to act as temporary barracks.¹⁰

Rifle ranges were quickly established at Pennance Point, Rosemullion Head, Anthony and Roseland. The Cornwall County Volunteer and Rifle Association had been in existence since before 1899. At their annual general meeting in June 1914 it was voted that a class for National Reserves should be included in their programme for the annual shoot and a 'rapid firing' course would be introduced. The annual shoot did not take place but all too soon those Reserves would be needed. There are no meetings recorded for the war years.¹¹

Falmouth was an important embarkation and disembarkation point and G. C. Fox & Co. had always been involved in the ticketing and movement of passengers in and out of the port. There was, however, an extra flurry of activity on 17 August, when the Austrian ambassador, Count Mensdorff with a retinue of two hundred people were rushed down from London on the fastest express train ever run and embarked on the *Aaro* for Genoa. The government was anxious to get rid of them with the minimum fuss, and they must have been equally keen to leave.

George Henry's eldest son Cuthbert enlisted in the Royal Engineers in September 1914. He wrote to a Wellington cousin, who regretted his action, of the importance of individual conscience and the difficulty of acting up to one's principles when there was a conflict of interest. He felt that his choice strengthened rather than weakened his Quaker belief.¹² He was first posted to Pendennis Castle so was able to do his training while still keeping an eye on the business. When the authorities decided to patrol the coast with steam drifters it

was Cuthbert who sought extra hands from the surrounding villages. A difficult task as many fishermen who were naval reservists were being called up.¹³ While at Pendennis he arranged a permit to take his friends round the castle via Castle Drive which had been closed except for official traffic since the outbreak of war. In her account of the visit Erica describes an 'apparatus for a 10 o'clock time-ball'.¹⁴ Time-balls were invented in 1833 and often used in conjunction with a cannon to synchronize time in a local area and on board ships in harbour.

1915

Women at Work

In January churches held intercessions for the war and teas were provided for troops at the Polytechnic and other halls in the town every day. The golf links were converted into a soldier's camp and drill ground, unfortunately the ground was so wet they were billeted in empty houses.¹⁵ In February 1915 *Wilhelmina* arrived with a cargo of food bought by the government. It had been shipped from America intended for the Americans in Hamburg but could not be delivered there. The Dutch liner, *Rotterdam*, one of the largest ever seen in the harbour at 18,000 tons (the *Minnie Ha-Ha* was longer but a smaller tonnage), arrived in April. Dispatches addressed to the Austrian minister were seized from one of the passengers as it was forbidden to transport enemy communications. Minesweepers were anchored in harbour before leaving for the Dardanelles, some of them were ships requisitioned from the Cornish trawler fleet.¹⁶

George Henry's daughter Annette joined the family company in May 1915; she attended to Cuthbert's Belgian consular work which grew when Belgian refugees were accepted in the town.¹⁷ She also did book-keeping and typing, a remarkable role change for a middle-class Quaker young lady of the time, who had been brought up to observe the social graces, used to leaving financial affairs to the men of the family and not to over-use her mental powers. In spite of the war the ship agency was busy, there was still trading to be done with neutral countries. In June a ship of the company described by Erica as 'Maritime Belge de Congo' came in from the Congo with passengers and mails.¹⁸ This was an experiment which if it proved profitable meant that the service would continue to use G. C. Fox & Co. of Falmouth as their agents. At a meeting in December 1915 the Harbour Board detailed harbour activity for the year; 44 ships called for orders, harbour dues had been paid on 56,783 tons, and licences had been granted to 95 men, 113 rowing boats and 17 motor boats. The Board advised that tug-men need not enlist. An Act of Parliament ratified the reconstruction of the Falmouth Docks company which was accomplished in August 1915. Howard Fox was president; he had been a Board member since 1867, at first with his father then joined by Robert Barclay and George Henry.

Blackout was introduced, searchlights were turned off and no boats moved after dark in the harbour. Train blinds were drawn after St Austell so that no lights shone to seaward. In the town, edges of steps were painted white to prevent accidents and Erica reports her mother going to a meeting with a candle lantern.¹⁹ The authorities decided to dam Swanpool to prevent invasion but there was no real danger, all available German soldiers were needed at the Front. Falmouth's war was that being fought at sea, ships lost and men taken away to serve, creating loss and hardship for the civilian population. Erica listed nineteen Fox cousins serving in the armed forces and she reported the first two deaths among them in 1915. Like many other enlisted men Cuthbert was posted to France, he went to Rouen. A Friend, Haldane M. Robinson, a bricklayer by trade came back from France to Falmouth and gave two addresses in the garden room at Glendurgan and a lantern lecture in the Meeting House about the Homes for the Homeless project, run by Quakers. He had been working in the Marne, helping to construct houses. It was satisfying to hear how money raised was being spent.²⁰ The Defence of the Realm Act came into force in 1915; it gave the government power to commandeer factories and buildings as they saw

fit, notices were posted throughout the town.

NATIONAL REGISTRATION ACT, 1915. Form for FEMALES.

Name: _____
(Surname first)

Residence: Woodhouse Place Falmouth
(Permanent) _____
(Present address, _____
(if away from home))

Age last Birthday. (1.)	If born abroad and not British, state Nationality. (2.)	State whether Single, Married, or Widow. (3.)	How many Children are dependent on you? (4.)		How many other Persons are dependent on you, excluding employees? (5.)		Profession or Occupation (see Note below). State fully the particular kind of work done, and the material worked or dealt in (if any). (6.)
			Under 15 years.	Over 15 years.	Wholly dependent.	Partially dependent.	

Name, Business, and Business Address of Employer.
(If not working for an Employer, write "None.") (7.)

Are you employed for or under any Government Department? Say "Yes," or "No," or "Do not know." (8.)

(a.) Are you skilled in any work other than that upon which you are at present employed, and if so, what? (9.)

(b.) Are you able and willing to undertake such work? (9.)

Signature.....

The foregoing particulars must be supplied by all girls and women who are between the ages of 15 and 65 on Sunday, August 16th, 1915. The Form must be filled up ready for collection by **Monday, August 16th**, and may, if desired, be put in an envelope.
The penalty imposed by the Act for wilful refusal or neglect to fill up a Form, or for giving false information, is £5.

* Persons engaged in household duties, other than domestic servants, may enter "Household Duties" in Column 6. Persons engaged in other occupations should state the nature of the occupation as accurately as possible, e.g., Sick Nurse, Nurse (Domestic), School Teacher, Worsted Spinner, Sewing Machinist (Tailoring), and so on.

The contents of the Form will be used for official purposes only. It is forbidden under penalty to communicate them for any other purposes.

(2298).—W.L. 17106/75—2000m.—7/15—11. & Sp. BERNARD MALLET, Registrar-General.

Figure 4: National Registration Act 1915 – Form for Females

Source: Charles Fox Archive

A national register for young women was brought into being in 1915. The copy at Figure 4 is pasted into Erica's journal. There was a growing shortage of working men at home and the Cornwall Advertiser and Visitors List published an article 'War Service for Women' in which Mrs Hext of Trebah (the Hext family bought the Trebah estate from Charles Fox), insisted that there was nothing dishonourable in war work.²¹ One of George Henry's daughters, Margaret (Meg) went to work at Lloyds Bank in Falmouth; another Erica went to work on the land. Although the war emphasis in Falmouth was on activities at sea and in harbour there was also considerable organisation around the farming industry.

The Cornwall War Agricultural Committee (CWAC) was formed in 1915 as a requirement of the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries for every county in England to increase food production and persuade more women to work on the land. In Cornwall it comprised nine district educational areas; women speakers were brought in to arouse interest and there were demonstrations of ploughing and other agricultural activities by women. This was not compulsory service but the CWAC register for Truro and Falmouth recorded 25 'moveable' women volunteers (prepared to go anywhere), 15 whole time and 72 part-time local women volunteers. Out of the total, six were found whole-time placements and Erica Fox was one. The *West Devon Mercury* reported from Mr Horne of Helston Farmers that:

... a fine example to women – a Cornish lady – a daughter of one of Cornwall's oldest families ... had taken a situation in a farmer's house, was milking cows, learning to feed calves and pigs and was assisting the farmer's wife with her duties. If a woman, at the call of duty would take on work like that, he [Mr Horne] was never going to despair of other women.²²

The example quoted was probably Erica. There were already women working in munitions and safety fuse factories – in Camborne 500 in munitions, 600 in safety fuses – and 517 other women offered to work in munitions, clerical and other types of work. The minimum wage for women land workers was 3½d an hour and committees, composed of one member of the district agricultural committee, two farmers and four ladies were asked to report irregularities. A co-operative was formed for the distribution of eggs and there was co-operation between cheese makers. The borough and rural district council might be asked in busy times to release their workmen, roadmen and other to assist in agricultural work and enlisted men billeted locally could be called upon at ploughing or harvest times.²³

**1916
Conscription,
Conscientious
Objection and
Air
Reconnaissance**

A Falmouth War Hospital supply depot was set up in February 1916. The Royal Victoria hospital Falmouth was used for casualties and the cemetery behind the hospital was used for the burial of those who died from war wounds, including a few from South Africa.²⁴ The Truro workhouse was adapted to be a 210 bed naval hospital in November 1915, it closed in 1919 after treating 4,000 patients. The Roll of Honour at Columb Major ‘highlights the local women serving as nurses in the naval hospital at Truro.’²⁵ The Fox family were saddened by the death of their Italian consular clerk, Signor Becherini, who had served the company well for 42 years. He was buried in Falmouth in 1916.²⁶

When conscription was introduced in 1916 under the Military Services Act, Tribunals were convened all over the country to judge the cases of those who sought exemption. There was a national outcry about the Tribunals in Falmouth because the chairman H. D. Acland would not allow entry to press or public. Quaker women were particularly anxious to see that judgement was fair but they, including Miss Olive Fox, daughter of Howard, Miss M. Williams and Miss Hodgkin, together with a reporter from the Falmouth Packet newspaper were among those refused entry. The Board of Agriculture urged the CWAC to appeal to the Tribunal on behalf of farm labourers and emphasised the necessity of all attesting as otherwise they could not appeal. Tug men remained exempt; fishermen were advised to join the Royal Navy or the Royal Marines. There were conscientious objectors (COs), not all Quakers but all were helped by local Quakers. The most well-known Cornish CO was John Stephens of Ashfield who was an absolutist in that he refused all combatant and non-combatant (Red Cross and ambulance) service. The Tribunal sent him to work on the land but after a short time he refused that and was imprisoned. Romney Fox, the younger son of George Henry joined the Friends Ambulance Unit as soon as he was old enough and was sent to France in 1916.

An air-raid warning system was installed in the town and a Royal Navy Air Station (RNAS Mullion) for air-ships was built at Bonython on the Lizard peninsula. The airships patrolled the coast spotting U-boats which had been blockading the coast since 1915 and shipping losses were increasing. On one day in March 1915 a U-boat (U-29) sank four vessels off the Scilly Isles.²⁷ After 1917, there were also aircraft at Bonython.²⁸ Erica comments on the excitement of seeing the first airships, and reports that one was lost at the beginning of their operations.²⁹



Figure 5: The War Zones of German Submarines

Source: Charles Fox Archive

This map of Europe in Erica’s journal, Figure 5, marks only Falmouth and London in England. Further restrictions were placed on ship movement and the Germans were threatening to attack merchantmen on sight. One American liner per week was permitted by the Germans to land passengers at Falmouth, ships to be marked according to German instructions. Passengers leaving Falmouth for America had to go before the Aliens Officer in Falmouth and produce their passports. All other commercial traffic was under threat from mines and submarines in the areas shown. Erica includes in her journal a report from the Secretary of the Admiralty which appeared in *The Times* of 9 December 1916 of the sighting in the North Atlantic of ‘a German armed and disguised vessel of mercantile type’ followed by an account of this vessel the SMS *Möwe* a fruit ship which had been converted into an auxiliary cruiser:

‘She sank ten British steamships and one sailing vessel, one French steamship, and one Belgian steamship, and captured the British liner ‘Appam’ which was sent with a German prize crew to the port of Norfolk in the USA’³⁰

A previous journal entry on 11 February records the arrival in Falmouth of passengers from New York who had been onboard the *Appam* when she was captured by the German merchant raider SMS *Möwe*; Archibald Hurd in his *History of the Great War* confirms *Appam*’s capture.³¹ Coincidentally on the day after Erica’s entry the *Möwe* ended her first raiding cruise and turned for home arriving in Wilhelmshaven in the first week in March.³² On 4 December *Möwe* stopped and boarded a Belgian steamer *Saniland* (Capt Wadsworth) en route from New York to Rotterdam with a general cargo for the relief of Belgians, examined her papers, destroyed her radio and allowed her to proceed to Falmouth.³³ The Allies armed some of their merchant vessels later in the war as anti-submarine vessels, they were known as ‘Q’ ships some of which were based at Falmouth.³⁴

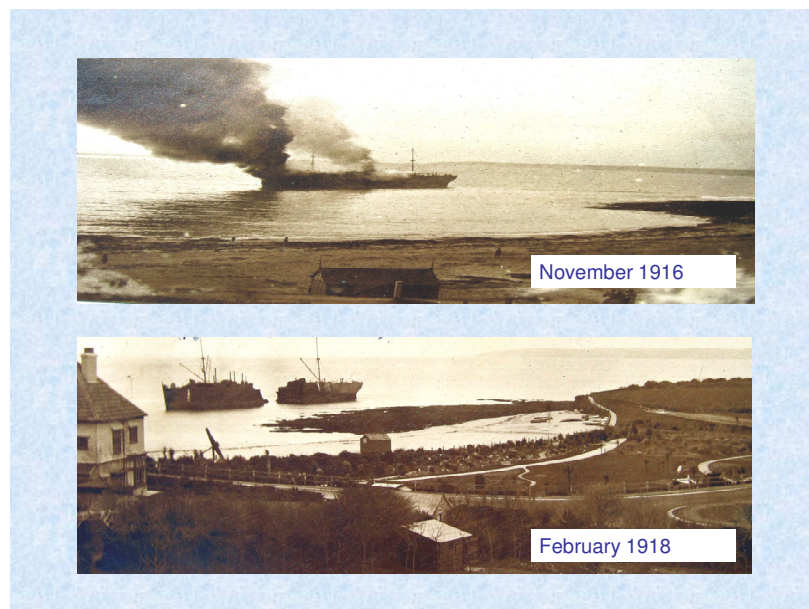


Figure 6: *Ponus* photographs from Erica Fox's journal
Source: Charles Fox Archive

During a gale in November 1916 the British Oil steamer *Ponus* (5,077 tons) was driven ashore on Gyllyngvase beach where she caught fire. A subsequent High Court case by the owners against Thomas Jewell, an assistant examination officer at Falmouth, for negligence over anchorage was dismissed. All the crew were safely landed, with the aid of the Falmouth lifeboat, unfortunately all attempts to get her off failed and she broke in half in winds of 75 to 85 miles an hour during the great gale in January 1917; the gale caused great coastal damage.³⁵ In December 1916 a minesweeper was blown up by a mine three miles off Rosemullion and Pendennis Point with the loss of seven lives; the explosion shook Durgan and Glendugan.³⁶ At a council meeting in December 1916 it was the opinion of the council that regulations should be made restricting the supply of foodstuffs and other commodities to neutral shipping calling at the port of Falmouth so as to empower the officials at the naval base to more effectively control the same.³⁷

1917 Restrictions and Rationing

By 1917 people in the town required permission to sketch or photograph within five miles of the coast; fishermen had to enlist or be drafted into the army. A submarine was captured eastward of Falmouth and later three Norwegian crews and one Spanish crew were brought in from torpedoed ships. The number of war-wounded in the town was increasing and many from Wodehouse Terrace hospital were offered recreational facilities at the Fox home, Wodehouse Place. Family members helped them in various activities, with the assistance of the Misses Carlyon; teas were provided and on fine days they could enjoy the garden. The early practice of providing bathing facilities at various places in the town was discontinued as there was a decrease in numbers making use of them. A curious arrival on Padgy Garra beach was a complete ticket office marked Glamorgan County Council. It was complete with a place for two berths, three-cornered shelves, a ticket opening and several lockers and cupboards. A possible victim of the gales, it was not reclaimed and reportedly bought by Sir A.P.Vivian.

At 10 o'clock at night on 23 May the British Steamer *Petingandlet* struck a rock and was holed, her master ran her aground between Perran Bay and

Mainporth (sic) beach. Littlejohn, the butler, heard the bang and alerted the family to aid those on board but fortunately the Falmouth lifeboat was on hand.³⁸

In June 1917 a wire-netted entrance channel into Falmouth was laid from inside Nare to St Anthony as protection from submarine attacks; it was marked with large floating casks. At the time eight or nine two and three-masted schooners and a patrol boat were moored inside these buoys at the Nare end. Erica's journal details many torpedoed and mined ships between 1916 and 1918, some managing to limp into harbour under their own steam or with the help of tugs. Some crews were rescued but there was great loss of life at sea. On 22 February 1917 a U-boat commanded by Captain Otto Hersing (1885-1960) sank six Dutch ships outside Falmouth. The total gross registered tonnage lost in that incident was 31,581 tons.³⁹ A Russian barque *Alide* was brought into harbour in a sinking condition and lay on her side on the beach for four or five weeks, rising and falling with the tide. Two entries in Erica's journal in August provide detail about the work of requisitioned tugs:

Aug.5 The 'Victor' has been 250-350 miles from Scilly to meet convoyed steamers coming home convoyed by big American destroyers. The 'Triton' started today towing 'Rebecca S Wade' 3 ton schooner to 165 miles west of Sicily midnight tonight.

Aug.9 'Triton' returned. Saw German submarines not a mile away pointing guns at them. They did not fire & were left alone but made the Channel Islands on the way home to escape. 'Rebecca S Wade' also returned to Falmouth under sail, leaking and crew refusing to proceed.



Figure 7: Cornish Sardine Company label
Source: Charles Fox Archive

Many deaths and casualties were recorded among relatives and friends; but one stranger was saved. The label from a sardine tin shown in Figure 7 (the sardine company was established by Fox & Co. but had been sold) was pinned to a letter sent to G. C. Fox & Co. in October 1917. Research indicates that in October 1917 that 32 Divisional Ammunition Column was in France and then Flanders:

In the field 23 October '17

I am sending the enclosed label thinking it might interest you – as it was the

cause of saving the life of one of your countrymen. During the battle of yesterday I was crossing a shell-swept zone, and seeing this label on the ground, I stooped to pick it up, [he probably thought it was treasure, and so it proved to be!] while doing so a shell burst, and had it not been for my stooping attitude it would have found a victim in me. Perhaps it might also interest you to know that your produce must be appreciated very much to be found so near the firing line – where only the most essential things are carried.

Signed Lt J. J. Hooper 32 DAC [Divisional Ammunition Column] BEF [British Expeditionary Force].⁴⁰

No-one had foreseen the length of the war and by the end of 1917 there was a growing shortage of commodities. Petrol had to be rationed and there was very little bread, meat and sugar. It must have been difficult for parents with children for they also had to contend with outbreaks of childhood diseases, schools were often closed because of outbreaks of German measles, measles, chicken pox and influenza. Food production was vital, and export of food products was banned. People were cautioned not to eat seed potatoes and gardens were ploughed up to plant potatoes and vegetables. Wilson Fox, who was, like many, a proud gardener found this hard especially as it was difficult to get garden help. He was also losing his bees to 'Isle of Wight' disease. First identified in the bee population of the Isle of Wight in 1904, this parasitic disease was thought to have wiped out the entire bee population of the British Isles (though later genetic studies found remnants that survived). It dealt a devastating blow to British bee keeping.⁴¹ A great interest for Wilson outside his garden was the Royal Polytechnic Society of which he was treasurer and he travelled regularly to British Association meetings; he sat on Assizes at Bodmin when needed and served on a War Pensions committee. His second wife, Constance (nee Rogers) was president of the Falmouth Girls Friendly Society which was active in fund-raising during the war. They had a munitions officer billeted with them for a spell.

1918 The Worst and the Best

By January 1918 most of the butchers' shops were closed as there was nothing to sell, ration cards were issued for meat and butter. A Food Control campaign for frugality was launched by the government and badges were awarded to those doing well. Petrol was strictly licensed. At the end of June George Henry Fox and Annette collected the petrol ration from Taylor's garage but were stopped by a policeman on the way home. He wanted to know if they were in the town on business and they explained that they were going to Glendurgan to pick gooseberries for which the license was partially granted. He wanted to see the license and asked what parish they came from and was satisfied when he knew they were from Falmouth. He was conscientious and civil but Erica writes – 'it much amused us that Father should be asked beneath G. C. Fox's windows what parish he came from.'⁴²

Early in 1918 Cuthbert Fox was awarded the Military Cross and later a Bar for gallantry to add to it. At the half-yearly meeting of the Falmouth Docks shareholders, Howard Fox resigned after fifty-nine years on the Board, forty of those as Chairman. Wilson was endeavouring to get signatures for a memorial, in the form of a South West University, but there is no record of any success.

When the Armistice came on 11 November, Erica reports in her journal where members of the family were. Wilson records twenty ships in harbour blowing whistles and sirens and everywhere bedecked with flags. G. C. Fox & Co. contributed £25 towards the celebratory torchlight procession. Margaret Keble, a delightful elderly Quaker lady whom the author met at Come-to-Good meeting house told how she was not allowed to join the children's procession

with a Union flag, because her father had been a Conscientious Objector. Instead, her mother made her a blue flag with a white dove of peace on it; she was the envy of the other children. Margaret had to do the same for her children after World War Two.⁴³

Life quickly returned to normal after the Armistice. Meg left the bank; Erica finished her landwork; Annette stayed on in the family business for some time after Romney returned in December, followed by Cuthbert in January 1919. Normal consular activity was resumed, the ship agency remained strong and the partners agreed to spend money advertising their services in America. Business in Falmouth changed; there was greater competition for orders. Men back from the war were re-employed and those employed for the duration lost their jobs. The docks company was sold to a large combine, Silley Weir who re-developed the complex, which meant that Foxes lost some of their tug work and dock facilities. The pilchard industry fell away. The amalgamated Fox/William Cory Company faced fierce competition from a new, cheaper coaling business. Fox Stanton rebuilt their timber trade. Alderman Chard remained mayor until 1917 when Charles Rusden was elected for one year and replaced by Charles Jago. In 1919 Alderman Bowles was elected mayor and Councillor Rusden was appointed to the Harbour Board.

1918 brought sweeping changes to the voting system, the franchise was widened to include more men and women over thirty, about 33 percent of the borough were now eligible – except men who had been COs, they did not get the vote until 1925. The women included at least ten Foxes but there is no mention in any family archive of their reaction. This seems extraordinary for the Fox family, together with other Quakers, had had connections with the suffrage movement since 1872. Mrs Howard (Orme) Fox was the first Honorary Secretary of the Falmouth committee; it was chaired by her husband. In 1913 a Cornish pilgrimage for Women's Suffrage visited Falmouth. The local National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies helped to look after Belgian refugees and raised money for the Scottish Women's Hospitals for foreign service, but the organisation had disappeared by 1916.⁴⁴ Falmouth was not visibly scarred by the war and normal ship traffic soon resumed:

In January 1919 the steamer from the Congo, instead of going from Falmouth to Hull, is for the first time since the war began, going to Antwerp from here on March 3rd. It wishes to buy £15 worth of flowers for decoration at a reception on board at Antwerp. A three-masted schooner with a white flag with a blue cross on it has been seen today in the harbour. It is a new Finland flag, the first that has appeared in Falmouth. Finland has now separated from Russia.⁴⁵

Nationally a different world began to emerge, but that is another story.

Conclusion

This paper has pictured the people of Falmouth in war in the context of the remorseless conflict at sea which coloured their lives. Although the town was not bombed and civilian lives were not lost they were in the forefront of the battle, dealing with disruption, war casualties and deaths, refugees and aliens. As a community they made compromises and endured personal and communal hardships as their town became a fortress. As Quakers, the Fox family had to face the challenge of conflicting loyalties, one son fighting and another in non-combatant service. This was replicated among their Fox cousins and indeed in countless other Quaker families and was dealt with without acrimony. Falmouth survived and rebuilt her strengths as a peacetime port; sadly the experience of this war only proved valuable preparation for the next confrontation with Germany.

Notes

- ¹ I am grateful to Charles Fox of Glendurgan for permission to draw on his family archives so freely.
- ² R.L. Brett. & C. Fox, (eds) *Barclay Fox's Journal 1832-1854* (Fowey: Cornwall Editions, 2008), p.460
- ³ Information on Falmouth is taken from *Kelly's Directory* 1914
- ⁴ Information on Fox family business comes from the Charles Fox archive (CFa)
- ⁵ Brett and Fox, *Barclay Fox's Journal*
- ⁶ Cornwall Record Office (CRO): DC/CRK/35, Minute Book 1908 - Borough of Falmouth, 6 August 1914
- ⁷ This painting was shown at the Royal Cornwall Museum in May 2008 as part of the H.S. Tuke exhibition 'Catching the Light: the sunshine paintings of Henry Scott Tuke'
- ⁸ CFa: Erica Fox Journal reference quoted in August 1917
- ⁹ CFa: Wilson Fox Journal 7 August 1914
- ¹⁰ CFa: Wilson Fox Journal 14 August 1914, a cutting from the *Cornish Echo*
- ¹¹ CRO: DDX.295/1, Records of the Cornwall County Volunteer Rifle Association
- ¹² CFa: Family letters
- ¹³ G.H. Bennett & Bennett, R., 'Maritime Cornwall in the era of Two World Wars' in Doe, Kennerley, Payton, (eds), *Maritime History of Cornwall* (forthcoming), p.1
- ¹⁴ CFa: Erica Fox Journal 18 September 1915
- ¹⁵ CFa: Wilson Fox Journal January 1915
- ¹⁶ Bennett and Bennett, 'Two World Wars', p.1
- ¹⁷ During the early months of the war refugees were not allowed to remain in the town as it was a prohibited area.
- ¹⁸ CFa: Erica Fox Journal 25 June 1915. This is the Compagnie Maritime du Congo
- ¹⁹ CFa: Erica Fox Journal 31 October 1915
- ²⁰ CFa: Erica Fox Journal 22 November 1915. Report with photographs
- ²¹ CFa: Erica Fox Journal 6 August 1914
- ²² *West Devon Mercury* dated 11 January 1916
- ²³ CRO: SRC/DC/2/12 and SRC/SC/18/1
- ²⁴ www.southafricawargraves.org [accessed 21 November 2008]
- ²⁵ Bennett and Bennett, 'Two World Wars', p.1
- ²⁶ CFa: Wilson Fox Journal February 1916
- ²⁷ Bennett and Bennett, 'Two World Wars', p.2
- ²⁸ www.cornwall.gov.uk [accessed 21 November 2008]
- ²⁹ CFa: Erica Fox Journal 2 July 1916
- ³⁰ CFa: Erica Fox Journal, newspaper cutting the Times 9 December 1916 p.8
- ³¹ A. Hurd, *The History of the Great War: The Merchant Navy* Vol. II (London: Murray, 1924), pp.386-91
- ³² Hurd, *The History of the Great War*, p.397
- ³³ CFa: Erica Fox Journal 7 December 1916 an entry in the handwriting of G. H. Fox
- ³⁴ Bennett and Bennett, 'Two World Wars', p.2
- ³⁵ Bennett and Bennett, 'Two World Wars', p.4
- ³⁶ CFa: Erica Fox Journal 21 December 1916
- ³⁷ CRO: DC/CRK/35 Minute Book April 1908. Entry for 12 December 1916
- ³⁸ Bennett and Bennett, 'Two World Wars', p.4 comments on the wartime role of Falmouth lifeboat
- ³⁹ www.uboat.net/forums/ [accessed 21 November 2008]
- ⁴⁰ CFa: Business letters
- ⁴¹ J. Ritchie, 'Isle of Wight Disease in Bees' *Nature* 97 160-161 20 April 1916. See also Hansard HC Deb 04 June 1919 vol116 cc2027-8W
- ⁴² CFa: Erica Fox Journal 29 June 1918
- ⁴³ This tale is quoted with the kind permission of Margaret Keble's son and daughter-in-law
- ⁴⁴ K. Bradley, *Friends and Visitors: A history of the Women's Suffrage Movement in Cornwall 1870-1914* (London: Hypatia Trust, 2000)
- ⁴⁵ CFa: Erica Fox Journal 23 January and 2 March 1919