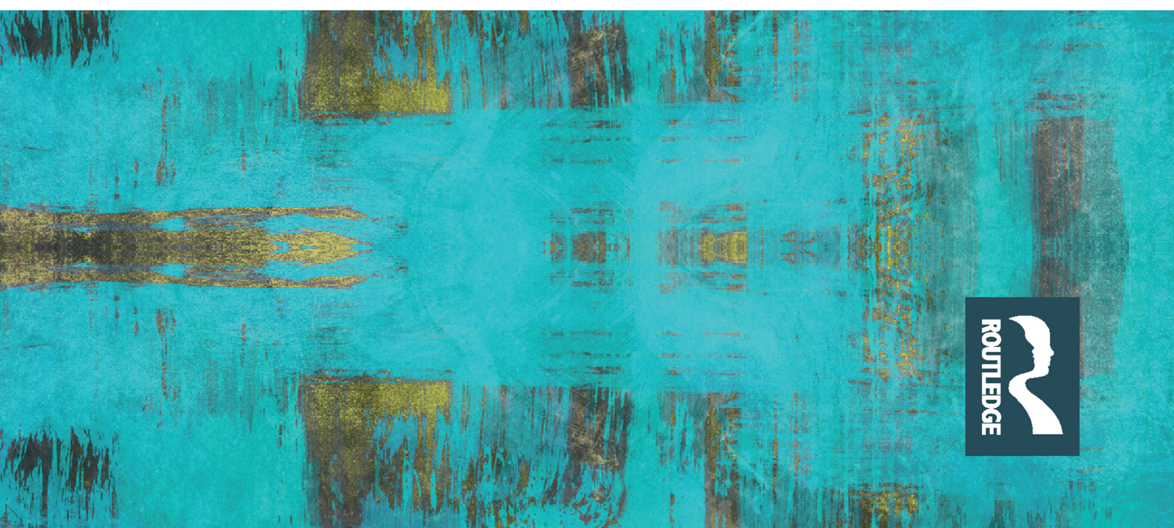
Routledge Studies in First World War History

MUSEUMS, HISTORY AND THE INTIMATE EXPERIENCE OF THE GREAT WAR

LOVE AND SORROW

Edited by
Joy Damousi, Deborah Tout-Smith
and Bart Ziino



Museums, History and the Intimate Experience of the Great War

The Great War of 1914–1918 was fought on the battlefield, on the sea and in the air, and in the heart. Museums Victoria's exhibition *World War I: Love and Sorrow* exposed not just the nature of that war, but its depth and duration in personal and familial lives. Hailed by eminent scholar Jay Winter as "one of the best which the centenary of the Great War has occasioned", the exhibition delved into the war's continuing emotional claims on descendants and on those who encounter the war through museums today. Contributors to this volume, drawn largely from the exhibition's curators and advisory panel, grapple with the complexities of recovering and presenting difficult histories of the war. In eleven essays the book presents a new, more sensitive and nuanced narrative of the Great War, in which families and individuals take centre stage. Together they uncover private reckonings with the costs of that experience, not only in the years immediately after the war, but in the century since.

Joy Damousi is Professor of History and Director, Institute of Humanities and Social Sciences, Australian Catholic University. She is the author of *The Labour of Loss: Mourning, Memory and Wartime Bereavement in Australia* (Cambridge, 1999) and co-editor (with Paula Hamilton) of *A Cultural History of Sound, Memory and the Senses* (Routledge 2017).

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Ross McMullin's book *Farewell, Dear People: Biographies of Australia's Lost Generation* was awarded the Prime Minister's Prize for Australian History. His other books include *Pompey Elliott* (awards for literature and

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A year after the exhibition opened, Museums Victoria hosted a symposium based around the themes of the exhibition. The "War & Emotions" symposium was sponsored by the ARC Centre of Excellence for the History of Emotions and Museums Victoria. The symposium papers form the basis of this volume, and we warmly thank the speakers for their contributions. In addition to the exhibition advisory committee, the speakers were Dr Tracey Loughran, Dr Ross McMullin, Professor Michael Roper, Professor Bruce Scates, Professor Andrea Witcomb, Professor Barry Conyngham and Ms Deborah Tout-Smith.

Each accounting of the war and its aftermath in this volume is rich with personal stories and voices. We sincerely thank all the individuals and families who contributed stories in this volume, including the Amery family, David Demant, Jilba Georgalis, Peter and Desi Kearsey and the Kearsey family, Jeffrey Kemp, Bev Lasini, Janet Mackenzie, Kevin Murray and Joan Wishart. Family and official papers referenced in this volume, which form a significant part of the legacy of the war, include those of Charles Bean, Harold "Pompey" Elliott, the Henderson family, Geoff McCrae, John Monash,

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Introduction

War, emotion and the museum

Joy Damousi, Deborah Tout-Smith and Bart Ziino

The war of 1914–1918 was fought on the battlefield, on the sea and in the air, and in the heart. It was a war not just of political or moral sensibilities, but a catastrophic assault on the senses and the emotions, fought on a colossal scale. And yet the intimacy and range of emotions that soldiers and civilians alike experienced have long been obscured from public view. Soldiers grappled with the modern industrialised battlefield, their bodies and minds immersed in its environment and subjected to its physical and mental traumas. Those who loved them were no less immersed in the war, for the war was fought not only with artillery and machine gun, bombs and poison gas, but with the willingness of civilians to continue the fight, or at the very least not to withdraw their consent to its continuation. Their greatest sacrifice to the war was their loved ones. For soldiers and civilians, their emotional responses to the war defined the experience. Now, however, the generation that fought the war is gone, and what was once pervasive has become difficult to see.

This collection of essays seeks to engage and extend our understanding of the senses in wartime, as it brings together both academics and museum curators to explore the central place of affect in war. Through the lens of emotion, and with a sensitivity to the specific historical context within which emotions emerge, intersect and manifest, new narratives of World War I emerge. Here, families and individuals move to the centre of the frame, and they testify that the war is better measured not by the duration of the fighting, but by its deep and persistent presence in human lives.

The wider canvas to this collection is a ground-breaking exhibition hosted by Museums Victoria to coincide with the centenary of World War I. *Love and Sorrow* sought to bring into public view that intimate and emotional war which defined the experience of soldiers and civilians. The exhibition deliberately aimed to challenge triumphant representations of war which told the story of World War I through narratives which centred on the birth of Australian nationhood, political diplomacy and military prowess. At the centre of *Love and Sorrow* was the effort to show the graphic impacts of war on bodies, minds, families and communities, and across generations. It succeeded admirably. Historian Michael McKernan observed in 2014 that the

exhibition "leads the way in showing a remarkable way of re-imagining the First World War", describing it as the most "moving and intense exhibition on aspects of the First World War that I have seen anywhere in the world".[1] Andrea Witcomb, Bruce Scates and others have reflected on the ways in which the exhibition extended and challenged representations of war, gender and violence, and used poignant personal mementoes of war to tell deep and searching stories.

Open for the entire centenary period, between 2014 and 2018, *Love and Sorrow* took on the challenge of bringing the intimate war of a century earlier to a wider public. Like the exhibition, the contributors to this volume of essays enter into the emotional world of 1914–1918 as it was experienced by its participants. They also delve into the war's continuing emotional claims on descendants and on those who today encounter the war through innovative museum practices. Together the authors contend with difficult histories of the war: experiences that were awkward to express in public for the past century yet were a reality for thousands of Australians and millions around the world. In this retelling across 11 essays, the sensory confrontation with battle stands alongside private reckonings with the costs of that experience, not only in the years immediately after the war, but in the century since.

This volume brings historians and museum practitioners together to provide new insight into the complexities of accessing and exhibiting challenging and at times confronting histories of World War I during the recent centenary period. Importantly, the book examines the way the war is remembered, re-told and re-imagined today. It explores the role of historians and curators as agents in this process, in a way that has been little seen elsewhere. It lays bare the process of historical enquiry and interpretation for public audiences, embracing primary sources including material culture, archives and personal memory to frame new questions in understanding the war in all is emotional layers and complexity, and our place in the continuum of understanding conflict and violence.

The work particularly builds on and extends the existing scholarship on emotions and war which began in the 1990s and has steadily extended to embrace a range of perspectives and dimensions. Historians of World War I have been diligent in expanding our perspective on the war as an event in people's lives, driven by a recognition that the war was not just something that happened *to* people, but a phenomenon sustained *by* millions of individuals. Even if the fronts occupied by soldiers and civilians were separated by vast distances – as they were in Australia – this was a very intimate war. Soldiers, nurses and their families worked hard to maintain their relationships. Even after deaths, families strove to maintain relationships with the dead through their commemorative practices, while in wounding and illness families became the locus of caregiving for returned soldiers. Understanding the emotional experience of those people – soldiers and civilians alike – is vital in charting not only the war's duration, but its long cultural demobilisation, and even longer efforts to cope with its personal and familial effects.

These essays identify new contexts and especially focus on family relations as crucial to understanding war and emotions. Authors identify the museum as a primary platform from which to inscribe new meanings and narratives about the war, and ways that war and its long impacts can be imagined and understood.

Museums, History and the Intimate Experience of the Great War is divided into four parts, moving from the emotional experience of the wartime home and battlefronts, into the hospitals and homes where wounds were borne collectively, and finally into the museum, where *Love and Sorrow* sought to represent those experiences to audiences at least a generation away from the war.

In Part I, "Emotions in Conflict: on the Battlefield and at Home", Joy Damousi, Ross McMullin and Bart Ziino interrogate the ways in which all the senses are intimately connected to the emotions of war. Damousi explores the place of sound and war in this terrain. A consideration of the emotions evoked in battle through sound, as well as birdsong and memories of the Zeppelin bombing in London, this chapter explores the emotional experience of civilians and combatants through sound. While the sound of war has attracted comment from historians, the emotions attached to sound and the memory of it has been less the focus of historical inquiry. Damousi argues that sound, emotion and memory are vital elements of a cultural history of war.

Chapters by Ross McMullin and Bart Ziino amplify the hidden emotional history of soldiers and their families, which has until recently remained an unspoken, even silent aspect of war. In the Victorian understanding of masculinity, the heroism of the soldier was defined by the suppression rather than expression of emotion, for it did not allow for the public articulation of feeling or even intimacy. As these two essays eloquently show, however, emotions were central to the way two of Australia's most iconic and senior military generals – Harold "Pompey" Elliot and John Monash – experienced the war. Elliot literally *felt* the war: he was pained and tormented by the death of his soldiers – his "brave boys" – and grieved their deaths. He displayed emotional volatility throughout the conflict from frustration, fury and anguish. The death of his brother shattered him. His suicide in 1931 shocked his family and the nation. The "emotional" general – as McMullin aptly calls him – contributed to victory through his tactical brilliance. But the cost of the war was too deep to bear. Ziino's examination of John Monash's familial relations reveals the emotional and the intimate in similar but different ways. Fear, mourning, loss and distress were ever-present in Monash's family during the war and in the families of men who were serving at the front. Waiting and hoping brought with it strain and stress. The everyday emotions of those on the home front are a sharp reminder of the ever-present and pervasive impact of war.

In Part II, "Bearing the Wounds of War", Kerry Neale and Marina Larsson refocus attention not only on the wounds that persisted and shaped

individuals' lives but remind us that bearing wounds was far from an individual process.

The mind is typically the focus of discussion of intimacy and emotions but a study of the body in war is in fact inseparable from analysing its devastating emotional impact. Kerry Neale explores the impact of facial wounds and disfigurement, and the emotional repercussions of the horrendous injuries soldiers endured in war, providing a powerful and compelling case study of the legacy of war. How is the representation of disfigurement made in a museum setting? In what ways can people connect with these representations in a museum context? Through the experience of Harold Gillies, the ear, nose and throat specialist, this chapter also charts the establishment of a maxillofacial surgery unit for British imperial forces through an extraordinary archive of Queen's Hospital in Sidcup, England, established in 1917 for the treatment of severe facial wounds. These files are severely confronting and the visual imagery distressing. Everyone, including nurses and journalists, was emotionally affected by the men with incomplete faces. Through the case study of William Kearsey, Neale draws out clearly the devastating legacy of disfigurement. The story of soldiers like Kearsey was a vital part of *Love and Sorrow* which so powerfully conveyed a shocking legacy of war.

Marina Larsson reminds us that the centenary of the war is also the centenary of the family caregiving that commenced during the war itself, and endured for decades afterwards. A focus on carers – typically mothers and wives – has provided a new approach to exploring the impact of war; in museum settings that focus has provided a unique and distinctive platform for the expression and exploration of the personal impact of the war. Familial bonds, Larsson argues, were crucial in how soldiers were cared for and sustained in the aftermath of war. The home treatment of soldiers became a vital part of soldier's recovery, and yet unpaid family support – emotional, material, financial – is an untold story of war. Exhibitions which showcase these stories offer new perspectives on homelife as a site of families' – especially women's – efforts to care for men damaged by war.

Part III, "Emotions in Histories of World War I", is a place for reflection not only on the emotions in war, but on how historians and curators engage with and negotiate their subjects' – and their own – emotions.

The inner dynamics of families and their histories form the basis of Alistair Thomson's exploration of the legacy of war through Australian repatriation files. These files show in graphic detail returned veterans' ongoing war. The emotional costs of war are starkly evident. A case study of Hector Thomson, the author's grandfather, demonstrates through a meticulous reading of the records how family history is written and re-written, forgotten and reconfigured, especially around the difficult issue of mental health. This raises questions about the responsibility and role of museums and other cultural institutions to reveal new stories through a wide use of sources which can highlight the emotional complexity of the war's aftermath.

Further to the way military history has been reconfigured through studies of emotion, Peter Stanley discusses how military museums have over time explored emotions in war. Drawing on personal experience and his own involvement in several exhibitions, Stanley charts the evolution of museum practice in engaging with emotions and war. Framing his chapter around the concept of a "gonzo" historian, Stanley opens a discussion of memory, emotion and war in the context of exhibitions within military history.

Striking a very different note about family emotion and war, Tracey Loughran explores the issue of identification and war when a historian has no personal or familial connection to it. In such a context, which is her own, identification takes on a very different form. In her case, this led to a romanticised identification with war through fiction, such as Pat Barker's classic work *Regeneration*. Through a personal account of identification and war, this is a reflective exploration about emotion, self and war, examining how claiming authority through family history is a complex endeavor. It challenges us to reflect on the centrality of emotion in history and the importance of identification in all its multiplicity.

In Part IV, "World War I in the Museum: Love and Sorrow at Museums Victoria", Deborah Tout-Smith, Andrea Witcomb, and Bruce Scates & Margaret Harris turn their attention to the challenges of representing the emotional history of World War I for a contemporary audience, and to gauging the responses of those who encounter that history. They focus on how museum exhibitions and educational settings can play a transformative role in reimagining the history of the war through new narratives about family and intimacy.

In her essay on personal artefacts, Deborah Tout-Smith demonstrates the power of objects in capturing the story of the intimate experience of war. Tout-Smith follows eight personal stories through the objects that expose their intimate relationships. These include a poignant postcard, a small hearth of mementoes and *Love and Sorrow's* facial wounds section: all build and construct a narrative of war that is confronting, challenging and deeply unsettling. The emotional engagement of the visitor is also crucial to the exhibition. Tout-Smith reflects on how *Love and Sorrow* led to a re-examination of war as it is documented in collections and archives, and the mechanisms through which stories are collected and acquired.

One way museums can create new paradigms and platforms such as *Love and Sorrow* is through a gender perspective, which Andrea Witcomb explores in her essay. A focus on gender allows for a deep exploration of family and the connection between objects, images and people across the generations. Witcomb identifies several frames that allow for affective interpretations – biographical studies; the use of faces and voices; the use of testimony; and the concept of "sticky" objects – providing intersection of narrative, affect and object. Analysing several stories that run through the exhibition, Witcomb concludes that a focus on feminist analysis and practice can shape new and challenging understandings such as the enduring

"Anzac legend" which has celebrated masculinist paradigms through which to interpret the war.

Finally, the world of digital technologies offers new ways of exploring how trauma can be understood. In their essay, Bruce Scates and Margaret Harris discuss the challenges of teaching emotion and affect in World War I in an online academic subject. Focusing on the online subject *100 Stories*, first conducted in 2015, this chapter examines learners' motivations and responses. The connection between the stories, the learners and the war itself is a valuable and significant nexus through which to understand contemporary emotional responses to the war of a century ago.

The kind of intimacy with the war that people experienced first-hand has long been obscured from public view. Its traces are still there: the names on war memorials might remind us that once there were those who came to such places who knew those names well. So too have the wounds of war become less visible to us, where once they were widely known in private and in public. But the intimate war is hardly lost to us. There are mementoes of the war in private homes – letters, diaries, medals, photographs – that speak to families shaped by the war, who still know the story and the impact of wounding, illness and loss. Collectively the essays in this volume expose the multiplicity and depth of emotions generated in the experience of World War I, on the battlefields and in the seclusion of private homes. These essays also challenge us to consider the representation of intimacy and emotions in museums, and through objects and personal effects as well as digital technologies. The full human catastrophe of that conflict only makes sense if we make the effort to recognise – and to show – the power and impact of emotional experience during and, indeed, long after the fighting.

Note

1 Michael McKernan (2015) Review, WWI: Love & Sorrow. *reCollections* 10(1), April. Available at https://recollections.nma.gov.au/issues/volume_10_number_1/exhibition_reviews/wwi_love_and_sorrow [Accessed: 7 February 2020].

Part I

Emotions in conflict

On the battlefield and at home

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1 Emotions and memory in the soundscapes of World War I

Joy Damousi

Writing in 1917, John Springthorpe, the senior physician at the Australian General Hospital No. 2 in the Dardanelles, described the volcanic cauldron of the battlefield of the Great War as "Hell Sound".[1] "Springy", as he was affectionately known, wrote at length to his superiors of the poor and unsophisticated treatment of soldiers as they suffered from the ongoing and devastating impact of the noise of the shells – which resulted literally in shattered nerves.[2] According to Springthorpe, the treatment given to soldiers who suffered from the effect of thunderous noise involved removing soldiers from the front, putting cotton wool in their ears and keeping them "out of sight or sound of bombs".[3] Even when soldiers were convalescing in the Casualty Clearing Stations, Emily Mayhew has noted, the sounds of battle would unsettle patients; "when the sound of the guns drew nearer and the patients became increasingly upset, the staff went around the ward putting cotton wool in their ears to muffle the noise and restore calm".[4] Springthorpe was not alone in identifying the sound of the war as central to experiencing it, nor in his constant lament that cotton wool was not going to adequately protect soldiers from short and long-term psychological and physical effects of the new industrialised sounds.

The participants in World War I regularly described their experience of war through the novel sounds they heard. This is a striking feature of writings of those on the front by soldiers, priests, journalists and nurses and those civilians on the home front who were at the frontline of attack. "[T]he battles in this great war are not pictures for the eye, but rather assaults for the ear" was how one correspondent described bombardment on the Western front in September 1915. The battle was in the distance but the terror of sound and its meaning was inescapable, in large part because it could be heard from long distances, from as

> far a distance as 30 miles off the great bombardment could be heard like the roll of a giant drum or the rattle of a tremendous machine gun … The never-ending growl of artillery conveyed a more grim impression of the awful tragedies that were being enacted before us than any spectacle of the attack could afford.[5]

Media reports marvelled at the sounds that could be heard from far distances. In January 1917, Queensland paper, the *Daily Mercury*, reported how the sounds of war could be heard in England, as such sounds

> have growled over Kent and Sussex; war's deep rumblings have broken the silence of sleeping London … Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire … It has … gained the ear of the sturdy ironworker toiling in the roaring factories of Birmingham, over 250 miles distant from the Somme.[6]

The sounds carried from war became a much discussed phenomenon with explanations about how sound from the war fronts travelled vast distances.[7]

The description of sound in accounts such as these, I argue, is more than a matter of background noise. As we shall see, at various times and in different contexts during the war on the home front and the battlefront, sound-dictated behaviour; it defined the memory of the war; and it elicited a range of emotional responses. Sound was never passive, or static, but was a powerful, inescapable and defining presence in the experience of war by both combatants and civilians.

Beyond this physical recognition and description, I explore in this chapter how sound constructs and generates experiences; how it is seminal in shaping memories of war and shaping emotional responses – all of which point to the centrality of sound in all of its complexity, variation and diversity. To date, the sensory experience of soldiers on the battle-front has been seen in isolation from other auditory aspects of the war. Scholars have also noted the importance and centrality other sounds through music, song, cheering and patriotic singing during World War I, and have argued that these cultural forms were vital in morale-boosting activity.[8] Historians have observed sound in the war not typically in these terms, but most commonly in relation to the "shattering of nerves" through extensive and relentless shelling. Attempts to analyse shell shock and its neurological, psychological and physical implications have been at the centre of extensive historical inquiry.[9] Recent literature has provided further insight into the contested nature of injuries due to shell shock, its transnational nature, its various treatments and the linguistic differences across cultures in describing the condition.[10]

In this chapter, I explore three examples connecting the themes of sound, war, memory and emotions in a more coherent way than scholars have previously discussed.

The first is to consider the way in which the experience of battle is experienced and remembered through sound. The new landscape of trenches, dugouts and air bombardment meant that the visual could not be relied on and other senses such as smell, touch and hearing augmented or replaced it on the battlefields. In soldiers' contemporary accounts and those written decades later, it is the sounds of war that soldiers, above other senses, often recall and recount in their memoirs. Being attuned to sound was protective,

too, as recognition of the sounds that particular shells or other weapons fire made allowed a solder to dive for cover. Many soldiers mention how they increasingly recognised the sounds; soldiers new to the physical experiences of the front were particularly vulnerable.

The second is the sound of birds in the context of war. When considering animals in war, scholars have focused on the vital role of horses and carrier pigeons in wartime.[11] I want to highlight both the diverse range and uses of bird sounds in the landscape of war and the character of soldiers' response to them. The London based Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, formed in 1889,[12] regularly reported throughout the four years of the conflict on the activities and sounds of birds on the battlefields. Through these reports we can glean a dynamic, ever-changing and moving soundscape of bird sounds and, at times, their profound emotional impact on soldiers.

Third is a consideration of sound on the home front, noting how sounds, especially during the London Zeppelin bombings of 1915, engendered emotions of fear and anxiety, often in unexpected ways. Sound affected the ways people behaved and responded at the time and played a key role in shaping public memory of this seminal event.[13]

The violent sounds of industrial warfare have been prioritised in the histories of the war. It is easy to understand why. The war ushered in a distinctive form of modern industrial warfare, extensively documented by military historians.[14] The battlefield became, according to Bartov, "a factory of death, where victory would be decided by the quality and quantity not of men, but of machines".[15] The war combined the machine gun, long-distance rifles, heavy artillery, howitzers and the firing and explosion of millions of shells in a lethal configuration. These new forms of military technology were extremely noisy, creating sound levels that were qualitatively and quantitatively different from anything heard before. In his soldier memoirs published in 1929, Robert Graves stressed how "you can't communicate noise, noise never stopped for one moment – ever".[16]

Two iconic battles – the Battle of the Somme and the Battle of Messines – powerfully demonstrate how it was the sound of these battles that soldiers most vividly recall. The Somme began with a weeklong artillery bombardment of the German lines with over a million shells fired at the Germans. One soldier described the unique and distinct presence of sound during the bombardment on the first day. "The sound was different", he noted,

> not only in magnitude but in quality, from anything known to me. It was not a succession of explosions or a continuous roar; I at least, never heard either a gun or a bursting shell. It was not a noise; it was a symphony. And it did not move. It hung over us. It seemed as though the air were full of vast and agonized passion, bursting now with groans and sighs, now into shrill screaming and pitiful whimpering… And the supernatural tumult did not pass in this direction or in that. It did not begin, intensify, decline and end. It was poised in the air, a

> stationary panorama of sound, a condition of the atmosphere, not the creation of man.[17]

The noise was so continuous and deafening that it was tangible. In June 1917 at the Battle of Messines, the 19 mines that were detonated resembled an earthquake – the largest man-made explosions in history to that date.[18] One witness was lost for words: "Can you imagine what over 600 tonnes of explosives in 20 or so blasts along an arc of 10 miles looks and sounds like? I cannot describe it for you", [19] while another described the way the "earth rocked as though a giant hand had roughly shaken it".[20]

This awe and fascination with the sound of war characterised memoirs of soldiers well after the end of hostilities. Aubrey Wade was an Australian gunner at Messines who, in 1936, published his memoir *Gunner on the Western Front*. He described the astonishing sound the mine explosions created and its impact on the physical landscape at the extraordinary scenes at Messines Ridge (Figure 1.1):

> The ground under our feet literally rocked. [The roar] rose, driving through the ear-drums with a sustained note of fury…a crescendo of sound; the air vibrated to the ceaseless drumming of guns… that raged and thundered and pounded incessantly.[21]

Figure 1.1 French artillerymen hold their ears against the tremendous noise created by a French 9.2 siege gun, firing towards the Asiatic coast, 1915. Australian War Memorial G00581.

The shaking and reverberations of the shelling left a powerful and enduring impact and defined his memory of the event. As he recalls,

> I do not quite know what would have happened if the shelling had kept on much longer – we were like rats in a trap, numbed with terror, hearing nothing but each other's hard-drawn breaths in the intervals between the explosions, no one saying a word.[22]

These new battle sounds created a range of emotions from terror and shock to fear and anxiety. Wade observed tellingly that sound could announce life or death, a reality reflected on the face of his two sergeants:

> both of their faces wore an indescribable expression of terror. They were not looking at me; all their souls were concentrated in their ears as they listened for the next shell.[23]

The emotions of fear and anxiety connected to sound were no more apparent than in the gas mask drill. The Great War has often been referred to as a chemist's war, because of the deployment of deadly war gasses and chemical weapons. Soldiers always had their mask nearby. Responding to the sound of a whistle, horn, clanging bell or shout, soldiers would move with speed and desperation – and fear – to put them on (Figure 1.2).[24]

The relationship between sound and the duration of silence could also be a matter of life and death. Silence in the context of war could be powerful and unsettling – it was literally the calm before the violent storm, as Wade described it. "The strange experience of not hearing shells for over a month", he reflected, "led to all sorts of speculations as to what was going to happen. It was certain that something would happen sooner or later to disturb the placid atmosphere of the front; the silence was absurd and unnatural".[25]

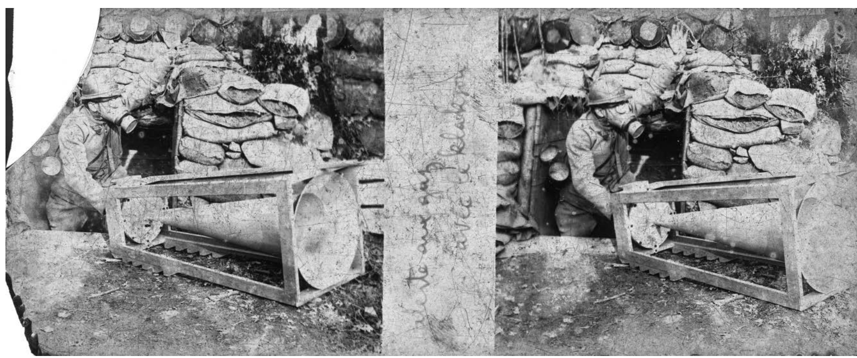

Figure 1.2 Unidentified soldier wearing a gas mask and sounding a Klaxon horn as a gas alarm, 1915–18. From a collection of French glass stereo transparencies, Australian War Memorial P11063.002.

But there were times when shell sound simply became an integrated and even mundane part of the landscape. One soldier wrote:

> I heard the noise of a shell bursting through the air, and then the bang as it exploded in hitting the ground about 400 yards to my right front close to a road … There were some Tommies playing football in a field close by, but they took no notice and proceeded with their game as if nothing had happened.[26]

At the other extreme, the piercing sounds of death screams could be terrifying. An attack on the trenches in the night was reported in this way in the *Times*: "The whole thing took place without hardly a sound except for the death screams of the 30 Germans which could have been heard for miles".[27] The trauma of shell shock was described not only as the shattering of nerves through explosions, but also in terms of hearing "screams of others in agony and pain and the thought of their own death".[28]

But it was the screams of animals, especially those of dying horses, that most powerfully impacted on soldiers and severely tested their capacity to endure the violence of particular war sounds. One of the most powerful depictions of the sounds of injured and dying horses, and the emotional and devastating impact of hearing these, is described in the unforgettable scene in Erich Maria Remarque's classic anti-war novel *All Quiet on the Western Front*, where the torturous sounds of dying horses become unbearable for soldiers.

> I have never heard a horse scream and I can hardly believe it. There is a whole world of pain in that sound, creation itself under torture, a wild and horrifying agony … You want to get up and run away, anywhere just so as not to hear that screaming any more.[29]

There were inventions developed during the war to curtail the impact of these sounds. These included the Mallock-Armstrong Ear Defender, reported in the *British Medical Journal* (*BMJ*), which was an advance on the cotton-wool plugs being used to that date (Figure 1.3).[30]

Gunners in particular sustained periods of prolonged deafness due to the lack of adequate protection for their ears on the battlefield. The medical profession was closely monitoring the impact of explosives on soldiers' loss of hearing, which was linked to shell shock.[31] As early as November 1914, deafness was identified as a wound inflicted by shells. Writing in the *BMJ,* Albert Wilson reported how, after the explosion of a shell, one soldier suffered bleeding from his ear, giddiness and deafness. After two weeks, all the symptoms had disappeared except deafness.[32]

On the home front, support for soldiers deafened by war was beginning to attract attention. In Scotland in 1917, funds were raised to offer educational

Figure 1.3 Mallock-Armstrong Ear Defender, 1915. Science Museum/Science and Society Picture Library A613189.

support for soldiers who had "been deafened in his country's service" so that the "deaf soldier may no longer feel that he is 'nobody's child'".[33] One British gunner, Arthur Begent of the 1/4 Battalion Northamptonshire Regiment, was discharged in July 1919. He had "sustained 50% deafness" after four years' service and was entitled to a pension on the basis of his condition from September 1919.[34] But employment opportunities for those like Begent were severely diminished after the war. One report published in 1919 noted that while there were many occupations to which "a deaf man can return, there are others, such as motor driving, and work on the railways, to which his affliction presents a barrier", and so "deaf men are learning diamond polishing, shoe making, and bee land poultry keeping. Any sort of farming is good for these deaf men, for it is desirable that they should be out in the air".[35] Of all the physical and psychological inflictions on returned soldiers, enduring deafness remains one of the most understudied.

Very early in the war, the risk of deafness and mutism was identified, but dealing with it was difficult and understanding of its condition rudimentary. The exploding shell was the most typical cause of it. In 1914, a case of "air concussion" was reported in the *BMJ* when a wound to the internal ear occurred after an explosion. In other cases, men become "dumb" and "deaf-mute". In what would much later be called shell shock, one French soldier experienced deafness this way:

> A native of Paris, aged 23, a sergeant. His mother was of neurotic family … When war began he was excited, ambitious and courageous. During a battle at Compiègne, after an explosion of a shell, he suddenly stopped speaking, and ceased fighting as if stunned … There was complete mutism and cerebral deafness. Words had no significance, but if a noise was made he turned in that direction … He was sent home after a month's rest quite unchanged.[36]

By 1915, deafness became a clearly defined aspect of shell shock. In May 1915 William Turner, physician to Kings College Hospital, described the symptoms that would soon become all too familiar. "Cases of nervous and mental shock may be counted among the more interesting and uncommon clinical products of the present war".[37] It has been noticed that such symptoms manifested when big shells exploded near soldiers who showed no discernible signs of "physical injury or bodily wound".[38] "Deafness" and "deaf-mutism" became a central aspect of the experience of being "blown away". "Deaf-mutism", Turner notes, "provides one of the clinical surprises of the war".[39]

The impact of deafness was perceived as limited although as the war progressed it was apparent that the issue could not be ignored. The *BMJ* reported that by 1917 the treatments for the sounds of war remained basic. British doctor Dr. J. Dundas Grant concluded that while the prevention of deafness was still sought through the application of cotton wool and wax, as well as the Mallock-Armstrong plug, "the experience of officers was that

although these measures of precaution deadened the sound of bombardment, they made it impossible to hear orders at a short distance". There was little to be done for the completely deaf soldier. "While not in so bad a case as his sightless comrade, was fully worthy of public commiseration. The only thing to do was to teach him to lip-reading".[40] The emotions of pity and commiserations were extended to deaf soldiers but their infliction was regularly compared to the blind soldier whose impairment was seen as more debilitating and devastating. The *Journal of Laryngology, Rhinology, and Otology* editorialised in July 1917 that

> deafness, even absolute deafness, does not incapacitate the individual sufferer so much as blindness does. There are many trades and handicrafts, for example, closed to the blind, in which a deaf man would have no difficulty whatever in competing with his normal neighbours.

But there was the question of scale. "The damage resulting to the State as a whole from the defect is quite as serious, since it is probably the case that the number of men rendered deaf by war is greater than the number who are blinded".[41] The suspicion of malingering was never too far from soldier's injuries, but doctors reported that most cases were genuine. Lionel Colledge, a surgeon at the Ear and Throat Department at the St Georges hospital in London, observed that "No doubt a number of men exaggerated their deafness to a certain extent, but it was gratifying to find that actual malingering was quite uncommon".[42] It was industrialised sound that created a range of emotional responses recorded by soldiers, but these were not the only sounds on the battlefield soldiers recalled and documented.

Alongside the sounds of industrial warfare were other sounds, such as birdsong.[43] Birds were sometimes used to further the war effort. Parrots were employed, early in the war, at the Eiffel Tower to announce the approach of hostile aircraft.

> It was found at first that the birds gave warning fully twenty minutes before an aeroplane or airship could be identified by the eye or heard by the human ear. The birds, however, which could never be trained to discriminate between a French and a German aeroplane, appear to have grown indifferent or bored, so that they ceased to be trustworthy.[44]

The role of canaries was more enduring. Being about 15 times more sensitive than humans to poisonous gases, they were used in mines and in mining disasters to test atmospheric conditions and save miners or explorers from gas-poisoning. Before the smell of the fumes could be perceived in the trenches, the soldiers were awakened to their danger by the noise of the birds such as canaries which had detected the first fumes of the gases.[45]

But the importance of birds to the soldiers' experience of war was mainly focused elsewhere. There were some concerns that the conditions of war

would affect and disturb the birds, an issue considered by the *Times* in 1915. "A great number of … birds return year by year to Germany from a winter sojourn in England", it reported, and "various conjectures have been published of the disturbing effect of the war on their movements and migrations, though so far there is little or no evidence of it". The *Times* argued that the war would have little effect on birds so long as they were left in free use and possession of their sites. They would, it said, be "soon likely to think as little of the sound of gunfire as they now did of the noise of trains".[46] But if birds would get used to the sounds of industrial warfare, what effect would the war have on the bird's own sounds? It was reported that birds mimicked the sound of a shell in one English garden, as was the habit of starlings.

When birds did imitate the battle sounds, they elicited rare moments of laughter and fun in war. The powers of mimicry of the starling found scope, writes an artillery officer on the Western Front, in the imitation of the three shrill blasts on a whistle used to denote the approach of enemy aeroplanes. "It was great fun", he writes, "to see everyone diving for cover, and I was nearly deceived myself one day".[47] Writing about an owl, "The beastly bird learnt to imitate the alarm whistle to a nicety", said one gun commander; "on several occasions he turned to me out in pyjamas and, when the crew had manned the gun, gave vent to a decided chuckle".[48]

For many soldiers, the sounds of birds could provide a respite from the constant bombardment and moments of rare reflection, contemplation and calm. Alexander Gillespie, an English Bar student at Oxford, wrote in May 1915, four months before his death, how:

> Presently a misty moon came up, and a nightingale began to sing. I have only heard him once before, in the day-time, near Farley Mount, at Winchester; but of course, I knew him at once, and it was strange [to] listen, for the song seemed to come all the more sweetly and clearly in the quiet intervals between the bursts of firing. There was something infinitely sweet and sad about it, as if the countryside were singing gently to itself, in the midst of all our noise and confusion and muddy work; so that you felt the nightingale's song was the only real thing which would remain when all the rest was long past and forgotten. It is such an old song too, handed on from nightingale to nightingale through the summer nights of so many innumerable years … So I stood there, and thought of all the men and women who had listened to that song …[49]

The nightingale's song provoked a moment of emotional power for Gillespie, in awe of the endurance of the bird's song and its remarkable survival amidst the carnage.

Sounds of birds did offer a welcome distraction. One correspondent wrote in delight of how birds created a dramatic contrast in sound to the environment around them. Chaffinches, blackbirds and wrens all "make the wood sometimes one green riot of sound", he observed. The real "lords of the wood"

are "the carrion crows, thick as rooks in a rookery and as talkative". Ordinarily, you only hear the one note of the crow, he observed. "But here, where the crows are at home, one learns their amazing conversational facility; their profuse vocabulary of clucks and groans and twangings like the breaking of violin strings. They entertain one another with all manner of clownish nonsense".

One high-ranking officer noted how the bustle of war did not drive away the birds, even from the trenches. There was much idle sitting in warfare and he took great pleasure in bird watching. In particular, he identified a vocal icterine which sang every morning and at intervals in the afternoon. Nightingales, in particular, were remarkably resilient, he observed: "I heard that a brood of nightingales was hatched on the day of the heaviest Hooge bombardment on the lip of the first-line trench". Then he heard a nightingale begin to sing in the garden; soon afterwards German shells pounded the garden incessantly throughout the day. It was surprising to him that the "bird sang without a pause … and survived, for the next morning he started again as cheerily as ever."[50] The oriole is also there, he reported, with a

> very human sound, rich and full … He starts with a splendid note, which can be heard 400 yards off, but it is all over after half-a dozen bars. The call note is loud and screechy … Orioles are amusing active birds, full of life and sound.[51]

For some soldiers, the landscape and the grind of the war itself became more tolerable after observing and listening to birds. Gillespie noted how the sounds of birds inspired other, more emotional and more profound, responses as he tried to make sense of the incomprehensible violence around him: it was the capacity of birds to provide a welcome escape from the immediate oppressive surroundings that made their sound so compelling. It was precisely because "birds are aloof from human consciousness", he observed, "that they bring us their primal refreshment; and in a world coloured with our own interests [will weary us] … it gives us … escape from ourselves".[52] The remarkable survival of the swans at the battle of Ypres also provided inspiration for soldiers as they fought for their own lives. The swans' extraordinary resilience, and the reverberation of their sounds in scenes of great carnage, provided scenes of beauty among human destruction. These swans, noted one solider,

> were well known to practically nearly every battalion which tasted the fighting in the Ypres… In June 1915 the shelling of this area was particularly severe, but the small family of swans, which lived in the moat below the ramparts of the stricken city, glided placidly on the water and survived this and the terrible bombardments of the subsequent three years … There was great excitement among the troops when in 1917 swans began nesting operations … and during the fearful fighting of the third battle for the city, two cygnets were hatched.[53]

Bird sounds on the battlefields aroused emotions of empathy, awe and contemplation. A Scottish miner observed how, “If it weren’t for the birds, what a hell it would be! I watch them singing, and something comes into my throat that makes me almost greet”.[54] Not all the sounds of birds inspired exhilaration, though, nor was their song always welcome. Some soldiers became angry and annoyed at hearing the sound of birdsong amidst the death and destruction. In 1915, reported the *London Mail*,

> After a day of terrific fighting, when the bombardment ceased, there lay on the battlefield some scores of our dead and wounded. Of a sudden a LARK darted into the sky, pouring forth his joyous lay. “What the ‘ell is ‘e singing about” irritably asked [one] Tommy.[55]

The war came much closer to the home front with the first air raids in Britain in May 1915 which struck terror in the population. First-hand accounts such as those by the suffragist Sylvia Pankhurst observed that the first air raid she experienced in London was announced by thunderous sound:

> I was writing at home one evening. On the silence arose an ominous grinding … growing in volume … throbbing, pulsating … filling the air with its sound … Then huge reports smote the ear, shattering, deafening, and the roar of falling masonry … An air raid![56]

One of the most richly-documented events, which draws our attention to the significance of sound for civilians, is the Zeppelin bombings on London during 1915. The Zeppelin represented the power and technological might of German airpower; it was the source of great interest and intrigue as well as fear. In 1915, three army airships set off to bomb London on 7–8 September, of which two succeeded: bombs were dropped between Southwark, Woolwich and Cheshunt before heading on to London and dropping a single bomb on Fenchurch Street Station.[57]

A group of school boys were asked to recollect their memories and record them the day after the bombings in September. These accounts were collated in a volume and presented to the headmaster of an elementary school in Holborn in January 1916. It is rare to read accounts of children’s recollection of war and especially of bombing raids. Many of these accounts are clearly mediated by what they heard adults say, or what was reported in the newspapers. Some chose to dramatise the event as one of thrill and adventure, placing themselves in the centre of their recollections, while others favoured a more matter of fact reporting style. Whatever the narrative structure, conveying and describing the *sound* of the Zeppelin and its destruction was at the centre of their memory of the bombings for these schoolboys.

A.J. Littenstein perhaps more vividly than most encapsulated the quiet domestic scene violently ruptured by sound. The image conveyed by

Littenstein is replete with descriptions of the sound of the Zeppelin and its immediate emotional impact:

> Suddenly Bang! Crash! Tinkle! Tinkle! The [sic] was a splintering of wood and a crash of falling glass. We all sprang to our feet with surprising alacrity. At other times wild horses could not drag me from the paper I was reading. As it was I was dragged away from it this time. Baa-ang! There was another crash. "Bomb's and Zeppelins" said my aunt. She was cool but the other women were panic-stricken. They gave vent to shrieks and screams that would have done credit to a hyena. I was shivering like a jelly but I soon got over it.[58]

Adults too recall and retell their experience of the Zeppelin bombings through the impact of sound and responses to it. In April 1916, Major John Cowan described the Zeppelin raid over Edinburgh in similar terms. The level of anxiety remained well after the Zeppelin had left destruction in its wake. Cowan describes how he could hear the Zeppelin coming from a distance, with "propellers whirring and the occasional thud of a bursting bomb". The rapid "crack-crack of a machine gun" was heard as the Zeppelins drew nearer, and the "whirring grew louder". When a bomb burst 150 yards away, it "wakened the heaviest sleeper with a start". What he described next was a "veritable turmoil of noise". This had the effect of making those witnessing the event "shiver" with fear but also "shake with excitement". The combination of a "crackling fire and mighty thunderstorm and a high wind" combined in "one medley of noise". Everyone was then on high alert, tense with fear, listening attentively to every sound, to the aeroplanes, and with each slight noise asking "is that the Zeppelin again?"[59]

But it was the irregular sounds of the birds that alerted those on the homefront of the impending raids and aroused anxiety but also some relief at the warning provided by birds: As one ornithologist observed:

> The Zeppelin raids … were nearly always heralded in this country by the crowing of pheasants, and the sensitiveness of this species to distant sounds was frequently a subject of comment. There seems no reason to suppose that pheasants have keener powers of hearing than men; it appears more probable that these birds are alarmed by the sudden quivering of the trees, on which they happen to be perched, at the time of an explosion … During the first Zeppelin raid in January 1915, pheasants … thirty-five to forty miles from the area over which the Zeppelins flew, shrieked themselves hoarse. In one of the early battles in the North Sea…Gamekeepers on the east coast used to say that they always knew when enemy raids had commenced, "for the pheasants call us day and night".[60]

On the outskirts of London, a pair of tawny owls, usually so silent and still, were credited with being able to detect the presence of Zeppelins when many miles away; on their approach they appeared to be uncharacteristically angry, agitated and nervous, flying from branch to branch. All birds seemed to join in, observed the *Times*, as the

> sudden outcry of scared birds was heard in places so far away from the Zeppelins' line of travel that the human ear would not catch the sound of the big engines at all. Some unusual disturbance of the atmosphere appealed to the more delicate senses of the birds, though man's nerves were not finely enough tuned to respond to it.[61]

Another witness, Ella Canziani says, of the behaviour of London sparrows which alerted her to an air-raid in 1916:

> One night last summer all our Sparrows began to chirp, and I woke, thinking an air-raid must be in progress … I sat by the open window, waiting and listening. The Owls began to hoot, and the green Parrot that lives with the Pigeons in Kensington Gardens screamed … The other birds stopped chirping for a moment, and then behind the trees everything was illuminated as the first explosion occurred. A second or two after came the sound of distant guns …[62]

It is perhaps to be expected that the sound of the Zeppelin on the home front created anxieties of this sort amongst birds, as its presence unsettled nature. But less known is that birds foreshadowed the coming of violence unleashed by the new technological killing machine.

Conclusion

The prevalence of sound in accounts of the experience of war across nations was striking both throughout the war itself and in the years that followed. In these accounts, we can see how the intersection between sound, emotion and memory shaped how the war was experienced and remembered.

Even before the first artillery was fired, it was through the disruption of sound that the war was announced. On the afternoon of 28 June 1914, Austrian writer Stefan Zweig records how, while holidaying in Baden, a small town near Vienna, it was the disruption of the natural sound of daily life that suddenly created a slight level of anxiety, making him attuned to the event which would change the course of the twentieth century. While quietly reading a book, he heard

> the wind in the trees, the twittering of the birds and the music floating across from the park were at the same time part of my consciousness. I could clearly hear the melodies without begun distracted, for the ear is so adaptable that a continuous noise, a roaring street, a rushing stream

> are quickly assimilated into one's awareness; only an unexpected pause in the rhythm makes us prick our ears … Suddenly the music stopped in the middle of a bar. I didn't know what piece they had played. I just sensed that the music had suddenly stopped. Instinctively, I looked up from my book. The crowd, too, which was strolling through the trees in a single lowing mass, seemed to change: it, too, paused abruptly in its motion to and fro. Something must have happened.[63]

It was through the disruption of sound that the news of the assassination of Franz Ferdinand and his wife Sophie, "burned" into Zweig's memory.[64]

Soon the reality of war set in, and by 1915 the language of war moved from initial excitement to war exhaustion, fatigue and even frustration. Sound metaphors were never far away from descriptions of war. "This war" noted the *Times*, is

> like loud and sensational music, the effects of which thrill an audience for about three minutes, and then there is nothing more to thrill them. The composer has exhausted himself and them. They are used to his noise and only sit waiting for the happy change of silence. So now war has exhausted our capacity for excitement. [65]

Katherine Mansfield reflected this war-weariness at the conclusion of the war in a letter to her friend the pacifist, English aristocrat and arts patron Ottoline Morrell through a description of the powerful onset of silence. When the "diabolical sounds" had finally stopped [in Paris], she recalled in November 1918:

> I opened the window and it really did seem – just in those first few moments that a wonderful change happened – not in human creatures hearts – no but in the air – there seemed just for a breadth of time – a silence, like the silence that comes after the last drop of rain has fallen – you know? It was so wonderful …[66]

The wonder of sweet silence announcing peace evoked emotions of great joy, relief and happiness. But it also ushered decades of deep mourning for relatives of the dead. The silence of the graves that littered the battlefields of Europe did not represent a calm acceptance for some, but instead a lifetime of inner turmoil and unresolved grief. Beneath the public clamour of commemoration, private anguish – typically among mothers and widows – would resonate through generations, which was sometimes spoken in public commemorations but more often internalised in painful silence.

As Mark Smith has noted in relation to the senses, "all war is total war, pushing [the senses] to their limits and beyond, dulling and overwhelming and then dulling them again".[67] War offers, he concludes, "a logic for the very notion of sensory history".[68] Sound in World War I was a major component of the experience of the battlefield and the home front. Through an analysis of this experience we can enable a broader, uncharted understanding of

a cultural history of the emotional experience of civilians and combatants and their memories during the Great War and beyond it.

Notes

1 J.W. Springthorpe, Volume IX of Diary entry around date of ~9/11/17, MS 9898, State Library of Victoria.
2 Joy Damousi 2005, p. 32.
3 Springthorpe 1932, p. 8.
4 Mayhew 2014, p. 46.
5 *Register*, 30 September 1915, p. 5.
6 *Daily Mercury*, 25 January 1917, p. 4.
7 *Northern Argus*, 25 February 1916, p. 4; *National Advocate*, 7 June 1917, p. 2.
8 Daniel Morat 2014; Robert Holden 2014; and Graham Seal 2005.
9 For the extensive literature on the history of shell shock see: Winter 2014a; Ben Shephard 2001; Peter Leese 2002; Mark S. Micale and Paul Lerner 2001; R. Chickering and S. Forster 2002; Tracey Loughran 2010; Edgar Jones 2010; and Gregory Mathew Thomas 2009.
10 Winter 2014a, pp. 310–33.
11 John Singleton 1993; Richard Holmes 2004; Richard Holmes (ed.) 2001; Tim Birkhead, Jo Wimpenny and Bob Montgomerie 2014, p. 142.
12 *Bird News and Notes* 1903, p. 1.
13 See Susan R. Grayzel 2012, pp. 20–63.
14 Michael Duffy 2013; Bernard Fitzsimons 1973; and J.P. Harris 1995.
15 Omar Bartov 1996, p. 21.
16 Robert Graves 1929.
17 John Ellis 1976, p. 63.
18 Robin Prior and Trevor Wilson 1996, p. 61.
19 *Times*, 8 June 1917, p. 7.
20 Frank Fox 1918.
21 Aubrey Wade 1936, p. 50.
22 Wade 1936, p. 123.
23 Ibid, p. 72.
24 Gerard J. Fitzgerald 2008.
25 Ibid, p. 128.
26 Football under Fire, *The Age*, 5 March 1915, p. 9.
27 *Times*, 11 January 1915, p. 3.
28 [Online] Available at: http://www.anzacsite.gov.au/1landing/s_diary1915may.html [Accessed: 9 January 2020].
29 Erich Maria Remarque 1929, pp. 44–5.
30 *British Medical Journal*, 2 January 1915, p. 25.
31 Ibid, 17 March 1917, p. 353.
32 Ibid, 7 November 1914, p. 807.
33 Ibid, 16 June 1917, p. 821.
34 British Army Records WO363 B1497, Arthur Begent.
35 *Newcastle Morning Herald and Miners' Advocate*, 6 January 1919.
36 *British Medical Journal*, 7 November 1914, p. 807.
37 *British Medical Journal*, 15 May 1915, p. 833.
38 Ibid.
39 *British Medical Journal,* 15 May 1915, p. 834.
40 *British Medical Journal*, 5 May 1917, p. 590.
41 The Deaf Soldier 1917, pp. 209–10.
42 Lionel Colledge 1921, p. 287.

43 The calls of birds are used in the *Love and Sorrow* exhibition to create a sense of place and immersion. The birdsong is from birds who live today in Glencorse Wood and are interspersed with the sounds of weapons that fired during the battle of 1917.
44 Hugh S. Gladstone 1919, p. 22.
45 Ibid, p. 23.
46 *Times*, 24 March 1915, p. 9.
47 *Bird News and Notes* vii, p. 115; Gladstone 1919, p. 156.
48 *Evening Standard*, 18 April 1918; Gladstone 1919, pp. 156–7.
49 L. Housman 2002, p. 111.
50 *Times*, 2 March 1916, p. 11.
51 Ibid, 2 March 1916, p. 11.
52 *Times*, 24 March 1915, p. 9.
53 Gladstone 1919, p. 127.
54 Ibid, p. 133.
55 Ibid, p. 123.
56 S. Pankurst 1932, p. 191.
57 For details of the Zeppelin raids see Susan R. Grayzel 2012.
58 J. Littenstein, The Air Raid of September 8th 1915.
59 Cowan, 2 April 1916.
60 Gladstone 1919, p. 83.
61 A Correspondent. Birds in the Firing Line. *Times*, 10 June 1915, p. 11.
62 *Bird News and Notes* viii, Spring 1918(2), p. 16.
63 C. Clark 2012, p. 378.
64 Ibid.
65 *Times*, 21 March 1915, p. 9.
66 Katherine Mansfield to Ottoline Morrell, 17 November 1918, in Vincent O'Sullivan and Margaret Scott 1987, p. 290.
67 Smith 2014, p. 7.
68 Ibid, p. 8.

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2 Pompey Elliott, Australia's emotional general

Ross McMullin

> I am proud of them all Katie, but oh my heart is breaking to see them, my hair is nearly quite grey with the worry and grief of it all to see them dying so.
>
> Pompey Elliott, 12 July 1915[1]

Harold "Pompey" Elliott was unique. Not only was he a dynamic, charismatic and highly successful commander who became Australia's most famous fighting general in World War I. He was also emotionally volatile and remarkably outspoken, with the result that his letters and diaries constituted an exceptionally candid, vivid and controversial personal narrative of the conflict (Figure 2.1).[2]

Elliott was apart from his wife Kate and their two young children for five years. He missed them acutely, and this exacerbated his pronounced mood swings during the war. When he was miserable it was the arrival of letters from home that revived his morale most effectively:

> I had started on foot at 9pm and got here after 12. The mud and slush most of the way was quite up to the knees, and I had fallen over into many shell holes so you can imagine the state I was in, but I found a heap of letters awaiting me including two from you … Muddy and tired out as I was, I read them all before I went to sleep and was quite cheered and comforted by all your kindness and love.[3]

Elliott and Kate agreed on a mutual no-secrets pact for their wartime communication, which reinforced the arresting frankness of his letters. He felt motivated to make his prolific correspondence to Kate about his experiences and emotions as illuminating as he could. This was important to them both: he wanted to tell Kate what he was going through, and she wanted to share his vicissitudes with him. Their no-secrets pact resulted from and reinforced this mutual priority. As a result, inevitably, from time to time Kate found herself reading profoundly upsetting accounts of battlefield events, but this was a price she was willing to pay; they were a close couple, and she wanted to feel – as he did also – that they were communicating just as frankly while they were apart as if they were together in Melbourne (Figure 2.2).

Figure 2.1 Portrait of Pompey Elliott at a photographic studio in London during the war. Australian War Memorial H15596.

Elliott wrote very lovingly to Kate while he was away:

> Well my dear old pet, I want to kiss you all over. Your dear eyes and cheeks and chin and sweet loving lips and everything. Can you just shut your eyes tight and imagine your old man is holding you tight up against him and kissing them all over and over again. Dear wee darling loving

Figure 2.2 Pompey with his wife Kate and their children Violet and Neil at Broadmeadows camp in 1914. Jan McCombe.

wife, God bless and keep you always for ever and ever … Now my own sweet pet, let me say goodbye once more. There never was and never could be anyone I could love as I love you. For you are just my own dear wifie, the mother of my own sweet wee bairnies. Little dear one, can you feel my arm round you and all my love coming out to you, dear wee curly hair just in my arm, little sweet face so near my own. I love you

> dearest Katie, my own wee angel wife. The purest and sweetest darling woman in all the world. Katie dearie, I am so glad you wedded me.[4]

Pompey's mercurial emotions were very evident in his correspondence. He identified himself with the formations he commanded and with the men he led; he formed a strong bond with them and cared deeply about what happened to them. Pompey was not only frank about what happened to him and the men he was commanding – he was also frank about what he *felt* about what happened to him and the men he was commanding. Again and again he became terribly upset about casualties. Pompey was adamant that the war had to be fought, and had to be won, and realised that casualties were inevitable, but he was repeatedly devastated all the same when they eventuated.

He was profoundly moved by his battalion's fate at the Gallipoli landing. Long afterwards he described what his men endured with lyrical intensity:

> As they approached the shore a machine gun opened, the bullets singing by. When they got the range, men crumpled up where they sat riddled through and through. The boat sides were pierced, the water squirted in, but the boat still [kept] on unwavering from her course, the rowers with their backs to the fire never missing a stroke – albeit they felt each one in imagination in the small of the back – till they fell back dead and another snatched the oar from their dying grasp. A little red-headed laddie named McArthur, scarcely more than eighteen, was shot through the femoral artery and the blood spurted from his thigh as the water squirted into the boat … A sergeant attempted to bind it up. "It's no use, Sergeant", he cried, "I'm done", yet he rowed on until he swooned from loss of blood, and a comrade took his place … The water gained in the boat and flowed around them, its blue turning a ghastly red with the blood of the wounded and dying. Still the hellish hail of fire continued, it did not cease when the boat grounded but swept over them, still piercing the writhing bodies through and through … Oh those leaden minutes of agony, how slowly, how dreadfully they passed by.[5]

Elliott wrote that account three years after the landing – amid the unfolding drama of the stirring climax of the war – but, even so, his recall of what had happened that first day was piercing. His reputation had soared in the interim. Pompey had become renowned as a commander exceptional in intellect, genuineness and resolve. He was a leader of penetrating tactical grasp and awesome determination. An accomplished tactician and astonishingly brave, he was renowned for never sending anyone anywhere he was not prepared to go himself.

His leadership was compelling from the outset. He led the 7th Battalion at Gallipoli, where he was wounded at the landing, and under his vigorous front-line leadership four of his men were awarded the Victoria Cross for conspicuous courage at Lone Pine. At the Western Front, where he

commanded the 15th Brigade, he was prominent in momentous AIF battles such as Fromelles, Polygon Wood and Villers–Bretonneux, and was conspicuous in numerous other engagements, incidents and controversies. No Australian general was more revered by those he led or more famous outside his own command (Figure 2.3).

It was not just the achievements, awards and accolades, though there were plenty of each. His fame had as much to do with his character and personality – with the style of his leadership as much as its results. A fierce disciplinarian with an explosive temper, Pompey was exuberant, wholehearted and utterly dedicated. He was not one for pretence or artifice – he was no good at guile anyway – and his tempestuousness generated a series of anecdotes that amused his men and disconcerted his superiors.

However, in July 1915, when his battalion had to occupy Steele's Post while the Turks repeatedly shelled it, he was dismayed by the ordeal his men endured:

> But they got up two heavy howitzers, one firing high explosive and the other common shell, and for the past week our trenches have been a hell upon earth. The trenches were not trenches any more but mere gaping holes in the earth … Men were blown to pieces by shells or crushed to death by the masses of earth blown down upon them, but Katie the boys are wonderful. They stick it out and the call for picks and shovels or stretcher bearers never fails to be answered, though often another shell sends these willing workers into eternity.

Figure 2.3 Pompey supervising his battalion's departure from Alexandria early in 1915 on his horse Darkie. Photo: Philip Schuler. Australian War Memorial PS0382.

> I am proud of them all Katie, but oh my heart is breaking to see them, my hair is nearly quite grey with the worry and grief of it all to see them dying so. We are like men under sentence of death, for every day takes its toll of us. We have lost nearly 200 men since I last wrote you, and we can do nothing. We are worn out too … It is only by the blessing of providence that I am alive this day for every day these wretched shells explode and cover me with dust and grime. So far I have avoided being buried, but any day may bring it or worse upon me … I am in excellent bodily health but I am broken hearted at the loss of my brave boys.[6]

A few weeks later Pompey and his men were in the thick of it at Lone Pine. Amid savage fighting there were heavy casualties as the Turks attacked relentlessly. With the situation looking desperate, Pompey summoned an officer and sent him to a vulnerable position, where numerous others had been hit, with a fervent farewell: "Goodbye Symons, I don't expect to see you again, but we must not lose that post!"[7] What Lieutenant Symons proceeded to do at that post was so outstanding that he was awarded the VC. Symons survived the battle, and when he was awarded his decoration in London he bluntly told the King that the lack of recognition for his commander, Colonel Elliott, was a flagrant injustice.

Pompey told a Melbourne lawyer what Lone Pine was like:

> The weather was hot and the flies pestilential. When anyone speaks to you of the glory of war, picture to yourself a narrow line of trenches two and sometimes three deep with bodies (and think too of your best friends, for that is what these boys become by long association with you) mangled and torn beyond description by the bombs, and bloated and blackened by decay and crawling with maggots. Live amongst this for days … This is war and such is glory – whatever the novelists may say.[8]

After the Gallipoli evacuation Pompey was promoted to command the newly created 15th Brigade. With characteristic wholeheartedness he threw himself into the challenging task of transforming this unpromising formation containing thousands of raw recruits. Months later it was clear that his vigorous leadership, rigorous training and astute recruitment of capable officers had succeeded in creating a highly proficient brigade ready to make its mark at the main arena, the Western Front (Figure 2.4).

However, shortly after his men entered the front trenches in July 1916 at a so-called nursery sector to learn the ropes, he was stunned to learn that his brigade had been ordered to participate in an imminent assault against the well-entrenched Germans opposite. Although he had just arrived at the Western Front, he quickly discerned that this operation near the village of Fromelles was a disaster in the making. He even tried to prevent it by hijacking a visiting major from the headquarters of the Commander-in-Chief (General Sir Douglas Haig), taking this major forward to the front line and beyond – out to a position in no-man's-land – persuading him that it was

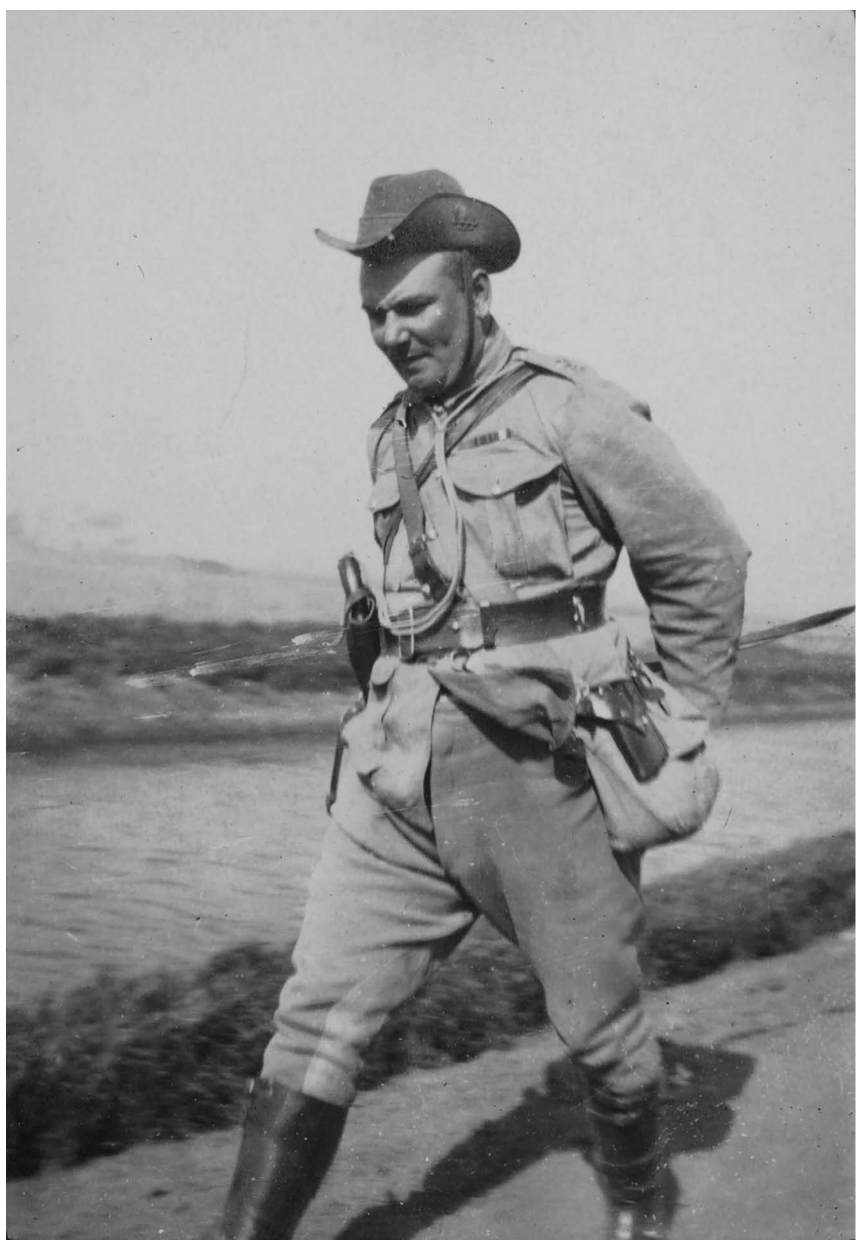

Figure 2.4 Pompey resorting to an ill-fitting substitute early in 1915 after his hat was stolen in a prank. Australian War Memorial 2DRL 513.

going to be a "bloody holocaust", and urging him to go back to Haig and say so.[9] But the attack was not cancelled, as it certainly should have been. The upshot was 5533 Australian casualties in one night in an utterly futile venture.

So, having toiled assiduously for months to make his brigade a splendid instrument, Pompey saw it slaughtered in a disaster that he had predicted and tried to prevent. He was in tears as he welcomed shaken survivors back. Charles Bean, the official AIF correspondent and later historian, saw General Elliott after the battle and described him as looking down and barely able to speak. In his correspondence over succeeding days Pompey was repeatedly scathing:

> God knows why this enterprise was ordered, apparently as a feint to distract the enemy's attention from the Somme area. [But] the Division was hurled at the German trenches without anything like adequate preparation, and … the slaughter was dreadful … my poor boys behaved magnificently … We have been labouring night and day to get in the wounded from no-man's-land in spite of the constant fire from snipers by day and machine-gun fire by night … I presume there was some plan at the back of the attack but it is difficult to know what it was.[10]
>
> [I] am still perfectly well though very, very sad … I have indeed hardly any officers at all left and must start to rebuild the brigade all over again.[11]

Fromelles was a searing experience for Pompey, and he never forgot it. In 1930 he delivered a penetrating lecture about what he called the "tactical abortion" of Fromelles. It generated headlines in London as well as in Australia, and no wonder:

> The whole operation was so incredibly blundered from beginning to end that it is almost incomprehensible how the British Staff, who were responsible for it, could have consisted of trained professional soldiers of considerable reputation and experience, and why, in view of the outcome of this extraordinary adventure, any of them were retained in active command.[12]

The 1916–1917 winter was the most severe in France for decades. Conditions in the forward trenches at the Western Front were appalling. Pompey was tormented by the agonies his men endured (Figure 2.5):

> By the constant shelling the whole of the field and even the metalled roads are literally pulverised to fine floury dust. When the rains set in, this dust was churned into sludge like thick pea soup up to your knees. When the drier conditions set in, this thickened to the consistency of glue, and men, waggons, guns and horses were constantly bogged in it.[13]
>
> My poor boys have been having a dreadful time. It rained very hard the last two days and all today it has been freezing hard … The poor fellows' feet swell up so that they cannot bear their boots on and take them off and

Figure 2.5 Stretcher-bearers of the 57th Battalion proceeding through a cemetery near Polygon Wood on 28 September 1917 despite almost incessant shell-fire. Photo: Frank Hurley or George Wilkins. Australian War Memorial E01912.

> walk barefooted. I fear they will lose the use of their feet, many of them … [and] I am afraid we will lose a lot of men through sickness, for water has to be carried up for miles to the front, and sometimes the parties get lost because you cannot go up in daylight at all, and then the men drink the water in the shell-holes and frequently this is contaminated by dead who are lying everywhere. I had seven men killed by one shell yesterday. A lot have been wounded too … I am very worried about it all … I have so much on my mind that I am afraid I cannot write much of a letter to you. It is dreadful that these boys have to suffer like this. Fancy a six-foot trench half full of muddy slush in which you have to live for three days at a time. During all that time you cannot lie down to rest. You can only snatch a little sleep by cutting a nick in the bank and sitting in it with your feet propped up as best you can. It is either raining or freezing every night.[14]

On the last day of 1916 he reflected on admired officers he had lost:

> I do miss poor Geoff McCrae very much. He had a particularly bright happy disposition … He, Cedric Permezel and the Henderson boys, both of them, and [Jimmy] Johnston were … all animated with a wonderful

> personal loyalty to myself. And now all are gone. I shall not look upon their like again – that is certain … If I myself should fall in France, I should like to be buried near poor Geoff.[15]

Pompey's two children, Violet and Neil, were born in 1911 and 1912, so they were still toddlers when he went away to war. He doted on them and kept urging Kate to tell him anything and everything about them: "I can never hear enough of them", he reiterated.[16] Elliott was not at all inclined to use his absence as an alibi for parental abdication. On the contrary, no one in the AIF tried more assiduously to be an effective long-distance father.

Pompey's superb letters to his children intensified his emotional connection with them and underlined how unfortunate it was for Violet and Neil that he was not around for the next five years that were such crucial formative years for them. At the end of 1916, for example, he wrote to Neil (then four years old), describing Western Front developments – including the unveiling of the latest military novelty, the tank – and referring to himself as "Dida", which his young children called him. Surely no other commander in any combatant nation in this war regularly turned the Western Front into a bedtime story like this:

> Since I wrote to you before we got a lot of big waggons like traction engines and put guns in them and ran them "bumpety bump" up against the old Kaiser's wall and knocked a great big hole in it and caught thousands and thousands of the Kaiser's naughty soldier men and we killed a lot of them and more we put in jail so they couldn't be naughty any more, but then it started to rain and rain and snow and hail and the ground got all boggy and the waggons got stuck in the mud and the old Kaiser has such heaps and heaps of soldiers that he sent up a lot more and thinned them out where the wall wasn't broken and started to build another big wall to stop us going any further … it is very very cold here and the Jack Frost here is not a nice Jack Frost who just pinches your fingers so you can run to a fire to warm them but a great big bitey Jack Frost and he pinches the toes and fingers of some of Dida's poor soldiers so terribly that he pinches them right off. Isn't that terrible … And the naughty old Kaiser burnt down every little house all round here and Dida's soldiers have to sleep out in the mud or dig holes in the ground like rabbits to sleep in. And all the trees are blown to pieces by the big guns and there is no wood to make fires and Dida's soldiers have to make fires of coal and the waggons are all stuck in the mud so Dida's soldiers have to carry it through all the mud and everything they eat and wear has to be carried too. And Dida's soldiers get so dreadfully tired they can hardly work or walk at all. Isn't that old Kaiser a naughty old man to cause all this trouble. Now goodbye dear little laddie. Give dear old mum a kiss and tell her Dida's coming home soon and that you will grow up soon and you won't let any old Kaiser come near her.[17]

After the terrible 1916–1917 winter there was a transformation in conditions and a transformation in morale for Australia's emotional general. This came about because the Germans retreated to the Hindenburg Line, and Pompey Elliott was chosen to lead one of the two AIF advanced guards directed to harass the German retreat. After the hideous boggy stagnation of the winter, Pompey and his men relished the opportunity to conduct mobile operations in the open. His advanced guard carried out its role successfully, capturing a series of villages with the envelopment tactics that Pompey advocated. He was in a buoyant mood:

> My word Katie, my boys have been making a name for themselves … for three whole days we were absolutely forbidden to advance one step further to allow the others to catch up on either side of us … my methods of attack … were simply paralysing the old Boche [who] cannot fight very well in the open.[18]
>
> I never saw men in such heart as our men are now. Their speed and dash in attack is equalled by no troops at present in the field, and in stubbornness of defence and endurance of shellfire they equal anything I have ever seen or read about. It seems to me that in their present form they are literally unconquerable.[19]

This transformation in Pompey's morale was typical of his recurring cycle of emotional volatility during the conflict. He would display dynamic and inspiring leadership during a battle, only to suffer a pronounced morale plummet afterwards when he was dismayed by the casualties, and then he would gradually gear himself up, summon his former verve, to meet the next challenge, the next engagement, when he would become distressed by the casualties once again. This pattern continued for the rest of the war.

It is widely and understandably presumed that Pompey's finest achievement was the famous counter-attack at Villers-Bretonneux, but his most outstanding accomplishment was – as Charles Bean concluded – Polygon Wood in September 1917. The plan at Polygon Wood was for the British and Australians to attack side by side, but the Germans sensed what was coming and launched a pre-emptive assault of their own, which drove the British back appreciably although Pompey's brigade held firm. The British-Australian attack went ahead all the same, and amid much confusion Pompey made a celebrated personal front-line intervention that proved decisive, because he sorted out the confusion and his men proceeded to attain not just their own objectives but those of the British alongside as well – a brilliant victory in circumstances of substantial adversity. Pompey had additional adversity to contend with because his younger brother George, a talented doctor and footballer, was fatally wounded during the battle, and he was also notified while he was running it that his legal partner in his firm of solicitors back in Melbourne had involved the firm in inappropriate financial speculations that had left Pompey liable for debts amounting to thousands of pounds.

What Pompey managed to accomplish at Polygon Wood was remarkable in the circumstances.

> They brought the news [about George] to me when I was tied to my office directing the fight, and I could not go to him though they said he was dying. I hope never to have such an experience again. The effort to concentrate my thoughts on the task of defeating the enemy as the messages came through revealing each move and the changing phases of the battle to me seemed as time went on to turn me into stone, and half the time I was like a man sleepwalking.[20]

But there was a cost. With the battle over, his distress about his brother became overwhelming: "After I knew Geordie had died I would have gladly welcomed a shell to end me."[21] His grief was crushing: "I feel still very sad and depressed. It is terrible to think of him dead, poor boy, one can hardly believe it."[22] Pompey was in a bad way for months after Polygon Wood. He felt "terribly depressed and pessimistic":[23]

> [S]ometimes I feel that I have reached the limit of my strength and that I cannot stand the strain much longer … I am always tired and sometimes my head aches … and my nerves seem all raw and aching.[24]

He was in a bleak mood at year's end:

> Here it's the last day of this sad old year 1917. I think it has held more of sadness and disappointment than any other year of my life. I am particularly in the blues today. It is bitterly cold and there is nearly a couple of feet of snow on the ground. There have been no home letters for more than a month … Having no news, I don't know what position my business is in … and it is very worrying … I see no hope of war finishing for long and long yet unless we give in … and all our sacrifices will be in vain. It is all a hopeless muddle as far as I can see.[25]

However, as in the aftermath of the previous winter, Pompey's morale transformed in March. Coming out of winter conditions was a factor, as in 1917, but other reasons contrasted. Whereas in March 1917 the Germans retreated and Pompey's men advanced, it was known in March 1918 that the Germans were about to launch an immense offensive, and his men would be defending. Pompey geared himself up for the challenge, convinced his brigade was in good shape to meet it. He even ended one letter with a Shakespearian flourish, quoting Henry the Fifth's words at Agincourt:

> And gentlemen in England now abed
> Shall think themselves accursed they were not here.[26]

The German offensive began on 21 March 1918 and drove the British back no less than 40 miles. There was widespread concern that after all the

hardships and casualties Britain might well lose the war. AIF formations were rushed to the rescue, Pompey's brigade among them. During these weeks of desperate defence Pompey's renowned leadership became even more indomitable and dynamic. He wrote a stream of vivid letters to Kate describing his experiences:

> The AIF have hitherto accomplished nothing to be compared in importance with the work they have in hand just now … We turned the tide that threatened to sweep over everything to Paris and the sea … Australia [should] be proud of our boys.[27]
>
> I was never so proud of being an Australian as I am today … The gallant bearing and joyous spirit of the men at the prospect of a fight thrills you through and through. You simply cannot despair or be downhearted – whatever the odds against you – when you feel their spirits rising the more the danger seems to threaten. It is glorious indeed to be with them.[28]

At this critical time Pompey's brigade was directed to occupy the village of Hedauville. When they arrived after a gruelling all-night march in the cold and rain and darkness, they found Hedauville occupied by a British unit that should have vacated it, with the result that Pompey's men had to wait outside in the rain:

> [The British officer in charge] told me that his Division had moved and until he got orders from them as to where he was to go he could not move. I asked him where his Division was. He did not know. I asked had he sent [anyone] out to find where it was – No. I then saw that the blighter had no intention to move, that they were very comfortable there and didn't want to move, and would take mighty fine care they didn't get orders. So I told him right there and then a few things I had found out about his Division and its fighting and running powers, and wound up by informing him that unless he and his officers and men were clear of the village by two o'clock I would send in an escort of my own men and march them out by force as prisoners. He got a nasty shock and was out of the village by the time fixed. He then had the [hide] to complain to his Division of the way I had treated him. In reply I let off some more steam and asked that a Court of Inquiry should [investigate] the conduct of the British officers and men in the village who had looted the whole place including the chateau. That startled them a bit, and the matter was dropped like a hot spud.[29]

Sensing this was the climax of the war, Pompey became more ebullient than ever. He concluded that drastic action was warranted in the crisis:

> A great many British officers were helping themselves to champagne. Whilst this was so you could not expect the privates to abstain. I caught a British captain with a cart loaded up with champagne for his officers

> mess. I handed him over to the provost guard and issued an order that the next officer I caught at this would be summarily and publicly hanged in the market square. I told them I was quite aware it might be illegal, but I was determined to stop the looting and consequent demoralisation and trust to the King's pardon in case of illegality. This order had immediate effect, and I never had the slightest trouble afterwards.[30]

The order, proclaimed in a prominent notice, declared that the hanged officer's body would be left swinging as a deterrent. "None seemed inclined to make of themselves a test case", Pompey observed.[31]

He was thrilled by his brigade's contribution in the crisis:

> My boys were three days on the journey with no proper rest or sleep – train-journeying, marching and countermarching – and then finally, after an all-night march of 26 miles, flung into the fight. Fortunately our first contact was nothing, and we got a couple of nights rest acting as a right flank guard to our army in case the French were driven back. Finally we were thrown into a gap between the British and French, and for some strenuous days were under the French army, and the situation maps show that during this time we had hurled against us no less than three complete German divisions. Yet our men stood so firm and fired with such deadly accuracy and speed that they not only beat off every attack, but every night followed up the enemy and gained a few hundred yards.[32]

The brigadier gave his sister-in-law a more colloquial summary:

> Things are only middling over here. A lot of the British troops got their tails down and the Bosche in consequence got very cheeky. Where the Australians have met him he is now in a much more subdued frame of mind.[33]

Pompey's exuberance was also evident in a fervent morale-booster he sent to an English cousin:

> I cannot tell you where we are, but think of what the Bosche most aimed for and plant my brigade right across the path. It is a great honour I feel to be placed there … we will hold him yet. You must tell every one to keep their spirits up – this is no time for softness and yielding … the boys are longing for him to come on … the more we see of him as a soldier, the more contemptuous of him do we become – his strategy and his tactics appear alike to have been copied from the locusts that devastate our fields at home on occasion … [Indeed] the whole military ability of the Teutonic race has advanced no plan beyond … the instinct of an infant grasshopper. In spots he must gain by such means a transient success, but will he win the war – never, if our hearts are stout and our brains cool and our arms ready to take advantage of opportunity … I must just stick it out like my boys – our backs to the wall but our faces

> and our breasts undaunted at all – facing the foe … never fear the ultimate result.[34]

The culmination of the AIF's significant role in resisting the German onslaught occurred a week later at Villers-Bretonneux. The Germans attacked this tactically vital town on 24 April and captured it from a British division safeguarding it, but the AIF regained it in a stunningly successful counterattack at night without artillery assistance. Various observers (including General Monash, who was uninvolved in the operation) described it as the most brilliant exploit of the war by any soldiers in any army. No one was more instrumental than Pompey Elliott:

> I submitted the plan for recapture of a town. I was told not to bother as the British corps concerned were doing it themselves and it was out of my area … I was told again not to attack and for 14 hours we delayed whilst the Bosche strengthened his position. [Eventually] I was solemnly handed over to the British corps concerned [together] with another Australian brigade – no means of communication with each other was provided – by this time it was pitch dark and raining, and we were launched and our meeting place fixed within the enemy's lines – and we were left to find each other. Everyone expected the whole thing to fail, but something desperate had to be done to restore the situation. In point of fact it was not nearly as desperate as it looked, for I had taken advantage of those 14 hours delay to have all my officers and some of the men thoroughly reconnoitre the ground actually during the fight, for the moment the [German] attack started I assumed that the British corps would be defeated.[35]

In the wake of this acclaimed victory Elliott became, as Charles Bean observed, "very aggrieved" that other commanders were claiming the credit.[36] As Pompey saw it, he "had to fight everybody to get permission to do it, and when it was done they were all breaking their necks to get or share the credit".[37] "Some who opposed my request in the beginning are now unblushingly trying to usurp the entire credit", he added.[38]

Pompey became even more aggrieved soon afterwards when he was overlooked for promotion. Three divisional command vacancies had opened up in the AIF, but General Birdwood preferred other brigadiers. Pompey was appalled. After a furious argument with Birdwood's senior staff officer, Major-General Brudenell White, Pompey paced around alone for half an hour before rejoining his staff with a memorable utterance: "My boy, if you want to get on in the army, go on leave to Paris, learn dancing, take lessons in deportment, learn to bow and scrape!"[39] He then unleashed his anguish in a letter to Kate:

> [White] said General Birdwood would not promote me. I asked why, and pointed to my services – the Bapaume advance, which is now lectured

> on as a classic example of advanced guard; on the Bullecourt show, on the Polygon Wood show and lastly on this Villers-Bretonneux stunt, which is supposed to be the finest thing the Anzacs have ever done in the war, and some say the finest thing done in the war at all. And Lone Pine too.
>
> He admitted all that, and said they had no general braver or more capable in the AIF, but I suffered from lack of control of judgment. Pressed to say what he meant, he could only say that I break out like a volcano if things don't go just as I want them. He mentioned about the row I had with Birdwood in Egypt; also the row in Egypt when they wouldn't give my men water and I threatened to march them back into town. Then at Fromelles, when the British didn't advance and my men got cut to pieces, I kicked up a row and got a general sacked and caused a lot of unpleasantness. Then at Polygon Wood, when my big report exposed the Tommies regiments, who bolted and left my 58th boys to fight alone; the same almost at Bullecourt, the same down here. Then the row I had with a young staff officer who kept all my brigade out in the rain until it suited him to get up about 10am in the morning after we had marched all night. Then when we got down here I found British officers stealing champagne wholesale, and I arrested them and threatened to shoot them if it did not stop, for I could not stop my men stealing wine if the officers would persist. That seems to have led to a row. Then some of the British officers were stealing the furniture of the poor people for their dugout. At the very same time we were punishing our men very severely for stealing the least thing. I reported this to Genl Birdwood and pointed out that we couldn't stop the men if the officers would do this, but I only got snubbed for my pains.
>
> Now would you believe it possible that they are now dragging all this up to show I am not fit for a higher job. It is amazing and incredible. I should have thought that taking this in conjunction with my fighting powers, which he admits are not approachable, it would have proved that I was the very man for the job. But there you are … Katie, I have done only my duty as my men will testify for always.[40]

Elliott's distinctive combination of celebrated exploits and emotional volatility continued until the Armistice. Pompey and his brigade were prominent in a series of momentous battles – some particularly complex and challenging – and his dynamic leadership kept on generating diverting incidents. He positioned his brigade headquarters at one stage 50 yards *ahead* of the then most advanced AIF positions; he proceeded across a damaged bridge, on his own and under fire, only to fall into the Somme with a spectacular splash and experience considerable difficulty in scrambling out; he was hit by a bullet in his posterior while guiding a tank into position, and had his bulky buttock attended to on a prominent mound while barking out orders as he carried on uninterrupted with his direction of the battle.[41] When battalions

mutinied against disbandment, he was the only brigadier who persuaded his men to discontinue their resistance. Having been directed to carry out a certain advance, he insisted that it had no hope of success and threatened to resign, whereupon his superior conceded that Pompey had been correct and there was "no better general" in France.[42] As always, Pompey was upset about casualties and acutely missed his family. The prospect of seeing them again was overwhelming: "Katie, I can hardly go to sleep at night for thinking of it. I am afraid I shall cry".[43]

He suffered a pronounced letdown after the Armistice while waiting to go home. During the arduous and stressful period of almost continuous fighting since March he had been sustained by his unswerving focus and single-minded commitment to the ultimate goal of victory. Now, though, he had too much time to think and brood in gloomy weather and surroundings. A severe dose of survivor guilt exacerbated his plummeting morale. Reflecting on those who had perished in his brigade, he declared that it had "been an inspiration to live with them. One might well wish to have died with them."[44]

Pompey was worried about the state of his solicitors' practice, the state of his health, and the threat of the Spanish influenza pandemic (in Europe and Melbourne). He was profoundly rundown, afflicted by a sense of past-his-best malaise, burdened by oppressive grief and loss, and tormented by depression. These "fits of the blues"[45] were "terrible, almost more than I can bear", he confessed (Figure 2.6):[46]

> At times I get fearful fits of depression when I can see nothing but misery for us all, and I wake up sometimes in the middle of the night with a

Figure 2.6 Pompey supporting the scouting movement after the war. Jan McCombe.

> shock and my heart feels as if it is on fire and every nerve aches because I can see no way out anywhere and no promise of getting on with the weight of debt over me.[47]

The famous commander returned home in mid-1919 and was invited to stand for the Senate, which he did, successfully. At the 1925 federal election he was again the first Victorian senator elected. During the 1920s he was an esteemed household name. He was prominent in politics, the law and the history of the war. In March 1931, however, Pompey Elliott committed suicide.

His death was not only a ghastly shock for his family. The manner of his death was also a terrible blow to numerous returned soldiers who admired him immensely. Many of them were struggling along in the Great Depression amid poverty, unemployment and the after-effects of wounds or gas; if this inspirational leader with renowned courage and intellect and capacity – as a commander, a solicitor and in parliament – could not handle these bleak and troubling times, what hope was there for them? The death of Australia's emotional general was a shattering event for many such battlers.

In that era, when stoic fortitude was an unquestioned virtue, suicide tended to be regarded as shameful, even by some as sinful. Its incidence was under-recognised, particularly its prevalence among returned soldiers; this was nowhere more exemplified than in the extensive press coverage of Pompey Elliott's death – no newspaper reported it as a suicide. A month later, however, *Smith's Weekly* revealed the truth. Its exposé was admiring and sympathetic, but many returned soldiers were incensed: to them, this was crass, sordid journalism at its worst. Angry agitators wanted to attack *Smith's* office and smash windows; some even wanted to set fire to it. Militants proceeded to gather there intent on destruction, and serious trouble was only narrowly averted.

Various factors had influenced Elliott's death. His resentment about not being promoted in mid-1918 after the Villers-Bretonneux triumph had become an enduring and consuming grievance. Pompey's chagrin had been reinforced when the peacetime defence force was established: seven vacancies had to be filled at the level of divisional command, and he was overlooked once again.

He also suffered from what is now known as post-traumatic stress disorder. His nightmares and flashbacks in the 1920s tended not to be about the shocking sights, sounds and smells that he experienced all too often as Australia's most famous fighting general. Rather, they tended to involve episodes when he had to delegate tasks to others – inevitably, as a general – and, just as inevitably, there were occasions when those he sent out on those assignments did not return.

Furthermore, he had struck his head severely in a horse-riding accident a few months before he died. When his family tried to make retrospective

sense of his death, they wondered whether this incident might have been more significant than they had thought when it occurred.

Also significant was the effect of the economic Great Depression. This was an extremely unsettling time. For people of Pompey's political orientation in particular, it seemed as if the whole commercial system was about to go over the cliff. He was desperately anxious about his own financial affairs, although he had no cause to be – in fact, a former prime minister examined Pompey's personal finances, and reassured him that all was well, but it did not stop him worrying. What he also found fundamentally perturbing about the Great Depression was that it undermined his capacity to do what he could to look after returned soldiers, which had been a priority for him since the war. He had assisted them whenever he could with employment, welfare, references, free legal advice and so on, and he became profoundly disturbed when much of this became no longer feasible in the Depression.

His men, and their families, never forgot him. More generally, though, in the national consciousness Pompey faded into obscurity. The manner of his death was a factor. Suicide in that era, especially when it concerned a legendary commander, was confronting and incongruous. However, Australia's emotional general deserved better from posterity.

> Neither the eyes of men nor the ears of men nor the nerves of men were created for the sights, the sounds and the sleepless anxieties of war – yet when it comes these must be endured.
>
> Pompey Elliott, 25 April 1928[48]

Notes

1 H. Elliott to K. Elliott 12.7.1915, Elliott papers.
2 This chapter builds on my book *Pompey Elliott at War: In His Own Words* 2017 and is also influenced by my earlier biography *Pompey Elliott* 2002.
3 H. Elliott to K. Elliott 2.11.1916, Elliott papers.
4 H. Elliott to K. Elliott 12.11.1915, Elliott papers.
5 Letter to editor, *British-Australasian* no date [May 1918].
6 H. Elliott to K. Elliott 12.7.1915, Elliott papers.
7 McMullin 2017, p. 79.
8 H. Elliott to J. Richardson, 25.1.1916, Richardson papers.
9 H. Elliott to J. Treloar, 25.5.1918, Elliott papers.
10 H. Elliott to E. Edwards, 23.7.1916, Elliott papers.
11 H. Elliott to K. Elliott, 20.7.1916, Elliott papers.
12 C. Bean papers, AWM 38 3DRL 6673/954.
13 H. Elliott to K. Roberts, 31.12.1916, Elliott papers.
14 H. Elliott to K. Elliott, 27.11.1916, Elliott papers.
15 H. Elliott to K. Roberts, 31.12.1916, Elliott papers.
16 H. Elliott to K. Elliott, 22.6.1917, Elliott papers.
17 H. Elliott to N. Elliott, 27.12.1916, Elliott papers.
18 H. Elliott to K. Elliott, 28.3.1917, Elliott papers.
19 H. Elliott to G. McCrae, 16.4.1917, McCrae papers.

20 H. Elliott to G. Henderson, 18.10.1917, Henderson family papers, privately held.
21 H. Elliott to K. Elliott, 2.10.1917, Elliott papers.
22 H. Elliott to K. Elliott, 3.10.1917, Elliott papers.
23 H. Elliott to B. Campbell, 26.2.1918, Elliott papers.
24 H. Elliott to K. Elliott, 7.1.1918, Elliott papers.
25 H. Elliott to K. Elliott, 31.12.1917, Elliott papers.
26 H. Elliott to E. Edwards, 14.2.1918, Elliott papers.
27 H. Elliott to K. Elliott, 17.4.1918, Elliott papers.
28 H. Elliott to K. Elliott, 18.4.1918, Elliott papers.
29 H. Elliott to K. Elliott, 18.4.1918, Elliott papers.
30 H. Elliott to K. Elliott, 11.4.1918, Elliott papers.
31 H. Elliott to J. Treloar, 25.5.1918, Elliott papers.
32 H. Elliott to G. McCrae, 6.5.1918, McCrae papers.
33 H. Elliott to B. Campbell, 11.4.1918, Elliott papers.
34 H. Elliott to E. Edwards, 19.4.1918, Elliott papers.
35 H. Elliott to E. Edwards, 30.4.1918, Elliott papers.
36 McMullin 2017, p. 382.
37 H. Elliott to K. Elliott, 5.5.1918, Elliott papers.
38 H. Elliott to G. McCrae, 6.5.1918, McCrae papers.
39 McMullin 2017, p. 397.
40 H. Elliott to K. Elliott, 24.5.1918, Elliott papers.
41 According to one of his colonels, seeing "Pompey with his tailboard down having his wound dressed" was one of the sights of the war: McMullin, 2017, p. 426.
42 H. Elliott to K. Elliott, 8.9.1918, Elliott papers.
43 H. Elliott to K. Elliott, 31.10.1918, Elliott papers.
44 H. Elliott to M. Denehy, 24.11.1918, Elliott papers.
45 McMullin 2002, p. 504.
46 H. Elliott to K. Elliott, 20.3.1919, Elliott papers.
47 H. Elliott to K. Elliott, 22.2.1919, Elliott papers.
48 *Bendigo Advertiser,* 26 April 1928.

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3 For the duration

Surviving World War I at home

Bart Ziino

Over 330,000 men and women left Australia for overseas service in the four-year war that lasted from 1914 to 1918. They left behind them a great many more than their own number: they left behind family and friends vigilant and desperately anxious about the welfare of their loved ones. For those people too, World War I was a profoundly difficult experience with which to contend. The war drew on Australians' reserves not just of patriotism and pride, but of emotional resilience and hope. As the war continued, and in the face of terrible losses, that resilience eroded. Diminishing resilience expressed itself in anger against those whose commitment to the war one deemed insufficient, and the fury of the two conscription campaigns gave that anger a public forum.[1] But the anxiety, fretting and pain that were fundamental to the experience of the war at home have been less visible to historians.[2] This chapter delves into the emotional experience of enduring the war at home. Mobilising for war was not just about the military, industry or finance, important as these were to winning. Sentiment and feeling were critical to maintaining popular consent for war; but while governments sought to manage private sensibilities, emotions engendered by the war defied containment. The anxiety and fear that so characterised those years for Australians at home have their own history. An analysis of the ways in which love tied Australians ineluctably to the battlefront, and how its attendant anxiety intensified in relation to those distant events, exposes the deep personal costs of supporting an open-ended war, in which loved ones remained away – exposed to the threat of wounds and death – "for the duration".

This chapter charts Australian patterns of feeling through an examination of the correspondence of General Sir John Monash, especially with his family and friends in Melbourne. We know much about Monash's exploits: he has been used by multiple historians to examine – and especially to celebrate – Australia's war in France.[3] Indeed, Monash positioned himself as one of the key narrators of Australian success on the Western Front through his own *The Australian Victories in France in 1918*.[4] His most comprehensive biographer well knew, however, that Monash's papers are also a trove for those who would seek insight into the world of families enduring the war at home.[5] Select parts of Monash's private correspondence had already

become public through the newspapers during the war; much more of it would be edited for publication by his son-in-law in the 1930s. But what that volume continued to conceal was the intimacy and extent of his connections to home. What Monash's correspondence from Australia reveals – in detail and for the duration of the war – is civilians' intense struggle to endure the anxiety of war. It speaks to the modulating and yet persistent tension of waiting and hoping, drawn taut at times of battlefield action. It speaks, too, to Australians' struggle to contain that tension with the ebbing of hope in 1917 and the terrible fear of defeat in 1918. Australians' commitment to the war persisted to its victorious conclusion, certainly, but surviving the war at home had been a torment that many felt driving them to their own untimely end.

One might easily imagine that in communications between home and battlefront, soldiers and civilians carried on a kind of mutual deception – the one obscuring the realities of the front, the other resisting expression of their own anxieties – in an effort to preserve one another's feelings. This kind of self-censorship certainly existed to a degree, and more in some places than in others, but it never concealed entirely the nature of the experience. In their frank accounts of the war, numerous soldiers' letters resist the claim that soldiers only covered up the realities of the front.[6] So too those on the home front spoke of their tribulations and saw it as important that their loved ones knew the situation at home. In the case of John Monash, the most outwardly patriotic of his correspondents were those most quick to dismiss their own travails in the face of those at the front. More than once, the 65-year-old scholar Dr John Purves Wilson imagined that "All our concerns here must seem so trivial beside the great struggle in which you are playing a man's part … But I do feel afraid of boring you".[7] And yet Australians at home *were* speaking those concerns. Monash was a focal point for families' investments in the war. His family of course expressed their concerns for his own welfare; later in the war a wider range of people came to see in Monash the man to whom they might appeal for relief from their own terrible anxiety and strain.

When Monash took command of the 4th Brigade, Australian Imperial Force, in September 1914, the pride of his family and community was quickly on show. But so too was anxiety and concern. Melbourne's Jewish community relished the honour of command bestowed on one of their own, and Karl Roth hoped that his cousin would return "covered with glory and decorations and medals, nobly won and praiseworthily earned".[8] If Roth was dazzled by the potential glory of Monash's war, there were few who did not note the accompanying sacrifice being made by families. In rendering congratulations, Caroline Vandeleur of Mildura noted at once how fine was Monash's volunteering and also "how brave [it was] of dear Mrs Monash to cheer you on".[9] Closer to home the meaning of that sacrifice was more clearly articulated. Monash's niece hoped that the war would be over before her uncle arrived, for it was "awful to have anyone you are fond of going".[10]

Twenty-one year-old Bertha Monash found her father's departure deeply painful. She shared the experience on the wharf with other women, and then in writing with her father: "I must admit Dad, that it was [the] most trying day I've ever spent, and I never want another like it. I'll never forget those dozens of weeping women and the pain in their faces as they said 'goodbye'".[11] Later in the war, the experience of farewell became worse, as "now … our eyes are opened, and one cannot help being convinced that many of those we came to see will never return! We were all cowards and all wept".[12] Even if Bertha had tried to conceal her pain, there were others prepared to report to Monash on his family's wellbeing. Bertha's friend Adelaide Shaw told Monash as he departed that "The poor kiddie is very, very miserable, and likely to be even more so, and I give you my word to stand by her and do everything one friend may do for another".[13]

John Monash could hardly be accused of being insensitive to his family's sacrifice in any case. But as his daughter had indicated, offering up one's family to the war became laden with more immediate dangers as the conflict proceeded. When Eric Simonson commenced work with the flying corps in March 1915, his mother Sarah professed to Monash that "I feel it very keenly", before reminding herself:

> still what has a Mother's feelings to do with my duty to my country when men are needed. He must go and do his best (and I trust it will be good) and I must wait and trust to God's justice to bring you and he back safe and sound.[14]

Figure 3.1 Soldiers' farewell, West Wyalong, New South Wales, April 1916. Museums Victoria ST 40693.

Figure 3.2 Family and friends on the wharf at Port Melbourne see off soldiers heading for the front, 1916. State Library of Victoria H40762.

Simonson showed that public invocations to women to emulate Spartan mothers were mouthed in private, but hardly overwhelmed attendant fears for the wellbeing of loved ones. Thus the intensification of Australia's war with the landing at Gallipoli, was quickly reflected in private correspondence. Even before Gallipoli, Monash's cousin Mat (Mathilde) Roth found it difficult to "think of anything else but this horrible war", but as the casualty lists began appearing in May, she declared that "it brings the War so much closer to us".[15] Bertha's fears for her father made it difficult to write, though she still managed to express that problem clearly to him:

> It is a strange thing but true, that it becomes harder to write to you, every time. This is because we are in the midst of such an anxious time, with nothing but troubles in our mind, and it is most difficult to refrain from telling you in detail just how much we know up to date, how worried we are and to ask you innumerable unanswerable questions.[16]

Days later Bertha wished that she could wake up from such a bad dream and relieve her anxiety. "But there is no hope", she conceded. Nevertheless, she reminded herself that her father's travails were certainly worse than her own.[17]

Pride and pain relating to the Australians at Gallipoli went hand in hand. Casualty lists appeared alongside honours lists; even the most vehement

expressions of pride in the exploits of the Anzacs were accompanied by acknowledgement of their costs. Victoria's Director of Education, Frank Tate, told Monash that "What you … have done makes it a proud boast to call oneself an Australian. … But oh! The pity of the awful price we have had to pay".[18] Monash knew the price well: it was all around him. But he could also see how death was entering his circle at home, as friends not only shared their grief, but quickly sought him out for the comforting details of death and burial that they desired. William Warren Kerr's son – a member of Monash's brigade – died a week after the landing at Gallipoli. Kerr wrote seeking certainty:

> it would be of some comfort … if we knew the circumstances of his death permitted of his burial in a grave that may be identified and cared for. Was he killed outright or did he suffer, do you know?[19]

Kerr was deeply grateful that Monash was able to relieve his and his wife's anxiety over the grave; still, Monash had begun to see the devastation of loss in people he knew. When Keith Wallace-Crabbe was killed in August 1915, his mother, Harriet Terese Wallace-Crabbe, exposed the difference between invocations to stoicism and the effort to come to terms:

> I gave him most willingly to fight for our King, but I cannot be brave, at having lost him for ever, as they say a British Mother, who has a son brave enough to do his duty, should be brave. I am utterly broken at the great blow. … Pardon me for all this dear Sir, for I know thousands of other mothers are suffering with me, but it does not make the individual case any lighter.[20]

Monash's words of consolation were appreciated, though he was able to offer little in the way of detail. Keith Wallace-Crabbe's body was lost. Such correspondence spoke, however, to the ways in which death was moving through communities at home, and the real and affective links between home and battlefront that deepened as a result.

Gallipoli quickly showed how anxiety and bereavement were elemental experiences of the war at home. Both insisted on fostering official and unofficial conduits to and from the front, through which comforting information might flow. Those channels allowed civilians a much deeper insight into the reality of the front than we have previously appreciated, or at the very least showed that Australians were frustrated at the level of detail available, rather than dutifully accepting that with which they were provided. Monash's letters were full of detail, some of which his wife Vic and daughter Bertha managed to have published in newspapers, while edited copies circulated widely within the family around the country. The editing was necessary: as Geoffrey Serle observed, "He wrote very freely to Vic, revealing much current information. … Sometimes he went much too far".[21]

For her part, Bertha declared that "We are like blessed censors ourselves and it is a real worry to keep remembering what is safe to tell and what not".[22] Elsewhere, Monash's relatives were also finding that other channels of information were opening up. Mat Roth noted that while soldiers' letters printed in the press were written in such a way as to render war a game, "one or two pathetic remarks show how they want to revenge the death of their friends".[23] Monash's cousin Oscar Behrend had been hearing "thrilling tales" of the landing and after from returned men. But according to those returned soldiers, "it is 'Hell on earth' there". Behrend wondered how anyone could stand the strain.[24] Perversely, such access to information did have the effect of suggesting that official channels were limiting the public's knowledge of the war, and it provoked resentment. Two of Monash's business associates declared their pessimism. Richard Taylor thought the censors mutilated the news to the extent that what was left was of little value; Ernest Wears declared simply that "such news as we do get is mostly padding half true and half not worth a row of pins".[25]

What could hardly be concealed, however, were the casualty lists, and the sense that the war was not going well for the Empire in 1915. From mid-1915, that knowledge fed a determination at home to contribute to the war more fully and to adopt a more "serious" attitude towards it. Though recruiting surged, most could not enlist, for reasons of age or gender. Richard Taylor wished he were 10 years younger, "for no one would be quicker in the midst of a scrap than yours very sincerely", while Frank Tate disparagingly referred to himself and others in Australia as "stay-at-homes".[26] Prominent medical practitioner Felix Meyer told Monash that those at home were following events at Gallipoli closely, "and not without very mixed feelings", given the level of casualties. Death and wounding of loved ones had "stirred up people here as nothing else had done". The atmosphere at recruiting rallies, he observed, was "sane but tense".[27] New hierarchies of legitimate activity emerged, all calibrated to the prosecution of the war. One key expression of commitment came in fundraising and the production of "comforts". Hence Mat Roth noted that "Immense sums of money are being collected here for Belgian Funds and Australian Soldiers, etc and we are all knitting as hard as we can".[28] Greater involvement in the war accelerated war's transformation of home-front society. Richard Taylor noted that transformation, telling Monash that "Melbourne has undergone a great change since you left – everything is connected with war – big efforts are being made everywhere for enlistment or raising funds for the Red Cross, Sick and wounded, and people are giving liberally".[29] The enlistment of greater numbers of men as part of that mobilisation also meant greater exposure for families to the threat of loss. Another of Sarah Simonson's sons now enlisted – with her reluctant consent – leaving her to observe that "The response here to the recruiting movement has been immense and every home has someone at the front".[30]

The induction of vast numbers of Australians into the torment of waiting and enduring was not as sudden as the drama of the Gallipoli landing

suggests, so much as it escalated over the course of 1915, and intensified again with the fighting on the Somme in 1916. At this point, the trial of enduring anxiety was becoming clearer and deeper. Sarah Simonson struggled to adapt to the absence of her two sons, which "has upset me more than ever I thought possible".[31] She had given up seeking enjoyment from cinema, theatre and horse racing, which had become little more than refuge from the "wretched casualty list [that] keep one always on tenterhooks". Meanwhile, she found that the returning wounded men "give one the creeps – they all look so thin and worn out".[32] If the effects of the war could be read on the bodies of those who returned, they were also beginning to show on those who remained. For some it was obvious. One friend told Monash that "Old Monty Cohen has taken Harold's departure badly he is hardly ever sober, they had to put him away for a time".[33] While J.P. Wilson thought Bertha Monash looked well enough, and others had not necessarily shown outward signs of strain, he still declared that "every one of us bears an awful load of suspense and trouble".[34] Such recognition of a shared burden was common. Even on holiday at Sorrento at the end of 1915, Bertha Monash observed the community of suffering of which she was a part: "Everybody here has sons, nephews, brothers or cousins at the war, and we are all one big family and companions in distress".[35]

The fighting on the Somme extended such circles of fear and mourning much further: the scale of the fighting eclipsed that at Gallipoli, as too did the casualties. The resulting angst seeped deeper into the community. In Monash's circle the main victim was family friend Harry Cathie, killed in May 1916. Though Bertha worked hard to support Harry's family, Adelaide Shaw noted that "She looks very weary and sad, poor kiddie, but now that Harry's last letters and full particulars from the chaplain and officers have come thro' I think she will feel better, for the strain of waiting is over".[36] Monash again did what he could by providing details, but the weight of anxiety induced by the Somme would not be dispersed. Reflecting on Harry Cathie's death, Mat Roth declared that "This is a terribly anxious time for everybody. … until this war is over, one can only hope and hope for the best".[37] James Lewis hoped that the war would end before his two sons arrived: "I would be greatly relieved", he told Monash, "to hear that they were not wanted, and to see you all victoriously returning".[38] Such hopes were in vain, and even as the Somme campaign petered out, J.P. Wilson was still referring to the "fathers and mothers who pass days and nights of anxiety and dread of the result of the great efforts being made in France".[39]

While Bertha Monash spoke of "one big family and companions in distress", the reality was that mobilisation for war also produced rebuke and criticism of those not seen to be contributing equally. Monash was privy both to accusations that elements of the community were "shirking" their responsibilities and to the difficult decisions being made within families about what reasonably could be given to the war. Resentments emerged even in the midst of the great boom in recruiting in mid-1915. Richard Taylor was impressed that "Most people are busy doing something", and yet "all the same

we have still too many 'shirkers' or 'cold feet'".[40] Aware of such criticisms, Monash's business associate J.A. Laing observed that "War is, of course, the all absorbing topic and it is not easy to justify one's non-participation in it".[41] Monash himself seems to have believed that Australians had not yet felt the weight and gravity of the war, though even in his own family he could see the dynamics that were preventing men from enlisting. His cousin Oscar Behrend had been contemplating enlistment but had been obliged to refrain, as "Mother was strongly opposed to my applying. She says that as I am the principal wage earner of the family I have no right to endanger my life in any way".[42] Such personal strictures – and the reproaches that followed – were a function of mobilisation, and they continued to play out across the war.

In the immediate term, such subtleties as Behrend described were not easily registered in the "yes" or "no" debate that ensued over conscription in 1916 and then again in 1917. Returned officer Harold Pope told Monash that arguments on the issue were "far more intense than anything I have seen previously in Australia", while Sarah Simonson thought that the referendum "seems to me almost to have become a personal question." Those with relatives at the front she thought would vote in favour, while others could not send their own or others' sons to be killed.[43] Monash heard the recriminations that followed the lost vote from both sides. J.P. Wilson was scathing of his fellow citizens, whose votes had meant "Australians determined to do what they d___d pleased – need I say that we are hanging our heads over the result and no longer boasting of our glory".[44] Journalist Agnes Murphy rendered the situation rather one of Prime Minister Hughes' political and judicial excesses, in which his "persistent statement that all who voted against Conscription wanted Germany to win" had antagonised voters and destroyed any remaining faith in voluntarism.[45] In rural Victoria, James Downie had voted against conscription, claiming "Hughes wanted to Prussianise Australia". He asked Monash if he should be kicked for his decision, but he still diagnosed the multiple facets of the problem clearly. "In your own country", he told Monash, "everything (in a business way, and in politics, and in family matters), all seems to be mixed up".[46]

If it was Hughes who had been willing to risk personalising the conscription issue, it was Australians themselves who perpetuated it. Like Wilson, professional man William Calder felt humiliated by the loss of the referendum, brought about by "sinister influences". He declared in December 1916 that "Things in this country are just as nearly approaching chaos as it is possible to be".[47] That sense of chaos continued into the federal election in May 1917, when Mat Roth insisted that the "turmoil and strife that is taking place are disgraceful … There does not seem any chance of conscription being made law and the voluntary effort is not a success." What she wanted more than the disciplining of the community, however, was its relief: "Our constant hope is that this war is nearing its end and that this year we shall see you back here again and that all your terrible worry and responsibilities will be over".[48]

Mat Roth found her hopes becoming more distant as 1917 continued. The limits of personal endurance were beginning to come into focus. Tensions at home were not being relieved by success on the battlefield: the brief pursuit of the German withdrawal beginning in February had ceased at a new and more powerful defensive line, while on the Eastern Front the Russians – who had already had one revolution – were not performing well either. Even Monash's success at Messines was costly. Roth found refuge only in hope:

> We had hopes of seeing you next Xmas, but the present War News makes that very doubtful. The Russians are so terribly disappointing. However we must all hope that the War will be over sooner than we expect.[49]

To compound matters, the links between home and front were coming under greater strain, as the submarine menace extended mail ships' journey time between Australia and Europe. The irregularity and increased wait for mails escalated tension, and the loss of mails in sunken vessels was cause for genuine upset. While nine-year-old Dorothy Warner simply wrote another letter to Monash "because my other letter that I wrote went down in the Red Sea", Vera Prowse lamented the loss of comfort parcels on the S.S. *Port Kembla* in September 1917: "It makes one quite desperate about sending parcels, however we are chancing things and sending some Xmas boxes next mail and mail after."[50] Later, in 1918, her sister Doris bemoaned the infrequency of mails and the difficulty of maintaining long-distance connections to loved ones: "it seems just an endless period", she wrote, "when we have to wait a whole month for letters from you all".[51]

The interruption of communications was just one compounding factor at a time when individuals and families were feeling the cumulative strains of absence and anxiety more intensely than ever before. Towards the end of 1917, they began to articulate them as never before. Monash was not unused to requests from friends and relatives, especially those seeking preferential treatment for sons in terms of opportunities and promotion. But while those kinds of requests continued for the duration of the war, a different vein of entreaty became more pronounced from the end of 1917. Monash had already received one request, in the midst of the 1916 Somme campaign (though his own Third Division was still training in England), from an anxious friend hoping Monash could remove his son from the fighting. The heavy casualty lists had so unnerved William Calder that he had come to ask Monash to "forgive a father whose only boy is doing his 'little bit' in the fighting line in France in longing to get him out of the ruck, and possibly you may be able to assist in this".[52] Observing Calder at the time, J.P. Wilson thought that Calder and his wife "take it more hardly than most people".[53] If this were true in 1916, though, then by late 1917 Calder was hardly unusual. Invocations to stoicism were becoming frayed, so that while in February 1917 Kew Town Surveyor W.J. Muntz could say that his wife was "standing the strain of sorrow and anxiety as the mother of soldiers should", by November Sarah Simonson was openly expressing her sense of helplessness:

Figure 3.3 Postcards were both a representation and practical expression of links between the fronts, such as a postcard written by Bill Nairn to his sister, Sarah, 4 May 1918. Museums Victoria HT 42727, donated by the Jackson family.

> What terrible fighting you have been in lately. God is good to keep you safe thro' it all. Sometimes I think the Almighty is tired with all the prayers he hears, but all that women can do is to wait and pray.[54]

Others now felt that Monash was a better option than God. A stream of letter writers began to request that he use his influence to remove sons and brothers from danger. Most addressed Monash as their loved one's commanding officer, others because he was a Jew like them, some simply because he was rising to such prominence within the Australian Imperial Force. All wanted his help.

Monash's correspondents were concerned not only to preserve their loved ones but increasingly cited the detrimental effects of the war on their own health as justification for their requests. They felt that the strain of waiting and hoping was approaching breaking point. Some had already lost loved ones to the war, inducing them to make their appeals for men still at the front. Claude Cowell's family in country Victoria had lost their two soldier brothers (the last in October 1917), and their father had recently died, when they asked that he be brought back home, or at least "given a job out of the firing line".[55] Similarly, Mrs. E.F. Turnbull in Nambour, Queensland, had "lost two sons in this dreadful war", which qualified her to ask that her remaining son be spared any further time in France, where he had been for two years. Turnbull had only her daughters at home to support her; sending her son to England would be "a very very great favour. I would thank you very much. I could not thank you so much".[56] The Allies' battlefield reverses at the end of 1917, together with the failure of the second conscription vote in December, surely had much to do with such requests; the extraordinary success of the new German offensive in March and April 1918 provoked anxious families even further. Hopeful statements about the duration of the war that had peppered Monash's previous correspondence were evaporating. In May Mat Roth could not see "that this terrible War will come to an end this year", while in July Monash's old friend Ada Benjamin could only feel that after four years it was "cruel to think no end is near yet and we all keep hoping on that is all we can do".[57] Fellow Jew Priscilla Da Costa could hope no longer. She wanted her youngest son kept out of the front line. It was not just that he was her sole support, but that "my health is very bad just now and if he were out of danger it would relieve me of a terrible strain". She had just received word that her eldest, married, son had been gassed. Even recognising the military situation, she pressed her desires: "I know men are wanted badly but it means such a lot to me".[58]

Monash was only experiencing what the Defence Department and other prominent individuals had already been experiencing. Importantly, those who pressed their claims also tended to profess their patriotic credentials and the level of their own sacrifice. The argument they were making was that they themselves should have relief, as much as their loved ones at the

fighting front deserved it. Sydney Stott, famous in Melbourne for his business college, told Monash that as he was now over 60 years old, and his wife an invalid, both were feeling the strain of their two sons being absent at the front. He had, he said,

> done all in my power to assist recruiting and would in no way relax my efforts to assist such a movement even though you may not see your way clear to granting my present request, which is made principally on his Mother's account.[59]

The same arguments were at work in Reverend Henry Gwynne Jones' appeal, ostensibly on behalf of Lieut. R.M. Bell, who had been fighting for three years and had recently lost a brother, but ultimately on behalf of his parents, "racked with anxiety lest the one surviving son … should be killed in action".[60] Monash was no doubt sensitive to such requests. Bertha had already noted that the war was liable to have severe effects on those waiting at home. So much did her aunt fret over her two sons that Bertha reported: "I'm afraid if she does not see them again the chances are that it will be because she herself is not here".[61] While few requests had much success, Kenneth Towl's case suggests the extent of Monash's sympathy. Charles Towl of Melbourne harboured very real fears that his remaining son's death would mean the end of his family line: "He is the last of us to bear the name and I venture to hope that he may be given such work to do during the continuation of the war as will ensure some reasonable chance of return".[62] Kenneth Towl survived the war, after being transferred to 10th Brigade Headquarters. His parents lived into the 1930s.

The end of the war in November 1918 was a time for celebration: the Allies had won, and Monash emerged from 1918 with a knighthood and an extraordinary reputation as the Australian Corps commander. The congratulations that came his way reflected that pride and reasserted the legitimacy of the war. But they also spoke to the profound relief Australians were feeling at the end of their long ordeal. A level of chauvinism in responding to the war was surely to be expected, such that University of Melbourne Registrar J.P. Bainbridge told Monash that "One feels that it is good to be a member of the British Empire, and that Australians of the right sort are as good as the best in the Empire".[63] So too does one naturally find enormous gratitude from those at home for the men who had risked their lives at the front. Cecilia Joyce of Geelong, whose brother had died at Gallipoli, declared that "Words fail me to express the thanks I feel for all you and your men have done for us in Australia".[64] Monash's closer associations were proud too, but they reminded him that the relief being felt was also on account of the trials of those who had seen him off. Mat Roth thought it was "glorious that there is now an Armistice and if Peace is soon declared, all the horrors of the dreadful war will be at an end and we can hope that we will soon see you home again".[65] Sarah Simonson's torment continued further, as her son Eric

joined a pioneering endeavour to return to Australia by air. His mother was frantic, but not without insight:

> God grant me relief. God grant me relief. Perhaps you will wonder at my attitude in this – having gone thro' the war – but perhaps I have lost my courage or am selfish anyway there it is. I can hardly tell you what it means to me.[66]

In a similar vein, it was not unusual for civilians to expect their soldier-friends and family to have aged noticeably in their time away. Photographs had begun to tell the tale during the war. At Scotch College, Melbourne, W.E. Littlejohn thought that Monash's photo showed that "The war has not renewed your youth", though "it is evident that the eye is not dim nor the natural force abated".[67] Later, in person, Ernest Wears declared that "You have changed old man, but not inside. It's the outside that shows the wear and tare [sic] of the last five years and the stress you have borne".[68] By the same token, soldiers like Monash were expecting to find their own loved ones changed. Doris Simonson thought to prepare him as Vic and Bertha headed off to join him in Europe. She reminded her uncle that: "it stands to reason that you would see a big change in them both, after all the anxiety and strain that we have all been thro".[69]

There is little indication, either in Monash's account of the fighting in 1918 or in the selection of his posthumously-published letters (produced in the main by a son-in-law who in 1919 felt that "War does not seem to have touched these people"), that Monash was sentient to the painful experiences of those who remained in Australia during the five-year war of 1914–1918. Yet John Monash was entirely alert to the scale of fear and anxiety that had so characterised the experience of his family and friends, and the increasingly wider circle of people who saw in him an avenue to loved ones at the front. To be fair to its editors, the book's dedication spoke to that insistent reality:

TO
THE WOMEN OF WAR-TIME AUSTRALIA,
WHO, LIKE THOSE TO WHOM THESE
LETTERS WERE WRITTEN, WORKED
AND WAITED THROUGH FOUR YEARS
OF WAR[70]

From the earliest moments of the war, Monash's family had been open about the ordeal they were facing and the burdens they were bearing. They might often have subjugated their own tribulations to those they knew Monash and his soldiers were enduring at the front, but they rarely suppressed them. It was love that bound the home and battlefronts so closely to one another, and at the same time tethered hundreds of thousands of Australians at

Figure 3.4 John and Bertha Monash at the grave of Frank Roberts, Peronne, 1919. State Library of Victoria H82.288/15.

home to an open-ended war. Pride, fear, anxiety, anger, love and sorrow. Such were the emotional elements of enduring World War I in Australia. The alchemy that fused those emotions varied across the community and between individuals, as it also changed over the course of the war. Plotting the history of that emotional ordeal exposes a narrative of the war tied less immediately to the political and military history of the war and more to the day-to-day effort to continue in the face of angst and apprehension. The escalating strain came more and more clearly to the surface from the end of 1917, in the appeals for relief authored from home to Monash and other authorities. Ultimately only the end of the war could answer to those appeals. And just as the signs of war were upon those who returned from the front, so they were also upon those who had remained.

Notes

1 Raymond Evans 1995.
2 See, however, Joy Damousi 1999; Tanja Luckins 2004; and Michael Roper 2009.
3 For example, Roland Perry 2004; Tim Fischer 2014; and Roland Perry 2017.
4 Monash 1920.
5 Geoffrey Serle 1982.
6 For example Alec Raws 1995, letter pp. 146–8.
7 J. P. Wilson to John Monash (hereafter JM), 1 April 1917. Monash papers, National Library of Australia (NLA), MS 1884, box 14, folder 119.
8 Karl Roth to JM, 24 September 1914. NLA MS 1884, box 13, folder 110.
9 C. J. Vandeleur to JM, 30 October 1914. NLA MS 1884, box 13, folder 110.
10 Vera Simonson to JM, 15 September 1914. NLA MS 1884, box 13, folder 110.
11 Bertha Monash (hereafter BM) to JM, 28 December 1914. NLA MS 1884, box 107, folder 801.
12 BM to JM, 20 September 1915. NLA MS 1884, box 107, folder 802.
13 Adelaide Shaw to JM, 15 December 1914. NLA MS 1884, box 13, folder 111.
14 Sarah Simonson (hereafter SS) to Monash, 6 March 1915. NLA MS 1884, box 13, folder 112.
15 Mathilde Roth (hereafter MR) to JM, 20 April 1915. NLA MS 1884, box 13, folder 112; 10 May 1915, box 13, folder 113.
16 BM to JM, 4 May 1915. NLA MS 1884, box 107, folder 801.
17 BM to JM, 12 May 1915. NLA MS 1884, box 13, folder 113.
18 Frank Tate to JM, c26 July 1915. NLA MS 1884, box 13, folder 113.
19 W. W. Kerr to JM, 1 July 1915. NLA MS 1884, box 13, folder 113.
20 Harriet Terese Wallace-Crabbe to JM, 16 September 1915. NLA MS 1884, box 13, folder 114.
21 Serle 1982 p. 212.
22 BM to JM, 9 March 1915. NLA MS 1884, box 107, folder 801.
23 MR to JM, 29 June 1915. NLA MS 1884, box 13, folder 113.
24 Oscar Behrend to JM, 7 August 1915. NLA MS 1884, box 13, folder 114.
25 Ernest Wears to JM, 17 October 1915. NLA MS 1884, box 13, folder 115.
26 Frank Tate to JM, 9 November 1915. NLA MS 1884, box 13, folder 115.
27 Felix Meyer to JM, 24 July 1915. NLA MS 1884, box 13, folder 113.
28 MR to JM, 29 June 1915. NLA MS 1884, box 13, folder 113.
29 Richard Taylor to JM, 4 August 1915. NLA MS 1884, box 13, folder 114.
30 SS to JM, 27 July 1915. NLA MS 1884, box 13, folder 113.
31 SS to JM, 1 November 1915. NLA MS 1884, box 13, folder 115.

32 SS to JM 15 September 1915. NLA MS 1884, box 13, folder 114.
33 Isidor Isaacson to JM, 14 February 1916. NLA MS 1884, box 14, folder 118.
34 J. P. Wilson to JM, 4 November 1915. NLA MS 1884, box 13, folder 115.
35 BM to JM, 26 December 1915. NLA MS 1884, box 107, folder 802.
36 Adelaide Shaw to JM, 10/7/16. NLA MS 1884, box 124, folder 919.
37 MR to JM, 7 August 1916. NLA MS 1884, box 124, folder 921.
38 James Lewis to JM, 6 August 1916. NLA MS 1884, box 124, folder 921.
39 J. P. Wilson to JM, 16 October 1916. NLA MS 1884, box 125, folder 927.
40 Richard Taylor to JM, 4 August 1915. NLA MS 1884, box 13, folder 114.
41 J. A. Laing to JM, 2 September 1915. NLA MS 1884, box 13, folder 114.
42 Oscar Behrend to JM, 17 December 1915. NLA MS 1884, box 14, folder 116.
43 Harold Pope to JM, 26 October 1916. NLA MS 1884, box 125, folder 927; SS to JM, 24/10/16, box 125, folder 927.
44 J. P. Wilson to JM, 1 April 1917. NLA MS 1884, box 14, folder 119.
45 Quoted in Serle 1982, pp. 268–9.
46 James Downie to JM, 14 November 1916. NLA MS 1884, box 125, folder 929.
47 William Calder to JM, 12 December 1916. NLA MS 1884, box 125, folder 931.
48 MR to JM, 1 May 1917. NLA MS 1884, box 14, folder 120.
49 MR to JM, 24 July 1917. NLA MS 1884, box 14, folder 120.
50 Dorothy Warner to JM, 27 May 1917. NLA MS 1884, box 14, folder 123; Vera Prowse to JM, 20/9/17, box 14, folder 124.
51 Doris Simonson to JM, 3 July 1918. NLA MS 1884, box 6, folder 135.
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65 MR to JM, 18 November 1918. NLA MS 1884, box 17, folder 144.
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Part II

Bearing the wounds of war

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4 A familiar face

Wartime facial wounds and William Kearsey

Kerry Neale

World War I changed the lives of thousands of British and Dominion soldiers who sustained disfiguring facial wounds. Unlike other wounds and disabilities which can be concealed by prosthetics and clothing, facial disfigurement is the most visible and the least concealable type of wound. It was (and still remains) one of the most distressing and emotionally confronting of all war wounds, both for the observer and for the wounded. The loss of a limb from war service became seen as a symbol of great sacrifice and patriotism in post-war years. The disfigurement of a face, however, is a far more complex "loss", one that is paradoxically the most visible but also that one no-one wants to see. Essentially this is because the face is the primary reflection of identity. Appearance is central to how an individual identifies and presents themselves, and it influences how society responds to and judges that individual. The importance of both the physical and social function of the face is paramount, and disfigurement presents a considerable challenge to social and personal identity.[1]

Introducing William

On a bookcase in my living room sits a framed portrait of a soldier. It is the kind of studio portrait many soldiers had taken before they left for World War I. The photo isn't an original and the soldier isn't a relative, but the portrait has been with me for over a decade now and every time I see it, a soft wave of emotion washes over me. The soldier has a friendly face – handsome, fairly young, with gentle eyes. The collar on his coat is popped and the peaked cap is tipped ever so slightly to the left, making him look quite dashing.

Beside this portrait sits another. The soldier is now a little older. His uniform bears colour patches of the 33rd Battalion, AIF, and a Rising Sun badge on the collar, which now sits down flat. His eyes are still gentle, but they have changed a little. They seem to slant inwards down towards his nose. His mouth also droops a little to the right. In fact, if you didn't know, you could be forgiven for not realising these two portraits are of the same man.

His name was William Kearsey; Uncle Bill to family and friends. I first "met" William in 2006 while searching medical files in the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons in Melbourne. Without knowing anything beyond the clinical notes from his hospital records, there was something about him that compelled me to learn more about his story.

But William's story is only one of thousands of Australian World War I soldiers who sustained facial wounds during the war and whose lives were affected by their facial disfigurement. To fully understand William's experience, though, and indeed the experiences of other disfigured veterans, it's first necessary to understand the nature of wartime facial wounds and reconstructive surgery during this period.

I came upon this topic quite unexpectedly, while listening to a radio talkback programme in 2006.[2] The programme was discussing the battle of the Somme, and a man had rung in saying that he had a series of photographs of his grandfather, who had lost his nose during the battle. The photos charted his grandfather's facial surgery journey. Two things struck me – firstly, that I couldn't begin to imagine the results of facial surgery during World War I. How had I studied this war for decades and not been more aware of facial wounds cases? The other thing was a comment made by the grandson – that in each of the photos, even though the grandfather's nose was being reconstructed, his eyes seemed to "dim a little" as though "he'd lost that spark of life". I couldn't understand this – if his appearance was being repaired, shouldn't life have been returning to his eyes as he regained confidence? And so my search for answers began.

What I found were stories of incredible innovation carried out at the Queen's Hospital, Sidcup, in the United Kingdom – a hospital established specifically for the treatment of severe facial wounds. Facial wounds are not unique to World War I, but with the improved medical treatment available in the field and advances in the transportation of the wounded, many soldiers who would have died from such wounds in earlier conflicts were now surviving and requiring further treatment. But beyond this medical innovation, are stories of incredible strength and resilience, alongside some of unbearable struggle, which cut to the emotional heart of the impact of disability in general and disfigurement in particular.

Facial wounds and wartime medical innovation

Begun primarily as a British endeavour under the direction of Harold Gillies (a New Zealand surgeon working with the British Red Cross), the Queen's Hospital attracted surgeons and staff from Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and later, a small unit from the United States and took in patients from all those countries. Between the hospital's opening in 1917 and its closure in 1925, surgeons there treated over 5000 servicemen and carried out more than 11,000 major operations. Work at the Queen's Hospital was mainly focused on gunshot and shrapnel wounds (approximately 80 per cent of all

cases treated there), most from the Western Front rather than other theatres of the war.[3]

Harold Gillies, an ear, nose and throat surgeon from New Zealand, had joined the British Red Cross at the outbreak of war and, after witnessing the work being undertaken by French surgeons and learning of the work of German specialists, he became determined to establish a maxillofacial surgery unit for British imperial forces. In 1916, a specialist maxillofacial unit was established at the Cambridge Military Hospital in Aldershot, England, under Gillies' command. He then arranged for the transfer of all facial wound cases to his small unit there. At his own expense and under his own initiative, Gillies purchased £10 of labels directing that the patient onto whose clothing the label was pinned be sent to him at Aldershot. After the Battle of the Somme in 1916, however, it was painfully obvious that the unit could not adequately manage the torrent of cases that were to arrive. As wounded men were evacuated to England, the 200 beds available to Gillies at Cambridge Military Hospital fell far short of accommodating the close to 2000 facial wound cases that arose from that battle alone. As a result, the Queen's Hospital in Sidcup, England, was established in August 1917 for the specific treatment of severe facial wounds.[4]

Visually confronting, the files of Queen's Hospital patients form one of the most complete archives of World War I specialist medicine – recording innovative surgical techniques, including triumphs and tragedies – yet they have been invariably overlooked by historians until recent years. Through a study of these records and the post-war lives of the men treated at Queen's, it becomes apparent that the treatment available was far from rudimentary, and I would argue that while some men did struggle in their post-war life, many more found the resilience to surmount the tragedy seemingly inherent in their wounds.

While each case that arrived at the Queen's Hospital was, by the nature of the wound itself and other factors, unique, certain types of wounds were more common than others and treatment procedures for those became relatively standard by the war's end. Gillies claimed that the "ravages of war have enabled a large number of cases to be collected under one team of surgeons. The various methods have been tried and sifted until a satisfactory combination has been developed."[5]

Medical staff would work from artistic records to determine how best to reconstruct a patient's face, with treatment always planned "from within outwards". That is, the repairs to the skeletal structure of the face and jaw had to be seen to first and made relatively stable before any soft tissue (skin and tissue) work could begin. Skin grafts and skin flaps are central to facial reconstruction, and a wax model was used at the hospital to explain the various flaps and procedures to patients – including the innovative technique of the pedicle tube where a patient's own flesh would be cut as a flap (generally from the upper chest region), rolled in on itself to form a tube and attached to the area needing repair.

During the process of reconstruction, a patient might be consulted on aspects of his repair. Horace Sewell, who while serving with the North Irish Horse in 1914 sustained considerable facial damage (including the loss of the tip of his nose and much of his septum) after being kicked by a horse, recalls the day that he was consulted on the repair to his nose:

> His [Gillies'] greeting one morning was, "Well, Paddy, your big day is here. What sort of nose do you think we ought to give you?" He made various sketches of me […] with different shaped noses. "I'm not fussy, sir." I said, and he decided I should have a Roman nose, as my face was rather round.[6]

It was important for the development of facial surgery that each attempted operation or technique was well documented. For this reason, a number of artists were commissioned to work at Queen's Hospital, and Gillies even took drawing lessons himself, by post, to be better able to record and plan procedures. Professor Henry Tonks, a Slade artist who had worked with Gillies at Aldershot, had considered Gillies' unit there "a chamber of horrors" (as described in a letter to a friend). One can only imagine how he found the scene at Queen's (Figure 4.1).[7]

Australian artist Lieutenant Daryl Lindsay began working with Gillies and the head of the Australian section, Sir Henry Newland, at Sidcup in 1918. While Lindsay was fascinated with the medical innovations being made, he was concerned about his ability to "translate what looked like a mess of flesh and blood into a diagram a medical student could understand."[8] Lindsay and Tonks' watercolour paintings of the patients serve as a colour record of the men's wounds, and reveal the extent of damage and disfiguration in a realistic, and often more confronting, manner than many of the black and white photographs (Figures 4.2 and 4.3).

Social and emotional repercussions of disfigurement

It was not just the clinical needs of the patient that were addressed at the Queen's Hospital. Gillies poignantly highlighted the emotional struggle for both the patient and the surgeon when he wrote:

> We noticed that if we made a poor repair … the man's character was inclined to change for the worse. He would become morose, break rules and give trouble generally. Conversely, if we made a good repair, the patient usually became a happy convalescent and soon regained his old character and habits. This seems but to emphasise again the powerful influence that our physical appearance wields over our character.[9]

Many nurses at the Queen's Hospital were emotionally overwhelmed by the condition of the men being treated there. Sister Gertrude Moberly wrote

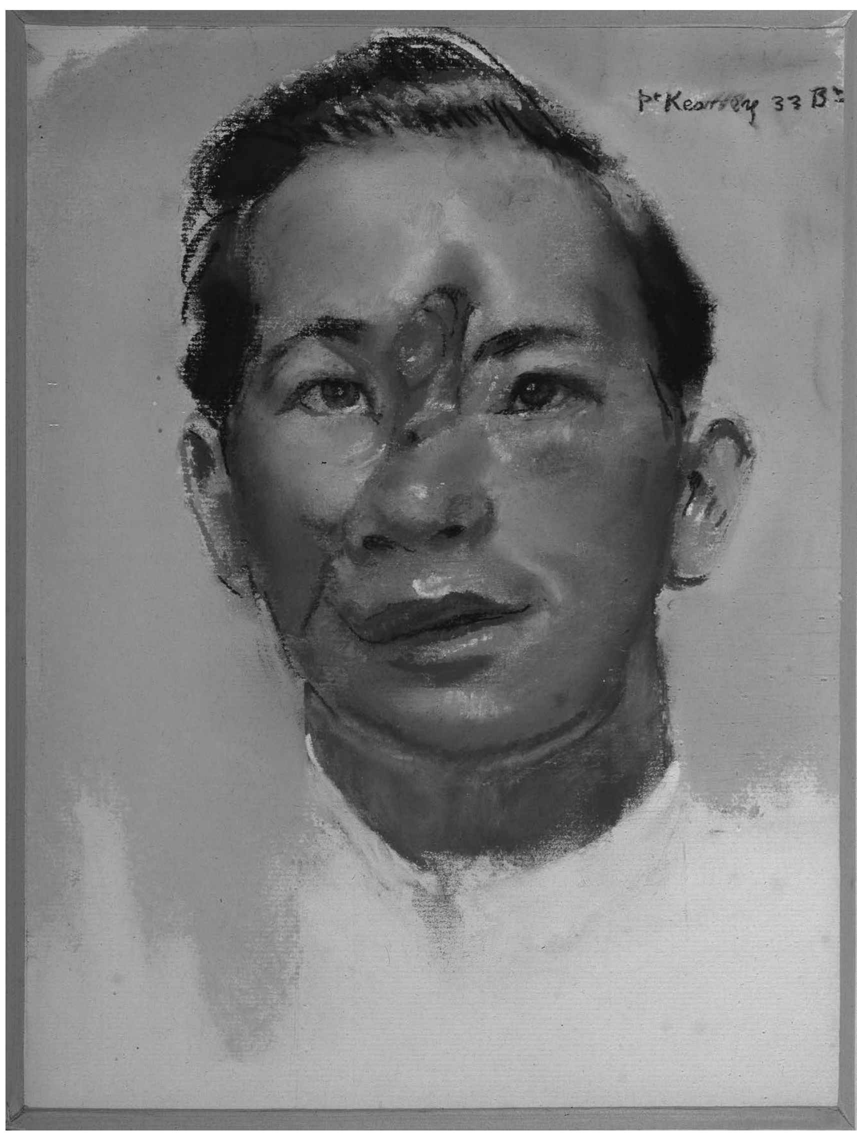

Figure 4.1 William Kearsey, pastel by Henry Tonks, undated. Gillies Archives.

that of the 600 men she had seen, there was "not one with a whole face".[10] After being shown photographs of the men before and after their operations, she was completely overwhelmed: "my stomach turned sick and I left hurriedly. As soon as I was out of sight of the building I sat by the roadside and cried and cried".[11] Ward Muir, an orderly at the 3rd London General,

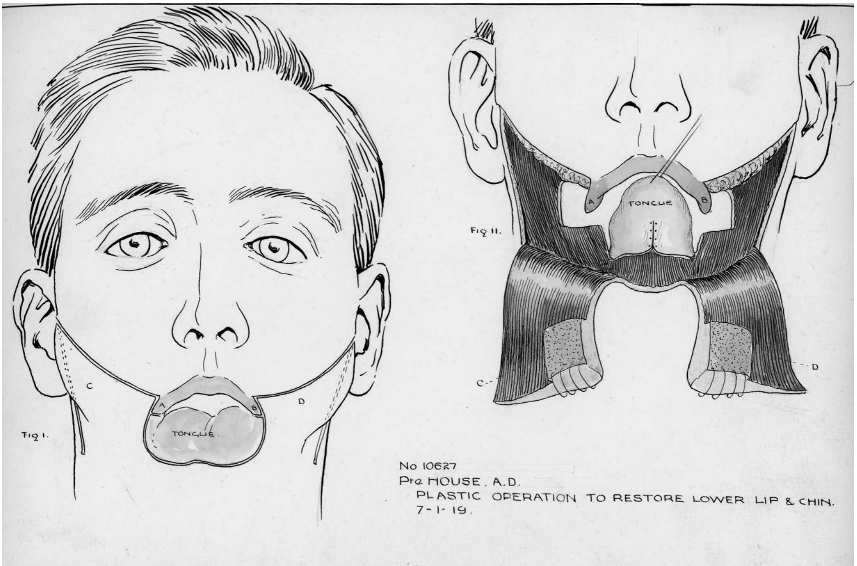

Figure 4.2 Diagrams by Daryl Lindsay outlining the operations to restore lower lip and chin of Private House, January 1919. Royal Australasian College of Surgeons (RACS).

had never felt any embarrassment or awkwardness in dealing with a patient, “however deplorable his state”, until he “came in contact with certain wounds of the face.” He wrote that

> even these, when still at the stage of needing to be dressed and bandaged, did not repel. When the wound healed, however, and the patient was going about with his wrecked face uncovered, I was sometimes sensible of the embarrassment to which allusion has been made. I feared, when talking to him, to meet his eye. [...] I feared that inadvertently I might let the poor victim perceive what I had perceived: namely, that he was hideous.[12]

Even journalists and others who visited the hospital with the specific purpose of sharing their experience with the general public often found themselves overwhelmed and unable to find words to describe what they had seen in the wards. A correspondent for the *Sunday Chronicle* poignantly avowed that

> I shall not talk about those photographs, not ever, though I may dream about them. I shall not talk about the operating theatres, nor the instruments, nor the gifted and untiring doctors, nor the wounds. One can imagine it all with awe and sympathy.[13]

Figure 4.3 William Kearsey, undated, circa 1918, watercolour by Daryl Lindsay. RACS.

At least while they were at the hospital, though, there was a something of sense of security and emotional support for the patients. The real challenge was to come when the men had to return to the outside world. Muir pondered how complicated such home-comings were going to be though:

> Suppose he is married, or engaged to be married. Could any woman come near that gargoyle without repugnance? His children … Why, a child would run screaming from such a sight. To be fled from by children! That must be a heavy cross for some souls to bear.[14]

Unlike other war-related disabilities, for which a veteran would generally receive sympathy, the most common responses to disfigurement were (and I believe often still are) shock, repulsion or even fear. For the men themselves, such reactions may have led to feelings of self-consciousness, isolation, withdrawal, even depression.

Broadly speaking, emotional responses to disfigurement occur from two perspectives: the "view from the outside" – largely social and cultural, being how appearance influences social perceptions and interactions; and the "view from the inside" – the impact of appearance on individual perceptions of self-concept, emotional well-being and "quality of life".[15] Regardless of their performance in battle or their pre-war appearance, the psychological burden of facial disfigurement meant that even the most confident man may have become hesitant to apply for a job, to court a woman or to simply leave his house.

The social stigma surrounding facial disfigurement has long been recognised. Writing in 1818 on disfigured veterans from the Napoleonic Wars, Carl Ferdinand von Graef observed:

> We have compassion when we see people on crutches; being crippled does not stop them from being happy and pleasant in society … [But those] who have suffered a deformation of the face, even if it is partially disguised by a mask, create disgust in our imagination.[16]

Almost 100 years later, Sir William Arbuthnot Lane, director of the Cambridge Military Hospital at Aldershot, United Kingdom, wrote of his interactions with facial wound cases:

> It's the poor devils without noses and jaws, the unfortunates of the trenches who come back without the faces of men that form the most depressing part of the work … people who look like some of these creatures haven't much of a chance.[17]

Indeed, there is something of a misconception that the lives of disfigured veterans were all inherently tragic. There are, of course, cases with tragic endings. Henry Nodrum, for example, was often described in correspondence

in his pension file as being "depressed and nervy" due to his disfigurement and admitted himself to "suffering from nerves". He had sustained severe facial wounds in September 1918. Henry married in September 1931, but by April 1933, his wife, Mabel, was so worried by his behaviour that she felt compelled to write to the Secretary of the Caulfield Military Hospital (where Henry had undergone treatment in the past) seeking his assistance for Henry's "very strange health" – at times worried that her own life was in danger due to his erratic behaviour. Just six months after Mabel wrote to the hospital for help, Henry died from self-administered nicotine poisoning.[18]

At the coroner's inquest, Mabel recounted Henry's recent comment to her that "he would be better out of the world than suffering as he was." While Henry made no direct reference to his disfigurement, it seemed to have permeated his attitude to life and possibly contributed to his unhappy death, but it is impossible to know for certain. Indeed, the Repatriation Commission decided that his death was not due to War Service.[19] While Henry's actions cannot be definitively attributed to his facial wounds and consequent disfigurement (Henry's mental state may have been unstable regardless of his disfigurement), it is surely worth considering the implications his disfigurement may have had on his life.

A case such as Henry's is, I think, what people expect to hear when I tell them about my research; but it is also important to reflect on the resilience and strength displayed by many men. Though painful and traumatic for all involved, a facial wound and consequent disfigurement was not necessarily "a tragedy" for all individuals in all cases. Drawing on material in repatriation files, as well as a limited number personal accounts (primarily from memoirs and a small number of interviews) it is possible to explore the social and personal implications of the veterans' disfigurement and assess how, and to what extent, these veterans and the societies to which they returned were able to cope with their disfigurement.

It is important to note, though, that if repatriation files are looked at in isolation from other evidence, the range of veterans' experiences are skewed to the negative – to those who needed and applied for pensions or other assistance from Repatriation bodies. Veterans who did not have cause to ask for assistance – who overcame the obstacles they may have faced – have not left the same detailed written evidence of their "successes", but it does exist.

William Kearsey: a case study

Returning to the story of William Kearsey, William was one of the patients who benefited from the remarkable treatment carried out at the Queen's Hospital in Sidcup. At the outbreak of World War I, William's two older brothers, Jack and Stan, had volunteered for service with the Australian Imperial Force, but both were found medically unfit: Jack suffered from asthma and Stan had a hearing problem. So when William, a 24-year-old coachbuilder, went to enlist, we can imagine how he may have felt to find

that he was also rejected because of problems with his eyes. Determined to play his part in the war, he underwent corrective eye surgery in Sydney during 1915. He successfully enlisted with the 33rd Battalion, AIF, in April 1916 (Figure 4.4).[20]

During the third battle of Ypres, on 3 October 1917, William was in the path of an exploding shell. The damage to his face was so devastating he was initially left for dead. It was only through the efforts of a fellow soldier, Jack Gaukroger, that William made it to an aid post to begin his long journey of repair and recovery. Transported to England and on to Sidcup, William spent more than 18 months at the Queen's Hospital, undergoing more than 25 major operations to repair his face (Figures 4.5 and 4.6).[21]

Returning to Australia in 1919, he spent another six months in Keswick Hospital in Adelaide under the care of surgeon Henry Newland (who had returned to Australia in 1918 after heading the Australian section at the Queen's Hospital). William was discharged from the army on 21 February 1921 (Figure 4.7).[22]

Acting on advice from Newland to seek farming or labouring work "in the bush" on his return home, William bought a property just outside of Inverell, in northern New South Wales and became a wool grower and classer. Unlike occupations that were in the public sphere and of a professional nature, rural occupations such as farming and labouring may have allowed disfigured veterans a degree of solitude and some freedom from the gaze of others. It wasn't easy – William first tried his hand at wheat growing in the early 1920s, but severe flooding and drought ruined his chances of harvesting even one bag of wheat. Over time, William moved on from growing wheat and moved to the Nullamanna region. There he acquired the property of Severn Vale, where he built up a flock over 3000 sheep, and for three years in a row cut more than 100 bales of wool (Figure 4.8).[23]

While he remained single for much of his life, he married at the age of 59 to a woman called Verdun – named for the Western Front battle in 1916, the year she was born. They dedicated many years to bringing out needy youths from the United Kingdom under the Big Brother Movement in the 1950s – helping 26 boys find a future in Australia. In 1960, 14-year-old Peter came to work on the Kearsey's property. The three soon became a family, with William and Verdun officially adopting Peter that same year.

While William had worked hard to overcome both the psychological and physical obstacles the war had left him, with the passing of time his war wounds took their toll. Verdun, like so many wives of veterans, was William's primary carer in his ailing health and his advocate with the Repatriation Department. Verdun wrote to the Repatriation Department for support in 1964, stating that life for William had become an "indurance [sic] test"; that she now had to read and write for him because of his failing sight, and that he has to engage someone to do the more important jobs on the farm "which he had previously derived so much pleasure in."[24]

Figure 4.4 Private William Kearsey, 1916. Australian War Memorial (AWM) P10965.001.

Figure 4.5 Top: William Kearsey, 26 November 1917; bottom: circa 1918. RACS.

Verdun died in 1969. Two years later William died, aged 80, and the two are buried alongside each other in Inverell. Even in death, William showed great compassion – in his will, he left donations to the Red Cross, the church, Legacy and the Blind Society.

Figure 4.6 Top: upper part of William's nose being restored by means of a pedicle tube taken from his forehead, 16 April 1919; bottom: the pedicle tube removed and skin grafted over his forehead, 28 April 1919. RACS.

Figure 4.7 William Kearsey, circa 1920s. AWM P10965.002.

Figure 4.8 William and Verdun Kearsey on their wedding day, 1951. AWM P10965.003.

"Uncle Bill": more than a case study

William has become a very direct and personal link for me to the experiences of the thousands of disfigured World War I veterans I have investigated. His was one of the first series of photographs I viewed at the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons, Melbourne, and the watercolour painted by Daryl Lindsay depicted such gentle eyes that I was immediately intrigued to learn the story behind them (Figure 4.9).

Just a week after first seeing these records, I found myself speaking to William's niece, Beryl Taylor. Beryl had responded to my notice asking for relatives of disfigured World War I veterans to contact me for my research. At 87 years of age, Beryl still had the warmest and most vivid memories of her "Uncle Bill". She recalled a man who was "gentle, caring" and "seemed to carry no bitterness" about his experience – according to Beryl, they "just knew [he] carried the scars from war injury. It was barely mentioned and Uncle Bill never complained."[25]

Figure 4.9 William Kearsey, original plaster cast, reproductions of photographs and original watercolour by Daryl Lindsay, undated, circa 1918, RACS. Photo: Kerry Neale, 2006.

In a strange way, William followed me on my PhD journey. Even when doing something as simple as searching for images of the hospital ship on which William returned to Australia, I never expected to see William's face, but of the hundreds of men on the ship, there he is staring straight at the camera (Figure 4.10).

In late 2013, I visited Belgium, and while walking through the galleries of the In Flanders Fields Museum in Ypres, I stepped into an enclosed obelisk, unsure of what I was to see. With nothing displayed on the walls, I turned my gaze upwards – who should be staring down at me but William (Figure 4.11).

By 2014, the development of the centenary exhibition at Museums Victoria, *World War I: Love and Sorrow*, was well underway. Part of the concept was to have descendants of the eight featured individuals narrate their story in the exhibition. At this stage, I had tried on numerous occasions to locate and make contact with Peter, but without luck. Success finally came in April, just a few days out from Anzac Day. We met for the first time in June 2014 when Peter and his wife, Desie, came down to Melbourne to record the narration for William's story and an interview for the exhibition.

The inclusion of William's story in *World War I: Love and Sorrow* represents a new direction in telling the history of World War I. Professor Michael McKernan specifically notes in his review of the exhibition that with William's story, and the accompanying section on facial wounds and reconstruction, the

> visitor is confronted with a much neglected aspect of the awfulness of this terrible war. … I have never seen a display like this in any other museum though most historians of the war would have known something of the story.[26]

Figure 4.10 Soldiers (including William, circled) and nurses aboard No.1 Australian Hospital Ship *Karoola*, 1919. AWM P01667.002.

Figure 4.11 Photograph of William (top centre) during treatment, as displayed at the In Flanders Fields Museum in Ypres. Photo: Kerry Neale, 2013.

Indeed, the stories and experiences of facially wounded veterans are only now really beginning to be told. For almost 100 years, they were forgotten or (perhaps worse still) overlooked in the writing of World War I histories, perhaps not fitting the ideal image of the "heroic Anzac". Even in the immediate post-war period, the plight of the disfigured veteran was obscured by the somehow less emotionally confronting figures of the amputee, the shell shocked, the blinded or gassed veteran. One hundred years on, it is timely and only right that these men should be given their place in the commemoration of the loss, struggle and emotion of World War I.

The legacy of World War I disfigured for today's veterans

While significant as a focus for study in their own right, the legacy of disfigured World War I veterans also provides insight into the emotional weight of disfigurement, critical to the support of current service personnel who sustain facial wounds. In modern conflicts, such as those in Iraq and Afghanistan, approximately 75 per cent (others estimate as high as 87 per cent) of wounds are caused by improvised explosive devices that possess wounding characteristics (jagged, torn and dirty) that can result in devastating maxillofacial wounds.[27] Studies of these conflicts suggest between 20 and 30 per cent of all wounded military personnel presented with facial and neck wounds – double the approximate percentage of facial wounds sustained by servicemen during World War I.[28]

To present just one recent conflict example, in late 2007, Australian soldier Sergeant Michael Lyddiard was deployed with the 3rd Reconstruction Task Force to Afghanistan. While conducting a route clearance task on 2 November, he was seriously wounded when the improvised explosive device he was rendering safe detonated. As well as losing his lower right arm, Lyddiard also sustained severe facial wounds and the loss of his right eye.[29] The fears and struggles voiced by Lyddiard echo those of similarly wounded men of almost 100 years ago – whether his children would be afraid of his appearance, concerns over his marriage given his altered appearance and what transitioning to civilian life would mean. But Lyddiard also demonstrates the same traits of resilience and strength that I found in many of the stories of World War I disfigured veterans. He overcame many of his physical limitations and pushed himself to become an elite athlete, competing in the 2017 Invictus Games in Toronto and winning three gold medals. While his marriage did end, he has a strong bond with his sons, and a fulfilling career as an occupational therapist.

While medical treatment can claim to have learned from the lessons of World War I, professionals working in the field of maxillofacial surgery today feel that more attention still needs to be given to the "symbolic and unique nature of facial disfigurement … and its consequences for social and mental adjustment."[30] To achieve this, society must understand disfigurement – from healing the wounds to coming to terms with the result – and the experiences of World War I disfigured are strong starting points for this emotional understanding.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Peter and Desie Kearsey, and the extended Kearsey family, for sharing William's story with me.

Notes

1 Joanna Bourke 2011; Frances Cooke Macgregor 1990; Michael Hughes 1998; Ray Bull and Nichola Rumsey 1988; Norman Bernstein 1976; and Frances Cooke Macgregor, Theodora Abel, Albert Bryt, Edith Lauer and Serena Weissman 1953.
2 ABC Radio National, *Plastic Surgery: From the Somme to Reality Makeovers*, first aired 20 July 2006.
3 For further reading see Harold Gillies 1920; Harold Gillies and D. Ralph Millard 1957; Reginald Pound, 1964.
4 Pound 1964, p. 25.
5 Gillies 1920, p. 211.
6 Horace Sewell quoted in Pound 1964, p. 58.
7 Tonks to art critic and friend D.S. MacColl, April 1916, quoted in Pound 1964, p. 30.
8 Lindsay 1965, p. 114.
9 Gillies and Millard 1957, p. 45.
10 Rupert Goodman 1988, p. 49.
11 Goodman, ibid.
12 Ward Muir 1918, p. 143.
13 'Hostelry of Healing', *Sunday Chronicle*, June 1918, 'The Queen's Hospital, Sidcup: News Clippings, 1917–1930', LMA H02/QM/Y/05.
14 Muir 1918, p. 53.
15 Andrew Thompson and Gerry Kent 2001, p. 664.
16 Carl Ferdinand von Graef, quoted in S.L. Gilman 1999, p. 162.
17 Arbuthnot Lane, quoted in Haiken 1997, p. 31.
18 Letter from Mrs M. Nodrum to Secretary of Caulfield Military Hospital, April 1933, Nodrum, file 47344, National Archives of Australia (Melbourne office).
19 Decision handed down as recorded in coroner's report, May 1934, p. 20, Nodrum, op. cit.
20 Pte William Kearsey, Series 96, P3/1/104, RACS; Service Record: William Kearsey, SERN 2341, NAA, B2455; Hospital Record. By Ashford Digger. Remarkable Surgery, *Glenn Innes Examiner*, 1 February 1932.
21 William's medical records of his treatment at the Queen's Hospital are held by the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons in Melbourne.
22 Kearsey's service record and repatriation files are available through the National Archives of Australia.
23 Hospital Record, op. cit.
24 Kearsey repatriation file, NAA.
25 Correspondence from Beryl Taylor to author, April–June 2006, held by author.
26 McKernan 2015.
27 A.J. Gibbons and N. Mackenzie 2010, pp. 114 and 118; Barry Reed, Robert G. Hale, Michael Gliddon and Mark Ericson 2008, p. 36.
28 Reed, Hale, Gliddon and Ericson, op. cit.; K. McVeigh, J. Breeze, P. Jeynes, T. Martin, S. Parmar and A.M. Monaghan 2010, p. 110; Gibbons and Mackenzie 2010, p. 120; J. Breeze and D. Bryant 2009, p. 274.
29 'The Face of Courage,' *Army: the Soldiers' Newspaper* 1182, 7 February 2008, p. 2.
30 Macgregor 1990, p. 256; Robert Newell and Isaac Marks, 2000; Robert Newell 2000, pp. 386–92; D.A. McGrouther 1997, p. 991.

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5 War disability and the centenary of family caregiving

Marina Larsson

The Centenary of World War I (2014–18) provided governments, public institutions and community organisations across the globe a new context for commemorating the “Great War”. In France, Germany, Britain, South Africa, Belgium, New Zealand, Australia and other former combatant nations, museums turned their attention to the question of representing a traumatic military conflict. By the November 1918 Armistice, the total number of global casualties, both military and civilian, stood at an estimated 37 million: 16 million deaths and 21 million wounded. This was a war without parallel, and the modern technologies of this war – including machine guns, tanks and poison gas – had a devastating impact on soldiers’ minds, and mutilated their bodies in a manner and on a scale hitherto unseen.

In the lead up to 2014–2018, the Australian Government announced that this anniversary would be officially branded as the “Anzac Centenary” indicating that the Anzac tradition would be the primary interpretative lens for this commemoration. Refreshingly, however, one of the hallmarks of museum exhibitions in Australia has been a curatorial desire to move beyond the standard Anzac military history towards a more profound exploration of the personal impact of war on combatants and their families. Skilled curators have presented Australian stories drawing on complex, nuanced global understandings of war and its consequences. This has been underpinned by a substantial body of scholarship by Australian and international historians on death, mourning, disability and grief which has changed the face of World War I history since the 1980s.

Museums Victoria’s *World War I: Love and Sorrow* exhibition has led this approach by telling intimate stories of 1914–1918. The exhibition foregrounds the familial bonds of love and the sorrows of loss amidst the destruction of war on minds and bodies. Exploring both universal and personal themes, it acknowledges the inter-generational effects of conflict to the present day. At the heart of *Love and Sorrow* are families – we meet our eight families at the start of the exhibition, whose stories take us not only between the lines, but across generations. This is a significant focus, for since 1915 the Anzac soldier has been insistently represented within a highly individualistic idiom. *Love and Sorrow* conceptualises each war story as a family story. Stories

of war death focus on the emotional labours of the grieving of those left to mourn without a body. Military objects are imbued with meaning as family mementos of remembrance.

A particular strength of *Love and Sorrow* is the curators' willingness to represent war disability – physical, mental and emotional. We encounter stories of shell shock, limblessness, facial disfigurement and the myriad other ways in which war mutilated soldiers' bodies and disturbed their minds. Only 20 years ago, the display of images and objects depicting war wounds and disability may be considered "distasteful", "disrespectful to veterans", or "too shocking" for a public museum. Indeed, in 2006 after I completed my PhD thesis (later published as *Shattered Anzacs: Living with the Scars of War*) I enquired about curating a war disability exhibition at the Australian War Memorial (AWM) and was gently informed that this was highly unlikely because it would be too confronting.

By contrast, during the Centenary of World War I, the public has demonstrated an increasing openness to hearing the "real" stories of soldiers, nurses and their families, and not just the tropes and glossy rhetoric of the Anzac legend. This has been particularly so in the case of war disability. Exhibitions at the National Army Museum London have led the way; in Australia *Love and Sorrow*'s treatment of disability anticipated similar exhibitions at a local level, and ultimately a modest but important facial wounds section was included in the AWM's revised World War I gallery. Disability is not only a challenging subject because of its imagery, but because soldiers' disablement raises difficult issues about male vulnerability and dependence on women caregivers in the home. In the Australian context, stories of disabled soldiers' dependence on wives, mothers and sisters are at odds with the masculine self-reliance associated with the iconic able-bodied Anzac. Yet the dependence of disabled soldiers was a reality and had consequences for family members. Moreover, as one blinded soldier noted in 1932, the "special attention" that wives gave to their disabled husbands was "extremely trying", and women's "health must suffer" under such a prolonged strain.[1] While fathers and male relatives played a part in caregiving, it was generally mothers and wives to whom the immediate burden of care fell, sometimes for many years. Such families formed communities of care that underpinned the official repatriation system, and without whom the system would have collapsed. The history of World War I that emerges from such recognition is much more attuned to the depth of its human suffering, the breadth of its burdens and the duration of its effects.

During and after World War I, disabled soldiers were a common sight in Australian towns and cities. In addition to the 60,000 soldiers who died on the battlefield, a further 90,000 were receiving a disability pension by 1920. Once medical treatment had ceased, the majority of these men returned home to live with their families, apart from a very small number who lived permanently in convalescent homes. Despite Official Historian C.E.W. Bean's claim that returned soldiers "merged quickly and quietly" into the

general population, the transition of thousands of disabled soldiers into the domestic sphere was not always easy. Within some households, certainly, it became clear that war disability posed few challenges and that demands upon kin would be negligible. In other cases, the immediate emotional impact of war disability was devastating, and the arrival of their "changed man" radically transformed families' futures.

Across the spectrum of disabilities, one thing was certain: adjusting to war disability was not simply the task of soldiers as individuals, but an endeavour which involved entire families. The effects of war disability upon family life were often invisible to the outside world. Indeed, as one commentator noted, this was "the part we do not see".[2] Wives and mothers typically took a leading role in the home treatment of disabled soldiers, feeding the bedridden, dispensing medication and maintaining surgical aids. The provision of medication, home remedies and health-giving foods became part of the daily routine. Kin ensured that medicines were correctly administered, particularly if a wound was "flaring up" or the veteran was in pain. As the chief cooks in the household, women also devoted their time to preparing special remedies to relieve their loved one's ills, and health-giving foods to fortify their constitution.[3] Over the years, women developed the knowledge and expertise to skilfully attend to their returned soldier's ailments and accommodate his needs within the family's daily domestic routine.

In addition to this, many veterans found themselves financially dependent on family members. Despite the government's promises that disabled soldiers would be generously provided for upon their return, many returned men were unable to generate a sustainable family income, because of an inadequate pension and a lack of jobs suitable for men with physical and mental limitations. Families adapted to their circumstances as best they could. Some sympathetic relatives employed disabled soldiers in family businesses on the understanding they could take plenty of time off for ill health.[4] Other families received ongoing financial assistance from relatives, or moved in with extended family due to the economic "impossibility of keeping up a house".[5] In some households, wives and older children undertook part-time work, and the household economy was based upon multiple incomes.[6] Such strategies for managing financial hardship were not unique to disabled soldiers. Cooperative family models of economic survival were evident in the households of disabled and non-disabled civilian men alike. For veterans who had been promised economic security after the war, however, financial dependence upon family members represented a loss of independence, contradicting the ideal of manly autonomy that the Repatriation Department so stridently promoted as the ultimate goal of war-affected men.

During and after 1914–1918 the challenges faced by disabled soldiers and their families were rarely discussed at length in the public domain. While the sacrifices of bereaved families of the war dead received significant public attention, the shock and grief of welcoming a blind or maimed son home from the war was perhaps too painful to represent in newspapers and newsreels.

There was little mention of the transformative impact of war disability upon family relationships, the burdens of care on family members or the fracturing of families who did not have the resources to support their "damaged" man. Most disabled soldiers were young men with their lives ahead of them: half of the Australian Imperial Force was aged 18 to 24 and 80 per cent was unmarried. This meant that in the first instance it was parents who became the caregivers. The reluctance of public commentators to explore soldiers' shared family lives reflected deep cultural anxieties about the extent to which young disabled men would become dependent upon their kin in the longer term. It also reflected concerns about the extent to which disability would be an impediment to marriage for some men.

Almost as a counterbalance to these fears, the Repatriation Department's official literature optimistically portrayed war disability as an individual burden that veterans heroically overcame. The Department presented rehabilitation as an individual journey towards manly "independence". Men were encouraged to become cheerful and productive members of the community, instead of remaining "a burden on the State or friends" for the rest of their lives.[7] Some rehabilitation experts even argued that "sympathising relatives and friends" actually lessened men's success in civilian life.[8] Photographs taken by repatriation authorities rarely show disabled soldiers with family members. Instead, men were posed basket weaving, wood carving or with props such as tools that represented a pathway to independence. The figure of the "brave disabled warrior" became a powerful positive stereotype that allowed the Australian public to discuss war disability in a manner that reinforced, rather than diminished, the masculine identities of veterans. As a consequence of the intense public attention on the sacrifices of disabled soldiers as individuals, however, the complex and challenging experiences of their family members remained largely concealed from public view.

After World War I, hidden underneath Australia's first repatriation bureaucracy, and overshadowed by its individualistic rhetoric about war disability, lay an intricate world of unpaid family support, struggle and survival. Historians often point to the World War I pensions system as being the first major scheme in Australia for the provision of welfare. When examined more closely, however, welfare provision for disabled soldiers in the war and post-war years consisted largely of unpaid labour undertaken in the home by family members. Many ex-servicemen simply could not have survived without their family network of support. Yet patriotic wartime literature fostered a public fascination and admiration for the national culture of care represented by the Red Cross, rather than family cultures of care. The public was more likely to read about the "unstinting generosity" of Voluntary Aid Detachments (VADs) than the generous support that families provided to their disabled loved ones in the home.[9] By focusing on institutional rather than family settings of care, the uncomfortable subject of familial dependence and the cost of caregiving for kin remained obscured.

In the present day, the Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA, the successor to the Repatriation Department) gives greater recognition to the therapeutic role of kin in ex-servicemen's lives and acknowledges the personal cost of war disability for them. This has been part of a gradual shift since the 1980s towards greater recognition of family carers. Through the passing of the *Carer Recognition Act 2010* the Commonwealth Government formally acknowledged the contribution of carers within civilian and military contexts. Families are now part of the landscape of DVA's approach to repatriation. While the systems are not without their challenges, frustrations and failures, families are now accepted as "key stakeholders" as soldiers return and re-integrate into civilian life. Family members can access counselling services through "Open Arms" – Veterans and Families Counselling; an online Carers' Booklet provides a guide to the "physically, emotionally and financially demanding role" of caring; and ministerial statements on veterans' health now routinely refer to families as part of veterans' network of support, and speak of "caring for the carers".[10]

Despite the greater official recognition of families, the day-to-day caring work of veterans' wives and mothers still remains largely hidden from view. In this context, the 2014–2018 anniversary has been important for contemporary caregivers to affirm their labours and pay tribute to their communities of support – past and present. In addition to Museums Victoria's *Love and Sorrow* exhibition, which offers a window onto this world, Melbourne became the site of a new public memorial dedicated to women caregivers. In August 2016, a statue to commemorate women carers of World War I was unveiled at Victory Park, Ascot Vale. Located prominently, adjacent to the World War I memorial unveiled in 1922, the bronze life-size statue of a woman known as "Rosemary" represents the enduring sacrifice made by wives, mothers and sisters. The statue was commissioned by Women Caring for Veterans of War (WCVW), with support from the Australian Government's Anzac Centenary Local Grants Program. The plaque reads: In Honour of the Enduring Sacrifice made by Women who cared for Veterans of World War 1 (Figure 5.1).

WCVW is an organisation of 10 women whose veteran husbands suffer post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). They have cared for their husbands over many years and raised families. Some also have fathers and brothers who are veterans. The dedicated women of this group, including Stephanie Curry and Carolynne You, see themselves as part of a military caregiving tradition that reaches back to World War I. As Curry reflects:

> No one returns from a theatre of war without being traumatised. This trauma ranges from being invisible to catastrophic. The "invisible" psychological damage is common in our loved ones and is disabling and permanent. It affects daily life for the family and wives, who needed to bear the extra burden of carers. The task of trying to keep the family as normal as possible and protect and maintain the dignity of the veteran publicly, results in carers being invisible too.[11]

Figure 5.1 Rosemary. Erected 2016 by Women Caring for Veterans of War, Melbourne. Photo: Bart Ziino, 2020.

Figure 5.2 Rosemary, detail. Photo: Bart Ziino, 2020.

For the WCVW, the goal of placing *Rosemary* in public space is to make visible the invisible labours of family caregiving and to educate the community about women carers today. Veterans of Australia's wars from 1914 to the present day have sought safety in their families' love, protection and healing. "Rosemary" stands for the women who gave that care, and continue to care for their loved ones in the aftermath of conflict. The wider Australian veteran community has responded positively to the statue, and many individual men of military connection have been deeply touched. Other women's carer organisations were delighted to see their work celebrated, and some mothers have been using the status thus achieved to convey the story of their family to their children and grandchildren.

Like the statue of Rosemary, Museums Victoria's *Love and Sorrow* exhibition foregrounds the resilience, strength and sacrifices of disabled soldiers and their families in managing the profound and lasting challenges of war disability. The 2014–2018 anniversary has many meanings – for several generations of women it is the "Centenary of Family Caregiving". The history of World War I cannot be understood in all its dimensions while their stories remain behind closed doors (Figure 5.2).

Notes

1 Attachment to letter, P. Lynch to Prime Minister, March 1932, National Archives of Australia (hereafter NAA): A461, 0394/1/1.
2 "Bedford Park", *RSA Magazine,* September 1918, p. 51.

3 Record of evidence, 21 March 1929. NAA: B73/58, Box 80, M15005.
4 See NAA: P130/1, M8367.
5 B. Broadbent, interview with Marina Larsson, 6 October 2004; “Mother of a large family: forced to keep 3 daughters on £2 a week”, *Herald,* 30 March 1922, p. 7.
6 B. Nelson, interview with Marina Larsson, 27 April 2005.
7 Fitzpatrick 1916, pp. 8–9.
8 Lawson 1922, p. 131.
9 “Australia’s Day”, *Sydney Morning Herald,* 30 July 1915, p. 7.
10 Department of Veterans’ Affairs, 2016. *Carers’ Booklet*.
11 Stephanie Curry, email correspondence to the author, 5 September 2017.

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Part III

Emotions in histories of World War I

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6 Searching for Hector Thomson

Telling difficult family war histories

Alistair Thomson

Family memory is rarely straightforward, and family histories can be difficult to write and painful to read. In 1986, in an early draft of the autobiographical introduction to the first edition of my book *Anzac Memories*, I wrote that my grandfather Hector Thomson contracted malarial encephalitis (an inflammation of the brain caused by malaria) while serving with the Light Horse in Palestine, and that as a result, he was "in and out of mental hospital" after the war. I only knew about Hector's mental illness fourth-hand, from my mother. My father, David Thomson, had never talked about it with his children, indeed he had only found out himself from an older relative after his father died. He was appalled by the reference in my writing to the mental hospital and demanded that I remove it.

The stigma of mental illness ran deep in the 1980s. Mental illness in the family was still shameful for my father. He was also furious about what he described as the "radical ideology" of my naive early efforts to critique the Anzac legend.[1] He felt I had betrayed his 30 years' service in the Australian army and the values that sustained him and hoped that none of his old soldiers would read my book. Perhaps worst of all, my writing ripped off the scab that had formed across his terrible childhood and unleashed angry, painful memories. Pent up emotions, from a childhood of grief compounded by neglect by his war-damaged father, now spilled over into our own troubled father and son relationship.

So I changed the phrase "in and out of mental hospital" to the more socially acceptable half-truth, that Hector was "in an out of Caulfield Repatriation Hospital".[2] Family historians often make difficult choices between their responsibility to history, their responsibility to narrators who have shared a life story and a responsibility to the wider family. In this case, I prioritised my father's feelings and hoped to repair our fractured relationship. Yet the whole point of the story about Hector Thomson had been to show that within families, as within the nation, some histories can be told while others are hidden or forgotten. The argument of my book *Anzac Memories* was that as certain versions of the past become dominant, alternative histories and memories are silenced. By removing the reference to post-war

mental illness I was contributing to a selective version of history. No one else could have spotted the omission, but I felt that I was compromising the historical and political aims of my book.

The secrets and lies of family war histories matter because one of the main ways in which many Australians connect to twentieth-century wars is through family histories. Indeed, one of the explanations for the resurgence of Anzac remembrance in recent decades links that resurgence to the boom in family history.[3] War stories have become a central element of Australian family histories, perhaps only rivalled by migration stories. It's easy to investigate family war history because it's easy to access extensive war records, because war stories are often preserved in family memory and because there is a vast historical literature about Australians at war.

In Australia, there's a potent inclination to interpret family war stories through the lens of an Anzac legend of comradeship and dutiful sacrifice, of Australian military masculinity and national achievement. Part of the problem is the cultural power of that Anzac legend. Part of the problem is that families conceal jagged stories so it's difficult to make histories that challenge family legends and upset family relations. And part of the problem is that the sources often lead family historians in one direction. Letters home were often written to console or reassure. Soldiers' photos tended to depict happy times out of the line. Service records barely hint at the experience of battle and say little about the battles of the peace. Veterans were often guarded with their memories and spared their children and grandchildren the worst of war – even if the mental and physical scars were all too apparent. In our era of "postmemory" – to use the term coined by Holocaust scholar Marianne Hirsch – when there are no veterans alive to share memories that might complicate our war stories, family history is thus perhaps especially vulnerable to mythology.[4]

And yet there are opportunities as well as constraints in family history. Another of the authors in this book, historian Bart Ziino, has studied collections of Australian World War I letters and diaries edited and published by family members. Ziino concludes that

> the nexus between family remembering and the public myth of Anzac remains mutually constitutive: Anzac frames and affirms family histories, while at the same time it is proving adaptable to the expanding variety of experiences that emerge in family histories.[5]

There are many instances of this expansion and adaptation in Australian war stories. For example, a quarter of a century after I fell out with my father over the story of *his* war veteran father's mental illness, it's now easier to write about soldiers and mental illness. In recent years, the stigma surrounding mental illness has begun to lift across Australian society, and historians and veterans themselves now more readily write about "shattered Anzacs" (to borrow the resonant phrase coined by another chapter

author, Marina Larsson) who return from war both physically and mentally damaged.[6]

We can also access sources about war veterans that weren't available 30 years ago. Australian World War I service records have been online for some time now, but the Repatriation Department records for individual ex-servicemen are now also available on request to the National Archives. The "Repat" medical files for Victorian World War I veterans alone comprise almost three kilometres of archive shelf space and are much more extensive than the better-known service records. These Repatriation case files are an extraordinarily rich record of twentieth-century Australian social and medical history. Letters from returned men – and from their wives and parents – detail war-related medical complaints that demanded treatment and a pension from the Repat. Doctors, expert witnesses and Repat officials argue each case, sometimes with sympathy, sometimes with callous suspicion or even contempt (Figures 6.1 and 6.2).[7]

The Repat files illuminate the battles of the peace that were fought in Australian homes and hospitals after the war. They show how damaged and desperate veterans sought support and recompense from the government, and how their desperation became more acute during the Depression of the 1930s. They suggest the emotional costs and consequences within families of the battles of the peace. They reveal contemporary medical understandings and prejudices about mind and body, and how doctors and other officials struggled to balance limited resources against increasing needs. In these records we can, for example, read Hector Thomson's own account of the impact of war on his life. Most surprising to me, and most poignant, my grandmother, Hector's wife Nell, emerges as a tragic heroine of the tale.[8] One man's war story becomes a *family* history that stretches across the decades and reverberates through the generations.

So let me share with you this example from my family history and show how it might be possible – though not easy – to create family war histories that stretch and challenge Anzac mythologies.

Hector Thomson was a strapping six-foot, 23-year-old jackaroo working in Queensland when he enlisted in the Light Horse Field Ambulance in 1914. He served in Palestine, where in 1916 he was awarded a Military Medal for rescuing wounded soldiers "under heavy rifle and shell fire". Hector's service record also includes a long charge sheet of the misdemeanours that were not uncommon in Australia's volunteer army, including disobedience, "familiarity with natives" (possibly a reference to prostitutes), ill-treatment of a mule, being "improperly dressed" and bringing intoxicating liquor into a hospital. At face value, Hector Thomson's war record of bravery and larrikinism exemplifies two sides of the Anzac legend (Figures 6.3 and 6.4).[9]

In 1917 Hector suffered a series of malaria attacks, and then in 1918 he was again hospitalised, this time for several months, with a serious respiratory infection. Upon arriving back in Australia on Christmas Eve 1918 Hector

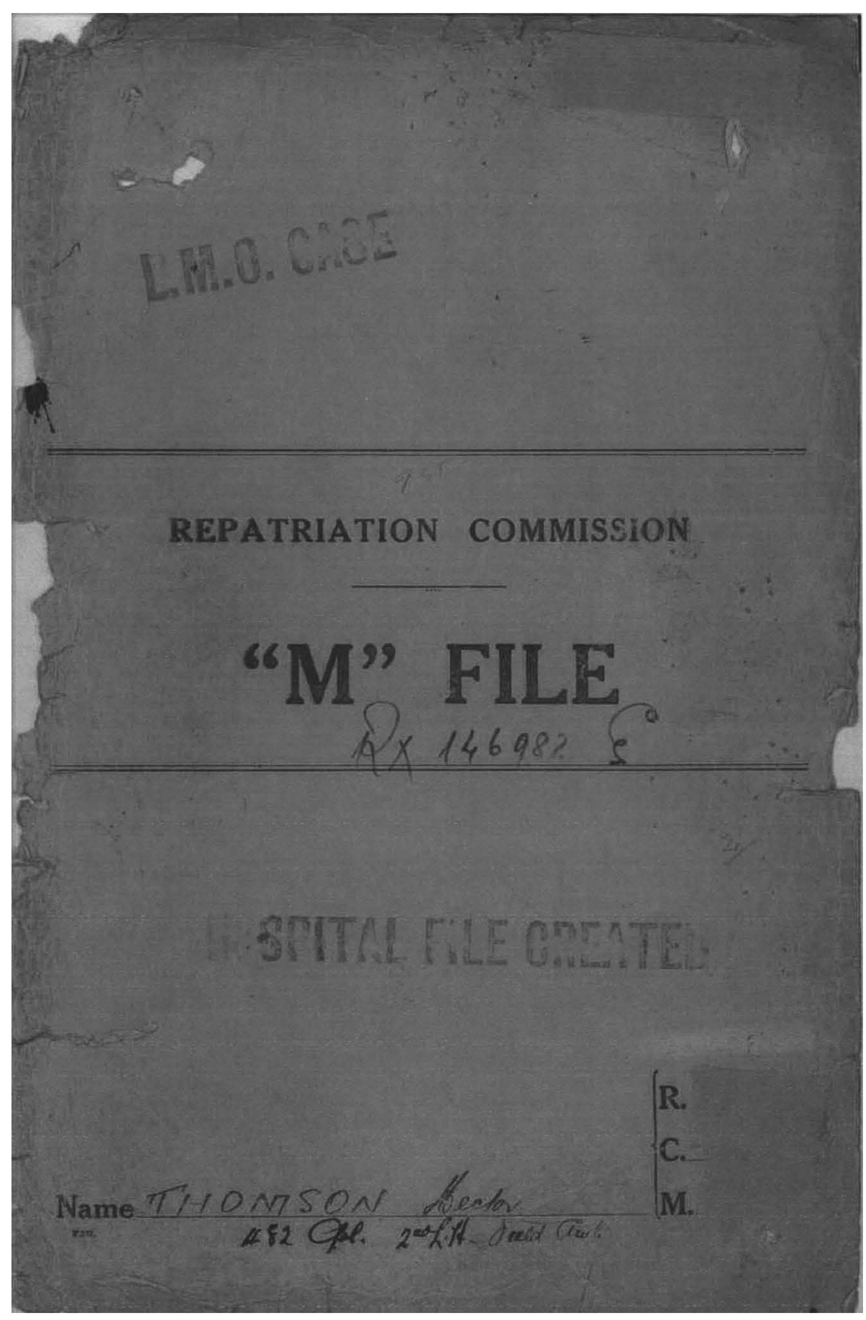


Figure 6.1 The front cover of Hector Thomson's Repatriation Department Medical (M) file. National Archives of Australia, B73, M587164.

LC/AMcK

COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA.

Form K (revised).

The Australian Soldiers' Repatriation Act 1920-22.

C. 33789.P.
R. 58164.

WAR PENSION MEDICAL REPORT.

Name and Address of Pensioner or Claimant.	Regimental Particulars.	"C" File No.	Specimen Signature of Pensioner or Claimant.
THOMSON, Hector "Bungalene", Clydebank Loose Bag, SALE.	482 - Cpl. 2nd. L.H.F.A.		SGD. Hector Thomson.

War disabilities in respect of which pension is *granted. *applied for.
(a) Post Malaria.
(b) Post encephalitis Lethargica.
(c) Cerebral exhaustion.
(d) Loss of memory.

*I *We have this day examined the above-named person for War Pension purposes in respect of the above-mentioned disability or disabilities, and the following report is submitted:—

1. States he is suffering from ... (a) No attacks now. (b) Last January (1930) had very bad "sleeping turns" and was in bed a week and could not go on with harvesting. (d) Memory alright now. Feels strong and well at present.

2. Age ... 39. ... Weight 13 st. 8 lb. (Coat and vest off.) (Official) 190.

3. Describe in detail the present condition of the disability or disabilities recorded under (a), (b), or (c) above. (Heart and lungs must be examined in all cases.)

(a) Good physique and nutrition and physical tone. Heart clear. V.M. good. (a) No objective signs. (b) At present is alert and cerebration appe rs to be active and no evidence of (c). No tremor. Knee Jerks sluggish. Pupils react to light and accommodation and are small.

4. The above condition is the result of ... W.S.

5. In my opinion the improvement during the past six months has been ... SLIGHT.

6. State any other disabilities not recorded in 3 above, indicating whether (a) Due to war service (b) Due to post-war causes

SUGGEST DR. GODFREY or Investigation Caulfield R. G. H. (G. F. Dane) & assessment prior to next Review

7. Period of incapacity ... (Indicate if condition permanent) — The condition is such as to render him *totally *partially incapacitated for a period of six (6) months from this date.

8. Percentage of incapacity ... He is at present incapacitated to the extent of 75 % of total incapacity, made up as follows:
(1) Disability existing, pre-war (if any) ... %
(2) Disability caused through war service ... 75 %
(3) Disability—aggravation caused by war service ... %
(4) Present disability (if any) due to post-war causes but not contributed to by service ... %
TOTAL as above ... 75. %

These may be combined under one percentage if thought desirable by medical examiner.

N.B.—Any degree of incapacity due to the default or wilful act of the ex-member is not a pension liability.

9. Nature of employment since discharge and time lost during past 12 months through war disabilities — FARMER - Lost about a month in bed from malaria.

FOR OFFICE USE (G.O. 312 (2)).

MEMORANDUM for :- THE OFFICER IN CHARGE, MEDICAL & GENERAL SECTION.

Referred please. Pensions' Section 17th. 3/30

To the Deputy Commissioner of Repatriation.
Signature SGD. Chas. L. Macknight. Medical Examiner.
Address SALE.
Date

* Strike out what is inapplicable.

Figure 6.2 An example of a War Pension Medical Report, from Hector Thomson's Repatriation Department Medical (M) file. National Archives of Australia, B73, M587164.

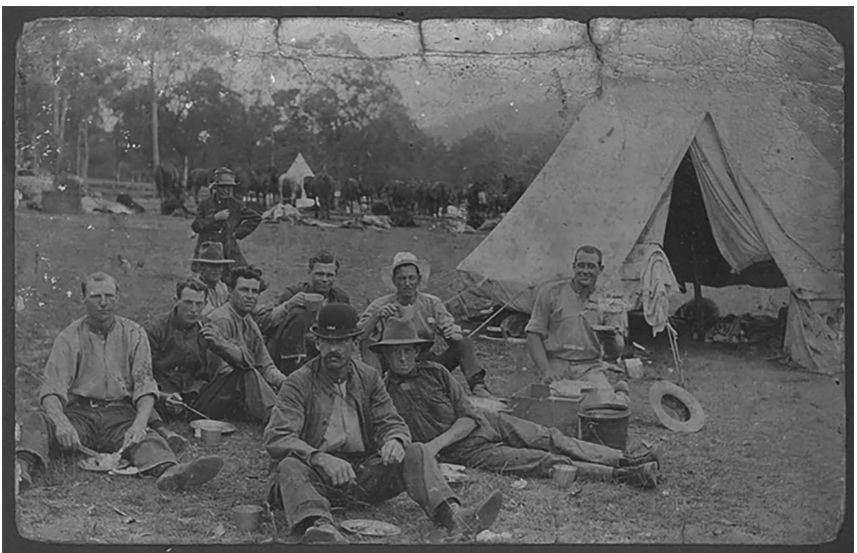


Figure 6.3 Hector Thomson (far right) with AIF recruits from Gympie, Queensland, 1914. Alistair Thomson.

was keen to get out of the army and – like many other returning soldiers – told the army medical officer that he was well. The doctor recorded that Hector had had a malaria attack in October but "No attacks since. Never otherwise in Hospital. Feels quite well. All organs normal" – and signed him off in "A" grade health.[10]

But on his return to his parents' farm in Gippsland, Hector's malaria attacks recurred. He was often unable to work, suffered violent headaches and on one occasion was found collapsed and unconscious by the plough.[11] In November 1919, with the support of the family doctor, Hector applied for a war pension. The Department agreed that his "general weakness" was due to an infection suffered while on service and was "not due to his default" and granted a 50 per cent pension back-dated to the point of discharge.[12]

Over the next few years, Hector's condition gradually improved and his pension was accordingly reduced until it stopped in 1922 when he failed to attend his annual Repat medical examination. In 1923 Hector inherited from an unmarried aunt the 405-acre mixed farming property "Bungaleen", near Sale in Gippsland. In the same year, he married Nell Scott, a lively, well-educated woman whose father had been the Anglican clergyman in Sale when Hector and Nell were teenagers. Hector and Nell had two sons, my father David and his younger brother Colin, born in 1924 and 1926. The loss of Hector's pension around the time of their marriage would become a source of great regret

Figure 6.4 Driver Hector Thomson, Light Horse Field Ambulance, Cairo, 1915. Alistair Thomson.

for Nell. In 1929 she recalled that a medical officer in the early 1920s had commented to Hector "Well bad fever has played up with you", yet

> the next report we received was that the small pension my husband had been receiving had been stopped. I wanted my husband to appeal then but he would not do so & the necessity was not great then as it is now.

In 1922 Hector probably did not want his bride to think that he was damaged by the war (Figures 6.5–6.7).[13]

In the mid-1920s Hector experienced a serious recurrence of illness but in an unexpected and debilitating form. Hard labour caused physical breakdown; he often fell asleep and suffered violent headaches, vomiting and memory loss, including one incident in November 1927 reported to the Repat by Dr Campbell, the family GP in Sale.

> Preparatory to harvest, he brought in some horses to be shod. He was in his working clothes. He did not arrive home that night, and next day realised he was in Melbourne Botanical Gardens. He immediately caught a train back. His memory of going to Melbourne or what he did there was a blank, except that he thought he stayed at a Coffee Palace. His condition after this was one of complete nervous exhaustion. He would sleep for the greater part of the 24 hours but when awake would talk quite lucidly and cheerfully. He took no interest whatever in the harvest or his affairs.

As Hector's bank manager Mr Witts reported to the Repat, this was "a serious and most pitiful case". Thomson had been a "very sick man" since 1927 and "will never work again in all probability. The slightest exertion prostrates him."[14]

Nell was awarded power of attorney over Hector and the property and was now managing the farm and her young family whilst also caring for her sick husband. The clergyman's daughter was forced to master many unexpected responsibilities in the first years of married life. From Repat medical and soldier settlement records we know that Nell Thomson was just one of many wives of damaged veterans who struggled to manage family life and livelihood in the inter-war years.[15]

In 1926 Nell instigated a new Repat pension claim on Hector's behalf, and for several years, she was his determined and sometimes desperate advocate, as evidenced in many letters and visits to the Repat (Figure 6.8).

> My reason for asking [in 1929] for a pension for my husband is that my husband is unable to work for any length of time without a complete breakdown & I cannot afford to keep a permanent man. Owing to my husband's severe illness which occasions loss of memory his business affairs have become very tangled. For three years I have been unable to keep any domestic help & I have had to manage all the business part &

Figure 6.5 Hector and Nell Thomson, Bungaleen property, near Sale, Gippsland, circa 1924. Alistair Thomson.

> the running of the farm as well as the constant nursing of my husband & the care of my two very small sons aged 3 years & 4 ½ years. I feel that if my husband could receive a pension it would enable me to carry on. […] If only we could have seen ahead the far-reaching effects of this dreadful malaria I would have begged my husband to appeal for a bigger pension & most certainly for a renewal of it.[16]

At this point, Repat officials sought the advice of Dr Sidney Sewell, a prominent Melbourne neurologist who was renowned for treating war veterans

Figure 6.6 Hector and Nell Thomson, with their sons David and Colin, Bungaleen property, near Sale, Gippsland, circa 1927. Alistair Thomson.

with shell shock. Sewell arranged for brain X-rays and conducted other tests, including the Wasserman anti-body test which came up negative for syphilis. Sewell concluded that "the history of the onset of his condition was indefinite & the diagnosis lay between an exhaustion Psychosis & a Post encephalitis lethargica". Encephalitis lethargica (best known from the 1990

Figure 6.7 Hector Thomson with his sons David and Colin, Bungaleen property, near Sale, Gippsland, late 1920s. Alistair Thomson.

film *Awakenings* based on Oliver Sacks' 1973 memoir of his experience as a young doctor) had been first described in 1917. Between 1915 and 1926 an epidemic of the condition spread throughout the world, with symptoms including high fever and headaches, lethargy and sleepiness, with extreme cases suffering from a coma-like state. The cause of this "sleeping sickness"

Dr Sydney Sewell & asked him if he had been
asked for a report – & he also said no.
My husbands constant illness & all the worry I have
had in connection has caused me to become ill,
& I simply had to close my home – & my husband
is staying with his people & I have come up here to
try & recover. I at once sent your letter on to Dr
Campbell but he will not receive it until
next week, as all letters sent to Lab are sent
to me up here.
I cannot understand the request for a report from my brother in
law – I gave Dr Campbell's name also Dr
Sydney Sewell & Dr Hume Turnbull as the
three medical men who have attended my
husband. Dr Campbell has attended my husband
for since his return from the war & treated him from
time to time for Malaria
My reason for asking for a pension for my husband
is that my husband is unable to work for any
length of time without a complete break down & I
cannot afford to keep a permanent man. Owing to
my husbands severe illness which occasions loss
of memory his business affairs have become
very very tangled. For three years I have been
unable to keep any domestic help & as I have

then if he had been asked for a report – & he said
no. As soon as we arrived in Melbourne I saw

Figure 6.8 Extract, letter from N. Thomson (Mrs H.G.L. Thomson), to Deputy Commissioner of Repatriation, 19 September 1929. Hector Thomson Repatriation Department Medical (M) file. National Archives of Australia, B73, M587164.

was not certain, though recent research suggests that it may have been a consequence of the Spanish influenza epidemic, with an immune reaction to infection causing neurological damage.[17]

Though the neurologist had noted the possibility of some form of psychotic breakdown unrelated to war service, to their credit the Repat

doctors gave Hector the benefit of doubt and concluded that the affliction to his brain and mental state may have been a consequence of encephalitis lethargica, possibly caused by Hector's wartime respiratory infection (but not by malaria). Hector was fortunate that his wartime medical file had survived and included evidence of a physical affliction that might have caused brain damage. Post-war "shell shock" survivors with no such evidence of a physiological cause found it much harder to prove their ill health was due to the war and were less likely to receive a pension. Their mental illness was often regarded as due to inherited character flaws or the stresses of post-war life.

Hector later claimed that Sewell had told him he had "a definite inflammation of the brain". Sewell never reported any such inflammation to the Repat, but in 1929 Dr Campbell wrote to the Repat that he agreed with Sewell's diagnosis of encephalitis and suggested that it might have been caused by an infection resulting from malaria. As the Thomson family doctor, Campbell probably wanted to ensure that Hector received a pension for this new condition. He would have known that the Repat was more likely to pension a man with observable, war-caused physical damage, and he did not mention the alternative diagnosis of a psychotic condition due to "exhaustion". Hector trusted Campbell, who was also an ex-serviceman (we will see this trust was ill-deserved), and from this point almost certainly believed that his ill-health was due to some form of brain inflammation (encephalitis) caused by wartime malaria. This was how Nell came to understand her husband's illness, and "malarial encephalitis" (rather than encephalitis lethargica) became the explanation whispered in family oral tradition and passed on to my generation.[18]

In 1930 Hector was granted a 75 per cent war pension and, at first, seemed to be recovering. But within a few months, he collapsed again, suffering the same symptoms. By summer harvest Dr Campbell noted that Hector

> had got much thinner and looked duller than before. I tried to persuade him to employ a stack builder, but he did not on account of the expense, with the result that he got completely knocked up, and the failing of memory and semi-comatose condition supervened.[19]

Gippsland doctors now agreed that Hector was "permanently incapacitated" and "quite incapable of work". From Gippsland Hospital he was sent by car to Caulfield Repatriation General Hospital, where Repat files record that Hector instigated a "violent maniacal attack [...] of all around". He was discharged to Royal Park Receiving House, the short term admissions section of Royal Park Hospital for the Insane. There is no further detail in the files about this violent attack, which seems to have been out of character, and after six weeks, Hector returned to Caulfield Repatriation Hospital and then, after a short stay, to home in Gippsland.[20]

While at Royal Park, Hector's war pension was increased to 100 per cent, but after his return home, it again dropped to 75 per cent. In July 1931, Nell wrote to the Repat seeking an increase in his pension to 100 per cent.

> I am in great financial difficulties and am heavily indebted to the Closer Settlement, I have absolutely nothing to live on except my pension out of which I have to pay a man 30/- a week and his keep. It is indeed a very serious position, not only for my husband, but for myself and my two children, the youngest of whom is not yet five and the elder is 6 ½ years of age. I am struggling, and have been for several years now to carry on the property with the advice of my husband's brother who lives 20 miles from me – I had to borrow on my husband's Life Insurance this year to enable me to put in a little crop, I therefore hope that my request for a full pension will be granted.[21]

In the review of Hector's case there was disagreement and debate amongst Repat doctors, who were generally suspicious of veterans who claimed that mental ill-health was war-caused, especially now claims from "burnt-out" diggers were increasing and the economic Depression reduced the government's ability to respond to need. Fourteen years after discharge from the army, Hector's condition was explained according to new medical paradigms. Dr Paul Dane had been an army doctor at Gallipoli and served with the 1st Australian General Hospital in Egypt, and after the war, he became interested in neurology and the treatment of shell shocked veterans. An early convert to Freudian psychology, by 1925 he had published on "The psycho-neuroses of soldiers and their treatment" and was recommending treatment by analysis. Perhaps not surprisingly, Dane was looking for psychological causes for Hector's symptoms:

> I can find no evidence in this man's history which would suggest to me an attack of Encephalitis; there is nothing in this [sic] symptoms to suggest a diagnosis of post encephalitic disorder. There are no signs of organic disease of C.N.S. [central nervous system] but he is quite definitely an athyroidic type [affected by a malfunctioning thyroid gland] – he is also the typical manic depressive character type and has been all his life. There are occurrences in his military history which point towards slight psychotic trends or character defects. This inherent familial type of mental make up plus malarial infection and athyroidism is sufficient in my opinion to account for his present condition.[22]

There is nothing in Hector's military records that suggests either psychotic trends or significant character defects (unless the doctor was referring to Hector's wartime disobedience or "familiarity with natives"?). But it was not unusual at this time for doctors to explain mental illness in terms of a flawed character and family history. In the absence of definitive physiological or

psychological evidence, doctors were speculating about Hector's condition, and their speculations say as much about the limits of medical understanding, and about contemporary prejudice, as they do about Hector.

Once again, however, Hector was fortunate. The Repat doctors concluded that there was enough evidence in his service records to suggest a possible link between mental illness and wartime physical illness. Hector's "acute mania" was now also accepted as war caused, and his pension was increased to the full 100 per cent for a totally incapacitated veteran. The war pension, which included an allocation for each dependent family member, was worth about half the basic wage. It was better than nothing and it was certainly better than the non-existent state benefits for non-veterans with mental health conditions. But the war pension consigned an incapacitated veteran and his family to a meagre living. Times were hard on the farm at "Bungaleen". My father was then aged seven, and in an interview, I conducted with him in 1985, he recalled "this was right at the end of the Depression, when things were very tough, there'd been a drought". Nell could not afford any help in the house, which "was fairly primitive and there was a lot of work doing it".[23]

Here, I'm afraid, this family story takes another, terrible turn. In 1932 Nell needed an operation on her gall bladder and Hector insisted on using Dr Campbell because he was an ex-serviceman. My father believes that Nell died on the operating table in September 1932 because his father was determined to use "the worst local doctor, because he had been in the War". The bond of ex-servicemen had a devastating effect.

At Nell's death, the boys were aged 7 and 5. My father remembers sitting outside in the back garden after a horse-rider brought news of their mother's death, and saying to his younger brother Colin, "I wonder what we're going to do now."[24] For a few months they lived with elderly grandparents on a nearby farm, and then, astonishingly, Hector brought them back to live with him at Bungaleen, with the support of a paid housekeeper who lived in a small cottage next door. The contrast with their earlier life was stark. Nell was remembered by my father as a bright and witty woman, "full of laughter", who "was quite modern" in her ways of upbringing, "very particular about the way we dressed", a voracious reader who read classics while she was pregnant in the hope that it would rub off and was reading Dickens' *David Copperfield* to her boys in the week before she died. For the first couple of years after Nell died the housekeeper was a "marvellous small English woman", but she left – quite likely because Hector was not easy to live with – and was replaced by a succession of "dreadful females". By this stage they were getting "very poor indeed, there was no money, and the house was getting shabbier and the garden was neglected".[25]

Sometime after Nell died, Hector began to drink "and we always dreaded his return from town from stock sales". One night he did not return, and the next day David discovered him in hospital recovering from a car crash. "We never had a car after that which restricted our lives even more." When the

boys reached the school leaving age of 13 Hector wanted them to work on the farm, but David was keen for further education, and a new rural school bus service was the “miracle” that made high school in Sale possible. They now lived “very enclosed lives”.

> My father by this stage was getting very withdrawn and silent and didn’t socialize at all, didn’t go out and quite often we’d be asked to birthday parties at other families fifteen, twenty miles away and he wouldn’t take us, he just couldn’t go. Oh as we got older we could ride, but he wouldn’t take us, just withdrew (pause) so it was a fairly tough life. By the time I was fifteen things got worse, ’cause I was fifteen my brother was thirteen, and we were informed that no longer could we afford a housekeeper, and I said, “What are we going to do?” and he said, “You’ll have to look after yourselves.” And he really had no alternative, I couldn’t understand it at the time, I can now understand he was desperate. I imagine he had a huge overdraft and no income, or very little.

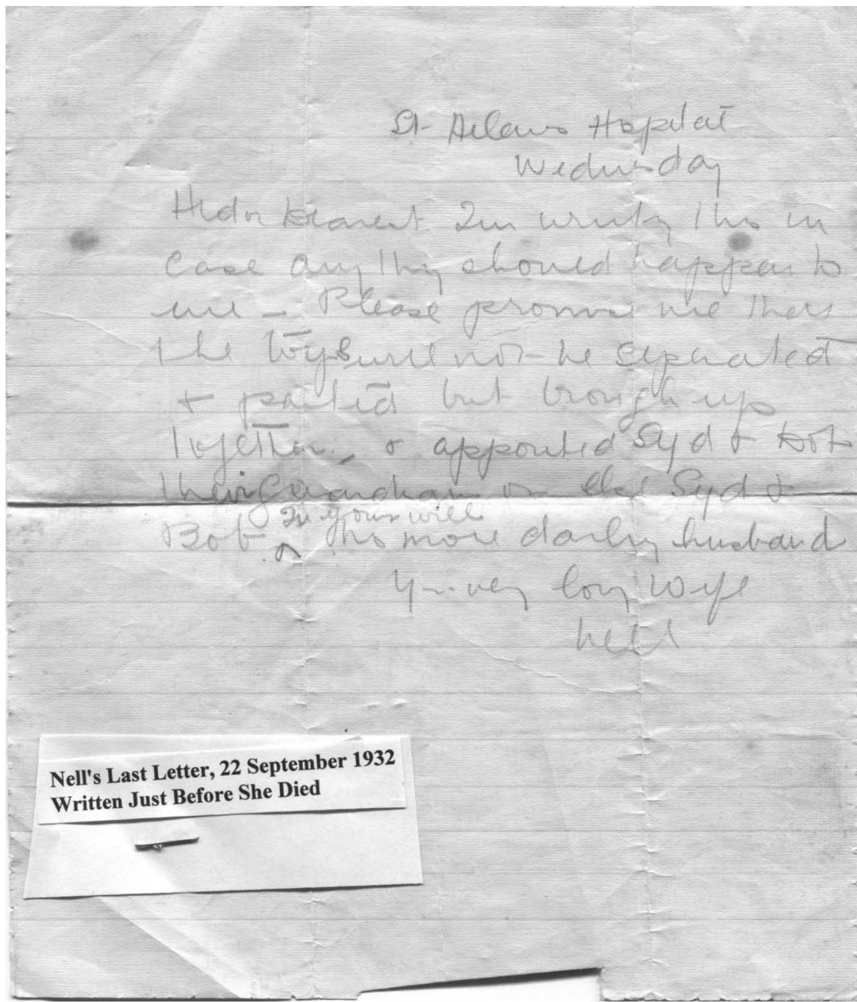
The boys did the shopping during the school lunch break, cooked the meals and did all the housework except the laundry, which was sent out. They also helped their father on the farm, because he could afford no paid help.

> Things were really pretty grim. … I remember, I suppose it must have been Christmas of 1939 or ’40, we spent Christmas Day making a haystack. And we had cold mutton or something for Christmas dinner. No one else to do it. We hadn’t been invited for Christmas dinner by anyone else, so the three of us had it ourselves.[26]

It’s not clear why there was so little family support. David and Colin enjoyed occasional holidays with Scott family relatives, and Nell’s elder sister Kathleen helped out when she could, but she lived in Melbourne. The Thomson families who farmed around Sale were less forthcoming. Perhaps they, too, had been alienated by Hector’s behaviour.

When he was a boy my father did not know that Hector was a very sick man. That Hector managed at all was exceptional. Most men in his situation in the 1930s found a new wife to raise the children and keep the house, or either gave up their children to a female relative or placed them in an institution.[27] Hector may have been guided by a note that Nell had written in pencil from her hospital bed the night before she died, in which she said, “if anything happens to me, don’t let the boys be separated” (Figures 6.9 and 6.10).

I like to think that although Hector barely managed as a parent, the fact that he did keep his boys with him on the farm, in dire circumstances, was an impressive achievement. While Nell was alive, Hector came to rely on her and succumbed to ill-health. Unwell, unable to provide for his family, unable to manage the finances or even conduct his pension claim, Hector almost



St Albans Hospital
Wednesday
Hector dearest I'm writing this in
case anything should happen to
me – Please promise me that
the boys will not be separated
+ parted but brought up
together & appointed Syd & Bob
their guardian or else Syd &
Bob in your will [illegible] more darling husband
Your very loving wife
Nell

Nell's Last Letter, 22 September 1932
Written Just Before She Died

Figure 6.9 Nell's final words to Hector. Alistair Thomson.

certainly felt a failure as a husband and father and as a man. Nell's death must have been a terrible blow, yet it also led Hector to take back control of his life, and of his farm and family, and to work through the worst of his illness for the sake of his sons.

Throughout the 1930s Hector worked intermittently on the farm and battled with the Repat about his pension. Though he *was* often unwell, Hector was certainly trying to work the Repatriation system to improve his war pension, playing one doctor off against another, citing symptoms that he hoped would match his accepted conditions and seeking to have other

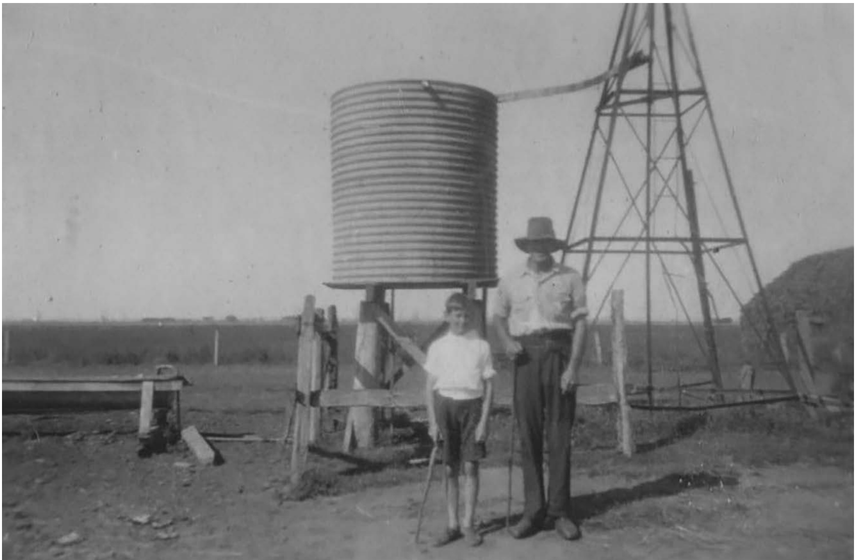


Figure 6.10 Hector and Colin at a drought-stricken Bungaleen, late 1930s. Alistair Thomson.

conditions accepted. The Repat doctors and officials were increasingly suspicious and unsympathetic. The evidence of my father's memory suggests that Hector was probably mentally unwell, though it is not clear whether this was due to a physiological condition with its origin in the war, or was simply due to some form of mental illness or depression. He certainly had good cause to be depressed.

In a final, ironic twist, in 1941 Hector Thomson went back to war. While David was away at boarding school for a year (funded by a 100 pound inheritance from his grandmother), Hector sent Colin to live with relatives on a nearby farm and then travelled to Melbourne to enlist in the Second AIF. In Melbourne, he could get away with lying about his age (39 instead of 50), birthplace (Glasgow instead of Sale) and surname (he added a "p" to Thomson) so that his over-age status and Repatriation record would not be discovered. On the medical history form, Hector admitted an appendix operation but wrote "no" to each of a long list of ailments which included "fits of any kind". The medical officer was suspicious about Hector's stated age – Hector had neglected to add a "p" to his signature, and the photo taken at enlistment shows a ravaged face which looks older than 50 years – but let him in. Though World War I may have caused the ruination of Hector's health, he had no grudge with war service itself, which offered a welcome escape from the hardships of his farm and family life. By early 1942 he had

returned to the Middle East, this time as a private with the $2^{nd}/6^{th}$ Cavalry Regiment, and at least one photo shows him looking content back among soldier mates and within the security of the army. But later that year Hector suffered serious petrol burns to his arms and legs, and it is likely that his real age was discovered. He was returned to Australia and discharged, in October 1943, ostensibly because he was required for work in the reserved occupation of farming.[28]

As they came of age both David and Colin also joined the army, and while they were serving with the occupation force in Japan after the war Hector sold his failing farm and spent the proceeds. His sons never forgave him. Hector then lived in boarding houses in Melbourne till he suffered a stroke in the mid-1950s. He died in the Heidelberg Repatriation Hospital in 1958, two years before I was born.

In 1992 my father wrote to me that at war Hector was "a hero and a successful soldier":

> It was his civilian life which was painful and not discussed. We make his war illness an excuse for his failings, but he may have failed in any case. Perhaps if Nell had lived he would have been different, but in some ways I feel that had she lived she would have had a very unhappy life. I know that Aunt Kar [Kathleen] believed that she should never have married Hector – apparently another man she loved was killed in WW1. Perhaps we were all victims of the war.[29]

That was an astute judgement by a son who felt failed by his father and who idolised the memory of his mother. But as a boy, my father never knew the nature or extent of his father's health problems. Nobody explained that their father was ill. When he wrote that letter to me in 1992 my father was still not privy to the history which unfolds in the Repat files, and he was struggling with his memory of a broken father and traumatic childhood.

Before my father David died in 2013 he had Alzheimer's disease. He couldn't remember yesterday and spoke very little, but he still recalled the pain of his childhood, and that his father was "damaged". Over the Christmas of 2012, I showed Dad Hector's Repat files and gave him a draft of the new family history that emerged from those files, which I've outlined in this chapter. Dad spent hours slowly reading each page, with an intensity of concentration that he rarely managed. His eyes narrowed and creased with pain as he recalled his childhood and said that Hector's physical and mental condition was worse than I described. For a lucid, fragile moment I think that he, too, came to a new understanding and emotional acceptance about the cause of his father's illness *and* about his mother's tenacity and resilience. With this new knowledge, my father agreed that Hector probably did the best he could in the circumstances, and he consented to the publication of my revised family history, which appeared in a new edition of *Anzac Memories* published in 2013.

When, as a young man, I researched and wrote the first edition of *Anzac Memories* and sought out old war veterans and their stories, I may have been searching for Hector Thomson all along. The topics of historical research often have personal roots, even when we are not aware of them. It's been good to find Hector in the files and explain the story behind a painful family secret. What I hadn't been expecting was to find my grandmother Nell. The Repat files helped me understand the impact of the war on soldiers' families and the critical post-war role of wives like Nell, both themes that were understated in my interviews with ex-servicemen and in the first edition of *Anzac Memories*.[30]

How families deal with complicated and even challenging war stories says something about the processes of family remembrance and the history of emotions, and about how the Anzac legend works, and sometimes does not work, at the intimate level of the family. For example, my father and his brother Colin knew that Hector had won a Military Medal for bravery and they wore his medals to school on Anzac Day (this was one of the few stories about Hector which they later shared with their own children). Hector did not talk to the boys about his war, and we don't know exactly when they were told that he had contracted malarial encephalitis at war, though we do know this became the accepted (and faulty) family explanation of his illness. Within the family that diagnosis probably concealed more disturbing concerns about psychosis or depression, and it carried the legitimation of a war-caused illness. We know that my father only learned after Hector's death about the time in a mental hospital. Aunt Kathleen carried much of the family oral history and she guarded its secrets carefully. My mother did not meet her future father-in-law until just before her marriage in 1955 and did not learn about his illness till many years later (perhaps my father feared she would baulk at marriage had she known about the family history of mental illness). As a child, I grew up with a mixture of heroic stories, half-truths and silences about my family war history. At that time, the bitterness and pain of my father's memory of Hector was such that he could hardly talk about him at all. The story of Hector's cousin, the soldier-poet Boyd Thomson who died on the Somme and was commemorated in a memorial book of verse, was easier to tell, and to hear.[31]

In 2014 I scripted and narrated an ABC radio documentary "Searching for Hector Thomson" that told my family story. Responses to the documentary, recorded online or by letter and email, suggest that some Australians – though not all – are open to this type of family war history.[32]

> You could and should show some respect for your own family, for if your father was alive today and of sound mind, you would surely have a lot to answer for… Who gives you the right to deconstruct what you call "family mythology"? … Of course it's none of my business. But you're the one making a public career out of those who gave you everything.

> I'm sure there will be many families who could tell a similar story but now know what information might be available.

> I was hearing a pattern that I have come to learn [from my family's Holocaust experiences] and realise how much of those past experiences are enacted as trauma transmission, which seem to me to have passed across to your father also.

> I have just listened to your presentation of your grandfather and father's history. I was extremely emotionally affected. I am not clear why but I think it is to do with my past and the gremlins that my father had and that were never clear to us… I am inspired and will try to set down something of what I know.

> Thank you for helping bring mental health issues (and farming) out into the open.

> I was moved by your family's story… I find myself asking – what do I know of my Grandad's and Papa's own struggles – or those of Granny and Nana?

> I am sure that every time you visit this topic you receive many responses … I will indeed look at my father's extensive Repat file. … My father drank too much, was often angry and very occasionally violent. Nevertheless he was devoted to our mother [and] brought up two children.

Clearly, many Australians are moved by the potent emotions of family war memories and are seeking to make better sense of war's effects on veterans and their families. We need to take care *and* risks with these family war histories. Broaching secrets and breaching confidences can hurt people we love and disturb the equilibrium of family life and relations, as I discovered in the 1980s. But secrets and lies can be more damaging than confession, and family historians who delve deep can not only make better histories, they can also generate better family understanding. In an Australian context, where the Anzac legend sometimes frames a narrow and superficial history of Australians at war, family history has an especially important role. Taken seriously, questioning family mythology and using all the evidence that is now available, we *can* create family histories that demonstrate complex, multi-faceted military experience, of bravery and fear, of achievement, loss and damage. More than that, we can show that it is not just military men (and military women) who are affected by war. We can illuminate the family context and consequences of war, the post-war impacts of war service and war's reverberations across the generations. In short, family history, researched carefully and written with searing honesty and a critical eye, is one of the ways Australians can remake our war history.

That's not easy to do. As *public* historians – and here I include academic historians like myself or Bart Ziino, and the authors in this book who work in museums and other institutions that preserve and present our collective histories – we bear an important responsibility to support and guide family history in such directions. We might suggest ways to interpret the history of emotions that are deeply personal within a family yet also have common causes and meanings. We should model critical histories that go beyond brave sacrifice and stoic soldiering. We can direct people to the widest range of historical sources. We must urge careful analysis of such sources so they reveal hidden meanings as well as secrets and lies and generate new historical understandings about war and its consequences.

Notes

1 Thomson 1988. My father also disapproved of my manuscript about "radical diggers" based on oral history interviews with Australian Great War veterans who became socialists and pacifists. The unpublished manuscript of "Forgotten Anzacs" is in the Australian War Memorial, Manuscript 1180.
2 David Thomson, letter to Alistair Thomson, 27 September 1986 (in author's possession); Thomson 1994, p. 2.
3 Ziino 2010. Note that Peter Stanley suggests that we too readily overestimate this family connection with Australians at war, arguing that in World War I more than half the men of eligible age did not volunteer to enlist, and that post-World War II migrants have no direct family connection. See Stanley 2012.
4 Hirsch 2008.
5 Ziino 2010.
6 Larsson 2009; Damien Hadfield 2010; John Cantwell 2012.
7 Larsson 2009; Garton 1996; Peter Stanley 2009; Bruce Scates and Melanie 2016. Details of the National Archives of Australia (NAA) series B73, Personal Case Files, World War I [Online]. Available at: https://recordsearch.naa.gov.au/SearchNRetrieve/Interface/DetailsReports/SeriesDetail.aspx?series_no=B73 [Accessed: 30 April 2013].
8 All file references in this chapter are from Hector Thomson Repatriation Medical file, M58164, Series B73, NAA, unless otherwise noted.
9 Hector Thomson, First AIF Personnel Dossier, 1914–1920, Series B2455, NAA.
10 Thomson, First AIF Personnel Dossier.
11 Hector Thomson, Record of Evidence Form, 24 July 1929.
12 Medical Report, 21 December 1918; Hector Thomson, Record of Evidence Form, 24 July 1929; Dr Hagenauer, extract from a letter dated 14 May 1919, Evidence File, 1929; Dr Campbell, extract from a letter dated 27 November 1919, Evidence File, 1929; Dr Campbell, letter to the Deputy Commissioner, 13 November 1929.
13 David Thomson, letter to Alistair Thomson, 27 September 1986 (author's possession); N. Thomson (Mrs H.G.L. Thomson), letter to Deputy Commissioner, 19 September 1929. It is not clear if the property was named after the local district of Bungaleen or the nineteenth-century Aboriginal elder of that name (also called "Bunjaleene" or "Bungalene"), whose appalling story is recounted in Watson, D. (1984) *Caledonia Australis: Scottish Highlanders on the Frontier of Australia*. Sydney: Collins, pp. 175–8.
14 Hector Thomson, Record of Evidence Form, 24 July 1929; Dr Campbell, letter to Deputy Commissioner, 13 November 1929; Mr Witts, letter to Deputy Commissioner, 7 August 1929. My father recalls his parents hosting Mr Witts and his wife at a dinner party at Bungaleen: David Thomson. 1999.

The Thomson Story: Childhood Memories, 1924–1941. Papers of the Thomson Family, MS8600, National Library of Australia.

15 Scates and Oppenheimer 2016; Larsson 2009; Marilyn Lake 1975.

16 Nell Thomson, letters to Deputy Commissioner, 15 May 1929 and 19 September 1929.

17 Dr Sidney Sewell, letter to Deputy Commissioner, 19 August 1929; see Encephalitis lethargica [Online]. Available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Encephalitis_lethargica [Accessed: 16 March 2013]; Sacks 1973.

18 Hector Thomson, Record of Evidence Form, 24 July 1929; Dr Campbell, letter to Deputy Commissioner, 13 November 1929. See Hurley 1988.

19 Dr Campbell, letter to Deputy Commissioner, 5 February 1931; Dr Godfrey, Medical Notes, 6 February 1931.

20 Dr Garrett, Case Sheet, Repatriation General Hospital, Caulfield, 14 November 1931, H58164, B73, NAA; Deputy Commissioner, letter to Medical Superintendent, Royal Park Receiving House, 15 November 1931; Medical Superintendent, Royal Park Receiving House, letter to Deputy Commissioner, 19 November 1931; Dr Bawm, Royal Park, Repatriation Commission Minute Paper, 24 December 1931; Dr Garrett, Repatriation Commission Minute Paper, 29 December 1931.

21 Nell Thomson, letter to Deputy Commissioner, 1 July 1931.

22 Dr Dane, Medical Report, 20 March 1931.

23 David Thomson, interview by Alistair Thomson, 4–8 August 1985, Australian Parliament's Oral History Project, TRC4900/35, NLA. David's younger brother Colin died in 2011. He found it even more difficult than my father to recall his childhood at Bungaleen and rarely talked about those times.

24 David Thomson, letter to Alistair Thomson, 27 September 1986; David Thomson interview, 1985. The Repatriation files show what Hector would not have known: that Dr Campbell had been a tardy expert witness for his pension claims, and that Nell had spent months chasing Campbell to complete a report for the Repat. See Nell Thomson, letter to Deputy Commissioner, 19 September 1929.

25 David Thomson interview, 1985.

26 David Thomson interview, 1985; David Thomson, letter to Alistair Thomson, 27 September 1986.

27 Bell 2012.

28 David Thomson interview, 1985; Hector Thomson, Medical History Sheet, 24 May 1941, Second AIF Service Records, VX56596, Series B883, NAA.

29 David Thomson, letter to Alistair Thomson, 6 February 1992 (in author's possession).

30 Thomson 2013.

31 Mitchell 2001, pp. 104–5.

32 Michelle Rayner (producer) 2014. The comments have now been removed from the ABC website.

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7 “Gonzo” historians and the emotional turn in Australian military history

Peter Stanley

As the title of the exhibition that inspired this book suggests, emotion – and the explicit acknowledgement of emotion – was at the heart of the ways in which it sought to interpret World War I. As its curator and contributors have explained elsewhere in this book, Museums Victoria’s *Love and Sorrow* exhibition arose from a determination to depict and interpret the experience of war. The museum chose not to focus primarily on important events, or significant individuals, or the chronology of Australia’s involvement in the war. Nor did the exhibition concentrate on the technological or military uses of the artefacts of the war. All of these approaches are adopted by other museums, notably “military” museums and may be legitimate or even desirable in their context. *Love and Sorrow* emerged from and articulated a particular and relatively new approach to the representation of war. In essence, it used as its primary driving force the principle of selection and expression of the idea of emotion and in several ways. *Love and Sorrow* was, most obviously, about the experience of war and its aftermath, about how a number of representative Victorians experienced the war and how their lives (and deaths) could be shown not so much in factual terms but could engage visitors on an emotional level as well as the more cerebral or even “factual” ways more familiar in more conventional “military historical” exhibitions.

This essay began as a paper “The Dead we Never Knew: a Lost Boy in the Family”, presented at the “War & Emotions” symposium held at Melbourne Museum in September 2015. It morphed in gestation and revision so that nothing in the original draft survived to be included in this published chapter.

“Emotion” is now such a significant element in the practice of history as a whole and “military history” in particular that it justifies reflection and analysis. The explicit use of emotion in exhibitions and other forms of historical interpretation is by no means new or unique. It has a lineage, one that needs to be traced and understood. In this essay, therefore, I want to link two objectives. First, I plan to identify some of the notable steps and works in the gradual introduction of emotion into military history in this country in museums and commemoration. Second, I want to reflect on my own work and experience in that it has been a part of the transformation in

question. Third, I'll offer some observations on the potential that a focus on emotion offers, in historical interpretation in a range of historical products.

Emotion in museums

My starting point is to ask where this impulse originated, where it can take us and how we might deal with the expectation that emotion should be a part of our treatment of war experience. It is very clearly distinguished from the conventional approach to displays about war. Military museums are not usually known for their sophisticated approach to or even acknowledgement of emotions. Traditionally, they present artefacts of war – weapons, uniforms, trophies, souvenirs and so on, along with art, images and documents, to describe the realities of war and military service. Often the history they have conveyed is as hard-edged as the artefacts they display. They usually deal in facts, in military movements and in actions: seemingly objective. Again, traditionally, the only emotions usually expressed are pride in the actions of individuals or units. Indeed, the individuals represented in the military museum as it evolved in western nations and military forces in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (often under the auspices of armies, initially regarded as "training aids" or supports for esprit de corps) were invariably either senior officers or men (and they were invariably men) who had performed heroic deeds in battle. Certainly, this model began to change from the 1970s when, under the impulse of developments in social history and in museology itself, military museums began to represent the experiences of both ordinary people and to reflect a more diverse approach to the representation of both combat and military life.

Still, the explicit depiction of artefacts or other display elements to express the emotion of war in museums had to wait until the 1990s, something I recall from my own experience as a museum historian. I worked in the Australian War Memorial, Australia's premier national military museum, from 1980 to 2007, closely involved in contributing to and curating permanent galleries and temporary exhibitions. Increasingly, the thinking of the Memorial's curators and historians moved from the traditional, supposedly "objective", model to approaches accepting that one of the principals and most powerful drivers of displaying and interpreting war "relics" (as they were called at the Memorial) was that they could be used to tell what came to be called "personal stories" which were increasingly seen to have and convey emotion. In the 50th anniversary exhibition *1945: War & Peace*, we included a wall of the "paybook" photographs of virtually all of the Australians who died in the notorious "Sandakan death marches" alongside a display of artefacts recovered from the ruins of the Sandakan prisoner-of-war camp. This presentation, devised by photograph curator Ian Affleck, explicitly sought to engage visitors' emotions. Visitors (not all with family connections to the Sandakan dead) were often found in tears in the alcove. These encounters accustomed Memorial professional staff to the

idea that Australia's military history could be an emotional as well as an intellectual experience. (I say "professional staff" because the visitor services staff were very familiar with visitors responding emotionally to what the Memorial displayed and represented.)

While we were working on *1945: War & Peace*, Memorial staff were developing and debating what became known as the *Gallery Master Plan*. This document, endorsed by the Memorial's Council in 1995, set out "Gallery Master Plan Principles" on which the Memorial's ambitious gallery redevelopment program (as it was called) would be based over the following decade. One of the principles under "Interpretation" was that "Galleries should engage visitors' intellect, imagination and emotion, using the collection to tell stories communicating the emotion of war experience".[1] Other guiding principles reinforced and elaborated this intention, such as the first item on the "checklist of themes, approaches and subjects to be considered in developing a gallery", which was that "Each gallery should be based on and should communicate stories of individuals, families and groups …"[2] The idea of "personal stories", now a commonplace in the development of exhibitions and books, is often a vehicle to deal with or refer to emotion, though the telling of "personal stories" may not necessarily involve reflections on emotion. However, this plan, though gradually changed as the experience of developing and opening new galleries (and by the involvement of new individuals) articulated and expressed the approach to new galleries.

A further crucial step in this evolution, and a direct outcome of the adoption of the Gallery Master Plan, was the Memorial's permanent World War II gallery, which I curated as "Concept Leader" of the exhibition team. In developing the gallery, in the years 1996–99, building on some of the insights gained through *1945: War & Peace*, we explicitly canvassed the idea of framing the story of Australia's World War II experience around a series of emotions – love, fear, pride, loyalty, endurance, mateship, courage and so on. In the end, we chose to follow a more conventional chronological-thematic approach, but the idea of referring to and expressing emotion remained. In several sections we told highly emotional "stories" – the word was beginning to be used routinely – such as the display of some of the possessions of Jan Ruff-O'Herne (1923–2019), who had survived months of sexual abuse in a Japanese brothel, an ordeal she had painfully charted in her memoir *50 Years of Silence*, a book so hard to read that, returning to it 20 years on, I have got little further than its verso page. The "emotional range" of Memorial exhibitions was enlarged by decisions such as these, a development seen in other museums, military and otherwise, in Australia and beyond.[3]

This brief chronicle points to some of the more notable developments in the evolution of museum practice, but it does not fully explain where museum historians and curators, who were essentially responsible for advocating these changes, got their ideas. The impetus to make museum displays more responsive both to the emotions inherent in their collections and more appealing to the emotions of their visitors came both from ideas within

the museum profession (such as the growth of "visitor studies" or "visitor advocacy", which asked new questions about museums' relationship to those they served) but also developments in the wider field of history and especially military history.

A new history

These changes within military museums (say, from the 1970s) paralleled profound changes in the practice of history in western liberal societies. Almost simultaneously, historians in the English-speaking world especially began to practise history in new ways. The idea that "social history" comprised merely "history with the politics left out" was overthrown in favour of "history from below", in which historians began to extend the range of their subjects, often encompassing groups hitherto excluded from or marginalised in conventional historiography. Military history, formerly the province of serving or former soldiers with an interest in operational practice, began to broaden to embrace a "New Military History", in which the experience of barrack life was as important as the conduct of battle; in which the voices of ordinary soldiers could be heard along with those of their officers. Often no clear chain of evolution can be traced, or rather, has not yet been traced. But it seems clear that from the 1960s and '70s academic historical study expanded in Australia (and other western nations). These decades saw the 50th anniversary of World War I, the greater availability of sources and the growth of television documentaries (such as the BBC's *The Great War* (1964) or the Thames Television series *World at War* (1973)) which fed off and exposed a new curiosity for the experiences of "ordinary people". All of these developments made easier and more acceptable an increasingly inclusive and open approach to the history of war.

One of the most significant manifestations of this changed attitude both to what "military historians" write about, and the ways in which they write about it, was John Keegan's ground-breaking book, *The Face of Battle*, first published in 1976. Keegan (1934–2012), a lecturer at the Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst, examined the experience of battle at Agincourt (1415), Waterloo (1815) and on the Somme (1916), focusing on how technology, tactics and ballistics determined or affected the lives and deaths of those involved. Keegan's opening chapter, which dealt with the ways in which historians understood military history, and how soldiers used it, began with a personal declaration: "I have not been in a battle; not near one, nor heard one from afar, nor seen the aftermath".[4] Keegan continued to bring his personal experience and perspective into his work in a career that saw the publication of some two dozen books, notably in his *Warpaths: Travels of a Military Historian in North America*. It begins, unashamedly, "I love America", and continues in a reminiscent, revelatory mood.[5] Keegan's influence accelerated the adoption and acceptance of a "war and society" or "military social history" approach, at least in the Anglophone world.

Beyond it, encountering some of the most horrific aspects of World War II brought many historians to refer to their own emotional reactions in explaining their approach to and interpretation of war. The American Holocaust historian Christopher Browning, read in the records of the (then) West German office for the investigation of Nazi crimes accounts of the indictments against men of Reserve Police Battalion 101. These records, documenting the unit's work in murdering Jews in central Poland in 1942, had a profound effect upon him. "Though I had been studying … the Holocaust for twenty years", he wrote, "the impact this indictment had upon me was singularly powerful and disturbing", and led him to publish *Ordinary Men*, a book reflecting on how otherwise ordinary German men were able to perpetrate mass murder.[6] Daniel Goldhagen's 1996 *Hitler's Willing Executioners*, which he offered as a rebuttal of Browning's argument, made the case with very little intrusion of Goldhagen's personal testimony, though on the last page of the text he acknowledged that in his understanding of Nazism and the Holocaust he owed his "greatest debt" to his father, Erich, a Holocaust survivor.[7] Thus, recognition of individual emotional reactions lies at the heart of these historians' responses to one of the greatest tragedies and crimes in human history.

The significance of World War I

At the same time, in Australia, several significant works heralded changes in how military history would be pursued and interpreted. The 50th anniversary of World War I saw historians publishing articles reflecting on the place of Anzac in a developing national historiography in which war had been notably absent (especially Ken Inglis's 1965 article "The Anzac Tradition").[8] In the next decade, books by Lloyd Robson and Bill Gammage took up aspects of Australia's Great War, in *The First A.I.F.* and *The Broken Years* respectively.[9] In Victoria, an energetic (if academically untrained) field officer for the State Library of Victoria, Patsy Adam-Smith, published *The Anzacs*, a compilation of stories based on the manuscripts she had gathered, all from "ordinary people" and many telling explicitly emotive stories.[10] Bill Gammage's *The Broken Years*, which first appeared in a small edition by the academic ANU Press in 1974, remained in print more or less continuously for over 30 years, in editions increasingly presented and marketed for popular readers (without markedly changing the text, which in turn had been closely based on his doctoral thesis). In this *The Broken Years* is a key exhibit in tracing the acceptance of an explicitly emotive interpretation of Australia's Great War. For all that Gammage's work broke new ground in opening up the Australian experience of World War I to scrutiny through the use of "letters and diaries", an approach now commonplace, *The Broken Years* did not itself explicitly address emotion. (Gammage did acknowledge how a Great War veteran had admitted to the author that he had enlisted twice – "once for the war and once for the nightmares" – but that admission

came in a Preface to the 2010 edition, not the previous editions.)[11] *The Broken Years* is so rich a text, a young scholar's book that remains a key source for his successors 40 years on, that no one could hope or expect it to have introduced a new approach in that regard also.

World War I, however, remained central to the advance of the emotional turn in Australian history that was plainly occurring by the 1990s. Indeed, notwithstanding that another of the central phenomena in making emotion academically acceptable was the collaboration between radio journalist Tim Bowden and historian Hank Nelson's ABC radio series and book *POW: Australians Under Nippon* (in World War II) the overwhelming impetus for an emotional engagement with the Australian experience of war primarily came through the interpretation of World War I.[12] (Gammage and Nelson had been academic colleagues both in Port Moresby and Canberra, and both had been protégés of Ken Inglis. Tracing the relationships that fostered and advanced the development of an emotional approach to the Australian experience of war would involve a complex diagram of friendship, collaboration, interaction and even opposition.)

Nor is it only in military history that historians began to explicitly acknowledge their personal involvement in or engagement with the past as a part of writing about it. The work of Mark McKenna offers two superbly revelatory examples. In 1993 McKenna bought land on the banks of the Towamba River on the south coast of New South Wales. Pondering the Indigenous presence on what was now "his" land, he came to realise that "my view across the river looked into a past so deep, so out of reach" – and set about seeking ways to bring it into comprehension, a task that produced his prize-winning 2002 book *Looking for Blackfellas' Point*. The book documented what McKenna called "my personal search to discover more about the indigenous history of south-eastern New South Wales".[13] Likewise, in his biography of the great Australian historian Manning Clark, McKenna reflected on his relationship with Clark as he revealed himself through the papers he had amassed and acknowledged his growing sense that McKenna confronted a subject whose selection and annotation of his papers was intended to influence his biographer's interpretation. McKenna wrote of his five-year encounter with Clark and the records on which he drew in writing the life and his struggles to discern the ways in which Clark sought to influence his biographer's findings: "I soon realised that Clark foresaw this book in his mind's eye. With every page turned, I could hear his voice calling to me – 'Come hither, come hither!'"[14]

One of the crucial events in enlarging the audience for and interest in the Australian military experience of World War I was Peter Weir's 1981 feature film, *Gallipoli*. Despite often being criticised by historians for its nationalist emphasis and details of its execution, the film had a massive influence, and for a decade dominated academic and popular discussions of the experience and memory of the war. It arguably kept afloat the idea that commemoration mattered to Australians (and certainly to generations who could not

themselves literally remember the world wars: what historians specialising in this area call "postmemory", a term coined by Holocaust historian Marianne Hirsch in 2001). It was certainly effective in maintaining interest in Gallipoli until, with the 75th anniversary of Gallipoli and Prime Minister Bob Hawke's first official pilgrimage there (in 1990) there began the cycle of officially sponsored populist commemoration which remains current.

Gonzo history

Books about Australia's Great War continued to demonstrate that historians had become comfortable with engaging with both experience and memory. A crucial book in critically engaging with the processes of and relationship between memory and history was Alistair Thomson's 1994 book, *Anzac Memories*. Thomson grappled both with the mutation of the Anzac legend as surviving veterans seemingly changed memories (partly in response to the Peter Weir film, *Gallipoli*), but also how he as an individual reacted to the evolution and the persistence of memories of war, not least from his own family's experience of war. His Introduction began "I had a military childhood …"[15] A crucial aspect of *Anzac Memories* was that it comprised not just a subtle analysis of how Anzac veterans incorporated and adapted aspects of an Anzac legend much more malleable than anyone had realised, but also a meditation of the author's responses to and relationships with the men whose memories constituted his raw material. Thomson's was explicitly and unashamedly an emotional as well as an intellectual engagement. He revealed (in a much-expanded second edition, published two decades later in 2013) how the earlier edition had not been able to reveal the full details of the experience of his grandfather, Hector Thomson, who suffered mental illness for the rest of his life after serving as a light horseman in World War I. Thomson, as Jay Winter wrote in a reflective foreword to the revised edition, confronted the taboo of mental illness encircling Hector Thomson and "has had the courage to take that fence down … to enter the … suffering and isolation which was a part of his grandfather's life".[16] Moreover, Thomson was able to write about it, reflectively and insightfully to illuminate the often painful relationships with personal, family or communal pasts. In this *Anzac Memories* has a point beyond illuminating the experience of World War I, the mutability of memory or even the processes of interpreting the past. It suggests a model for a new and challenging kind of historical writing.

When I recalled reviewing the first edition of *Anzac Memories* on its appearance, in *Australian Historical Studies*, I *remembered* that I had called Thomson a "gonzo" historian, a term that could usefully be revived to describe historians who write themselves into the stories they tell.[17] Or, rather, I *thought* I had: actually on checking I did not; but I certainly thought that at the time I should have. In my review of the revised edition, also in *Australian Historical Studies*, in 2014, I certainly did, but also claimed that I had

in 1996 when I hadn't.[18] I'm glad I've got that off my chest: an example, as if Thomson needed it, of the mutability of memory.

The term "gonzo" is taken from the writings of the late American political, sporting and cultural journalist Hunter S. Thompson (1937–2005), who embodied a "gonzo journalism". In this practice, the reporter's own reactions, views and experiences become part of the story, often through the first-person narrative. The word "gonzo" (the origins of which are disputed) was first used in 1970 to describe Thompson's article "The Kentucky Derby Is Decadent and Depraved".[19] Stripped of its counter-cultural, satiric and drug-addled connotations, "gonzo" has been applied to other fields of cultural expression. As the *Wikipedia* entry on "gonzo journalism" puts it, the practice

> involves an approach to accuracy that concerns the reporting of personal experiences and emotions, in contrast to traditional journalism, which favors a detached style and relies on facts or quotations that can be verified by third parties. Gonzo journalism disregards the strictly-edited product favored by newspaper media and strives for a more personal approach [sic] …[20]

Needless to say, the gulf between respectable historical non-fiction and the wild, drug-fuelled unrestrained prose of Hunter S. Thompson is wide – a reviewer of this chapter deprecated my use of the term – but what unites them is that both essentially depend upon the author's honesty.

I became an admirer and advocate of the honest disclosure that *Anzac Memories* represented. Encouraged by Alistair Thomson's example, I included in my 2003 book *For Fear of Pain: British Surgery 1790–1850* a section in its epilogue, "Dreams of the dreadful knife: a memoir", in which I recounted a traumatic memory induced by a biography of Horatio Nelson in my primary school library (in which the author of a children's biography of Nelson described the amputation of his arm in 1797) and discussed how *For Fear of Pain* constituted an exorcism of the resultant 30-odd years of nightmares. My epilogue comprised just two pages. Few Australian historians, perhaps, have taken self-disclosure to the lengths to which Thomson went, in that he contributed an entirely new fourth part in the 2013 edition in which he described "Searching for Hector Thomson" and reflected on how the release of new documentary evidence elaborated both the life histories of his original interview subjects and the historian's relationship to them.

"Memory studies" in Australia

Anzac Memories was only one of a shelf-full of books on war and its place in Australian history which over the past 20-odd years have explicitly dealt with the emotional impacts of war, both on those directly involved and those

confronted with its consequences. They include many of the contributors to the *Love and Sorrow* project and indeed to this book: Joy Damousi, whose *The Labour of Loss* led several studies of bereavement, along with Bart Ziino and his *A Distant Grief*.[21] These books connected with the burgeoning field of "memory studies" which Ken Inglis had introduced to Australians in the late 1980s, especially by connecting to the work of Jay Winter. (Inglis and Winter became twin patrons of a movement, particularly among Melbourne historians, who advanced this concern more fully than counterparts in Sydney.) By contrast, Canberra military historians arguably favoured a more astringent approach to military and military-social history, with Michael McKernan, Joan Beaumont and Jeff Grey notably resisting the open embrace of sentiment (as they might have termed it), though Beaumont took up Inglis's baton and became the doyenne of "memory studies" in Australia. The only qualification to this generalisation was that my own work at the time coming as it did out of my position at the Australian War Memorial, Canberra, where I headed its historical section from 1987 to 2007, usually included a commemorative dimension. In a succession of "battle" books, I tended to end each with a reflection inspired by cemeteries or memorials: Tarakan, Alamein, Quinn's Post, St Nazaire and Mont St Quentin (see Bibliography). I used to argue that harnessing traditional military history to commemoration enhanced the emotional power of both, but have since concluded (not least from witnessing the sentimental and nationalist excesses of the Anzac centenary) that emotion in military history is an unstable element, liable to transmute into unjustifiable sentimentality unless carefully handled.

Nevertheless, one result of the greater willingness of historians in general and military historians in particular to engage with the emotional was that by the end of the first decade of the new century it became absolutely commonplace for academic military historians to openly discuss the place of their work in relation to individual "subjects" and to deal much more freely than ever before with the emotional impact on themselves of their work and of their encounters with the "subjects" of it. Perhaps the most notable exponent of this willingness to confront emotion and transmute it into interpretation has been Bruce Scates, formerly of Monash University and now of ANU. Scates's books, and especially his two exploring the phenomenon of "pilgrimages" to the Australian battlefields of the two world wars, *Return to Gallipoli* and *Anzac Journeys*, exemplify the explicitly emotional engagement with historical experience.[22] In this Scates is another "gonzo" historian, his books infused by a sensitivity to the feelings of the visitors to Anzac battlefields he calls "pilgrims". Scates not only wrote of the "'deeply emotional', inspiring, humbling, and very often disturbing" journeys that visitors made to former battlefields and war cemeteries, but was "inclined to think of my own journey across the killing fields as well as through the archives, in much the same way".[23]

"Sentimental nationalism"?

Clearly, not all historians accept or are comfortable with the explicit incorporation of emotion into historical thinking or writing. Bruce Scates's approach has been especially criticised by Mark McKenna and Stuart Ward in a review of Scates's *Return to Gallipoli*. Despite Mark McKenna's own admission of the importance of feelings about his place in the genesis of *Looking for Blackfellas' Point*, McKenna and Ward expressed deep hostility to what they called "sentimental nationalism".[24] They found Scates's open embrace of both his subjects' emotional responses to their "pilgrimages" to Gallipoli and his own embrace of emotional language troubling. They argued that Scates came under "the emotional spell of his material" (questionnaires and interviews with self-proclaimed pilgrims), quoting passages in which he perceived how at the Nek or at Villers-Bretonneux "hearts were broken at the very moment nations were made": "returns" to Gallipoli would become "ever more important to the way Australians define themselves as a people".[25] Whether Scates's approach was "sentimental" or "emotional", "nationalist" or "humanist", he certainly genuinely both sought to understand the feelings of those about whom he wrote and to acknowledge his own emotional responses to their experiences. This, it seems, is in accord with and perhaps in advance of a trend in historical writing which produces better history than historians who may ignore or deny the place of emotion. Having acknowledged that military historians, or perhaps rather "war and society" historians, have in recent decades begun to deal with and incorporate emotion explicitly into their analysis of the human and historical experience of war, we might need to accept some qualifications. The first, as is apparent from the examples I've discussed, is that historians so far have tended to scrutinise a relatively narrow range of emotions. Overwhelmingly, writers have addressed grief, bereavement and mourning, partly as a consequence of the lead imparted by historians of the "memory boom" – notably (in Australia) Joy Damousi, Pat Jalland, Tanja Luckins, Bruce Scates and, of course, the doyen of memory studies, the late and much missed Ken Inglis (1929–2017). Not only have scholars followed the lead of the overseas "memory boom" (through the work of, say, the late George Mosse, Jay Winter and Annette Becker) but have been helped by the strong bias in the available primary sources in memorial documentation. Rich sources including Roll of Honour and AIF personnel files, bereavement notices in newspapers, private collections and, of course, "war memorials in the Australian landscape" led to a profound and productive engagement with these darker emotions.

Whether it is possible to deal with a broader and perhaps lighter palette of emotion remains to be seen. Traditional war history often buttressed and expressed feelings of martial or patriotic pride: but that seems antithetical to a critical approach to history. The experience of war, the brutality and trauma it inflicts, seem to offer a hefty counter-weight to any treatment of,

say, the pleasures of youthful discovery, of learning about the world, of the satisfactions of comradeship or the joys of love which war can often bring. To paraphrase Tolstoy, "All happy societies are unhappy in their own way; happy experiences are individual rather than societal". Grief – or other emotions shared across a society – seem more susceptible to analysis and generalisation than, say, the experience of young love (surely as prevalent in time of conflict) but which seems to lead to no systematic conclusion. One qualification may be made in recognising studies of sexual relations (notably in, say, Frank Bongiorno's *The Sex Lives of Australians*)[26] even though understanding is complicated by the dearth or difficulty of the sources.

War, which involves violence, hardship, suffering, wounds and death – and immense suffering even for those not directly under arms (indeed, often *especially* for civilians) – is clearly one of the aspects of human history which – you might think – demands by its very nature the acknowledgment, incorporation and analysis of emotion. On canvassing the literature of military history this seems to have either largely not been the case or has been so, but in a severely qualified form. In fact, surveying the history of writing about war by historians (or at least writers who have not taken part directly in the conflicts in question) emotion has been largely absent. The only emotions evident in much of the classic military historical canon seem to have been pride in achievement, admiration of heroism or grief at loss. This is has changed over the past 30-odd years. Now, increasingly, we have increasingly become "gonzo" historians. We both seek out and seek to understand the feelings of others – especially those about whom we write – and we acknowledge our own feelings in doing so. We believe that this makes for better history – more empathetic, more transparent, more honest – and that that openness is preferable to an attitude in which feelings are kept at bay, controlled or denied. Whether this will make better history is, perhaps, for the future to decide.

Notes

1 Australian War Memorial 1995, p. 18.
2 Ibid, p. 140.
3 Ruff-O'Herne 1994.
4 Keegan 1976, p. 15.
5 Keegan 1995, p. 1.
6 Browning 1992, p. xvi.
7 Goldhagen 1996, p. 604.
8 Inglis 1965.
9 Robson 1970; Gammage 1974.
10 Adam-Smith 1978.
11 Gammage 2010, p. xviii.
12 Bowden and Nelson 1985.
13 McKenna 2002, pp. 5–6.
14 McKenna 2011, p. 29.
15 Thomson 1994, p. 1.

16 Thomson 2013, p. xvi.
17 Stanley 1996, pp. 359–60.
18 Stanley 2014, pp. 158–9.
19 Thompson 1970.
20 Available at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gonzo_journalism [Accessed: 28 January 2020].
21 Damousi 1999; Ziino 2007.
22 Scates 2006 and 2013.
23 Scates 2016, p. xxiii.
24 McKenna and Ward 2007, pp. 141–51.
25 Ibid, p. 144, quoting Scates 2006, p. 215.
26 Bongiorno 2012.

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8 Distance, intimacy and identification

Reflections on writing a history of trauma

Tracey Loughran

In the foreword to *Alfred and Emily*, the novelist Doris Lessing wrote that World War I "squatted over my childhood. The trenches were as present to me as anything I actually saw around me. And here I still am, trying to get out from under that monstrous legacy, trying to get free".[1] Born in 1919, the child of a war amputee and a nurse, Lessing returned at the end of her life to the world war that she felt had shaped it. *Alfred and Emily* is a novel-memoir, a piece of creative fiction that does not fit established forms. In the first part of the book, a novella, Lessing plots how her parents' lives might have been lived out if the war had never happened – a history from which she is absent, as she imagines a happier past for her parents, in which they never met and she was never born. In the second part, she provides a "true" account of their lives and in this way ruminates on the legacies of the war, tracing her parents' misery and its effects on her own childhood back to the devastating effects of that conflict. This novel-memoir, therefore, enacts an extreme form of family history as a form of creative work in which "lives are reimagined and relationships with ancestors reconstructed".[2] In melding fact and fiction, and family history with counterfactual visions, Lessing also invites readers to consider how and why they identify with particular stories of the war, and especially the importance of family histories in establishing a felt connection with the war.

In this chapter, I explore the issue of identification by situating my own story, especially the influences and experiences that led me to become a historian of war trauma, in the wider context of historical scholarship on World War I. My aim is to reflect on different kinds of identification with war stories, and how these identifications feed into the reading and writing of History.[3] Identification is especially evident in family histories, a form premised on a lived connection to the past, now directly or indirectly transmitted down the generations. The "authenticity" of such emotional responses is disputed or defended by different historical schools, but both sides of this debate tend to implicitly or explicitly devalue historical understanding gleaned from strong emotional responses to post-war cultural productions – an understanding that is not about "how it really was", but about how emotion is productive as well as necessary in thinking about,

researching and writing History, and how this can lead us to better (fuller, more humane) histories. This chapter teases out some problems around the relations of self, family, emotion and authority in histories of World War I, though it does not promise to untangle them.

Questions of identification are especially intriguing because of the uneasy place of emotion in scholarship on the history of World War I. Since the 1960s, the majority of popular depictions and academic works on the war have focused on the misery, horror and suffering it generated.[4] Throughout the late 1990s and 2000s, revisionist scholars excavated the creation of the cultural memory of the war and argued that the tropes of "mud, blood and donkeys" tell us more about current mores than about the experience of 1914–18.[5] These revisionist scholars are perhaps more concerned than most of their professional brethren to expunge emotion from their histories. In Brian Bond's *The Unquiet Western Front*, the word "emotion" and its derivatives appear five times in the book. Four of these uses are in relation to literary or historical commentary on the war: in all cases, emotion is assumed to affect historical comprehension negatively.[6] Revisionists tend to believe that post-war cultural productions have skewed, in damaging ways, historical understanding of the war as experienced in 1914–18.

Revisionist scholarship, therefore, censures identifications with war experience that are perceived as facile, based on misapprehensions, and rooted in the concerns of the present rather than the past. For these historians, family history provides no more "authentic" connection with the past than any other kind of experience forged in contemporary life rather than the crucible of war. Dan Todman, for example, suggests that within family research veterans' testimony is often "appropriated and used for an act of imaginative recreation" in ways that reinforce dominant cultural narratives of the war.[7] Against this view, Bart Ziino has argued that even if family histories are partly shaped by the culture of the present, they actively compose, rather than simply reflect, "complex and diverse national myths of war". The constant "making and remaking" of family memories therefore troubles "any terminal process in which the war is rendered a single-faceted symbol".[8]

Excellent recent publications by Alistair Thomson and Mike Roper bear out this point.[9] Both revisit a past which is simultaneously personal (in that knowledge of the war shaped the author's own life in complex ways), familial (in that this knowledge and shaping occurred in the context of family relationships) and historical (in that the personal and familial past is deployed in the cause of understanding a major historical event). They go beyond reference to family history as an aside that adds authority or emotional affect.[10] Instead, Thomson and Roper use their personal and familial relations to the past to open out new ways of thinking about the legacies of the war. To separate out these histories from the popular boom of family history research on World War I,[11] and to acknowledge their more ambitious claims as contributions to historical scholarship, it might be best to call these works "familial histories".

Familial histories claim authority over the past in complex ways. We all have an immediately recognised authority to speak about our own pasts: while part of family life is knowing that our parents and siblings might see things very differently, no one can reasonably dispute any claims *I* make about how *I* experienced those events. The fact of my self is integral to the status of the story I tell. The historian's authority to speak about the past as History, on the other hand, derives from professional status and training: immersion in the archives, proper use of the scholarly apparatus of footnotes, and so on.[12] Most often, the clear separation of the author from the topic of study is perceived as essential to the integrity of the History, and this is often achieved through an effacement of self.[13] In making his or her own self and family relations the topic of the History, even if its ultimate object is something wider (for example, troubling conventional understandings of early twentieth-century masculinity or reconsidering how we periodise the legacies of war), the historian implicitly claims both types of authority. However, because these are contradictory types of authority – one rests entirely on subjectivity, the other on a commitment to the pursuit of objectivity – there are also significant dangers that the project will both fail as History and lack the authenticity of a personal narrative that has not been edited and offered up for public consumption.

The risks and opportunities offered by histories that operate on the boundary of autobiography have been well-rehearsed.[14] What I am particularly interested in here, however, is the question of identification in histories that explore the effects of war through the historian's own family relationships: in terms of both how the historian's personal identification with the past might enhance the History produced, and how this perceived identification affects the reader's understanding of that History. While empathy is "an aspect of all historical work, no matter how seemingly impersonal", familial histories must surely invoke more immediate and somehow more *personal* emotions in the historian than other research topics?[15] Meanwhile, despite the fact that this is a controlled, careful and undoubtedly partial insight into the historian's own past, not a no-holds-barred confession or conventional autobiography, the reader cannot help but feel that s/he has privileged access to the historian's self, and therefore is expected to emotionally identify with the History in much the same way that readers typically respond to autobiographies.[16] In familial histories, emotion, subjectivity and identification are all bound up with each other, for both historian and reader.

Does this mean that emotion, subjectivity and identification are less present, or less complicated, when historians cannot claim this kind of familial association? Alternatively, are emotional identifications that arise from culture rather than family somehow less "authentic"? I will tell the story of my own relation to a post-war novel, Pat Barker's *Regeneration* (1991), as a way of reflecting on how emotional identifications to the histories (myths?) of World War I operate, and on what is lost when we attempt to divest History of emotion, relegate certain kinds of identification to the

sidelines, and dismiss them as somehow inauthentic. My own initial emotional identifications with the war came entirely from culture rather than history. I have no idea what my great-grandparents did in the Great War. I realised for the first time when writing this chapter that I do not even know their given names. This undoubtedly shows a remarkable lack of curiosity, but it also demonstrates the extent to which neither family nor this war has ever been a matter of personal history so far as I am concerned. This in itself should tell you something about my family. We are not much given to historifying in general, and not least ourselves. I suspect this lack of interest in the longer past is typical of a certain type of working-class migrant family, the kind that does not come from nor go to something called a "community"; that is spliced together by love or chance that somehow stuck, rather than ethnic or religious bonds; that never owned homes where letters, photographs and mementoes might be safely stored, and so where there are no material objects to which remembrance might affix itself for more than a generation or two;[17] and for whom the tally man is a more vivid presence in intergenerational memory than the ancestors who were our blood relatives.

I know something of my maternal grandparents' experiences in World War II (he an army cook who signed up underage, she escaping from domestic service, and the chair stuck under the door handle to fend off the nightly rattle from the man of the house, into the NAAFI)[18], but nothing of what my paternal grandparents did in those years. All I know of either set of great-grandparents is that my maternal great-grandfather was a miner, that he died young (but looking old) from an unspecified illness contracted in that noble pursuit, and that he evaded the shame of a pauper's grave at the last minute when a kind stranger offered to pay for the funeral (a story with the ring of myth). I did once ask my nan, born in 1924, what her dad did in the war; she didn't know, had never thought about it, and so I suspect he was not called up, most likely because he was in a reserved occupation. It's probable that my paternal great-grandfather, a Catholic from Belfast, did not see active service either. Twenty-three British or Irish men named "Loughran" are listed on memorials to the dead of World War I, and only five are from Irish regiments.[19] For all these actual and probable reasons, family stories of the war were absent from my childhood.

Of course, I learned about World War I from many sources. I vividly remember watching *Blackadder Goes Forth*, a comedy series that has drawn much ire from revisionist historians since it was first broadcast in late 1989.[20] I was 10 at the time and found it hilarious, so it's likely that I had imbibed enough general knowledge by that point to "get" the jokes about the war. The only war poem I remember reading at school is Charles Causley's "At the British War Cemetery, Bayeux" (I now know that Causley's father was killed in the war). I have no memory of being taught Wilfred Owen's poetry, though I do recall being very intrigued by a project my older sister did, on something to do with war poetry; but it is the drawing she made to accompany her coursework, the outline of a blackened tree against a sky of flames,

that has stayed with me (probably as much to do with the special pen she used to draw it, which I coveted with great passion, as with the words or images). But my first really emotional encounter with representations of the war, and one that almost certainly determined the path I later took as a historian, occurred when I read the first volume of Pat Barker's *Regeneration* trilogy at the age of 15 or 16.[21]

The starting point for Barker's *Regeneration* (1991) is the real-life encounter between the psychiatrist W.H.R. Rivers and the poet Siegfried Sassoon in 1917. Sassoon had embarked on a protest against the political conduct of the war, refusing an order to return to duty in the hope that the publicity attendant on a court-martial would draw attention to the suffering of the troops. The War Office decided to defuse this potentially combustible situation by having Sassoon declared unfit for service on grounds of "shell shock", and he was sent to Craiglockhart War Hospital for treatment.[22] Barker uses the episode to open out a consideration of the ethics and costs of war, the role of medicine and psychiatry in conflict, and the effects of psychological trauma on masculine ideals and experiences. Barker continued to explore these themes in the subsequent volumes, *The Eye in the Door* (1993) and *The Ghost Road* (1995), but in these novels she awarded W.H.R. Rivers and the fictional character of Billy Prior greater prominence than Sassoon, who became more or less a minor character.

Billy Prior is a working-class second lieutenant from the north of England whose defining feature is contradiction. In *Regeneration*, Barker highlights the dissonance between Prior's working-class background and his status as an officer. Prior is ambitious, but does not belong to the world he now inhabits; he is alive to the snobbery he encounters, and often scathing about the officer class. He is, according to his father, "neither fish nor fowl".[23] At the deepest level, though, Prior remains working-class. When we first meet Prior he is suffering from the hysterical symptom of mutism. Rivers tells us that officers rarely suffer from hysterical symptoms such as mutism, whereas such disorders are common among privates.[24] The form of Prior's breakdown – the symptom through which his psyche manifests his pain – fixes his class identity more firmly than his accent, the colour of his shirts, his nostalgia at the smell of steak frying, or any of the other myriad tiny markers of social class that litter the pages of *Regeneration*. Class, Barker seems to be saying, exists beneath the skin. In *The Eye in the Door*, the duality of Prior's character is emphasised even further. We now learn that he is bisexual, divided between his loyalty to the fighting men and the socialist-pacifism of his childhood friends, and prone to episodes of dissociation in which a childlike tendency to aggression, violence and fearlessness takes over.[25] Everything about him is divided.

My 16-year-old self identified with Billy Prior in ways quite beyond reason. I too felt myself neither fish nor fowl. As a scholarship girl attending a private school, my accent was a constant reminder of social difference, and at an age where difference is keenly felt.[26] Language cannot help but

reveal the speaker's loyalties, expressing solidarity with those who speak in the same way, and social distance from those who speak differently.[27] I did not want to change my accent, but nor did I want to draw attention to myself, and so I stopped speaking unless spoken to. I was not mute, but I knew about silence, about difficulties in articulation, about the inability to be heard. I knew, too, about the way that pain writes itself on the body. In these years, which were a long time ago now, I self-harmed because my emotions were simultaneously non-existent and overwhelming, in ways that could not be defined, and the pain and the blood calmed me down. I carried a razor blade into school every day because I did not feel safe unless I had the means to cut myself.

I can now put these feelings and actions into different frameworks of understanding. I know that psychogenic voice disorders – an extreme and unwilled manifestation of the incapacity to speak – are more common in women. I know that many physicians believe these disorders stem from feelings of "anxiety, anger, irritability, impatience, frustration and depression", and internal conflict about speaking these emotions.[28] I know that among children, selective mutism is higher in ethnic minorities and immigrant groups, and that this is often explained as a result of the lower social status of "home" languages or the sociocultural dissonance resulting from migration.[29] I know that self-harm is usually perceived as "motivated by a desire to regulate feelings of intolerable tensions, sadness or emotional numbness".[30] I know that now, my history might be viewed by others as part of wider History, in which an "epidemic" of self-harm became visible in the 1990s.[31]

In Pat Barker's story of traumatised men, I saw an echo of myself, my own pain, my own inability to exist within a body. This identification was ludicrous and overblown, in the way of teenage identifications. It does not diminish the serious depression of that girl, so far away in time now that I not only think of her as a different person but can finally give her the pity she deserves, to say that whatever haunted her, it was not quite on the level of a world war. In memory, *Regeneration* is forever part of the heady hormonal mix of the mid-1990s; the alluring aura of sexual danger, the evocations of Vaseline and spit and "turn and turn about",[32] appealed to me in much the same ways as early albums by the androgynous glam-pop band Suede. At the same time, the identification was real, deeply felt, and it *mattered*, in the way of teenage identifications. If it was romanticised, and based on an inadequate historical understanding, then it was no different to the ways in which many adults, including historians, find the stories they want to hear and to tell: in "the project of finding an identity through the processes of historical identification", we search for "the ideas, and times, and images that will give us, right now, solidity and meaning in time".[33] Insofar as it is a quest for understanding, History is also a quest for meaning. This meaning cannot be wholly self-created *and* properly historical – there is always a negotiation with the evidence – but it is a matter of interpretation, and so

it is also perspectival, and based on identifications of one kind or another (Figure 8.1).

The questions then become, what identifications are permissible, who makes that judgement, and why? Revisionist historians did not like the *Regeneration* trilogy's use of History. Dan Todman put forward a measured assessment that, alongside other literary novels of the 1990s, Barker's works "reflected the dominant myths of the culture that produced them", and thus "reinforced their power".[34] Brian Bond disdained their descriptions of "sordid sexual exploits which leave nothing to the imagination", and dismissed the climactic scene of the trilogy as "the authentic whingeing note of the 1990s transposed unconvincingly to 1918".[35] Ben Shephard incorporated an appraisal of Barker's novels into a sideswipe at all those he deemed "more concerned to recruit 'shellshock' to the gender wars and neo-Foucaultian seminars of the 1980s than to establish its on-the-ground historical reality".[36]

The ostensible point here is that History should not be co-opted to serve contemporary concerns. However, the scorn of some commentators for Barker, a female working-class novelist from the north of England, feels rather pointed.[37] It is likely that Brian Bond was particularly disturbed by Barker's graphic descriptions of homosex, as despite discussing the two novelists side-by-side, he had nothing to say about the equally graphic

Figure 8.1 My battered copy of *Regeneration*, with Suede's first album. Tracey Loughran.

descriptions of heterosex in Sebastian Faulks' *Birdsong* (1993). From my current vantage position, I think these critiques rather miss the point of historical novels, particularly how they bring marginalised voices to the fore.[38] Barker's interest in socialism, pacifism, homosex and working-class perspectives might reflect a distinctively late twentieth-century sensibility; at the same time, some people who lived through 1914–18 had these experiences and shared these beliefs, and their voices have not formed part of standard narratives of the war. There is room in History for several perspectives, and many would see part of the historian's task as to make audiences aware of the number of different stories that might be told. Indeed, this has been the mission of social history since at least the 1960s, and it remains an important and necessary aim.[39]

When I first read these critiques of *Regeneration*, I responded quite differently. I was a doctoral student at the time, keen to establish myself as a historian, and not quite sure what that meant or how to do it. Then, I took it for granted that these men were better historians than I was, and so I assumed the rightness of their argument about the cultural memory of the war. I was also in my early twenties, and so in many ways attempting to become a historian was part of my wider striving towards adulthood. I did not reject *Regeneration*, but I did dismiss my reasons for loving it; I laughed at the teenager I had been, her romanticism and idealism, and only half-fondly (she was still too close for pity). In doing so, I not only decried my own fierce identification with a text but, as I see it now, sided with the powerful against the powerless, and with a masculinised ideal of objectivity against a feminised History grounded in emotion. I contributed to a wider refusal to acknowledge certain ways of thinking and being. Perversely, while I did this in the name of a certain image of professionalism, that very desire for professional status and recognition was as blind, desperate and nakedly emotional as any feeling I ever attached to a novel. Although I had become a historian of "shell shock" because of an identification with a fictional character that unlocked some way of understanding the most private and inarticulable aspects of my self, I came to believe that this kind of identification was not acceptable to that self *as historian*.

This striving for a certain ideal of objectivity, which I believed others had attained while I had not, shaped how I responded to specific research problems encountered while writing my doctoral thesis. I had chosen to focus on medical texts on "shell shock", a resource that had not been systematically studied as a unified and coherent body of evidence, but I could not find what I had expected to find about social class or gender in these publications. In fact, they were remarkably silent on both these matters. I lacked the combination of intellectual flexibility, bloody-mindedness, imagination and experience that would have allowed me to plough on with my original intentions, and instead ended up writing something very different to the thesis I had originally envisaged. It was a thesis about doctors rather than patients, middle-class professionals rather than working-class men and women, and

ideas rather than experiences.[40] In the discipline of History, the monograph is still perceived as the mark of a serious scholar, and so I wanted (and was expected) to produce a book from the thesis. Over the next half-decade or so, this expectation nagged at me like an open sore. In my more self-flagellating moments, I felt that in accepting the limits of my sources, I had been colonised; in trying to sound like a historian, I had adopted an inauthentic voice, and consequently my History was nothing more than a pretence.

In the eight years between gaining my doctorate and submitting my book manuscript to the publisher, I did many things that eventually helped to slough off that deadened and crippling skin of "objectivity". Instead of trying to sound like a historian, I became one; and by that I mean someone who actively both pursued and transmitted a more nuanced understanding of the past through teaching as well as research. In the human relationship of lecturer-student I was able to articulate a clear and convincing vision of what was at stake in History in ways that had been impossible – had seemed merely pretentious – when I was writing for an audience I could not imagine. I engaged with a much wider range of historical writing than I had in the early years of my career, both in teaching historical theory modules and in formulating a new project on the history of women's psychological and bodily health in the late twentieth century. I discovered that contingency, openness and awareness of subjectivity were integral to feminist history, and that many of the truly paradigm-shifting works of History in recent decades had emerged out of this feminist historical consciousness.[41] I discovered new possibilities for practising History and ways of being a historian.

The most important realisation of this period was that emotion is not only an unavoidable, but a desirable part of History; that we should not write emotion out of our histories to make them plausible, but write it *in* to make them honest and meaningful. While for the most part this "writing in" is about how we deal with the emotions of those in the past, it also necessitates reflection on the historian's empathetic connection to the past and how this mediates the process of research.[42] Insofar as such realisations ever happen in one moment, mine came about through an unexpectedly emotional response to wartime lacunae in the minute books of a student medical society, which I have written about elsewhere.[43] To write about this incident, I had to reflect on my own historical practice, and use the first person to do so. This felt quite intensely vulnerable, but somehow this acknowledgement of self made it possible, at last, to finish my book on "shell shock". It was not, in many ways, the book I wanted to write; to do that, I would have had to start with different questions, and consult different sources; in short, to begin again from scratch. But it was the best book I could write, and I tried to make it humane and meaningful.

I don't know, and will never be able to tell, whether I achieved this. While the book was at proof stage, my younger brother died, after years of struggling with addiction and mental health problems, at the age of 30. A few weeks after his death I rewrote the acknowledgments to tell him how much

I loved him, and to tell all the members of my family what they meant to me; if I could put the words into print, stamp them with an ISBN, then maybe it would stave off, in the future, the guilt I had to live with now; that I had not done or said the things I should, that there might have been some misunderstanding about what, when all was said and done, we still were to each other. In the quite overwhelming craze of grief, the thought kept drumming through my head, hard and insistent as a blinding headache, that I had spent more than a decade writing (and actively not writing) a book about the psychological suffering of young men, but a book that would not help anyone to understand such pain or to ease it; a book that really said very little about these young men at all. This may not be true – I do not know what readers will take from the book – but I do know that I want to be certain, from now on, that any History I write counts, that it contributes to some kind of greater good, no matter how small (Figure 8.2).

What I have learned from grief and mourning takes me back, in some ways, to Billy Prior and to the 16-year-old girl who loved him; but it also takes me forward, to different forms of understanding that are personal but, because I am a historian, also inflect my sense of the constraints and possibilities of History. I do not believe that grief is of the same order as traumatic experience. Individual deaths are startling, unexpected, unbelievable, and in many

Figure 8.2 Holding my younger brother, not long after he was born. Tracey Loughran.

ways unassimilable, but bereavement is within the range of ordinary human experience, as inevitable as breathing and its eventual cessation. Grief is socially comprehended, if often clumsily handled in individual interactions. I would agree with Judith Herman that "trauma", on the other hand, involves certain violations of the social compact which are too terrible to utter aloud; for her, the essence of traumatic experience resides in what is silent because it cannot be spoken, admitted or made real through the transference from individual suffering to social acknowledgement.[44] The experience of grief, therefore, does not provide any special insight into trauma, but it has made me believe that there is something transhistorical about the experience of bereavement, and I now have a quite different (not necessarily truer) sense of just how awful it must have been to live in a society where so many of the young men had died before their parents; surely always "a complete reversal of the natural order".[45]

Grief does make it clearer what silence might mean, and how certain experiences exist beyond words. As historians, trapped within our sources, this is something we need to realise fully in order to comprehend traumatic pasts. Grief is felt in the body, and language is an inadequate approximation of this experience. Its raw matter remains unarticulated because it is a different order of knowledge to that which can be articulated. The body will hold its own past, and although I am scarred and tattooed I never truly knew what this meant until I grieved: the moments when I stop, and my mind empties but my hand shakes in front of me, and my will cannot force it to stop shaking or to move forwards, because my will is not there; well, I cannot put that into words in any way that matters, because it is all feeling. And the memories that suddenly catch me, and take me over: these I will not put into words, because I am a historian, and I know that to construct a narrative, to historicise, is also to fix a meaning that can only be partial, to lose through ossification that which can be kept safe if only you do not think or speak. Sometimes, people do not want to tell their stories of the past, or not the ones that matter, because they know as well as any poststructuralist historian that the "search for what is lost and gone" inevitably alters the nature of that experience and memory.[46]

There are different orders of knowledge: the intellectual versus the emotional, the articulable versus that which lives within the body; or, to put it in a more formal language, declarative versus procedural memory.[47] What does this mean for historical understanding? The central lesson, I think, is about what we can and cannot know, and what this means for how we treat those sources which do describe an experience. We live, Marilynne Robinson tells us, "on a little island of the articulable, which we tend to mistake for reality itself".[48] The testimony of trauma is not what is spoken but what cannot be rendered speakable.[49] If we look to recorded evidence for histories of trauma, then we look for something which cannot be found; if we assume that because it cannot be found, then it is not there, then we are using the wrong tools to look for the wrong thing. The testimony of trauma

is found in silences: in the silences of those millions of "ordinary" men who returned home and did not talk about the war, and in the silences in the accounts of those men who did. As Siegfried Sassoon wrote in 1936, at the end of the third volume of his fictionalised autobiography, after pouring out tens of thousands of words about his war experience: "it is only from the inmost silences of the heart that we know the world for what it is, and ourselves for what the world has made us".[50]

Let me be clear: we cannot assume that we know what silence means. Historians do not have a licence to fill in gaps in the historical record with whatever they like, and we should not assume a direct or easy equivalence between our own experiences and those of people in the past. But it is equally inexcusable to assume we can infer all that was felt from the small quantity of experience that could be articulated, and from the negligible amount of this articulated evidence that survives to speak to us. There must be some balance between empathy and empiricism. Those experiences that shape us – they also shape how we see the world, and how we understand the words of our ancestors. A loss at the heart of a family, the belongings of a son or brother kept close, the faces scoured out by grief – those things do not change. Imaginative and empathetic attempts to convey something of those losses, whether that is a novel like *Regeneration* or an exhibition like *World War I: Love and Sorrow* (Melbourne Museum, 2014–18), should be cherished as ways of nurturing an essential kind of historical understanding in those who have not suffered through the same times or in the same ways. The powerful emotional drive of familial histories, "journeying from the homes of one's own past to other experiences and landscapes of 'after'", is more properly historicised, but performs the same work.[51] In all of this, our aim should not be the balm of easy consolation, "the emollient lie that time heals, but the more astringent perception that, whether we heal or not, the wound was deep and real and ours".[52]

Notes

1 Lessing 2009, p. viii.
2 Ziino 2010, p. 137.
3 Throughout this chapter I use "History" to refer to the discipline of History ("the work of historians; history-writing": Steedman, 2001, p. 146), and "history" to refer to the individual and/or collective past.
4 Sheffield 2002, pp. 1–24.
5 Corrigan 2003.
6 Bond 2002, pp. 32, 36, 57 and 84.
7 2005 p. 215.
8 Ziino 2010, pp. 140–1.
9 Thomson 2013, Chapter 10; Roper 2018.
10 For example Winter 1979, pp. 20, 75, 243; Grogan 2014, pp. 8–9, 10, 137.
11 Wallis 2015.
12 Passmore 2017.
13 Sword 2012, pp. 39–40.

14 Passerini and Geppert, 2001; Vinen 2011.
15 Roper 2014, p. 174.
16 Marcus 1994, pp. 205, 267.
17 See Barrett 2008, p. xiii.
18 "NAAFI" is the acronym for the Navy, Army and Air Force Institutes, an organisation that ran recreational establishments and canteens on military bases.
19 I reached this number from an online search of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission records of the war dead: https://www.cwgc.org/find/find-war-dead.
20 Badsey 2002, p. 41.
21 Loughran 2011.
22 Roberts 2000, pp. 101–32.
23 Barker 1991, p. 57.
24 Barker accurately represents W.H.R. Rivers' views on the social distribution of symptoms. I have argued elsewhere that this analysis was not common in the wartime medical literature (Loughran 2008; Loughran 2016, pp. 129–36).
25 Barker 1993, pp. 237–42.
26 Loughran 2018.
27 Burke 1987, pp. 3–6.
28 Butcher, Elias and Raven 1993, pp. 6–11.
29 Cline and Baldwin, 1994, pp. 16–9.
30 Millard 2015, p. 1.
31 Chaney 2017, pp. 214–226.
32 Barker 1993, pp. 14, 17.
33 Steedman 2001, p. 77.
34 Todman 2005, p. 160.
35 Bond 2002, pp. 76–77.
36 Shephard 1996, p. 434.
37 Todman is again the exception here, noting that Barker was more or less brought up by her grandparents and therefore had "remarkably direct contact with a veteran of the war in a way perhaps more typical of the inter-war years", 2005, pp. 175–7.
38 Loughran 2017; de Groot 2010, pp. 139–70.
39 Thompson 1963.
40 I had not read many doctoral theses, and so I was unable to realise that despite these perceived deficiencies, it was actually a very good example of the form. It put forward a strong argument that made sense of apparently divergent aspects of medical discourse on "shell shock", challenged existing perspectives on contemporary approaches to the disorder, and therefore contributed to historical understanding.
41 Eley 2005, pp. 155–72.
42 Roper 2014.
43 Loughran 2012, pp. 115–7.
44 Herman 1996, pp. 4–6.
45 Jalland 2010, p. 8.
46 Steedman 2001, p. 77; Behar 1996, pp. 81–2.
47 Kirmayer 1996, pp. 176–8.
48 Robinson 2012, p. 21.
49 Suárez-Orozco and Robben 2000, p. 7; Miller and Tougaw pp. 11–4.
50 Sassoon 1983, p. 150.
51 Roper 2018.
52 Eaves 2014, p. 106.

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Part IV

World War I in the museum

Love and Sorrow at Museums Victoria

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9 After one hundred years

Exhibiting World War I

Deborah Tout-Smith

World War I: Love and Sorrow is an exhibition for our times. Mounted by Museums Victoria to mark the centenary of the outbreak of the conflict in 2014, *Love and Sorrow* focuses on personal lives, intimate experiences and emotional responses. It ends not with the Armistice, nor repatriation, but in the present day, where the meanings and impacts of the war continue to be felt. The exhibition deliberately works with some of the war's most hidden stories, the hardest to confront: facial wounds, "shellshock", tuberculosis, sexually transmitted diseases and "the missing", those whose bodies had probably disintegrated on the battlefield. The exhibition is built around different experiences and perspectives, following eight personal stories through the war and post-war years. At the entrance to the exhibition, visitors are drawn into circles of intimate relationships, invited to "join" one of eight communities. Each story unfolds as the visitor moves through the chronology of the exhibition. Visitors follow a selected story to experience something of the anxiety of not knowing, even when the larger outcomes of the war are so well known. The key characters themselves are seen to change as the war takes its toll.

Love and Sorrow moves far from the military and political framework of the war. Its tools are poignant objects, mementoes of lost lives and hopes; large-scale photographs of final farewells, rows of the dead and wounded veterans; fragments of words and ideas; and patriotic music of the times, drifting amongst the displays with increasing irony as the story of suffering builds. The intent is to maximise emotional engagement and provide an environment in which new ways of seeing become possible. The exhibition is deliberately *destabilizing*, to use Naja Zehfuss' term:[1] it challenges ideas about the duration of the war and its intensity inside personal lives. It also begins to uncover the processes by which we remake our understandings of the war over time – processes in which we ourselves are implicated today (Figure 9.1).

The exhibition is also theatrical space, particularly in the facial wounds section, where surgeon Harold Gillies stands at his operating table, patching up critical facial wounds at the Queen's Hospital, in Sidcup, Kent. In a nearby case false eyes, dental splints and a facial prosthetic leave the visitor's

Figure 9.1 Roberts, Demant and Hargreaves introductory cases, 2015. Photo: Benjamin Healley, Museums Victoria.

Figure 9.2 The "dreadful abyss into which our wounded have fallen" (*London Evening Standard*, 15 June 1918). Display about the treatment of facial wounds at Queen's Hospital at Sidcup, England. Australian artist Daryl Lindsay, left, documented the treatment of patients. Photo: Benjamin Healley, Museums Victoria.

imagination to complete the picture. In this imaginative space, more distress is conjured than can ever be shown. The theatre of pain becomes animated in the "Storyteller" mobile app, as the visitor watches a soldier, unable to be fully repaired, being fitted with a prosthetic face at Anna Coleman Ladd's Studio for Portrait Masks in Paris.[2] Four case studies illustrate marathons of personal suffering as repairs are undertaken and the wounded man is gradually "able to assert himself again", to use Robert Whalen's words.[3] As we see, though, this is never entirely possible. The facial wounds section of the exhibition collectively moves between body as object and body as a locus of the suffering self (Figure 9.2).

Central in the exhibition is a small hearth around which mementoes, photographs and toys are clustered, creating a setting for one person's home life, Albert Kemp. Kemp was a butcher living in Caulfield, Melbourne, with a young family when he left for war in October 1916 (Figure 9.3).

A postcard sent by his young daughter Ethel is among the most emotional moments of the exhibition.[4] Albert's correspondence with his family indicates this deep emotional connection was reciprocated, with one letter ending with 31 kisses (HT 13600); but amongst the last he sent, "The Burial of Two British Soldiers on the Battlefield" (MM 90943), was perhaps the most poignant (Figure 9.4). He writes:

> It is a very solemn postcard to send but it is quite true and I have done some of this work while under heavy fire of our enemies but neverless [sic] it touched your heart a bit but we feel quite pleased with ourselves when we can get to our dead comrades & boys to buried [sic] the dead and give them a decent grave.

It was a simple wish that Albert himself was denied. On 21 September 1917, he was killed by a bomb, and his body was never found. He is commemorated today on the Ypres (Menin Gate) Memorial, Belgium, which bears the names of more than 54,000 soldiers whose bodies were never recovered.[5]

It is Albert's death, and that of Aboriginal soldier William Murray, killed in the same battle a day later, that provide the location for the central theatre of the exhibition. Their lives ended at Glencorse Wood, east of Ypres, a site documented in the panorama by official German and Australian photographers between 1915 and 1917. As visitors stand in the panorama of the battlefield their shadows break open the panorama to reveal the next layer of time, the progression of the landscape's devastation. The final part of the panorama is the landscape as it appears today, now a lush forest. Faint sounds play in the space, whether of guns or the sound of the trees and birds that live in the forest today. Change – in terms of landscape, war and personal story – is placed at the heart of the exhibition (Figure 9.5).

The circle of the panorama is completed with the names of the 1771 soldiers killed in the vicinity in little over one week in 1917. The inclusion of an "honour roll" in Glencorse Wood is significant. Honour rolls are a central part of a public tradition of war memorialisation, keeping the dead safe

Figure 9.3 Annie Kemp with her children Ethel and George, circa 1916. Photo: Melba Studio, private collection.

Figure 9.4 Postcard, Private Albert Edward Kemp to his family, The Burial of Two British Soldiers on the Battlefield, 1917. Museums Victoria MM 90943.

Figure 9.5 Glencorse Wood interactive, 2015. Photo: Benjamin Healley, Museums Victoria.

from anonymity and preserving their memory as (often heroic) individuals. They seem to freeze time. They also bestow comradeship on the living, and between the living and the dead.[6] Typically these rolls maintain the order of the battlefield, teasing out the names from a single army or particular units. Marina Larsson has spoken of the challenges these rolls present:[7] for instance, what defines a war death, and when was the last death that could be attributed to World War I? These questions remain poignant for the Australian War Memorial's Roll of Honour, the official roll of Australia's war dead of 1914–18. In *Love and Sorrow* we use the medium to a further end: reuniting as humans all those who fought and died in one area, no matter for whom they fought. German, British and Australian soldiers are all named, in alphabetical order. As the label explains,

> Many still lie where they fell. The wood has grown over them.

The list of names adds gravity and power to the interactive, reminding visitors not only of the number who died, and the incalculable grief for so many families but deliberately drawing a veil over the bitter political divisions of war that betrayed even their basic humanity. The honour roll is thus re-imagined.[8]

The Glencorse Wood interactive was a direct response to visitor evaluation of the exhibition concept. Visitors welcomed the idea of a graphic and personal exhibition about World War I, but were keen to have some "experience" of being on a battlefield. Trench recreation has been a hallmark of many World War I displays including large-budget endeavours at the Imperial War Museum in London and the Auckland War Memorial Museum (now removed). They can only hint at the terrifying, suffocating, barbaric realities of the front lines. Reiko Tachibana uses the term "evoking the ruins – the recreation of immediacy".[9] *Love and Sorrow* tries to do this in a very modest way, placing the visitor into the mindset of another time and place and creating emotional connections. We are trying to convey the experience of war and war-time, to "grasp with words a world that lies outside the imagination", to use Rainer Emig's words.[10]

Love and Sorrow ends at the place visitors begin: the present. Each of the eight personal stories culminates in a short film of a descendant, speaking about the meaning the story still holds for them. Joan Wishart, for example, says of her father John Hargreaves, who enlisted as a teenager and served as a telegraph messenger, that

> shellshock … had a profound effect on him for the rest of his life. As an adult, and recognizing the effect of war on Dad, it gave me a horror of wars. And that is a feeling that's grown stronger over the years. And when I think of Dad, who (my uncle said) went off to the war full of adventure and so excited to be going overseas and the wreck he was when he came back – it's just incomprehensible why we continue to have wars.[11]

Opposite the films is the final scene of the exhibition: images from an Anzac Day dawn service in Box Hill, Melbourne, in 2014. The crowd is seen from behind, anonymous, looking towards a cenotaph, participating in a defined ritual of annual commemoration. The images are intended to draw the visitor back to the present, where World War I is remembered alongside later wars, where family, military, death, pain and pride all sit side-by-side for an hour or two, and where the grand narratives of war are revived. The ritual plays out as the sky lightens. The images at Box Hill are interspersed by two statements about war:

> A chain of graves of nearly 1,020,000 men encircles the earth
>
> Imperial War Graves Commission, 1925

> World War I was a tragedy on an almost unimaginable scale. One hundred years later its effects are still felt
>
> The cost of the war was paid over a lifetime by military personnel and their families. So it is for all wars
>
> We acknowledge those who have fought, suffered and died.
>
> (Deborah Tout-Smith, curator)

Love and Sorrow, with its dynamic, emotive, theatrical approach, is underpinned by the idea that experience, memory and history can be viewed from different perspectives and are never fixed in time. Whalen reminds us that

> The war meant different things to different people: men and women, proletarians and capitalists, soldiers and civilians, children and adults. The poets and artists who tried to express their feelings about the war were not necessarily representative of anyone but themselves. Moreover, some attitudes towards the war changed over time, though others remained fixed.[12]

Larsson focusses on post-war changes:

> the 1920s and 1930s were not simply an era during which the memories of the "fallen" were sustained, but an era productive of experiences of war-related death and grief, which saw newer memories compete with older memories of loss for public recognition.[13]

Anna Clark recently argued that "The fluidity of memory, the ways memory moves between the individual and the collective, and the memories that we make and absorb, as well as paper over and forget, are all vital pieces of the Anzac puzzle."[14] Such recognition of the workings of memory is critical to a mature representation of war. As *Love and Sorrow* tries to show, our contemporary representations of war are themselves part of a continuum of understanding.

Love and Sorrow works to connect its audience to multiple perspectives on the war across time, aware that we do not need to be concerned about imposing "a meaning that was not available to those involved".[15] The meanings attributed to the war are multiple and fluid and in a constant state of remaking. The passing of time can expose that remaking brutally, as the words of former prisoner-of-war Captain Donaldson in 1919 remind us: "I can assure you the Germans masses have had enough of war, and it is not likely they will want to try to conquer the world again."[16]

The end game will never come. From the moment the present is gone "the past" starts to be re-shaped and re-imagined, by innumerable people and from innumerable perspectives, both consciously and unconsciously. As Jonathan Vance explains, it is the "diversity of authorship that makes the memory of war so fascinating".[17] Some settling of the character of the past gradually happens, but it does not always settle in shapes that reasonably resemble the past. The needs and interests of later days and years can have unreasonable influence. Sometimes powerful or determined minorities have the loudest voices; sometimes cultural imperatives take precedence, such as the need for a unifying narrative about a just war, worthy sacrifice and the "blooding" of a newborn nation. Amongst all this, the "ruined veteran" has "little place in the myth of the war".[18] At the centenary of the war, however, that figure on the margins – and the families that supported him – has come back into focus.

Viewed in these terms, it is worth reflecting on the extent to which the exhibition uncovers how individuals and communities navigate the landscape of distress: how they build memory structures or narratives that make sense and are possible to live with. In the brief and fleeting format of the exhibition the agents of this process remain elusive, but the objects, documents and photographs that survive tell much. They show which moments are the most remembered, and how they are remembered on individual, familial and communal levels. They provide important clues about how and why some memories are bedded-down for the long term. Some symbolise particular moments when the world tips up and never looks the same again. Perhaps the most poignant example is a tiny pair of booties, one of which Ruby Roberts sent to her husband Frank at the front, with a little note purporting to be from their daughter Nancy:

> *Daddy dear this is my shoe / can you put it on dear daddy I wonder?… Mummy tells me its* [sic] *16 months since she saw you. Come home soon … Good luck to you daddy / Mummy and I want you home so badly / lots of love from your little daughter Nance.*

Frank never received the parcel. He was killed 10 days before the note was written, on 1 September 1918, during a fierce battle at Mont St Quentin.[19] The parcel was returned to Ruby, stamped "UNDELIVERABLE". Ruby kept the parcel all her life, with the reunited shoes. In old age she was still brought to tears when remembering Frank, and the life they never had together (Figure 9.6).

Figure 9.6 Nancy's bootie sent by her mother Ruby to father Frank, 1918, stamped "UNDELIVERABLE". Private collection, 2016. Photo: Rodney Start, Museums Victoria.

The tipping of the world is also seen in the telegram dated 18 October 1917, addressed to the Reverend White at Holy Advent Church in Malvern (HT 13566): "*Kindly inform wife Mrs. Kemp … Pte. A.E. / Kemp killed in action 21/9/17*". We cannot know how Annie felt receiving the telegram, but it was preserved by her, and then her daughter Ethel, until their long lives ended, together with mementoes that marked the progress of Albert's memorialisation and the establishment of Annie's life as a widow. These include his plaque and commemorative scroll, letters relating to his commemorative tree in the Caulfield Avenue of Honour, the establishment of her war pension and financial correspondence that documents her struggle to support her family.[20]

A third example in the exhibition speaks of a later tragedy when the scars of war were reopened as another conflict loomed. On 9 November 1938, a small pair of silver goblets – ceremonial Kiddush cups – sat on the mantelpiece of a flat in Schneidermuhl, (then in) Germany, next to a military medal for bravery. Here lived Mrs. Matilde (or Mathilde) Demant, widow of a rabbi, mother of two sons who served in the German army in World War I. And here, on the day of Kristallnacht, Nazis vandalised her flat, denting the goblets in the process. When she protested that her son had won a medal for Germany and had died for Germany, they destroyed his medal in a rage of spite and denial. The damaged goblets in the exhibition are shown next to an image of the lost medal, by request of her grandson.

Objects such as these remind us of the long journey that tragedy must take. They also make us think about how perspectives change as events and experiences unfold.

Perhaps most important for the *Love and Sorrow* exhibition is the shift of popular memory away from the brutality of war. Of all that was remembered from and about the war, why did brutality become so invisible, particularly as the last of the physically- and mentally-savaged veterans passed from view? Vance reminds us that "People did not want their loved ones to be identified as anonymous victims sacrificed in a pointless slaughter."[21] He reflects on the purposelessness of the veteran reliving continually

> the worst day of his life in the trenches at Sanctuary Wood, or for the war widow to torture herself with the knowledge that her husband died in agony after an attack that should never have gone ahead in the first place. Such thoughts only kept the sores of war festering.

Better, instead, for the veteran to remember the night in the estaminet before the attack, and for the widow to believe that her husband died with a smile on his face.[22] From this perspective, it might be argued that people bed down those memories and accept those perspectives, *that they can live with*, and let the more painful ones slide away. Sometimes they are edited into invisibility. The ability to relinquish *the idea* of pain can be central to recovery.

Take the example of John Hargreaves' diary. Displayed one pair of pages at a time through the life of the exhibition to preserve the diary, it offers a progressive account of increasingly dangerous circumstances. John records gas "scares", mud "fights" and "shrapnel for dinner". He "can hear big guns booming, see star shells at night". The diary ends abruptly on 17 May 1916, when he was serving as a runner delivering messages in the trenches. This was only weeks before the Battle of Pozières, where he "displayed great bravery continuously delivering messages to various parts of our front frequently passing through severe artillery barrages", as his recommendation for a Distinguished Conduct Medal states. Then, on 7 September 1916, John was buried alive by a shell explosion and subsequently fell into a "mental stupor". His body was completely paralysed. What can we make of the absence of the critical final weeks before his "shellshock" from the diary? Was John unable to continue to write as conditions in the trenches worsened? Some pages are missing from the diary. Did he or a concerned relative remove them? Perhaps there was another volume that was lost when his possessions were transferred between many hands during his treatment and return to Australia, still catatonic. What we do know is that the penultimate moments of his war story in his own words are not preserved. This absence changes the tenor of his story, silencing its worst terrors. His daughter is now the only witness, and then only to her father's outward life.

When we see the paintings John Hargreaves made during his recovery, showing an increasing technical skill and an ability to move focus from fellow soldiers in their hospital blues to gentle Australian landscapes, we can almost imagine a calming process as he navigates towards ways of seeing, remembering and living that are possible to endure.

Elsewhere in *Love and Sorrow* we see others "editing" or consciously shaping their memories and understandings of the war. Garry Roberts' scrapbooks – at least 28 of them[23] focussing on his lost son Frank – show a very deliberate pattern of construction. He builds Frank into an "emblematic" digger,[24] representing the bonds of love and comradeship, an idea which becomes so real in the world that a memorial for Mont St Quentin, where Frank was killed, was sculpted in Frank's likeness by Garry's friend Charles Web Gilbert, with Frank as a conquering hero slaying a Prussian eagle. The use of Frank was Gilbert's idea, with Garry in full agreement.[25] Garry worried about Frank's manner of death and compiled accounts of his final moments from fellow soldiers, assuming control of the (idea of the) event through knowledge. The perfectly formed, frozen shape of Frank cast a shadow over his widow's future marriage, too, where (as his granddaughter says) her second husband "could never live up to Frank, and I used to feel a bit sorry for my grandpa, because he was a good man too …"[26] (Figure 9.7).

These examples show how participants could work to edit their memories and construct more comforting narratives with which they could live. Today's shift to the representation of World War I as a nadir of pain and

Figure 9.7 Roberts scrapbook case, 2015. Photo: Rodney Start, Museums Victoria.

distress arguably says more about ourselves a century later, temporally and physically disconnected from the war and its participants, than about those times.

Investigating individual or personal perspectives about World War I also reveals alternative or subversive thinking about the war. As Vance observes, "Individuals who do not subscribe to the dominant memory, who refuse to forget or remember what it prescribes, become subversives. Their private memories are driven underground, to exist as a potentially threatening undercurrent to the social order."[27] In the words of one visitor, "I saw there was [sic] conflicting interests in society."[28] In *Love and Sorrow* each personal story has an element of dissonance. One young man whose jaw is blown away does not endure heroically, but abuses his wife and later drowns, perhaps inebriated, on Anzac Day.[29] A mother does not quietly mourn her lost son but falls to pieces entirely, is institutionalised and later dies, possibly by suicide.[30] A wounded Aboriginal veteran does not accept that he is ineligible for a pension and writes passionate letters all the way up to former Prime Minister Billy Hughes, by then Minister for Health and Repatriation.[31] A veteran with tuberculosis from the trenches sleeps in a tent in his back yard to avoid giving it to his family, but all four of his sons fall victim.[32] Each one of these people, by deliberate or unintended action, unsettles dominant, obvious war narratives.

In the exhibition context, adjacency highlights this unsettlement at key moments. For example, in the conscription debate section, two texts are placed side by side:

> Any right-minded woman would rather be the mother or sister of a dead hero than a living shirker.
>
> "Sister of Soldiers", *Brisbane Courier*, 12 July 1916

> It was not the thought of his being killed that was a nightmare to me. That was terrible; but more terrible still was the thought of his killing another dear boy like himself, a boy whose mother loved him as passionately as I loved mine.
>
> "Sorrowing Mother", Australian Women's Peace Army Conscription Manifesto, 5 October 1916

The inclusion of non-Allied content in the exhibition also deliberately unsettles the narrative. The centenary of the war internationally has been remarkable for its lack of engagement between the former foes. It may be harder than we acknowledge, after all, for us to let go of the idea of victory and defeat. So many of the histories we write and exhibitions we curate still reflect the perspectives of the victor. Once the substance of victory dissolves away, and the political context becomes more distant, the personal can emerge into sharper focus and the bare bones of suffering become more visible.[33]

The story of the German Demant brothers, introduced above, particularly illustrates this tendency. Salo Demant was a professional soldier whose

membership of the musical troupe "The Happy Hamburgers" belied the bitter challenges he faced during nearly four years of war. He was eventually killed in the Spring Offensive in March 1918. His shocked family placed a simple notice in the paper: "*Im tiefsten Schmerz*" (In deepest pain). In the same month his brother Moritz Demant, who dreamed of becoming a doctor, was drafted into the infantry, becoming a French translator for the German army. He survived the war, but in the Demant story, we see the full force of the period's tragedies played out. Their sisters Ida and Ella both died of influenza. With the rise of Nazism their mother Mathilde was attacked in her flat during Kristallnacht and fled to England to join Moritz and his family in exile. Two more sisters died in concentration camps. The story of war is the heavy chain that binds them all.

Evaluation

By creating exhibitions, we as curators hope to do more than reflect the world back on itself, share knowledge and perspectives, or provide entertainment. We hope to make a difference in the lives of visitors, to generate new ideas and beliefs and support new ways of thinking, seeing and feeling. We are particularly challenged by the extent to which we can reflect the dynamic, changing, contradictory nature of things.

We know that the public considers exhibitions relevant to understanding war.[34] We also know that over one million people visited the exhibition in its first three years.[35] Evaluation of *Love and Sorrow* helps us to identify if and why the exhibition works as intended. The exhibition has been evaluated several times by Museums Victoria's Audience Insights team, using visitor observations, interviews and online evaluation between October 2014 and March 2017. Notably, some of the evaluations focussed on the emotional impacts of the exhibition. In addition, I undertook an assessment of 3360 visitor comments cards, left in the reflective space at the end of the exhibition, in 2015. These evaluations have been discussed in detail elsewhere.[36]

The evaluations show us that the exhibition worked largely as intended. Visitor focus on the cost of war, and in particular its brutality, is of particular note.[37] Summative evaluation[38] found that the main message received from the exhibition relates to the effects of war: pain, suffering, "lives lost, human cost, impact on individual and families and hardship". The second most prevalent message was that "war is a terrible thing that effects [sic] everyone; avoid wars; there are no winners".[39] Importantly, 97% of visitors were "made to think of the impact of the WWI on Australian society"; most report a high level of learning and new perspectives. Related to this, observation studies found visitors interested above all in stories of wounding and treatment – about which they (arguably) knew least.[40] Importantly, the inclusion of deep personal stories and connections to visitors' own family stories was very helpful for engendering emotional connections; and emotional connections in turn seem to help visitors become receptive to new ideas and ways of thinking.

Visitors whose responses express gratitude to service people, and note their heroic qualities, are most clearly represented in the comments cards sample, where they are proportionately over-represented in relation to overall visitor responses (45%). This is likely due to way that visitor comment areas operate: they are familiar commemorative landscapes, where conventional phrases and words such as "Lest we forget" and "sacrifice" (used by 34% of the writers sampled) seem appropriate cultural shortcuts, particularly as visitors hasten at the end of the exhibition experience.[41] However tempting, we cannot read too much into the absence of words, nor assume they reflect an absence of thoughts. Romain Fathi also reminds us that "Lest we forget" may express anxiety about the forgetting of war,[42] appropriate to an exhibition that is very clearly focussed on remembering, re-thinking and representing so much that was forgotten or concealed.

Further research was undertaken in 2017 to explore the role of emotions in the museum experience using visitor drawings combined with interviews. It particularly interrogated the function of emotion as a mechanism for change, using a framework of non-representational theory (expressing that which can be difficult to articulate, such as emotional responses) used in cultural geography and allied disciplines.[43] Each participant strongly identified with at least one of the eight key characters in the exhibition. They tended to meld these narratives with their own personal histories and experienced "empathic unsettlement" (Witcomb, 2013) in response to traumatic content. They found specific content and objects particularly emotionally-charged, including the Roberts baby bootie. Some visitors noticed changes in the key characters, which in turn seemed to mirror their own shifts of thinking as they witnessed fate unfold. For instance, "after [Bill Kearsey] came back, he was a different person physically … a lot of these people had to completely reinvent themselves … They had to learn to be someone different or having a different mind" (Participant 1). Later the same visitor noted the sense that "anything can happen and things are not fixed". Another visitor noted that when soldiers return home "their whole life has changed and no one sees them the same again" (Participant 3).

Broadly, participants felt that the exhibition had helped them to appreciate the mental, physical and social costs of war and its impact on families. Overwhelmingly, they expressed negative attitudes to war, although these were not tested against their attitudes prior to visiting the exhibition.

Fundamentally, this final evaluation confirmed the broad findings of previous work: that the exhibition impacted many visitors deeply, and changed their minds about war and its impacts.

Postscript

This paper was written and revised during the life of the *Love and Sorrow* exhibition. The exhibition closed at 11 am on 11 November 2018, at a poignant event attended by many of the families who contributed stories.

The Centenary has caused museums to re-examine the ways we document war through material culture and archives. We have reflected on the mechanisms by which we have acquired collections and stories, and the intentions and perceptions they champion. We have identified absences and biases, guided by significant academic scholarship in Australia and beyond over the past three decades. We have endeavoured to document and investigate the material we hold, to acquire further collections which more accurately reflect the diversity and depth of experience, and to make those collections accessible online and through exhibition.

In this phase of active re-imagining, we have considered ways we can represent the past with more honesty. *Love and Sorrow* showed the graphic effects of war on the human body; the experience of wounding and death; waiting and longing; loss and endurance. Personal experiences of war, and the memory of war in families, assumed primacy in the narrative of war.

Evaluation of *Love and Sorrow* has shown that emotional engagement, prompted by the display of objects rich with poignancy, original voices and photographs, set within a narrative structure, is deeply affective. It can, and does, change minds about war and conflict, and not only that terrible war now 100 years in the past. This knowledge will impact the way future exhibitions are imagined, researched and realised.

In *Love and Sorrow* we showed how war plays out at a personal level. It seeps into thoughts, words, actions, things, spreading terror and dread. Its impacts are inescapable, life-long and inter-generational. We cannot break our gaze, and we cannot stop trying to make sense of what we see.

One hundred years after the Armistice was signed, *Love and Sorrow* also reminds us that our understandings of World War I will never stop changing. They change in response to personal, community and societal needs; they can be contradictory and mystifying, benign and brutal. We are reminded, too, that each person's experience of the war differed, and that minds were changed as fates took their course. Conscious and unconscious strategies for remembering and forgetting enabled life to go on.

There never has been a single story of World War I. Drawing visitors into its multiple potentialities, the diversity of its outcomes and the duration of its effects promises a greater understanding of the ways in which we continue to remake the meanings of war in the present and for ourselves.

Notes

1 Zehfuss 2007, p. 145.
2 The "Storyteller" app, which visitors could download or use on borrowed devices, provided additional content on each character such as readings of letters, photographs and moving footage. Unfortunately, technical issues hampered its use, particularly in relation to beacons that were intended to progressively release content as the visitor moved through the space. It was withdrawn from general use part-way through the life of the exhibition.
3 Whalen 1984, p. 54.

4 Refer chapter by Andrea Witcomb in this volume for further detail on Ethel's postcard.
5 Available at: http://www.cwgc.org/find-a-cemetery/cemetery/91800/YPRES%20(MENIN%20GATE)%20MEMORIAL [Accessed: 21 December 2019].
6 Jonathan Vance calls this "the cult of the service roll" (1997, pp. 116 and 135).
7 Larsson 2009, p. 264.
8 At the end of the exhibition, an Associated Stock & Station Agents honour roll (HT 33129) draws visitors back to a more familiar form; but it too is taken further, with an adjacent panel relating stories of some named on the roll, and an invitation for visitors to contribute more personal stories, building a scaffold of humanity around the names.

Three months after *Love and Sorrow* opened, the "Ring of Memory" memorial was inaugurated in northern France, naming in alphabetical order almost 580,000 killed, again with no distinction of army or rank.
9 Tachibana 1998, p. 27. She uses the term (in Chapter 2) in another context: thinking about post-World War II writers who "move back and forth between physical ruins and their larger or symbolic implications."
10 Rainer Emig, Augen/Zeugen: Kriegserlebnis, Bild, Metapher, Legende. In: Schneider, T. F. *Kriegserlebnis und Legendenbildung: Das Bild des 'modernen' Krieges in Literatur, Theater, Photographie und Film*, vol. I (Osnabruck: Universitatsverlag Rasch 1999), p. 19. Cited in Zehfuss 2007, p. 156.
11 Joan Wishart, interview with Marina Larsson and Deborah Tout-Smith, Castlemaine, 21 May 2014.
12 Whalen 1984, p. 22.
13 Larsson 2009, p. 264.
14 Clark 2017.
15 Zehfuss 2007, p. 146.
16 Captain Donaldson, on his return to Australia in 1919. Quoted in Home Again, *The Sun* (Sydney), 25 February 1919, p. 5 (final extra). Available at: http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article222639508 [Accessed: 14 September 2017].
17 Vance 1997, p. 7.
18 Ibid, p. 53.
19 Documented by Peter Stanley in *Men of Mont St Quentin* (2009).
20 Albert Edward Kemp Mourning Collection, Museums Victoria. A selection of these are displayed, changed over for conservation reasons during the life of the exhibition.
21 In this case Vance is referring to public responses to semi-fictionalised accounts of the war (1997, p. 191).
22 Ibid, p. 251.
23 The number is unclear in part because Garry Roberts compiled numerous other scrapbooks, many documenting the earlier life of his family or containing reams of newspapers; and other volumes may exist. In 2017 Frank's granddaughter Jilba found another scrapbook, previously unknown to the State Library of Victoria, which holds the scrapbooks.
24 As noted by Stanley 2009, p. 256.
25 Stanley, ibid, pp. 166–7. The sculpture symbolized a military engagement itself smoothed into a palatable shape by commentators. Neither would last. The sculpture was melted down by the returning Germans during another war; and the Mont St Quentin war narrative has itself been given a more nuanced shape at the hands of historians such as Stanley.
26 Jilba Georgalis, interview with Deborah Tout-Smith, Melbourne, 2 June 2014.
27 Vance 1997, p. 9.
28 Preliminary notes (incorporating unidentified visitor comments) for evaluation report, Meehan, March 2017.

29 Gordon John Wallace, service #6108.
30 Eliza Amery.
31 Herbert Murray, letter to W. M. Hughes, 6 June 1935. National Archives of Australia series B73, barcode 13112166.
32 Patrick Rouhan, service # 6442 / 1010.
33 If We Had Not Won the War. *The Telegraph* (Brisbane), 27 May 1919, p. 4 (second edition). Available at: http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article176079659 [Accessed: 5 September 2017].
34 Similarly, Zehfuss notes the relevance of books to understandings of war (2007, p. 145)
35 A total of 1,022,900 visitors, calculated by Carolyn Meehan, Manager, Audience Insights, Communication & Partnerships, Museums Victoria, 18 October 2017.
36 Tout-Smith 2018.
37 Interestingly, in all of the evaluations conducted, no visitor suggested we ought not to have depicted the brutality and cost of the war.
38 Online survey, October 2014–January 2015, 191 respondents.
39 Borisova and Meehan 2015.
40 Marsh and Meehan 2015. A more recent study confirmed the focus on this topic, and that visitors learned much from it: Meehan, 2017.
41 Roughly 18% of "Lest we Forget" comments are qualified by more personal or reflective statements, suggesting either a deeper engagement or a greater willingness to express personal responses – unfortunately not explored with the writers themselves.
42 Fathi 2019, p. 165.
43 Project was funded under the McCoy scheme to support cooperative research between the University of Melbourne and Museums Victoria. Coordinating Investigators were Dr Rachel Hughes & Deborah Tout-Smith; Dr Candice Boyd was Partner Investigator. See Boyd 2017.

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10 "Sticky" objects, faces and voices in the museum

Love and Sorrow's use of affective interpretation strategies to challenge masculinist commemorations of World War I

Andrea Witcomb

Introduction

Writing in 1994, at a time when social history was well embedded in history museums, Edith P. Mayo argued that it would

> Not [be] until the theories and methodologies by which we research, write, and understand history are defined by women as well as by men; not until the constructions by which history is created and written becomes angles of vision held by women and not by men; not until the questions we ask of history are defined also by women; and not until the breakdown of historical periods reflects the patterns of women's lives and women's consciousness [that] will we see meaningful women's history in museums.[1]

In this chapter I will argue that although *Love and Sorrow* is not a women's history exhibition, its focus on the impact of World War I on families does enable a feminist history to emerge, creating a platform from which the usual masculinist perspectives on the history of World War I can be challenged. This is because gender is a central category from which the experience of war is apprehended, enabling a focus on relations between family members as well as relations between the individual and the state. As Jill Matthews put it,

> feminist history is that which seeks to change the very nature of traditional history by incorporating gender into all historical analysis and understanding. And the purpose of that change is political: to challenge the practices of the historical discipline that have belittled and oppressed women, and to create practices that allow women autonomy and space for self-definition.[2]

In the case of *Love and Sorrow*, the aim is not simply to “allow autonomy and space for self-definition” for women, though that does occur. The aim is also to create a space in which the emotional impact of war on family and through the family, wider society, is allowed to emerge, providing a platform from which to offer an implicit critique of Australia’s masculinist mythology around World War I, the Anzac Legend. This implied critique is in part made possible because, as Ann D. Gordon, Mari Jo Buhle and Nancy Shrom Dye explained as early as 1976: “…the writing of women into history necessarily involves redefining and enlarging traditional notions of historical significance, to encompass personal, subjective experience as well as public and political activities.”[3]

The importance of personal stories in challenging traditional historiographies and enlarging the ways in which human experience is documented and interpreted is clear if we look at the difference between the narratives about World War I produced through the frame of the Anzac Legend, critiqued by many historians for its inherently masculinist bias and those by social historians alert to the possibilities inherent in documenting the lives of individual people. As a founding narrative of the Australian nation, the Anzac Legend has privileged a form of commemoration that heroicises the sacrifice of young men for their nation by focusing on their bravery, courage and mateship under the crucible of war, turning successive generations of Australian soldiers into martyrs for the greater cause of the nation. Critics have argued that the power of this emotional language has made it difficult to investigate questions about atrocity, whether or not Australia should have been involved in the war in the first place, the association between war and nation-making,[4] a history of pacifism in response to the experiences of World War I[5] as well as a lack of understanding that many Australians in the immediate aftermath of the war felt alienated by forms of commemoration that focused on the dead but did nothing for the living.[6] Of interest is the fact that the pacifist strain of thought which re-emerged during the Vietnam War in particular, saw extensive criticism of the Anzac legend around the masculinity of its narrative, seeing this as leading to an erasure of the act of killing, as well as the war’s racist and imperial foundations. This focus on the men who died had, by the 1980s and 1990s, produced a narrative in which the figure of the Anzac became, as Donaldson and Lake put it, a “tragic hero”,[7] one who died too young, still innocent of the ways of the world – and one with whom it was all too easy for Australia’s youth to empathise. Historians such as Joy Damousi argued that this new narrative generated both sentimentality and nostalgia amongst the young for their forebears. Placing these particular forms of emotion at the heart of commemoration, she argued, enables the erasure of any need to understand either the history of the events themselves or of their commemoration. As she put it “[a] critical examination of the costs and consequences of war, its horror and waste, the mistakes and massacres is resisted and repressed”.[8]

In contrast to this, recent work by a number of social historians has put the experiences of individual people at the heart of the account of the experience

of war and its impacts on society. An important development in this work has been a focus on the impact of the war on families and Australian society more generally, leading inevitably to a history of people's emotional experiences as part of the impact of the war on the home front. Key amongst these works has been the work of Marina Larsson with her book *Shattered Anzacs: Living with the Scars of War*, which explores the emotional lives of the families who had to welcome back thousands of disabled soldiers, exploring the travails of both the men themselves and the impact that had on their families,[9] and that of Tanja Luckins who, in her book *The Gates of Memory: Australian People's Memories of Loss and the Great War*, puts women back into the Anzac story, revealing their role in public and private commemoration as well as exploring the range of experiences and emotions they went through on learning of the loss of their loved ones.[10] In centring their accounts of the impact of the war on the home front through attention to questions of gender, new accounts of the history of World War I were made possible, accounts which focus on a different range of emotions and their causes, on the lives of families broken apart by the experience of the war, as well as on the complex responses by social institutions who did not always know how to help those who were suffering. It is a history that shifts the focus from commemorating the heroes who died to remembering those who were left and had to live with the consequences of the decision to go to war in the first place.

These books also represent a new use of emotion for history writing. Whereas critics of the Anzac Legend are wary of the ways in which emotional language has been used to produce sentimental and nostalgic responses to the history of the war, effectively pre-empting any possibility of a more critical understanding of either the war or its impact on the home front, these new histories privilege emotional insight as a resource for critique. In looking to the interior lives of people, they are, I suggest, inheriting the mantle of feminist history writing and, in the process, challenging how we understand the past. In this chapter, I am concerned with how this new form of history writing and the questions it opens up are translated into an exhibition and given material form. How is the visitor encouraged not to fall back on an easy, sentimental commemoration of World War I but is, instead, encouraged to reflect on the extensive social impact of the war on those who did not lose their lives but were, nevertheless, touched by death?

The answer to this question requires us to look in some detail at the interpretation strategy that was used to structure the visitor experience in *Love and Sorrow*. To begin with, *Love and Sorrow* has none of the traditional language associated with the commemoration of the Anzacs. Blood, sacrifice, courage, mateship and bravery are neither concepts nor words that can be found anywhere within the exhibition. There are no examples of ordinary men and women as heroes, though individuals are the focus of its narrative structure as are the emotions that they experience. The real key though, is not at the level of language, but at the level of narrative structure – how the stories are told. For it is this structure that enables emotions to be put to work in the creation of a more critical interpretation of the past.

My argument is that the curatorial process through which personal and subjective experiences are communicated in *Love and Sorrow* relies on four very specific forms of affective interpretation practices, which connect with each other to create the weave that holds this exhibition together. The first is a focus on eight individual biographies through an analysis of two of their emotions as they develop in response to the experience of war – love and sorrow. In tracing and giving body to these two emotions, curator Deborah Tout-Smith has used them to provide not only a heart-wrenching story as to what happened to each individual but to draw in their families as well. Thus, while ostensibly there are only two women amongst the eight individuals whose stories provide the narrative backbone to this exhibition, almost every story brings into view not only the men who went away but their wives, children, mothers and fathers. The focus on their relationships with other members of their families makes women a very strong focus of the exhibition as well as enabling an exploration of the impact of the war on the family who is left behind and then either has to deal with grief at the news of the loss of their loved ones or, alternatively, has to deal with traumatised men and women upon their return, often without much help from the State. This focus on the family and the ways in which its emotional hearth is broken by the experience of war is then used to provide a window into the effects of the war on Australian society more generally, a strategy that is given material form by the representation of a fireplace at the centre of the exhibition, signifying the hearth and home of all Australians.

The second strategy is the use of faces and voices to build a form of mimetic forms of communication to convey the strength of these emotions and their impact on the fabric of Australian families and by extension, Australian society both then and now. The third is the anchoring of these voices and faces to particularly powerful objects that become, in Sarah Ahmed's terminology, "sticky" with affect.[11] The fourth is to use a descendant of the original eight characters whose stories we follow, to "witness" their forebears' love and sorrow while holding on to the "sticky" object that embodies that love and sorrow. In doing so they generate their own form of mimetic communication, enabling visitors to become witnesses as well.

As we shall see, the effect of these different strategies and their cumulative impact is to bring the power of mimetic communication into the present, transferring the power of the emotions experienced by the families whose stories we follow in the exhibition to the visitors to this exhibition, who take on the role of witnesses, helping to spread the testimony embodied in the faces, voices and objects they have just experienced outwards, beyond the walls of the exhibition. As I will show, these strategies of interpretation are used to structure the narrative of the exhibition, enabling the building of an affective experience in which emotions are the vehicle for building a more critical understanding of the legacies of events such as war and indeed the ways in which we commemorate them.

Before we focus on some of the individual stories we need to understand both mimetic communication and the notion of a "sticky" object. In an essay on mimetic communication, Anna Gibbs describes mimesis as a form of communication practice that embodies relations between people, rather than the communication of information. For Gibbs, mimetic communication involves "corporeally based forms of imitation, both voluntary and involuntary" which, as they spread from body to body, result in a "'synchrony of facial expressions, vocalisations, postures and movements with those of another person', producing a tendency for those involved 'to converge emotionally'".[12] These transfers occur primarily through visual contact with people's faces and by hearing their voices.

Thus, for example, if someone smiles it is very hard not to smile back, offering a recognition of their smile but also as a result of feeling the joy that original smile gave us. Smiling back provides an intensification of that affect. It is something that happens automatically, a visceral response from one body to the other. The same is the case with voices whose tonal qualities – loud/quiet, harsh/soft, fast/slow or rising/falling can likewise express and communicate affective states such as anger, happiness, joy, pleasure, disdain or fear. For Tomkins, whose work on affect Gibbs is following here,

> affects are not private obscure intestinal responses but facial responses that communicate and motivate at once publicly outward to the other and backward and inward to the one who smiles or cries or frowns or sneers or otherwise expresses his affects.[13]

The ability of these affects to either draw people in or push them away has the effect of building emotional landscapes that can build as well as break social bonds.[14]

Within *Love and Sorrow*, this form of communication is built up through a particular assemblage of images of faces and voices that produces a narrative sequence in which time is at once chronological, in that we follow the lives of particular people, but is also flat in that the temporal distance between those who experienced the events that are the subject of the discussion, and their descendants and visitors to the exhibition, is broken down. We are encouraged to feel the same emotions they did via this process of mimesis.

The work of these images and voices is also aided by key objects which, in their recurrence throughout the exhibition, build up a "sticky" object. These are objects that can accrue layers of meaning that become attached to them and which leave a residue on those that come into contact with them. This residue is what Ahmed describes as affect. For her, affect "is what sticks, or what sustains or preserves the connection between ideas, values and objects".[15] *Love and Sorrow* is an exhibition that builds a sticky residue by combining objects, faces and voices in ways that speak powerfully to the twin emotions of love and sorrow and which, in so doing, reframe

established narratives about World War I, making it impossible to sentimentalise something that caused such pain and ongoing suffering.

The third element whose effect we need to understand in order to see how the various strategies are woven together is that of testimony. We are most familiar with the idea of testimony in relation to the Holocaust and it is from this context that I wish to extrapolate a few points to show the way in which I understand testimony to work in *Love and Sorrow*. As Nanette Auerhahn and Dori Laub have argued in relation to their experiences in collecting testimony of the Shoah, the giving of testimony is not a simple process and involves much more that simply giving evidence. To begin with, there is the desire to overcome the absence of the dead by documenting their past presence in what becomes the creation of a historical document as well as a memorial. Secondly, the audience is multifaceted and includes the dead, other survivors, the perpetrators and the bystanders as well as present-day audiences. This means that as devices that address the dead, testimonies are intended to "reanimate, anthropomorphise, or make present the addressee".[16] But as devices that address the perpetrator, the bystander and their descendants, they are intended to do much more than deny them victory. Testimonies are also intended to constitute the testifier as a whole person again by insisting on a dialogue with those who denied them their humanity. The rhetorical presence of the listener creates the hope of reconstituting the victim's sense of self as human again and thus overcome the trauma of losing their humanity by no longer being alone. Testimonies, thus, are predicated on the possibility of empathic listening. Given that the experience of the Holocaust for Jewish people represents the loss of faith in the possibility of empathy, the attempt is courageous and potentially dangerous, carrying the risk of not reaching the intended audience in the desired manner and thus of reliving the initial trauma over and over again.[17]

The stakes are not as high in the context of the experiences that *Love and Sorrow* is documenting and interpreting. Nevertheless, there is a sense in which experiences that have not been part of the story of World War I in the past are given shape and body by the ways in which those who lived through them are allowed to speak in the first-person narrative voice through their "sticky" objects. In that sense, the dead are reanimated in *Love and Sorrow* as well as memorialised. Moreover, those who are reanimated include not only those who went to the front and lost their lives, but those who came back, and the families who stayed behind and whose lives were changed forever. That their reanimation occurs alongside the use of a photograph that enables a face to face, eye to eye connection, helps to stage an encounter in which visitors become witnesses. While visitors are neither perpetrators nor bystanders, there is a sense in which there is a demand made of them. This is what Roger Simon has in mind when he talks about the "terrible gift" that is embodied in the giving of a testimony – the request to ensure that the past is not repeated.[18] In the case of *Love and Sorrow*, this gift is enacted through the staging of a second testimony, but this time in the present, through the

descendants of the original protagonists whose experiences we follow in the exhibition. For it is these descendants who make it obvious that the pain is an ongoing one, that it travels through generations and that we all have a role to play in preventing its occurrence in the future.

Mimetic communication, sticky objects and the giving of testimony in *Love and Sorrow*

While each of the eight biographies we can follow in the exhibition have a "sticky object" and a witness to their stickiness, here I only have space to focus on three examples. We first come across the eight individuals we are invited to follow across the exhibition through black and white portrait photographs of them. These are set against other photographs of them with their families, as if on a mantelpiece, suggested by a small narrow shelf on which their portrait is placed underneath the larger family shot. Succinct text underneath these photos provides enough biographical detail to enable us to situate them as part of a wider family, their ethnicity or race, their age, where they lived and what they did for a living. The theme of love and the suggestion of possible sorrow is introduced with a short extract from a letter written by a soldier to his wife which says: "If I am to die, know that I died loving you" (Figure 10.1).[19]

Amongst them is Frank Roberts, then 27 years old, who married his fiancée, Ruby, months before he left. His parents, though worried, were

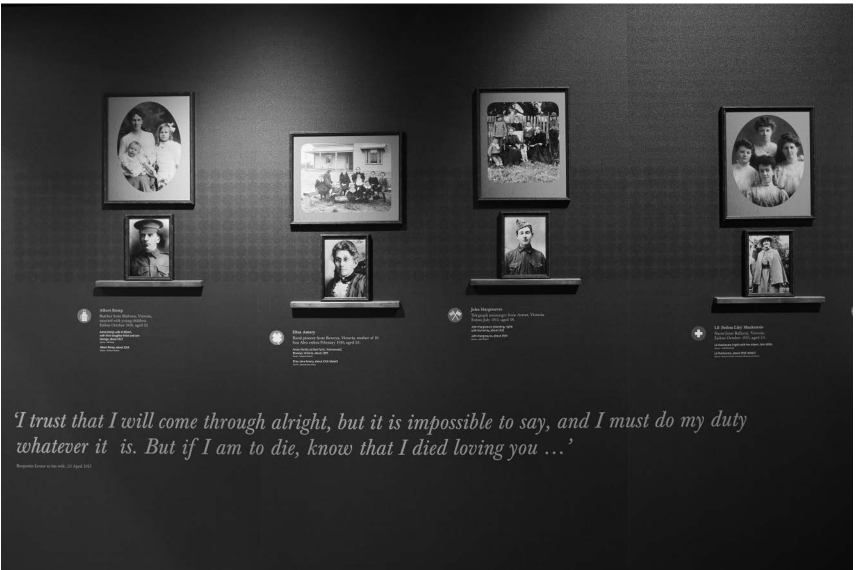


Figure 10.1 Introductory wall, *Love and Sorrow*, 2015. Photo: Benjamin Healley © Museums Victoria.

proud that he was doing his “duty”. Albert Kemp was a butcher who lived in Normanby Avenue, Caulfield with his young wife Annie and their two small children, one of them a baby at the time he left. Eliza Amery was the mother of Alex who went to war as a young man of 23.[20]

The bonds between these three individuals and their families were strong, a point that is made through an assemblage of objects that include photographs, letters, telegrams and personal effects that have been kept within these families and were treasured across generations. Some of these objects are used a number of times, becoming “stickier” each time we meet them. Thus, for example, in the panel that tells us fairly early on in the exhibition that Frank Roberts was sent to France, we have a black and white photograph of him looking up at his sweetheart, Ruby, adoringly. She looks down on him as she is lifted up above him with a gentle smile, placing her arms around his neck in an embrace. It is obvious that they adore one another. The negative space between their faces is charged with love and that is what our eyes focus on, as this is the centre of the image. Their faces communicate to us the love between them (Figure 10.2).

Their baby daughter, born in November 1917 while Frank was serving in Belgium, is referred to in a letter he writes home to his wife as he lay in his trench waiting for the orders to go over, “the picture I had before my eyes was that enlarged photo of you and little Nancy”. The next time we come across this family is to learn of Frank’s death in France. We do so with that enlarged photograph of Ruby and baby Nancy before us. This is the first time we see that photograph though we have already had a reference to it and know how important it was to Frank. The photograph is Frank’s “sticky” object. Beside it is a little package containing a letter purportedly from Nancy to her father with one of her little booties asking him if he would be able to fit into it. The letter and the little bootie never made it to Frank and were returned to Ruby, becoming her “sticky” object. She kept it all her life, later giving it to Nancy. At the end of the exhibition, in a movingly filmed interview with Ruby’s granddaughter Jilba, the little bootie turns up again, this time in Jilba’s hands. Unconsciously, as she talks of Ruby’s pain and the hole that Frank’s death had on their family, she strokes the little bootie, as if to console her mother and grandmother. Sticky with the residue of the pain experienced by this family, including that of Frank’s father who spent the rest of his life compiling every bit of information about Frank and his life in a series of scrapbooks in a labour of love that also documents his own grief, we become witnesses to the ways in which this war had a lasting effect on Frank’s family and his descendants. As we watch Jilba fight back her tears and notice her involuntary caresses of the little bootie, we cannot but respond mimetically, metaphorically caressing her back with our own affective and emotional response. We become part of that family’s circle of sorrow. Jilba’s face, with her teary eyes looking straight at us, her soft and sad voice and the movement of her thumb caressing the bootie act as a form of testimony. She is both a witness to her mother’s and grandmother’s

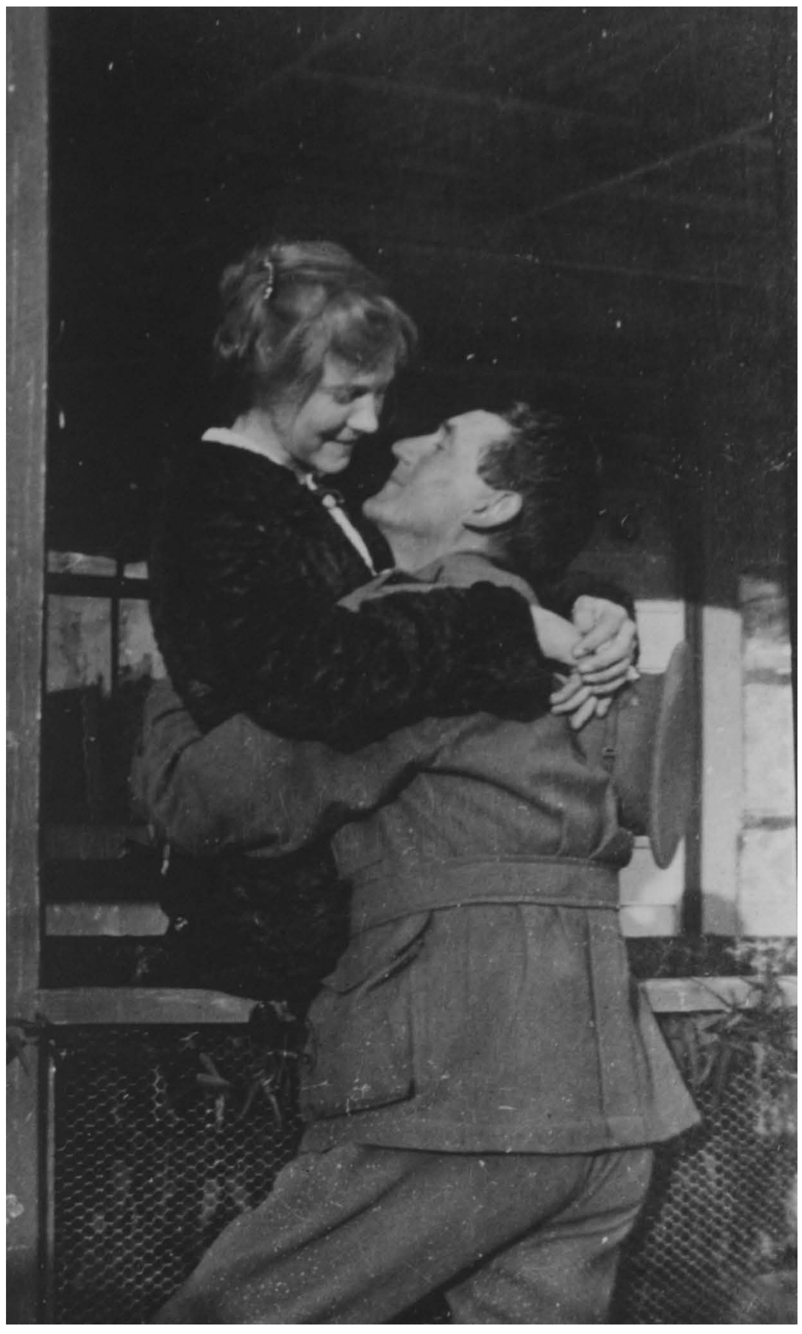


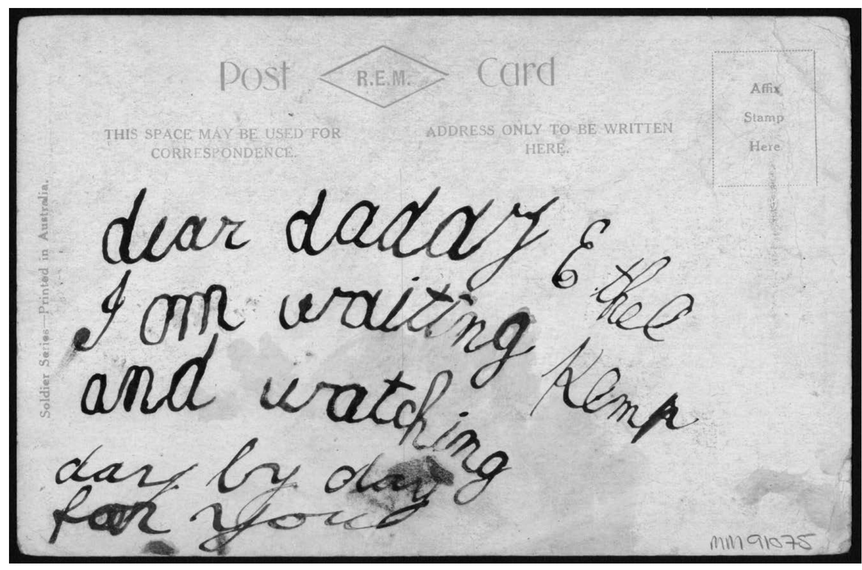
Figure 10.2 Frank and Ruby Roberts, circa 1916. Museums Victoria, courtesy of Jilba Georgalis.

sorrow and the giver of her own testimony, allowing us to become witnesses in our own right to the ways in which the emotional trauma generated by World War I left a legacy that can still be felt today (Figure 10.3).

Albert Kemp is one individual whose biography is central to the exhibition, forming part of its emotional core. He is first introduced to us as the head of a young family, via a photograph of his wife, daughter Ethel, then five years old and a baby boy, a family that loved him deeply. Ethel, the five-year-old, seems a vulnerable little girl, looking at us with wide, open eyes and a very serious demeanour. Albert kept his experiences during the war close to his heart. Most of his correspondence with his wife focuses on home, though he admits in one of his postcards that he has been part of burial parties "while under every fire of our enemies", an indication of the dangers that he experienced on a regular basis. Immediately around the corner from this, we hear the only sounds of guns in the entire exhibition. Walking into this sonic landscape I found myself standing between a Memorial Roll and the landscape of Glencorse Wood – a desolate piece of no man's land, ripped apart by cannons. As I walked through the space I encountered myself in a direct relationship to the past, for the display involves the slow dissolve between three images. Two are historical, taken by the English and the Germans documenting the progressive destruction of the woods. The third is a present-day image of the same place – the woods have returned, the birds are singing, everything is fresh and green. Life has returned, but it is on top of bodies that were never recovered. "Tread softly by / Our hearts are here / With our beloved Jack", says the text behind, quoting the words put on the grave of Jack Reynolds by his parents. The request means something, for as we move through the space the silhouettes of our bodies cause the dissolution from one image to another. We are present in that landscape and provide continuity between past and present. The act of walking is an act of remembrance. Walking out we are faced almost immediately with little Ethel's face – this time beside a postcard she had written to her dad in which she tells him "dear Daddy I am waiting and watching day by day for you". Next to this is the telegram sent to the local priest asking him to communicate Albert Kemp's death at Glencorse Wood to his wife Annie. His body was never found and I had just tread softly on his place of death (Figure 10.4).

Around the corner we come to an Edwardian fireplace that is not only the hearth of every Australian home but the hearth of Albert Kemp's family. On the mantelpiece is a memorial plaque given to his family. Beside it the family portrait from which the image of little Ethel we saw as we took in the news of his death is taken. To the side is a photograph of Frank Roberts, festooned in mourning ribbons and placed in the family's dining room. Around these objects are many other mementoes from other family hearths. To the left of this display is a multimedia interactive detailing the impact of war on all the residents of Normanby Avenue where the Kemp family had lived before the war. Together with the hearth, it is clear that Ethel's story and that of her

Figure 10.3 Jilba Georgalis, 2014. Museums Victoria/Director: Natasha Gadd, Daybreak Films.


Post R.E.M. Card

THIS SPACE MAY BE USED FOR CORRESPONDENCE.

ADDRESS ONLY TO BE WRITTEN HERE.

Affix Stamp Here

Soldier Series—Printed in Australia.

dear daddy
I am waiting
and watching
day by day
for you

Ethel
Kemp

MM91075

Figure 10.4 Postcard, Ethel Kemp to her father Albert, 1917. Museums Victoria MM 91075.

mother is repeated not only on that street but throughout the land as Albert and his family become a microcosm of a global as well as national experience. At the end, Ethel's god-daughter Bev, a woman now in her middle years of life, holds Ethel's postcard to her dad as she explains the impact of his death on his family. Her thumb caresses it as if she was offering comfort to Ethel and Annie, acknowledging not only their sorrow but physically, viscerally, embodying her own witnessing of this sorrow. In turn, in reading her face, her voice and her gesture, we too become witnesses and ponder on not only the emotional impact but what it meant in practical terms – having to leave the family home, live with in-laws and deal with economic hardship (Figure 10.5).

Eliza Amery, a label tells us, was an Irish woman who came to Australia in the 1870s as a rural pioneer. She settled in country Victoria with her own piece of land, marrying, building a slab hut and later a homestead. She was the mother of ten children, of whom Alex was the sixth. When we are first introduced to her we see a family photograph taken outside their homestead "Homewood" in which she is seated surrounded by her children, the youngest on her knees. An individual portrait, taken around 1910, shows her on her own in formal dress and looking straight at the camera. We can only see her from the bust up though we can make out the back of a chair behind her. When we come to the first showcase introducing us to her relationship with her son Alex we realise that the initial portrait with which we were

Figure 10.5 Hearth, *Love and Sorrow* exhibition, 2015. Photo: Benjamin Healley © Museums Victoria.

introduced to her is a detail of a larger portrait that shows her seated beside Alex who is standing beside her his left arm gently touching her right arm. Alex must have been around 17 years old at the time the photograph was taken. We know from the source of this photograph that it was kept within the family down to the present (Figure 10.6).

When Alex went off to war at the age of 23, the label tells us, his mother took to writing to him every week. In the showcase beside this photograph are a pile of her letters neatly folded next to a dip pen. They show Eliza's spidery handwriting. A quote from one of these letters frames the assemblage of objects, indicating both her intense love for Alex and her deep worry: "I would give all I possess to clasp your hand this day" as if she felt his own hand on her arm all those years earlier. A photograph of him in uniform, showing just how young he was, stands silently behind the pile of letters, helping us to imagine Eliza's own image of her son as she sat writing her letters as if talking to him (Figure 10.7).

The next time we pick up Eliza's story it is against an image of an unknown grave. We learn not only that Alex was killed in France and that his body was never found but that the stress of the news, coming on top of the death of Eliza's husband "was too much to bear" and she was committed to Royal Park Receiving House suffering from delusion and senility. Her stress was compounded by the fact that it took nine months, from May 1917 to January 1918, for the authorities to finally tell the family that Alex had died. The initial news was that he had gone missing and Eliza, hoping for news that he had been found, would walk down to the gate of the homestead every morning, hoping for a letter from Alex to tell her he was alive, safe and well. The letter never came. The official letter communicating his death to the family is surrounded not only by the same portrait of Alex in uniform, this time with some rosemary beside it but by letters from his family seeking information as to what had happened to Alex in a desperate hope that they could help his mother. The next time we come across Eliza is to a photograph of her grave, next to that of her husband. We are told she drowned in the family's dam, in a case of suspected suicide. The photograph and the label that accompanies it is superimposed on an image of graves at the Australian 1st Division memorial at Pozières, France, embodying the way in which Alex's death caused that of his own mother. To the side, is the commemorative certificate for Alex together with his medals, held by the family to this day. At the end, Eliza's great-granddaughter Kerryn gives testimony to Eliza's grief. In her hands is one of her many letters to Alex which she reads an extract from. The extract once again speaks to Eliza's desperate desire to see her son again, holding within it all the "stickiness" of the pile of letters we saw at the beginning of the exhibition and that one photograph of Eliza with her son by her side. In that letter, she tells him

> My darling boy, I was lying awake early yesterday morning thinking of you and I heard a voice say Alex is coming home' and I said 'when?' And

Figure 10.6 Alexander Amery and Eliza Jane Amery, circa 1910. Museums Victoria, courtesy of Barbara and Ian Amery.

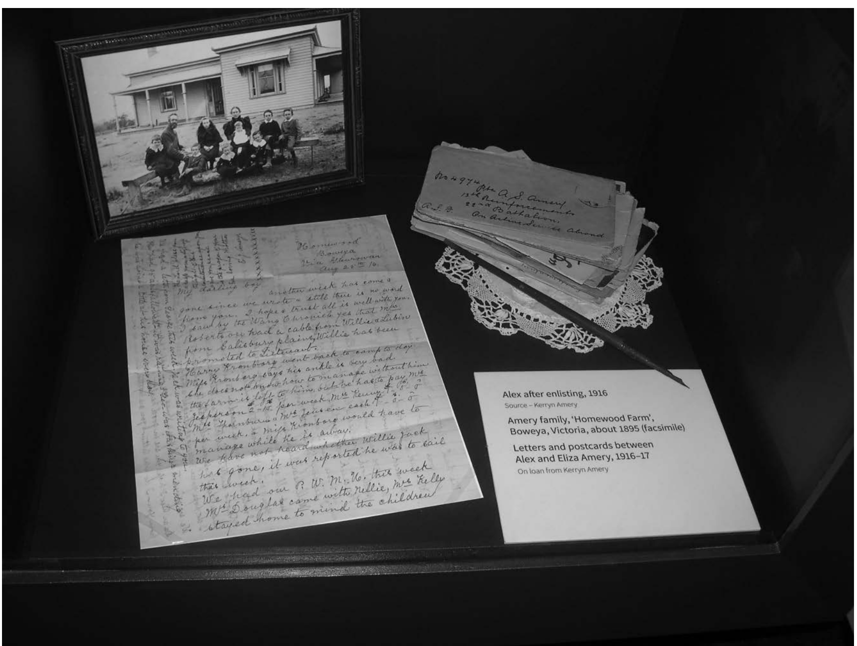


Figure 10.7 Introductory case for Amery story, with letters from Eliza Amery to her son Alex. Photo: Deborah Tout-Smith © Museums Victoria.

> the answer came, 'in God's own time'. And so dear Alex I will keep on hoping and praying for you to come back to us.

Once again, she involuntarily caresses the letter, while, looking straight to camera and therefore to us, she tells us how the family believed Eliza suicided from the pain the news of Alex's death caused her.

In all of these examples, the past collides with the present via the process of witnessing. It is a process that is possible not only because descendants of the family act as testifiers to the emotions that ran between the main protagonists, but because we have already become sensitised to the depth of the emotions of love and sorrow that the experience of World War I shaped within Australian society. This sensitisation is achieved through the use of photographs in which people, just like you and I, look directly at us, holding us with their gaze while objects that became significant in their lives because they embodied relations of love and sorrow become "sticky" in deft curatorial and exhibition designer's hands, adding to the stickiness of the photographs themselves. We feel their emotions and become embroiled in them precisely because we become part of the story and, in the process, witnesses to other people's pain. Not simply mementoes, these "sticky objects"

become "sites of feeling"[21] which in turn have the potential to become what I have elsewhere called a "pedagogy of feeling" – a form of cultural pedagogy that uses affect to open up a critical engagement with received narratives about the past.[22] As I have argued elsewhere, a pedagogy of feeling is characterised by a collapsing of time so that the past is not allowed to become disconnected from the present. Furthermore, the recognition of the ways in which the past can continue to live in the present involves a critical questioning of received narratives about that past. In this case, that critical questioning involves a distancing from a form of commemoration that heroised young men and turned them into victims without recognising the many other victims of that war or the ways in which the war itself fractured and wounded society.

Some of these fractures are revealed in the other personal stories visitors can follow. The Murray brothers' story reveals the pain of one Aboriginal family who could never get a health pension from the Australian State as Herbert Murray's illnesses were not recognised as a side effect of his war experiences. John Hargreaves story reveals the difficulties faced by families whose sons and husbands came back broken men with traumas that never left them and which affected the lives of those they loved. His daughter Joan, reading from her father's diary, tells us how her father lived with nightmares due to his experience of being buried alive, fighting recurring depression. The experience of living with the aftermath of war, she tells us, "gave me a horror of wars", going on to state that "it is just incomprehensible why we continue to go to wars". Side stories support the idea that there is much more to the experience of World War I than the heroic action of Australian soldiers on the battlefront. While horrible war wounds provided the need for medical developments such as facial reconstruction, prosthetic limbs and ways of dealing with tuberculosis, the sheer number of men who could not look after themselves and required hospitalisation is embodied in Albert Ward's story. He spent the rest of his life in a day bed at the Anzac Hostel in Brighton, Melbourne. Others tried to combat constant bouts of illness, without adequate support, as exemplified by one returned soldier who battled tuberculosis while trying to make a living for his family as a bootmaker and paying for a War Service Home. In all of these stories, it is the humanity of these people that speaks to us, more often than not through strong photographs in which they pin us with their gaze, looking straight at us and we at them. Flinch we might, but their constant gaze on us makes a demand that we witness their story and think hard about what war means and how we treat those who return broken men and women, those who were left without their loved ones and who, somehow, often against the odds and without much help, had to pick up the pieces.

In making people's emotional lives central to the history of World War I and how we should commemorate and remember that history, *Love and Sorrow* embodies one aspect of the legacy of feminist history practices in the context of social history museums. That legacy has to do with the ways in

which attention to questions of gender not only allow for a much broader as well as deeper understanding of people's lives but also allow us to challenge received narratives about the past. In moving away from the masculinist overtones of the Anzac Legend, *Love and Sorrow* has created a new commemorative landscape, one that is inclusive of a wider group of participants as well as one that creates a space in which commemoration and practices of remembrance no longer have to suffer from blind patriotism. When combined with a sophisticated interpretation strategy that turns visitors into witnesses through a series of affective encounters using mimetic forms of communication anchored in the use of "sticky" objects, *Love and* Sorrow demonstrates the potential of using a history of emotions, embodied in personal stories, to challenge the kinds of emotional histories produced under the banner of the Anzac Legend. This is critical history at its best.

Notes

1 Mayo 1994, p. 61.
2 Matthews 1986, p. 148.
3 Gordon, Buhle and Shrom Dye 1976, p. 89.
4 Reynolds 2010.
5 Donaldson and Lake 2010.
6 Beaumont 2013.
7 Donaldson and Lake 2010, pp. 90–1.
8 Damousi 2010, p. 97
9 Larsson 2009.
10 Luckins 2004.
11 Ahmed 2010.
12 Hatfield, Cacioppo and Rapson 1994, p. 5, cited in Gibbs 2010, p. 186.
13 Tomkins 1966, p. vii, cited in Gibbs 2010, p. 191.
14 Gibbs 2010 p. 191.
15 Ahmed 2010, p. 29.
16 Auerhahn and Laub 1990, p. 447.
17 Ibid, p. 448.
18 Simon 2006.
19 Benjamin Leane to his wife, 23 April 1915.
20 Two of these stories, those of Kemp and Roberts, are taken from Witcomb 2016.
21 Di Nardi 2014.
22 See Witcomb 2015a and 2015b.

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11 "The stories are like magnets"

Love and Sorrow and the engagement of on-line learning

Bruce Scates and Margaret Harris

World War One: A History in 100 Stories was launched as a free online course a few days before the centenary of the Gallipoli landings. Enrolments quickly exceeded any comparable Mass Online Open Courseware (MOOC) fielded by FutureLearn, a leading provider of such courses. The course was fielded nine times and attracted more than 50,000 enrolments. Participants were drawn from every continent on the globe (bar Antarctica) and whilst the majority of online learners were based in Australia, New Zealand and the UK, all the nations embroiled in the catastrophe of 1914–18 were represented. Learner motivations and responses varied, and the purpose of this chapter is to consider the same. But all shared one experience in common. The first scenes and last scenes they viewed in the *100 Stories* were framed around *World War I: Love and Sorrow* exhibition, developed by Museums Victoria.

Parallel Journeys: *Love and Sorrow* and the *100 Stories* Project

The "museum journey" (as one learner put it) began in the exhibition itself, a panning shot by the camera surveying a panoramic photograph of Glencorse Wood (Anon 01).[1] For much of the war, the wood was in the frontline of fierce fighting in Flanders. By September 1917 and the disastrous push on Passchendaele, the forest that had once stood there was all but obliterated by shellfire. Michael McKernan's review of *Love and Sorrow* describes the imagery of the shattered wood as "supremely evocative". At one level, it recalls the moonscape imagery of Great War battlefields, the ghostly remains of trees eerily emblematic of men butchered by the same artillery.[2] At another, it mobilised sound to "connect" visitors with an otherwise unimaginable experience: "for the first and only time in *Love & Sorrow"*, McKernan notes, "we hear the sound of battle gradually replaced by today's birdsong".[3] That temporal shift – from the roar of the guns in 1917 to the tranquil woods of today – was reinforced by the way visitors interacted with the photographic panels. As individuals moved across the space of the gallery delayed sequence composition 'ghosted' one image on another, the green of the forest,

symbolising life and renewal, restored in each figure's wake. "Visitors to this space find their own form embedded in that landscape", the MOOCs opening commentary announced, suggesting that "the Great War still somehow touches us all." The introductory episode of *100 stories* carried that metaphor further, outlining the structure of learning content to follow.

> In the next five weeks, we'll walk through woods like this one, we'll take you on a journey across the killing fields of Europe, we'll speak to the historians that have made these landscapes their life's work and we'll discuss the testimony – the voices from the past – that can still whisper through these woods and make this imagined place somehow real.[4]

Interactive technology was one means by which *Love and Sorrow* sought to situate visitors in the lost landscape of 1914–18; the strategic deployment of objects was another. Several hundred artefacts were dispersed through the spaces of the galleries, recreating domestic settings, hospital wards and civic space. Many such objects were confronting from the outset: a display cabinet of surgical instruments used in the treatment of venereal diseases, or the iron cot where a patient wasted away for 43 years. But by considered context (aided by interpretation through a smartphone audio device) even the most prosaic items – a letter, an article of clothing, a pension card – were charged with powerful messages of pain and loss.[5] Objects were used in a similar way by the MOOC. A brooch issued to grieving mothers, a shard of shrapnel, the sword of an artillery officer, knitting needle and thread provided a platform for discussion and debate. Artefacts like these literally embodied the past, enabling (as many learners put it) a "connection" with the experience of past generations (Figure 11.1).[6]

And the objects featured in *Love and Sorrow* provided the framework of that first introductory episode, previewing the themes of all the weeks to follow. The Honour Roll from a Stock and Stations Agents in Melbourne invited interrogation of both private grief and public commemoration (week 1); the scarlet of a nurse's cape framed discussion of women's wartime mobilisations (week 2); Indigenous service and the "Other" Anzac (week 3) was prefigured by the individual stories centred on soldiers of non-British descent; and plaster casts of facial reconstructions conveyed a sense of both the physical and psychological damage wrought by war (week 4). The final week of the MOOC considered repatriation and the trauma of post-war society – a panoramic view of Anzac Day flagging the theme of aftermath.

The MOOC carried the exhibition's content well beyond the walls of the museum. Participants from across the globe praised the courage, depth and richness of every gallery filmed, "exhibiting the artefacts but also … giving them context" (Anon 12).[7] "This American student really wishes he could go to the *World War 1: Love and Sorrow* exhibition at Museum Victoria", one learner announced (Anon 01).[8] "I don't live in Australia nor do I have plans to visit soon", rejoined another, "I'm glad I got to see some of the exhibition

Figure 11.1 “Artefacts literally embodies the past”: Bruce Scates and the *Devanha* lifeboat in Melbourne’s Shrine of Remembrance. The plastic sheeting signalled the boat’s fragility and its iconic status. As the sheets were peeled away, stories of the Gallipoli Landings were revealed and interrogated. Photo: Monash University.

though I wish I could see all of it” (Anon 14).[9] Australian learners, for their part, vowed to make yet another trip to Melbourne: “you’ve left me with so much to follow up – sites to consult and [must see the] *Love and Sorrow* Exhibition. I have to find out more about Bill Kearsey” (Anon 04).[10] Equally importantly, the exhibition’s objects and its equally compelling imagery bookmarked the course as a whole, visual reference points around which readings, quizzes and interviews with leading academics were set. In the course of the project two early career researchers discussed grief and commemoration with Mike Roper, women’s mobilisation with Rae Frances, war wounds with Jay Winter, and memory and repatriation with Alistair Thomson. Week 3 (on the “other Anzac”) featured the testimony of Indigenous playwright Wesley Enoch and considered the way Indigenous communities had negotiated Anzac. Commentary of this calibre was much valued by learners – as was the standard of their presentations. “The interviews were especially well done”, one learner volunteered, “They were not just talking heads but experts who were passionate about their subjects” (Anon 23).[11] The choice of PhD candidates Laura James and Bec Wheatley to lead these discussions and moderate learner commentary on the same was careful and deliberate. Their engagement with new sources and often confronting content mirrored that of other participants. As one student put it, they “acted as surrogates for all of us learners” (Anon 08) (Figure 11.2).[12]

The course concluded by returning to the exhibition spaces for interviews with *Love and Sorrow*’s curator, producer and conservator. Sarah Babister

Figure 11.2 “Passionate about their subjects”: Professor Mike Roper and Doctoral Candidate Rebecca Wheatley during the filming of an interview. Professor Roper explored both the public and private manifestations of grief and its gender-specific nature. Note the photograph albums on the bookshelf. This record of a 1925 pilgrimage to Gallipoli was one of the objects that framed discussion Photo: Monash University.

explained the domestic and emotional labour that went into a recreation of World War I memorabilia, Judith Penrose examined plaster casts charting horrific facial wounds and Deborah Tout-Smith recounted the story of Garry Roberts and his family. Roberts lost his son Frank in one of the final actions of the war and spent the remainder of his own life in public and private acts of remembrance. In the course of filming Deborah Tout-Smith retrieved a baby’s bootie from a display case. It had been sent to Frank overseas as a means of connecting with a daughter he would never meet. Both the fragile bootie and the parcel marked “Return to Sender” elicited a strong response from both learners on the MOOC and exhibition visitors. Such objects – as Tout-Smith observed – were “heart rending”, their emotive power resting on “the depth and context of the story”.

Personal narratives of war are another point of parallel between *Love and Sorrow* and the MOOC. As they entered the exhibition spaces, visitors were encouraged to “adopt” one of eight life-stories to follow – Frank Roberts’ story was featured in the MOOC (a life well canvassed by historians, amongst them Damousi, Luckins, Scates and Stanley).[13] These individual lives provided a point of orientation throughout each of the galleries and bridged

the wider story of the war. Supported by both archive and artefact, summoned into life by smartphone commentary, personal stories fostered an "authentic" and empathetic engagement with the past. The approach taken by the *One Hundred Stories* was at once similar and different. Like *Love and Sorrow*, the MOOC used individual narratives to address broader issues of historical process. "Fascinating how each story adds up to give us a more detailed picture of the war, its aftermath and its legacy", one learner remarked a week into the programme, "and how each story highlights some aspect of social history and culture. All are stories of individual loss but they accumulate to build a record of the 'lost generation'" (Anon 13) (Figure 11.3).[14]

But whilst *Love and Sorrow* relied, to some extent, on measured curator commentary, *100 Stories* employed text and silence. A brief video presentation simulating handwriting across a page, the blunt typeface of newsprint or telegram and words that were spoken from the pulpit, in courts, on the hustings. This use of animated Keynote software was an experiment in digital humanities. Each story aimed to distil the essence of an archive, outlining a life – or rather a phase of a life – in a matter of minutes, evoking "voices" from the past in a sharp and arresting way. Individual stories acted as a synecdoche (a part of the thing standing for the whole) and represented an experience intended to challenge or enlarge traditional narratives. All the presentations used in the MOOC, and a number of others, are screened continuously in the National Anzac Centre in Albany. They can also be accessed (with sources and commentary) on a website hosted by the Australian National University (https://onehundredstories.anu.edu.au/).

To historians raised in the mystique of the monograph, Keynote might seem a crude and limited medium. Admittedly, a three-minute presentation of disembodied text offers limited scope for nuances of meaning. But, as one learner observed, such presentations were "deliberately brief". Never intended to "tell the whole story", their role was "provocative" and a prompt to "further study" (Anon 21).[15] Participants like this one welcomed the minimalist text: it permitted space for their own readings and interpretation. Others found the content rich, new and full of unexpected "insight" (Anon 18, 2015). "It is true that the stories are starkly told", one learner mused, "There are many ways to tell a story but this was certainly an effective one" (Anon 28).[16] "Thank you for presenting the stories", another learner wrote, "The silent presentations screamed with the injustice, grief, homesickness, and a myriad of emotions and situation" (Anon 23).[17] For many, silence itself was a virtue. In a world besieged by auditory overload, a silent black and white screen demarcated space for contemplation. "I especially liked the silent videos", one learner commented: "for me, it is easier to take in and reread, rather than having the distraction of graphics or picking up everything by the spoken word". The same learner referred to this technique as "documenting the archive" – faithfully revealing narratives they had not hitherto known. And far from being narrowly didactic or singular and self-contained, each keynote narrative initiated conversation and inquiry. The interviewees noted above each commented on the selection of stories,

Figure 11.3 “The lost generation”: the Irwin family on the eve of young George’s departure to war. Neither parent accepted their son’s death and Sarah corresponded with the Red Cross Missing and Wounded Bureau until the last of the prisoners taken at Anzac came home. In 1926 the grieving couple joined a pilgrimage to Lone Pine and took a rubbing of George’s name from the memorial to the missing. The photograph was kindly provided by a member of the family. Note the look of foreboding on that mother’s face. Accessed with the kind assistance of David Champion.

invariably reflecting on comparable cases from their own research. In online forums, learners debated the actions of individuals and governments and social agencies. We were "a community of students", several remarked, keenly "participating from all around the world". "This has been a wonderful learning experience", another continued, "it has been a joy to read the posts in each section of the course. They opened interpretations of work which I would never have [considered]" (Anon 07).[18]

Most important of all, learners initiated independent research. Just as each week examined a certain theme, it also introduced a different set of digital archives and offered instructions on how best to navigate them. Such a "rich data base", one learner wrote appreciatively, "the demo provides confidence" to enter these hitherto "daunting" sites" (Anon 05).[19] Learners used Trove to access newspapers, scoured repatriation files at the National Archives of Australia and (like the learner just cited) assessed conflicting accounts in Red Cross Wounded and Missing Files for "stories of their own". "The stories are like magnets", another learner commented,

> attracting you to find out more by reading one or two pages of the comments, looking up the links added by others, doing your own research and then adding your own comments. One story equates to at least 30 minutes of this, if you are mesmerised by the story. (Anon 09)[20]

In short, participants set the stories in their learning context and viewed the course as a totality. One learner offered in evaluative feedback:

> I learned so much … The presentation of the silent story was excellent and the interviews were easy to listen to and to follow. Readings and research information helped complete and round off the course. All in all the course was interesting educational and an amazing insight [in]to what was a horrific period in our history (Anon 06).[21]

Confronting the pain of war

The confronting content of both *Love and Sorrow* and the *100 Stories* is another important point of comparison. Both exhibition and MOOC considered the way war reached into and damaged the social fabric, its cost to the community continuing long after the guns ceased firing. Both ran counter to the sanitisation and romanticisation of war commonplace through the course of the Anzac Centenary. Stories of suicide, domestic violence, the physical and psychological wounds suffered by veterans, and the unresolved grieving of a generation did not lend themselves, as many learners observed, to an "easy" or "comfortable" history. In a way, both the exhibition and the MOOC sought to widen the ambit of remembrance – shifting the focus from soldier to civilian, revealing the ways war divided rather than united

communities, recovering the experience of those marginalised or silenced by the Anzac mythology. These themes are familiar to historians. Arguably they have yet to figure in a wider public consciousness. Consistently course evaluations spoke of “fresh” and “different” perspectives, an “eye opener”, a “far reaching and complex” view of the conflict they had not really considered before (Anon 01, Anon 15 and Anon 8).[22] This extended even to some of the most confident learners. “Until 5 weeks ago, I thought I knew everything there was to know about WWI”, a student based in Scotland posted “How wrong was I!” (Anon 19).[23] The “inequities meted out to war widows”, the “injustices” faced by the families of Indigenous servicemen, struggles over pension entitlements, neglect by repatriation authorities and the gendered inequalities of war service prompted extended forum discussion in every run of the course and led, as one learner put it, “to a much fuller and complex understanding of the far reaching and complex effects of war” (Anon 11, Anon 02 and Anon 01).[24]

Dealing with disturbing content posed its challenges, both for the producers/curators of *Love and Sorrow* and the historians involved in the *100 Stories*. From the outset Museums Victoria made a principled decision. Their exhibition would not shy away from material some members of the public might find shocking or even offensive. Instead, visitors would be free to chart their own course through the galleries, guided by the careful “emotional mapping” of exhibition content but choosing their own level of engagement. A display devoted to the “faceless men”, for example, was set carefully to one side. Visitors made a conscious choice to enter that space or avoid it (Figure 11.4).

The Anzac Centenary Advisory Board (ACAB) dealt with “contentious content” very differently. Far from trusting the public to make their own decision the preference of the Board was to avoid such issues altogether. This leads us to the origins of the *100 Stories* project. The silent, digital narratives that form the core of the MOOC were originally proposed as part of the official Centenary programme. Historians advising ACAB were highly critical of a proposal to project the name of the war-dead in lights on major landmarks and memorials.[25] It was not just the militarisation of civic space or the slightly garish quality of a commemorative light show that were issues of concern. Who were the war-dead, historians asked, when official fatality figures excluded those who died long after armies demobilised? What of Australians who had served in Imperial or Dominion contingents? What of those who survived the fighting, a legion of the blind, insane and crippled who carried the war home with them? Most important of all, the cost of war was never borne solely by combatants – how could its impact on the wider community be better acknowledged and understood? The *100 Stories* began as a kind of historical “corrective”, a widening of focus beyond this fixation on the Fallen. They offered a fragment of Australia’s experience of war, one hundred lives – conveyed in a crisp but open archival commentary – to symbolise the Centenary.[26]

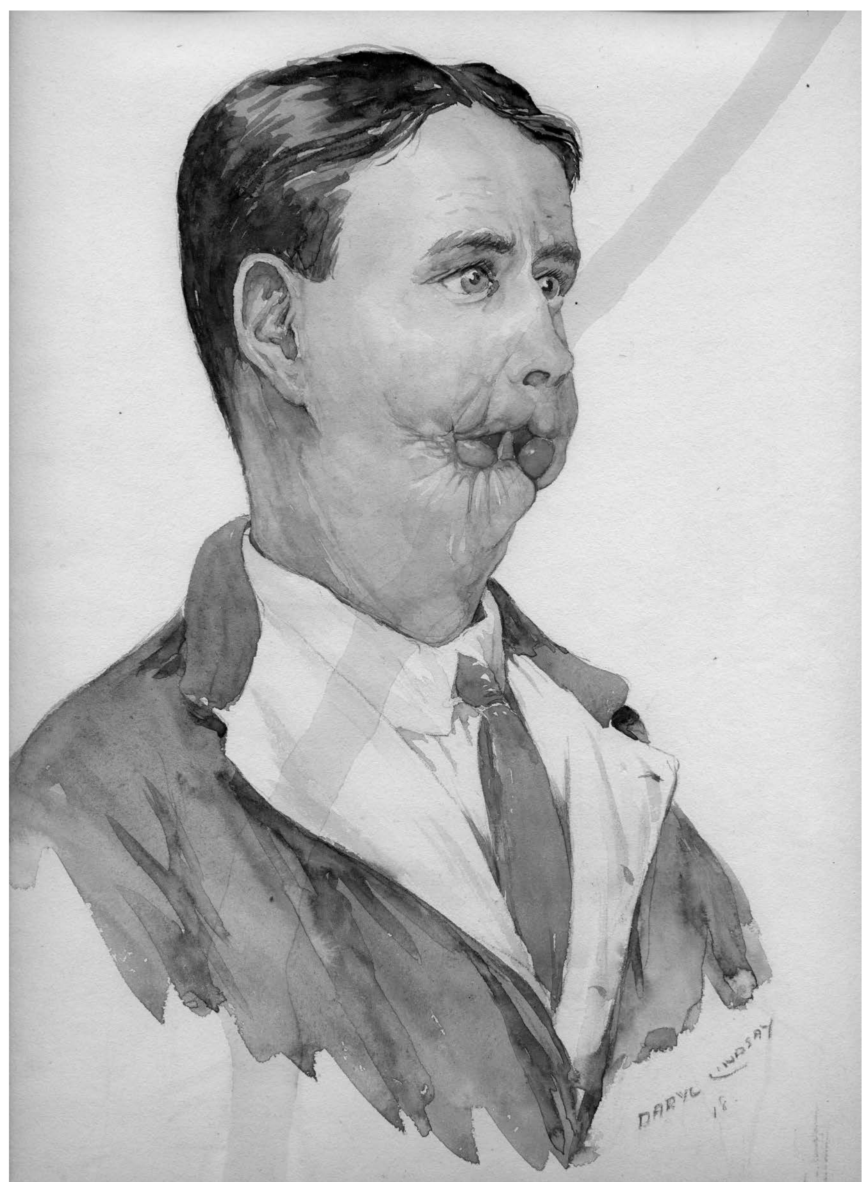

Figure 11.4 "The faceless men": Gordon Wallace. An interview with Judith Penrose (the Producer of *Love and Sorrow*) introduced learners to the challenges of facial surgery. There were, as Penrose noted, stories of great courage and resilience, and these too were flagged by the *100 Stories* project. Wallace was not so fortunate. His lifeless body was dragged from the Yarra not long after Anzac Day 1954. Photo: Royal Australasian College of Surgeons.

Between 2012 and 2014, each story was presented both to the Board and five further advisory panels. There was sometimes vexed debate between historians and commemorative stakeholders, public servants, government ministers and the eclectic selection of "public figures" appointed to Board Membership. Far from being a singular, monolithic entity, the ACAB was a contested forum, its deliberations fractured by competing loyalties and perspectives.[27]

One presentation in particular signalled a parting of ways. It centred on Frank Wilkinson, whose courage earned the Military Medal (MM) in an action not far from Glencorse Wood. Wilkinson survived the war but not the peace. He returned home, took up a block as a soldier settler, struggled to provide for his family, fell deep into debt and eventually took his own life. None of this was so exceptional in post-war narratives, and similar experiences had been flagged in previous presentations. But Frank Wilkinson's story straddled that difficult divide between passive victimhood and unrestrained violence. Before he slit his own throat, Wilkinson took a hammer to his family and battered his wife and four-year-old daughter to death (Figure 11.5).[28]

No one hurried to condemn Frank Wilkinson in the 1920s. The public made allowance for the trials of a returned war hero, a broken man, it was widely assumed, momentarily deranged. But the Board resolved to reject the story altogether. The Chair instructed historians to delete all reference to Frank Wilkinson MM and replace his confronting testimony with "a positive, nation building narrative". A senior government bureaucrat declared that what the public hoped for from the Centenary was "a warm fuzzy feeling" – the Wilkinson narrative (by contrast) might well "embarrass the minister". Board members wondered if there couldn't be some other spin on the stories. Was there a "need", one asked, for historians to be so "brutally honest"?[29]

Both the *100 stories* and *Love and Sorrow* assert the value of an honest and searching history. They took, as one learner put it, "a warts and all approach" and did not "back away from confronting content" (Anon 03).[30] Far from offending the general public, there has been a widespread affirmation of both projects. Few visitors have felt that *Love and Sorrow* did a disservice to those who endured World War I. On the contrary, as Marina Larsson observed at the launch of the exhibition, not to have canvassed the confronting issues would have diminished the experience. By the same token, most learners respected what one course participant called the MOOC's "corrective goals" (Anon 16).[31] The "terribly hard" stories offered the most to learn, one learner wrote; "a difficult but rewarding journey" commented another (Anon 10).[32] A woman identifying herself Lis thanked the course convenors for "introducing me to my own countries [sic] history in a compelling, sometimes confronting, but always honest and forthright way" [33] "[This course] has been a fascinating introduction to a huge subject [World War I]" echoed Vanessa S., "bringing out those stories that until a few years ago would not have been talked about".[34] Scholars have noted the role such traumatic narratives have played in reshaping the nature of war memory.[35]

Figure 11.5 "Survived the war but not the peace": Frank Wilkinson MM. This photograph was provided by Frank's family, as was additional information surrounding his death. Wilkinson's niece Jill was pleased the tragic story was told so "honestly" as for decades, it had remained a dark secret. This willingness to confront and move beyond the traumas of the past suggests the maturity of the Australian public. It is also evidence of the way the *100 Stories* project empowered family stories and offered an alternative to commemorative cliché. Copyright expired. Accessed with the kind assistance of Jill Fradd.

Personal connection: family narratives and the emotional labour of learning

This personal and human connection also challenged the learners. The labour they were asked to perform was not merely academic, but was also emotional – and the gritty, sometimes "haunting" nature of the stories

presented wore heavily on some. “Compassion fatigue” as one learner aptly called it. (Anon. 29).[36] “This week has been very traumatic for me”, wrote Esma P. after the week examining war wounds. “I have shed a lot of tears, and will probably shed more before I finish, my father fought in france [sic] in WW1, wounded twice and suffered from PTSD for life”.[37] Even learners without this personal connection found the course difficult. “All [these] stories are so harrowing”, wrote Julie O. “All affect you and to live them as these soldiers did with these horrors and not getting the right help goes beyond belief”.[38]

This emotional connection was heightened by the personal reasons many learners had sought out the course. As would be expected by the current memory boom, and in common with many other courses and exhibitions, participation was driven by family history.[39] “[The course] is of interest to me …” wrote Daniel M. “[because] my cousin (twice removed) was in the RAMC & was killed after safely returning some of the wounded from Gallipoli.”[40] Sharon S. wrote her “interest [was] in learning more of the war experience from my family perspective since my grandfather was gassed at Ypes [sic]”.[41] A large number of commentators took any opportunity to speak of those family members who lived through World War I, building an individualised connection to the topic concerned. “My husband’s grandmother lost her brother and fiance [sic] in the first world war,” wrote Pauline J. on a module (or “Step”) devoted to war memorials.

> My husband’s other grandfather died of his wounds in the first world war leaving his wife with 4 children… So many names on memorials are being brought alive by this course, hard to read because they are all so sad.[42]

And the forum was not the only means whereby learners placed family stories within a wider national narrative. “Some time ago, I found my great uncles … WW1 diary”, an excited learner announced, “I have transcribed this for [my] family [and] I will now link it up with the NSW State Library” (Anon 30).[43] Several learners like this one created archives as well as researched them.

World War I was an imperial conflict, and, given the high number of learners based in the UK, many had family who served with British forces.

> [Being] a Brit I didn’t know much about WW1 from the Anzac point of view so that’s been particularly interesting. I have mentioned in other comments that my Grandmother lost one of her brothers in the war and since doing this course it has encouraged me to do even more investigating about him. It has also made me extra grateful that my two Grandad’s [sic] who fought in WW1 survived … I wish I could have talked to them about their experiences but according to other family members they never talked about the war and so their stories died with them (Anon 31).[44]

It was the ability to recover such stories through a host of recently digitised archives that especially privileged Australian online learners of Australian history.

> As I have researched my own family history, I have discovered how every piece of information available becomes a treasure and brings to life that connection to real people and history making me feel part of a much larger whole. All the hard work of digitizing records and making them available on-line could already be seen to be giving many learners on the course a connection to their past that they may not have known or had only a few bits and pieces of the story and could not fill in the missing parts. The course also puts a much more complex face on war and what it does to those people both directly and indirectly involved than what we sometimes see in other media available to us. It also shows that the effects of war go on for many many generations. (Anon 25)[45]

In some cases that sense of connection worked in a very literal way. Frank Roberts' granddaughter joined the first run of the MOOC. The baby bootie mailed to Frank, and returned to the family after his death, was one of the poignant objects featured by both the exhibition and the series. His granddaughter Jilba contributed at several critical points to the online discussions, but it was her closing comments (where her own connection to Roberts was restated) that attracted some of the most interest from learners.

> An excellent moving, thought-provoking and informative course. … "The war didn't end in 1918. It went decades and decades on". And this is so true. The war's terrible effects were felt by the returned servicemen, their families who had lost loved ones, the nurses who had witnessed such horrible suffering, the physically and the psychologically wounded and their families who tried to support them. In most cases the effects were never forgotten. As the granddaughter of Frank Roberts, one of the soldiers followed in the Melbourne Museum Love and Sorrow exhibition, I grew up hearing stories of Daddy Frank from my mother and witnessing the tears of his widow, my beloved grandmother, Ruby. I can attest to the fact that the war never ended for her until she took her final breath.[46]

Many other posts were written with the same disarming intimacy. The grandchildren of World War I may not have immediate "memory" of that conflict, but they carried with them a kind of intergenerational trauma and the "terrible effects" of that war shaped a sense of personal identity.

A sense of connection reached out across generations – and across a vast geographical distance. "My grandfather, William Leslie, and my great uncle Richard Allardice, both Scottish, have been my focus for the last 10–15 years", a learner wrote from the UK.

> They were my family connection to the war. Until now I knew a few scant details of my other great uncle, John Allardice, who emigrated to Australia in the 1900s. He was never heard from again. It was on a whim, a few short months ago, that I decided to see what I could find out about him. Lo and behold, he pops up as an Anzac. Since then, and with the help of this course, I've expanded my horizons tremendously. I see WWI from a very personal perspective now. It's hard to believe that so many families were affected directly and indirectly on a global scale (Anon 17).[47]

"Thanks to the AWM [John Allardice's] war records were right at my finger tips", this learner continued, reclaiming "a missing person in our family". "Personal stories", he concluded, "have come alive again", with a "poignancy [he] could never have expected" (Anon 33).[48] And that reference to the transmission of "memory" across time and space was poetic as well as explicit: "The whispers that echoed across generations will not be forgotten" (Anon 34).[49]

In other cases, connections were more imagined than real. Many learners felt the lure of what World War I historian Jay Winter dubbed fictive kinship.[50] One woman outside London drove for several hours to lay a wreath on a "forgotten" Anzac's grave; another systematically researched Anzac soldiers from his community, men who'd held high hopes of a new life in Australia, only to die in Flanders or on the Somme (Anon 35).[51] And the connection with one war was often conflated with others. One learner announced that

> I lost an Uncle in WW2, [so] I have some idea of how the families of lost men found their grief compounded by the fact their loved one was either missing or buried in some far off place, that they would never to able to visit…. My Aunt eventually saved enough to visit his grave in Ravenna, Italy in 1968, and I visited in 2005. The same story told hundreds of times, men lost now lying in countries that as children they probably hadn't even heard of…….how many graves have never had a visitor? (Anon 36)[52]

Mentions of relatives also served a secondary function – that of imbuing comments with authority. Referencing either military service, or relatives with service, acted as a source for claims which were otherwise opinions. "Both my Grandfathers served in WW1 one English and one Irish," wrote Georgina A. during a dispute over the justness of the World War I, "so I have first hand accounts of the 'obligations' felt by that generation who in the main were uneducated and easily influenced by the establishment and society to serve in this needless war".[53] Some such interventions were welcome. But there were also times these claims of "privileged knowledge" brought learners into conflict with teachers. Thomas L. and one moderator

engaged in a vexed debate over whether war memorials carried political as well as personal meanings.[54] That debate became all the more charged when Thomas L. discovered the teacher in question was herself a veteran. That experience commanded far more of his respect than her position as a moderator or her relevant PhD. He appealed emotionally to her service in several postings. "Does the fact that you have served and lost comrades, your brothers and sisters, only to say that their resting places, and their sacrifice only serves a political agenda?"[Sic] In this case, after two academic posts outlining the relevant position, the (slightly vexed) moderator ceased to reply (Figure 11.6).

While some learners found challenges to their beliefs difficult, other learners responded positively. "What I am finding compelling is the extra research on each story, to find the complex tapestry behind the simple narrative presented here", wrote Susan H. "… I am thoroughly enjoying myself."[55] Learners such as Susan H. also invested significant quantities of time and effort into finding and presenting quality sources relevant to the story at hand (mostly those available digitally). These learners were then imbued

Figure 11.6 "Buried in some far off place": The neatly manicured lawns of Ari Burnu Cemetery on Gallipoli. Commemorative sites like these sanitised the "trauma scapes" of the Peninsula. Every Anzac Day, the Commonwealth War Graves Commission stages something of a flower show on the Peninsula. Its arresting beauty is often remarked upon by visitors. Photo: Bruce Scates.

with significant social prestige via the “like” button. While many learners demonstrated this kind of “high performance”, other learners attempting to contribute to the discussion – while clearly well-meaning – could struggle when distinguishing which sources held value and which should be hedged. Tertiary sources such as modern newspaper articles and governmental websites were frequently posted, as were links of more dubious provenance – discussion boards and non-organisational websites. By far the greatest problem was the frequent reference to fiction and television – invariably prompting lively conversation. These could be both highly visible and difficult to corral, especially in the second week of the course, focused on war and gender. “I wonder if anyone else has seen the drama series “Anzac Girls“? wrote one learner. “… it was really good and I think based on true life events? Definitely worth watching.” (Angela A.)[56] Reference to these creative works was not misleading in itself, only when learners imbued fiction with the same authority as history.

The independence of the online learner: negotiating politics and nationalism

What all this suggests is the independence of the learner and perhaps the democratic character of MOOCs generally. Expertise, peer review and the integrity of the historical source were not always respected in so large, so vocal and so unruly a forum. And it alerts us to a grave structural problem native to on-line learning (and forms of social media more generally): visibility. Learners were often confronted with up to 200 comments on each step, so many chose to filter the thread by the number of “likes” a particular discussion received. There were advantages to this approach. FutureLearn, in common with many online learning websites, actively encourages “liking” a valuable post – and filtering by “like” allowed learners to find and engage with high-quality comments. Unfortunately, the most popular posts were not necessarily those which add the most value. The “buffet” style “learn-at-your-own-pace” that online learning allows also ensured a premium was placed on comments which appeared first. These had more time to accrue the most “likes”. Those with controversial or adversarial positions often gained “likes” from those few who agreed. Without a “dislike” button, and alienated by the commentary already present, some chose to leave the discussion altogether – it is likely these would have made the conversation more diverse.

Maintaining the educational quality of the discussion was one challenge we encountered. Outright opposition was another. Here it needs to be stated that most learners clearly approved of the course. That is evident not just in the comments above but is much higher than average completion rates for free online learning. Even so, some took issue with what they saw as a “politically-driven” agenda. Such comments bore a strong correlation to events happening outside the learning and teaching environment. Run 4 coincided with the immediate aftermath of the 2016 United States

presidential election and Week 3 (focused on how ethnicity altered men's experiences of war) proved particularly challenging to moderate. "[This week has looked at the] cases of four men and tried to imply that they were poorly treated because of their colour or antecedents", commented Brian C., "yet their experiences reflect that suffered by many of the soldiers of that time."[57] One such case centred on the story of Alex McKinnon, one of Australia's "Black Diggers". McKinnon's will bequeathed all his worldly goods to his mother, an Aboriginal woman known by the name of "Cobb". When McKinnon was killed in Flanders, a parcel containing his books, bible, pipe and wallet was duly despatched to his mother. But not his medals. "I am of the opinion that the war medals would not be valued by "Cobb"", Major J.W. Pugh, Base Commandant at Keswick Barracks announced, "and suggest they be awarded to Mrs Mary McKinnon" (Alex's white stepmother, and a woman he had never met). Nor did "Cobb" receive Alex McKinnon's war gratuity, even though she applied for it. The military authorities thought that sum of money, based on a soldier's period of service, would be best entrusted to the Chief Protector of Aborigines in Adelaide.[58] The debate surrounding this case demonstrated how strong communities of learning could effectively self-regulate. One learner immediately took issue with Brian C.'s critique. "Not one of the white servicemen would have had their medals given to someone other than family where family existed and was known to do so … sorry, but that's the rub here." (Patricia D.)[59] Others followed, "Why is it wrong to highlight racism and social injustice?" learner Shelia G. challenged. "Why are you disrespecting the experience of this soldier and his family? Why does he 'count' less to you?"[60] Normally the course moderator might make two to three direct interventions a week, partly to enhance discussion but also to guide disruptive learners away from undesirable behaviour. That week upwards of some 30 postings were necessary, reflecting the fraught interaction between online and offline spaces.

The historians and institutions involved in producing the MOOC strove for the highest standard of scholarship within the limited format of online learning. Teacher/student ratios are an issue of real concern to university teachers today – but a ratio of one "moderator" to several thousand students is not uncommon in the world of internet learning. Managing the pre-existing expectations of the learners, many from a non-academic background, was another significant challenge. Many who enrolled in the MOOC had strongly held opinions about the cause, nature and justice of the conflict, and students sometimes reacted sharply to any view different to their own. Alec D. blasted the course in his final review, stating he had been "exposed to an ill-conceived retrospective lacking in context and perspective delivered by twenty-first century historians with a narrow liberal agenda."[61] Julia R. also felt there was "too much colouring with today's attitudes and sensitivities". The "story became political [she complained] and I think a partial victim to lazy caricature. Perhaps greater contextual information … would not have been amiss?"[62] The inference here was that greater contextual

information would support an alternative, more acceptable reading than the commentary of experts or a host of recommended peer-reviewed texts.

The drift of much World War I scholarship in recent years has been to adopt a transnational approach to the conflict. As the editor of the *Cambridge History of the First World War* observed, a global catastrophe demands a global perspective.[63] While the *100 Stories* project spoke to transnational themes, it was funded and managed by Australian institutions, and its most compelling case stories were drawn from Australian archives. There was a very good reason for this. Australia's lavish expenditure on commemorative projects has created some of the most extensive digital archives in the world, a database now accessible to a global community of learners. While the course educators continuously addressed World War I's global reach, the Australian focus of the stories nonetheless stirred up some controversy, specifically with British learners. Not all found an Anzac cousin across the seas, and quite a few took exception to any remotely anti-British sentiment expressed by contemporaries. Australian historians have long debated World War I's role as a crucible of nationalism. And many have observed disenchantment with Empire through the course of that conflict. But a remark by Tev Davies, an Australian nurse stationed in England, that Britain was a land more "bound by tradition" than Australia and its people (often) narrow-minded and "pompous", provoked predictable furore. (Sheree, G.)[64]

Colonial legacies proved particularly difficult to negotiate. The learning step "Their Name Liveth for Evermore?" focused on the story of Abas Ghansar, an Indian man who enlisted for war in Australia despite his own physical illness. It proved a tipping point for many British learners. Tina M. ignored the racial and physical intersectionality of the story:

> Why was Indian independence brought into this story?!!! It wouldn't be just another chance to have a go at the British would it? His story stood alone and roused deepest sympathy in me. If you wish to see whether the Indians were valued by the British, go and look at the Menin Gate and the other memorial nearby on the Ypres ramparts. People in glass houses comes to mind…[65]

Despite repeated interventions by the course moderator (who for the final five runs was a New Zealander), some British learners never wavered from their belief that a course made by Australians must be inherently anti-British. "Interpretation leading to too much Brit bashing", wrote Chris F. dismissively in his feedback to the course.[66]

In a globalised world, nationalist narratives often take unexpected turns.[67] It was not surprising that learners based in Turkey and New Zealand laid their own respective claims over Chunuk Bair as a key commemorative site at Anzac. The New Zealand memorial was placed there in 1925, the first such monument to be raised on the Peninsula.[68] Since the early 1990s, it has been "stared down" by a 10 metre statue of Ataturk, a pointed reminder of

Ottoman victory in the victory in the Dardanelles and a forceful instance of dialogical memorialisation. Gallipoli was contested ground in 1915 and (as recent scholarship into the "ownership" of Anzac suggests) it remains contested today.[69] Some learners were offended by an attempt to politicise commemorative space; Aysel G. responded to their challenge.

> As a Turkish person, I can … answer your question[s]. Our land was washed away with the blood of our soldiers our ancestors died for the sake of our lives today and Gallipoli [is an] important place for us. It was the place that saved our country and at the point we almost lost our hope, that man – Mustafa Kemal Ataturk – gave us hope, he became the light of so many people… [We] just need to honor our one and only true leader. I don't see any harm in this.[70]

Others did, and in the end, an open letter from the Lead Educator sought to restrain heated dispute. Less expected was a response from South America. "We Uruguayans [sic] are said to have boiling blood," one learner declared,

> I'm not objective. … I hadn't know [sic] of the statue, maybe because all the British written books that I've read about the campaign obviated the final insult. And not very subtle at that. Don't want to offend [sic] any Turkish [sic] fellow participants of the course. (Alvaro C.)[71]

Yet another Turkish learner avoided any comment on the statue at all, speaking instead of the emotional connection engendered by war.

> i live in turkey and my grand grand father [sic] also took place [sic] in Gallipoli war which was horrible. last year i went to visit Çanakkale where Gallipoli is, and all i could tell this one can still feel bitter pain of war and soldiers there. i couldn't help myself and tears ran fell of me [sic] eyes. (Leyla D.)[72]

That intervention was better received by increasingly divided course learners, with both a family connection and the intimacy of the response offering scope for empathetic engagement. Clearly, the MOOC touched on a range of sensitive issues and some well beyond the reach of World War I.

Conclusion

The US historian Barbara Rosenwein has alerted scholars to the importance of "emotional communities". These, she explains, are similar to social communities

> but the researcher looking at them seeks above all to uncover systems of feeling: what these communities … define and assess as valuable or

> harmful to them; the evaluations that they make about others' emotions; the nature of the affective bonds between people that they recognize; and the modes of emotional expression that they expect, encourage, tolerate and deplore.[73]

Of course, the learners' forum centred on the *100 Stories* MOOC was not a community in any physical sense. Few of its participants would ever meet and many came from vastly different backgrounds and locations. Even so, most professed an immense emotional investment in the memory of World War I and many were what scholars have called "memory agents", consciously engaged in the work of remembering.[74] The posts we've considered in this chapter range from outrage to excitement, pathos to celebration: the "modes of emotional expression", as Rosenwein puts it, varied enormously. But one point all these learners had in common: a desire to somehow connect with an Anzac past, actual (though a sense of a family's inheritance) or imagined.[75]

Learning on-line offers historians a chance to engage with such emotional communities. Few mediums facilitate so wide a forum to discuss historical work or so raw a perspective on the shaping of historical sensibilities. But MOOCs also have their limitations. And ultimately neither an online teacher nor for that matter a museum curator controls the message independent learners take from these respective forums.

While this chapter has highlighted many of the challenges encountered in the *100 Stories,* one should not lose sight of its achievement. Often the success of the Mass Online course is gauged by aggregate figures, the number of posts, completions or enrolments. By this simple quantitative evaluation both *World War One: A History in 100 Stories* and the much-visited *Love and Sorrow* exhibition has proved something of a triumph. But historians should also be mindful of more important measures. The transmission of knowledge and the critical skills fostered by historical inquiry are not something one can chart on a spreadsheet. The achievement of the MOOC and the exhibition is that both facilitated what one learner called a "huge paradigm shift", offering not just new "angles" on the war years, but also on the years to follow them (Jacquie B, 2015).[76] Digital stories also opened spaces for new kinds of learning. "The silence of these presentations", as Jill F. aptly put it, "is indeed defeaning".[77] Most important of all perhaps, the MOOC "inspired" learners to learn more and empowered them with the skills to negotiate new archives. And in this new and democratic teaching medium, the last word should go to a learner. Cathi M. described the *100 Stories* as a "provocative, comprehensive and deeply moving course". It was, she remarked, "an amazing, immersive learning experience". But it was not "the abundance of beautifully produced videos, the on-location shots in Gallipoli and Europe, the range of topics, [or] the inclusion of music & art" that mattered most to her. Rather it was a willingness "to think outside the box" and share new insights with others.[78] Perhaps that quest for flexible, versatile and collaborative learning is the greatest promise and greatest challenge of online teaching (Figure 11.7).

Figure 11.7 “On location in Gallipoli”: journalism students capture footage near Walker’s Ridge at Anzac. Each week’s topic was introduced with on-site commentary from either Gallipoli or the Western Front, commemorative landscapes framing the *100 Stories* themes. The direct involvement of students further democratised teaching and learning. Photo: Bruce Scates.

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