

When 'Germany Called the Tune': Music, Liberalism and the Call to War

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In Leicester, as in most other English towns, the first impression made by the declaration of war in 1914 was slight. The troubles in Ireland had seemed far more serious than those in the Balkans; nearer home a threatened addition of a shilling to the rates was far more immediately alarming. (Jack Simmons) (1)

There was an initial enthusiasm to voluntarily join up, but this rapidly died down, and by 1915 'the backwardness of Leicester began to become a public scandal.' (2) However by October, renewed recruitment appeals proved more successful, aided by news of the Leicestershire Regiment at the attack on the Hohenzollern Redoubt that month.

As the war progressed, its horrors became apparent with millions of lives being lost or ruined. The unprecedented slaughter was made possible by industrialised nations being able to equip their armies with new, more effective means of destroying lives. No sector of society was immune, and whilst the common soldier drawn from the working classes was in the greatest number on the battlefield, the new form of warfare required the mustering of all levels of society, requiring technicians as well as soldiers; and a commitment by the educated middle and upper classes to the war.

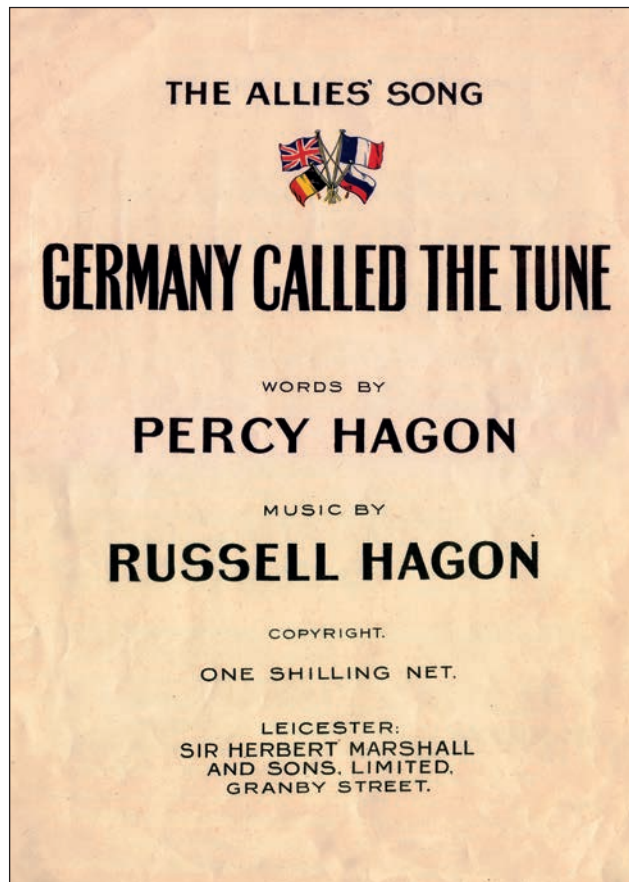
The writing of this article was prompted by the survival of a piece of patriotic piano music. The piece, entitled *The Allies' Song – Germany Called the Tune*, was written in the opening months of the war, at a time before the full implications of the conflict would be realised, and at the time when the recruitment campaign in Leicester was flagging. The song expressed sentiments that the war was a

just cause, that there was a wrong that needed to be righted, and called on Britain and her allies to restore order.

The words of the song were written by Percy Hagon, and the music composed by Russell Hagon, one of his two sons, both of whom served as junior officers in the war. The Hagon family lived in Leicester in the lead up to the war, and the song's discovery provided the catalyst to research the family, and in doing so also gave an interesting insight into Liberal political activism in the seventeen years leading up to the outbreak of war. The Hagon family were very much part of the growing middle class, a family whose children would have been brought up on Christian zeal and a

belief in the might of the nation. They were also a family that developed a strong liberal political stance. This was accompanied by a sense of duty to those less fortunate than themselves, along with an expectation to take up responsibilities compatible with their evolving position in society.

Percy Hagon was born in Bristol in 1870, the son of William Kebble Hagon, and his wife Susan, née Weeks. William Hagon was a journeyman painter and a ship's mate in the Royal Naval Reserve. (3) Percy Hagon grew up in the St James' and St Paul's districts of Bristol and at the age of 19 married Kate Amelia Pritchard at Bedminster. The 1891 Census records the couple as resident at 118 Coronation Road, Bedminster, listing Percy's occupation as a manager and clerk to a leather manufacturer.



Cover of the sheet music titled The Allies' Song: Germany Called the Tune. Written and composed by Percy and Russell Hagon, it was published in Leicester by the well-known Leicester music publishers Sir Herbert Marshall and Sons.

Shortly after the birth of their son Percy Russell Hagon in May 1892, the Hagon family moved to Leicester where their second son Charles Stanley Hagon was born in November 1893. Both sons were known by their second names.

Percy Hagon's life in Leicester is particularly interesting for his involvement in local Liberal politics in both Leicester and the county, and his support for certain Liberal councillors prior to 1914 (4), and his subsequent support for the war. As a leather company representative, he also regularly travelled from Leicester to the U.S.A. Much of the evidence used here comes from local newspapers.



By 1911 Holmfield Road, Leicester, was the location of the Hagon family home Hillesley, which was named after Kate Hagon's place of birth in Gloucestershire.

Towards the end of October 1897 Percy Hagon is heard of taking part in a meeting held in Christow Street School, Leicester in support of the local Liberal candidate R. K. Hull who was contesting the Wyggeston Ward in the town's municipal elections. The main business of the meeting was concerned with having to oppose a member of the Independent Labour Party (I.L.P.), who the meeting felt ought to be a member of the Liberals. A speaker at the meeting said 'it would be a glorious day for Leicester and the country when the I. L. P. were joined to the Liberal party again.' Hagon supported the resolution. (5)

On an early January evening in 1907, he took part in a meeting of the Victoria Road Church Literary and Debating Society in Leicester where he initiated a debate on the influences of the church on the public. He argued that the churches could only bring 'influence on the formation of public opinion, and thereby an influence on government if they displayed true sympathy and interest in the social problems of the age.' He said church pastors must be men of courage and that they should be engaged in 'exposing social evils even if in so doing they offended some.' He finished by remarking that the Salvation Army had set a notable example in bringing 'succour and assistance to the downtrodden.' It was reported that an interesting debate followed. (6)

In March 1907, Hagon is heard of taking part in a meeting of the Leicester Parliamentary Debating Society which discussed the pernicious measure of the Licensing Act of 1904, and the control of liquor sales. (7) In September 1908 he chaired a meeting of the Leicester branch of the National League of Young Liberals. The meeting, held in the Liberal Club Lecture Hall, Bishop Street, took the form of a smoking concert, which was reported to have been an excellent musical programme. (8) Hagon also attended the branch meeting of the League on the 24th March 1909. (9)

Percy Hagon's job as a representative for a leather manufacturing company started to regularly take him away from Leicester. On the 5th May 1909, he sailed from Southampton to New York aboard the *S.S. Kronprinzessin Cecille* arriving six days later (10), his work being to seek out new supplies of leather for the company.

Returning to England, Hagon gave a lecture at the Victoria Road Adult School, Leicester on the 25th July 1909, one of a series on the subject of *Riches and Poverty*. He talked about the abnormal distribution of wealth and concluded by saying: 'The monopoly of capital created and perpetuated a lopsided power, which failed to recognise the just claims of labour.' (11) A month later, Hagon along with Councillor Evan Barlow, held an outdoor meeting of the Leicester Liberal Association at Clarendon Park. Councillor Barlow talked about his confidence in the Liberal Government's budget, and was seconded by Hagon who said 'the budget was sound financially and distributed the burden with justice. It put the heaviest burden on the broadest backs.' Hagon was applauded when he said that 'the only way to pay for social progress was Mr. Lloyd George's way.' (12)

In September 1909, Hagon sailed again to New York, this time on the *S.S. Baltic*, arriving in port on the 3rd October. The *Baltic* was one of six transatlantic liners that were secured to their piers that day and which together discharged over 4,600 passengers from their first and second class cabins alone. (13)

Returning home, Hagon attended a meeting of the Leicester branch of the National League of Young Liberals on the 24th November 1909 at which impending action by the House of Lords on rejecting the government's budget was discussed. At the end of the meeting a resolution was passed, seconded by Hagon, 'indignantly protesting against the arbitrary and unconstitutional action of the House of Lords.' (14) The following month on 20th December, Hagon gave a speech at a protest meeting held in the School Rooms at Oadby, at which he condemned the blocking of the government's budget. The meeting concluded with a resolution that the House of Lords should be abolished. (15) Hagon gave an even more vociferous speech on the budget

at Groby on the 14th January 1910, saying ‘If the Peers wanted Dreadnoughts let them pay their share towards them . . . The Lords were against the Budget, because it touched the land . . . The Peers’ policy was keeping all they had, and trying to get more . . .’ The meeting was reported to be one of the most successful ever held in the village. (16)

In the spring of 1910, Hagon’s job took him back to New York leaving from Liverpool aboard the world’s largest ship, Cunard’s magnificent S.S. Mauretania, arriving in New York on the 6th May where he was to stay at the Hotel Victoria.

Subsequently back in Leicester, Hagon took part in a meeting of the Leicester Parliamentary Debating Society held at the Memorial Hall on New Walk on the 20th January 1911. Discussions focussed on proposals to reform the House of Lords. Hagon spoke in opposition to the Conservative viewpoint saying: ‘the Tory party were in search of another weapon with which to thwart the will of the people.’ (17) The following month, Hagon attended the annual meeting of the General Committee of the Leicester Liberal Association (18), and in early March, he took part in a debate at a meeting of the Leicester Parliamentary Debating Society. (19)

At the end of April, Hagon attended a meeting of the executive of the Leicester Liberal Association in Leicester. (20) He was also present in August at a Liberal fete held at Barrow-upon-Soar attended by Loughborough’s Liberal MP Sir Maurice Levy (21), and at the opening of the Liberal Bazaar by Sir Maurice at Leicester’s Temperance Hall on 18th November. (22) Towards the end of the year Hagon spoke at a Liberal meeting at Kirby Muxloe (23), and in February 1912 he addressed the Aylestone Ward Liberal Association on the social reform that was introduced by the National Insurance Act of 1911, and how it worked for the betterment of the less favoured of the community. (24) At the end of March he attended a branch meeting of the National Society of the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (N.S.P.C.C.) held in Leicester’s Council Chamber. (25)

Hagon returned to the U.S.A. aboard the S.S. Caronia which after a nine day voyage docked in New York on the 29th May 1912, with his work for the leather business taking him on to Boston this time.

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GERMANY CALLED THE TUNE.

Words by
PERCY HAGON.

Music by
RUSSELL HAGON.

Introduction.

Piano. *ff*

Alla Marcia.

The Ger-man War Lords long have plann'd To

marcato

rule the world o'er sea and land, Whilst Eu-rope, dis-be-liev-ing, stood As -

pp

-kance, till Wil-helm show'd his hand; Then Bri-tain cease-less strove for peace, And

Copyright.

H. & C. 1

The opening words and music to The Allies’ Song: Germany Called the Tune.

Later in the year Hagon stood in the municipal elections in Leicester but lost to the Conservative Mr P. L. Baker. (26)

On the 27th February 1913, assisted by Councillor Loseby, Hagon presided over a meeting of Leicester’s Knighton Ward Liberal Association at the Avenue Road Council School. Hagon was amongst those elected to represent the association for the coming year. (27)

The annual meeting of the Coalville Liberal Association held on 15th October 1913 in the mining village’s Progressive Hall began with a reference by the Chairman Mr. B. G. Hale, to the previous year’s loss of the *R.M.S. Titanic*, and the previous day’s explosion at the Universal Colliery in the Aber Valley, Glamorganshire, the worst in British history, in which 439 men and boys perished. Hagon went on to address the meeting on the blocking of Liberal legislation by the House of Lords and the Irish question of

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CHORUS.
Vivace. marcato

Ger-man-y call'd the tune To Bri-tain, Rus-sia and France, And Ger-man-y's got to pay, And Ger-man-y's got to dance. For Ger-man-y call'd the tune To Bri-tain, Rus-sia and France, And Ger-man-y's got to pay, — And Ger-man-y's got to dance.

H. & C. 1

The closing chorus to The Allies' Song: Germany Called the Tune.

Home Rule. He also spoke on the scandalous conditions under which some labourers were living, whilst saying of the Liberal Party that 'it had justified its existence since 1906, and that the future held out greater promise for the nation than ever.' (28)

In January 1914, Hagon was in London attending a meeting of the National Executive of the League of Young Liberals discussing the growth in expenditure on armaments, and a resolution was passed 'This committee of the National League of Young Liberals regrets expressions of belief in the doctrines of force recently uttered by some of His Majesty's Ministers, and views with alarm the ever increasing expenditure on armaments, being of opinion that this growth is a menace to the social well-being of the democracies of Europe and a most injurious diversion of national resources from reproductive industrial enterprise.' (29)

Meanwhile, Hagon returned to Boston on business in 1914, having sailed from Liverpool aboard the *S.S. Carmania* arriving in New York on 23rd March and taking rooms at the *Hotel Essex*.

In early August Prime Minister Herbert Asquith, leader of the Liberal Party, delivered the ultimatum to Germany to remove its troops from Belgium, whose neutrality Britain had guaranteed since 1839. The request was rejected, and the British government issued a declaration that as from 11pm on the 4th August 1914, Great Britain was at war with Germany.

Amongst the early British sea casualties of the war were *H.M.S. Pathfinder* and the loss of over 1,400 sailors from three Royal Navy cruisers *H.M.S. Aboukir*, *Cressy* and *Hogue*, sunk by German U-boats. Attacks on merchant ships began in October.

The same month, Leicester's Corn Exchange was the scene for a lively meeting which was addressed by one of the town's Labour Members of Parliament, Ramsay MacDonald, well-known for his anti-war opinion. He spoke about the importance of democracy and overcoming militarism, but was interrupted by political opponents within the building, some of whom were ejected by the police. Mr MacDonald said 'He did not want those men who were joining the colours now with such magnificent enthusiasm to come back at the end of the war and find that the country had failed to

carry out the ideals which inflamed their hearts when they joined.' Over 10,000 people had gathered in the Market Place practically filling the area, with around 100 police officers endeavouring to maintain order. Whilst the M.P. was speaking inside the Corn Exchange, outside beneath the Rialto arch others delivered patriotic addresses to sections of the crowd. Amongst those making speeches was Percy Hagon. (30) It was barely 9 months since Hagon had attended the London meeting of National Executive of the League of Young Liberals which denounced the ever increasing expenditure on armaments.

Whilst Leicester gained notoriety as a supporter of Leftist anti-war feelings, Hagon was by now committed to the war, supporting his party's leader Asquith who had taken the country into war.

Undaunted by the war at sea, and perhaps with a mixture of patriotic duty and commercial opportunity in mind, by the

7th November 1914, Hagon was back in New York, having arrived aboard the *S.S. Lapland*. Whilst the adage that ‘an army marches on its stomach’ may have been as true in 1914 as it had been to Napoléon Bonaparte a century before, it was also true that the allied armies had in reality to march on their feet. The *Sunday Oregonian* reported that Percy Hagon, a London representative of a firm of leather manufacturers, was in New York, endeavouring to buy leather to ‘furnish the French, Russian and English armies with shoes.’ (31)

Back from his overseas travels, Hagon, along with his wife, organised the entertainment for the annual New Year party for the *Leicester Guild of the Crippled*. Held on the 8th January 1915 at the Guild Hall, Colton Street, the party was attended by over 300 people. According to the *Leicester Chronicle*:

An excellent programme was arranged by Mr and Mrs Percy Hagon, who also provided refreshments. An interesting feature of the programme was the singing of a new song *Germany Called the Tune*, the words of which are by Mr Percy Hagon, the music being by Mr Russell Hagon, while Stanley Hagon was the singer. The song goes with a good swing, and was much appreciated. (32)

The newspaper also commented on the pleasant decoration of the venue and the distribution of gifts. Amongst those who provided a full programme of entertainments was Mr Will Hay, a comedian who had been working at the Leicester Palace and who would later gain popularity in British cinema comedy films. Also from The Palace providing entertainment were the Sisters Aberdare.

During the Great War Percy Hagon continued to support the Liberal cause. On the 30th August 1915 He spoke at a meeting held in the Victoria Hall, Granby Street, Leicester which was organised by the Leicester Committee affiliated to the Central Committee of National Patriotic Organisations. At the meeting, which was chaired by Sir Herbert Marshall, Hagon spoke in favour of organising a public or town meeting to expose what was considered to be Ramsay MacDonald’s unrepresentative attitude towards the war. (33)

On the 27th November 1917 Hagon wrote a vitriolic letter to the editor of the *Leicester Daily Post* that poured scorn on Mr Ramsay MacDonald. Hagon accused the Leicester MP of misusing his position, and also wrote that ‘his evil work proceeds. He is working overtime in these days, and always against the interests of our nation in the throes of a life struggle with a relentless and unscrupulous foe.’ (34)

On the 10th December 1917 Hagon spoke in a debate that was held at the 5th Northern General Hospital, entitled *Is the Labour movement the hope of the future?* Hagon, whilst not mentioning the Liberal party, led a debate that was firmly

against a Labour future. He contended ‘the Labour movement had not been a true Labour movement; it had been exploited by Socialism.’ He also cited the treachery of the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia. The Rev F. L. Donaldson spoke in favour of a Labour future. Officers and soldiers at the military hospital, which was housed in the former County Lunatic Asylum, participated in the debate. One officer, Captain Rev G. Barclay, believed that the Army, when it came back from overseas, should run the country, as it had learned fellowship, and that they must not let the ideal go from them. (35)

After the war Hagon maintained his support for the Liberal cause. He supported the candidature of Mr. W. B. Wykes as a Coalition representative for the Knighton Ward during the Spring of 1919. (36)

Percy Hagon moved from Leicester sometime after 1920 and by 1922 was working as the Manager of F. J. Walker & Company, Hide and Skin Importers, of 27 Mincing Lane, London, E.C.3. (37) He died in London in 1930.

Of his sons, Stanley enrolled in the Territorial Army at Lincoln’s Inn on the 28th June 1915 to serve with the Inns of Court Officer Training Corps. In October 1915 he was discharged on account of being appointed to a commission with the 147th (Leicester) Heavy Battery Royal Garrison Artillery (R.G.A.). (38) The following March Stanley’s older brother Russell, a commercial traveller for the Dunlop Rubber Co. Ltd., also enlisted for military service. He was initially placed on the Reserve, his call up for service coming the following year on 9th May 1917 when he joined the Royal Flying Corps (R.F.C.) as 3rd Class Airman, 80411, Russell Hagon. (39) On the 30th June 1916 Stanley Hagon, now a 2nd Lieutenant, embarked aboard ship at Southampton, landing at Le Havre for service with his unit. However, on the 2nd August, with just over a month on active service, he was admitted to the 35th General Hospital at Calais suffering from tonsillitis, where he was considered unfit and sent back to England. He went to recuperate and take a water-cure at Ashover House Hydro, near Chesterfield. He recovered from tonsillitis, but developed seborrheic dermatitis, a skin disease associated with stress. A series of medical boards followed, declaring him unfit for general service, but fit for home service, and on the 27th November 1916 he joined the 2a Reserve Brigade Royal Field Artillery at Fulwood Barracks, Preston. In early May 1917 he briefly rejoined the R.G.A. but within less than two weeks was again considered unfit, and not able to return to general service until November 1917 when he was back in France posted to the 146th Heavy Battery R.G.A. (40) In 1918 he was made second in command of the 146th Heavy Battery and Acting Captain. After the Armistice and demobilisation, he relinquished his commission whilst retaining the rank of Lieutenant. He was subsequently

awarded the British War Medal and Allied Victory Medal in recognition of his overseas service. (41) Meanwhile, Russell Hagon obtained a commission as 2nd Lieutenant in September 1917. The following month he was appointed as an Equipment Officer 3rd Class with the R.F.C. Balloon Training Wing. He went on to become a 2nd Lieutenant in the Royal Air Force following its formation from the amalgamation of the Royal Flying Corps with the Royal Naval Air Service on the 1st April 1918. (42) He left the Royal Air Force in May 1919. By the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939, both brothers were working as commercial travellers. Stanley was back in the Midlands, living at 99 Northampton Road, Market Harborough. (43) whilst Russell was living at 16 Rayleigh Road, Harrogate, Yorkshire. (44) Stanley died in the Market Harborough area in 1968 and Russell in Yorkshire in 1971.

Postscript:

There are a number of World War I songs from morale-raisers to rousing marches and romantic ballads which remain well-known today a hundred years after they were written, including titles such as *Keep the Home Fires Burning* (originally called *Till the Boys come Home*) 1914, *Pack up your Troubles in Your Old Kit-bag* 1915, *Take me back to dear Old Blighty* 1916, and *Roses of Picardy* 1916. *Germany Called the Tune* belongs to the early patriotic recruiting songs popular at the outbreak of the war before the introduction of conscription, and is now a forgotten song from a bygone time – although perhaps its ambiguous and potentially misleading title contributed to its obscurity. To date, no other copies of the sheet music have been traced by the author, nor has any other music written and composed by Percy or Russell Hagon been identified.

References and Notes:

1. Jack Simmons, *Leicester Past and Present, vol.2 Modern City 1860-1974*, (Eyre Methuen, 1974), p.62.
2. *Ibid.*, p.63.
3. *Western Daily Press*, 23rd April 1868.
4. *Leicester Chronicle & Leicestershire Mercury*, 28th October 1893.
5. *Ibid.*, 23rd October 1897.
6. *Ibid.*, 12th January 1907.
7. *Ibid.*, 16th March 1907.
8. *Ibid.*, 3rd October 1908.
9. *Ibid.*, 27th March 1909.
10. TNA BT27 Passenger Lists leaving the UK 1890-1960; The Statue of Liberty – Ellis Island Foundation Inc. – Passenger Lists - www.libertyellisfoundation.org
11. *Leicester Chronicle & Leicestershire Mercury*, 31st July 1909.
12. *Ibid.*, 21st August 1909.
13. *New York Times*, 4th October 1909.
14. *Leicester Chronicle & Leicestershire Mercury*, 27th November 1909.
15. *Ibid.*, 25th December 1909.
16. *Ibid.*, 15th January 1910.
17. *Ibid.*, 21st January 1911.
18. *Ibid.*, 18th February 1911.
19. *Ibid.*, 11th March 1911. By this time, the Hagon family had

moved to *Hillesley* on Holmfield Road, Leicester. The April 1911 census records Percy, his wife Kate, and their younger son Stanley at home, along with their live-in domestic servant Lily Norcott. Their elder son, Russell, was living at 30, Burbury Street in the Lozells district of Aston. Russell was working in the West Midlands jewellery trade, and was employed as a jewellery moulder.

20. *Ibid.*, 29th April 1911.
21. *Ibid.*, 26th August 1911.
22. *Ibid.*, 18th November 1911.
23. *Ibid.*, 9th December 1911.
24. *Ibid.*, 17th February 1912.
25. *Ibid.*, 4th May 1912.
26. *Ibid.*, 26th October 1912.
27. *Ibid.*, 1st February 1913.
28. *Ibid.*, 18th October 1913.
29. *Pioneer*, 24th January 1914.
30. *Leicester Chronicle & Leicestershire Mercury*, 24th October 1914.
31. University of Oregon Libraries - Historic Oregon Newspapers *The Sunday Oregonian*, Portland, 8th November, 1914. <https://oregonnews.uoregon.edu>
32. *Leicester Chronicle & Leicestershire Mercury*, 9th January 1915.
33. *Leicester Daily Post*, 31st August 1915.
34. *Ibid.*, 28th November 1917.
35. *Ibid.*, 11th December 1917.
36. *Ibid.* Daily Post, 3rd April 1919.
37. New York Public Library, *The Leather Manufacturer* v.33, July 1922, p.198.
38. TNA WO 339/44535 Service Records of 2nd Lieutenant Charles Stanley Hagon, R. G. A.
39. TNA Air Ministry – Airmen’s Records AIR 79/730/80411.
40. TNA WO 339/44535 Service Records of 2nd Lieutenant Charles Stanley Hagon, R. G. A.
41. TNA Medal Index Card WO 372/8/193085 – Charles Stanley Hagon.
42. TNA Air Ministry Officers Service Papers - AIR 76/201/116; TNA WO 339/115314 Service Records of 2nd Lieutenant Russell Hagon, R.F.C.
43. TNA 1939 Registration Index RG101/6048G/005/29 Letter Code: RFIJ, Schedule 44/1-5. Also listed were his wife, his 81 years’ old widowed mother-in-law and his wife’s spinster sister who worked as a school mistress. The household employed a domestic servant.
44. TNA 1939 Registration Index RG101/3655A/012/22 Letter Code: KNCB, Schedule 100/1-5. Also listed were Muriel Lily Hagon, her father (a retired bank manager), and his wife Laura.

General Registry Office: Births, Marriages, Deaths
The National Archives (TNA): Census 1891, 1901, 1911

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