

WRITING HISTORY ON THE PAGE AND SCREEN:
Mediating Conflict through Britain's First World War Ambulance Trains

This article examines how different forms of writing mediate the past. In doing so, I focus on two ostensibly distinct types of authorship: the light writing projected onscreen, and the life-writings found in letters and diaries. Between 1914 and 1919 in Britain, cinema and personal testimonies intervened in historiography in apparent opposition to one another. It is easy for us now to assume that state-censored, propagandistic movies narrated the state's version of the First World War, while secret, illegal accounts written by personnel on the Western Front line described actuality.¹ However, a study of British ambulance trains reveals that films and life-writings have a shared vocabulary, which complicates the two media's connections to history, and to one another. I argue that by interrogating the motifs congruent on the screen and the page, and by reading films and testimonies in tandem, we can rediscover effaced narratives about wartime conditions and marginalised peoples.

The British government's propaganda strategy during the First World War did not initially include film. Military and parliamentary authorities concealed the conflict's scale from the British public, and strict censorship was at odds with the revelatory nature of cinema, which necessarily made visible the conditions facing the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) in France. However, the Ministry of Information (MoI, the government department set up to regulate wartime news) increasingly recognised the moving image's value not only in reaching large audiences, but also in persuading people to support the war effort. In January 1916, footage shot at a battle was released in Britain for the first time and proved popular with viewers.² Later in 1916, a poem entitled 'The War Films,' was printed in *The Times*. In the poem, Henry Newbold describes '[h]ow in a gleam have these revealed/ The faith we had not found.'³ His assertion that the films inspired a newfound 'faith' in viewers attests to film's role in convincing the British public to back the war effort. So strong was the association between cinema going and support for the BEF that by 1917, the MoI's rhetoric demanded that viewers watched British war news 'in order to save the country'.⁴

Popular pictures screened on the Home Front included scenes of battles, munitions and subaltern troops. One recurrent motif in wartime film was caregiving, and the ambulance train (all but forgotten in today's histories of the war) was essential to an onscreen narrative about medical practice that the government propagated to reassure civilians about conditions in the military. For example, fiction films such as *Under the Red Cross* (1914), *John and the Ambulance* (1914) and *Red Cross Pluck* (1915) all, as their titles suggest, portrayed nurses and

medical officers.⁵ Throughout the conflict, the Royal Army Medical Corps (RAMC), Red Cross, and the Friends' Ambulance Unit (FAU) staffed over forty vehicles that carried patients across an extensive European rail network.⁶ Under the cover of darkness, the trains provided relative shelter to the injured and sick, and romanticised depictions of the vehicles were prevalent in British media. The ambulance trains (AT) featured in numerous articles in the daily press, covering subjects ranging from technical appraisals to descriptions about the work carried out on board.⁷ Additionally, there are at least nine surviving ambulance train films, including *The Wonderful Organisation of the RAMC* (1916), *Behind the Lines with Our French Ally* (1917), and *The Military Power of France* (1917).⁸

The ambulance train films showed gleaming, white railway spaces that offered modern care to smiling troops. Personal testimonies by those on board the trains described the blood, dirt and life-threatening injuries experienced by the military off-camera. Nevertheless, there are three topoi (routine, medical instruments and whiteness) that are consistent throughout both cinematic and written accounts of the ambulance trains. I therefore examine why both public films and private testimonies shared a vocabulary when so many other disparities existed between the two media. In doing so, the article re-evaluates how we conceive of wartime propaganda and proposes that by reading between the lines of the surviving newsreels and personal testimonies, we can access the trains' contested spaces and the experiences of the minority groups within.

Ambulance Trains

Ambulance trains were used on the continent to transport sick and wounded soldiers from Casualty Clearing Stations (CCS, semi-permanent medical establishments) to base hospitals and ports further afield. In 1914, the British army had only one such vehicle at its disposal.⁹ A report in *The British Medical Journal* described how on arrival in France, the French 'allowed the English to beg, borrow and steal coal carriages wherever they could find them, at a time when the French themselves were very hard up for like accommodation'.¹⁰ Suitable vehicles were hard to acquire as most French rolling stock was sent south to avoid capture by the invading German army.¹¹ Furthermore, the French rail network was running at full capacity, so even when the BEF obtained carriages there was no certainty of using the coaches.¹² Consequently, the first eleven ambulance trains operated by the British on the Western Front were improvised and unreliable.

By April 1915, eight months into the war, the borrowed trains evacuated 67,000 wounded troops to French ports.¹³ The British government commissioned the nation's requisitioned private rail companies (including Great Central, and London and South Western) to build new, more suitable caregiving facilities.¹⁴ With no formal blueprint to work from, many companies

continued producing ambulance coaches that were inappropriate for the task. For example, the ‘Knight’s of Malta and the Grand Priory of Bohemia’ train only accommodated one hundred patients.¹⁵ John F Plumridge suggests that the vehicle was designed to serve the staff rather than the patients, with the train’s inventory listing items including ‘glasses for champagne, port, claret, sherry, wine and liqueurs, as well as wine decanters and beer tumblers, spoons and nut crackers’.¹⁶ However, by 1916, numbers 12 to 42 were in service and all designed to a regulated standard. H Massac Buist, a contemporary medical professional, claimed that bespoke vehicles were ‘undoubtedly better’ at serving the military’s requirements; the new coaches were therefore an improvement on the earlier models.¹⁷

Subsequently, those serving on board divided the British ambulance trains into two groups. The first, according to an officer’s diary, were ‘[t]he green trains,’ which referred to the vehicles compiled from French carriages. The green trains were numbered one to eleven.¹⁸ The second group, numbered twelve to forty two, were ‘streamlined, painted a flat khaki colour, against which the white of the Red Cross show[ed] conspicuously’.¹⁹ The ‘khaki’ trains were the new vehicles, and, in Matron McCarthy’s words, ‘[a]ll coaches communicated’ (with through corridors) and were ‘most beautifully fitted up’.²⁰ Leonard Horner, an FAU volunteer, described No. 15 AT in a letter to his cousin. The train was typical of the standardised design sent to France from 1915, in that it was ‘about 230 yards long’ and had fifteen coaches that looked ‘pretty much like an ordinary corridor train’. The orderlies ‘ha[d] the last coach on the train. There [were] four bunks in each compartment: two up, two down’.²¹ The ambulance train wards were similar in design to those found in contemporary hospitals. In permanent caregiving institutions, architects laid out wards along corridors, enabling nurses to inspect the patients with ease, while adding ‘a strong element of regimentation along with sanitary order.’²² Railway carriages, which often featured through-corridors, were structures well suited for adaptation into hospital environments. However, the ambulance trains were not equipped with the same amenities as hospitals. London institutions featured laboratories, schools, museums and spacious wards.²³ Even the larger military hospitals in France ‘lack[ed] nothing that wealth c[ould] provide’ and offered ‘up-to-date treatments.’²⁴

While funding and space persistently restricted facilities inside the mobile trains, the staffs now lived and worked in railway spaces more consistent with the needs of the wounded soldiers. On the khaki trains there were offices, dispensaries, dressing stations, operating theatres and isolation wards. Pantries were fitted in old lavatories. On No. 16, the coaches’ interiors were painted in white enamel and had electric light throughout.²⁵ Meanwhile the London and South-West Railway included mahogany compartments ‘with white enamel panels,’ ‘upholstery of dark

maroon leather,’ and a floor ‘covered with Corticene’.²⁶ Fox described how the carriages were mainly used for ‘sitting-up’ cases, or the walking wounded. Other coaches were fitted to take ‘lying-down,’ or more serious, cases and featured double-width doors to admit patients on stretchers. Inside the lying-down wards, Fox wrote, ‘little or nothing of the original interior remained; and along the walls there were three tiers of collapsible iron beds’.²⁷ No. 16 AT’s souvenir book, *A Train Errant*, suggests the *Brechot-Deprez-Ameline* system (the method used to attach the cots to the carriage walls) provided ‘comfortable spring beds’ for the patients as they journeyed away from the battlefield.²⁸

However, despite the government and railway constructors’ efforts, Britain’s ambulance trains were not sufficiently equipped to cope with the scale of the wartime emergency. Even after the introduction of the new ambulance train fleet, overcrowding proved a persistent problem. Nurse Morgan wrote that on one day alone she witnessed an improvised (‘green’) train unload nearly 1,000 patients, with another arriving shortly afterward to exchange six hundred more. Her own train, No. 6, carried four hundred, ‘the majority of whom were on stretchers.’²⁹ A reporter noted that inside the vehicles, ‘stretchers were placed three deep—that is, one above the other—and this seemed to preclude any really adequate attention being paid to any of the three.’³⁰ Yet in hospitals, wards were a minimum width of twenty-one feet, and each bed occupied six feet of wall space.³¹ Of course, as the war progressed, purpose-built medical facilities were also subject to overcrowding. Nurse Margaret Brander, who initially worked in a base hospital before transferring to an ambulance train, described how ‘corridors were filled with stretchers, the chairs (from the gamblers’ tables) full of wounded [and the patients] were tumbled into the places as soon as they were left vacant.’³² Nevertheless, hospitals generally were more spacious and better lit than ambulance trains, which had cramped ward coaches and no windows.

The volume of soldiers that required assistance overwhelmed the medical services. Official figures state that in the first five months up to January 1915, the BEF dealt with 177,423 casualties.³³ Meanwhile, Brander bemoaned the time-consuming practice of loading the train.³⁴ First, each soldier’s temperature was taken. Second, a paper slip (similar to those seen in the film *New Zealand Ambulance*, c.1917) was filled out. This recorded the soldier’s name, his injury, temperature, diet and suggested treatment. Caregivers then pinned the slips to the patients’ pillows while loading the men inside the carriage. On the trains, journeys were long and provisions scarce: drugs, bedding, food and space were difficult to locate. An officer on No. 26 recounted that carriages were lit with candles because the gas ran out.³⁵ Leonard Horner, a Quaker conscientious objector who volunteered on No. 16 claimed that, without heating, ‘[b]read [was] like stone’ and that bare hands froze to the exposed metal work.³⁶ Fox carried the tea pails

down ‘150 yards of confoundedly obstructed corridor’ (which often were filled with men on stretchers) to hand out the rations ‘in the hope that they will go round’.³⁷ Food was mouldy. Lavatories were overflowing and had to be emptied by hand.³⁸ On particularly busy trips, the staff had to give up their bunks to injured soldiers.

Many of the personal testimonies that survive the ambulance trains refer to the disturbing scenes observed by the medical staffs when treating the injured. For example, Horner wrote to his cousin: ‘I have seen sights today that I shall never forget’.³⁹ Geoffrey Winthrop Young, an FAU pioneer, was struck by ‘the stench of old wounds, among always fresh hundreds of shattered remnants of human beings’ on his arrival in France.⁴⁰ Brander, meanwhile, described the primitive comforts offered to the wounded. She saw one train that provided ‘no conveniences for the poor men at all, not even water could they get and there they had to sit from 22 to 36 hours.’ It was, she remarked, ‘a perfect disgrace’.⁴¹ Soldiers made journeys with shrapnel, maggots and dirt in infected wounds and days elapsed before the men had dressings applied to their injuries. Operating theatres were available on some vehicles but were used only in emergencies (for instance, if a patient was likely to die before reaching a hospital). The train had to stop for surgical procedures to be carried out, which endangered the lives of other passengers.⁴² Morgan, on No. 6, tried to treat ‘[o]ne poor man’ who was ‘shot in [the] head, both hands, shoulder and chest, so needed a good deal of attention’.⁴³ Attention was all she could give: Fox asserts in his memoir that aspirin and laudanum were the only drugs available and that staff used sandbags to support the soldiers’ broken limbs.⁴⁴ And, when one load of men was delivered to a hospital, another was ready to move out. On July 1, 1916 (the first day of the Somme offensive), No. 16 carried 691 men – the figure in the logbook underscored in heavy pencil lines three times.⁴⁵ Writings about life on board the ambulance trains were defined by deprivation and hardship – a world away from that on the cinema screen.

Visual Media in Britain During the First World War

The First World War was the first conflict extensively filmed. The camera shot living soldiers whose bodies continued to roam screens as celluloid ghosts long after the men were dead. But death did not explicitly feature in movie theatres: instead, government-censored films focused on medical advances and the high standard of caregiving. Nurse Emily Jean Hardstone described working on ‘a train full of men, shattered and suffering’: she called it a ‘train full of tragedies’.⁴⁶ In contrast to her words, film footage depicted order and cleanliness. Cameramen, their subjects, and film distributors were bound by state censorship to produce films suitable for national

propaganda. Pictures were valuable commodities on the Home Front, and mechanically reproduced images were sold in newspapers and cinemas purportedly providing ‘real’ proof of life in the trenches. Cameras, of course, tell untruths. Subjects are arranged and images manipulated to alter context and editing—the process of splicing, cutting and reordering—changes narrative. Yet the government distributed mechanically reproduced images documenting the war as truth.

The Illustrated London News was especially, if not surprisingly, invested in the campaign, with the periodical frequently featuring articles that dehumanised photojournalism. ‘The Camera as War Correspondent,’ for example, replaced illustration with mechanised images and the war correspondent with the camera.⁴⁷ Photography was, in effect, given a by-line. The journal also ran articles under the banners ‘Camera as Recorder’ and ‘The Camera in Three Continents’.⁴⁸ The publication gave human agency to the camera and invested the machine with qualities superior to regular journalists (in doing so discrediting other, human reporters). British media represented moving images as purveyors of truth to ensure the movie’s effectiveness as propaganda, and production companies marketed their newsreels as accurate, mechanical representations of an altered reality. For instance, Gaumont illustrated the camera’s benefits to an audience in an advertisement entitled ‘Contrasts’. The promotion featured the image of a projector on the left and a German Zeppelin on the right. The former was ‘[a]bsolutely reliable’ while the latter was ‘[a]bsolutely unreliable’.⁴⁹ The advertisement implied that film (or British film, at least) did not lie.

Assertions about film’s ontology were manipulations in an information-based war that the British government controlled in part by exerting pressure on journalists working with cameras at battle sites. The government did not initially use cinema for propaganda because the elite considered movies as lowbrow entertainments for the masses.⁵⁰ Luke McKernan contends that cinema was ‘alien to both the class and literary culture of those who controlled British propaganda.’⁵¹ Ministers were at first wary of the medium and were slow to realise film’s potential, with government policies controlling information at best confused, and at worst overly draconian (and even totalitarian). Cameramen and print journalists struggled to access the Western Front in 1914; upon arrival most were returned home. Cate Haste argues that ‘so little information [about the conflict in Europe] was released that the home front was left in a state of bewilderment about the nature of the war’.⁵² Officials blockaded war news so thoroughly from newspapers and movie-theatres that both media organisations and the masses alike were largely ignorant as to what happened on the continent.

Reporters did not successfully gain admission to the trenches again until 1915, when critics began acknowledging film as an increasingly ‘sensible’ mode of communication that should be exploited.⁵³ However, British officials, who imposed strict guidelines on the materials shared in the public domain, still viewed the camera’s presence with caution.⁵⁴ Topical Films (a conglomerate of production companies overseen by the British Topical Committee for War Films) was responsible for all war-related news films to ensure that the newsreels complied with government regulations.⁵⁵ In December 1915, *The Times* announced that the first motion pictures from the Front Line in France had passed the ‘final’ stage of censorship at the War Office, suggesting that the films had to navigate multiple restrictions before being exhibited.⁵⁶ The King then viewed the same selection of Topical Committee films privately before distributors released the images to the public.⁵⁷ As a result, an unlikely picture emerged on the British home front that showed order where there was chaos, and sturdy trenches where there were swamps. Footage and images released to the public often showed the BEF carrying out training exercises, maintenance work or routine daily tasks. Still and moving images alike protected those at home from the real horrors taking place in Europe’s trenches and towns. Thus publishers’, distributors’, and the government’s assertions about photography’s, (and by proxy, film’s), ontological connection to the real were designed to hide the actual situation at the Front.

However, caregiving facilities provided filmmakers with relevant wartime narratives that focused on salvation rather than abjection. Alongside ambulance trains, news media also reported on other medical facilities, including Red Cross training; ambulance barges; casualty clearing stations; hospitals; and the Blue Cross service for injured animals.⁵⁸ Despite the apparent popularity of caregiving in wartime news, it is difficult now to locate evidence about how medical-related stories were distributed or received during the conflict. Yet sources do suggest that films from the Front garnered major press attention, owing to War Office press releases announcing new footage. Moreover, distribution companies paid to advertise war films, with some, such as Gaumont, printing colour notices for *British Army in France* (the first pictures from the Front screened in January 1916) in the trade press.⁵⁹ On yellow paper with red and black text, the boldly coloured advertisement was sandwiched between notices for popular fiction such as *The Devil’s Bondman*, signifying Gaumont’s confidence in selling wartime narratives.⁶⁰ Indeed, critics attested to the popularity of war films not only in London, but also in rural areas and the ‘Dominions’.⁶¹ For example, *The Bioscope* described ‘[a] large audience at the West End Cinema on Tuesday morning,’ which ‘testified to the great interest shown in these pictures’.⁶² Another reporter stated that the *British Army in France* films were ‘having quite a good run in Scotland, and wherever they have been shown have been exceptionally well received.’⁶³ To some

extent, the War Office stamp of approval encouraged large audiences by lending the films an air of authenticity, with one reporter claiming that the official nature of the images ‘ensure[d] that no “faking” of any kind [was] permitted.’⁶⁴ Consequently, film production units, distributors, exhibitors and the daily press were complicit both in promoting carefully edited propaganda as ‘real,’ and accepting government interventions in wartime filmmaking as necessary to the nation’s success.

Ambulance Trains Onscreen

Throughout the war, cinema going intersected not only with notions of public duty, but also charity. Caregiving films in general, and ambulance trains in particular, were linked with fundraising activities that persuaded audiences to attend screenings of war-related pictures. Of course, with news scarce and information limited, caregiving films from the continent offered Home Front audiences greater proximity to the BEF and gave viewers in Britain the chance to recognise family and friends serving overseas onscreen.⁶⁵ But the British public also attended screenings of the caregiving and AT films as a patriotic obligation that supported British industries and war-related charities.⁶⁶ For example, a screening of what was probably *Care of Our Wounded* took place at the West End Cinema in Coventry to raise money for the Nation’s Fund for Nurses, demonstrating how cinema-going and charitable giving were bound together.⁶⁷ *The Manchester Guardian* reported that at the event, the audience would have the opportunity to watch ‘the progress of the wounded man from the battlefield to his arrival in a home hospital,’ with the Red Cross ambulance train ‘admirably presented’.⁶⁸ Alongside exhibitions of the ambulance trains at stations across Britain (new vehicles frequently toured the country to garner public interest and financial support), the films helped increase both the vehicles’ profile and public donations to the war effort. Even the AT staffs in France were aware of the attention the vehicles received back in Britain. Leonard Horner’s cousin Robbie wrote that he had viewed No. 29 while the train was on display in Blackpool. And a month later, in March 1916, Horner replied ‘I see from the papers that two new GWR trains are on show in England.’⁶⁹ Government strategists were so assured of the vehicles generating positive press coverage that the tours continued despite AT shortages and growing casualty numbers in France.

In the nine extant ambulance train films, there are three recurrent motifs: first, the crews demonstrate their activities in orchestrated set pieces. Second, there is a fascination for the instruments and spaces that the medical staffs used. And third, whiteness pervades the otherwise sepia screen. The films show the medical system’s advantages in choreographed shots wherein each body functions like a cog in a machine. Indeed, seven of the nine surviving ambulance train

newsreels have one sequence in common: stretcher-bearing men in and out of carriages. For example, in *The Wonderful Organisation of the RAMC*, scores of men are unloaded from a railway ambulance onto a hospital ship: the bodies are anonymous and each new patient replaces the one that went before. Filmmakers had to find ways to avoid brutality onscreen, attempting to bury out of sight the masses that were shot in more literal and damaging ways on battlefields. The newsreels' cyclical sequences were always cut before the final load came into view: there was always another replacement waiting to take the former patient's turn.

As such, where at first there is one stretcher-bearer, there are sure to be many hundreds more. A single motor ambulance pulls away to reveal another, and another and another. Where one man lays in his cot on the ground another ten lie beside him. For example, *Hospital Offered by the Americans in France* shows stretcher-bearers loading patients into a carriage. There is a pause between one man being loaded and the next so that the operation's lengthy nature soon becomes apparent. When three men are loaded, the film cuts to a wide exterior shot to reveal at least five more men waiting to be taken on board. Military personnel, volunteers and injured troops all occupy the screen together and all participate in the same activities of loading and unloading. Nurses also are abundant in the films, their presence implying domesticity in sequences that portray the women calmly overseeing the men's manual work. Gender is demarcated in the sequences by both uniform (the men wear khaki, the women wear white) and the roles performed (carrying men or supervising), and so men and women are segregated. However, the nurses' onscreen presence includes women in the machinated caregiving routines.

The viewer cannot see precisely how many patients await transferral to or from the train in any of the ambulance train films. *Hospital Offered by the Americans in France* keeps a tight focus on the stretcher-bearers' repetitive actions (stepping up and down, walking back and forth), suggesting an automated activity with no beginning and no end. The camera in *The Wonderful Organisation of the RAMC* tells audiences more about the numbers involved when it cuts from a medium close-up to a long shot, revealing hundreds of men working alongside the tracks. The patients' bodies stretch into the distance; however, the scale is so great that the men become like a conveyor belt of goods. Thus newsreel items codified the spaces of medical transportation like modern factories, and reduced bodies to technological phenomenon. Men who worked like wind-up toys treated patients, while the wounded were loaded into mechanical trains. There was no chaos, and no blood or fear, and so the war was justified to audiences in Britain not only as ideologically necessary, but also as safe and advanced as possible for the conscripted troops.

The objects that made possible effective evacuation and treatment are foregrounded in the films, with items including stretchers and cot frames consistently represented onscreen. Moving

images do more than simply photograph the objects for posterity; the movies preserve how the things actually were used. It is likely that contemporary audiences took an interest in how things worked, and that the camera's focus on transporting patients had practical implications for British moviegoers, for the ambulance train films were instruction manuals for those who might one day serve in the forces.⁷⁰ Audiences watching the newsreels in Britain were reassured of the high standard of treatment their loved ones received, and also learned in a practical sense how to perform that level of care. Viewers, therefore, vicariously participated in the same processes as the ambulance train crews, as the films' spectators were instructed to carry stretchers at shoulder height when loading men into carriage doors that stood five feet from the ground. A shot set level with the ambulance train's doors in *Care of Our Wounded* demonstrated the correct way to unload patients by passing stretchers from floor level inside the coach to the men's shoulders outside the vehicle.⁷¹ In addition, the film exhibited how to unclip stretchers from the wheelbarrow-like conveyances that were used to move patients over short distances.

The practice of transporting recumbent men was also displayed in *Mr Justin Godard Inaugurates an American Hospital Train Offered to Our Wounded* (1916), in which an eager crowd is gathered outside the train to watch first-hand as a man is borne from the carriage by two medical workers. *The Wonderful Organisation of the RAMC* also showed stretcher-bearers hard at work. In one sequence, a nurse oversees the operation to ferry patients in and out of the vehicle. The film then cuts to a long shot that reveals the same practice going on down the entire train's length. Pillows are passed on board, and men and blankets are shaken and folded. In *Pathé Old Negative Collection 15* (1915) the film provides detailed close-ups of a medical officer fixing a cot frame inside a motor ambulance.⁷² Moreover in *New Zealand Ambulance*, close-up shots reveal to the audience how nurses attached cardboard identity tags to wounded soldiers before the journey from the CSS to the hospital. Ambulance train films educated audiences about vital aspects of the crews' work, enabling viewers to participate in events at the front while seated in auditoriums.

The films' spectators also vicariously inhabited the spaces occupied by the ambulance staffs. In the movies about caregiving trains, the camera follows the vehicles' spaces and workers on cinematic journeys that replicate those taken by wounded soldiers from battlefield dressing stations to hospital ships. Thus the interior spaces of the ambulance trains were mapped out in the newsreel items. The onscreen tours always began outside the vehicles. No film footage remains that depicts the trains at a station; in every case, the locomotive was stopped in the countryside where space was abundant for the large-scale loading operation and supply exchange. That the sanitary conditions at rail stations were appalling, with human waste inches deep alongside the

tracks, may also account for filmmakers' stationing trains out in the countryside.⁷³ Once the outside location was established, the films moved toward the vehicles' interiors. Inside the trains, both wards and dressing stations were revealed in *The First Italian Hospital Train for the Front* (1918). In *Hospital Offered by the Americans in France* (1920) a nurse's office compartment—a standard first-class compartment with a table—is visible through the window. In many films, the wide, double carriage doors are featured, signalling from the exterior the architectural changes wrought inside. Moving images redefined once familiar spaces with new practices, the camera instructing and guiding the cinema audience over new terrain.

Both the objects and spaces associated with the ambulance trains were noticeably white. Whiteness stands out from the brown sepia in every frame, with the juxtaposition in colouring serving three purposes. First, for practical sanitary reasons, many medical implements and uniforms were white. The ubiquity of whiteness in caregiving facilities followed Florence Nightingale's assertions that white walls, whitewashing, and white fittings (for instance, curtains) were conducive to sanitary medical care.⁷⁴ And, in the three decades preceding the war's outbreak, white objects (including uniforms and bed linen) and white spaces (such as laboratories), became commonplace in the wake of germ theory.⁷⁵ Hospital facilities were redesigned so that 'the virtues of hygiene and order' were emphasised by institutions to patients and visitors.⁷⁶ Second, the white markings in the Red Cross design made vehicles and people visible as non-targets. Third, whiteness made people safe: just as whiteness protected ambulance trains, so it protected audiences from the real wounds sustained in war. For those on the trains, and for those in movie theatres, whiteness was a cocoon that neutralised the confusing colours of the world outside, removing any trace of blood and dirt. Hence the First World War ambulance trains reflected contemporary medical architectures.

Consequently, British media presented the vehicles as up-to-date, clinical environments. For example, the stretchers, so common a sight in the ambulance train films, were white. In *The Military Power of France*, the nursing sisters were dressed in crisp white linen. *The First Italian Hospital Train for the French Front* displayed pristine white sheets in the racks above the cots. White pillows and blankets are supplied during *The Wonderful Organisation of the RAMC*. The white background to the Red Cross is visible on a waiting ambulance train's side as women sort through stretchers in *US Signal Corps, Royal Engineers and QMAAC on the Western Front* (UK, 1918). There are white bandages and white slings. Nurses hold their hair back with white caps. Through windows and open double doors we see the stark white interiors of the carriages themselves. *Care of Our Wounded*'s short interior sequence shows white metal cot frames, white walls and three invalids resting beneath white sheets. White, which evokes peace and surrender,

is ubiquitous. Blood and dirt were absent in the onscreen theatre of war; the films on and around ambulance trains were rewriting history, effectively ‘whitewashing’ the suffering occurring within the carriages.

A Shared Vocabulary

Newsreels exhibited the objects and spaces used everyday by the medical services. But the films do not show us where the staffs cooked, slept or socialised. Silently moving images do not grant us access to the thoughts of patients who needed medical attention on cold, dimly lit trains. The films also belied the severity of the patients’ suffering. The three men lying serenely in their cots in *Care of Our Wounded* are at odds with the wounded soldiers described in the crews’ letters and diaries. Also the graphic descriptions of patients’ injuries penned by Hardstone, Morgan and Brander, among others, attest to brutalities that occurred in the conflict that were overlooked in onscreen reports. Brander goes so far as to describe one improvised ambulance train she visited as a ‘shame to the British nation’.⁷⁷ The ambulance train films were eager to promote the ideals of an inclusive national identity. Yet extant personal accounts reveal the hierarchal nature of public media, which privileged the state’s discourses about democracy over narratives about the experiences of ordinary people. Hence deficiencies in wartime care were not rendered in black and white on cinema screens.

But the three tropes consistent throughout the extant newsreels—routine, objects and whiteness—permeate the staffs’ letters and diaries, too. Accounts by nurses Hardstone, Morgan and Brander deal explicitly with the ambulance trains’ shortcomings. Nevertheless they, and other writers, also describe the experience as one that encompassed community and domesticity. Many of the writers refer to the repetitive nature of their work, with cleaning occupying both the staffs’ spare time and their writings. Nurse Brander, after unloading all the train’s patients, would get ‘all beds brushed, cleaned and made up again’ and all the sweeping and dusting done.⁷⁸ The next morning, her routine would start in earnest, as ‘all paintwork had to be washed inside and outside, windows cleaned and brasses polished’.⁷⁹ Similarly, the crew on No. 17 AT reported that they ‘set in for a hard day’s work, making beds, scrubbing floors, cleaning woodwork, polishing brasses, until the place looks spotless once more.’⁸⁰ On No. 16, the staff aired and counted blankets, swept floors and scrubbed windows, brasses and ‘the worst of the white paint’.⁸¹ If time permitted before the train was loaded with patients, domestic chores included polishing silverware and one last attempt to clean the white walls.⁸²

The writers’ described their alterations to everyday objects in both diary entries and letters. The changes implemented by ambulance train staffs to their living quarters went some way

toward making the vehicles more homely, with individuals varying the carriages' standard designs to make the spaces more efficient. Alterations also enabled people to assume ownership of the accommodation by personalising the interiors. Morgan, for example, made 'four pairs of curtains for our carriage window [...] and they look[ed] rather nice'.⁸³ In the same way that one would redecorate a new house to cement ownership, Morgan redecorated her train. She acknowledged, too, the changes wrought by her colleagues, who laid rugs and attached chocolate boxes to the walls next to the cots.⁸⁴ Furthermore, the orderlies created 'meat safes' in the kitchens that used canvases and dripping water to keep provisions cool in hot weather.⁸⁵ Horner also made changes to No. 5 when he transferred there in March 1917. He became secretary and had his own office compartment, which he redesigned to create more usable space. His renovations involved removing the upholstery, which gave 'an extra 9" in width,' and in January 1918, at 'personal instigation,' shelves were fitted in place of the luggage racks, his desk covered in 'American leather' and dining-car tables replaced the bunks.⁸⁶ Horner neatly sketched out the alterations to his office in his letters home, with before and after diagrams included as proof of his ingenuity – and no doubt more palatable to Horner's relatives than stories about injury and illness.⁸⁷

Moreover, the staffs were conscious of their trains' white things. The workers scrubbed and brushed interiors, and washed the windows with chalk.⁸⁸ Fox exaggerated that '[o]ur carriages were painted white throughout—doors, corridors, walls, ceilings, and everything'. His preoccupations were endemic on No. 16. The train's culture encouraged his belief that 'if the white paint on the train was applied to a wall six feet high, this would reach for over a mile'.⁸⁹ The souvenir book for No. 16 made the very same claim – and commented upon 'the dazzling beauty of the white paint'.⁹⁰ The motif of whiteness permeated multiple media, colouring not only private accounts and film, but also articles about ambulance trains in the national press. In a report about the Princess Christian Hospital Train, a journalist wrote that 'the whole of the interior [was] finished in enamelled white throughout'.⁹¹ The Midland Railway ambulance had 'sides and roofs [...] painted in glossy white enamel'.⁹² And the Canadian Northern Railway provided a train that 'has been painted white, having been given three coats of a hard drying highest-grade enamel'.⁹³ Even a 1918 advert for 'Benger's Food' (a company that supplied the ambulance services) in *The Illustrated London News* promoted whiteness, with the image of a white-clad nurse standing before both an ambulance train and a truck whose exteriors, even, appeared white.⁹⁴

References to whiteness are consistent throughout personal testimonies, with both the whiteness of things and cleanliness obsessing the staffs. The workers wanted the trains to be seen

and remembered as empty, polished and white. In *A Train Errant*, the reader was invited onto the train as an imaginary visitor. The writer asked that '[f]or the credit of the personnel it may be assumed that the train has been without a load for a day or two, and that it is looking at its best, its varnish sleek and glossy, and its long rows of brasses shining in the sun like gold'.⁹⁵ The passage is particularly fascinating because of the assertion that the vehicle 'has been without a load for a day or two'. Patients, the ambulance trains' *raison d'être*, were an inconvenience that disrupted the workers' attempts to establish domestic arrangements. Sanitary conditions on board were necessary for the injured soldiers' effective treatment; sanitary conditions also were maintained, the author implied, to remove all traces of the soldiers from the interior space. In particular, the walls' cleanliness was a major concern: *A Train Errant's* guide noted that while the white paint was 'beautiful,' it needed 'much cleaning [...] to keep it at its best!'⁹⁶ Again, one supposes that the whiteness would have been better preserved without patients to dirty it.

That the newsreels, with their staged footage of smiling soldiers, should differ from private accounts about life on the ambulance trains comes as no surprise. The conflict between the public and private experience of war affirms our historical understanding of government censorship and propaganda. But both images and words often intersect in describing a world disrupted by violence, yet untouched by war. Whether we look at stretcher-bearers going about their work in *Care of Our Wounded*, or Fox's account of his cleaning schedule, authors represent a frontline landscape that echoes the familiarity of home. Domesticity was a motif on both screen and page because the ambulance train *was* a home from home, a bit of Britain that remained intact overseas. The theme served three purposes. First, the nomadic staffs relied on a traditional British identity to inure themselves from the changes taking place around them and their alien status on the continent.⁹⁷ Second, the British government used the trope to gloss over the troops' inadequate provisions. Ambulance train exhibitions and films presented the vehicles as symbols of Britain's modernity to the public. Both homeliness and advanced engineering were thus 'made in Britain' – even as French, American and Canadian rolling stock was used to bolster British supplies. The whiteness that pervaded films and writings about the trains further established a homogenous national culture that looked the same at home and abroad. And third, the mundane domesticity described in personal testimonies and performed for the camera was a reaction to the temporal and spatial uncertainties that upset the rhythms of everyday life. During the First World War, the nation witnessed the devastation that occurred when technologies including trains, cinemas and guns mechanised killing. Hence films and testimonies described routines and created diagrams to create an orderly illusion where really there was chaos. Everything was laid out for inspection and approved like Sunday-best clothes before church. Structural certainty, be it

temporal (for example, a cleaning schedule) or spatial (the ambulance train interior's white familiarity), was a survival mechanism that characterised wartime culture.

Domesticity, therefore, was not only a private concern, but also a public one for a nation whose imperial status was in decline. In a world already disrupted by war, newsreels, newspapers and diaries alike inhabited a safe space that was untouched by conflict. The three topoi consistent throughout both public and private media—routine, instruments and spaces, and whiteness—contributed to an aesthetic that reassured home front audiences by alluding to technological innovation and advanced caregiving strategies. Films and personal testimonies used devices such as repetition, whiteness and (in the written accounts' case), statistics, to describe a railway space akin to a factory in its spatial configuration and mechanisation. Loading and unloading men is reminiscent of mass production's conveyor belt system. White interiors mimic the sanitary spaces of food packagers. And choreographed sequences imply the automated actions of factory machines. British cinema from the First World War era, and even the 1920s, tended to avoid anything other than 'oblique' references to modernity; indeed, Christine Gledhill asserts that the war undermined notions of progress, which was registered in films that were fantastical rather than scientifically rational.⁹⁸ However, the ambulance train films explicitly recount the effects of modernisation and so are valuable to us now as archives of the transformations wrought by industrialisation.

Thus both films and personal testimonies indicate how technology altered British culture in terms of aesthetics, scale and industrial practices. The shared vocabulary of the two media was also connected to the nation's changing social hierarchy and Britain's position as an international political power. For example, the whiteness motif that appeared onscreen and in written accounts implied the soldiers inhabited a safe, sanitary environment, which served to placate a population suffering conscription. Yet simultaneously, the whitewashed narrative of caregiving separated those who did and did not comprehend the full scale of wartime destruction and so created a hierarchy whereby those on the Front line were more knowledgeable than those at home. And contrary to media representations of inclusivity, the ambulance train staffs, as well as the general public in Britain, were subject to divisions. Nurses (including Morgan, Brander and Hardstone) wrote in detail about the violence they witnessed. Meanwhile other serving ambulance workers were insistent on the trains' cleanliness but did not write about trauma. For example, Horner chose not to put into words what he witnessed: he decided to suppress the horrors he saw until he had returned home.⁹⁹ The discrepancies between the testimonies might be explained by the professional staffs' training equipping them to cope with the situation better (the nursing diarists were experienced professionals, while FAU writers were volunteers). Moreover, the First World

War contributed ‘shell shock’ to the medical dictionary and psychological wounds were commonplace among both the troops and the supporting medical workers, which perhaps accounts for the writers’ reluctance to address violent topics.¹⁰⁰

The vocabulary shared by the films and testimonies, which conveys a particular national identity, is all the more intriguing when one considers that the ambulance train diarists and letter senders did so without any obvious motivation from the state. Writers were not dissimilar from filmmakers, with their words painting pictures about routine and whiteness just like those captured on film in the newsreels. Authors composed personal testimonies as practiced tour operators who drew attention to the palatable spaces of caregiving, but distanced readers from the topographies of danger. Letters were censored and had an intended reader.¹⁰¹ Families and friends, and rigorous military censors, read all correspondence, which might account for writers maintaining a positive outlook on upsetting events to reassure relatives at home. However, keeping diaries was banned for all military (including medical) personnel. Fox’s diary extracts, if true to his originals, describe a staff member who genuinely took pride in his railway home. It is therefore likely that spaces and objects distracted the staffs from their patients just as white interiors and stretchers onscreen distracted viewers from the wounded.

Penny Summerfield argues that all personal testimonies register, and hence uphold, the dominant culture prevalent at the time of writing.¹⁰² Owing to the War Office’s initial reluctance to allow volunteers to serve on the continent, it is possible that some personal accounts convey the propaganda the authors consumed in British media before joining the Forces. For instance, the writers’ focus on whiteness indicates the workers were reflecting, as well as contributing to, formations of national identity. And while many writers recorded their horror of war, the conflict was still justified in noble terms – Hardstone consoled herself with the idea that ‘the shedding of blood, the mutilation and the giving of life’ were sacrifices for ‘freedom and humanity’.¹⁰³ Private discourses acknowledged the high human price paid for success, yet the workers still upheld the dominant, state-determined rhetoric of inclusivity and domesticity in their writings. That the writers supported dominant cultural values in their accounts challenges the notion that the First World War represents a moment of rupture in British history. The testimonials’ depictions of mechanisation and modernity are congruent with state-controlled media on the Home Front, despite the authors’ geographical remoteness from Britain. Thus, vocabulary shared between public and private media challenges the notion that propaganda films only served to conceal, rather than reveal, the experiences of those serving on the Front Line.

Conclusion

Cinema's development throughout the war from a pastime regarded by the governing classes as cheap entertainment for the masses, to a mode of propaganda with the potential to persuade public opinion, is well documented. For example, in a 1918 article entitled 'Victory!', *The Bioscope* reported not only military success, but also a triumph for the motion picture, which, through its 'war record' had convinced even 'erstwhile critics [...] of its serious value and possibilities.'¹⁰⁴ However, the ambulance train's role in onscreen narratives about caregiving, and associations both with charity and modernity during the First World War, are less well known.

The vehicles, painted with the Red Cross insignia, were prominent in visual media on the Home Front because the vehicles not only evoked the railway's cultural significance in shaping Britain's industries, but also exemplified neutrality and respite from destruction. Films and newspapers depicted the vehicles as inclusive, which not only supported the rhetoric that the nation was united by international conflict, but also exhibited British society's increasingly egalitarian structure.¹⁰⁵ For example, onscreen, military or Red Cross uniforms concealed the inhabitants' class differences. In addition, both film and print media persistently referred to the ambulance trains' whiteness. Everything from the trains' interior décor to the nurses' uniforms were white, which configured the vehicles as up-to-date, sanitary and homogenous sites by foregrounding the stark, factory-like aesthetics of modernity.¹⁰⁶ Yet the mobile caregiving units also were sites of conflict; liminal spaces that represented anxieties about national identity and empire. Press reports designated the ambulance trains as singularly British when the mobile wards were international in their construction. The trains were homes but also places for work. And where the cinema represented the trains as safe, the privately written personal testimonies revealed chaos and death were rife. Moreover, letters and diaries written by the ambulance trains' staffs emphasised the roles of both women and conscientious objectors (two demographics often disregarded in populist narratives about the war) in caregiving. Neither group was consistently, if ever, represented in contemporary British media.

In addition to revealing the tensions and transformations that characterised British culture in the early twentieth century, the films and written accounts also now provide us with valuable insights into the peculiarities of everyday life as experienced on the ambulance trains. As I have demonstrated throughout the article, the vehicles were prevalent in multiple media including newsreels, newspapers, exhibition guides and personal testimonies. The staffs, however, received less attention than the trains' material objects and spaces. My research so far has uncovered ten accounts by ambulance train workers. One author is anonymous; four are nurses; and five are conscientious objectors. However, none of the numerous newspaper articles about the trains refer

to these minorities as staff. Between two and four nurses were stationed on each train, while conscientious objectors were involved through the Friends' Ambulance Unit, a Quaker organization set up to organize medical volunteers. The group's founder acknowledged the FAU had 'hardly been mentioned in the Press' and faced 'cold-shouldering and suspicion'.¹⁰⁷ Without the staffs' writings, and appearances onscreen, these groups' experiences would be lost to us.

The conscientious objectors are not visibly distinguishable in the newsreels like the female, white-clad nurses. However, by reading the volunteers' writings alongside watching the films, the FAU's presence is assured. This alters the films' status, as the newsreels are transformed into documents archiving the conscientious objectors' contributions. Reading the films and writings in tandem also changes how one perceives women's wartime roles – onscreen, the nurses' spatial proximity to the Front Line is revealed, while the scope of their duties and living conditions are documented in their testimonies. Both groups are therefore indebted to ink and light writing to preserve their experiences. Public films and private diaries now work together to challenge both our perception of wartime propaganda in Britain, and minority groups' involvement in caregiving. Reading between the lines of these two media, we can use film to contextualise the writers' accounts, yet also draw on personal testimonies to revise assumptions about the history projected onscreen.

Endnotes

¹ While letter writing was permitted (subject to censorship), all serving personnel were banned from keeping diaries.

² *Daily Express*, “Official War Films,” January 18, 1916, p.2.

³ Henry Newbold, “The War Films,” *The Times*, October 14, 1916, p.7.

⁴ *The Bioscope*, “Civilians, Fall In!” May 24, 1917, pp.717-719.

⁵ *Under the Red Cross* (Excel; UK, 1914); *John and the Ambulance* (Monofilm; UK and France, 1914); *Red Cross Pluck* (Ethyle Batley, Burlingham Standard; UK, 1915). None of these fiction films survives so or is available for viewing.

⁶ The FAU was a Quaker organization established in 1914 to support the British Expeditionary Force. In the FAU, conscientious objectors contributed to the war effort while ensuring the preservation of life. Geoffrey Winthrop Young, *A Story of the Work of the Friends’ Ambulance Unit October 1914 – February 1915*, 1915.

⁷ For example, *Railway Gazette*, “The London and South-Western Ambulance Train,” August 29, 1914, pp.336-338 and *Railway Gazette*, “Life and Work on an Ambulance Train,” February 2, 1918, pp.131-132.

⁸ *The Wonderful Organisation of the RAMC* (British Topical Committee for War Films, UK, 1916); *Behind the Lines with Our French Ally* (Pathé Frères, UK, 1917); *The Military Power of France* (Gaumont Pathé, UK, 1917). In total there is an extant canon of nine ambulance train films that also includes: *New Zealand Ambulance* (New Zealand, c.1917); *Latest US Ambulance Train* (Gaumont Pathé, UK, 1917); *Care of Our Wounded* (Gaumont Pathé, UK, 1918); *Red Cross Ambulance Train Used by Germans for Ammunition* (UK, 1918); *Hospital Offered by the Americans in France* (Gaumont Pathé, France, 1920).

⁹ Surgeon-General Sir T Longmore, *A Manual of Ambulance Transport* (London: Harrison and Sons, 1893) 349. Government records show ambulance trains did figure in contingency plans at the outbreak of war in Europe. However, state authorities assumed railway conveyances would be used only to transport the wounded between British ports and London hospitals. Edwin A Pratt, *British Railways and the Great War Vol. I: Organisation, Efforts, Difficulties and Achievements* (London: Selwyn and Blount Ltd, 1921), 199.

¹⁰ *The British Medical Journal*, ‘Ambulance Trains’, 1, no. 3260 (Jun 23, 1923), 1061.

¹¹ Colonel G A Moore, *The Birth and Early Days of Our Ambulance Trains in France, August 1914* (London: John Bale, Sons and Danielsson Ltd, 1922), 5.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ John S Haller Jnr, *Battlefield Medicine: A History of the Military Ambulance through the Napoleonic Wars through World War I* (Carbondale and Edwardville, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2011), 181.

¹⁴ Plumridge, *Hospital Ships and Ambulance Trains*, 115. Caregiving trains were also common in Britain, although these more typically were of the ‘naval’ rather than ‘army’ variety. To my knowledge, there are no extant films featuring these vehicles. Naval ambulance trains in Britain ran between the five principle ports at Edinburgh, Hull, Plymouth, Portsmouth and Chatham. See Edwin A Pratt, *British Railways and the Great War Vol. II: Organisation, Efforts, Difficulties and Achievements* (London: Selwyn and Blount Ltd, 1921).

¹⁵ John F Plumridge, *Hospital Ships and Ambulance Trains* (London: Seeley, Service and Co., 1975), 90.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ H Massac Buist, “Ambulance Work at the Front,” *British Medical Journal* 2, no. 2806 (1914): 642.

¹⁸ Sir Theodore Fox, *A Boy with the BEF: Recollections of 1918, 1919*, 15.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

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- ²⁰ E M McCarthy, *The Work of the Nursing Sisters with British Ambulance Trains and Station Units in France in 1914*, 1919, 2.
- ²¹ Leonard Wiseman Horner, *Private Papers of L W Horner, 1915-1918*, August 5, 1915.
- ²² Virginia Berridge, "Health and Medicine" in *The Cambridge Social History of Britain 1750-1950 Volume 3: Social Agencies and Institutions*, ed. F M L Thompson (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1990), 208.
- ²³ D'arcy Power, "The Medical Institutions of London," *British Medical Journal* 2, no. 1803 (1896): 141-146.
- ²⁴ "General and Stationary Hospitals," *British Medical Journal* 1, no. 2873 (1916): 141.
- ²⁵ *A Train Errant: Being the Experiences of a Voluntary Unit in France, and an Anthology from their Magazine* (Hertford, UK: Simson and Co. Limited, 1919), 2.
- ²⁶ *The Railway News*, "The London and South-Western Ambulance Train," August 29, 1914, pp.336-338.
- ²⁷ Fox, *A Boy with the BEF*, 15.
- ²⁸ *A Train Errant*, 4.
- ²⁹ F Morgan, *The Private Papers of Miss F Morgan 1916-1918*, June 3, 1916.
- ³⁰ "The Way Home of the Wounded Man," *British Medical Journal* 2, no. 2811 (1914): 851.
- ³¹ Royal Army Medical Corps, *Guide to Hospital Spaces*, c.1914-1918.
- ³² Margaret Allan Brander, *Private Papers of Miss M A Brander, Volume 1, 1914-1915*, March 15, 1915.
- ³³ Yvonne McEwen, *'It's a Long Way to Tipperary': British and Irish Nurses in the Great War* (Dunfermline: Cualann Press Limited, 2006), 61.
- ³⁴ Brander, *The Private Papers of Miss M A Brander*, May 2, 1915.
- ³⁵ Anonymous, *Letters from No. 26 Ambulance Train, December 1918 – 1919*, 3.
- ³⁶ Horner, *The Private Papers of L W Horner*, October 31, 1915.
- ³⁷ Fox, *A Boy with the BEF*, 22.
- ³⁸ *Ibid.*, 24.
- ³⁹ Horner, *The Private Papers of L W Horner*, December 20, 1915.
- ⁴⁰ Young, *A Story of the Work of the Friends' Ambulance Unit*, 4.
- ⁴¹ Brander, *The Private Papers of Miss M A Brander*, August 17, 1915.
- ⁴² Pratt, *British Railways and the Great War Vol. II*, 571.
- ⁴³ Morgan, *The Private Papers of Miss F Morgan*, July 1, 1916.
- ⁴⁴ Fox, *A Boy With The BEF*, 23.
- ⁴⁵ Friends' Ambulance Unit, *No. 16 Ambulance Train Logbook 1915-1919*, June 30 – July 1, 1916.
- ⁴⁶ Emily Jean Hardstone, *While the World Sleeps*, 1917, 1.
- ⁴⁷ *The Illustrated London News*, "The Camera as War-Correspondent: Notes by Photography," December 4, 1916, p.720.
- ⁴⁸ *The Illustrated London News*, "The Camera as Recorder: News by Photography," March 4, 1916, p.297; *The Illustrated London News*, "The Camera in Three Continents: War News by Photography," March 11, 1916, p.328.
- ⁴⁹ *The Bioscope*, "Gaumont Company Limited" advertisement, February 25, 1915, p.704.
- ⁵⁰ Cate Haste, *Keep the Home Fires Burning: Propaganda in the First World War* (London: Penguin Books, 1977), 45.
- ⁵¹ Luke McKernan, "Propaganda, Patriotism and Profit: Charles Urban and British Official War Films in America during the First World War," *Film History* 14 (2002): 369.
- ⁵² Haste, *Keep the Home Fires Burning*, 31.
- ⁵³ *The Times*, "Our Duty Towards the Cinema," April 6, 1915, p.11.
- ⁵⁴ Philip M Taylor, *British Democracy in the Twentieth Century: Selling Propaganda* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), 27.

⁵⁵ Topical Films comprised: Barker Motion Photography; the British & Colonial Kinematograph Company; Éclair Film; Gaumont; Jury's Imperial Pictures; Kineto; and Topical Film. See *The Bioscope*, "Official Pictures of the British Army in France," January 6, 1916, p.89.

⁵⁶ *The Times*, "Films of Our Army in France," December 20, 1915, p.6.

⁵⁷ *The Manchester Guardian*, "British Army War Films," January 13, 1916, p.8.

⁵⁸ For example in *The Wonderful Organisation of the RAMC* (British Topical Committee for War Films, UK, 1916), *Care of Our Wounded* (Gaumont Pathé, UK, 1918) and *Topical Budget - Ambulance for Horses* (War Office, UK, 1917).

⁵⁹ *British Army in France* (Gaumont Pathé, UK, 1916).

⁶⁰ *The Bioscope*, "British Army in France," and "The Devil's Bondman" Gaumont advertisements, January 13, 1916.

⁶¹ *The Times*, "Front Line Films," August 9, 1916, p.3.

⁶² *The Bioscope*, "Official Pictures of the British Army in France," January 6, 1916, p.89.

⁶³ *The Bioscope*, "The Official War Films," February 6, 1916, p.503.

⁶⁴ *The Times*, "Films of Our Army in France," p.6.

⁶⁵ *The Times*, "Films of Our Army in France," p.6.

⁶⁶ *Illustrated London News*, "'An Epic of Self-Sacrifice and Gallantry': British War Films," August 26, 1916, p.240-241.

⁶⁷ Another example of the link between cinema going and charity was the nationally recognised Cinema Day, which was held annually on November 9 to raise funds from admissions to pay for motor ambulances. See *The Bioscope*, "The Ambulance Fund," January 6, p.4.

⁶⁸ "The Red Cross Film," *The Manchester Guardian*, February 3, 1918, p.5.

⁶⁹ Horner, *The Private Papers of L W Horner*, March 20, 1916.

⁷⁰ Michael Hammond argues that in First World War films '[t]here was a tension between the attraction of real action footage and the educative properties of experiencing first hand what the boys at the front were going through.' Michael Hammond, *The Big Picture Show: British Cinema Culture in the Great War, 1914-1918* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press), 101.

⁷¹ *Care of Our Wounded* (Gaumont Pathé, UK, 1918).

⁷² *Pathé Old Negative Collection 15* (British Pathé, UK, 1915).

⁷³ RAMC Medical Officer, quoted in McEwen, 'It's a Long Way to Tipperary,' 62.

⁷⁴ Florence Nightingale, *Notes on Nursing: What it is, and What it is Not* (New York: D Appleton and Company, 1860).

⁷⁵ Christopher Lawrence, *Medicine and the Making of Modern Britain, 1700-1920* (London: Routledge, 1994), 1969.

⁷⁶ Berridge, "Health and Medicine" in *The Cambridge Social History of Britain 1750-1950, Volume 3*, 208.

⁷⁷ Brander, *The Private Papers of M A Brander Vol. 1*, August 17, 1915.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, May 2, 1915.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ *Lines of Communication* (London: Wightman and Co., Ltd. 1919), 9.

⁸¹ *A Train Errant*, 5.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 6.

⁸³ Morgan, *The Private Papers of Miss F Morgan*, May 26, 1916.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, May 29, 1916.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, May 25, 1916.

⁸⁶ Horner, *The Private Papers of L W Horner*, September 26, 1917.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ Fox, *A Boy With The BEF*, 26.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁹⁰ *A Train Errant*, 4.

⁹¹ *The Railway News*, “Princess Christian Hospital Train,” April 17, 1915, p.628.

⁹² *The Railway News*, “Midland Railway Ambulance Train for Service with the American Expeditionary Forces,” January 5, 1918, p.7.

⁹³ *The Railway News*, “The Canadian Northern Railway and the War,” May 15, 1915 p.784.

⁹⁴ *The Illustrated London News*, “Benger’s Food” advertisement, July 13, 1918, p.51.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁹⁷ Benedict Anderson argues that the nation ‘is an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign’, which became ‘the legitimate international norm’ for conceiving of identity after the First World War. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991), 6 and 131.

⁹⁸ Christine Gledhill, *Reframing British Cinema 1918-1928: Between Restraint and Passion* (London: British Film Institute, 2003), 2.

⁹⁹ Horner, *The Private Papers of L W Horner*, December 12, 1915.

¹⁰⁰ In her work on nurses on the Western Front, McEwan highlights a case whereby a staff nurse died of shell shock on active service. McEwan, ‘*It’s a Long Way to Tipperary*,’ 99.

¹⁰¹ Carolyn Steedman argues that unlike books, films and other published materials, the personal testimonies we discover in archives have ‘unintended reader[s]’. Carolyn Steedman, *Dust: The Archive and Cultural History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), 75.

¹⁰² Penny Summerfield, *Reconstructing Women’s Wartime Lives* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), 11.

¹⁰³ Hardstone, *While the World Sleeps*, 4.

¹⁰⁴ *The Bioscope*, “Victory!” November 14, 1918, p.4.

¹⁰⁵ The ambulance train films, therefore, prefigured the extension of suffrage legislated in 1918, when 14million British citizens were enfranchised. David Marquand, *Britain Since 1918: The Strange Career of British Democracy* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 2008), 19.

¹⁰⁶ Whiteness might also allude to privileged racial identity. Onscreen, the topos frames white, British people within an inclusive culture that positions subaltern subjects as ‘other,’ for example, in films such as *From Trinidad to Serve the Empire* (Topical Budget, UK, 1916) and *With Indian Troops at the Front Part One* (War Office, UK, 1916). Reading whiteness as a racial signifier in First World War media warrants further analysis; however, in this article, which is limited in scope to investigating ambulance trains, whiteness is considered in a medical context.

¹⁰⁷ Young, *A Story of the Work of the Friends’ Ambulance Unit*, 4.