

A Composer Goes to War: E. J. Moeran and the First World War

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Introduction

Just over one hundred years ago, in the early morning of 3 May 1917, Lieutenant Ernest John Moeran, along with tens of thousands of other officers and men of the British and Australian armies, took part in what would later become known as the Second Battle of Bullecourt—a major effort by the Allied Command to break German resistance at the so-called Hindenburg Line. At some point during the morning, Moeran was injured, and the story of this injury and its consequences has evolved into a compelling and persistent narrative that has generally informed writing on the composer and his music.¹ Moreover, the ordeals that he is believed to have endured during his wartime service have placed Moeran on a pedestal of circumstances that has engendered a sympathetic and favourable response to virtually every aspect of his later life and career. However, a comparative examination of the various accounts of Moeran's experiences during the First World War exposes inconsistencies that raise suspicions regarding the reliability of much of the story. Extensive research has

¹ For example: Philip Heseltine, 'E. J. Moeran', *Music Bulletin*, 6/6 (June 1924), 170–4: 171; Sir Arnold Bax, 'E. J. Moeran: 1894–1950', *Music & Letters*, 32/2 (April 1951), 125–7; Geoffrey Self, *The Music of E. J. Moeran* (London: Toccata Press, 1986), 19–20, 233–4 and 245–7; Trevor Hold, *Parry to Finzi: Twenty English Song Composers* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2002), 373; Geoffrey Self, 'Moeran, Ernest John Smeed (1894–1950)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004), <https://doi.org.jproxy.nuim.ie/10.1093/ref:odnb/35052>; Anthony Payne, 'Moeran, E. J.', in Stanley Sadie (ed.), *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians, Second Edition*, Vol. 16 (London: Macmillan, 2001), 880; Fabian G. Huss, 'Moeran, Ernest John', in Harry White, Barra Boydell (eds), *The Encyclopaedia of Music in Ireland* (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2013), 673–5; numerous CD liner notes, including: Paul Conway, in *Ernest John Moeran Overture for a Masque, etc.* London: Naxos 8.573106, 2012; Lewis Foreman in *Ernest John Moeran Symphony, etc.* London: Naxos 8.555837, 2001; Calum MacDonald in *British Works for Cello and Piano, Vol. 3*, Colchester: Chandos CHAN 10818, 2014; numerous concert and recital programme notes. The 2001 *New Grove Dictionary* entry by Anthony Payne has recently been superseded by a new entry written by the present author: Ian Maxwell, 'Moeran, E(rnest) J(ohn) S(meed)' *Grove Music Online* (Oxford University Press, 22 September, 2015), <https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.48243>.

uncovered evidence that enables a verifiable account of Moeran's entire war to be assembled, and this has necessitated a reconsideration of the prevalent victim narrative. Since the reception of Moeran's music has hitherto been predicated on a sympathetic response to the composer having been regarded as a casualty of fate, it is now necessary to re-examine Moeran's work in the context of the new evidence that is presented in this paper.²

The home soldier

In the summer of 1914, Moeran had just completed his second year of studies at the Royal College of Music, and he would have returned home at the end of term in late July. It is probable that he was well-informed about the deteriorating European political situation, and discussion in the Moeran household, just as in countless other households around the country, must have centred on the prognosis for the immediate future.³ When it came to the question as to whether the nineteen-year-old music student should enlist, it is likely that the prevailing attitude of his family, in common with many others with sons of a similar age, would have been one of reluctant acceptance. Moeran's eventual decision was probably motivated both by what he had read in newspapers, and by influence from friends and colleagues who had already enlisted. Thus, instead of returning to the college for his third year, Moeran presented himself on 30 September 1914 for inspection at his local Territorial Force, the North Walsham headquarters of the Norfolk Regiment.

Having been examined and passed as medically fit for service, Moeran was enlisted with the rank of private in the 1/6th (Cyclist) Battalion of the Norfolk Regiment.⁴ Details of his day-to-day activities in the battalion can be surmised based on what has been written generally about army life at the time, from a few hints in Moeran's personal recollections and from his military service record.⁵ Apart from undertaking regular bicycle or motorcycle patrols along the coast, it is likely that his

² See in particular Self, *The Music of E. J. Moeran*, 19–20, 233–4 and 245–7.

³ For more information about the British public attitude to the prospect of a European war, see, for example, James Bishop, *A Social History of the First World War* (London: Angus & Robertson, 1982) and E. S. Turner, *Dear Old Blighty* (London: Michael Joseph, 1980).

⁴ The National Archives WO 374/48245 C457620: Lieutenant Ernest John Smeed MOERAN. The Norfolk Regiment: Army Form E. 501 – Territorial Force, Attestation.

⁵ For general information about army life during the First World War, see, for example, Mike Chappell, *The British Army in World War I* (Wellingborough: Osprey Publishing, 2005); D.S.V. Fosten and R.J. Marrion, *The British Army 1914–18* (Wellingborough: Osprey Publishing, 1978); K.W. Mitchinson, *England's Last Hope: The Territorial Force, 1908–14* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008) and Ray Westlake, *British Territorial Units 1914–18* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 1991).

duties would have been relatively light and concerned primarily with practising his riding proficiency, learning how to maintain his machine and acquiring other necessary skills, such as map-reading.⁶ Additionally, as a Territorial Force soldier, he would also have been required to attend basic weapons training and drills. On 19 November, just seven weeks after enlisting, Moeran was promoted to lance corporal.⁷

The young officer

Since 1912, Moeran had been a performing member of the Oxford & Cambridge Musical Club, and its records confirm that he maintained his membership by paying his annual 'in army' subscription of one guinea on 28 January 1915.⁸ He also continued to compose, and it is likely that numerous works were written between mid-1914 and the end of 1916—although just a few are extant, including the piano piece *Fields at Harvest*,⁹ and the recently discovered manuscript, dated 4 April 1915, of *The North Sea Ground*. This last is a setting of a poem that was published without attribution in the 24 March 1915 edition of the magazine *Punch*.¹⁰ While this, his earliest surviving song, is a minor work in the overall context of Moeran's oeuvre, it suggests that he had developed a reasonable degree of compositional fluency.¹¹

In early May 1915, after having served six months as a lance corporal, Moeran entered an application for a commission. As a former public schoolboy, he had an

⁶ It is not clear from the records whether Moeran would have ridden a bicycle or a motorcycle—the cyclist battalions used both, although most of the men rode bicycles. Later biographical evidence testifies to Moeran's motorcycle skills and enthusiasm (see, for example, Philip Heseltine, *E. J. Moeran* (London: J. & W. Chester, 1926) and 'Motoring – London-Land's End Trial', *The Exeter and Plymouth Gazette*, 10 April 1923, 6), but it is not known whether this was the case as early as 1914. However, Moeran's family circumstances were such that his possessing his own motorcycle at the age of nineteen would have been quite possible, and there is evidence that some members of the Cyclist Battalions were recruited together with the machines that they owned. See, for example, 'Recruiting the Motor-Cyclists', *Sheffield Daily Telegraph* (23 August 1915), 3 and 'Motorcycle Territorial Recruits Wanted', *Hawick News and Border Chronicle* (1 August 1913), 2.

⁷ The National Archives WO 374/48245 C457620: Lieutenant Ernest John Smeed MOERAN. The Norfolk Regiment: Statement of Services.

⁸ *Oxford & Cambridge Musical Club Archives*, GB-Ob, Dep.c.961, 109.

⁹ *Fields at Harvest* was published in John Talbot, *E. J. Moeran, Centenary Edition, Collected Solo Piano Music*, vol. 1 (London: Thames Publishing, 1994).

¹⁰ *Punch*, 148 (24 March 1915), 230.

¹¹ The manuscript of *The North Sea Ground* has been deposited in the British Library: *E. J. Moeran: Song, 'The North Sea Ground', for baritone solo and piano, words by Cicely Fox Smith; 1915. Autograph, in ink*, GB-Lbl, Music Collections, MS Mus. 1692 G, fols 57-61v. A published edition by the author is also available: Ernest John Moeran, *The North Sea Ground* ed. Ian Maxwell (London: Novello, 2012).

advantage over those of his fellow soldiers who had not been to public school or university, and with the benefit of Sir Hubert Parry's attestation to his 'good moral character', his application was successful.¹² On 4 June 1915 Moeran received a commission as second lieutenant,¹³ and he spent the remainder of 1915 and the first six months of 1916 as a cyclist battalion officer.¹⁴ He still found time to compose, and in common with many other composers during the first few decades of the twentieth century, he turned his attention to A. E. Housman's cycle *A Shropshire Lad*. The manuscript of his set of *Four Songs from 'A Shropshire Lad'* is dated 'Midsummer 1916'.¹⁵

A composer goes to war

As casualties mounted in France during 1915 and 1916, the need for replacement front-line soldiers and officers increased, and members of the cyclist battalions were gradually released to be transferred to other regiments.¹⁶ According to an entry in the

¹² The National Archives WO 374/48245 C457620: Lieutenant Ernest John Smeed MOERAN. The Norfolk Regiment: Certificate of Moral Character.

¹³ The National Archives WO 374/48245 C457620: Lieutenant Ernest John Smeed MOERAN. The Norfolk Regiment: Commission.

¹⁴ For detailed information about the Territorial Army Cyclist and Motorcycle Battalions, see Ray Westlake, *The Territorial Battalions, A Pictorial History, 1859–1985* (Tunbridge Wells: Spellmount, 1986) and Capt. W.H.L. Watson, *Adventures of a Despatch Rider* (London: William Blackwood & Sons, 1915). Also see Ronald Coxford, *A Half-Crown Holy Boy: The Story of the 2/6 (Cyclist) Battalion Norfolk Regiment and the letters of one young soldier serving in the 1st World War* (Private Printing, 2007), in GB-Lbl, YK.2007.a.9685, for specific information about the Norfolk Regiment Cyclist Battalions.

¹⁵ The manuscript of the *Four Songs from 'A Shropshire Lad'* is held by the Lenton Parr Music Visual and Performing Arts Library of the University of Melbourne as part of the E. J. Moeran Collection, AUS-Mlpml, 780.92 Moe VCA MOE 12, and comprises settings of the following poems: *Westward, on the high-hilled plains*, *When I came last to Ludlow*, *This time of year a twelve month past* and *Far in a western brookland*. The set was eventually published in 1994 as an appendix to *E. J. Moeran, Centenary Edition, Collected Solo Songs*, Vol. 3, ed. John Talbot (London: Thames Publishing, 1994), with the following editorial comment: 'These four early Housman settings are published together here for the first time, primarily in the interests of scholarship. Although Moeran did allow the second song to be published early in his career, in an arts journal, his significant revision of the fourth some nine years after it was written indicates perhaps his ultimate dissatisfaction with the set'. Talbot's reference was to a facsimile of the manuscript of *When last I came to Ludlow*, which was included in the Autumn 1919 edition of the magazine *Arts and Letters*. These songs will be examined more closely in the context of the composer's friendship with the Garrod family and with the younger son Roland Perceval Garrod in particular in the author's biography of the composer: Ian Maxwell, *Ernest J. Moeran: His Life and Music* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, forthcoming December 2020).

¹⁶ Although in response to a question in parliament in early November 1915 by Arthur Wellesley Soames, the MP for Norfolk South, Harold Tennant, the Under-Secretary for War, is reported to have said that '...there was no immediate prospect of the 1/6 (Cyclists) Battalion Norfolk Regiment being

war diary of the West Yorkshire Regiment, Moeran reported for duty at Somerlyton Park, near Lowestoft in Suffolk on 20 July 1916, and was assigned as second-in-command of a platoon in A company.¹⁷ The issue of the *London Gazette* dated 11 July 1916 had reported that Second Lieutenant E. J. S. Moeran had been given the rank of temporary lieutenant, as of 12 July 1916, and it is possible that this promotion had been an incentive or a reward for his volunteering for service in a front-line unit. Several of Moeran's fellow 1/6th battalion officers also transferred to the West Yorkshire Regiment at the same time, so he would not have been alone amongst strangers in his new unit.¹⁸

Shortly after joining his regiment, Moeran had signed the Agreement to Overseas Service, which rendered him liable to be sent to any theatre of battle without further formality, so he was evidently willing to fight.¹⁹ However, by mid-1916, Moeran had spent nearly two years with his cyclist battalion, more than half that time as a commissioned officer with very light duties that enabled him to devote much of his time to pursuing musical activities, and the importance of the cyclist battalions for home defence and public morale was such that he could with some certainty have looked forward to remaining with the battalion for the duration of the war.²⁰ Considering why he volunteered for front-line service, it is possible that both the growing list of casualties amongst the former Uppingham School and Royal College of Music students who had been Moeran's friends or contemporaries and perhaps some sense of national duty convinced him that he was not necessarily serving his country well by remaining comfortably, and certainly safely, in Norfolk, guarding against an increasingly unlikely invasion. By July 1916, the roll of those killed or wounded

required in any of the war zones – Cyclists' Battalions were doing valuable work on our coasts and could not be replaced. This, it would appear, applies to all Cyclists' Battalions...', from *The Half-Crown "Holy Boys" Chronicle* (Bridlington, November 19, 1915), vol. 2, 15, GB-Lbl, General Reference Collection, P.P.4039.wbc.(2.).

¹⁷ The National Archives WO 95/3082/3: 2/8 Battalion West Yorkshire Regiment: War Diary Vol. 1, 53.

¹⁸ *London Gazette*, (11 July 1916), issue 29660, 6861.

¹⁹ The National Archives WO 374/48245 C457620: Lieutenant Ernest John Smeed MOERAN. The Norfolk Regiment: Conditions of Service and Army Form E. 624 – Agreement to Overseas Service. The Conditions of Service in the Territorial Force were precise: 'The engagement on Army Form E. 624, of an officer or man of the Territorial Force to accept liability for service outside the United Kingdom in time of national emergency, will be to serve with his own unit, or with a part of his own unit, only. He cannot, under this agreement, be drafted as an individual to any other unit'. Signing the Agreement to Overseas Service effectively circumvented these rules but no member of the Territorial Force was obliged to do so. However, in practice, most Territorial volunteer recruits did sign the Agreement.

²⁰ See for example the Under-Secretary for War's statement in note 16.

included such close Uppingham School friends as Roland Perceval Garrod (cellist in Moeran's string quartet), Roland Aubrey Leighton (*fiancé* of the later writer Vera Brittain), and at least a quarter of those other fellow pupils who had entered the school at about the same time as had Moeran.²¹

Into action

According to the West Yorkshire Regiment war diary, during the next six months, the strength of Moeran's new battalion was gradually increased and recruits received regular weapons training, together with instruction in trench digging, road building and infrastructure support. They eventually embarked at Southampton and sailed on the *S.S. Archangel* for Le Havre on 8 January 1917, from where they marched to billets at Bonnières, at which location the battalion set up their company and transport headquarters.²² Bonnières was some distance from the front-line trenches and it was necessary for the command team to gain practical experience before the battalion was sent to the front. Thus, on 18 January 1917, Moeran, together with several other officers and NCOs, marched to Frohen-le-Grand to be attached to the 19th Division for four days of preliminary instruction in the trenches.²³ While the exact nature of this training is not known, it would have given the twenty-two-year-old Moeran an idea of what he would be faced with when he was sent to the front line for an extended period. The war diary entry confirms that he and his colleagues returned to the battalion on 25 January. A few days later, Moeran, together with three others, was sent to the 5th Army Group Divisional School of Instruction for trench mortar and other advanced weapons training.²⁴

²¹ The editions of the *Uppingham School Magazine* beginning with issue number 413 (October 1914) each carried a cumulative list of former pupils (Old Uppinghamians) who had been reported as casualties. Access to the original copies of the *Uppingham School Magazine* was provided to the author by the school archivist Jerry Rudman, to whom the author extends his thanks.

²² The National Archives WO 95/3082/3: 2/8 Battalion West Yorkshire Regiment: War Diary, Vol. 1, 68–9.

²³ The National Archives WO 95/3082/3: 2/8 Battalion West Yorkshire Regiment: War Diary Vol. 1, 70.

²⁴ The National Archives WO 95/3082/3: 2/8 Battalion West Yorkshire Regiment: War Diary Vol. 1, 81. Moeran spent two months at the 5th Army Divisional School of Instruction receiving specialist weapons training. Such training was only given to those that displayed the skills and potential for the investment of time away from the front line to be worthwhile for the battalion. Although Moeran had not been a member of the Officer Training Corps during his time at Uppingham School, it may be deduced that he had some experience with a rifle and that he was a reasonable shot. According to the Editorial in the February 1900 issue of the school magazine ('Editorial', *Uppingham School Magazine*, 39/298, February 1900, 1–2), early that year the headmaster Dr Edward Selwyn introduced

First Battle of Bullecourt²⁵

The next mention of Moeran in the war diary is dated nearly two months later, when he is noted as having returned from the Divisional School of Instruction on 4 April 1917.²⁶ He had been away undergoing training for nearly two months, and, according to the war diary entries covering the period of his absence, he had missed some front-line action in which several of his colleagues had lost their lives. However, on his return, Moeran was immediately involved in an operation to relieve the 2nd Border Regiment from their positions to the west of the village of Bullecourt. The next day, the battalion moved its advanced posts forward to within five hundred yards of the German lines. These posts were relieved during the night of 5 April, during which operation Lieutenant Christopher George Fowler was killed.²⁷ Fowler had transferred from the Norfolk Regiment at the same time as had Moeran the previous July, and Moeran had probably known him since he enlisted. The operations that were being carried out each night by the battalion were part of the localized preparation for what would later become known as the Second Battle of Arras, which began a few days later on 10 April. This was Moeran's first experience of going into battle, and the war diary shows that he was one of the leading officers:

At dawn three strong patrols under Lt. Alexander MC, Lt. Moeran and Lt. Burrows attacked the Hindenburg Line (Operation Order No. 13) but met with considerable resistance and had to retire.²⁸

a rule that no boy could take part in any inter-house competition or be awarded a school prize unless he had been trained to maintain a rifle and could pass a marksmanship test, and this rule was not rescinded until long after Moeran left the school. Moeran was awarded several prizes during his years at Uppingham and he was a member of his house cricket eleven.

²⁵ The factual information provided in this section and the next relating to the First and Second Battles of Bullecourt comes from Moeran's regiment war diary (The National Archives WO 95/3082/3: 2/8 Battalion West Yorkshire Regiment: War Diary Vol. 1), and from detailed accounts and analyses presented in the following books: Paul Kendall, *Bullecourt 1917: Breaching the Hindenburg Line* (Stroud: The History Press, 2010); Peter Barton, *Arras: The Spring 1917 Offensive, including Vimy Ridge and Bullecourt* (London: Constable & Robinson, 2010); Graham Keech, *Battleground Europe: Bullecourt* (Barnsley: Pen Sword Books, 1999); Peter Oldham, *Battleground Europe: The Hindenburg Line* (London: Leo Cooper, 1997); Jonathan Walker, *The Blood Tub: General Gough and the Battle of Bullecourt, 1917* (Staplehurst: Spellmount Ltd, 1998) and Everard Wyrall, *The History of the 62nd (West Riding) Division 1914-1918* (London: Bodley Head, 1925-8).

²⁶ The National Archives WO 95/3082/3: 2/8 Battalion West Yorkshire Regiment: War Diary Vol. 1, 100.

²⁷ As note 26.

²⁸ The National Archives WO 95/3082/3: 2/8 Battalion West Yorkshire Regiment: War Diary Vol.1, 101.

Poor planning and communication were compounded by the fact that the attack took place during a snowstorm and in freezing temperatures, which combined to delay the progress of the battalion of tanks that had been deployed to support the attack. Moreover, the artillery barrage that had been intended to destroy the barbed wire obstruction and to force the German infantry back into their entrenched positions had been ineffective. As the war diary entry recorded, Moeran and his unit ran into strong opposition, and at 5:10am, just forty minutes after the attack started, they were ordered to withdraw to the comparative security of the sunken road, which Moeran's unit was using as a defensive position, rather than an excavated trench.²⁹ However, this, as Paul Kendall notes, did not provide safety for the troops:

[O]nce enemy flares illuminated No Man's Land, German machine gunners in Bullecourt concentrated their fire upon the West Yorkshires ... Many men were entangled and trapped in the barbed wire, where they fell. Those who survived sought sanctuary in the sunken road, but even here they were not safe, for some were blown to pieces by an intense barrage from their own artillery. [General Walter] Braithwaite, commanding the 62nd division, was informed of the operation's postponement at 4.55 am, which was too late ... [t]he West Yorkshires had lost 162 men.³⁰

On this occasion, Moeran's platoon did not sustain any fatal casualties, although one officer and six men were wounded during the relief of advanced posts later that evening.

After the failure of the attack on 10 April 1917, a new set of operation orders was drawn up, and the attack on Bullecourt was resumed at 4:30am the following morning.³¹ However, there had been too little time to modify the orders sufficiently in the light of the experience of the previous day and as the war diary recorded:

At dawn battalion [sic] was in readiness to attack the Hindenburg Line with tanks, however the tanks did not turn up.³²

Again, the attack failed dismally. While allied casualties numbered more than ten thousand killed, wounded or captured, the Germans lost just one thousand men, and they took possession of two of the still highly secret British tanks.³³

²⁹ As note 28.

³⁰ Paul Kendall, *Bullecourt 1917: Breaching the Hindenburg Line* (Stroud: The History Press, 2010), 61–2.

³¹ The National Archives WO 95/3082/3: 2/8 Battalion West Yorkshire Regiment: War Diary Vol. 1, 115–17.

³² The National Archives WO 95/3082/3: 2/8 Battalion West Yorkshire Regiment: War Diary, Vol. 1, 101.

³³ A particularly vivid account of the battle is given in Kendall, 89–105.

Second Battle of Bullecourt

After the failure to break the German lines and capture the village of Bullecourt, more intelligence was required. The war diary entry for 12 April records:

Lt. Moeran went out on patrol to examine the enemy wire last night (11-12 April). Lt. Potheary and 2nd Lt. A.R. Moore went out on a patrol to find out the strength with which the *Hindenburg Line* was being held. 2nd Lt. A.R. Moore was killed. Lt. Moeran, Lt. Alexander M.C. and Serg. Potts each patrolled a portion of the enemy wire on our front.³⁴

Patrolling the wire was an extremely dangerous undertaking, requiring close visual inspection of the barbed wire entanglements that were spread out forward of the German lines—sometimes as close as a few metres away from the enemy trenches. Officers would be asked to volunteer for the task in turn. Contemporary accounts suggest that during the night, No Man's Land was busy with men from both sides, each spying on the other and each trying to avoid the other.³⁵ The most dangerous aspect of the mission was frequently the return to friendly trenches as the officer ran the risk of being mistaken for an enemy operative, and sentries often fired at anything that moved.

Later that night, Moeran's unit was relieved, and the next three weeks were spent away from the front line at the town of Béhagnies, a few kilometres south-west of Bullecourt. The war diary reports that the battalion passed their time in a daily round of kit and foot inspections, and activities such as bayonet fighting practice, close order drill, rapid firing practice, physical training and bathing. Unsurprisingly, there are no extant musical works or fragments by Moeran that can be dated to the period January to April 1917 and it is probable that he had put music aside for the duration of his posting to France.

As the end of April approached, the Allied High Command strategy required that another attack on the Hindenburg Line would be made. The German army had counter-attacked a few days after the First Battle of Bullecourt, and although this had been repelled, it was realized that progress in pushing back the German army to the north and east depended upon taking the heavily defended and secured Bullecourt salient. A set of operation orders to cover this attack was issued in late April, and the war diary records a briefing to all officers that took place on 30 April 1917 informing

³⁴ The National Archives WO 95/3082/3: 2/8 Battalion West Yorkshire Regiment: War Diary, Vol. 1, 102.

³⁵ See, for example, those quoted by the online resource Spartacus Educational: First World War: Strategy and Tactics: Reconnaissance Patrols, <https://spartacus-educational.com/FWWpatrols.htm>.

them that the attack would begin at 3:45am on 3 May 1917.³⁶ The weather had improved considerably over the previous few weeks, with most of the lying snow having melted and the temperature was considerably higher than the freezing conditions of the previous month. Further briefings for the officers and men of Moeran's battalion took place on 1 and 2 May, and, having marched the few kilometres from Béhagnies, they took up their positions on the forming-up line in the early morning of 3 May. The line covered several kilometres to the north-west and south-east and comprised tens of thousands of British and Australian officers and men, most of whom, like Moeran, would have been veterans of the April 10–11 battle. However, the action was again unsuccessful, as the war diary recorded:

The attack began at 3:45 am. The 186th Brigade reached the first objective with considerable loss and was unable to establish itself in the enemy front line owing to enfilade machine gun fire. Being unable to get into the front line the remnants of the brigade took up their position in the sunken road some 400 yards from the enemy line, and there held on until dusk when they were ordered to retire on the original line of resistance.³⁷

Also included was a list of the casualties:

The casualties were: Killed other ranks 5; Wounded Officers 3: Lieut. E. J. S. Moeran, 2nd Lt. R. D. Netherscot and 2nd Lt. B. W. Thornhill. Other ranks: 49. Missing Officers 2: Lieut. Tansley and 2nd Lt. Muirhead; Other ranks 37.³⁸

This war diary entry provides primary evidence of Moeran's injury. He was not riding a motorcycle or bicycle as a dispatch rider, as has hitherto been believed. He was a commissioned infantry officer taking part in one of the most significant battles of 1917. As second-in-command of his platoon, he would have been encouraging his men to carry on forward, and leading by example, trying not to be distracted by those falling on either side, up to the point where he was hit by a fragment of a bullet, probably from a German machine gun, although the possibility that he was hit by friendly fire cannot confidently be rejected.

³⁶ The National Archives WO 95/3082/3: 2/8 Battalion West Yorkshire Regiment: War Diary, vol. 1, 120–126.

³⁷ The National Archives WO 95/3082/3: 2/8 Battalion West Yorkshire Regiment: War Diary vol. 1, 128.

³⁸ The National Archives WO 95/3082/3: 2/8 Battalion West Yorkshire Regiment: War Diary, vol. 1, 128–9.

Repatriated

Other than what may be gleaned from the war diary entry, the exact circumstances of Moeran's injury are not known, although the course of the action around Bullecourt that day is now well understood by military historians. Neither is it known what happened to him in the immediate aftermath of the event, or how he was able to return or be returned to the British lines. However, a War Office Arrival Report dated 21 May 1917 verifies that Lieut. E. J. Moeran of the 1/6th Cyclist Battalion the Norfolk Regiment, attached overseas to the 2/8th Battalion the West Yorkshire Regiment, was repatriated on 7 May 1917, embarking on the hospital ship *HMHS St. Denis* at Boulogne for Dover, the cause of his return being noted as a 'Shrapnel wound in neck'.³⁹ Moeran was admitted to the Cambridge Research Hospital, and his first Medical Board Report, with Lieutenant-Colonel George Edward Wherry as President and L. E. Shore as member, was dated 10 May 1917.⁴⁰ It provides a more detailed diagnosis of his injury:

The Board having assembled pursuant to order...proceed to examine [Lieut. E. J. Moeran] and find that he has a small Gun Shot Wound on [right] side of Neck just below the Mastoid process of the temporal bone. The X-ray plate shows a piece of Metal near the Vertebra on the [right] side. There is a small discharging of wound, no Nerve complications.⁴¹

The Medical Board Report also confirmed that the military condition to which the injury may be attributed was a bullet wound. Moeran was moved to London and another Medical Board Report followed an examination at the Prince of Wales Hospital for Officers on 22 May 1917.⁴² The Medical Board found that:

³⁹ The National Archives WO 374/48245 C457620: Lieutenant Ernest John Smeed MOERAN. The Norfolk Regiment: Arrival Report 21 May 1917.

⁴⁰ The Cambridge Research Hospital opened in 1905 was requisitioned in 1914 for treatment of injured officers. It has since been renamed the Strangeways Research Laboratory. See R. A. Peters, *History of the Strangeways Research Laboratory (formerly Cambridge Research Hospital) 1912–1962* (Cambridge: private publication, 1962), and *Strangeways Research Laboratory*, collection reference SA/SRL, Wellcome Library.

⁴¹ The National Archives WO 374/48245 C457620: Lieutenant Ernest John Smeed MOERAN. The Norfolk Regiment: Medical Board Report dated Research Hospital, Cambridge, 10 May 1917.

⁴² The Great Central Hotel at 222 Marylebone Road was requisitioned by the War Office in 1916 and operated as the Prince of Wales Hospital for Officers from then until 1919. It is now the five-star Landmark London hotel. See <https://www.landmarklondon.co.uk/about/heritage/>.

...the metallic fragment is still in situ. Wound has healed and leaves no disability. There is considerable thickening around wound. No operation is advised meantime.⁴³

Moeran was discharged from hospital and sent on three weeks' leave. It is evident that his condition was not considered to be serious, and that the metal fragment was small, although it remained in place. It is important to note here that the use of X-ray techniques, while primitive in comparison with twenty-first-century technology, were certainly capable of detecting even small metallic particles, and it is inconceivable that one or more additional larger fragments would not have been located, even if they were lodged close to his brain, as has been previously claimed.⁴⁴ Moreover, there is no mention of treatment requiring the insertion of a metal plate, or, indeed, any treatment at all.⁴⁵ While this Medical Board Report is enough to verify that Moeran's injury seemed relatively insignificant, additional effective substantiation may be found by a consideration of his activities following his discharge from hospital. A report in the issue of the *Thetford & Watton Times and People's Weekly Journal* dated Saturday 2 June

⁴³ The National Archives WO 374/48245 C457620: Lieutenant Ernest John Smeed MOERAN. The Norfolk Regiment: Medical Board Report dated Prince of Wales Hospital, 22 May 1917.

⁴⁴ See for example the biographical references listed in note 1, particularly Self, *The Music of E. J. Moeran*.

⁴⁵ The story that the treatment required the insertion of a metal plate to replace a damaged part of Moeran's skull has long been one of the most dramatic elements of the Bullecourt injury narrative, and, consequently, one of his most identifying characteristics. It was in circulation by the late 1930s, as attested by an anecdote recounted by Maureen O'Shea to the British music enthusiast Barry Marsh. Maureen O'Shea was the daughter of Jim and Bridget O'Donnell, the proprietors of the Lansdowne Arms Hotel in Kenmare where Moeran often stayed during the 1930s and 1940s. Mrs O'Shea's testimony runs thus: 'I have a lovely memory ... my mother told me that Moeran had a plate in his head, from the First World War ... There was some night, we were in the sitting room, which was a major event, because the sitting room was only used at Christmas, and my father was present, and I have a memory of him in an armchair, [whispered] buckled out of his socks! [i.e. very drunk] ... My mother kept the piano well-tuned, because we all had to learn it whether we liked it or not. He [Moeran] played for me that night ... Do you know the bridge? If you go out past that bridge, turn left, turn left again, and you come around back into town again. It's called "around Roughty" ... the Roughty is a river ... now what he was playing for me was a walk around Roughty, and it was Irish music. He told me: "now we're going over the bridge and we're turning left ... now we're at Sheen Falls" ... You see, the awful thing is, I was standing immediately behind him ... behind his shoulder, and I wasn't remotely interested in what he was playing ... I was about six inches from his head, and I was trying to see the plate. And when it was all over and my mother hoping that I was duly impressed that this man had played for me ... and I said "I couldn't see any plate" ... now I was only seven or eight, and I expected to see something resembling the ring that you'd get under a dinner plate. That's what it meant to me, and I was disappointed!' From an interview with Maureen O'Shea recorded by Barry Marsh at the Lansdowne Arms Hotel, Kenmare, Co. Kerry (date unknown), transcribed by the author from the original recording.

1917 strongly suggests both that Moeran had returned to being musically active, and that his injury was not hindering him. The article in the newspaper gives an account of a memorial service that took place in Bacton Parish Church on Monday 27 May 1917, and it includes the information that: 'Lieutenant Jack Moeran, Norfolks, presided at the organ'.⁴⁶ This is the first documented confirmation of Moeran's musical activities since the completion of the set of *Four Songs from 'A Shropshire Lad'* nearly a year earlier.

Apart from practising the organ, Moeran was also re-acquainting himself with the piano and with the repertoire that he had assimilated during his later years at Uppingham School and his time at the Royal College of Music. This is shown by his participation in the 408th *Oxford & Cambridge Musical Club* programme on 2 August 1917. Moeran contributed the central solo feature of the programme by performing the *Sonate Fantastique* Op. 44 by the Ukrainian composer Theodore Akimenko.⁴⁷

A few days after his *Oxford & Cambridge Musical Club* performance, Moeran was examined again by the Army Medical Board. In the report, dated Smallburgh 9 August 1917, Moeran was assessed thus:

...his condition has improved. The discharging wound mentioned in [Medical Board Report] of 10/5/17 has now healed. Any excessive muscular exertion gives rise to pain on right side of neck, at other times, he is quite free from any inconvenience.⁴⁸

A handwritten comment notes: 'It is not necessary that this Officer should, in future, appear before the same Board'.⁴⁹ Although the comments of the Medical Board suggest that they believed Moeran had recovered from the worst of his injury, the recommendation remained that he was still not fit for active or general service, and he was ordered to return to his unit for what was termed 'Light Duty at Home'.

⁴⁶ 'Bacton – Memorial Unveiled', *Thetford & Watton Times and People's Weekly Journal*, 2 June 1917, 5.

⁴⁷ *Oxford & Cambridge Musical Club Archives*, GB-Ob Dep.c.967, 53. The recitals generally followed a standard format: 1) chamber music, 2) songs, 3) solo item, 4) more songs, 5) closing chamber music. In this programme, Moeran is credited as 'Lieut. E. J. S. Moeran'. The archives of the Oxford & Cambridge Musical Club in Oxford University Library show that the (fortnightly) music recitals were referred to as 'Programmes' from the 1st Programme on 1 March 1900 to the 1127th Programme which took place on 13 November 1968. The subsequent recital on 30 November 1968 was called the 1128th Concert, and the recitals have been called 'Concerts' ever since.

⁴⁸ The National Archives WO 374/48245 C457620: Lieutenant Ernest John Smeed MOERAN. The Norfolk Regiment: Medical Board Report dated Smallburgh, 9 August 1917.

⁴⁹ As note 48.

Moeran had been on medical leave for some three months but was now considered fit enough to recommence some form of military duty. His unit was based at Worstead Camp, near Norwich, which was a short railway journey from his parents' house at Bacton. Thus, it is likely that Moeran was able to spend time at home. However, it is evident that even during his period of recovery he was still considered to be an asset to the Territorial Force. As shown above, Moeran had been given a temporary promotion to Lieutenant on 12 July the previous year, and it seems now to have been decided that this appointment should be made permanent. The following announcement appeared in the *London Gazette*:

Norfolk Regiment: 2nd Lt. (temp. Lt.) E. J. S. Moeran to be Lt. with precedence as from 8th July 1917, 28th Aug. 1917.⁵⁰

However, Moeran was still suffering from some occasional discomfort, and he appeared before a Medical Board at Smallburgh on 21 September 1917. His condition was reported as follows:

...he has improved, but there is still some pain on excessive movement of neck. A recent skiagraph shows a foreign body just below right mastoid process.⁵¹

Moeran was assessed as now being fit for 'Home Service' but remained unable to re-join any form of active service. Despite this, he was still able to pursue his musical activities. The 412th *Oxford & Cambridge Musical Club* programme on 15 November 1917 again featured Moeran as the central item soloist, and on this occasion, he performed Ravel's *Sonatine*.⁵² As was the case with the Akimenko *Sonate Fantastique* that he had performed three months earlier, the *Sonatine* is sufficiently technically demanding that it would also have required preparation and practice, further testifying to Moeran's generally good state of health and ability to concentrate and work.

By the beginning of December 1917, Moeran had spent six months on leave or undertaking light duties, and he had been in a favourable position to pursue his musical activities. Thus, it may be asserted that, from both a personal and a musical perspective, his injury at Bullecourt turned out to have been to his considerable advantage. Compared with countless of his fellow officers and men, he was extremely

⁵⁰ *London Gazette* (24 August 1917), supplement 30254, 8884.

⁵¹ E. J. Moeran Military Record, Medical Board Report – Smallburgh, 21 September 1917, National Archives WO 374/48245 C457620. The word 'skiagraph' refers to X-ray photography.

⁵² *Oxford & Cambridge Musical Club Archives*, GB-Ob Dep.c.967, 55.

fortunate, first that his injury was minor, and second that it led to his removal from the front line.

However, towards the end of the year, it became apparent that the injury was not healing thoroughly. A Medical Board Report at Wroxham on 21 December 1917 noted that 'any special exertion causes pain in the affected region', and that 'An operation will be necessary', although it did not specify a timetable.⁵³ The conclusion was that Moeran was thirty per cent disabled. He was excused active service for another three months and remained assigned to home duties in Norfolk. It is probable that he was still able to spend time at home, and he may well have been given leave over Christmas 1917. Unfortunately, Moeran's condition deteriorated, and he attended a Medical Board examination at Wroxham on New Year's Day 1918. He was now suffering from considerable pain when he moved his head. The report was:

The Board find that the wounds in the right occipital region have healed. He complains of pain in the head at times especially if he moves it quickly—A skiagraph shows fine pieces of metal embedded.⁵⁴

This is the first, and only, Medical Board Report that specifically mentions 'fine pieces of metal embedded' although it is not clear from the Report where exactly they were. Apparently, the original X-ray investigation had overlooked these, so the metallic pieces must have been very small. Moreover, the Medical Board Report does not clarify whether the 'fine pieces of metal' were something other than the 'metallic fragment' that the earlier X-ray examination had detected. However, it is evident from this that the later commonly accepted notion of shrapnel fragments embedded in Moeran's head may have had a factual origin. The 'fine pieces of metal' were not alluded to in subsequent Medical Board Reports and so it is probable that they were not considered to be a serious problem. Moeran was described now as 'fit for general service', his disability degree was rated as 'nil' and he was instructed to return to his unit.

Ireland

In January 1918, units from the Norfolk Regiment, including Moeran's battalion, were deployed to Ireland. It was suggested by Philip Heseltine in his 1924 *Music Bulletin* article that while he was in Ireland Moeran was attached to the 'transport section of

⁵³ The National Archives WO 374/48245 C457620: Lieutenant Ernest John Smeed MOERAN. The Norfolk Regiment: Medical Board Report dated Wroxham, 21 December 1917.

⁵⁴ The National Archives WO 374/48245 C457620: Lieutenant Ernest John Smeed MOERAN. The Norfolk Regiment: Medical Board Report dated Wroxham, 1 January 1918.

the R.I.C.'.⁵⁵ However, extensive research in the archives of the Royal Irish Constabulary, now in the care of the Police Service of Northern Ireland, has failed to locate an E. J. Moeran on attachment to the Constabulary. The most likely explanations for this idea having arisen are either that Moeran misremembered or misrepresented his attachment, or that Heseltine misunderstood Moeran's account of his war.

Moeran's first Medical Board Report in Ireland was dated 23 March 1918 and it indicates that he was based at Boyle Barracks in County Roscommon. However, the Medical Board itself was held at the King George V Hospital in Dublin, and it may be presumed that Moeran travelled there from Boyle.⁵⁶ No mention is made of the pain that Moeran had been suffering a few weeks earlier, and the conclusion of the Report was:

He has considerably improved since [the] last board [and] [h]e is now fit for general service: instructed to re-join his present unit.⁵⁷

The report also instructed that Moeran be assigned to light duties. Exactly what the light duties were while he was with the Norfolk Regiment in Ireland is not documented, but, as a cyclist, or by this time most probably motorcyclist, dispatch riding is the most likely activity, particularly since this is how he chose to recall his wartime experiences in later life.

As far as the author has been able to determine, there are just two pieces of primary evidence that provide specific detail of Moeran's activities during his stay at Boyle Barracks in March and April 1917. The first comes from the Membership Register of the *Grand Lodge of Freemasons of Ireland*, which records that Moeran was *Entered Apprentice* on 6 March 1918 at lodge number 76 at Longford, County Longford.⁵⁸ Moeran's grandfather and great-grandfather had been Freemasons, as were his father, brother, and several other living male relatives, and it appears that Moeran made the

⁵⁵ Heseltine, 171.

⁵⁶ Primary source material pertaining to the King George V Hospital in Dublin has not been found, but anecdotal evidence suggests that it was established as a military hospital by the British Army Royal Engineers in 1909 and operated as a specialist neurological unit during the First World War. It was transferred to the army of the Irish Free State in 1922 and was renamed St. Bricin's Military Hospital, under which name it continues in use today. See <http://archiseek.com/2010/st-bricins-military-hospital-arbour-hill-dublin>.

⁵⁷ The National Archives WO 374/48245 C457620: Lieutenant Ernest John Smeed MOERAN. The Norfolk Regiment: Medical Board Report dated Dublin, 23 March 1918.

⁵⁸ Membership Register 1733-1923, Grand Lodge of Freemasons of Ireland, 451, available online at Ancestry.co.uk, <https://search.ancestry.co.uk/search/db.aspx?dbid=60904>.

decision to join them at this time. Moeran's 'Vocation' was given as Lieutenant in the Norfolk Regiment.

The second item of evidence testifying to Moeran's activities in Boyle, probably during April 1918, is the autograph manuscript of the first movement of the work that was published by Novello in 1956 as the String Quartet in E Flat.⁵⁹ Although a determined effort has apparently been made to obscure any possible dating information on the manuscript—with handwritten notes on the front page and at the end of the first movement having been scratched out, even to the extent of creating holes in the paper—it is possible to decipher the words 'Co. Roscommon' in the top right corner of the first page. Moreover, on the final page of the first movement there remain traces to suggest that the first word may originally have been 'Finished', and that the second word was 'April'. Taken together, these clues imply that the work was composed, or at least completed, while Moeran was in County Roscommon in April 1918. No evidence has been found to suggest that Moeran ever returned to Roscommon in later life, so it may be reasonably asserted that there is a high degree of probability that the first movement of the String Quartet in E Flat dates from April 1918.⁶⁰

During late April or early May 1918, Moeran's medical condition seems to have further deteriorated, and a Medical Board Report, dated 22 May 1918 from the Officers' Hospital 33 Upper Fitzwilliam Street in Dublin,⁶¹ records that he had been admitted to hospital at the beginning of the month:

About two weeks after Medical Board of 23.3.18, the piece of metal in back [sic] began to cause pain. He was admitted into above hospital on 4 May 1918, [and] [t]he foreign body is to be removed from his neck tomorrow. His general health is very good.⁶²

The Medical Board Report also concluded that, at the present time, Moeran was 100% disabled. The pain caused by the bullet fragment was evidently debilitating, and it

⁵⁹ After publication, the manuscript was accessioned by the Royal College of Music, and it remains in their keeping: Moeran, *String Quartet in E flat*, GB-Lcm, MS 4985.

⁶⁰ A forensic analysis of the extant manuscript of the quartet and a discussion of its possible origins was presented in the author's PhD thesis: Ian Maxwell, *The Importance of Being Ernest John: Challenging the Misconceptions about the Life and Works of E. J. Moeran* (PhD dissertation, University of Durham, 2014), 134–55.

⁶¹ IRL-Dml, Heritage Collections, 'Minute book. Hospital for wounded officers, 1914–1918', uncatalogued.

⁶² The National Archives WO 374/48245 C457620: Lieutenant Ernest John Smeed MOERAN. The Norfolk Regiment: Medical Board Report dated Dublin, 22 May 1918.

may therefore be presumed that the operation to remove it finally took place on 23 May 1918. The next Medical Board Report is dated 2 July 1918 from Castlebar, County Mayo, and states simply that the ‘Operation wound [is] healed’.⁶³ The Report assessed Moeran as ‘Fit for Home Service’ and ordered him to return to his unit.⁶⁴

Moeran’s final Medical Board Report took place at his barracks at Shanes Park Camp, Randalstown on 5 September 1918. It summarized his medical condition:

He has improved very much since last appearance, [and] [h]e has completely survived. General health excellent.⁶⁵

Moeran was classed as fit for general service and he was directed to resume duty with his unit. No more Medical Boards were necessary. Finally, some sixteen months after the injury Moeran sustained while charging the German lines at Bullecourt, he was again in full health and capable of fully resuming his role in the 1/6th (Cyclist) Battalion of the Norfolk Regiment. However, it is worth noting the degree of care that Moeran evidently received for what was undoubtedly a relatively minor wound. While treatment of officers during the First World War always did take precedence over what were usually referred to as ‘other ranks’, even as an officer Moeran was especially well-connected—his being an Old Uppinghamian, a prize-winning student of the Royal College of Music, a long-standing member of the *Oxford & Cambridge Musical Club* with its important networking opportunities and the son and brother of members of the Freemasons would all have been to his considerable advantage.

Home

The Norfolk Regiment returned from Ireland in September 1918. With the end of the war approaching, it was unlikely that Moeran would return to active service abroad and he seems to have decided to join the Royal Air Force. When he enlisted in 1914, he had signed up for four years or the duration of the war—whichever was the longer period—and he was now into his fifth year of service. His military record indicates that he joined the No. 1 School of Military Aeronautics in Reading on 14 October 1918.⁶⁶ This record also provides a possible hint to Moeran’s plans for his future after

⁶³ The National Archives WO 374/48245 C457620: Lieutenant Ernest John Smeed MOERAN. The Norfolk Regiment: Medical Board Report dated Dublin, 2 July 1918.

⁶⁴ As note 63.

⁶⁵ The National Archives WO 374/48245 C457620: Lieutenant Ernest John Smeed MOERAN. The Norfolk Regiment: Medical Board Report dated Randalstown, 5 September 1918.

⁶⁶ The National Archives AIR 76/352/41: Name Moeran, Ernest John Smeed Date of Birth: 31 December 1894.

his imminent demobilization. Under the section 'Occupation in Civil Life', he wrote 'Undergraduate at Clare College, Cambridge'.⁶⁷

The Armistice was declared on 11 November 1918, but in practice this meant little for Moeran. Although he continued his training for the Royal Air Force, he was able to spend time away from the School of Aeronautics. He had maintained his membership of the *Oxford & Cambridge Musical Club* during 1918 by paying the one guinea 'in army' subscription on 16 April, and while he did not participate in any of the recitals between January and the end of October—due to his being stationed in Ireland—his *Four Songs from 'A Shropshire Lad'* had been performed at three of the fortnightly musical programmes.⁶⁸ However, on 21 November, Moeran himself was back in London playing at the 433rd programme, once again featuring as the performer of the central solo item, and he performed *Poème* and *Enigme* from *Three Pieces* Op. 52 by Scriabin, and *Sylphides* from *Crépuscules* Op. 56 by Florent Schmitt.⁶⁹

Moeran completed the initial four-week training period at the School of Aeronautics. His military record shows that he was 'struck off the strength of the school' on 4 December 1918 and that he was ordered to report to the 3rd Reserve Battalion of the Norfolk Regiment at Felixstowe to resume military duty.⁷⁰ However, in early January 1919, the orders for Moeran to re-join his battalion were cancelled and he was discharged from the Territorial Force as of 8 January 1919.⁷¹ His Medical Category was given as A1,⁷² his military service was over, and the next part of his life was about to begin.⁷³

⁶⁷ The truth of Moeran's association or otherwise with Clare College, Cambridge remains unknown. He had previously mentioned membership of the college, probably as a convenient device to support his election to the *Oxford & Cambridge Musical Club* in October 1912. However, exhaustive examination of the college archives has failed to uncover any reference to or mention of Moeran during the years 1912 to 1920. The only evidence that could conceivably link Moeran with a possible studentship at Cambridge is that the Professor of Music, Sir Charles V. Stanford, had been Moeran's composition teacher at the Royal College of Music from 1912 to 1914.

⁶⁸ *Oxford & Cambridge Musical Club Archives*, Oxford University Library Dep.c.962, 108.

⁶⁹ *Oxford & Cambridge Musical Club Archives*, Oxford University Library Dep.c.967, 65.

⁷⁰ The National Archives WO 374/48245 C457620: Lieutenant Ernest John Smeed MOERAN. The Norfolk Regiment: No. 1 School of Aeronautics letter dated 4 December 1918.

⁷¹ The National Archives WO 374/48245 C457620: Lieutenant Ernest John Smeed MOERAN. The Norfolk Regiment: orders cancellation.

⁷² During the First World War, the British War Office had a system of medical categorization that enabled the abilities of each officer or soldier to be readily identified. Four basic categories of general health (in descending order of fitness): A, B, C and D, were themselves sub-divided: A (1-4), B, C and

Final Thoughts

Like many young men of his time, Moeran answered the national call and joined the army shortly after the outbreak of the First World War. He began his war in a home-based Territorial Unit, and, at first sight, this may be regarded as his having selected a safe and easy option. However, during 1914 and 1915, the danger of an invasion by the Germans along the east coast of England was widely propagated by the government as part of an agenda to arouse and encourage anti-German sentiment and public support for British participation in the war. It was popularly believed that the enemy would lose no time in mounting a seaborne attack, and the German naval bombardments of Scarborough, Hartlepool and Whitby in December 1914 greatly exacerbated public fear. Although the German High Command never had any intention of invading Britain, this was not known at the time, and Moeran and his fellow cyclists regarded themselves as the front-line in the event of such an attack.⁷⁴ Thus, it cannot be alleged that Moeran had sought to avoid any danger. However, his war was (mostly) exceptionally easy, although he did spend a few weeks serving as an officer on the Western Front in France, and the glimpses of Moeran at the front line that are provided by the War Diary reveal that he participated courageously and professionally. While compared with many of those at the front line, Moeran did not see the worst horrors of the war, he witnessed friends and colleagues being killed or injured alongside him and he was shot at and wounded under the worst circumstances of a poorly planned and ineptly executed large-scale military operation. From the comfort of a (mostly) peaceful twenty-first-century Europe with very little chance now of encountering such a situation, it is difficult to imagine the effects that these events may have had on him. Nonetheless, he was a young man, his injury was not serious, he was removed from further dangers and it is evident that he received excellent treatment.

In order to determine the extent to which Moeran's wartime experiences may have shaped the rest of his life, they must be considered from an objective perspective, and

D (1-3), each sub-category defining a descending range of activities for which the man's condition was suitable. Category A signified: 'Able to march, see to shoot, hear well and stand active service conditions', and sub-category 1 signified: 'Fit for dispatching overseas, as regards physical and mental health, and training'. For more information, see The National Archives CAB 21/695 Registration: recruiting and medical services, 1915-1918.

⁷³ The National Archives WO 374/48245 C457620: Lieutenant Ernest John Smeed MOERAN. The Norfolk Regiment: Protection Certificate dated 7 January 1919.

⁷⁴ For more information about the attitude of cyclist battalion members, see Coxford, *A Half-Crown Holy Boy* and the issues of *The Half-Crown "Holy Boys" Chronicle*.

this has required an exhaustive examination of all the available evidence. While much else can be deduced from the Medical Board Reports and the other items from Moeran's military history that have been presented in this paper, the crucial facts that emerge are that there is no record of psychological effects, such as what would now be classed as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), and that he eventually recovered completely. Moeran's minor injury and its principal consequences—his periods of extended home leave and his deployment on light duties to Ireland with the result of his becoming enamoured with the country and the people—are key factors in determining his later course as a composer.

There is no evidence that Moeran ever spoke about his active involvement at Bullecourt, and this remained unknown until the author's discovery of the war diary records in 2016. During conversations with Philip Heseltine that resulted in the publication by J. W. Chester of a biographical essay, Moeran evidently asserted that he had been wounded accidentally while performing his duties as a motorcycle dispatch rider, and these conversations may reasonably be regarded as the origins of the mythology of Moeran's war story.⁷⁵ Why he concealed the truth cannot be established unequivocally, but an understanding of his character, gained from the knowledge of his entire life, makes plausible supposition possible. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to undertake an in-depth analysis of Heseltine's personality, an examination of other writings on the composer suggests that he possessed a complexity, unpredictability and power, which engendered an influence that Moeran may have found difficult to resist—even if he had been inclined to do so.⁷⁶ Heseltine's attitude to the war, which he would hardly have concealed from his friend, was entirely negative and critical, and this may have been expressed so forcefully as to compel Moeran to reconsider his own participation less favourably. The story of Moeran's life, especially his relationship with Peers Coetmore during the mid-1940s, suggests that he suffered from a deep sense of personal insecurity,⁷⁷ possibly exacerbated by or even the result of suppressed sexual identity issues,⁷⁸ and his desire—perhaps even need—for a close

⁷⁵ Philip Heseltine, *E. J. Moeran*, (London: J. & W. Chester, 1926).

⁷⁶ See particularly Cecil Gray, *Peter Warlock* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1952) and Barry Smith, *Peter Warlock: The Life of Philip Heseltine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).

⁷⁷ Moeran's letters to Coetmore written at the start of their relationship contain frequent seeking of reassurance of her regard for him; see Rhoderick McNeill, *A Critical Study of the Life and Works of E. J. Moeran* (PhD dissertation, University of Melbourne, 1983) Appendix 1, Part A, The Letters of E. J. Moeran.

⁷⁸ While the truth of Moeran's sexuality cannot be definitively established, the author has uncovered evidence that strongly suggests a homosexual aspect to Moeran's identity. This evidence is still being

friend would probably have driven him into confrontation-avoiding compliance. Thus, he may have believed that providing an account of his wartime injury as effectively being in the wrong place at the wrong time and being hit accidentally would resonate better with Heseltine than the truth, particularly since revealing the truth to the pacifist Heseltine would necessarily have included an account of Moeran engaging the enemy directly with a determination to kill as many of them as he could.

It is difficult at first to reconcile the portrait that was presented by Lionel Hill in *Lonely Waters* of Moeran as a sensitive and creative artist with the young man brandishing a revolver in May 1917 and urging the men in his platoon into the attack.⁷⁹ Countless similar young men who fought in and survived the First World War returned to their normal lives and lived for decades without apparent effect, other than a general reluctance to talk about their experiences. However, in the case of a composer whose music reflects a part of themselves, such simplified generalization is inadequate. The available evidence relating to Moeran's life both before and after the events of April and May 1917 suggests no aggressive tendencies, latent or otherwise, nor any kind of belligerent or confrontational propensity.⁸⁰ In the aftermath of the First World War he appears to have held no innate hostility towards Germany or the German people—certainly, at least until the outbreak of the Second World War. Moeran's music was performed in Germany and Austria during the 1930s, and he travelled to Berlin and Vienna on at least two occasions—in 1934 meeting the German-Czech composer Arthur Willner, with whom he later had a close working relationship. Thus, it may be reasonably surmised that Moeran left any personal anti-German bellicosity behind on the battlefield at Bullecourt.

Eric Saylor, in his incisive 2017 book *English Pastoral Music*, suggested that when those composers who survived the war relatively unscathed returned home, it was to a realization that 'pastoralism [had come] of age as a powerful mode of modernistic

examined and will be presented and discussed in the author's forthcoming biography of the composer.

⁷⁹ Lionel Hill, *Lonely Waters: The Diary of a Friendship with E. J. Moeran* (London: Thames Publishing, 1985). Of course, one can also argue that Hill's portrayal is somewhat rosy-tinted, his regard for the man being conflated with his love for the music.

⁸⁰ One possible exception is the suggestion that he later became involved in the nationalist movement in Ireland but the evidence for his engagement in this is tenuous at best and entirely circumstantial, and it seems unlikely in the extreme that he took part in any violent action. For more on this see Maxwell, *The Importance of Being Ernest John*, 194–7.

artistic expression amongst English artists, whether in music, painting or literature'.⁸¹ Citing Fussell and Winter,⁸² Saylor asserted that creative artists who had experienced either directly or indirectly the cataclysmic events of the war sought a 'language of loss' with which they could adequately convey the expression of those experiences.⁸³ Hitherto, Moeran has been regarded primarily as an accidental victim of the war, and whose injuries were disproportionate to his personal involvement, but who nonetheless experienced the full nightmare of years of the horror of the trenches. Now that the truth of his war is mostly known, should Moeran's choice of a largely pastoral style of musical expression be attributed in any way to his wartime journey, and, if so, is this an example of Saylor's and Winter's 'language of loss'?

In addition to the obvious loss of comrades or family members, those who participated in the war—especially those young men at the front line, mostly in their late teens and early twenties—would have experienced what might be regarded as a loss of innocence. In witnessing the carnage that was the consequence of the battlefield tactics generally employed during the First World War, they lost the ability, innate in the young, to disregard both their own mortality and that of others. Even though he was on the front line for just a few weeks, Moeran had these experiences. He certainly suffered personal loss; numerous friends and colleagues from his school and college perished—including his closest friend (and, perhaps, lover) the cellist Roland Perceval Garrod; and it is Garrod's death at Festubert on 22 May 1915 that suggests a solution to the conflict between the sensitive artist of Lionel Hill's depiction and the idea of a young Moeran rushing into battle.⁸⁴ Moeran would have been affected deeply by the death of his friend, and it is therefore not too fanciful to speculate that this was the principal motivation for his eventual volunteering for front-line service, and his fervent participation in front-line action—up to the point where he was wounded.⁸⁵

⁸¹ Eric Saylor, *English Pastoral Music: From Arcadia to Utopia, 1900–1955* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2017), 56.

⁸² Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975, 2000, 2013) and Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

⁸³ Winter, 5.

⁸⁴ Moeran's relationship with Garrod will be examined in more detail in the author's forthcoming biography of the composer.

⁸⁵ At the time, Moeran's personal and private response to the death of Garrod would necessarily have been internalized, and his coping mechanisms would have been crude at best. Apart from the shame that would probably have accompanied any attempt to share his emotions with family or fellow-

While it is now possible to establish Moeran's actual war narrative, determining to what extent the war remained with him in later life is more difficult due to a lack of direct evidence from the composer himself. Geoffrey Self suggested that Moeran was profoundly affected by his wartime experiences, but provided no evidence to support this claim beyond an implied assumption that because so many others were so affected, Moeran must have been the same.⁸⁶ Neither did Self explain how Moeran might have been affected, other than broadly stating that the composer 'lived through three years of [the war's] horrors, and carried the permanent effect of his head injury to the grave'.⁸⁷

It is also worth noting that Moeran revisited his school, Uppingham, for Old Boys' Day in June 1919, but the list of attendees, as published in the school magazine,⁸⁸ includes just two or three names from those known to have been his friends and contemporaries between 1908 and 1912. If Moeran had been expecting or hoping to see more of his erstwhile school friends, any prevailing sense of loss could only have been deepened, thus reinforcing his anguish. Conversely, it is possible that visiting the location of happier times could have worked positively by providing him with some closure. Whatever his response to the visit to Uppingham was, Moeran then travelled to Ireland, spending several weeks in the country collecting folksong melodies and there is circumstantial evidence to suggest that he became temporarily embroiled in the Nationalist movement.⁸⁹ However, by the end of September 1919, Moeran was back in London⁹⁰ and the documentary evidence pertaining to his life from that date on suggests no signs of trauma. Between 1920 and 1925, Moeran's rise as an increasingly admired and performed composer was nothing short of meteoric and it can only be assumed that, somehow, Moeran had largely overcome any personal demons.

officers, men were expected to suppress such weakness. Consequently, Moeran may have thrown himself into the fray on the basis that it no longer mattered what happened to him.

⁸⁶ Self, *The Music of E. J. Moeran*, 245–7. It should be noted that when Self wrote his book, the evidence pertaining to Moeran's relationship with Roland Perceval Garrod was unknown.

⁸⁷ Self, *The Music of E. J. Moeran*, 245–6.

⁸⁸ 'Old Boys 1919', *Uppingham School Magazine*, 57/450, (July 1919), 154–8.

⁸⁹ Maxwell, *The Importance of Being Ernest John*, 194–7.

⁹⁰ *Oxford & Cambridge Musical Club Archives*, Oxford University Library Dep.c.962, 108; Moeran paid his annual club subscription in full and in person at the club premises in Bedford Square, London.

Moeran's interest in folksong fed his dependency on melody, and the pentatonic basis of many of his tunes strongly reflects this.⁹¹ Moeran's melodies were his own—except for his folksong arrangements—and they certainly evoke the pastoral, but his use of harmony could be ambivalent. While such works as the String Quartet in A minor (1921) and the *First Orchestral Rhapsody* (1922) sit squarely in a pastoral stylistic frame, the Sonata for Violin and Piano (1922), although tonally-based, exhibits elements of a more dissonant and sparse harmonic idiom. While Moeran took this sparseness further in the Sonata for Two Violins (1930), the harmonic indulgence of the pastoral remained a principal characteristic of his musical style throughout his working life. Moeran's own somewhat self-effacing descriptions of his compositional process, although written many years later, imply that he was not endeavouring to produce anything profound or representative.⁹² If Moeran (and, for that matter, any other composer) had selected a style of working specifically as a response to the war, this would be detectable as a distinct variance with their earlier work. However, while it may be possible to show this for other composers, in Moeran's case, only five works survive that are known to have been composed before he went to the front line and was injured in 1917, and three of these—the piano work *Fields at Harvest* (probably December 1915), the song-cycle *Four Songs from 'A Shropshire Lad'* (July 1916) and what is now published as the second movement of the String Quartet in E flat (probably November 1916) indicate the influence of folk music, and may be considered as displaying the characteristics of a pastoral idiom. In later life, Moeran was prone to destroying earlier compositions that he found now displeased him, and the present author has estimated based on the number of former works that are known or believed to have previously existed that just a small proportion of Moeran's work produced between 1913 and 1925 has survived.⁹³ Thus, it seems to be very likely that Moeran originally composed a quite extensive body of work that may have been in a folksong-

⁹¹ A detailed account of the origins and development of Moeran's interest in folksong would be too extended to include there, but it seems to have originated with the composer having heard a performance of Vaughan Williams' *First Norfolk Rhapsody* when he was either a schoolboy or a student at the Royal College of Music. This experience encouraged him to search out songs in his own neighbourhood of Norfolk and, during the years immediately preceding and following the First World War, collected nearly seventy songs. See Roy Palmer, 'Neglected Pioneer: E. J. Moeran (1894–1950)', *Folk Music Journal*, 8/3 (2003), 345–61.

⁹² McNeill, Appendix 1, Part A, The Letters of E. J. Moeran.

⁹³ This is supported by anecdotal evidence from Peers Coetmore quoted by Stephen Wild in his monograph *E. J. Moeran* (Triad Press: London, 1973), 10.

influenced pastoral idiom from about 1915 onwards—more than a year before he experienced any war-induced trauma.⁹⁴

There is no doubt that Moeran experienced many difficulties during the last twenty years of his life. His decision in early 1925 to join Philip Heseltine in his artistic commune in Kent was the beginning of a process that led to his creative faculties deserting him, and to his rapid descent into alcoholism—both of which may be directly attributable to the probably unintended but seemingly irresistible influence of Heseltine.⁹⁵ Whether this process was a re-awakening of long-suppressed wartime trauma, or whether it was new for Moeran cannot be established for certain but with a lack of evidence to support the former it would seem that the influence of Heseltine may be a more important factor.⁹⁶ Moeran composed almost nothing between 1926 and 1929, and when he recovered his inspiration after the collapse of the commune and Heseltine's death in 1930, he found that composition had become hard and time-consuming work. In the twenty years between 1930 and 1950, he completed fewer works than he had done during his five-year early period 1920–1925. Moeran's later life was also marred by frequent bouts of ill-health and accidents that were the results of alcoholic binges. Finally, his unsuccessful attempt to stabilize his life at the age of fifty by getting married led to his adding emotional stress to his health and alcoholism problems.⁹⁷ Thus, it seems problematic to invoke an earlier and deeper-rooted mechanism.

⁹⁴ Although the author's recent research suggests that the *Four Songs from 'A Shropshire Lad'* were probably composed in memory of Moeran's close friend Roland Perceval Garrod, who had been killed at Festubert on 22 May 1915, the adoption of a pastoral idiom for the settings is not exceptional—even at this early stage of Moeran's composing career.

⁹⁵ In his 1983 thesis, Rhoderick McNeill quoted from a letter he had received from William Walton: 'I knew [Moeran] through Heseltine, who I knew well enough to avoid his somewhat baleful influence. I couldn't keep up with his drinking luckily, whereas Moeran could, with I feel, deleterious effects on him'. Letter from Sir William Walton to Rhoderick McNeill, 7 April, 1981, quoted in McNeill, 87.

⁹⁶ It is certainly possible for PTSD to have a delayed onset, even years after the cause was experienced. For a detailed examination of PTSD, see Christopher R. Brewin, *Post-traumatic Stress Disorder: Malady or Myth?* (Yale MA: Yale University Press, 2003).

⁹⁷ Although, as mentioned earlier, evidence that suggests a homosexual component to Moeran's sexual identity has been uncovered, it is apparent that he also engaged in heterosexual relationships, most particularly during the period of the Eynsford cottage commune, as implied by Michael Holroyd's biography of Augustus John: 'Though [Augustus John] shared [Eileen Hawthorne's] favours with the musician E. J. Moeran, it was John who, after some grumbling, paid for the abortions', see Michael Holroyd, *Augustus John, Vol. 2 The Years of Experience* (London: William Heinemann Ltd, 1975), 90. It is probable that the sexual aspect of Moeran's relationship with Peers Coetmore was both short-lived and unsatisfactory, as suggested by Lionel Hill's recollection: '...Peers was talking in a

Ultimately, Moeran's survival of the war can only be attributed to the caprices of fate, as can the deaths in equivalent circumstances of George Butterworth, Frederick Septimus Kelly, Edward Brittain and many others who, had they lived, may have made major contributions to twentieth-century music. Whether Moeran's contribution to twentieth-century music may be considered major is open to debate, but the reception of that contribution can now be enriched and illuminated by improved awareness and understanding of its creator's experiences.

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frank manner to Betty about her relationship with Jack. She told my wife that "It was like living with an uncle – you don't know how frustrated I feel."". Hill, 73.