

From First World War anti-German sentiment to ‘white riots’ in 1960s Middlesbrough’s ‘little Harlem’: Cannon Street, conflict and urban belonging

Urban Belonging: History and the Power of Place

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Cannon Street, conflict and urban belonging

- Middlesbrough: a town built on migration
- Cannon Street
- Loving the Alien: Henry Bolckow
- First World War: Removal from the community and violence
- 1961 'race riots'?

Middlesbrough: a town built on migration



Middlesbrough: a town built on migration

- Rapid Victorian growth owing to discovery of ironstone in nearby Cleveland Hills
- Economic migrants come to the town seeking opportunities in manufacturing
- Middlesbrough Dock and River Tees a key site of cultural encounter, exchange and conflict

Loving the Alien: Henry Bolckow



Henry Bolckow

- Born in Mecklenburg
- Founding ironmaster
- First mayor and MP
- Donor of town's first public park
- Subject of Middlesbrough's first public statue
- Has economic and familial links with Germany including as a merchant and manufacturing networks



Cannon Street



Cannon Street

1800s

- One of Middlesbrough's earliest communities
- Strong perceptions of a 'close-knit community' and a 'reputation for toughness'

1930s –
early 1950s

- Poor quality housing, high pollution and new housing estates built due to industrial development and post-war housing initiatives. Depopulation process accelerates

Mid 1950s-

- Subject of slum clearance, low quality cheap housing
- Attracts migrants due to low rents and available commercial properties

Hostility to the Alien



Rounding up the Alien

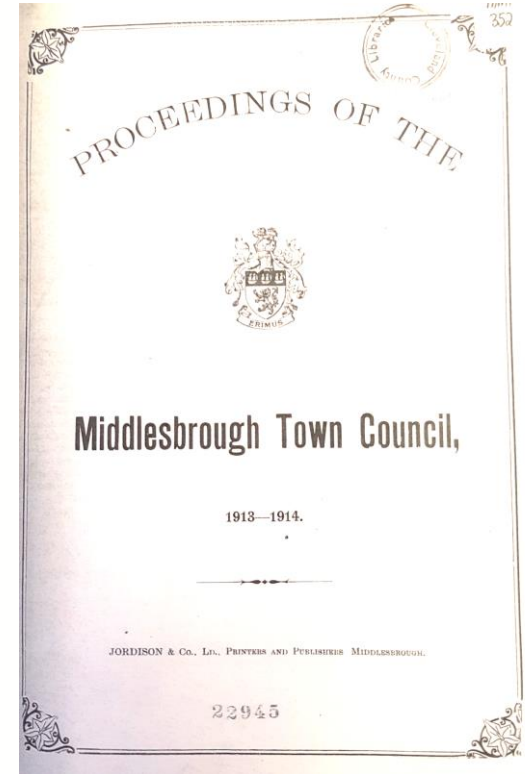
- Restrictions on the movement of Aliens
- Friday 7th August: 'quiet arrest' of all male Germans remaining in Middlesbrough who were not naturalised (Menzies, 2014)
- German aliens locked up under heavy guard at Middlesbrough Town Hall's Crypt...metres away from the portrait of German ironmaster Bolckow!



'Attacks on shops with German names'

'During the current week large numbers of recruits have been sent to the various depots from Middlesbrough in response to Lord Kitchener's appeal...the majority of Recruits have left Middlesbrough by the 10-48p.m train each night...at about midnight on the 4th instant a large crowd consisting of mainly women and youths congregated on Cannon Street...and later on broke the window in the shop of Mr P. Kraus, Locksmith, carrying on business in Cannon Street'.

Watch Committee (Special), Middlesbrough Town Council, 5th September 1914, 1210



'Attacks on shops with German names'

- Further damage carried out in Cannon Street to properties of perceived enemy
- Nearby Newport Road butchers of Henry Schumm (naturalised British citizen) attacked along with property on Linthorpe Road
- Schumm's had the previous week subscribed to the Prince of Wales National Relief Fund

P. Menzies, *Great War Britain: Middlesbrough, Remembering 1914-1918* (Stroud, 2014), p.85

Continued suspicion

DEFENCE OF THE REALM REGULATIONS AND ALIENS RESTRICTION (CONSOLIDATION) ORDER, 1914.

Since the last ordinary Meeting of your Committee the Police have been kept particularly busy in carrying out the Orders of the War and Home Office in enforcing the various provisions of the Regulations made under the Defence of the Realm Act, and the Aliens Restriction (Consolidation) Order of 1914.

Speaking generally all alien enemies eligible for Naval or Military service have now been interned in the various Military Camps, but I regret to say the Government has not seen fit—at least no Order has been issued at present—to deal with alien enemies who have attained the age which renders them exempt from Military Service.

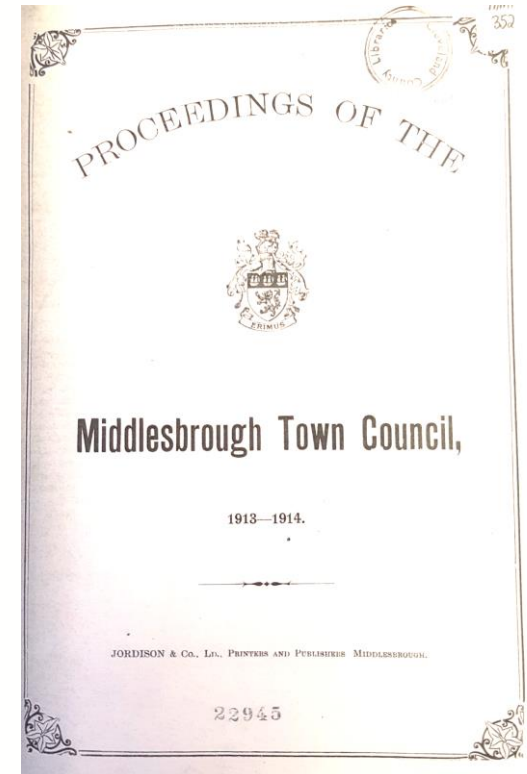
There are several residing in the County Borough of Middlesbrough at the present time, and I am in communication with the Home Office as to what steps should be taken to deal with these people, who, unquestionably, would be a source of danger if the North-east coast was invaded by the enemy.

The question of resident Germans, Austrians and Hungarians who have become naturalized British Subjects have not escaped attention.

*Chief Constable's Report, Watch Committee (Special),
Middlesbrough Town Council, 27thth October 1914, 1384*

New urban belonging

- Belgium refugees welcomed into the town on Woodland Road
- Municipality provide provision for free gas supply to Belgium refugees
- Charity funds in the town welcome the newcomers to Middlesbrough



*Gas and Electricity Committee (Special),
Middlesbrough Town Council, 27th October 1914 ,
1380*

Sinking of the Lusitania

- Sinking of the Lusitania led to widespread outbreaks of violence across Britain (Panayi, 1996 / Reeve, 2016) as national press provoke hostility further fracturing urban belonging
- Middlesbrough: *North Eastern Daily Gazette*: 'what a proud boast...it would be if we could say at Middlesbrough that we rose above the passions of the hour – that on no innocent people did we spend any of the just anger which the cruel deeds of a merciless military system provoked'
- Relatively small scale issues for remainder of the war

ONCE A GERMAN—

A youth of seventeen, Casper Fischer, born in Britain of German parents, was at Middlesbrough yesterday sentenced to six months in the second division for taking photographs at a steel works where he was a fireman. A comrade, who had warned him, when asked to develop the negatives made a pretence of doing so and informed the police.

In a second charge Fischer was said to have caused trouble at the works by saying that the Germans were as good and better than any Englishmen.

Daily Mail, 15th April, 1916

1961: 'race riots'



Cannon Street Riots 1961

- Indian and Pakistani communities in Middlesbrough were established in 1950s
- A number of shops and restaurants owned by migrants to Middlesbrough including in Cannon Street and 'over the border'
- Taj Mahal opened on 64 Cannon Street by Mr and Mrs Meah in Summer 1961

Cannon Street Riots 1961

- Long-simmering tensions with a number of smaller-scale outbreaks of violence leading up to major conflict (Taylor, 1991)
- Altercation at the Taj Mahal between the owner and a well-known criminal beforehand



Murder to Mob Riot

- Hussain Said arrested for the murder of 18 year old John Joseph Hunt (18th August)
- Taj Mahal, only recently opened following £5,000 investment, is subsequently attacked



Mob riot continues

- Worst offenders in Courts following Monday
- Middlesbrough in international press as race riot town
- chaos becomes urban spectacle
- After several days of violence the conflict dies down
- Continued racial motivation played down



Race Riot: 'Nothing Racial in this riot'

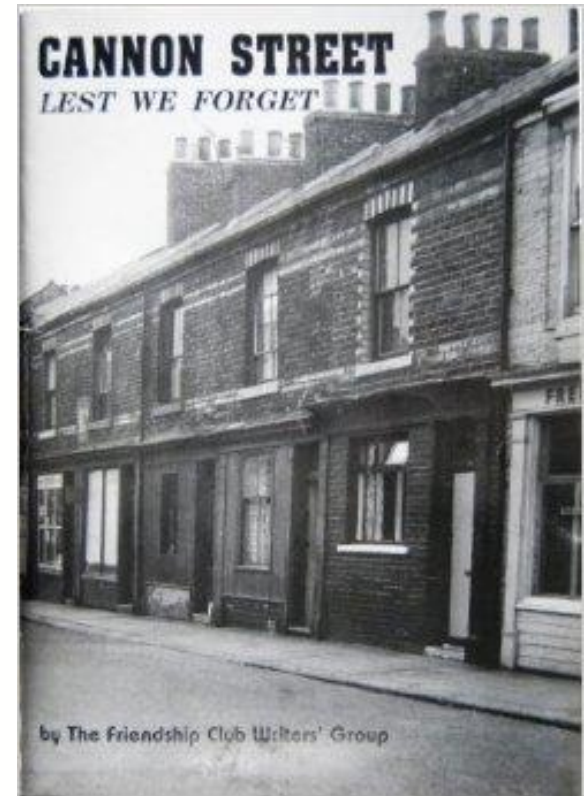
'During one charge a police inspector saw two coloured men with two white girls watching. The crowd didn't bother about them...not until newspaper headlines mentioned racial violence was this used as an excuse for a fight against authority...it seems that even the children do not like authority. For that dislike Middlesbrough has been in the headlines in Russia, India, Pakistan and the Southern States of America, branded unjustly as a city of racial violence'.

The Observer, 27th August 1961

After the storm

After the storm: Legacies of Cannon Street

- Hussain Said's murder trial goes to retrial after first trial halted
- Jury return a verdict of not guilty on judge's recommendations
- But, Said does not return to Middlesbrough following acquittal
- The continued clearance of Cannon Street is complete by mid to late 1970s



After the storm: Legacies of Cannon Street

Subsequent oral history interviews have played down extent and racial nature of conflict:

‘solely and simply an idea for the wrong-doers, the criminals and the no-goods, to get their own back on the police’

Mr Hunt, retired Police Officer, OA/235 Teesside Archives

- Community projects have romanticised history and excluded riot with stronger emphasis on community

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Conclusion

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- Both disturbances had major implications for urban belonging
- The extent and duration of fragmentation caused to notions of urban belonging for the 'outsider' or 'other' varied from short-term violence to lasting associations with a location
- In the case of 1961, the motivations for continued attacks cannot be definitively explained by solely racial motives
- New forms of 'urban belonging' created/articulated:
 - Belgian Refugees
 - Mob