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► **To cite this version:**

Margaret Hutchison, Romain Fathi, Andrekos Varnava, Michael Walsh. The Longer Battle: Australia, World War I and Its Aftermaths. Australian Historical Studies (Online), 2021, 52 (1), pp.1 - 7. 10.1080/1031461X.2021.1852659 . hal-03366668

HAL Id: hal-03366668

<https://hal-sciencespo.archives-ouvertes.fr/hal-03366668>

Submitted on 10 Dec 2021

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To cite this article: Margaret Hutchison , Romain Fathi , Andrekos Vanarva & Michael Walsh (2021) The Longer Battle: Australia, World War I and Its Aftermaths, Australian Historical Studies, 52:1, 1-7

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/1031461X.2021.1852659>



Published online: 08 Feb 2021.



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Editorial

The Longer Battle: Australia, World War I and Its Aftermaths

At dawn on Saturday 25 April 2020, hundreds of Australians gathered in their driveways to observe a minute of silence to commemorate Anzac Day. In suburbs across the country they found inventive ways to mark the occasion, decorating fences with rosemary and wreaths, letterboxes with paper poppies, and pathways with candles and chalked messages 'Lest we forget'.¹ Anzac Day fell during the national COVID-19 pandemic shutdown and 'Light up the Dawn' or 'Stand at Dawn', as the Returned Services League (RSL) termed it, was a response to the cancellation of dawn services around Australia.² After the recent decline in Anzac Day Dawn Service attendance of post-centenary celebrations, it was a poignant act of remembrance and one that was perhaps all the more moving given its disconcerting echoes with history.³ Only once before in its over one-hundred-year history had Anzac Day ceremonies been similarly disrupted, during the public health crisis brought about by the Spanish influenza pandemic in 1919, when most events were postponed and some even cancelled.⁴ Anzac Day 2020 was not only a commemoration of the country's military past but also an event, like Anzac Day 1919, that connected communities in the face of a global pandemic and the social isolation that it brought in its wake. The traditions sparked by World War I still hold an important place in Australian political and cultural life, and today, as the country deals with crises that resonate with those of a century ago, the history of this conflict has a heightened relevance.

This special issue of *Australian Historical Studies* shifts the spotlight beyond Australians' wartime experiences onto the enduring effects and aftermaths of the conflict. World War I cast a long shadow and its legacies were many and

¹ 'Australia and New Zealand Mark Anzac Day in Driveways', *BBC News*, 25 April 2020; Matilda Boseley, 'Australians Turn Out for Driveway Dawn Service to Mark Anzac Day in Time of Coronavirus', *The Guardian*, 25 April 2020.

² Kelsie Iorio, 'Here's How to Hold an Anzac Day "Light Up the Dawn" Service in Your Driveway This Year', *ABC News*, 24 April 2020.

³ Georgie Moore, 'Numbers Down for Vic Anzac Dawn Service', *The Canberra Times*, 25 April 2019; Benoît Delespierre, 'Emotion intacte au Mémorial de Villers-Bretonneux pour un Anzac Day d'après Centenaire', *Le Courrier picard*, 25 April 2019.

⁴ *Northern Star* (Lismore, NSW), 4 April 1919, 5; *The Daily Telegraph* (Sydney, NSW), 23 April 1919, 8; *Barrier Miner* (Broken Hill, NSW), 23 April 1919, 1; *Cowra Free Press* (NSW), 24 April 1919, 2; *Lithgow Mercury* (NSW), 23 May 1919, 4.

varied. The intention of the guest editors is to extend the historiography of the conflict beyond the four years of fighting and the peace treaties made in its wake. The contributions deal instead with the far-reaching legacies of the war for Australia and Australians and how these manifested themselves in myriad ways, from their impact on the welfare of returning servicemen and women to the regional consequences of the global Spanish influenza pandemic, from nascent nationalisms and collective commemoration to selective immigration. The chronological parameters are also set wide and the articles range from the latter years of the nineteenth century to the 1970s with the passing of returned nurses.

The outpouring of scholarship that accompanied the centenary of World War I (2014–19) reinvigorated the field. In numerous publications during this period scholars revisited and revised ideas about the conflict, extending and enlarging World War I studies in the process.⁵ Most of the articles in this issue stem from a conference hosted by Nanyang Technological University and Flinders University in December 2018 titled 'Empire, Armistice, Aftermath: The British Empire at the "End" of the Great War', which explored the exit from war and the legacies it bequeathed. In the past, and despite some notable exceptions, literature pertaining to Australia's war experiences has tended to focus on the war years themselves, with only intermittent attention paid to the aftermaths and consequences of conflicts – be they political, social, economic or related to physical and mental health. The aim of this special issue, then, is to consider World War I beyond hard starting and finishing points. How does one delineate a conflict's ending? Is it when the guns fall silent? When a peace treaty is signed (which can sometimes happen years after the fighting has ceased)? Or when all veterans of a conflict have passed away? There are no clear answers to these questions, because the effects of a conflict can be felt for decades after the fighting on the battlefield ends. Intergenerational trauma can linger in families and societies.⁶ Borders can remain contested, shattered landscapes and environments embark on lengthy recoveries, and unexploded ordnance causes misery across the globe for generations to come.

Pioneering research specific to Australia's experience of the aftermaths of World War I has been produced by historians such as Alistair Thomson, Stephen Garton, Marina Larsson and Martin Crotty, Peter Stanley, Bruce Scates, Joy Damousi,

⁵ Jost Dülffer, 'Centenary (Historiography)', in *1914–1918-online. International Encyclopedia of the First World War*, eds Ute Daniel, Peter Gatrell, Oliver Janz, Heather Jones, Jennifer Keene, Alan Kramer and Bill Nasson, issued by Freie Universität Berlin, Berlin 2020-07-21; Carolyn Holbrook and Margaret Hutchison, 'Representing War: Cultural Histories of the First World War in Australia and New Zealand, 2013–2020', *Journal of Australian Studies* 44, no. 4 (2020): 410–426. This trend had also been observed prior to the centenary: see Heather Jones, 'As the Centenary Approaches: The Regeneration of First World War Historiography', *The Historical Journal* 56, no. 3 (2013): 857–78.

⁶ Laurie Leydic Harkness, 'Transgenerational Transmission of War-Related Trauma', in *International Handbook of Traumatic Stress Syndromes*, eds John P. Wilson and Beverley Raphael (Boston: Springer, 1993), 635–43.

Melanie Oppenheimer and Joan Beaumont.⁷ More recently, Romain Fathi and Bart Ziino have imported the concept of *sorties de guerre* developed in French historiography to put the processes and mechanisms of exiting a war under further scrutiny by identifying a postwar period with its own challenges to demobilise, reconvert a wartime economy to civil production, treat the wounded, clean up the land, rebuild, and recalibrate mentally. Exiting war is not merely a matter of undoing what was done but a long period of accommodating and adapting to new issues created or exacerbated by the war and its official end.⁸ As 1918 turned to 1919, Australia did not return to its prewar structures but embarked on a complex and creative reinvention, or adaptation. Many Australians were heavily engaged over numerous years to fashion a new society in the aftermath of the world's first industrialised conflict.⁹

This special issue of *AHS, Australia and the 'End' of World War I* examines some key aspects of what we have termed 'the longer battle' which both pre- and post-dates World War I itself. The battle is one of ideology stretching back through history, then into the postwar period with the pragmatic struggle for rights, recognition, pensions, and for the better lives promised to all. In doing so, the contributors suggest that war was not simply something that Australia and Australians were engaged in from 1914 to 1918, but a longer-term venture carrying over into times of 'official peace', the legacies of which Australians continue to live with today.

The collection opens with an article from Joan Beaumont who explores the complexities surrounding returned soldiers during the economic crises of the 1930s. During this period their elevated status as veterans was (re)mobilised by

⁷ Alistair Thomson, *Anzac Memories: Living with the Legend* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1994); Stephen Garton, *The Cost of War: Australians Return* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1996); Martin Crotty and Marina Larsson, eds, *Anzac Legacies: Australians and the Aftermath of War* (Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2010); Peter Stanley, *Bad Characters* (Sydney: Pier 9, 2010); Peter Stanley, *Men of Mont St Quentin: Between Victory and Death* (Melbourne: Scribe, 2009); Bruce Scates and Melanie Oppenheimer, *The Last Battle: Soldier Settlement in Australia 1916–1939* (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 2016); Joy Damousi, *The Labour of Loss: Mourning, Memory, and Wartime Bereavement in Australia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Joan Beaumont, *Broken Nation: Australians in the Great War* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2013); Joan Beaumont, 'Remembering Australia's First World War', *Australian Historical Studies* 46, no. 1 (2015): 1–6; Joan Beaumont, 'Australia's Global Memory Footprint: Memorial Building on the Western Front, 1916–2015', *Australian Historical Studies* 46, no. 1 (2015): 45–63.

⁸ Romain Fathi and Bart Ziino, 'Coming Home: Australians' *Sorties de Guerre* after the First World War', *History Australia* 16, no. 1 (2019): 7. On the notion of *sortie de guerre*, see also Bruno Cabanes and Guillaume Piketty, 'Sortir de la guerre: jalons pour une histoire en chantier', *Histoire@Politique* 3 (2007): 1–3; Cosima Flateau, 'Les sorties de guerre. Une introduction', *Les Cahiers Sirice* 17, no. 3 (2016): 5–14.

⁹ See for example: Natasha Milosevic Meston, "'I Simply Can't Go Back to My Old Life': Female Gender Identity in Australian Contexts of War and Peacetime", *History Australia* 16, no. 1 (2019): 38–51; Martin Crotty "'What More Do You Want?": Billy Hughes and Gilbert Dyett in Late 1919', *History Australia* 16, no. 1 (2019): 52–71; Nicole J. Davis, George Vanags and Andrew J. May, 'Returning to the City: World War One, the Repatriation of Soldiers and the Shaping of Melbourne', *History Australia* 16, no. 1 (2019): 130–52; William Scates Frances, 'Managing Men, Managing Failure: Deviant Diggers in the Soldier Settler Program in New South Wales', *History Australia* 16, no. 1 (2019): 153–68.

then Prime Minister James Scullin to create a sense of unity and pride. In fact, as Beaumont demonstrates, the returned soldier became a virtually uncontested site of memory, a superior citizen and the architect of the new Australia. Yet by the time of the Great Depression in the 1930s many were asking why veterans should still get preferential treatment over young union men who had not been old enough to serve in the war. And what of pensions that the country could now ill afford? Was this, as was claimed at the time, a 'sacred obligation' and part of a 'moral economy', or was it a time-locked expense that needed to be undone? Through Beaumont's article, then, a greater question is posited – how long does the national and historical debt of gratitude and wartime privilege last for returning soldiers?

Erik Eklund examines the Spanish influenza pandemic that swept the globe following the end of the war, focusing specifically on the local impacts of this deadly disease in 1918–19. Weaving together regional and family history approaches, he explores the 'vernacular memory' of the devastating pandemic and the challenges it posed in Gippsland. Eklund's article resonates deeply with the COVID-19 crisis of our own times. He argues that the way state departments, local medical professionals and volunteers worked together proved crucial to the Gippsland experience of the pandemic. He also shows how such crises reveal the limits of a community's tolerance and its often-obscured divisions: debates over borders caused friction in 1919 just as they did in 2020. Collective action lies, as Eklund concludes, at the centre of any societal response to catastrophe, and it is the capacity for such action, as we are witnessing with the current pandemic, that determines and defines the consequences of crises.

Carolyn Holbrook contrasts the development of a sense of nationhood centred around the Gallipoli landing in 1915 with the failure of Federation as a unifying national narrative. Holbrook questions why the martial nationalism of the Anzac myth gained more traction than the imperial liberalism that propelled the Federation movement. In doing so, she provides new insights, not only into Australia's most well-known product of the war – Anzac – but also into the broader relationship of Australia to the British Empire and how it saw its place in the world after the war. It is a complex and emotive issue summarised with crisp clarity by Hew Strachan when he wrote:

The Commonwealth was formed in 1900, not at Gallipoli; the experience of the war divided rather than united Australian society, particularly on religious and political lines; and the country's leaders justified Australia's participation in terms not of Australian identity but of the British empire.¹⁰

Holbrook, however, advises the reader of a gradual but 'audacious act of reinvention [whereby] Anzac was stripped of its imperial connotation to become the

¹⁰ Hew Strachan, 'Review: Broken Nation: Australians in the Great War', *Australian Historical Studies* 46, no. 1 (2015): 128.

most potent symbol of post-British Australia'.¹¹ And within this 'reinvention', as Fiona Nicoll reminds us, 'Other Australians, such as women, modernists and shell-shocked soldiers, were expelled from this egalitarian national community'.¹²

Margaret Hutchison traces those who fell outside this community in her detailed study of the enduring impact of the war on veterans. Her particular focus is on nurses and their experience of care in old age. This article explores the changing debates about the impact of war service on ageing from the inter-war years through to the 1970s. Adding to recent scholarship on disability due to service in World War I, Hutchison shows that, for those Australian veterans who could not prove that their disability or illness was war-related, the burden of care, be it financial, or medical, fell to voluntary organisations such as the RSL, Edith Cavell Trust Fund and Red Cross.¹³ Her analysis makes clear that the postwar return to Australia was neither egalitarian nor fair for nurses. World War I may have been a great struggle for civilisation that transformed the welfare state, but when it came to caring for ex-servicewomen the aftermath of the Armistice was a time of abandonment – even rejection – and hardship.

The grand narratives of civilisation, empire and classicism were very much to the fore when it came to devising the aesthetics appropriate for national/imperial commemoration, as Katti Williams explores in her article. In the 1920s, discussions about commemorative structures centred on how to historicise the past and pave the way for a desired future. What would the appropriate aesthetic vocabulary be to convey the gravitas of a just, but costly, war? Would it be inspired by Classical Greek tropes, or take inspiration from Australia's unique characteristics, borrowing motifs from its botany, zoology and great open

¹¹ Carolyn Holbrook, 'Nationalism and War Memory in Australia', in *Australia and the Great War: Identity, Memory and Mythology*, eds Michael Walsh and Andrekos Varnava (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2016), 230. See also: Joan Beaumont, "'Unitedly We Have Fought": Imperial Loyalty and the Australian War Effort', *International Affairs* 90, no. 2 (2014): 397–412; Rhys Crawley, 'Marching to the Beat of an Imperial Drum: Contextualising Australia's Military Effort during the First World War', *Australian Historical Studies* 46, no. 1 (2015): 64–80; James Cotton, 'William Morris Hughes, Empire and Nationalism: The Legacy of the First World War', *Australian Historical Studies* 46, no. 1 (2015): 100–18; Sarah Rood, 'Australia Will Be There: Victorians in the First World War', *Australian Historical Studies* 46, no. 1 (2015): 122–4.

¹² Fiona Nicoll, *From Diggers to Drag Queens: Configurations of Australian National Identity* (Sydney: Pluto Press, 2001), 113.

¹³ See Damousi, *The Labour of Loss*, 65–102; Meaghan Kowalsky, "'This Honourable Obligation": The King's National Roll Scheme for Disabled Ex-Servicemen 1915–1944', *European Review of History* 14, no. 4 (2007): 567–84; Wendy Jane Gagen, 'Remastering the Body, Renegotiating Gender: Physical Disability and Masculinity during the First World War, the Case of J. B. Middlebrook', *European Review of History* 14, no. 4 (2007): 525–41; Fiona Reid, *Broken Men: Shell Shock, Treatment and Recovery in Britain, 1914–1930* (London: Continuum, 2010); Alice Brumby, "'A Painful and Disagreeable Position": Rediscovering Patient Narratives and Evaluating the Difference between Policy and Experience for Institutionalised Veterans with Mental Disabilities, 1924–1931', *First World War Studies* 6, no. 1 (2015): 37–55; Melanie Oppenheimer, *All Work, No Pay: Australian Civilian Volunteers in War* (Walcha, NSW: Ohio Productions, 2002); Bethany Rowley, "'We Will Never Forget You": Christian Charities and the Rehabilitation of Disabled Ex-Servicemen in Inter-War Leeds', *Local Population Studies* 101, no. 1 (2018): 47–63; Jessica Meyer, "'Not Septimus Now": Wives of Disabled Veterans and Cultural Memory of the First World War in Britain', *Women's History Review* 13, no. 1 (2004): 117–38.

spaces? And what of the Australian individual – an archetype epitomised by Russel Ward’s ‘noble bushman’?¹⁴ If there were to be an alternative to the British imperial embrace of Roman aesthetics in post-Armistice Australia then this must surely be it.¹⁵ So while references to Greece would foreground an idealised civilisation and culture, and references to Rome would imply imperial might and valour, the ‘Australian Ideal’ had to play its role too. The intention was to create a meeting place for the individual and the collective, the personal and the national, the historical and the mythical, the bereaved and the triumphant. Hence, as Williams explains, the planning for public memorials in the decades after the war was encoded with ideas about Australia’s past, present and future.

And yet the undeniable influence of the classics on the public imagination of Australian war memorialists did not convert into welcoming modern Greeks into Australia after the war, as Andonis Piperoglou argues in his article, adding to the growing literature on ‘undesirable’ Greek-speaking migrants in the Anglophone world.¹⁶ Charles Bean, educated at the University of Oxford, had mobilised to great effect the classical tone in his histories of Anzac among the islands, peninsulas, and tides of Gallipoli, which had also witnessed the struggles of Athenians, Spartans, Trojans, Ottomans, Venetians and Persians. Xerxes and Alexander the Great themselves had trodden the plains on which the legend of Troy was set and in which the youthful Australia now found itself engaged.¹⁷ Even in 1919, those commenting on Anzac Day linked the heroics of modern-day Australian soldiering to the ancient Greeks: ‘Looked on in the light of human self-sacrifice and human chivalry, Anzac stands as an achievement greater than Thermopylae, than Balaclava, than Waterloo’.¹⁸ But such strong classical underpinnings nevertheless failed to win modern Greeks their place in Australia. During the early years of the war, the neutrality of Greece had led many Australians to racially vilify the Greek community.¹⁹ The legacy of Byronic Greece, the liberating

¹⁴ Russel Ward, *The Australian Legend* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1958); Frank Crowley, ed., *A New History of Australia* (Melbourne: William Heinemann, 1974), 323.

¹⁵ For a fuller discussion on the scholarly problematisation of Australian identity in relation to World War I, see Michael Walsh and Andrekos Varnava, ‘Australia’s Great War: Contemporary and Historiographical Debates’, in Walsh and Varnava, *Australia and the Great War*, 1–23.

¹⁶ Evan Smith and Andrekos Varnava, ‘Creating a “Suspect Community”: Monitoring and Controlling the Cypriot Community in Inter-War London’, *English Historical Review* 132, no. 558 (2017): 1149–81; Andrekos Varnava and Evan Smith, ‘Dealing with Destitute Cypriots in the UK and Australia, 1914–1931’, in *Australia, Migration and Empire: Immigrants in a Globalised World*, eds Philip Payton and Andrekos Varnava (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 277–312.

¹⁷ Peter Lunday, ‘A Possession for Ever: Charles Bean, the Ancient Greeks, and Military Commemoration in Australia’, *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 53, no. 3 (2007): 344–59; Sarah Midford, ‘“A Deathless Monument of Valour”: The National Memorialisation of Anzacs as Ancient Greek Citizen-Soldiers from the War’s Aftermath to the Centenary Dawn Service at Gallipoli’, in *After the Armistice: Empire, Endgame, Aftermath*, eds Michael Walsh and Andrekos Varnava (Routledge, forthcoming 2021); Sarah Midford, ‘CEW Bean, Australia’s “Father of History”: Locating Homer, Herodotus and Thucydides in the Official History of Australia in the War of 1914–1918’, in Walsh and Varnava, *Australia and the Great War*.

¹⁸ *Call and WA Sportsman* (Perth, WA), 25 April 1919, 1.

¹⁹ Joy Damousi, ‘“This Is Against All the British Traditions of Fair Play”: Violence against Greeks on the Australian Home Front during the Great War’, in Walsh and Varnava, *Australia and the Great War*, 128–46.

clash at Navarino, the adulation of antiquity housed at the British Museum, and the fact that Greece had been an ally in the Great War from 1917, also failed to alleviate discrimination. Piperoglou shows that, even in the wake of the Μικρασιατική Καταστροφή (the Asia Minor Catastrophe), as Greeks call it, the war between Turkey and Greece (1919–22), which created a massive refugee crisis, Greek peasants failed to make it onto Australia's 'hierarchy of desirability'.

E.H. Carr asked if historical enquiry was 'an unending dialogue between the present and the past'.²⁰ Such a dialogue is continuous, necessarily reflective, and must seek to fill or bridge the silences in the story. The 'unending dialogue' then is an appropriate point on which to begin this collection of articles, which contribute to the fluidity of historical narrative, historiography and historical reflection on Australia, Australians and World War I.

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²⁰ E.H. Carr, *What Is History?*, 2nd edn (London: Penguin Books, 1990), 30.