

**The Great War on the Small Screen:
A Cultural History of the First World
War on British Television, 1964-2005**

**Thesis submitted for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy**

Emma Mahoney

**School of History
University of Kent
2006**

**The Great War on the Small Screen:
A Cultural History of the First World War on British Television, 1964-2005**

**Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
School of History, University of Kent, March 2006**

Emma Mahoney

Historical research on how the major conflicts of the twentieth century have been remembered has in the past focussed on commemorative sites and rituals. However, these formal commemorations are a diminishing part of the public perception of both World Wars. Since the 1960s, British television documentaries about the First World War have constructed the most public sites of memory and mourning. Television documentaries about 1914-1918 have continued the language of public commemoration to mark significant wartime anniversaries by using modes of representation established in the inter-war years. As commemorative texts of *public* history, as opposed to professional history written by historians, many documentaries placed the war and its aftermath beyond public critical discussion, continuing to present the war as a barely healed national trauma.

The structure is thematic and covers the significance of *The Great War* (BBC, 1964) and its legacy, the role of veteran eyewitnesses, representations of landscape, and recent programmes that addressed more controversial subjects such as the strategic capabilities of the High Command and executions by Courts Martial. Material has been used from collections such as the Imperial War Museum and the BBC Written Archives Centre, as well as newspaper archives, correspondence and interviews with historians, television professionals and First World War veterans who appear in several of the programmes covered by this thesis. By analysing each documentary as a piece of primary evidence, this study traces the major epistemological developments in British televisual representations of 1914-1918. Whilst the epic 26-part series *The Great War* (BBC, 1964), which commemorated the fiftieth anniversary of the outbreak of war, is still regarded as the definitive grand narrative of the conflict, twenty-first century viewing figures suggest that new generations are increasingly interested in programmes that confront established ideas of loss, futility and horror. The study concludes with a general discussion of the future of history documentaries on television.

Contents

Acknowledgements

List of Video Clips

List of Illustrations

- 1. Introduction** p.1
 - The First World War and British Culture
 - History on Television
 - Methodology
 - Structure

- 2. *The Great War* (BBC, 1964)** p.36
 - A Monumental Monument
 - The Production Team
 - Audience Reception
 - Use of Film
 - *The Great War* and Great War History
 - Influence on Subsequent Programmes
 - *The Great War* enters the 21st Century

- 3. Veterans** p.90
 - The Nature of Memory
 - Veterans on Remembrance
 - Veterans on the High Command
 - Veterans on Conditions

- 4. Landscape** p.137
 - The Pastoral Mode
 - *The Battle of the Somme* (BBC, 1976)
 - Poppies
 - Trees
 - Weather
 - Music

5. Controversy p.181

- *Haig: the Unknown Soldier* (BBC, 1996)
- *Shot at Dawn* (Carlton, 1998)
- *The Crucified Soldier* (Channel 4, 1998)
- *The Trench* (BBC, 2002)

6. Conclusion p.226

- *World War One in Colour* (Channel 5, 2003)
- *The First World War* (Channel 4, 2003)
- *The Last Tommy* (BBC, 2005)
- *The Somme* (Channel 4, 2005)

Appendices p.251

Appendix 1 – Table of Viewing Figures

Appendix 2 – Catalogue of First World War Documentaries

Bibliography p.257

Acknowledgements

This thesis could not have been written if it were not for the support of a number of people. From my days as an undergraduate, Dr Mark Connelly has been a constant source of inspiration, guidance, encouragement and humour. He also lent me a large proportion of his Great War video collection for me to use in this study. I am also indebted to those who have given me the benefit of their time, knowledge, experience, and in some cases hospitality: Dr Stephen Badsey, Correlli Barnett, Malcolm Brown, Julia Cave, Anne Dacre, Taff Gillingham, Dr Stefan Goebel, Peter Gordon, Jerry Kuehl, Dr Esther MacCallum-Stewart, Dr Jean Moorcroft Wilson, Iain Overton, Professor Gary Sheffield, Professor Peter Simkins, Dr Dan Todman, Richard van Emden, and Professor David Welch. Also Tracy Weston and Trish Hayes at the BBC Written Archives Centre, Roger Smither at the Imperial War Museum, the staff of the Birmingham Central Library's Social Sciences department, the British Library, and Suzanne Bowles at the GMI. I was extremely honoured to have met two soldiers who fought on the Western Front 1917-1918: Harry Patch of the Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry, and the late Arthur Halestrap of the Royal Engineers Signals, both of whom welcomed me into their homes and tolerated my questions. I am also grateful to the School of History, the *Historial de la Grande Guerre*, Péronne, the Western Front Association and the Colyer-Ferguson Trust for bursaries which assisted with research costs. The University of Kent's Alumni Scholarship helped with tuition fees.

I owe the biggest debts to my family. My heartfelt thanks go to them for their unfailing love, support, and occasional B&B when research and teaching commitments called me away from home. To my Dad Richard for helping in financial emergencies. To my Grandma Jean, and Carol, Tim, Chris and Georgia Clark for being there. My Mum Christine provided for free her own extensive research and language skills, but above all it is her strength, support and understanding that continue to spur me on *Per Ardua ad Astra*. But it was my partner Steven Hanna gave me the opportunity to write this thesis. An additional three years on the academic rollercoaster was not part of our original deal, but he accepted the financial burden of helping me to pursue an academic career. I will always be in his debt. I dedicate this thesis to Steven and my family, including my late Grandfather, Reginald Ward-Penny. He would have disagreed with me about Haig and preferred something on Monty, but I think he would have been proud all the same.

Emma Mahoney
Canterbury, March 2006

List of Video Clips

1. *Blackadder Goes Forth* (BBC, 1989) – opening sequence
2. *Dead Ringers* (BBC, 2002) – ‘Yet Another History Programme’
3. *The Great War* (BBC, 1964) – opening sequence
4. *Blackadder Goes Forth* – Lieutenant George
5. *The Great War* – opening of episode 13
6. *The Great War* – opening of episode 26
7. *1914-1918* (BBC, 1996) – opening sequence and first scene
8. *Lions Led by Donkeys* (Channel 4, 1985)
9. *World War One in Colour* (Channel 5, 2003) – Harry Patch
10. *A Game of Ghosts* (BBC, 1991) – Alf Razzell
11. *Very Exceptional Soldiers* (BBC, 1986) – two ceremonies in France
12. *A Time for Remembrance* (BBC, 1989) – opening sequence
13. *Peace in No Man’s Land* (BBC, 1981) – opening sequence and first scene
14. *Battle of the Somme* (BBC, 1976) – opening sequence
15. *The Western Front* (BBC, 1999) – first scene
16. *Gone for a Soldier* (Channel 4, 1985) – corpses awaiting burial
17. *The Western Front* – Richard Holmes at High Wood
18. *Haig: the Unknown Soldier* – opening sequence
19. *The Western Front* – ‘Commanding the Front’
20. *Shot at Dawn* (Carlton, 1998) – opening sequence
21. *Shot at Dawn* – Private Billy Nelson’s niece visits her uncle’s grave
22. *The Crucified Soldier* (Channel 4, 1998) – ‘Canada’s Golgotha’
23. *The Trench* (BBC, 2002) – opening sequence
24. *The Trench* – the ejection of ‘Jabber’ Nolan
25. *The Trench* – remembrance service at Beverley Minster
26. *World War One in Colour* – opening sequence
27. *The First World War* (Channel 4, 2003) – opening sequence
28. *World War One in Colour* – veterans at the Menin Gate
29. *The Last Tommy* (BBC, 2005) – opening sequence
30. *The Somme* (Channel 4, 2005) – opening sequence

List of Illustrations

1. Geoffrey Malins in uniform (Imperial War Museum - Q11846) **After p.35**
2. A British soldier rescues a comrade under fire (IWM – Q79501)
3. ‘Over the top’ (IWM – Q70164)
4. More ‘Over the top’ (IWM – Q70168)
5. The main cast of *Blackadder Goes Forth* (BBC, 1989)
6. Tony Essex (1925-1975): Producer, *The Great War* (BBC, 1964) **After p.89**
7. Gordon Watkins (1920 – 1992): Producer, *The Great War*
8. The ‘Silhouetted Soldier’ in *The Great War* (opening sequence)
9. The ‘Staring Soldier’ in *The Great War* (opening scene)
10. The uniformed skeleton-corpse in *The Great War* (opening scene)
11. Sketch for opening sequence of *The Great War* (BBC WAC T32/1139/1)
12. The original photograph (IWM - Q1)
13. A veteran on *The Great War* (episode 13)
14. Harry Patch in *World War One in Colour* (Channel 5, 2003) **After p.136**
15. Harry photographed in December 2004 for ‘Patch’s Pride’ cider
16. Arthur Halestrap (1898-2004) in *World War One in Colour*
17. A ceremony at the Menin Gate in *World War One in Colour*
18. Veterans at the unveiling of the Shot at Dawn memorial 21 June 2001
19. Four stills from the filming of *Battle of the Somme* (BBC, 1976) **After p.180**
20. ‘After the battle’ Paul Nash
21. ‘We are Making a New World’ Paul Nash
22. The last scene of *Blackadder Goes Forth*
23. The ‘Weeping Cross’ of Delville Wood
24. The ‘Shot at Dawn’ memorial at the National Arboretum, Staffordshire
25. ‘Wire’ Paul Nash
26. Field Marshal Sir Douglas Haig (1861-1928) **After p.225**
27. John Mills as Haig in the film *Oh! What a Lovely War* (1969)
28. Geoffrey Palmer as Haig in *Blackadder Goes Forth*
29. Actors on set in *The Somme* (Channel 4, 2005) **After p.250**
30. Actors recreating an ‘over the top’ scene in *The Somme*
31. Three images from Channel 4’s website ‘Lost Generation’

Introduction

In Great Britain the First World War has been commemorated and memorialised more than any other conflict. The loss of nearly one million of its sons had a profound effect on Britain's national consciousness, and this affected the way in which the war has been historicised.¹ In the years after 1918 individual and family experiences were collectivised in virtually every city, town and village with the building of thousands of memorials to the dead. The conflict generated its own apocalyptic myths, and it became almost impossible for anyone to think or write about the war without the use of rhetoric thought to reflect the enormity of the conflagration and the number of lives lost.²

In recent years the ways in which the war has been remembered has emerged as a significant historiographical issue.³ Researchers have focussed on the study of commemorative sites and rituals, but these formal modes of commemoration represent a diminishing part of the public's perception of the First (and Second) World War. In Britain since the 1960s, the memory of both World Wars has occupied a central position in the most influential medium of popular culture – television.⁴ This thesis, therefore, examines how British television has remembered the First World War, to study of a range of documentary-films in terms of their cultural, historical and aesthetic significance. After more than four decades of public broadcasting it is time for historians to recognise that it is their business to understand and analyse television documentaries as influential texts of 'public history'; a form of popular history designed to be consumed by a mass audience, as opposed to academic history written for publication in specialist journals and monographs.⁵

¹ George Robb, *British Culture and First World War*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), p.208

² Malcolm Smith, 'The War and British Culture' in Stephen Constantine, Maurice W.Kirby, Mary B.Rose, *The First World War in British History*, (London: Arnold, 1995), p.169

³ The study of memory was first approached by a French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs in the 1920s, who followed Emile Durkheim's notion of collective conscience - the contention that all acts of memory are social and that to remember is to act as part of the collective. Halbwachs believed that history and memory were opposing ways of recalling the past, but his insights were largely neglected until the increase in interest of memory studies in the 1980s and 1990s. See Kendall R.Phillips, *Framing Public Memory*, (Tucaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2004), pp.1-2

⁴ John Tosh, *The Pursuit of History (Fourth Edition)*, (Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2006), p.xiii

⁵ The term 'public history' has been used in the United States in recent decades, for example see Barbara Howe & Emery Kemp (eds), *Public History: An Introduction* (Florida: Malabar, 1986), and Susan Benson & Roy Ronsenzweig (eds), *Presenting the Past: Essays on History and the Public* (Philadelphia: Temple, 1986). British historian Arthur Marwick has in the past preferred to use the

The study of televisual representations of the First World War is especially important because the historiography of the conflict bears the mark of two crossing vectors: one lies inside the historical profession and the other outside of it.⁶ This thesis will show that the site where these two vectors form a very public interface is on the television screen. From the development of new broadcast technologies and academic approaches in the 1960s to the recent ‘Memory Boom’ in the 1990s, the space of remembrance continues to broaden.⁷ Operational and strategic analyses of the First World War have been joined by an emphasis on the direct impact on combatants, their families and communities. These representations have been complicated by additional layers such as first-hand remembering, as well as public and cultural constructions.⁸

If historians are ‘fellow travellers in the broader conversations about the languages – written, oral, visual, material – in which we collectively inscribe the “meaning” of the Great War’⁹, then it should be recognised that these ‘conversations’ have significant silences. The processes of selection, management and interpretation of historical knowledge as presented in televisual ‘conversations’ are rarely accessible to the general public and remain largely unimagined by them. The primary concern of this

term ‘applied history’ which never caught on, but the American phrase is now in common academic use in some areas of research. See Arthur Marwick, *The New Nature of History*. (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), p.227. In addition, in February 2006 there was a two day conference on ‘History and the Public’ at the Institute of Historical Research, University of London, and in 2006 Ruskin College, Oxford introduced a new part-time MA course in ‘Public History’.

⁶ A recent publication by Jay Winter and Antoine Prost identified three historical configurations: the military and diplomatic history [1918 to 1960s], social history [1960s-1990s], and cultural-social history [1990s onwards]. All these elements are present in each configuration but the weight of emphasis in each stage has changed over time. The first configuration in the 1920s and 1930s explained the story through the decisions of individual actors; the second by the force of social groups or classes; the third proposes that studies of representations and signifying practices enable us to observe how men and women in the past made sense of the world in which they lived. Between the first and second configuration there was a period of silence because of the Second World War, but between the second and third configuration there was no rupture but a shift of emphasis, a cultural turn towards cultural history, the roots of which already existed in social history, to the history of representations where memory and identity are inseparable. However, Winter and Prost’s views are somewhat controversial and are by no means shared all historians of the First World War: general military-diplomatic surveys are still valuable, such as those by Hew Strachan (2001) in Britain and Paul-Marie de la Gorce (1991) in France. See Jay Winter & Antoine Prost, *The Great War in History: Debates and Controversies, 1914 to the Present*, (Cambridge: CUP, 2005), pp.3 - 33

⁷ Jay Winter, ‘The Generation of Memory: Reflections on the “Memory Boom” in Contemporary Historical Studies’ *Bulletin of the German Historical Institute* 27 Fall 2000, passim., and Jay Winter & Emmanuel Sivan (eds), *War & Remembrance in the 20th Century* (Cambridge: CUP, 1999) pp.2-3

⁸ Catherine Moriarty, ‘The Material Culture of Great War Remembrance’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol.34. No.4 (October 1999), pp.653-662

⁹ Jay Winter & Antoine Prost, *The Great War in History: Debates and Controversies, 1914 to the Present*, pp.190-191

thesis, therefore, is to examine the narrative and chronological development of the production of programmes with more in-depth analysis of the visual design by which the conflict has been presented on British television.¹⁰ The work presented here is not a definitive history of the First World War on British television; for practical reasons, such as the difficulty in obtaining broadcast material and the chronic lack of document-based archive sources, this work cannot discuss every programme that has been broadcast in Britain.¹¹ In addition, the lack of archive material combined with other methodological complications mean that this is a *text-centred* study which makes no claim to addressing audience-centred research except where sources such as viewing figures and audience reception reports exist.¹² This study is a work of cultural history which by the very nature of its sources is a multidisciplinary survey of a rather narrow collection of sources.

These problems, however, do not mean that television texts as historical sources should be ignored by the academy. Any cultural history of British society in the years after the Second World War cannot dismiss television programmes as primary texts in their own right because the media is such an all-pervasive part of the twentieth and twenty-first century life that any history of Britain post-1945 would be incomprehensible without it.¹³ If the ‘memory’ of the First World War is an amalgamation of the stories that has been told about it, then each documentary-film is an historical text, a building block in British representations of 1914-1918. Documentary-films are primary sources in their own right because they have been

¹⁰ The importance of television aesthetics and the concept of visual design was discussed by John Corner, ‘Styling the Past: Visual Design and Historical Imagination’, keynote speech, Televising History Symposium, University of Lincoln, 14-15 July 2005.

¹¹ Other difficulties involved getting access to the documents that do exist, such as the items of correspondence between Correlli Barnett and John Terraine regarding their respective opinions on the writing of history television. Even with personal recommendations from Peter Simkins and Correlli Barnett I was not granted access to Terraine’s papers by the executor of his estate. Therefore, I have only been able to quote the details of letters that passed between the two historians with reference to Barnett’s article on their exchanges published in the Western Front Association’s journal *Stand To!* January 2006, No.75, pp.5-8. This material was also presented by Barnett in a paper presented to the British Commission of Military History at Oxford in May 2005. I will return to this correspondence in the concluding chapter.

¹² Audience Research Reports are only available for BBC programmes (performed by their in-house Audience Research Department) and the BBC Written Archives at Caversham only hold data for programmes broadcast before 1980. Therefore *The Great War* (1964) and *Battle of the Somme* (1976) are the only programmes in this study to have an Audience Research Report(s). For recent research into audience reception see Tony Wilson, *Watching Television: Hermeneutics, Reception and Popular Culture*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993).

¹³ David Cannadine (ed), *History and the Media*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p.4

created a powerful site of mediation that facilitates society's on-going negotiation with the past. It follows that an analysis of these programmes will enable us to trace the major epistemological points where text and context mapped the development of agreed knowledge about the war. In order to be understood by the community for which they are produced, television documentaries about the First World War utilised the language and imagery of remembrance rituals that were established in the immediate post-war period.

Life in communities relies on the possibility of communicating something that resonates with all participants, and clusters of facts, images and memories are partially forged by the associates, especially the media.¹⁴ By broadcasting the nation's useable past in the form of public history television's aesthetic techniques have had a significant influence on modern attitudes to 1914-1918.¹⁵ Television quickly became a self-defining subject where the production and reactivation of history occurs on the screen; instead of being an objective assessment of past events, historical documentary-films have become media events.¹⁶ The production and broadcast of programmes as memorials about the First World War has centred on the most significant wartime anniversaries in November (the signing of the Armistice on 11 November 1918) and July (the beginning of the Battle of the Somme in July 1916). In this way, they have extended of the rituals of remembrance where the proliferation of symbols such as the Christian *Cross of Sacrifice* and the red poppy on Remembrance Sunday dominated public commemorative iconography.¹⁷ In this way, the visual design of British documentaries about the First World War are rooted in the modes of remembrance and the symbiotic relationships between cinema, poetry, prose and art.

Researchers investigating the cultural aspects of the First World War have been crossing disciplinary boundaries for some time. The growing body of this work underlines that historical work is not necessarily done by academics working in history departments. Military historian John Keegan's *The Face of Battle* (1976) was

¹⁴ Pierre Sorlin, *Mass Media: Key Ideas* (London: Routledge, 1994), p.36

¹⁵ For a wider discussion on the effect of television aesthetics see Ludmilla Jordanova, *History in Practice* (London: Arnold, 2000), pp.141-171

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.8

¹⁷ Aribert Reimann, 'Popular Culture and the Reconstruction of British Identity' in Hartmut Berghoff & Robert von Friedeburg (eds) *Change and Inertia: Britain Under the Impact of the Great War* (Bodenheim: Philo, 1998), pp.99-120

written from an anthropological perspective, and Paul Fussell (1975) and Samuel Hynes (1992) produced influential studies on literature and art.¹⁸ Other diverse subject areas have included mourning (Jay Winter 1995, Stephan Audoin-Rouzeau 2002), brutalisation (George Mosse 1990), violence (Audoin-Rouzeau et al 2002), face-to-face killing (Joanna Bourke 1999), art and the avant-garde by Richard Cork (1994), cinema by Michael Paris (edited volume 1999), and music by Glenn Watkins (2003). The essence of cultural history is to examine the signifying practices which might indicate how humans make sense of the world in which they live it is time for historians to appreciate the aesthetic elements of history on television, and the effect of those techniques on viewers' historical imagination. This enhanced knowledge of the mechanics of television can then be used to work towards the production of good quality programmes.

However, this study does not seek to perpetuate the unhelpful and now rather dated debates about the differences of opinions between academics and documentary filmmakers. Simon Schama has summarised these old assumptions as

[t]he usual moan of the Common Room and the opinion columns that 'serious television' is a 'contradiction in terms'; that the subtlety of history is too elusive, too fine and slippery to be caught in television's big hammy fist; that try as it might, television can't help but simplify the complications; personalise the abstract; sentimentalise the ideological and just forget about the deep structures – all of which are assumed to be at the heart of what my colleagues (on that side of the fence) like to call real history [...] the usual dialogue of the deaf whereby scholars berate the vulgarity of the medium for failing to understand the nature of historical debates, and producers return the compliment by charging that print historians are no more capable of telling stories in images than they are cooking a soufflé or changing a tyre (probably less).¹⁹

It is well known that the majority of the academy regards small screen history as a secondary or marginal business compared with the task of preparing research for peer

¹⁸ Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, (Oxford: OUP, 1975) and Samuel Hynes, *The War Imagined*, (London: Pimlico, 1995)

¹⁹ Simon Schama, 'Television and the Trouble with History' in David Cannadine (ed), *History and the Media*, pp.20-33. This paper was also delivered at the Congress of History Producers in Boston, October 2001

assessment and the Research Assessment Exercise.²⁰ Historians have so far preferred to expose historical mistakes in contemporary media output, and one of the commonly-expressed anxieties about error-strewn television history is that faulty representations of the past will mislead viewers in to holding inaccurate beliefs about the past: this is indeed a justified concern but it also an admission of the power of the medium. While there is no reason why historians should not comment on these errors, in the case of documentary-films many historians are missing the bigger picture. The primary purpose of this thesis is not to provide a catalogue of errors made by some programmes in their explanations of military and diplomatic events. It is right that misrepresentations or omissions of important events should be pointed out by professional historians, and this will be done here where it is deemed helpful to the overall interpretation of the programme and its historical and historiographical significance, but it is not the primary aim of this thesis.

This study contends that to repeatedly dismiss television as an inadequate and improper medium for the 'serious' business of scholars is to ignore a resource that is now a dominant cultural form. It is now time, as Arthur Marwick has suggested, that works of history, in whatever form they take should be judged by what they set out to do and by the level they are aiming to operate on.²¹ This attitude provides the basis for the present study as one which is an example of new methods of cultural-historical enquiry which is largely concerned with the symbolic and its interpretation within a culture, meaning the wider anthropological meaning as the network of attitudes, values and practices of a particular group of human beings.²²

The First World War and British Culture

Although there were many Colenso and Mafeking Streets built after the Boer War (1899-1902), the public organisation of private grief via the erection of thousands of war memorials after 1918 meant that death became synonymous with Britain's public memory of the First World War. In a similar way to calvaries in Catholic countries, in

²⁰ Justin Champion, 'Simon Schama's "A History of Britain" and Public History', *History Workshop Journal*, 56 (1), 2003, (pp.153-174), p.170

²¹ Arthur Marwick, *The New Nature of History*, p.232

²² See Peter Burke, *What is Cultural History?*, (Cambridge: Polity, 2004),p.3, and Arthur Marwick, *The New Nature of History*, p.218

Britain the war memorial became ‘the touchstone of one of the things that was held in common by Britons, a shared myth of mud, poppies and putties with which to surround the smiling young faces in family photograph albums and the letters tied in ribbon. Whatever the political differences and social frictions, Remembrance Day was for decades the moment at which people and nation fused.’²³ The unprecedented scale of loss in the Great War led to the first comprehensive commemoration of every man that died whether he was an officer or private, volunteer or conscript. Monuments for the dead appeared in every town, village and city, in schools, factories and town halls.

The accepted language of remembrance enshrined the experience of the war, removing it from social and political debate by elevating it to a level of spiritual significance from where its memory for peacetime British society was of a special and sacred quality; through annual acts of remembrance the mass of British society was discouraged from entering into a political discussion of the war’s causes and consequences by Kipling’s ‘lest we forget’.²⁴ These remembrance rituals were also designed to be self-generating. For example, in November 1921, the British Legion established the sale of red Flanders poppies, an annual act of individual remembrance which was cemented within ceremonial ritual by the laying of poppy wreaths and the cascade of a million poppies fluttering on the assembly at every British Legion Festival of Remembrance since 1927. The service of remembrance held at the cenotaph was broadcast on BBC radio every year from 1923, and it was televised from 1937 with a six year hiatus during the Second World War.²⁵

In British memory the First World War is not only a ‘forgotten victory’ but it is a national tragedy, a story that can be told again and again where we can change neither the plot nor the symbols which define the period.²⁶ The Western Front, particularly the battle of the Somme in 1916, has become known as a symbol of loss and total futility because of the especially high number of casualties suffered by the British Expeditionary Force in the early stages. The ‘heroes’ in the tragedy are the thousands of ‘Kitchener’s Men’, civilian volunteers who soon became casualties in the few

²³ Malcolm Smith, ‘The War and British Culture’, p.172

²⁴ Ibid.,

²⁵ Ibid., p.135

²⁶ Pierre Sorlin, ‘Cinema and the Memory of the Great War’ in Michael Paris (ed), *The First World War and Popular Cinema*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999) p.22

hours of an attack engineered by the war's alleged 'villains' – the British High Command, most specifically Douglas Haig. This thesis will show that, in order to bring the conflict within the realm of human comprehension and public acceptability, television continued to use traditional modes of remembrance. This resonates with Dr Jay Winter's thesis that the signifying practices of wartime and its aftermath were framed in traditional language which was understood via commonly shared images and ideas derived from classical, romantic, and Christian sources where the bereaved found the languages which enabled them to mourn.²⁷ The ironies inherent in what Paul Fussell labelled 'modern memory' could shock, stimulate or delight, but it could not heal, and healing is what was - and perhaps still is - needed to help British society come to terms with the aftermath of the First World War.²⁸

National differences in First World War memory are pronounced. In France the centralised educational system which creates a space for historians to contribute directly to a national pedagogic project through centrally controlled textbooks, and studying the First World War is an integral part of preparing students for active citizenship. The First World War is largely a forgotten war in German popular memory, perceived more often as a prelude to the Weimar Republic and the eventual rise of the National Socialists.²⁹ The study of remembering the conflict in Germany is still in the early phases and has developed in more recent times. In Britain there is no sense of the war as a British victory, and poets and novelists have been much more influential in shaping the British discursive field of remembrance than has been seen in other combatant countries. British historians, although they have produced an enormous body of very good work, have had a negligible effect on the way that the majority of the nation thinks about the war.

The original First World War documentary was *Battle of the Somme* (1916) which was filmed by the War Office's Official Cinematographers Geoffrey Malins and J.B.McDowell [See Fig.1]. Put on general release by Lloyd George and the War Office on 21 August 1916 in London, and in provincial towns and cities the week after that, by September 1916 it had been shown in more than one thousand cinemas

²⁷ See Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning*, (Cambridge: CUP, 1995)

²⁸ Jay Winter & Antoine Prost, *The Great War in History: Debates and Controversies, 1914 to the Present*, pp.182-183

²⁹ Dr Stefan Goebel to Emma Mahoney (by email) 19 April 2005

and to the King and Queen at Windsor. *Battle of the Somme* was designed to underline the historic significance of the battle, to justify sacrifices at home, and to maintain people's support for the war.³⁰ In 1916, and to a large extent ever since, *Battle of the Somme* has offered Britons a special insight into the life of the British soldier on the Western Front.³¹ Images from the film [see figs.2, 3 and 4], especially the 'over the top' scenes are regular staples that continue to be re-used in almost every modern documentary about the First World War. The historical significance of *Battle of the Somme* was recently officially inscribed on the 'Memory of the World' register, a formal UNESCO mechanism to recognise documents of international significance.³² The film was the first feature length documentary to be nominated, and it is the first and only 'document' of any kind to be nominated. The argument for the film to be registered was based largely on the importance of the film both as a pictorial record of this significant and tragic moment in British military history, in addition to being an important landmark in the development of documentary and propaganda filmmaking.

While other combatant countries produced their own wartime films for a range of propaganda, news and entertainment purposes, no other country produced and broadcast as many documentaries about the war as Britain in the period after 1945. Radio-Télévision Belge de la Communauté Française (Belgian Radio-Television of the French Community) did produce a weekly programme *14-18* broadcast 1964-1968, and there was a French programme of two and a half hours duration called *1914-18: the Great War* that was broadcast in 1964. However, most other European series have been collaborative projects shown on channels such as ARTE, established in 1992 as a Franco-German station that considers itself a European forum. German television stations such as ZDF have concentrated on the Second World War, especially in the last twenty years. It was not until 2004 that a German-produced documentary series on the Great War was broadcast on German television: ARD's

³⁰ Samuel Hynes, *A War Imagined: The First World War and English Culture*, (London: Pimlico, 1995), p.123. For a full account of the reception of *Battle of the Somme* see pp.122-126.

³¹ Roger Smither, 'The film *The Battle of the Somme* as a window onto Tommy's experience of the Western Front' speaking at the University of Birmingham, 26 November 2006. I am very grateful to Roger Smither and the Imperial War Museum for allowing me to reproduce three screen shots from *Battle of the Somme*.

³² The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) is a United Nations agency that was founded in February 1945 to promote international co-operation in the fields of education, science, culture and communication among member states. See <http://portal.unesco.org/> (accessed 19 March 2006).

breakthrough series *Des Erste Weltkrieg (The First World War)* in which the noted German television historian Professor Krumeich of Dusseldorf University was involved.

France, Germany, Russia and America had all experienced major wars on home soil before the outbreak of the Great War in 1914, whereas Britain's relatively small professional army had fought in far away lands. Britain was never occupied, and attacks on civilians were rare until the bombing raids of the Second World War. Other nations faced major calamities in the inter-war years; Bolshevik revolution and Stalinist terror in Russia, and the rise of the Nazis in Germany. In contrast, the British experience of the 1940s was a heroic experience which in some way even redeemed the disaster of 1914-18.³³ After atomic bomb attacks on civilians and the discovery of concentration camps there was a shift in the precedent for human suffering.³⁴ Fascists and Stalinists raised the threshold of brutality to a new level of terror. After 1945, 'no mythology could cloak the horror of mass liquidation on Nazi racial and Marxist class foundations.'³⁵ This encouraged Britons to view the First World War through the lens of the Second: a 'good war' with an economical rate of casualties. The earlier conflict suffered by this simplistic comparison.³⁶ Therefore, the popular perception of the First World War as a futile conflict which resulted in a lost generation of British youth was sharply defined by the war for freedom against Nazism.³⁷

In Britain the idea that the First World War can be understood through its literature has proved particularly enduring. The British education system has played a major role in buttressing the popular misconception that 1914-1918 can be understood by its literature alone. Wilfred Owen's poetry appeared on Advanced Level English literature syllabi in 1960, and today the First World War is taught separately in

³³ Malcolm Smith, 'The War and British Culture', p.169

³⁴ Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning; The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge: CUP, 1995)

³⁵ George Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars* (Oxford: OUP, 1990)

³⁶ Gary Sheffield, "'Oh What a Futile War!': representations of the Western Front in modern British media and popular culture' in Ian Stewart & Susan L Carruthers (eds), *War, Culture and Media: Representations of the Military in 20th Century Britain* (Trowbridge: Flicks, 1996), pp.54-74

³⁷ This is an interesting area for future research which might compare and contrast the television documentary output of European countries in much more detail, a reflection of the growing need for comparative studies in this area. The need for more comparative work on the Great War was discussed at *The Future of the First World War* at Queen Mary, University of London, 4 June 2005. The leading work in this field at the moment is an ongoing project, *Capital Cities at War*, by a team led by Dr Jay Winter, including Dr Stefan Goebel and Dr Adrian Gregory.

History and English Literature lessons from Keystage One to GCSE in the National Curriculum in England and Wales. The cornerstones of war myths were cemented by a flood of books about the war; Siegfried Sassoon's *Memoirs of a Fox-Hunting Man* (1928), Edmund Blunden's *Undertones of War* (1928), Robert Graves' *Goodbye to All That* (1929), Frederick Manning's *Her Privates We* (1930) and Cecil Lewis' *Sagittarius Rising* (1936).

After the Second World War there was a resurgence of interest seen in a 'reflowering' of the literature of disillusionment and the cynical anti-heroic representations in the earlier conflict. Alan Clark's *The Donkeys* (1961), Barbara Tuchman's *Guns of August* (1962) and A.J.P. Taylor's *The First World War* (1963) reinforced the negative images of the war as a cruel and futile slaughter. Anthony Burgess's novel *The Wanting Seed* (1962) even used the First World War as a blueprint for mass slaughter in a future genocide. The stage play 'Oh! What a lovely War' (1963) mocked the pretensions of wartime politicians and generals in a spirit of 1960s anti-authoritarianism, and the film *King and Country* (1964) was a sympathetic tale of a First World War private shot for desertion. All these texts confirmed the primacy of a school of historiography which seemed more interested in expounding *a priori* assumptions than looking at the facts.³⁸

The literature of 1960s and 1970s was characterised by disillusionment and pessimism about the First World War as contemporary attitudes to the conflict (tragedy, futility, mass death) replaced earlier heroic and idealized versions. Vera Brittain's *Testament of Youth* and Richard Aldington's *Death of a Hero* were reprinted, Charles Carrington's *Soldier from the Wars Returning* came out in 1965 (revisiting much of the material he published in 1929 under the pseudonym of Charles Edmonds *A Subaltern's War*) and Frederick Manning's novel *Her Private, We* (1930) was published in all its use of profanity in 1977 as *The Middle Parts of Fortune*. A new series of war memoirs appeared, including George Coppard's *With a Machine Gun to Cambrai* (1969), Eric Hiscock's *The Bells of Hell Go Tong-a-Ling-a-Ling* (1969), H.E.L. Mellersh's *Schoolboy into War* (1978) and P.J. Campbell's *In the Cannon's Mouth* (1979).

³⁸ Richard Holmes, *Tommy: The British Soldier on the Western Front* (London: Harper Collins, 2004), p.xxi

So great are these common ideologies in British cultural life it is unsurprising that the popular voice feels a responsibility to uphold the common mythology of the war.³⁹ Recent representations of the war in novels, such as Pat Barker's best-selling trilogy *Regeneration* (1991), *The Eye in the Door* (1993) and *The Ghost Road* (1995), Sebastian Faulks' *Birdsong* (1993), and Ben Elton's *The First Casualty* (2004) have further buttressed the primacy of the war's literature over its history. Popular publications such as these have enjoyed great commercial success because they reinforce the historical myth by resonating with what the reader expects to read.⁴⁰ While Bernard Bergonzi (1965), Paul Fussell (1975), Eric Leed (1981), Roland Stromberg (1982), Modris Eksteins (1989) and Samuel Hynes (1990) refracted Britain's modern understanding the Great War through 'high' cultural representations of the conflict, revisionist historians agree that 'one should no more rely solely or even primarily on literary sources to understand the First World War than base one's entire knowledge of fifteenth-century Anglo-French relations on Shakespeare's *Henry V*.'⁴¹

Cinematic images have also done a great deal to buttress the idea of the war as 'waste built on futility and compounded by human error.'⁴² After wartime documentary-films such as *Battle of the Somme* (1916), from the mid-1920s, the filmic image was equally influential for reconstructing that memory than literature. Films such as *Hearts of the World* (1918), *Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* (1921), *The Big Parade* (1925), *Westfront 1918* (1930), *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1930), *Journey's End* (1930), *Hell's Angels* (1930) and *Tell England* (1931), together with later pictures such as *Paths of Glory* (1957), *King and Country* (1964) and *Oh! What a Lovely War* (1969) continued to provide the dominant popular interpretations of the war, simply because of the ability of film to reach a far greater public than the printed word.⁴³ The scale of destruction of loss as a result of the First World War itself 'undermined conceptualization and encouraged dramatization: it emphasised acts and images, not

³⁹ Esther MacCallum-Stewart 'The First World War & Popular Literature' PhD thesis, University of Sussex 2005

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, .p.xviii

⁴¹ Gary Sheffield, *Forgotten Victory* (London: Headline, 2001), p.16

⁴² Charles Carrington, *Soldier from the War Returning* (London: Hutchinson, 1965), p.264

⁴³ Michael Paris, 'Introduction' in Michael Paris (ed) *The First World War and Popular Cinema* (Edinburgh: EUP, 1999)

words [...] traditional categories and definitions broke down: documentary and fiction, news and storytelling, history and literature began to mix and overlap.’⁴⁴ This is significant because the documentary form descended from the cinema. The man credited as the ‘father’ of the documentary, Scottish-born film producer John Grierson, wrote in 1933 that documentaries were ‘the creative treatment of actuality [...] a new art with no such background in the story and the stage as the studio product so glibly possess.’⁴⁵

Grierson embraced the artfulness that binds the documentary to invention of various kinds. Indeed, it is the creative interpretation of reality that visual representations of the First World War have utilised the documentary’s creative treatment of actuality to enable the camera to create its own visual and mythical chronology, the war imagined of 1914-1918. This chronology is not the war entire but an accumulation of the narrative strands that confirm a set of attitudes and ideas of what the war was and what it meant.⁴⁶ These stories have been told in many different ways, in histories, fictions and memoirs, poems, plays, paintings, television documentaries and films, yet the essential elements – of mud, blood and poetry - remain much the same.

The established mythical narratives that have clustered around the memory of the First World War are British ‘hand-holds’ because the enormity of the conflict and its casualties is so difficult to master.⁴⁷ It is for this reason that British viewers continue to find the comedy *Blackadder Goes Forth* (BBC, 1989) the most palatable representation of the conflict [see fig.5]. The six-episode pastiche drew from a selection of war literature as well as *Journey’s End* (1928) and *Oh What a Lovely War* (1963). The first broadcast was watched by 14 million viewers, the series is now a regular feature on BBC2 and satellite channels such as UK Gold because it still resonates as historical truth about Britain’s war experience. When *Blackadder Goes Forth* was repeated at the time of the armistice’s 80th anniversary in 1998, it entered

⁴⁴ Ibid. p.10

⁴⁵ John Grierson, ‘The documentary producer’ *Cinema Quarterly* 2:1 (1933) pp.7-9, Derek Paget, *No Other Way to Tell It: Dramadoc/Docum drama on Television* (Manchester: MUP, 1998), Duncan Ross ‘The Documentary in Television’ *BBC Quarterly* Vol. V No. 1 (1950) pp.19-20

⁴⁶ Samuel Hynes, *A War Imagined*, p.ix

⁴⁷ Hew Strachan & Jonathan Lewis, ‘Filming the First World War’ *History Today* (October, 2003) 53 (10) pp.20-22

the weekly list of the top 20 most watched programmes with 4.12 million viewers.⁴⁸ In November 2004, *Blackadder* was voted as the nation's second favourite comedy in a national BBC poll, receiving more votes than other comedy staples such as *Dad's Army* (BBC, 1968-77) and *Fawlty Towers* (BBC, 1975-79).⁴⁹

[Play video clip 1: *Blackadder Goes Forth*]

The legacy of Captain Blackadder and his companions has proved particularly persistent. Military historian Richard Holmes has recalled that for years it was impossible to attend a military presentation without a clip of *Blackadder Goes Forth* discussing the strategic imperative of inching Field Marshal Haig's drinks cabinet closer to Berlin, and that in 1991 during the first Gulf War British camps were named after Captain Blackadder and his cronies.⁵⁰ Several short clips from *Blackadder Goes Forth* were also included in the most-watched Great War documentary *Haig: the Unknown Soldier* (BBC, 1996), the most revisionist programme in this study utilised the comedy's popularity to set up the accepted stereotype of the British High Command as 'butchers and bunglers'. By providing a source of entertainment for a further generation of viewers, however, *Blackadder Goes Forth* has helped to shape their future attitudes towards the Great War. By attracting the attention of historians of the conflict *Blackadder* has brought into sharp focus the nature of the debate regarding the Western Front of literature and popular culture against the Western Front of history.⁵¹

The British public's interest in the First World War began a second popular revival in the 1980s. Historian John Giles founded the Western Front Association in 1980 as an organisation to promote the observance of local and national anniversaries. It was also the first private organisation to raise money for war memorials since the 1920s. It was not until the 1990s however that remembrance rituals attained pre-1939 dominance in the national media. In November 1998, British newspaper coverage of remembrance events filled an unprecedented 1292 column inches, compared to 303 inches on the

⁴⁸ *Broadcast* 6 November 1998 p.28

⁴⁹ www.bbc.co.uk/comedy/blackadder/vote/ (accessed 14 February 2005)

⁵⁰ Richard Holmes, *Tommy: The British Soldier on the Western Front*, p.xviii

⁵¹ Stephen Badsey, 'Blackadder Goes Forth and the Two Western Fronts Debate' in Graham Roberts and Philip M. Taylor (eds), *The Historian, Television and Television History* (Luton: LUP, 2001), pp.113-126

worsening situation in Iraq, and 155 inches for military action in Kosovo. In the same year, the Imperial War Museum's exhibition *The First World War Remembered* attracted thousands of visitors, and 55,000 people a day logged on to the Commonwealth War Graves Commission's newly launched on-line register of the 1.78 million dead from both world conflicts.⁵² The observance of the two-minute silence has been more widely observed in Britain from the 1990s than at any time since the 1930s, and the number of television documentaries about the First World War is a parallel component which reflects the heightened interest in the conflict. Television documentaries stimulated by the eightieth anniversaries included the seven-part *1914-18* (BBC, 1996), Richard Holmes' six-part *The Western Front* (1999) and *Haig: the Unknown Soldier* (BBC, 1996).

History on Television

The Second World War delayed the development of the new medium, but after 1945 Britain's television service grew from a few hours of black and white broadcasts in London to the present day service: five main channels broadcasting colour programmes nationwide, in addition to many cable, digital and satellite stations transmitting more than twenty hours a day. Since the immediate post-1945 era, television has occupied a cultural centrality which is unique to Britain.⁵³ Today, approximately 64% of all households have more than one television set, and 99% of the British population pay television licence fees.⁵⁴ At the beginning of the twenty-first century it was calculated that the average British adult watches three hours of television per day, and the average British family will have their television switched on for approximately six hours a day. It has also been calculated that an average British child born after the mid-1990s will by the age of 18 have spent more hours watching television than any other activity except sleeping.⁵⁵

The advent of commercial television in September 1955 resulted in increased competition between the BBC and ITV. This stimulated the creation of documentary modes, subjects and styles we see today. *Panorama* (BBC, 1953-present) produced

⁵² <http://www.cwgc.org>. - *Times* 22 January 1999 p.3

⁵³ David Christopher, *British Culture – An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1999), p.106

⁵⁴ Graeme Burton, *Talking Television* (London: Arnold, 2000), p.11

⁵⁵ David Christopher *British Culture – An Introduction*, p.106

documentaries about current affairs, social and political events where documentary background reports were combined with the subjects under discussion and scientific issues featured in *Horizon* (BBC, 1964 – present). Major documentary series such as Sir Kenneth Clark's exploration of culture and history *Great Temples of the World* (BBC, 1964) went on to the highly successful series *Civilisation* (BBC, 1969) which was made with an enormous budget that enabled sequences to be filmed in thirteen different countries. The documentary genre extended its reach to drama-documentary with Peter Watkins' *Culloden* (BBC, 1964) which used cinema vérité-style re-enactment, and used a television team to 'report' the battle with 'appalling physical realism.'⁵⁶ Dr Jacob Bronowski's *The Ascent of Man* (BBC, 1973) showed how science could benefit from big-budget documentary treatment.

History on television was incredibly popular throughout the 1950s and 1960s. Epic history documentaries such as *Victory at Sea* (BBC, 1952), *War in the Air* (BBC, 1954) and *Valiant Years* (BBC, 1961) had already paved the way for stirring musical scores, eloquent narration and dramatic archive footage. Lieutenant-General Sir Brian Horrocks' *Men in Battle* (BBC, 1956), *Epic Battles* (BBC, 1958) and *Battle in Space* (BBC, 1958) attracted audiences of more than six million viewers as did anything by A.J.P. Taylor.⁵⁷ The expansion of higher education by the Labour governments of the 1960s created more historians as well as a more educated audience for published works of history. However, programmes broadcast on the developing television medium could reach millions of people who did not need a long academic apprenticeship to understand the war. This period marks a historiographical change; a new vision of the Great War was made possible by television, inevitably marked by the faces of individual men and women.⁵⁸

Indeed, the democratising tendency of images underscored the most powerful Anglo-Saxon synthesis on the war – A.J.P. Taylor's *The First World War: an illustrated history* (1964) – a populist vision of the Great War as a waste of life 'which decentred

⁵⁶ Tony Howard & John Stokes (eds), *Acts of War: the Representation of Military Conflict on the British Stage and Television Since 1945* (Aldershot: Scolar, 1996), p.17

⁵⁷ A.J.P. Taylor's television appearances included the first televised lecture in front of a live audience *The Russian Revolution* (ATV, 1957), a successful experiment that paved the way for *The First World War* (ATV, 1961), *The 1920s* (ATV, 1962) and *Men of the 1860s* (ATV, 1963).

⁵⁸ Jay Winter & Antoine Prost, *The Great War in History: Debates and Controversies, 1914 to the Present*, p.20-21

the historical narrative, marking a fundamental point of departure for all subsequent Anglo-Saxon studies.⁵⁹ In May 1964, A.J.P. Taylor's programme on George V in the series *Men of Our Time* (ITV, 1964) attracted a record audience of more than 6.9 million viewers, significantly more than *Sunday Night at the London Palladium*, *Coronation Street* and *Z-Cars*.⁶⁰ The popularity of history on television continued in to the 1970s. The most popular history documentary series was *The World at War* (ITV, 1973-4), a grand narrative of the Second World War in the modern documentary style of *The Great War* (BBC, 1964). The 1980s was an especially turbulent period for the television industry in Britain as well as other Western European countries. Heightened competition such as the re-distribution and creation of new ITV franchises, the launch of Channel 4 in 1982, and the development of cable and satellite technology, and the increased competitiveness fostered by Margaret Thatcher's governments, did not provide an atmosphere conducive to the creation of good quality historical documentaries.

It was not until the late 1990s that history documentaries developed new forms by crossing established documentary modes with reality, reconstruction and re-enactment to produce drama-documentary programmes which enabled viewers to not just *see* but gain a tangible sense of historical immediacy to the events on the screen. While this was not an entirely new genre after Peter Watkins' groundbreaking *Culloden* (BBC, 1964), the 'house' formats kick-started the contemporary shift towards innovative reality-history series such as *The 1900s House* (Channel 4, 1999), *The 1940s House* (Channel 4, 2001), *The Frontier House* (Channel 4, 2002) and *The Edwardian Country House* (Channel 4, 2002). Examples of the developing genre include *The Ship* (BBC, 2002), *The Trench* (BBC, 2002), *Lad's Army* (BBC, 2002) and *Bad Lad's Army* (ITV, 2004). Channel 4 has also had reality-history successes with *Spitfire Ace* (2003) and *Bomber Crew* (2004). *Spitfire Ace* was a four episode series which followed four young pilots competing to be trained as a Battle of Britain pilot, and achieved an audience of 2.8 million, a 12% share.⁶¹ *Bomber Crew* showed how grandchildren of Second World War aircrews learned to fly a Lancaster bomber and

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ *Daily Telegraph* 30 May 1964 p.10

⁶¹ *Guardian* 30 November 2004 as viewed on

<http://media.guardian.co.uk/broadcast/comment/0,7493,1362687,00.html> (accessed 30 December 2004)

was watched by 1.6 million viewers, a 7% audience share.⁶² The BBC has also enjoyed success with *Dunkirk: the Soldier's Story*, a drama-documentary series that cost £2.5 million to make and achieved a peak audience of 5.1 million viewers.⁶³

In Britain, numerous social and political developments might explain an increased interest in history: the growth of people going to university, the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the end of the Cold War in 1991, the advent of New Labour and the return of Hong Kong to the Chinese in 1997, the millennium, the death of the Queen Mother and her daughter's Golden Jubilee in 2002, as well as devolution.⁶⁴ The marketing of memory has paid off in a huge consumer boom in images of the past in films, books, articles, the internet, television, and increasingly more sophisticated museum exhibitions.⁶⁵ The popularity and increasing diversity of history on television, however, has led to public debates fretting that television is progressively 'dumbing down' by exerting a negative effect on levels of literacy among schoolchildren and university students. Television has been blamed for trivialising coherent discussion by placing greater emphasis on narrative at the expense of analysis, as well as excessive showmanship with the increasing use of Computer Generated Images (CGIs). It has been suggested that in the manner of Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1931), people are becoming addicted to visual technologies that are eroding their critical faculties and destroying their sense of history.⁶⁶

A recent national survey studying the state of tertiary education at British institutions found that academics remain divided on the matter. One respondent asserted that television history has 'hugely stimulated the national historical imagination' and has 'widened and provoked' student's historical curiosity. Another lecturer believed that despite an over-concentration on military and dynastic themes, television history can

⁶² *Guardian* 14 December 2004 as viewed on <http://media.guardian.co.uk/overnights/story/0,7965,1373407,00.html> (accessed 30 December 2004)

⁶³ *Guardian* 19 February 2004 as viewed on <http://media.guardian.co.uk/overnights/story/0,7965,1151632,00.html> (accessed 30 December 2004)

⁶⁴ David Cannadine, 'Introduction' in David Cannadine (ed), *History and the Media*, p.1

⁶⁵ Jay Winter, 'The Generation of Memory: Reflections on the "Memory Boom"' in *Contemporary Historical Studies*

⁶⁶ Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, (London: Heineman, 1986). Other academics concerned about the media's negative impact on consumer's cognitive capacities include Jerome Bruner, Jack Goody, Walter Ong, Marshall McLuhan, Julian Jaynes and Eric Havelock.

give students 'a better sense of the chronological and geographical breadth of history than A-Level does.' Other academics in the survey were not so optimistic. One respondent noted that 'colour, action, biography and narrative' in television history has altered student's expectations who 'expect to be told stories rather than acquire the skills of the historian.'⁶⁷

Many historians continue to complain that a lack of historiographical discussion and quality research means that television beams out 'agreed' knowledge which does not reflect the best academic research. This is an outdated argument that has moved on to appreciate the nature of history on the screen as opposed to history on the page. Television producers have long maintained that their medium is best suited to 'telling stories and anecdotes, creating atmosphere and mood, giving diffuse impressions. It does not lend itself easily to the detailed analysis of complex events; it is difficult to use it to relate coherently complicated narrative histories, and it is quite hopeless at portraying abstract ideas.'⁶⁸ In reality, it is assumed that any historiographical dialogue would require viewers to have knowledge of conceptual and epistemological matters which are considered beyond the intellectual scope of the majority of viewing audiences, and many documentary makers are themselves unfamiliar with these concerns. To ensure that their programme will appeal to the largest possible audience, therefore, broadcasters prefer to present simple historical representations which are more easily digestible for the majority of viewers.⁶⁹

Nevertheless, today's historian-presenters have surpassed what A.J.P. Taylor started with his radio and then television lectures from the 1940s until the 1970s. David Starkey's *Six Wives of Henry VIII* (Channel 4, 2001) looked down on sitcoms and soap operas such as *Friends* and *Brookside* from a height of more than 4 million viewers, and Simon Schama's *History of Britain* (BBC, 2000) has been one of the BBC's biggest commercial successes followed by Richard Holmes' *Battlefields* (BBC, 2001).⁷⁰ Sir Ian Kershaw, series historian for the documentary *Nazis: A Warning from History* (BBC, 1997) has said that 'Some remarkable documentaries -

⁶⁷ Eleventh Annual Survey on University History published *History Today* August 2003 pp.54-57

⁶⁸ Jerry Kuehl, 'History on the Public Screen' in Paul Smith (ed), *The Historian and Film* (Cambridge: CUP, 1976), pp.177-185

⁶⁹ Robert Ferguson, *Television on History: Representations of Ireland* Media Analysis Paper 5, University of London Institute of Education (London, 1985), pp.1-2

⁷⁰ *Guardian* 29 October 2001 'Media' p.2

The World at War is one - will stand the test of time which most history books will eventually fail. History on television is here to stay. If historians do not help to mould and influence it, others will.⁷¹

Indeed, it has been the most prominent presenter-historians who have given the history business a shake: 'like Steven Spielberg and Martin Scorsese lighting fireworks under Hollywood they have pushed television outside the narrow archive-based tramlines it had run on for years.'⁷² Television historians are ubiquitous enough to be a target for satire: *The Mary Whitehouse Experience* (BBC, 1990-1992) found comedic value in their spoof 'History Today' by parodying 'history men'; more recently Simon Schama, David Starkey and Adam Hart-Davis have all been lampooned by the popular BBC comedy *Dead Ringers* (BBC, 2002-present). *We Are History* (BBC, 2000-2001) featured comedian Marcus Brigstocke as the boorish David Oxley (BA Hons) who poked fun at the absurdities of television's new obsession with the past.

[Play video clip 2: *Dead Ringers*]

As Jay Winter had already done in *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning* (1995), Simon Schama used Walter Benjamin's 'Theses on the Philosophy of History' (1940) and Paul Klee's *Angelus Novus* to illustrate that history is 'a weak and wasted creature; less the master than the victim of history; the demoralised opposite of a "real" historian's presumption that he can order the chaos; make whole the fragments; make sense of the mess; impose music on the cacophony.'⁷³ Schama continued his reference to the Angel of History to explain the predicament of all historians who work in television as

never quite having the luxury of enough time (especially edit time) to be able to consider the careful thought; to give utterance to the finely tuned epigram that happens to be true as well as stylish. Why? Because of the law of the 57-minute programme. And because a storm is blowing in from paradise, otherwise known

⁷¹ Ian Kershaw, 'The Past on the Box: Strengths and Weaknesses' in David Cannadine (ed) *History and the Media* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p.121

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Simon Schama, 'Television and the Trouble with History', pp.21-22

as the Channel Controller's office, which pushes us into the future to which our back is turned – the next schedule; the next budget round; the next seasonal schedule; the next way to be one-up on the opposition.⁷⁴

Whilst the medium itself has become more sophisticated the market in which it operates has become increasingly diverse and competitive. The advent of satellite television in the 1990s resulted in a growing plethora of extra channels, and broadcasters now compete to attract the attention of a much more diffuse audience. Producers of history documentaries measure their success with reference to the 'three-four million club' as an exclusive group of programme-makers whose programmes manage to attain this number of viewers.⁷⁵ For example, in 1964 *The Great War* attracted an average audience of 8.2 million viewers, a 16% share of the available audience.⁷⁶ Thirty-seven years later, in a market of hundreds of potential channels available at any one time, David Starkey's *Six Wives of Henry VIII* (Channel 4, 2001) was hailed a great commercial success because it attracted an average audience of 4 million viewers, a similar audience share to *The Great War* achieved in a more competitive market.⁷⁷

The multi-media age in which television operates complicates the matter further: restraints on budgets and scheduling time are so great in today's television market that broadcasters often publish related books and allocate internet space for historical information related to their programme. This enables programme makers to include all the facts, figures and historiographical discussion that could not be translated to the screen. For example, the American funded series *1914-18* (BBC, 1996) offered viewers the chance to purchase an educational pack, and it is now common for books accompanying series to be published in tandem with the broadcast, as well as VHS, DVD and audio-tape copies of the programmes. In this way, Simon Schama's *History of Britain* series, watched by an average of 3.3 million viewers, was a 'merchandising goldmine' for the BBC.⁷⁸ Richard Holmes also followed his popular series *War Walks*

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Taylor Downing, 'Bringing the Past to the Small Screen' speaking at the IHR conference 'History and the Media' also published in David Cannadine (ed), *History and the Media* pp.7-19

⁷⁶ BBC WAC Audience figures compiled by Gwyniver Jones for Professor Alex Danchev 15 June 1988

⁷⁷ *Guardian* 29 October 2001 'Media' p.2

⁷⁸ *Guardian* 28 October 2002 p.5

(BBC, 1996) with *The Western Front* (BBC, 1999), and books to accompany both series went on the market soon afterwards.

When the BBC finally agreed to repeat *The Great War* in 2002, Correlli Barnett duly re-issued the book that corresponds with the series, with a revised introduction by Barnett's co-writer John Terraine.⁷⁹ In addition, *The First World War* (Channel 4, 2003) and *World War One in Colour* (Channel 5, 2003) both had interrelated books on sale when the series were broadcast.⁸⁰ Websites are a further extension of the franchise. Channel Four's current site for *The First World War* reflects the quality approach of their recent series which was based on Professor Hew Strachan's latest publication, but their more recent site for *The Somme* (Channel 4, 2005) is titled 'Lost Generation'.⁸¹ The BBC's First World War site, despite some good revisionist articles by respected military historians such as Professor Gary Sheffield, also includes a link to a 'Wilfred Owen Audio Gallery'.⁸² Interactive digital services are now increasingly used to feature the material that could not be included in the main programme: a recent example was *Dunkirk* (BBC, 2004) which featured a great deal of extra information and programming on the digital service 'BBCi'. Today, viewers with digital equipment can access hours of additional programming with their remote controls by pressing the now ubiquitous 'red button'.

Methodology

It was not until the late 1960s that the study of the moving image in a historical context was legitimised as an area for academic study.⁸³ The next generation of academics in this field have encouraged new areas of research into the historical value of films and related studies such as textual analysis and semiotics were taken up in the 'new' universities established in the 1960s.⁸⁴ However, despite being the prevalent

⁷⁹ Correlli Barnett, *The Great War* (London, 1979/2002)

⁸⁰ Hew Strachan, *The First World War* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2003), and Charles Messenger, *World War One in Colour* (London: Random House, 2003)

⁸¹ <http://www.channel4.com/history/microsites/L/lostgeneration/somme/film1.html> (accessed 17 March 2006)

⁸² <http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/war/wwone/index.shtml> (accessed 6 April 2005)

⁸³ See various works by Nicholas Pronay, Arthur Marwick, Nicholas Reeves, John Grenville, D.Cameron Watt, John Ramsden, Jeffrey Richards, Pierre Sorlin and Asa Briggs.

⁸⁴ See various works by Anthony Aldgate, Ken Ward, Andrew Kelly, Philip Taylor, David Welch, Nicholas Hiley, Mark Connelly and Michael Paris.

medium for information and entertainment in most advanced countries since the 1960s it remains that there are remarkably few serious works of history that embrace television as a primary source of information. Academics have been more wary of studying television than cinema through perceived methodological difficulties, academic snobbery, or a fear of the new and/or transient.⁸⁵ Organisations such as the International Association for Media and History (IAMHIST), the Inter-University History Film Consortium, the International Association for Audio-Visual Media in Historical Research and Education, and the British Universities' Film and Video Council have increasingly sought to bring academics and television professionals together through conferences and publications such as IAMHIST's quarterly publication *The Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*.

While Dr Stephen Badsey, Professor Gary Sheffield and Professor Alex Danchev have all published work commenting on televisual treatments of the First World War, a small number of articles were published in *The Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* after a conference on *The Great War* series at Queen Mary, University of London in 2002.⁸⁶ This was followed by Professor Brian Bond's *The Unquiet Western Front* (2002) and Dr Dan Todman's *The Great War: Myth and Memory* (2005). These works have provided excellent starting points on a small number of documentaries, although the majority focus on *The Great War* series, but this study seeks to analyse a wider selection of programmes in a more interdisciplinary methodology to determine - not just when and by whom - but *how* documentary-films about the First World War were created as televisual texts of public history and *why* British television's visual design is rooted in Britain's cultural heritage and popular memory.

By examining a selection of television texts about the First World War, this analysis will show that the majority of documentaries are remembrance rituals in their own right, fashioned from the rich symbolism, modes and signifying practices which lie at the foundation of British remembrance rituals. The use of this cultural inheritance means that their portrayals of the scale of human loss and destruction have resonated most strongly in Britain's memory of the war. The source of this resonance has been

⁸⁵ Graham Roberts and Philip M Taylor (eds), *The Historian, Television and Television History*, p.2

⁸⁶ *The Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* Vol.22, No.1, 2002

the generative force of metaphor: the ability to invest with meaning a variety of attitudes and experiences which resonates with a particular statement in a particular context to acquire universal significance.⁸⁷ This is a methodology intended to show historians how they might interpret television output in a cultural history format.

While this thesis cannot be definitive it is the first work to attempt a survey detailed enough to analyse a wide selection of programmes to provide the basis for an informed debate on the production and reception of First World War histories on the screen. The task of examining the ways in which history has been communicated to wider audiences is worthwhile, and certainly there can be no reason why new studies should not look at sources that for too long have been ignored by many British historians.⁸⁸ In investigating these sources this thesis will also show that a contemporary cultural history must make use of all the available techniques of analysis, even when they are traditionally understood to lie 'outside' the established discipline of history to discuss why given texts and images came into existence and why they found resonance with the audience for whom they were created.

History is a subject of practical social relevance, and in today's world 'the proper performance of its function depends on a receptive and discriminating attitude to other disciplines, especially the social sciences.'⁸⁹ Academics working in the field of cultural studies have accepted that, by its very nature, a cultural study should be historically rooted.⁹⁰ Therefore, if they can admit that without history their discipline makes little sense, then surely historians should return the compliment by admitting that, without a constructive dialogue with neighbouring subjects in the social sciences, any historical survey of cultural texts should show awareness and an understanding of ideas on cultural theory. The media historian's task is to investigate how producers, distributors, exhibitors and audiences employ films in the realm of human action, but theory alone cannot provide an adequate analysis; history *and* theory must place movements, filmmakers, and individual films in their historical context. Theory can

⁸⁷ Northrop Frye, *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature* (Toronto: Toronto Academic Press, 1981), p.217

⁸⁸ Arthur Marwick, *The New Nature of History*, p.227

⁸⁹ John Tosh, *The Pursuit of History*, p.xix

⁹⁰ John Corner & Sylvia Harvey, *Enterprise and Heritage: Crosscurrents of National Culture*, (London: Routledge, 1991), p.16-17

only suggest some conceptual tools, and some of these apparatus will be more useful and acceptable to historians than others.⁹¹

In order to provide a rigorous examination of a medium as complicated as television, and to look at how it operates within a concept as multi-faceted as 'culture', is a task that cannot be achieved by subjecting multi-dimensional texts in the form of *history on the screen* to the rules and conventions of *history on the page*. Today's researchers and the historians of our time operate in a multi-media environment, and their work increasingly involves looking at multi-layered sources as part of the media's output. They therefore have to equip themselves with the skills to understand the sources and learn the language of those texts in order to master the techniques necessary to interpret their sources, be they films, websites, magazine images, radio or television programmes. In the same way that a historian studying the history of a foreign country should equip themselves with the linguistic skills to interpret sources in a language different to their native tongue, so the historian of later twentieth and early twentieth century media output must learn the language of their multi-media sources.

This approach is not designed to muddy the waters of 'traditional' methods of historical enquiry, rather it underlines the fact that it is time for historians to recognise that an analysis of modern sources requires a firm grasp of more modern and inclusive techniques of enquiry. The reticence of some academics to adapt their skills to the demands of the sources is short-sighted and ahistorical. By refusing to allow new methods of historical enquiry to evolve to meet the challenges presented by the technologies in which we live is a most grievous error. As Richard Evans has said 'drawing up the disciplinary drawbridge has never been a good idea for historians. For centuries they have profited immeasurably from the invasions of neighbouring disciplines [...they] should approach the invading hordes of semioticians, post-structuralists, New Historicists [...] and the rest with more discrimination. Some of them might prove more friendly, or more useful, than they seem at first sight.'⁹² This thesis therefore answers the call for a genuine need for more inclusive approaches to historical research.

⁹¹ Carl Plantinga, *Rhetoric and Representations in Non-fiction Film*, (Cambridge: CUP, 1997), p.2

⁹² Richard J. Evans, *In Defence of History* (London: Granta, 2000), pp.8-9

The transdisciplinary nature of this study reflects the fact that to deal with culture is to deal by definition with the mixing of categories and the system of meanings which makes order, ranks priority and suggests useful connections between things, real or imagined. This study will show that, in order to understand how and why certain ideas have developed over time, it is possible to observe and analyse those instances when meanings were newly articulated, questioned or reinvested with meaning. Therefore, the proposed methodology will highlight areas fundamental to human interaction such as the conditions of communication, and the terms of representation and interaction between structures of meaning as they have been embedded and codified in public narratives and discourses. In reading sources 'culturally', therefore, we are able to assemble a whole range of related themes – visual, textual, musical - to gain a point of fresh focus and insight within a historical framework.⁹³ To understand a culture is to retrace the significations invested in the symbolic forms: to go back and forth between texts and contexts to compare each specific and localised use of one symbol or another to the world of significance that lends it meaning.⁹⁴

While historians are happiest at work puncturing myths and historical inaccuracies they miss the potential value of a more sensitive approach to myth. Fresh techniques raise new questions about the *active* relationship between past and present. An epistemological approach to historical representations would allow us to observe the displacements, omissions, and reinterpretations through which myths in personal and collective memory take 'as shaped accounts in which some incidents were dramatized, others contextualised, yet others passed over in silence, through a process of narrative shaping in which both conscious and unconscious, myth and reality, played significant parts.'⁹⁵ This more nuanced approach towards representations mean that can be viewed as a particular explanation and interpretation of events rather than as a cleverly designed falsification of reality. They should not be regarded as wholesale fictions concealing a more murky reality because they reveal a great deal about how people relate to their own national past.⁹⁶

⁹³ Miri Rubin in David Cannadine (ed.), *What is History Now?*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), p.85

⁹⁴ Roger Chartier, *Cultural History: Between Practices and Representations*, p.96

⁹⁵ Raphael Samuel & Paul Thompson (eds), *The Myths We Live By* (London: Routledge, 1990), p.5

⁹⁶ Mark Connelly, *We Can Take It! Britain and the Memory of the Second World War* (London: Pearson Longman, 2004), pp.5-8

Since the 1920s French historians connected to the journal *Annales: économies, sociétés, civilisations* have used phrases such as *civilisation*, *mentalités collectives*, and *imaginaire social*,⁹⁷ but it was not until the late 1980s that academics began to refer to a ‘New Cultural History’ in a response to challenges such as the expansion of culture itself and the rise of cultural theory.⁹⁸ In recent times new methods of cultural history have become increasingly open to new techniques of analysis, and respected historians, such as David Cannadine, Peter Burke and Arthur Marwick, have made attempts to show the relevancy of the past to the present by bringing history into media and media into history.⁹⁹ It is in the spirit of this expanding area of academic work that the methodological approach of this thesis utilises fields considered by some as ‘foreign’ to history.

Mythology has its own history that is central to the common sense and to the history of the period in which they hold sway.¹⁰⁰ Representations in the forms of myth and history share at least one meaning in Ancient Greek; *mythos* – project, plot, tale, and *istoria* – search, interrogation, and examination: both have in common a sense of discourse or narration.¹⁰¹ Roland Barthes’ *Mythologies* (1957) asserted that myths are effective because they become part of every day language and speech: ‘Myth does not deny things, on the contrary, its function is to talk about them; simply, it purifies them, it makes them innocent, it gives them a natural and eternal justification, it gives them a clarity which is not that of an explanation but that of a statement of fact [...] it does away with all dialectics, with any going back beyond what is immediately visible, it organises a world which is [...] without depth, a world wide open and

⁹⁷ The *Annales* ‘school’ of historians has been connected with the influential work of historians such as Marc Bloch, Lucien Febvre, Ferdinand Braudel and Alain Corbin, and others associated with the journal have made many contributions to this field to the study of collective representations and mentalities.

⁹⁸ This phrase came into use in the late 1980s with an edited volume by American historian Lynn Hunt in 1989 of papers delivered at a conference in America ‘French History: Texts and Culture’ at Berkley in 1987. Peter Burke, *What is Cultural History?*, pp.49-50

⁹⁹ A good example of this is Asa Briggs and Peter Burke, *A Social History of the Media: From Gutenberg to the Internet*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002) who state in the preface and p.2 that whatever the starting point, it is necessary for people working in communication and cultural studies to take history seriously, and historians – whatever their period and preoccupations – to take serious account of communication (including communication theory).

¹⁰⁰ Malcolm Smith, *Britain and 1940* (London: Routledge, 2000), p.6

¹⁰¹ Luisa Passerini, ‘Mythbiography in Oral History’ in Raphael Samuel & Paul Thompson (eds) *The Myths We Live By*, p.60

wallowing in the evident, it establishes a blissful clarity: things appear to mean something by themselves.’¹⁰²

Since the early 1960s there has been a growing interest in theories about how society receives and makes sense of media output. Canadian academic Marshall McLuhan’s *Understanding the Media* (1964) concluded that ‘[v]isceral reaction takes priority over the particulars of content in personal recall [...] Images, styles, texts, tones, fashions, ambiences, and manner are salient. Facts, dates, names, places, institutions, cause-and-effect theories and other components that inform a literacy-based historical perspective are reduced to the accoutrements of an entertainment experience.’¹⁰³ The effects of his work are still relevant today, and a ‘McLuhan Renaissance’ is a widely discussed academic concern, especially in France and Quebec.¹⁰⁴ In Britain, John Berger’s series and book *Ways of Seeing* (BBC, 1972)¹⁰⁵ was influential, but it was McLuhan’s ‘the medium is the message’ which underlined that the content of the television message should not be examined without regard to the character of the medium and how the message is produced.¹⁰⁶ John Fiske and John Hartley’s *Reading Television* (1978) was also influential.¹⁰⁷

Recent writing on this subject has continued that ‘you can’t have a message without a medium [...] it is a question of proportional rather than exclusive interest [...] mediation implies a forming or re-forming of a message in a specific way in order to signify a particular meaning [...therefore] there are specific signifying practices which can be identified, described and analysed in specific contexts.’¹⁰⁸ These signifying practices include the *mis-en-scène*. Literally translated as ‘put on stage’, it

¹⁰² Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (London: Cape, 1972), pp.142-143

¹⁰³ David Marc, *Bonfire of the Humanities: Television, Sub literacy and Long-Term Memory Loss* (USA: Syracuse, 1995)

¹⁰⁴ Gary Genosko, *McLuhan & Baudrillard: The Masters of Implosion* (London: Routledge, 1999). McLuhan’s vast body of work included *The Mechanical Bride* (1951) an analysis of propaganda methods and advertising methods; *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (1962) which documented the historical changes surrounding the shift from print to electronic technology; *Understanding the Media* (1964) which brought McLuhan fame and status; *The Medium is the Message* (1967) a collage of media criticism; *War and Peace in the Global Village* (1968); *Through the Vanishing Point* (1968) which challenged traditional views of perception; *Culture is Our Business* (1970) an analysis of American advertising as mythology; *Laws of Media: The New Science* (published posthumously in 1988).

¹⁰⁵ John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: BBC, 1972)

¹⁰⁶ John Eldridge, Jenny Kitzinger, Kevin Williams (eds), *The Mass Media & Power in Modern Britain* (Oxford: OUP, 1997), pp.6-7

¹⁰⁷ John Fiske & John Hartley, *Reading Television*, (London: Methuen, 1978)

¹⁰⁸ Robert Ferguson, *The Media in Question*, (London: Arnold, 2004), p.4

is the important assumption that everything on the screen has been included in the frame of shot for a reason. The careful selection and presentation of material or the *mis-en-scène* places emphasis on seven fundamental points which are all essential to the form and content of the programme: choice of voiceover narrator or on-camera presenter, the use of eyewitness interviews, the use of music, the choice of camera style and lighting for both interviews and outdoor shots, and the selection and treatment of archive footage.¹⁰⁹ Television analysis can borrow techniques from the study of cinematography in the assumption that the gaze of the viewer should be drawn to the intended subject or centre of interest in every scene through the design of its visual elements.¹¹⁰ Analysis centres on televisual codes in the form of subjects, symbols and words combined with ambient sounds (such as artillery fire or marching feet), and non-diegetic sounds, the most powerful of which is music. These sounds contribute to a generally agreed meaning which is determined by context and message.¹¹¹

Historians who wish to understand the way television works should use a visual logic according to the cognitive principles of *montage* because the medium generates intellectual and critical meaning by the juxtaposition and collision – not continuity – of abstracted images. Historical objects are first constituted by being blasted out of the historical continuum: the visual icon has become less and less secure and trustworthy as denotation, as an ‘image of’ but more ‘the historical and historicizing circumscription of a *special site* that bounds and condenses without necessarily synthesising a set of variously related, possible narratives.’¹¹² The extensive use of images on television has led some writers to suggest that photographs are not illustrations of the visual truth of objects, people and events but that the camera constructs its own reality. This suggests a self-reflexive crisis of representation, where what was once understood as a ‘mirror with a memory’ can now only reflect other

¹⁰⁹ Robert Ferguson, *Television on History: Representations of Ireland*, (London: Department of English and Media Studies, University of London Institute of Education in association with Comedia, 1985), p.23

¹¹⁰ Pierre Sorlin, *The Film in History: Restaging the Past* (New Jersey: Barnes & Noble, 1980), p.xi

¹¹¹ Nick Lacey, *Image and Representation: Key Concepts in Media Studies* (London: Macmillan, 1998), pp.22-54

¹¹² Vivian Sobchack, ‘The Insistent Fringe: Moving Images and Historical Consciousness’ *History and Theory* vol.36, no. 4, (December 1997), pp.4-20, 11-13

mirrors, resonating with Jean Baudrillard's 'hall of mirrors' theory.¹¹³ Baudrillard's theories, as all postmodern ideas, should be approached with caution, but Baudrillard did believe that Marshall McLuhan's 'the media is the message' was 'the key formula for the age of simulation' and thought television was *the* medium of 'electronic simulation.'¹¹⁴

Structure

The structure of this thesis focuses on four broad themes: '*The Great War* (BBC, 1964)', 'Veterans', 'Landscape' and 'Controversy'. The material collected for this thesis crosses a number of disciplinary boundaries: only *The Great War* series has a document archive, and the BBC Written Archives Centre at Caversham holds very limited information on BBC programmes broadcast after 1980. Other sources of material have been found in collections such as the Imperial War Museum's Document and Film and Video archives, the British Film Institute, and the Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives at King's College, London. A large amount of material has been derived from newspaper archives but the most informative material has come from correspondence and interviews with those who have worked on or appeared in the programmes discussed in this study. The interviews were conducted with leading historians, military specialists, television professionals, and two Great War veterans who have appeared in a number of documentaries about 1914-1918.

The First World War was 'rediscovered' with a spate of fiftieth anniversaries between 1964 and 1968, and the fiftieth commemorations had a profound commercial and psychological significance, a reminder that the First World War was still an un-exorcised and barely healed national trauma.¹¹⁵ This was evident in the attention given to the BBC's 26-part epic *The Great War*, launched on the fledgling second channel on 30 May 1964, hailed by the *Sunday Times* hailed as 'The intelligent man's

¹¹³ Linda Williams, 'Mirrors Without Memories' in Grant/Slowioski (eds), *Documenting the Documentary* (Detroit, 1998) pp.379-396. Baudrillard made his controversial comments on 'the reality gulf' during the first Gulf War in January 1991, suggesting that sophisticated societies are too dependent on the simulations and sub-realities constructed by the media in the *Guardian* 1 January 1991 (Leader)

¹¹⁴ Asa Briggs and Peter Burke, *A Social History of the Media: From Gutenberg to the Internet*, p.250

¹¹⁵ Alex Danchev, "'Bunking and Debunking'": The controversies of the 1960s' in Brian Bond (ed) *The First World War and British Military History* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991), pp.263-264

guide to Armageddon.’¹¹⁶ It was understood by those involved in the early planning stages of the series that *The Great War* would ‘nullify these wide variations in interpretations which are so apparent in current war literature’.¹¹⁷ However, *The Great War* did not change the way that the majority of the nation thought about the war because the overwhelming visual and emotional impact of the series cemented its own variations on the canon of war myths already embedded in Britain’s cultural landscape.

The Great War showed that television was a suitable platform that was fit for the purpose of public remembrance and the series laid the foundations for the powerful self-generative force of televised commemoration. It was the most monumental of monuments: it still holds the record for being the longest-running television documentary about war, distilling 1561 days of 1914-1918 that involved 26 nations, 65 million combatants in 16 theatres of war into 26 episodes over 17 screen hours. More than 30 full-time staff sourced approximately 844, 800 feet of archive film from the archives of 20 countries, as well as 20,000 photographs, paintings, posters and contemporary newspapers.¹¹⁸ The series was the biggest television project of its time as well as the largest to deal exclusively with the fighting of 1914-1918. The series’ technological advances, rigorously revisionist script, sweeping musical score, veteran interviews, and archive images that were treated to look like contemporary newsreel, meant that the series quickly became part of the history it commented upon. Like a Great War memorial in stone and bronze, the weight of *The Great War* placed the conflict beyond the reach of critical discourse. Since the 1970s, *The Great War* has been consistently referred to as ‘the finest documentary in television history’¹¹⁹, and it inspired a 26-part grand narrative of the Second World War, *The World at War* (ITV, 1974) as well as further First World War series such as *1914-18* (KCET/PBS/BBC, 1996) and *The First World War* (Channel 4, 2003).

The second chapter, ‘Veterans’, examines the role of veteran-eyewitness in television documentaries. From the 1970s, the First World War on the small screen reflected the

¹¹⁶ LHCMA LH 13/62 *Sunday Times* 31 May 1964

¹¹⁷ Dr Christopher Roads (IWM) to Undersecretary of State for War September 2 1963 (IWM Documents, Department of Film)

¹¹⁸ Kenneth Passingham, *The Guinness Book of Television Facts and Feats* (Guinness Superlatives, 1984), pp.89-90

¹¹⁹ LHCMA LH 13/62 *Daily Telegraph* 17 May 1975

developments of works about the war in print by mining relatively vast but disappearing seams of memory of the British Tommy at war. Television reflected the trend for more populist oral-based published histories from the 1980s led by Lyn Macdonald, Max Hastings, Malcolm Brown, Max Arthur and Richard van Emden. The increase in interest was reflected by ‘memorial’ programmes such as *Gone for a Soldier* (Scottish TV, 1985 – written by Lyn Macdonald), *Very Exceptional Soldiers* (BBC, 1986), *A Time for Remembrance* (Channel 4, 1989) and *A Game of Ghosts* (BBC, 1991). By the time that *Veterans: The Last Survivors of the Great War* (BBC, 1998) was broadcast, veterans’ roles in remembrance rituals had reached a status which has remained largely unquestioned. Veterans on camera have given the war a human dimension, and viewers can respond to one man in his war ‘and so if we would understand what war is like, and how it *feels*, we must turn away from history and its numbers, and seek the reality in the personal witness of the men who were there.’¹²⁰ On the other hand, the use of veterans has contributed to the creation of myths about the First World War by buttressing the traditional narratives of the conflict. It has been suggested that television has encouraged a ‘tyranny of the witness’, the pretext that only the men who have lived through the war have the moral, generational and historical right to discuss it.¹²¹

The third chapter, ‘Landscape’, explains how television has used well known artistic representations of landscape and the Western Front as on screen narrative. These images were fuelled by pre-war pastoralism and post-war literature and art, and while much of the material referred to in this chapter is familiar, if not over-used, this is the first study to show how television documentary-films have employed pastoral representations of British modes of remembrance. This chapter will show how programmes such as *Battle of the Somme* (BBC, 1976) utilised this cultural inheritance by presenting history as tragic art in the form of Elegy: a poetic mode of mourning for the dead.¹²² This chapter will show how television has used existing representations of the war’s landscape, found in well known cultural re-workings and recordings - such as the music of Ralph Vaughan Williams and the paintings of Paul

¹²⁰ Samuel Hynes, *The Soldier’s Tale: Bearing Witness to Modern War*, (London: Pimlico, 1997), pp.xii-xiii

¹²¹ Stéphane Andoin-Rouzeau & Annette Becker, *1914-1918 Understanding the Great War* (London: Profile, 2000), pp.37-39

¹²² Margaret Drabble & Jenny Stringer (eds), *The Concise Oxford Companion to English Literature* (Oxford: OUP, 1987), p.176

Nash - to enhance the televisual narrative. They can do this because they have long been held to resonate with the ideas of loss, horror, and futility that lie at the core of British remembrance rituals. By taking viewers to the battlefields, programmes such as *Battle of the Somme* (BBC, 1976), *Lions Led by Donkeys* (Channel 4, 1985), *Very Exceptional Soldiers* (BBC, 1986), *Gone for a Soldier* (Scottish TV, 1985), *A Time for Remembrance* (Channel 4, 1989) and *Western Front* (BBC, 1999) all underlined that in British minds the remembrance of death has become part of the physical and emotional landscape. This chapter will explain why the visual design of television has utilised the pastoral-elegiac representations of the former battlefields because it enables the viewer to by-pass the psychic defence called 'numbing' which helps to bring the scale of destruction and loss of 1914-1918 within viewers' comprehension.

The final chapter, 'Controversy', examines the most controversial programmes inspired by the eightieth anniversaries of the battle of the Somme in 1996, and the armistice in 1998. While the American-made series *1914-18* (KCET/BBC, 1996) failed to give the twenty-first century a replacement for *The Great War*, *Western Front* (BBC, 1999) cemented Richard Holmes' place as Britain's favourite military historian in the manner of Lieutenant-General Sir Brian Horrocks's *Men in Battle* (BBC, 1956-7). Not even Holmes, however, could convince viewers that the Allied victory in 1918 was not down to luck but hard work, perseverance and casualties. The most significant programmes began to address more controversial aspects of the war's memory such as the strategic capabilities of the High Command, British soldiers 'Shot at Dawn', the legend of the Crucified Soldier, and the most controversial Great War programme of all, *The Trench*.

Haig: the Unknown Soldier (BBC, 1996) made a significant move towards a reappraisal of the 'butchers and bunglers' cliché of the war, but the programme showed that not everyone appreciates having established and comfortable stereotypes debunked. Two years after the programme had been broadcast, the *Express* launched a campaign to pull down Haig's statue in Whitehall, and Haig's reputation was again under fire in *Shot at Dawn* (Carlton, 1998). The programme showed just how intense the debate over pardons for the 346 British soldiers executed during the war had become, broadcast as it was in the year the subject was debated in the House of Commons. The broadcast of *Shot at Dawn* is evidence of the shift in the public's

perception of this divisive element in First World War history. Military executions had never before featured in a mainstream documentary, certainly not in the grand narrative of the 1960s, *The Great War*. However, during the 1980s and 1990s greater acceptance of terms such as post-traumatic distress disorder – officially recognised as a legitimate medical condition in 1980 - previously termed shell shock or combat fatigue, validated entitlements to public sympathy.¹²³ This suggests that it is symptomatic of the commemoration of perceived victims in the commemoration as an expression of the tragic history of persecuted minorities.

The most controversial programme was *The Trench* (BBC, 2002). The three-part series was television's biggest attempt to imagine the unimaginable, to visualise a war that has too often been recreated by the most popular and dominant war literature. The programme followed 24 male volunteers from Hull who 're-experienced' elements of what their forebears in the 'Hull Pals' had in 1916. The series provoked considerable media outrage long before it was due to go into production. It was pilloried as 'Big Brother in the Trenches', and one television critic cynically suggested a similar format based in Auschwitz.¹²⁴ Nevertheless, *The Trench* seemed only to offend a handful of journalists and academics. One History teacher wrote to the *Times Educational Supplement* to say he had told his year nine class to watch the series as part of their homework, but he was disappointed that participants would not be experiencing dysentery, trench foot, or shell shock.¹²⁵ Only one journalist conceded that although nobody was firing live ammunition at the men 'no one was dropping bombs on the inhabitants of Channel 4's *1940 House*, either.'¹²⁶ Overall, the strength and dominance of war literature showed in the press's reactions to the series, which also showed that representations of the war on television are now subjected to a highly emotional and morally charged set of beliefs.

More than forty years have passed since *The Great War* showcased what we recognise as the 'modern' documentary form, and as the ninetieth anniversary of the end of the First World War approaches, there can be no better time to open up a field

¹²³ Jay Winter 'The Generation of Memory: Reflections on the "Memory Boom" in Contemporary Historical Studies'

¹²⁴ *Independent* 15 March 2002 p.5 also *Guardian: G2* 11 March 2002 p.13

¹²⁵ *Times Educational Supplement* 29 March 2002 p.21

¹²⁶ *Independent* 15 March 2002 p.5

of research into how the most powerful broadcast medium of the period communicated ideas about the conflict to British viewers. This thesis will show how Britain television documentaries about the First World War became central sites of national memory and mourning which used representations of the First World War that resonated with accepted ideas of the war: loss, horror and futility. By using these modes of representation, that were established in the inter-war years and were designed to be self-generating, many programmes placed the war and its aftermath beyond public critical discussion. Where more recent programmes challenged the accepted stories they were roundly condemned by the press. By showing that television documentaries are worthy of analysis as historical texts this thesis will provide the foundation for further work in this area. This study will conclude with a summary of the main developments in this area in the period 1964-2003, and it will end with a general discussion about the future of the First World War on television.



Fig.1: Geoffrey Malins in the uniform of a War Office Official Kinematographer, a detail taken from a larger photograph (Imperial War Museum - Q11846)



Fig.2: A well known and much used scene where a British soldier rescues a comrade under fire (Imperial War Museum – Q79501)



Fig.3: 'Over the top' (Imperial War Museum – Q70164)



Fig.4: More 'Over the top' (Imperial War Museum – Q70168)

All *Battle of the Somme* stills used with the kind permission
of Roger Smither, Imperial War Museum, London.



Fig.5: The main cast of *Blackadder Goes Forth* (BBC, 1989)

The Great War (BBC, 1964)

The Great War bequeathed to British television an enduring historical and technological legacy. The series set the bench-mark for historical television documentaries being remembered as ‘quite brilliant, utterly compelling [...] the end of radio with pictures, and the herald of a new age in television.’¹²⁷ The series broke new boundaries with its generous budget, the voluminous amount of archive footage it sourced from around the world, and the number of people who were involved in its production: sixty full-time staff interviewed more than 1200 people from six different countries and they had been helped by seventy organisations from around the world.¹²⁸ The final cost of the project was in the region of £250,000, approximately one third of the money required to produce a fiction film series.¹²⁹

The first episode of *The Great War* was broadcast on BBC2 on the evening of 30 May 1964. The series enjoyed high audience ratings which were measured by the BBC’s in-house Audience Research Department, scoring an average reaction index of 80 out of 100 over all 26 episodes, putting it in the same league as two popular documentary series on the Second World War, *Valiant Years* (1961) and *War in the Air* (1954).¹³⁰ The importance of *The Great War* series is evident in that it attracted similar audience numbers to the popular BBC prime-time programmes such as *The Dick Emery Show* (1963), *The Benny Hill Show* (1964), *The Likely Lads* (1965), and *Z-Cars* (1962).¹³¹ The series was seen by approximately one fifth of adults in Britain: a mean audience share of 16.5% with an average of 8,167,500 viewers per episode.¹³² Despite its impressive scale, importance, and popularity with viewers, however, the BBC’s grand narrative of 1914-1918 did not change the way the majority of the nation thought about the war. The overwhelming visual and emotional impact of *The Great War*

¹²⁷ *Sunday Times* 17 November 1996 p.9

¹²⁸ LHCMA LH 13/62 *Kine Weekly* 28 May 1964

¹²⁹ LHCMA LH 13/62 *Guardian* 11 February 1965

¹³⁰ BBC WAC T32/823/1 – VR/64/308 Audience Research Department July 13 1964 - *Valiant Years* (1961) scored an average of 80 over 26 episodes, and *War in the Air* (1954) averaged 81 over 15 episodes.

¹³¹ Dan Todman, ‘Representations of the First World War in Britain 1918-1998’, PhD Thesis, University of Cambridge (2003). See also Todman’s *The Great War: Myth and Memory* (London: Hambledon & London, 2005)

¹³² BBC WAC Audience Figures compiled by Gwyniver Jones for Professor Alex Danchev 15 June 1988

cemented its own variations on the canon of war myths already embedded in Britain's cultural landscape by 1964.

A Monumental Monument

The impetus for the series was stimulated by the approaching fiftieth anniversaries of the war. As the anniversary of the outbreak of war approached, well-known wartime veterans enquired about the public broadcaster's plans such as Vera Brittain, a wartime nurse and author of *Testament of Youth* (1933).¹³³ The idea of a commemorate to mark the start of the conflict had been mooted in 1960 by Paul Johnson, a journalist on the *New Statesman*, but discussions about such a project were suspended during the reorganisation of the BBC 'Talks' department in 1961.¹³⁴ At the end of August 1963, however, Alasdair Milne, Head of the BBC's *Tonight Productions*, had seen *Victory at Sea* in America and thought 'if they can do it why can't we?'.¹³⁵ *The Great War* was soon created as a central component of the BBC's commemorative programme of the war's fiftieth anniversary alongside *The Life of Wilfred Owen*, Britten's *War Requiem*, and *Songs of the Trenches*.¹³⁶ *The Great War* was also to be the flagship programme for the new BBC2 channel after a number of heated arguments and several resignations over the BBC's policy on the new channel's 'high-brow' purpose.¹³⁷ In addition, if viewers wanted to receive the new BB2 channel they had to invest in new television sets as new broadcast technology replaced the old 405-line pictures with higher-definition 625-line service after months of test transmissions.¹³⁸

The Great War's producer Tony Essex was fully aware that 'a subject like the First World War would be wasted unless it was dealt with on a massive, thought-provoking, and moving scale. I wanted the series to be the biggest thing in the world.'¹³⁹ The series continued the trend for histories whose scale corresponded with

¹³³ BBC WAC T32/1, 158/1 Vera Brittain to Grace Wyndham Goldie 18 February 1963

¹³⁴ BBC WAC T32/1158/1 Donald Baverstock to Stuart Hood 25 May 1961

¹³⁵ *BBC History Magazine* March 2003 p.43

¹³⁶ *Radio Times* 30 July 1964 p.26

¹³⁷ LHCMA LH 13/62 *Daily Mirror* 29 May 1964

¹³⁸ Peter Graham Scott, *British Television: An Insider's History* (North Carolina: McFarland, 2000), p.153

¹³⁹ LHCMA LH 13/62 *Guardian* 11 February 1965

the enormity of the events they portrayed. Wartime artistic works had long sought to achieve parallels with the war's colossal presence: paintings such as John Singer Sargent's 'Gassed' and Percy Wyndham Lewis's 'A Battery Shelled' were large in scale, and John Foulds' now forgotten *World Requiem* (1918-1921) was a huge musical event in twenty movements which took 1,200 singers and musicians two hours to perform.¹⁴⁰ Foulds described the work as 'a tribute to the memory of the Dead – a message of consolation to the bereaved of all countries' which confirmed the value and significance of the war's sacrifices.¹⁴¹ Published works had long measured the monumentality of the war's history by their sheer size; the *Times* history of the conflict ran to twenty-one volumes and John Buchan's to twenty-four. In the 1960s, Purnell's Great War history ran to more than one hundred issues, and in 2003 Hew Strachan published the first part of his projected three-part history of the conflict.

By the time *The Great War* went into production in September 1963, Britain's public discourse about the First World War was already subject to a wide variety of representations. On 19 March 1963, a musical play *Oh What a Lovely War* was performed by the Theatre Workshop at the Theatre Royal, Stratford East, London. The production, largely organised by the left-wing director Joan Littlewood, was a scathing attack on Britain's involvement in the war, underlining the ignorance and petty rivalries of European royal families and the British High Command as well as the jingoistic masses who cheered for a war that destroyed 20 million lives. Journalists asked if the interest in the First World War would soon die down. Many believed that the trend towards the war as a subject for discussion would be more lasting because those with personal memories of the conflict were becoming scarcer, but they were being replaced by a new generation 'who have just had it put on their history syllabuses at school. The war museum is full of small boys who know what they are looking at. It looks as though 1914-18 is headed deeper and deeper into the national consciousness, taking over, eventually, from Trafalgar and Waterloo.'¹⁴²

The Imperial War Museum's director, Dr Noble Frankland, recognised that any involvement in the series was an opportunity to raise the Museum's declining profile,

¹⁴⁰ *World Requiem* was first presented at an Armistice Night concert at the Royal Albert Hall in 1923, sponsored by the British Legion, and it featured at every Armistice night concert until 1926.

¹⁴¹ Samuel Hynes, *A War Imagined* (London: Bodley Head, 1990), p.275

¹⁴² *Daily Mail* 21 August 1963 p.4 – emphasis in original

and he made the museum's extensive film archive available to the BBC at a reduced rate. The Museum had been moribund and stagnant in the 1950s, due in part since many of the directors before Frankland had been middle-aged male civil servants and militaria collectors rather than young historians or professionally-trained curators. The Museum was eager to preserve its government subsidy, and it was this anxiety over funding, rather than growing social trends such as the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND), that was the real reason for the IWM's stagnation. Frankland transformed the Museum by recruiting a crop of enthusiastic young historians like Peter Simkins in the 1960s, who did away with old habits, helped to organise courses run by the Museums Association, attended conferences, and generally took a fresh interest in military history and Museology. New technology such as tape recorders, television, new design trends, the beginning of the heritage boom, more private wealth and ease of travel combined with the anniversaries of the First World War to further enhance the museum's visibility.¹⁴³

After securing £160,000 from the BBC's Board of Management, Alistair Milne wrote to the War Office regarding a new project he referred to as 'a full-scale authoritative visual History of World War I.' Milne asked that the fifty year rule might be interpreted in such a manner that documents and papers relevant to the conflict would be made accessible to the series' scriptwriters. He pointed out that transmission was scheduled to coincide with the fiftieth anniversary of the outbreak of war, and that a global history of 1914-1918 had never been attempted 'with neither undue bias nor emphasis on any one of the participants.' Milne underlined that it was the BBC who could 'bring the subject in all its vast and complex aspects to its screens, [and by doing so] it will be rendering an important service in the interests of history [...] The series will create a better understanding of the problems of European politics, a realisation that there is no quick and easy way to win wars, and a recognition of the efforts and sacrifices of our fathers in the interests of individual and national beliefs.'¹⁴⁴

¹⁴³ Peter Simkins to Emma Mahoney (by telephone) 22 March 2004

¹⁴⁴ IWM Documents, Department of Film, Alasdair Milne to James Ramsden MP (War Office) 30 August 1963

Dr Christopher Roads, Keeper of the Department of Records at the BBC's production associate the Imperial War Museum, also wrote to the War Office on the same matter. Roads underlined the commemorative aspects of the series, the prospect of a large international television audience and 'the national value of the project.' Roads also pointed out that the series 'will be presented not only throughout the world as a form of *entertainment*' but that 'it will be seen by thousands of school children and students in the course of their general education.'¹⁴⁵ The War Office granted access to some of its unpublished records with certain caveats: War Office representatives should sit-in on production; final scripts should be cleared by the department which will amend where 'it is considered necessary in the public interest' and that the War Office's help should not be made explicitly public, and that neither the BBC nor the IWM should publicise the relaxation of the fifty year rule. The War Office's final word asserted that it must 'retain the right of veto in the public interest.'¹⁴⁶ Files do not show however that the government played any further role in the programme, and it appears that the War Office was no longer involved in what was beginning to resemble a national history lesson.¹⁴⁷

The Production Team

In the early 1960s the majority of *The Great War*'s production team were working on the popular current affairs programme *Tonight* (BBC, 1957-mid 1960s), a topical magazine programme broadcast every weekday evening to an average audience of 10 million viewers.¹⁴⁸ *Tonight* was known for its irreverent attitude and its production team comprised of well-respected current affairs journalists and film editors. Grace Wyndham Goldie, the executive at the helm of the 'Television Talks' department (documentary and current affairs, described the *Tonight* stamp as being exemplified by Kevin Billington's portrait of Spanish bull-fighters in *The Matador*, and Jack Gold and Alan Whicker's treatment of foxhunting in *Death in the Morning*, as the most highly creative, adventurous and innovative television programmes of their time. The *Tonight* team was always set apart from the mainstream administration of the BBC

¹⁴⁵ IWM Documents, Department of Film, Dr Christopher Roads to Undersecretary of State for War 2 September 1963

¹⁴⁶ IWM Documents, Department of Film, E.H.G.Richardson (War Office) to Dr Christopher Roads 18 October 1963

¹⁴⁷ Peter Simkins to Emma Mahoney (by telephone) 22 November 2003

¹⁴⁸ Alan Whicker, *Within Whicker's World* (London: Elm Tree, 1982), p.95

because of their tendencies towards overwork and fatigue. Due to their high level of creative drive and they strove to ‘understand the actions of politicians and of generals as well as to show the impact that these had upon soldiers in the field [...] The conflict was of feeling, all of it strong, all understandable, and all of it expressed visibly in action.’¹⁴⁹

The Great War was produced by Tony Essex and Gordon Watkins [see figs. 6 and 7]. Anthony Essex-Lopresti (Tony Essex, 1925-1975) had worked for thirty shillings a week as a tea boy in Wardour Street, the centre of the old British film industry in London’s Soho. When he was demobilised from military service after the Second World War, he founded a small production company called Eclipse Films with his younger brother Francis.¹⁵⁰ Essex’s first film was made by Eclipse: *The New Face of Britain* (1947), on the misuse of land which might be reserved for its agricultural, scenic, historic or scientific value. Monica Hutchings, who worked with Essex on his first production, recalled her first impression of the young film-maker:

He was a dark, untidy, faintly nervous young man. He had no poise and no assurance and, I judged, very little personality [...] his face was hardly that of a schoolboy, it was lined and slightly worried-looking [...] His fingers were badly stained with nicotine and I saw at once he smoked too much. I decided that he looked too young to know what he was about and that I was a priceless fool to let myself get mixed up with any half-baked incompetent Bohemians who really did not know a thing about ‘the things that matter.’¹⁵¹

Once she had spent some time working with Essex on the script ‘he was a different person. He knew just what he wanted, all he really needed was his ideas backing up by someone of a like mind he was] galvanized into action and responsibility: nervy, dynamic, idealistic.’ After he completed this first film, Hutchings wrote that ‘it opened up a new world for him [...] Anthony fought against all kinds of odds to keep his heart in this film and its admirable theme. Nothing and no one could side-track him or turn him from his appointed course [...] He did not even care if he made

¹⁴⁹ Grace Wyndham Goldie, *Facing the Nation: Television & Politics 1936-1976* (London: Redwood, 1977), pp.219-220

¹⁵⁰ LHCMA LH 13/62 *Guardian* 11 February 1965

¹⁵¹ Monica Hutchings, *The Walnut Tree An Autobiography of Kindness* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1951), pp.269-277 dedicated to Anthony Essex-Lopresti and Littleton C.Powys

money or not, as long as he might continue to make good films that would do good.’¹⁵² Essex also worked in Canada in the early 1950s as a film-editor, sometimes with Sydney Newman, one of the most influential producers in British television in the 1960s. He also met Ed Rollins during his time in Canada, who later acted as Associate Producer on *The Great War* for the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation.¹⁵³

When Essex returned to England he joined the BBC in 1956 as an editor and film producer on *Panorama*. The following year he co-founded the *Tonight* programme as Supervising Film Editor and Associate Producer, editing the reports of Alan Whicker. Essex was not always happy on *Tonight* because he did not have everything his own way and threatened to resign so many times that in the end he had to. In 1965 Essex recalled that he read his future on the back of a matchbox: ‘[i]t said I was persuasive, diplomatic and charming. So I immediately began negotiations to return and in three months I was back – and into *The Great War*.’¹⁵⁴ He admitted that ‘I am, by profession, something of an historian, but my interest and study of history started long after I had left school. Teachers made history totally uninteresting and I disliked it. It was only later that I started reading political biography, and from this fascination with the people concerned grew my interest in the times in which they lived.’¹⁵⁵ Essex was fascinated by the First World War, and in May 1963 he developed the thematic progression of the 26 episodes that became *The Great War*.¹⁵⁶ From the earliest stages Essex gained complete control of the project: his planned 26 episodes of between thirty and forty minutes each were adopted as the running order of the series with no change to Essex’s original chronology.

Essex’s co-producer Gordon Watkins (1920 – 1992) was more of a BBC insider than Essex. He was also one of the six founder producers of *Tonight*, having gone straight to television from print journalism for the *Bedfordshire Standard*, *Birmingham Gazette* and *Picture Post* where he learned how to complement pictures with words. He was quick to adapt to the demands of writing for television because he ‘never expected the viewer to be interested in any item he was working on; he always saw it

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Anne Dacre (née Jarvis) to Emma Mahoney (by telephone) 8 March 2004

¹⁵⁴ LHCMA LH 13/62 *Guardian* 11 February 1965

¹⁵⁵ BBC WAC T32/1145/2 Tony Essex to Miss M.Ford 13 April 1965

¹⁵⁶ Correlli Barnett to Emma Mahoney (interview in person) 9 March 2004

as his job to make them interested.’¹⁵⁷ Described by his *Tonight* colleague Alan Whicker as ‘ebullient’, Watkins served as an army captain during the Second World War, and he was fascinated by the Imperial War Museum’s film archive.¹⁵⁸ As a result the *Tonight* team ‘exploited it shamelessly for any anniversary they could think of.’ By 1964, Watkins had made his mark as a television writer with *Tonight*, and he was assigned to supervise *The Great War* scripts while Essex was to deal with the film. When he teamed up with Tony Essex, Watkins brought to *The Great War* not just his skills as a picture journalist but insights into war drawn from his own experiences.¹⁵⁹

The production of the series was fraught with clashes of personalities and opinions, exacerbated by very tight broadcast deadlines.¹⁶⁰ Barrie Pitt (b.1917), who had been captured at Dunkirk and later escaped from a Prisoner of War camp, was originally recruited as the series’ sole scriptwriter. It soon became apparent however that a project of this magnitude would require more than one historian-writer and several other historians, described as the ‘new wave’ of writers were recruited. Alistair Horne (b.1927) went to Cambridge and then to the Guards, and he was brought in to the series for his specialist knowledge. The two main scriptwriters were John Terraine and Correlli Barnett. Barnett (b.1927) went to Oxford before going into advertising and writing at weekends.¹⁶¹ Barnett had begun to publish military history, daring to re-evaluate Field Marshal Montgomery’s conduct of the North African campaign in *Desert Generals* (1960) which was followed by his first Great War work *The Swordbearers* (1963). John Terraine (1921-2003) went to Oxford and joined the BBC where he worked for twenty years as a recording assistant in the East European Service, a producer of *Radio Newsreel*, and as programme organizer of the Pacific and South African Service. In 1963, Terraine published a biography of *Douglas Haig: the Educated Soldier*, insisting that the war was well fought by Britain and that it was worthwhile.

¹⁵⁷ *Times* 10 July 1992 p.17

¹⁵⁸ Alan Whicker, *Within Whicker’s World*, p.95

¹⁵⁹ *Times* 10 July 1992 p.17

¹⁶⁰ See *That was The Great War That Was*

¹⁶¹ Correlli Barnett’s first published book was a novel - *The Hump Organisation*, (London: Alan Wingate, 1957)

Barnett had acquired a reputation as the *enfant terrible* of British military history, a somewhat glamorous figure whose involvement would enhance the series' viewing figures.¹⁶² Barnett was 'converted' by Terraine in turning away from the received view of the war, and he was appointed to *The Great War* series after Terraine organised a meeting with Essex and Watkins.¹⁶³ Barnett went on to write about the High Command in *The Collapse of British Power* (1972) where he asserted that the war was a tragedy only in the eyes of post-war intellectuals. Barnett and Terraine were designated as principal script writers whilst Alistair Horne and John Williams were brought in for their detailed knowledge of specific events.¹⁶⁴ Captain Basil Liddell Hart, a Western Front veteran who had gained a formidable reputation as a military theorist and historian, was invited to be the series' Historical Adviser, more for the use of his name to enhance overseas sales than any practical involvement with the writing of the series.¹⁶⁵

Many of today's influential producers and journalists had their first experience of working in television on *The Great War*. Jerry Kuehl worked as a historical researcher, and in the early 1970s he was a producer on ITV's grand narrative of the Second World War, *The World at War*, with Jeremy Isaacs. He recalled that '[*The Great War*] series affected me dramatically. For the first time I was able to appreciate how it was possible to tell true things about the past using moving images, and that it was possible to share them not only with merely a handful of university students, but to literally reach millions of viewers all at once. I have tried to do that ever since.'¹⁶⁶ Between 1979-1981, Kuehl was head of General Studies for the National Film School, and today he part owns *History Today* and works as an independent television producer of historical documentaries. Julia Cave, who was brought in to *The Great War* as Eyewitness Researcher from the light entertainment show *What's My Line?*, continues to work as an independent documentary producer, and she co-authored *A Touch of Genius: The Life of T.E. Lawrence* (1988) with Malcolm Brown. Max Hastings, *The Great War's* teenage office assistant, went on to work as a journalist, war correspondent and military historian. He recalled that working on the project,

¹⁶² Anne Dacre (née Jarvis) *That Was The Great War That Was*

¹⁶³ Correlli Barnett to Emma Mahoney (interview in person) 9 March 2004

¹⁶⁴ LHCMA LH 13/62 *Town* April 1964 pp.60-64

¹⁶⁵ LHCMA LH 13/62 Basil Liddell Hart to Alasdair Milne 3 November 1964

¹⁶⁶ Jerry Kuehl, 'The Great War – my first grown-up job in television' *Historical Journal of Film Radio and Television* Vol.22, No.1, 2002 pp.5-6

albeit as ‘the humblest link’, taught him ‘something about the First World War’ but ‘rather more about the manic intrigues and serial bonking which characterise life in television, or at least it did so in those days.’¹⁶⁷

The majority of the production and writing team were under fifty years of age, but all of them had grown up in the shadow of both world wars. Some members of the production team were not ignorant of the realities of military life, having served in the Second World War or on National Service. Negotiations amongst the writing team were largely based on the viewpoints that had become established in the inter-war years. Before *The Great War* was first screened on BBC2 it was well reported that the historians working on the programme had disagreed on key themes such as the fighting in the Somme region in 1916. Of the most public spat between Terraine and Liddell Hart it was reported that behind the scenes of *The Great War* ‘rages another war – between [John Terraine and] the advising historian of 1914-18.’¹⁶⁸ Liddell Hart resigned from the series in September 1964 via an open letter to the *Times* saying that ‘duty to history’ compelled him to remove his name from the end credits.¹⁶⁹ He complained that his comments on the scripts for episodes on the Somme (episode 13) and Third Ypres (episode 17) had been disregarded, and that he had not been given the chance to see or approve the final versions before the programme was broadcast.¹⁷⁰ The main points of contention were that Terraine’s Somme script had placed ‘undue emphasis on the rawness and lack of training of the troops’ while ignoring the faults of the High Command.¹⁷¹

Liddell Hart’s tussle with the series led the *Times* to claim that he ‘reflects the doubts of a number of military experts about the programmes.’¹⁷² However, Liddell Hart’s departure from the programme was seen as a relief, especially for Correlli Barnett

¹⁶⁷ Max Hastings, ‘Hacks and Scholars: Allies of a Kind’ in David Cannadine (ed) *History and the Media* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p.105

¹⁶⁸ LHCMA LH 13/62 *Town* 29 April 1964 pp.60-64

¹⁶⁹ For a detailed analysis of the disagreements between Terraine and Liddell Hart see Mark Connelly, ‘The Devil is Coming’ *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* Vol.22, No.1, 2002 pp.21-27

¹⁷⁰ LHCMA LH 13/62 *Times* 19 September 1964

¹⁷¹ LHCMA LH 13/62 Alasdair Milne to Liddell Hart October 26 1964

¹⁷² LHCMA LH 13/62 ‘Liddell Hart and BBC in Somme script clash’ *Daily Telegraph* 21 September 1964, ‘Adviser wins TV ‘Great War’ battle’ *Sunday Telegraph* 20 September 1964, ‘Removal of name for BBC 1’ *News of the World* 20 September 1964, ‘TV war: Liddell Hart’s name will be out’ *Sunday Express* 20 September 1964, ‘TV war experts in clash’ *Sunday Mirror* 20 September 1964, ‘Liddell Hart in row with BBC’ *Sunday Times* 20 September 1964, ‘Somme battle dispute with BBC’ *Guardian* 20 September 1964.

who described him as the 'self-proclaimed guru' of military history, that he was 'incredibly vain', and that his departure was 'bloody good riddance.'¹⁷³ *The Great War* series is conspicuous by its absence in Alex Danchev's official biography of Liddell Hart, *Alchemist of War* (1998), and Liddell Hart's subsequent forays into television appear to be limited to drama programmes such as *The Regiment* (1968), a nostalgic evocation of honour and courage in the British Army 1895-1914.¹⁷⁴

Away from the historians' squabbles, Essex encoded the war as an epic tragedy. He was 'a born romantic as well as an intelligent, well-read man, who supervised well-researched and tough-minded scripts which were then yoked to pictures selected for their ability to involve and to move the viewer.'¹⁷⁵ He admitted that 'I'm an emotional person. I believe it really is about time television started to have some emotional impact. That would be a sign of its maturity.'¹⁷⁶ Therefore, a basic core of tension was established in the series, between ideas of the war that reflected the best contemporary military history and a sophisticated televisual presentation that produced from the public an emotional revulsion against all wars, the Great War in particular.¹⁷⁷ Essex was acutely aware that the series could not be as full an account of the war as he and many others would have liked. Once it was clear that the series was a huge ratings success the *Radio Times* agreed to print a short synopsis of each week's episode, to be written by one of the series' historians, to further inform and contextualise for readers the significance of events shown in the week's programme.¹⁷⁸ Furthermore, the producers wanted 'to add another dimension to the relevance of the war today.'¹⁷⁹

Essex prevented the writers from watching any archive footage for at least six months because he thought that they might be distracted by the images. He later said that 'I wasn't after a mere script so much as a narrative which was substantial in its own right, something with literary value. In the end it turned out what I regard as one of

¹⁷³ Correlli Barnett *That Was The Great War That Was*

¹⁷⁴ LHCMA LH 13/64 *Radio Times* 17 November 1970 – Liddell Hart was approached by Andrew Osborn (head of Series, BBC Television Drama) for a series called *The Regiment* 5 July 1968

¹⁷⁵ John Ramsden 'The Great War: The making of the series' *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* vol.22, No.1, 2002 p.10

¹⁷⁶ LHCMA LH 13/64 *Guardian* 11 February 1965

¹⁷⁷ John Ramsden, 'The Great War: The making of the series', p.10

¹⁷⁸ BBC WAC T32/1139/1 Tony Essex to Mr D.Graham-Williams and Mr D.P.Flessati of the *Radio Times* 23 March 1964

¹⁷⁹ BBC WAC T32/1,136/1 Tony Essex to Gordon Watkins 28 April 1964

the main powers of the series – the contrast between the wide-ranging and often beautiful words you heard and the concentration on the detail you saw.’ While this was a point of contention between Essex and Watkins during production, by the end of the series’ first run on BBC2 one newspaper hailed the series as ‘the television equivalent of a classic work of literature.’¹⁸⁰ Essex was happy to draw on the literary and artistic ferment created by the arts’ ‘rediscovering’ of the war in the early 1960s.¹⁸¹ He used several of his favourite war poets in the series including Wilfred Owen’s ‘Dulce et Decorum Est’ in episode 17, John McCrae’s ‘In Flanders Fields’ and ‘The Anxious Dead’ as well as Robert Palmer’s ‘How Long Oh Lord How Long’ in episode 23 because he understood that the majority of people were most familiar with the war through its most well-known poetry written in 1914-1918. Essex felt that it was A.E.Housman’s ‘Here dead we lie’ was the most beautiful epitaph for British war dead, and he used a passage in the title of episode 26, the final instalment, that

Here dead we lie because we did not choose
To live and shame the land from which we spring.
Life, to be sure, is nothing much to lose;
But young men think it is, and we were young.¹⁸²

The inclusion of poetry appears to have had the desired effect on viewers. One gentleman wrote to Essex that ‘the poetry used in your commentaries prompted me to buy a book of poems “Up the Line to Death” written by men who were there; and these poems in conjunction with your films have turned a series which, for me, began as a glimpse of history, into a vivid emotional experience.’¹⁸³ This was the kind of reaction that Essex wanted to encourage. Buried in the series’ archive at the BBC is proof that Essex wanted the opening sequence to include a reading of one six line verse of a 26-verse poem to be specially written for the series by Siegfried Sassoon. In November 1963, Essex included in his design requirements that

¹⁸⁰ LHCMA LH 13/62 *Daily Telegraph* 30 November 1964

¹⁸¹ John Ramsden, ‘The Great War: The making of the series’, p.10

¹⁸² BBC WAC T32/1145/1 Tony Essex to Mr W.Austin 21 April 1965

¹⁸³ BBC WAC T32/1,145/1 G.N.Benton to Tony Essex 25 April 1965

[As the opening titles are rolling] one 6-line verse of a 26-verse poem specially written for the series by Siegfried Sassoon is read. This starts off with words to the effect –

‘I saw a million men.....etc.

(the middle lines change from week to week and set the theme for the particular programme being introduced, and the last line had words to the effect)...

‘and they went singing to their death’¹⁸⁴

It is interesting to think that a poet who had already a disproportionate influence on Britain’s national memory of the war would be involved in a production of this type. However, Sassoon’s biographer Dr Jean Moorcroft Wilson thinks that it is highly unlikely that he would have agreed to be involved with the series as he disliked being remembered as a war poet, particularly after his conversion to Catholicism in 1957, and what little poetry he did write in his last years was religious.¹⁸⁵ Correlli Barnett believes that it is likely that Essex intended to secure Sassoon’s services for the opening sequence and saw this as a unique selling point, but Sassoon had never agreed to write such a verse.¹⁸⁶

After episode 10 was first broadcast, Alasdair Milne wrote to Essex and Watkins that *The Great War* was proving to be ‘one of the biggest audience pullers on BBC2 as the charts show as well as being one of the best documentary series ever made anywhere [...] each episode has had a unity and strength of its own and the more recent episodes have gained in power and dramatic effect.’¹⁸⁷ By February 1965, as the series was broadcast on BBC1, it was planned that the series would enjoy further screenings on both BBC1 and BBC2.¹⁸⁸ In the autumn of 1964, John Terraine saw an opportunity to bring the historiographical debates about 1914-1918 to the larger BBC1 audience. He suggested to Milne a ‘curtain-raiser’ discussion or symposium-type programme with a suggested line-up of A.J.P.Taylor, Hugh Trevor-Roper, Robert Blake, Sir Charles Petrie, Michael Howard, Correlli Barnett, and himself ‘setting each view against the

¹⁸⁴ BBC WAC T32/1139/1 ‘Design Requirements’ to Planning Manager 19 November 1963

¹⁸⁵ Dr Jean Moorcroft Wilson to Emma Mahoney (by letter) 26 February 2004 - At the time, however, Sassoon was seriously ill with a duodenal ulcer, and he was later diagnosed with inoperable abdominal cancer. He died on 1 September 1967.

¹⁸⁶ Correlli Barnett to Emma Mahoney (interview in person) 9 March 2004

¹⁸⁷ BBC WAC T32/1145/1 Alasdair Milne to Tony Essex and Gordon Watkins 5 August 1964

¹⁸⁸ BBC WAC *Evening News* 19 February 1965

other without too much interruption or argument.¹⁸⁹ Milne referred to Donald Baverstock, Controller of BBC1, saying that ‘It might be a moment to get together people like Taylor, Trevor-Roper, Robert Blake and perhaps some of the younger people like Terraine or Correlli Barnett to examine the value of a historical series such as this one.’¹⁹⁰ However, no such discussion took place in front of the cameras, and the series was left to reinforce preconceived ideas about Britain’s involvement in the Great War.

Audience Reception

As well as being a ratings success, *The Great War* was well received by the majority of the British press. The *Sunday Telegraph* exclaimed that ‘Not since *TW3* [*That Was The Week That Was*] has the BBC produced a compulsive reason for staying at home on Saturday evenings as their new 26-week series’ which they hailed as ‘such a vast project [that] must make a better export than the Beatles or beef.’¹⁹¹ The *Sunday Times* said ‘the most persuasive reason so far put forward for investing in 625-line machinery is *The Great War*’ because it would be at least equal to *The Valiant Years* and *Victory at Sea* ‘in the sense that it is written on a quieter, less strung-up, less melodramatic and more intelligent note.’¹⁹² The *Daily Mail* said that the film was ‘as smooth and clear as newsreel’, and that the narration was ‘beautifully balanced against the higher emotional level of the films.’¹⁹³

The *Times* acknowledged that ‘viewers are familiar with the perils of television’s attempts at historical documentary [...] when it wishes to place events in their social and historical context, suggesting a panoramic rather than a narrowly focused view, it is often trapped into the ineptitudes of simplification.’ However, the paper judged that Barnett and Terraine had skilfully avoided these traps. The *Times* also noted that the long list of titles at the end of the programme – television’s version of footnotes and bibliography – were a testament to the series’ seriousness and academic pedigree.¹⁹⁴ Others were less impressed. The *Daily Mirror* questioned the BBC’s approach: ‘I

¹⁸⁹ BBC WAC T32/1158/1 John Terraine to Alasdair Milne (undated)

¹⁹⁰ BBC WAC T32/1158/1 Alasdair Milne to Ch.P.BBC 1. 22 May 1964

¹⁹¹ LHCMA LH 13/62 *Sunday Telegraph* 31 May 1964

¹⁹² LHCMA LH 13/62 *Sunday Times* 31 May 1964

¹⁹³ LHCMA LH 13/62 *Daily Mail* 1 June 1964 p.3

¹⁹⁴ LHCMA LH 13/62 *Times* 1 June 1964

would have been more impressed if the BBC had given us a historian of the calibre of A.J.P.Taylor for a personal assessment of the war, instead of presenting it as a dull piece of TV reporting.’ The writer thought the commentary ‘lacked bite’ and prophesised that ‘I doubt the series can maintain interest for 26 weeks simply by digging up 50-year old films.’¹⁹⁵

However, by the autumn of 1964 the series’ masterful combination of archive film, rigorous script and memorable music quickly resulted in 25 countries purchasing the rights to the series including Russia and the United States.¹⁹⁶ A succession of awards was bestowed upon *The Great War* such as The Screenwriters Guild Documentary Script Award of the Year to John Terraine and Correlli Barnett, and an award from the Television Producer’s Guild. However, despite its evident success, Essex had mixed feelings about the final product: ‘I saw *The Great War* in my mind’s eye. It was tremendous. It was almost worthy of its massive subject. But when it was finished, and I could see the reality as viewers saw it, the sore-thumb prominence of the might-have-beens overwhelmed its merits, and life was hell.’¹⁹⁷ Even so, by February 1965 it was reported that Essex and Watkins had been entrusted with two follow-up projects: *1940*, a two and three-quarter hour programme to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the Battle of Britain narrated by J.B.Priestley, and a sequel to *The Great War* – a 13-part series called *The Lost Peace* to tell the story of 1918 to 1933-34 ‘when it became clear that World War I had been fought in vain.’¹⁹⁸

Dan Todman has already shown that the continued emotional involvement, innovation and realism of the series further encouraged Britain’s active remembering of 1914-1918.¹⁹⁹ As a highlight of the fiftieth anniversary, interest in the war was already high, and that it was still an event in which families felt some involvement. Todman believes that significant parts of the audience watched film from the First World War as if it were news footage of an event in which they were closely involved, and that the very existence of the quantity and quality of footage used by the series came as

¹⁹⁵ LHCMA LH 13/62 *Daily Mirror* 1 June 1964

¹⁹⁶ LHCMA LH 13/62 *Daily Express* 31 August 1964 and *Daily Telegraph* 30 November 1964

¹⁹⁷ LHCMA LH 13/62 *Radio Times* 1 April 1965

¹⁹⁸ LHCMA LH 13/62 *Evening News* 19 February 1965

¹⁹⁹ Dan Todman, ‘The Reception of The Great War in the 1960s’ *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* Vol.22, No.1, 2002 pp.29 – 36. See also Todman’s *The Great War: Myth and Memory* (London: Hambledon & London, 2005)

such a surprise to the audience that it affected the way they reacted.²⁰⁰ We need however to delve into the technical reasons why the series failed to change Britain's view of its involvement in the Great War. The rigorously revisionist script was purposefully overpowered by the emotional nature of the film's images, and this was the intention of those involved with the series at the most senior level who were determined that the series should capture the imagination of its viewing audience. The Controller of BBC2, Donald Baverstock, was particularly keen each programme should have 'Twenty moments of high television imagination' which Gordon Watkins took to mean 'moments that depend on sheer productive inventiveness – something which involves both film and commentary.'²⁰¹

Scriptwriter Barrie Pitt insisted that the series should also propose valid historical conclusions: 'if we do our job properly the viewer must draw it himself – not in such excellent prose perhaps, but he should be made to feel it, whether he expresses the conclusion or not.'²⁰² Pitt was particularly aware that 'we will only achieve strong dramatic tension if we assume that we are telling a story which no-one knows. Once we admit to ourselves that the viewer knows the end of the story we will lose a psychological drive which is essential for good story-telling.'²⁰³ Watkins and Essex knew that the series had to be watchable and it had to be a good story. Both men came from journalistic backgrounds, and they knew that their history of the war had to have popular appeal as well as being historically rigorous. Essex believed that 'We are telling a story as great as that of the Bible, in its way, and clarity and understanding are far more important than technical flair. If people can follow and understand, our task will be done.'²⁰⁴

Essex was aware that 'most people are not convinced by logic but seduced by stories [...] no one could spin a better story than a journalist.'²⁰⁵ *The Great War* melded the skills of the journalists with those of the film makers and historians. Indeed, prior to the series' first broadcast, Gordon Watkins found it appropriate to circulate a memo

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ BBC WAC T32/1152/1– Gordon Watkins to Tony Essex after a meeting with Donald Baverstock 29 January 1964

²⁰² BBC WAC T32/1152/1 Barrie Pitt to Gordon Watkins January 6 1964

²⁰³ BBC WAC T32/1152/1 Barrie Pitt to Gordon Watkins January 6 1964

²⁰⁴ BBC WAC T32/1152/1 Tony Essex to Gordon Watkins 30 January 1964

²⁰⁵ *Times* 21 January 1991 p.10

he titled 'THE PURPOSE OF THE EXERCISE' to all production staff working on *The Great War*. Reminding his team of a passage from Chesterton's Essay on 'The Duty of The Historian' he wrote that 'There are two quite distinct purposes of history – the superior purpose, which is its use for children, and the secondary or inferior purpose, which is its use for historians. The highest and noblest thing that history can be is a good story. Then it appeals to the heroic heart of all generations, the eternal infancy of mankind.'²⁰⁶

The best piece of film to demonstrate the series' use of dramatic effects is the visual and musical design of the opening title sequence. On a practical level the sequence separated its content from preceding programmes, and signalled its *seriousness* as a piece of national history. On a more critical level it is an elegy and an overture which provides a dramatic exposition of thematic development, underlining that the series was an act of public memorialisation. History on television has always had dramatic aspirations. Even A.J.P. Taylor's *The First World War* lecture series contained moving images from film archives, but *The Great War*'s stylistic features included uneven narration, peaks and troughs at the beginning and end, and structural features to denote stasis and action in war, supported by *crescendi* in other codes such as music and cutting. All were used to stunning effect by Essex with particular emphasis on more tragic visual images.

[Play Video Clip 3: *The Great War* – opening sequence]

The film montage contains just three dramatic photographs from the Western Front - a silhouetted soldier [fig. 8], a single staring soldier [fig.9], and a uniformed skeleton corpse [fig.10] - but the accelerating rostrum camera movements create an overall impression of a collage of many more. Wilfred Joseph's score paces the quickening camera movements downwards and sideways, creating a free-falling effect as the viewer is dragged down through the horrifying depths of mud, confusion and despair.²⁰⁷ This sequence was clearly designed to evoke the disorientation and horror embedded in the popular memory of the Western Front; muddy trenches, dashed

²⁰⁶ BBC WAC T32/1152/1 – memo Gordon Watkins to All Production Staff 25 March 1964

²⁰⁷ Wilfred Josephs (1927-1997)

hopes, death and decay.²⁰⁸ This sequence could also be interpreted as the emotional wasteland of an age living in the shadow of two world wars, as well as the post-atomic landscape of the early 1960s, but above all it is the visual recipe for what Samuel Hynes called the *War Imagined*.

Unlike any subsequent major documentary made in Britain, such as ITV's *World at War* (1972-3), Essex had control over all aspects of the series, including the graphic design of the opening sequence.²⁰⁹ [See fig.11] In his directions to Malcolm Arnold, conductor of the BBC Northern Symphony Orchestra who performed the series' title theme, Essex directs that 'a sombre building of tension' should be portrayed by the rising timpani strokes during the close up 'of rough wooden cross against the sombre sky' that is inscribed 'In Memory'. He then directs that 'A helmeted soldier stands silently looking down at the cross. Both the cross and the soldier are silhouetted against a heavy sky. They stand on a hill, which too is black against the sky.' The timpani repeat the original stroke pattern twice 'with growing tension' and the script demands the camera begins

tilting down into almost blackness, (like Alice falling down the rabbit-hole to wonderland – only this time it's to horror).

As the music is
sizzling and growing in stridency and volume with tremendous passion...Great climatic crash of full orchestra, gong, the works!

the camera 'suddenly ends on the bottom of a trench where lies a ghastly uniformed shattered skeleton. As the music once again swells

strong, melodic, passionate, tragic...pan across derelict trench to another part where two dead bodies lie. Over them tired, exhausted, with uncomprehending eyes a British soldier leans against the trench wall. He looks at camera with a strange tired appeal. All the while track very slowly into the TIRED FACE AND EYES OF THE soldier.²¹⁰

²⁰⁸ Colin McArthur, *Television and History* (London, 1978), p.23

²⁰⁹ Anne Dacre (née Jarvis) to Emma Mahoney (by telephone) 8 March 2004.

²¹⁰ BBC WAC T32/1139/1 'Music and Visuals Script' Tony Essex to Malcolm Arnold (undated)

This is the final version that was used to introduce each of the 26 episodes. Earlier drafts for the title sequence in the BBC archives show the development of ideas that Essex wanted to convey about the conflict. In November 1963, the opening scene was going to feature a foggy reconstructed battlefield redolent of scenes from Lewis Milestone's film of *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1930): 'as if we are peering through the murk into the past [...] out of the fog looms simple dark shapes, a fallen helmet, a curl of broken barbed wire, a smashed gun-carriage wheel, a broken tree, and, finally, after the suggestion of a dead soldier's face, the body's arm looms into frame.' It is possible to see the influences that contributed to Essex creating the sequence like this: two examples resonate with the war poetry of William Noel Hodgson and Wilfred Owen. The use of a hill and the phrase 'uncomprehending eyes' can be found in William Noel Hodgson's poem 'Before Action':

I that on my familiar hill
Saw with uncomprehending eyes
A thousand of thy sunsets spill
Their fresh and sanguine sacrifice.²¹¹

The draft script then describes how the corpse's arm fades into the image of a 'huge field gun slowly rises to its angle of firing and fires' Which recalls Wilfred Owen's 'On Seeing a Piece of Our Heavy Artillery Brought into Action':

Be slowly lifted up, thou long black arm,
Great Gun towering towards Heaven, about to curse;
Sway steep against them, and for years rehearse
Huge imprecations like a blasting charm!²¹²

As the shell exploded and the smoke cleared Essex directed that

we dissolve into a desolate battle scene, over which, in silhouette on the left of frame, a figure of Grief stands in utter dejection. It should be a powerfully tragic

²¹¹ Marcus Clapham (ed) *Wordsworth Book of First World War Poetry* (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth, 1995), p.39

²¹² Jon Stallworthy, *Wilfred Owen The War Poems* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2000), p.38

pose...As this title ends, the battlefield scene fades, leaving only a cloudy, hazy image, and the statue of Grief becomes lit. We begin to track into big close-up of the tragic face of the statue.²¹³

In addition to these visual events, Essex had written in the early drafts for the opening titles that Sassoon's poem would be read, a different verse for each episode. As the reading finishes, the camera is told to hold the face of Grief in a close up, and as the music ends, 'we fade everything to black.'²¹⁴ The statue of Grief might have borne some resemblance to the female figure that features on the Canadian memorial on Vimy Ridge unveiled in July 1936.²¹⁵ From these early drafts we can trace the progression of main themes and ideas for the series: that it should be an act of public memorialisation in honour of the dead as well as loss and grief. Viewer correspondence shows that the opening titles had the desired effect. One commented that 'how superbly perfect was the opening scene and the accompanying music, like the voice of Destiny itself.'²¹⁶

The single British soldier that challenged the viewer to meet his gaze at the start of every episode soon became an iconic image and one of the memorable visuals from the series, described in 1965 as 'the most famous unknown soldier in the world.'²¹⁷ It is well known that the picture of the soldier was removed from an IWM still, numbered Q1 in the Imperial War Museum's highly valued Q series of 115,000 Great War photographs, that depicts him sitting with his more cheerful comrades in a trench before the attack on the Somme on 1 July 1916 [Fig.12]. The unhappy soldier became 'a symbol of the awesomeness of the First World War' and 'a second Unknown Warrior.'²¹⁸ His image has been used in numerous books and magazines in Britain and Canada, as well as advertisements for battlefield tours and publicity flyers for conferences.²¹⁹ Essex freely admitted that they had made a composite image, writing

²¹³ BBC WAC T32/1139/1 'Design Requirements' to Planning Manager 19 November 1963

²¹⁴ BBC WAC T32/1139/1 'Design Requirements' to Planning Manager 19 November 1963

²¹⁵ <http://www.vac-acc.gc.ca/general/sub.cfm?source=memorials/ww1mem/vimy/vmemory> (accessed 18 May 2005)

²¹⁶ BBC WAC T32/1,145/1 Mrs M.Booth to Tony Essex 10 April 1965

²¹⁷ LHCMA LH 13/62 *Radio Times* 9 April 1965

²¹⁸ *BBC History Magazine* March 2003 pp.40-43

²¹⁹ The image of 'Private Bailey' was also used on the cover of *CBC Times* Vol.17 No.52, 1965 (Canada) – the series was shown three times a week at 8pm from 7 August 1965

that ‘it was done to suit our title sequence’²²⁰ and that ‘every part of the composite picture is made up of actual photographs.’²²¹ Essex deliberately moulded the images to form a memorial in that the opening sequence would show the steps back in memory:

The opening sequence was designed to take us back in time, from the cross, which could be any memorial any time, via the survivor standing over the grave, down to the long dead skeleton, over to the recently dead in the trench and across to the ‘not yet dead’ soldier with the tragic face at the end of the sequence. To achieve this simple thought, the ‘not yet dead’ soldier has indeed been taken from another picture and placed in this more suitable setting [...] The titles and their background serve one purpose, the body of the film another.²²²

This did not elude some sharp-eyed viewers, who wrote to the BBC informing them they would find the correct picture, without the corpses, on page 99 of A.J.P. Taylor’s bestseller *The First World War* which was published in 1963.²²³ After the series’ first showing there was a national appeal to identify the new Unknown Warrior, a symbol for everyone’s lost male relative. Those who had lost male relatives believed that he was a stand-in: one gentleman wrote that his eldest brother, who was killed in 1918, was ‘the double of this soldier even to the index finger and thumb held in the left hand, this is an idiosyncrasy of our male family.’²²⁴ At the time he was named as Private Joseph Bailey of the 12th Battalion Yorkshire and Lancashire Regiment who was killed in action just hours after the photograph was taken.²²⁵ Subsequent research suggests that the soldier in the photograph belonged to an Irish regiment, and that his name was almost certainly not Joseph Bailey.

As Private Bailey’s photograph was adjusted, evidence suggests that the image of the silhouetted soldier [fig.8] used in the opening sequence, was staged by the official war photographer Lieutenant Ernest Brookes. David Laing, a driver who served in the R.A.S.C. Motor Transport between May 1915 and May 1919, wrote to Essex during

²²⁰ BBC WAC T32/1145/1 Tony Essex to Mrs G.H.Baker 23 November 1964

²²¹ BBC WAC T32/1139/1 Tony Essex to Mrs M.E.Butterworth 2 February 1965

²²² BBC WAC T32/1 145/4 Tony Essex to Redmayne 22 December 1964 emphasis in original. My thanks to Dan Todman for providing me with the text of this letter.

²²³ A.J.P.Taylor, *The First World War – An Illustrated History* (London: Penguin, 1963)

²²⁴ BBC WAC T32/1,145/1 Thomas Ball to BBC 10 April 1965

²²⁵ John Ramsden, ‘*The Great War: The making of the series*’, pp.7-18

the series' first run on BBC2 that he had been the driver and orderly to the War Office Official Cinematographer, Lieutenant Geoffrey Malins and Lieutenant Brookes. Laing wrote that 'On the introduction of each week's series you have a still picture of a soldier standing by a cross on a war grave, well I am almost sure this picture is of myself, as I well remember Lieutenant Brookes asking me to pick up a rifle, (which I did not carry normally) and stand on this little mound as the sun was setting as he thought it would make a good picture.'²²⁶ When this letter was found amongst the correspondence for the series in the mid-1990s, staff at the IWM were unable to trace Mr Laing. Indeed, if he was 20 years of age in 1916 as he indicates in his letter, then there was a good chance he was no longer alive by the mid-1990s.

The image of the silhouetted soldier, taken on 22 August 1917 at Pilkem Ridge is 'a photograph of the way the war will come to be remembered.' Taken fifteen months before the armistice, it has been suggested that it is 'a photograph of the future, of the future's view of the past. It is a photograph of Binyon's poem, of a sentiment. We *will* remember them.' Binyon's words were written in September 1914 before the fallen actually fell. His poem, therefore, is 'a work not of remembrance but of anticipation, or more accurately, the *anticipation of remembrance* a foreseeing that is also a determining.'²²⁷ Paul Fussell admitted that he partly attributed the success of *The Great War and Modern Memory* to 'the inexpressibly touching picture of the discouraged young soldier wearing the wading boots required for daily work in the flooded trenches [...] the boy's expression was unmistakably 'twentieth century'. If anyone ever looked aware of being doomed to meaningless death, it is this boy.'²²⁸

The Great War's opening sequence shows that historians should use a visual logic instead of a lineal one because historical images are first constituted by being 'blasted' out of the historical continuum. This is because 'we have become a culture completely familiar with the practices and manipulations of mediation, the visual icon has become less and less secure and trustworthy as denotation, as an "image of", and more and more the historical and historicizing circumscription of a *special site* that

²²⁶ Letter from Mr David Laing of Aberdeen to Tony Essex – no date but must be contemporary to the series' first run on BBC 2 from mid-1964. I am very grateful to Dr Ulf Schmidt and Roger Smither for sending me a copy of this letter.

²²⁷ Geoff Dyer, *The Missing of the Somme* (London: Penguin, 1994), p.7

²²⁸ Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford: OUP, 2000), p.342

bounds and condenses without necessarily synthesising a set of variously related, “possible” narratives.’²²⁹

Private Bailey’s gaze appears to have exerted a great deal of power over the viewing audience in Britain 1964-65, evident in the volumes of correspondence sent to the BBC. However, most of the letters were written after the BBC had announced in the *Radio Times* in April 1965 that photographs of ‘Bailey’ would be sent to those who wrote in to request one. This suggests that the BBC actively encouraged people to stare back at ‘Bailey’ to consolidate the popularity and emotional drive of the series with the face that was beamed into their living rooms at the beginning of every episode. The viewer’s embodied knowledge of the war as a bloody and terrible event was reinforced by the visual and emotional power of the series made these visual records a strong approximation of wisdom. However, it was the BBC that generated the kind of hysteria seen in the correspondence received after the *Radio Times* feature, and the level of viewer’s emotional involvement appears to have run at a remarkably high pitch.²³⁰ One viewer imagined a war narrative inspired by the soldier’s face that

If one looks deep and long into this picture – into this abyss of hell – a whole galaxy of the horrors of war are revealed. Once a quiet sort of chap really, quite content to go home to his wife and kids after a hard day’s work, eyes that held nothing but love for his family. But now after being trained to kill or be killed, are eyes that seem to burn and accuse us, the eyes seem filled with shock – hatred – mistrust – disgust – despair – loneliness, and the pleading questions of why – for what – to what end – for whom. Yes, it’s all there even a look of pity, like forgive them for they know not what they do [...] what do we need the atom bomb for as a deterrent? When we have here a lone soldier sitting, so silent but telling us so much.’²³¹

One viewer wrote that ‘of all the pictures of the many thousands in this series, this single one epitomizes The Great War.’²³² Another viewer wrote to say the image was

²²⁹ Vivian Sobchack, ‘The Insistent Fringe: Moving Images and Historical Consciousness’ *History and Theory* vol.36, no. 4, (December 1997), pp.4-20

²³⁰ Bill Nichols, *Blurred Boundaries: Questions of Meaning in Contemporary Culture* (USA: Indiana UP, 1994), p.2.

²³¹ BBC WAC T32/1,145/5 Mrs G.R.Trowsdale January 1966

²³² BBC WAC T32/1,145/2 Joan Gardner 7 April 1965

‘a fitting memento to one of the most appalling incidents this century.’²³³ Age does not also appear to have mattered, as one viewer born in 1886 said that ‘Bailey’ ‘so reproachfully looks at the generation of which I belong.’²³⁴ The series also seemed to convey to certain viewers a great deal about a war that had cast a shadow over their childhood experiences. One woman wrote that ‘I have never watched any programme which has made such an impression on me – I was 12 when this war ended so I do have vague memories of it. Now that I have seen the horrors of trench warfare I can well understand why none of my uncles would ever talk about their experiences.’²³⁵ Another viewer recounted that ‘your series brought back to mind and memory the agony of the people whom I remember, even as a very small boy, when they received tragic news of husbands and sons. It is right that all should be reminded, or more important, taught the history with its attendant tragedies.’²³⁶

The BBC archives show that a number of children watched the series, and that they also responded to a romanticised view of the war. A ten-year old boy wrote that ‘I dislike very much the skeletons and dead bodies at the beginning. I do not like the music at the beginning and end [...] A better thing to put at the beginning and end would be men singing “It’s a Long, Long Way to Tipperary”.’²³⁷ One young man wrote ‘I feel most awfully sorry for that man at the beginning. He is now my hero. Please could I have a picture of him to stitch in my photo album along with the rest of my friends?’²³⁸ Another young viewer, who was told to watch the series by her history teacher, wrote to say that she would like a picture because ‘I will always be reminded of what History really means.’²³⁹ A thirteen year old said ‘I agree entirely with the girl who said “he means more to me than the Beatles”.’²⁴⁰

Despite accounting for less than 1% of the viewing audience, even veterans appeared to see something familiar in ‘Bailey’.²⁴¹ One ex-field artillery officer wrote asking for a copy of the photograph saying ‘Never has his character been so ably portrayed and

²³³ BBC WAC T32/1,145/2 Kenneth Beale 2 May 1965

²³⁴ BBC WAC T32/1,145/2 Herbert S.Binyon 12 April 1965

²³⁵ BBC WAC T32/1,145/1 Mis L.F.Astell to Tony Essex 12 April 1965

²³⁶ BBC WAC T32/1,145/1 J.Armstrong to Tony Essex 9 December 1964

²³⁷ BBC WAC T32/1,145/1 R.Stewart to Tony Essex 6 December 1964

²³⁸ BBC WAC T32/1,145/2 D.J.Ballard 14 April 1965

²³⁹ BBC WAC T32/1,145/2 Margaret Ford 2 April 1965

²⁴⁰ BBC WAC T32/1,145/2 A.J.Close 8 April 1965

²⁴¹ See Dan Todman, ‘The Reception of The Great War in the 1960s’

to me he is the live memory of all the thousands who I have known, passed and spoken [...] in those my young days.²⁴² Another former officer wrote that the image was ‘a remarkable projection of what a British soldier might have been feeling like.’²⁴³ A former soldier who fought in the 1st Battalion Worcester Regiment, 8th Division in 1918 wrote that ‘The choice of the man in the introduction to each programme denotes a stroke of genius [...] for many years I have had a copy of C.R.W.Nevinson’s “Group of Soldiers” but always I felt he had somehow failed to portray the essential qualities of the English soldier of that time. When “your man” first came on to the screen I knew immediately that this picture fulfilled the image.’²⁴⁴

But why did the image of the Unknown Soldier exert such a powerful resonance with successive viewing audiences? A Semiotician would underline the popular cliché that the eyes are the mirrors of the soul, and in archaic cultures, to give someone the ‘evil eye’ is to threaten or warn them in some way. The primary function of such a gaze is phatic: this mode signals verbal interaction in the initiation and maintenance of conversation to indicate that a communicative channel is open. A prolonged gaze at another person can be seen as a signal for them to speak next, and as an index of intimacy, sympathy, hostility, aggression, or dominance. Staring eyes are a threatening signal for primates, where aspects of social dominance are established or strengthened by a gaze. In humans, fixed eye contact is understood as a signal of power.²⁴⁵

As television images are perceived in the present tense ‘these figures are also ghosts or simulacra of others who have already acted out their parts [...] The indexical image authenticates testimony now about what happened then. With historical footage from the time recounted appended to it, indexicality may guarantee an apparent congruity between what happened then and what is said now.’²⁴⁶ By 2003, on the eve of *The Great War*’s repeat run on BBC2, Malcolm Brown wrote that the high level of familiarity means that ‘the unknown Tommy in his trench will fix his angry glare on a new generation viewers and, by a curious paradox, instead of turning people away

²⁴² BBC WAC T32/1,145/1 E.Bolton Morns 14 May 1965

²⁴³ BBC WAC T32/1,145/1 Brigadier M.S.Bendle 7 April 1965

²⁴⁴ BBC WAC T32/1,145/1 T.B.Blight to Tony Essex 10 April 1965

²⁴⁵ Winfried Nöth, *Handbook of Semiotics* (USA: Indiana UP, 1990), pp.405-406

²⁴⁶ Bill Nichols, *Blurred Boundaries*, p.4

from the mysterious world of which he has become an unintentional symbol, he will invite them in.'²⁴⁷

The second image of a 'silhouetted soldier' appears as being raised above the war on the Allies' metaphorical moral high ground. There are overtones of grief as he bows his head next to a grave of a friend, perhaps. He is a blank figure upon which any bereaved family could transpose their loved ones' features. He could be anybody, a template of any Great War soldier of the millions who went to fight. If the Unknown Soldier, who as 'Bailey' was widely believed to have died on the Somme, was taken to represent Britain's war dead, then the silhouetted soldier was the living unknown warrior - a figure representing the millions that did return. He could be any of the veterans appearing in Great War documentaries, appearing as *they* remembered themselves, who survived and have lived with the weight of their war memories, not all of them horrific, that only other soldiers can really understand. Indeed, it is significant that the figure of the silhouetted soldier is similar to the generic figures that feature on war memorials. Indeed, when *The Great War* was recently released on DVD and VHS, the cover featured a soldier in silhouette who stands in the exact 'action' or non-ceremonial pose very similar to hundreds of war memorials across the British Isles.

Such visual iconicity means that stories, figures, and identities need to be transmissible as icons. To do this they must first be compressed into quick encapsulations able to quickly circulate through the channels of mass mediation. These are called mediaphemes: the most common unit of communication in mass-mediated iconographic modes of remembering. Once a story, person, or event is translated into mediapheme form, it ricochets through the channels of mass mediation with ease. Mediaphemes may become icons that can outlast single, short-lived versions of an event, character or history becoming sites for the repeated staging of narratives on which the past, present, and future may be written.²⁴⁸

When mediaphemes appear in photographs, the example here being 'Bailey' as the Unknown Soldier, they can then be used to form a syntax that requires movement and

²⁴⁷ *BBC History Magazine* March 2003 pp.40-43

²⁴⁸ Vivian Sobchack, 'The Insistent Fringe', pp.4-20

repetition. This is compatible with television's need for constant movement, and it can be seen in this opening sequence as a good example of how this syntax, when combined with a dramatic soundtrack, can induce emotional responses to visual and aural stimuli. Essex was 'one of the masters of the craft of visual storytelling' and that *The Great War*, one of his greatest achievements, had produced 'a sustained visual narrative which has now established itself as the definitive pictorial document of the first major war ever to be comprehensively recorded in moving pictures.' It was said that 'he was an artist to the tips of his fingers and his satisfaction lay in the sharing of his imaginative experiences with millions of people he never met, but whose emotional responses he understood and evoked with the skill of a master craftsman.'²⁴⁹

Essex's conscious and unconscious decisions led him to encode the titles as a montage of images that resonated with ideas about the war already embedded in British modern memory. Taking its cue from associations which the symbol calls to mind, the interpretation extends those associations which relate the symbol to the situation in which the interpretation takes place.²⁵⁰ Given *The Great War*'s recurrent opening motif of such dramatic force, the rhetoric of the narration could not then relapse into pure 'hard' information-giving or analysis: dramatic necessity requires that it aspire, from time to time at least, to the same register as the visual and aural pitch of the credit sequence. Thus, episode five entitled 'This Business May Last a Long Time' – concerned with the change from mobile combat to static trench warfare – begins with shots of German soldiers in repose accompanied by the cadenced narration of Sir Michael Redgrave: 'The pendulum of war had come to rest; the armies halted. Round camp fires men were too weary to talk much, but they could wonder which way they would march tomorrow...'

Use of Film

Some members of the production team have been highly irritated by scholars fretting over the use of archive. Appearing on *That Was The Great War That Was*, the series'

²⁴⁹ BBC WAC *Times* 17 May 1975

²⁵⁰ Alex King, *Memorials of the Great War in Britain: The Symbolism and Politics of Remembrance* (Oxford: Berg, 1998), p.12

Film Researcher Eric Davidson thundered that ‘anyone who says we didn’t use authentic footage doesn’t have a clue about what we were trying to do.’ Reconstructed material used in *The Great War* falls into three main categories; film taken behind the front line shortly after a particular operation, film shot by official photographers after the war, re-enacting certain engagements. The last category also includes a small amount of film of pre-war French and German manoeuvres, contained in the programmes dealing with 1914, and feature films from the 1920s and 1930s such as Pabst’s *Westfront 1918* (1930). The average percentage of reconstructed film in *The Great War* was calculated at approximately nine per cent, including all interviews, maps, diagrams, stills, and main title sequences which account for 20-25 per cent of the total film. The proportion of reconstructed material would be higher if calculated on the film sequences alone.²⁵¹ Julia Cave emphasised that the restrictive nature of film techniques in the early 1960s did not permit the onscreen labelling of film, even if the producers had wanted to interrupt the flow by identifying reconstructed sequences:

Today, we could easily mark it with a caption. You couldn’t do it then. You could not do it unless you sent that particular piece of film to the laboratory and had what was called an ‘optical’ engraved on it, which would take ten days. This was also hugely expensive. Now it’s extremely simple, but then it was a huge process. Besides, you never knew to the last minute whether that shot would be used in the final version or not.²⁵²

The Great War is now well known for being the first series to treat archive film so that the Allies advance from the left and the Germans from the right and at a speed seen acceptable to a modern audience.²⁵³ However, by March 1965, just four viewers out the total audience had written in to remark on the reversal of film images. Essex explained that this was done ‘to save confusion in battle scenes and sequences which contain maps’ maintaining that ‘clarity for the many [was] more important than

²⁵¹ IWM Central Files Folder Special Film Productions BBC *The Great War* Film 1964, Dr Noble Frankland (director of IWM) sent to the correspondence editor of *The Daily Telegraph* January 16 1965

²⁵² Julia Cave to Emma Mahoney (interview in person) 2 March 2004

²⁵³ For example Hew Strachan & Jonathan Lewis, ‘Filming the First World War’ *History Today* October 2003 53 (10) pp.20-22

accuracy for the few.²⁵⁴ In response to the Imperial War Museum's complaints on his use of archive footage Essex was forced to draft an announcement to be included in the opening titles relating to the use of archive film: 'A very small proportion of the film material used in this series is reconstructed, usually by Official Photographers two or three days after the event depicted. Material of this kind is used only when the reconstruction is so accurate as to be indistinguishable from the real thing, and when no genuine film exists.'²⁵⁵

Indeed, due to the limited recording technology and the difficulties of filming in a highly dangerous war zone, footage of military operations could not be caught on film. Geoffrey Malins' recording of scenes for *Battle of the Somme* (1916), many of which were reconstructed behind the lines, was seen as exceptional by the standards of the time. German footage was especially problematic, because they had run out of the chemicals needed to develop their films from 1917. This led to repetition and scenes were taken from Georg Wilhelm Pabst's 1930 film *Westfront 1918* and Lewis Milestone's film of Eric Maria Remarque's novel *All Quiet on the Western Front* released in the same year.²⁵⁶ In addition, there was only one film camera at Gallipoli,²⁵⁷ so many images of military action there had to be constructed from stills and drawings.²⁵⁸ When it came to depicting aerial warfare, the production team struggled to find a significant amount of good film shot during the war.

This is one of the reasons why *The Great War* makes very few references to aerial combat. Essex wrote to a viewer who had complained about the lack of aerial action saying that 'Our cutting rooms were full of very badly reconstructed material, filmed in the 1920s, but the reconstruction so obviously lacked the true nature of Air Warfare that I could not bring myself to authorise their use.'²⁵⁹ In addition, it has been said that footage of action at sea is relatively dull viewing in comparison to watching troops on the ground. After episode 6 'So sleep easy in your beds' on naval warfare and the

²⁵⁴ BBC WAC T32/1139/1 Tony Essex to A.E.Bell 18 March 1965

²⁵⁵ BBC WAC T32/1139/1 Tony Essex to Gordon Watkins 23 April 1964

²⁵⁶ Lewis Milestone's *All Quiet on the Western Front* won an Academy Award for Best Picture in 1930. See Andrew Kelly, *Filming All Quiet on the Western Front 'Brutal Cutting, Stupid Censors, Bigoted Politicos'* (London: I.B.Tauris, 1998)

²⁵⁷ Stephen Badsey, 'Introduction' in Roger Smither (ed), *IWM Film Catalogue Volume I The First World War Archive* (Trowbridge: Flicks, 1994), p.vii

²⁵⁸ LHCMA LH 13/62 *Daily Telegraph* 30 November 1964

²⁵⁹ BBC WAC T32/1139/1 Tony Essex to H.J.Boyd 4 January 1965

battle of Jutland was first broadcast in July 1964, the Chief of Programmes for BBC2 Michael Peacock asked ‘Have we other programmes planned which concentrate exclusively on the naval war? Film of battleships etc appears to have a more monotonous quality than film of war on the land.’²⁶⁰

The Great War has also been criticised for an absence of personal writing such as diaries and letters. The series has been unfairly compared to Ken Burns’s *American Civil War* (PBS, 1990) which contained 80 per cent photos, with letters and diaries read in voiceovers by well-known actors. Hugh Purcell believed that *The Great War* should have made more of the material sent to them by veterans as ‘This montage of documentary evidence can be extraordinarily effective, particularly when, as in the First World War too there was such a profusion of personal writing including poetry – perhaps the most devastating medium for evoking war.’²⁶¹ However, for Burns in 1990 there was no way of connecting with the 1860s by any other means than through letters and diaries, because there were no remaining veterans of the fighting in America 1861-1865. In 1964, there were a number of veterans who were available to impart their memories of 1914-1918 if people wanted to ask. However, Purcell was comparing *The Great War* to a series that was made nearly thirty years later, and such comments show a lack of understanding as to the programme’s aim. The production team were aware of these problems at the time and sought to present the most accurate history they could. It would fall to the more personalised ‘arts style’ documentaries from the 1970s such as Malcolm Brown and Martin Middlebrook’s *Battle of the Somme* to place greater emphasis on diaries and letters as well as veterans’ testimonies.

The Great War and First World War History

The Myth of Participation

The dramatic visual impetus of *The Great War* encouraged certain views of the war that were already well established before 1964 and one of the most enduring images was that it was a war fought by volunteer soldiers. *The Great War* stands accused of

²⁶⁰ BBC WAC T32/825/1 Michael Peacock to Head of Talks Programmes, Television 7 July 1964

²⁶¹ Hugh Purcell, *History Today* (August, 1994), pp.9-12

substantially enhancing this Myth of Participation. At a press conference 3 July 1963, the producers appealed for those ‘who served on any front up to the end of 1915.’ Recent research on conscription in the First World War has asserted that *The Great War* has meant that ‘the major commemorative creation of the state-owned television ignored over half of the British soldiers who fought in it [...] and the image of the volunteers not only survived intact but became further embellished by personal testimony.’²⁶² However, it is clear it had never occurred to the production team to disregard conscripts. Nevertheless, the romance of the Pals Battalions has led to a Myth of Participation has belied the actual statistics of men involved: 50.3 per cent of the BEF were conscripts, representing the majority of men who fought in the Allied offensives of 1918.²⁶³

Like many subsequent documentaries, *The Great War* underlined that the mobilisation of the New Armies was one of the most remarkable aspects of Britain’s involvement in the war. When Lord Kitchener issued an appeal on 17 August 1914 for 100,000 men, 1,186,000 volunteered within five months. Unprepared for the rapid influx of such numbers, during the autumn and winter of 1914-15 many men in ‘Kitchener’s Army’ did not have uniform or rifles, and they were often billeted in private homes. Influential men such as the Liverpudlian magnate Lord Derby recruited four battalions from Merseyside, and other private individuals and organisations raised their own respective ‘Pals’ battalions in addition to the pre-war territorials who were called up to supplement Britain’s small regular army. By the end of 1915, 2,466,719 men had volunteered, but by January 1916 conscription was introduced to cope with the losses from both fighting fronts. In total, 5,704,000 men served in the British Army, split between regulars, territorials, volunteers, and conscripts.²⁶⁴

However, *The Great War* shows that the Myth of Participation was already enshrined in the minds of the production team: born after the armistice in 1918 ‘their approach was formed by imagery, as much as any fact gleaned from a document or a book. Yet it is clear that even for well-informed historians this image did not include the

²⁶² Ilana Bet-El, *Conscripts: Lost Legions of the Great War* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 1999), p.204

²⁶³ *Ibid.* p.2

²⁶⁴ Gary Sheffield, *Forgotten Victory The First World War Myths and Realities* (London: Headline, 2001), p.43

conscripts in any way.’²⁶⁵ This is significant because conscripted men may not have put themselves forward for commemorative events such as appearing on camera in *The Great War*, a reticence that ‘negated their own participation in the war’ by allowing volunteers to speak for them, so in effect the conscripts by default accepted the public image of the war as one fought by volunteers.²⁶⁶ This was compacted by the British obsession with the battle of the Somme. John Terraine, who wrote the script for episode 13 ‘The Devil is Coming...’ also wrote a précis of the episode in the *Radio Times* where he emphasised that the British army of 1916 was ‘a unique phenomenon [...] the product of the most amazing outburst of voluntary effort in British history. The majority of these men were those who had responded to Lord Kitchener’s appeal. By September 1915, 2,257,521 men had volunteered. They were the physical and spiritual elite of the nation; their high spirits were only matched by their ignorance of war.’²⁶⁷

Terraine’s *The Smoke and the Fire* (1980) underlined one of the main reasons for the Somme’s place in the canon of Great War mythology: ‘British accounts generally dwell upon the enthusiasm and élan of these high-spirited, patriotic and physically elite volunteers.’²⁶⁸ Those who wrote and published the most well-known memoirs, novels and poetry were all volunteers, and to a large extent they were among the social and intellectual elite in Britain at that time. However, the romantic story of Kitchener’s men appeals across class barriers: for example, two male characters in the popular 1970s drama *Upstairs Downstairs* answered the call in 1914 – the footman and the master of the house, showing that the volunteering spirit was somehow ingrained in the English national character with no regard to social class.²⁶⁹ The myth of the volunteers continued through to 1976 and beyond. During *Battle of the Somme*, an actor’s voice is heard over archive footage of inexperienced troops marching towards the Somme at the end of June 1916 ‘You came of your own accord, you didn’t have to be fetched, you bloody fools!’²⁷⁰ This has developed into a leitmotif of

²⁶⁵ Ilana Bet-El, *Conscripts*, p.205

²⁶⁶ Ibid.

²⁶⁷ BBC WAC *Radio Times* 31 December 1964 - 5 January 1965

²⁶⁸ John Terraine, *The Smoke and the Fire Myths & Anti-Myths of War 1861-1945*, (London: Leo Cooper, 1992 edition), p.112

²⁶⁹ *Upstairs Downstairs* (1971- 1975) was a series by London Weekend Television that featured the lives of a wealthy London family and their servants from the period 1903.

²⁷⁰ BBC WAC *Battle of the Somme* production script p.20

the First World War that has also been continued by more modern and light-hearted works, which also highlight the upper class nature of many of the officer volunteers, such as *Blackadder Goes Forth*.

[Play video clip 4: *Blackadder Goes Forth*]²⁷¹

Indeed, the success of *Blackadder Goes Forth* lies in that ‘It reflected and reinforced the majority of the public’s views and emotions about the Great War’ drawing as it did ‘upon a half-remembered folk memory of the *1066 and All That* variety’ with ‘echoes of works as diverse as the ‘War Poets’ of 1914-18, R.C.Sherriff’s play *Journey’s End*, and W.E.Johns’ juvenile *Biggles* novels.’²⁷² The myth of a volunteer war is a powerful part of the conflict’s legacy.

Somme Myths

The romantic and tragic elements of the Kitchener Army and its fate in the summer of 1916 means that not even *The Great War* could stop the Somme being the British by-word for futility. The two episodes covering the Battle of the Somme were edited into one programme and shown on BBC4 to mark Remembrance Sunday and Armistice Day in November 2002. The reason given for the prominence of the Somme films above the others was that the battle ‘is the heart of the series and an unforgettable account of combat. The Somme has become for British people a symbol of the incomprehensible atrocity of world war one [*sic.*]²⁷³ Nearly forty years earlier, Terraine wanted ‘to consider carefully whether we wish to perpetuate this cliché or offer something fresh.’²⁷⁴ Basil Liddell Hart complained of being sidelined to BBC Director General Hugh Greene, and resigned from the series. Undeterred, Terraine

²⁷¹ Tony Robinson as Baldrick recalls joining up for the ‘Turnip Street Workhouse Pals’ and Hugh Laurie as the Honourable George Colthurst St Barleigh gushes that ‘I joined up straight away – 10 August 1914. What a day that was. Myself and the fellows leap-frogging down to the Cambridge recruiting office, then playing tiddly-winks in the queue. We’d hammered the hell out of Oxford’s tiddly-winkers only the week before and here we were off to hammer the Boche. A crashingly superb bunch of blokes, fine, clean-limbed – even our acne had a strange nobility about it.’ Richard Curtis & Ben Elton, *Blackadder the Whole Damn Dynasty* (London: Penguin, 1999), p.439 from *Blackadder Goes Forth* episode 6 ‘Goodbye’.

²⁷² Gary Sheffield, “‘Oh What a Futile War!’: representations of the Western Front in modern British media and popular culture’ in Ian Stewart & Susan L Carruthers (eds), *War, Culture and Media: Representations of the Military in 20th Century Britain* (Trowbridge: Flicks, 2000), pp.54-74

²⁷³ BBC 4 Editor Nick Fraser quoted in BBC Press Release 21 October 2002

²⁷⁴ BBC WAC T32/827/1 John Terraine to Tony Essex (undated)

wanted to present a detached overview with lots of detail, but Tony Essex wanted an intensely personal piece of television that would try to portray the experience of war. During the production of episode 13 Terraine wrote at length to Essex why there should be less emphasis on the first day, and more about the German's experience:

I would like you to think very hard about the Programme value of offering the audience a conception of the Somme that they have never had before – the Somme at the receiving end. This bloody parochial nation of ours can never see beyond the end of its toffee nose; it's just about time to tell them that the Germans were there too, busily losing the war...and when it comes to heroic efforts, I am just about sick to death of the way all the heroism of the 141 days is always lost to sight because of the drama of the 1st day [...] Nothing alters the taste of death. It is just as foul as the end of a battle as at the beginning. Let's do justice. And let's be fresh.²⁷⁵

The programme broadcast was a compromise on both sides, grinding out the message of the victory of attrition. The use of German material and interviews with German ex-servicemen was particularly striking.²⁷⁶ Tony Essex, always with an eye for drama, wrote to John Terraine of the British army's lessons on the Somme 'A nasty experience, but by God, bloody good television', and the audience seemed to agree.²⁷⁷ First screened on 22 August 1964, episode 13 'The Devil is Coming' scored the highest audience reaction score of the series at 89 out of 100. However, it was the most contentious episode of the series, representing 'a part of the struggle waged over the historiography of the Great War [...] a clash between two generations of historians.'²⁷⁸

A closer examination of episode 13 reveals why the audience's reaction to the episode appears to sum up the general attitude towards the reception of the series as a whole. Terraine's tried to present a more balanced revisionist view: that the fighting between July and November 1916 was the turning point of the entire war in giving the German army a shock from which it never recovered. However, as the programme begins the

²⁷⁵ Ibid. Emphasis in original.

²⁷⁶ Mark Connelly, 'The Devil is Coming' *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* Vol.22, No.1, 2002 pp.21-27

²⁷⁷ BBC WAC T32/827/1 Tony Essex to John Terraine 7 July 1964

²⁷⁸ Mark Connelly, 'The Devil is Coming', pp.21-27

predominant images are of heavy artillery, corpses, mud and lengthy casualty lists, and the drama is supplied by the episode's opening with a verse from Gilbert Frankau's poem 'The Voice of the Guns':²⁷⁹

[Play video clip 5: *The Great War* – opening of episode 13]

The script takes care to underline the battle's objectives. After a week of sustained British heavy artillery bombardment, a British infantry offensive on 1 July 1916 would relieve pressure on the French at Verdun, assist the Allies by stopping the transfer of German troops and material into the area, and thereby wear down the German army. It is also pointed out that it was the 132nd day of the battle of Verdun, and that the Germans suffered both physical and psychological damage while they were trapped in their dugouts for the duration of the preliminary bombardment. A German veteran described finding his comrades 'suffocated or smashed to pulp' and that 'event the rats became hysterical', echoing the film *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1930) which depicts a similar scene. Terraine wanted to show that 'the Germans were there too'.²⁸⁰

Episode 13 does not dwell on 1 July 1916 as some later documentaries would do. The programme moves quickly to show that the fighting on the Somme was a series of attacks and counter-attacks, some of which were Allied successes.²⁸¹ Indeed, the film presents the German case as the more desperate, quoting General von Bülow's order to his troops that 'the enemy should have to carve his way over heaps of corpses.' The narration emphasises that on the battlefields 'every inch was soaked with British and German blood'. The shift towards the material battle of attrition and the British home front's disappointment and apparent shock at the extended fighting and resultant heavy casualties is underlined by a quote from a German soldier that the destruction

²⁷⁹ 'We are the guns, and your masters. Saw ye our flashes?/Heard ye the scream of our shells in the night and the shuddering crashes?/Saw ye our work by the roadside; the shrouded things lying,/Moaning to God that He made them - the maimed and the dying?/Husbands or sons, fathers or lovers, we break them./We are the Guns!'

²⁸⁰ BBC WAC T32/827/1 John Terraine to Tony Essex (undated)

²⁸¹ For example, the 2nd Guards Division who achieved their objective and held the most westerly point on the German line by the end of 1 July. Malcolm Brown, *The Imperial War Museum Book of the Somme*, p.100

of flesh no longer seemed to matter because amongst the heavy artillery 'the individual man had gone' with the war's appetite for men.

Terraine succeeded in giving the narrative less of a sense of inevitability for this particular story; by pointing out that while the volunteer recruits were gaining experience, and Germany was beginning to bleed to death, plans for the September offensives were designed to knock Germany out of the war because by then it was genuinely thought possible that 'one more thrust on the Somme might settle the account.' Terraine tried to hammer the point home that the British forces were learning fast, that their industry was improving with the help of American resources, that there were 500 more British heavy guns in September than there had been in July, and that hundreds of thousands of men were brought in to supplement the heavy losses. When the tank is introduced, it is to a more optimistic musical accompaniment to signify its role as a potential war-winning weapon, which led one German soldier to lament that the sinister new addition to the Allied armoury was 'a supernatural force...the Devil is coming'.

By the autumn there was the mud - 'a new enemy, the arbiter of destiny, mocking British and German alike'. While the French were still holding Verdun the narration emphasised that 'the Somme was the muddy grave of the German field army, and the faith in the infallibility of the leadership'. The closing images juxtapose German corpses with more footage of British heavy artillery, but the long panning rostrum camera shots of casualty lists in newspapers have by then stuck in the mind of the British viewer who might spare little sympathy for the Germans. The BBC's Audience Reception Report quotes a retired army officer and Somme veteran who believed that 'this was the war programme to end all war programmes.' A housewife whose husband had fought on the Somme in the Artillery remembered 'how anxiously I scanned the casualty lists in the newspapers. This series should be seen by all to bring home the horrors of war and the dreadful waste of young manhood.' It became clear that

Viewers in the sample almost without exception made it abundantly clear that the Great War series had reached a very high peak of interest in this part which dealt with the Battle of the Somme. This 'marvellous production' was certainly

highly successful, many said, in explaining and depicting the progress of this phase of the war in all its stark reality, making it impossible for them to be other than wholly gripped throughout as the grim tale was unfolded, and greatly saddened too by the tremendous loss of life and the ‘futility of such carnage.’²⁸²

Again, when images of the war were combined with a powerful narration and a dramatic musical score they made the deepest impression on viewers over a script that had been written by an expert military historian. Therefore, *The Great War*’s special effects failed to present the events of the summer of 1916 as the turning point of the fighting on the Western Front, despite the weekly entry for in the *Radio Times* by John Terraine explaining in simple terms that 1 July 1916 was the 132nd day of the battle of Verdun, and that ‘140 days of endurance, wonderful courage, awful losses, and fine achievement for the British Army’ led to the German retreat to the Hindenburg Line in February 1917. Terraine underlined that the Somme was ‘an irreparable blow [that had been struck] at the German army’ and the Somme was its ‘muddy grave’.²⁸³ However, sensitivity to the more atmospheric and aesthetic elements of the televisual narrative made a considerable impact on the Audience Research sample. A large majority declared it to be

brilliantly written and spoken [...] achieving just the right effect, according to most accounts. The film material, it appeared, could not have been better chosen, action pictures taking viewers straight into the heart of the battle and providing a moving and engrossing spectacle throughout. It was found surprising that so many contemporary photographs and films were available, and the quality was frequently noted as extremely good – ‘Considering the difficulties under which these films were made these were really excellent. I for one did not realise that so many films of the war existed, and I admire the way in which they have all been collected up and pieced together to show us exactly what happened.’ The soundtrack was found a most acceptable addition to the atmosphere and sombre mood of the programme.²⁸⁴

²⁸² BBC WAC T32/827/1 - VR/64/461 Audience Research Department 11 September 1964

²⁸³ BBC WAC *Radio Times* 31 December 1964 - 5 January 1965

²⁸⁴ BBC WAC T32/827/1 - VR/64/461 Audience Research Department 11 September 1964

Sixteen years after the first broadcast of John Terraine's *The Smoke and the Fire* acknowledged that 'The literature of 1 July 1916 is endless. Salutary at first, a proper corrective to the streams of propaganda clap-trap about "laughing heroes" and "the Great Adventure" which had previously gushed forth, after a time it developed into a most mischievous mythology.' The concentration on one combat day out of more than 1500 is a morbid and peculiarly British fascination. Terraine asserted that if any day should be singled out it was 2 July 1916: 'it was 'make or break' day; the British Army decided to 'make', not 'break', to its eternal honour'.²⁸⁵ Gary Sheffield's *Forgotten Victory* (2001) and Simon Robbins' *British Generalship on the Western Front 1914-18* (2005) have further emphasised this point that the notoriety of 1 July 1916 should not overshadow the fact that it was a crucial point on a 'learning curve' which was very steep indeed after the initial assault.²⁸⁶ While the Somme inflicted irreparable damage on the German army, and the BEF gained experience and improved tactics, so 'unpalatable as it may seem, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the Somme was an essential precondition to success in the last two years of the war'.²⁸⁷

This would not have been the view of the Somme familiar to a British audience at a time when Wilfred Owen was posited as the essential voice of the war. Revisionists like John Terraine and Correlli Barnett had just started to publish their research, but the majority of the viewing public would have been reading A.J.P. Taylor's enduring bestseller *The First World War* (1963) or Alan Clark's *The Donkeys* (1961) in addition to the long-established poetry, plays, memoirs and novels that flooded the market from the late 1920s. The audience was already conditioned to think about 1914-1918 in a way that had been moulded by the disenchantment that grew in the inter-war years. In addition to Clark and Taylor, significant publications of the 1960s include Leon Wolff, *In Flanders Fields* (1958), Barbara Tuchman, *August 1914* (1962), Harold Owen, *Journey from Obscurity* (1963), C. Day Lewis, *The Collected Poems of Wilfred Owen* (1963), Brian Gardner, *Up the Line to Death* (1964) and Ian Parsons, *Men Who March Away* (1965). The majority of these books buttressed a

²⁸⁵ John Terraine, *The Smoke and the Fire*, pp.111-112

²⁸⁶ Gary Sheffield, *Forgotten Victory*, p.140, also see Simon Robbins, *British Generalship on the Western Front 1914-18: Defeat into Victory*, (London: Frank Cass, 2005)

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.* p.157

certain view of the war, especially the Somme, as futile and murderous, and explained in terms of sacrifice and disillusion.

In this cultural climate *The Great War* struggled to effect a change in the way the British audience thought about the war. The script was flooded by powerful images and references that had already been used to portray the received view of the war as a bloody and worthless event. The visual element of the film resonated with the views established by the most popular war literature of the period. Terraine had 'strongly wished to present the Western Front and Haig's leadership from his own revisionist point of view, in contrast to the prevailing *Oh What a Lovely War* myth. [...] But as critics later pointed out, the trouble was that our revisionist scripts were playing against the most powerful images of the horrors of trench stalemate.' Barnett recalled that 'In the end, not even John was entirely happy with the final Somme and Third Ypres programmes. Essex and Watkins *did* edit out some of the more contentious material in John's scripts, and so John regarded the two programmes as broadcast as producing impressions very different from his own convictions.'²⁸⁸

However, *The Great War* did resonate with the findings of the most informed military history with its representation of the final few months of the war in 1918. Episode 26 begins with footage of the English countryside and of the harvest being brought in. In a sequence rich with pastoral imagery, Redgrave's narration recalls that 'In 1914 the nations of Europe had marched to war while the corn ripened. Now it was 1918 and the harvest was being reaped.' The script then goes on to underline the military actions of 1918 – such as the battles of the Marne, Amiens and Baupaume - that had brought the German Army to its knees, and the Allies closer to victory after they broke through the Hindenburg Line and the German home front edged closer to revolution.

[Play video clip 6: *The Great War*]

²⁸⁸ Correlli Barnett, 'John Terraine and Television History', *Stand To!* January 2006, No.75, pp.5-8, p.6

Influence on subsequent programmes

The success of the series created problems for future programme makers in its wake. Malcolm Brown, who had been working on other programmes at the BBC while *The Great War* was made, was concerned with the question of how to follow the series when he came to film a special one-off documentary to mark the 60th anniversary of the Battle of the Somme in 1976: he was ‘well aware that the only way of showing it due respect was to do something quite different [...] I suggested it should be done without “talking heads”, voices off instead; with specially shot colour film of the Somme battleground as a crucial element; and archive film and stills to be used only when portraying precisely the incident or situation described.’²⁸⁹ Brown also introduced an onscreen narrator, actor Leo McKern. This documentary, filmed in the increasingly popular arts-style - depicting history as tragic art, will be the central feature of discussion in Chapter Three.

***The Lost Peace: 1918-1933* (BBC, 1966)**

On the back of *The Great War*'s success, the BBC quickly commissioned a sequel, *The Lost Peace: 1918-1933*, a thirteen-episode series about the inter-war years to be broadcast in the autumn of 1966.²⁹⁰ In many ways the production of *The Lost Peace* mirrored that of its predecessor: Essex was readily awarded another six-figure budget, but the series was beset by problems involving delays and artistic disagreements that were widely reported in the press. Transmission was delayed for nearly a year because writers John Terraine and Correlli Barnett were busy with other projects, writing just six of the series' thirteen scripts between them.²⁹¹ Arthur Marwick was one of the replacement scriptwriters who were called in to finish the series.²⁹²

Barnett recalls that he and John Terraine found the experience of working on *The Lost Peace* ‘a total disaster’.²⁹³ During production Terraine drew comparisons with their

²⁸⁹ Malcolm Brown to Emma Mahoney (interview in person) 9 August 2004

²⁹⁰ BBC WAC *Daily Telegraph* 30 November 1964

²⁹¹ BBC WAC *Evening Standard* 25 February 1966

²⁹² Arthur Marwick, *The New Nature of History* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), p.232

²⁹³ Correlli Barnett, ‘John Terraine and Television History’, *Stand To!* January 2006, No.75, pp.5-8, p.7

work on *The Great War* and complained to Barnett that ‘the big difference is that this story has no centrepiece, no main stage, no hard core of continuous (and interesting) action: in other words, no Western Front. This story is really a mass of “meanwhiles”.’²⁹⁴ Terraine and Barnett fell out during *The Lost Peace*, because of their different attitudes to writing television scripts, and production fell so far behind schedule that Terraine’s contract ran out and he accepted the role of principal scriptwriter for *Mountbatten: A Television History*. By that time Terraine had written only two of the seven fifty minute programmes. Barnett recalled that Terraine thought *The Lost Peace* ‘was mostly crap, largely thanks to Essex, and was happy to get out of it.’ Barnett stayed on ‘and saved Essex’s bacon by writing or re-writing the remainder of the programmes.’²⁹⁵

Although none of the writers were not proud of *The Lost Peace* as a piece of television, it was reported in the press that the series was ‘by far the most ambitious and most impressive’ of the new season’s television, and that the television documentary as a genre was being exercised as never before because ‘research along the political trails of those tortuous years would clearly be more exacting and baffling than demands of a purely military history.’²⁹⁶ *The Lost Peace* emphasised Versailles as a crushing blow to dreams of a new world which sowed the seeds of the Second World War.²⁹⁷ In 1965, Essex, who continued to reply to every one of the thousands of letters sent to him about *The Great War*, assured one gentleman that

One so often forgets that they [the younger generation] have enormous worries of their own, for we have not yet made them a really worth while future to draw towards. They might feel a little pointless for their parents to suffer all that and then not insist, when it was all over, upon getting what they were fighting for. Our next series is called “The Lost Peace”, and it is a very discouraging story, as you can doubtless imagine.²⁹⁸

Another viewer wrote to Essex about the scale of human loss during the Great War, and his reply reassured that ‘I know you must at times feel that these boys died in

²⁹⁴ Ibid. p.7

²⁹⁵ Ibid. p.7

²⁹⁶ BBC WAC *Times* 3 October 1966

²⁹⁷ BBC WAC *Times* 10 October 1966

²⁹⁸ BBC WAC T32/1139/1 Tony Essex to Mr W.E.L. Attenborough April 20 1965

vain, but in fact the preservation of a democratic way of life demands tremendous sacrifices, and these have certainly been made. The fact that we are not yet advanced enough to put our democratic way of life to better use, (or indeed appreciate it as it should be appreciated), is another matter, but this will come with time, and the boys who died have given us more of it. We should all be thankful.’²⁹⁹

***The World at War* (Thames, 1973-74)**

The Great War ‘not only showed how a large television historical documentary series could be made, but [they] also made it to such a high standard as to establish television in Britain as a respectable format for history.’³⁰⁰ The current affairs-style approach pioneered by the series was widely reproduced, most prominently by a Second World War 26-part series *The World at War* (ITV, 1973-4), recently listed among ‘24 Shows That Changed the Face of TV.’³⁰¹ The series’ producer Jeremy Isaacs, later Chief Executive of Channel 4, acknowledged that it was *The Great War* that showed what was possible in modern history documentaries, and that the influence of the older series was ‘much undervalued.’³⁰²

The BBC considered the plans for *The World at War* before ITV bought the rights. Arthur Marwick has written that no wholly academic team could handle a subject as vast as the Second World War, and he believed that it was a great opportunity for co-operation between academics and television professionals.³⁰³ The BBC however abandoned any plans for a series on 1939-1945 when Tony Essex left to be Head of Documentaries at Yorkshire Television in July 1967.³⁰⁴ This was good news to Noble Frankland who had ‘dreaded the prospect of working again with Tony Essex, and I doubt I would have risked associating the Museum for a second time with a production of his.’³⁰⁵

²⁹⁹ BBC WAC T32/1139/1 Tony Essex to Mrs M.C.Utton April 13 1965

³⁰⁰ Stephen Badsey, ‘The Great War since *The Great War*’, *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 22, 1 (March 2002), p.40

³⁰¹ *Radio Times* 15-21 February 2003 p.16

³⁰² Ibid.

³⁰³ Arthur Marwick, *The Listener* May 1 1969, and Marwick and Frankland in the *Times* (letters) April 1 1969 and April 8 1969.

³⁰⁴ BBC WAC *Times* 30 July 1967

³⁰⁵ Noble Frankland, *Historian at War The Campaigns of an Historian* (London: Giles de la Mare, 1998), pp.184-5

In contrast to his involvement in *The Great War*, *The World at War* gave Frankland his chance to influence the making of a major television series. The Imperial War Museum gave the series its full support but Frankland maintained a much more friendly and productive working relationship with Isaacs than he had with Essex. Frankland's memoirs recalled that 'Although Tony Essex's *Great War* series was a break-through in the presentation of history on the screen [...] I do not feel proud of my part in the *Great War* series. From the point of view of the ulterior aims I had in mind, however, it proved to be a great success. It launched the idea of history on the screen more surely than I realized at the time.'³⁰⁶ Frankland recalled that *The World at War* was the 'most important foray I made into the field of history on the screen. It was also a happy sortie.'³⁰⁷

The World at War told the story of the Second World War through the testimony of key participants. Each hour-long programme was carefully structured to focus on a key theme or campaign, from the rise of Nazi Germany to Hitler's downfall and the onset of the Cold War, and in a similar vein to *The Great War* there are no academic 'talking heads' to spell out an official version of history. In addition, by 1964 the principal political and military actors of the 1914-1918 were no longer alive, and so their words were read and recorded by actors, but *The World at War* allowed voices other than the narrator to be performed by the original speaker. *The World at War* also had a far wider choice of sources because the events of the Second World War occurred thirty years before the series was in production, and there were greater amounts of high quality footage, including colour film, available to the historians of 1939-1945.

After the lengthy debates on *The Great War*'s use of archive material, *The World at War* team was more sensitive to the problem of how such material should be used.³⁰⁸ Where *The Great War* had employed professional military historians as scriptwriters, unattached to any institution and authors of highly successful books, by 1974 commercial conditions had conspired to render this breed of military historian

³⁰⁶ Ibid. pp.184-5

³⁰⁷ Ibid. p.189

³⁰⁸ Stephen Badsey, 'The Great War since *The Great War*', p.37-45

virtually extinct. The gulf between professional historians and television producers that widened since *The Great War* 'has been a constant in television's portrayal of the First World War, and indeed of many other historical issues' where television has taken a conservative line. Television producers prefer that the Historian is now allowed to present controversy only as a personal view, and never in a major series.³⁰⁹

The narration for *The World at War* was performed by Sir Laurence Olivier, and this follows the narrator-thespian tradition encouraged by Richard Burton in *Valiant Years* and Sir Michael Redgrave in *The Great War*. This has been continued by *1914-18* which was narrated by Dame Judi Dench, and *World War One in Colour* narrated by Kenneth Brannagh. *The World at War*, like *The Great War*, called upon veterans to speak for themselves, except that the later series included more personalities from the High Command which were also identified by on-screen captions. Again, painstaking research in the archives of the Imperial War Museum also unearthed a vast quantity of newsreel footage, including on occasion the cameraman's original raw rushes which presented an unvarnished and never-before-seen picture of important events. The opening sequence for *The World at War* was as dramatic as *The Great War*: Carl Davis's portentous main title theme opened a score that underlined the grand scale of the series. Other descendent programmes of *The Great War* are not confined to histories of large-scale warfare. Documentary techniques encouraged by the series can be seen in Kenneth Clark's series *Civilisation* (1969), Jacob Bronowski's *Ascent of Man* (1973), Richard Attenborough's *Life on Earth* (1973) and Robert Kee's *Ireland* (1980).

1914-18 (KCET/PBS/BBC 1996)

In the early 1990s, American television company KCET had the grandiose aims of providing the twenty-first century with an account of the First World War to replace *The Great War*, and a series to compete with the prolific work of Ken Burns, America's foremost documentary producer. Burns came to prominence in the 1990s with several bestselling series about American history and culture, among them *The Civil War* (PBS, 1990) and *Baseball* (PBS, 1994). KCET producer Blaine Baggett

³⁰⁹ Ibid.

wanted to step into the niche market carved out by Burns.³¹⁰ *The Great War and the Shaping of the Twentieth Century* was initially shown in America by PBS where it was very well received.³¹¹ Winter emphasised that it was time for a specifically cultural televisual history of the war because of the way this field of history had advanced since *The Great War* was made in 1964. Winter asserted that ‘military history and cultural history have lived in majestic isolation, each on its separate peak’ and because a new generation’s work on new sources and interpretations could tell stories that were simply unknown to historians in the 1960s. He underlined that while political, diplomatic, military, strategic and political elements have been staples of historical representations of the war, ‘they had never been presented to the general public as cultural phenomena, as having been encoded within rich and complex images, languages and cultural forms.’³¹²

The scale of the project was vast. Numerous academics and television professionals were invited to sit in on production committees at two conferences in Los Angeles, and the series took seven years and \$6 million to make.³¹³ Funding for the series was provided by a variety of American political and social endowment groups that shaped the nature of the series. It was however re-edited by the BBC’s *Timewatch* team and broadcast in Britain as *1914-18*.³¹⁴ Professor Peter Simkins, Malcolm Brown and Sir Michael Howard were recruited as Historical Consultants for BBC Television, working with Carole Sennett of the BBC’s *Timewatch* team to tailor the series for the British audience. Episodes were re-cut and more interviews with British academics such as John Terraine and Peter Simkins were conducted and spliced into the film. John Keegan, Trevor Wilson, Michael Howard, Niall Fergusson, Norman Stone, and Jay Winter also appeared as ‘talking heads’.

Where *The Great War* had 26 episodes *1914-18* had just seven, so there was little enough space with which to work on what many military experts would say were

³¹⁰ Peter Simkins to Emma Mahoney (by email) 23 April 2004

³¹¹ Jay Winter, ‘Recent Trends in the Historiography of Britain and the First World War: Cultural History, Comparative History, Public History’ in Hartmut Berghoff & Robert von Friedeburg (eds) *Change and Inertia: Britain Under the Impact of the Great War* (Bodenheim, 1998), pp.87-97

³¹² Ibid.

³¹³ Jay Winter & Blaine Baggett, *1914-18 the Great War and the Shaping of the Twentieth Century* (London: BBC, 1996)

³¹⁴ *1914-18* BBC2 Mondays 7.00pm from 11 November to 23 December 1996

more important points. The primacy of cultural and social history over military details was due to the influence of the series' principal historian Dr Jay Winter. Whilst Tony Essex and Gordon Watkins had sought to produce a developing philosophy on war and to give an amount of the political, social and economic history of the twentieth century, Jay Winter's cultural emphasis jarred with the work of many military historians.³¹⁵ Once again, particular points of contention were the programmes that discussed the battle of the Somme and the events of 1918. The emphasis on a 'people's history' was underscored by the visual design of the opening sequence which features close-up shots of the faces of cheerful soldiers, women ammunition workers, military commanders, injured soldiers and children. The series also starts with a film sequence about the poet Wilfred Owen and his death shortly before the end of the war, emphasising that he was one of the 'lost generation' destroyed by the conflict, the events to which every disastrous element of the twentieth century can be traced.

[Play video clip 7: 1914-18]

The British version disposed with film sequences which filled gaps in the visual narrative with shots of purely atmospheric pieces such as clouds drifting over houses, or a candle flickering in a dark corner of a mock Edwardian set. However, the BBC version was still too arty for many.³¹⁶ However, still bearing a grudge from his experience on *The Great War*, Noble Frankland pronounced that *1914-18* was 'not only as good as Tony Essex's version but better.'³¹⁷ But Frankland was in the minority. The press drew much less favourable comparisons between *The Great War* and *1914-1918*, underlining that the genre of Great War documentary was tired: 'The story starts in 1914 with the Great War – doesn't it always? Roll montage and credits, men with improbable moustaches and hats that look like practical jokes, big bangs, blokes in kilts getting out of holes, women waving goodbye to trains. We're in the Big Past Country.'³¹⁸ The *Times* outspoken columnist A.A.Gill, a self-proclaimed fan of *The Great War* who in 1964 'had to lie about my age to stay up and watch it' did

³¹⁵ Asa Briggs, *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom: Volume V: Competition 1955-1974* (Oxford: OUP, 1995), p.416, also see Jay Winter, *The Experience of World War I* (London: Papermac, 1989)

³¹⁶ Peter Simkins to Emma Mahoney (by email) 23 April 2004

³¹⁷ Noble Frankland, *Historian at War*, pp.185-6

³¹⁸ *Sunday Times* 17 November 1996 pp.9-10

not think that *1914-18* came anywhere near the first series.³¹⁹ *1914-18* was labelled a ‘puny, sick, ill-disciplined, gutless shower [...] American money and sensibility have made this the social services war, the group therapy to end all group therapy.’³²⁰ After the first episode on the causes of the conflict Gill proclaimed that

Clever men have written weighty tomes, but they all seem to have missed the fact that, according to this film, it was down to the Kaiser’s unhappy childhood, German dress designers and the rise of feminism. Presumably we’ll be getting the pivotal role of ethnic minorities, the differently abled, and those with eating disorders and dyslexia in future programmes. This is the Great War as remembered by Oprah Winfrey [...] This was risible, dumbing television, with its pointless made up sets, Blue Peter insight and research, and wasted sound bite experts. It would be simply forgettable or ignorable if it wasn’t the froth on a huge wave of distasteful, sentimental prurience, centred on the First World War, the Somme as chic horror.³²¹

Gill contrasted the first episode of *1914-18* with that year’s Remembrance Day service, which has been televised on BBC1 since 1946. Compared with the high emotion of *1914-18* and Dame Judi Dench’s ‘hopeless and inappropriate’ narration, Remembrance Day was ‘Perfectly shot, perfectly measured and paced. Tom Fleming’s narration delivered a monologue with observations that were pitched at exactly the right level, never descending into bathos or climbing to sentimentality. It elicited tears and gratitude without manipulation. Whatever the BBC gets wrong, it gets these big occasions so right that I almost forgive it everything.’³²² In contrast to the ‘pretentious nonsense’ of *1914-18*, after 32 years of war documentaries since *The Great War*, the writer appeared to find that he could only stomach the raw and relatively unmediated form of memory as the Cenotaph ceremony.³²³

The *Times Educational Supplement* thought that *1914-18* was an ‘Elegy for a lost generation’ and emphasised that it was made in conjunction with the BBC’s Education department which invited students to participate in a ‘war memorial

³¹⁹ Ibid.

³²⁰ Ibid.

³²¹ Ibid.

³²² Ibid.

³²³ Ibid.

project' at the Imperial War Museum with BBC Education and Middlesex University. The *TES* also praised the compilation of archive film and other contemporary documents, as well as the narration, and the 'lucid' explanation of the war's origins, in addition to the change of emphasis from earlier histories to fit a National Curriculum-friendly view of women, ethnic minorities, the working class and left-wing groups. The paper believed that what endured most from the series was 'the suffering', and that 'there were more than enough tears to come and they are well evoked here.' It was particularly appreciative of the series opening with a letter written by Wilfred Owen to his mother: 'the greatest poet of the Great War, who saw as clearly as anyone, the *futility* of it all.'³²⁴ There were some favourable reviews for the series' cultural style. The *Observer* wrote that *1914-18* was more interesting than unreconstructed military history because it was 'a tapestry of faces and voices' that 'takes us out of the diplomats' cabinet and into the backstreets of Europe where, also, history was made'.³²⁵

1914-18 made little impact on British national discourse about Britain's role in the First World War because the visual design and cultural bias of the series merely reinforced the received view of the fighting on the Western Front. The *Radio Times* opened its review with a quote by the German artist Otto Dix, a critic of the war and a 'voice' used as a testimony in *1914-1918*: 'Rats, barbed wire, fleas, shells, bombs, underground caves, blood, liquor, mice, cats, artillery, filth, bullets, mortars, fire, and steel: that is what war is. It is all the work of the devil.' The article sums up the course of the war as shown by the series as 'from boded beginnings to an inconclusive end, with a sober survey of the heartbreak in between.' The *Radio Times* underlines the series emphasis on the futility of it all by quoting another 'voice' from the series, that of Australian infantry officer Cyril Lawrence: 'The boys will come marching home. Upon the doorsteps and at the gates there will be loving hearts and arms to gather them in. But think again. There will be empty doorways and gateways [...] and behind many a window will be a mother whose boy is not coming up the street.'³²⁶

³²⁴ *Times Education Supplement* 22 November 1996 p.10 my emphasis

³²⁵ *Observer Life Magazine* 10 November 1996 p.84

³²⁶ *Radio Times* 9-15 November 1996 pp.37-38

There was no such approval from Correlli Barnett. He lamented that the programme was co-produced by the BBC Education Department because ‘this politically correct telly tract will be fed to our young in schools and universities as “history”.’ The man who wrote eight of the 26 episodes of *The Great War* and received the Screenwriters’ Guild Award for best television documentary in 1965 with John Terraine said that *1914-18* was ‘a turkey if considered as a television production and a Britannocentric muddle if considered as history’. Barnett could not stomach the prominence of ‘whingeing’ and ‘entirely unrepresentative’ poets Siegfried Sassoon and Wilfred Owen and that the series was ‘content to trot out yet again the downbeat view about the war cherished by the ‘progressive’ intelligentsia since the 1920s.’ (However, poetry written by both Sassoon and Owen were used in Episode 17 in *The Great War*.) The script, Barnett thought, was ‘plodding and cliché-ridden’, the commentary ‘lugubrious’, Dench’s narration was ‘schoolmistressy’, and Mason Daring’s score was ‘funereal.’ The absence of any explanation of the political or strategic dynamics of the war did not help it in the eyes of this particular military historian, who was so irritated by Jay Winter’s role as expert ‘anchor’ that he wanted to ‘hang one on his hooter’.³²⁷ Simkins believes that *1914-18* is exemplary of the dangers in television history documentary production where funding comes from a variety of political and social endowment groups who all have their own agenda as to how their money should be used.³²⁸

1914-18 represented a paradigm shift towards a more cultural, comparative and public history of the Great War. The series reflected the changes that have taken place in the historiography of the conflict since the ‘memory boom’ of the early 1990s. In 1998, Jay Winter explained that the nature of these shifts became apparent to him during his involvement in the production of *1914-18*. Winter described the series as ‘self-consciously and provocatively different’ from other visual accounts of the Great War, in which the cultural aspects of the war’s chronology are emphasised and visualised: ‘We were commissioned to present cultural history, and that is precisely what we did [...] We “sold” cultural history, both to sponsors and audiences, as the exploration of the hopes and dreams, the ideas and aspirations, the exhilaration and despair, both of

³²⁷ *Spectator* 18 January 1997 pp.18-19

³²⁸ For the problems of funding in an increasingly commercialised market see Richard Kilborn and John Izod, *An Introduction to Television Documentary* (Manchester: MUP, 1997), pp.165-189

those remote from power and those who led them. Cultural history, we insisted, is the story of the way they made sense of the war and its consequences.’³²⁹

1914-18 came directly from what Winter called ‘the new cultural history of the war.’ Following those scholars who were stimulated to write about the Great War after the Second World War and the Vietnam War, such as Paul Fussell and Eric Leed, *1914-18* was an attempt to alter the historical landscape of the war. Winter asserted that they had ‘redefined the Great War as an event which transformed language, shifted radically the boundaries between the public and private realms, obliterated the distinction between civilian and military targets, occasioned witch hunts for internal enemies, challenged gender divisions, and opened a new phase in the history of race and empire.’³³⁰ This field has been extended by Modris Eksteins and Samuel Hynes, as well as Jean-Jacques Becker, Marc Ferro, George Mosse, Antoine Prost and Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau. All of these scholars have created a new cultural history of the war which jettisons the distinctions between ‘high’ and ‘popular’ culture as well as those between political, economic and military history. Nevertheless, reviewers could not accept this new approach because they could not help but compare it to the war’s established grand narrative series *The Great War*.

The Great War enters the 21st Century

After the repeats of *The Great War* in the early 1970s, the series languished in the BBC Library unless an application was made to the BBC to rent a viewing theatre at Broadcasting House for the purpose of legitimate research. A.A.Gill fumed in his *Times* column about the problems he had trying to obtain a copy of *The Great War* in 1996, as an antidote to watching *1914-18*, but he would have to wait another six years before its release on VHS and DVD. He decided that the BBC’s hidden agenda was driven by increasing the value of its library stock: as the number of channels proliferated and the arrival of digital television and satellite became established, the expected the demand for ready-made programmes would rise and increase the value of archives. Gill complained that ‘Auntie doesn’t want to risk alienating her rich

³²⁹ Jay Winter, ‘Recent Trends in the Historiography of Britain and the First World War: Cultural History, Comparative History, Public History’, pp.87-97

³³⁰ Ibid.

suitors by giving you or me one-night stands. But the archive is valuable in another way too; it is the single greatest repository of the defining cultural form of our century. It is like having the Vatican in a cellar or keeping Beethoven symphonies, Mozart operas and Dickens novels in a box. No, it's more than that – it's like someone coming and taking your photograph album and saying you can't see it because somebody else wants to buy it.'³³¹

It has been suggested that after years of pressure to release *The Great War* the BBC finally relented in response to forthcoming series such as Channel Four's *The First World War* and Channel Five's *World War One in Colour*, both broadcast in 2003. Perhaps the BBC was unwilling to spend the time and money to make another series that could match the new breed from independent channels, and instead chose to release the widely acknowledged classic. However, as Roger Smither, Keeper of the Film and Video Archive at the Imperial War Museum has underlined, *The Great War* was made 'in an era when television was still a largely live and repeat-free medium, the producers had no reason to anticipate endless re-runs, let alone domestic sales.'³³² Therefore, no agreements were made to facilitate the series' future usage, the reason behind the copyright difficulties that were cited as hindering further broadcasts of *The Great War*.

The Great War was released on VHS and DVD in 2002, and the BBC announced the series was to be shown on BBC2 and the satellite channel BBC4 in 2003.³³³ In a BBC press release in 2002, Laurence Rees, Creative Director for BBC History, commented that '*The Great War* was a landmark in television history in the 1960s, offering the post-war generation a new way of experiencing the turning points in history.' Described as 'the definitive film account of the world-shattering events of 1914-1918' the BBC was keen to underline that it was reshowing 'a documentary masterpiece'. An introductory documentary *That Was The Great War That Was* was also scheduled,

³³¹ *Sunday Times* 17 November 1996 pp.9-10

³³² Roger Smither, 'Why is So Much Television History about War?' in David Cannadine (ed) *History and the Media* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), pp.51-66

³³³ BBC WAC T32/1,144/1– memo from Head of Documentary Programmes Richard Causton dated 21 April 1978 details the problems of tying up and tracing stills and shots used. It advises that any production office that wants to find out who holds the copyright of certain films should be referred to the PasBs [programmes as broadcast] 'and informed there is no shot list'. This made it particularly difficult for the series to be broadcast or released on VHS. However, shot lists do exist in BBC files.

featuring interviews with some of the series' production team, 'the cream of BBC talent in the 1960s.'³³⁴ However, erratic scheduling and the outbreak of the second war in Iraq meant that the series was missed by many who had waited years for the series to reappear.³³⁵

Military historian John Hughes-Wilson referred to the series as 'buried treasure' and gave thanks that '*The Great War* did not end up in a Wood Lane skip or recycled to record some episode of *Terry & June*.' He asserted that despite the length of time since the programme was last put on the air, two things struck him: how differently the Great War was treated in 1964, and of how the soldiers talked about their experiences 1914-1918: 'The veterans interviewed are not old men quavering on their dotage. On the contrary, in 1964 they are astonishingly youthful. They are vigorous, lively voices, alert, unsentimental and refreshingly candid.'³³⁶ The series was generally acknowledged to have withstood the test of time and was lauded for its 'clarity, the intelligence of the script and the lack of histrionics.'³³⁷ Another review remarked 'What is most amazing is how modern it feels, even now. Unlike many of today's documentaries, there is no star historian presenter, but the artful mix of talking heads, archive footage and quotes read by actors could have been concocted yesterday. The magic ingredient though is unique and a little dated – the narrator Sir Michael Redgrave's voice, deep and sonorous with a constant hint of emotional quaver. Forty years on it still gives me goose bumps.'³³⁸ Another television critic harked back to Redgrave's 'mellifluous commentary...“the unseen flame ran swiftly along the fuse...the [British] cabinet still toiling and the muddy byways of Fermanagh and Tyrone...foresight and happy chance now came together” Those were the days.'³³⁹

In 1964, *The Great War* series emphasised that the BBC had cast itself in the dual role of educator as well as a platform for public remembrance. The series was the biggest television project of its time as well as the largest to deal exclusively with the fighting

³³⁴ BBC Press Release 21 October 2002 – www.bbc.co.uk/print/pressoffice/pressreleases/stories/2002

³³⁵ Taff Gillingham to Emma Mahoney (by email) 26 February 2004

³³⁶ John Hughes-Wilson, 'How the Great War Was Lost and Found' www.firstworldwar.com/features/greatwarlost.htm (accessed 16 March 2005)

³³⁷ *Times TT2* 24 March 2003 p.19

³³⁸ *Times TTPL* 22 February 2003 p.28

³³⁹ *Times TT2* 3 March 2003 p.19

of 1914-1918. It still holds the record for being the longest-running television documentary about war, distilling 1561 days of the First World War that involved 26 nations, 65 million combatants in 16 theatres of war into 26 episodes over 17 screen hours. *The Great War* series is significant for two central reasons; its sheer scale and technological innovation secured a place in broadcasting history as one of only two major historical series that are mentioned in the appendix of the official history *The BBC: the first fifty years* under 'BBC milestones'³⁴⁰ and the series laid the foundations for the powerful self-generative force of televised remembrance. It was understood by those involved with the organisation of the series that *The Great War* would neutralise the wide variations in interpretations apparent in war literature.³⁴¹ Yet despite the balanced and masterful script, and the innovative use of veterans and archive film, the series' visual power resonated with what already existed in British minds after decades of prose, poetry, theatre, film, music and art. In the 1960s, viewers were fascinated by *The Great War*, but the overwhelming visual design and emotional impact of the series resonated with ideas about 1914-1918 that were embedded in Britain's cultural landscape in the inter-war years.

The series quickly became part of the history it commented upon, and the BBC received thousands of letters asking for repeat showings which were granted in the 1970s when it was described as 'the finest documentary in television history.'³⁴² Nevertheless, it was not until 2001 that the series went to general release on VHS and DVD, and another two years for a run on BBC2 in February 2003. *The Great War* was welcomed back by the majority of the British viewing audience in a wave of nostalgia. The series' place in British national memory was confirmed by the documentary of its making, *That Was The Great War That Was* broadcast 22 February 2003.³⁴³ The publicity for the hour-long film, a prelude to the first episode, described how hard it was to make 'a suitable *monument* to such a traumatic period in history.'³⁴⁴ Viewers were even promised that while it was scheduled for broadcast

³⁴⁰ Stephen Badsey, 'The Great War since *The Great War*', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 22, 1 (March 2002), pp.37-45

³⁴¹ IWM Documents, Department of Film, Dr Christopher Roads (IWM) to Undersecretary of State for War September 2 1963

³⁴² LHCMA LH 13/62 *Daily Telegraph* 17 May 1975

³⁴³ *That Was The Great War That Was* Saturday 22 February 2003 BBC2 5.40pm

³⁴⁴ *Radio Times* 22-28 February 2003 p.64

before the 9.00pm watershed the film ‘naturally includes some horrendous images that are deeply distressing.’³⁴⁵

The Great War still represents television’s grand narrative of the First World War. Then as now, the size of the series’ subject, as well as the series’ actual size, has made *The Great War* the nation’s public war memorial to the dead of 1914-1918: it is therefore sacred, beyond the reach of critical discourse. It is for this reason that the series is still the benchmark against which every successor is compared.

³⁴⁵ Ibid.

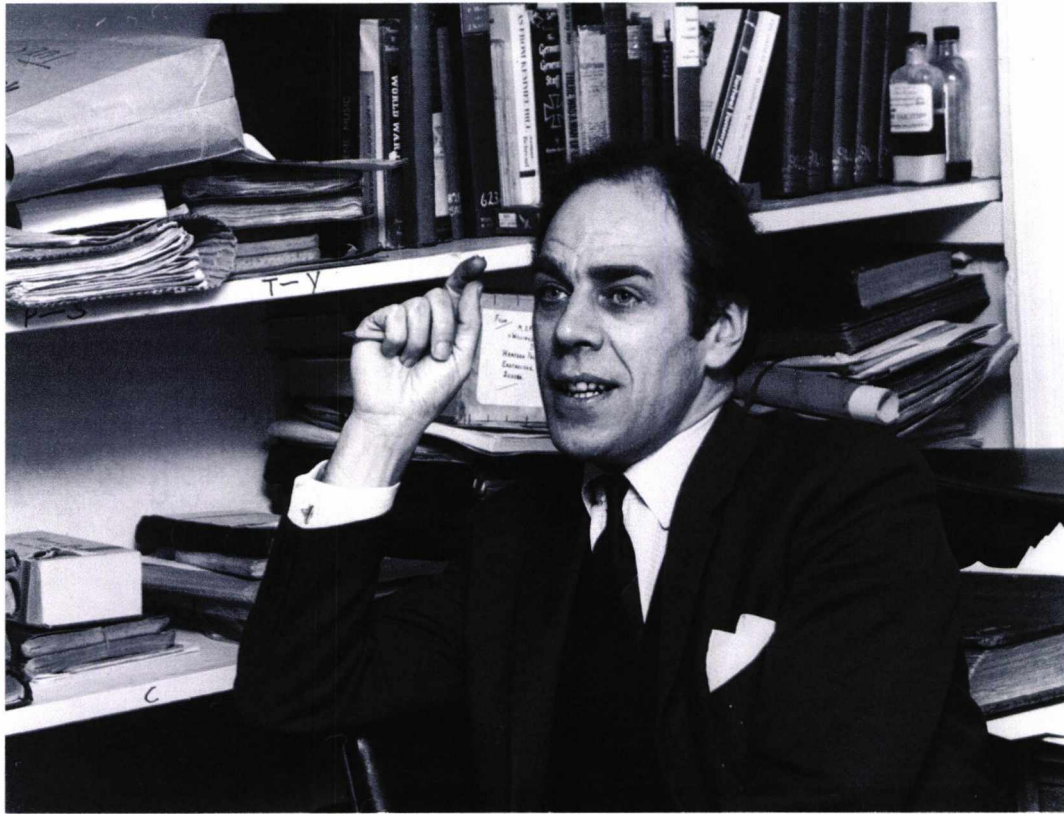


Fig.6: Tony Essex (1925-1975) - Producer, *The Great War* (BBC, 1964)



Fig.7: Gordon Watkins (1920 – 1992) - Producer, *The Great War* (BBC, 1964)



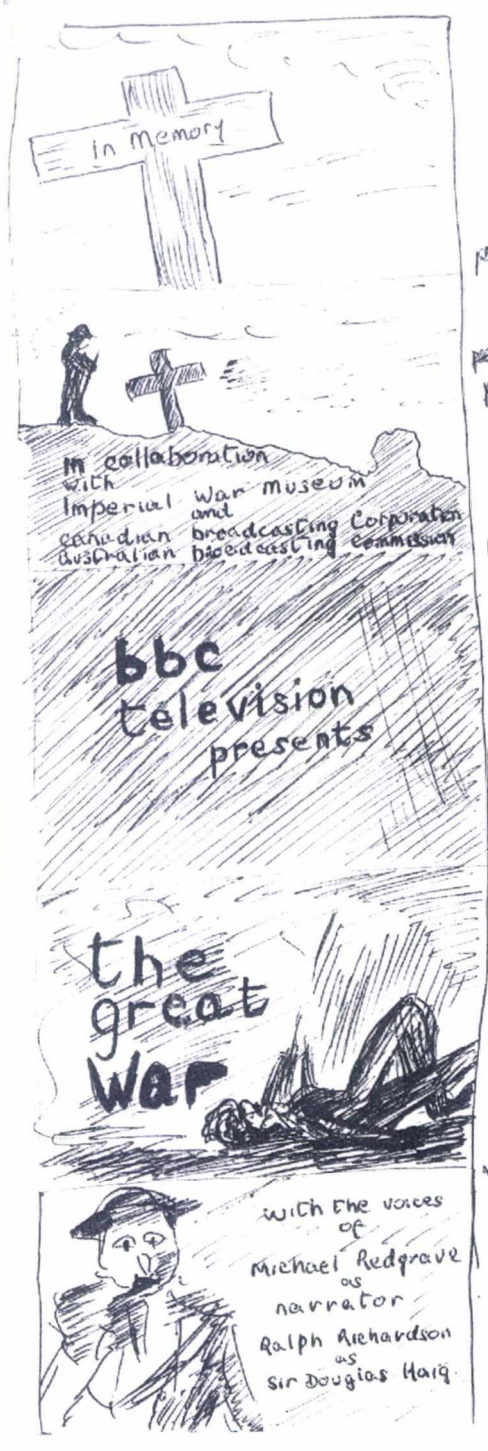
Fig.8: The 'Silhouetted Soldier' in *The Great War* opening sequence



Fig.9: The 'Staring Soldier' in *The Great War* opening scene



Fig.10: The uniformed skeleton-corpse in *The Great War* opening scene



4 ft hold.
 6 ft track cut.
 + ft stop hold
 10 ft hold.
 1 ft fade in in cell with
 sup war museum.
 4 ft hold.
 1 ft fade in Canadian Broadcasting
 Australian Broadcasting
 Commission.
 5 ft hold.
 1 ft fade cbc oase etc & tilt as fade start
 1 ft tilt these continue then.
 7 ft fade in BBC Television Place
 6 ft hold
 1 ft hold.
 3 ft continue track tilt.
 1 ft stop as skeleton walking &
 7 ft fade in main title.
 4 ft hold backing, then start
 track
 min walking to muddy trench.
 4 ft further close title
 3 ft pay to
 min backing to MLS soldier
 Reach soldier, stop & fade in roll
 1 ft fade in roll.
 35 ft roller, with very slow track
 in as soldier's face.
 Rose roller, &
 1 ft fade in last title Episode
 title.
 6 ft hold.
 1 ft low title.
 8 ft low walking to black, still track

Fig. 11: The sketch for opening sequence of *The Great War* drawn by Tony Essex in 1963 (BBC WAC T32/1139/1)



Fig.12: The original photograph (Imperial War Museum - Q1)

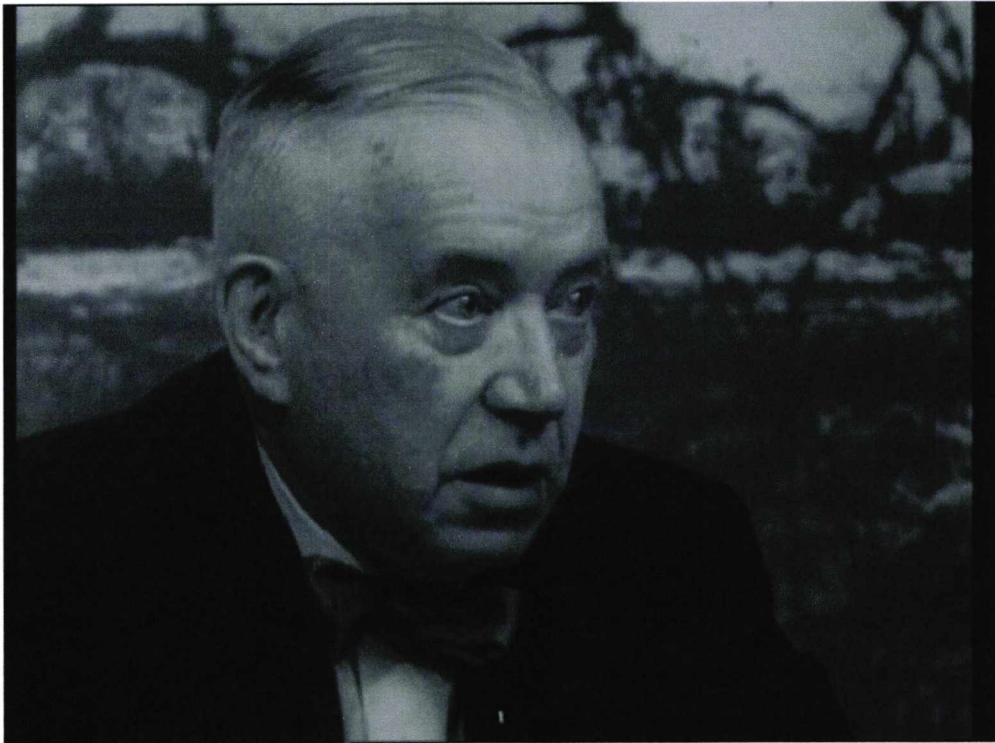


Fig.13: A veteran on *The Great War* (episode 13)

Veterans

A large pool of personal narratives about the First World War has been collected by television documentaries, but historians' views of veterans on film have continued to be contentious. In the 1960s, A.J.P. Taylor spoke of them rather unkindly as 'young men drooling over their lost youth'³⁴⁶ but in 2003 they were described as 'national grandparents.'³⁴⁷ By recording the selected recollections of those who have experienced significant historical events, television has shown that while it is difficult to establish the links between collective and individual experiences, 'the traumatic effects of this century cannot be understood without reference to their effects on the individual.'³⁴⁸

Indeed, televised oral history is not confined to the First World War. Many other programmes of this nature have proved popular with viewers: for example, a six-part series to commemorate the liberation of the largest Nazi death camp - *Auschwitz: the Nazis and the 'Final Solution'* (BBC, 2005) - was based on testimonies from more than 100 concentration camp survivors, and it achieved an average audience of more than 4 million viewers.³⁴⁹ The documentary *Dunkirk: the Soldier's Story* (BBC, 2004), also consisted of a composite of war narratives from interviews conducted with D-Day veterans for the making of the three-hour drama-documentary *Dunkirk* (BBC, 2004), which was watched by more than 4 million viewers. The internet has also extended this realm of public history. During the VE Day celebrations in the spring of 2005, the BBC's 'People's War' project actively appealed for anyone who remembers Britain at war 1939-1945 to record their memories online.³⁵⁰

Since the early 1960s veteran eyewitnesses have played a significant role in British televisual representations of 1914-1918. Television interviews with men *who were there* are so effective because seeing the informants themselves create a dimension of

³⁴⁶ Richard Holmes, *Tommy: The British Soldier on the Western Front* (London: Harper Collins, 2004), p.xxiii

³⁴⁷ Dr Toby Haggith, IAMHIST conference 'It may be history, but is it true?' 15 October 2004 Imperial War Museum, London

³⁴⁸ Omer Bartov, 'Trauma and Absence: France and Germany, 1914-1918' (pp.347-358) in Paul Addison & Peter Calder (eds) *A Time to Kill: The Soldiers' Experience of War in the West 1939-1945*, (London: Pimlico, 1997), p.348

³⁴⁹ <http://media.guardian.co.uk/overnights/story/0,7965,1398988,00.html> (accessed 24 June 2005)

³⁵⁰ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/dna/ww2/> (accessed 25 May 2005)

historical immediacy.³⁵¹ They have helped give the war a more human face on television to whom viewers can respond, and in doing so ‘we would understand what war is like, and how it *feels* [...] the reality [is] in the personal witness of the men who were there.’³⁵² Veterans on camera were a prerequisite for any documentary about the war from the 1980s, but their memories have been utilised in a number of ways. For example, in *Lions Led by Donkeys* (Channel 4, 1985) and *Haig: the Unknown Soldier* (BBC, 1996), veterans were used to give the ordinary Tommy’s opinion about their former commander, Field Marshal Haig.

By the mid-1980s, the gradual re-recognition of remembrance rituals such as the two-minute silence on 11 November (as opposed to the nearest Sunday) gave rise to memorial programmes which underlined the sacrifices these men and their dead comrades made during the war. *Gone for A Soldier* (STV, 1985), *Very Exceptional Soldiers* (1986) and *A Time for Remembrance* (Channel 4, 1989) were all documentaries broadcast as memorials to the men who fought on the Western Front. By the 1990s, the ‘Memory Boom’ was encouraged by the official acknowledgement of post-traumatic stress syndrome and the increasing need to identify victims of past events. Elements of what Pierre Nora had first called ‘ego history’ - the image of the self not only marketed but consumed by the self – meant that there was increasing interest in the memories of forefathers who witnessed a small part of the cataclysmic events of the first half of the twentieth century.³⁵³

Televised oral histories of the Great War were sparked by *The Great War*, the first series to feature veterans of the conflict speaking of their own war experiences slotted into the series’ narrative. [See fig.13] *The Great War* was the first television series to publicly appeal for eyewitnesses to the fighting of 1914-1918 in the national press.³⁵⁴ Producer Gordon Watkins told his team that ‘Eye-witness accounts are the most vivid of all historical sources. At their liveliest, they not only present facts, they create atmosphere [...] Yet although they are the most vivid of historical sources, they are not necessarily the most reliable [...] The best use of eye-witness accounts is to

³⁵¹ Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past* 2nd Edition, (Oxford: OUP, 1988), p.235

³⁵² Samuel Hynes, *The Soldier’s Tale: Bearing Witness to Modern War* (London: Pimlico, 1997), pp.xii-xiii

³⁵³ Alan Milward, *Times Literary Supplement* 14 April 2000 p.8

³⁵⁴ *Radio Times* 28 May 1964 p.6

examine them carefully [...] and then relate them to both other eye-witness accounts (where they exist) and to other kinds of historical source material [...] official documents, statistics and fiction.³⁵⁵ Correspondence sent in to the series by veterans was often accompanied by badges, souvenirs and keepsakes, and letters continued to pour in after the series had broadcast. In the late 1960s, 170 collections were presented to the Imperial War Museum, Lambeth.³⁵⁶ In addition, the Imperial War Museum's Sound Archive has in its catalogue 275 interviews recorded for *The Great War* 1963-1964.³⁵⁷ Many of those testimonies can now be downloaded as 'audio extracts' from the museum's website.³⁵⁸

As a direct result of *The Great War* series, testimonies of men not available to the public in any quantity before the 1960s are still available at the Imperial War Museum as well as online. In this way veterans on the screen have emphasised the development of history on television as an advanced form of oral history in the post-literate era. This trend was further encouraged by *Gone for a Soldier* (BBC, 1980) and *Lions Led By Donkeys* (Channel 4, 1985), the first documentaries to prioritise veterans' recollections and opinions of the war and its conduct. Popular histories of the Great War incorporated the experiences of the average British Tommy: *Gone for a Soldier* was based on Lyn Macdonald's popular veteran-led history *They Called it Passchendaele* (1978) just as *Battle of the Somme* was heavily influenced by Martin Middlebrook's book *The First Day on the Somme* (1971).³⁵⁹

As the history of 1914-1918 was reduced to a single set of easily communicated myths, the memory of the war passed away from the memoirists as the conflict and its legacy became 'a paradigm case for thinking about what is the very essence of history: the weight of the dead on the living.'³⁶⁰ This weight reached an apex in November 1998 when the eightieth anniversary of the armistice was marked by an

³⁵⁵ BBC WAC T32/1152/1 Gordon Watkins to Tony Essex 16 December 1963

³⁵⁶ I am very grateful to Roger Smither, Keeper of Film at the Imperial War Museum, for providing me with this information.

³⁵⁷ Roger Smither, 'Why is So Much Television History About War?' in David Cannadine (ed) *History and the Media* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004, pp.51-66

³⁵⁸ <http://www.iwmcollections.org.uk/> (accessed 14 April 2005)

³⁵⁹ Lyn Macdonald, *They Called it Passchendaele* (London: Penguin, 1978), and Martin Middlebrook, *The First Day on the Somme* (London: Penguin, 1971)

³⁶⁰ Stéphane Andoin-Rouzeau & Annette Becker, *1914-1918 Understanding the Great War* (London: Profile, 2000), p.1

upsurge in public commemoration across Western Europe, most visibly in France and Britain in which the war's veterans were given a particularly prominent role. In public remembrance ceremonies, press interviews and specially made television documentaries such as *Veterans: the Last Survivors of the Great War* (BBC, 1998), old soldiers were at the core of remembrance rituals. The deaths of many veterans of the First World War coincided almost exactly with the moment at which their eyewitness accounts began to be given a more significant place in national Great War mythology: this had significant implications for how their accounts were presented and for the memories rehearsed by veterans themselves.³⁶¹

Technological developments since the 1960s and 1970s, such as audio-visual and computer-based data banks, have preserved the 'voice' of the victims of 20th century tragedies such as both world wars, but most specifically the Nazi Holocaust. By listening and viewing their stories we can touch their lives and their tragedies. These voices had been marginal during the 1940s and 1950s, but the transition to post-war stability in the 1960s and 1970s there was room for the 'victims' to come forward and be heard.³⁶² The role of the veteran was therefore celebrated and revitalised by the media and popular writers, but at the same time their prominence lead some academics to examine the dynamic relationship between memory and myth. Indeed, television's use of soldier's tales has buttressed the traditional narratives of the conflict which reflect the recent developments in published oral history since the 1980s.

Lyn Macdonald's *1914-1918: Voices and Images of the Great War* (1988), Richard van Emden and Steve Humphries' *Veterans: the Last Survivors of the Great War* (1998) and Max Arthur's *Forgotten Voices of the Great War* (2002) are just some examples of the use of eyewitness accounts to create composite war narratives. The tagline of *Forgotten Voices of the Great War* was 'a new history of WW1 [*sic.*] in the words of the men and women who were there', and the cover underlines its official production in association with the Imperial War Museum. The material for the book was gleaned from the sound archives of the Imperial War Museum which the book's

³⁶¹ See Dan Todman, *The Great War: Myth and Memory* (London: Hambledon & London, 2005)

³⁶² Jay Winter, 'The Generation of Memory: Reflections on the "Memory Boom" in Contemporary Historical Studies' *Bulletin of the German Historical Institute* 27 Fall 2000

publicity claims ‘contain the forgotten voices of a generation no longer with us’ and that ‘historians have only used a fraction’ of this resource.³⁶³ Arthur claimed that his role in collecting together the memories of the war generation was ‘to try to *bring to life* again their vivid memories.’³⁶⁴ Indeed, memories represent the book’s only material. Organised chronologically by year, each recollection is a part of the metanarrative of the war without any attempt to give some impartial historical context.

What is most striking about *Forgotten Voices of the Great War* is historian Sir Martin Gilbert’s introduction. Apart from his claim that ‘One reads this book with bleeding eyes’, he is at pains to emphasise the novelty of what Max Arthur, or rather his team of researchers, in producing published oral testimonies. Clearly he was not familiar with the work of Lyn Macdonald, Malcolm Brown or Richard van Emden. However, the most pertinent aspect of Gilbert’s gushing introduction is that he selects a number of storylines that affected him ‘by their power and vividness.’ The plots he selected outlined a number of Great War myths including ‘a boy of sixteen lying about his age to enable him to enlist, an undergraduate convinced – in August 1914 – that the war would be over in time for him to start the new university term on 7 October, soldiers on leave, in civilian clothes, being taunted by women with the white feather of cowardice, and a soldier reflecting on his charmed life and that of his friend under bombardment “because nothing struck Johnny, nothing struck me”.’³⁶⁵

The Nature of Memory

Historian Richard Holmes is concerned that these sorts of themes have come to represent the total experience of the war he summed up as ‘Up to my neck in muck and bullets; rats as big as footballs; the sergeant major was a right bastard; all my mates were killed.’³⁶⁶ Although Holmes featured several veterans in his series *The Western Front* (BBC, 1999), he has suggested that ‘sometimes they tell us [these stories] because they have heard it themselves.’³⁶⁷ Veterans on television have also

³⁶³ Max Arthur, *Forgotten Voices of the Great War* (London: Ebury, 2002) – inside cover

³⁶⁴ Author’s preface, p.x, my emphasis

³⁶⁵ Ibid. ‘Introduction’

³⁶⁶ Richard Holmes, *Tommy*, p.xxiii

³⁶⁷ Ibid.

encouraged the pretext that only the men who have lived through the war have the moral and historical right to discuss it.³⁶⁸ Military historian Gary Sheffield has said that veterans speaking in television documentaries are often ‘historically worthless’, suggesting instead that programmes should use footage of veterans recorded in the 1960s and 1970s.³⁶⁹ Sheffield reflects the concern of many military experts about the development of ‘professional veterans’ who consistently tell the same rounded stories of what purports to be their own individual war experiences. Holmes has concurred that ‘Sometimes survivors play their roles all too well: they become Veterans, General Issue, neatly packed with what we wanted to hear, exploding at the touch of a tape-recorder button or the snap of a TV documentarist’s clapper-board.’³⁷⁰

The historians’ task was made much more difficult because during the war soldiers set themselves up as chroniclers of their own experience. One documentary producer recalled that during interviews with veterans for *Shell Shock* (Channel 4, 1998) she found it ‘bloody difficult because they [veterans] have their own story they’ve lived with for so long. It’s difficult to interrupt and say you’re after something that’s very specific.’³⁷¹ Some documentary makers, such as Malcolm Brown, have long been reluctant to include veterans on camera because ‘they know what tune they’re expected to sing to.’³⁷² Indeed, Brown’s *Battle of the Somme* (BBC, 1976) did not feature any old soldiers because the idea of the programme was to show that the war was fought by young men. This was heavily emphasised in the programme’s script which pronounced that ‘At last the moment had arrived for which the young men of 1914 had volunteered. Men in their twenties, men in their thirties and boys in their teens [...] Junior officers who might have been at school a year before, stood looking at their watches, whistles in their mouths as the last seconds ticked away. Now the war was no longer in the hands of the generals and the commanders, but in the hands of these young men.’³⁷³

Twenty-seven years later *The First World War* (Channel 4, 2003) did not include veteran’s testimonies because its Historical Consultant Professor Hew Strachan

³⁶⁸ Stéphane Andoin-Rouzeau & Annette Becker, *1914-1918*, p.37-39

³⁶⁹ Gary Sheffield to Emma Mahoney (interview in person) 5 October 2004

³⁷⁰ Richard Holmes, *Tommy*, p.xxiii

³⁷¹ Sally Lindsay, Assistant Producer *Shell Shock* quoted in *Broadcast* 6 November 1998 p.34

³⁷² Malcolm Brown to Emma Mahoney (by telephone) 9 August 2004

³⁷³ BBC WAC *Battle of the Somme* script p.23

believes that 'First World War documentaries have become the preserve of the veteran. Centenarians are filmed, recording their memories, often for little better reason than the fact that they are centenarians: they have survived.' Strachan added that

[w]hat they say can be extraordinarily lucid and almost unbearably moving. But in many ways it can also be misleading. Historians who would pooh-pooh the use of memoirs written in the inter-war years, saying entirely rightly that we should be using primary documents written in the war itself, are for some reason prepared to suspend that judgement when dealing with witnesses eighty and more years after the events they describe [...] often mediated by experience since 1918 and almost certainly shaped by the writings of others.³⁷⁴

Strachan believed that documentaries tell us more about the nature of memory than of history: 'What old men say on screen, however powerful, is what they feel now, not what they felt nearly 90 years ago. The soldiers that went to war in 1914 were young men. *The First World War* uses the words they spoke then and, in doing so, it forsakes the poets and the painters whose interpretations have too often stood duty for those less famous.'³⁷⁵ Strachan underlined a parallel between the memories of Great War veterans to soldiers' accounts of the Peninsular War when Sir Charles Oman noted that the recollections divided into two categories: those written before William Napier began the publication of his famous six-volume history of the war in 1828 and those written afterwards. Strachan emphasised that those who published their memoirs after 1929 had a market primed for them by Erich Maria Remarque's incredibly popular book *All Quiet on the Western Front* which was made into an Academy award winning film in 1930.

The weight given to oral history and memory has increased since the days when historians decreed that their work should flow inevitably from more solid forms of evidence. Standard academic texts such as R.G.Collingwood's *The Idea of History* (1946) and G.R.Elton's *The Practice of History* (1967) privileged factual information as 'exact knowledge', and Eric Hobsbawm described oral history as 'a remarkably

³⁷⁴ Hew Strachan & Jonathan Lewis, 'Filming the First World War' *History Today* October 2003 53 (10) pp.20-22

³⁷⁵ *Times Extra TV* 20 September 2003 p.4

slippery medium for preserving facts.³⁷⁶ More modern approaches contend that the credibility of oral testimony may often lie not in its adherence to facts but rather in its divergence from them where imagination, symbolism, and desire break in: ‘History is not just about events, or structures, or patterns of behaviour, but also about how these are experienced and remembered in the imagination [...] what people imagined happened, and also what they believe *might* have happened – their imagination of an alternative past, and so an alternative present – may be as crucial as what did happen.’³⁷⁷ Charles Carrington (1897-1990), a well-known veteran and author, freely admitted the frailty of human memory in *Soldier from the Wars Returning* (1965). He recalled that his memories of the Maurice debate in the House of Commons in May 1918 have been influenced by subsequent research rather than his own personal recollection:

‘Old men forget...’ and, alas, my intermittent First World War diary has no entry for that day. What I remember is a visual, like a silent film [...] I have now to admit that I do not recall a single word or phrase that he [Lloyd George] used or even the sound of his voice [...] The magic worked and years passed before I discovered, by reading *Hansard* and checking the figures, that his speech had been a pack of lies, defending a policy which brought death to many of my friends.³⁷⁸

Veterans’ memories became ‘inextricably linked with disillusion and pointless horror and sacrifice.’³⁷⁹ Bernard Martin’s *Poor Bloody Infantry* (1987) retrospectively dismissed his enthusiasm in joining up as soon as he became of age as the mature author of his own life experience. He rejected his young and more naïve self because he found it hard ‘to believe I could have been so stupid at the age of seventeen.’³⁸⁰ Contemporary oral historians have asserted that oral memory ‘offers a double validity in understanding a past in which myth was embedded in real experience: both

³⁷⁶ Anna Green & Kathleen Troup, *The Houses of History* (Manchester: MUP, 1999), p.230

³⁷⁷ Paul Thompson *The Voice of the Past* (Oxford: OUP, 1988) p.139

³⁷⁸ Charles Carrington, *Soldier From the Wars Returning* (London: Hutchinson, 1965), p.216 – I am grateful to Professor Gary Sheffield for reminding me about this passage.

³⁷⁹ Janet Watson, *Fighting Different Wars: Experience, Memory and the First World War in Britain* (Cambridge: CUP, 2004), p.262

³⁸⁰ Bernard Martin, *Poor Bloody Infantry: A Subaltern on the Western Front 1916-1917* (London: Murray, 1987), pp.3-5

growing from it, and helping to shape its perception.³⁸¹ Whilst recollections are told from the vantage point of the present they need to make sense of the past by selecting, ordering, and simplifying to make ‘a construction of coherent narrative whose logic works to draw the life story towards the fable.’³⁸² The juxtaposition of private and public myths can show that they are bound together in a perpetual exchange. Therefore, memory needs to be seen both as evidence of the past as well as a continuing historical force in the present.³⁸³

After *The Great War*, veterans became staple features of memorial programmes which reached their apogee in *Veterans: the last Survivors of the Great War* (BBC, 1998). The two-part programme centred on onscreen testimonies from approximately 43 men and women who had direct experience of the Western Front, and by November 2000 there were fewer than forty veterans still alive. Some of the remaining veterans are regarded as minor celebrities, regularly invited to royal receptions, local events and pilgrimages to First World War battlefields. Their deaths are reported in the local and national press, and lists are read at Western Front Association local meetings and published in their journal *Stand To!*³⁸⁴ In November 2003, it was reported that there were 27 First World War veterans remaining, and at the 2003 Cenotaph service some members of the crowd said they had gone to the Whitehall service because they thought it might be the last one to feature veterans of the Great War.³⁸⁵

The increasing interest in veterans’ recollection has stood in reverse correlation to the number of those who survived the trenches: as the number of survivors decreases, the level of interest in their stories rise and their rarity value soars. Harry Patch fought at the battle of Third Ypres as a Lewis Gunner in the 7th Duke of Cornwall’s Light Infantry in 1917. [Fig.14] He has appeared in various books and programmes about the Great War as *someone who was there*. He was ‘discovered’ by author and

³⁸¹ Raphael Samuel & Paul Thompson (ed) *The Myths We Live By* (London: Routledge, 1990), pp.6-15

³⁸² Ibid.

³⁸³ Ibid.

³⁸⁴ One recent example was the publicity surrounding the death of Great War veteran Albert ‘Smiler’ Marshall, formerly of the Essex Yeomanry. He died in May 2005 at the age of 108, and he was the last surviving cavalryman who had fought at the Battle of Loos in 1915. His funeral, near his home at Ashted, Surrey, was reported in *Daily Express* 25 May 2005 p.15

³⁸⁵ *Guardian* 10 November 2003 p.5

producer Richard van Emden in 1998 after appearing in a local paper at his 100th birthday, and van Emden contacted him to see if he had fought in the war. Harry agreed to feature in van Emden's two-part series, *Veterans: the Last Survivors of the Great War* (BBC, 1998), and later *The Trench* (BBC, 2002) and *World War One in Colour* (Channel 5, 2003). He has since become something of a local celebrity. In December 2004, a local cider making company announced that they had made 106 bottles of 'Patch's Pride', producing one bottle for every year of his life.³⁸⁶ The poster to celebrate the batch of special cider features Harry smiling in the garden of his residential home in Wells, war medals pinned to his suit. [Fig.15] Harry was also present at the launch of the National Archives where he was pictured sharing a joke with the Prince of Wales, and in June 2004 he was a Guest of Honour at the Royal Bath and West Show where he read the 'Exhortation' before The Last Post and an explosion of poppies.³⁸⁷

When Henry Allingham, a Great War veteran who also appeared in *Veterans: the Last Survivors of The Great War* (BBC, 1998) was asked on national radio in 2004 how he felt about recalling his wartime experiences for the media he said 'they rouse things I want to forget. I don't want to remember so much. I wanted to forget the war, and I did. I was made to feel that if I didn't respond to what they asked me I would be disrespectful to those who gave all they had got.'³⁸⁸ Arthur Halestrap [Fig.16], of the 46th Division, Royal Engineers Signals, thought that 'people should realise that they owe something to us [soldiers] because they are living in a land of freedom where they can do what they like.'³⁸⁹ Harry Patch lost three of his closest friends in action on Pilckem Ridge, and like many ex-servicemen he found his war memories so painful he stayed silent for more than eighty years. Approximately five million men served in the war and returned home. Out of that number approximately three million men experienced quintessential horror of trench warfare on the Western Front:

Every frontline soldier experienced loss, the loss of comrades who were often intensely bonded with those who survived. The combination of this loss, often

³⁸⁶ <http://news.bbc.co.uk/> (accessed 22 December 2004)

³⁸⁷ <http://www.bathandwest.co.uk/hotnews.lasso?article=181> (accessed 14 April 2005)

³⁸⁸ BBC Radio Four, 21 June 2004. Henry Allingham, then aged 108, was interviewed on the occasion of receiving a lapel badge in recognition of his wartime experience in the Royal Navy Air Service.

³⁸⁹ Arthur Halestrap to Emma Mahoney (interview in person) 14 February 2003

horrific and witnessed at close range, with the more general effects of surviving the ‘carnival of death’ (memories of living with the dead, memories of the fear of death, close escapes from death, memories of killing) produced a complex experience of bereavement, possibly even more intense than the loss of a close relative (and many veterans have suffered that in addition).³⁹⁰

The experience of wartime comradeship meant that author Henry Williamson could not leave his war memories behind. In 1963, shortly after he had been interviewed for *The Great War*, the eleventh instalment in his acclaimed series *A Chronicle of Ancient Sunlight* was published. In *The Power of the Dead*, the lead character Philip, a thinly disguised portrait of the author, recalled that ‘the real war was the comradeship, the great chance to know the best of friendship; even as the war at home was hateful mass-ignorance led and fed by lies that were the negation of the truth and beauty of the comradeship of war.’³⁹¹ Survivors have often felt that it is their duty to relay the reasons why they went to war and the cause for which they fought. Richard van Emden believes that the veterans themselves ‘do feel that they are telling a story about their lives and those they left behind, giving form to men who would otherwise be forgotten. Almost all graves in the Commonwealth War Graves Commission cemeteries are faceless. We stand and look at the graves without any knowledge of who these men are, or how they came to be in France. The veterans tell stories which bring them back to life to a degree.’³⁹²

The definition of an interview is a talk or discussion designed to be overheard, and there are many different types of interview: live or recorded, location or studio, interviewer in or out of shot, with questions heard or removed. Whatever form of dialogic speech is employed it has been agreed that ‘the underlying advantages of interviewing remain relatively constant.’³⁹³ Interviews provide a number of possibilities to question a subject or informant, giving direct access to personal testimonies and viewpoints in encouraging more relaxed and personable styles of speaking which have proven appeal to a mass television audience because ‘the business of description involves acts of personal recollection, sometimes a kind of

³⁹⁰ Adrian Gregory, *The Silence of Memory: Armistice Day 1919-1946* (Oxford: Berg, 1994), p.19

³⁹¹ Henry Williamson, *The Power of the Dead* (London: Panther, 1963)

³⁹² Richard van Emden to Emma Mahoney (by email) 22 February 2003

³⁹³ John Corner, *Critical Ideas in Television Studies* (Oxford: OUP, 1999), p.42

remembering aloud. Where the memories are traumatic ones [...] the viewing experience can also become shocking and potentially distressing. This type of interviewing has been one of the key areas of development over the last decade, bringing both admiration for honesty and depth as well as rebuke for sensationalism and invasion of privacy.³⁹⁴

Many ex-soldiers were reabsorbed into the social fabric of post-war Britain, but a number of veterans often felt that their experiences of combat stood them apart in civilian life. In 1965, Charles Carrington, who was interviewed for *The Great War*, said his fellow veterans were 'united by a secret bond and separated from their fellows who were too old or too young to fight in the Great War. Particularly the generation of young men who were soldiers before their characters were formed, who were under twenty-five in 1914, is conscious of the distinction, for the war made them what they are.'³⁹⁵ Only 10% of men returning from the war, however, joined veterans' groups, which suggest that there is little evidence that former combatants felt the need for organised remembrance outside the official national ceremony in the immediate post-war years.³⁹⁶ Moreover, a number of veterans felt they had been let down by the country for which they had fought, especially before the acceleration of media interest around the big anniversaries. For example, a letter sent in response to the appeal for witness to appear on *The Great War*, one veteran wrote to the BBC 'I wear Mons Star so my brother late Dorsets I am late Queens Royal West Surrey we could tell you quite a lot about gratitude etc and being thrown on the rubbish heap by a grateful country we are always at home old age pensioners and forgotten, rubbing our wounds [*sic.*]³⁹⁷

Controversy over the nature of remembrance was most intense during 1930s. Encouraged by Philip Gibbs' *Realities of War* (1920), which was read widely, veterans were honoured not as heroes but as ordinary people caught in an extraordinary tragedy who wanted the true nature of the tragedy known to

³⁹⁴ Ibid. p.43

³⁹⁵ Charles Carrington, *Soldier From the Wars Returning*, p.250

³⁹⁶ Alex King, *Memorials of the Great War in Britain* (Oxford: Berg, 1998), p.221

³⁹⁷ IWM Document Archives BBC's *The Great War* collection volume FAC-FLU Letter from Albert and Ernest Fletcher of Woking to Tony Essex - undated but circa 1963-4



everyone.³⁹⁸ After the Second World War, the war of 1914-1918 was re-addressed. *The Great War* presented veterans as heroes *and* ordinary people caught in the maelstrom of the conflict, and from that point onwards British television started to give Private Tommy Atkins an increasingly prominent platform in Britain's remembering of 1914-1918. Ever decreasing in number, those that are left are saturated with requests for interviews for newspaper, radio, and television. Harry Patch told me in 2003 that he was 'browned off with it. For four years I have done nothing but talk about the war. I am getting fed up with it. Everybody comes with a tape recorder.'³⁹⁹

The inclusion of interviews with eyewitnesses like Harry is a prerequisite for contemporary historical documentaries as the living 'survivors' of landmark historical events. Soldier's records were only recently opened for public scrutiny when a new archive at the National Archives at Kew was opened in November 2002 containing the surviving records of two million private soldiers and non-commissioned officers. The papers, dubbed the 'burnt documents' after they survived a Luftwaffe incendiary bomb in September 1940, include once confidential medical notes, disciplinary records and private letters. A National Archives historian commented that 'It is now possible to examine the final part of the world war – the human dimension.'⁴⁰⁰ However, British Great War television documentary makers have been interested in 'the human dimension' since *The Great War*. The series established the veteran eye-witness as an essential part of Great War television documentaries. The BBC's appeal for eye-witnesses in the national press garnered an overwhelming response, and the BBC claimed to have received letters from approximately 50,000 veterans.⁴⁰¹ The Imperial War Museum, which holds the collection of correspondence sent in to the producers, estimates that the figure is nearer 20,000, but this still represents a considerable quantity.⁴⁰²

Producer Tony Essex was particularly keen to present the average fighting man's experience to enable his team 'to form an accurate picture of what the Great War was

³⁹⁸ Alex King, *Memorials of the Great War in Britain*, pp.201-202

³⁹⁹ Harry Patch to Emma Mahoney (interview in person) 5 February 2003

⁴⁰⁰ *Independent* 10 November 2002 p.12

⁴⁰¹ BBC WAC *Daily Telegraph* 8 June 1964

⁴⁰² IWM Information Sheet (March 1979) kindly sent to me by Roger Smither 3 December 2002

like. By reading the 50,000 letters, stories, and articles etc submitted our writers have been able to fill in the blanks which most histories contain – i.e. the human side.’⁴⁰³ Most of the veterans were men from the ranks, but they did include more well-known commentators such as Charles Carrington who had served as a British officer during the war, and author of *A Subaltern's War* (1929) and *Soldier from the Wars Returning* (1965). Other well-known personalities interviewed for the series included Cecil Lewis, author of *Sagittarius Rising* (1936), and Henry Williamson, author of the *Chronicle of Ancient Sunlight* series (1951-69). Edmund Blunden, poet and author of *Undertones of War* (1928), travelled to London for the series, but when Eyewitness Researcher Julia Cave saw how reluctant he was to be filmed she sent him home, much to the annoyance of Gordon Watkins.⁴⁰⁴

Cave joined *The Great War* in 1963 as Eyewitness Researcher from the quiz show *What's My Line?* She was 20 years old and had been selected by Tony Essex for her ability to ‘find people’. Once she had selected suitable candidates from the letters sent in to the BBC, eyewitnesses were invited to the production team’s house in Hammersmith to be interviewed, a total of several hundred veterans processed at an average rate of eight men per day. Those that were deemed suitable to appear in the programme were interviewed by Cave, and transcripts were sent to the writing team who selected which extracts they wanted to include in their scripts. The chosen testimonies were then recorded at Ealing Studios during two weeks of intensive filming. Footage of the veterans was filmed on 16mm film to stay in keeping with the archive footage, so that they would blend in to the series as a whole. The background set featured enlarged photographs of the war, and the veterans were lit from the front to produce a flat effect. Cave would sit as close as she could to the interviewee, just off camera in the dark, so that that the veterans would feel more relaxed and conversational.⁴⁰⁵ Cave recalled that she thought that ‘it was unlikely that these people would be interviewed again, and that it was in a sense a historical record [...] We were recording people for history.’⁴⁰⁶

⁴⁰³ IWM Document Archives BBC’s *The Great War* collection volume HOA-HOY Letter from Tony Essex to Mr W Holvey of Bristol dated 17 August 1964

⁴⁰⁴ Julia Cave to Emma Mahoney (interview in person) 2 March 2004

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid.

Stimulated by the war anniversaries and the success of *The Great War*, some saw it as the right time to step-up the existing campaign about veterans' pensions. One protestor wrote that the broadcast of *The Great War* was the ideal opportunity 'to draw attention to the shaming treat which successive governments have meted out to those veterans of the first world war [*sic.*]' The British Legion and the Officer's Pensions Society had already claimed that it was unfair that veterans of 1914-1918 were receiving pensions of a lower value than those awarded to men who had served in the Second World War. One correspondent suggested that the BBC, as a public service broadcaster, should feature a programme on the plight of those First World War servicemen: 'There must be many hundred thousand people like me who conscience has not been sufficiently disturbed until we have seen your stunning series of the "Great War". In any case there is no medium of communication comparable with television for illuminating the minds of the general public [*sic.*] it may well have the effect of remedying the wrong meted out to the veterans who have been cheated of their due award.'⁴⁰⁷ Indeed, this was not the only letter calling for a better deal for Great War pensioners.⁴⁰⁸

The Great War 'functioned as a trigger for the rehearsal of memories not just in writing, but within individual families. It is clear that the series was, in modern terms, event television [...] Families gathered around the screen to watch. Specifically, *The Great War* encouraged an interaction between younger Britons and their grandparents about what they had done during the war. For many veterans the broadcast of the series encouraged a cathartic reaction, stimulating a discussion which helped to ensure continued interest in the family history of the war and extended the 'shelf-life' of family mythologies.'⁴⁰⁹ The series helped reunite servicemen who had lost touch with one another such as naval veteran John Bowyer who saw his fellow signalman from HMS *Nestor* Charles Farmer for the first time since the ship was sunk at the Battle of Jutland in 1916. *The Great War* also helped the wives of ex-servicemen who had found the gap of experience too wide to cross. One lady, whose husband served in France for four and a half years, said that 'During all our 43 years of married life we

⁴⁰⁷ BBC WAC T32/1,145/1 Enid Aing to Gordon Watkins 11 March 1965

⁴⁰⁸ BBC WAC T32/1,145/1 Tony Essex to Derek Amoore 22 March 1965 attached to above. An internal BBC memo attached to the letter features a note from Tony Essex to Derek Amoore, editor of *Tonight*: 'I have had quite a few of these (needless to say!) and you might be disposed to do a film story on some aspect of the subject. I would personally you didn't, but have to pass it on.'

⁴⁰⁹ See Dan Todman, *The Great War: Myth and Memory*

have talked, and indeed sometimes during the early years of his return to civilisation, endured the nightmares of those terrible days, which he says he would not have missed! So few of his friends were around to talk, but this series has really crowned what was to him the most important years of his life.⁴¹⁰

The communication of memories has always formed an essential part of our historical record, but in Britain during the 1960s there was a marked increase in interest for the stories and experiences of the ordinary man. The fiftieth anniversaries of the First World War stimulated large-scale acts of public remembrance interfaced with growing interest in wider historical-social studies, reflecting an expansion in the social range of researchers themselves.⁴¹¹ The role of oral history has also been utilised to draw attention to twentieth century atrocities, such as the Holocaust. An international award, the *Prix de la Mémoire*, was founded in 1989 by the France-Libertés Foundation to honour those who preserve collective memory, because ‘the expression, transmission, and preservation of Human Memory is the most effective means of struggling against the recurrence of barbarism.’⁴¹² In an increasingly post-literate age, veterans on television have returned oral history its original folkloric and sociological roots where non-elite groups are permitted to share the main focus of recorded historical experiences.⁴¹³ Although it can demand a sophisticated technique, oral history can nonetheless be widely practised, and is in some ways part of a more democratic approach to history.⁴¹⁴

Methodological issues aside, the sight of a pensioner recalling their war experiences is seen by many producers as useful televisual currency. Some producers feel that ‘with historians, what you always get is received wisdom, whereas if you present twenty individual accounts, you get this amazing range of feeling and opinions.’⁴¹⁵ Documentaries about the First World War made after the 1980s, however, had to rely upon a much smaller number of veterans. By the time *World War One in Colour* was broadcast, only three veterans appeared on camera: Harry Patch, Arthur Halestrap and

⁴¹⁰ BBC WAC T32/1,145/1 Mrs Gibson to Tony Essex 2 April 1965

⁴¹¹ Anna Green & Kathleen Troup, *The Houses of History*, p.230

⁴¹² *Ibid.* p.231

⁴¹³ Trevor Lummis, *Listening to History* (London: Hutchinson, 1987), p.17

⁴¹⁴ Ludmilla Jordanova, *History in Practice* (London, 2000), pp.52-53

⁴¹⁵ Stewart Binns, Series Producer of *The Second World War in Colour* (Carlton, 1999) *Broadcast* 27 August 1999 p.42

Arthur Barraclough which resulted in frequent recycling of the veteran's testimonies.⁴¹⁶ For example, Harry Patch's speech 'If anyone tells you he wasn't scared, he's a damn liar...', and his recollection of bringing down an approaching German soldier without wanting to kill him, are each used three times. Arthur's rendition of Binyon's last verse of 'For the Fallen' is used twice, as is his speech questioning the worth of the sacrifices made during the war where he poses the rhetorical question 'have the years condemned us?'

As fewer veterans are able to appear on television documentaries, those that are left are increasingly taken as the spokesmen of their generation because their experience of loss and trauma 'extends beyond personal recollection and comes to encompass both individual and collective expectations of the future.'⁴¹⁷ This is compounded by the consensual nature of the television medium which implies that all veterans experienced the war as their 'representatives' are portrayed on the screen. However, the emphasis on the war as senseless slaughter assumes that those who went to fight had very little sense, and were shepherded to their deaths like sheep. This view of 1914-1918 feeds off pity. It encourages viewers to empathise with the sensitivities of a few selected 'trench poets' who have posited the idea in peoples' minds that the First World War was 'engineered by knaves or fools on both sides, that the men who died in it were like beasts to the slaughter, and died like beasts, without their deaths helping any cause or doing any good [...] The soldier is represented as a depressed and mournful spectre helplessly wandering about until death brought his miseries to an end.'⁴¹⁸ At around the same time as he recorded his interview for *The Great War*, author Charles Carrington was frustrated that

I never meet an 'old sweat', as we liked to describe ourselves, who accepts or enjoys the figure in which we are now presented, though it is useless – undignified – to protest. Just smile and make an old soldier's wry joke when you see yourself on the television screen, agonised and woebegone, trudging from disaster to disaster, knee-deep in moral as well as physical mud, hesitant about your purpose, submissive to a harsh, irrelevant discipline, mistrustful of your

⁴¹⁶ The colourisation process cost \$10,000 per minute and was performed at a film laboratory in India. Stephen Badsey 'World War One in Colour' www.iamhist.org/forum/badsey-1 (accessed 9 September 2004)

⁴¹⁷ Omer Bartov, 'Trauma and Absence: France and Germany 1914-1918', pp.348-358

⁴¹⁸ Cyril Falls, *War Books: A Critical Guide* (London: Davies, 1930), p.xi

commanders. Is it any use to assert that I was not like that, and my dead friends were not like that, and the old cronies that I meet at reunions are not like that?⁴¹⁹

However, it was glut of memoirs published in the late 1920s that cemented this view of First World War veterans into Britain's popular memory of the conflict. For example, Robert Graves' *Goodbye to All That* (1928) reinvented his central character to produce a more noble and moving figure which created the twentieth-century war veteran as a scarred, disillusioned man, angry at society, haunted and solitary. The classic, almost paradigmatic account of the mood of the melancholic veteran, walking alone with thoughts of dead comrades, leaving celebration to civilians and crass colonials. The Graves of 1918 is the real ex-serviceman, with a tough, cynical posture and a suggestion of regret that things had not been a little more rowdy and celebratory.⁴²⁰

Nevertheless, this characterisation purified the memory of the dead and the veterans who survived. Post-war representations 'ignored important aspects of the wartime experience of many, if not all, soldiers. It ignored the need to cultivate aggression, the weaknesses induced by fear and strain, the problems of discipline, the consolations of sex and drink.'⁴²¹ For example, the national mythology surrounding Australian troops between 1914-1918 found that specific and often contradictory experiences of veterans were clouded by the nostalgic vision of the 'Diggers'. Aspects of ANZAC veterans' war experiences that were once deemed taboo in Australia, such as believing the war to be futile and that soldiers were victims, became acceptable after modern reworkings of the 'Digger' legend in literature, television and film from the 1980s. Anti-heroic films such as *Breaker Morant* (1980) *Gallipoli* (1981) and *The Lighthorsemen* (1987) showed how national mythologies can and cannot work for both individuals and society in general, and Thomson found that veterans who did not enjoy the war felt more comfortable not having to adhere to the national stereotype.⁴²²

⁴¹⁹ Martin Stephen, *The Price of Pity* (London: Leo Cooper, 1996), p.78

⁴²⁰ Adrian Gregory, *The Silence of Memory*, p.63

⁴²¹ Alex King, *Memorials of the Great War in Britain*, p.181

⁴²² Alistair Thomson 'Anzac Memories: Putting popular memory theory into practice in Australia' in Anna Green & Kathleen Troup, *Houses of History*, pp.239-252. See also Alistair Thomson, *Anzac Memories Living with the Legend* (Oxford: OUP, 1994)

The majority of participant-witnesses often wanted however to exorcise the war to make an alternate reconstruction that would help them endure the trauma of their war experiences as ‘memories, particularly traumatic memories – are always reconstructions and reworkings, and, depending on the period and expectations, the testimonies of belligerents at different times vary greatly. Historians trusting ‘testimonies’ too readily, have forgotten that, by their very nature, accounts of extreme violence are set apart, that they don’t fit into the same analytical and interpretive categories as accounts of ordinary temporal events [...] Memory serves to forget.’⁴²³ Many ex-combatants chose to remain silent on many crucial points about the subject of war and violence: ‘True, all their stories emphasise the extreme horror of the battlefield, but the brutality described is always anonymous and blind [...] it is a violence the responsibility for which is unidentified and hence from which they are themselves exonerated.’⁴²⁴

Television documentaries are artificial constructs where ‘the truth of historical research, as expressed in single referential statements, may be demonstrated only inasmuch as they correspond to other statements with the same referent saying the same things about it.’⁴²⁵ In the realms of oral history an interviewer must distinguish between what people are willing to relate from what they remember. It has been suggested that we will never have direct access to memory, because there is a difference between *direct access to experience* of the past and the *remembered aspects of activity* in the past.⁴²⁶ Television producer Richard van Emden underlined that he ‘always felt that talking with veterans has given me a chance to touch history [but] it can’t be remembered exactly as it was. A memory is only a memory of the last recollection, and memories become overlaid with slight confusion or re-interpretation over time.’⁴²⁷ Narratives are central to the creation and representation of historical knowledge and explanation. Historians’ narratives of an event or a connected flow of events are normally invested with a naturalism concerning truth that more obviously fictional narratives do not claim. Prior to the act of narration the given events and facts are arranged according to their causal connection parallel to the actuality of the

⁴²³ Stéphane Andoin-Rouzeau & Annette Becker, *1914-1918*, pp.43-44

⁴²⁴ Ibid.

⁴²⁵ Alun Munslow, *The Routledge Companion to Historical Studies* (London: Routledge, 2000), p.83

⁴²⁶ Trevor Lummis, *Listening to History*, p.122

⁴²⁷ Richard van Emden to Emma Mahoney (by email) 22 January 2003

events and facts described.⁴²⁸ Narratives are not just storage devices for random pieces of information; they structure perceptual experience and organize memory, where subjects ‘impose order on the flow of experience to make sense of events and actions in their lives.’⁴²⁹

Telling stories about the past is a universal human activity, and interviews for television encourage the natural impulse to narrate. However, media interviews can fracture the essential meaning-making structures in the service of interpretation and generalization by taking snippets of a response out of context.⁴³⁰ Deciding how to describe and prioritise events is one of the many dilemmas documentary makers continue to face. The emplotment procedure demands ‘ideological, social theory and/or cultural decisions, and in the majority of cases events can be emplotted in a number of different ways in order to furnish those events with different meanings [...] It is a structure written in anticipation of a preferred outcome.’⁴³¹

Veterans are crucial building blocks in the related processes of emplotment and colligation in a television documentary: the truth-conditions of certain events can be ascertained and described, making it worthwhile to fill in the detail missed out by the bigger picture. The detail provides the boundary we walk between the important and the insignificant in the past and in the present.⁴³² By prioritising first-hand oral evidence given in person to camera, the medium implies that it is a more interesting and trustworthy source. The challenge of war memories is ‘the distinction between witnessing and seeing [...] about how one is placed in relation to a history one has lived through but not seen, or seen only partially.’⁴³³ While veterans did of course see and experience elements of the war first hand, historians are wary of what they thought they saw, what they have added, forgotten, or altered in their mind since the events themselves. In 1985 *Lions Led by Donkeys* featured several veterans of fighting on the Somme revisiting their own sites of memory.

[Play video clip 8: *Lions Led by Donkeys*]

⁴²⁸ Alan Munslow, *Deconstructing History* (London: Routledge, 1997), p.169

⁴²⁹ Catherine Kohler Riessman, *Narrative Analysis* (London: Sage, 1993), p.2

⁴³⁰ Ibid.

⁴³¹ Alan Munslow, *The Routledge Companion to Historical Studies*, p.84

⁴³² Ibid. p.90

⁴³³ Trudi Tate, *Modernism, History and the First World War* (Manchester: MUP, 1998), pp.1-3

Harry de Maine shows us where he was stationed at the edge of Thiepval Wood during the battle of the Somme. Victor Rand is filmed walking over the grooves of a trench he claims to have occupied: he points out where the parapet, parados, traverse and fire step used to be, and explains what they were, and what they were used for. Norman Tennant also points out where he was stationed and how he felt during the Allied bombardment of the German lines prior to the attack on 1 July 1916. But would it be churlish to suggest that due to the inaccuracy of contemporary military maps, the size and nature of the Western Front trench system, and the fallibility of the human memory, perhaps the veteran could be mistaken in thinking that eighty years previously he stood *right there*? Taff Gillingham, military adviser on *The Trench* asserted that

Veterans only saw a tiny, tiny part of the war. No front line soldier knew anything of the strategic picture. Few knew anything outside their own battalion, let alone division. Everyone has a different view of the same event, and there can rarely be an exact representation of any individual event which was viewed or recorded by more than one witness. I once spoke to four men, who landed together at Normandy on 6th June, 1944. Just off the beach they all remember crossing the road at Coleville. One swears he saw a German tank – the other three say there was definitely no tank. Imagination? Or did three men look to their left as they dashed for cover and the other to the right and spotted a tank? All four are right in their own way.⁴³⁴

Personal remembrances show that some ex-soldiers remained haunted by the trauma of losing friends or relatives in battle, expressed on television as the physical and emotional weight of the dead upon the living. It is in this vein that *A Game of Ghosts* (BBC, 1991) features a group of Somme veterans facing their pasts, discussing the burdens of memory as well as the psychological scars that have stayed with them. To illustrate this point, the programme makers felt compelled to open their film by quoting Siegfried Sassoon: 'I'll go with you, then,/Since you must play this game of ghosts.'⁴³⁵ This prepares the viewer for the eerie and atmospheric quality of the film, where a group of Somme veterans who were haunted by the ghosts of their Great War

⁴³⁴ Taff Gillingham to Emma Mahoney (by email) 22 June 2003

⁴³⁵ Siegfried Sassoon 'To One Who Was With Me In The War'

memories. Veteran Tom Bromley announced that ‘I am now 94 and nearing the end.’ He speculated as to when his last visit to the battlefields would be, explaining that he returned to France on a regular basis to visit the site where four of his closest pals were killed by a shell on a road on the Somme, and the film shows him going to pay his respects. He tells us that the bodies of his friends were later exhumed and moved to the main cemetery at Arras, where he is filmed laying a wreath of poppies. Back at his home, whilst talking about his fallen comrades, Tom suddenly thunders at the interviewer ‘and where is the fifth? The fifth is talking to you now, and he feels a bit of a fraud having left them over there!’⁴³⁶

Survivor’s guilt is a theme that also runs through *A Time for Remembrance* (Channel 4, 1989). Major-General Ashton Wade, an officer in the Second World War, makes the comment that ‘I don’t think I’m the only one to feel a guilt complex that you were damn lucky and you have got a debt to pay.’ Field Marshal Lord Carver agreed that ‘Everybody who survives a war feels guilty, in a sense that it is only through the sacrifice of those that died did one survive. If one had been less lucky or more courageous, you could be lying there as well.’ The film suggests that veterans’ pilgrimages are an essential part of the process in dealing with the guilt of having survived while others did not. One veteran in *A Game of Ghosts* was filmed saying ‘I’m not the best of them, and yet I survived and they didn’t.’ It is this sense of responsibility which permeates the testimonies of many Great War veterans.

Some men were so traumatised by events of the war that they could not forget. During the fighting on Pilckem Ridge in September 1917, Harry Patch’s Lewis Gun team came across a mortally wounded private from another company in their battalion. Harry told me about this particular incident when I went to see him in March 2003, and the following speech has also been used in *The Trench, Veterans: The Last Survivors of the Great War* (1998), *World War One in Colour* (2003) and *Till The*

⁴³⁶ Also in *A Game of Ghosts* Alf Razzell recalls to the camera that when captured by the Germans in No Man’s Land, he came across Willie Hubbard, a pal who had been mortally wounded and left in a shell hole within reach of the German line. Alf said that he tried to carry Willie to safety but his injuries were severe and he pleaded to be left, while Alf as a more able-bodied prisoner was forced to follow his German captors. Memories of this event haunted Alf, but in 1984 he recalled a visit to Arras and saw Willie Hubbard’s name on the memorial to the missing, and from that day ‘he was a human being, not some nightmarish memory I’ve had of leaving him all those years ago. Ever since then I have felt happier about it. It lightened my heart.’

Boys Come Home (ITV West, 2004).⁴³⁷ It also appeared in Max Arthur's *Forgotten Voices of the Great War*.⁴³⁸

[Play video clip 9: *World War One in Colour – Harry Patch*]⁴³⁹

When I interviewed Harry he told me that 'I came across this Cornishman; he was ripped from his shoulder to his waist with shrapnel. His stomach was on the ground the side of him. As we got to him he says 'shoot me' and before we could get a revolver out, because number one and two carried revolvers as they couldn't manage a rifle he was dead. I never saw such a bloody mess in all my life. I will always remember when he was passing from this life to the next, I got a glimpse of what is to come. His cry of 'mother' wasn't in pain; it was just a cry of relief to think that his mother was on the other side waiting to receive him. That's the painful part. I shall never forget it. I never knew him. I would have liked to have undone his tunic and got his identity disk, but number one had moved on, and having the spare parts I had to go with him.'

Whilst there is no doubting Harry's terrifying memory, the fact that it has been used so many times by documentary makers shows that Harry's story has become part of the established war narrative that exerts a powerful emotive effect on viewers. This device is powerful because veterans of the conflict can paint a vivid picture to illustrate a programme's content in a way that documents such as letters or diaries could never do on screen. Alf Razzell, who was approaching his 95th year when filmed for *A Game of Ghosts*, told of his vivid memories of being sent out into No Man's Land to collect the pay books of his battalion's dead on the day after the first day of the Battle of the Somme. Accompanied by slowed-down footage of the dead

⁴³⁷*Till The Boys Come Home* (ITV West) is a documentary that follows the making of a community play performed by the people of Midsomer Norton and Radstock, near Harry's Somerset home. The three-part local television series follows the making of the production from teacher Chris Howell's recording of Harry to the rehearsals, culminating in the first night performance. The play was a mixed media production that included dramatic reconstructions of First World War battlefields shot locally on the Somerset levels. http://www.itvregions.com/programmes_view.php?region=West&page=14794 (accessed 14 April 2005)

⁴³⁸ Max Arthur, *Forgotten Voices*, p.222. This was purportedly made up of testimonies from the Imperial War Museum's collection, but Harry Patch did not start to speak of his war experiences until he was visited by Richard van Emden in 1998 and his war memories were never recorded by the Imperial War Museum.

⁴³⁹ Harry Patch to Emma Mahoney (interview in person) 5 February 2003

being lined up for burial, Alf's memories of the dead are placed in juxtaposition with a glimpse of men (in civilian clothes – perhaps when they joined up in August 1914) who are alive and smiling for the camera.

[Play video clip 10: *A Game of Ghosts* - Alf Razzell]

Rarely looking at the camera or the interviewer, in dimly lit shots, Alf describes the injuries and the mess as he walked among the mutilated bodies of his comrades. As many veterans do, he mixes his tenses, as if he is still there in his mind's eye carrying out the duty he recalls: 'that day has been registered on my mind all my life. I couldn't help thinking that these poor relics that were lying there, a couple of days before they had been happy-go-lucky, laughing and joking comrades; now they were *here*.' Alf also appears in *Lions Led by Donkeys* recalling the same event. Filmed four years before *A Game of Ghosts*, he continued to 'see' his memories as 'a picture that has been registered in my mind all my life.' Julia Cave recalled that veterans would often slip back in time when they rehearsed their memories for the cameras:

There was one in particular. He was talking about Passchendaele and going out into No Man's Land and looking at a dead body. He absolutely went back there, I could see he had gone back there. We ran out of film, but I didn't want to stop him because I didn't want to break what he was saying, and I also realised that he had gone, he wasn't in the room. We remained very quiet in the studio. When he finished speaking, he said 'I don't know where I am at all', and I realised that he didn't, he had really got transported. He was very disturbed for quite a while after that I'm afraid.⁴⁴⁰

Some documentary makers have claimed that televised oral history can be a therapeutic or even cathartic process. Steve Humphries, producer of *Veterans: the Last Survivors of The Great War*, commented that at the time of filming in 1998, many veterans started to talk about the war 'with an honesty and depth of feeling that was almost impossible before the 1970s [...] they [had] finally decided to unburden

⁴⁴⁰ Julia Cave to Emma Mahoney (interview in person) 2 March 2004 – the veteran was R.B. Talbot Kelly, who taught art at Rugby School and later published *A Subaltern's Odyssey: A Memoir of the Great War 1915-1917* (London: Kimber, 1980). Cave also recalled this interview in *That Was The Great War That Was* (BBC, 2003)

themselves of memories which have haunted them for a lifetime.⁴⁴¹ Relatives and carers told the producers of *Veterans* that being interviewed on camera ‘was the performance of their lives [...] they had wanted to do justice to the memory of their comrades and friends [...] This was their tribute to a lost generation.’⁴⁴²

Yet the process of recollection is not always painless. Recurrent nightmares and flashbacks have been a part of every day life for Harry Patch. He told me that ‘You get the memories back. Sometimes even now eighty years after, I get a nightmare, that’s the painful part of it. If I am half asleep and half awake, if someone switches on a light outside my room, that’s the flash of the bomb. That starts things off. I have to gather my senses together and remember where I am.’⁴⁴³ Richard van Emden thinks that ‘There is no doubt that talking about the war has been very therapeutic. I was the first person to interview Harry Patch and he had never told his story before. There was far more pain in his recollections then, than there are now. The war, while it will remain a burden on his shoulders, is at least getting lighter, and that has been true of so many veterans over the years.’⁴⁴⁴

Veterans on Remembrance

The nature of remembrance and the rituals that surround Armistice Day have changed over time. In the inter-war years few seemed satisfied with the commemorations: the British Legion complained that Armistice Day was being hijacked by ‘flapper hedonism’ in the 1920s, and Charles Carrington recalled that marching to the Cenotaph ‘was too much like attending one’s own funeral.’⁴⁴⁵ In 1965 Carrington wrote that

The first Armistice Day had been a carnival; the second Armistice Day, after its solemn pause at the Two Minute’s Silence [...] was a day of festivity again. For some years I was one of a group of friends who met, every Armistice Day, at the Café Royal for no end of a party, until we began to find ourselves out of key

⁴⁴¹ Steve Humphries & Richard van Emden, *Veterans: The Last Survivors of the Great War* (London: Cooper, 1998), p.12

⁴⁴² *Ibid.* p.10

⁴⁴³ Harry Patch to Emma Mahoney (interview in person) 5 February 2003

⁴⁴⁴ Richard van Emden to Emma Mahoney (by email) 22 January 2003

⁴⁴⁵ Janet Watson, *Fighting Different Wars*, p.296

with the new age [...] the Feast-Day became a Fast-Day and one could hardly go brawling on the Sabbath. The do-gooders captured the Armistice, and the British Legion seemed to make its principal outing a day of mourning [...] I know many soldiers who found it increasingly discomfiting, year by year.⁴⁴⁶

Carrington and his fellow veterans found themselves increasingly out of step with the popular memory of the war. Those veterans whose accounts and perspectives did not fit neatly with the established account of disillusionment were overlooked: 'new stories began to be remembered that negotiated a delicate balance between disillusionment and enthusiasm, waste and nobility of purpose.'⁴⁴⁷ The role of veterans on television centres instead on their centrality to national remembrance of the war. Documentaries such as *Very Exceptional Soldiers* (BBC, 1984), *Gone for a Soldier* (BBC, 1985) *Roses of No Man's Land* (Channel 4, 1988), and *A Time for Remembrance* (Channel 4, 1989) constructed televisual memorials and acts of remembrance which were not intended to provide a detailed debate on military tactics or strategy. In comparison to more well-known series, the smaller memorial programmes from the 1980s and 1990s feature little or no discussion of the conduct of the war itself, as they maintain that their purpose is to explore the workings of remembrance, both in the minds and memories of the veterans, and in the national psyche in general.

Very Exceptional Soldiers (BBC, 1986) takes the viewer along with a group of 'Old Contemptibles' on a visit to Mons. These soldiers were among the first British forces to engage with the German army on the Western Front on 23 August 1914. Behind schedule, the BEF was en route to meet with French forces on the Sambre near Charleroi when it met German army patrols near the town of Soignies on 22 August. The pride the men felt for their regiment is palpable. Veteran George Rippon reminds us that 'The British Army was spot on with a rifle, I was very proud' having been one of the professional riflemen who fought off German attackers so effectively the latter were convinced that they were facing British machine guns. Approximately 70,000 British troops with 300 guns faced 160,000 Germans with 600. Despite the Germans's

⁴⁴⁶ Charles Carrington, *Soldier From the Wars Returning*, p.258

⁴⁴⁷ Janet Watson, *Fighting Different Wars*, p.296

numerical advantage, they suffered terrible losses to the BEF's expert rifle fire.⁴⁴⁸ Once British intelligence had measured the strength of the recovering opposition, the order was given to retreat after the BEF suffered 1,600 casualties. The Battle of Mons was hailed as a British triumph, albeit watered down by the French failure at Charleroi, and it has given rise to a popular myth that the British could have fended off advancing German troops if they had been a slightly bigger force and not a 'contemptible little army', as Kaiser Wilhelm is alleged to have said.

The first segment of this clip shows the 'Old Contemptibles' veterans at a memorial for a Canadian battalion. One veteran turns to the assembled crowd to quote Binyon's verse of remembrance, and the camera pans to nearby red rose bushes (in lieu of poppies perhaps?) as the soldiers line up for photographs. In the second segment of this clip, the veterans gather at another service to lay a wreath for their comrades. Noticeably frail - the youngest member was approaching his nineties at the time - the men stand to attention, salute their memorial, and then they are left to their own thoughts and memories as families and spectators look on. The veteran nearest the camera becomes so overwhelmed by the experience he dissolves into tears as he looked back at his line of comrades standing beside him.

[Play video clip 11: two scenes from *Very Exceptional Soldiers*]

The cameras have captured a very solemn moment which may well have been the last time those men visited the town that carries so many memories of triumph and retreat in the late summer of 1914. It makes fantastic lump-in-the-throat television which must not have failed to move the emotions of the most hardened viewer. The programme ends with footage of veterans walking over some of the grooves that remain in the ground where trenches once stood, and at the Menin Gate in Ypres where they stand for the Last Post. The programme ends with views of Tyne Cot cemetery, and then a roll call of names and photos, in the style of a memorial of those that survived, ends the programme on a sombre note.⁴⁴⁹

⁴⁴⁸ Stephen Pope & Elizabeth-Anne Wheal (eds) *The Macmillan Dictionary of the First World War* (London: Macmillan, 1995), p.327

⁴⁴⁹ Tyne Cot cemetery contains the graves of men who died fighting for Passchendaele Ridge in 1917, and the memorial wall at the back of the cemetery features the names of men missing in the actions 1917-1918. It is therefore a rather unsuitable memorial site to show for the fighting of 1914. Perhaps

Roses of No Man's Land (Channel 4, 1988) is a documentary devoted to the women who served as medical orderlies and VADs in France, Belgium, and Britain. The programme underlines those women and girls, the majority from comfortable middle and upper class backgrounds, played their part just as bravely as the men at the front, and as a result they deserve their own programme to record their thoughts, memories and experiences. To a delicate piano accompaniment, they recall what it was like to leave their safe lives at home to look after dying and wounded soldiers. The feel of the programme may appear more genteel in comparison to other documentaries that deal with military action, but this soon dissipates when some of the women discuss the uses of maggots in gangrenous wounds and of the weight of amputated limbs as they carried them from operating theatres. *Roses of No Man's Land* is permeated with the spirit of Vera Brittain: a well-educated upper class woman who served as a VAD in France after her brother and fiancé joined the army. After the publication of *Testament of Youth*, Brittain has had a considerable effect on the perception of women both during and after the war.⁴⁵⁰

As Samuel Hynes has pointed out, war for women can be 'an inevitably diminishing experience. There is nothing like a war for demonstrating to women their inferior status, nothing like the war experiences of men for making clear the exclusion of women from life's great excitements, nothing like war casualties for imposing on women the guiltiness of being alive and well.' *Roses of No Man's Land* seeks to remember some of the women who felt it their duty to serve. Hynes believes that 'women were excluded from the men's game of war [yet] they were sustained during those war years by the thought that they were proving their worth in other ways and that when the war ended they would be rewarded with the rights they deserved.'⁴⁵¹ *Roses of No Man's Land* has sought to memorialise a group of women who have had scant recognition for their war efforts, as other programmes have done in remembrance of the men who fought in the trenches. The ending is particularly

the cemeteries containing the dead from the fighting of 1914 were not big enough for the effect the producer wanted.

⁴⁵⁰ Vera Brittain, *A Testament of Youth an Autobiographical Study of the Years 1900-1925* (London: Victor Gollanz, 1933)

⁴⁵¹ Samuel Hynes, *A War Imagined* (London: Pimlico, 1990), pp.378-379

poignant, as the majority of the women interviewed for the programme died before it was broadcast. *Roses of No Man's Land* was the women's' televisual memorial.

The most significant single-episode memorial programme was *A Time for Remembrance* (BBC, 1989), broadcast when there was a significant revival of public interest in commemorating Armistice Day.⁴⁵² A poll in the *Sunday Times* indicated that 93% of Britons were committed to remembering the sacrifices made during both wars, and the Royal British Legion had adopted an aggressive advertising campaign depicting alarmist and confrontational posters to remind Britons of their duty to veterans. The images included in the £250,000 advertising campaign included snapshots of what life would have been like if Germany had defeated Britain in the Second World War, including an image of jackbooted Nazi soldiers marching past the Houses of Parliament.

A Time for Remembrance formed part of the debate on the nature and need for remembrance. It is the programme's declared aim to underline, through the recollections of veterans, that Britain no longer respects the two-minute silence with the reverence it did in times past, and this is a point of great sadness to the commentators that appear on the programme. The opening scene features a modern-day memorial service held in the Oxfordshire village of Chargrove, attended by veterans of both world wars together with packs of Scouts, Guides and Brownies marching behind a brass band. As the Last Post sounds, the narrator informs us that to most of the assembled villagers 'the Great War is now just history, remote from everyday life' and he poses the question of why the dead of the Great War are commemorated in this way, asking 'will we for much longer?'

[Play video clip 12: *A Time for Remembrance*]

Over footage of veterans taking part in a parade through Ypres, John Terraine underlines that the veterans themselves serve a purpose for the act of remembrance because they are 'a particular and irreplaceable element' of the process. Historian Sir Michael Howard states that 'the problem is how to commemorate those who die in

⁴⁵² Brian Bond, *The Unquiet Western Front* (Cambridge: CUP, 2002), p.90

war without glorifying war itself' pointing out the intensely personal nature of memory in that 'remembrance does not depend on visible memorials, although having some does help.' Indeed, this programme appears to be the most visible of memorials, detailing the usual clips of archive footage used in many Great War documentaries, but that it examines how veterans have lived with their memories.

As the veterans travel by coach through Belgium, the film switches focus to black and white footage of men at recruiting stations in 1914 and in uniform at the front, accompanied by a shrill female voice singing the music hall number 'We Don't Want to Lose You (But We Think You Ought To Go)'. Veterans Frank Sumptor, Charles Young, and Clarrie Jarman tell us about the rumble of the guns, being under fire, and seeing men die 'just like cutting down a field of corn.' One added that 'You were comrades, all pals together and we made a bit of a laugh of it at times.' Suddenly it appears that the veteran's primary usefulness to the programme ends, as the rest of the programme features a series of 'experts' who appear to validate, explain, contextualise and commentate on what the veterans have said, or are assumed to be feeling as they are filmed inspecting various CWGC cemeteries in Flanders. The veterans, together with archived footage and war songs, have already set the stage for the more serious discussion, suggesting that veterans' testimonies are more helpful for scene-setting than detailed debate and discussion.

A Time for Remembrance also investigated the reasons why veterans might continue to go on pilgrimages to the battlefields, and in this respect it is quite unique. Lord Blake points out that as a country Britain needs to remember such an important time in national life and survival, and another expert bravely suggests that 'wars are remembered very often because people actually enjoyed participating in them and this gives a colour to life which disappears in peace time.' However, the overriding atmosphere created by the collage of contemporary and archived footage, suggests a different view of the processes of mourning and grief. The programme was rare in its attempt to distil the essence of remembrance and memorialisation as understood by those that have taken part in military action by taking on the structure of a church memorial ceremony, the music playing a central part in invoking a sombre mood of mourning. We leave the veterans and their families in the cemeteries to the sounds of subdued choral music, and brass fanfares play as the soldiers visit a set of preserved

trenches. To accompany footage filmed at Tyne Cot cemetery near Zonnebeke, the largest British war cemetery in the world, a brass ensemble play *Amazing Grace* before the focus shifts to the Menin Gate at Ypres to hear the Last Post. Then, to the strains of a bagpipe, the film returns to London with a chorus of *Abide With Me*. As a voice-over quotes Binyon's verse 'They shall not grow old...' the trumpet reveille sounds, and the programme ends.

The *Times* reported that *A Time for Remembrance* looked at 'the long aftermath of another senselessly brutal war.' The trip to Ypres was quoted as the last annual British Legion trip, giving the events depicted on the programme an air of finality and perhaps even pessimistic morbidity in not expecting the veterans to last much longer. It was felt that the programme 'gave a harrowing man-in-the-trenches view' of the war, and expressed the rather patronising tone which completely obfuscates the reasons why men felt compelled to fight for King and Country: 'After 70 years Kitchener's coercive patriotism looked rather ugly. For many of those recruited by his finger who managed to survive through to the Armistice, home coming was, it seems, a bitterly deflating experience.' It is clear that *A Time for Remembrance* was understood as 'an essay in how and why we remember those who gave their lives in battle' and that 'it could not have been more devastating.'⁴⁵³

In recent 'memorial' programmes such as *Veterans: The Last Survivors of The Great War*, the veterans are treated as individuals, their names are announced by the narrator at regular intervals and captioned on the screen. *The Great War* did not identify any veteran, but this was not an apparent attempt to recreate a democratic feeling of the average fighting man's war. For the same reason that reconstructed film was not captioned, the technology, time and expense required to put captions onto film was beyond what could be done at that time. As a result, we feel much more attached to the frailer but named veterans who appear in recent memorial programmes.

In the early 1960s, Tony Essex and *The Great War* team had tens of thousands of veterans willing to appear on camera. Forty years later, producers like Richard van Emden have counted themselves lucky to get just a handful to appear in more recent

⁴⁵³ *Times* 11 November 1989 p.41

documentaries. Veterans have become such a central part of modern day remembrance rituals the media has invited them to comment on present-day conflicts. [Figs.17 and 18] At a time when the British army is engaged in military action all over the globe, but most specifically in Iraq and Afghanistan, the British press see veterans as the ideal spokesmen to buttress the futility of war. Jack Davies, aged 108, was quoted at one of his last appearances as saying that 'Although I was once a soldier, I dislike war in any form. I have seen young men die for their country, and we were told the Great War was the war to end all wars. How tragic that people are killing each other in Iraq.'⁴⁵⁴

Veterans have played a central role in representations of the Christmas Truce, a story that has gained in resonance and potency as the years have passed. Wartime chronicles since Troy have recorded temporary cessations in fighting, and in the Great War by December 1914, there had been a number of truces involving French, German, Russian and Austrian forces.⁴⁵⁵ Nevertheless, numerous temporary ceasefires during the war's first Christmas have been melded into one glorious event - *The Christmas Truce*: a myth comprising many narratives about fraternisation along the British sector of the Western Front.⁴⁵⁶ The first documentary dedicated to the Truce was *Peace in No Man's Land* broadcast by the BBC on Christmas Eve, 1981. *Peace in No Man's Land* sought to tell the story of the Christmas Truce in the simplest way possible, in the words of the men who were there.

The selected veterans - Graham Williams of the London Rifle Brigade, Leslie Walkington of the 16th London Regiment (Queens Westminster Rifles), and Albert Moren of the Queen's Royal West Surreys - were in their eighties at the time of filming. Numerous stories of fraternisation were painstakingly constructed from war diaries, interviews, letters, and newspapers by BBC television producer Malcolm Brown. The idea of filming *Peace in No Man's Land* was conceived in 1980 after the *Today* programme appealed for any surviving Great War veterans that had taken part

⁴⁵⁴ *Daily Mail* 9 April 2003 p.34

⁴⁵⁵ Stanley Weintraub, *Silent Night: The Remarkable Christmas Truce of 1914* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2001) p.xv

⁴⁵⁶ According to Malcolm Brown's map at the beginning of *Christmas Truce* the most concentrated incidences of truces occurred in the British sectors between Messines and Richebourg.

or witnessed a football match in No Man's Land on Christmas Day, 1914.⁴⁵⁷ To hear these men describe what they did and how they felt during the truce, and to listen to a German male voice choir sing 'Stille Nacht', gives the viewer a rarefied sense of historical immediacy. Introduced in the context of their everyday lives, the men are transported back to the trenches of 1914, and they present the most compelling evidence of the event's reality.

[Play video clip 13: *Peace in No Man's Land*]

It is the testimonies of veterans that help to make *Peace in No Man's Land* the most sentimental documentary about the Great War.⁴⁵⁸ The truce is a historical soft spot: emotions are engaged which render the audience uncritical.⁴⁵⁹ Malcolm Brown explained the attraction of the truce as 'It is the human dimension which means that this relatively obscure event in the fifth month of a fifty-two month war is still remembered and will continue to catch the imagination. In a century in which our conception of war has been changed fundamentally, from the cavalry charge and the flash of sabres to the Exocet, the Cruise missile and the Trident submarine, the fact that in 1914 some thousands of the fighting men of the belligerent nations met and shook hands between their trenches strikes a powerful and appealing note.'⁴⁶⁰

Here it can be seen that the intensity of veterans' recollections readily engage the romantic sensibilities of the viewer.⁴⁶¹ *Peace in No Man's Land* has a particularly magical feel, and the stunning photography encourages a temporary suspension of disbelief. It has all the ingredients of a good television narrative: a well-known plot, multiple and interconnecting storylines, individualized characters, evocative backgrounds, and an omniscient narration over previews and flashbacks.⁴⁶² Rostrum camera shots of veterans' photographs are particularly effective, contributing to a

⁴⁵⁷ Malcolm Brown to Emma Mahoney (by telephone) 9 August 2004

⁴⁵⁸ A new programme was broadcast in December 2004 as one episode in the BBC series *Days that Shook the World*. This drama-documentary features events and characters first described by Malcolm Brown in 1981. Rifleman Graham Williams, a veteran witness in *Peace in No Man's Land*, is played by an actor as a young Tommy dreaming about his father's rum punch during Christmas Eve sentry duty.

⁴⁵⁹ Ludmilla Jordanova, *History in Practice* (London: Arnold, 2000), p.169

⁴⁶⁰ Malcolm Brown & Shirley Seaton, *Christmas Truce* (London: Pan Macmillan, 1984), p.xxv

⁴⁶¹ Ludmilla Jordanova, *History in Practice*, p.53

⁴⁶² Graeme Burton, *Talking Television* (London: Arnold, 2000), pp.116-117

privileged feeling that the viewer is looking at a family album. There is also the historical casting back which might set viewers to wonder if the men pictured in the grainy photographs survived the war and went on to live lives as long and fulfilling as the veterans in the film.⁴⁶³ Overall, the Christmas Truce reverberates with an incalculable sense of loss, and veterans are a key part of this process because they have dual roles as both witnesses and survivors.⁴⁶⁴

Veterans on the High Command

Not all British documentaries about the First World War have sought to honour *all* the men who fought on the Western Front.⁴⁶⁵ *Lions Led By Donkeys* was broadcast on Channel 4 on 9 November 1985. It was watched by 1.1 million British viewers, and it was described as ‘the most distinguished and terrible’ of all the programmes dedicated to Britain’s war dead that year.⁴⁶⁶ The programme was a critical outburst against the alleged incompetence of Great War generals that singled out Field Marshal Haig for his handling of the Somme offensive in July 1916. It was directed by Brian Duffy who had also produced Richard Attenborough’s film of *Oh! What a Lovely War* in 1969. Clearly, *Lions Led by Donkeys* has more to do with the socio-economic problems of the Thatcher era than 1914-1918 using footage of the miner’s strike, the Live Aid concert, and youths outside a job centre; the veterans appear as witnesses to the prosecution in adding weight to the programme’s anti-authoritarian attack on the establishment.

Somme veteran Sidney Rogerson’s *Twelve Days* (1933) pronounced his own verdict on the legacy of the battle: ‘This post-war propaganda, piling corpse on corpse, heaping horror on futility, seems bound to fail from every point of view. In its distortion, the soldier looks in vain for the scenes he knew.’⁴⁶⁷ *Lions Led By Donkeys*

⁴⁶³ Catherine Moriarty, ‘Through a Picture Only: Photography and Commemoration’ pp.30-47 in Gail Braybon (ed), *Evidence, History and the Great War: Historians and the Impact of 1914-18* (Oxford, 2003)

⁴⁶⁴ Stanley Weintraub, *Silent Night*, pp.192-3

⁴⁶⁵ Gary Sheffield, ‘British High Command in the First World War: An Overview’ in Gary Sheffield & Geoffrey Till (eds), *The Challenges of High Command: The British Experience* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p.17

⁴⁶⁶ *Daily Telegraph* 11 November 1985 p.30. Viewing figures courtesy of Dan Todman

⁴⁶⁷ Sidney Rogerson (2/West Yorkshire Regiment) quoted by John Terraine in Gerald Gliddon, *Legacy of the Somme 1916; The Battle in Fact, Film and Fiction* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 1996), p.vii-viii

took a small group of veterans back to France, looking for the scenes *they* knew in villages near the Somme where they billeted in 1916. As a reconstructed film sequence depicts a single young lad in khaki uniform tramping across a field with his rifle, veteran James Snailham talks about the kit the troops were forced to carry into the lines. In describing himself and his comrades as ‘mules’ in a thinly veiled reference to the programme’s title, he joked that with the amount of ammunition he carried, he was ‘a moving arsenal.’ The film’s anti-war stance completely negates important wartime concepts - the ‘big words’ such as King and Country. Instead its message was directed against the recent action in the Falkland Islands. One sprightly veteran, Reg Lundy, was filmed in a field in France asserting that

It’s nice to have a reunion, it’s nice to have annual dinners and talk about these things. It’s nice to have a regimental tie, and it’s nice to have your gongs on every Armistice Day. But is it worth it? I don’t want my grandsons or great-grandsons to have to decide whether it’s worth it or not. We don’t want any more.

Somme veteran Bill Hay provided the voice-over for footage of the Thiepval memorial, which is engraved with the names of 73,000 missing British and Imperial soldiers who fought in the area between July and November 1916. The concentration on casualties at this point firmly underlines the futile view of the war. As the camera focuses on old photographs of family groups, with most of the men in uniform, Bill talks of how he saw his childhood friend Alec Wright was killed. ‘Even today I still remember Alec, and I wonder what he would be like if he lived as long as me.’ Another Somme veteran tells us that the war ‘is a thought that’s in my head all the time, has been for years.’ To the tune of the trench song ‘We’ll Never Tell Them’, another old soldier tells us that he will ‘never regret joining the army. We had good times and bad times, I want to remember every minute of it. Every night I go to bed I think about it, and all my pals.’

In the early 1980s ‘the baleful historical harmony of the politicians and the Press reached its apogee’ against a background of serious industrial unrest, and the political correspondent of the *Daily Telegraph* told his readers on 2 May that ‘The recent steel strike was a war that everybody lost,’ said Sir Geoffrey Howe, the Chancellor, last

night. 'The living standards of British steelworkers were sacrificed as fruitlessly – and as surely – as the lives of the soldiers on the Somme' he added.⁴⁶⁸ When the programme was broadcast, the miners' strike was coming to an end, and in May the police and courts were given extra powers to contain picketing and violent demonstrations by the Home Secretary Leon Brittan. The Falklands War had occurred three years earlier, Anglo-Irish relations remained complicated, and 1984 had been a year of marked social, political, and industrial unrest.

Whilst the veterans travel back to France in the villages around the Somme where they billeted in 1916, Norman Dixon, author of *On the Psychology of Military Incompetence* contextualises Haig's imperviousness to a gargantuan amount of human sacrifice helped Britain and her allies towards victory. However, one veteran informs us 'by 1917 we all called him The Butcher' and another proclaims 'he wanted shooting.' On General Rawlinson's assurances that the barbed wire in no-man's land would be cut by the artillery bombardment seven days before the infantry were to attack on 1 July, one veteran makes the comment 'What a lot of bullshit he talked.' As the programme ends, we see one of the last surviving Accrington Pals at his battalion's memorial, standing alone amongst the hundreds of names, many of whom were known to him. The 11th Battalion East Lancashire Regiment, the Pals' official name, lost approximately 585 out of 700 men on the Somme.⁴⁶⁹

Lions Led By Donkeys suffers from a serious bout of presentism - the inability to accept that the past cannot be judged by the same values as the present. As the camera pans to the town's memorial, on which two names of soldiers killed fighting in the Falkland's War have been engraved. The purpose of the closing shot is clear and obvious – that governments will continue to send men to war as nothing more than an expendable resource. The film directs its anti-war message at the recent action in the Falkland Islands. *Lions Led By Donkeys* rests on an axis of futility and misplaced pride. By utilising the memory and irony of a particularly tragic group of soldiers, these men are presented as the typical British example to buttress the lost generation myth and as victims of their own commanders.

⁴⁶⁸ Geoffrey Howe quoted in Gerald Gliddon, *Legacy of the Somme 1916: The Battle in Fact, Film and Fiction*, p.vi

⁴⁶⁹ Martin Middlebrook, *The First Day on the Somme*, p.260

The Somme is further emphasised as ‘a synonym for the supposedly mindless repetition of totally unimaginative and hideously costly attacks which were widely believed to have been the sole significant characteristic of the conduct of the British Somme offensive.’⁴⁷⁰ This is a documentary that seeks to show that intelligent men who volunteered to serve their country were subjected to three-months of military drill, turning them into cannon fodder with no minds of their own. *Lions Led By Donkeys* illustrates the dangers of looking at 1914-1918 at a distance of more than eighty years from the events they are being asked to discuss. Perhaps we should be asking if the evils of hindsight make veterans’ views on Haig any less valuable as historical sources, considering that they have been exposed to the growth of the popular anti-Haig movement instigated by David Lloyd George, Captain Basil Liddell Hart, and films such as *Oh! What a Lovely War* where the actor John Mills held a lengthy correspondence with Liddell Hart about the character he was to play.

The debate over Haig’s role in the conflict continued to rage, and a more balanced view did not get on to British television screens until *Haig: the Unknown Soldier* (BBC, 1996). Veterans appeared as witnesses for the defence to suggest that Haig may not have been the murderer, donkey, or butcher of popular myth. Watched by more than 3.5 million people, the expert witnesses were historians who had more of a leading role, with professional axes to grind in this televised battle of fact and opinion. Veterans were used to pad out the comments laid down by the experts, as the old soldiers do not tell us anything new. The soldiers were all from the ranks, and it was their subjective view of the man who had commanded the BEF that mattered most to the programme makers. The veterans’ input proved particularly popular with the newspaper reviewers. One journalist thought that ‘one of the most persuasive accounts of Haig’s career’ came from Ted Rimmer, who served in the 2/6 King’s Liverpool Regiment 1917-1919.⁴⁷¹ Rimmer commented that ‘I thought he was a good commander. What would have happened if he hadn’t have sent them over? The war would have gone on and on and on. It was a war of attrition to see whoever could stand it the longest.’

⁴⁷⁰ John Terraine in Gerald Gliddon, *Legacy of the Somme 1916*, p.v

⁴⁷¹ *Radio Times* 29 June – 5 July 1996 p.94

There are few critics of Haig's leadership among the veterans. Only Tom Brennan of the 125 Heavy Battery, Liverpool Pals, explained that 'a week before the [Somme] battle they blew all the wire to clear the ground for the men to go over the top, but unfortunately, they didn't clear sufficient, so when the infantry went over the top a lot of wire was still in position.' He does not appear to think that this was the fault of Field Marshal Haig. Tom also tells the camera that on the evening of 1 July 'I went up on what was the battlefield, and you couldn't walk on grass, there were a lot of dead bodies everywhere.' Again, while illustrating the scale of the casualties, he does not appear to hold anyone other than the Germans responsible for the number of British dead. Of the German Spring Offensive in 1918 during an advance of more than 40 miles, when the BEF were being pushed back, Tom Brennan points out that 'They were pushing us back so far, and that's when Haig issued that order that every man had to stand his ground. Couldn't do anything else really, it was either that or let them win.' The sheer amount of responsibility that rested on Haig's soldiers is addressed in some detail, and veteran Robert Burns admits that he could not have done the Field Marshal's job because 'I wouldn't like the responsibility of sending people to their death, but Haig did. Someone had to accept the responsibility.'

Indeed, it is easier to accept that a man was killed than it is to accept that he, too, was a killer. Moreover, death, anonymously inflicted by long-range artillery fire has led many commentators to posit Great War soldiers, especially the British, as the victims of a series of massacres engineered by their political and military leaders. The war's place in twentieth century history underwent a re-evaluation because the anniversary invoked the 'duty to remember' where 'people experienced a spectacular return of the Great War to the collective consciousness.'⁴⁷² Soldiers were portrayed as victims, and that the 1998 commemorations failed to treat history as history, where fine sentiments should not be confused with academic analysis. Henry Rousso said that '[s]ince being able to pass judgement has become one of the terms of our relationship to the past, and the memory of the Genocide the yardstick for measuring any approach to history, we now expect real or imaginary guilty parties to be clearly designated for all the tragedies of the century that our age has not yet assimilated.'⁴⁷³ By transforming

⁴⁷² Stéphane Andoin-Rouzeau & Annette Becker, *1914-1918*, pp.2-3

⁴⁷³ *Ibid.* p.2

combatants 'into sacrificial lambs offered to the military butchers, the process of victimisation has long impeded thought if not prevented it.⁴⁷⁴

Veterans on Conditions

When veteran signaller Arthur Halestrap was taken to visit the set of *The Trench* (BBC, 2002) near Flesquières before the series was filmed, the producers felt that his seal of approval gave the location a credibility with which few other people could argue.⁴⁷⁵ Indeed, oral history can permit historians to collect the data needed to illuminate particular areas about which too little information has survived from other sources explored through lived experience.⁴⁷⁶ The producers of *The Trench* who were determined to get every detail right, and saw the programme's most important point as seeing exactly how men in the front line in 1916 coped with the everyday routine tasks in the frontline trenches, aside from the contemporary manuals on trench routine that were issued to infantry battalions throughout the war.

Indeed, many veterans had spoken on camera about the great battles in which they took part, but most talked less about the day-to-day activities, such as wiring parties, trench riveting, eating and sleeping: it was felt that stories of the veterans' 'normal' activities gave focus to the experiences of the men who volunteered for the documentary. Sometimes comparisons could be made that, for the first time, brought to life the daily routines of the trenches.⁴⁷⁷ Indeed, it was conveying the aspects of daily routine that Arthur Halestrap thought most important about the making of *The Trench*:

I have had letters from people who say it did make them understand more than anything else, that they didn't realise what people had to endure. I was glad it was being put on because it did attempt to show not only the bad times that people had, but the boredom that they had to put up with from time to time when there were no operations and all they had to do was get up on the fire step and

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid. pp.2-3

⁴⁷⁵ Richard van Emden *The Trench – Experiencing Life on the Front Line 1916* (London: Bantam, 2002), Introduction

⁴⁷⁶ Trevor Lummis, *Listening to History*, p.17

⁴⁷⁷ Richard van Emden, *The Trench*, p.6

watch the enemy, and then do the normal routine of having a shave and keeping themselves clean and all of that sort of thing.⁴⁷⁸

The ways in which men coped with the mental and emotional pressures of frequent stays in front-line trenches were also addressed. Arthur Halestrap told me that

I didn't go over the top with a bayonet but I had to go over the top when I was told, to erect an aerial under terrific bombardment. I had to be in the trenches of course, but the infantry wouldn't have us anywhere near them...I can say this honestly, but when I had to go over the top in a terrific barrage I felt no fear although one of my group of three was on the ground shell-shocked so badly that he was gibbering on the ground. His corporal said 'you had better get on with it' and so we went over the top to erect our aerial to get the messages from the colonel of the regiment to send back.⁴⁷⁹

Harry Patch continued this theme with an almost identical speech in both *The Trench* and *World War One in Colour* (Channel 5, 2003):

Anyone who tells you that in the trenches they weren't scared, he's a damned liar: you were scared all the time. You couldn't deal with the fear. It was there and it will always be. I know the first time I went to the line we were scared; we were all scared. We lived hour by hour, we never knew the future. You saw the sun rise, hopefully you'd see it set. If you saw it set, you hoped you'd see it rise. Some men would, some wouldn't.⁴⁸⁰

Harry told me that 'we didn't know from one moment to the next, when the dark angel would come along with our ticket' to illustrate the daily uncertainties of life in the trenches. It was a special kind of endurance that enabled the men of the BEF to withstand regular bombardments by heavy artillery in the worst sectors of the line, and a strong sense of comradeship was an essential part of the coping process. *The Trench* showed that the British infantry had a lot more to do than sit and watch German shells whistle over his head. In addition to luxuries like chocolate or tobacco, humour was a great survival or coping mechanism for men during stays in the

⁴⁷⁸ Arthur Halestrap to Emma Mahoney (interview in person) 14 February 2003

⁴⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁰ Richard van Emden, *The Trench*, p.231

trenches, on the march, or on lengthy and exhausting fatigues. The British Tommy had his own ‘special brand of cynical, stoic humour’ which was essential to morale. Arthur recalled that because the men sang songs such as ‘Take Me Back to Dear Old Blighty’ and ‘I Want To Go Home’ that ‘the Germans thought that we had had enough and that morale was low, nothing could have been further from the truth. They just did not understand the humour of the British soldier.’⁴⁸¹

However, *The Trench* was lambasted by the British press before production even began. The veterans were assumed to have not been informed about the nature of the programme, and that they were ‘being used by the producers as sandbags against possible detractors’.⁴⁸² One television reviewer said that the programme makers of *The Trench* had ‘shot themselves in the foot’ by including recollections from Great War veterans: ‘their testimonies were as moving as the rest of the programme was embarrassing [...] only they can know how they felt.’⁴⁸³ Harry Patch and the other veterans *were* consulted about the series’ plans in great detail. Nevertheless, several of them harboured deep reservations about the capacity of any medium to effectively recreate what men like them experienced on the Western Front. Jack Davis (1895-2004) the last veteran who had joined up in 1914 was also a regular on television documentaries, and he concurred with Harry on having doubts about television’s ability to portray their war. Before *The Trench* went into production, Jack said he did not understand how the programme could work: ‘They can’t do it as far as I’m concerned – not with any degree of authenticity – I believe the conditions for those of us who were there can’t be shown in this way.’⁴⁸⁴

On the other hand, Arthur Halestrap told me that ‘Many people have said to me, that after having seen *The Trench* that they did not realise that people had to endure that sort of thing. I would disagree with him [Harry Patch] there but I know what he means because *The Trench* did not show the worst of it. They could not because the weather was not suitable and they could not repeat the military operations to show what they had to endure.’⁴⁸⁵ Harry Patch maintains that however well intentioned and

⁴⁸¹ Arthur Halestrap to Emma Mahoney (interview in person) 14 February 2003

⁴⁸² *Guardian G:2* 11 March 2002 p.13

⁴⁸³ *Observer* 17 March 2002 p.20

⁴⁸⁴ *Guardian* 5 July 2001 ‘Review’ p.9

⁴⁸⁵ Arthur Halestrap to Emma Mahoney (interview in person) 14 February 2003

researched, no documentary would ever be able to convey *what it was really like*. When I asked him if he has ever watched films or documentaries about the Great War he seems to have made up his mind without actually watching them:

No, I don't watch them. I don't want to see it, I have been through the real thing myself. I know what it's like, I don't want to see a film, I know it's acting. I have been through the real thing. That's it. I never watched a war film, I never spoke of the war for eighty years...I never spoke of it. Not even my wife knew what I had seen in active service.⁴⁸⁶

Conversely Arthur watches as many programmes on the war as he can, but he did comment that 'Some of the raconteurs that speak on these programmes, they don't seem to know very much about it. They don't realise, I must admit that, but on the whole I think that what they portray are the terrible times in which we were living in that time, and of course war is terrible anyway.'⁴⁸⁷ Richard van Emden added that

Most can't or are unwilling to describe events so graphic that such descriptions might make them upset or their listener. Of the 260 veterans I have met only perhaps half a dozen have been so descriptive that I have felt that I really have an inkling of what it may have been really like, though only a inkling. Not all descriptions have to be miserable or fearful...[one veteran's] description of rats running across his face was particularly vivid, as he used his scuttling fingers to represent the little feet as they passed over his forehead.⁴⁸⁸

The Great War can still be regarded as living history because a dwindling band of 1914-1918 survivors still live with the ghosts of their own remembered pasts. Great War veterans on television have been consistently portrayed as the holders of the last *living* memories of 1914-1918, passing on their experience for the enrichment of the nation which they went to war to protect. The presence of living veterans and the memory of the dead act to prime the social consciences of generations to follow. They have also provided a more tangible and emotional history than any print media as documentary films have recorded the recollections of these men in their own words,

⁴⁸⁶ Harry Patch to Emma Mahoney (interview in person) 5 February 2003

⁴⁸⁷ Arthur Halestrap to Emma Mahoney (interview in person) 14 February 2003

⁴⁸⁸ Richard van Emden to Emma Mahoney (by email) 22 January 2003

as living human beings. We not only hear their words, but their laughs and their singing voices. We see their expressions, body language and sometimes tears. The sum of these fundamental human traits can only be captured on television. In the eyes of the viewers, these old soldiers will never die because they have been recorded on film, a medium that will enable them to speak to television audiences many years after their death. The element of historical immediacy that these men and women have lent to this selection of documentaries cannot be underestimated. The appearance of old soldiers in their centennial years is seen as something of an accomplishment in itself. Richard van Emden, producer of *Veterans: The Last Survivors of the Great War* thought that

I think in recent years it has to make them marvel. That men aged 100 and more could have such vibrant, cogent memories of so long ago. I think people are fascinated by their stories of a war that, at least early on, had clear similarities to the battles fought at Waterloo a century earlier. I think the veterans have made people look into their own history and has no doubt encouraged the massive increase in battlefield visits made in the last few years...the veteran is the fundamental crucial building block to any story we might be telling about the war whether the story is about prisoners of war, or young soldiers.⁴⁸⁹

Jean-François Lyotard's work on metanarratives argued that now the grand stories of the past have passed their useful life, we are left with an infinite number of little narratives, with veterans' testimonies representing a large proportion of the residue of the past.⁴⁹⁰ This underlines the philosophical debate about historians' work in telling *the* story of the past as opposed to *a* story about the past. In effect these practices are self-legitimising and that by their nature they cannot offer our culture transcendent or unqualified access to the reality of the world as it actually is, or was.⁴⁹¹ The building of collective memory can however result in a historical force of immense power in its own right.⁴⁹² In contrast to Great War military histories based on documents left in official archives by the army and government elite, oral sources challenge that

⁴⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁰ Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition A Report on Knowledge* (Manchester,: MUP, 1984)

⁴⁹¹ Alan Munslow, *The Routledge Companion*, p.155

⁴⁹² Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past*, p.140

subjectivity ‘to unpick the layers of memory, dig back into its darkness, hoping to reach the hidden truth.’⁴⁹³

Indeed, it has been the goal of many First World War documentaries to tell the story of the average fighting man, from *The Great War* to the more recent *Veterans: The Last Survivors of the Great War* (BBC, 1998). Oral history is based on the idea that powerful insights can be derived from people talking about their experiences, giving status to memory, no matter how complex or uncertain this mental faculty may be.⁴⁹⁴ Oral history allows the historian to ‘collect the type of evidence which customary documentary and material sources have not supplied.’⁴⁹⁵ However, oral testimonies and documentary sources are not mutually exclusive as one is much weakened without the other, but for many viewers, veterans over 100 years of age speaking their own war narratives are both visually and aurally fascinating in comparison to historians and military advisers. Arthur Halestrap strongly underlined that viewers should take far more notice of the veterans that appear on the screen than any historians or self-proclaimed experts ‘because we were actually there.’⁴⁹⁶ Richard van Emden agrees that viewers will tend to trust or be more interested in what a veteran has to say than an appointed ‘expert’ historian, because after all, they *were* there. However, the tyranny of the witness is therefore established: ‘Refraining from discussing the combatant’s experience under the pretext that only the men who have lived through the war can analyse it is tantamount to abandoning the elementary rules of historical study.’⁴⁹⁷

Veterans are taken to represent an inherited store of war memories, and many have expressed on screen the burden of being among the few left, as human repositories of Great War memory. However, television documentary makers have insisted in filming veterans like Jack Davis, the last veteran to have enlisted in 1914 who appeared in the media up to his death in 2004 at the age of 108. Even though men like Jack remained extraordinarily lucid for his age, military historians bemoan the fact that there is so much material, a great deal of which was recorded forty years ago when they

⁴⁹³ Ibid. p.150

⁴⁹⁴ Ludmilla Jordanova, *History in Practice*, p.53

⁴⁹⁵ Richard van Emden to Emma Mahoney (by email) 22 January 2003

⁴⁹⁶ Arthur Halestrap to Emma Mahoney (interview in person) 14 February 2003

⁴⁹⁷ Stéphane Andoin-Rouzeau & Annette Becker, *1914-1918*, pp.37-39

[veterans] were more abundant, still exists in archives unused. Many experts maintain that the broad depth of material available in archives must have major advantages over continually recycling the last 25-30 surviving Great War veterans whose wartime experience, like their memories, is limited.⁴⁹⁸ It is, therefore, a rather ahistorical assertion to make that a small group of extremely old men recalling events nearly ninety years old can add anything new to the historiography of the First World War.

Today's programme makers, however, are reluctant to use the abundant recorded archive resources, such as the voice-only recordings at the Imperial War Museum or footage from *The Great War*. Many are afraid that it will make the programme appear dated, and that a living veteran is of more use to the visual design of a programme than a recording of one who gave his testimony in the 1960s. Malcolm Brown was adamant that *The Great War* had already shown how veterans could be used in a documentary about the war, and for *Battle of the Somme* in 1976 he wanted to produce a very different film. Brown was determined he would preserve the youth of the men that fought in it, and he deliberately avoided having any veterans on the programme. He did interview three men who had fought on the Somme in 1916, but his film relied on two male voice-overs, one officer and one other rank to read the words of the men themselves from diary extracts, poems and letters home.⁴⁹⁹ In the same way, the 2003 series *The First World War* does not include any veterans as talking heads: actors' voice-overs are used to read contemporary wartime material.

As the small band of old soldiers became an increasingly prominent part of Great War documentary-remembrance on television, many historians are concerned over the development of 'professional veterans' and that the overemphasis on the memories of this decreasing band of centenarians has resulted in a 'tyranny of the witness' where only those that witnessed historical events have the moral right to discuss them:

A person speaking to a historian of their own experience generates an especially direct kind of evidence which is all the more valued if it comes from those who were not previously considered significant historical actors. And if such testimony contains, as it so often does, accounts of suffering and deprivation, of

⁴⁹⁸ Taff Gillingham to Emma Mahoney (by email) 16 June 2003

⁴⁹⁹ Malcolm Brown to Emma Mahoney (by telephone) 9 August 2004

heroism and stoicism, then our romantic sensibilities are readily engaged. This does not necessarily involve seeing the past as better than it was [...] but it may create an emotional aura that affects the resulting scholarship. Such emotional investments have their generative side, but they can also reinforce simple moral polarities, which are necessarily, given what we know of the human condition, strategic fictions.⁵⁰⁰

Televised oral history might encourage historians to analyse the interaction between memory and mythology to see how memories of the past resonate with interpretations of the present. The veterans present to the viewer the juxtaposition of Laurence Binyon: they are the ones that have grown old, living with the memories of those that did not grow old. Whilst the veterans survived they have lived with the weight of the dead. In the manner of the Swahili, the deceased remain alive in the memories of others as 'living dead' and they will only be completely dead when the last person to have known them has died.⁵⁰¹ In this way, the Great War generation who did not grow old are kept alive by the television medium. Veterans are perceived as the representatives of a 'lost generation' which further emphasises the sense of obligation to the dead. In this way, television has emphasised an idea recognised and propagated by recruiters, politicians and clergy well before the troops returned from the war, and even before many of them had gone to it.

Veterans' sense of guilt in their survival and an obligation to their comrades has long buttressed the moral superiority of the dead which was enshrined in the official remembrance of the war.⁵⁰² In this way, subsequent recollections have reshaped veterans' experiences to conform to the canon of approved behaviour and feeling.⁵⁰³ Historians are criticised for not being more wary of the 'ambiguous service rendered by the unprecedented number of first-person accounts by the combatants themselves [...] a nearly inexhaustible documentary fund reservoir, has made historians of the First World War feel guilty and inadequate [...] How could an historian question the

⁵⁰⁰ Ludmilla Jordanova, *History in Practice*, p.53

⁵⁰¹ David Lowenthal *The Past is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge: CUP, 1985), p.195

⁵⁰² Alex King, *Memorials of the Great War in Britain*, pp.221-222

⁵⁰³ David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country*, p.211

narratives recited by men who lived through such trials, when he himself had no comparable experience?’⁵⁰⁴

Military historian Dr Stephen Badsey was a recent victim of this ‘tyranny’. In April 2005, *History Today* hosted a special screening of *Dunkirk: the Soldier’s Story* at the Imperial War Museum’s cinema. The occasion was to celebrate the programme’s Grierson Award for Best Historical Documentary in 2004. The evening started with a showing of the 50-minute film to a mixed audience of film-makers, academics and Dunkirk veterans, followed by a panel discussion chaired by the editor of *History Today*, and included the director Peter Gordon, Stephen Badsey, and James Bradley, a veteran eyewitness who appeared in the film. The declared objective of the panel’s discussion was to establish better criteria on what makes a good television documentary, but Badsey was concerned with the number of historical errors in the film. He thought that the film’s makers had a surplus amount of interesting interviews to handle them properly, but Badsey did not attempt to discuss the programme in the presence of many Dunkirk veterans, including James Bradley, because it made it virtually impossible to be critical of a film of which they were so proud.⁵⁰⁵ Yet this thesis asks professional historians to overcome the guilt that scholars are prone to by facing the testimony of combatants which television has freely accepted as the truth, and has been used happily in many popular documentary series.

⁵⁰⁴ Stéphane Andoin-Rouzeau & Annette Becker, *1914-1918*, p.37-39

⁵⁰⁵ Stephen Badsey to Emma Mahoney (by email) 5 May 2005



Fig.14: Harry Patch (b.1898), Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry, in *World War One in Colour* (Channel 5, 2003)

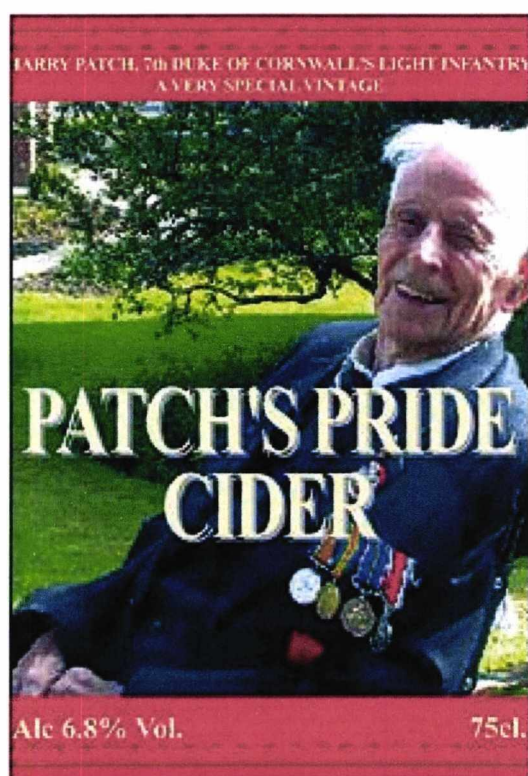


Fig.15: Harry photographed in December 2004 when a local cider company announced that they had made 106 bottles of 'Patch's Pride', a bottle for every year of his life.

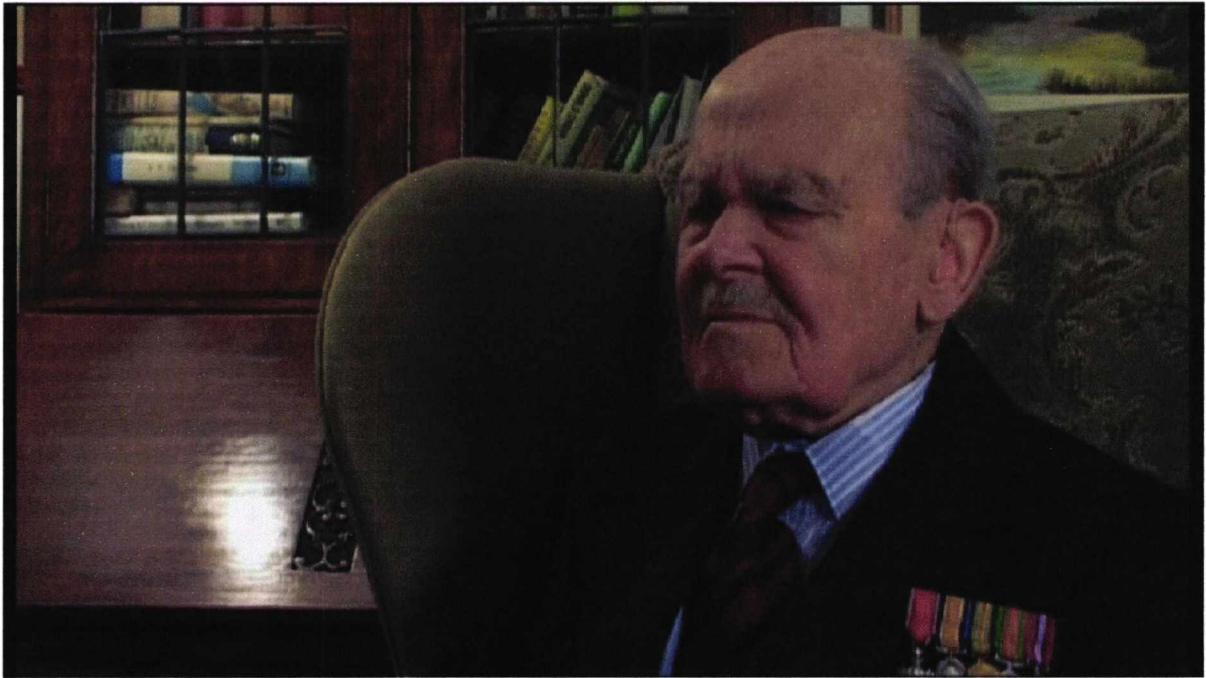


Fig. 16: Arthur Halestrap (1898-2004), 46th Division Royal Engineers Signals, in *World War One in Colour* (Channel 5, 2003)

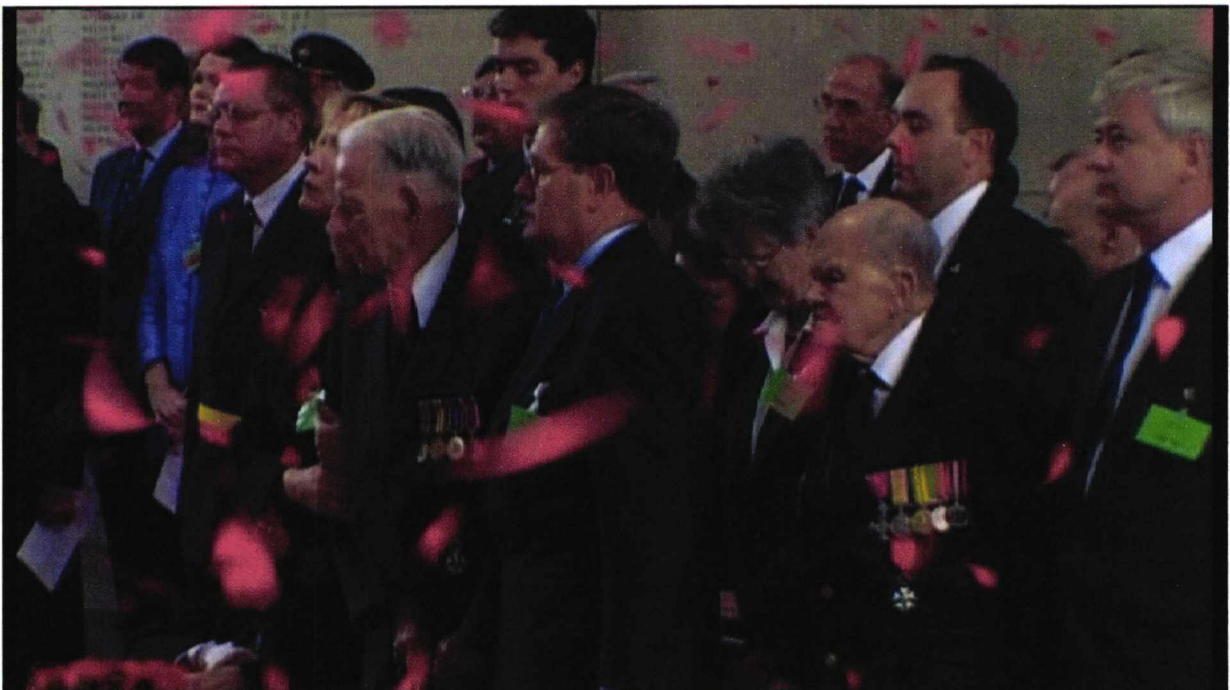


Fig. 17: Harry Patch (left) and Arthur Halestrap (right) filmed at a remembrance ceremony the Menin Gate in *World War One in Colour*



Fig. 18: Fred Bundy (b.1900), Royal Navy, and Jack Davies (1897-2005), Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry, at the unveiling of the Shot at Dawn memorial at the National Arboretum, Staffordshire, 21 June 2001

Landscape

Whilst the relationship between the natural landscape and the First World War in British culture is a topic that has already attracted a certain amount of academic attention, there has never been an examination of the ways in which this cultural inheritance have been incorporated into the visual design of televisual representations of the conflict. This chapter will show how British television documentaries have sought to emphasise that Flanders and Picardy are the closest we can get to having contact the ‘lost’ generation because it is the landscape where they fought, died, and now lie buried. This is particularly pertinent to Britain’s popular memory of the First World War, especially the popular memory of the fighting near the river Somme in the latter half of 1916. The fascination with the battle lies in its continual repetition in popular memory as an event that encapsulated the true texture of the First World War, a symbol of absolute horror and total futility.⁵⁰⁶

Images of landscape in British television documentaries have continued to be mediated by two broadly defined levels of representation: the *physical* landscape of remembrance marked by memorials and cemeteries which act as portals to the *emotional* landscape, a place forever scarred by the events of the First World War. Landscape is not just an area of land where fierce fighting took place but imagined and mediated land that has been aesthetically processed: ‘The innocent eye is a myth – all thinking is sorting, clarifying. All perceiving relates to expectations [...] we carry culturally prefabricated mental templates with us.’⁵⁰⁷ Landscapes are culture before they are nature, ‘constructs of the imagination projected onto wood and water and rock [...] once a certain idea of landscape, a myth, a vision, establishes itself in an actual place, it has a peculiar way of muddling categories, of making metaphors more real than their referents; of becoming, in fact, part of the scenery.’⁵⁰⁸

Whilst the majority of the former battlefields were quickly reclaimed as farmland, many parts of the landscape, especially around the Somme and in the preserved

⁵⁰⁶ Mark Connelly, ‘The Great War, Part 13: The Devil is Coming’ *Historical Journal of Film Radio and Television* Vol.22, No.1, 2002 pp.21-28, and Malcolm Brown, *Imperial War Museum Book of the Somme* (London, 1996), p.xxv

⁵⁰⁷ Malcolm Andrews, *Landscape and Western Art* (Oxford: OUP, 1999), p.4. See also Kenneth Clark, *Landscape into Art* (London, 1949), E.H.Gombrich, *Art and Illusion* (London: Phaidon, 1960)

⁵⁰⁸ Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory* (London: Fontana, 1995), p.61

trenches around Ypres, still bear the marks of war. Malcolm Brown's *Battle of the Somme* (BBC, 1976), Richard Holmes' *War Walks* (BBC, 1996) and *Western Front* (BBC, 1999), along with *Lions Led By Donkeys* (Channel 4, 1985), *Very Exceptional Soldiers* (BBC, 1986), *Gone for a Soldier* (BBC, 1980) and *A Time for Remembrance* (Channel 4, 1989) have all filmed present day scenes of Great War battlefields to demonstrate the physicality of the geographical area where fighting occurred. In addition, the physical reminders of memorials and cemeteries mean that the thousands of tourists that visit the former Western Front are already aware that they are visiting a site that contains the remains of the millions of men who lost their lives.

The land of the former Western Front is seen as both holy and haunted. In 1998, poet laureate Andrew Motion wrote that 'Those guns may have fallen silent eighty years ago, but their echoes neither die nor even fade away.'⁵⁰⁹ Television has buttressed the sense of these visual and aural reverberations. One such echo was a short speech and song performed by a soldier on the Western Front as shown in Episode Two of Hew Strachan's 2003 series *The First World War*. Sergeant Edward Dwyer VC recorded a couple of minutes entitled 'With Our Boys at the Front' in 1915, in which he describes taking part in the retreat from Mons in 1914, and then bursts into one of the marching songs that he said kept them going – 'Here We Are, Here We Are, Here We Are Again, Hello, Hello, Hello, Hello.' Dwyer was later killed in action on the Somme aged 19 years of age. When the discovery of the recording was reported in 1996 the journalist was unnerved as 'with a final whoop, the voice died away, the final hellos hanging mournfully in the air as if calling out from the grave.'⁵¹⁰

British Television has also continued to underline that at the Western Front, remembrance is part of the landscape: 169 cemeteries maintained by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission are contained within an area of less than 54 square miles. These burial sites constitute 'silent cities of the dead which circle Ypres like a crown of thorns.'⁵¹¹ In addition, it has been estimated that there are hundreds of thousands of human remains outside the official military cemeteries. In the Ypres Salient alone, more than 42,000 Allied - and an equal number of German - bodies

⁵⁰⁹ *New Statesman* 18 September 1998 p.38

⁵¹⁰ *Guardian* November 9 1996 p.5

⁵¹¹ Paul Reed, 'Vestiges of War: Passchendaele Revisited' Peter Liddle (ed), *Passchendaele in Perspective*, p.468

were never recovered.⁵¹² From 1916, the British organised the Imperial (now Commonwealth) War Graves Commission, their garden cemeteries quickly becoming the focal point for veterans and bereaved relatives who made a number of pilgrimages to these areas in France and Belgium. Large areas of Northern France and Belgium constitute national cemeteries, the final resting place of tens of thousands of British, French and German soldiers. Soldier-poet Charles Hamilton Sorley, killed at Loos in 1915, believed there might always be a connection between landscape and memory along the Western Front because ‘Earth will echo still, when foot/Lies numb and voice mute.’⁵¹³

The physical presence of British dead means that the conflict is kept very much alive in Britain’s modern memory. The thousands of gravestones and memorials to the missing encapsulate the core of British remembrance rituals because it resonates with the overriding influence in British memory: casualties. In the 1920s, remembrance ceremonies referred to the ‘Million Dead’ as the Imperial War Graves Commission had registered the names of 1,081,952 soldiers who had been buried or registered as missing. Official publications such as *Soldiers Died in the Great War*, published in 80 parts between 1920-21, together with Service Rolls and War Cemetery Registers from the 1920s, meant that ‘the dead took on a sacred character, and the preservation of their memory, beyond the personal circle of family and friends, began to be seen as a national obligation.’⁵¹⁴ This sense of obligation extends to modern day battlefield tourism. Unlike other battle fronts in Northern Italy, Northern Greece, Gallipoli and the Holy Land, it is close to the British Isles, it was the decisive theatre of operations, and the majority of the British dead are buried there. Therefore, in Britain, the Western Front is most closely identified with the nature of the war.⁵¹⁵

In 1920, *The Pilgrim’s Guide to the Ypres Salient* advised that ‘yours is a pilgrimage in memory of those who passed this way. You will tread reverently, for it is Holy Ground.’⁵¹⁶ From the earliest battlefield tours and pilgrimages in the early 1920s,

⁵¹² Lyn Macdonald, *They Called it Passchendaele* (London: Penguin, 1978), p.239

⁵¹³ Charles Hamilton Sorley, ‘All the Hills and Vales Along’ Jon Silkin (ed), *Penguin Book of First World War Poetry*, pp.87-88

⁵¹⁴ Bob Bushaway, ‘Name Upon Name: The Great War and Remembrance’ in Roy Porter (ed) *Myths of the English* (Cambridge: Polity, 1992), p.138

⁵¹⁵ David Lloyd, *Battlefield Tourism* (London: Berg, 1998), p.100

⁵¹⁶ Paul Reed, ‘Vestiges of War: Passchendaele Revisited’ p.476

visitors to the battlescape assumed that at particular places and moments it was possible to renew, recreate or capture something of the war and the experiences which defined it. Pilgrims and tourists to the battlefield have long risked the failure of not feeling or perceiving whatever is expected. Therefore, in order to forestall failure, tourists prefer to see landscape in the prescribed manner.⁵¹⁷ In this way, a cycling tour guide for France from 1936 noted that '[Near Albert] are villages whose names will live forever in British history: Fricourt, Mametz, Pozières, Thiepval, Flers, Guedecourt. I repeat, there is no scenery here – just pleasant rolling down land dotted with brand new red-brick villages. But if you do not thrill to their memories and atmosphere, then your imagination is indeed dull.'⁵¹⁸

Post-war tourism and pilgrimages reflected the continuing presence of the war in the lives of all its victims.⁵¹⁹ The Western Front has continued to exert a 'hold' over the visitor's imagination. After a visit to Beaumont Hamel in November 2004, two British schoolgirls wrote a poem which demonstrates the necessity to process landscape, resulting in the transformation of the *actual* landscape into a scene *imagined*:

We stood on the battlefield,
The harsh wounds inflicted on the countryside were healing.
The mud had gone,
Replaced with lush grass on the hillside.
The shell holes were still there,
Though years of attention from the weather were leading them to fill.
Mother Nature was again claiming her lost ground,
New trees towered around and birds flew, singing.
The trenches lay like gashes in the Earth's skin,
Ripped and torn in curved lines.
The German and British trenches faced each other sternly,
As if they could not forget how they had once been enemies.
We walked along as the soldiers had years before,
It was hard to imagine how it must have been.
From both sides the pain of war cried out,

⁵¹⁷ John Taylor, *A Dream of England: Landscape, Photography and the Tourist's Imagination* (Manchester: MUP, 1994), pp.5-12

⁵¹⁸ Bernard Newman, *Cycling in France* (London: Herbert Jenkins, 1936), p.88

⁵¹⁹ David Lloyd, *Battlefield Tourism*, pp.1-2

The agony was still there,
Buried but not forgotten.⁵²⁰

British televisual representations of the First World War have continued to underline that the countryside of northern Europe has long been represented as indelibly marked with the blood of those who fell fighting there. The sacrifice of British blood in the soil of France was so significant it led the British government to collect six barrels of earth from the Ypres Salient to fill the tomb of the Unknown Warrior in Westminster Abbey in November 1920. Of the hill near Fricourt, Masfield emphasised in *The Old Front Line* that ‘Those fifteen feet of height were bartered for with more than their own weight of sweat and blood; the hill can never lose the marks of the struggle.’⁵²¹ The first British battlefield tours to Ypres started in 1919 with the purpose of taking relatives of the deceased to the area where their loved ones were or were thought to be buried. Guidebooks were widely published such as *The Pilgrim’s Guide to the Ypres Salient* (1920), *The Immortal Salient* (1925) and *The Battle Book of Ypres* (1927). Tour companies were sometimes run by ex-officers who also supplied related services such as the ‘Wipers Auto Service’.⁵²² When King George V went on a pilgrimage to the battlefields in 1922 he preceded the popular tours envisaged by Masfield which were then bitterly satirized by Philip Johnstone’s sardonic prediction about where pilgrimage and tourism might overlap on the Western Front:

...Observe the effects of shell-fire in the trees
Standing and fallen; here is wire; this trench
For months inhabited, twelve times changed hands;
(They soon fall in), used later as a grave.
It has been said on good authority
That in the fighting for this patch of wood
Were killed somewhere above eight thousands men,
Of whom the greater part were buried here,
This mound on which you stand being...
Madame, please,
You are requested kindly not to touch

⁵²⁰ A poem ‘Beaumont Hamel’ by Rebecca Simpson and Katie Burrows (15), The Godolphin School Salisbury from *The Write Stuff* West Country Vol.1, as printed in *Stand To!* No.69 January 2004 p.56

⁵²¹ John Masfield, *The Old Front Line*, p.141

⁵²² Paul Reed, ‘Vestiges of War: Passchendaele Revisited’ p.476

Or take away the Company's property
As souvenirs ...
This is an unknown British officer,
The tunic having lately rotted off.
Please follow me –this way...

The *path*, sir, *please*...⁵²³

The demand for tours to significant places such as Ypres lasted for twenty years before the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939, when the industry lay dormant until Martin Middlebrook published *The First Day on the Somme* (1971) after a visit to the battlefields to France and Belgium in 1967. *The First Day on the Somme* is not a 'top-down' or generals-led history, but the story of ordinary men who fought told through their own recollections, diaries and letters. Middlebrook even included in his appendix a battlefield tour of the Somme which included maps, directions, and references to significant events mentioned in the text.⁵²⁴ In doing so he developed what Masefield had started to do in 1917, adding the 'voices' of those who took part, a style perpetuated by Malcolm Brown, Lyn Macdonald and Paul Reed. In the same way, television programmes that take the viewer on a tour of the battlefields work in a similar way to the manner in which battlefield guides interpret the significance of the landscape for the tourist. The viewer is forced to accept the vantage point of the camera and the preoccupation of the author.

Anniversaries of the war have stimulated modern day tourists to visit the most well-known First World War locations such as Ypres, Passchendaele and the Somme. Holt's Tours have on their books over 200 travellers who have completed at least twenty battlefield tours, and some of their customers have visited significant Great War sites more than one hundred times.⁵²⁵ Their website promises customers that 'You will see a country from a fresh perspective. So often behind the peaceful countryside, village and town there is another story and an opportunity to see how the past has shaped the present.'⁵²⁶ Tour operators now enlist well respected historians such as Professor Richard Holmes and Professor Gary Sheffield to lead battlefield

⁵²³ Edited version of 'High Wood' by Philip Johnstone (1918) quoted from the introduction to *The Old Front Line*

⁵²⁴ Martin Middlebrook, *The First Day on the Somme* (London: Penguin, 1971), Introduction

⁵²⁵ Maureen Meakin (Holt's Tours) to Emma Mahoney (by email) 14 April 2004

⁵²⁶ <http://www.battletours.co.uk> (accessed 10 April 2004)

tours of significant sites of both world wars. These tours are well advertised, and *BBC History Magazine* regularly runs competitions to win day trips to Ypres and other significant battlefield sites with the well-known television historian Richard Holmes.

The Pastoral Mode

Representations of landscape in British television documentaries about the First World War are an organic development of the vision of the Western Front buttressed by pre-war pastoralism and post-war literature and art. Television has merely extended the form of History as Elegy (mournful poems for the dead) on to small screen mediations of the battle.⁵²⁷ The pastoral mode is a well-established method in English literature: this chapter will show how its use has been continued by television producers in their attempts to understand the psychological legacy of the conflict, as well as fully gauging with the calamities of the war as ‘a way of invoking a code to hint by antithesis at the indescribable.’⁵²⁸

Rupert Brooke’s well-known ‘1914’ declared ‘If I should die, think only this of me:/That there’s some corner of a foreign field/That is for ever England’⁵²⁹, but the unprecedented number of volunteer and conscript soldiers that fought for Britain in the First World War were men whose parents or wives had not accepted as one of the conditions of a professional soldier’s career the possibility of an unknown grave in a foreign country.⁵³⁰ John Masefield’s *The Old Front Line* (1917) was the first mediation to make a conscious attempt to use the language of pastoral description to picture the battle for home consumption: he sought to provide ‘a memorial for the dead and *memoria technia* for the bereaved’ because he foresaw a need to visualise the battlefield site where loved ones had died.⁵³¹ The use of the pastoral mode continued to develop in the inter-war years. In 1936, a Gaumont British newsreel of the Cenotaph ceremony depicted a series of scenes during the minute’s silence. The camera cuts from the royal family to the crowds, the national family, to country churchyards, and to a shire horse in a field as an image of the ‘England’ which

⁵²⁷ Margaret Drabble & Jenny Stringer (eds), *The Concise Oxford Companion to English Literature* (Oxford: OUP, 1987), p.176

⁵²⁸ Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford: OUP, 1975), p.235

⁵²⁹ Jon Silkin (ed), *The Penguin Book of First World War Poetry* (London: Penguin, 1996), pp.79-80

⁵³⁰ Bob Bushaway, ‘Name Upon Name: The Great War and Remembrance’, p.138

⁵³¹ *Ibid.*

soldiers had died to save. The extraordinary construction of national unity ‘fed on a wide range of registers of British national identity, particularly pastoral images, with the Whitehall Cenotaph itself as its core.’⁵³²

The Battle of the Somme is particularly raw in British popular memory. Prior to the 80th anniversary in July 1996, the *Observer* claimed that the importance of the Somme is as a parable of modern Englishness, ‘a moving, prophetic vision of how life in Britain would be after the war was over [...] the day on which Britain’s century began [...] there was no collective revolt, no consensus for resistance to orders. The English soldier groused – as the English still tend to – and sang wry songs about whiz bangs and wanting to go home.’⁵³³ Whilst French war memory is encased within the walls of Verdun, for most Frenchmen the Somme is merely a river but to the British the Somme means a battle: ‘in Britain the Great War can still evoke a sense of waste, heroic loss, glimpse of what might have been, in France that war is regarded – if at all - as a meaningless massacre [...] It is dismissed as pointless, is disregarded, and ultimately largely forgotten. The Somme is thus a frontier of the mind [...] it is where France ends and Britain begins.’⁵³⁴ Between July and November 1916 Britain suffered approximately 420,000 casualties, and the bodies of 73,412 men were never found, but their names inscribed on the memorial at Thiepval.

***Battle of the Somme* (BBC, 1976)**

Battle of the Somme was the first documentary-film about the First World War to make use of the pastoral-elegiac inheritance of 1914-1918.⁵³⁵ The programme presented the actual battlefield as both a character and main feature of the story of the fighting that occurred there in 1916. It was presented by the actor Leo McKern. [Fig. 19] The script was written with McKern’s voice in mind after Brown had worked with him on a documentary on the Russian Revolution *The World Turned Upside Down*

⁵³² Malcolm Smith, ‘The War and British Culture’ in Stephen Constantine, Maurice W. Kirby, Mary B. Rose, *The First World War in British History*, (London: Arnold, 1995), p.171-172

⁵³³ *Observer* 30 June 1996 p.4

⁵³⁴ *The Listener* 14 December 1989 pp.16-18

⁵³⁵ BBC WAC VR/76/345 – Audience Research Department Report 16 July 1976. The BBC estimated that the programme was watched by approximately 7.7% of the United Kingdom population, and achieved an average audience Reaction Index of 76 out of 100: 31% of the viewing sample gave the programme a rating of A+, and 48% awarded a grade A. The programme also enjoyed critical acclaim: it was nominated for BAFTA and EMMY awards.

(1967). Brown envisaged McKern as a ghostly guide appearing to battlefield tourists to say ‘do you know what happened here?’⁵³⁶ He was ‘the programme’s lynchpin, narrating the story from the actual battlefield, the only figure in a once lethal landscape, in effect one man standing in for thousands. He would be a kind of revenant, an ancient-mariner-figure taking the audience by the arm to explain what had happened in those haunted killing fields in the summer and autumn of 1916.’⁵³⁷

[Play video clip 14: *Battle of the Somme*]

Battle of the Somme appeared at a time when historical writing began to place greater emphasis on the experience of the ordinary man at war. As well as being the television equivalent of John Masefield’s *The Old Front Line* and Leon Wolff’s *In Flanders Fields* (1957), it was Martin Middlebrook’s *The First Day on the Somme* (1971) that was used as a main inspiration, and Middlebrook worked with Brown as Historical Adviser. The style encouraged by *Battle of the Somme* can be seen in later programmes such as *A Slow Walk Over No Man’s Land* (Channel 4/Ulster TV, 1986), an evocation of the Ulster Division’s experience on the Somme, in addition to *The Somme 1916* (Tyne Tees TV, 1994), *The Somme: 70 Years On Old Soldiers Remember* (Central TV, 1986), and *Voices of War* (Channel 4, 1988).⁵³⁸ The research for *Battle of the Somme* culminated in Malcolm Brown’s first published book *Tommy Goes to War* (1978).

Malcolm Brown intended that Leo McKern would tell the story of the battle with a long and patient build-up: it was intended that the shock that was to follow was made all the more powerful because the story of the battle ‘was not widely known then [as it is today].’⁵³⁹ The BBC’s Audience Research Department found that it did make a profound impression on reporting viewers ‘inducing feelings of horror at the extent of the slaughter [...] and sadness at the futility of it all.’⁵⁴⁰ The overall opinion of the series was that it had been most effective in conveying what it must have been like to

⁵³⁶ Malcolm Brown to Emma Mahoney (by telephone) 9 August 2004

⁵³⁷ *BBC History Magazine* March 2003 p.42

⁵³⁸ Programme details from Gerald Gliddon, *Legacy of the Somme 1916; The Battle in Fact, Film and Fiction* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 1996), p.176

⁵³⁹ Malcolm Brown to Emma Mahoney (by telephone) 9 August 2004

⁵⁴⁰ BBC WAC VR/76/345

be one of the 'poor bloody infantry.'⁵⁴¹ Television reviews largely focused on the theme of remembrance, and the number of casualties suffered on the first day of the battle, 1 July 1916. One newspaper quoted Brown describing the Somme as 'as though six Waterloos were fought side by side and five were lost.'⁵⁴² The *Sunday Times* wrote that the Somme was

the bloodiest and certainly the most senseless battle in the history of warfare [...] the story of a military strategy which seemed to consist of feeding soldiers to the enemy until their lines were choked with corpses [...] No matter how well-known in outline, the detailed story of the Somme battle is still mind-boggling. The military theory was that seven days of bombardment would annihilate the enemy and the boys could just stroll across no-man's land [...] stubbornly held by Haig and General Rawlinson [...] In the first day of the 'stroll' [...] 60,000 British soldiers were killed or injured [...] four and a half months later there was a total of 1,200,000 victims.⁵⁴³

In addition to the evident confusion over the facts and figures of the battle's statistical legacy, reviewers understood that the programme was underpinned by remembering the dead of the war. They reported that listening to McKern's narration 'was like listening to a trumpet voluntary' and that the 'vivid commentary, delivered with conviction by Leo McKern, was sternly equal to this terrible story.'⁵⁴⁴ The battlefield itself was described as 'still scarred by the memory of war, where military cemeteries stretch as far as the eye can see'⁵⁴⁵ and the method of measuring miles gained by lives lost announced that '2 million casualties were inflicted for a 7 ½ mile advance.'⁵⁴⁶ When *Battle of the Somme* was repeated on 26 June 1986 it had lost none of its emotive force. The *Times* spoke of 'So many thousands, and too young to sleep forever – except that euphemism really won't do: they didn't fall asleep; they died painfully, horribly, and alone – especially alone, buried in the mud in which they fell.'⁵⁴⁷ It was described as 'harrowing and powerful' story of the 'Terrible Great War confrontation in which 1,200,000 men were killed or wounded in the devastated

⁵⁴¹ Ibid.

⁵⁴² *Daily Mail* 29 June 1976 p.18

⁵⁴³ *Sunday Times* 4 July 1976 p.36

⁵⁴⁴ *Daily Telegraph* 30 June 1976 p.13 and *Sunday Times* 4 July 1976 p.36

⁵⁴⁵ *Daily Mail* 29 June 1976 p.19

⁵⁴⁶ *Guardian* 29 June 1976 p.22

⁵⁴⁷ *Times* June 27 1986 p.14

landscape of Picardy.⁵⁴⁸ These reviews show that the pastoral images used by documentaries like *Battle of the Somme* resonated with viewers' understanding of the Somme as a portal to futile and industrialised mass slaughter.

Battle of the Somme underlined that Britain's contemporary visual memory of the Western Front has been deeply affected by the paintings of Paul Nash, an artist whose work did not resemble traditional mediations of the English landscape but the 'anti-landscape' of the Western Front as no longer a place of beauty but of death.⁵⁴⁹ Leo McKern's voice-over on Nash's 'After the battle' and 'We are making a new world' [Figs. 20 and 21] admits that the war artist's interpretations of the Western Front 'have become significant documents of our time.'⁵⁵⁰ Nash was just one of many official war artists despatched to the Western Front by Charles Masterman to record the war, but television has done much to exploit his particular perception of the war. An official war artist from November 1917, Paul Nash had served as a Second Lieutenant in the Hampshire Regiment until he was wounded in March 1917. Nash's expeditions to the battlefields transformed him into an angry opponent of the war's destructive futility, and that his belief in the sanctity of landscape hastened this inner metamorphosis.⁵⁵¹

When Nash returned to the Ypres Salient as a war artist, he was outraged at the change in the landscape after the fighting at Passchendaele, that nature was 'no longer capable of alleviating the damage wrought by incessant gunfire, appeared everywhere to have suffered irrevocable extinction.' In a letter to his wife, Nash commented that 'Evil and the incarnate fiend alone can be master of this war, and no glimmer of God's hand is seen anywhere. Sunset and sunrise are blasphemous, they are mockeries to man, only the black rain out of the bruised and swollen clouds all through the bitter black of night is fit atmosphere in such a land.'⁵⁵² When *Battle of the Somme* sought to evoke the reality of the destruction of war on the Western Front, it was Paul Nash's 'We are making a new world' (1918) that was transposed onto film of present day Flanders. The painting depicts the rising sun breaking into No Man's

⁵⁴⁸ *Guardian* 26 June 1986 p.30

⁵⁴⁹ Samuel Hynes, *A War Imagined* (London: Pimlico, 1990), pp.194-202

⁵⁵⁰ BBC WAC, *Battle of the Somme* script p.8

⁵⁵¹ Richard Cork, *A Bitter Truth: Avant-Garde Art and the Great War* (London: Newhaven, 1995), p.198

⁵⁵² *Ibid.*

Land, a malleable landscape that is constantly reshaped by bombardment. Other wartime artists like Nash, such as Wyndham Lewis, Eric Kennington and C.R.W.Nevinson, painted landscapes not in the more traditional style of Muirhead Bone's 'Battle of the Somme' but 'elegies for the death of landscape.'⁵⁵³

Battle of the Somme also underlines that the English heaven did not differ greatly in appearance from much of the land that became the battlefields of the First World War, especially the areas by the Rivers Somme and Ancre. This is a useful dramatic device. Ivor Gurney published his first collection of poems *Severn and Somme* (1917) to link his wartime reality with more comforting parallels of his Gloucestershire home. Gurney wrote that 'All these verses were written in France, and in sound of the guns [...] whose images of beauty in the mind were always of Gloucester, county of Cotswold and Severn, and a plain rich, blossomy, and sweet of airs.'⁵⁵⁴

John Masefield was the first to write that the country north of the Somme 'is very like Wiltshire' and described it as 'curiously British'.⁵⁵⁵ Raymond Asquith wrote to his wife that it was 'a rolling down country, rather like the uplands of Hampshire or Wiltshire.' Charles Carrington said of a village in the Somme valley 'it might be Kent if it wasn't Picardy. Poppies, cornflowers, deep green lanes, wide rolling downs, all the same [as England] except that France has bluer distances and wider expanses of open country.' John Buchan wrote of the Somme tributary, the Ancre, that 'it is such a stream as many to be found in Wiltshire, with good trout in its pools.'⁵⁵⁶ After the end of the Somme battle in November 1916, however, Private Archie Surfleet noted in his diary that the very word Somme 'conjured up a picture of miserable waste, mud and devastation.'⁵⁵⁷ *Battle of the Somme* illustrates this binary vision by quoting Sergeant Leslie Coulson's poem

⁵⁵³ Samuel Hynes, *A War Imagined*, p.199

⁵⁵⁴ Ivor Gurney, *Severn & Somme* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1917), Preface

⁵⁵⁵ John Masefield, *The Old Front Line*, 'Introduction' by Colonel Howard Green, p.21

⁵⁵⁶ Malcolm Brown, *The Imperial War Museum Book of the Somme* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1997), pp.1-3

⁵⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

Who made the law that men should die in meadows[?]
Who spake the word that blood should splash in lanes[?]
Who gave it forth that gardens should be bone yards?
Who spread the hill with flesh and blood and brains?⁵⁵⁸

The opening scenes of the programme remind the viewer that this area was repeatedly fought over centuries before the first wave of the BEF arrived to save Belgium in the summer of 1914. McKern points out that the region of Picardy has been inextricably linked with the fortunes of the English for more than five hundred years:

If you take the train from Amiens to Arras across north-east France you will pass through a region deeply linked by emotion and history with the people of Britain. This is Picardy. Through this land in 1415 came Henry the Fifth, en route for his encounter with the French at Agincourt. And here, 501 years later, the descendants of Henry's knights and bowmen fought again – in a battle so gigantic in scale that it makes Henry's one day clash seem like a cock-fight in a barnyard.⁵⁵⁹

This is a device that has been used by a number of artists in the post-war period. In *In Parenthesis* (1937) the poet, artist and Western Front veteran David Jones re-attached traditional meanings to the unprecedented actualities of war by underlining previous Anglo-French conflicts before Agincourt, the battles of Crécy (1346) and Poitiers (1356): 'My fathers were with the Black Prince of Wales/at the passion of the blind Bohemian king./They served in these fields,/It is in the histories that you can read it [*sic.*]'⁵⁶⁰ Richard Holmes' episode on the Somme in his *War Walks* series (BBC, 1996) also refers to Agincourt as he stands on a bridge that he said was crossed by Henry V on his way to meet the French. The choice of reference to the battle of 1415 is particularly significant because Agincourt folklore is the very antithesis of the modern folkloric tales of tragedy on the Somme in 1916: the British underdog secures a decisive (and quick) victory over a far larger French army. The reference is a dramatic device, a prologue to set the scene for the drama and tragedy that follows.

⁵⁵⁸ BBC WAC, *Battle of the Somme* script p.34

⁵⁵⁹ *Ibid.* p.2

⁵⁶⁰ David Jones, *In Parenthesis* (London: Faber & Faber, 1937/1963 edition), p.79

Placing contemporary events in the setting of a heroic past, and placing strange new events in the context of familiar and glorious occurrences of the past, results in a reassuring sense of continuity.⁵⁶¹ Lyn Macdonald also used this historical emplotment device at the opening of *Somme* (1983). Macdonald points out that the road connecting the landmarks of the Somme - Amiens, Albert, Bapaume and Arras - was built by the Romans, underlining that Belgian territory was marched over thousands of years before the 'khaki tide' arrived in 1914.⁵⁶² Ivor Gurney's preface to *Severn & Somme* also recalled the virtues of the River Severn 'as the wise Romans knew, who made their homes in exile by the brown river, watching the further bank for signs of war.'⁵⁶³ In 1989, a newspaper article on remembrance rituals in Bury St Edmunds showed the continued significance of ancestral pride in local communities: 'When Bury men were called to arms, they went: to Agincourt as archers and pike men, to Waterloo to hold the thin red line, to Minden, to Passchendaele, Dunkirk, Palestine, Malaysia, the Falklands and Northern Ireland. They have shed their youth and blood in foreign fields.'⁵⁶⁴

When historical-cultural emplacement is used in a television documentary, it serves to firmly root the viewers' mind in the historical as well as emotional and geographical landscape over which an industrial war of such unprecedented scale was waged. Richard Holmes' *War Walks* buttressed the idea for viewers of the physical, geographical and emotional importance of actually standing in the same place as important battles, to follow in the footsteps of the British Expeditionary Force. When visiting land that has been the scene of generations of violence and turmoil, the visitor's embodied knowledge of the events that took place on the battlefields of the Western Front encourages the sense of a 'haunted' atmosphere that the land itself has been made sacred by the historical events that have played out over otherwise unremarkable farmland. During a visit to the forests of Lithuania, Simon Schama recognised that

⁵⁶¹ Stuart Sillars, *Art and Survival in First World War Britain* (London: Macmillan, 1987), p.7

⁵⁶² Lyn Macdonald, *Somme* (London: Michael Joseph, 1983), p.3

⁵⁶³ Ivor Gurney, *Severn & Somme*, Preface

⁵⁶⁴ *Times* 4 November 1989 p.35

There was, I knew, blood beneath the verdure and tombs in the deep glades of oak and fir. The fields and forests and rivers had seen war and terror, elation and desperation, death and resurrection; Lithuanian kings and Teutonic knights, partisans and Jews; Nazi Gestapo and Stalinist NKVD. It is haunted land where greatcoat buttons from six generations of fallen soldiers can be discovered lying amidst the woodland ferns.⁵⁶⁵

This viewpoint is encouraged by *Battle of the Somme*. Leo McKern recalled the Somme's 'strangely evocative landscape' in that 'You could sit on a beautiful day with the larks singing and you would realise that you were on top of someone's dead body – 70,000 were never found.'⁵⁶⁶ There has been an increasing amount of press interest in this bond with the dead since the 1960s. One recent story discussed the construction of a car park in Horstel, near the German-Belgium border: 'Week by week, more and more remnants of the 500,000 British troops missing in this century's two world wars are creeping up through the soil or emerging when deep foundations are dug.'⁵⁶⁷ The physical traces of the war have not completely disappeared and therefore the war remains active and alive in the public's consciousness. Year after year, the land releases the dead and the accoutrements of war, a theme that is regularly covered by the British press because it resonates with the sense of a 'lost generation' that is central to Britain's modern memory of 1914-1918.⁵⁶⁸

The land of the former Western Front is still a dangerous place. Along some parts of where the Western Front once stood it has been calculated that there are five unexploded shells per square metre, and 5000 kilos of shrapnel per hectare. The

⁵⁶⁵ Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory*, p.24

⁵⁶⁶ *Radio Times* June 29 1976 p.3

⁵⁶⁷ *Guardian* November 9 1998 p.3

⁵⁶⁸ *Daily Telegraph* 11 November 2000 p.10. The unlawful removal of wartime artefacts was reported by *Battlefield Scavengers* (Channel 4, 2000). A small team of undercover reporters followed a group of nine retired Belgian men called the Diggers, who in 1998 began excavating a field on the outskirts of Boezinghe, on the northern edge of the Ypres Salient. The landowner, who wished to preserve the field as sacred ground as it had been since the armistice, had died, and the land was sold for a factory development. The programme reported that the Diggers made 'no secret of the fact that some of their numbers take items from the field, but they claim to have rules concerning personal effects.' When the article was written 105 bodies had been recovered from the site, and only one, a Frenchman, had been identified. Jeremy Gee, of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, expressed concern that most of the remains remain 'unknown' and quoted an average 60-70% identification rate at other sites. Of the fifty-nine British bodies found, only nine had been placed in their military units, and the article (not the CWGC representative) insinuates that because the Diggers had removed the cap, flash badges and insignia from the remains, the CWGC could not identify the other fifty British bodies.

Belgian Army now control the recovery and disposal of weapons and concentrate their work excavating the unexploded shells fired at the battle of Third Ypres (Passchendaele) where they harvest up to 250,000 kilos of metal each year.⁵⁶⁹ Recent headlines such as ‘Sacred battlefield still gives up its dead’ and ‘Ypres fields still yield a sad harvest’ are media staples around Remembrance Day.⁵⁷⁰

When remains can be identified it is especially newsworthy, as in October 2001 when the body of a soldier from Bury. Private Harry Wilkinson’s remains were recovered more than eight decades after he disappeared during an attack on a German position at Ploegsteert Wood on 9 November 1914. His regimental museum appealed for Wilkinson’s relatives to come forward, pointing out that he had a six-year old son who would be in his nineties at the time the story was published. The article suggests a form of obituary for the army reservist, a fireman called up in August 1914, adding the personal details that are so important to friends and relatives of the deceased. An article in the *Times* commented on the ‘sad harvest’ and burial of twelve unknown Tommies: by underlining that they were ‘men who loved and were loved, but somewhere in Britain their descendents went about their normal lives utterly oblivious’ it buttressed the debt owed to the British war dead.⁵⁷¹

However, there are many people who still care for the men who lie in foreign ground. In 1986, the *Times* referred to the caretaker of a Commonwealth War Graves Commission cemetery on the Somme as ‘the caretaker of 21,490 souls’ who refers to the bodies in his care as ‘my friends’. Arthur Leech is the son of the previous caretaker, a Somme veteran who had looked after the graves ‘to care for his old pals.’⁵⁷² On a visit to Beaumont Hamel, the location of the BEF’s last push in the Somme offensive near the River Ancre in mid-November 1916, the journalist Michael Watkins wrote that ‘The place has a brooding quality that cannot be entirely in the imagination [...] if hundreds of years of prayer impregnate the fabric of a church; that generations of birth, laughter, tears, leave a mark upon an old house – then it should not be difficult to sense a ghost army on the move.’⁵⁷³

⁵⁶⁹ Mark Derez, ‘A Belgian Salient for Reconstruction’ p.443

⁵⁷⁰ *Daily Telegraph* November 11 2000 p.10, *Times* October 28 2000 p.16

⁵⁷¹ *Times* October 28 2000 p.16

⁵⁷² *Times* June 27 1986 p.14

⁵⁷³ *Ibid.*

Special film techniques in *Western Front* emphasised the idea of a ‘ghost army.’ During the opening sequences that show him on the Eurostar train, looking out on to the same vistas as McKern twenty-three years before, Holmes leaves little to the audience’s imagination by superimposing film images from the war on to the present day film to show the events that were played out in that area of France. Viewers are not only told of the landscape’s memory, but the viewer can watch it play upon the screen. As the camera pans away from Holmes’ profile, the train window is used as projector in replaying images of 1914-1918: troops marching, artillery firing, and horse-drawn wagons of supplies going up the line, the land still haunted by a reconstructed ‘ghost army’. It is not the army of Roman Emperors or Henry V’s bowmen, but the men of the First World War that are remembered above all others, apparitions which haunt the minds of the thousands of tourists that visit the area each year.

[Play video clip 15: *Western Front*]

Western Front also shows footage of a tank superimposed on modern day film enables the ghost-like machine to roll through a village which has not seen its like since the cessation of hostilities in 1918. This technique re-affirms the element of the replaying and revisiting assumed memories of 1914-1918. The perception of the landscape as it was then and how it is now can be seen in the countless battlefield tours and journal articles such as the Western Front Association’s journal *Stand To!* with its regular column ‘The Camera Returns’. Other press articles on this theme have sought out the personalities that were involved in the fighting on the Western Front. One journalist wrote that he walked ‘among the ghosts of Passchendaele’ to find two of the next war’s most famous characters who had also fought in the Great War:

From the main road Wytschaete was just a wood, shading in the curve of the Flanders countryside. There, towards the end of the Great War, Adolf Hitler enjoyed the life of a young private soldier in the German army, facing the armies of the British Empire crammed into the Ypres Salient. ‘Churchill was here,’ a Belgian had told me earlier. Of course, I had replied. After the bloody disaster of the Gallipoli landings, he had sought solace, away from the Whitehall snake pit, with a bit of good honest soldiering out on the Western Front. I [...] fantasised

about the two men slugging it out in the mud; settling two 20th-century catastrophes for the price of one.⁵⁷⁴

The landscape of the Western Front is perceived to hold the war memories of the men who fought over its land. Henry Williamson's *The Power of the Dead* (1963) features a war veteran named Philip as its main character, who in the manner of Siegfried Sassoon and Robert Graves, is the author's thinly veiled self-portrait, a First World War veteran who attempted to re-join civilian life by learning to farm his uncle's estate.⁵⁷⁵ Philip is haunted by the 'misused country' of the 'shattered trees, wire-tangled loam and corpse-shattered slops of the Somme.'⁵⁷⁶ The character recalled that 'I must return to my old comrades of the Great War – to the brown, the treeless, the flat and grave-set plain of Flanders – to the rolling, heat-miraged down lands above the river Somme – for I am dead with them, and they live again in me.'⁵⁷⁷

Like many veterans, the writer and academic Edmund Blunden experienced nightmares, especially about the Somme, and he felt a compulsion to revisit the sites of war – in addition to official inspections on behalf of the Imperial War Graves Commission – because he felt as he had left some part of himself there.⁵⁷⁸ In 1919, Blunden described himself as a 'a harmless young shepherd in a soldier's coat', but out of today's most popular war writers he spent the most time in the firing line. Blunden remained a pastoral poet in a war setting, not having developed a new wartime artistic style like Paul Nash, or found a new voice like Siegfried Sassoon, Wilfred Owen or Isaac Rosenberg. Blunden's war poems 'concentrate on the courage of his comrades, the nature of the landscape or life away from the Front Line; the horrors and ironies are muted, the tone still often deliberately literary, as if he were striving to keep the role of observing poet separate from that of active soldier.'⁵⁷⁹

⁵⁷⁴ *Guardian* 9 May 1998 p.8

⁵⁷⁵ Henry Williamson, *The Power of the Dead* (London: Panther, 1963)

⁵⁷⁶ *Ibid.* Back cover

⁵⁷⁷ *Ibid.* p.80

⁵⁷⁸ Extract from the poem 'On Reading That the Rebuilding of Ypres Approached Completion': Of his physical and emotional investment he wrote: '.....I/Am in the soil and sap, and in the becks and conduits/My blood is flowing, and my sigh of consummation/Is the wind in the rampart trees.'

⁵⁷⁹ Barry Webb, *Edmund Blunden – A Biography* (London: Newhaven, 1990), p.57. Serving as a Field Works Officer in C Company, 11th Sussex Regiment, Blunden's longest duties were carried out near Hill 60 and in trenches five miles north of Loos. According to Barry Webb, Blunden had two years under fire compared to Owen's 8 months, Sorley less than a year, Graves a year, Gurney 15 months, Sassoon 16 months, Rosenberg 19 months, and David Jones 22 months.

This was a theme Blunden expanded in *Undertones of War* (1928). Blunden never completely exorcised the spectres of the war: ‘Unlike Robert Graves, he was unable to say “Goodbye to all that” and memories and allusion to warfare were cruelly faithful companions. A row of trees, the quality of light on a landscape, the sound of the wind – any of these could transport him back to the trenches.’⁵⁸⁰ In 1924, Blunden wrote of his own mental landscape as ‘it was impossible not to look again, and to descry the ground, how thickly and innumably yet it was strewn with the facts or notions of war experience. I must go over the ground again.’⁵⁸¹ After Blunden’s death in 1975, artist Laurence Whistler produced a glass engraving for a commemorative window that represented ‘the interpenetration of two worlds – not the solace of healing and forgetting, but the barbed wire as a living briar, and the shell burst as a tree in bloom.’⁵⁸²

The murder of nature as a metaphor for men has been further emphasised by documentaries such as *Western Front* and *Battle of the Somme*. The later quoted former Royal Flying Corps officer Cecil Lewis, author of *Sagittarius Rising* (1936), who described the Western Front as ‘a sinister brown belt, a strip of murdered nature.’⁵⁸³ The idea of nature being so violently attacked by the Western Front is further underlined by the *Battle of the Somme* reference to ‘that livid wound that lay across Europe’.⁵⁸⁴ In parallel to Lewis’s view from his RFC plane, television has used air transport and camera hoists to show the physical effects of war on landscape. *Western Front* shows Richard Holmes taking a helicopter flight above the forests of Picardy to get a bird’s eye view of the battlescape. Holmes also chose Verdun for its richness in human metaphor and analogy for the third episode of the series. Fort Douaumont, near Verdun, is described as being ‘pockmarked by shell holes’, and the camera shows the effects of a war that wrought such damage on the complexion of the land it scarred. However, the idea of land as flesh and war as disease is nothing new. In 1916 John Masefield wrote of the mine crater of Beaumont Hamel that

⁵⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁸¹ Edmund Blunden, *Undertones of War* (London: Collins, 1965), p.8

⁵⁸² Laurence Whistler quoted in Hugh Cecil, ‘Passchendaele – A Selection of British and German War Veteran Literature’ in Peter Liddle (ed), *Passchendaele in Perspective*, 1997

⁵⁸³ BBC WAC, *Battle of the Somme* script p.11 quoting Cecil Lewis, *Sagittarius Rising*

⁵⁸⁴ Charles Edward Montague, *Disenchantment* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1992)

It is like the crater of a volcano, vast, ragged, and irregular, about one hundred and fifty yards long, one hundred yards across, and twenty-five yards deep. It is crusted and scabbed with yellowish tetter, like sulphur or the rancid fat on meat. The inside has rather a look of meat, for it is reddish and all streaked and scabbed with this pox and with discoloured chalk. A lot of it trickles and oozes like sores discharging pus, and this liquid gathers in holes near the bottom, and is greenish and foul and has the look of dead eyes staring upwards.⁵⁸⁵

Gone for a Soldier (STV, 1985) which describes Britain's response to the invasion of Belgium as 'patriotism ran through Britain like a fever.' In addition, Holmes' 'Calvary of French suffering', the strategically important hill on the left bank of the Meuse known as *La Mort Homme*, is said to have been fiercely fought over as 'the battle seethed across these slopes stripped bare by artillery and raped by machine gun fire.' Such terms connected with sexual violence and molestation assume that the landscape has suffered the worst degradation the war could inflict upon her. John Masefield used similarly graphic words associated with violent torture, describing the area around Serre as 'skinned, gouged, flayed and slaughtered'.⁵⁸⁶

In a sequence rich with imagery, Holmes describes *La Voie Sacree*, the road in and out of the heavily fortified town, as 'the artery that pumped blood into Verdun' conveying the idea of Verdun as the national heart of France. Holmes claims that Verdun was the place men were sent to spill their own blood in sacrifice to save *La Patrie*, and in doing so they suffered one million casualties. Even over the last thirty years, Holmes believes the Western Front's 'scars have softened', but the ground remains pockmarked with shell holes and the cemeteries stand as permanent reminders of the almost incomprehensible scale of death and suffering. Indeed, it is the death and suffering of the men that has seeped into the landscape. Conversely, *Peace in No-Man's Land* suggests that it was the experience of a temporary truce and period of friendship means the landscape of the Christmas Truce is

not permanently scarred, like other parts of the old Western Front. The relics of war are few [...] Here and there are old crumbling concrete bunkers, relics of later battles. In Plugstreet Wood, which never suffered the cruel mutilation of the

⁵⁸⁵ John Masefield, *The Old Front Line*, pp.104-5

⁵⁸⁶ John Masefield quoted in Geoff Dyer, *The Missing of the Somme*, p.120

infamous woods of Ypres or the Somme can still be found a concrete first aid post with its oddly evocative name still visible on the lintel: "Blighty Hall". It's as fitting a landscape as any for this 20th Century story of temporary peace and goodwill.⁵⁸⁷

A programme broadcast on BBC Radio Four in November 2003 described how some Flanders residents are still touched by the Great War and its legacy on both the physical and emotional landscape. Presenter Helen Mark travelled round several of the most pertinent sites of memory and mourning, interviewing a local farmer, an archaeologist, a retired army priest and a Great War collector. All had their own stories to tell of how the effects of 1914-1918 are still present in the twenty-first century. A Belgian farmer recounted the numerous times that shrapnel, grenades, helmets, and gas masks that have been caught up in the harvester, referring to the recovered artefacts as 'a special crop.' At Orelle-sur-Coup, many years' work of restoration continues on Yorkshire Trench, Boezinghe, in the northern sector of the Salient. The head archaeologist describes the moment he entered the dugout for the first time in 1992 as 'history unfolding in front of your eyes' and spoke of emotion at finding boots with bones in them, or other human remains that belonged to 'somebody's father, son, brother', as well as the problems of identification. The archaeologist added that when he found the pieces of a harmonica, he thought it was 'strange to think of music on this battlefield.'

The presenter also met ex-army chaplain, Reverend Ray Jones at the German cemetery at Langemark, and hears of a recent service he conducted to bury six unknown soldiers nearby. The Director of the Flanders Museum, took the opportunity of the radio broadcast to protest against the proposed motorway near Pilkem Ridge, saying that the battle sites should be preserved so new generations can be told about the 'atrocious and horror.' He speaks of the Salient as one big cemetery, and of his difficulty in comprehending the scale of human loss: 'I don't understand. I cannot grasp it, although it is *here*. There are 60-70,000 bodies out there in the mud. It is a fact that we have learned to live with the dead.'⁵⁸⁸ Indeed, the Ypres Salient and the fields around the Somme are seen by some as one huge cemetery to those killed in the

⁵⁸⁷ BBC WAC, *Peace in No-Man's Land* script p.28

⁵⁸⁸ BBC Radio 4, *Open Country*

war, as a link to the ‘lost generation’ that ‘an entire generation had remained, buried in the Flanders mud.’⁵⁸⁹ *Gone For a Soldier* illustrates this by showing a photograph of a line of corpses awaiting burial, with a cross laid across the length of each man. Here the men have already found their graves, and the viewer can see them as they would have been laid in the ground and covered in earth. The programme’s narrator comments that after seventy years ‘the soldiers buried in the Ypres Salient have long since turned to dust, but people continue to return every year.’ Echoing the Christian burial service, ‘dust to dust, ashes to ashes’, *Gone for a Soldier* underlines that the men are now an integral and natural part of the earth. The closing shot of the film is a photograph of a badly decomposed and damaged body, almost unrecognisable as something that was once a man. The narrator then recalls one Scottish soldier’s letter home that said that ‘Ypres was Gallic for sacrifice.’

[Play video clip 16: *Gone for a Soldier*]

This final scene suggests a certain view of the war that posits a comparison between broken nature and the broken bodies of dead men who have become a part of the ground they fought for. The use of a single image, in this example a rotting corpse, is a means of imposing an order out of a complex reality. The human losses of the Great War are so great that the numbers might by-pass viewers’ emotional comprehension. By the conscious or subconscious act of selection the documentary maker has to create a sense of reality for the beholder so that ‘a single incident or image stands for the whole: order is given to chaos, and a manageable myth or symbolic image created, through which the beholder may derive some sense of understanding [of] the larger movement of the war.’⁵⁹⁰

Poppies

The symbolism of the poppy has continued to gain resonance. Where the French adopted the cornflower, the *bleuet*, the red poppy (*Papaver rhoeas*) is now universally accepted as signalling Britain’s active remembrance of the First World War. The importance of this most pastoral symbol points to ‘some compensatory quality in

⁵⁸⁹ *Times* 4 November 1989 p.35

⁵⁹⁰ Stuart Sillars, *Art and Survival*, p.88

nature, some equilibrium – of which the poppy is a manifestation and symbol – which means that where terrible violence has taken place the earth will sometimes generate an equal and opposite sense of peace [...] the vast capacity for forgiveness revealed by these cemeteries, by this landscape.’⁵⁹¹

In October 1999 the *Independent* reported plans that had been put to Picardy Regional Council for a permanent living memorial to the soldiers who died on the Somme. This would take the form of a forest of poppies 12 miles long and 100 yards wide, following the trench lines of the battle of the Somme. It was planned that for six weeks each June and July, when poppies are blooming in Picardy, tens of millions of flowers would form a ‘river of blood’, and that the army of poppies would march into the distance on either side of the line that carries the Eurostar trains between London and Paris. They would straddle the A1 auto route, used by British motorists driving south from the tunnel and Channel ports. The article pointed out the rising numbers of British tourists visiting the area, and that the blooming period of the poppies would not only coincide with the anniversary of the start of the Somme offensive, but that it would attract more people during peak periods ‘for tourism and pilgrimage to the battlefields.’ Despite the poppy’s significance as a specifically British symbol of the war it would be a more fitting tribute to all soldiers who died on the Somme because the designer said that ‘the colour of poppies, the colour of blood, would be more striking and more moving. My idea is that they should be a river of blood: a permanent reminder of the sacrifice and the horrors of the war, for all the nations who were involved.’⁵⁹²

Poppies have continued to be a highly emotive sign for remembrance for those who have lost their lives in combat since 1914. Introduced to Britain by the Romans, to whom the poppy was connected with their god of sleep Somnus, representations of the poppy for sleep and rebirth in the elegiac English pastoral tradition accumulated a ripe traditional symbolism in English writing where they have been a staple since

⁵⁹¹ Geoff Dyer, *The Missing of the Somme*, p.130 – however Dyer can only be referring to Allied cemeteries as ‘forgiving’ as German cemeteries, for example at Langemark, appear to be very different spaces to the bright and upright CWGC cemeteries, being dark and brooding, covered by trees, with group (not individual – 12-17 names on each) headstones laid flush to the ground.

⁵⁹² *Independent* 18 October 1999 p.12

Chaucer.⁵⁹³ Pastoral-elegiac poems such as John McCrae's 'In Flanders Fields' and Isaac Rosenberg's 'Break of Day in the Trenches' enabled the poppy to become an established part of national life. It was almost a social cliché – a symbol of mass death and suffering that was later accepted for use in marketing products unrelated to the war or its aftermath.⁵⁹⁴ The Poppy Appeal made explicit an aspect of Armistice Day that had previously been implicit: the re-affirmation of the country's obligation to the living as well as the commemoration of the dead. Sold exclusively by women volunteers on November 11, until the aftermath of the Second World War, the red poppy quickly became the essential element in the general symbolism of Armistice Day ritual. The advent of white poppies from the peace movements of the 1930s had little impact on the reverence held for the red variety.

However, the poppy as a token of remembrance is something of a paradox. The flowers had a well-established connection with the production of opium, a narcotic drug extracted from opiates derived from poppy sap, which was also used for the relief of pain. The flower that was commonly found in the areas where fighting took place caught the imagination of the British public. In 1927, the British Legion Festival of Remembrance 'introduced its most distinctive and moving feature whereby a million poppies, each one representing a life, flutter down on to the servicemen assembled below.'⁵⁹⁵ On 1 July 1966 Canadian planes flew low over the Thiepval memorial on the Somme to scatter Flanders poppies over the lines of yesterday's troops and the veterans who went back to remember their old chums.⁵⁹⁶ On the fiftieth anniversary of VJ Day in May 1996, a Lancaster bomber dropped one million poppies on the Mall in London. A similar rainfall of poppies is staged at the annual British Legion's Festival of Remembrance on the Saturday evening before Armistice Day as thousands of poppies descend from the ceiling of the Royal Albert Hall.

In November 2001, a row erupted because presenters and guests on the BBC World news channel were asked to remove their poppies before appearing on international

⁵⁹³ Paul Fussell *The Great War and Modern Memory*, pp.243-254

⁵⁹⁴ Companies such as Players Cigarettes, Shell Oil, and Cadbury's placed special adverts in major newspapers on Armistice Day, producing a double effect of philanthropy and public relations in the pursuit of their commercial interests as well as underlining the modernity of the Haig Fund charity. See Adrian Gregory, *The Silence of Memory*

⁵⁹⁵ Geoff Dyer, *The Missing of the Somme*, p.25

⁵⁹⁶ Malcolm Brown, *The Imperial War Museum Book of the Somme*, p.340

transmissions because it was thought that while some people abroad will understand the significance of the poppy, many do not. Gerald Howarth, Conservative MP and vice-chairman of the Commons defence committee, said the decision was scandalous: 'They are not the world broadcasting corporation, they are the British Broadcasting Corporation and the idea that presenters should not wear poppies is as daft as the British Airways' decision to remove the union flag from their aeroplanes.'⁵⁹⁷

Prior to Remembrance Day in 2003, the popular television presenter Jonathan Ross had pre-recorded his film review programme without wearing a British Legion poppy. Unable to re-record the show, technicians added a poppy to Ross' suit lapel.⁵⁹⁸ This was thought politic in a social climate that is increasingly concerned about forgetting the British dead of both world wars, especially during the aftermath of the second Gulf war, where a Sky News viewers' poll to the question 'Do we in Britain do enough to honour our war dead?' resulted in an overwhelming majority vote (85%) of 'no'.⁵⁹⁹ Even the popular comedy *Blackadder Goes Forth* ended its final episode 'Goodbye' with the main characters going over the top, the script directs that 'Blackadder, Baldrick, George and Darling run on, brandishing their hand guns. They will not get far. Silence falls. Our soldiers fade away. No Man's Land turns slowly into a peaceful field of poppies. The only sound is that of a bird, singing sweetly.'⁶⁰⁰ [Fig.22]

This gradual fade – a film technique used specifically to sear a scene onto viewers' minds - transforms from desolate battleground to a bright meadow filled with red poppies, was voted one of the most powerful television moments for its emotive power at the end of so much hilarity. Ten years after *Blackadder Goes Forth* was first broadcast, Channel 4 and the *Observer* conducted a poll to determine the one hundred most memorable TV moments. The final 'over the top' scene was placed ninth, while every other entry in the top ten, apart from a scene from *Only Fools and Horses*, was news coverage of major events such as the 1969 moon landing.⁶⁰¹ The poppy has a

⁵⁹⁷ *Guardian* 3 November 2001 p.2

⁵⁹⁸ *Sky News* 'Active' 9 November 2003

⁵⁹⁹ *Sky News* 'Active' viewers' poll 11 November 2003

⁶⁰⁰ Richard Curtis & Ben Elton, *Blackadder The Whole Damn Dynasty 1485-1917* (London: Penguin, 1999), p.452

⁶⁰¹ Chris Howarth & Steve Lyons, *Cunning – the Blackadder Programme Guide* (London: Virgin, 2000), p.153

sobering effect at the demise of Captain Blackadder, but when it is used in a documentary the image of the flower has attained unquestioned significance.

This is a technique that was recently used in an Imperial War Museum exhibition, *Women and War*, in a part of the display which included a silent film of images in remembrance of those that were killed in the First World War. Entitled 'Remembering', the black and white film showed a series of still pictures for approximately three seconds each. After close-up pictures of barbed wire and screw pickets, a picture of a field of poppies was followed by a close-up of a wire poppy, which proceeded to turn from black and white to bright red in a gradual fade.⁶⁰² In Commonwealth War Graves Commission cemeteries in France and Belgium, paper and plastic poppies are placed in the earth near graves, and wreaths of artificial poppies are laid at the feet of memorials. Whether not the real flowers appear, human remembrance rituals ensure that poppies keep their vigil at the gravesites of the fallen, as shown in the opening scenes of *A Time for Remembrance*. The programme also ends with the Field of Remembrance at Westminster, a memory ritual observed every autumn since 1922.

Again, this is nothing new. Richard Attenborough's film of *Oh! What a lovely War* (1969) inverted the poppy's symbolism. The flower is presented as a recurrent symbol that anticipates death. For example, the opening titles featured poppies among shots of familiar household items of the period, such as a coronation mug and a Union Jack flag. As the titles progress each item becomes more sombre than the one before – a dead moth by a snuffed out candle, ammunition, a spiked club, barbed wire, a skull, and finally a poppy. The Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife are given poppies by the photographer *before* they are assassinated. When war is declared there is a shot of a large basket of poppies: the flowers grow in the trenches where the Smiths are killed, and when Jack Smith meets his end the red shape of a poppy in close-up fills the screen to hide his body. Significantly, there are no poppies on the striking sequence at the end of the film where thousands of white crosses stretch into the distance, but they are scattered over the hall where the armistice is signed.⁶⁰³ *Shot at*

⁶⁰² The *Women and War* exhibition was at the Imperial War Museum, London 15 October 2003 – 18 April 2004

⁶⁰³ Terry Bolas, 'Oh What a Lovely War' *Screen* 10, 3 May/June 1969 pp.84-90

Dawn (Carlton, 1998) also used the poppy as a symbol of death: during a reconstruction of a Great War military execution in the background, to the left foreground a bunch of red poppies are seen blowing in the breeze.

In 1976 the narration and pastoral imagery of *Battle of the Somme* underlined that the Somme area of Picardy was where ‘the flower of the war generation fell’ and *Gone for a Soldier* believes the Somme ‘put paid to the flower of Kitchener’s army.’ A newspaper column written after the 60th anniversary of the Somme admitted that ‘Of course, we have never fully recovered from the 1914-1918 war [...] after losing the *flower* of our country.’⁶⁰⁴ These emotive reactions built upon the war’s literary inheritance after Herbert Read’s poem ‘Armistice Day’, written in 1930s, wrote that ‘lustre go in genuine flowers/and men like flowers are cut/and withered on a stem.’⁶⁰⁵ Read and McCrae, at different times, both use imagery of men as being as vulnerable as flowers, a theme continued by many television documentaries in this study. These highly moving evocations of the frailty of human life and the references to Kitchener’s army metaphorically show that while a plant takes a long time to cultivate, it flowers only briefly. During the fourth episode of *Western Front*, as Richard Holmes stands in High Wood and speaks of the costliness of the fighting on the Somme, the camera closes in on a bunch of poppies and a few seconds later pictures of corpses are superimposed onto the poppies swaying in the breeze.

[Play video clip 17: *Western Front*]

On a simple level, the bright red colour of the flowers could be taken as signifying the blood spilled on the battlefields, but many of the poppies shown had yet to flower: a sign of promise unfulfilled, of men who had not the chance to blossom. This imagery of the scything down of healthy men is widely used with reference to citizen volunteers. Television’s emphasis on and treatment of this group, often referred to as ‘the cream of English manhood’ has placed greater emphasis on volunteer soldiers at

⁶⁰⁴ *Times* 10 July 1976 p.12

⁶⁰⁵ Herbert Read, ‘A Poem for Armistice Day in Herbert Read, *Poems 1914-1934* (London: Faber & Faber, 1935)

the expense of conscripted soldiers who made up just over half of the British Expeditionary Force in the second half of the war.⁶⁰⁶

Known as ‘Kitchener’s men’, they volunteered in the opening months of the war in response to the calls for recruits to free Belgium from German invasion. Often from the same towns, factories, villages and sports teams, many ‘pals’ battalions fought and died together on the Somme in 1916. *Battle of the Somme* buttresses this myth by saying that after many months of training and preparation these volunteer Pals battalions ‘were two years in the making and ten minutes in the destroying.’⁶⁰⁷ The mobilisation of the New Armies was one of the most remarkable aspects of Britain’s involvement in the war. When Lord Kitchener issued an appeal on 17 August 1914 for 100,000 men, 1,186,000 volunteered within five months. Unprepared for the rapid influx of such numbers, during the autumn and winter of 1914-15 many men in ‘Kitchener’s Army’ did not have uniform or rifles, and they were often billeted in private homes. Influential men (for example Lord Derby - he recruited four battalions from Merseyside) and private organisations raised their own respective ‘Pals’ battalions. By the end of 1915, 2,466,719 men had volunteered.⁶⁰⁸

The civilian nature of the New Armies is underlined by gardening imagery which emphasises that many of these men, later personified by Robert Newton’s character, a First World War veteran called Frank Gibbons in the film *This Happy Breed* (1944) came from (and were fighting for ‘a nation of gardeners [...] We like planting things, and watching them grow, looking out for changes in the weather.’ Gardening is a recurrent theme in many elegiac documentaries that feature panning shots of well-maintained Commonwealth Grave Commission cemeteries. *Battle of the Somme* incorporates these images as a voiceover reads a soldier’s letter to his family: ‘I can imagine how things must look at home and the garden, as you say, must be almost at its best.’⁶⁰⁹ A newspaper article in 1996 even asserted that ‘England produced no Hitlers, [and] no revolutionary corporals [because] the average English soldier just

⁶⁰⁶ Illana Bet-El, *Conscripts: Lost Legions of the Great War* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 1999)

⁶⁰⁷ BBC WAC, *Battle of the Somme* script p.25

⁶⁰⁸ Gary Sheffield, *Forgotten Victory The First World War Myths and Realities* (London: Headline, 2001), p.43

⁶⁰⁹ BBC WAC, *Battle of the Somme* script quoting a letter from Arthur Hubbard to his family

wanted to get home and quietly dig his new allotment.’⁶¹⁰ Indeed, in March 2002 BBC1’s prime time gardening programme *Ground Force* travelled to Jamaica to create a garden at the Curphey Home for Jamaican war veterans, among them a Somme veteran of 107 years of age.⁶¹¹ Fussell believes that England, as a nation of gardeners ‘was not likely to miss the opportunities for irony in pretending that ‘thickets’ of barbed wire were something like the natural hedges of the English countryside.’ One soldier wrote home describing the wire snarled at the bottom of mine crater near Pozières, declaring ‘the characteristic war-flora [...] represented here as usual by derelict snarls of *Barbedwira volubilis*.’⁶¹² Pastoral parodies can also be found in the *Wipers Times* with a column titled ‘In My Garden’, a satirical take on the weekly magazine *Country Life*: ‘It must be remembered that the planting of toffee-apples on the border of your neighbour’s allotment will seriously interfere with the ripening of his gooseberries.’⁶¹³

The theme of ‘men like flowers are cut’ is underlined by footage of crops in the fields of Belgium and France, a connection with the fact that poppies are commonly found in cornfields. *Battle of the Somme* gives a strong visual impulse to this theme by showing Leo Mckern marching through long grass waving in the breeze: in doing so the programme added further weight to the ‘mowing down’ of men who suffered the worst casualties in the first hours of the battle, many of whom were described as ‘green’ or ‘fresh’. In the second episode of *Western Front* Holmes describes the initial bombardment and British advance at Neuve Chapelle, where the Middlesex and Scottish Rifles were ‘mown down’ like grass in a meadow or corn at harvest time while Holmes crouched in a field of growing crops. When he discussed British casualties at Loos, he stands in an area that has already been harvested, imagery which invests his spoken text with the visual emphasis of the mowing down of men in battle. *Lions Led by Donkeys* also featured a Somme veteran who said of his fellow soldiers that ‘they were like sheaves of corn in a harvest field’ as a solitary soldier-actor strides through the ploughed fields. One veteran in *Game of Ghosts* showed the

⁶¹⁰ *Observer* 30 June 1996 p.4

⁶¹¹ *Radio Times* March 2-8 2002 p.42-3 on BBC1 programme *Ground Force Goes West Indian*

⁶¹² Reginald Farrer, *The Void of War: Letters from Three Fronts* (London: Constable & Co, 1918), p.82

⁶¹³ *Wipers Times* December 25 1917 quoted in Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, p.238 – Gooseberries were thick balls of barbed wire five or six feet in diameter used to block trenches or fill gaps in wire entanglements. Toffee-apples were globular projectiles about a foot in diameter fired from the British trench mortar.

capacity of the pastoral mode to give a more comfortable analogy than might otherwise be made in answer to why he survived when so many did not:

I've thought about it, thought about it all the time and I can never say why some person can survive and another one doesn't. I mean at Ovilliers, when our battalion was practically annihilated, I walked about 700 yards: there was machine gun fire everywhere and yet I walked through unscathed, why? I did hear from one of our men, who was a farmer in England and he said that there was one idea that he had, he said that when you are driving a horse-drawn reaper reaping a field of corn, you would go all round the field, round and round until it was finished but even then if you looked, here and there, there was a stalk standing and he thought that accounted for some survivors.⁶¹⁴

The capacity for the pastoral mode to provide more comfortable analogies for death in war can also be seen in references to trees as metaphorical descriptions of the physical destruction wrought on men's bodies. For example, the first episode of *Western Front* shows close ups of shattered tree stumps to accompany the narration on the fighting in Sanctuary Wood, an example of where men were maimed and disfigured like the trees that were smashed by bullets, shrapnel and shells. Television has continued what was already established in the canon of Great War literature: Henri Barbusse wrote in his *War Diary* of 'The charred skeletons of the trees' and Harold Macmillan thought 'the most extraordinary thing about the modern battlefield is the desolation and emptiness of it all. Nothing is to be seen of war or soldiers – only the split and shattered trees.'⁶¹⁵ David Jones' *In Parenthesis* relies heavily on the imagery of nature and landscape, and there are copious references to trees as the personification of men.⁶¹⁶ Comparisons have also been made to link ruined tree stumps and the remains of buildings like Ypres' famous Cloth Hall which was ruined during long spells of intense fighting over the city.⁶¹⁷

⁶¹⁴ BBC WAC, *Game of Ghosts* script p.29

⁶¹⁵ Geoff Dyer, *The Missing of the Somme*, p.115

⁶¹⁶ David Jones, *In Parenthesis* p.66

⁶¹⁷ Geoff Dyer, *The Missing of the Somme*, p.115

Trees

The relationship between man and landscape was already established in literature and art before the Great War. Before 1914, the French tradition of *naturalisme* was the determining influence on Henri Barbusse's *Le Feu* who had already gained a reputation as a neo-naturalist novelist with his pre-war publication *L'Enfer*. In British literature, there was a different form of realism that was popularised by the poetry and prose of Thomas Hardy, and his work had a strong influence on those men who wrote the much-vaunted literature of the war.⁶¹⁸ For example, A.E.Housman's poetry cycle *A Shropshire Lad* (1896) features the poem 'The Loveliest of Trees.'⁶¹⁹ Trees have formed an implicit part of British remembrance rituals. The coffin that carried the British Unknown Soldier was made from a tree that had stood in the gardens of Hampton Court Palace.⁶²⁰ In 1983, violinist Kenneth Popplewell made a violin with pine and sycamore wood from trees that had grown around Great War battlefields. The instrument is displayed in the lobby of the Imperial War Museum and is played at commemorative events.

The South African legend from the Somme campaign is particularly illustrative of the metaphoric connection of men and trees, blood and sap. That sap, the life-blood of a tree contained in its bark, is particularly pertinent to the legacy of South African troops who fought at Delville Wood in July 1916, and it is generally known as the bloodiest battle ever fought by South Africans. The South African Infantry Brigade troops took the northern tip of the triangle shaped wood and held it unsupported for six days under continuous shelling and machine gun fire. From having 121 officers and 3052 other ranks before the action at Delville, Colonel Edward Thackeray marched out with two officers, both wounded, and 140 other ranks. Of these survivors one officer and 59 men of the light trench mortar battery had joined as reinforcements two days earlier.⁶²¹ The South African brigade's commanding officer General Lukin

⁶¹⁸ A.D.Harvey, 'First World War Literature' *History Today* 43 (November 1993) p.10-12

⁶¹⁹ A.E.Housman, *A Shropshire Lad* (London: G.Richards, 1898): 'Loveliest of trees, the cherry now/Is hung with bloom along the bough,/And stands about the woodland ride/Wearing white for Eastertide./Now, of my threescore years and ten,/Twenty will not come again,/And take from seventy springs a score,/It only leaves me fifty more./And since to look at things in bloom/Fifty springs are little room,/About the woodlands I will go/To see the cherry hung with snow.'

⁶²⁰ BBC Radio 2 documentary 'The Unknown Soldier' presented by Tony Robinson [Blackadder's Baldrick!] as reported in the *Guardian* 14 November 1998 p.18

⁶²¹ Ian Uys, *Delville Wood*, (Johannesburg: Uys Publishers, 1983), p.x

took branches from Delville Wood back to South Africa, and made a cross for the national shrine to their war dead in the Garden of Remembrance at Pietermaritzburg. [Fig.23] The 'Weeping Cross of Delville Wood' is said to bleed or weep every year on or around 14-18 July, the anniversary of the battle. Two similar crosses in Cape Town and Durban do not exhibit this phenomenon, but legend has it that the Delville bark will stop 'weeping' when the last veteran dies.⁶²²

In February 2000, the 'Shot at Dawn' campaign succeeded in getting permission for a memorial to the 306 British soldiers executed by Courts Martial at the National Memorial Arboretum in Staffordshire. It was reported that an eight-foot statue of a boy soldier blindfolded before a firing squad would be placed in the centre of 306 trees, each one dedicated to an executed man. [Fig.24] The statue is said to have been modelled on Private Herbert Burden, of the 1st Battalion Northumberland Fusiliers, who was shot for desertion in 1917. John Hipkin, the founder of the Shot at Dawn pressure group, said that the official recognition given to their cause means that 'they have come home at last in the memory of the country they tried to serve.' The journalist claimed that the 'wood enshrine[s] a growing mood of pity for the soldiers nearly 90 years after their deaths.'⁶²³

Five years after *Battle of the Somme*, Malcolm Brown used still photographs of shattered tree stumps as fades into footage of present-day trees standing motionless in wintry scenes in *Peace in No Man's Land* (1981). This enhances the mood of stillness which pervades the atmosphere of a programme that documents a time when the war literally stood frozen still for those that took part in the Christmas Truce of 1914. *A Game of Ghosts* also uses a fading technique in reverse to that used in *Peace in No Man's Land* as the film of healthy modern day trees regressing back to their disfigured state when they were destroyed by the fighting on the Western Front. The use of trees as a pastoral-elegiac metaphor can be seen in the wartime paintings of Paul Nash. Nash, like John Constable, was said to have regarded trees as an extension of his own body.⁶²⁴

⁶²² www.encounter.co.za/html/delville.html (accessed 30 December 2004)

⁶²³ *Guardian* 19 February 2000 p.10

⁶²⁴ An article in *Country Life* January 18 1990 pp.70-71 'You lover of trees' discussed a similar theme with reference to the painter John Constable (1776-1837) as he 'loved trees. To him they epitomised the beauty and vitality of nature...their well-being was too personal a matter: storm damage vexed him;

Nash's *Wire* [Fig.25] unleashed the full force of his indignation by emphasising the shattered tree in the foreground of a ruined, murdered and murderous landscape: 'the remains of this abused trunk are as pitiful as any human martyr. Enmeshed in barbed spirals, which circle around the tree like the thorns crowning Christ's head, the tree symbolises the degradation and extinction of all living things...'⁶²⁵ However, *We Are Making a New World* which is used at the end of the *Battle of the Somme* to signify the concerns in post-war Britain that life would never be the same after such destruction. The bitterly ironic title shows that the prospect of rebirth was highly doubtful, and the lack of incidental detail shows that Nash believed that the world faced destruction and that nature would soon be extinct. A pale cold yellow sun begins to illuminate a scene barren of everything except shattered and severed tree trunks, perhaps representing the killed, wounded and disabled men who were once so strong and healthy.

Battle of the Somme uses shots of woods around the Somme to re-connect the present-day landscape with that of the battlefields that surrounded that area during the war, in a similar way to Leo Mckern's walk down a tree-lined road to say that this was the road that many soldiers used to get to the front line trenches. In addition, the straight long lines of trees could also represent an army platoon lining up for parade. This is redolent of Paul Nash's painting *Column on the March*. By the use of dramatic perspective, a company of soldiers are depicted on a road that is flanked by tall sinister trees, accentuating a sense of oppression and confinement. The trees do not offer protection, but condemn the weary soldiers 'to trudge in an apparently unending procession on a road as monotonous and inflexible as the war itself.'⁶²⁶

The cycle of life and mortality can be seen metaphorically through the symbolism of trees. Where so many men fell, the trees can signify a form of immortality as they recovered from their burnt-out stumps to rise again and produce green foliage year after year. In *A Game of Ghosts* the trees stand tall and silent, sunlight filtering

he fussed about felling, and was distressed beyond words by the fate of a young Ash tree at Hampstead which was killed by 2 long spiked nails "far driven into her side" to support a notice board.' One wonders what he would have made of the Western Front that Nash was sent to record.

⁶²⁵ Ibid. p.199

⁶²⁶ Richard Cork, *A Bitter Truth*, p.199

through the canopy of leaves and branches, growing solidly out of the ground that once looked to some as desolate as the surface of the moon. As the veterans recollect the details of their experiences on the battlefields we are told that they are in the autumn of their lives, and fittingly, shots of leaves turning with the season are shown to portray that these men are also approaching the ends of their lives. In this way the trees of the Somme are metaphors for the veterans themselves, they represent the steadfastness of the men who went to fight, many of whom were cut down, destroyed, or badly damaged. Those that survived and appear in the programme are linked to those trees, as if the landscape has made an indelible mark on their psyches. Annually, the trees will produce fresh leaves, and the veteran's minds will constantly revisit and refresh their battlefield memories, so the landscape will accompany those thoughts and mirror the internal processes of recollection and renewal. The veterans that feature in *A Game of Ghosts* are as rooted to the battlefields of their youth almost as much as the trees themselves, and the dizzying collage of film shots and music, a whirl of confusion and chaos, suddenly cuts back to views of the tree canopy as if the camera is on the ground looking up.

The appearance in documentary film of corpses and shattered woodland areas from the war enables producers to underline the parallel destruction that war has wrought both on nature and man, perhaps even the human condition and our relationship to nature itself. *Battle of the Somme* comments that the Western Front 'seemed to belong to another world. Every sign of humanity had been swept away.'⁶²⁷ The landscapes seen by soldiers on the front line were often altered by the presence of death, and those qualities of the physical world that the words *landscape* and *nature* once designated were altered by the fighting, and that nature appears in poems and in paintings in order to be disfigured, annihilated, and made irrelevant to the reality of the conflict.⁶²⁸ Nevertheless, many post-war artistic representations of the conflict do not resonate with many veterans' war memories. Henry Williamson's self-portraiture in *The Power of the Dead* underlined that not every soldier shared the more progressive artists' vision of the landscape: 'The war as one experienced it was not the gashed and limbless trunks in shredded pink woollen vests, ruddy-swollen necks and faces of internal bleeding, strewn all across the old uneven grass-grown wilderness of

⁶²⁷ BBC WAC, *Battle of the Somme* script p.11

⁶²⁸ Samuel Hynes, *A War Imagined*, p.201

the Somme country in the retreat of the Fifth Army in March 1918. One was somehow above, or apart from, that general post-war picture.⁶²⁹

Weather

It is a British idiosyncrasy, Dr Johnson noted, that when making conversation British people will comment upon the weather.⁶³⁰ Just as landscape has been endowed with human characteristics, weather conditions and the seasons have provided visual and metaphorical syntax for events during the war well known in British modern memory: the pure white snow of the Christmas Truce in 1914, the sun of the Somme in 1916, and the mud of Passchendaele in 1917. Weather is seen as an indistinguishable part of the war itself, a protagonist playing a defining role in the conditions of warfare appearing to favour one side with rain, snow, or wind that will delay or impair offensives against the enemy. Paul Fussell claimed that the long Edwardian Summer of 1914 is ‘the tombstone of the pastoral tradition, the idea of England as an Arcadia that was to be destroyed by the first of the machine wars, culturally formalised in the inversion of the pastoral tradition by the trench poets and post-war modernists [...] The future is dark and violent and the past is a green and peaceful land: the turning point is the Great War.’⁶³¹

In 1976 a Radio 4 broadcast *A Summer Day on the Somme* underlined the Fussellian irony in that such slaughter occurred ‘In the silence and sunshine of a beautiful summer morning, skylarks were heard singing. A few second later the battle of the Somme began.’⁶³² John Masefield dramatically wrote of 1 July that it was ‘a day of an intense blue summer beauty, full of roaring, violence, and confusion of death, agony, and triumph, from dawn till dark.’⁶³³ The irony of 1 July 1916 breaking ‘fine and clear with just a hint of mist in the valleys’ is particularly poignant in *Battle of the Somme*. A voice-over of a diary entry or letter from a soldier on the Somme said that

⁶²⁹ Henry Williamson, *The Power of the Dead*, p.15

⁶³⁰ Samuel Johnson, *The Idler* 11 June, 24, (1758) – ‘It is commonly observed, that when two Englishmen meet, their first talk is of the weather; they are in haste to tell each other, what each must already know, that it is hot or cold, bright or cloudy, windy or calm.’

⁶³¹ Malcolm Smith, ‘The War and British Culture’, p.180

⁶³² *Radio Times* June 29 1976 – *A Summer Day on the Somme* was broadcast on BBC Radio 4 and was largely along the same lines as the television programme. Martin Middlebrook was the historical consultant, and it was both written and produced by Malcolm Brown.

⁶³³ John Masefield, *The Old Front Line*, p.91

‘when the sun is shining you feel much more brave than when you’re ploughing through the mud and snow.’⁶³⁴ Viewers were said to be particularly struck by the photography, ‘finding the contrast between sunlit Picardy fields today and the hell of sixty years ago particularly poignant.’⁶³⁵

The long Edwardian summer of 1914 has been described by Paul Fussell’s influential study as ‘a tombstone of the pastoral tradition, the idea of England as Arcadia that was to be destroyed by the first of the machine wars, culturally formalised by the inversion of the pastoral tradition by the trench poets and the post-war modernists.’⁶³⁶ However erroneous Fussell’s assertion about the summer of 1914 appears to many historians, in cultural, literary and artistic interpretations the war appears to mark a fundamental cultural disjuncture where the future is dark and violent and the past is a green and peaceful land: the turning point is the First World War. Malcolm Smith has written that ‘If one had to choose two moments in twentieth-century British history that have taken on iconographic status, it would probably be “the summer of 1914” and “the summer of 1940”, the first being the end of the old world and the second the beginning of the new.’⁶³⁷

Whilst this study accepts that the weather conditions at the time of television recordings is beyond the control of the producers, especially in the Ypres Salient, it is in many cases a happy accident when the weather lends added effect to the *mis-en-scène*. *Battle of the Somme*, however, was filmed in May 1976 to ensure that the weather conditions were as similar as possible to the sunny day of 1 July 1916, and Malcolm Brown recalled that the programme was broadcast during a hot summer’s evening in June 1976 which he believed added impact to the film.⁶³⁸ Nevertheless, Richard Holmes’ *Western Front* provides many examples for the illustrative power of the weather in Great War television documentaries. When Holmes discusses the British and German clash before the battle of the Marne, it is against a backdrop of dark, stormy clouds and the rumble of thunder and lightning which conveniently signifies the storm of war.

⁶³⁴ BBC WAC, *Battle of the Somme* script p.12

⁶³⁵ BBC WAC, VR/76/345

⁶³⁶ Malcolm Smith, ‘The War and British Culture’, pp.180-183

⁶³⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶³⁸ Malcolm Brown to Emma Mahoney (by telephone) August 9 2004

In the second episode of *Western Front* the story of the first gas attack near Ypres is accompanied by footage of a Belgian town shrouded in mist and fog to signify the gas that was pumped towards the allied lines in 1915. Wind is all important for movement, and it was especially vital when the British first deployed gas as a weapon of war at the battle of Loos. The setting of a red sun at the end of that engagement is also telling about the lives that faded that day, such as Rudyard Kipling's son John. At Verdun, Holmes tells us that the Germans attacked nearby French defensive positions 'like a hurricane' with accompanying spinning camera movements to portray the confusion of an unexpected attack. Holmes also tells us that it was a snowfall that delayed the German attack on Verdun, positing the weather as some kind of saviour that gave France a few more days to prepare to fight.

Historian John Hussey has underlined that 'No one can think of Third Ypres [Passchendaele] without haunting images of the mud and filth and rain filling his mind'.⁶³⁹ When Richard Holmes first mentions Passchendaele in the fifth instalment of *Western Front* he is giving a piece to camera in the rain. He informs us that August 1917 was the wettest in years, and the excessive rainfall and resultant quagmire is well known in British modern memory as muddy by Sassoon's couplet 'I died in hell/they called it Passchendaele.'⁶⁴⁰ Not only were the troops bogged down fighting for Passchendaele ridge in the late summer and autumn of 1917, Holmes adds that many felt that the war was stuck-in-the-mud, both sides feeling that the Western Front was in stalemate. Fussell notes that 'onomatopoeic speculations' brought Wyndham Lewis to write twenty years after the war 'The very name [Passchendaele], with its suggestion of *plashiness* and of *passion* at once, was subtly appropriate [...] This nonsense could not have come to its full flower at any place but at *Passchendaele*. It was pre-ordained. The moment I saw the name on the trench-map, intuitively I knew what was going to happen.'⁶⁴¹

⁶³⁹ John Hussey, 'The Flanders Battleground and the Weather in 1917' in Peter Liddle (ed) *Passchendaele in Perspective*, p.151

⁶⁴⁰ Siegfried Sassoon, 'Memorial Tablet' in Marcus Clapham (ed), *The Wordsworth Book of First World War Poetry* (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth, 1995), p.102

⁶⁴¹ Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, p.16

The received view of Passchendaele is that Field Marshal Haig needed a dry season for the operations he had planned for the autumn of 1917 even though GHQ ‘knew’ that the season would be subject to regular and heavy rain. For the fighting at Passchendaele in the autumn of 1917, meteorologist Ernest Gold, of the BEF’s Meteorological Section, had predicted that commanders ‘could reasonably expect weather in Flanders which would be generally favourable to British plans.’⁶⁴² As Gary Sheffield points out in *Forgotten Victory*, the rainfall in the autumn and early winter of 1917 was abnormally heavy.⁶⁴³ Hussey asserts that this confusion is due to an inaccurate comment made by Haig’s Intelligence chief Brigadier General John Charteris who claimed that ‘Careful investigation of records of more than eighty years showed that in Flanders the weather broke early each August with the regularity of the Indian Monsoon.’

This statement, Hussey shows, is completely untrue, but it is often seen as proof of Haig’s guilt in continuing with an unsuitable plan for the Passchendaele campaign in the knowledge that the weather would be unfavourable. Quite the contrary is true as Hussey has shown. Thanks to detailed records of Flanders weather he suggests that in 1917 ‘Major Gold and the British High Command could reasonably expect weather in Flanders which would be generally favourable to British plans [...] The British commanders were fully informed of the weather history and the meteorological prospects, and the operational plans were drawn up in the light of that information.’ Indeed, August 1917 was an abnormally bad month for Flanders weather, and the meteorological records could not have given any warning of this. Hussey underlines that the progress made in September 1917 showed what could be achieved on ground that had begun to dry, and if October had not been so unexpectedly wet, progress could still have been made.⁶⁴⁴

The sixth episode of *Western Front* tells us that ‘mist cloaked the fields of Cambrai’ and provided a ‘protective blanket of fog’ for the tanks in November 1917. Weather conditions are seen as an integral part of the conflict, and Holmes blames a bout of fog for allowing German storm troopers to slip ‘like wraiths through gaps in the line’

⁶⁴² John Hussey, ‘The Flanders Battleground and the Weather in 1917’, p.144

⁶⁴³ Gary Sheffield, *Forgotten Victory* (London: Headline, 2001), p.179 – see also Peter Doyle, *Geology of the Western Front 1914-1918* (Geologists Association, 1998)

⁶⁴⁴ John Hussey, ‘The Flanders Battleground and the Weather in 1917’, p.151

in attacking and taking a position of a Manchester Regiment at Cambrai. The well-known cliché – the fog of war – is used as a climatic phenomenon to illustrate confusion. But on whose side was the weather during the Great War? *Battle of the Somme* describes the rain ‘With the autumn, both sides were confronted with another belligerent, the rain. It sapped men’s energy and turned the battlefield into mud’ with the war itself becoming increasingly ‘bogged down.’⁶⁴⁵ *Gone for a Soldier* comments that the artillery bombardment before the first attack on the Somme was ‘like thunder’ and could be heard 130 miles away in London. Certainly, thunder is certainly a suitable approximation of what artillery fire might have sounded like, a useful illustration to describe what many veterans referred to as indescribable.

Pure white snow could be placed in juxtaposition with the blood being spilled on the battlefield, and it is used to punctuate the war’s chronology in the fifth episode of *Western Front* from Christmas 1916, ‘the coldest in living memory’ to the end of 1917 where the mud that characterised the fighting at Passchendaele was frozen and covered with snow. The weather of the war seems to operate in extremes – the blazing hot summer’s day of 1 July 1916, the wettest August for Passchendaele, and coldest ever winter that ended a terrible year for French and British casualties. When old soldiers looked back to his time in the trenches ‘the real enemy was the weather [...] Cold was perhaps the greatest enemy.’⁶⁴⁶ *Battle of the Somme* illustrates that as the Newfoundland troops advanced in No-Man’s Land on 1 July 1916 ‘they tucked their chins into their shoulders against the hail of bullets, as though they were facing into a blizzard of the Newfoundland winter.’⁶⁴⁷ *Peace in No-Man’s Land* also used the purity and innocence of snow to illustrate the war’s most touching event. One veteran recalled that ‘It was a Christmas card Christmas Eve [...] a beautiful moonlight, frost on the ground, almost white everywhere, and round about 7 or 8 in the evening we heard this singing, ‘Silent Night’, ‘Stille Nacht’ – it was one of the highlights of my life. I thought, what a beautiful tune.’⁶⁴⁸

That the sun shone on what has come to be known as the worst day in British military history is seen to be particularly ironic. A sunny day such as 1 July 1916 could be

⁶⁴⁵ BBC WAC, *Battle of the Somme* script p.34

⁶⁴⁶ Denis Winter, *Death’s Men Soldiers of the Great War* (London: Penguin, 1978), pp.95-96

⁶⁴⁷ BBC WAC, *Battle of the Somme* script p.26

⁶⁴⁸ BBC WAC, *Peace in No-Man’s Land* script p.14

considered as a happy, innocent time ripe for leisure and enjoyment: but the battle of the Somme has gained a reputation for being the place where Britain's innocence was lost along with tens of thousands of Kitchener recruits. Lynn Macdonald noted that 'As the first hundred thousand men went over the top, the sun was already shining strongly enough to feel warm on the napes of their necks and it blazed on through the long summer's day.'⁶⁴⁹ One soldier recalled in *Battle of the Somme* that, on going over the top, 'At first we strolled along as though walking in the park. Then suddenly we were in the midst of a storm of machine gun bullets.' As Siegfried Sassoon watched the fighting from his position near Fricourt, he wrote that 'I am looking at a sunlit picture of hell.'⁶⁵⁰

Of the Tyneside Irish brigade's attack near La Boisselle, described as one of the most tragic stories of July 1, McKern says that 'An officer who saw them remembers the sun shining through the early morning mist and glinting on their bayonets.'⁶⁵¹ In *Game of Ghosts*, when Somme veterans Sid Lovell and Alf Razzell are heard talking about 'How young we were and strong in hearts', the script directs the camera to show 'bright orange sunlight shining through' the trees. One is reminded of Binyon's words 'at the going down of the sun...' as a significant punctuation. In the same programme, Tom Bromley sings 'one of the less abrasive' songs which he said was sung whenever his fellow soldiers were downhearted, showing that the sun shining was a metaphor of opportunity and fun:

Wait 'til the sun shines Nelly
And the clouds are drifted back
We shall be happy Nelly, by and by
Over the hills we'll wander
Sweetheart you and I,
Wait 'til the sun shines Nelly, by and by'⁶⁵²

The sun was a particularly significant piece of poetic punctuation for William Noel Hodgson:⁶⁵³

⁶⁴⁹ Lyn Macdonald, *Somme*, p.61

⁶⁵⁰ BBC WAC, *Battle of the Somme* script p.24

⁶⁵¹ *Ibid.* p.25

⁶⁵² BBC WAC, *Game of Ghosts* script p.34-5

I, that on my familiar hill
Saw with uncomprehending eyes
A hundred of thy sunsets spill
Their fresh and sanguine sacrifice,
Ere the sun swings his noonday sword
Must say goodbye to all of this!⁶⁵⁴

The binary vision of the BEF's first days on the Somme seen in *Battle of the Somme* has been subsequently underlined by authors such as Lyn Macdonald. Macdonald's *Somme* underlined as 'just a week after midsummer, a balmy evening would have followed such a glorious day and turn imperceptibly into a warm cloudless night. But the night had fallen early, and it fell so thick with the dust and fumes of battle that you could almost touch it [...] A hundred and fifty thousand men, living or dead, lay out in the inferno.'⁶⁵⁵ The weather, real or imaginary, is a useful illustrative device in literature, and television documentaries have continued to harness the descriptive power of the pastoral tradition.

Music

Music is the most potent of non-diegetic sounds on television. It is a signal that cues moments of drama, evoking the appropriate emotion in the mind of the viewer.⁶⁵⁶ Music is of vital importance to all Great War documentaries: for example, the sounding of the Last Post is the musical signification of remembrance and solemnity. The sister art of poetry and painting, both of great significance in the cultural legacy of 1914-1918, the music used in each programme has been carefully chosen to evoke certain moods and emotions, and to enhance the visual events on the screen. Most significantly, however, is the way in which documentaries use music as an atmospheric device by using music which was composed by men who were serving in the Army during the war itself.

⁶⁵³ William Noel Hodgson (1893-1916) was a bombing officer in the 9th Devonshire Regiment and killed on 1 July 1916 at the Battle of the Somme.

⁶⁵⁴ BBC WAC, *Battle of the Somme* script p.18

⁶⁵⁵ Lyn Macdonald, *Somme*, p.61

⁶⁵⁶ Nick Lacey, *Image and Representation: Key Concepts in Media Studies* (London: Macmillan, 1998), p.54

Battle of the Somme and *A Game of Ghosts* both use the trumpet motif from the slow movement of Ralph Vaughan Williams' Third Symphony, the 'pastoral', to great effect. Vaughan Williams' musical language changed to reflect his own experiences and emotions in a rapidly changing world.⁶⁵⁷ He was deeply affected by the trauma of war, especially the loss of his close friend the composer George Butterworth, who was twelve years his junior. Butterworth's musical setting of Houseman's *A Shropshire Lad* also features in *Peace in No Man's Land*.⁶⁵⁸ Vaughan Williams believed that the purpose of music was as a vehicle for emotional expression and the 'pastoral' was written while Vaughan Williams was at the Western Front, and a man yearning for his country in time of war.⁶⁵⁹ The third 'pastoral' symphony was written on the Western Front and first performed in London in 1923. The use of a natural trumpet in the second movement is used to stunning effect in *Battle of the Somme*: out-of-tune partials prescribed in the score are echoes of some of Vaughan Williams' memories from 1914-1918:

Lodged in the composer's mind was a recollection of camp life with the RAMC at Bordon in Hampshire where the bugler hit the 7th as a missed shot for the octave. The symphony was incubated during Vaughan Williams' military service, and in so far as any particular locality is depicted in the symphony it is northern France, where he went after being commissioned in the Royal Garrison Artillery in 1917. The scenery in the Pastoral symphony is not spectacular and northern France with its willows and streams is much like southern England.⁶⁶⁰

The trumpet motif could be seen as a mediated version of the traditional Last Post that has sounded in remembrance of the fallen since 1914, played every Armistice Day and at the Menin Gate in Ypres every evening. The 'pastoral' symphony's strong associative qualities with nature and landscape has suggested to some 'a man thrown

⁶⁵⁷ Wilfrid Mellers, *Vaughan Williams and the Vision of Albion* (London: Barrie & Jenkins, 1989), p.260-261

⁶⁵⁸ See Glenn Watkins, *Proof Through the Night: Music and the Great War*, (Berkeley/London: University of California Press, 2003)

⁶⁵⁹ Ursula Vaughan Williams & Imogen Holst (eds), *Heirs and Rebels – the letters of Ralph Vaughan Williams and Gustav Holst* (Oxford: OUP, 1959), p.44: In the early autumn of 1914 Vaughan Williams volunteered as a private in the 2/4th Field Ambulance RAMC where he served at Ecoivres north of Arras until he was transferred to Salonika in 1916. In 1917 he was commissioned into the Royal Garrison Artillery serving as a Second Lieutenant, and a year later he was appointed Director of Music of the First Army BEF in France based at Valenciennes. He was demobilised in February 1919.

⁶⁶⁰ Frank Howes, *The Music of Ralph Vaughan Williams* (Oxford: OUP, 1954), p.22-23

back on his immense resources, seeking [...] to discover the roots of his being.⁶⁶¹ The *Mars* movement from Gustav Holst's *The Planets* also feature in the closing scenes of *Battle of the Somme*, as the present day landscape is faded into Paul Nash's *We Are Making a New World*. The music's gradual fade-in fosters the impression that after the start of the Somme fighting midsummer 1916, a new period of warfare started. In addition, the reference to Mars as the Greek god of war, and to a planet thought to be barren and inhospitable also draws parallels between descriptions of areas of the Western Front as being as cratered and desolate as to be like the surface of the moon. Holst, a good friend of Vaughan Williams', tried to enlist at the beginning of the war, and *The Planets* was composed 1914-1916 while Holst was depressed because he was unable to contribute to the war effort.⁶⁶²

The title music for *The First World War* (Channel 4, 2003) was also written during the war itself by Cecil Coles (1888-1918). He was born in Scotland, studied and worked in Germany, and he was also a friend of Gustav Holst. He returned to England in 1914, and like Vaughan Williams he continued to compose music while on active service. His last piece of music was 'Behind the Lines'. For the series' title music composer Orlando Gough arranged part of the third movement 'Cortège' after the producers were given permission to use the score by Coles's daughter Catherine, who only discovered the score in the family's attic shortly before her own death. She had never known her father, and she did not live to see the series broadcast. Coles was killed rescuing casualties from the Somme in April 1918. The bonus DVD disk even remarks that Coles 'died humming Beethoven' and that 'the manuscript still bears the marks of mud and shrapnel.' By using his music, therefore, the producers of *The First World War* are trying to establish a link between the Western Front the composer saw when he wrote the melody used by the programme, and the images of the battlescape included in their documentary-film.

In this way, composers like Coles and Vaughan Williams, and painters like Nash, are tangible 'voices' of the First World War. The use of artistic works shows today's

⁶⁶¹ Hugh Ottaway, *Vaughan Williams' Symphonies* (London: BBC, 1972), p.24-25

⁶⁶² Ursula Vaughan Williams & Imogen Holst (eds), *Heirs and Rebels*, p.44: Holst was rejected as unfit for military service or any active war work because of short sight and neuritis (inflammation of nerves). Before the end of the war the education department of the Y.M.C.A. appointed him as Musical Organiser to troops stationed on the Eastern Front, working in Salonika November 1918 to June 1919.

pilgrims to the Western Front the enormity of the ‘planting of names on the landscapes of battle’ that has seared the number of casualties onto British modern memory: in Tyne Cot cemetery on Passchendaele ridge alone, there are 34,888 names of soldiers whose bodies were never found on walls that surround 11,908 graves. On the memorial at Thiepval on the Somme, the names of 73,367 of the missing are engraved in the stone. It has been written that ‘[t]he pyramids pale by comparison with the sheer scale of British – let alone German, French, Belgian, Portuguese – commemorative imposition on the landscape [...] the names and headstones are like shadows of the dead, standing in one-to-one correspondence with the fallen, representing them to the living in their ungraspable quantitative specificity.’⁶⁶³

The landscape that has drawn mourners and tourists to the battlefield sites since the 1920s has also been an emotional one: it is not the sites themselves but their associations. The names of the places resonate with meaning, and via the poems, prose, artwork and music that has been produced with this landscape in mind, British television documentaries about the First World War have transferred this resonance to the small screen.⁶⁶⁴ These images of landscape in these programmes are effective because they are an organic development of Britain’s vision of the Western Front: television has continued perceptions of the war by referring back to pre-existing artistic representations. By presenting the emotional and physical ties between the former Western Front and Britain’s popular memory the pastoral device engages the horror of the war by invoking a code to describe the indescribable.⁶⁶⁵ This is why many television documentaries about 1914-1918 have continued to use the pastoral mode because it is the most effective emotive device for television to render the war’s colossal scale of destruction and loss within viewers’ understanding.

⁶⁶³ Thomas Laquer, ‘Memory and Naming in the Great War’ in John Gillis (ed), *Commemoration: The Politics of National Identity* (Princeton: PUP, 1994), pp.150-167

⁶⁶⁴ David Lloyd, *Battlefield Tourism*, p.112

⁶⁶⁵ Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, p.235

Fig. 19: Four stills from the making of *Battle of the Somme* (BBC, 1976) all courtesy of Malcolm Brown (producer/director) and John Goodyer (cameraman)

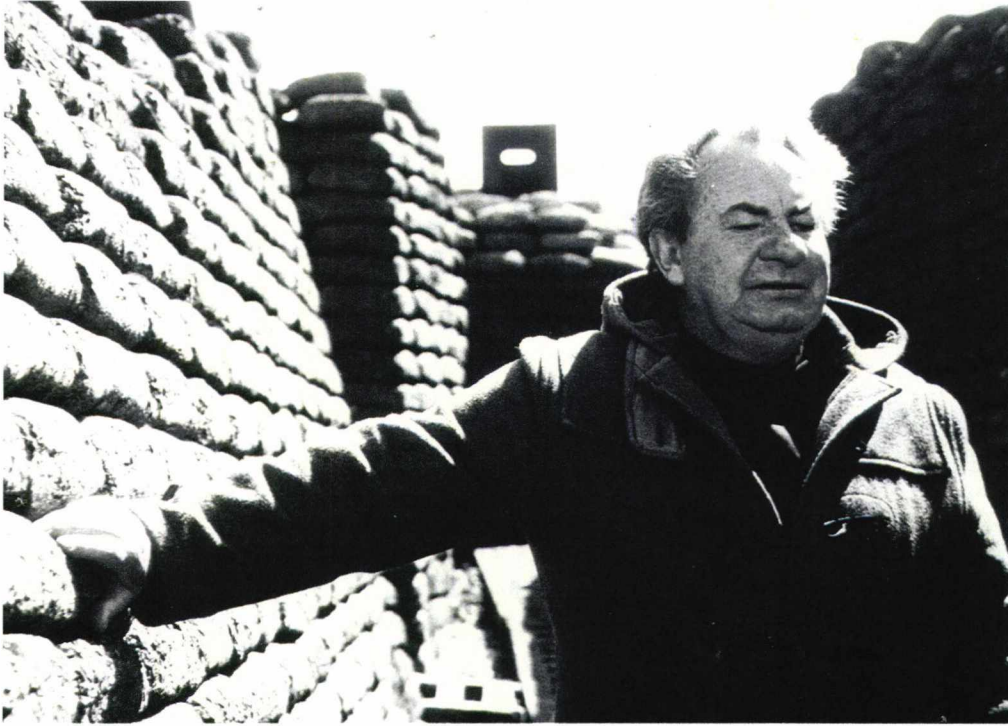


Fig. 19a: Leo McKern in the BBC's official publicity photograph (BBC 1976/PU 76/1567)



Fig. 19b: Malcolm Brown directing Leo McKern in the trenches at Vimy (photograph John Goodyer)



Fig. 19c: Leo McKern filming at
Newfoundland Park,
Beaumont Hamel
(photograph John Goodyer)



Fig. 19d: Leo McKern filming at
Querrieu Chateau
(photograph John Goodyer)

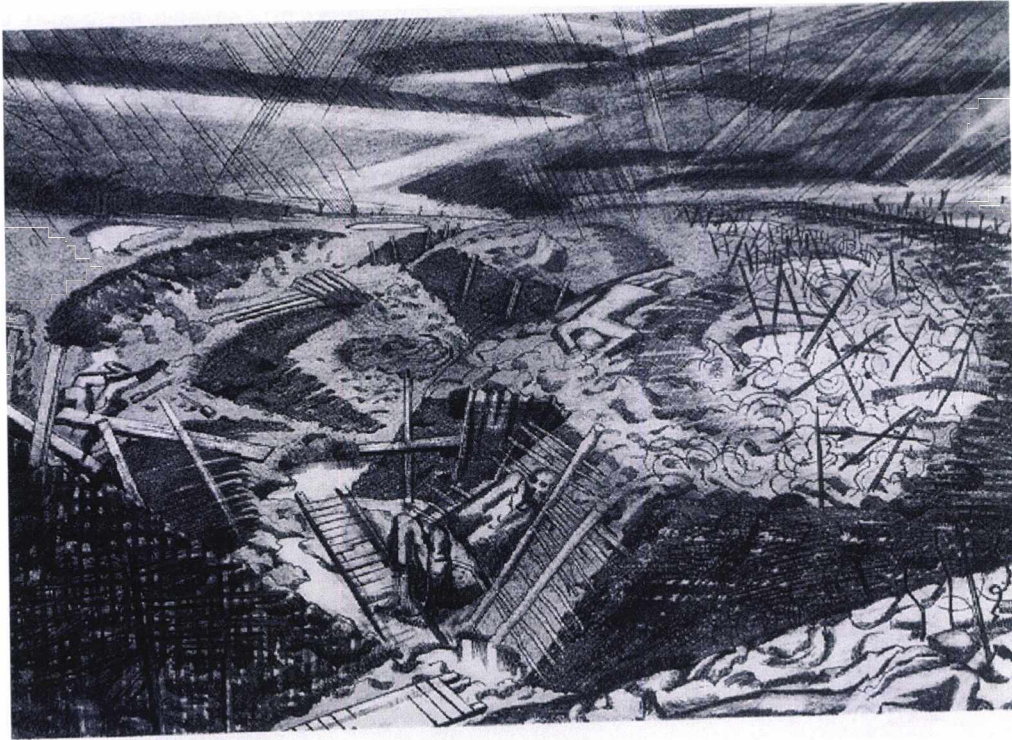


Fig.20: 'After the battle' Paul Nash



Fig.21: 'We are Making a New World' Paul Nash

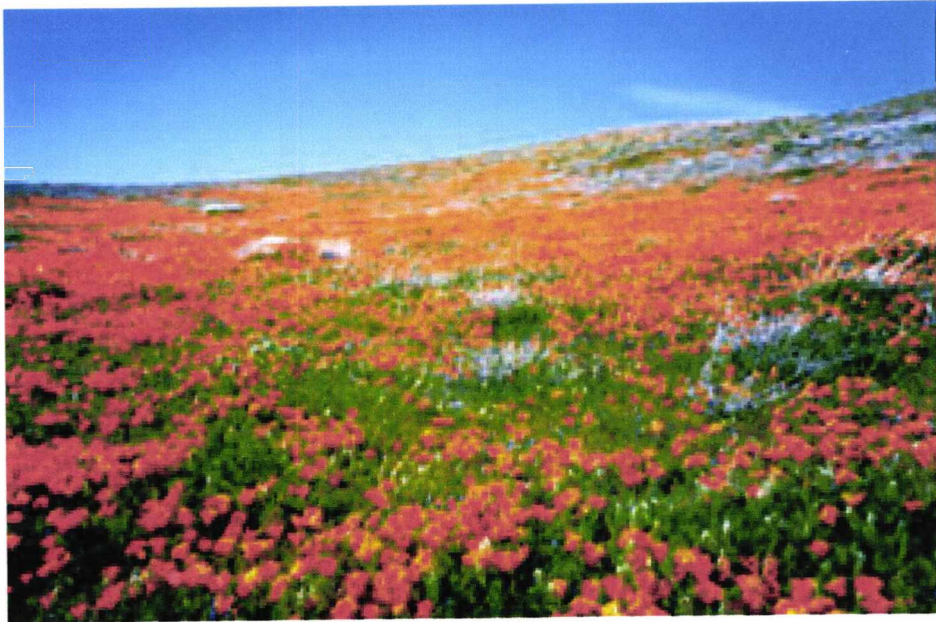


Fig.22: The last scene of *Blackadder Goes Forth* (BBC, 1989)



Fig.23: The 'Weeping Cross' of Delville Wood



Fig.24: The 'Shot at Dawn' memorial at the National Arboretum, Staffordshire.
Unveiled 21 June 2001



Fig.25: 'Wire' Paul Nash

Controversy

During the eightieth anniversary commemorations of wartime events such as the Battle of the Somme in 1916 and the signing of the armistice in 1918, a number of single-episode and short-series programmes marked a change of direction which involved looking at more specific historical elements of the First World War. *Haig: the Unknown Soldier* (BBC, 1996) examined the allegations of incompetence against the British High Command, *Shot at Dawn* (Carlton, 1998) put forward the campaign for pardons, and the myth of the 'Crucified Canadian' was discussed in *The Crucified Soldier* (Channel 4, 1998). *The Trench* (BBC, 2002), however, stimulated a controversy all of its own as it was the first documentary about the First World War to reflect British television's growing trend for screen history in the reality-reconstruction-documentary-drama format. The programmes broadcast during and after the eightieth anniversaries formed the most public interface where new televisual representations of the conflict collided with the war's history and memory.

Field Marshal Sir Douglas Haig

The accepted view of Haig is that he was an over-privileged cavalryman who was out of step with new developments in modern warfare and who sacrificed hundreds of thousands of British men in a series of badly planned offensives. [Fig.26] It is the weight of casualties and for the alleged lack of imagination in large scale offensives such as the Somme and Passchendaele that lies at the root of the debate about Haig's generalship.⁶⁶⁶ Haig's memory has been pinned down by those who claim the war was a futile waste of life and resources, and has even given rise to the odd conspiracy theory.⁶⁶⁷ The battle over his military legacy already raged in published books. Since the 1920s, historian and Western Front veteran Basil Liddell Hart wanted the British High Command held to account for the 'manslaughter' that took place as a result of

⁶⁶⁶ See A.J.P. Taylor, *The First World War* (London: Penguin, 1963), pp.119-139

⁶⁶⁷ David Windsor, *Earl Haig: Hero or Traitor?* (Norfolk: DJD, 2002). The author recalled a chance meeting with a stranger while on holiday in Germany in 1950. The German alleged that for reasons that are unclear, a businessman named Hugo Stinnes approached Haig in 1914 via a third party to offer him money in exchange for killing as many Germans as possible. Windsor alleges that hundreds of thousands of German Marks were deposited in a secret account at the Reichsbank, which were rendered worthless by hyper-inflation in the 1920s.

their strategy of attrition.⁶⁶⁸ In 1963, Basil Liddell Hart's *The Real War 1914-1918* was reprinted, and John Terraine's *Haig: the Educated Soldier* was published for the first time. Terraine boldly presented Haig as an effective commander who recognised the intractable and terrible nature of modern war. In the same year, A.J.P.Taylor's bestseller *The First World War* asserted that the generals of the war were overwhelmed by the nature of modern warfare.

British television documentaries have failed to reflect more recent research in military history that Haig 'bore a greater burden than any other twentieth-century British commander', and his reputation has been burdened with inconsistencies, inaccuracies, and lies. When Haig died in January 1928 he was mourned as a national hero. By 11 November 1937, at the unveiling of his memorial in Whitehall, the *Times* wrote that of all the political and military leaders of 1914-1918, Haig's reputation had suffered the most.⁶⁶⁹ The foundations of the anti-Haig myth were laid during the war itself. Anti-Haig sentiments were buttressed by the first deluge of war books from 1928 and the publication of David Lloyd George's *War Memoirs* in the mid-1930s when the wartime prime minister, who had never had a friendly working relationship with Field Marshal Haig, painted the British High Command as incompetent old men incapable of leading their country through a major war.⁶⁷⁰

On 19 March 1963, the Theatre Workshop's musical play *Oh What a Lovely War* was first performed at the Theatre Royal, London. In 1969 it was made into a film directed by Richard Attenborough, starring John Mills as Haig [Fig.27]. The character of Haig was represented as an incompetent fool who watched the casualty statistics of the Somme mount up on a cricket scoreboard. A.J.P.Taylor, who had dedicated his bestselling book *The First World War* to the show's director Joan Littlewood, was unusually even handed about Haig when he reported that 'the show [...] reflects too much the belief nowadays that the generals were all imbeciles [...] Haig wasn't as stupid as he is painted here.' However, Bernard Levin of the *Daily Mail* believed that in a decently ordered society Haig 'would have been employed, under the supervision

⁶⁶⁸ James Hayward, *Myths & Legends of the First World War*, p.187

⁶⁶⁹ *Times* 11 November 1937 Lead Article

⁶⁷⁰ David Lloyd George, *War Memoirs of David Lloyd George* (London: Ivor Nicholson & Watson, 1933-1936)

of an intelligent half-wit, to run the very simplest sort of public lavatory. Instead, he ran a war: "Battle of the Somme: British loss 65,000 in three hours. Gain nil."⁶⁷¹

Britain's modern representations of the First World War cannot shake off the memory of the battle of the Somme as it lies at the core of the butchers and bunglers myth. It is the concept of attrition and the huge number of lives lost, typified by the events of July 1st 1916, that haunt Haig's place in Britain's modern memory of the Great War. However, after its first broadcast in 1976, reviews for *Battle of the Somme* in the national press made only veiled references to 'a generation betrayed'. Only one article blamed Haig for 'deploying an army of continental size to tragically small effect.'⁶⁷² When the BBC repeated the programme in June 1986, however, there were no public denunciations of Haig's character or method for winning the war.

Nevertheless, while the BBC's *Battle of the Somme* did not *explicitly* criticise Haig and his colleagues, in 1985 Channel 4's *Lions Led by Donkeys* launched the first televisual outburst against the alleged incompetence of First World War generals, singling out Field Marshal Haig for his handling of the Somme offensive. It was described as 'the most distinguished and terrible' of all the programmes dedicated to Britain's war dead that year, stating that the veteran-eyewitnesses who appeared in the programme had 'their faith in their leaders shattered.'⁶⁷³ The usual war myths prevailed in the national press' reviews of the programme which also contained a number of factual errors. *The Daily Telegraph* assumed that the documentary shares its title with Alan Clark's *The Donkeys: A History of the British Expeditionary Force* (1961) but the 'donkey' myth can be traced back to a book published by a junior officer from the Royal Army Service Corps called Peter Thompson in 1927.⁶⁷⁴ It was also stated in the *Times* and the *Daily Telegraph* that 60,000 British men *fell* on 1 July 1916, both reviewers ignoring the distinction between deaths and casualties.⁶⁷⁵

⁶⁷¹ LHCMA *Daily Mail* 20 March 1963. In 1969 Richard Attenborough made his directorial debut with the film of Littlewood's play, transporting the characters to Brighton Pier and sending Haig, played by John Mills, down a helter-skelter to see casualty numbers displayed on cricket scoreboards.

⁶⁷² *Daily Mail* 29 June 1976 p.19 and *Times* 10 July 1976 p.12

⁶⁷³ *Daily Telegraph* 9 November 1985 p.34

⁶⁷⁴ Peter Thompson, *Lions Led by Donkeys* (London: T. Werner Laurie, 1927), Preface

⁶⁷⁵ *Daily Telegraph* 11 November 1985 p.30 and *Times* 9 November 1985 p.19

The documentary itself, however, was saturated with references to the socio-economic problems of the period rather than the military events of the First World War. Footage included shots of mounted police attacking miners during the Miners' Strike, a crowded Wembley Stadium during the Live Aid concert, and of youths outside a job centre. The footage of the Live Aid concert was thought to be a particularly powerful part of the film which provided the visual reinforcement of the number of men who lost their lives on 1 July 1916:

Perhaps the most telling single shot of all the weekend's programmes recalling the dead of this century's wars was the one showing the great sea of humanity which filled Wembley Stadium last summer for the Band Aid concert [...] it is impossible to comprehend and visualise slaughter on such a scale. Showing the enormous Band Aid crowd [...] was a brilliantly imaginative stroke, which suddenly brought the unthinkable into direct, awesome focus.⁶⁷⁶

As discussed in the 'Veterans' chapter, the programme ends with views of the memorial to the Accrington Pals' (11th Battalion East Lancashire Regiment) who lost 83 per cent of their number at the Somme.⁶⁷⁷ The *Daily Mail* mentioned that 'in almost every case, [the veterans] blamed the vain, incompetent leadership which sent their comrades to their death [...] the traditional working class respect for authority and the "officer class" was killed on the Somme, and was never again reborn.' The reviewer acknowledged however that the overall feeling of the documentary and 'the other memorial programmes over the haunted weekend, was not one of recrimination but, as it should be, of tribute and grateful remembrance.'⁶⁷⁸

***Haig: the Unknown Soldier* (BBC, 1996)**

Whilst *Newsnight* had broadcast a critical discussion on the topic of *Haig and the Somme* on 1 July 1986, it was not until the eightieth anniversary of the Somme in 1996 that a full documentary programme was devoted to exploring the myths surrounding the reputation of Field Marshal Haig. *Haig: the Unknown Soldier* was broadcast on BBC2, 3 July 1996, and attempted to address the myths that surround

⁶⁷⁶ *Daily Mail* 11 November 1985 p.30

⁶⁷⁷ Martin Middlebrook, *The First Day on the Somme* (London: Penguin, 1971), p.260

⁶⁷⁸ *Daily Mail* 11 November 1985 p.30

Haig's leadership that have contributed to his reputation as the architect of a strategy resulting in the biggest casualty figures in British military history. The programme was watched by 17% of the available audience, which means that *Haig: The Unknown Soldier* had an audience proportionately bigger than *The Great War*, which was watched by 16.5% of the available audience.

It has been suggested that *Haig: the Unknown Soldier* was made after the BBC was unhappy about Jay Winter's series for American channel PBS *1914-18* (BBC, 1996) that was scheduled for transmission later that year.⁶⁷⁹ *Haig: the Unknown Soldier* was the strongest attempt at a balanced programme that pitched proponents of the traditional derogatory view against figures such as Professor Gary Sheffield, Dr Trevor Wilson, and the programme's Historical Adviser Dr Gerard de Groot, author of *Douglas Haig 1861-1928* (1988). The programme was Professor Sheffield's first experience of appearing on television. He had been encouraged by producer Helen Bettinson's academic interest in the subject: Bettinson had already produced *Tanks: Wonder Weapon of World War I?* (BBC, 1995) and after the making of *Haig: the Unknown Soldier* she went on to write a doctoral thesis about servicemen's pensions.⁶⁸⁰

The most strident anti-Haig voice on the programme was that of John Laffin, author of *British Butchers and Bunglers of World War One* (1989). The producers wanted to pitch such a fervently unreconstructed view, and Trevor Wilson requested that he was asked exactly the same questions as those that had been put to Laffin, and the result was a most effective piece of television to demonstrate the medium's capacity for showing two such polarised viewpoints which provided the modern television audience a taste of the debates that took place between Liddell Hart and John Terraine in the 1960s. However, the most striking feature of the programme was the inclusion of extracts from the British viewing audience's most memorable exposure to Haig's alleged wartime activities, the BBC comedy series *Blackadder Goes Forth* (1989). *Haig: The Unknown Soldier* used footage from *Blackadder* to set up the accepted stereotype. Ben Elton and Richard Curtis's pastiche of *Journey's End* and *Oh! What a*

⁶⁷⁹ Gary Sheffield to Emma Mahoney (interview in person) 5 October 2004

⁶⁸⁰ *Tanks: Wonder Weapon of World War I?* broadcast BBC2, 12 November 1995

Lovely War had finally found its way into the first televisual discussion of Haig's character and ability as a national military leader. [Fig.28]

[Play video clip 18: *Haig: the Unknown Soldier*]

The use of *Blackadder* struck a chord of recognition in the national press. The *Times*'s television columnist accused Haig of being 'the chap responsible for posting more black-edged sadness through the country's letter boxes than anyone ever'⁶⁸¹ and the *Daily Telegraph* thought Haig's wisest move was 'to be become a semi-retired donkey, let his lions lead the way and save his energy for the consequent victory parades.'⁶⁸² It appeared that four television critics took the *Blackadder* clips as historical truth against which to evaluate the programme. This demonstrates the sheer popularity of the series and the depth of anti-Haig sentiment because *Blackadder* was seen to encapsulate the essential truths about Haig and the Western Front, and the British, Australian and American historians who appeared on the programme to state otherwise were to be ignored.⁶⁸³

Nevertheless, the historical chronology of *Haig: the Unknown Soldier* was at best selective. A short summary of the battle at Neuve Chapelle (March 1915) went straight to the battle of the Somme (July 1916) without any reference to the highly significant battle of Loos in September 1915. Sheffield had hoped the programme might place less emphasis on Haig as an individual, and focus on the development of the British Army he later outlined in *Forgotten Victory* (2001). However, *Haig: the Unknown Soldier* fell prey to the historiographical pitfalls that have befallen many analyses of Haig. The programme, whose historical adviser was Gerard de Groot, followed the basic line of de Groot's biography of Haig, which is not regarded as definitive because he did not sufficiently engage with the most important issues of Haig's wartime command or analyse how the BEF fared on the Western Front.

Haig: the Unknown Soldier continued a long tradition of books about Haig the man, as opposed to Haig the soldier, such as Sir George Arthur's *Lord Haig* (1928),

⁶⁸¹ *Times* 7 July 1996 p.10

⁶⁸² *Daily Telegraph* 4 July 1996 p.29

⁶⁸³ Brian Bond, *The Unquiet Western Front*, (Cambridge: CUP, 2002), p.80

Brigadier-General Charteris' *Haig* (1933) and Duff Cooper's *Haig* (1935).⁶⁸⁴ The methodological approach of John Terraine's *Douglas Haig, the Educated Soldier* had been the only work to place Haig's personality into its correct wartime context, but *Haig: the Unknown Soldier* did not analyse Haig as a commander in the context of the war that he fought and the armies he commanded. As a result, the programme often dissolves into a character assassination.⁶⁸⁵ John Laffin launched into a fierce attack on Haig's character, asserting that Haig was 'the worst donkey' and that he was 'criminally negligent' as well as blasphemous for his belief in sacrifice as a Christian virtue.

What *Haig: the Unknown Soldier* did do was to prove that, as far as television is concerned, there is *still* no middle ground on the subject of the British High Command 1914-1918. Sheffield was uncomfortable being portrayed as a supporter of Haig when he is not an uncritical supporter of Haig as a commander, and his views are more finely balanced than the programme suggests. He received several items of 'hate mail' after the programme was broadcast, seeing first-hand how angrily viewers responded after disturbing an accepted stereotype. Sheffield believes that the editing of film for *Haig: the Unknown Soldier* portrayed him as someone who holds far more controversial views than is actually the case, and he regrets agreeing to be interviewed in a cemetery because it visually reinforced the view that Haig sacrificed so many lives.⁶⁸⁶ Judging by the press reviews, however, there was little that any historian could do. The *Times*' critic was not satisfied with the *historical* outcome of the war, finding comfortable refuge in the usual works of literature:

The reappraisal of Haig would have been more convincing if the sad history had been borne out, if he'd achieved a brilliant Borodino or Heights of Abraham to

⁶⁸⁴ Viscount Norwich (Duff Cooper), *Haig* (London: Faber & Faber, 1935), John Charteris, *Haig* (London: Duckworth, 1933), Sir George Arthur, *Lord Haig* (London: Heinemann, 1928)

⁶⁸⁵ Other recent First World War documentary-films have fallen into this familiar trap: *1914-18* featured the historian John Keegan admitting that Haig 'does seem to have been cursed by some emotional deficiency. He was continually thinking of his own position and he was continually thinking of victory. Those things seem to have been more important to him than conserving lives. I mustn't be unfair here. All sides, all generals, still thought in terms of victory, in the sense at least, they didn't want to lose the war. But Haig does seem to have been guilty of persuading himself and persuading politicians that he could actually achieve a victory in a classic military sense. And I don't think such a victory was possible in the conditions of 1914 to '18.'

See http://www.pbs.org/greatwar/historian/hist_keegan_06_general.html (accessed 4 November 2004)

⁶⁸⁶ Gary Sheffield to Emma Mahoney (interview in person) 5 October 2004

win the war. Actually it ended in exhaustion and the starvation of Germany. Nothing was learnt [...] Some things transcend any comprehension of a next time [...] think of Bill Bryden's *Glasgow Pals*; Pat Barker's *The Ghost Road*; Sebastian Faulks's *Bird Song*; and the continuing popularity of the poets Graves, Sassoon and Owen [...] We have travelled this century with too many empty seats.⁶⁸⁷

The reviewers did recognise that the idea of the programme was to 'overhaul' Haig's reputation.⁶⁸⁸ Nevertheless, they were so used to the general idea of the war as futile and of Haig as an inept and stubborn commander they could not accept the counter-argument of the documentary: one admitted that 'to an extent, Haig has been made a scapegoat for much wider failings [...] Despite this, I am sorry I cannot buy the *new* line.'⁶⁸⁹ It would be difficult to tell how many of the 3.59 million viewers were able to digest the revisionism of *Haig: the Unknown Soldier*.⁶⁹⁰ What we do know is that two years later in November 1998, anti-Haig sentiment remained strong enough for the *Daily Express* to call for the bronze statue of Haig in Whitehall to be pulled down.⁶⁹¹ The current Earl Haig, the son of Field Marshal Haig, spoke out against the campaign to remove his father's statue by saying that 'It is high time my father was given the credit for the job he did and the victories he achieved [...] He is portrayed as this callous man when he was the most humane man [...] It is in more recent times that it has come. Many of the people who now pour scorn on my father and the way the war was fought don't know the first thing about it.'⁶⁹² Richard Holmes described his own experience of swimming against the tide of assumption:

As any historian who has tried even mildly to be revisionist about Field Marshal Sir Douglas Haig on television will acknowledge, there is a corpus of opinion which is not overly interested in the facts because it has already made up its mind. Point out that it was more dangerous to be a British general in the First World War than the Second; that just over half the British soldiers who fought had volunteered to do so; or that in its war-winning offensive in the last hundred days of the war the British Army captured twice as many Germans as the French,

⁶⁸⁷ *Times* 7 July 1996 p.10

⁶⁸⁸ *Radio Times* 29 June – 5 July 1996 p.94

⁶⁸⁹ *Daily Telegraph* 4 July 1996 p.29 – my emphasis

⁶⁹⁰ Audience figures for *Haig: the Unknown Soldier* supplied by Trish Hayes BBC WAC 11 May 2005

⁶⁹¹ *Daily Express* 6 November 1998 p.1

⁶⁹² *Ibid.*

Americans and Belgians put together, and your interlocutor will disagree on the grounds that, as Field Marshal Sir William Robertson used to put it, he had heard different.⁶⁹³

Holmes' *Western Front* (BBC, 1999) accepted that Haig's name has become synonymous with the Somme. Episode 4 'Commanding the Front', which opened with Holmes watching the 1916 film *Battle of the Somme*. Holmes underlines that 'one impression of the First World War haunts us more than any other, that of thousands of brave men condemned to a futile death by the incompetence of the generals that led them.' After a reference to *Blackadder Goes Forth* ('...blundering commanders, who just wanted to move their drinks cabinets another six inches to Berlin...') Holmes describes Haig as 'well connected and ambitious' and that he had been 'instrumental in supplanting Sir John French whom he regarded as quite unfit for High Command in time of crisis.' Sitting astride a horse outside a chateau he empathises with the viewers that 'it's hard to like First World War generals, they seem comfortable, well breakfasted, privileged and remote [...] they ride or stride about a world of chateaux and staff conferences.' Haig is portrayed as embodying 'what is best and worst about the British High Command [...] single-minded about winning and [he] believed that blood was indeed the price of victory.'

[Play video clip 19: *Western Front*]

***Shot at Dawn* (Carlton, 1998)**

Haig's name is now also synonymous with the debate over pardons for the British and Commonwealth soldiers executed by Courts Martial during the war.⁶⁹⁴ *Shot at Dawn*, broadcast on the evening of 8 November 1998, was part of the fresh campaign on pardons sparked in parliament by Andrew Mackinlay, Labour MP for Thurrock every year since 1992. In February 1993, John Major had rejected the motion on the grounds that 'sentences were imposed based on the values of the time'⁶⁹⁵, but in 1998

⁶⁹³ Richard Holmes' Foreword to Cathryn Corns & John Hughes-Wilson, *Blindfold & Alone: British Military Executions in the Great War* (London: Cassell, 2001), p.11

⁶⁹⁴ *Radio Times* 29 June – 5 July 1996 p.94

⁶⁹⁵ John Major to Andrew Mackinlay quoted by John Peaty, 'Haig and Military Discipline' in Brian Bond & Nigel Cave (eds), *Haig: A Reappraisal 70 Years On*, (London: Leo Cooper, 1999), p.198

the campaigners renewed their activities as they thought a Labour government might be more amenable to the case of pardons. The discussions revealed a great deal about modern day attitudes about 1914-1918 which stressed all British soldiers as *victims*.. Minister for the Armed Forces, Dr John Reid, remarked that ‘those executed were as much victims of this war as the soldiers and airmen who were killed in action or died of wounds or disease.’⁶⁹⁶ However, *Shot at Dawn*, whose Historical Adviser was Julian Putkowski, a leading writer on the subject, was quick to say that ‘Butcher Haig’ was responsible for the losses on the Somme and Flanders, and that it was quite ridiculous that he had ‘little in common with the troops under his command. No real understanding of their lives, or the horrendous conditions on the front line.’

The debate surrounding military executions of the Great War is not new. A number of post-war committees convened to investigate military discipline 1914-1918. The Darling Committee on Courts-Martial in 1919, the Southborough Committee on Shell-Shock in 1922, the Lawson Committee on Army and Air Force Discipline in 1925, and the Oliver Committee on Army and Air Force Courts-Martial in 1938: all of these bodies used substantial evidence in the form of documents and witnesses that are not available to today’s researchers, but ‘all failed to substantiate miscarriages of justice during the Great War.’⁶⁹⁷ The first published work about military executions of the Great War was William Moore’s *The Thin Yellow Line* (1974).⁶⁹⁸ Moore was not permitted access to the trial transcripts but he did identify many of the issues that underpin contemporary debates about the subject. Nine years later, ex-soldier and experienced judge Anthony Babington was allowed to use available archive records on the condition that he did not identify the names and units of those executed. Babington’s *For the Sake of Example* (1983) concluded that all the sentences had been carried out in a fair and proper manner, underlining that the death sentence was ‘indispensable to the fighting efficiency of the army.’⁶⁹⁹ Julian Putkowski and Julian Sykes followed with *Shot at Dawn* (1989). The authors could not consult trial

⁶⁹⁶ *Guardian* 25 July 1998 p.5

⁶⁹⁷ For a full and detailed criticism of the book in as well as a good account of the campaign for pardons see John Peaty, ‘Haig and Military Discipline’ in Brian Bond & Nigel Cave (eds), *Haig: A Reappraisal 70 Years On*, pp.196-222 and six articles ‘Condemned: Courage and Cowardice’ including one by Gary Sheffield in *Journal of the Royal United Services Institution* 143 (1998) pp.51-69

⁶⁹⁸ William Moore, *The Thin Yellow Line* (London: Leo Cooper, 1974)

⁶⁹⁹ Anthony Babington, *For the Sake of Example: Capital Courts Martial 1914-1920*, (London: Leo Cooper, 1983), p.193

transcriptions as they were not then available for public use, so they were forced to use other sources such as medal rolls, war diaries, memoirs, and the details that featured in Babington's earlier work.

More recent additions to this controversial area are Leonard Sellers' *For God's Sake Shoot Straight!* (1995) and Gerald Oram and Julian Putkowski's edited volume *Death Sentences Passed by Military Courts of the British Army 1914-1924* (1998). Oram has also published *What Alternative Punishment is There?* (2000) and *Military Executions in World War One* (2003).⁷⁰⁰ The cases of executed Canadians have been covered by Andrew Godefroy with *For Freedom and Honour?* (1998), and Christopher Pugsley has covered the Australian and New Zealand executions in *Fringe of Hell* (1991).⁷⁰¹ Gary Sheffield put the issue within the context of the BEF's maintenance of military discipline in *Leadership in the Trenches* (2000), but the most rigorous revisionist British work dedicated to the issue of executions alone is *Blindfold and Alone* (2001) by Cathryn Corns and John Hughes-Wilson.⁷⁰² Putkowski continues to have a considerable presence on the World Wide Web maintained by his own website. His site asks readers to send an email to the site in support of the Shot at Dawn campaign which will form part of a petition to be sent to the Prime Minister.⁷⁰³

Julian Putkowski's performance on camera has overtones of John Laffin's polemic in *Haig: The Unknown Soldier*, where the central focus of inquiry was based around Haig's character instead of his performance in a wartime military context. Unlike *Haig: the Unknown Soldier*, *Shot at Dawn* makes no attempt to present any counter-argument to Putkowski's tirades. The British High Command, read Field Marshal Haig, stand accused of believing in 'a form of military eugenics, of killing off physical and moral degenerates, as they called them. The generals never questioned their own judgements and their own inadequacies.' Putkowski describes the Battle of

⁷⁰⁰ Leonard Sellers, *For God's Sake Shoot Straight!*, (London: Leo Cooper, 1995); Gerald Oram & Julian Putkowski, *Death Sentences Passed by Military Courts of the British Army 1914-1924*, (London: Francis Boutle Publishers, 1998); Gerald Oram, *What Alternative Punishment is There?*, (Open University, 2000); Gerald Oram, *Military Executions in World War One*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

⁷⁰¹ Andrew Godefroy, *For Freedom and Honour?*, (Ontario: CEF Books, 1998); Christopher Pugsley, *Fringe of Hell*, (Auckland/London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1991).

⁷⁰² See also Andrew Mackinlay MP, 'The Pardons Campaign' Western Front Association Bulletin no.39 (June 1994) pp.28-29

⁷⁰³ <http://www.shotatdawn.org.uk/> (accessed 7 June 2005)

Loos in 1915 as 'one of the most ill-directed butcher's picnics of a battle it is possibly conceivable to imagine', and continues his tirade on the subject of underage soldiers executed by courts martial: 'They picked on the weak, the most hopeless, the illiterate, the ones that remained silent, and the kids.' Claiming that the High Command should have taken time out from commanding the war to reflect on the fate of young and defenceless soldiers, who signed up of their own volition while under the legal minimum age of 18, Putkowski summarised the Generals' attitude: 'If you're old enough to join the army, and you're old enough to desert, then you're old enough to be executed.'

For all Putkowski's polemic, research into the subject of manpower and the British Army in the Great War has shown that a comprehensive assessment of Haig and military discipline is almost impossible because little primary evidence has survived. A total of 3,080 death sentences were passed down between 1914 and 1918, but only one record exists for every thousand Court Martial that took place. Only those papers that dealt with capital offences remain, where those about non-capital offences and capital offences where a verdict of not guilty was returned or a death sentence was commuted by Haig no longer exist, so the fragmentary nature of these records means that any assessment of Haig and the way he ran his army cannot be historically rigorous and accurate. There are many problems for anyone wanting to perform detailed research into British military executions 1914-1918.

The definitions of serious offences and their corresponding punishments were defined by the Army Act of 1881, re-enacted annually up to and including the period of the Great War. It was designed to keep discipline in Britain's limited standing army which was a small colonial police force before 1914. Peaty underlines that the Act's passage through the Commons was no mere formality: 'it was always accompanied by trenchant debate [...] which reflected increased knowledge and changed attitudes over the course of time.' This included a clarification of the position regarding shell shock in April 1918. During the Great War the death penalty could be used as punishment for the following offences: treachery, desertion, cowardice, mutiny, murder, striking or violence, disobedience, sleeping on post, quitting post and casting away arms. It was used during the Great War for all these offences bar treachery. Between August 1914 and March 1920, 3,080 men were sentenced to death by courts-martial under the

Army Act: 346 were confirmed and carried out. Out of 324 soldiers from Britain and the Dominions, 91 men (28%) were subject to suspended sentences for previous offences, and 40 had been sentenced to death before. One soldier had been handed the death sentence on two previous occasions. These figures do not give the impression of an unrelentingly harsh military system, but instead they 'suggest a system of military justice that could be tough but was usually prepared to give a man another chance.'⁷⁰⁴

Shot at Dawn removed the subject of executions from their correct historical and military context which resulted in a programme which was misleading on a number of points. At no point were viewers informed that the British Army was bound by British law, and that the death penalty was an accepted punishment in civilian life and it was not abolished for more than forty years after the end of the war. In addition, the post-war committees or their findings mentioned in the commentary. The report of the Darling Committee on the operation on courts-martial is particularly significant because it found that '[w]e are satisfied not only that the members of courts-martial intend to be absolutely fair to those who come before them, but also that the rank and file have confidence in their fairness.'⁷⁰⁵ The lack of historical context of this debate was paralleled by the British press in their reporting of the campaign for pardons. Another 'Shot at Dawn' campaigner, Gerald Oram, was quoted as saying that 'the debate should have happened in the 1920s but all the files were closed for 75 years, so the debate is necessary now.'⁷⁰⁶ Again, no reference was made to the related investigations which did take place, armed with much more primary evidence than is available to the protagonists of this debate today.

Shot at Dawn also shows how Anglocentric television's view of the Great War has become. As with casualty rates, the proportion of British soldiers executed for offences during the war is comparably less than other combatant nations. Britain executed 346 men, 11.23% of those sentenced. The Italian Army, in which smoking on duty was punishable by death, executed 750 men, 18.75% of the 4000 sentenced. The Russian Army also had a brutal reputation. The French Army executed 600 of their soldiers, and the Germans 48, but their records are acknowledged to be

⁷⁰⁴ John Peaty, 'Haig and Military Discipline', p.199

⁷⁰⁵ Ibid. p.218

⁷⁰⁶ *Guardian* 19 March 1998 p.9

incomplete and do not account for any summary executions in the field.⁷⁰⁷ Most significantly, *Shot at Dawn* failed to underline that the British Army did not dissolve into mutiny as others had done: the Russians in 1916 and the French in 1917. Professor Hew Strachan has noted that the German Army was considerably more harsh between 1939-1945 with 15,000 executions, and in the Second World War, German forces fought to the bitter end and did not collapse into ‘a welter of desertions’ as they had done in 1918.⁷⁰⁸ The need for more understanding of military discipline and procedure has been firmly asserted by Gordon Corrigan’s *Mud, Blood and Poppycock* (2002). A former officer of the Royal Gurkha Rifles, Corrigan has underlined that

[t]he 37 murderers executed by the military would have suffered death by hanging had they been brought before a civilian court in England. While the death penalty is no longer on the statute books of most western democracies, there is an argument for its retention in war [...] should the British army ever again have to expand far beyond its peacetime strength by the addition of conscripts and men to whom military life does not come naturally, then an ultimate sanction to ensure good behaviour may be needed [...] If [...] the punishment for failing to go forward is a term in prison with a good chance of an amnesty when the war is over, then the imperative is somewhat lessened.⁷⁰⁹

The link between Field Marshal Haig and the controversial issue of British military executions 1914-1918 is a fact of his role as Commander-in-Chief of the British forces. It was up to him to confirm any death sentence handed down to British soldiers under his command. Haig confirmed the death sentences of more men during his time as Commander-in-Chief of the BEF by the sheer fact that he was in post much longer than his predecessor Sir John French: French was Commander-in-Chief of the BEF and confirmed 56 death sentences between August 1914 and December 1915, whilst Haig, who replaced French in December 1915 and remained in service

⁷⁰⁷ <http://www.shotatdawn.org.uk/> (accessed 7 June 2005)

⁷⁰⁸ Hew Strachan quoted in John Peaty, ‘Haig and Military Discipline’, p.210

⁷⁰⁹ Gordon Corrigan, *Mud, Blood and Poppycock* (London: Cassell, 2002), p.231 – Men executed were found guilty of the following crimes: Mutiny 3, Cowardice 18, Desertion 266, Murder 37, Striking or using violence to a superior 6, Disobedience to a Lawful Command 5, Sleeping at Post 2, Quitting a Post Without Authority 7, Casting Away Arms 2 – p.230.

until April 1919, authorised the execution of 258 men.⁷¹⁰ *Shot at Dawn* draws attention to the fact that Haig confirmed 239 of the 306 sentences carried out during the war: therefore, Putkowski places undue emphasis on the fact that Haig authorised the killing of three British or Commonwealth men every fortnight.⁷¹¹ The visual design of the programme's opening sequence is also clearly intended to underscore the general atmosphere of futility and meaningless slaughter.

[Play video clip 20: *Shot at Dawn*]

During the discussion of individual cases, interspersed with interviews with living (all female) relatives of the deceased, the camera pans to rostrum shots of documents, among them a death warrant, focusing on the words 'confirmed: Haig'. Often there are a few poppies placed on the paper for added pathos. The granddaughter of executed soldier Harry Farr seemed disgusted with Haig as she proclaims 'I don't think he ever refused [to sign] one'. Clearly she is unaware of the fact that Haig authorised 11.23% of the total sentenced to death, and more than 80% of death sentences were commuted to lesser punishments.⁷¹²

The principal charge laid against Haig in *Shot at Dawn* is the authorised murder of men based on distinction of class, which are expressed in the language of left-wing class struggle. What the programme fails to illustrate is that men were tried by officers from neighbouring units and executed by men from their own units: they were judged and punished by those who were facing the same dangers and hardships as the accused. *Shot at Dawn* does not inform the viewer of the actual legal process that was followed by the British Army as it leaves the audience to infer that Haig was the ultimate judge and jury. As John Peaty has shown, the courts martial system was full of checks and balances. The surviving proceedings provide no evidence that the chain of command was circumvented, or that those in the chain of command discharged their responsibilities frivolously or incompetently.⁷¹³

⁷¹⁰ John Peaty, 'Haig and Military Discipline', p.199

⁷¹¹ *Shot at Dawn* also points out near the end of the programme that for every minute of the war 4 soldiers of all nationalities died, making a daily average of 5600 deaths per day over 4 years.

⁷¹² 3,080 British soldiers were sentenced to death 1914-1918. Gordon Corrigan, *Mud, Blood and Poppycock*, p.229 – see more revisionism on this subject by Cathryn Corns & John Hughes Wilson, *Blindfold and Alone*

⁷¹³ John Peaty, 'Haig and Military Discipline', p.211

Haig was the last in a long line of checks and balances. When a death sentence arrived on the desk of Sir John French or Sir Douglas Haig, or their counterparts in other theatres; unit, brigade, division, corps and army commanders had all commented in writing on the appropriateness of the sentence. The Commander-in-Chief had to take into account not only the views of the accused's superiors but also the prevailing conditions, such as the unit's state of discipline at the time, and whether or not the offence was prevalent. All 393 death sentences for sleeping on sentry were commuted until two soldiers serving in Mesopotamia were executed in February 1917. Gordon Corrigan has pointed out that after that date (with a much larger army in theatre) only six [death sentences for falling asleep on sentry] were passed, and once again none of them were carried out.⁷¹⁴ In addition, as the war went on, an increasing number of legally qualified officers became involved in the courts martial procedure. A Courts Martial Officer was appointed at the headquarters of each corps to oversee procedure, and from early 1915 the accused were not permitted to plead guilty to a charge that could attract the death penalty as the case had to be heard in full and the prisoner's guilt proved beyond doubt reasonable doubt.⁷¹⁵

The programme's purpose is to posit the *Catch-22* style irony that not only did British commanders purposely execute their own men on grounds of class, but that their battle tactics were also responsible for the mass slaughter of the men who carried out their orders. *Shot at Dawn* underlines this sense of irony at the beginning of the programme. Over the most well-known 'over the top' scene from the official film *Battle of the Somme* (1916), an actor's voice reads Private Albert Troughton's last letter to his family: 'Think how we were being slaughtered at the beginning of the war. You would think that they would have a bit of pity and mercy for those who are living and fighting for their country.' This reading is followed by aerial shots of military cemeteries to underline that behind the official commemoration of British sacrifice, there are 306 'unremembered' souls who were killed by their own side. The camera then pans to other graves surrounded by masses of flowers, perhaps to signify that along with those who died in action, those executed were also cut down whilst their lives were also in full bloom.

⁷¹⁴ Gordon Corrigan, *Mud, Blood and Poppycock*, p.232

⁷¹⁵ *Ibid.*

On the case of Eric Poole, the first British officer to be executed, Putkowski commented that in December 1916 ‘It was about time an officer was executed. Poole was a Canadian, he hadn’t gone to public school so there would be no ructions on the old Boy network. He was a bit of an outsider. He had been shell-shocked, but that was discounted by the court. He fitted the bill.’ Putkowski thundered that ‘we can’t keep upholding the values of Victorian staff officers’, but the British Army *was* ‘an organisation that prided itself on pure paternalism and care for its soldiers based on the Victorian values of the public school and muscular Christianity.’⁷¹⁶

However, research into the transcripts available has found that ‘the most damning evidence in a trial was nearly always given by NCOs and other soldiers.’⁷¹⁷ While officers did give evidence to courts martial, their comments usually corroborated events that had already been described by junior ranks who had witnessed the events in question first-hand. In the case of Private Hawthorne, Corns and Hughes-Wilson underlined that the court was concerned that the convicting evidence had been provided by junior officers so that ‘a very deep feeling against the officers as a whole may be engendered and the battalion will consequently become valueless.’⁷¹⁸ The testimonies of two Western Front veterans do little to add balance to the programme. Robert Burns, a regular television veteran, who enlisted for the Cameron Highlanders at 14, appeared to support Putkowski’s class crusade:

If I hadn’t done what I was told to do, probably I would have been shot. I didn’t see anybody shot, but we heard about it. But you can imagine the state of mind of someone who didn’t know where he was, and he was asked to do a job and some little NCO or a young officer would say “that man’s no good to us – shoot him” and that’s what happened.

As the programme draws to its conclusion, Burns says of the campaign for a blanket pardon that ‘even a deserter, in my opinion, should be pardoned.’ Would it be churlish to suggest that he might have had a different opinion as he himself advanced towards the enemy while under heavy fire? Military specialist Taff Gillingham has said that

⁷¹⁶ Cathryn Corns & John Hughes-Wilson, *Blindfold and Alone*, p.22

⁷¹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷¹⁸ *Ibid.*

I am sure that soldiers would not have been keen to see deserters pardoned at the time. It's a shame that the surviving veterans have been 'contaminated' in recent times by so much propaganda. I have actually seen TV reporters and newspaper journalists bullying veterans into giving them the take they want on this subject. One in particular - a local Leicesters veteran - was clearly uncomfortable with saying they should be pardoned but the reporter wouldn't leave it until he had tried every avenue and finally the old boy agreed with a lesser statement which, when published, was headed "Veteran demands pardon for all men Shot at Dawn".⁷¹⁹

Indeed, Cathryn Corns and John Hughes-Wilson have shown that those sentenced to death seemed to have had little sympathy from their units. They found that 'with the passing of the years surviving veterans appear to have become more tolerant and sympathetic to the failings of their long-dead comrades as the distorting prism of time and compassion blurs emotions.' Quoting the words of one battalion doctor, they present what they believe was the prevailing view of this subject as it was thought of at the time: 'I think that it was absolutely essential. It was setting a bad example to the men. They had begun to feel that you only had to walk off during a battle and then come back afterwards and you escaped death or mutilation [...] I think that it was a necessary punishment.'⁷²⁰

In a similar vein to *Lions Led by Donkeys*, *Shot at Dawn* is a good example of how the past is subject to judgements from the present imposed retrospectively on past events. The programme is infused by today's civilian mores rather than the correct context of the military regimen of 1914. As a consequence *Shot at Dawn* runs on a high emotional register which results in a blatantly distorted screen history. One scene shows the niece of an executed soldier, Private Billy Nelson of the Durham Light Infantry, visiting her uncle's grave in Flanders for the first time. At the graveside she recalls that her mother, the sister of the executed man, had told her that he had been murdered. Kneeling in front of the uniform headstone she sobs:

⁷¹⁹ Taff Gillingham to Emma Mahoney (by email) 29 September 2004

⁷²⁰ Cathryn Corns & John Hughes-Wilson, *Blindfold and Alone*, p.23

I'm here, I'm here. I'd thought I'd lost you. I'm here for Mum. I've got your bible, and I've got all the things of Mum's like the poppy she bought the second year after you were gone. She was only fifteen and she's kept it eighty years and she loved you. You loved your sister and your brother - who you never saw grow up; to know a mother's love, a wife's love, or a family. You never had that chance – they took it away from you and God forgive them because I never will and never will Mum. Goodbye sweet uncle.

[Play video clip 21: *Shot at Dawn*]

This misplaced moral framework gives the programme a highly unstable base. *Shot at Dawn* states that more than 300 MPs supported the case for pardoning executed men, but that the British government did not agree with Putkowski that 'eighty years on [...] despite a greater understanding of combat stress, and the failings of the army's wartime legal system. We are still refusing to deal with the legacy of this barbarity.' The niece of Peter Goggins, a soldier executed in January 1916, made a rather odd comment that 'You can't change history, but you can add on to history. I think it will take a brave government to do it.'

In 1998, the Armed Forces Minister Dr John Reid said that the government '[did] not wish, by addressing one perceived injustice, to create another [...] The point is that now, eighty years after the events and on the basis of the evidence, we cannot distinguish between those who deliberately let down their country and their comrades in arms, and those who were not guilty of desertion or cowardice.'⁷²¹ Relatives also asserted on the programme that the executed men 'were just as much victims of that war' and that 'it's a shame we have this stain on our history.' However, executed men's graves were indistinguishable from their comrades who died in action, but *Shot at Dawn* does not pay heed to this important point. In general the programme fails to appreciate that 'in some corner of a foreign field that is forever England the dust of those who died bravely and those whose deaths were shaming are irretrievably mixed.'⁷²²

⁷²¹ *Guardian* 25 July 1998 p.5

⁷²² John Peaty, 'Haig and Military Discipline', p. 221

The Shot at Dawn campaigners continue to press for pardons, encouraged by the example of the New Zealand government who in April 2000 granted pardons to five of its soldiers executed between 1916 and 1918. The Canadian government is currently reviewing the cases of 23 executed men. In the year 2000, it appeared that support for the Shot at Dawn campaign had shifted towards being part of established remembrance rituals. In February of that year, it was announced that a statue was to be placed among 306 trees at the National Memorial Arboretum in Staffordshire, and each tree would bear a plaque dedicating it to each one of the executed men.⁷²³ In November, the families of 15 British soldiers executed during the war took part in the official march past the Cenotaph for the first time, an event organised by the British Legion who were said to have sympathy to the families' cause.⁷²⁴ At the time of writing, the family of Private Harry Farr has taken the government to the High Court in an attempt to win a pardon for their executed relative.⁷²⁵

Nevertheless, leading military historians now recognise that some of the executed men were sentenced without a trial that would have been regarded as fair by the standards of the Edwardian civilian judicial system, in addition to accepting that a handful of others were suffering from psychological trauma that would have been treated, not punished, in the Second World War. However, the charges of persecution on the grounds of class do not stand up. The BEF's morale remained 'essentially sound' throughout the First World War due to the ethos of the pre-war officer corps 'which stressed the need for the officer to exercise paternal care for his men [which was] a major factor in the maintenance of wartime morale.'⁷²⁶

In 2003, Gerard de Groot wrote that the debate between historians on the conduct of the First World War has become 'as predictable as the pendulum swing on a grandfather clock.' While reviewing Winston Groom's *A Storm in Flanders* and Gordon Corrigan's *Mud, Blood and Poppycock*, his explanation was that, as he would

⁷²³ *Guardian* 19 February 2000 p.10

⁷²⁴ *Guardian* 10 November 2000 p.5

⁷²⁵ Late in 2005, 92-year old Gertrude Harris, daughter of Private Harry Farr, sought a retrospective pardon in the case of her father. She has pursued this matter for 14 years. Mr. Justice Burnton remarked that the death penalty should not have been imposed in all circumstances and he commented on the possibility of a conditional pardon. The case has been adjourned to give John Reid MP, Minister of Defence, more time to consider a response to the application. The court will reconvene in March 2006.

⁷²⁶ Gary Sheffield *Leadership in the Trenches: Officer-Man Relations, Morale and Discipline in the British Army* (London: Macmillan, 2000), pp.64, 178

know, 'The Great War still sells, so authors eagerly join the gravy train. But whereas there was once vibrancy, imagination and insight on both sides of the debate, nowadays once encounters repetitive squabbles distinguished only by the poison in the invective.'⁷²⁷ Televisual histories of the First World War have continued this 'poisonous' discourse by underlining that Haig remains responsible for the highest and most concentrated casualty rates ever suffered by the British Army. Rarely is he placed in his rightful context as the man that steered Britain towards the most hard-won victory in British military history.

The Crucified Soldier (Channel 4, 1998)

The Crucified Soldier was broadcast by Channel 4 on the evening of 8 December 2002. The programme explored the trench myth that alleged a Canadian Sergeant was crucified by German soldiers in April 1915 at St. Julien near Ypres. The series was based on unpublished research by Iain Overton as part of an M.Phil in International Relations at Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge, under the supervision of Dr Jay Winter. Overton now works as a war correspondent for the BBC.⁷²⁸ Overton had started his research with the intention of investigating trench mythologizing, but he soon found a paper trail that suggested it might be possible to verify that the event actually happened, and that the crucified soldier could be identified. Most historians of this period have dismissed the tale of a crucified soldier as at best rumour, and at worst black propaganda. The programme's Historical Adviser, Dr Adrian Gregory, underlined that 'most of the most lurid atrocity stories are what we would now call urban myths. They are rumours spreading through the population in khaki, and soldiers start many of these stories, and amongst civilians which are then subsequently picked up by the press.'

The programme underlines that in the years after 1915, the story came to symbolise German brutality, which was a useful image for the purposes of Allied propaganda. In 1918, a Hollywood film *The Prussian Cur* directed by Raoul Walsh, provoked a sense of outrage at the allegations against German troops, and the documentary shows a rare

⁷²⁷ *BBC History Magazine* October 2003 p.54

⁷²⁸ Overton sold the rights to the programme to Tiger Aspect, who produced it for Channel Four, and the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation has broadcast programmes about this story reflecting Overton's findings. Iain Overton to Emma Mahoney (by email) 13 August 2004

still from *The Prussian Cur* which is now lost. Canadian cultural historian Dr Maria Tippett appears throughout the programme, and believes that the myth of the crucified soldier is powerful because crucifixion, religious connotations aside, is ‘the worst thing you could do to someone.’ The religious overtones of the crucified soldier were further emphasised by a bronze sculpture in the Canadian War Memorials Exhibition held at the Royal Academy, London in January 1919, funded by the Canadian press magnate Lord Beaverbrook. Exhibition 186, ‘Canada’s Golgotha’ by the British sculptor Francis Derwent-Wood, was described by the *Express* as ‘the ghastliest thing in these rooms’. Tippett interpreted the sculpture as ‘tantamount to Christ on the cross and the Germans are sacrilegious criminals – the juxtaposition of good and evil. It focused the grief and sorrow everyone was feeling in 1919 – the public indictment of the Germans just before the Versailles conference. Everybody was saying “make Germany pay” and here was a reason why Germany should pay, in the sculpture [...] immortalised in bronze.’⁷²⁹

[Play video clip 22: *The Crucified Soldier*]

The programme follows the Germans’ official protests through Swiss Litigation and the withdrawal of Derwent-Wood’s sculpture to the vaults of the Canadian War Museum where it has stayed ever since. In January 1919 Sir Edward Kemp of the Ministry of Overseas Military Forces began to investigate the alleged German atrocity, and as eyewitnesses came forward the more inconsistent the stories became. Gregory explains the potency of the rumours by the clues in the countryside surrounding Ypres: British troops were ‘exposed to the visual culture of Belgian Catholicism with cavalries and crucifixes which they saw going to and from the trenches.’ Combined with the horrific shock of poison gas, and the fact that this occurred at Easter, Gregory finds the promulgation of such a myth ‘quite unsurprising.’ The inconsistencies of the eyewitness reports meant that the British government could not produce any significant evidence against Germany, and the story of the crucified soldier was dismissed as not proven. The Germans, however, were accused of committing atrocities against French and Belgian civilians, including

⁷²⁹ Maria Tippett has published a number of academic works including *Art and the Service of War: Canadian Art and the Great War* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984) and *Canada, Art and Propaganda in the Great War* (London: Canada House, 1989)

women and children. *The Crucified Soldier*, in two parts, spends the second half of the programme detailing two periods of German aggression against civilians in Aerschot and Dinant in August 1914.

Whilst *The Crucified Soldier* puts the myth into its correct historical context, the consensual nature of television gave the impression that the programme had ‘proved’ that event actually happened. Indeed, the *Times* television reviewer wrote that the programme’s conclusion was ‘horrifying.’⁷³⁰ The programme follows the paper trail through the papers of a Red Cross nurse who was told by a Canadian Lance Corporal that the man who was found crucified was Sergeant Harry Band, 48th Highlanders of Canada, a volunteer battalion raised in Toronto comprising of more than 1000 Scottish immigrants. Most of the regiment was killed in the fighting around Ypres.

Correspondence between Band’s sister and Private William Freeman are the strongest proof that a soldier had been crucified, and his name was Harry Band. Band’s remains were never found, and his name appears on the Menin Gate at Ypres. Tippett remains convinced that ‘something definitely happened of this nature in the Ypres Salient in 1915’ which gave weight to the idea that this particular atrocity was willingly perpetrated by German soldiers. The culpability of the German troops as expressed in *The Crucified Soldier* lies in opposition to the view of the Germans as seen in *Peace in No Man’s Land*, for example, which alleged that the German soldiers were just as civilised as the allies, and that they were forced to fight by their vindictive generals and politicians. To emphasise the memorial aspect of the programme, the film closes with footage of a dark winter’s evening at the Menin Gate accompanied by the Last Post. The screen then fades to darkness.

***The Trench* (BBC, 2002)**

In September 1999, novelist William Boyd made his directorial debut with *The Trench*, a film set in the front line of the trenches on the Somme in 1916, in what the film’s publicity described as ‘a place 8ft wide, 600 miles long, man-made and God-forsaken.’ The film had a lukewarm reception, and it lacked the most basic factual

⁷³⁰ *Times* 8 December 2002 p.29

elements, despite the efforts of the Association of Military Remembrance, the 'Khaki Chums', to train the actors in their permanent 'home' trench on an Essex farm to behave more like the soldiers of 1916. Firstly, the actors cast had a wide range of accents - Southern English, Northern English, Scottish, Irish and Liverpudlian - which is not an accurate reflection of the regional make-up of the majority of 'Pals Battalions' in the first half of 1916. Secondly, the film set appeared to consist of a very well-built trench with a concrete floor of which the Germans would have approved. Thirdly, the attitude of the platoon 'in the last few days before they go to almost certain death' is depicted as being cynical and downhearted, whilst the reality of the week before the attack was one of high expectancy and jubilation.⁷³¹

Despite the fact that a motion picture might lay a claim to artistic licence, it was not berated in the British press for being either historically inaccurate or disrespectful to those that had fought on the Somme in 1916.⁷³² The significance of the film is Boyd's reasons for wanting to make it. In a newspaper interview he admitted that he had a great-uncle and a grandfather who survived the war, and that it had 'always been part of family lore [...] my great-uncle was wounded at the Somme [...] the way I write is often to put myself in situations of which I have no experience and try to imagine what it must be like [...] the first world war [*sic.*] may be the ultimate challenge in that respect. Two members of my family were there. It's not long ago and yet you come up against this brick wall of battlement [...] particularly, the iconic image of the trench: *the challenge was to try and show viewers what it was like to be in that space.*'⁷³³

Boyd's motivation behind his own recreation of the war imagined was similar to Malcolm Brown who said that among his reasons for making programmes such as *Battle of the Somme* were that he wanted to see what his father had gone through in the trenches. In the same vein Boyd wanted to see how he would have measured up if his generation had been called upon to fight.⁷³⁴ This is not uncommon: an ITV spokesperson said that the reason behind the *Lad's Army* format was that they were

⁷³¹ *Guardian* 17 September 1999 p.12

⁷³² One reviewer even compared the bland opening sequence of the film to 'the shocking title sequence of the 1960s BBC documentary *The Great War*.' Theo Robertson, Scotland post on <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0161010/#comment> (accessed 13 April 2005)

⁷³³ *Guardian* 17 September 1999 p.12 - my emphasis

⁷³⁴ Malcolm Brown to Emma Mahoney (by telephone) 9 August 2004

testing the theory ‘that National Service defined a generation and see if today’s generation is up to scratch.’⁷³⁵ The growing popularity of family history, enhanced by the internet and series such as *Who Do You Think You Are?* bears this out. The BBC said that the aim of the series was to present ‘a challenging look at where we have come from and the society we have created.’⁷³⁶ Ian Hislop, editor of *Private Eye* and pundit on the topical quiz show *Have I Got News for You* was one of the subjects on the first series of *Who Do You Think You Are?* He was visibly moved to discover one grandfather had fought against the Boers in South Africa and another in the trenches of the Western Front.

Boyd’s film *The Trench* passed largely unnoticed. In March 2002, however, a television series of the same name proved to be highly controversial. The programme looked at elements of the British infantryman’s experience of the Western Front 1914-1918. Twenty-five male volunteers from Hull who re-experienced elements of what some members of the 10th Battalion East Yorkshire Regiment (the ‘Hull Pals’) had done prior to the Battle of the Ancre in the autumn of 1916. Once the plans for the series became public, the BBC said that *The Trench* ‘is conceived as a serious documentary with a serious message and educational purpose, rather than as reality TV.’⁷³⁷ In a similar way to William Boyd, the commissioner of *The Trench*, Jane Root, had recently discovered her Grandfather’s Great War diary.⁷³⁸ The project sought to be an investigation of everyday life in the trenches, including periods of recreation and rest behind the lines as well as duties in the front line trench. Kevin Smith, a member of the ‘Khaki Chums’, the group that was involved in the 1999 film *The Trench* said ‘We don’t attempt to recreate battle, it borders on bad taste, and you cannot simulate that fear or danger [...life in the trenches was] 90% tedium [...] they will have to provide entertainment or people won’t watch it.’⁷³⁹ Nevertheless, the project was marred by negative publicity before it went into production. In June 2001, the *Guardian* scoffed at the BBC’s plans:

⁷³⁵ *Daily Telegraph* 5 March 2002 p.3

⁷³⁶ http://www.bbc.co.uk/pressoffice/pressreleases/stories/2004/09_september/24/who.shtml (accessed 31 December 2004)

⁷³⁷ *Guardian* 25 June 2001 p.5

⁷³⁸ Taff Gillingham to Emma Mahoney (by email) 4 June 2005

⁷³⁹ *Guardian* 25 June 2001 p.5

Wanted: 25 young men for a fortnight's trip to the continent. Must be willing to wade through mud, live with rats and maggots, and be gassed, deprived of sleep and subjected to simulated shelling. If that sounds like hell, the programme-makers have almost got it right. The BBC is trying to simulate life in a first world war trench for the most ambitious 'reality TV' show yet produced: a recreation of life on the western front in November 1916. Volunteers [...] will be exposed to tear gas, woken at all hours, and will have to wear heavy tin helmets night and day. Each will play a real-life soldier and will have no idea when he is going to 'die' - until producers remove him.⁷⁴⁰

The Trench has more documentary than dramatic elements: film of the trenches is interspersed by archive footage and interviews with veterans, pulled together by an omniscient narrator. The 'drama' was provided by the volunteers who each represented a real-life soldier and the events that happened to them as detailed in the regimental diary, apart from the exit of one problem volunteer, Private David 'Jabber' Nolan, whose vociferous complaints led to his ejection in the early stages of filming. To stay in keeping with the history of the 10th East Yorkshires, all the volunteers were recruited from the Hull area, and several of the men were direct descendents of veterans who had fought in the war. However, Julian Putkowski dismissed the idea of the programme by ignoring what the project aimed to do:

In purely physical terms, these people will be taller and stronger - really you would have to take people who were prone to disease. They should be traumatised, having seen a third of their school friends killed in the previous six months. And I hope they include a 16 or 17-year-old; by their own estimate, 15% of the British army was under age. You would need at least one person with venereal disease, and another would need to get the news that his wife had run off with someone else. They would have no sleep for three or four days on end. They would suffer hypothermia, lice and lice-borne infections.⁷⁴¹

Participants were not expected to experience dysentery, trench foot, or shell shock. Indeed, owing to health and safety regulations, rats, lice, gas, shelling, death and decomposition were strictly off the menu. But this was not the programme's aim: *The Trench* pushed the boundaries of history on television. Viewers witnessed the opening

⁷⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁷⁴¹ Ibid.

up of a world that was never about dry facts, dates, and academic squabbling, but about survival in extreme circumstances. Dennis Goodwin, chairman of the World War One Veterans' Association, welcomed news of *The Trench* because 'it will give people some idea of what it was like, because a lot of young kids today don't have a clue.'⁷⁴²

One secondary school History teacher wrote to the *Times Educational Supplement* to say he had told his year nine class to watch *The Trench* as part of their homework.⁷⁴³ Posters marketing the series in schools underlined the educational aspect of the programme, in parallel with National Curriculum Keystage Three which features a unit called 'Life on the Western Front'. From Keystage One pupils are encouraged to draw poppies and to think about war memorials and remembrance events such as the two-minute silence. Surely any encouragement away from the war taught as English Literature through a handful of poets is an improvement, and it appears that the programme was successful in this way. All Key Stage 3 and 4 schools were sent A3-size posters which announced: 'The Trench...LIVE the Experience. A major new series recreating in extraordinary detail the life of soldiers on the frontline in the First World War.' The reverse side read: 'The First World War was the conflict which was supposed to end war on a grand scale for ever. Lasting over four years, it cost the British Empire nearly a million young men; a lost generation. The first global war, it made use of new technologies such as planes, tanks, gas and machine guns. And took 10 million casualties worldwide.'

Then

Young men are recruited from the streets of Hull to fight for their country on the frontlines in 1916.

Now

25 volunteers are recruited from the streets of Hull to re-live the experiences of these men in a specially reconstructed trench network in Northern France.

⁷⁴² Ibid.

⁷⁴³ *Times Educational Supplement* 29 March 2002 p.21

BBC TWO has created a four-part series following these young men in order to recreate as faithfully as possible the conditions endured by the East Yorkshire Regiment in 1916.

Life on the Western Front is reproduced in incredible detail based on eye-witness accounts of surviving WWI veterans, as well as the diaries, photos, letters and recollections of the soldiers at the time.

Guns, uniforms and kitbags from that period have been replicated, as well as rations, utensils and personal effects. The relentless shelling, rifle fire and enemy attacks are simulated, the rain, mud, cold, boredom and fear are not.

The present-day volunteers truly appreciate the extremity of the situation faced by ordinary soldiers living in their muddy trenches, below the surface of Northern France

Tune in and live the Experience.⁷⁴⁴

The style of the programme reflected the growing trend for reality-history documentary programmes established by *The 1900s House* (Channel 4, 1999) and *The 1940s House* (Channel 4, 2001), *Surviving the Iron Age* (Channel 4, 2001), *The Frontier House* (Channel 4, 2002) and *The Edwardian Country House* (Channel 4, 2002). These programmes developed what Peter Watkins showed what television could do in the 1960s with *Culloden* (1964), but contemporary drama-documentaries in the reality-history field now rely on viewers getting involved not in the events or the facts, but in the characters that have been plucked from our everyday modern existence and placed in a re-enacted historical environment.⁷⁴⁵ A reviewer for the *Times* wrote that his late grandfather had fought on the Somme and would never talk about his experiences. He felt that *The Trench* might him a glimpse of his service life

⁷⁴⁴ My thanks to Esther MacCallum-Stewart for lending me an original copy of this poster

⁷⁴⁵ *The Frontier House* featured three modern families living the life on the America frontier for five months, in wood cabins in the style of the Montana Territory as they were in 1883. The trials they had to endure included blizzards, hunger, scorching sun, forest fires, and disputes with neighbours. *The Edwardian Country House* took 21 people into a stately home and assigned fifteen of that number the task of serving the remaining six according to contemporary household rule books of the time.

must have been like before he was lamed by shrapnel, and in doing so ‘drew me a little closer to him, or at least to his memory.’⁷⁴⁶

[Play video clip 23: *The Trench*, opening sequence]

However, the genre plumbed new depths by the addition of ‘game show’ elements. For example, *Regency House Party* (Channel 4, 2004) featured ordinary British people re-enacting the etiquette of the eighteenth century aristocratic marriage market which resulted in a hybrid programme more reminiscent of a Jane Austen novel mixed with *Blind Date*. Nevertheless, television operates in competitive market, and the ‘house’ formats have proved to be popular with audiences. *The Ship* (BBC, 2002), *Lad’s Army* (BBC, 2002) and *Bad Lad’s Army* (ITV, 2004) were all ratings successes, the latter winning the competitive 9pm-10pm slot with 5.4 million viewers, a 26% audience share.⁷⁴⁷ A sequel to *Bad Lad’s Army* was broadcast in the summer of 2005. Channel 4’s *Spitfire Ace* (2003) and *Bomber Crew* (2004) were also popular with viewers: *Spitfire Ace* achieved an audience of 2.8 million, a 12% share.⁷⁴⁸

Once *The Trench* was broadcast in March 2002 there was a second flood of criticism, not from viewers but television critics. One suggested a similar format based in Auschwitz and another in a Japanese Prisoner of War camp or a series in which ‘volunteers spend a few weeks [after a plane crash] in the Andes pretending to eat each other.’⁷⁴⁹ Parallels between the Great War and the German Holocaust during the Second World War were not new, however, and the recourse to parallels between 1914-1918, and the Nazi’s persecution of Jews and other minorities 1939-1945, are highly indicative of the ways in which the conflict on the Western Front is remembered in Britain. On the eve of the publication of *Birdsong* (1993), journalist-turned novelist Sebastian Faulks wrote about the Great War that ‘We have learned to endure the footage of the concentration camps [...] But what took place on the banks of the River Ancre on July 1 1916 when 60,000 casualties were sustained in a single day; what took place at Arras and Passchendaele; the ripping up and evisceration of a

⁷⁴⁶ *Times TT2* 22 March 2002 p.11

⁷⁴⁷ <http://media.guardian.co.uk/overnights/story/0,7965,1277783,00.html> (accessed 30 December 2004)

⁷⁴⁸ <http://media.guardian.co.uk/overnights/story/0,7965,1122189,00.html> (accessed 30 December 2004)

⁷⁴⁹ *Sunday Times* 17 March 2002 p.9, *Independent* 15 March 2002 p.5, *Guardian G:2* 11 March 2002 p.13

country's youth, the fragmentation of our society, the grief of mothers, lovers and fathers [...] this was our holocaust.'⁷⁵⁰

The controversies that surrounded *The Trench* centred upon a commonplace view that the war was a sacrosanct historical event and should be treated as such: it was seen as morally wrong to reproduce trench life. The question of historical morality on film do not seem to have been applied to Spielberg's *Schindler's List* (1993) or the television drama *Conspiracy* (2001), or the plethora of programmes about Hitler and the Nazis on satellite channels which are often based upon dramatic reconstructions. The *Independent* television review quipped that 'Next year, no doubt, *Holocaust*, in which whole families live behind the skirting board for two weeks before being rounded up, sent to mock-ups of concentration camps and then, er, not killed.'⁷⁵¹ The *Guardian's* critic dreamed up his own Holocaust series called *Camp* in which a hundred volunteers would relive the horror of the Nazi death-camps: 'The participants will be shaved and starved and subjected to a range of experiments modelled on those of Dr Mengele [...] the quest for controversy and ratings in television is now such that one man's satire of television is another's pilot for Channel 5.'⁷⁵² One *Daily Telegraph* columnist proclaimed that *The Trench* is a symptomatic product of today's television schedules because reality history programmes attract larger audiences than 'boring old factual programmes.' He told viewers that *The Trench* 'is not just bad history...[it] is pornography.'⁷⁵³ The harshest critic of all was the *Times's* A.A.Gill, an avid subscriber to the myth of a 'lost generation':

If *The Trench* is deemed a success, will the next version be to get 20 Polish Jews and mock up a concentration camp so that the couch-bound viewer can get a deeper, more emphatic, accessible understanding of the Auschwitz experience – using, of course, *Top of the Pops* smoke for gas, as they did in *The Trench*? Up to a couple of weeks ago, I would have said that would have been beyond even satire [...] I thought *The Trench* was one of the most depressing and defiling things I have seen on television [...] because of the lousy, self-serving, morally bankrupt excises that made up the justification for it [...] The consequences of

⁷⁵⁰ *Guardian G:2* 15 September 1993 pp.1-2

⁷⁵¹ *Independent* 15 March 2002 p.5

⁷⁵² *Guardian G:2* 11 March 2002 p.13

⁷⁵³ *Daily Telegraph* 12 March 2002 p.27

the war still surround us, not just in the millions who died, but in the future generations that were never born. We are, all of us, standing in as other people. We have to be the children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren they never had. We are indebted. We owe them. We owe them more than to turn their short lives into an endurance game show, to repeat tragedy as vain farce.⁷⁵⁴

This stems from what John Terraine called ‘The Great Casualty Myth’ being ‘the fixed belief that the First World War was the deadliest experience in human history.’⁷⁵⁵ In addition, this also resonates with the modern need to define victims.⁷⁵⁶ This element of very recent documentaries about both World Wars was underlined by the drama-documentary *Dunkirk* which showed, in graphic detail, British soldiers being executed by German soldiers after they had surrendered.⁷⁵⁷ Only the *Daily Telegraph* appreciated that *The Trench* ‘was not a game show but a grave dramatic reconstruction [...] In convincingly dire conditions with explosions all around, the imagination filled in for the lack of bullets. The new recruits quickly acquired nicknames and a sense of comradeship that mirrored in some small degree the real thing.’⁷⁵⁸ *The Trench* series was an exercise in the *practicalities* and some of the basic every day *realities* of trench warfare in 1916, details that experts should not have the arrogance to assume are known amongst a viewing public brought up on war poetry and novels.

The inability of the press to understand the war by any other route than literature was ably demonstrated by a journalist decided to test the BBC’s idea by digging a trench in his own back garden. His ignorance of *The Trench*’s aims was aptly demonstrated in his reading war poetry, Sebastian Faulks’ *Birdsong*, and Pat Barker’s *Regeneration Trilogy*. If anything could be deemed insulting to the men who fought in the Great War it was his *Blue Peter*-style efforts, and asking his wife to turn the television to the

⁷⁵⁴ *Sunday Times* 17 March 2002 p.9

⁷⁵⁵ John Terraine, *The Smoke and the Fire* (London: Leo Cooper, 1992), p.35

⁷⁵⁶ See Jay Winter, ‘The Generation of Memory: Reflections on the “Memory Boom” in Contemporary Historical Studies’ *Bulletin of the German Historical Institute* 27 Fall 2000 and Jay Winter & Emmauel Sivan (eds), *War & Remembrance in the 20th Century* (Cambridge: CUP, 1999)

⁷⁵⁷ One particularly horrific scene of soldiers portraying the fate of men from The Royal Warwickshire Regiment was shown at the IAMHIST conference at the Imperial War Museum 15 October 2004 by the programme’s directors.

⁷⁵⁸ *Daily Telegraph* 16 March 2002 p.26

kitchen window so he could watch *Eastenders*.⁷⁵⁹ This sort of response shows that the accepted view of the war has been moulded by the prose and poetry of a handful of upper class British men, and any challenge to this understanding provokes an entirely emotive response. The visceral reaction to plans for *The Trench* show just how deeply these mythologies are in British culture. *The Trench* does not include any references to war literature as the whole point of the series was to dispel the most persistent myths buttressed by poetry and novels that gives the impression that all British soldiers ‘wandered about until death brought their misery to an end.’⁷⁶⁰

The Trench emphasised that not every British soldier thought or behaved like a disillusioned war poet, and that there was more to war experience than sitting around, waiting for imminent death or injury: it is regularly pointed out by the narration that ‘in any one year, the average infantryman spent only five to 10 days in direct combat with the enemy.’ A spell of military training at the British Army facilities at Catterick gave the 25 volunteers a taste of what they might expect on the ‘set’, and as they arrived in the trench on the first night during a simulated artillery bombardment they are visibly shocked by the force of the ‘shells’. Whilst they are aware that they would not come to any physical harm, the simulated explosions were the nearest they could get to understand the sound of artillery barrages, a concept which many veterans, including Arthur Halestrap, are recorded as saying was impossible to describe. Tactical explanations were given for each of the occurrences experienced by the volunteers as they happened. This is a particular strength of *The Trench*: it was not concerned with giving a grand historical narrative, as that has been done by several major series up to that point such as *The Great War* (1964), *1914-18* (1996) and *The Western Front* (1999). *The Trench* took the viewers into the Western Front without the guidance of poets or novelists, and even without the explicit help of expert historians in front of the camera.

The first episode explains that poison gas could also be a cover for an imminent attack by the enemy, as well as having veteran Andrew Bowie describe the effect of a gas attack as feeling like there was ‘a corkscrew turning in your throat.’ The sentry system is explained, as well as the problems of sanitation, and supplying food, water

⁷⁵⁹ *Guardian G:2* 13 March 2002 p.3

⁷⁶⁰ Cyril Falls, *War Books: A Critical Guide* (London: Davies, 1930), p.xi

and post to men in action. *The Trench* repeats throughout the series that the British Army grew to be a huge organisation that learned to cope with gargantuan logistical problems as the war progressed. Other important aspects covered by the programme include a detailed description of the workings of a Lewis Gun team by veteran Lewis Gunner Harry Patch. *The Trench* also detailed the way men repaired and maintained the trenches, how they were paid, punished, how they worshipped and washed, and how they rested behind the lines with games of football and rowdy episodes in local estaminets. Whilst these are not major tactical or strategic elements of the war in its entirety, they are nonetheless vital elements of the conflict that have not been covered by any other documentary before or since. Many of these activities are taught as part of the National Curriculum in British schools.⁷⁶¹

The system of Pals Battalions was also explained in detail. The belief that recruiting men from the same firms, villages and towns would help them bond together and produce effective fighting units was borne out by the series' use of volunteer men from Hull who quickly gave each other nicknames and formed firm friendships. Indeed, after the series was filmed the temporary Tommies have continued to hold regular reunions.⁷⁶² Veteran Arthur Halestrap underlined the sense of what the ANZACS called 'mateship' as 'we were one body of men together', and when one volunteer, 'Private' John Pryer, nearly collapses after a particularly long march back to the billets, his fellow volunteers rally to their colleague. *The Trench* used a good deal of archive footage to reinforce the impression of authenticity. Scenes of the volunteers going in and out of the lines, on the march, playing football and firing weapons, were all supplemented by quick cutting from footage of the programme's volunteers to that of real Great War soldiers performing the same tasks. Interviews with the volunteers, both during and after the programme was made, try to give the viewers a greater understanding of what the programme is trying to achieve. 'Private' John Baxter says to an interviewer off camera that 'I know this isn't for real but it's getting more real.' The tension building up to a planned 'attack' was clear, but here is the programme's most exposed point: the volunteers are clearly not going to meet any armed Germans across No Man's Land, despite the authenticity and accuracy of the programme as a whole. Another moment of weakness is the ejection of 'Private'

⁷⁶¹ Andy Robertshaw of the National Army Museum at the University of Kent 28 October 2004

⁷⁶² Personal knowledge

Nolan, nicknamed by the other volunteers as ‘Jabber’ for his constant moaning. Near the end of the first episode Nolan is marched in to the officer’s dugout to face serving army officer Lieutenant Rob Yuill. The officer tells the malingerer that ‘you have not played the game [...] you’ve let the guys whom we are remembering down.’

[Play video clip 24: *The Trench*]

Despite the well-meant sentiments behind Yuill’s comments, this is the closest *The Trench* gets to shifting its emphasis away from documentary towards the misguided ‘game show’ as it was painted in the press. One reviewer thought the ejection of Nolan was a ‘cop-out’ and berated the programme for not following through with correct wartime discipline of Field Punishment Number One, tying the accused to the wheel of an artillery piece: ‘Had *The Trench* incorporated that kind of discipline it would have been infinitely more gripping.’⁷⁶³ However, the programme did show one recruit subjected to Field Punishment Number Two for not shaving in episode one.⁷⁶⁴

The volunteers were subjected to a number of bombardments, and the second episode opens with archive footage of men preparing to go ‘over the top’ spliced in with the programme’s temporary soldiers doing the same. The narration explains the tactical purpose of a preliminary artillery barrage was to soften up the target and cut through any barbed wire across No Man’s Land. In addition, the narrator adds that whilst the bombs were not real and the volunteers were not in mortal danger, the noise of the explosions meant that ‘the men still had strong reactions to the planned attack.’ Volunteer ‘Private’ John Robinson, visibly shaken by the experience, said to the camera that ‘I tell you, what I didn’t want to do was stand here. What I did want to do was to go that way [forward] or that way [back]. It was standing here that was getting to me, and I can understand now about people saying you run away or charge at the enemy.’ The mental strain of front line trench life was underscored by one of the many historical connections between the volunteers and family members who fought in the regiment. ‘Private’ Steve Spivey’s great-grandfather had served in the East Yorkshires, and in a recorded voiceover he read a letter written by his great-

⁷⁶³ *Observer* 17 March 2002 p.20

⁷⁶⁴ ‘Private’ John Thompson was made to carry 65lbs on his back and run around the parade square five times with his rifle held above his head after appearing to be inadequately shaved for the soldier’s pay parade.

grandfather to his great-grandmother that he was ‘fed up with this life [...] hoping for a Blighty this time. If you knew what was on my mind it would drive you mad.’

The media furore over *The Trench* in the national press, *Radio 4*, and television’s *Newsnight* can only have added to the fact that it attracted an average audience of 2.51 million viewers which was just short of Simon Schama’s average audience for his eminently successful series *History of Britain*.⁷⁶⁵ The temporary Tommies even beat the popular comedy *Father Ted* in the ratings, and to date it is the only recent documentary about the First World War to earn a place in the trade paper *Broadcast*’s weekly top 50 most watched programmes. Not all reviews were negative. The *Daily Telegraph* grudgingly wrote that the series was done ‘surprisingly well’ considering that ‘it could have been an unmitigated disaster.’⁷⁶⁶ The *Independent* reported that *The Trench* ‘seems like a worthwhile history lesson: it’s not disrespectful in the slightest, but very illuminating, especially on the smaller, everyday privations of trench life. Okay, so nobody is firing live ammunition at these men, but then no one was dropping bombs on the inhabitants of Channel 4’s *1940 House*, either.’⁷⁶⁷

Over the last forty years there have been a number of television documentaries about the Great War: *The Trench* was not intended to give viewers yet another long narrative about the origins of the Great War. Academic thought on the reality-history phenomenon has moved towards a more accepting stance which has started to appraise the new programmes for what they are trying to achieve without dismissing them out of hand. At a recent IAMHIST conference at the Imperial War Museum in October 2004, an entire panel of speakers addressed the challenges of reality-history programmes on British television. Academics and television historians Helen Weinstein and Juliet Gardiner concurred that historical narratives on television have already been established, and that on television history is most effective when it contains an element of discovery for viewers.⁷⁶⁸

⁷⁶⁵ BBC WAC Audience figures for *The Trench* supplied by Trish Hayes, *History of Britain* audience figures as quoted in *Guardian* 28 October 2002

⁷⁶⁶ *Daily Telegraph* 16 March 2002 p.26

⁷⁶⁷ *Independent* 15 March 2002 p.5

⁷⁶⁸ IAMHIST conference about history on television: ‘It’s history, but is it true?’ at the Imperial War Museum, October 15 2004

As discussed in the ‘Veterans’ chapter of this study, *The Trench* was authenticated by four Western Front veterans, Harry Patch (1898-) and Arthur Halestrap (1898-2004) as well as Jack Davis (1895-2003) and Arthur Barraclough (1898-2004). Producer and writer Richard van Emden felt that the veterans’ support gave *The Trench* genuine credibility because they ‘have given us a final glimpse into a war that has all but been consigned to history.’⁷⁶⁹ Richard van Emden remains adamant that ‘To miss the input of old soldiers would have been an opportunity gone for ever, and who was to say that they did not wish to make their contribution?’⁷⁷⁰ Some television reviewers thought that the veteran’s testimonies created a ‘powerful structure [on which were] grafted impressive amounts of historical information.’⁷⁷¹

Yet it seemed that the producers of *The Trench* could not win. Whilst the veterans were aware of the project before they were interviewed, one newspaper assumed that the veterans had not been informed about the nature of the programme.⁷⁷² Another suggested that the old soldiers made a mockery of the entire programme, that the programme makers of *The Trench* had ‘shot themselves in the foot’ by including recollections from Great War veterans: ‘their testimonies were as moving as the rest of the programme was embarrassing [...] only they can know how they felt’.⁷⁷³ The veterans were very much involved in the initial stages of the project, and the producers received very mixed opinions from the men who had fought on the Western Front. Harry Patch harboured deep reservations about the capacity of *any* medium to effectively recreate what men like him experienced on the Western Front. When I asked if he thought that the making of *The Trench* was worth it Harry replied

I don’t think so, but you will never get it over in a book [or a documentary]. They can write as many [books and documentaries] as they like, but the younger generations will never understand what we went through. There will never be another trench war. If television can get it over, the uselessness of war, then ok. If you are with them [other soldiers] when they die, as long as you live you will never forget it. Never.

⁷⁶⁹ Richard van Emden, *The Trench— Experiencing Life on the Front Line 1916* (London: Bantam, 2002), Acknowledgements

⁷⁷⁰ *Ibid.* p.6

⁷⁷¹ *Daily Telegraph* 16 March 2002 p.26

⁷⁷² *Guardian G:2* 11 March 2002 p.13

⁷⁷³ *Observer* 17 March 2002 p.20

The last surviving veteran who joined up in 1914, Jack Davis (1895-2004), a regular on television documentaries, concurred with Harry's doubts about television's ability to portray their war. Before *The Trench* went into production, Jack said he did not understand how the programme could work: 'they can't do it as far as I'm concerned – not with any degree of authenticity – the conditions for those of us who were there can't be shown in this way.'⁷⁷⁴ However, Arthur Halestrap maintained a strong sense of responsibility to those who did not come back. He told me that he represented 'those tens of thousands of them that suffered and died in misery [*sic.*]'⁷⁷⁵ He was taken to visit the set of *The Trench* near Flesquières before the series was filmed, and the producers felt that his seal of approval gave the location credibility with which few could argue.⁷⁷⁶ Arthur understood that the programme's most important aim was to show how men coped with the everyday routine tasks of survival in the frontline trenches, aside from the British Army's official manuals on trench routine that were issued to infantry battalions throughout the war. Richard van Emden pointed out that many veterans had spoken on camera about the great battles in which they took part, but most had talked less about the day-to-day activities, such as wiring parties, trench riveting, eating and sleeping. Indeed, it was conveying the aspects of daily routine that Arthur Halestrap thought most important about the making of *The Trench*.

The veterans' memories of 'normal' activities gave focus to the experiences of the volunteers in the documentary, and sometimes comparisons were made that brought to life the daily routines of the trenches.⁷⁷⁷ The practical matters of washing, eating, and sleeping were covered, in addition to the ways in which men coped with the mental and emotional pressures of frequent stays in front-line trenches. It was a special kind of endurance that enabled the men of the BEF to withstand regular bombardments by heavy artillery in the worst sectors of the line, and a strong sense of comradeship was an essential part of the coping process. *The Trench* showed that British infantrymen had a lot more to do than sit and watch German shells whistle over his head, and Arthur Halestrap thought it was most important that the series

⁷⁷⁴ *Guardian* 5 July 2001 'Review' p.9

⁷⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷⁶ Richard van Emden, *The Trench*, Introduction

⁷⁷⁷ *Ibid.* p.6

underlined the fact that the majority of soldiers just got on with their jobs.⁷⁷⁸ On the other hand, Harry Patch, a man who was more traumatised by the war than Arthur, spoke candidly of the fear that still haunts him.⁷⁷⁹

The final episode of *The Trench* contained strong justifications of what they had tried to achieve in the series. ‘Private’ Craig Wright told the camera that the real Pals ‘were very similar to how we are now: they were a bunch of lads picked out of civvy life, they just got on with it, for a lot of these men didn’t go home and they didn’t know how long the war would last. I’ve got the greatest respect for them, the greatest. I think they were fantastic. They did a lot for England and the rest of the world. You can’t take that away from them.’ ‘Private’ Mark Palmer added that he enjoyed the fact that in the trench he had no responsibilities and that ‘it was just like being at school again.’ Despite the odd quip about the atmosphere in the trench – one volunteer is heard to say ‘it’s like a chimp’s tea party, but with crap tea’ - the programme continued to educate viewers about well-known aspects of wartime myths. Whilst explaining that for every infantryman in the front line there were up to seven men behind the lines, as well as the tactical importance of sentry duty. The programme pointed out that sleeping on sentry was punishable by death, and that 449 men were sentenced to death for this crime, but only two had their sentences carried out.

The last instalment also tackled casualty numbers in the context of the battalion featured by *The Trench*. Accompanied by the ubiquitous ‘over the top’ footage, staged behind the lines for the 1916 film *Battle of the Somme*, the narration informs the viewer that the real-life Hull Pals had 25% of the battalion killed, 50% were wounded, and 15% returned home ‘unscathed.’ This is a higher mortality rate than the national average which saw eight out of every ten men return home.⁷⁸⁰ As the temporary Pals go to their ‘attack’, the narration underlines that during the real life fighting for the village of Serre, as part of what became known as the Battle of the Ancre in 1916, the Pals lost 263 men. This is then put into a wider context of the Somme in general. The programme’s military adviser Taff Gillingham wanted to emphasise that the British and German forces incurred one million casualties during more than four months

⁷⁷⁸ Arthur Halestrap to Emma Mahoney (interview in person) 14 February 2003

⁷⁷⁹ Harry Patch quoted in Richard van Emden *The Trench*, p.231

⁷⁸⁰ Gordon Corrigan, *Mud, Blood and Poppycock*, p.55

fighting in the Somme region, ‘the Germans paid the highest price and their army never recovered.’ However, the decision to include this passage was taken up to the head of BBC2, Jane Root, and after intense debate among some of the producers the phrase was used in the final programme.⁷⁸¹

After the volunteers have gone over the top, but not to encounter any Germans, the on-location footage concludes with shots of the deserted trench set, but the series ends with film recorded at a Remembrance Day service at Beverley Minster, Hull. The volunteers are filmed meeting up before the service, greeting one another warmly and introducing any family members they have brought to the occasion. Volunteer Craig Wright compared their new friendships to those formed by the real life soldiers, albeit in less dangerous and more temporary circumstances. After they have spoken to the camera of what it felt like to return to every day life, Arthur Halestrap described the ‘eerie silence’ of the first Armistice Day in 1918, recalling that he felt there was ‘nothing to live for, no objective.’

As the volunteers file in to a side chapel in the church that houses the war memorial to the 10th Battalion of the East Yorkshires, many are visibly moved and profess a feeling of shock at the number of casualties. One volunteer is heard to say ‘names seem so anonymous in a way, it’s sad, but we brought them back to life.’ A fellow volunteer quickly concurs ‘we did.’ The programme’s volunteers are filmed during the two-minute silence, and a subsequent voiceover recording of one recalls that the church in which they were standing ‘would have been full after the war...it was a terrible thought.’ As the Remembrance Day parade progresses past the volunteers and down the main street away from the Minster, Volunteer ‘Private’ Mark Thompson is moved to speak of the real Hull Pals that ‘It’s upsetting to know what these people have done for us. The best thing you can do is give them your respect and honour them.’ As the volunteer battalion is shown marching away into the French countryside, John ‘The Baptist’ Baxter in an interview asserts that ‘this documentary has been a fabulous experience. I used to think it was just about people going over the top and being slaughtered, but it was so much more. I’m glad I’ve done it and I’ve shared their experiences.’ The final word of the series goes to Arthur Halestrap: ‘I feel

⁷⁸¹ Taff Gillingham to Emma Mahoney (by email) 4 June 2005

very grateful to them [the volunteers] for putting up with it all, and for volunteering, giving their time to let others know what was done by their forebears for their benefit; because what we did was for the benefit of posterity, and posterity is the modern population.'

[Play video clip 25: *The Trench*]

In May 2002, military historians Dr Stephen Badsey and Dr Gary Sheffield debated the merits *The Trench* for readers of *BBC History Magazine*. Badsey appreciated the fact that television reconstructions can help to dispel the intellectual snobbery of the Academy in these matters, and that if a programme like *The Trench* can introduce the study of history to a larger audience 'it is one more legitimate method for us to use.' While Badsey thought *The Trench* was a worthwhile experiment, Sheffield concurred that the programme was entertaining and educational but 'it can only take us so far.' His main concern about the series was that it was impossible for modern-day volunteers to understand 'the mental world inhabited by the products of a very different society.' Quoting L.P.Hartley's *The Go-Between*, Sheffield asserted that some aspects of the past are beyond the reach of a television programme, no matter how good it is, because 'the past is a foreign country; they do things differently there.'⁷⁸² The task of *The Trench* was always going to be hard: to convince the sceptics in the Academy and the press, whilst giving the 'entertainment-hungry public' an enthralling series worthy of its subject.⁷⁸³

The Trench emphasised the fact that television creates texts of public history by converting a public event into a range of idiosyncratic personal experiences. The Great War has been much more comfortably filtered through poetry, novels, art and film as the author/artist acts as the mediator to diffuse the experience. Whilst other television documentaries have 'filtered' the Great War into manageable chunks, *The Trench* flooded the viewer with the everyday grind of life on the front line, albeit without the full force of the German army across no-man's land. It confronted viewers with the actuality of life as an everyday soldier with a face, a character and a family without presenting the British Tommy as faceless cannon fodder. The character of

⁷⁸² *BBC History Magazine* May 2002 p.44

⁷⁸³ *BBC History Magazine* March 2002 p.27

Tommy, a cheerful working class man doing his best in extreme circumstances, was well represented by the temporary Tommies in *The Trench*.

Nevertheless, this study suggests that British viewing audiences do not wish to see the conditions endured by troops on the Western Front. A second Great War *Timewatch* documentary *1914: the War Revolution* (BBC, 2003) sought to explain why a war that would be 'over by Christmas' turned into 'a long and bloody struggle involving 7 million British troops and resulting in a horrendous number of casualties.' Gary Sheffield guided the programme through the technical developments of the war such as the machine gun, barbed wire, telephones and tinned food, while Richard van Emden staged reconstructions based on accounts from diaries kept by the 4th Royal Irish Dragoon Guards. The review in the *Radio Times* wrote that the film was 'chilling' because 'although the appalling conditions and suffering of the troops have been well documented, it is still shocking to be reminded of them.'⁷⁸⁴ Perhaps *The Trench* was too personalised for audiences to cope with. If viewers forget that programmes are edited they will attend to them 'as raw glimpses of what actually happened. The feeling that that the past is open to perusal as never before creates an illusion that *we*, at last, can know what it was *really* like.'⁷⁸⁵

The series could be seen as public history, the televisual version of the trench mock-ups that are now established features at the Imperial War Museum. Indeed, museums dedicated to the war in France and Belgium, such as the Historial de la Grand Guerre in Péronne, and visitor's centres at Thiepval, Newfoundland Park and Vimy Ridge, provide forms of a more tangible experiential history. The visitor's centre at Thiepval is an Anglo-French project which encourages the thousands of visitors to see the Thiepval Memorial to the Missing in the context of the battlefield. This is explained in three languages - English, French and German – and the centre's display panels provide an overview of the course of the war.⁷⁸⁶ At Vimy Ridge there is an 'Interpretative Centre' where a short film about the battle can be seen, along with various artefacts and photographs.⁷⁸⁷ Newfoundland Park is a 10 hectare site which

⁷⁸⁴ *Radio Times* 1-7 February 2003 p.106. *1914: the War Revolution* BBC2 Friday 7 February 2003 9.00pm

⁷⁸⁵ David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge: CUP, 1985), p.368

⁷⁸⁶ <http://www.thiepval.org.uk/> (accessed 13 June 2005)

⁷⁸⁷ <http://www.legionmagazine.com/features/memoirspilgrimages/98-01a.asp> (accessed 13 June 2005)

includes a preserved trench system. Indeed, *The Trench* was closely linked with the Imperial War Museum: a free exhibition staged as an offshoot of the programme appeared on publicity posters sent to schools and it was announced before and after every episode, with full details given for members of the public to log on to the BBC website or call a free phone number. The exhibition proved to be so popular its stay at the museum was extended.⁷⁸⁸

The Trench programme therefore acted as a further portal of understanding to encourage people to visit the Imperial War Museum and learn more about how soldiers lived during the Great War. Exhibitions such as these are not a new phenomenon: for groups of school-children, the Imperial War Museum has stewards that dress up as soldiers, fire wardens and nurses to add to the student's experience of what it was like to be there – the whole basis of school history at the more junior levels, to find historical understanding through empathy. *The Trench* wanted to educate, but to gain a place on the schedule it also had to excite. Museums have had to adapt to the changing nature of methods to make learning more interesting, now television has started to reflect that trend. The new breed of reality television history emphasises that television itself is a form of experiential re-enactment: it starts with known elements and fills in the gaps with the typical, the probable, or the invented.⁷⁸⁹

In 2004 plans announced by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation planned to take this new trend to the extreme. The production company Galafilm advertised for 300 descendants of Canadian Great War soldiers, airmen and nurses to participate in a nine hour television epic to mark the ninetieth anniversary of the war by a nine-hour 'television event' in three parts: documentary, experiential re-enactment, and drama.⁷⁹⁰ The plans for the Canadian series show that they intend to go much further than what had been done in *The Trench*:

⁷⁸⁸ Esther MacCallum-Stewart to Emma Mahoney (by email) 10 June 2005

⁷⁸⁹ David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country*, pp.211-240

⁷⁹⁰ <http://www.iamhist.org/news.html#great-war> (accessed 30 December 2004) This project is going to be produced by Galafilm Productions (Canada) and the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. The producers secured the services of Taff Gillingham and the Khaki Chums (also involved in *The Trench*) to train their 'recruits' at the Chums's training trench in Essex, but their visit was cancelled at the last minute.

Did your great-grandfather take Vimy Ridge? Did your great-grandmother heal his wounds? [...] This nine-hour epic, to mark the 90th anniversary of the Great War, is a new form of storytelling, an uncommon blending of documentary and drama forged into a ground-breaking television event. Like your great-grandfathers and grandmothers, you will answer the call, board a train with other descendents and travel to a battleground with the same conditions as 1914. You will outfitted, trained and fed as a Canadian World War I soldiers and be part of the re-enactment drama [...] Our participants will learn first-hand the horrific sights, sounds and smells of trench warfare. They will be filmed as they struggle with mud and discipline, preparing for the big attacks. They will make sorties into no-man's land to capture German prisoners. They will learn, as poet John Masefield remarked ironically, why the trench was the 'long grave already dug' [...] THE GREAT WAR will be a television event filled with the power and epic quality of Lord of the Rings [...] but more so. Because it is true. Because it happened. Because it has never been told this way before in any country, by any filmmaker, by any broadcaster.⁷⁹¹

To be broadcast in Canada in autumn 2007, 300 volunteer-descendents will camp for seven days in a field that will be transformed into a 'battlefield' on which they will re-enact some of the most significant battles fought by Canadian forces on the Western Front. Galafilm hopes that the exercise will help the volunteers to experience what their forefathers had during the war, as well as encouraging a sense of camaraderie among the 'recruits'.⁷⁹² By August 2005 five thousands Canadians had applied to take part in the series.⁷⁹³ Some parts of the series were filmed in October 2005.⁷⁹⁴

The Trench, however, sought to reflect an inescapable truth about the war, that life in the trenches was not always action-packed. Not only was it a valuable educational tool, but a primary source in its own right: a reflection of television's growing need to provide good quality television history that is new and entertaining enough to attract a large audience. At a conference in December 2002, Simon Schama dared to utter 'the E word': entertainment.⁷⁹⁵ More recently another lecturer-presenter referred to three

⁷⁹¹ Ibid.

⁷⁹² <http://www.greatwar.ca/schedule.html> (accessed 22 August 2005)

⁷⁹³ Janet Torge (Galafilm) to Emma Mahoney (by email) 22 August 2005

⁷⁹⁴ Janet Torge (Galafilm) to Emma Mahoney (by email) 26 February 2006

⁷⁹⁵ 'History and the Media' conference at the Institute of History Research, London, December 2002

such 'E words' to jar in the ears of the Academy: that the purpose of television history should be 'to entertain, educate and excite.' He argued that if television history can 'throw some intelligent light on the past through an engaging narrative' it's doing its job.⁷⁹⁶

In this way *The Trench* demonstrated that the animated elements of the television medium can recall the past for the majority of viewers in a more effective and accessible way than more traditional or static forms of history such as war memorials and published books. Television encourages viewer's to participate in the past, and the medium's 'animations' may also help to confirm or deny hypotheses about the past. *The Trench* attempted to show more of the routine of trench life to prove that not every day of the war was like 1 July 1916. However, *The Trench* appeared at a time when reality television had passed the novelty stage and was deemed to be very low-brow. As the barrage of press complaints about the series showed, this proximity to the likes of *Big Brother* invited close comparisons with *The Trench*, and as a result, the idea of *The Trench* was deemed as inappropriate and offensive to the memory of Britain's war dead.

Television documentaries are useful vehicles for showing controversial historical topics in an interesting manner. The medium can utilise several effects to pitch opposing views against one another as seen in John Laffin versus Trevor Wilson in *Haig: the Unknown Soldier*. Television can also use its strong visual impetus to posit a number of possible scenarios for the audience to consider as seen in *The Crucified Soldier*. The television documentary is also capable of presenting a one-sided view where didacticism can leave little room for counter-argument, as seen in *Shot at Dawn*. However, new television genres have enhanced the medium's ability to invite the viewer inside a historical reconstruction. *The Trench* showed that viewers could gain a more tangible sense of historical immediacy instead of holding the audience at arm's length by using the three documentary cornerstones of archive film, veterans and historians.

⁷⁹⁶ Dr Tristram Hunt, *Guardian* 21 July 2003 p.5

To go some way towards understanding the conditions of the front line was the declared aim of *The Trench*. Reflecting the growing trend for history programmes in the reality-reconstruction-documentary-drama genre, the programme sought to imagine the unimaginable by visualising what life was like in the front line trenches of the Western Front in 1916. In this way, *The Trench* moved the Great War on television closer to the audience, much closer than literary, theatrical or cinematic representations of the war, but it was a number of academics and the British press that found this especially uncomfortable. Comparisons in the press between the events that took place on the Western Front and the Nazi Holocaust during the Second World War prove that the Great War in British memory continues to be understood as a barely healed national trauma.



Fig.26: Field Marshal Sir Douglas Haig (1861-1928)



Fig.27: John Mills as Haig in the film *Oh! What a Lovely War* (1969)

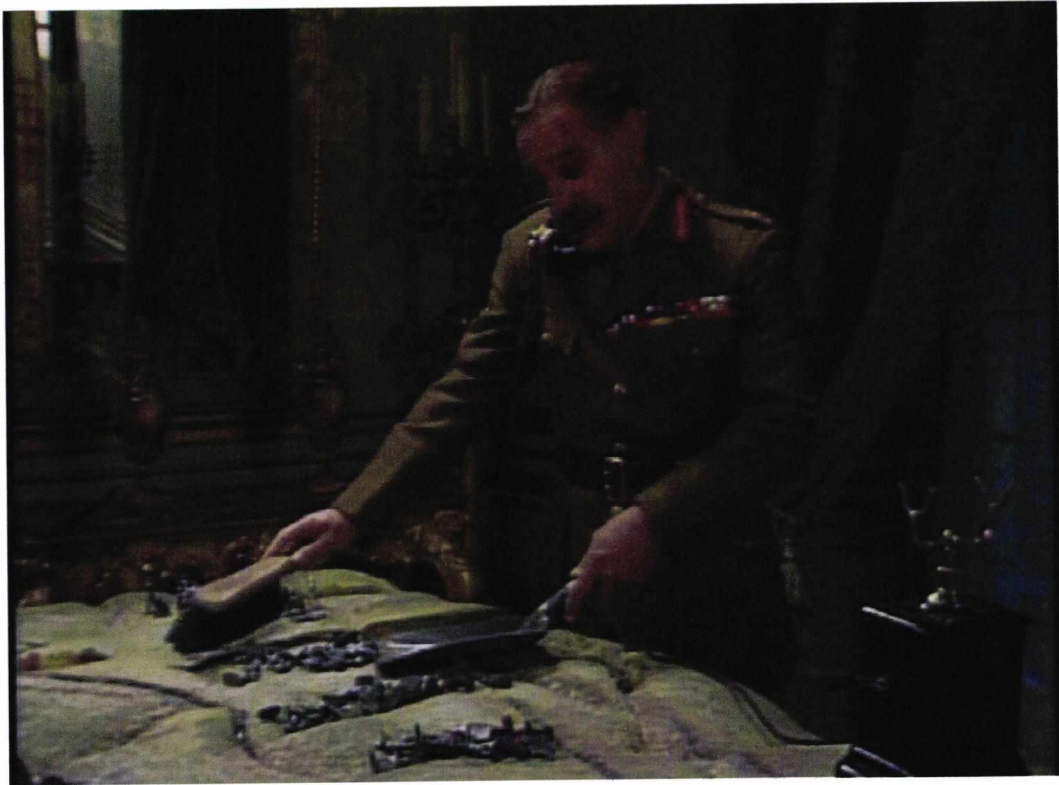


Fig.28: Geoffrey Palmer as Haig in *Blackadder Goes Forth* (BBC, 1989)

Conclusion

As the 'age of television' began in the 1950s and picked up speed in the 1960s, many military historians were beginning to re-evaluate and question the alleged futility and wastefulness of the First World War. However, the powerful visual impetus of the developing medium utilised established modes of remembrance rooted in Britain's cultural heritage, which meant that televisual representations of the war continued to portray the conflict as the most tragic episode in British national life. These signifying practices were developed to enable the nation to mourn the death and disappearance of so many of its sons, and in the years after 1945, television documentaries about the conflict became the most public site of memory and mourning for remembering the First World War.

The production, broadcast, reception and present-day recollection of *The Great War* series is significant for several reasons. In the wider context of history on the small screen, the series ignited an ongoing debate between the two leading historian-scriptwriters about the ways in which historical information should be delivered to viewers. Correlli Barnett has described Terraine's attitude to writing a script for television in that it was a 'distillation' which 'combined essential fact, crystal-clear explanatory narrative, sharp phrase-making, and not least, deep compassion.'⁷⁹⁷ Barnett underlined that Terraine's scripts 'were NOT fresh contributions to knowledge, like his books, but *dissemination* of knowledge to a mass audience.'⁷⁹⁸ Terraine thought that Barnett had lower standards towards writing for television than he did for writing books, but during production for *The Lost Peace* in 1965 Terraine insisted that 'the form of TV history is as important as the form of any other history.'⁷⁹⁹

Barnett still cannot accept that television should be ranked as an equivalent medium to books for communication of history. However, the producer of *The Great War*, Tony Essex, thought that television *was* the modern way to diffuse historical knowledge, as did Lord Mountbatten, which is why he wanted a major television

⁷⁹⁷ Correlli Barnett, 'John Terraine and Television History', *Stand To!* January 2006, No.75, (pp.5-8), pp.6-7

⁷⁹⁸ *Ibid.* p.7, emphasis in original

⁷⁹⁹ *Ibid.* emphasis in original

series about his life rather than an authorised biography, *The Life and Times of Lord Mountbatten* (ITV, 1968), which was written by John Terraine. Barnett continues to maintain that television history is too superficial and ‘*précis-ed*’ to be anything other than a popularisation:

[h]ow far should freelance historians like John and myself have looked on television as a money-making pot-boiler to do the best you can with, and how far as a legitimate alternative to writing heavyweight historical books? I myself had no doubt at the time that it was a pot-boiler to be done as best as one could, in order to subsidise the writing of books – in my case at that period, *Britain and Her Army* and *The Collapse of British Power*. However, John himself at this period more and more took the opposite view that television could be made to bear the weight of detailed historical argument, analysis and information.⁸⁰⁰

By the 1970s, Terraine believed that television history should take the form of a lecture illustrated with film clips or slides, but he continued to be disappointed in the ways in which *The Great War* was received:

I am now sick to death of being told how good it was by people who know nothing of the subject, but were ‘moved’ by it, usually in directions precisely opposite to that I would wish. I am sure that the great reclame was due to its emotional impact, almost undefiled by celebration. Where, for example, was any analysis of the leading characters of the War, military or civil? How could there be, in that style? Where was the strategic debate? Where were the tactical innovations? Where was the war in the Air? I am quite sure the Mountbatten series failed at many points. But at least I was able to try to deal with some of these matters.⁸⁰¹

Barnett continues to believe that it is impossible to marry intellectual complication and factual detail with archive film ‘unless a celebrity presenter like Schama or Holmes can expound the complication in some suitable locale.’⁸⁰² He believes that Terraine was mistaken in believing television could be an alternative to major books as a historiographical medium, and he has said that ‘I regret that in those years 1965-

⁸⁰⁰ Ibid. pp.7-8

⁸⁰¹ Ibid. p.7

⁸⁰² Ibid. p.8

1977 he [Terraine] did not instead treat television as simply the means to subsidise the writing of major original studies on the Great War, the Western Front, and the British Army's role.'⁸⁰³ Barnett has underlined that '[g]round-breaking though *The Great War* television series was, it is on *Haig the Educated Soldier* and these later books that rests John's reputation as an outstanding military historian, and especially as the man who single-handedly turned the tide of informed opinion about the British Army and its leadership on the Western Front.'⁸⁰⁴

While the debate that ran through Barnett and Terraine's long friendship preceded those that continue among historians and television professionals today, the fact that Britain's public service broadcast corporation poured such an enormous amount of human and financial resources in to *The Great War* is a clear indication of the level of the position both the series and the war itself were thought to have held in British cultural life. However, it was the first screen memorial of Britain's involvement in the First World War, and *The Great War* firmly underscored the emotive power of the visual design of the medium that built on the pre-existing cultural and artistic inheritance. The series also showed that television could serve as a repository for human memory for which, as the parallel expansion in published histories and memoirs has shown, there was a considerable market in Britain from the 1960s. This market continued to expand through to the memory boom of the 1990s, and there is little sign of a decline in history in all its forms today.

In parallel with the flowering of history output designed for the public in the 1990s, there was a cultural shift in British televisual representations of the First World War around the time of the eightieth anniversary commemorations. Documentary-films appeared to split into two broad camps; there was a revival of the military-diplomatic series with Richard Holmes' *Western Front, World War One in Colour* and *The First World War*, but there was also a noticeable emphasis on cultural aspects of the war such as *1914-18* and the development of the drama-documentary mode. The

⁸⁰³ Ibid. p.8

⁸⁰⁴ Ibid. p.8. Between 1965-1977 Barnett emphasised that Terraine did not publish any work based on original research. He has said that the years after 1977 were Terraine's most fruitful period as a military historian from *The Road To Passchendaele* (1977), through to *To Win a War; The Smoke and the Fire; The Right of the Line: the Royal Air Force in the European War;* and *Business in Great Waters: the U-Boat Wars 1916-1945*.

commemorations also stimulated a heightened interest in the conflict seen in a number of small single-episode programmes that examined more controversial aspects of the war which proved particularly popular with modern viewing audiences. Interest in the events of the First World War did not diminish with the birth of the twenty-first century. In 2003, the BBC finally announced that they were going to repeat *The Great War*, perhaps in response to the imminent arrival of two major series the same year: *World War One in Colour* (Channel 5) and *The First World War* (Channel 4).

The project for a colourised series about the First World War was conceived by Jonathan Martin who had produced and directed *A Century of Warfare* series. Martin joined forces with another experienced documentary producer Philip Nugus to produce a six-part series *World War One in Colour*. They decided to make a colour film of the First World War because they thought that a new generation of viewers would be more ‘colour literate’, and that their film will be able to describe more effectively what their great-grandfathers went through, underlining that television is ‘very good at putting across the sense of an event as large as the First World War.’⁸⁰⁵ Martin said that he was particularly keen to include eyewitness accounts, poetry and extracts from letters because these elements ‘personalise’ the series and that ‘[t]he closer you can get to the reality the better’. Nugus explained that he was inspired to make the series because his father had joined up while underage and that he was almost buried alive after being left for dead from the effects of a gas attack.⁸⁰⁶ Overall, *World War One in Colour* painted a very simple picture of trench warfare for the Playstation generation, underscored by the opening titles and introductory film sequence which explains why the series had been made.

[Play video clip 26: *World War One in Colour*]

Archive film for the series was sent to India to be colourised at a cost of \$10,000 a minute. This led Stephen Badsey to ask why all the money had gone on the films and not towards the quality of the programme’s content.⁸⁰⁷ With episode titles such as ‘Catastrophe’, ‘Slaughter in the Trenches’, ‘Blood in the Air’, and ‘Killers of the

⁸⁰⁵ Quotes from the Bonus Material DVD *World War One in Colour*

⁸⁰⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁰⁷ Stephen Badsey- <http://www.iamhist.org/forum/badsey-1.html> (accessed 12 August 2004)

Sea', it is clear that the series was not written by Great War specialists striving to create a balanced programme. Interviews with experts such as Professor Norman Stone, Malcolm Brown, Professor Gary Sheffield and Taff Gillingham were cast alongside veterans Harry Patch and Arthur Halestrap. A number of their contributions to the series were repeated throughout the series which gave the programme a highly repetitive feel, and there was little originality in the series' use of quotations, as most of them were derived from memoirs of some of the war's most oft-quoted participants such as the Royal Flying Corps pilot Cecil Lewis and wartime nurse Vera Brittain.

However, the colourisation of black and white film is not as much of a novelty as the producers of *World War One in Colour* claimed. Original colour footage shown by *The Second World War in Colour* (ITV, 2000) was watched by eight million viewers, and it was followed by *Britain at War in Colour* (ITV, 2000), *The Colour of War: The American Story* (PBS, 2001), and *The Empire in Colour* (Carlton, 2002). Documentary producer Taylor Downing asserted that these programmes have sought to exploit the fact that most viewers have become accustomed to seeing representations of the past exclusively in monochrome. Downing firmly believes that 'colour gives immediacy, a "contemporariness", a sort of closeness that black and white does not – especially for younger viewers. These programmes [...] have done much to extend the appeal of television history.'⁸⁰⁸

However, Downing was talking about original colour footage that has been unearthed in the last few years, and the colourisation process seen in *World War One in Colour* had only just gone into production. He recognised that the success of history programmes featuring original colour footage was that 'the genie is out of the bottle [...] and it will never be possible to put it back again. This will be a very divisive issue because tampering with the historical record will outrage many archivists and purists.'⁸⁰⁹ Downing was right. Military historian Stephen Badsey found many errors in the series and he wrote that a major drawback of the colourisation was that it did tend to highlight weaknesses in the original choice of archive.⁸¹⁰ It appears that every documentary about the First World War feels the need to present some colour skills or

⁸⁰⁸ Taylor Downing 'Bringing the Past to the Small Screen' in David Cannadine (ed) *History and the Media* pp.10-12

⁸⁰⁹ Ibid.

⁸¹⁰ Stephen Badsey- <http://www.iamhist.org/forum/badsey-1.html> (accessed 12 August 2004)

footage to keep up with the market and the need to present something perceptibly ‘modern’ about 1914-18. The trend for showing colourised images of the conflict can also be seen in the opening title sequence of *The First World War* series.

[Play video clip 28: *The First World War*]

Despite Taylor Downing’s expectation that colourised films of the future would attract large audiences, *World War One in Colour* seems to have escaped notice as press reviews of the series are scarce. A rare review in the *Times* was indignant that ‘narrator Kenneth Branagh explains the darkroom trickery by telling us that the First World War actually happened in colour; as if we might not have noticed how bloody the slaughter was, or how brave and selfless our soldiers had been, when we saw the images only in monochrome?’⁸¹¹ The series opens with scenes of a Remembrance Ceremony at the Menin Gate at which First World War veterans Arthur Halestrap and Harry Patch were filmed. Setting the tone for the main body of the series, this extract places a heavy and very deliberate emphasis on the personal trauma experienced by soldiers such as the loss of friends in battle.

[Play video clip 27: *World War One in Colour*]

Episode Two ‘Slaughter in the Trenches’ summarises the year 1915 as the time when the war entered ‘a deadly new phase’: poison gas, shell shock, mines, and a good deal of footage showing infantry ‘going over the top’. Harry Patch’s comment ‘If anyone tells you they weren’t scared going over the top they’re a damned liar’ is used for the third time in this series alone.⁸¹² Despite some even handed comments by Malcolm Brown on the stalemate of 1915, and Gary Sheffield on the communication problems experienced as the war became entrenched, the programme is at pains to emphasise that the first volunteers of August 1914 saw their first action at the battle of Loos in September 1915 when the British Army’s tactics ‘turned into the standard pattern of battle: artillery bombardment, followed by infantrymen going over the top, followed by slaughter.’ According to the narrator, the result of action at Loos was 43,000 British casualties, and it is also underlined that after such an engagement Field

⁸¹¹ *Times T2* July 24 2003 p.23

⁸¹² Harry was also recorded saying the same thing for *The Trench* (BBC, 2002).

Marshal Haig was appointed Commander of the BEF, as if Haig was a harbinger of death as 'the slaughter on the Western Front had only just begun.'

World War One in Colour took the *Blackadder Goes Forth* view of tactical success by measuring the amount of ground gained in proportion to the amount of British lives lost. The narration proclaims that in the first four and a half months of the war the Allies had advanced seven miles at the expense of 600,000 casualties. It is also claimed that David Lloyd George wanted to sack Douglas Haig after the opening of the Somme just as the French government replaced Marshal Joseph Joffre with General Robert Nivelle, and Germany sacked General Erich von Falkenhayn for Field Marshal Hindenburg and General Erich Ludendorff. The inference is that Haig should have been sacked along with his foreign counterparts. According to the series, it was only at the battle of Messines Ridge on 7 June 1917, which Haig assigned to General Sir Herbert Plumer, that 'junior officers realised that they were being led by someone who really knew his business.' When the battle of Passchendaele is introduced, the matter of mud is quick to surface. Gary Sheffield provides some context by discussing the weather conditions, pointing out that Haig was 'damned if he did and damned if he didn't' order the offensive in October 1917. But again, the programme measures the fifteen week long battle by saying that the Allies captured 41 square miles at a cost of 1000 casualties for each mile gained.

The series closes by returning to the scenes filmed at the Menin Gate that opened the first episode which are accompanied by a voiceover of Arthur Halestrap reading Laurence Binyon's poem 'For the Fallen.' Poppies flutter from the roof of the Menin Gate, falling on to the assembled crowd below at a memorial service attended by veterans including Harry and Arthur. Gary Sheffield makes a last stand by saying that the war may have been tragic but that it was not futile, but his words are pushed aside by the visual design of the series which used stock images of all Western Front documentaries: British gravestones, red roses and poppies blown by the breeze. Vera Brittain is quoted 'the dead were the dead and would never return' and again there is slow motion footage of British troops march eerily across the screen: the dead walking. Stills of rotting corpses fade into close up shots of panels on the Menin Gate. The message is clear: the First World War was fought in vain at the expense of millions of men's lives.

The return of *The Great War* to British television screens in 2003 was a retrograde step in our understanding of the war and its legacy, argued the makers of the ten-part series *The First World War*, which was based on the research of the respected military historian Professor Hew Strachan. He acknowledged that *The Great War* was the progenitor of modern history documentaries like *The World at War* because it showed archive film at the right pace, broadcast interviews with veterans, and it could expect its audience to commit to a 26 week broadcast run, but he argued that *The Great War* ‘is now almost as distant from us as its makers were then from the war itself.’⁸¹³ With the ending of the Cold War and the re-emergence of the First World War’s unfinished business in the Balkans and the Middle East have brought the events of the conflict into fresh focus:

We need to see the war differently, but too many don’t. The belligerents of 1914 were imperial powers: war for Europe meant war for the world. The First World War is therefore global in its conception. *The Great War*, by contrast, was Anglocentric, and even today the British persist in seeing the conflict largely in terms of the Western Front. In endlessly raking over ‘how’ the war was fought, but neglect to the ‘why’. [...] for many this was a war for liberalism against German militarism, with its objectives – international order and democratic government – those still echoed by Bush and Blair.⁸¹⁴

Strachan and the series producer Jonathan Lewis underlined that *The Great War* would no longer do as a television history of the war. They believed that history has moved on: ‘since the late 1960s the archives of the belligerents have been opened and subsequent research has transformed our understanding of the war, especially here in Britain.’ Secondly, the war should be understood in terms of its totality. Strachan and Lewis said that *The Great War* was ‘military history, narrowly defined. Our series has clung to the notion that the military history must give the narrative shape [...] it has integrated the social and economic dimensions of the war.’⁸¹⁵ *The First World War* does appear to mark progress towards a more revisionist stance on the reality and

⁸¹³ Hew Strachan, *Times Extra TV* 20 September 2003, p.4

⁸¹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸¹⁵ Hew Strachan & Jonathan Lewis, ‘Filming the First World War’ *History Today* October 2003 53 (10) pp.20-22

practicalities of battle.⁸¹⁶ For one television historian Strachan's work marks a turning point in the war's historiography by his 'scholarship blended with emotion' and an attempt to see the war as a global event and 'not just as the Western Front with attached sideshows.'⁸¹⁷

The First World War is a very different production to *World War One in Colour*. It confronts the popular image of 'lions led by donkeys' head-on at the start of episode six 'Breaking the Deadlock'. The programme acknowledges that the Generals 'weren't so much callous as realistic, and there were more good generals than bad.' It is emphasised that rather than sitting out the war in chateaux miles behind the lines the British High Command suffered the highest number of Generals killed in action: 78 from the BEF, compared with 71 from the German Army and 55 from the French Army. Taking a whole-world view, not being as Euro or Anglo centric as other series, *The First World War* presents a more balanced and realistic view of the problems faced by the High Commands of all combatant countries. The programme underlines that the challenge in the trenches along the Western Front was 'to find new ideas, new weapons, and new spirit among the men. Only then could they break out and win. For all their mud, blood and horror trenches saved lives, they were the safest places to be on the battlefield.' It is emphasised that all sides needed dynamic ways to break the deadlock, and that this was costly in human life. By the time the French had learnt the lessons of Verdun they had lost 750,000 men in the first half of 1916 alone – the British Empire lost the same number of men in the duration of the entire war.

The First World War did posit Haig as the main architect of the battles around the Somme, which it acknowledges has become 'a byword for wholesale suffering and slaughter.' Originally conceived by Rawlinson as a limited artillery attack, the programme states that it was Haig that turned the plan into a major offensive so large that when the British guns opened the preliminary artillery bombardment on the Somme on 24 June 1916 'the windows rattled in London 160 miles away.' The performance of French and British troops on 1 July 1916 is compared and the programme states that 'the French knew what they were doing and the British did

⁸¹⁶ Hew Strachan, *The First World War* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2003)

⁸¹⁷ Richard Holmes, *Tommy: The British Soldier on the Western Front* (London: Harper Collins, 2004), p.xxii

not.’ After a quick and concentrated artillery bombardment French troops advanced to their positions quickly, and achieved their objectives. The British, on the other hand, had shot the forward ground to a quagmire and troops advanced slowly, suffering 57,470 casualties to France’s few thousand. Nevertheless, the series concluded that ‘Haig must bear the responsibility for not stopping the slaughter when the breakthrough failed.’

However, *The First World War* reflected the most recent research on this area of the conflict by explaining that after the early stages of the Somme ‘the British became avid learners’ and started to use new techniques such as the creeping barrage, locating and destroying enemy guns with flash spotting, sound ranging and trigonometry, in addition to improving the accuracy of artillery and improving the reliability of shells.⁸¹⁸ The focus shifts to the battles of Cambrai in November 1917, pointing out that the British Army was formulating new combat methods such as combining fire power and movement with tanks, having a General at the front led the attack from the ground, and artillery that did not destroy the ground ahead which troops would later need to cross. Tanks were followed by infantry and the cavalry followed at the rear: screens were used to camouflage movement and tracks were covered. The fighting at Cambrai, despite some setbacks around Flesquières and Fontaine, where 32 tanks were destroyed by German troops, showed that the BEF were developing ways to consolidate their breakthrough. In this way *The First World War* reflected current scholarship which contends that Haig was far from the technophobic and old-fashioned cavalryman as he has been painted by some.

Nevertheless, the British viewing audience’s reaction however was unfavourable to both series broadcast in 2003; *The First World War* achieved an average of just 1.62 million viewers, a 7% share of the available audience, and *World War One in Colour* fared little better.⁸¹⁹ Press reviews for both series are scarce which suggests that today’s media are more interested in the human interest stories and resulting pathos engendered by the use of veteran eyewitnesses. Indeed, the fusion of human memory and the media only served to underscore the commemorative nature of successive

⁸¹⁸ See Gary Sheffield, *Forgotten Victory: First World War Myths and Realities*, (London: Headline, 2001) and Simon Robbins, *British Generalship on the Western Front 1914-18: Defeat into Victory*, (London: Frank Cass, 2005)

⁸¹⁹ Viewing figures provided by Trish Hayes BBC WAC 16 June 2005

First World War series. As veteran-eyewitnesses to the events of 1914-1918 became even more scarce, the 'Memory Boom' of the late 1990s was fed by veterans' storytelling which was usually relayed in the form of traumatic memory. This underground river of recollection was first discussed in the aftermath of 1918 but it was not until the 1980s and 1990s, when post-traumatic stress disorder gained official medical recognition, that this element of First World War history was subjected to increasing attention, especially in the media. The trend for televised human memory accelerated in the late twentieth century because of the increased popularity of placing family stories within the context of national historical narratives expressed in museums, exhibitions, computer-based projects and media output.

In November 2005 the BBC broadcast what it assumes will be the last documentary-film to feature veterans of the First World War. *The Last Tommy* featured some of the remaining veterans, but the programme focussed on Harry Patch who was filmed on his 'last' visit to Belgium to meet and shake hands with the last remaining German veteran of the First World War. The *Guardian's* television reviewer effused that 'It was impossible not to be moved by *The Last Tommy* [...] Wonderful old men, the embers of a generation [...] remember the fear, horror, the buddies who never came home, the biscuits and the bully beef. But also they remember the camaraderie and the songs. The whole thing reminded me of watching a beautiful sunset over the sea. You don't want to look away in case, when you look back, it's gone.'⁸²⁰ The programme was recorded in the summer of 2003, when there were 27 Great veterans left. The British public's interest in these men has not waned: on average 3.9 million viewers, a very significant 17% share, tuned in to watch *The Last Tommy*.⁸²¹

[Play video clip 29: *The Last Tommy*]

The 'emotionalisation' - the mixing of emotion and history - has merged veterans' memories in to one single narrative, and in the case of *The Last Tommy*, the First

⁸²⁰ <http://media.guardian.co.uk/broadcast/comment/0,,1637521,00.html> (accessed 17 March 2006)

⁸²¹ *The Last Tommy* was broadcast 16 November 2005, BBC2, 9pm.. As a point of comparison, 2 million viewers watched Channel 4's drama-documentary *The Somme* the previous evening. This makes it one of the most-watched documentary ever made if calculated by audience share (17%) alongside *Haig The Unknown Soldier* and *Veterans: The last Survivors of the Great War*. On 2 March 2006 *The Last Tommy* was nominated in the 'Best single documentary' category for the Broadcasting Press Guild Programme Awards 2006.

World War was communicated via the traumatic memories of Harry Patch.⁸²² The fusing of personal and public memory in the re-imagining of past events has meant that Britain's televisual presentation of the men who fought have remained highly selective. Those that survived are perceived as scarred men who are haunted by their memories more than eighty years after they returned to civilian life, and the dead are characterised in ways that ignores important aspects of the wartime experience of many soldiers, such as the need to cultivate aggression, the weaknesses induced by fear and strain, the problems of discipline, the consolations of sex and drink, elements that were frequently repudiated as dishonouring the dead because they were understood as a threat to the public's purified remembrance of the conflict.⁸²³

Veterans' sense of guilt in their survival and an obligation to their comrades has long buttressed the moral superiority of the dead which was enshrined in the official remembrance of the war.⁸²⁴ This public memory of Tommy Atkins and his role in the war continues to be fuelled by televisual histories of the First World War. Either he is a young man dressed in khaki, marching into battle and disappearing beyond the edge of the television frame to a grave in a foreign field, or he is an extremely old man who survived the bullet and the shell but were scarred by their experience of the conflict. As the last of the Tommies will not be able to be filmed for television for much longer, the words of those that fought in the war continue to be used by modern documentaries about the conflict where actors reactivate First World War memories from beyond the grave. Indeed, the experience of watching this new breed of historical documentary is closer to seeing a feature film than a documentary. The most recent example of the new drama-documentary style was *The Somme* (Channel 4, 2005).

[Play video clip 30: *The Somme*]

The Somme is a good example of new approaches to making documentaries about the First World War. The programme was produced by Carl Hindmarch who was born in the 1960s and had a grandfather who volunteered in 1914 and fought in the Durham

⁸²² The 'emotionalisation' of human memory in television histories was discussed by Dr Andrew Hoskins in a paper 'Conflict and Catastrophe' at a symposium on television history at the University of Lincoln 7-8 July 2005.

⁸²³ Alex King, *Memorials of the Great War in Britain: The Symbolism and Politics of Remembrance* (Oxford: Berg, 1998), p.181

⁸²⁴ *Ibid.* p.222

Light Infantry. His main interest in filming television documentaries was inspired by watching *The World at War* as a teenager in the 1970s.⁸²⁵ Hindmarch's film used a good deal of archive film, the majority of it being taken from Geoffrey Malins' *Battle of the Somme* (1916) interspersed with scenes recreated by actors which Hindmarch maintained 'enhances the drama. If you watch those vintage films in silence, with their very long takes and wonky camera work, they feel very dry. But if you take out a scene and splice it into a modern dramatic film, it really comes alive.'⁸²⁶

Historian Malcolm Brown helped Hindmarch with the initial research by taking him through archive material, such as soldiers' letters and diaries, that are stored at the Imperial War Museum in London, and for this Brown was credited as the series' Historical Adviser. Hindmarch recalled that Brown insisted it was important to hear the voices of men who died in the battle because, as Hindmarch underlined, the material is 'refreshing – it has none of the bitterness and cynicism of hindsight. It has irony, sarcasm, vulgarity, but not retrospective knowledge.'⁸²⁷ Apparently this helped the director to see that '[t]hese men were not naïve, nor were they sheep. And if there was one thing that really blew me away it was the idea that most of the men involved in the Somme were volunteers. There was a strong moral sense and a collective sense of duty, which we don't see much today. There's a sense of mutual responsibility and also of individual resilience.'⁸²⁸ Hindmarch felt a good deal of responsibility that all the characters depicted in the film actually existed: 'We didn't make anything up; we used only the words from their letters and diaries. It was a heavy responsibility because we were dealing with real people's lives. We sought permission from all the surviving relatives, and most were delighted that the material would reach a wider audience.'⁸²⁹

The scenes involving a cast of actors and more than one hundred extras were all filmed in Poland in July 2005 over a period of three weeks. [Figs.29 and 30] Hindmarch had wanted to film the programme on the former battlefields in France,

⁸²⁵ Interview with Carl Hindmarch by Aleks Sierz as reproduced on Channel 4's 'Lost Generation' website <http://www.channel4.com/history/microsites/L/lostgeneration/somme/film1.html> - (accessed 28 February 2006)

⁸²⁶ Ibid.

⁸²⁷ Ibid.

⁸²⁸ Ibid.

⁸²⁹ Ibid.

but the cost of the project was prohibitive. He was disappointed because, after directing a film on the Wright Brothers' first flight for the BBC's *Days That Shook the World* which he shot in North Carolina on the same beach the event had taken place, he echoed the thoughts of his own series' Historical Adviser nearly thirty years before in the making of *The Battle of the Somme* (BBC, 1976) by underlining that 'there's something very special about using the right place.'⁸³⁰

Even though Hindmarch had been taken through some of the more 'revisionist' aspects of historical research on the Somme, the British press continued to refer to the events in July 1916 as 'the tragically futile offensive'⁸³¹ and 'one of Britain's worst military disasters'⁸³² As with *The Great War, 1914-18* and *The Trench*, the most vociferous complainant about *Battle of the Somme* was the columnist A.A.Gill in the *Times*. Gill complained that the events of the summer of 1916 is 'a familiar and overworked story, mined and mulled over by hundreds of novelists, military historians and tooth-sucking, lachrymose commentators.'⁸³³ He thought that Channel 4 had told the story in 'a dull and slightly whiny way, with actors in clean uniforms running about meadows that were supposed to be Flanders and standing in new ditches that were supposed to be trenches.'⁸³⁴ He did not like the fact that diaries and letters from soldiers would be added to a voiceover which paraphrased it, then 'an extra with a stuck-on moustache in a hole would mime it in case we didn't quite understand.'⁸³⁵ He thought that the 'mawkish music informed us of an appropriate emotional response' and that the result was 'both farcical and ghastly.'⁸³⁶ Gill concluded that

Until now, I would have defied anyone to be able to make a documentary on the Somme that didn't reduce the audience to tears, but they managed not just to leave us with dry eyes, but to replace them with yawns. It was bad history, appalling storytelling, embarrassing, patronising and crass. The attempts to personalise the battle for empathy just made it seem parochial. You can't

⁸³⁰ Ibid.

⁸³¹ <http://media.guardian.co.uk/broadcast/story/0,,1552010,00.html> (accessed 28 February 2006)

⁸³² <http://media.guardian.co.uk/broadcast/story/0,,1551504,00.html> (accessed 28 February 2006)

⁸³³ *Sunday Times* 'Culture' 20 November 2005 p.14

⁸³⁴ Ibid.

⁸³⁵ Ibid.

⁸³⁶ Ibid.

remember what you don't know, every new generation has to learn its history afresh. Nobody's who's young now has a parent or grandparent to tell them first-hand. TV is how most of us learn most things. Occasionally it's very good, but of a lot of it, like this, is banal in concept, timid in presentation and ephemerally unmemorable.⁸³⁷

But what did the viewers think? In an unusual but very interesting move, the makers of *Battle of the Somme* invited an audience of sixth-form pupils, from schools and colleges in the South East, to a preview of the film. Each member of the audience was given a questionnaire to complete both before and after the viewing. The programme makers said that the views of 'Generation Y' were important because 'their experiences and lifestyles are inevitably so different from the Lost Generation of the First World War that we thought it would be interesting to see how a group of sixth-form students would react to the harrowing and touching drama documentary that recounts one of the worst disasters in British military history.'⁸³⁸ Emphasis was placed on the difference between young people today and the generation that went to fight in the First World War, and many of the questions were designed to get the students to consider that many of the men who fought on the Somme in 1916 were roughly their age, and this is a point driven home by images on the 'Lost Generation' website which depicts First World War scenes and people placed in contemporary and predominantly urban settings. [Fig.31]

Before they watched the film the sample of students were asked a number of questions which included 'what comes to mind when you hear the words "The Somme"?', 'Where is the Somme?', 'What comes to mind when you hear the words "The First World War"?', 'What do you think of patriotism?', 'Would you volunteer to fight in the First World War and would you volunteer to fight now?', 'Where is your local war memorial?' and 'Do you think the men and women that went to the front were foolhardy or brave?'. The replies to the first question were reasonably

⁸³⁷ Ibid. pp.14-15

⁸³⁸ 'Generation Y' is a demographic term used to describe 'the youth of today' – those people born in Western societies in the 1980s and 1990s. Audience members came from: Harrow School, Middlesex, Barking Abbey School, Essex, Woodhouse College, Finchley, London, St. James Independent School for Senior Girls, Olympia, London, Bexley Grammar School, Welling, Kent, Woodford County High School, Essex, and The Tiffin Girls' School, Kingston upon Thames, Surrey.
<http://www.channel4.com/history/microsites/L/lostgeneration/somme/panel1.html> (accessed 17 March 2006)

predictable. When the sample was asked about their thoughts on the Somme they responded with 'Mud, rats, violence, gas', 'Trenches, young men, death, rats, poetry, literature, new war fought on old lines', 'Fighting, the front, Allied troops, Germans, trench warfare, bombing, the dead, the young, shell holes', 'Poppy Day. The first conflict with such huge losses', and 'Trenches, poetry, "Dulce et Decorum est".' The majority of the students could name the location of their local war memorial, and that thought that the men who volunteered to fight in the war were 'brave, but they may not have known the true nature of the war', that 'They were given a very glorified picture of warfare and they were certainly brave, especially when you think of how sheltered and irresponsible many 17-year-olds are today', or that they were 'Foolhardy and perhaps naïve to begin with, going to war to feed the lust for blood and for honour and glory, but brave upon realising the harsh reality of war.'

After the group had watched the film, their feelings about the battle had not changed by any great degree: the programme had merely underlined what they already thought about the First World War. However, the programme makers did ascertain that the students did seem to feel more personally involved with the stories of the men who fought on 1 July 1916. When asked a second time about their feelings on hearing the word 'Somme' some replied 'Horror, fear, death, tears', 'The great loss of life, the ignorance of those who organised it and the futility of the situation', and 'Tragedy. Why did it go so wrong for us?' When they were asked about their feelings on the film itself, the students replied that 'It shocked me. I had never considered the impact of the battle on the soldiers. It moved me', 'Watching and hearing about the lives of the men was devastating', 'Upsetting, moving – the personal stories really emphasised the impact of the film', 'I found it depressing, but it was useful. It made me feel not very happy', and 'I nearly cried and felt like running out of the room. After it finished, I felt sympathy and sorrow for them and for us and our generation, not just here, but in Iraq.'⁸³⁹

The Somme was broadcast shortly after Remembrance Day, and the two and a half hour programme attracted an average audience of two million viewers, approximately

⁸³⁹ This survey is reproduced in full on Channel 4's 'Lost Generation' website which can be found at <http://www.channel4.com/history/microsites/L/lostgeneration/somme/panel1.html> (accessed 17 March 2006)

10% of the available number of viewers.⁸⁴⁰ In the context of other programmes about the First World War this is a reasonably sized audience [see Appendix 1 – Viewing Figures]. Although *The Great War* achieved an average audience of more than 8 million viewers, the series' share of the available audience shows that at 16.5%, *Haig: the Unknown Soldier* and *Veterans: the Last Survivors of the Great War* were seen by 17% of the available audience. At the bottom of the table are the two most recent attempts at grand narratives: *World War One in Colour* and *The First World War*. Two of the most controversial programmes much fought over in the press, *1914-18* and *The Trench*, were just short of 3 million viewers. These figures suggest that today's British viewers prefer to watch shorter programmes which are likely to be more innovative in their approach. Perhaps the grand narrative as a documentary form is dead.

If these viewing figures can be taken as an indication of viewers' preferences, today's audience does not want to be 'taught' or commit to a lengthy grand narrative. Jay Winter's assertion that cultural history sells was borne out by that fact that his series *1914-18* was just shy of the 3 million viewers mark despite being scheduled for weekdays at 7.00pm on BBC2, a slot not particularly conducive to attracting a large number of viewers. Apart from *1914-18*, the most recent long series that purported to provide a chronological narrative of the conflict have not found an audience of more than 7-9% of available viewers: *World War One in Colour*, *The First World War* and *The Western Front* managed only an average audience of 1.5 million viewers each. However, other variables should be taken into consideration, for example scheduling: all three series were broadcast in late summer, a peak time for British holidaymakers, and Channel 5 can only be received by 80% of people with a television set.⁸⁴¹

The cultural bias of more modern programmes might be due in part to the awareness that younger generations of viewers are open to new interpretations of the conflict.⁸⁴² Those that were born after the war's eightieth anniversary commemorations exhibit a lower level of hostility to new studies and discussions of the conflict than older generations, as seen in the press's response to new programmes like *The Trench*

⁸⁴⁰ <http://media.guardian.co.uk/overnights/story/0,,1643188,00.html> (accessed 28 February 2006)

⁸⁴¹ <http://625.uk.com/channel5/> (accessed 27 September 2004)

⁸⁴² Dan Todman speaking at *The Future of the First World War* conference at Queen Mary, University of London, 4 June 2005

which became a ratings success. When Channel 4 broadcast *The First World War* they emphasised that the ninetieth anniversary of the outbreak of the war was ‘time to analyse rather than just report the war’, but the series attracted less than half the number of viewers that watched *The Trench*.⁸⁴³ Whilst they want to look at the war as history, today’s media-literate audience wants to be entertained by conflict, human interest and debate. *The First World War* sought to place the conflict in its global context, a move away from the Anglo-centric representations British television has consistently produced. The detailed chronology and poor quality production, for example the synthesised electronic score, failed to appeal to the modern audience. The series was hailed by many leading historians as ‘good history’, but it was received by viewers as ‘bad television’ with an average audience of just 1.62 million.⁸⁴⁴

Indeed, the First World War as an historical event is far more remote than it once was. Very few of today’s young people have come into contact with a family member who was a Great War veteran, and as the Second World War generation begins to fade, younger viewers will look at both world wars in a more dispassionate and critical manner. The more open attitudes of new generations also apply to historical documentaries about other subjects. Producer Steve Humphries believes that there will be more demand for polemical series, such as Professor Niall Fergusson’s *Empire: How Britain Made the World* (Channel 4, 2003).⁸⁴⁵ The ten-part series proved to be popular with viewers, who were drawn to Fergusson’s handsome on-screen appearance, his right-wing historical philosophy, and the wide variety of tropical locations.⁸⁴⁶

The relatively recent trend for drama-documentary and reconstruction, although it has proved popular with viewing audiences, has become known as the lowest common denominator in contemporary British television. Nevertheless, the role of the viewer has become more participatory than ever before, a trend underscored by the growth of the internet and digital-interactive broadcasting, and ‘reality’ television has moved the

⁸⁴³ *The First World War* (Channel 4, 2003) ‘viewing notes’ booklet to accompany DVD

⁸⁴⁴ Viewing figures provided by Trish Hayes BBC WAC, 16 June 2005

⁸⁴⁵ Steve Humphries (Testimony Films) IAMHIST conference ‘It may be history, but is it true?’ 15 October 2004 Imperial War Museum, London

⁸⁴⁶ Viewing figures for *Empire* averaged at 2 million, a 9% share of the available audience. *Guardian* 31 January 2003 as viewed on <http://media.guardian.co.uk/overnights/story/0,7965,886400,00.html> (accessed 23 June 2005)

documentary-film away from the fixed and monolithic nature of the more traditional documentary series. Programmes like *The Trench*, the most discussed and debated experiential series at many television/media history conferences, has increased the personal dynamic of history on the screen which reflects the complexity of television as a modern cultural interface.⁸⁴⁷

However, the majority of independent producers canvassed for this study do not believe that the documentary in grand narrative form will die soon. Steve Humphries (Testimony Films) believes that broadcasting stations will continue to make historical documentaries in the traditional style. Jerry Kuehl (Kuehl TV) agreed that 'the evidence of multi-part, presenter-led histories like Schama, Holmes, Corrigan, Spivey and Ackroyd [...] and big-scale works like Laurence Rees and Jonathan Lewis [...] and [...] Guido Knopp shows how much life there still is in the form. And if you add reconstructions like *Dunkirk* which incorporate archive footage, and CGI simulations of the lives of ancient Egyptians and other antique peoples, I don't think the genre is going to run out of steam soon at all.'⁸⁴⁸ Peter Gordon (BBC), the director of *Dunkirk: the Soldier's Story*, believes that 'there is still quite a life-expectancy for [grand narratives] because in the world of modern TV, big is still very, very beautiful!'⁸⁴⁹ Gordon also believes that the popularity of programmes that focus on oral testimony, of the kind he most likes to produce, will continue:

Using these 'small' stories together, to tell the 'bigger' story is a powerful way of using history on TV, and is one that I think an audience relates to most strongly. The DUNKIRK film is a case in point. I wanted the veterans to speak in an unmediated way as time constraints allowed. Facts and hard information were provided by simple captions, and relevant archive film footage was used. This may be an extreme example compared to bigger and more expensive historian-fronted history programmes, but in fact the viewing figures were pretty similar. [...] there should be room for both. It's really the quality of the story-telling that counts. My main concern would be that there is a tendency to 'lighten' content in a drive to popularise and attract an audience [...] the real interest is actually what someone has to say. I think it might be true that in the multi-channel world there

⁸⁴⁷ This was discussed in a paper by Dr Jerome de Groot, 'Empathy and Enfranchisement: Popular Histories' at a symposium on television history at the University of Lincoln 7-8 July 2005.

⁸⁴⁸ Jerry Kuehl (Kuehl TV) to Emma Mahoney (by email) 23 June 2005

⁸⁴⁹ Peter Gordon (BBC) to Emma Mahoney (by email) 26 June 2005

is a smaller audience than say, in the days of THE WORLD AT WAR or THE GREAT WAR but at the same time there is a clearly defined interest in history on TV, people do watch programmes that have something to say if they say it well.⁸⁵⁰

The Future of History on Television

Whilst the aim of this thesis is not to perpetuate the unhelpful ‘dialogue of the deaf’, which for too long has pitted academic historians and programme makers against one another, it is difficult to overcome the persistent tensions between those historians who see themselves as gate-keepers of professional history, versus television professionals whose attentions are naturally focused on budgets and ratings.⁸⁵¹ This study has sought to emphasise that the debate on the nature of history on television is becoming increasingly sophisticated. Well-respected producers agree that the definition of history on television is that sounds and images are used as a way of saying true things about the past, but many historians are concerned that some of the images used have a tangential relationship to the text, as visual wallpaper that helps to *describe* what actually happened without being able to show what *really* happened. Producer Jerry Kuehl recently suggested that history documentaries should use the internet to list the images they used in the form of footnotes: thereby film makers would need to be as scrupulous as historians in their use of archive footage.⁸⁵²

Many of the most influential producers working in television today started their careers in the 1960s. With inevitable overtones of nostalgia they recall that these were the days when the BBC’s factual programmes ‘were astonishingly well-funded, and when programme-makers still possessed amazingly ambitious ideas about the seriousness of the message they might hope to convey to viewers.’⁸⁵³ *The Great War* is still held as the best example of a good history script married with moving images. Hastings recalls that in a conversation about *The Great War* with a television producer working on a new First World War series, he agreed that they were

⁸⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁸⁵¹ Simon Schama, ‘Television and the Trouble with History’ in David Cannadine (ed) *History and the Media* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p.20

⁸⁵² Jerry Kuehl speaking at *The Future of the First World War* at Queen Mary, University of London, 4 June 2005

⁸⁵³ Max Hastings, ‘Hacks and Scholars: Allies of a Kind’ in *History and the Media*, p.105

‘unusually intelligent [...] Yes, he said, they were pretty heavy stuff. He added: “Of course, you couldn’t possibly get away with scripts like that nowadays.”’⁸⁵⁴ This is not a phenomenon limited to television. Hastings was once editor of the *Daily Telegraph*, and he pointed out that while journalism has always represented a balance between information and entertainment, in recent years the balance has tilted more sharply in favour of entertainment at the expense of information. Hastings believes the demand to leaven dry facts with entertainment has grown more insistent with each generation. In this way,

history and media need each other [...] academics, journalists and programme makers need to talk to each other about how we can best serve each other, and the public, above all by bringing the fruits of historical research to a popular audience [...] The years I have spent in newspapers and television have taught me a great deal about their limitations – but also a lot about their thrilling opportunities. If a new generation of professional historians can learn to exploit those opportunities, and if programme-makers and newspaper editors can give them the freedom to do so, there are wonderful mountains out there for all of us to seek to ascend.⁸⁵⁵

Indeed, a critically acclaimed documentary can reach an audience of more than 50 million people, many more than a history book, however well acclaimed. One of the earliest advocates of popular history to recognise the power of the new medium was Cambridge historian G.M.Trevelyan. He believed that historical research was not an end in itself, and that ‘If historians neglect to educate the public, if they fail to interest it intelligently in the past, then all their historical learning is useless except insofar as it educates themselves.’⁸⁵⁶ More recently, the Director of the Institute for Historical Research, David Cannadine, recently warned that ‘professional history’ is ‘in danger of collapsing under the weight of its unwieldy erudition; more and more historians know more and more about less and less; most scholarly articles and monographs have a readership of twenty and a shelf life of five years; academic history, as taught and practised in universities, increasingly appears to outsiders to be at best

⁸⁵⁴ Ibid. p.107

⁸⁵⁵ Ibid. pp.116-117

⁸⁵⁶ David Cannadine, *G.M.Trevelyan – A Life in History* (London: Harper Collins, 1992), p.184

incomprehensible, at worst ridiculous.’⁸⁵⁷ However, many television companies do not treat historians very well. Whilst programme makers want academic legitimisation for their films, many have used historians’ contributions where it suits them without consulting the historian first. Indeed, a historian may back a programme which might damage rather than enhance his or her professional reputation.

Many producers consider that today’s audiences are smarter and more media-literate, despite the onslaught of low-grade reality television programmes such as *Big Brother* (Channel 4, 1999-present). At a recent conference on television history, BBC producer Peter Grimsdale warned his colleagues ‘underestimate the intelligence of the audience at your peril.’⁸⁵⁸ With the expansion of more specialist digital channels such as BBC4, broadcasters can now commission programmes which would not normally be thought attractive to the larger terrestrial audience. The development of interactive television services as an integral element of 21st century broadcasting was seen by its heavy use as an additional information resource for *Dunkirk* in 2004. It is, however, expensive and time consuming to design, so the future of interactive television is difficult to predict.

What can be judged as good television history today? The Grierson Awards for Best Documentary Film of the Year in 2004 might provide some indication.⁸⁵⁹ The annual awards bestowed by the Grierson Trust are said to ‘celebrate the best documentary films in a period when documentary film-making is threatened by the rapid expansion of television channels and the chase for mass audiences’ in that they ‘continue to recognise outstanding films that demonstrate integrity, originality and technical excellence, together with social or cultural significance [...] At a time when documentaries are as vital and vibrant a force as ever within television and cinemas, the Griersons are the only awards dedicated exclusively to documentaries in all of its many forms.’⁸⁶⁰ The category for Best Historical Documentary was won by *Dunkirk*:

⁸⁵⁷ Ibid., p.184

⁸⁵⁸ Peter Grimsdale ‘Where do we go from here?’ IAMHIST conference ‘It may be history, but is it true?’ 15 October 2004 Imperial War Museum, London

⁸⁵⁹ The Grierson Trust was established in 1972 after the death of the Scottish documentary producer John Grierson. See http://www.griersontrust.org/grierson_2005.htm (accessed 14 June 2005)

⁸⁶⁰ Ibid.

the Soldier's Story (BBC, 2004).⁸⁶¹ The fifty minute film was the by-product of interviews conducted with veterans of the Second World War for the making of the BBC's three-hour drama-documentary *Dunkirk*, a big-budget production that attained an average audience of 4.5 million viewers.⁸⁶² The material researchers gleaned from interviews with 130 veterans were regarded as good enough to make an additional programme on the strength of the eyewitness statements alone.

Dunkirk: the Soldier's Story was watched by 5.1 million viewers, far more than any of the other films nominated for a Grierson Award in the same category.⁸⁶³ However, one of the Grierson Award's panellists recalled that the majority of the judges had little idea of how films are made, and that like the viewers they were drawn to the power of the eyewitness accounts that formed the film's central core. Most of the judges did not appreciate how sloppy the use of archive was in *Dunkirk: The Soldier's Story*. The director Peter Gordon admitted that a good deal of the combat footage had been shot in the Soviet Union, in addition to a number of other errors such as showing the wrong aircraft attacking the beaches, and using footage of 'Dunkirk' which portrayed a rolling landscape instead of the actual flat terrain in that area of the French coast.⁸⁶⁴ Whilst these shots were regarded as 'visual wallpaper' and part of the medium's flow, these are the kinds of errors which encourage professional historians to deride many history documentaries.⁸⁶⁵

History on television remains a booming industry, but what will happen in the future? One historian has suggested that by 2015-2020 broadcast television will have ended,

⁸⁶¹ Other documentaries shortlisted for the award were *Revealed: The Great Escape* (Channel 5), *Tetris: From Russia With Love* (BBC4), *Seven Wonders of the Industrial World: The Great Ship* (BBC2), *Nefertiti: The Search for the Lost Mummy* (Channel 5), *Battle of the Bogside* (BBC4), *Strike: When Britain Went to War* (Channel 4), and *Churchill: The Last Prize* (ITV).

⁸⁶² Wanda Koscia & Alex Holmes (producer & director *Dunkirk*) speaking at the IAMHIST conference 'It may be history, but is it true?'

⁸⁶³ *Guardian* 19 February 2004 as viewed on <http://media.guardian.co.uk/overnights/story/0,7965,1151632,00.html> (accessed 30 December 2004)

⁸⁶⁴ Jerry Kuehl to Emma Mahoney (by email) 14 June 2005

⁸⁶⁵ In April 2005, *History Today* hosted a special screening of *Dunkirk: the Soldier's Story* at the Imperial War Museum which was followed by a panel discussion chaired by the editor Peter Furtado. The panel's objective was to establish better criteria on what makes a good television documentary. Some panellists agreed that documentaries that use reconstructions are not regarded in the same way as films in a straight documentary style, and Stephen Badsey underlined that in his opinion, good television history was simply good history, which rules out reconstruction by definition. The panel concluded that whatever is well-made and well-considered will make a good television history documentary.

having had a lifetime comparable to music hall (vaudeville), or cinema newsreels. It could be replaced by the sort of technology that is increasingly available today such as digital broadcasting and drop-down menus, in simple terms a fusion of television and the internet. This will enable viewers to access a greater amount of television programmes at their own leisure in their own homes which strongly indicate a strong future in 'niche' programming which will make high quality history programmes for a smaller and more specialised audience, a development of what the satellite channels already do today.⁸⁶⁶ What we can be sure of is that the debate on television history will continue for some time, and the First World War will continue to be one of the most popular fields of history for television programmes after the hundredth anniversary of the outbreak of war has passed. This is because Britain's memory of the war 'provokes emotions rather than facts: sorrow, bewilderment, pride. It is not that we are short of facts and statistics – they are available in substantial measure – but it is the feelings that rise to the surface first.'⁸⁶⁷

Television has proved that the more eloquent expressions of war experience are not found in the military and political histories, but in contemporary accounts from first-hand experience, and the pieces of poetry, art and music that sprang from the war. The central human interest element of British televisual representations of 1914-18 lies in the fact that behind each of the eyewitness accounts, paintings, poems and photographs are countless individual testimonies to the sacrifice, anger, endurance and courage four years of war exacted from our forebears.⁸⁶⁸ All these factors make the First World War a tantalising subject for television's bias in favour of the cultural and human-interest elements of the conflict's memory.

This study has underlined that the overriding influence in the First World War in British culture is mourning. For British documentary producers and the viewers that watched them, many of whom are related to those who actually fought in the conflict, the act of producing and broadcasting television programmes about the First World War became a remembrance ritual in its own right. This thesis has shown that television documentaries about the First World War can be interpreted as war

⁸⁶⁶ Stephen Badsey to Emma Mahoney (by email) 25 July 2005

⁸⁶⁷ Gaynor Kavanagh, *Museums and the First World War: A Social History*, (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1994), p.1

⁸⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p.2

memorials because they constitute a public record and representation of events that are of a national interest. Like most memorials they have to present a story which is artfully constructed so it will be accepted in the moment of their creation and the society for whom they are created. Whether they are cast in stone in bronze, or projected onto the television screen, memorials commemorate events of a public significance and ensures that society does not forget the price paid by those who did not return to the land for which they fought. Documentaries are, therefore, historical documents as well as expressions of grief and consolation. The aesthetic design of televisual histories of the First World War built on Britain's rich cultural inheritance fashioned from established modes of remembrance, and the continued presence of the conflict on British television will ensure that the history of 1914-18 is not just a subject for academic study, but that the memory of the war is and will always remain everybody's business.⁸⁶⁹

⁸⁶⁹ Jay Winter & Antoine Prost, *The Great War in History: Debates and Controversies, 1914 to the Present*, (Cambridge: CUP, 2005), p.190



Fig.29: Actors on set in *The Somme* (Channel 4, 2005)

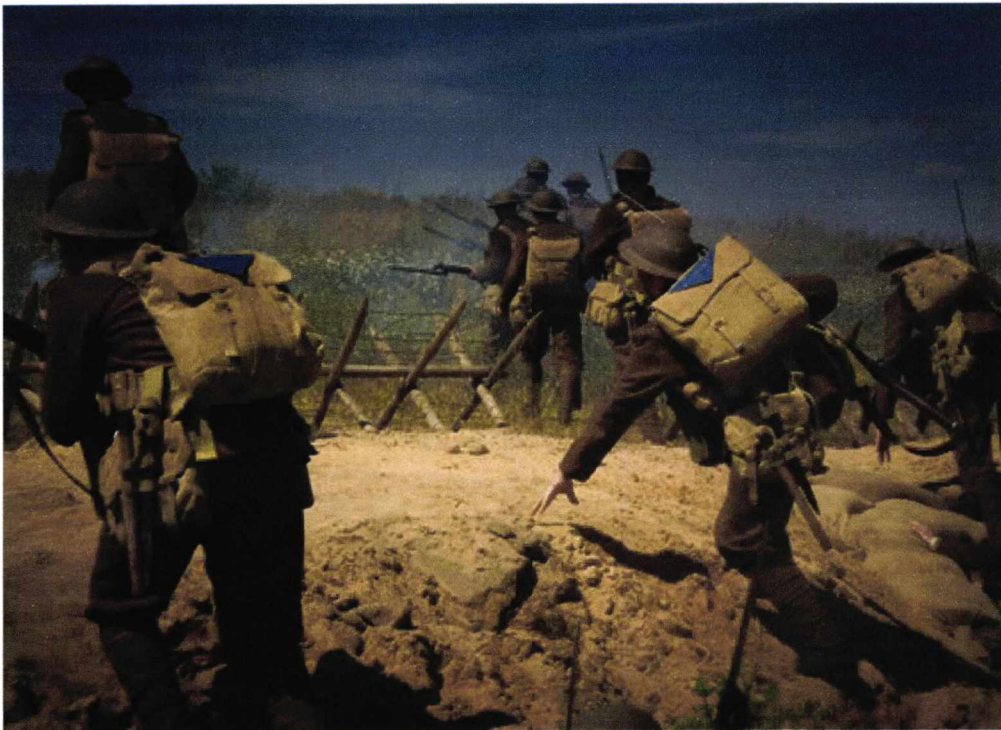


Fig.30: Actors recreating an 'over the top' scene in *The Somme*

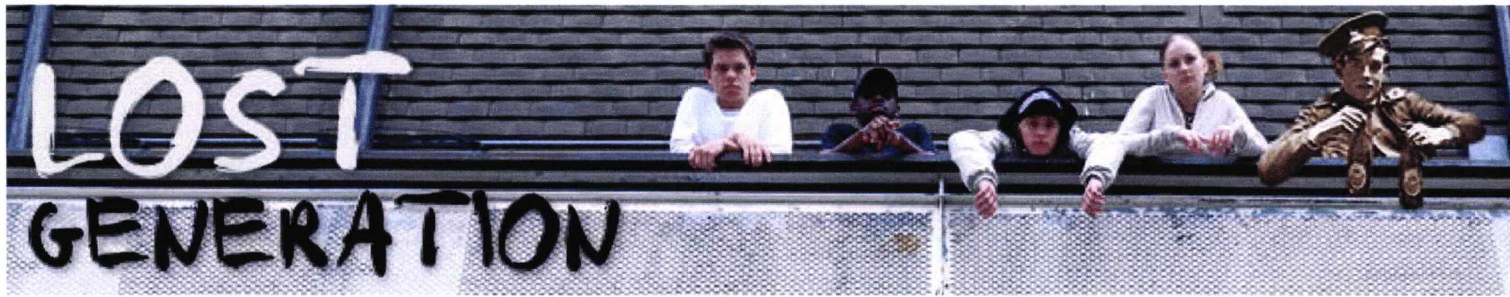


Fig.31: Some images from Channel 4's 'Lost Generation' website which was launched in tandem with the broadcast of the drama-documentary *The Somme* in November 2005.

<http://www.channel4.com/history/microsites/L/lostgeneration/somme/panel1.html> (accessed 17 March 2006)

Appendix 1: Viewing Figures (where available)

Title	Channel/Year	Audience (share if known)
<i>The Great War</i>	BBC1 & BBC2, 1964-5	8,167,500 (16.5%)
<i>The Last Tommy</i>	BBC1, 2005	3,900,000 (17%)
<i>Haig: the Unknown Soldier</i>	BBC2, 1996	3,590,000 (17%)
<i>Veterans: The Last Survivors of the Great War</i>	BBC1, 1998	3,110,000 (17%)
<i>1914-18</i>	BBC2, 1996	2,900,000 (10%)
<i>The Trench</i>	BBC2, 2002	2,510,000 (12%)
<i>The Somme</i>	BBC2, 2005	2,000,000 (10%)
<i>The Crucified Soldier</i>	Channel 4, 1998	1,900,000 (9%)
<i>Battle of the Somme</i>	BBC2, 1976	N/A (7.7%)
<i>The First World War</i>	Channel 4, 2003	1,620,000 (7%)
<i>World War One in Colour</i>	Channel 5, 2003	1,530,000 (7%)
<i>The Western Front</i>	BBC2, 1999	1,480,000 (9%)

Appendix 2:

Catalogue of British Great War Television Documentaries (discussed in this study)

Title: *The Great War*
Duration: 26 x 45 minutes
Colour: Mono
Date of first transmission: BBC2, Saturday 30 May 1964, 7.30pm
Date of second transmission: BBC1, 23 October 1964, 9.25pm (also 1974 & 2003)
Producer(s): Tony Essex & Gordon Watkins
Other: John Terraine, Correlli Barnett (principal script-writers)
Narrator: Sir Michael Redgrave
Audience: BBC1 - 8,167,500 (16.5%)
General VHS/DVD release: 2002
Publication: Correlli Barnett *The Great War* (BBC, 1979/2003)
Related: *That Was The Great War That Was*
Saturday 22 February 2003, BBC2 5.40pm

Title: *Battle of the Somme*
Duration: 1 x 70 minutes
Colour: Colour
Date of first transmission: BBC2, 29 June 1976, 9.55pm
Date of second transmission: BBC2, 26 June 1986, 11.00pm
Producer(s): Malcolm Brown
Director(s): Malcolm Brown
Other: Martin Middlebrook (Historical Consultant)
Narrator: Leo McKern (Presenter)
Audience: 7.7% share

Title: *Peace in No Man's Land*
Duration: 1 x 45 minutes
Colour: Colour
Date of first transmission: BBC2, 24 December 1981, 11.15pm
Date of second transmission: N/A
Producer(s): Malcolm Brown
Director(s): Malcolm Brown
Other: Shirley Seaton (Research)
Narrator: Martin Jarvis
Publication: Malcolm Brown & Shirley Seaton
The Christmas Truce Leo Cooper, London 1984

Title: *Lions Led By Donkeys*
Duration: 1 x 55 minutes
Colour: Colour
Date of first transmission: Channel 4, Saturday 9 November 1985, 8.00pm
Producer(s): Brian Harding
Director(s): Brian Duffy
Other: Written by Peter Crookston
Narrator: Robin Bailey

Title: ***Gone for a Soldier***
Duration: 1 x 50 minutes
Colour: Colour
Date of first transmission: Channel 4, Sunday 10 November 1985, 2.30pm
Date of second transmission: N/A
Producer(s): Russell Galbraith
Director(s): Tina Wakerell
Other: Written by Lyn Macdonald
Narrator: Robert Urquhart

Title: ***Very Exceptional Soldiers***
Duration: 1 x 50 minutes
Colour: Colour
Date of first transmission: BBC2, November 1986
Producer(s): Patrick Hargreaves
Other: Written by Brian Thompson
Narrator: Brian Thompson

Title: ***A Time for Remembrance***
Duration: 1 x 45 minutes
Colour: Colour
Date of first transmission: Channel 4, 11 November 1989
Producer(s): David Batty
Director(s): David Batty
Other: Written by David Batty
Narrator: Robert Lang

Title: ***Everyman Special: A Game of Ghosts***
Duration: 1 x 50 minutes
Colour: Colour
Date of first transmission: BBC2, 1 July 1991, 11.10pm
Producer(s): David Willcock
Director(s): Stephen Walker

Title: ***1914-18***
aka *The Great War and the Shaping of the Twentieth Century* (USA version)
Duration: 7 x 50 minutes
Colour: Colour
Date of first transmission: BBC2, 11 November-23 December 1996, 7.00pm
Date of second transmission: N/A
Producer(s): Blaine Baggett (KCET), Carole Sennett (BBC)
Other: Dr Jay Winter (Series Historian)
Narrator: Dame Judi Dench
Audience: Average 2.9 million (10% share)
General VHS/DVD release: 1997
Publication: Jay Winter and Blaine Baggett *1914-18: the Great War and the Shaping of the Twentieth Century* (London: BBC, 1996)
Website: <http://www.pbs.org/greatwar/>

Title: ***Timewatch - Haig: the Unknown Soldier***
Duration: 1 x 48 minutes
Colour: Colour
Date of first transmission: BBC2, 3 July 1996
Producer(s): Helen Bettinson
Director(s): Helen Bettinson
Other: Dr Gerard de Groot (Historical Consultant)
Narrator: Kirsty Wark
Audience: 3.59 million (17% share)
General VHS/DVD release: 2000

Title: ***Shot at Dawn***
Duration: 1 x 50 minutes
Colour: Colour
Date of first transmission: ITV/Carlton, 8 November 1998, 5.30pm
Producer(s): Steve Clark
Director(s): Alan Lowery
Other: Julian Putkowski (Historical Adviser)
Narrator: Anton Lesser

Title: ***Veterans: The Last Survivors of the Great War***
Duration: 2 x 50 minutes
Colour: Colour
Date of first transmission: BBC1/Testimony Films, 8 & 15 Nov 1998, 10.00pm
Producer: Steve Humphries
Audience: Average 3.11 million (17% share)
Publication: Steve Humphries & Richard van Emden
Veterans – The Last Survivors of the Great War
Leo Cooper, London 1998

Title: ***The Day the Guns Fell Silent***
Duration: 2 x 45 minutes
Colour: Colour
Date of first transmission: BBC1, 10 & 11 November 1998, 10.45pm

Title: ***Shell Shock***
Duration: 3 x 50 minutes
Colour: Colour
Date of first transmission: Channel 4, 8-22 November 1998 8.00pm
Producer(s): Julia Harrington
Director(s): Julia Harrington

Title: ***The Western Front***
Duration: 6 x 50 minutes
Colour: Colour
Date of first transmission: BBC2, 29 July – 2 September 1999, 7.30pm
Producer(s): Mark Fielder
Director(s): Keith Sheather
Other: Written and presented by Professor Richard Holmes
Audience: Average 1.48 million (9% share)
General VHS/DVD release: 2000
Publication: Richard Holmes *Western Front* London, BBC 2001

Title: ***The Trench***
Duration: 3 x 60 minutes
Colour: Colour
Date of first transmission: BBC2, 15-23 March 2002, 9.00pm
Producer(s): Dick Colthurst
Director(s): Dominic Ozanne
Narrator: Andrew Lincoln
Other: The Khaki Chums
Audience: Average 2.51 million (12% share)
Publication: Richard van Emden *The Trench – Experiencing Life on the Front Line 1916* (London: Bantam, 2002)
Website: www.bbc.co.uk/history

Title: ***The Crucified Soldier***
Duration: 1 x 50 minutes
Colour: Colour
Date of first transmission: Channel 4/Tiger Aspect, 8 December 2002, 9.00pm
Date of second transmission: The History Channel (multiple showings)
Director(s): Jonathan Dent
Other: Dr Adrian Gregory (Historical Adviser)
Based on unpublished MPhil by Iain Overton
Audience: 1.9 million (10% share)

Title: ***1914: the War Revolution (Timewatch)***
Duration: 50 minutes
Colour: Colour
Date of first transmission: BBC2, 7 February 2003 9.00pm
Other: Dr Gary Sheffield, Richard van Emden

Title: ***The First World War***
Duration: 10 x 45 minutes
Colour: Colour
Date of first transmission: Channel 4, 20 September – 25 October 2003, 7.00pm
Other: Professor Hew Strachan (Historical Consultant)
Producer(s): Jonathan Lewis
Director(s): Marcus Kiggell
Narrator: Jonathan Lewis
Audience: 1.62 million (7% share)
General VHS/DVD release: 2004
Publication: Hew Strachan *The First World War* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2003)
Website: http://www.channel4.com/history/microsites/F/firstworldwar/index_learnmore.html

Title: ***World War One in Colour***
Duration: 6 x 50 minutes
Colour: Colour
Date of first transmission: Channel 5, 23 July – 27 August 2003, 9.00pm
Date of second transmission: Channel 5, March-April 2005
Producer(s): Annalisa D'Innella

Executive Producers: Simon Berthon & Philip Nugus
Narrator: Kenneth Brannagh
Audience: 1.53 million (7% share)
General VHS/DVD release: 2003
Publication: Charles Messenger *World War One in Colour*
(London: Random House, 2003)

Title: ***Britain's Boy Soldiers***
Duration: 1 x 50 minutes
Colour: Colour
Date of first transmission: Channel 4/Testimony Films, 14 June 2004, 9.00pm
Producer(s): Neil Rowles
Director(s): Neil Rowles
Publication: Richard van Emden *Boy Soldiers of the Great War*
(London: Headline, 2005)
Other: The Khaki Chums

Title: ***Days that Shook the World: The Christmas Truce***
Duration: 1 x 50 minutes
Colour: Colour
Date of first transmission: BBC4
Date of second transmission: BBC2, 15 December 2004, 9.00pm
Producer(s): David Upshal
Director(s): Nic Young
Other: The Khaki Chums

Title: ***The Somme***
Duration: 2 hours 30 minutes
Colour: Colour
Date of first transmission: Channel 4, 15 November 2005, 9pm
Date of second transmission: N/A
Producer/Director: Carl Hindmarch
Written by: Carl Hindmarch & Mark Hayhurst
Narrator: Tilda Swinton
Other: Malcolm Brown (Historical Consultant)
Audience: 2 million
General VHS/DVD release: N/A
Publication: N/A
Related:

<http://www.channel4.com/history/microsites/L/lostgeneration/somme/film1.html>

Title: ***The Last Tommy***
Duration: 3 x 45 minutes
Colour: Colour
Date of first transmission: BBC1, 16 November 2005, 9pm
Date of second transmission: N/A
Producer/Director: Harvey Lilley
Other: Richard van Emden (Consultant)
Taff Gillingham (Military Supervisor)
Narrator: Bernard Hill
Audience: 3.9 million
General VHS/DVD release: N/A
Publication: Richard van Emden, *Britain's Last Tommies: Final memories of soldiers from the 1914-18 war, in their own words*, (London: Leo Cooper, 2005)
Related: www.bbc.co.uk/history

Bibliography

1. Broadcast Sources - Television

(See Appendix for more detailed information on each documentary)

The Great War (BBC, 1964)

Battle of the Somme (BBC, 1976)

Peace in No Man's Land (BBC, 1981)

Lions Led By Donkeys (Channel 4, 1985)

Gone for a Soldier (STV, 1985)

Very Exceptional Soldiers (BBC, 1986)

A Time for Remembrance (Channel 4, 1989)

Everyman Special: A Game of Ghosts (BBC, 1991)

Tanks: Wonder Weapon of World War I? (BBC, 1995)

1914-18 (BBC, 1996)

Timewatch - Haig: The Unknown Soldier (BBC, 1996)

Shot at Dawn (Carlton, 1998)

Veterans: The Last Survivors of the Great War (BBC, 1998)

The Day the Guns Fell Silent (BBC, 1998)

Shell Shock (Channel 4, 1998)

The Crucified Soldier (Channel 4, 1998)

The Western Front (BBC, 1999)

The Trench (BBC, 2002)

That Was The Great War That Was (BBC, 2003)

Timewatch - 1914: the War Revolution (BBC, 2003)

The First World War (Channel 4, 2003)

World War One in Colour (Channel 5, 2003)

Britain's Boy Soldiers (Channel 4, 2004)

Days that Shook the World: The Christmas Truce (BBC, 2004)

The Last Tommy (BBC, 2005)

The Somme (Channel 4, 2005)

Broadcast Sources – Radio

BBC Radio 4, *Open Country*, 13 November 2003, presented by Helen Mark

BBC Radio 2, *The Unknown Soldier*, 13 November 1998, presented by Tony Robinson

BBC Radio 4, *A Summer Day on the Somme*, June 29 1976, written and produced by Malcolm Brown

2. Manuscripts

BBC Written Archives Centre, Caversham

Production Files - Folder Numbers

BBC WAC T32/1,136/1

BBC WAC T32/1,145/1

BBC WAC T32/1,145/2

BBC WAC T32/1 145/4

BBC WAC T32/1,145/5

BBC WAC T32/823/1

BBC WAC T32/825/1

BBC WAC T32/827/1

BBC WAC T32/1139/1

BBC WAC T32/1,144/1

BBC WAC T32/1145/1

BBC WAC T32/1145/2

BBC WAC T32/1152/1

BBC WAC T32/1158/1

BBC WAC: Production Scripts

BBC WAC, *Battle of the Somme*

BBC WAC, *Peace in No-Man's Land*

BBC WAC, *Game of Ghosts*

BBC WAC: Viewing figures

The Great War, compiled by Gwyniver Jones BBC WAC, June 15 1988

Haig: the Unknown Soldier, compiled by Trish Hayes BBC WAC, 11 May 2005

Veterans: the Last Survivors ..., compiled by Trish Hayes BBC WAC, 11 May 2005

The Western Front, compiled by Trish Hayes BBC WAC, 11 May 2005

The Trench, compiled by Trish Hayes BBC WAC, 30 March 2005

The First World War, compiled by Trish Hayes BBC WAC, 16 June 2005

World War One in Colour, compiled by Trish Hayes BBC WAC, 16 June 2005

BBC WAC: Press cuttings
(miscellaneous – no page numbers were available)

BBC WAC *Daily Telegraph* 8 June 1964
BBC WAC *Daily Telegraph* 30 November 1964
BBC WAC *Radio Times* 31 December 1964 - 5 January 1965
BBC WAC *Evening News* 19 February 1965
BBC WAC *Evening Standard* 25 February 1966
BBC WAC *Times* 3 October 1966
BBC WAC *Times* 3 October 10 1966
BBC WAC *Times* 1 April 1969
BBC WAC *Times* 8 April 1969
BBC WAC *Daily Telegraph* 17 May 1975

Imperial War Museum, London

IWM Central Files Folder Special Film Productions BBC *The Great War* Film 1964
IWM Information Sheet (Prepared March 1979)
IWM Document Archives BBC's *The Great War* collection (multi-volume, viewers' correspondence)

Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, King's College, London
(no page numbers were available for press cuttings)

LHCMA LH 13/62 *Daily Mail* 30 March 1963
LHCMA LH 13/62 *Town* April 1964 pp.60-64
LHCMA LH 13/62 *Kine Weekly* 28 May 1964
LHCMA LH 13/62 *Daily Mirror* 29 May 1964
LHCMA LH 13/62 *Sunday Times* 31 May 1964
LHCMA LH 13/62 *Sunday Telegraph* 31 May 1964
LHCMA LH 13/62 *Daily Mail* 1 June 1964 p.3
LHCMA LH 13/62 *Times* 1 June 1964
LHCMA LH 13/62 *Daily Mirror* 1 June 1964
LHCMA LH 13/62 *Daily Express* 31 August 1964
LHCMA LH 13/62 *Times* 19 September 1964
LHCMA LH 13/62 *Sunday Telegraph* 20 September 1964
LHCMA LH 13/62 *News of the World* 20 September 1964
LHCMA LH 13/62 *Sunday Express* 20 September 1964
LHCMA LH 13/62 *Sunday Mirror* 20 September 1964
LHCMA LH 13/62 *Sunday Times* 20 September 1964
LHCMA LH 13/62 *Guardian* 20 September 1964
LHCMA LH 13/62 *Daily Telegraph* 21 September 1964
LHCMA LH 13/62 Alasdair Milne to Basil Liddell Hart October 26 1964
LHCMA LH 13/62 Basil Liddell Hart to Alasdair Milne 3 November 1964
LHCMA LH 13/62 *Daily Telegraph* 30 November 1964
LHCMA LH 13/62 *Guardian* 11 February 1965
LHCMA LH 13/62 *Evening News* 19 February 1965

LHCMA LH 13/62 *Radio Times* 1 April 1965
LHCMA LH 13/62 *Radio Times* 9 April 1965
LHCMA LH 13/64 *Radio Times* 17 November 1970
LHCMA LH 13/62 *Daily Telegraph* 17 May 1975

3. Newspaper and Magazine Articles

(Listed alphabetically then chronologically by title)

BBC History Magazine May 2002 p.44
BBC History Magazine March 2002 p.27
BBC History Magazine March 2003 pp.40-43
BBC History Magazine October 2003 p.54
Broadcast 6 November 1998 p.28
Country Life January 18 1990 p.70-71
Daily Express 6 November 1998 p.1
Daily Express 25 May 2005 p.15
Daily Mail 21 August 1963 p.4
Daily Mail 29 June 1976 pp.18-19
Daily Mail 11 November 1985 p.30
Daily Mail 9 April 2003 p.34
Daily Telegraph 30 May 1964 p.10
Daily Telegraph 30 June 1976 p.13
Daily Telegraph 13 March 1978 p.10
Daily Telegraph 9 November 1985 p.34
Daily Telegraph 11 November 1985 p.30
Daily Telegraph 4 July 1996 p.29
Daily Telegraph 11 November 1998 p.8
Daily Telegraph 11 November 2000 p.10
Daily Telegraph 12 March 2002 p.27
Daily Telegraph 16 March 2002 p.26
Daily Telegraph 5 March 2002 p.3
Guardian 29 June 1976 p.22
Guardian 26 June 1986 p.30
Guardian 1 January 1991 Leader
Guardian G:2 15 September 1993 pp.1-2
Guardian November 9 1996 p.5
Guardian 19 March 1998 p.9
Guardian 9 May 1998 p.8
Guardian 25 July 1998 p.5
Guardian November 9 1998 p.3
Guardian 17 September 1999 p.12
Guardian 10 November 2000 p.5
Guardian 19 February 2000 p.10
Guardian 25 June 2001 p.5
Guardian 5 July 2001 p.9
Guardian 29 October 2001 p.2
Guardian 3 November 2001 p.2
Guardian G:2 11 March 2002 p.13
Guardian G:2 13 March 2002 p.3

Guardian G:2 28 October 2002 p.16
Guardian 21 July 2003 'Review' p.9
Guardian 10 November 2003 p.5
Idler 11 June, 24, (1758)
Independent 31 October 1996 leader page
Independent 18 October 1999 p.12
Independent 15 March 2002 p.5
Independent 10 November 2002 p.12
Kinematograph Weekly 4 June 1964 p.18
New Statesman 18 September 1998 p.38
Observer 17 March 2002 p.20
Observer 30 June 1996 p.4
Observer Life Magazine 10 November 1996 p.84
Radio Times 28 May - 4 June 1964 p.6
Radio Times 30 July 1964 p.26
Radio Times June 29– 5 July 1976 p.3
Radio Times 29 June – 5 July 1996 p.94
Radio Times 9-15 November 1996 pp.37-38
Radio Times 2-8 March 2002 p.42-3
Radio Times 15-21 February 2003 p.16
Radio Times 1-7 February 2003 p.106
Radio Times 22-28 February 2003 p.64
Spectator 18 January 1997 pp.18-19
Sunday Times 4 July 1976 p.36
Sunday Times 17 November 1996 pp.9-10
Sunday Times 17 March 2002 p.9
Sunday Times 'Culture' 20 November 2005 pp.14-15
The Listener 14 December 1989 pp.16-18
Times 11 November 1937 Lead Article
Times 10 July 1976 p.12
Times 9 November 1985 p.19
Times 27 June 1986 p.14
Times November 4 1989 p.35
Times 11 November 1989 p.41
Times 4 November 1989 p.35
Times 10 July 1992 p.17
Times 7 July 1996 p.10
Times 22 January 1999 p.3
Times October 28 2000 p.16
Times 8 December 2002 p.29
Times Extra TV 20 September 2003 p.4
Times Education Supplement 22 November 1996 p.10
Times Literary Supplement 14 April 2000 p.8
Times TT2 22 March 2002 p.11
Times Educational Supplement 29 March 2002 p.21
Times TTPL 22 February 2003 p.28
Times TT2 24 March 2003 p.19

4. Theses/Unpublished Research Papers

MacCallum-Stewart, Esther 'The Great War and Popular Literature' University of Sussex (2005) PhD

Todman, Dan 'Representations of the First World War in Britain 1918-1998' University of Cambridge (2003) PhD

5. Published Sources

Addison, Paul and Calder, Angus (eds), *A Time to Kill: The Soldiers' Experience of War in the West 1939-1945*, (London: Pimlico, 1997)

Akeroyd, John, *The Encyclopaedia of Wild Flowers*, (Bath: Dempsey Parr, 1999)

Andoin-Rouzeau, Stéphane & Becker, Annette, *1914-1918* (London: Profile, 2000)

Andrews, Malcolm, *Landscape and Western Art*, (Oxford: OUP, 1999)

Arthur, George, *Lord Haig* (London: Heinemann, 1928)

Arthur, Max, *Forgotten Voices of the Great War*, (London: Ebury, 2002)

Arthur, Max, *When This Bloody War: Soldier's Songs of the First World War*, (London: Piatkus, 2000)

Ashworth, Tony, *Trench Warfare 1914-1918: the Live and Let Live System*, (London: Macmillan, 1980)

Babington, Anthony, *For the Sake of Example*, (London: Leo Cooper, 1983)

Baggaley, John & Duck, Steve, *Dynamics of Television*, (Farnborough: Saxon House, 1976)

Barlow, Adrian, *The Great War in British Literature*, (Cambridge: CUP, 2000)

Barnett, Correlli, *The Great War*, (London: BBC Worldwide, 2003/1979)

Barthes, Roland, *Image-Music-Text*, (London: Fontana, 1977)

Barthes, Roland, *Mythologies*, (London: Cape, 1972)

Benson, Susan & Ronsenzweig, Roy, (eds) *Presenting the Past*, (Philadelphia: Temple, 1986)

Berger, John, *Ways of Seeing*, (London: Penguin, 1972)

Berghoff, Hartmut & Friedeburg, Robert von (eds) *Change and Inertia*, (Bodenheim: Philo, 1998)

- Bet-El, Ilana, *Conscripts: Lost Legions of the Great War*, (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 1999)
- Blunden, Edmund, *Nature in English Literature*, (London: L&V Wolf, 1929)
- Blunden, Edmund, *Undertones of War*, (London: Collins, 1965 edition)
- Bond, Brian & Cave, Nigel (eds), *Haig: A Reappraisal 70 Years On*, (London: Leo Cooper, 1999)
- Bond, Brian (ed), *The First World War and British Military History*, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991)
- Bond, Brian, *The Unquiet Western Front*, (Cambridge: CUP, 2002)
- Borg, Alan, *War memorials: from antiquity to the present*, (London: Leo Cooper, 1991)
- Bourne, John, *Britain and the Great War 1914-1918*, (London: Routledge, 1989)
- Braybon, Gail (ed), *Evidence, History and the Great War*, (Oxford: Berghahn, 2003)
- Briggs, Asa, *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom: Volume V*, (Oxford: OUP, 1995)
- Briggs, Asa & Burke, Peter, *A Social History of the Media: From Gutenberg to the Internet*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002)
- Brittain, Vera, *A Testament of Youth*, (London: Victor Gollancz, 1933)
- Brown, Malcolm & Seaton, Shirley, *Christmas Truce*, (London: Pan Macmillan, 1984)
- Brown, Malcolm *The Imperial War Museum Book of the Somme*, (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1997)
- Brown, Robin, *Shark Infested Custard*, (London: Wiedenfeld & Nicolson, 1990)
- Buitenhuis, Peter, *The Great War of Words: Literature as Propaganda*, (London: Batsford, 1989)
- Burke, Peter, *What is Cultural History?*, (Cambridge: Polity, 2004)
- Burton, Graeme, *Talking Television*, (London: Arnold, 2000)
- Calder, Angus, *The Myth of the Blitz*, (London: Cape, 1991)
- Cannadine, David (ed), *History and the Media*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004)

- Cannadine, David, *Class in Britain*, (London: Penguin, 2000)
- Cannadine, David, *G.M.Trevelyan – A Life in History*, (London: Harper Collins, 1992)
- Cannadine, David, (ed.), *What is History Now?*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002)
- Carrington, Charles, *Soldiers from the War Returning*, (London: Hutchinson, 1965)
- Cecil, Hugh and Liddle, Peter (ed), *The Eleventh Hour*, (London: Leo Cooper, 1998)
- Charteris, John, *Haig*, (London: Duckworth, 1933)
- Chartier, Roger, *Cultural History: Between Practices and Representations*, (Cambridge: CUP, 1988)
- Christopher, David, *British Culture – An Introduction*, (London: Routledge, 1999)
- Clapham, Marcus (ed), *The Wordsworth Book of First World War Poetry*, (Herts: Wordsworth, 1995)
- Clark, Alan, *The Donkeys*, (London: Pimlico, 1961)
- Clark, Kenneth, *Landscape into Art*, (London: John Murray, 1949)
- Clarke, Peter, *Hope and Glory Britain 1900-1990*, (London: Penguin, 1996)
- Connelly, Mark, *The Great War Memory and Ritual*, (London: Boydell, 2002)
- Connelly, Mark, *We Can Take It!*, (London: Pearson Longman, 2004)
- Constantine, Stephen, Kirby, Maurice W., Rose, Mary B., *The First World War in British History*, (London: Arnold, 1995)
- Cooke, Deryck, *The Language of Music*, (Oxford: OUP, 1959)
- Cork, Richard, *A Bitter Truth: Avant-Garde Art and the Great War*, (London: Newhaven, 1995)
- Corner, John (ed), *Documentary and the Mass Media*, (London: Edward Arnold, 1986)
- Corner, John, & Harvey, Sylvia, *Enterprise and Heritage: Crosscurrents of National Culture*, (London: Routledge, 1991)
- Corner, John, *Critical Ideas in Television Studies*, (Oxford: OUP, 1999)
- Corner, John, *The Art of Record – a Critical Introduction to Documentary*, (Manchester: MUP, 1996)

- Corns, Cathryn & Hughes-Wilson, John, *Blindfold & Alone*, (London: Cassell, 2001)
- Corrigan, Gordon, *Mud Blood and Poppycock*, (London: Cassell, 2003)
- Crary, Jonathan, *Techniques of the Observer: Vision & Modernity in the 19th C.*, (Mass: 1990)
- Cummings, Bruce, *War and Television*, (London: Verso, 1992)
- Currie, Tony, *A Concise History of British Television 1930-2000*, (Tiverton: Kelly, 2000)
- Curtis, Richard & Elton, Ben, *Blackadder the Whole Damn Dynasty*, (London: Penguin, 1999)
- De Greef, Willem & Keshing, Willem, *Image-Reality-Spectator*, (Leuven: Acco, 1988)
- DeGroot, Gerard, *Blighty*, (London: Longman, 1996)
- Dibbets, Karel & Hogenkamp, Bert, *Film and the First World War*, (Amsterdam: AUP, 1995)
- Dickinson, A.E.F., *Vaughan Williams*, (London: Faber & Faber, 1963)
- Dixon, Norman, *On the Psychology of Military Incompetence*, (London: Cape, 1976)
- Drabble, Margaret & Stringer, Jenny (eds), *Companion to English Literature*, (Oxford: OUP, 1987)
- Dyer, Geoff, *The Missing of the Somme*, (London: Penguin, 1994)
- Edgerton, Gary and Rollins, Peter, *Television Histories*, (Lexington: KUP, 2001)
- Eksteins, Modris, *Rites of Spring*, (London: Macmillan, 2000 edition)
- Eldridge, Kitzinger, Williams (eds), *Mass Media & Power in Modern Britain*, (Oxford: OUP, 1997)
- Emden, Richard van, *The Trench – Experiencing Life on the Front Line 1916*, (London: Bantam, 2002)
- Evans, Richard, *In Defence of History*, (London: Granta, 2000)
- Falls, Cyril, *War Books*, (London: Davies, 1930)
- Farrer, Reginald, *The Void of War: Letters from Three Fronts*, (London: Constable & Co, 1918)

- Ferguson, Robert, *Television on History: Representations of Ireland*, (London: Department of English and Media Studies, University of London Institute of Education in association with Comedia, 1985)
- Ferguson, Robert, *The Media in Question*, (London: Arnold, 2004)
- Fiske, John & Hartley, John, *Reading Television*, (London: Methuen, 1978)
- Foucault, Michael, *Power/Knowledge*, (London: Harvester, 1980)
- Frankland, Noble, *Historian at War: The Campaigns of an Historian*, (London: Giles de la Mare, 1998)
- Frye, Northrop, *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature*, (Toronto: Toronto Academic Press, 1981)
- Fussell, Paul, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, (Oxford: OUP, 1975)
- Geertz, Clifford, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, (London: Hutchinson, 1973)
- Genosko, Gary, *McLuhan & Baudrillard: The Masters of Implosion*, (London: Routledge, 1999)
- Gillis, John (ed), *Commemoration: The Politics of National Identity*, (Princeton: PUP, 1994)
- Gliddon, Gerald, *Legacy of the Somme 1916: Fact, Film and Fiction*, (Stroud: Sutton, 1996)
- Glover, Jonathan, *Humanity: A Moral History of the 20th Century*, (London: Pimlico, 2001)
- Godefroy, Andrew, *For Freedom and Honour?*, (Ontario: CEF Books, 1998)
- Gombrich, E.H., *Art and Illusion*, (London: Phaidon, 1960)
- Grant, Barry & Slowioski, Jeanette (eds), *Documenting the Documentary*, (Detroit: Wayne UP, 1998)
- Green, Anna & Troup, Kathleen, *The Houses of History*, (Manchester: MUP, 1999)
- Greene, Hugh, *The Third Floor Front: A View of Broadcasting in 1960s*, (London: Bodley Head, 1969)
- Gregory, Adrian, *The Silence of Memory Armistice Day 1919-1946*, (Oxford: Berg, 1994)
- Gurney, Ivor, *Severn & Somme*, (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1917)

- Hall, Stuart (ed), *Cultural Representation and Signifying Practices*, (Oxford: OUP, 1997)
- Hardy, Forsyth, *John Grierson A Documentary Biography*, (London: Faber & Faber, 1979)
- Hayward, James, *Myths & Legends of the First World War*, (Stroud: Sutton Publishing 2002)
- Hayward, James, *Myths & Legends of the Second World War*, (Stroud: Sutton Publishing 2003)
- Hewison, Robert, *Too Much: Art & Society 1960-1975*, (London: Methuen, 1986)
- Holmes, Richard, *Tommy: The British Soldier on the Western Front*, (London: Harper Collins, 2004)
- Holt, Tonie & Valmai, *In Search of the Better 'Ole*, (Yorkshire: Milestone, 2001)
- Housman, A.E., *A Shropshire Lad*, (London: G.Richards, 1898)
- Howard, Tony, & Stokes, John (eds), *Acts of War*, (Aldershot: Scolar, 1996)
- Howarth, Chris, & Lyons, Steve, *Cunning – the Blackadder Programme Guide*, (London: Virgin, 2000)
- Howe, Barbara & Kemp, Emery (eds), *Public History: An Introduction*, (Florida: Malabar, 1986)
- Howes, Frank, *The Music of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, (Oxford: OUP, 1954)
- Humphries, Steve & Emden, Richard van, *Veterans –Last Survivors*, (London: Cooper, 1998)
- Hutchings, Monica, *The Walnut Tree*, (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1951)
- Hynes, Samuel, *A War Imagined*, (London: Bodley Head, 1990)
- Hynes, Samuel, *The Soldier's Tale: Bearing Witness to Modern War*, (London: Pimlico, 1997)
- Jones, David, *In Parenthesis*, (London: Faber & Faber, 1963)
- Jordanova, Ludmilla, *History in Practice*, (London: Arnold, 2000)
- Kavanagh, Gaynor, *Museums and the First World War: A Social History*, (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1994)
- Keegan, John, *The First World War*, (London: Pimlico, 1998)

- Kelly, Andrew, *Filming All Quiet on the Western Front*, (London: I.B.Tauris, 1998)
- Kilborn, Richard & Izod, John, *An Introduction to Television Documentary*, (Manchester: MUP, 1997)
- King, Alex, *Memorials of the Great War in Britain*, (Oxford: Berg, 1998)
- Kipling, Rudyard, *The Collected Poems of Rudyard Kipling*, (London: Wordsworth, 1994)
- Knightley, Philip, *The First Casualty*, (London: André Deutsch, 1975)
- Kohler Riessman, Catherine, *Narrative Analysis*, (London: Sage, 1993)
- Lacey, Nick, *Image and Representation: Key Concepts in Media Studies*, (London: Macmillan, 1998)
- Laffin, John, *Butchers and Bunglers of World War One*, (Stroud: Sutton, 1989)
- Lee, Christopher, *This Sceptred Isle - Twentieth Century*, (London: Penguin, 1999)
- Leed, Eric, *No Man's Land Combat and Identity in World War One*, (Cambridge: CUP, 1979)
- Lewis, Cecil, *Sagittarius Rising*, (London: Warner, 1993 edition)
- Liddle, Peter (ed), *Passchendaele in Perspective*, (London: Leo Cooper, 1997)
- Lloyd George, David, *War Memoirs*, (London: Ivor Nicholson & Watson, 1933-1936)
- Lloyd, David, *Battlefield Tourism*, (London: Berg, 1998)
- Lowenthal, David, *The Past is a Foreign Country*, (Cambridge: CUP, 1985)
- Lummis, Trevor, *Listening to History*, (London: Hutchinson, 1987)
- Lyotard, Jean-François, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, (Manchester: MUP, 1984)
- Macdonald, Lyn, *Somme*, (London: Michael Joseph, 1983)
- Macdonald, Lyn, *They Called it Passchendaele*, (London: Penguin, 1978)
- Marc, David, *Bonfire of the Humanities*, (USA: Syracuse, 1995)
- Martin, Bernard, *Poor Bloody Infantry: A Subaltern on the Western Front 1916-1917*, (London: Murray, 1987)
- Marwick, Arthur, *The Deluge*, (London: Macmillan, 1965)

- Marwick, Arthur, *The New Nature of History*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001)
- Masefield, John, *The Old Front Line*, (London: Spurbooks, 1972 edition)
- McArthur, Colin, *Television and History*, (London: British Film Institute, 1978)
- McLuhan, Marshall, *The Gutenberg Galaxy Man*, (London: Routledge & Keegan Paul, 1962)
- McLuhan, Marshall, *Understanding the Media*, (London: Ark, 1964)
- McLure, Kevin, *Visions of Angels & Tales of Bowmen*, (Harrogate: 1996)
- McQuail, Denis, *McQuail's Mass Communication Theory 4th Ed.*, (London: Sage, 2000)
- Mellers, Wilfrid, *Vaughan Williams and the Vision of Albion*, (London: Barrie & Jenkins, 1989)
- Messenger, Charles, *World War One in Colour*, (London: Random House, 2003)
- Middlebrook, Martin, *The First Day on the Somme*, (London: Penguin, 1971)
- Montague, Charles Edward, *Disenchantment*, (London: Chatto & Windus, 1992)
- Moore, Christopher, *Trench Fever*, (London: Abacus, 1999)
- Moore, William, *The Thin Yellow Line*, (London: Leo Cooper, 1974)
- Mosse, George, *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars*, (Oxford: OUP, 1990)
- Moult, Thomas, *Cenotaph*, (London: Cape, 1923)
- Munslow, Alan, *Companion to Historical Studies*, (London: Routledge, 2000)
- Munslow, Alun, *Deconstructing History*, (London: Routledge, 1997)
- Newman, Bernard, *Cycling in France*, (London: Herbert Jenkins, 1936)
- Nichols, Bill, *Blurred Boundaries: Questions of Meaning*, (USA: Indiana University Press, 1994)
- Nöth, Winfried, *Handbook of Semiotics*, (USA: Indiana University Press, 1990)
- Oram, Gerald & Putkowski, Julian, *Death Sentences Passed by Military Courts of the British Army 1914-1924*, (London: Francis Boutle Publishers, 1998)
- Oram, Gerald, *What Alternative Punishment is There?*, (Open University, 2000)

- Oram, Gerald, *Military Executions in World War One*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003)
- Ottaway, Hugh, *Vaughan Williams' Symphonies*, (London: BBC, 1972)
- Paget, Derek, *No Other Way to Tell It: Dramadoc/Documdrama on TV*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998)
- Paris, Michael (ed), *The First World War and Popular Cinema*, (Edinburgh: E Edinburgh University Press, 1999)
- Passingham, Kenneth, *The Guinness Book of Television Facts and Feats*, (London: Guinness Superlatives, 1984)
- Paxman, Jeremy, *The English A Portrait of a People*, (London: Penguin, 1999)
- Phillips, Kendall R., *Framing Public Memory*, (Tucaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2004)
- Plantinga, Carl, *Rhetoric and Representations in Non-fiction Film*, (Cambridge: C Cambridge University Press, 1997)
- Pope, Stephen & Wheal, Elizabeth-Anne, *Dictionary of the First World War*, (London: Macmillan, 1995)
- Porter, Roy (ed), *Myths of the English*, (Cambridge: Polity, 1992)
- Postman, Neil, *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, (London: Heineman, 1986)
- Priestly, J.B., *The Beauty of Britain*, (London: Batsford, 1935)
- Read, Herbert, *Poems 1914-1934*, (London: Faber & Faber, 1935)
- Reed, Paul, *Walking the Somme A Walker's Guide*, (London: Leo Cooper, 1997)
- Reith, John, *Into the Wind An Autobiography*, (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1949)
- Robb, George, *British Culture and the First World War*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002)
- Robbins, Simon, *British Generalship on the Western Front 1914-18: Defeat into Victory*, (London: Frank Cass, 2005)
- Roberts, Graham & Taylor, Philip (ed), *The Historian, Television & Television History*, (Luton: LUP, 2001)
- Rosenstone, Robert, *Visions of the Past*, (London: Harvard UP, 1995)
- Samuel, Raphael & Thompson, Paul (ed), *The Myths We Live By*, (London: Routledge, 1990)

- Sassoon, Siegfried, *Memoirs of an Infantry Officer*, (London: Faber & Faber, 2000)
- Schama, Simon, *Landscape and Memory*, (London: Fontana, 1995)
- Sheffield, Gary & Till, Geoffrey (eds), *The Challenges of High Command: The British Experience*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003)
- Sheffield, Gary, *Forgotten Victory: First World War Myths and Realities*, (London: Headline, 2001)
- Sheffield, Gary, *Leadership in the Trenches: Officer-Man Relations, Morale and Discipline in the British Army in the Era of the First World War*, (London: Macmillan, 2000)
- Short, Michael, *Gustav Holst*, (Oxford: OUP, 1990)
- Silkin, John (ed), *Penguin Book of First World War Poetry*, (London: Penguin, 1996)
- Sillars, Stuart, *Art and Survival in First World War Britain*, (London: Macmillan, 1987)
- Silverstone, Roger, *The Message of Television: Myth & Narrative*, (London: Heinemann, 1981)
- Simpson, Jacqueline & Roud, Steve, *Oxford English Dictionary of English Folklore*, (Oxford: OUP, 2000)
- Smith, Anthony (ed), *Television – An International History*, (Oxford: OUP, 1998)
- Smith, Malcolm, *Britain and 1940*, (London: Routledge, 2000)
- Smith, Paul (ed), *The Historian and Film*, (Cambridge: CUP, 1976)
- Smither, Roger (ed), *IWM Film Catalogue Volume I*, (Trowbridge: Flicks, 1994)
- Sorlin, Pierre, *Mass Media: Key Ideas*, (London: Routledge, 1994)
- Sorlin, Pierre, *The Film in History: Restaging the Past*, (New Jersey: Barnes & Noble, 1980)
- Stallworthy, Jon, *The Oxford Book of War Poetry*, (Oxford: OUP, 1984)
- Stallworthy, Jon, *Wilfred Owen The War Poems*, (London: Chatto & Windus, 2000)
- Stephen, Martin, *Never Such Innocence*, (London: Buchan & Enright, 1988)
- Stephen, Martin, *The Price of Pity*, (London: Leo Cooper, 1996)

- Stewart, Ian and Carruthers, Susan (eds), *War, Culture and the Media*, (Trowbridge: Flicks, 1996)
- Strachan, Hew (ed), *Oxford Illustrated History of the First World War*, (Oxford: OUP, 1998)
- Strachan, Hew, *The First World War* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2003)
- Tate, Trudi, *Modernism, History and the First World War*, (Manchester: MUP, 1998)
- Taylor, A.J.P., *The First World War – An Illustrated History*, (London: Penguin, 1963)
- Taylor, John, *A Dream of England: Landscape, Photography & Tourist's Imagination*, (Manchester: MUP, 1994)
- Taylor, Philip M., *Munitions of the Mind*, (Manchester: MUP, 1995 edition)
- Terraine, John, *Douglas Haig: The Educated Soldier*, (London: Hutchinson, 1963)
- Terraine, John, *The Smoke and the Fire Myths & Anti-Myths of War*, (London: Leo Cooper, 1992)
- Thompson, Paul, *The Voice of the Past 2nd Ed*, (Oxford: OUP, 1988)
- Thompson, Peter, *Lions Led by Donkeys*, (London: T.Werner Laurie, 1927)
- Thomson, Alistair, *Anzac Memories Living with the Legend*, (Oxford: OUP, 1994)
- Thornton, R.K.R., *Ivor Gurney Severn & Somme and War's Embers*, (Exeter: Carcanet, 1987)
- Tiratsoo, Nick, *From Blitz to Blair*, (London: Phoenix, 1997)
- Tosh, John, *The Pursuit of History (Fourth Edition)*, (Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2006)
- Travers, Tim, *The Killing Ground*, (London: Unwin Hyman, 1990)
- Trevelyan, George Macaulay, *Autobiography and Other Essays*, (London: Longman, 1949)
- Trevor-Roper, Hugh, *History: Professional and Lay*, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1957)
- Uys, Ian, *Delville Wood*, (Johannesburg: Uys Publishers, 1983)
- Vaughan Williams, Ralph, *National Music and Other Essays*, (Oxford: OUP, 1963)
- Vaughan Williams, Ursula and Holst, Imogen, *Heirs and Rebels*, (Oxford: OUP, 1959)

- Vaughan, Dai, *For Documentary Twelve Essays*, (London: British Film Institute, 1999)
- Vaughan, Dai, *Television Documentary Usage*, (London: British Film Institute, 1976)
- Vidal, Gore, *Screening History*, (London: André Deutsch, 1992)
- Warren, John, *History and the Historians*, (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1999)
- Watson, Janet, *Fighting Different Wars*, (Cambridge: CUP, 2004)
- Webb, Barry, *Edmund Blunden – A Biography*, (London: Newhaven, 1990)
- Weintraub, Stanley, *Silent Night*, (London: Simon & Schuster, 2001)
- Welland, Denis, *Wilfred Owen; A Critical Study*, (London: Chatto & Windus, 1978)
- Whicker, Alan, *Within Whicker's World*, (London: Elm Tree, 1982)
- Williams, Raymond, *Television Technology & Cultural Form*, (London: Routledge, 1990)
- Williamson, Henry, *The Power of the Dead*, (London: Panther, 1963)
- Wilson, Jean Moorcroft, *Siegfried Sassoon: Journey from the Trenches*, (London: Duckworth, 2003)
- Wilson, Tony, *Watching Television: Hermeneutics, Reception and Popular Culture*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993)
- Winter, Denis, *Death's Men: Soldiers of the Great War*, (London: Penguin, 1978)
- Winter, Jay & Baggett, Blaine *The Great War & the Shaping of the 20th Century*, (London: BBC, 1996)
- Winter, Jay & Sivan, Emmanuel, *War and Remembrance in the 20th Century*, (Cambridge: CUP, 1999)
- Winter, Jay, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning*, (Cambridge: CUP, 1995)
- Winter, Jay, *The Experience of World War I*, (London: Papermac, 1989)
- Winter, Parker, Habeck (eds), *The Great War & the 20th Century*, (Yale: Yale UP, 2000)
- Winter, Jay, & Prost, Antoine, *The Great War in History: Debates and Controversies, 1914 to the Present*, (Cambridge: CUP, 2005)
- Wolff, Leon, *In Flanders Fields*, (London: Longmans, 1959)

Wyndham Goldie, Grace, *Facing the Nation: Television & Politics 1936-1976*, (London: Redwood, 1977)

6. Articles in Journals

Badsey, Stephen 'The Great War since *The Great War*', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 22, 1 (March 2002) pp.37-45

Barnett, Correlli, 'John Terraine and Television History', *Stand To!* January 2006, No.75, pp.5-8

Bolas, Terry, 'Oh What a Lovely War' *Screen* 10, 3 May/June 1969, pp.84-90

Champion, Justin, 'Simon Schama's "A History of Britain" and Public History', *History Workshop Journal*, 56 (1), 2003, pp.153-174, p.155

Connelly, Mark, 'The Devil is Coming' *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* Vol.22, No.1, 2002, pp.21-27

Eleventh Annual Survey on University History, *History Today*, August 2003, pp.54-57

Ferguson, Robert, *Television on History: Representations of Ireland* Media Analysis Paper 5, University of London Institute of Education, 1985

Grierson, John, 'The documentary producer' *Cinema Quarterly*, 2:1, 1933, pp.7-9

Harvey, A.D, 'First World War Literature' *History Today*, 43, November 1993, p.10-12

Kuehl, Jerry, 'The Great War – my first grown-up job in television' *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* Vol.22, No.1, 2002, pp.5-6

Mackinlay, Andrew, MP, 'The Pardons Campaign' *Western Front Association Bulletin* no.39 (June 1994), pp.28-29

Malvern, Sue, 'War as it is: the art of Muirhead Bone, C.R.W.Nevinson and Paul Nash, 1916-1917' *Art History* 9, December 1986, pp.487-515

Moriarty, Catherine, 'The Material Culture of Great War Remembrance' *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol.34. No.4 (October 1999), pp.653-662

Potts, Alex, "'Constable Country" Between the Wars' in Raphael Samuel (ed) 'Patriotism: The Making and Unmaking of British National Identity', volume 3, *National Fictions*, Routledge, 1989, pp.160-186

Purcell, Hugh, 'Television and the Great War', *History Today*, 44 (8), August, 1994, pp.9-12

Ramsden, John, 'The Great War: The making of the series', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, vol.22, No.1, 2002, pp.7-18

Ross, Duncan, 'The Documentary in Television', *BBC Quarterly*, Vol. V, No. 1, (1950), pp.19-20

Sobchack, Vivian, 'The Insistent Fringe: Moving Images and Historical Consciousness' *History and Theory* vol.36, no. 4, Theme Issue 36: Producing the Past: Making Histories Inside and Outside the Academy (Dec. 1997), pp.4-20

Strachan, Hew, & Lewis, Jonathan, 'Filming the First World War', *History Today* October 2003, 53 ,(10), pp.20-22

Todman, Dan, 'The Reception of The Great War in the 1960s', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* Vol.22, No.1, 2002, pp.29-36

Weeks, Jeffrey, 'Foucault for Historians', *History Workshop Journal*, 14, (1982)

Winter, Jay, 'The Generation of Memory: Reflections on the "Memory Boom" in Contemporary Historical Studies', *Bulletin of the German Historical Institute*, 27, Fall 2000

7. Interviews

(In person and by telephone, in chronological order)

Harry Patch to Emma Mahoney (interview in person) 5 February 2003

Arthur Halestrap to Emma Mahoney (interview in person) 14 February 2003

Peter Simkins to Emma Mahoney (by telephone) 22 November 2003

Julia Cave to Emma Mahoney (interview in person) 2 March 2004

Anne Dacre (née Jarvis) to Emma Mahoney (by telephone) 8 March 2004

Correlli Barnett to Emma Mahoney (interview in person) 9 March 2004

Professor Peter Simkins to Emma Mahoney (by telephone) 22 March 2004

Malcolm Brown to Emma Mahoney (by telephone) 9 August 2004

Professor Gary Sheffield to Emma Mahoney (interview in person) 5 October 2004

8. Correspondence

(By letter and by email, in chronological order)

Richard van Emden (Testimony Films) to Emma Mahoney (by email) 22 January 2003

Taff Gillingham to Emma Mahoney (by email) 22 June 2003

Dr Jean Moorcroft Wilson to Emma Mahoney (by letter) 26 February 2004

Maureen Meakin (Holt's Tours) to Emma Mahoney (by email) 14 April 2004

Professor Peter Simkins to Emma Mahoney (by email) 23 April 2004

Iain Overton to Emma Mahoney (by email) 13 August 2004

Taff Gillingham to Emma Mahoney (by email) 29 September 2004

Taff Gillingham to Emma Mahoney (by email) 19 April 2005

Dr Stefan Goebel to Emma Mahoney (by email) 19 April 2005

Dr Stephen Badsey to Emma Mahoney (by email) 5 May 2005

Taff Gillingham to Emma Mahoney (by email) 4 June 2005

Esther MacCallum-Stewart to Emma Mahoney (by email) 10 June 2005

Jerry Kuehl (Kuehl TV) to Emma Mahoney (by email) 14 June 2005

Jerry Kuehl to Emma Mahoney (by email) 23 June 2005

Peter Gordon (BBC) to Emma Mahoney (by email) 26 June 2005

Dr Stephen Badsey to Emma Mahoney (by email) 25 July 2005

Janet Torge (Galafilm) to Emma Mahoney (by email) 22 August 2005

Janet Torge (Galafilm) to Emma Mahoney (by email) 26 February 2006

9. Exhibitions and Conferences

'History and the Media' conference at the Institute of History Research, London, 16-18 December 2002

'Women and War' exhibition, Imperial War Museum, London, 15 October 2003 – 18 April 2004

IAMHIST conference 'It may be history, but is it true?' Imperial War Museum, London, 15 October 2004

'The Future of the First World War', a colloquium at Queen Mary, University of London, 4 June 2005

'History on Television', a symposium at the University of Lincoln, 7-8 July 2005

10. Websites

(Listed chronologically by date of access)

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/print/pressoffice/pressreleases/stories/2002>
(accessed 21 November 2003)

<http://www.cwgc.org>
(accessed 20 January 2004)

<http://625.uk.com/channel5/>
(accessed 27 September 2004)

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/>
(accessed 22 December 2004)

<http://media.guardian.co.uk/overnights/story/0,7965,1122189,00.html>
(accessed 30 December 2004)

<http://media.guardian.co.uk/overnights/story/0,7965,1373407,00.html>
(accessed 30 December 2004)

<http://media.guardian.co.uk/overnights/story/0,7965,1151632,00.html>
(accessed 30 December 2004)

<http://media.guardian.co.uk/overnights/story/0,7965,1347839,00.html>
(accessed 30 December 2004)

<http://www.encounter.co.za/html/delville.html>
(accessed 30 December 2004)

<http://media.guardian.co.uk/overnights/story/0,7965,1277783,00.html>
(accessed 30 December 2004)

<http://media.guardian.co.uk/overnights/story/0,7965,1122189,00.html>
(accessed 30 December 2004)

<http://media.guardian.co.uk/overnights/story/0,7965,1151632,00.html>
(accessed 30 December 2004)

<http://www.iamhist.org/news.html#great-war>
(accessed 30 December 2004)

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/comedy/blackadder/vote/>
(accessed 14 February 2005)

<http://media.guardian.co.uk/broadcast/story/0,7493,846968,00.html>
(accessed 17 February 2005)

<http://media.guardian.co.uk/mediaguardian/story/0,7558,582362,00.html>
(accessed 14 March 2005)

<http://www.firstworldwar.com/features/greatwarlost.htm>
(accessed 16 March 2005)

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/war/wwone/index.shtml>
(accessed 6 April 2005)

<http://www.battletours.co.uk>
(accessed 10 April 2004)

<http://www.iwmcollections.org.uk/>
(accessed 14 April 2005)

<http://www.bathandwest.co.uk/hotnews.lasso?article=181>
(accessed 14 April 2005)

http://www.itvregions.com/programmes_view.php?region=West&page=14794
(accessed 14 April 2005)

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/dna/ww2/>
(accessed 25 May 2005)

<http://www.shotatdawn.org.uk/>
(accessed 7 June 2005)

<http://www.thiepval.org.uk/>
(accessed 13 June 2005)

<http://media.guardian.co.uk/overnights/story/0,7965,886400,00.html>
(accessed 23 June 2005)

<http://media.guardian.co.uk/overnights/story/0,7965,1398988,00.html>
(accessed 24 June 2005)

<http://media.guardian.co.uk/overnights/story/0,,1643188,00.html>
(accessed 28 February 2006)

<http://media.guardian.co.uk/broadcast/story/0,,1552010,00.html>
(accessed 28 February 2006)

<http://media.guardian.co.uk/broadcast/story/0,,1551504,00.html>

(accessed 28 February 2006)

<http://www.channel4.com/history/microsites/L/lostgeneration/somme/film1.html>
(accessed 28 February 2006)

<http://www.channel4.com/history/microsites/L/lostgeneration/somme/panel1.html>
(accessed 17 March 2006)

<http://portal.unesco.org/> (accessed 19 March 2006)

