Archive Reference: GB 0532 MIS

Research Papers of David J. Mitchell on Military Nonconformity: Interim Catalogue

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# Introduction

This small research archive contains recollections and other documents about 1) the experiences of “absolutist” conscientious objectors during the First World War and 2) individuals who struggled with military life for various reasons during the Second World War or during national service post-war.

The catalogue is based on a collection description written for the Archives Hub and rough lists made by the donor when he sent it to Special Collections. We are making the catalogue available online with minor edits as part of our Quick Wins programme, which will put much more information about our archives online quickly by digitising old lists. This is an “Interim” catalogue because there is scope for more detailed listing of the contents of the archive in future, particularly in series 2.

If you’d like to use this archive, do get in touch: our contact details are on the front cover of this catalogue.

Alison Cullingford, Special Collections Librarian.

# Collection description

## Reference code

GB 0532 MIS.

## Title

Research Papers of David J. Mitchell on Military Nonconformity.

## Dates

1962-1998 (most material from 1962-1965 and 1985).

## Level of description

Collection.

## Extent

0.14 linear metres. 0.0142 cubic metres.

## Name of creator

David J. Mitchell, b. 1924, author.

## Biographical history

Mr Mitchell was born in London in 1924 and served for a short time in the Royal Air Force during the Second World War. After working as a journalist and picture editor, he became a freelance writer in 1965. He has published extensively on historical subjects including the women’s suffrage movement and the Spanish Civil War.

## Immediate source of acquisition

Donated to Special Collections by David Mitchell in April 2002.

## Scope and content

This archive contains material relating to two areas of Mr Mitchell’s research:

Series 1. “Absolutist” conscientious objectors of the First World War, researched mainly between 1962 and 1965.

Series 2. “The awkward squad” of the Second World War, individuals who, like Mr Mitchell during his time in the RAF, had problems adjusting to military life for various reasons. Most research carried out in 1985.

Both series comprise correspondence with individuals, interview notes, articles and other writings by Mr Mitchell and notes on published sources.

## Appraisal

Published items have been transferred to book and pamphlet collections. Mainstream and irrelevant press cuttings and photocopies have been weeded. Further appraisal may be required when more detailed cataloguing work is carried out.

## System of arrangement

The archive has been kept as far as possible in the order in which it was received from Mr Mitchell. The numbering has been applied by Special Collections, with revisions between the 2006 and 2014 editions of the catalogue which should make it more helpful to readers.

## Access conditions

Available to researchers, by appointment. Access to archive material is subject to preservation requirements and must also conform to the restrictions of the Data Protection Act and any other appropriate legislation. Some correspondence files in this archive contain sensitive personal data on living individuals or other confidential material. Access to these files is therefore restricted

## Copyright/conditions governing reproduction

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## Language of material

English.

## Related archives

A large collection of material from Mr Mitchell’s research into the women’s suffrage movement is held by The Museum of London. Special Collections at Georgetown University holds his research material for the book *The Jesuits: a history* (1980).

Other archives on conscientious objectors are to be found in many repositories, notably the National Archives and the Peace Pledge Union.

## Archivist’s note

Described by John Brooker and Alison Cullingford.

## Rules or conventions

ISAD(G) 2nd ed.

## Date(s) of description

January 2003, minor revisions October 2006, extensive revisions May 2014.

## Indexing

## Persons

Mitchell, David J., 1924-.

## Subjects

Conscientious objection. Great Britain.

Draft. Great Britain.

World War 1914-1918. Conscientious objectors. Great Britain.

# Series 1. Conscientious objectors of the First World War

**Biographical history:** Mitchell began to research the absolutists with a view to publishing in 1962, prompted by the pamphlet *The Century of Total War* by Hugh Brock. He abandoned the research when he learned that Lords Russell and Brockway were sponsoring book by David Boulton which became *Objection Overruled* (MacGibbon and Kee, 1967). Mitchell returned to the subject in 1965 following interest from the *Weekend Telegraph*.

**Dates:** mainly 1962-1965.

## 1/1 Correspondence

### 1/1/1 Emrys Hughes MP

Two letters from Mitchell to Hughes 21 January 1963 and 13 August 1965. Note from Hughes 28 January 1963 clarifying his position as a “political objector” and explaining that he was court-martialled and imprisoned.

### 1/1/2 Alfred Taylor

Letter from Mitchell asking for interview 21 January 1963 and reply from Taylor 26 January offering assistance. Notes by Mitchell on this letter which appear to refer to Taylor’s death (September 1964 aged 69) and connection with Fred Murfin.

### 1/1/3 Fenner Brockway

Correspondence 1962-1963 and letter from Mitchell 1965. Discussing books and archive sources for absolutists, the No Conscription Fellowship (NCF) and Miles Malleson.

### 1/1/4 B.J. Boothroyd

Letter to Boothroyd on role of British women in the First World War especially Violet Tillard of the No Conscription Fellowship, 2 September 1964. Note from Boothroyd promising to send recollections, 7 September 1964.

### 1/1/5 C.H. Norman

Letter to Norman asking for assistance 6 September 1965. Two letters from Norman in which he answers Mitchell’s questions but cannot be of further assistance as he is doing similar work on a memoir of his own.

### 1/1/6 Miles Malleson

Letter from Mitchell 13 August 1965 and reply from Malleson 3 September 1965 confirming he was not a CO but had “great sympathy” with them especially absolutists.

### 1/1/7 Sydney Silverman

Letter from Mitchell 13 August 1965 asking about his memories and views. No reply but note of phone call in which Silverman did not wish to take further.

### 1/1/8 Mrs Eileen Barratt Brown

Detailed letter from Mrs Barratt Brown 3 July 1963: asked to contact him by Lady Allen. Her husband, Alfred Barratt Brown, was a lecturer at Woodbrooke College, Principal of Ruskin College, and active in formation of Midland Branch NCF. He died in 1949. Letter of thanks from Mitchell 6 June 1963.

### 1/1/9 John Rae

Correspondence with John Rae concerning CO research, 1965.

**Note:** Rae was writing his thesis on COs, later published as *Conscience and Politics* (OUP, 1970).

## 1/2 Writing and research

**Scope and content:** Typescripts by Mitchell.

1/2/1 Two versions of article “The conscientious objectors”, commissioned by *Weekend Telegraph* in 1966 but not used.

1/2/2 Synopsis of article headed “The absolutists (or the deemed soldiers)”

1/2/3 Song lyric “The conscientious objector”.

1/2/4 Transcriptions from *Goodbye to all that* by Robert Graves and notes on key books.

1/2/5 Caption material for article.

1/2/6 List of absolutist COs and other contacts consulted by Mitchell and list of possible illustrations for article.

## 1/3 Allan M. Laing

1/3/1 Notes by Mitchell on interview with Laing 28 September 1963 and press cutting of letter from J.R. Till to the *New Statesman*, 19 June 1970, concerning Laing’s recent death.

1/3/2 Extensive correspondence between Mitchell and Laing 1963-1965. Also between Mitchell and David Boulton who was working on a book about COs, published as *Objection Overruled* (MacGibbon and Kee, 1967). Includes discussion of Laing’s book *Carols of a Convict*, his time in prisons, his absolutist ideas, and a poem written by Silverman to Florence, who later married Laing.

1/3/3 Envelope containing:

1/3/3/1 Photograph of Laing taken June 1963 with statue of Pan [?]. Possibly in garden of Harrington House, Bourton-on-the-Water.

1/3/3/2 Postcard from Laing to Mitchell 22 September 1963 depicting interior of Netley House, Holiday Fellowship Guest House, Gomshall, near Guildford Surrey.

1/3/3/3 Photographic print and negative showing Laing in garden, 1962.

1/3/3/4 Flyer, possibly pages from a book, about Netley House.

## 1/4 Rowland Philcox

1/4/1 Notes by Mitchell on interview with Philcox, 10 February 1963.

1/4/2 Notes by Mitchell from correspondence between Philcox and his fiancée Kathleen 1916-1918. Prison life, prison diet.

1/4/3 Anonymous article “My prisons” in *Calamus* April 1932: “two addresses by a war-time pacifist delivered recently in London”. Pp. 63-75. Given to Mitchell by Philcox.

1/4/4 Correspondence between Mitchell and Philcox, 1963, mainly concerning loan of books. Notes by Mitchell written in 1965 about Philcox, his vegetarian principles in prison, also notes on Sylvia Pankhurst and Lydia Horton of the No Conscription Fellowship.

## 1/5 Correspondence and notes

### 1/5/1 Harold Steele

Correspondence between Mitchell and Harold Steele September 1965. Steele was an absolutist. Sent Mitchell a more detailed document which was returned.

### 1/5/2 Raymond Postgate

Letter from Mitchell 13 August 1965 asking whether Postgate was a CO. Postgate’s reply 17 August, short period in prison 1916 and “on the run” from mid-1918 to the end of the war. Notes by Mitchell.

### 1/5/3 Lydia Smith

Notes by Mitchell on Lydia Smith, Brighton Area Tribunals, NCF.

### 1/5/4 R. Palme Dutt

Letter to Mitchell 26 February 1963 on his experiences as a “socialist war resister”, not a pacifist, imprisoned Aldershot, Winchester, Wormwood.

**Access: restricted**.

### 1/5/5 Arthur Creech Jones and Mrs Violet Creech Jones

Correspondence between Mitchell and Arthur Creech Jones (absolutist CO, served 3 years hard labour) 1963 and 1964 and, following his death, with his widow in 1965. She met him through the NCF and wrote about his role in improving the treatment of objectors in the Second World War. His papers at Nuffield College. Notes by Mitchell about Jones.

### 1/5/6 Francis Meynell

Correspondence between Mitchell and Francis Meynell, about Meynell’s experiences as an absolutist (he was imprisoned in the guard-house and then discharged). 1963 and 1965.

**Access: restricted**

### 1/5/7 J. Allen Skinner

Correspondence between Mitchell and J. Allen Skinner 1962-1965 including detailed letter from Skinner about his experiences (absolutist, not then a pacifist, imprisoned).

## 1/6 Research notes

Scope and content: typescript notes by Mitchell.

1/6/1 Notes from *War memoirs* by David Lloyd-George (Nicholson and Watson, 1933).

1/6/2 Notes from No Conscription Fellowship circular, 1919.

1/6/3 Notes from *We did not fight* by Julian Bell (Cobden-Sanderson, 1935).

1/6/4 Notes from *The nineteen-twenties* by Douglas Goldring (Nicholson and Watson, 1945).

1/6/5 Notes on Leonard Woolf (who opposed the First World War though was not a CO – unfit).

1/6/6 Notes from Fussell, Paul (ed.) *The ordeal of Alfred M. Hale: memoirs of a soldier servant* (Leo Cooper, 1975).

Note: Hale was not a CO but suffered from “conscription shock”.

1/6/7 Transcription from *Handed-over: the prison experiences of Mr J. Scott Duckers* (C. W. Daniel, 1917).

# Series 2. Military “misfits” during and after the Second World War

**Biographical information:** In 1985, Mitchell began to collect material for a possible book on the “awkward squad”, military “misfits” during and after the Second World War, and drawing on his own experiences . He returned to these themes throughout the 1990s as new information or opportunities arose.

## 2/1 Dr R.G.S. “Dicky” Whitfield

Note: RGSW held by Japanese in Shinegawa camp, near Tokyo, during Second World War

2/1/1 Correspondence between Mitchell and RGSW, 1990

2/1/2 Photograph of RGSW, 1989

2/1/3 Notes by Mitchell of RGSW's life including detailed account of his experiences as a prisoner of war.

2/1/4 Photocopy of his Distinguished Service Cross citation issued 1946 and 1952.

2/1/5 Photocopy of book review by RGSW as George Sarel in Central African Examiner 13 February 1960 including detail about his experiences.

## 2/2 6 BFTS (British Flying Training School), Ponca City, Oklahoma

**Note:** Mitchell was based at 6 BFTS October-December 1943.

2/2/1 Correspondence concerning research into 6 BFTS.

2/2/2 1943 photograph of Mitchell in uniform. Drafts of articles by Mitchell about his wartime experiences at Ponca City and elsewhere with press cuttings and notes.

2/2/3 Photocopies of articles by Mitchell: “The Battle of Ponca City”, *London Magazine*, April/May 1988 and “Berlin? I'd sooner drop a few bombs on Ponca City”, *Guardian*, 12 September 1990. Correspondence with John Selwyn Gilbert concerning film based on Mitchell's experience. Film script by Gilbert “The Battle of Ponca City”, November 1991. “The Battle of Ponca City”, detailed typescript account by Mitchell of his wartime experiences.

2/2/4 Correspondence with Roger Lees, photograph of Lees, Mitchell and Mollie Lees in the garden, notes by Mitchell about Lees, and photocopies of Lees' letters to Mollie 1943.

**Note:** Lees was schoolfriend of Mitchell and preceded him at BFTS (unlike Mitchell, he enjoyed the experience)

## 2/3 Eastchurch Combined Re-selection Centre

Correspondence concerning research into Eastchurch Combined Re-selection Centre, Isle of Sheppey, 1991-1993.

**Note:** Mitchell arrived in spring 1944.

## 2/4 Conscientious objectors of the Second World War

Correspondence with “Tommy”, Tom Hopkinson, Glyn Jones, John Elwyn mentioning John Ormond and other COs. 1985 and research notes.

## 2/5 "Anarchist angles"

Correspondence with Colin Ward and notes, 1985, concerning Aldershot Mutiny of 23/24 February 1946, Ernest Silverman, Philip Sansom and anarchist views. Carbon copy of appeal made by Freedom Defence Committee on behalf of Northallerton mutineers and typescript of talk by Ward on "Soldiers after the war". Notes and press cuttings concerning Albert Meltzer, including *Black Flag Quarterly* article on soldiers' strike in Cairo 1946.

## 2/6 Bernie Lineham

Correspondence, notes, press cuttings, typescript of article “Bernie’s War” by Mitchell, offered to the *London Magazine* in 1996.

**Note:** Lineham, a career criminal from London’s gangland, was a ringleader in the 1946 Aldershot Mutiny.

## 2/7 Other "misfits”

Correspondence with many individuals following appeals by Mitchell in national and local press for memories. Topics covered include memories of "legendary" misfit Harry Hill, a WAAF perspective, deserters, various political views (Mosleyite, socialist), homosexuality in the services.

**Access: restricted.**

## 2/8 Correspondence and notes

Correspondence, mainly with other writers researching service life during and after the Second World War. Correspondents include Trevor Royle, Paul Foot, J.M. Rae, Leslie Paul, Peter Grafton, Richard Pankhurst, Henry Cowper, Freddy Hurdis-Jones and Michael Hamburger (1994 correspondence). Research notes.