THE ENDURING IMPACT OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR

A collection of perspectives

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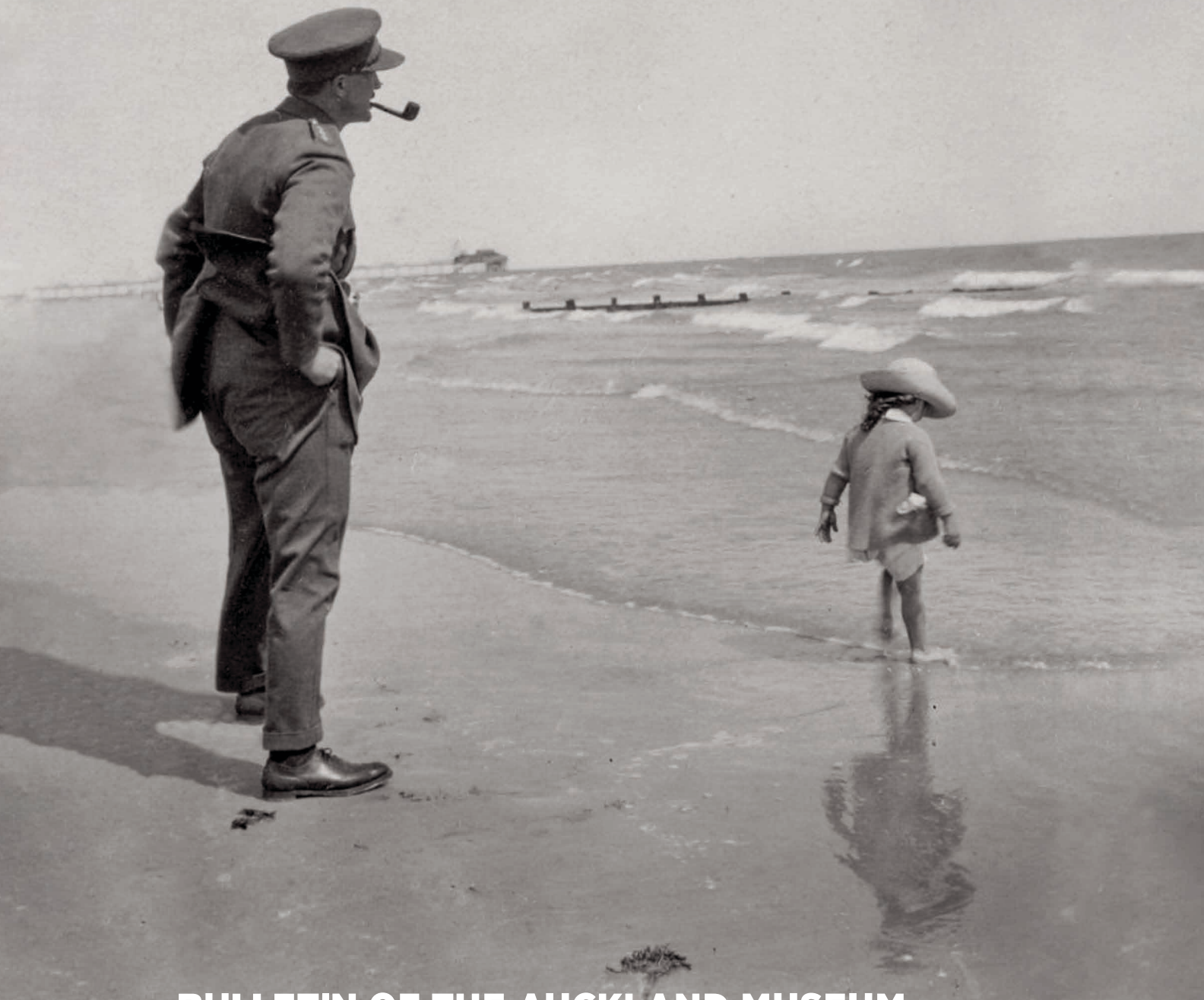

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‘Fittingly Displayed’: The Acquisition and the Exhibition of Photographs of New Zealand’s Great War Medal Recipients at the Dominion Museum

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Abstract

In 1917, the director of the Dominion Museum in Wellington, New Zealand sent his first form letter to the next-of-kin of New Zealanders awarded medals during the Great War. The director wrote to families, asking them for photographs of their decorated kin, and any other artefacts, ‘in readiness for the time when they can be fittingly displayed’. The outcome of this effort was 71 photographic display boards, now held at Archives New Zealand along with the correspondence associated with the acquisition, reproduction, and display of the photographs.

The heroic, commemorative narrative represented by the images featured on these boards was just one of many ways in which photographic technology operated during and immediately after the war. However, as Sandy Callister notes in her 2008 book, *The Face of War: New Zealand’s Great War Photography*: ‘…[t]oo often, the multiplicity of ways in which New Zealanders produced and consumed photographs during the war years is overlooked’. With this in mind, the article considers the nature of war photography, museums, and public remembrance, through the close examination of the correspondence related to the Great War medal recipients’ photographic display boards. By doing so, the article amplifies the work of Callister, in addition to Tanja Luckins and Anne-Marie Condé’s research, which has examined the motivations behind the donation and sale of Great War soldiers’ diaries and letters to the Australian War Memorial in Canberra and Mitchell Library in Sydney. As this case study demonstrates, we see that photographic prints, because of their capacity to be copied, existed simultaneously both in private and in public, and conveyed different but also overlapping meanings in each of these two spheres.

Keywords

Dominion Museum; First World War soldiers’ portraits; history of collecting; museum collections; New Zealand; photography

INTRODUCTION

After the tactical failure of the armies of the British empire and France on the Somme in 1916, the war seemed to demand an alternative approach to its public presentation. A new type of military history was needed to make sense of this defeat and the protracted, unprecedented nature of the conflict. A group of British politicians and prominent citizens believed that the most fitting and effective way to do this was through a ‘National War Museum’, which was officially established in March 1917. (Later that year, the ‘national’ institution became the Imperial War Museum (IWM) after its founders were reminded of the Dominions’ contributions to the war).[1]

Advocates of the IWM promoted it as a setting where ‘the individual [would] find the work of himself and his family exhibited for all time as a living acknowledgement of their sacrifices offered by them to the Empire’.[2] They aspired to an institution that would provide ‘a more intimate personal interest for the individual than any museum that has ever been contemplated’.[3] The museum’s collecting committees soon began accumulating diverse materials in a range of subject areas that would enable the museum to exhibit

1 On the formation of the Imperial War Museum see Gaynor Kavanagh, ‘Museum as Memorial: The Origins of the Imperial War Museum’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 23, (1988), 77–97.

2 ‘The Imperial War Museum’, circa 1917, 9, WA10 3 ZWR 6/8 part 2, Archives New Zealand, Wellington (ANZ).

3 *Ibid.*

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https://www.aucklandmuseum.com/discover/research/publications/bulletin/vol21/ross
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'total war'. Photography was perfect for connecting visitors personally to this subject, and within a year, the IWM's Photography Section held 10,000 items.[4]

Hillary Roberts, who is the Research Curator of this collection, observes that 'professional and amateur photographers of all nationalities combined to create a significant body of work which informed public understanding during the war itself'.[5] However, most historical considerations of First World War photography disregard the ways in which the public understood this pervasive medium. Research tends to focus on official photography and its contested status as propaganda and historical record, or on the amateur soldier photographer and the issue of censorship.[6] New Zealand photographic historian Sandy Callister asserts that: 'What historians have overlooked is how central photography was *at the time*…. [F]ew works of history in New Zealand deal specifically with the accumulation, use and dissemination of photographic records.'[7] Too often, she observes, the 'multiplicity of ways in which New Zealanders produced and consumed photographs during the war' goes unnoticed.[8]

This article builds on Callister's insights.[9] Instead of looking at the production and subject matter of New Zealand's official First World War photography, it is concerned with war-time photography on the home front, specifically the Dominion Museum's acquisition of around 2000 individual photographic portraits of decorated soldiers.[10] The article is a study of New Zealand's '*evolving* mnemonic culture of the Great War', as seen through the process of museum collecting from 1917–1921. In particular, it explores the degree to which *becoming* a collection multiplied the meanings of the photographs, at a time before local war memorials and Anzac Day were the dominant mode of community remembrance.[11] It introduces museum director Allan Thomson, who designed the collecting initiative on behalf of the Dominion Museum, and touches on his motivations and the strategies he used to secure portraits—as well as other related material—from next-of-kin and returned servicemen. It goes on to survey donors' responses to Thomson's appeal, based on a reading of a sample of the archive generated by his requests.[12] The conclusion considers what this scheme, and the responses to it, demonstrates about photography's role in determining historical meaning towards the end of, and immediately after, the Great War.[13]

4 'The Imperial War Museum', circa 1917, 21, WA10 3 ZWR 6/8 part 2, ANZ. The IWM now has almost eleven million items in its photography collection. https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/photographs (accessed 25 June 2019).

5 Hilary Roberts, 'Photography', in *1914–1918-online. International Encyclopedia of the First World War*, Ute Daniel, Peter Gattrell, Oliver Janz, Heather Jones, Jennifer Keene, Aland Kramer, and Bill Nasson, eds, Freie Universität Berlin, Berlin, 8 October 2014, accessed 18 June 2019, https://encyclopedia.1914–1918-online.net/article/photography.

6 Scholars focussing on official war photography and photographers include Martyn Jolly, 'Australian First-World-War Photography: Frank Hurley and Charles Bean', *History of Photography*, 23, no. 2, (1999), 141–148; Robert Dixon, 'Spotting the Fake: C.E.W. Bean. Frank Hurley and the Making of the 1923 Photographic Record of War', *History of Photography*, 31, no. 2, (2007), 165–179; Peter Robertson, 'Canadian Photojournalism During the First World War', *History of Photography*, 21, no. 1 (1978), 37–52; Laura Brandon, 'Words and Pictures: Writing Atrocity into Canada's First World War Official Photographs', *Journal of Canadian Art History*, 31, no. 2 (2010), 110–126. For war-time photography as propaganda for military medicine on the U.S. home front see also Beth Linker, 'Shooting Disabled Soldiers: Medicine and Photography in World War I America, *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences*, 66, no. 3 (2011), 313–346.

7 Sandy Callister, *The Face of War, New Zealand's Great War Photography*, (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2008), 6, 7.

8 *Ibid.*, 6.

9 For work that explores war-time photography as photography undertaken *during* war, rather than war photography as photography of war, see Michael Fitzgerald and Claire Regnault, *Berry Boys: Portraits of First World War Soldiers and Families*, (Wellington: Te Papa Press, 2014); Kate Hunter and Kirstie Ross, *Holding on to Home: New Zealand Stories and Objects of the First World War* (Wellington: Te Papa Press, 2014), 32–33, 37. For personal photographs as war memorials in a British context see Catherine Moriarty, '"Though in a Picture Only": Portrait Photography and the Commemoration of the First World War', in *Evidence, History and the Great War: Historians and the Impact of 1914–1918*, Gail Braybon, ed., (New York: Berghahn Books, 2003), 30–47.

10 On New Zealand's official war photographer see Chris Pugsley, '"Who is Sanders?" New Zealand's Official Cameraman on the Western Front 1917–1919', *Stout Centre Review* 5, no. 1 (1995), 19–22. See also Melanie Lovell-Smith, 'Photographing New Zealanders at War', accessed 21 June 2019, https://ww100.govt.nz/photographing-new-zealanders-at-war.

11 Stephen Heathorn, 'The Mnemonic Turn in the Cultural Historiography of Britain's Great War', *The Historical Journal*, 48, no. 4 (2005): 1123. On the history of New Zealand's war memorials see Jock Phillips, *To the Memory: New Zealand's War Memorials* (Nelson: Potton & Burton, 2016). First World War memorials are discussed in chapters two and three. On Anzac Day see Scott Worthy, 'New Zealand's First Anzac Days', *New Zealand Journal of History* (*NZJH*) 36, no. 2 (2002), 185–200.

12 The photographs are in two series: AALZ 902 and AALZ 25044, Archives New Zealand. Individual records in series 902 are described as 'Exhibition photographs – Great War medal recipients' on Archives New Zealand's database. The correspondence related to the photographs is in AALZ 907, ANZ. A random sample of approximately one quarter of the correspondence was consulted for this study.

13 Useful comparative studies of the collection of personal WWI-related documentary records are Tanja Luckins, *The Gates of Memory: Australian People's Experiences and Memories of Loss and the Great War*, (Freemantle: Curtin University Books, 2004), chapter 8 as well as Luckins, 'Collecting Women's Memories: The Australian War Memorial, the Next of Kin and Great War Soldiers' Diaries and Letters as Objects of Memory in the 1920s and 1930s', *Women's History Review* 19, no. 1 (2010), 21–37; Anne-Marie Condé, 'Capturing the Records of War: Collecting at the Mitchell Library and the Australian War Memorial', *Australian Historical Studies*, 125 (2005), 134–152.

PIONEERING HISTORY IN THE MUSEUM?

New Zealand's national museum, which opened in 1865 as the Colonial Museum, was initially dedicated almost entirely to collecting, researching, and displaying natural history and ethnology.[14] However, just prior to the outbreak of the war in Europe, the government began looking at the systematic acquisition and preservation of New Zealand's history of European settlement, through private records and documents. The museum—by now designated 'Dominion'—would house this national collection which would come into its own for the coming generations. This new direction coincided with the appointment of Allan Thomson, the museum's third director, in January 1914. Two years later, the New Zealand born, Oxford-educated geologist submitted a formal report on establishing such a collection. In this paper, Thomson predicted that 'the whole tendency of historical research serves to show that documents of a private nature will be … valued by the historian of the future'.[15]

Such aspirations reflected the intellectual climate of the period. In the decades around 1900, some Pākehā were developing an appreciation of their fast-fading pioneering past. Concerned amateur scholars, politicians, and civil servants began tracking down key documents from the colonial period which would later form the basis of historical research and writing.[16] As a corollary, so-called early or old settler organisations also sprung up in this period. Members of these groups came together to celebrate a district's progress, usually by marking significant anniversaries, but very occasionally through the formation of local museums and collections. Fiona Hamilton, in her study of Pākehā collective memory at this time observes that the 'pioneering histories' of these organisations were 'genealogies of communities striving for a sense of legitimacy in a recently settled land'.[17]

However, the outbreak of war compelled Thomson to expand his collection activities and to consider the acquisition of contemporary military artefacts, documents, and imagery for the Dominion Museum, alongside his commitment to amassing 19th century historical records. Through 1915 the director tried to obtain material from Gallipoli, although he was disadvantaged by distance and the absence of an active local agent to collect on his behalf for the museum.[18] And because Thomson was civilian, official war trophies were unavailable to him: they remained the property of military authorities. Only a few personal artefacts made their way back to Wellington; others—mostly unused and generic—were supplied to the museum by the Defence Department.[19]

But during this period, when collections from the Dardanelles campaign failed to materialise, Thomson successfully acquired items related to battles fought on New Zealand soil in the 1860s and 1870s. This was a large collection, including historical photographs of New Zealand Wars medal recipients, which the museum negotiated to buy from a private collector, W.F. Gordon, between June 1914 and early 1916.[20] Thomson was conscious of the purchase's strategic importance, noting in the museum's annual report for 1915–16 that the 'Gordon Collection' was one of two recent additions to the museum that formed 'a fitting nucleus for the national historical collection, the growth of which, it is hoped, will be the principal feature of the year's activity'.[21]

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14 C. McCarthy, 'Displaying Natural History: Colonial Museum in *The Amazing World of James Hector*, S. Nathan and M. Varnham, eds, (Wellington: Te Awa Press, 2008), 49–61. In its early years, photography was a minor adjunct to the museum's research activities. See Athol McCredie, 'Augustus Hamilton – Creating a Visual Database', *Journal of the Royal Society of New Zealand*, 47, no. 1 (2017), 138–144.

15 Allan Thomson, 'Report on the Establishment of a National Collection of Historical Records', 20 January 1916, MU01/015/07, Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa Archives, Wellington (Te Papa Archives). Thomson conducted this investigatory work under the auspices of a statutory body, the Board and Science and Art. The government's ambition to establish a national historical collection is covered by David Colquhoun '"The Pioneers Are Steadily Passing to the Great Beyond": Early Collecting and the National Historical Collection', *Archifacts*, October (2005), 1–17.

16 Fiona Hamilton, 'Pioneering History: Negotiating Pakeha Collective Memory in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries', *NZJH*, 36, no. 1, (2002), 66–81. The Early Settlers and Historical Association of Wellington was set up in 1912; 'to promote and foster the study of Wellington and New Zealand and a spirit of patriotism and friendship in the people'. *Journal of the Early Settlers and Historical Association of Wellington* 1, no. 1 (1912), not paginated. See also Sean Brosnahan, To *Undying Fame: The Otago Settlers Association and its Museum, 1898-1998*, (Dunedin: Otago Settlers Association, [1998]).

17 Hamilton, 'Pioneering History', 77.

18 Thomson approached New Zealand's official war correspondent, Malcolm Ross, in August 1915, but nothing came of this, unlike Ross's Australian counterpart, Charles Bean, who is lauded for his contributions to the founding of the Australian War Memorial and the breadth of its First World War collections. For an assessment of Ross's work on Gallipoli, see Ron Palenski, 'A New Zealand Failure in the Great War', *Australian Historical Studies* 39, no. 1 (2008), 19–35.

19 On Thomson's numerous attempts to collect war-related material from overseas, see Kirstie Ross, '"More than books tell": Museums, Artefacts and the History of the Great War' in *Making History a Difference: New Approaches from Aotearoa*, Katie Pickles, Lyndon Fraser, Marguerite Hill, Sarah Murray and Greg Ryan, eds, (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge University Scholars, 2017), 240.

20 See Rebecca Rice, 'From Aide-memoire to Public Memorial: The "Gordon Collection" of Photographic Portraits Relating to the New Zealand Wars', NZJH 52, 1 (2018), 41–68.

21 Thomson, 'Report of the Director of the Dominion Museum 1915-16', *Appendices to the Journals of the House of Representatives*, H-33, (1916), 4.

A selection of photographs of the medal recipients was displayed soon after the collection came into the museum (Fig. 1). When the Minister of Internal Affairs opened the exhibition on 8 April 1916, he echoed Thomson's belief that these portraits formed the foundations of a national history collection. He also noted that the veterans depicted in the portraits were 'men who took [an] active part in the making of history in this country during the turbulent days of the Maori wars'.[22] The exhibition and these comments were apposite, as the first anniversary of the landings at Anzac Cove by the New Zealand Expeditionary Force (NZEF) was rapidly approaching. In this context, exhibition visitors (and readers of the newspaper report) would have been inclined to link the heroes who had made history in the 1860s with the soldiers whose efforts on Gallipoli were being recognised and were continuing to make New Zealand's history for the future.

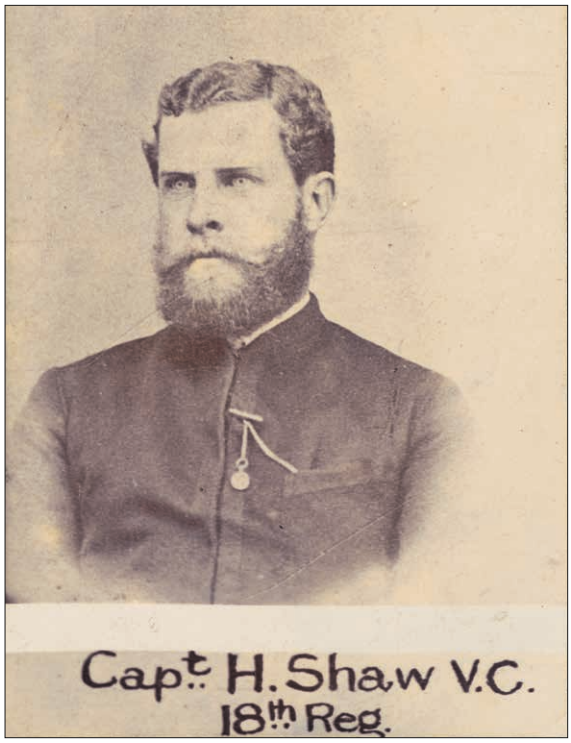

Figure 1. The portrait of New Zealand Wars recipient Captain Hugh Shaw came to the Dominion Museum as part of the Gordon Collection in 1915. Shaw also served in Afghanistan, Egypt, Ireland and India. Purchased 1916. Te Papa (0.045187).

'GIFTS SPECIALLY DESIRED'

The following year, when Thomson embarked on a targeted collecting programme for the museum, he exploited this assumed connection between the present and the past. In February 1917 he sent out a circular to descendants of early settlers asking for donations related to 'the history of the Dominion from its commencement'. With a ministerial signature adding authority to the document, recipients were ensured the 'permanent preservation' of any donations given to a national collection. The circular listed eleven 'Gifts Specially Desired', including 'letters written from the Front during the present great European War'.[23] A second circular, declaring that '[m]aterial in reference to Great War [was] specially desired', was sent at the same time.[24] Securing items related to current events appeared to be just as critical as salvaging those from the 19th century.

A newspaper article from April 1917 also stressed that collecting material related to the current overseas conflict was an urgent matter. Its anonymous author—Thomson perhaps—strategically invoked New Zealand's colonial wars of the 19th century to motivate donations of material related to the current fighting overseas. The article appealed to readers: if 'relations of a Maori War veteran [had] a son or a brother at the front[,] [l]etters from him would be of interest' to the Dominion Museum.[25] Pre-empting the loss of historical records underpinned this request: 'The heroes of today will be the veterans of to-morrow, and there is no reason why their writings and doings should not be collected while the fighting is going on, instead of leaving it to a future generation to send out a search party such as is now in progress to discover and fill the blanks of the past history of the Dominion.'[26]

PHOTOGRAPHS OF THE 'HEROS OF TODAY'

Uniting the 'heroes of today' in one place was the key note in Thomson's next collecting scheme, which he launched around July 1917. This time his emphasis diverged from previous efforts. Thomson now sought recent photographic portraits of men awarded medals for gallantry, which he described in the first version of his requests as 'New Zealanders whose conduct has marked them out for distinction by their King and country'.[27] However, the salvage of settler history remained a priority. In the standard letters he sent, Thomson also mentioned, somewhat obliquely, that '[i]n putting on record the fine work of our Pioneer Settlers' by establishing a national

22 *Dominion*, [8 April 1916], clipping (incorrectly annotated 8 March 1916). MU14/001/0010, Te Papa Archives. See also Charlotte Macdonald, 'The First World War and the Making of Colonial Memory', *Journal of New Zealand Literature*, 33, no. 2 (2015), 15–37.

23 Russell, 15 February 1917, MU73/001/82, Te Papa Archive.

24 For a list of the types of material sought by Thomson see Ross, '"More than books tell"', 243. For methods used to solicit war-related historical material by staff at the Mitchell Library, Sydney and the Australian War Memorial, see Condé, 'Capturing the Records of War, 136–45.

25 *Evening Post*, 10 March 1917, 6.

26 *Ibid.*

27 Thomson to Mr W.J. Bassett, [19] December 1917, AALZ 907 box 2, ANZ.

historical collection—it was 'most desirable to trace the splendid part their descendants are playing in the present great war for freedom'.[28]

This correspondence drew on newspaper lists of medal recipients and early embarkation rolls for next-of-kin contact details.[29] In his requests, Thomson asked next-of-kin and medal recipients themselves for additional war-related material—letters, trophies, and souvenirs—while reassuring these potential donors that their possessions would be 'valued and safeguarded in a manner impossible to the average dwelling'.[30] Thomson promised, too, that the photographs donated to a 'New Zealand War Section' of the 'National Historical Collection' would eventually be 'fittingly displayed'. In the interim, before a suitable venue was formally established, the portraits were installed for public viewing 'above the stairs' at the Dominion Museum.[31] The first framed groups, which comprised of randomly arranged portraits, were hung in this location in January 1918. Captions identified medal recipients, mostly in uniform, and sometimes explained the circumstances of a soldier's award.

Thomson's call for photographs resembled regular appeals made by newspapers for personal portraits which illustrated rolls of honour of dead and wounded soldiers. Circulated publicly in this way, deceased soldiers 'made their way back into the public arena as evidence of both service to and sacrifice for one's country', as Callister puts it.[32] A national portrait gallery of medal recipients and war heroes, however, served another purpose beyond that of mourning and remembrance. This display of myriad faces in a national institution validated a heroic version of the war. The men exhibited in the groups illustrated universal qualities admired and aspired to by many. As we will see, the museum was the context within which their deeds were confirmed as public property and the portraits were the medium for making this collective sense of the war.[33]

RECEPTION: 'A VERY NICE IDEA'

Thomson's revised collecting scheme ran from mid-1917 to 1921.[34] In that time, the clerk who administered it handled the correspondence and receipt or reproduction of more than 2000 portraits. The archive associated with the collection reveals that almost everyone contacted responded positively to Thomson.[35] Letters from two mothers whose sons received the Military Cross (MC), expressed sentiments that were typical of those who endorsed the initiative: Frank Greenish's mother 'fe[lt] very proud that [the photograph] should be included in the national collection', while Clarence Seton's 'consider[ed] it a very nice idea….'[36]

The chance to display his son's portrait in a national gallery with those of other medal recipients also met with the approval of Oliver Senior, the father of deceased MC recipient Charles Senior. In correspondence with Thomson he explained that: 'I have hitherto declined the invitations from the public press but [Charles's] mother + I recognise that the purpose for which you require [the photo] is of an entirely different nature + we are sending you a 'home portrait' [?] one he himself liked best.'[37]

Senior did not explicitly outline reasons behind this preference. Perhaps it was having the portrait displayed in the company of other imperial heroes in an enduring national institution that prompted Mr and Mrs Senior to favour the scheme (Fig. 2).

Much of the sampled correspondence is of a practical nature. In some cases photographs were delivered to the museum by hand, which suggests personal investment in the portrait gallery, and perhaps reflects a sense of pride, the preciousness of the photo, or the chance for a more intimate exchange with Thomson. Only one correspondent in the sample, Mr W.G. Berryman, felt that the scheme's focus was too narrow. Berryman wrote several times to justify the inclusion of his undecorated

28 *Ibid.*

29 Thomson to H. Watkinson, 19 October 1920, AALZ 907 box 16, ANZ.

30 Thomson to Mr W.J. Bassett, [19] December 1917, AALZ 907 box 2, ANZ. Thomson's reference to the protection provided by the museum echoed a claim made by Charles Bean when collecting private records for the Australian War Memorial. See Ross, 235–236.

31 Thomson to John Llewellyn Saunders, 7 May 1918, AALZ 907 box 14, ANZ.

32 Callister, *The Face of War*, 75–79; quote on 11.

33 Thomson's scheme predated a similar one undertaken by the Canadian War Records Office in London, launched at the start of August 1917. See Robertson, 'Canadian Photojournalism', 45. The New Zealand and Canadian schemes differed in scope from an IWM initiative that started at around the same time. In July 1917, the IWM announced in national and local newspapers, that it wanted to acquire portrait photographs to create a national visual record of those who had participated in the war. The museum's photography curator was 'anxious to receive photographs of every man who served'. Fifteen thousand portraits, mostly of those who died, came in between 1917 and 1919. Moriarty, '"Though in a Picture Only"', 38–39, quote on 38.

34 No official documentation has been sighted, yet, that reveals either the official start of the scheme or its conclusion.

35 This was also the case in Australia: Tanja Luckins has observed that next-of-kin contacted by the Australian War Memorial for war-related material 'belie[ved] that they were contributing to Australia's history, so consequently took up the task of replying to the AWM seriously'. Luckins, 'Collecting Women's Memories', 28.

36 Mrs Greenish to Thomson, 30 August 1917, AALZ 907, box 7; Mrs G.E. Seton to Thomson, 5 January 1920, AALZ 907 box 14, ANZ.

37 Oliver Senior to Thomson, 5 May 1920. AALZ 907 box 14, ANZ.

Figure 2. Charles Senior's head and shoulders 'home portrait' is third from the right in the middle row of this framed group of medal recipients. R21921822, AALZ 902 item 71, Archives New Zealand.

and deceased son, Stanley, in the portrait gallery, along with his son, W.O. Berryman, who was awarded the MC in 1915.[38]

On the other hand, Thomson's collection was developed using an expansive definition of nationality. All NZEF medal recipients, New Zealand-born or not, qualified for the gallery, as did New Zealand medal recipients who had served or were serving in other imperial forces —Victoria Cross (VC) recipient Bernard Freyberg, for example (Fig. 3). These men were all members of the British empire, their valour and bravery recognised as uniting them in their shared commitment to its defence.

Although the scheme's national scope elevated its purpose and shaped its reception, this caused anxiety for some next-of-kin. In a climate of suspicion around what was (and was not) 'British', even a decoration for gallantry might not adequately prove imperial loyalty. This was the case for the family of Louis Noedl, a Woodville man of Hungarian descent who won the Distinguished Service Order (DSO) and the MC as a member of the Australian Imperial Forces. Noedl was a 'foreign' sounding surname and his father Robert worried that, because the family's background was not known to museum visitors, they would judge his son by his name and not by his actions. To pre-empt any

Figure 3. Portraits of medal recipients were framed in groups like this one. In the centre is New Zealander Brigadier-General Bernard Freyberg, who was awarded the DSO and VC while serving in British units. R21921771, AALZ 902 item 20, Archives New Zealand.

38 Mr H.G. Berryman to Thomson, 26 April 1918; 1 November 1918; 26 November 1918. Thomson to Berryman, 14 May 1918; 4 December 1918. AALZ 907 box 2, ANZ.

Figure 4. Captain Lois Noedl. R24184040, AALZ 25044 2/F110, Archives New Zealand.

discrimination, Robert Noedl provided extensive details of the family's imperial credentials to accompany his son's portrait (Fig. 4). These were summed up in its caption: 'Captain Noedl is of Hungarian descent and his grandfather fought under the British flag and lost his life in The Crimean War'.[39]

Returned serviceman Tom Parsons demonstrated an alternative response to the scheme's national focus. Parsons, who served in the Field Ambulance, was awarded two medals for gallantry—the Distinguished Conduct Medal (DCM) and the Military Medal (MM). However, he politely refused to be included in the collection—the only person in the sample to do so. In his response to Thomson, Parsons stressed that he did 'not desire to perpetuate anything confined to a national state'. In declining the invitation to submit a photograph of himself, he also cited his humanitarianism as a reason for his refusal.[40]

'NO SOUVENIRS TO SEND YOU'

The generally positive reception to the scheme meant that the clerk administering it could not keep up with the work it created.[41] On the other hand, Thomson's call for First World War-related artefacts yielded little if anything for the museum. It seems that next-of-kin or surviving medal recipients preferred to keep memorabilia rather than surrender objects to a public institution. Sometimes—possibly to deflect Thomson's request—the material was described by owners as too trivial or personal for public consumption.[42] As the mother of MC recipient Joseph Venables (Fig. 5) put it: 'I have no souvenirs to send you; all he has sent are too sacred to me and would not appeal to any but a Mother.'[43]

Even original photographic prints were valuable mementoes that some families and soldiers did not want to surrender. Australian-born DCM recipient Joseph Ward, for example, had to remind the museum to return the one he had provided for copying. The snap, taken by an old friend of Ward's in Germany, was 'treasure[d] more than … the decoration'.[44]

Thomson's concurrent ambition—of locating historical records through related generations of soldiers—was also unsuccessful.[45] His attempts to 'rivet the links of the Pioneer Settlers, with their descendants', as he put it in one letter, did not stimulate the donation of 19th century material that he desired. Only two correspondents mentioned a family link to New Zealand's pioneering days, although it is unclear whether any donations came into the museum as a result of either exchange. One correspondent was the sister of MM recipient Robert Ure, who mentioned her brother's 'direct descent from one of our old pioneer families'. Thomson followed this up by sending Ure's sister the February 1917 circular, discussed above, and requested 'addresses of older members of the family'.[46] Another soldier who had a pioneering genealogy was MC recipient William McKail Geddes. Geddes' Scottish grandfather, William Webster, was described as 'one of

39 Robert Noedl to Thomson, 14 February 1919 and 25 February 1919, AALZ 907 box 13, ANZ. Such nervousness was unnecessary locally where Louis Noedl's allegiance was undisputed. Between January 1916 and December 1918, his name appeared 300 times under the heading 'The Call of Empire' in the *Woodville Examiner*, along with those of other loyal servicemen in the district.

40 Tom Parsons to Thomson, 15 August 1920, AALZ 907 box 13, ANZ.

41 By June 1920, the museum had at least 1600 portraits, which staff were having difficulty in processing for display. Thomson, War Committee meeting minutes, 18 June 1920, AD1 19/45, ANZ.

42 See also Luckins, 'Collecting Women's Memories', 27–29.

43 Mrs C. Venables to Thomson, 31 March 1918, AALZ 907 box 16, ANZ.

44 Thomson to Ward, 1 July 1920; Ward to Thomson (reminder), 6 October 1920. Photograph returned to owner, 16 November 1920, AALZ 907 Box 14, ANZ.

45 Thomson to Vivian Riddiford, 28 April 1918, AALZ 907 box 14, ANZ.

46 Thomson to Miss L.M. Ure, 2 April 1918, AALZ 907 box 16, ANZ.

Figure 5. Captain Joseph K. Venables. R24184877, AALZ 25044 1/F719, Archives New Zealand.

the ancient landmarks of the Far North'.[47] He arrived in New Zealand in 1839 and settled at Kohukohu, in the Hokianga. In 1850, Webster married Hanapera (Annabella) Gillies, whose mother was Ngāti Toro of Ngāpuhi.[48] This whakapapa (genealogy) brought to light a more complex narrative of New Zealand's 19th century history that Thomson may not have anticipated.

PHOTOGRAPHY AND NEW ZEALAND'S EVOLVING MNEMONIC CULTURE OF THE WAR

Three observations can be drawn from the preceding evidence about the media and narratives that New Zealanders were using to make sense of the war. Firstly, there was general support for the collection and public display of photographs that illustrated people and qualities of which they were proud; secondly, there was a reticence towards donating war-related objects as these seemed to possess no public meaning or value; and thirdly, current events dominated most people's sense of history. These factors meant that Thomson's references to the 19th century history and a narrative of intergenerational fighting families fell on deaf ears.

Two related factors facilitated the unproblematic transfer of photographs from private hands into the museum. Firstly, photographs can be reproduced and multiples of one image can co-exist in many different contexts. The 'fluidity of both a photograph's form and meaning as it circulates through different social contexts and institutional spaces' makes it a versatile and dynamic medium, as Robert Dixon puts it.[49] Personal photographs of First World War soldiers retained in domestic settings 'intersected with the everyday, [with] the personal and the historical'. This allowed families to 'construct a complex way of memorialisation', writes Callister.[50] But re-contextualised within a thematically unified collection and displayed in the museum, the portrait of an individual medal recipient straddled the public and the private, the civic and the sentimental, the nation and the empire.

Format also explains why next-of-kin and returned medal recipients were reluctant to relinquish cherished personal objects—even to a respected national institution. This was because objects could not be copied nor occupy multiple contexts and spaces simultaneously. Nicholas Saunders, in his study of the meanings generated by metal trench art from the Great War, notes that '[f]or all concerned, artefacts taken home and placed in domestic spaces mediated between past and present lives, moving history into private time by juxtaposing it with a personalized present'.[51] Personal souvenirs—even those that owners deemed trivial or were seemingly disconnected from combat—were potent and singular touchstones of experience for their custodians, and was a private affair.[52] For this reason they were too valuable to surrender to collective ownership, even with Thomson's promise that in the museum they would be 'valued and safeguarded in a manner impossible to the average dwelling'.[53] In the museum, the emotions invested in these objects by next-of-kin and medal recipients would be overwhelmed by the weight of national meaning-making.

The difficulties Thomson experienced in acquiring objects could also be attributed to the prevailing historical imagination. In New Zealand there was still little

47 *Observer*, 2 December 1904, 4.

48 Jennifer Ashton, *At the Margin of Empire: John Webster and the Hokianga 1841-1900*, (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2015), 99.

49 Dixon, 'Spotting the Fake', 166.

50 Callister, *The Face of War*, 7.

51 Nicholas Saunders, 'Bodies of Metal, Shells of Memory: "Trench Art", and the Great War Re-cycled', *Journal of Material Culture* 5, no. 1, (2000), 59–60.

52 Luckins observation, that '[t]he very materiality of soldiers' diaries and letters helped the next of kin contextualise memories which were rendered invisible by language alone', describes how and why this attachment worked in an Australian context. Luckins, 'Collecting Women's Memories', 33.

53 Thomson to Mr W.J. Bassett, [19] December 1917, AALZ 907 box 2, ANZ.

appreciation of the role of museums and their collections as media for presenting and understanding the past, despite tentative attempts to collect documentary heritage for the Dominion Museum. And although one or two early settler groups had set up museums, they preferred social events as a media for historical recollection. These were occasions when they could re-live mutual experiences and share memories of the past in person.[54]

Finally—and warranting further research—it is worth noting that not all members of the NZEF had pioneering pedigrees nor were they necessarily New Zealand-born. It could be argued that the composition of the forces that fought on behalf of the Crown against iwi in the 1860s and 1870s contributed to the lack of familial connections to 'the heroes of today' that Thomson sought. This was a relatively small and mobile force, and its members may not have remained in New Zealand in significant numbers as military settlers.[55] But perhaps overriding these demographic factors was a simpler psychological one: comprehending the unprecedented nature of a geographically distant conflict was challenging enough without considering the legacies of previous conflicts at home. Eventually Thomson seemed to have acknowledged this; by April 1918 he had stopped referring to the past in his efforts to collect the present.

CONCLUSION

Photography's value, writes Hillary Roberts, 'particularly as a powerful medium of mass communication [was] clearly established' during the First World War.[56] Its early uptake by the IWM acknowledged both its power and pervasiveness. On the edges of empire and far away from the battle front, photography was just as influential in mediating the meaning of the war. Dominion Museum director Allan Thomson actively sought photographs, including those of New Zealand's medal recipients, in order to commemorate and construct a heroic narrative around this unprecedented event.

This article, which builds on the insights presented in Sandy Callister's history of New Zealand's Great War photography, has explored the degree to which the meanings of the photographs of medal recipients shifted and multiplied in the process of becoming a museum collection. It has also been a case study in understanding how photography was more successful than material culture in New Zealand, in 'providing the crucial narratives in which memories of the war became socially acceptable'.[57] Overall it suggests that, in the context of an antiquarian imagination and in the face of an embryonic public commemorative infrastructure, this collection of photographs temporarily and conveniently mediated and consolidated a reassuring way of thinking about the war in New Zealand.

Today, the situation is reversed: the portraits of medal recipients collected by Thomson, although digitised for the public by Archives New Zealand, went unnoticed during the hundredth anniversary of the First World War, whereas social history, conveyed through personal objects and stories, was and is fundamental to the presentation of the past in museums, including particular narratives related to conflict. Thomson's other goal, of giving prominence and due recognition to the New Zealand wars within the history of the nation, has not yet been realised. But it is unacceptable today to expect 'future generations to send out search parties… [to] discover and fill in the blanks' about the conflicts at home that forged Aotearoa many decades before the First World War.

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54 Hamilton, 'Pioneering History', 77.

55 For the Marsden-funded project that explores 'garrison and Empire in nineteenth century' and lives of the 12,000 imperial soldiers who fought in New Zealand in the 1860s and 1870s, see http://www.soldiersofempire.nz/ accessed 24 June 2019.

56 Roberts, 'Photography', accessed 18 June 2019.

57 Heathorn, 'The Mnemonic Turn 1122.