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An early experiment in national identity cards: the battle over registration in the First World War1

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Abstract

The current debate on issuing identity cards to the British population was foreshadowed during the First World War, when the National Registration Act of 1915 provided for a register of all men and women between 15 and 65, later used to aid conscription. The National Register was produced by Bernard Mallet, the Registrar General of England and Wales. The information demands of the war also provided an opportunity for Mallet to press forward his pre-war agenda of reforming the system of routine registration of births, marriages and deaths. His desire for reform was shaped by the pressing eugenic questions of the day - infant mortality and national efficiency - and as the war progressed, he developed his ideas to include a permanent universal register of all individuals. This article examines the fate of Mallet's proposals, and shows how lack of political consensus and lack of support, even from colleagues in the General Register Office for Scotland, prevented his proposals coming to fruition.

Introduction

The First World War is a series of familiar stories: the great battles, the high political struggles, the introduction of conscription and National Service, the introduction of rationing, the internment of aliens, and at the end of the war, the extension of the franchise. Behind all of these is one theme - the need for information on the population at an individual level. This is not a new point, and Edward Higgs has argued that the growth of the information state was legitimised by total war, as well as total welfare.[2] However, this need for information hugely increased the pressure on those producing that information - primarily, the General Register Office (GRO) in England and Wales, and the General Register Office in Scotland (GROS).

The GRO and the GROS were set up in 1837 and 1854 respectively to provide the apparatus for obtaining the vital statistics of the population.[3] During the First World War, the administrative machinery of the two register offices was adapted for the war effort, collecting, coding and circulating information on men and women of military age in the National Register. The office also responded to requests for information on the births, marriages and deaths of Belgian refugees from the Belgian authorities, and provided details of interned Germans dying on British soil to the German government.[4] As the war impinged on civilian life with the introduction of rationing, local registrars provided a ready-made

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[2]Edward Higgs, *The Information State in England* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).
[3]Edward Higgs, *Life, Death and Statistics: Civil Registration, Censuses and the Work of the General Register Office, 1836 - 1952* (Hatfield: Local Population Studies, 2004).; Anne M Cameron, "'a Long Gestation': The Delayed Establishment of General Registration in Scotland" (paper presented at the 'Birth pains and death throes: the creation of vital statistics in Scotland and England' Symposium, University of Glasgow, 17 September 2004).

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network to issue application forms to parents registering births and to collect ration cards from relatives of the deceased.[5] The routine work of providing extracts of birth and death for purposes such as separation allowances also increased exponentially over the course of the war.[6] But it was the setting up and maintenance of the National Register from 1915, under the direction of the Registrars General, and the assistance given by registrars to the Ministry of Food in 1918, which was crucial in the shift towards total war. This work underpinned conscription and rationing, and so the GRO and the GROS became essential to the expansion of state powers during the war. The creation of the National Register in particular brought the collection of personal information to the front of the political stage.

By the summer of 1915 it was clear that the attitude of 'business as usual' which had characterised the British approach to the war in the early months would no longer suffice, and that the war would be longer and more demanding of manpower than had been anticipated. The shell shortage of March to May 1915 and heavy battle losses in the summer of 1915 were followed by political wrangling over the leadership of the country and the organisation of the military - and the National Registration Bill straddled both issues. This Bill, providing for a register of the population between the ages of 15 and 65, including employment details and compelling individuals to report change of address, was widely seen as a prelude to military and industrial conscription. As such, it was situated at the centre of one of the most anxious debates of that period - namely whether the voluntary system of recruitment should be replaced by compulsion. This went to the heart of questions of British national identity - not only did Britain define herself as a liberal, free state in contrast to the highly organised, state controlled 'Prussianism' of her enemies, but she also prided herself on being able to raise enough men to fight voluntarily from a patriotic population. But the National Registration Bill was also seen by some as reflecting on the problems of Asquith's Coalition government, formed in May 1915, and an indictment on the leadership and prosecution of the war more generally. The decision to leave Ireland out of the Bill also exposed government reluctance to stir up further trouble in that region. These political issues affected the form of the Bill and the way in which National Registration was carried out.

As National Registration threw the political spotlight on the collection and use of personal information by the state, it also provided an opportunity for the English Registrar General, Bernard Mallet, and his medical superintendent of statistics, Dr. Thomas Stevenson, to press forward their pre-war agenda of reforming the registration of births, marriages and deaths. This agenda had developed from concerns about public health and the quality of the population. Mallet desired to resolve the tension between the mid-nineteenth century actuarial roots of civil registration and the twentieth century demands of public health through his reform plans, but his ambition was also shaped by eugenic debates about the future quality of the race.[7] The war provided the impetus to implement pre-war ideas about national efficiency, especially in the field of infant welfare. Mallet corresponded intensely with well-known social reformers, including Sidney and Beatrice Webb, to promote his ideas.[8] Mallet's plans were separate from the discussions about conscription and the prosecution of the war which surrounded National Registration in 1915. But National Registration provided an opportunity for Mallet and Stevenson to extend their proposals for registration to include the ultimate goal of a permanent peacetime registration card, which

[4] *War refugees: registration of*, GRO 5/1040 National Archives of Scotland, General Register Office (hereafter GRO); *War 1914 - War refugees - preliminaries to marriage*, GRO 5/1041; *Births, deaths and marriages of Belgian refugees and soldiers in Scotland*, GRO 5/1043; *War: deaths of enemy aliens in internment camps: transmission of special certificates of death*, GRO 5/1208.
[5] *War: Food control: Ration cards or papers (Sugar distribution): issue and collection by Registrars of Births etc*, GRO 5/1236.
[6] *Preparation of Annual Circulars*, GRO 5/840.
[7] Higgs, *Life, Death and Statistics* .; Edward Higgs, "Some Forgotten Men: The Registrars General of England and Wales and the History of State Demographic and Medical Statistics, 1837 - 1920" (paper presented at 'Birth pains and death throes: the creation of vital statistics in Scotland and England', symposium, University of Glasgow, 17 September 2004).

they promoted to senior civil servants and politicians on the back of the national emergency. Both the debate around National Registration in 1915 and Mallet and Stevenson's subsequent efforts raised issues of liberty, state control of the individual, and government access to personal data which foreshadowed current political debates on the need for identity cards in Britain.[9] A further issue was cost, also central to current day concerns. Mallet's strategies were not widely known which raises the question of 'hidden' agendas for the state use of personal information.

The fate of Mallet and Stevenson's proposals for a permanent universal registration card rested on shifting alliances behind the scenes as well as ideological and financial opposition to his proposals. Mallet himself was very well connected. His wife had been a lady-in-waiting to Queen Victoria and he came from a distinguished line of civil servants.[10] As Registrar General, he sought to influence rather than merely implement policy, and his experiences provide some insight into the relationship between the civil service and politicians at a time of high political turmoil. The question of personal identification was also taken up in 1915 by the man who was to succeed Mallet as Registrar General, Sylvanus Vivian. Vivian promoted his own ideas for a central register from his position at the National Health Insurance Commission and later, at the Ministry of Food in connection with rationing. Vivian schemed against Mallet with the liberal activist and social reformer, Violet Markham in 1915 and 1916, and later also with the Webbs, and ultimately replaced Mallet as Registrar General in 1921.

Noticeably absent from the Whitehall plotting were Mallet's counterparts at the GROS in Edinburgh, despite their obvious potential as allies in expanding the boundaries of the 'information state'. The Scots, in particular the Scottish Registrar General, James Patten MacDougall, and his medical superintendent of statistics, Dr. James Dunlop, were one step removed from the interpersonal and cross-departmental rivalries in London. Their response to the war was much more pragmatic than Mallet and Stevenson's. They saw their job as responding to the pressures of war within the framework of existing legislation. The differing responses of the GRO and the GROS were politically and historically contingent. The Scottish registration system from its inception took public health issues into account and was in a more independent position than the English. The GROS had fewer plans for reform and were not supportive of Mallet's grand vision. They also lacked the fervour of the eugenicists. This suggests that support for the growth of the information state was by no means assured from all areas of the national information services. The Scots were geographically removed from the political intrigue, and were concerned with day to day problems. They implemented National Registration without an underlying agenda and their experience offers a useful counterbalance to the high political drama of Whitehall. The Scottish experience also shows how central policy had to be negotiated to fit local context and the difficulties in turning grand, centralised schemes into workable policy without a measure of consensus.

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[8] Szreter suggests that Mallet developed his interest in eugenics after he left the GRO, based on his membership of the Eugenics Society in the 1920s and his publications. Higgs argues that Mallet was interested in eugenic questions while he was at the GRO, and indeed, before he took office there, pointing to his publications on the differential burden of taxation while he was at the Inland Revenue, and the focus on infant mortality in his published annual reports at the GRO. Simon Szreter, *Fertility, Class, and Gender in Britain, 1860-1940* , vol. 27, *Cambridge Studies in Population, Economy, and Society in Past Time* (Cambridge and NY: CUP, 1996).pp. 264-68; Higgs, *Life, Death and Statistics* .pp.134 - 141.

[9] Cm. 6020 *Identity Cards: the next steps* (November, 2003).

[10] 'Sir Bernard Mallet: a distinguished civil servant', *The Times* , 29 October 1932, p.12.

Background

The experience of manpower shortage first brought problems of personal identification to the fore. The initial rush to the colours in the autumn of 1914 left many industries bereft of key workers, and the demand for both military and industrial manpower required up-to-date knowledge of the resources of the nation. The creation and maintenance of the National Register in 1915, for which the GRO and GROS were the central authorities, was an attempt to provide this. As Grieves notes, the new National Register was designed to give a reliable statistical basis for the discussion on manpower and how it should be distributed.[11] But the National Registration Bill, which introduced the register, was seen as a prelude to conscription and was therefore politically contentious.[12] The President of the Local Government Board, Walter Long, was pro-conscription, but, when presenting the National Registration Bill to Parliament, he was careful to distance the Bill from compulsion to serve, suggesting instead that it would allow the government to better organise voluntary efforts. Asquith himself described National Registration as 'the guiding of voluntary enlistment, military and industrial, into channels least hurtful to national production and efficiency'.[13] Supporters of the Bill argued that resources were being wasted by poor organisation of the population: examples were given in the press and Parliament of men being sent back from the Front because their skills were needed in the munitions factories or agricultural jobs, and of employers asking for men for particular tasks and no-one coming forward.[14] Britain was compared unfavourably with her enemies: Sir Alfred Mond argued in the Parliamentary debate on the bill that Germany had not recalled people from the front back to the munitions factories.[15] An underlying theme of the debate in the press and Parliament was that there were 'shirkers' and 'slackers' who were not doing their duty to the country.[16] By compelling everyone to declare what he was doing for the war effort, National Registration would compel some to confess that they were doing nothing.[17]

Some argued explicitly that a register of eligible men should be drawn up with a view to conscription, and opposition to suggestion prompted much of the opposition to the Bill. While supporters of the Bill lauded German organisation, opponents decried the attempt to 'Prussianise' the British people. One MP argued that the government were 'surrendering to outside agitation' for a register, meaning the Northcliffe Press and the National Service League who wished to see conscription introduced.[18] But opponents to National Registration also drew on arguments about poor organisation, suggesting this was the fault of the government and not the people, and would not be helped by merely increasing the bureaucracy of the country.[19] They believed that the government already had enough powers under the Munitions of War Acts, which amounted in practice to industrial conscription as employees were not allowed to leave their employment without written consent from their employer. But the most fundamental opposition to the Bill was that it was 'an interference with the customs and liberties of the people unparalleled in the history of the country'.[20] In the end the view that these very liberties were under threat won the day: the spectre of 'the enemy at our gate' was used to justify the extension of government powers to collect personal information during war-time. But Walter Long also tried to weaken arguments about the erosion of individual liberty and national identity by suggesting

[11] K. Grieves, *The Politics of Manpower, 1914 - 1918* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988). p. 202.
[12] R.Q.J. Adams and Philip P. Poirier, *The Conscription Controversy in Great Britain, 1900 - 1918* (London: Macmillan Press, 1987).
[13] 'The Great Organisation', *The Glasgow Herald*, 25 June 1915, p. 8, col. c.
[14] 73 H.C. Deb 5s, col. 75; *The Times*, June 1, 1915, p10 col. b; *The Times*, July 2 1915, p. 9, col. b.
[15] 73 H.C. Deb 5s, col. 115.
[16] 'The need for men', *The Glasgow Herald*, June 3, 1915, p. 9 col. c.
[17] 73 H.C. Deb 5s col. 62.
[18] 73 H.C. Deb 5s col. 113.
[19] 73 H.C. Deb 5s col. 66.
[20] 73 H.C. Deb 5s. col 108.

that National Registration did not differ materially from the Census, which people accepted as a matter of course in peace time.[21] Those opposing the Bill were depicted as opposing the war effort and being 'anti-patriotic'.

Thus, as Higgs has pointed out, the link between 'citizenship and fighting for the nation/state', implicit in the National Registration Bill legitimated the gathering of personal information on an unprecedented scale.[22] He sees this within the framework of the growing 'information state'. In Higgs's argument, the success of the National Register encouraged Stevenson, the superintendent of statistics at the GRO, to suggest in 1916 that the national registration system be continued after the war, with a single identification document to replace all other official documentation, 'an identity card in all but name'.[23] The Hayes Fisher Committee was set up in 1917 to consider this. Its members included Mallet, Stevenson, Vivian, and Beatrice Webb, as well as Patten MacDougall and Dunlop.[24] Its report in 1918 recommended that the National Register be continued. Higgs notes that 'their recommendations reveal the potential intertwining of positive rights, obligations and state surveillance of the individual', a set of aims which can be compared with current proposals for identity cards.

Nevertheless there seems to have been little probability of these proposals succeeding after the First World War. This was because of the cost to local authorities, but also because of the public anxiety over the state interference which maintenance of the register implied, for example, through the requirement to report changes of address.[25] There were also constitutional questions: in order to get the Act passed, it had been time-limited as a war measure, and further legislation was needed to extend it after the end of the war.[26] Higgs notes that neither the parliamentary secretary to the President of the Local Government Board, Hayes Fisher, nor the permanent Secretary at the Local Government Board, Sir Horace Monro, signed the final report, although both had been involved at the start of the Committee meetings, and the National Register had been set up under the authority of the Local Government Board.[27]

A significant absence from the Whitehall debate was Dr. James Dunlop, the superintendent of statistics at the GROS. Dunlop spent a good deal of time in London during the war, as he was seconded to the War Office and divided his time between there and Edinburgh. His name appears as a signatory to one of the first memos the committee produced in 1917, but not in the later ones.[28] The clue to this is found in a note from 1917 that 'Dunlop has returned to his native land',[29] but it was more than geography which precluded his support for the recommendations. While both Bernard Mallet and his later successor, Silvanus Vivian, saw National Registration as a vehicle for their long term strategies, Patten MacDougall and Dunlop were more concerned with protecting their office from what they perceived as unreasonable demands from London than with extending their remit. This reflected differences between the English and the Scottish approaches to registration, stemming from the way the systems had been established in each country. A key factor was the Scottish Registrar General's autonomy, which, until the introduction of National Registration, was not substantially challenged. The Scottish Registrar General reported

[21] 73 H. C. Deb 5s col. 62 - 64.
[22] Higgs, *Information State* ., p.137.
[23] Idem.
[24] The other members were Seebohm Rowntree and Sir Horace Monro.
[25] J. Agar, "Modern Horrors: British Identity and Identity Cards," in *Documenting Individual Identity: The Development of State Practices in the Modern World* , ed. J. Caplan and J. Torpey (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).
[26] 5 & 6 Geo. V. (Ch.60).
[27] E. Higgs *The Information state* p.139.
[28] 'Memorandum on the Establishment of a Central Register', Public Record Office, London (hereafter PRO) RG 28/4.
[29] Mallet to Vivian, 26 Sept 1917, PRO RG 28/7.

directly to the Secretary of State for Scotland, and not, as in England, to the Local Government Board, who often had their own view on the management of national statistics. This meant that the GROS was somewhat sheltered from the territorial struggles of Whitehall. In Scotland, the administrative unit was the county or burgh, sub-divided into parishes, while the English Registrar General was working within a system originally mapped on to the poor law unions. This presented considerable difficulties as the English Registrar General was, in the words of Bernard Mallet, 'practically without influence' to change registration districts to bring them in line with the public health authorities and to resolve other outstanding issues of registration practice, such as local anomalies in death registration and burial practice and the registration of stillbirths.[30] Mallet's goal of a universal registration card therefore has to be seen within the wider context of reforming the whole registration system.

There are several strands to Mallet's desire for reform, which can in turn be related to wider political struggles over the reform of the Local Government Board and the fate of the English Poor Law. Mallet's discontent with the system of registration he inherited in 1909 stemmed from his concern over one of the main intellectual questions of the day - broadly, national efficiency, but more precisely, infant mortality and the declining birth rate, particularly amongst more affluent social groups. Before Mallet took office at the GRO, he was a member of the Census Committee of the Royal Statistical Society, which, in 1908-9, made a series of recommendations about the decennial population survey.[31] These included the addition of two columns on duration of marriage and number of children. These two columns were to become the basis of the 1911 fertility study, which is commonly seen as having a eugenic motivation.[32] The Census Committee also proposed the introduction of a limited quinquennial census (age and sex) in addition to the decennial census to provide a more accurate picture of the population. These suggestions were presented to the Royal Statistical Society in 1910 by Stevenson, who emphasised that his words represented the joint conclusions of the Registrar General and certain members of his staff.[33] Stevenson noted that questions on fecundity had been included in the Scottish registration of births in 1855, but were deemed to cumbersome to continue. He added:

> It is very much to be desired that when the revision of our registration laws is undertaken, due provision will be made for obtaining information of that type along with the registration of births, if not also of deaths.[34]

But without such a reform, the only way to address questions of marital fertility was through the blunt tool of the census. The additional questions were deemed relevant enough to warrant Treasury funding because of concerns about differential fertility.[35] The fear that the population was expanding fastest among the least capable held credence in both eugenicist and environmental circles, coming together to a certain extent in the social hygiene

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[30]'Memorandum on the Registration Acts (Births, deaths and marriages) with proposals for their reform, March 1915 by Bernard Mallet', PRO RG28/3, p. 41.
[31]'Recommendations of the Census Board of the Royal Statistical Society', GRO 3/363/16.
[32]Richard A. Soloway, *Demography and Degeneration: Eugenics and the Declining Birthrate in Twentieth Century Britain* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1990)., pp. 9-12.
[33]T.H.C. Stevenson, "Suggested Lines of Advance in English Vital Statistics," *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society* 73, no. 6/7 (1910).p. 685. Both Higgs and Szreter credit Stevenson with the introduction of the fertility study into the 1911 census, based on this presentation the Royal Statistical Society. But, as explained above, the idea originated with the 1908-1909 Census Board of the Royal Statistical Society of which Mallet, and not Stevenson was a member. It is more likely that, when Mallet took up office in 1909, their interests coalesced. However, Stevenson is most associated with the study because he devised the socio-economic classification system for the analysis and was responsible for the presentation of the results.
[34]Ibid. p. 694.
[35]Soloway, *Demography and Degeneration* . p.9

movement.[36] The fertility survey aimed to 'definitely determine' the extent to which differential fertility operated.

Pre-war concerns about population quality and national efficiency increased with the outbreak of hostilities and as it became clear that the conflict would be a protracted one. Figures provided by the Registrar General and his superintendent of statistics amplified fears about racial decline.[37] The birth-rate fell steeply from the start of the war, and this combined with high casualty figures to throw the emphasis onto preserving infant life.[38] Despite improvements since the end of the 19th century, infant mortality and stillbirth remained relatively high. How to resolve this was a pressing question, but there were tensions between social reformers who sought to improve environmental conditions and positive eugenicists who believed that the better classes of society should be urged into reproduction. The renewed urgency of the national efficiency issue informed proposals put forward by Mallet in a 1915 memorandum to the Local Government Board. He suggested reforming the registration system radically, the revision which Stevenson hinted at in 1910.[39] This was the first elucidation of Mallet's grand vision for registration, which went through several incarnations in the following years. There were many strands to his plan, but he was chiefly concerned with the falling birth-rate and the quality of the population. Mallet emphasised the 'growing demands made on the Registrar General for information as to the facts of natality, fertility and mortality...much of that it is important to know from the point of view of the modern development of public health and socio-economic questions...'.[40] His proposed reforms included more information on birth and death certificates in order to trace family history, tighter verification procedures for vital events, more detailed certification of deaths and the registration of still-births. This last had been recommended by the Interdepartmental Conference on Physical Deterioration as a way of shedding light on the antenatal conditions prejudicial to survival of the unborn child. Mallet also proposed overhauling the infrastructure for collecting this information, to place registration within the public health service. This disassociated registration from the poor law. Mallet argued that 'the statistics of Births and Deaths collected in Poor Law areas were useless... for the modern administrative and public health areas'.[41] This anomaly had been addressed with the introduction of machine card tabulation in 1911,[42] which allowed deaths to be re-allocated to public health districts, but this was, Mallet argued, an unnecessary expense which could be saved if registration could be severed from the Poor Law. His 1915 memo therefore shows a mix of intellectual, financial and administrative arguments for the reform of registration.

But it also has to be seen in the political context of the time. Since 1907, social reformers, including Sir Robert Morant, Sir George Newman, Margaret McMillan and the Webbs, had been agitating for a central body to co-ordinate national public health and medical services. Their ambitions were frustrated by the introduction of the National Health Insurance Commission in 1911, but this body was seen to threaten the local medical provision of the

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[36] Greta Jones, *Social Hygiene in Twentieth Century Britain* (London: Croom Helm, 1986).
[37] Cm. 8484, *Seventy eighth Annual Report of the Registrar General for Births, Marriages and Deaths in England and Wales* , 1915 (March, 1917); Cm. 8869, Seventy ninth Annual Report of the Registrar General for Births, Marriages and Deaths, 1916 (1918); Soloway, *Demography and Degeneration* . p. 138.
[38] Deborah Dwork, *War Is Good for Babies and Other Young Children: A History of the Infant and Child Welfare Movement in England, 1898 - 1918* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1987).; Soloway, *Demography and Degeneration* . p. 138.; J. M. Winter, "The Impact of the First World War on Civilian Health in Britain," *Ec.H.R.* 30, no. 3 (1977).
[39] Bernard Mallet, "Memorandum on the Registration Acts (Births, Deaths and Marriages) with Proposals for Their Reform," in *PRO RG 28/1* (London: General Register Office, 1915).
[40] Ibid. p.7.
[41] Ibid. p.41.
[42] Edward Higgs, "The Statistical Big Bang of 1911: Ideology, Technological Innovation and the Production of Medical Statistics," *SHM* 9, no. 3 (1996).

Poor Law.[43] Mallet's ideas for registration, therefore, can be seen as jostling for position in the planning for centralised public health and medical services - a scrawled note by him referred to the fact that the Poor Law authorities were 'already under sentence of death!'.[44] Mallet's 1915 memo to the Local Government Board proposed that registration use the administrative counties, the county boroughs and the metropolitan boroughs as the basis of the new organisation. He further proposed that the work of registration come under the cognisance of the local medical officers of health (MOHs), who would then transmit information to the General Register Office. While this gave far greater powers to MOHs in relation to registration, these officials, in their new capacity, were to be appointed by the Registrar General rather than local authorities. This power would have situated the GRO at the heart of public health provision.[45] By 1915 Mallet had a far-reaching vision for registration, shaped by major anxieties of the day and his own ambition.

National Registration

National Registration gave Mallet a vehicle to develop his proposals because the General Register Office was to supervise the new register with the data collection and maintenance based at local authority level. This mirrored the structure Mallet envisaged for moving responsibility for vital statistics to the town and county councils. However, the administration of the National Register became complex and problematic: it was not an unqualified success.

The problems with National Registration arose from its importance in the conscription debate. The National Registration Bill was framed as a stock-taking of the man-power of the country in order to disassociate it from conscription and get it through Parliament. Therefore the terms of the Act were vague. It indicated the details the register was to hold and how the information was to be collected, but contained no detailed instructions for the maintenance of the register itself and nothing to say how the information would be used.[46] The Act stated explicitly that the Register was to exist only for the duration of the war.

The vague terms of the Act gave rise to competing views as to how the register should be organised, and while this might seem a detour into the minutiae of administrative bureaucracy, the organisation of the register was crucial not only to its efficiency as an accurate record of the population, but also to its reputation. Grand schemes stand or fall on the detail, as well as the ideology. Current debate on biometric ID cards has focussed as much on the technological and administrative details as on the ideological issues.[47] In July 1915, even as the National Registration Bill was passing through Parliament, concerns about storing and maintaining the data were raised by Vivian at the National Health Insurance Commission. He argued that the National Register differed from a census in that it concerned individuals, not aggregate statistics, and that it must be constantly updated when people moved house.[48] It was, he believed, impossible to secure compliance without appealing to self-interest: penalties alone would not be effective because registration would

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[43]Bentley B. Gilbert, *British Social Policy, 1914 - 1939* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1970).p. 98.
[44]Pencil annotation on a memorandum from W T Jerred to Mallet, Local Government Board, September 1916, PRO RG 28/3.
[45]Mallet, "Memorandum on the Registration Acts." pp. 40-46.
[46]Each man and woman between the ages of 15 and 65 was to fill in a form to be collected on August 15th 1915, National Registration Day. These forms gave name, address, age, nationality, marital status, profession or occupation, and employment details. People were also asked to give any secondary occupations, or potential occupations, i.e. other areas in which they worked, or in which they were skilled but not currently working. Individuals were then to be given a registration certificate, which was to be kept. People were required by law to notify the Local Registration Authorities when they moved house and were then to be issued with a new registration certificate. National Registration Act, 1915, 5 & 6 Geo c. 60.
[47]Peter Warren, ID cards: Can technology cope? *Computing* , 24 Novemeber 2003, accessed on line http://www.itweek.co.uk/computing/analysis/2075850/id-cards-technology-cope; The London School of Economics and Political Science, 'The LSE Identity Project Report, 2005', 27 June 2005, accessed on-line http://is.lse.ac.uk/idcard/identityreport.pdf
[48]Memorandum of the National Registration Scheme, SP Vivian, I July 1915, PRO RG 28/1.

be impossible to police. It would be difficult to prevent people from re-registering when they moved, rather than notifying the Local Registration Authorities, thus duplicating individuals in the register. Vivian believed that place of employment rather than residence was a more stable indicator, and that employers rather than individuals should be required to report movements of personnel.[49] He corresponded candidly with Violet Markham, a member of the various Registration Committees in 1915, and with Sir Horace Monro at the Local Government Board, denouncing Mallet's plans.[50] Vivian's proposal hinged on individuals having a unique identifying number which would be marked on their certificate, and which could easily transferred from one area to another. This implies the need for a central index. Vivian's vision for the National Register was far more far-reaching in terms of monitoring the population than the Bill envisaged.

At this stage Vivian was writing as an outsider, albeit an ambitious one. The responsibility for setting up the register in England and Wales lay with Bernard Mallet. Mallet rejected the idea of a separate numbered index to the register because of the labour involved and the possible loss of forms and duplication. This appears to be the result of lessons learnt from the creation of the Central Register of Belgian Refugees, which the GRO had set up at the request of the president of the Local Government Board in late 1914. This register was intended to ascertain numbers and particulars of the refugees and to allow them to be traced (ostensibly by family and friends, although searches in the register were also made by foreign committees, the police and the British and Beligan military authorities).[51] The Central Register of Belgians held records of some 225 000 people on a central card index and was beset by problems of duplication and erroneous records, as people registered more than once or failed to give adequate details. Stevenson had also set up a second parallel card index of Belgian refugees, coded and classified by occupation as in the 1911 census. This was supposed to be kept up-to-date through information from the labour Exchange, a plan which proved unsuccessful. This unsatisfactory experience may have had some bearing on the decision to make notification of change of address for the National Register a personal responsibility, not the employer's.

Having eschewed a central index, Mallet planned to make the National Register 'self-indexing'. Registration forms, some 25 million in all, were to be put in order - at local authority level - first by occupational group and secondly by name in alphabetical order, using the original forms filled in by the population to save copying time and storage space. Occupations were to be divided into 46 groups for men and 30 groups for women and coded - the 500-odd classifications used for the census were deemed too elaborate, possibly again from the experience of the Belgian register - Then certificates - marked with the occupational code - were to be written out and distributed to individualsand the original forms sorted by occupational category into age groups and marital status for the purposes of tabulation The forms of men of military age (19 - 41) were to be copied onto pink forms, also in occupational order.[52]

These instructions hint at the eventual use of the National Register to hammer the last nails into the coffin of voluntary recruitment. It is clear from the minutes of the first National Registration Committee (Jackson Committee) that Mallet had the interests of the War Office

[49]Memorandum (2) on National Registration, undated, PRO RG28/1.
[50]Vivian to Monro, undated but reply 16 July 1916; Vivian to V Carruthers (Violet Markham's married name), 20 July 1915; 21 July 1915 PRO RG 28/1. The file contains a number of letters from Markham to Vivian which suggest his correspondence was fuller than this. The tone of the correspondence is illustrated by a cutting aside made by Markham about Mallet. Ostensibly commenting on her life between politics and kitchen garden, Markham noted that at least with her cabbages, 'something happened'. Markham to Vivian, May 7 1916, PRO RG 28/1.
[51]T.T.S de Jastrezebski, "The Register of Belgian Refugees," *Jnl. Royal Stat. Soc.* (1916).
[52]Memorandum of Registrar General National Registration Act 1915, 20 July 1915, PRO RG 28/1.

and their need for information on potential recruits in mind from the start and that he devised the process with this in mind. Initially, the War Office wanted all the 'pink forms' of men between 19 and 41 to form the basis of a military register which was to be used for recruitment - recruiting officers were to visit the homes of those who had not enlisted, up to three times, recording their reasons for not enlisting and pressing them to do so. But, as Mallet realised, part of the rationale for national registration was to determine which occupations, and therefore which personnel, were to be exempt from recruiting. Hence his organisation of the register by occupation and the coding of the pink forms along similar lines. The pink forms, sorted by occupation group, were to be sent to the recruiting authorities, where representatives of the ministry of munitions and the labour exchanges would deal with men in exempt occupations, coding as 'starred' those who should not be recruited.[53] The recruiting authorities would then get the rest.

The existence of the pink forms was an open secret and the Press speculated as to their purpose, even before the data for National Registration was collected. On August 14th, a leader in the *Times* appealed for the government to disclose the purpose of the pink forms, as recruiting agents were already pre-supposing that they were to be used for later conscription.[54] A recruiting poster in Glasgow, for example, urged young men not to let their names appear on the 'special "funk" form' (pink form) by enlisting now.[55]

The list of exempt occupations was considered by a further National Registration Committee (Lansdowne Committee) in August 1915. The matter was complicated because the demands of different departments had to be incorporated, and these were often not clear at the outset. The Board of Agriculture, for example, did not request that certain classes of farm servants be exempted until mid-October 1915, by which time much of the sorting and coding of the registration forms had been done.[56] The Lansdowne Committee also recommended that the Registrars General compile an estimate of the number of men available for military service once the needs of the country had been taken into consideration. This request takes on a ominous tone when seen in light of contemporary events. From August onwards, a War Policy Committee was also meeting to consider how best to prosecute the war and whether conscription need be introduced. Asquith decided, following the various recommendations of the War Policy Committee, to give voluntary recruitment one last push: if this did not succeed, he would have a the rationale for introducing conscription. The last push was Lord Derby's scheme, launched in October 1915. Under this scheme, all males between the ages of 19 and 41 were to come forward and 'attest' that they were willing to serve in the army if called on. The names of men who 'attested' would be checked against the National Register to see if sufficient numbers had come forward. If not, stronger measures (i.e. conscription) would be needed. Adams has argued that this scheme was designed to fail, but that it allowed Asquith to buy time to 'convert' the country to the conscriptionist cause.[57]

The Scottish experience

As Mallet, the various government departments and the National Registration Committees inched towards a workable policy for creating and using the National Register, and government pondered the question of conscription, the GROS saw National Registration primarily as another piece of policy to be implemented. Until the passing of the National Registration Act in 1915, the response of the GROS to the circumstances of war was one of

[53]National Register (Lansdowne) Committee, Interim Report, 3 Sept 1915, PRO RG 28/9.
[54]'Numbering the people', *The Times* , 14 August 1915, p. 7, cols a and b;
[55]'Improved Recruiting: effect of the Register in Glasgow', *The Times* , 14 August 1915, p. 8, col. c.
[56]Memo from the Board of Agriculture for Scotland, 15 October 1915, GRO 5/1937.
[57]R.J.Q. Adams, "Asquith's Choice: The May Coalition and the Coming of Conscription, 1915 - 1916," *Journal of British Studies* 25, no. 3 (1986).

'business as usual', trying, for the most part successfully, to accommodate wartime demands within existing statutory provisions. Although the number of casualties was unprecedented, the GROS dealt only with deaths occurring in Scotland, and with untoward circumstances, such as deaths on hospital ships anchored off the Scottish coast. Men on these ships were cut off from normal family networks who knew their personal details for death registration purposes. Further, fleet surgeons objected to the day-long trip their messengers had to make to register such deaths. The problem was finally dealt with by referring such deaths straight to the Navy.[58] But most other circumstances of war could be accommodated within the existing legislation, even if this required some creative thinking, as in the case of marriage by declaration when one party was in Scotland and the other in the Dardanelles,[59] or delaying birth registration to allow the putative father to get home on leave and make an honest woman of the mother.[60]

National Registration represented a step-change in the traditional functions of the GROS, and went beyond the increased bureaucracy associated with war. Before the war, the GROS collected and collated information defined by statute and presented its findings to Parliament with relatively little external interference. During the war the extra work piled on the office was largely determined by the needs of government departments in London (and in the case or refugees and prisoners of war, foreign governments). This developed existing arrangements: information collected by the GROS was already used in the administration of national legislation, to verify ages of applicants for old age pensions, for example. But National Registration introduced new structures for collecting information and the need to keep information up to date. The way in government departments used the register for recruitment had substantial implications for the lives of individuals. This was a major development, since the GROS was traditionally concerned with recording life events rather than influencing them. This new role caused senior staff in the GROS a certain amount of disquiet on moral grounds, as well as problems of cost and labour.

For the Scots, the implementation of the Register was extremely problematic, because the plans set out by Mallet and the various National Registration Committees required a good deal of adjustment to work in the local context. The Scottish experience shows the difference between planning and reality, and why, for a staff with limited technology and resources, there was little enthusiasm for Mallet's proposal of a permanent peacetime register. Problems arose partly because there were no senior members of the GROS staff on any of the National Registration committees in the late summer and autumn of 1915. Thus, when the GROS received Mallet's instructions through the Scottish Office, they had already embarked on their own strategy to implement the register. In August 1915, Dunlop met with labour exchange officials in Edinburgh to discuss the creation of the register and they decided that the registration forms filled in by the population should be copied on to index cards, containing all information except the employer's name. These cards could then be sorted into occupational groups, while the registration forms themselves were kept in alphabetical order. Labour Exchange and Ministry of Munitions officials would have access to all the cards. Because each index card was numbered, they could easily be linked to the original registration forms.[61] This had been agreed before any decision had been made on the use of pink forms.

On August 28th, Mallet sent Patten MacDougall details of the latest proposals about the pink forms, which were to form the basis of the military register. This confidential circular,

[58]National Archives of Scotland, Edinburgh, GRO (hereafter GRO) 5/1005/24-31.9, also GRO 1/534/460 and GRO 1/639/9.
[59]Index notes, May 1916, GRO 5/1084/8.
[60]Registrar General to Registrar of Hamilton, 6th February 1915, GRO 1/534/269.
[61]Undated memo by Dunlop of meeting, surrounding correspondence suggests it was in mid-August 1915, GRO 5/1110/3.

endorsed by the Scottish Office, outlined Mallet's plan described above, namely that bundles of pink forms, sorted by local authorities by occupational code, should be delivered to the recruiting depots and that certain bundles should then be handed over to the Labour Exchange for further coding.[62] This was a complex process, which was cost and labour intensive, and was to be done mostly by a temporary, voluntary staff. The Scots, who had already started their separate card index, objected to these proposals for a number of reasons. They had sorted the index cards, not the registration forms, into occupational groups, so that returns could be more easily prepared without recourse to the registration forms and maintenance would be simplified. The registration forms were organised by district and then alphabetically by individual.[63] Therefore, when the pink forms - copies of the original registration forms - had to be sorted and coded by occupation, not alphabetically, this entailed a good deal of extra work. Dunlop was also concerned about the number of coding operations Mallet proposed - 'no fewer than four', the way coding was to be done 'by enumerators or supervisors, at all events locally and almost universally by a volunteer service', and the way the coded forms were to be used. Dunlop emphasized how occupational information gathered for the purpose of war differed from the needs of the peacetime census:

> Two points stand out. The use of code numbers for classifying men into Recruitable and Non-recruitable, and the grouping of forms as coded. This process relies on the skill of those coding for the Local Authorities and puts a responsibility on them, which to say the least of it, is very questionable. Coding was devised for the purposes of facilitating statistical abstraction, for which absolute accuracy was not essential for the statistics obtainable would be of necessity crude, and a slight additional error not very material. But the use of amateur coding for the purpose of dividing a section of the community into recruitable and non-recruitable, a process requiring absolute and individual accuracy, is quite another matter'.[64]

The crux of his objection was that the occupational information used would decide who was to be sent to war, a matter of life and death well beyond the traditional boundaries of the work of the GROS. This was more than a concern about the implications of possible clerical errors, since Dunlop's comments represent broader concerns about taking responsibility for military decisions. Dunlop also noted that the initial call from the War Office had been for a complete list of men aged between 18 and 41, that many of the local registration authorities had prepared this, and that the pink forms containing the information were ready for delivery. 'Any further division of Pink forms into classes by Local Authorities is a new division and responsibility' he said, which would entail extra labour. Not only was the preparation of coded pink forms 'too difficult and serious a duty for amateurs', but most voluntary staff had been released because the initial process of registration was now complete.[65] Moral concerns about the use of National Registration were intertwined with cost and labour issues. Thus, the two factors which - in Higgs's account - worked against the continuation of the register after the war were already present in Scotland when the National Register was established.

Dunlop finally proposed a compromise, as he was unwilling either to entrust the task to local authorities or for the GROS to bear the responsibility for coding the pink forms. Instead, coding was done by 'the munitions department who had a staff of 30 men under expert supervision in the Register House'. This 'assure(d) results for which accuracy and

[62]Mallet to Patten MacDougall, 28 August 1915, GRO 5/1110.
[63]Memorandum by Scrubie, Labour exchange office, 22 August 1915, GRO 5/1110/9.
[64]Memorandum on pink forms by Dunlop, 28 August 1915, GRO 5/1110/32; Memorandum on English proposals by Dunlop, undated, GRO 5/1110/38.
[65]Memo on English proposals, undated, GRO 5/1110/38

consistency could not be expected from 250 different local authorities'.[66] The GROS retained their card index. Hence the Scots register differed from the English on three main grounds. Firstly, the register itself was ordered alphabetically by district rather than by occupation. Secondly, each registration form had a unique identifying number which made it easier to keep up with population mobility, and thirdly, the occupational coding of the pink forms was done centrally, at the GROS under expert supervision, rather than at local authority level by volunteers.

There were further disputes about the coding of secondary occupations, and the way in which returns were to be submitted. The GROS repeatedly urged caution on interpreting the statistics produced by the National Register, particularly the unreliability of self-reported occupations. As Dunlop put it, 'human tendency is not to minimise the nature of the personal occupation'.[67] A list of reserved occupations was added in November, and itself became a focus of rancour.[68] Agricultural nomenclature was a particular sticking point, not only because of differences in understanding, but also differences in perceived gender roles - Dunlop asked, for example, why milkers had to be specified saying that 'milking in Scotland is a woman's job'. Words obsolete in England were still used locally in Scotland, for example, 'hind'. Some terminology was considered out of date; Dunlop requested that 'attendants in charge of lunatics' be withdrawn from the list and replaced by 'attendants in charge of the insane' - 'the last term being more modern and up-to-date than Lunatics'.[69] Some of this might seem like nit-picking, but the underlying question was still who would be sent to war and who would stay behind. But even with such close attention to detail at the GROS, anomalies still occurred: a letter to the Registrar General in February 1916 from a firm of electrical contractors questioned why, when the staff had all given themselves the same occupational description on their National Registration forms, all the men had been starred (exempted) except the senior manager, who was essential for organising the work of the firm.[70]

As discussions became protracted, signs of frustration can be detected in Edinburgh. Having noted that it was Sunday and he was on his own in Register House, Dunlop complained about the complexity of the occupation lists now being compiled. In a letter to James Dodds at the Scottish Office he wrote - 'if this process continues, it will soon be easier to make a list of the few recruitables left than to make a list of those excluded'.[71] He was reluctant to provide the figures required to establish the number of recruitable men, arguing that 'even good work does not make a faulty mathematical argument into a good one'.[72] He qualified the first estimate of 153 000 recruitable men for Scotland, saying that enlistment had been carried to a higher point in Scotland than in England, that men were required for the export trade and other needs of the Allies. This figure included men already declared physically unfit or unavailable for other reasons. Differences in the Scottish and English occupational lists meant that the figures could not be directly compared.[73] Nonetheless, the Cabinet took the higher figure as the number of men available for enlistment in Scotland, as in England, although it was widely accepted at the time that the Register had been 'inaccurately compiled' and that numbers of men available for enlistment were somewhat inflated.[74] Thus, Lord Derby's report in December 1915, used as justification for the introduction of

[66] Patten MacDougall to Lamb, Scottish Office, 11 September 1915, GRO 5/1936/26.
[67] Patten MacDougall to Laird, Scottish Office, 9 November 1915, GRO 5/1938/34.
[68] Correspondence on reserved occupations, GRO 5/1938/30 - 33.
[69] Dunlop to Dodds, Scottish Office, 7 November 1915, GRO 5/1938/32.
[70] Stevens and Brown, Electrical Contractors, to Registrar General, 23.2.1916, GRO 7/8/13.1
[71] Dunlop to Dodds, 7 November 1915, GRO 5/1938/32.
[72] Memorandum by Dunlop, 15 November 1915, GRO 5/1938/61.
[73] Memorandum as to the number of men available for recruiting in Scotland at the 15th August 1915, GRO 5/1939.
[74] 80 HC Deb 5s 16 March 1916 Sir J Simon quoting Lord Selbourne, President of the Board of Agriculture.

conscription the following spring, compared attestments to an unrealistic number of potential attestees.

The Scottish experience shows a resistance to new bureaucratic demands, even in the circumstances of war. This was also underpinned by the feeling that Scotland as a country, and indeed, members of the GROS staff, were already giving disproportionately to the war effort. A pencil note added in Edinburgh to a letter from Mallet in September 1915 noted that Scotland had already been 'thoroughly skinned' by the recruiting sergeants.[75] This contrasted with Mallet's view that any time lost in handing the pink forms over to the recruiting depots was 'regrettable'.[76] This difference in attitudes towards recruiting at a national level is mirrored in attitudes towards the staff of the GRO and GROS. In the annual reports of the war years, Mallet emphasised the number of his staff who had left to go to the Front.[77] This contrasts with the situation at the GROS, where, although keen to let staff at first, Patten MacDougall very quickly realised he could not keep his smaller office afloat with a seriously depleted staff.[78] Those remaining worked long and hard and Patten MacDougall was also forced into re-considering his long-standing objection to female staff.[79] Yet, in all of the correspondence about enlisting and extra hours, there is no feeling that this should not be done - indeed, Patten MacDougall stressed repeatedly that the office was engaged in government work which was essential to the war effort. He was also sensitive to accusations of not being patriotic - responding quickly to negative press about his staff in the *Scotsman* in 1916.[80] As local registrars were also frequently pressed into doing gratis work, mostly searches and extracts, for the war effort, Patten MacDougall repeatedly drew on the rhetoric of patriotism to persuade them to comply.[81]

Although the staff of the GROS were labouring to support the war effort, they did invest considerable time making their National Register workable, and were proud of its efficiency. This contrasted with the situation in England, where the Natonal Register was beset by problems of maintenance. As Vivian had predicted, maintenance fell down on the question of population mobility. With on-going military recruitment, the introduction of conscription and lists of exempt occupations, the question was not only one of keeping up with labour mobility, but also updating the details of those who had enlisted, been discharged, been killed or died, as well as those who had been declared unfit for military service or referred to a tribunal on occupational grounds.[82] The physical scale of the register and limited technology made organisation formidable. The registration forms were filed in boxes in local authority premises, with some three thousand records per box. Mallet issued memo after memo dealing with the minutiae of how the files should be stored, sorted for calculations and accessed, down to the detail of what to do if forms were curled at the bottom and slipped down in the boxes. By 1916, politicians and the press despaired of the register's accuracy and Violet Markham wrote that it was 'an atrocious muddle' suggesting that it would 'have been better to let the whole thing slide and revise after six months', which is essentially what happened in the Ministry of National Service in 1917.[83]

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[75]Pencil annotation on Mallet to Patten MacDougall, 17.9.1915, GRO 5/1936/55. 'Thoroughly' was the second choice of word, 'horribly' had been scored out.
[76]Mallet to Patten MacDougall, 31 August 1915, GRO 5/1110/35.
[77]Cm. 8206, Seventy seventh Annual Report of the Registrar-general of Births, Deaths and Marriages in England and Wales, 1914 (March, 1916).
[78]Patten MacDougall to Under Secretary of State for Scotland, April 1915, GRO 5/1029/12.2.
[79]Memorandum on Registrar General's Department - duties performed by (General), by Gray, August 1917, GRO 5/1233. Gray, the secretary to the Registrar General, notes that he had worked the last 13 months until 7pm with no leave.
[80]Patten MacDougall to the editor of *The Scotsman* re negative press about Register House and recruiting, 14 March 1916, GRO 5/1029/25. In response to criticism that all men of military age had enlisted or attested, he wrote that 42% were in service and the rest would go when they were called up, that female staff were employed where possible and that staff had had little or no leave since the National Registration Act had been passed and were continually working overtime, including Saturdays and Sundays.
[81]Patten MacDougall to Secretary of State for Scotland, 20 January 1917, GRO 5/1043/11.3; Circular 3 September 1914, GRO 5/840.
[82]GRO 5/1938; also Work of the National Register, PRO RG 28/1, p. 20.

National Registration and plans for reconstruction

Despite these problems, Mallet again touted his proposals around those at the centre of negotiations when planning for post-war reconstruction began in 1916. With the experience of National Registration behind him, he expanded earlier ideas for reform to include a proposal for a universal register, which would, in effect, continue the work of the National Register.[84] This proposal was largely opportunistic, as Mallet believed that it would appeal to other departments who sought population information in either peace or wartime. He used the examples of the extension of the franchise alongside the fear of future military emergencies to justify the need for more comprehensive information. Mallet suggested that an improved birth certificate should replace all other documents and that registration be under one central body, to which every department requiring personal information should turn. He again drew on arguments about the vitality of the nation and infant mortality to justify such an all-encompassing register, but he also noted that the 'fundamental principle (was) the transfer of local registration of births, deaths and marriages from the Poor Law Authorities...to the Local Authorities'.[85] When the Hayes Fisher Committee was appointed in 1917, it had two briefs: the first was the question of a permanent universal register, the second Mallet's initial aim of reforming registration of births, marriages and deaths.[86] In 1918, when it became apparent that there was little political support for a universal register, Mallet fell back on the need to reform routine registration. In a memo to the Hayes Fisher Committee, he argued that this question must be decided first, as it was imperative to define the new registration authorities if there were any prospect of Poor Law re-organisation.[87] Thus, reforming the registration system and disassociating it from the Poor Law was the necessary precursor to any plans for universal registration. The two elements dovetailed in the final report of the Committee in 1918.[88] Mallet's plans for a universal register were shaped by the political opportunities presented by the war-time need for personal identification measures and the demands of post-war reconstruction, but he did not lose sight of his original aim of reforming the registration system as a public health and eugenic measure.

Although the Scots expressed cautious support for a limited quinquennial census in addition to the existing decennial one, an idea floated before the war, they did not see the time as right for reform of the system of registration on the whole.[89] Nor is there is anything to suggest they supported a post-war universal registration card. During Dunlop's appearances in London in 1917, he agreed to the recommendation for a central index in any future register.[90] The context was the creation of a national register in a future emergency, which was different from Mallet's plans for a permanent peacetime register. Dunlop arguably saw this as a way to press home the advantages of the Scottish system. The Scots had worked hard to iron out the flaws in National Registration and by the latter years of the war, were more confident in the accuracy of their register than were the English. When Mallet canvassed civil servants about his proposals for a universal register, Patten MacDougall stressed the efficiency of the Scottish system.[91] When Mallet issued a circular in January

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[83] 80 HC DEB 5S, col. 2315-6, 16 March 1916; V. Carruthers to Vivian, 26 September 1915, PRO RG 28/1.
[84] Mallet to Nash, secretary of the Reconstruction Committee, 2 August 1916, PRO RG 28/3.
[85] 'My memo to W.V. Nash', Mallet, Sept 1916, PRO RG 28/3; Memorandum by Mallet, 17 May 1917, PRO RG 28/3
[86] Memorandum by Mallet, 17 May 1917, PRO RG 28/3; Departmental Committee on National Registration, Proposals for a System of General Registration and its Bearing upon the system of Births, Deaths and Marriages, 1 July 1918, PRO RG 28/4.
[87] Memorandum from Mallet, 14 March 1918, PRO RG 28/3.
[88] Departmental Committee on National Registration, 1 July 1918, PRO RG28/4, p.17. The Committee concluded that proposals made by the Registrar General in 1915 for improvements to the system of registration of births, marriages and deaths would be facilitated by the implementation of a central register.
[89] 'Memorandum by Registrar-General for Scotland', 4 July 1917, PRO RG 28/4 .
[90] Memorandum signed by Mallet, Stevenson, Vivian and Dunlop, July 1917, PRO RG 28/4.
[91] Memorandum by Registrar-General for Scotland, 4 July 1917, PRO RG 28/4.

1918 suggesting that the local registers be kept in alphabetical order, Patten MacDougall reminded the Scottish Office that the Scottish registers were already kept thus,[92] and when the amending bill for the existing National Registration Act was on the table in 1918, Patten MacDougall stressed the need for the Scots to keep their central index, saying,

> this is the key to the arrangement of our whole existing registers, which differs essentially from the English arrangement and we could not depart from ours without upsetting the entire Register. This could not be faced.[93]

Dunlop arguably saw the Committee initially as a way to press home the advantages of the Scottish system, but neither Dunlop or Patten MacDougall signed the final report of the Hayes Fisher Committee recommending the implementation of a universal peacetime register.[94]

The initial involvement of Dunlop in post-war planning in 1917 suggests that the GROS could have been a natural ally of the GRO in extending the information state, but for pragmatic, rather than political reasons, they were not. The GROS was a small office, removed from the policy hub of Whitehall, and staff were stretched to the limits by the bureaucracy of war. The creation and maintenance of the National Register was far more problematic than Higgs's account suggests, and the plans for a universal register arose as much from the desire to reform the whole English registration system, as from a response to National Register's success. But it is also possible to see the Scottish position as liberal opposition to the growth of the information state, although this argument should not be overstated. Both Dunlop and his chief clerk, McKinley, objected to the inclusion of intrusive questions on marital fertility in the 1911 census. Perhaps more importantly, Dunlop doubted whether the resulting natality tables showing, 'it is claimed', differential fertility across age and social class, the relationship between fertility and infant mortality, the effect of preventive measures (contraception) and the effect of female occupation on fertility were 'of sufficient practical importance to justify the expenditure of a considerable sum of public money'.[95] This would suggest that the Scots were not as caught up in the eugenic debates that motivated their English counterparts. Dunlop's report on the 1911 fertility study - as he was compelled to include the objectionable questions - is a much sparser affair than Stevenson's and does not engage with any of the issues which prompted the survey.[96] Later, in the 1920s, when Dunlop was Registrar General for Scotland, he consistently objected to the registration of stillbirths on the grounds that it was an intrusion by the state into personal matters.[97] This was articulated as a belief in the privacy of the individual and suggests some desire to protect the integrity of the GROS, and not extend its original remit in the collection of vital statistics. Such sentiments were also apparent in relation to the National Registration Act. Apart from the moral questions surrounding conscription and the designation of individuals, the National Register threw up a number of interesting personal issues - supposedly single domestic servants were forced to declare their marital status, for example, while the Registrar General received several letters from wives anxious to trace absent husbands. The GROS replied consistently, but unhelpfully, that the National Register could not be used in this way.[98]

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[92]Patten MacDougall to Rose, 22 January 1918, GRO 7/11/1.3.
[93]Patten MacDougall to Rose, Scottish Office, 30 January 1918, GRO 7/11/9.4.
[94]Departmental Committee on National Registration, 1 July 1918, PRO RG28/4, p.20.
[95]Memorandum by McKinley, 29 September 1909, GRO 6/363/16; Memorandum on the proposed inclusion in the census of a study of the fertility of marriage, James C Dunlop, 26 November 1909, GRO 6/363/15.
[96]James Craufurd Dunlop, "The Fertility of Marriage in Scotland: A Census Study," *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society* 77, no. 3 (Feb., 1914).
[97]James Dunlop 'Observations on Bill to amend the law relating to the Certification of Deaths and the Disposal of the Dead - 15 Geo V Bill 132', GRO 5/887.
[98]GRO 7/8, for example, 23.1, 9.5.1916.

These are differences not only in detail, but in approach. Mallet, like his successor Vivian, had a grand vision for registration. His correspondence is as much about high political plotting as about practicalities. The focus of the Scottish correspondence, on the other hand, is on practical organisation, fitting the Whitehall directives to the Scottish context and reining in excessive demands with an eye to cost and labour. Rather than following the English lead, the Scots were keen to assert their own *modus operandi*, challenging where necessary the 'do as the English do' assumptions from Whitehall. Unlike their English counterparts, the Scots seemed to be singularly uninterested in expanding their remit through the issue of personal identification. This not only contrasted with Mallet and Stevenson, but with Vivian, who also saw questions of personal identification as a way of expanding his own political profile. This was apparent in his actions at the Ministry of Food in late 1917 and 1918, where he used rationing as a means of testing his plan for a central index of the population.

Central registration at the Ministry of Food

From 1916 onwards, Mallet and Stevenson had been canvassing different government departments about the need for personal identification, and promoting their plans for a central register within a reformed registration system at the heart of government. The establishment of the Reconstruction Committee provided the perfect channel, and they began to lobby for a committee to consider the question. Mallet engaged in extensive correspondence with anyone who would listen, certainly not acting as a civil servant whose job was to implement, rather than create policy. In doing so, Mallet and Stevenson became involved in tensions between the Local Government Board and the National Health Insurance Commission over the question of a post-war Ministry of Health. This was probably intentional: Mallet wrote to Robert Morant, head of the NHIC, in January 1917 about his proposals for a central register and reform of the registration system, saying, 'I have resorted to the Reconstruction Committee because that seemed the best way of attracting attention at the Local Government Board'.[99] He also corresponded through March and April 1917 with the Webbs, who were interested in the central register as a means of social control and promoting the rights and responsibilities of the citizen.[100] Many of the more grandiose elements of Mallet's later plans appear to emanate from the Webbs, including a suggestion from Sidney Webb that the GRO should stand alone as a national organisation of statistics under the Privy Council.[101] Mallet picked this up and suggested the Treasury as a better alternative.[102] At the same time, Mallet also sought to ally his proposals to any other national initiatives requiring personal identification.[103] The most important of these was food rationing, but Mallet predicted somewhat dolefully that the newly-established Ministry of Food would 'scrap all that had been done before and start afresh... with a still more elaborate register'.[104] However, this did not prevent him from seeing it as a 'snubbing' when they actually did so.[105]

The person in charge of the new register at the Ministry of Food was Sylvanus Vivian, who had already criticized Mallet privately. Morant and Vivian were closely allied, and when lobbied by Mallet over a central register, Morant had referred him to Vivian and the 'special attention he has given to the many difficulties involved in the registration of insured persons and others... and the very valuable experience he possesses'. Morant noted that Vivian and

[99]Mallet to Morant, 26 January 1917, PRO RG 28/3.
[100]Mallet to B. Webb, 2 March 1917; B. Webb to Mallet, 20 March 1917; B. Webb to mallet, 3 April, 1917, PRO RG 28/3.
[101]S. Webb to Mallet, 27 September 1917, PRO RG 28/3.
[102]Mallet to S. Webb, 28 September 1917, PRO RG 28/3.
[103]Memorandum by Mallet, 14 March 1918, PRO RG 28/3.
[104]Mallet to Monro, 1 March 1917, PRO RG 28/3.
[105]Mallet to S. Webb, 24 September 1917, PRO RG 28/3.

he had been 'cogitating' on the idea of a central register for some time. Morant also indicated that he and Vivian were interested in of Mallet's proposals for reform of medical nomenclature and medical certification.[106] Thus Mallet's proposed alliance with the public health authorities recommended themselves to Morant's vision of a streamlined medical service, and he despatched Vivian to sit on the Hayes Fisher Committee.[107]

Vivian was involved in discussions on the need for a central index in July and August along with Mallet, Stevenson and Dunlop, but he was taken up with his work at the Ministry of Food from autumn 1917 until the early months of 1918. But Vivian also wrote to Beatrice Webb detailing how a central index, containing only enough information to identify each individual, could be linked to local registers with fuller relevant personal information. 'The central index', he wrote, 'cannot be overloaded with information'.[108] Vivian's own contribution to a national register was via food rationing. Here, individuals filled in an application form which was sent to the Registration Clearing House in the Ministry of Food. If the form was in order, each received a ration paper that could be exchanged at the Post Office for eight weeks worth of food coupons.[109]. Thus the distribution of food was local, but it was managed centrally. Vivian was able to put his main principle (outlined to Violet Markham in 1915) to the test, namely that any register should be tied to self-interest, in this case, food distribution, in order to resolve the issue of voluntary notification of change of address, and indeed, to ensure that everyone registered in the first place.[110]

This innovation did not go unnoticed in the press, not least because the forms, in the first instance for sugar tickets, required a deal of personal information. There was some speculation as to the purpose of this, why it was necessary to have 'such elaborate details' of people merely to provide them with sugar. One Labour MP suggested that it was a political trick to keep conscription, but criticisms of the measure were muted.[111] An article in the *New Statesman* suggested that the forms constituted a new census of the nation which would be used to inform post-war policy:

> They will provide a current register and measurement of manpower; they will give a clue to the necessities of industrial housing; and they will mark out the ground geographically for the new educational regime with its jurisdiction over adolescents.[112]

The *Daily Chronicle* picked up the theme, writing that a by-product of the sugar tickets would be a complete national register at a minimum cost, a move which it termed a 'stroke of administrative genius'.[113] There was little of the debate about the infringement of personal liberties which had surrounded the introduction of National Registration in 1915. Mallet was annoyed at the press reports of the sugar scheme, complaining to Beveridge about the lack of consultation with the GRO and describing the suggestions of a new national register in the article as 'a figment of the writer's imagination'.[114] It is clear that he was worried about the threat that this posed to his own proposals. But if Vivian had overcome the thorny issue of state regulation by tying his register to entitlement, he still ran into some of the same problems which eventually foreclosed Mallet's grand vision for a universal register - namely, cost and labour concerns, and lack of support from other areas of

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[106] Morant to Mallet, 29 January 1917, PRO RG 28/3.
[107] Morant to Mallet, 16 April 1917, PRO RG28/3.
[108] Vivian to B. Webb, 21 February 1918, PRO RG 28/3.
[109] W.H. Beveridge, *British Food Control* (London: Humphrey Milford, 1928). p. 191-195.
[110] Sylvanus Vivian, *History of National Registration* (London: Historical Branch, Cabinet Office, 1951).p.79.
[111] Cutting from the *Times*, 24.11.1917 in GRO 5/1236.
[112] 'A Register for Reconstruction', *New Statesman*, 22 September, 1917, PRO RG 28/3.
[113] 'A Sugar Stratagem', *The Daily Chronicle*, 22.9.1917.
[114] Mallet to Beveridge, 26 September 1917, PRO RG 28/3.

the national information services. Vivian's scheme was simple on paper but the administration required was immense - Beveridge notes that at the Registration Clearing House alone, a staff of 600 girls was engaged.[115] On visiting the Clearing House, Patten MacDougall's secretary noted that 'they have a great job before them'.[116]

There were also territorial disputes over who had the central authority to issue instructions to local government staff. The GRO and GROS were not directly involved with the Registration Clearing House directly, but registrars were involved at the local level. They issued application forms to new parents, took back coupons when deaths were registered and sent them back weekly to the Ministry of Food, and issued extract entries of birth when necessary. When the informant of a death did not hand in the deceased's sugar card, the local registrars filled in a default form and sent it to the Ministry of Food.[117] In some cases, over-zealous registrars refused to register deaths until the ration cards had been returned.[118] But the GROS resisted Vivian's attempts to issue instructions to the registrars directly. Patten MacDougall pointed out in November 1917 that every parent in Scotland received a free extract of entry of birth, and these extracts could be used by the local Food Controller, avoiding the need to send applications to London. Patten MacDougall also wished to retain Scottish control over the cancellation of food coupons by death,[119] but Vivian wished a uniform procedure across Britain, believing that a local system would inevitably break down.[120]

There was also some annoyance on the part of the GROS about perceived ignorance of Scottish affairs. In May 1918, when the Local Government Board for Scotland suggested that food controllers have access to death registers, Patten MacDougall reacted angrily, saying,

> it is erroneously assumed that the latter department and not the Registrar General is charged with the administration of the Registration Acts and with the direction and control of the Registrars in Scotland. The authority for imposing on the Registrars the service indicated in the memorandum will certainly be questioned, and the matter ought at once to be put on a proper footing. [121]

More seriously, the registration process for food rationing was beset by financial and administrative problems. Registrars complained repeatedly about the relevant stationary not being sent, a seemingly trivial matter which assumed greater importance in light of disputes over fees.[122] Local registrars complained vociferously about the amount of extra work they were required to do in relation to rationing, indeed the amount of work they had been expected to do 'gratis' and for low pay throughout the war. At the beginning of February, the Association of Registrars (in Scotland) complained about 'the great feeling of dissatisfaction which prevailed ...in regard to the demands made upon them, locally and departmentally, without any remuneration' and about 'what appears to be a concluded arrangement purporting to bind our members... hurriedly entered into between the Registrar General and the Ministry of Food'.[123] They threatened to withdraw such services unless the fees for extracts were increased. This ultimatum came to nothing, as Patten MacDougall threatened to resort to the Defence of the Realm Act.[124] Nonetheless the episode was the

[115]Beveridge, *British Food Control* . p.191.
[116]Memorandum by Gray, 8.1.1918, GRO 5/1236/7.
[117]Vivian to Patten MacDougall, 24 November 1917, GRO 5/1236/1.
[118]Secretary of Greenock and District Trades' and Labour Council to Patten MacDougall, 8 April 1918, GRO 5/1237/19.1.
[119]Patten MacDougall to Vivian, 28 November 1917, GRO 5/1236/1.4.
[120]Vivian to Patten MacDougall, 3 December 1917, GRO 5/1236/1.5.
[121]Patten MacDougall to Secretary, Ministry of Food, 9 May 1918, PRO RG 48/585.
[122]Index note by Froude, 11 January 1918, GRO 5/1236.
[123]Registrars' Association of Scotland to Patten MacDougall, 6 February 1918, GRO 5/1236/26.1.
[124]Registrars' Association of Scotland from Patten MacDougall, 12 February 1918, GRO 5/1236/26.2.

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culmination of tensions which had been brewing throughout the war as the registration service was increasingly stretched.

Mallet had to deal with a similar representation from his own registrars.[125] Thus Higgs rightly concludes that labour and cost were hurdles to any extension of the registration system after the war, but this went beyond the civil service to the grassroots of the registration apparatus. The existing bureaucracy was stretched to the limits by the demands of war and there was little enthusiasm from those who ensured its smooth running to see it extended. Without the threat of the Defence of the Realm Act and the call of patriotism, it is hard to see how any extension of the information service would have been tolerated. Vivian's central index was wound up in 1918.[126] At the same time, lack of political will and wider economic retrenchment meant that the National Register was also abandoned after the war, effectively ending Mallet's proposals for a permanent, peacetime register to keep track of individual citizens.[127] Although there had been some support for the continuation of National Registration after the war among local government officials, the view in Parliament by the end of the war was that it should be terminated as 'a step to obviate useless expenditure'.[128] With the abandonment of the National Register, Mallet's plans for a reformed registration system also ended, and Mallet was supplanted by Vivian, largely at Morant's instigation. Vivian was appointed deputy Registrar General in November 1919 and charged with examining the organisation of the GRO. Mallet found himself in an untenable position, and eventually resigned. On January 1st, 1921, Vivian replaced him as Registrar-General, and the GRO assumed a subordinate position within the Ministry of Health.[129]

Conclusion

The Registrar General's proposals to reform registration and maintain a system of personal identification were at the nexus of controversial ideological and political territory. The ideological debates were rooted in pre-war concerns about national efficiency. Already in 1908-9, before he took office as Registrar General, Mallet saw the GRO as a crucial part of the apparatus for giving statistical support on these issues. Fertility questions in the 1911 census were a step in this direction, and by 1915, Mallet had a well-developed set of proposals to situate registration within public health provision. National Registration in wartime allowed Mallet to bring his ambitions before a broader political audience, and he hoped to magnify the influence of his office in Whitehall. In doing so, he positioned the GRO in the midst of contentious debate around the future of the Local Government Board and a potential new Ministry of Health.

But the creation of a National Register also gave questions of personal identification immediate political significance. National Registration became tied up with debates about voluntary recruitment and conscription, debates central to the prosecution of the war and the efficacy of the Coalition government. The introduction of a national identification system in 1915 was justified in terms of national emergency, but it was not uncontroversial: it was seen by opponents as unnecessary and costly bureaucracy which interfered with the liberty of the individual. But interference with the liberty of the individual was cast against the greater threat from the enemy. The rhetoric was similar to that used today in the 'war against terror', as freedoms are protected through increasingly restrictive legislation - the difference now is that the enemy is no longer constructed as at our gate, but as within our midst. Both the debates around conscription in July 1915 and Mallet's longer term proposals for reform

[125] Registrars' Association of England to Mallet (Copy), 29 December 1918, GRO 5/1236/26.1.
[126] Beveridge, *British Food Control*. p. 215.
[127] Morant to Mallet, 12 July 1919, PRO RG 28/3.
[128] 'National Register: its value (Burgh Officials Mtg)', *Glasgow Herald*, June 22, 5f; HC Deb 5s 1919, vol. 115, col. 1766.
[129] Higgs, *Life, Death and Statistics*. pp.188-193.

of the registration system illustrate the contentious nature of personal information and the personal and political agendas which surround its use, bringing to light precisely the kind of ulterior motives feared by many today. As Dunlop was aware, the high politics of Whitehall had serious consequences for the ordinary public, whether through conscription for war, or exposing private life to official scrutiny.

In the face of national emergency, the majority of the population complied with the National Registration Act of 1915, creating a vast and unwieldy bureaucracy which proved difficult and costly to maintain accurately, one of the fears about current proposals. However, the rationale for the National Registration Act, and maintaining the bureaucracy, fell away at the end of hostilities. Despite Mallet's attempts to tie his proposals for a universal register to other political developments, such as the extension of the franchise, the extension of National Registration into peacetime was resisted. Mallet's escalating schemes, with their need for complex and expensive bureaucracy, went against the tide of post war economic retrenchment. With Vivian undermining his credibility as an efficient administrator from 1915, it is not surprising that Mallet was outflanked by the end of the war, despite his ever more desperate attempts to sell his vision to anyone of influence who would listen. Lack of support from his Scottish counterpart was a noticeable factor. The GROS was removed from the political struggles of London and its senior staff were far less involved in ideological debates about social reform and the functions of government. Indeed, the Scottish experience of National Registration shows the negotiations necessary to make central policy work in practice.

Yet, as with much other administration, the lessons from the First World War were put to use in the Second. Vivian was Registrar General until 1945 and devoted a considerable amount of energy throughout the interwar period to perfecting his own plans for a new National Register in a future emergency. At the outbreak of World War Two, he was well prepared. Although the second National Register was still tied to conscription, the link with food rationing ensured that the emphasis was on entitlement as well as compulsion - a principle which Vivian had advocated since 1915. His World War Two Register, which continued into peacetime as rationing was extended, was also used as the basis for NHS entitlement, and still exists as a record of the population today. Vivian's ambitions were more modest than Mallet's, but ultimately proved effective. The issues in the debate which occupied the Registrars General in World War I, over the creation of a single register for both entitlement and surveillance, have also proved extremely durable.

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