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'There is a list of studer who have joined up. There are 129 names... ow Cardiff University's student newspaper reported World War One

Many young students were called to serve during World War One – but how did one university’s student newspapers report on the conflict? Dr John Jewell, director of undergraduate studies at the Cardiff School of Journalism, Media and Cultural Studies takes a look at the university’s Cap and Gown publication from 100 years ago



By **Jessica Flynn**

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Dr. John Jewell of Cardiff University looks back at the time of the Great War.

University's student newspaper during the

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Gair Rhydd (Free Word) is the newspaper of Cardiff University's students with a potential audience of nearly 29,000 readers all expecting to read a paper which can cover local and international news, provide incisive commentary on a range of social and political issues and cater for the lighter side of college life.

It was partly the success of Gair Rhydd and the realities of life as a modern student, which made me consider – as we approach the centenary of the beginning of World War One – how the Cardiff student of 100 years ago communicated and dealt with the life changing events which began in 1914.



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For scholars of a century ago it was Cap and Gown - the magazine of the university college of South Wales and Monmouthshire (as Cardiff University was then known) – that kept them informed.

The first edition I saw was from May 1914 some three months before the outbreak of war. And, apart from a brief mention of the lack of an officer training corps in Cardiff, there is no mention of the prospect of encroaching war.

Indeed, there is, to my eyes, at least, an air of whimsy and celebration about the whole edition which makes the knowledge of what is to come even more affecting.

The editorial could have been written yesterday: “Everyone who has taken even the smallest interest in the life of the college cannot but look back on his or her sojourn here as one of the happiest periods of life and it is natural to suppose that everyone will want to keep in touch with the institution that has afforded s’ appiness.”

And it’s this contemporary tone which most . g. Consider these lines from the poem Behold I Am Not One Who Goes to Lectures:

I am not one who greatly cares for experience, soap...or a graduated income tax.

The coercion of Ulster, Lloyd George, Mexico...or College conversaciones

For none of these do I care...

Myself only do I sing

Me, envied, popular, tremendous, colossal, titanic, stupendous

Ego! Moi-Meme! ME.

Elsewhere, there are essays on nature and art, a genuinely funny article on the quality of student “digs”, letters on suggested examination reform and a jokes, which, with a little modernising, could grace the union bars of today:



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Student: I am very sorry, sir, that I could not get back on the 14th but

Prof: So you had two more days of grace did you?

Student: Well, sir, not exactly two more days of Grace; her name was Phyllis.

I was genuinely surprised by the lack of reference to rising tensions in Europe and the fact that the issues which concerned, or didn't bother, the student body of a 100 years ago are replicated so similarly today.

How would things change by the next issue of December 1914, the war being underway for four months?

War is present from the beginning now as the readers are told of students who have "cast aside the academic robe for a time and put on the uniform of the British soldier".

There is a list of students past and present who have joined up.

There are 129 names.

This is December and war broke out in August.

If this tone is reverential or matter of fact I was not prepared for what came next.

It's a "War Guyde" parody written by someone who has "unrivalled military experience, having been the owner of a pair of military hairbrushes for many years".

The tone of the guide is mocking and satirical.

Not for this student the deferential attitude to war poetry that shapes our attitudes to World War One nowadays: we are told that "no fewer than 17, 643, 279 war poems have appeared in newspapers and periodical since the war commenced".

Newspapers are the subject of much derision – "possibly more terrible than the war are its results: among them, the newspaper accounts. The newspapers hash up the same news day



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Amidst all this is a pithy epistle to the freshmen from a seasoned undergrad – the message of which seems to predate the summer of love and the hippy '60s by some 50 years.

The thrust of the advice can be adequately summed up thus: “Be ye not troubled, take things as they come. Above all things, be cool.”

Of final poignancy is an article by a member of the University's and Public Schools brigade.

Whilst not yet fully one of the “tommies” the correspondent writes of the “thrilling military atmosphere” at his billets.

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There is an air of melancholy about the idyllic life described, though, and acceptance that their fate is out of the hands of these young men.

I was moved by the simple prophecy of these lines: “For our subsequent fortunes we must politely refer you to the newspapers, perhaps the casualty lists in particular.”

It was not even 1915.

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