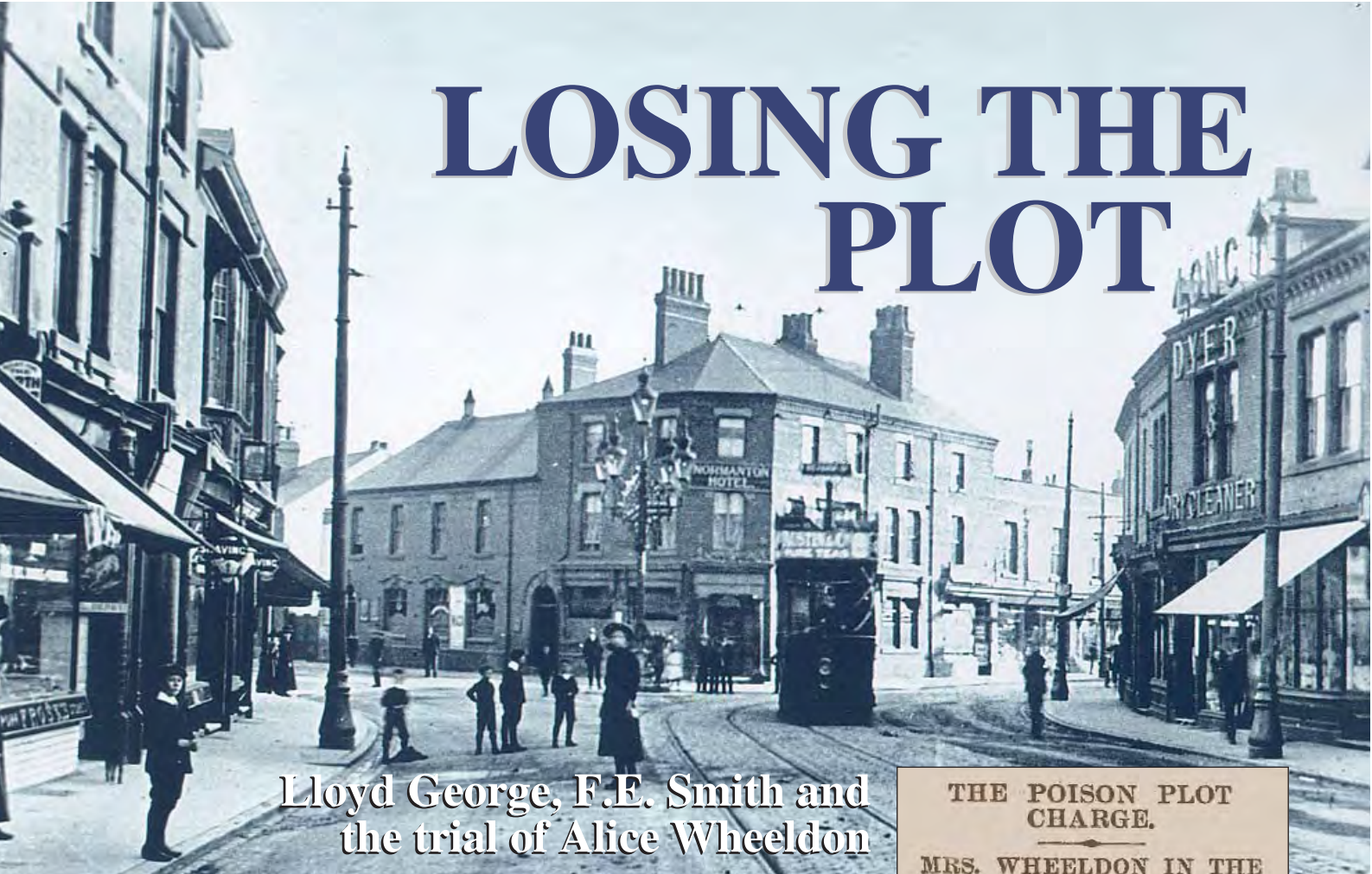


LOSING THE PLOT



Lloyd George, F.E. Smith and the trial of Alice Wheeldon

THE POISON PLOT CHARGE.

MRS. WHEELDON IN THE WITNESS-BOX.

STRYCHNINE "FOR DOGS."

At the Central Criminal Court yesterday, before Mr. Justice Low, the trial was continued of ALICE WHEELDON, 51, HARRIET ANN WHEELDON, 27, school teacher, WINNIE MASON, 23, school teacher, and ALFRED GEORGE MASON, 24, chemist, upon the indictment charging them under the Offences against the Person Act, 1861, with conspiring to murder Mr. Lloyd George and Mr. Arthur Henderson, and other persons' unknown, and with soliciting Herbert John

John Jackson exhumes the extraordinary case of a middle-aged woman from Derby convicted of plotting to murder the Prime Minister. Alice Wheeldon's anti-war activities in 1916 caused her and her family to be targeted first by the secret service and then made an example of by an Attorney General who put the policies of the government before his duty to truth and justice. The shocking sequence of events and the tragic ending illustrate how the innocent can suffer if the Rule of Law has no champion and the state tramples on the rights of individuals in its anxiety to maintain national security.

Above: the case reported in *The Times*, March 8th, 1917. Below, left to right below: a warden, Alice's daughters Hettie and Winnie, and Alice herself during their incarceration in Derby, February 1917.

ON JANUARY 29TH, 1917 AN arrest warrant was issued in the County Borough of Derby in the following terms:

To each and all of the Constables of the said County Borough.

Information on oath has been laid this day by Edward Parker, of New Scotland Yard, London, Inspector of Police, on behalf of the Director of Public Prosecutions, that ALICE WHEELDON and HETTY WHEELDON of 12 Peartree Road, Derby, and WINNIE MASON and ALFRED GEORGE MASON, of 172 Millbrook Road, Southampton, hereinafter called the defendants, on divers days between the 26th day of December 1916 and the date of laying this information, at the County



Left: Normanton Road, Derby, and to the left of the hotel, Pear Tree Road. Alice Wheeldon's house from where she sold second-hand clothes is the first building to the left of the hotel. Right: Lloyd George addressing a meeting at Sutton-in-Ashfield, Nottinghamshire, 1913. Bottom: new recruits, 1914.

Borough aforesaid, did amongst themselves unlawfully and wickedly conspire confederate and agree together one the Right Honourable David Lloyd George, and one the Right Honourable Arthur Henderson wilfully and of their malice aforethought to kill and murder, contrary to the Offences against the Person Act, 1861, section 4, and against the peace etc.

YOU ARE THEREFORE HEREBY COMMANDED to bring the defendants before the Court of Summary Jurisdiction, sitting etc.

Alice Wheeldon, a fifty-two-year old married woman, was making a living by selling second-hand clothes from the front room of her house, set up as a shop, in Pear Tree Road. Hettie Wheeldon and Winnie Mason, her daughters, both in their twenties, were school teachers and Alfred Mason, her son-in-law, was a lecturer in chemistry at Hartley University College, Southampton. What had they done to cause the authorities to lumber into action with such ponderous solemnity and accuse them of conspiracy to murder both the Prime Minister and the leader of the Labour Party, also a member of the War Cabinet?

By the end of 1916 the war effort, presented to the public with a great deal of spin and orchestrated patriotism, was in serious trouble. Despite the public exhortations and efforts of lords Kitchener and Derby and an imperial appeal by King George to 'men of all classes' in October 1915, the romantic eagerness with which the nation's young had, at first, answered their country's call to fight the Germans had faded. Even the private application of unpleasant social pressures – the anonymous sending of white feathers denoting cowardice, for example – failed to swell sufficiently the numbers of young, and by 1916 not so young, men willing to die for their country. Conscription, first of single men



and, soon after, of married men, had been introduced early in the year under the provisions of the first two of the five Military Service Acts. The later battle of the Somme, an initiative by the Allies intended to break the deadlocked and blood-soaked trench warfare on the Western Front and resulting in total casualties on the two sides amounting to some 1.25 million over five months, had produced nothing of advantage. The local tribunals established to hear applications by conscientious objectors and those seeking exemption from military service for reason of occupation, hardship or ill health were busy and there was growing unrest and militancy among the workforce, particularly in the muni-

tions factories.

While support for the war was expected from all those in public office in their speeches, the underlying mood in some quarters was different. One of the recently elected Sheriffs of London, George Haysom, a respected pillar of the middle-class establishment, confided privately to his diary on December 13th,

The papers today are full of Peace proposals by Germany but I don't think much of them although I am of (the) opinion that we are all sick of the War.

That someone as 'respectable' and 'ordinary' as George Haysom, should have these thoughts was significant. He would have been in considerable trouble if his views had become known.

At its outset the war, and those on both sides seen as responsible, had been widely condemned by radical intellectuals, by internationalists, by activists on the left, particularly syndicalists, by much of the trades union movement, by many campaigners for female and universal suffrage and by many inside and outside Ireland who wanted, and had thought they would shortly obtain, Irish Home Rule. The common elements binding this broad grouping were the pursuit of (different) freedoms, of human rights and a distrust of capitalists and the politicians that they supported. The condemnation



persisted as the war progressed, particularly in industrial centres outside London. It grew not only underground but also openly in the socialist press and in pamphlets such as *The Tribunal* and *The Socialist*. The possibility that this strangely wide alliance (described in one 'intelligence' document as 'All the disintegrating and reactionary elements in the State') might say or do things which could infect the opinions of the wider working and middle classes was the stuff of nightmare for an increasingly alarmed government. A government led by a prime minister,

Machine company, which had large factories in Scotland, and re-structure industry so as to destroy the negotiating power of the craft workers by de-skilling production methods. In October 1916, shop stewards in Sheffield confronted the Government when a craftsman, a fitter, was conscripted into the army. He should have been exempt from conscription but his employer, the Vickers company, withheld the papers which would have kept him in civilian employment. The shop stewards believed, correctly, that this was another ploy devised by the employ-

duction but later also over distribution. As historian Sheila Rowbotham has pointed out, it was recognized that the shop stewards movement was contradictory in that it was both a defence of the privilege of skill and an assertion of a more democratic and meaningful relation to work. Increasing effort was put into the cause of worker solidarity and the persuasion of the unskilled work force, male and female, that they should stand rock solid with their craft fellows who were leading the way. The need for this effort was evidenced by a little ditty circulating in the ranks of the unskilled and reflecting resentment of the privilege claimed by their skilled colleagues, the loathing of conscription and scant respect for the King:

Don't send me in the Army, George,
I'm in the ASE,
Take all the bloody labourers,
But for God's sake don't
take me.
You want me for a soldier?
Well, that can never be –
A man of my ability
And in the ASE.

Sheffield, the city where the latest strikes had been fomented, and its factory gate meetings became closely watched by Government and the young, but rapidly growing, secret service.

This was not the first industrial action to worry the authorities. In mid-1915 the Munitions Act had become law. Its sponsor was the Munitions Minister, David Lloyd George, a prominent Liberal with extensive ministerial experience. It was resented particularly for its restriction of industrial action in munitions factories. In Glasgow this resulted in the formation of the Clyde Workers Committee (CWC) under the chairmanship of the future leader of the British Communist Party, Arthur MacManus. MacManus was an active militant socialist, a member of the Socialist Labour Party (which published *The Socialist*) and a disciple of James Connolly, the brilliant and charismatic Irishman who had contacts with the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) from the time he had spent in the US (1903-10).

Militancy was already in the air in Glasgow. Led by the CWC and Mac-

ers, but this time with official encouragement, to weaken the position, of craft workers. They threatened to call a strike if the fitter was not released from the army and reinstated in his job. Determined not to become the victims of isolation they organized a fleet of motor cyclists centred on Sheffield to spread word of the need for sympathetic action to all factories engaged in the manufacture of munitions throughout the country. This tactic succeeded and, faced with the threat of a growing stoppage, the Government, which initially had rejected the shop stewards demands, capitulated and the fitter was re-instated.

It had long been believed by some left-wing shop stewards in the craft unions that the answer to employer power lay not in political representation but in syndicalism, the establishment of direct, workplace based, democratic control by workers – the creators of wealth – initially over pro-



Arthur MacManus (left), the only Briton whose ashes are interred in Red Square, at the Communist Party headquarters in King Street, Covent Garden, c.1920.

Herbert Asquith, who had promised the nation two years earlier that the war against Germany would be pursued to the end, whatever the cost: 'We shall never sheathe the sword'. Hatred of everything German was right. Hatred of war and denunciation of politicians who were keen on waging it was unpatriotic and subversively incorrect.

That nightmare looked close to becoming reality when, in the autumn of 1916, a wave of strikes by skilled workers organized by the craft union, the Amalgamated Society of Engineers, hit the munitions factories, particularly on Clydeside and in the Midlands. The strikes had their origins in the fear that employers would follow the pre-war example of the American Singer Sewing



Manus, workers learned how to coordinate actions between factories and a wave of strikes was soon underway. This coincided with massive rent strikes organized by militant women workers in the munitions factories in protest against high rents demanded for verminous and insanitary accommodation. The Government decided to smash the CWC not by direct attack but by encouraging employers on the Clyde and elsewhere (including Vickers in Sheffield) to organize work so as to dilute the importance of skilled workers. This they reasoned would split the workforce and engender sympathy for the employers among the unskilled work force. But they did act directly against MacManus and four colleagues by using emergency powers under the Defence of the Realm Act of 1914 to 'deport' them from Glasgow and prohibit them from living or working, or communicating with others, in the area. At the end of 1915 Lloyd George, accompanied by Arthur Henderson, leader of the Labour Party and another member of Asquith's coalition war cabinet, had been humiliated publicly when they visited Glasgow in an attempt to charm and reason with the shop stewards. Lloyd George was furious.

Very heavy casualties in the first weeks of the war had made it clear that compulsory military service was likely. In 1915 the No-Conscription Fellowship (NCF) was set up. The fellowship contained many pacifists, particularly Quakers, who cam-

A suffragette is the target of crowd hostility for heckling during an address by Lloyd George at Criccieth, c.1913.

aigned successfully for a conscience clause to be included in the conscription legislation of 1916. Conscientious objectors seeking exemption from military service were required to attend a tribunal to have their claim assessed. Each tribunal contained a military representative with the right to cross examine applicants to establish their sincerity. Those who could persuade the tribunal of their belief that any form of support for war was morally wrong could

Left: WSPU poster from 1914 about the force feeding of Suffragettes; below: poster addressing Lloyd George on the matter of women's rights; right: a WWI propaganda poster of the YWCA encouraging women in the war effort.



obtain complete exemption. Those who were prepared to do civilian work which would release others for war service could be exempted provided they did that work. And those who were prepared to be non-combatants working under military direction but not required to use weapons could be put on the military register on that basis.

The tribunals were, in general, composed of members, some of them women with sons or husbands in active service, who had little sympathy with conscientious objection. At their hearings, applicants were frequently subjected to abuse from the public galleries. Famously, Lytton Strachey was one such to be abused. Very few obtained exemption, either conditional or complete. Most were either classified as non-combatants



The case reported in the *Daily Sketch*, February 1st, 1917, shows the moment of Alice's arrest (centre) and portraits of the chief protagonists.

and were drafted into the Non-Combatant Corps, the NCC (or No-Courage Corps as the press dubbed it), or were rejected completely. The discipline in the NCC imposed by the soldiers in charge of the units was harsh and refusal to undertake a task or, particularly, to wear a uniform resulted in charge, court martial and imprisonment in foul conditions. Before long there were numerous conscientious objectors on the run, some of them escapees from what were effectively prison camps. Many of them went underground and were aided by networks composed largely of NCF members, suffragettes, feminist and other socialists, Sinn Feiners, left-wing shop stewards and IWW seamen.

Despite the ordinariness of their daily occupations, Alice Wheeldon and her two elder daughters were active politically: this they saw as part of their civic duty. Alice's husband, William, fourteen years her senior and a drunkard prone to violence, would have none of that and her youngest daughter Nellie, developing political awareness, concentrated on helping her mother in the shop. The three activists were members of the NCF and the Socialist Labour Party, long term militant suffragettes (members of the Women's Social and Political Union), pacifists and feminist socialists. Hettie Wheeldon, also a rationalist, believed in free love and a woman's right to birth control whether by contraception or abortion. Like many suffragettes she was, with some justification, suspicious of marriage which she saw as an institution devised by men to enshrine their right to own and dominate women. This did not deter her from becoming engaged to the deportee shop steward Arthur MacManus whom she met either while he was helping to stir things up in Sheffield or when he was on a fraternal visit to munitions workers in Derby.

MacManus, following his removal from Glasgow, had secured a job with the Cunard shipping line in Liverpool and by the end of 1916 was helping to smuggle deserters and conscientious objectors across the



Atlantic, sometimes by way of Ireland where his former friendship with Connolly (who, dying of his wounds and strapped in a chair, had been executed by firing squad in Dublin in April 1916 for his role in the Easter uprising) ensured he had helpful contacts. Alice's only son William was a pacifist and devout socialist and, denied exemption by the tribunal which heard his application, was in hiding waiting for help to leave the country from Hettie's fiancée. Her sister Winnie's husband, Arthur Mason, the chemist, was also a pacifist and socialist and was expecting that, although he was a lecturer, his application for exemption would be similarly rejected. Given their backgrounds and NCF connections it is not surprising that the Wheeldon family was actively engaged in helping escapee conscientious objectors, an unlawful activity, and had been of interest to the authorities for some time.

The network of which Alice Wheeldon was a part was infiltrated in December 1916 (the same month in which Lloyd George connived successfully with the Tories to have Asquith deposed as prime minister

in his favour) by an agent calling himself Alex Gordon (he used many names but his true name was William Rickard). A man who was mentally unstable with a criminal record, he had been sent to Sheffield by his employers, the intelligence unit of the Munitions Ministry. He passed himself off successfully as a 'conchie' on the run and was introduced to Alice Wheeldon. Trustingly, she took him in and concealed him, either in the house in Pear Tree Road or another house in Derby that she, her husband, Hettie and Nellie sometimes occupied, and told him of her worries about William and Arthur. Gordon, scenting opportunity, contacted his immediate superior, Herbert Booth, who, having consulted the head of the intelligence unit in the Ministry, William Melville Lee, came hotfoot to Derby. Melville Lee followed him to supervise his subordinates and to make arrangements for the interception of mail.

Booth was introduced by Gordon to Alice as 'Comrade Bert', on the run also, and with IWW connections. Alice took him in as well. Thereafter, events moved quickly. Letters and telegrams exchanged between the

Derby and Southampton households were intercepted, as were parcels containing gifts of food and clothing from Alice to Winnie. A parcel sent by the Masons to a friend of Alice in Derby was confiscated. On examination it was found to contain two glass phials of strychnine and two of curare with instructions for use, wrapped in cotton wool and secreted in a tin box. The Attorney General, F.E. Smith, was told what Booth was prepared to swear to and he 'advised' prosecution.

The four accused appeared before magistrates in Derby. F.E. Smith appeared personally – an unusual step for the Attorney General – and they were sent for trial at the Central Criminal Court at the Old Bailey in the first week of March. Smith, who had described the accused to the Derby magistrates as 'a gang of desperate persons poisoned by revolutionary doctrines and possessed of complete and unreasonable contempt for their country' – undoubtedly wanted a show trial in London, then being bombed by Zeppelins, declaring that it might be difficult to find a jury in Derby without bias against the Wheeldon family. This was part of an approach to justice that Smith was a master at. By deeply prejudicial remarks, likely to be reported in the press, he painted a picture of bad reputation and guilt by association with what a jury would not like. In the case of the Wheel-dons, who represented everything that most in the middle classes, and many in the working classes, would find disturbing, especially outspoken socialism, this was not difficult.

The courtroom at the Old Bailey was packed with 'high society' eager to see women, all self assured and striking in appearance, who had the temerity to talk like men. The trial, colourfully reported in the press, was presided over by Mr Justice Low flanked on his judicial bench by City of London dignitaries. Sheriff Haysom was not one of these and commented acidly on the 'swank' of a colleague who encouraged the press to name him as officiating. When proceedings got underway (they had to be restarted due to the illness of a juror) Alice Wheeldon was no match for Smith who showed the same venomous vigour with which he had prosecuted (some would say persecuted) the Irish patri-

ot Sir Roger Casement for treason in 1915. He derided Alice's claim that in return for a promise to help her son, her son-in-law and another objector already hiding in Pear Tree Road flee the country, she had asked Arthur Mason to provide the poisons so that Alex Gordon could kill dogs guarding an internment camp in which young Jews had been incarcerated. Despite a clear reference to the way in which a dog would suffer in a letter from Mason to Alice, Smith dismissed the explanation as a complete fabrication. Knowing that Gordon had a criminal record and had once been diagnosed as criminally insane, Smith, high handedly, 'for reasons which seem to me to be good', refused to call him as a witness. Instead he pressed the jury to accept the evidence of Booth 'whose honour and integrity has not been challenged'. Booth claimed that Alice had suggested to him that he,



or another, should fire a dart tipped with curare at the prime minister whilst he played golf at Walton Heath. Apart from the poison and the evidence of Booth, whose written deposition read in places as if he had been 'coached' and consisted, almost in its entirety, of his version of what Alice (or Gordon) had said to him, the prosecution relied on correspondence within the family. Some of the letters that had been intercepted contained sections in code. Since the escapee network was unlawful that was hardly surprising. The key to the code cipher was 'We'll hang Lloyd George on a sour apple tree'. The jury was invited to deduce from this a clear intention to harm the Prime Minister. Cross examined by Smith with open help from Low, Alice admitted to an



intense dislike of and contempt for Lloyd George. Smith, who clearly thought that a plot to murder the Prime Minister would play best with the jury enquired less deeply into her feelings for Arthur Henderson, the Labour Party leader and regarded by many as a traitor to the Labour

The Attorney General F.E. Smith (left), whose interest in making the Wheeldon case a cause célèbre took him in person to Derby (above, giving his opening speech to lay magistrates before committal of the accused to a show trial at the Old Bailey in London (below).





Conscientious objectors at Dyce Camp, a quarry works near Aberdeen, October 1916.

cause. Although Hettie thought they had heard it sung by soldiers, the cipher key probably reflected Winnie Mason's sense of history. The battle hymn of the Republic in the American Civil War contained, in one version, the line 'We'll hang Jeff Davis to a sour apple tree'. The hymn was sung to 'John Brown's Body' and that was adopted in 1915 as the tune of the great socialist anthem 'Solidarity For Ever', well known to members of the Socialist Labour Party.

The press reporting the trial expressed astonishment when the barrister leading the defence, a Dr Riza, suggested that the accused should prove their innocence by submitting to trial by ordeal. The journalists missed his point. 'Strange suggestion of counsel' ran a *Daily Telegraph* bi-line. In a thinly veiled way Riza was implying that his clients would be better served by divine intervention than by the justice being meted out by a court presided over by a prejudiced judge. Mr Justice Low, obtuse, and in awe of the Attorney General also missed the point – 'that is impossible!'. Low's attitude is exemplified by a remark in his 'very grave' summing up. Winnie and Hettie had admitted to using 'coarse' language in their private letters. A letter from Winnie to Hennie had contained the word 'bloody' (the *Pygmalion* word which in 1914 had caused Bernard Shaw to be condemned from pulpits across the country) and referred to Lloyd George as 'that damned buggering Welsh sod'. Smith had commented of these words that they 'would be disgusting and obscene in the mouth of the lowest class of criminal'. Low, doubtless with raised judicial eye-

brows, said:

One of the prisoners, a teacher, has admitted that certain disgusting language she had used was the habitual language of some teachers. It makes one almost hesitate to think that elementary education is the blessing one had hoped.

He was on the same tack as the Attorney General who in his closing address clearly invited the jury to infer guilt by reference to background and association with the supposedly disreputable. Low went on to say that conspiracy to murder by poison was 'the most dangerous and dastardly of all conspiracies' and, referring to the evidence of Booth, that 'it was one of the necessities of the Government and these times that secret agents must be employed' and that whilst the evidence of police spies wanted careful watching 'it is not in the same category as the evidence of accomplices'.

Found guilty by the jury after a half-hour's retirement, Alice was sentenced to ten years penal servitude, Arthur Mason seven and Winnie Mason five. Hettie, who had handled herself well, was acquitted. Shortly after, the Court of Criminal Appeal rejected the appeal of the three convicted saying, *inter alia*, that they would have

George Haysom, Sheriff of London, 1916-17.



considered the significance of the Crown's refusal to produce Alex Gordon (or to say where he was) if, but only if, the defence had attempted to call him as a witness.

After rejection of the appeal Alice Wheeldon, incarcerated in Aylesbury prison, started a series of hunger strikes. Her health deteriorated and in December 1917 an alarmed Lloyd George ordered her release. This was a political and not a compassionate decision. Documents at the National Archive suggest that the intention may have been to take Alice back into prison – as soon as she was strong enough – under the 'Cat and Mouse Act' (Prisoners Temporary Discharge for Health Act) devised in 1913 (in addition to forcible feeding) to counter the tactic of hunger strike used by imprisoned suffragettes. The order signed eventually by a Home Secretary uncertain of his instructions did not admit the 1913 procedure.

Alice did not enjoy her freedom for long. Ostracized as a convicted criminal by many in Derby she died of influenza in February 1919. At her funeral William came out of hiding and draped a red flag on his mother's coffin and a leader of the Socialist Labour Party condemned her 'judicial murder'. Two years

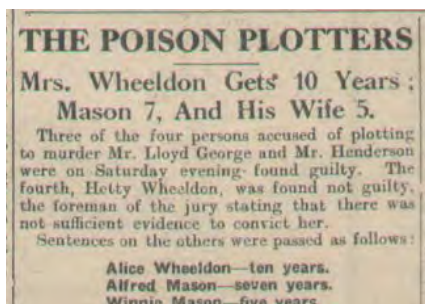
later William, pardoned under a general amnesty for conscientious objectors, settled in Russia. From there he kept in contact with the Masons who had both contracted pneumonia in prison and were released shortly before Alice's death. They emigrated to Australia where they rebuilt their shattered marriage.

William was shot following his arrest by Stalin's secret police on an unknown date after 1928. Hettie married Arthur MacManus but died in 1920 after delivering a still born child.

It is clear that whatever the Wheeldons and Masons were guilty of, it was not of a plot to assassinate anybody. It is also now accepted, following the release to the Public Record

Office (National Archive) of MI5 documents in 1997, that Gordon, with the knowledge or acquiescence of Booth, and probably intoxicated by his own fantasies had acted as *agent provocateur*.

Despite the grossly unfair way in which the prosecution was conducted (echoed in a later remark by Sylvia Pankhurst that it 'was a sordid story and one which the Lloyd George government will doubtless wish to forget'), it is fanciful to suggest that Gordon and Booth were instructed to act as they did and that Alice and her family were selected by government and 'set up' *pour encourager les autres*. Although they were close to Arthur MacManus (regarded as a very dangerous man) and, through him, other shop stewards and leading militant thinkers on the left, and were known to be helping conscientious objectors, they were not prominent enough for that. It is



more likely that enthusiastic underlings in the intelligence services saw an opportunity to ingratiate themselves with their superiors, who needed a 'kill', by providing them with a marvellously soft, and somewhat naïve, target.

However, their amoral duplicity would have come to nothing had it not been for the cynicism, personal prejudices and, politically correct, patriotic zeal of the Attorney General. F.E. Smith was close, politically and personally, to his predecessor Edward Carson, a hard line Unionist MP (Attorney General, May-October 1915) who hated Sinn Feiners and their associates and had pressed for MacManus and his shop steward colleagues to be tried for treason. The two men had been actively involved in the Casement trial and in the coup which put Lloyd George into 10 Downing Street. Smith was an important member of the Government and anxious to please the Prime Minister. Acknowledged as a brilliant orator with political acumen

he had been promoted from Solicitor General to Attorney General whilst only forty-four years of age. He hoped for, and obtained, more. He was appointed Lord Chancellor in 1919. The best evidence of his prejudice is in the account of the trial of Alice Wheeldon written by Smith himself, by then Lord Birkenhead, and published in 1926. A disgracefully partial history, embellished with references to Communism 'masked under the guise of pacifism' (the first phase of the Russian Revolution had begun during the trial), emphasized the importance of winning in court once the difficult decision to prosecute – 'a matter of grave anxiety' had been taken – 'To commence a prosecution and then withdraw it inevitably causes a loss of prestige, which may have disastrous consequences.' It also contained (four years after Lloyd George had been driven from office in disgrace because of his 'cash for honours' scandal) an astonishing and servile suggestion that in 1917 Lloyd George alone 'stood between this country and defeat'. The whole account reeks of either *ex-post facto* rationalization by a guilty man who knew he had put political expediency above his duty to truth and justice or of blind self-righteousness. The last paragraph of the account, written by someone who had held all the legal offices of state, is chilling:

The trial is noteworthy from the fact that it was the only instance of its kind during the war. It served to emphasise the unanimity of the nation to prosecute the war with the utmost

vigour to its successful conclusion.

This relatively recent history contains some disturbing ingredients: the victimization of innocent people by indoctrinated members of the intelligence services seeking to please their superiors and advance their careers; a deferential court reflecting the climate of unreasoning patriotism insisted on by a government armed with emergency powers and determined to win (and justify) a war at all costs; the holder of one of the great offices of state seeing it as a personal fiefdom which entitled him both to share in the making of political policy and to determine how the rule of law should be applied in the public interest. It is comforting to reflect that these things could not happen today. They couldn't, could they?

FOR FURTHER READING

Sheila Rowbotham, *Friends of Alice Wheeldon* (Foreword, Playscript and Afterword) and *Rebel Networks in the First World War* (both published by Pluto Press, 1986; New Feminist Library, 1987); Nicholas Hiley, 'British Internal Security in Wartime: the Rise and Fall of P.M.S.2, 1915-17', *Intelligence and National Security*, vol. 1 no. 3, 1986; 'Counter-Espionage and Security in Great Britain during the First World War', *English Historical Review* (July 1986); Carl Williams, *The Policing of Political Belief in Great Britain 1914-1918* (LSE, 2002); F.E. Smith, *Famous Trials of History* (1926).

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Above left: the *Daily Sketch* report of the verdict on the Wheeldons, March 12th, 1917. Right: after the trial Sylvia Pankhurst, (right: seated, centre, at a post-war celebration in the East End) was permitted to make an unsworn statement denying the involvement of the suffragettes in a previous alleged plot to kill Lloyd George referred to in Booth's evidence.

