

THE ENDURING IMPACT OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR

A collection of perspectives

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Introduction

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‘The European nations had dug themselves into a war trap’, wrote David Stevenson, ‘and on one level the story of 1917 is of their efforts to escape it’.¹ Over a century after the war’s end, it is not only the nations of Europe who are coming to terms with the impact of events of 1917. That year the conflict’s global reach expanded as the United States, in no small part due to Germany’s campaign of ‘unrestricted’ submarine warfare, and others—including China and Brazil—joined the Allied side. On the battlefield combatants experienced victory and loss from Passchendaele to Cambrai on the Western Front, at Caporetto on the Austro-Italian Front, and Beersheba and Ramadi in the Middle East.

Post-war political and social changes were signalled with the imminent collapse of the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman empires, and Russia—in the midst of revolution—withdrawn from the war. The Balfour Declaration pledged Britain’s support for a national home for the Jewish people in Palestine; India was offered ‘responsible government’ by Britain; suffragettes in Washington were arrested as they picketed the White House; and conscientious objectors from New Zealand were shipped to the Western Front in an attempt to force them to join the war effort. The United States and Japan signed the Lansing-Ishii Agreement, which acknowledged that the latter had ‘special interests’ in China. Within the British Empire, the Imperial (now Commonwealth) War Graves Commission was established to build cemeteries and memorials for the commemoration of the war dead, and an imperial war museum was founded to record both military and civilian experiences and to honour the sacrifices of war. In cultural life, Marcel Duchamp redefined art with the *Fountain* urinal; De Stijl was formed in the Netherlands; the art and literature review *Dada* was published in Zurich; and soldier poet, Wilfred Owen wrote *Anthem for Doomed Youth*. In medicine, Queen’s Hospital (later to become Queen Mary’s Hospital) opened, and there Harold Gillies and his colleagues developed many

techniques of plastic surgery, operating mostly on soldiers with facial injuries.

The narrative of 1917 and its legacy is characterised by a multitude of perspectives, practices, cultures, histories, locations, and expressions. It is the richness and diversity associated with this year that inspired a significant international symposium in 2017 during the centenary of the First World War, *The Myriad Faces of War: 1917 and its Legacy*.² While 1917 has been the subject of a number of events, publications, and even a recent feature film directed by Sam Mendes and simply titled *1917*, their focus has tended to be on major events directly related to the First World War. The focus of the symposium, on the other hand, was three-fold. Firstly, to concentrate on what happened in that year irrespective of whether or not it was directly related to the war. Secondly, to explore not only the events of 1917 but also their legacies, some of which continue to be felt today in political, economic, social, cultural, scientific, and technological spheres. Thirdly, to draw together many of these diverse facets into a shared conceptual space to gain something of a holistic impression of the year 1917. In this way, *The Myriad Faces of War: 1917 and its Legacy* symposium examined this single year, 1917, and expanded outwards to reflect on the significant impact of the Great War and associated events, and the way in which particular actions contributed to a reordering of global structures that have reverberated through the intervening century to the present.

Ensuing from the symposium was a publication, *The Myriad Legacies of 1917: A Year of War and Revolution* in which thirteen scholars reflected on the myriad legacies of the year 1917.³ As one book could not fully represent the richness and diversity of the research presented at the *Myriad Faces* symposium, it was always the intention of the organisers to seek an opportunity to publish more material presented at the event. This *Bulletin of the Auckland Museum* fulfils that objective. The peer-reviewed publication, comprising articles

1 David Stevenson, *1917: War, Peace, & Revolution*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017, 9.

2 *The Myriad Faces of War: 1917 and its Legacy* was held at the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa in Wellington between 25-28 April 2017. The organisers of the event were WHAM (War History Heritage Art and Memory) Research Network, Auckland War Memorial Museum, Manatū Taonga Ministry for Culture and Heritage, Massey University, Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, and The University of Auckland.

3 Maartje Abbenhuis, Neill Atkinson, Kingsley Baird, and Gail Romano eds., *The Myriad Legacies of 1917: A Year of War and Revolution*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018.

developed from symposium papers and emphasising previously unpublished research, continues two of the major themes established by both the symposium and *Myriad Legacies* publication: a diversity of perspectives and the legacy of events of 1917.

The diversity of the articles' topics underlines how the war—and, in particular, the year 1917—had a global impact that transcended the First World War's geographic reach. The range includes visual art, forms of commemoration and national identity, education, conscription, historiography, trade, diplomacy, social unrest and ethnic division, law, propaganda, visual and material culture, museum collections and contrasting manifestations of masculinity. The authors represent a diversity of backgrounds and reflect perspectives from Australia, Argentina, Germany, New Zealand, UK, and US.

Paul Gough and Marcus Moore explore contrasting aspects of creative practice. Gough's article is concerned with how artists of the First World War period attempted to 're-remember' the conflict. The sensitivity of portraying the victims of war is exemplified by the British government's 1917 edict banning depictions of dead British and Allied troops in officially sponsored war art. Gough discusses how artists have negotiated—and continue to do so—this challenge from the First World War to the present, focusing especially on Stanley Spencer's oil painting, *The Resurrection of Soldiers* (1928–29). For Moore, war is not the explicit topic of the artworks featured in his article. Instead he considers how the conflict forced the 'exile' of two artists; one from his native country (in the case of Frenchman, Marcel Duchamp) and the other from his country of adoption (in the case of American painter, Marsden Hartley). Moore uses the apparently accidental juxtaposition of Duchamp's sculpture, *Fountain* (1917), and Hartley's painting *The Warriors* (1913) in Alfred Stieglitz's 1917 photo as the starting point to compare the two artist's wartime trajectories and commonality of experience as exiles.

Commemoration, national identity, and the mythology of war are themes explored by a number of authors. Kingsley Baird discusses the return of New Zealand's unknown warrior from a First World War military cemetery in France in 2004 against a backdrop of the establishment of the Imperial War Graves Commission in 1917 to care for the graves of the British Empire's fallen. Baird argues that the unknown warrior continues to be enlisted in New Zealand's national identity narrative of overseas wars and sacrifice. The unknown warrior's tomb is the focus of the beginning of Steve Watters's analysis of the development of his Ministry for Culture and Heritage education programme at New Zealand's National War Memorial. The aim of the programme for school students is to achieve a balance of empathy and emotion, along with critical thinking in the practice of commemoration.

While war memorials are obvious subjects for the study of national identity and patriotism, Paul D. Turner's topic focuses on the role of singing and the official

introduction of songs composed by New Zealanders into public schools during the war. Unlike some of their stone or bronze counterparts, Turner argues these patriotic musical forms have not successfully transcended their immediate wartime use. Myths of the war, particularly those emanating from the Western Front, persist despite evidence to the contrary as Alexander Mayhew's article testifies. Mayhew describes how themes of futility, mud, and incompetent command still have currency in popular memory despite not being representative of a soldier's experience. Revisiting who, what, and how we remember have been constant themes of investigation during the commemoration of the centenary of the First World War. The old certainties and the perpetuation of myths as revealed by Mayhew, the patriotic songs discussed by Paul Turner, and the lack of criticality behind glib sentiments such as 'they died for us' which Steve Watters's education programme aims to complicate, are no longer fit for purpose.

Emanating from the 100 Stories project, Bruce Scates and Rebecca Wheatley explore the tragic outcomes of war for three Australian soldiers and their families, and how, even today, some stories are considered too raw for public consumption to be included in officially sanctioned commemorative projects. Scates and Wheatley contribute to this volume a 'counter narrative' to Australia's dominant First World War commemoration story. In contrast, the preferred narratives are those of war heroes whose status is recognised officially by the bestowal of medals of bravery. Unlike the tragic stories recalled by Scates and Wheatley, Lieutenant Albert Jacka's heroic profile, described in Bryce Abraham's article, is readily made available for public consumption, thus contributing to propaganda that stokes recruitment and supports the nation's wider war effort. Drawing parallels between military and sporting prowess, Abraham joins a line between official promotion of 'martial heroism and military celebrity' during the First World War and the use of contemporary decorated soldiers—healthy and sporting Anzac heroes—for the same ends. John Crawford also relates a success story of an individual soldier, New Zealander Herbert Hart. With particular emphasis on 1917, Crawford tracks Hart's upward trajectory: he had a 'good war during a bad year'. Again, unlike the tragic protagonists in Scates and Wheatley's article, Hart's war experience—on the surface at least—sets him up for a successful post-war life.

Two articles focus on visual and material objects in museum collections. The acquisition and display of these objects reveal wider institutional imperatives, including what stories collections are intended to tell. Kirsty Ross's discussion of the correspondence related to the acquisition and exhibition of photographs of New Zealand's Great War medal recipients at the then Dominion Museum⁴ reveals the different and overlapping meanings of these photographs in both private and public settings. While Ross continues a

4 The Dominion Museum is now Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa.

narrative of heroism and masculinity consistent with other articles, Joseph McBrinn reveals how objects can carry multiple and even contradictory meanings. Focusing on a singular object (a casket in the collection of Te Papa) made by a former combatant under the Disabled Soldiers' Embroidery Industry (established to provide employment for disabled soldiers), McBrinn reveals how notions of masculinity, disability, and craft were transformed by the First World War.

An international perspective is presented by Thomas Munro in his article concerning the form of a new world order that would determine the structure of post-war international relations. While the previous Hague Peace Conferences of 1899 and 1907 had influenced the US's role in global affairs, by 1917 it was clear that President Woodrow Wilson had a different vision for the post-war world. María Inés Tato's article also relates to the impact of US intervention in the war, in this case in Latin America. Tato examines the principle of Pan-Americanism and US influence in determining the foreign policies of Latin American states and the decision of most to align themselves with their influential North American neighbour against Germany. However, in Latin American intellectual circles opinions were divided between those who supported American leadership and those who rejected a perceived imperialist intervention by the US. While Madelyn Shaw and Trish FitzSimons's article deals with global matters, their focus is on trade and how the short supply of a vital resource, wool, sought after for military uniforms and blankets, promoted innovation in synthetic fibre technology.

Local conditions in Germany, New Zealand, and United States are examined by three articles. Michael Epkenhans reveals how Germany introduced desperate tactics such as unrestricted submarine warfare as a strategy to force Britain's defeat before the inevitable entry of the US into the war. While victory over Romania and the

Russian Revolution appeared to advance Germany's war aims, at home deprivation and shortages were taking a toll on the German population. Internal political tensions, social divisions, and pre-existing contrasting attitudes to the war clearly revealed the nation's seemingly unified front in support of the war was an illusion. In contrast to Epkenhans's national picture, the focus of Laura A. Macaluso's article considering divisions in society is decidedly local. In 1917, while Americans were preparing to enter the war on the side of the Allies, in New Haven, Connecticut, the fraught relationship between the increasingly ethnic town and elitist gown (the Ivy League Yale University) was evident. Macaluso examines the relationship between town and gown in 1917, and how the evocation of the response to an earlier conflict, 'The Spirit of 1776', played a role in fostering a sense of identity in New Haven.

David Littlewood's and Darise Bennington's articles examine matters of conscription and law and order in New Zealand during the war. Severe punishments—including death—were meted out to New Zealand servicemen overseas who did not comply with military discipline and regulations. At home and abroad, the military's treatment of conscientious objectors tarnished the country's First World War record. However, according to Littlewood, the determinations of military service boards, established to determine appeals for exemption from conscription, were more nuanced and measured than their reputation suggests. For the New Zealand government the maintenance of law and order was a primary concern during the war. Bennington relates how war regulations—particularly those that dealt with sedition and 'intoxicating liquor'—were introduced to attend to the particular challenges arising during a time of war as well as the lasting impact of some in contemporary New Zealand society.

Gail Romano is Associate Curator, History at Tamaki Paenga Hira Auckland War Memorial Museum where she works at developing, documenting, and researching the social and war history collections. Exhibition work includes the military medal visible storage section in the Pou Maumahara Memorial Discovery Centre and *Entangled Islands: Samoa, New Zealand and the First World War*. Gail is a board member of the WHAM (War History Heritage Art and Memory) Research Network. She co-edited the collection *The Myriad Legacies of 1917: A Year of War and Revolution* (Palgrave, 2018), following an interdisciplinary international symposium held in Wellington in 2017. She has worked previously at Waikato Museum following an earlier career in IT and business management, and education. gromano@aucklandmuseum.com

Kingsley Baird is a visual artist whose work represents a longstanding and continuous engagement with memory and remembrance, and loss and reconciliation through making artefacts and writing. Major examples of his work in this field are the New Zealand Memorial in Canberra (2001, with Studio of Pacific Architecture), the Tomb of the Unknown Warrior (2004, Wellington, New Zealand); the international Nagasaki Peace Park sculpture, *Te Korowai Rangimarie The Cloak of Peace* (2006); *Tomb* (2013) at France's Historial de la Grande Guerre; and *Stela* (2014) at the Militärhistorisches Museum der Bundeswehr in Germany. Memorial investigation continues in current practice with *Odyssey*, a sculpture collection concerned with composing historical and contemporary visual narratives – principally related to conflict – within the three-dimensional 'settings' of cast-bronze First and Second World War helmets. Kingsley Baird is the board chair of WHAM (War History Heritage Art and Memory) Research Network; and is the General Editor of Memory Connection journal. He is a Professor of Fine Arts in the College of Creative Arts at Massey University. www.kingsleybaird.com | k.w.baird@massey.ac.nz

