



PLAYING THE GAME

Germans in London

In 1914 it was estimated that there were 100,000 Germans living and working in Britain, with at least 53,000 living in London itself. There were 2,010 Germans living in Westminster in 1911, with a large community residing in Soho, many working as waiters or tailors. Large German communities existed in St Marylebone (730) and Paddington (1,176), whilst a large German community lived in the Sand's End area of Fulham, which came to be known as "German Square."

Shortly after the declaration of war in 1914, *The Times* and *The Daily Mail* objected to the fact that many Germans were changing their names to British-sounding names. The government rushed through laws to prevent this. Many individuals placed adverts in the local press to confirm their allegiance to Britain, while companies like Jaeger were forced to publish adverts stating that they were British companies. Despite these laws, the most prominent family of all, the Royal family, changed their name from 'Saxe-Coburg-Gotha' to the more English 'Windsor' in 1917. It was an attempt to draw attention away from the fact that Kaiser Wilhelm was a first cousin of George V.

The story of Max Paul Seeburg shows how this hysteria impacted on ordinary people. Max was born in Leipzig, Germany, on 19th September 1884, and was just two when his family moved to London in 1886 to set up a fur shop near Tower Bridge. Football quickly became his passion, and he joined Chelsea at the end of their very first season. He never broke into the first team, but his performance for Chelsea's South Eastern League team persuaded Spurs to buy him for £30 in May 1907. At Spurs Max became the first German-born player to play in the Football League, and later went on to play for Burnley and Grimsby before joining Reading for

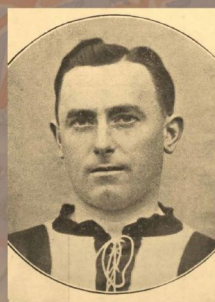
the 1912-1913 season. At Reading, he was so well thought of that he quickly became their club captain.

Despite being a local football celebrity and a popular pub landlord, Seeburg was interned for a short period at the outbreak of World War One. This was particularly ironic as his brother Frank was serving in the Middlesex Regiment as a soldier at the time. Despite his treatment, Max remained in England afterwards, becoming a carpenter by trade. He died in 1972.

The crisis for most German families came to a head with news that 1,198 lives had been lost following the sinking of the *Lusitania* by a German submarine on 7th May 1915. On 12th May, Archibald Walker recorded in his diary how strong anti-German feeling had grown as a result. In Chelsea the residents of Slaidburn Street rioted, while in Fulham, Steil's, a German baker's shop in Wandsworth Bridge Road, was only saved by an heroic local vicar, the Reverend H.B. Thompson, who had witnessed the attack on the bakers and decided to step in:

'He had been a witness of other rioting, and now, standing on the doorstep with arms extended, he cried, to the demonstrators who had arrived "If you throw, you hit me". This was too much for the crowd and Mr Steil's shop was saved.' Fulham Chronicle, 1915

Further riots occurred in London in June 1916, July 1917 and September 1918. These were often as a result of set-backs at the Front or Zeppelin raids. By then, those in the German community who could do so, had changed their names and blended in. Many Londoners today are probably unaware of their German heritage that disappeared because of World War One.



MAX SEEBURG (Inside Right).

The war picture of Max Seeburg during his time playing for Reading Football Club

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Anti-German protester

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Lusitania riots in East London, 1915

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Illustrations by Michael Foreman