

The Trapp family of Grange-over-Sands during the First World War¹

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Ludwig Trapp was born around 1885 in Kunzelsau in Württemberg, Germany and around 1900 he left his home town for England. He found work at the Prospect Hotel in Harrogate as a groundsman and gardener. In 1907 he married a local woman Florence Annie Smith, and met Mr William Martello Gray, probably a guest staying at the hotel, who was a retired banker from Bradford, who had built Graythwaite Manor in Grange-over-Sands in 1890. Mr Gray invited Mr and Mrs Trapp to Grange where Mr Trapp was asked to construct the gardens for the house. They were living at Graythwaite Manor Lodge by May 1908 when their daughter, Marie Iris, was born. The family are recorded as living at Graythwaite Manor Lodge in the 1911 census. Mr Trapp was aged 25 and is recorded as a German citizen, and Florence was aged 23. Mr Trapp called himself 'Head Gardener'.

The family became part of the Grange community with Mr Trapp winning horticultural prizes at the local produce shows, the family attending the Congregational Church on Sundays, and Marie becoming a pupil at Grange school. The Trapps were well thought of by the Gray family and were particularly friendly with the Burrows family who were local fishermen. However everything changed for them with the outbreak of the First World War in August 1914.

Mr Trapp had not sought to become a naturalised British citizen and as the census showed retained his German citizenship. Mrs Trapp, by marrying a German citizen, was also classed, as was the law at that time, as a German citizen, and Marie was regarded as a British subject born of German parents. As a result of the hastily passed Aliens Registration Act in August 1914 Ludwig had to register with the police. By the end of the month he had been arrested and was initially interned at the hastily requisitioned camp for internees at Handforth in Cheshire. When Handforth became a military camp during the autumn of 1914 Ludwig was transferred to the purpose built internment camp at Knockaloe on the Isle of Man.² There was no system of release for those men who were of military age so Ludwig remained on the Isle of Man for the duration of the war, and was not seen again by Florence or Marie.

As a 'German' citizen through marriage, Florence was restricted in how far she could travel from Grange. The internment of Ludwig also led to the loss of the wage earner in the family, and it is not clear whether Mrs Trapp took a job whilst in Grange or sought help from the Board of Guardians, a recourse taken by other women in her position. The fact that Ludwig was German and was therefore interned was common knowledge in the community, and many of the people of Grange were not sympathetic to the situation faced by the family. During the 1990s Marie, then living in Kendal, described what happened to her and her mother in both *Grange Now* and in an interview for the Kendal Oral History Group. She described the situation as follows:

When [my father, Ludwig] was interned trouble started for us in Grange 'cos Mother was classed as a German, because she was married to a German, and I was classed as a British subject born of German parents. Mother could travel no more than ten or fifteen miles [from Grange]. I don't think Mother would have any money with him [her father] being interned. At school, Grange School, the boys [threw] stones at me calling me 'German pig'. I [went] home crying; Mother [went] to school and that's sorted out. Then the next thing is...overnight someone tied a flag to the chimney. The villagers saw it, went to the police and said 'Mrs Trapp has tied a flag to the chimney to guide the German fleet to Morecambe Bay'. In the end the police and the vicar came to mother and said 'Please, please will you leave Grange'. The feeling [against us] was so high. We had done nothing wrong and they could not force us to leave...we went back to Harrogate.³

This sad story reveals that the family became caught up in the Germanophobia and spy fever of the time. Not unsurprisingly an anti-German feeling developed during the war, and even Germans who had become British citizens as well as families with German connections, like the Trapp family, became the targets of xenophobia, regardless of how well integrated they had become in their communities. The 'atrocities stories' brought by Belgian refugees fleeing to Britain in the autumn of 1914, and the sinking of *Lusitania* by a U-boat in May 1915 increased Germanophobia which took many forms. These included riots against German shopkeepers, as in Barrow-in-Furness in May 1915, and spy-fever whipped up by some newspapers which suggested that every German residing in Britain was a potential spy. Examples from Cumbria include the arrest of a visitor to Millom whose luggage was seen to display many labels from foreign parts, the arrest of a British geologist at Caldbeck suspected of being a German prospector searching for minerals of value in warfare, the foreign wife of a German waiter in Carlisle whose house contained 'suspicious' items, and a woman from Moresby and a man from Maryport, who like the Trapps in Grange, were suspected of signalling to enemy ships offshore.⁴

Given the feeling against the Trapp family in the town, it was not surprising that when they decided to leave the town they should go to Harrogate where Florence had been brought up. They rented a small house and Mrs Trapp's work in a shoe shop would have brought in an income to help her and her daughter survive the war years. Marie did not find life any easier at her Harrogate school where she was again the target of anti-German feelings amongst her fellow pupils. Eventually she had to leave a second school, and her mother suggested that she say that her father had died of a heart attack rather than that he was interned as an alien.

When war ended in November 1918, Ludwig, like thousands of other internees was still in a camp, in his case Knockaloe. In the twelve months following the armistice, the vast majority of the internees were deported back to their home countries of Germany and Austria. Mr Trapp was one of these. There was the option of going before a Tribunal to make a case for remaining in Britain, and some such as Mr Nenninger, a German waiter in Keswick, did so saying that Keswick was his home where his English-born wife and children lived, and he

was given leave to stay. It is unknown whether Mr Trapp sought to stay in Britain. However the fact that he was deported meant that his wife and daughter had the choice of applying to go to Germany to join him. Mrs Trapp chose not to and shortly after the war ended Mr and Mrs Trapp were divorced.

The consequences of hostilities affected people in many different ways. One group that has largely been ignored by historians is the fate of the over 70,000 German and Austrian citizens, and the large number of German and Austrian born British citizens who found themselves on the wrong side of a frontier when war was declared. The story of the Trapp family is an example of what happened to such people across the country, and reveals how war affected individuals and families well away from the front line. And it should not be forgotten that there was also thousands of British citizens interned 'for the duration' in the main German internment camp at Ruhleben near Berlin. Families on both sides suffered this largely forgotten consequence of the war.

¹ This article has been written with the help of Kendal Oral History Group, Iain Blakemore, and Pat Rowland.

² Information from Knockaloe Internment Camp and Patrick Visitor Centre (I of M) archive.

³ Kendal Oral History Group: interview 0070 (January 1999); *Grange Now*, March and April 1999.

⁴ See R. David, "Once a German always a German': Attitudes to people of German and Austrian extraction in Cumbria during the First World War', CWAAS, *Transactions*, CW3, 16, 2016, 73-93.